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I See London, I See France

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I See London, I See France

By: Molly Kessler

(Lights up.)
(MOLLY enters.)

MOLLY

Thank you. Thank you guys so much for coming tonight. This semester has been a whirlwind of emotion, and I'm so happy and thankful for everything I've been able to do. *(Rattles off some "thank yous.")* *(Oscar music plays.)*

(Looks at wrist.) For those of you who have never met me before, my name is Molly and this is my honors thesis project. It's called *I See London, I See France*, and it combines my studies in French, linguistics, and theatre into one scholastic performance. *(Looks at wrist.)* The play is made up of a series of short vignettes about living in a foreign country. *(Pause.)* Hold on just a second. *(Runs backstage.)*

(Reenters with binder. Opens binder.) See, the first scene is really funny. It starts with this guy walking out with his cell phone, and he's like "Uh oh, I see you posted another album on Facebook." And it's great because he...okay, well, then there's another one that has a poem about a refrigerator *(Flips through script.)* and one of the scenes toward the end has masks in it! *(Pause.)* Okay, no, I can't do this.

Hey, Preston, could you bring the house lights up?

(House lights up.)

(MOLLY freezes.) Oh God. No, back down. Back down, please.

(House lights down.)

I'm sorry, you guys. Look, I—I don't really know how to put this, but...um...*(mumbles)*.

PRESTON

What?

MOLLY

(Mumbles.)

PRESTON

Molly, I can't hear you.

MOLLY

Oh my God! I didn't finish it! Okay? I didn't finish my thesis.

I've been under a lot of pressure lately. This semester got really hectic, and I put too much on my plate again, and my classes are wearing me out, and there was a pit bull on my porch, and I'm constantly torn between work and work and work, and I'm supposed to graduate soon, and

everybody's telling me "Don't graduate. Never graduate. Stay in school as long as you can," and now I'm freaking out because what's so bad about graduating? Everybody does it! Well, most...some people have done it!

I just lost track of time. You know the semester happens a lot faster than you think it will.

So I'm sorry if you drove all the way from Nashville or the University Center, but please understand this is kind of a bummer for me too.

I had this grandiose vision of somehow writing *a play* and directing people to act out my words in *a play*, and...that's crazy! That's what crazy people do!

(Looks at wrist. Edges toward exit.)

So what am I saying? I guess what I'm trying to say is there is no play. And I probably should not have waited so long to tell you, but, well, here we are, so...you can all go home if you want. Or don't. I really don't care.

(MOLLY exits. House lights up. 10-second pause. SCOTT enters with armchair. Sets armchair at center. Exits. Returns with newspaper and cell phone. Sets props and exits. 10-second pause. SCOTT peers head through curtain, looks around, and steps out. He looks around, moves newspaper to other arm of chair, and exits. Pause. He pokes head back through curtain. Voices O.S. SCOTT exits quickly.)

(LEO and BROCK enter.)

LEO

I still don't see what that has to do with Olive Garden. [All I'm saying is that maybe, just maybe, your pants are a little too high.]

BROCK

Leo, all I'm saying is they really missed out by not calling it the Garden of Eatin'. (Leo, the guy at the pants store said only the most intelligent people would be able to appreciate the majesty of the pants.)

LEO

[Oh. No, I see it.]

(LEO and BROCK freeze onstage. They notice the audience. Pause.)

BROCK

Something's different.

(AMBER enters holding a poster.)

AMBER

Hey, you guys, look at this poster I—O!

(AMBER runs out.)

LEO

I don't think we should be here right now.

BROCK

Something's definitely different.

LEO

(To the audience.) Are you guys waiting for something?

BROCK

(Absentmindedly.) I can't put my finger on it.

LEO

Is there a show tonight?

BROCK

The stage is the same.

LEO

Wait, is there a show happening right now?

BROCK

Has it always been this black in here?

LEO

Oh my god there's a show happening right now.

BROCK

Did you get a haircut?

(AMBER creeps back in. She waves the poster.)

AMBER

(Whispers.) Hey! Brock! Leo!

BROCK

What?

(AMBER runs onstage.)

AMBER

This. *(She hands the poster to LEO.)* It's for Molly's play. It was hanging on the door.

LEO

Oh yeah, I wanted to go see that.

BROCK

Me too. When is it?

AMBER

Guys—

LEO

The poster says it just started. If we go now, we could still make it.

AMBER

Guys—

BROCK

Let me put my backpack in the car first.

LEO

Yeah, we should probably get out of here anyway. *(To AMBER.)* I think there's a show going on. *(Turns to leave.)*

AMBER

Wait for it...

LEO & BROCK

Oh my God!

AMBER

There it is.

(AMBER pushes BROCK and LEO toward exit. SCOTT pokes head through curtain. He sees the others.)

SCOTT

Psst!

(AMBER, BROCK, and LEO turn to SCOTT. He motions them upstage. They cross to him. He whispers that he doesn't know where anyone is.)

(MCKINLEY enters. Company onstage turns sharply, freezes, and watches her pass.)

MCKINLEY

You know, when a person says, “Hey, wait up,” that usually means—(*Steps past audience member.*) excuse me—that usually means please stop leaving, don’t go anywhere, I want to walk to the parking lot with you. But, no, we’re just going to leave McKinley in the box office so she can be murdered. No need to get involved.

(*MCKINLEY crosses and exits. Others remain frozen. Pause. MCKINLEY reenters.*)

Whoa.

BROCK

...Hey, McKinley.

LEO

So you’re saying *this* is Molly’s thesis? (*SCOTT nods.*) Right here?

AMBER

Right here.

LEO

Right now?

AMBER

Right now.

BROCK

This can’t be her show. There’s nobody here.

AMBER

Maybe it hasn’t started yet.

LEO

Maybe it has started. Maybe by nature of reacting to the circumstances, we’ve become a part of the show. Maybe the absence of theatre *is* the theatre. (*Pause.*) It’s brilliant.

AMBER

That’s ridiculous.

LEO

Brock, write that down.

(*BROCK rummages through backpack, retrieves notepad, and scribbles furiously.*)

MCKINLEY

Hey, what’s going on?

LEO

Something wonderful.

AMBER

I See London, I See France.

MCKINLEY

Excuse me?

AMBER

Molly's thesis. Scott said it was supposed to be happening right now, but he doesn't know where everybody is.

MCKINLEY

Right here?

AMBER

Right here.

MCKINLEY

Right now?

AMBER

Right now.

BROCK

This can't be her show. There's nobody here.

MCKINLEY

I'll check backstage. (*MCKINLEY exits. SCOTT disappears behind curtain.*)

LEO

Let's just find some seats.

(AMBER, BROCK, and LEO sit in house. Pause. MCKINLEY reenters.)

MCKINLEY

Again with the leaving!

LEO

(Whispering.) We saved you a seat.

MCKINLEY

There's no one backstage!

BROCK

What?

AMBER

(Rushes to stage.) There's no one backstage?

MCKINLEY

Besides Scott, no.

(SCOTT enters. He paces frantically.)

LEO

I think maybe we should just go.

AMBER

Yeah. Sorry, Scott.

(All except SCOTT turn to leave.)

SCOTT *(whispers)*

No, don't leave me!

LEO

What do you want us to do?

(SCOTT looks around. points to audience, and whispers to AMBER.)

AMBER

Ask the audience?

BROCK

And break the fourth wall? *(To the audience.)* No, thank you. *(Winks.)*

AMBER

Leo, ask them what's going on.

LEO

Right. *(To the audience.)* Ladies and gentlemen, we are now entering the audience participation portion of the show. Does anyone know what's going on? *(Improvise until they explain what happened.)* I don't think any of us saw that one coming.

MCKINLEY

So she left.

LEO

That's what it looks like.

(SCOTT whispers to AMBER.)

BROCK

Bummer.

LEO

This is not the “theatre is the absence of theatre” I was hoping for.

BROCK

That’s for sure.

(SCOTT disappears backstage and returns with binder. He hands it to AMBER.)

MCKINLEY

Okay, so if the play isn’t happening, why is everybody still here?

AMBER

Guys—

LEO

It was a beautiful idea.

BROCK

I know, buddy.

MCKINLEY

Do they think this is part of the show?

AMBER

Guys—

LEO

It was just so self-aware.

BROCK

It’s gonna be okay.

MCKINLEY

(To the audience.) Oh my god, you think this is part of the show, don’t you?

AMBER

Guys! It *is* part of the show!

BROCK, LEO, & MCKINLEY

What?

AMBER

That's right. This is what was supposed to happen. Everything we're saying is scripted, right?
(*SCOTT nods.*) Isn't it clever? Laugh. It's funny.

(*Forced laughter.*)

(*In a hushed voice.*) Scott has a copy of Molly's script. He wants us to try and perform it.

(*They turn to SCOTT. He pleads.*)

BROCK

I don't know. I'm kind of hungry.

MCKINLEY

Hold up. You want us to perform a play we've never read before?

AMBER

He said it's not that complicated and that he'd help us get through it. We could at least try a few scenes.

BROCK

I was sort of on my way to Taco Bell.

AMBER

Just read a scene backstage, and as long as you get the gist of the story—

LEO

—you can improvise the rest. It's brilliant. Brock, write that down.

BROCK

Wow, this Taco Bell idea is really picking up momentum, no point in trying to stop it.

AMBER

Now, there is one small problem. This play has French in it.

LEO

I don't speak French. Do you speak French?

(*AMBER shakes her head and turns to SCOTT.*)

I don't think he speaks.

(*SCOTT shakes his head and turns to BROCK. BROCK shakes his head and turns to MCKINLEY. MCKINLEY slowly raises her gaze.*)

MCKINLEY

Un petit peu.

AMBER

Perfect! *(To LEO.)* And you still have a key to the prop closet, right?

LEO

I think so. *(LEO retrieves crowbar from backpack.)*

MCKINLEY

So we're really doing this?

(Everyone gathers belongings to head backstage.)

AMBER

Do we have a choice?

MCKINLEY

There are so many other choices.

LEO

McKinley, the first rule of improv: you never say no. It's always "yes and."

AMBER

Brock, will you do the house announcement?

BROCK

Yes and.

AMBER

Right. We'll let you know when we're ready.

(AMBER, LEO, MCKINLEY, and SCOTT exit backstage. BROCK trails behind, arms full of backpack contents. He paws at curtain but can't find the opening. He turns to audience, chuckles nervously, and hands items to random people. Items include: paper & pens, books, backpack, etc. BROCK returns to stage. Lights down. Lights up.)

BROCK

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Clarence Brown Lab Theatre for tonight's performance of *I See London, I See France*. Now, there are a few brief announcements before we get underway. First, as a courtesy to the cast and crew who have worked tirelessly on this production, please silence all cell phones, pagers, and small children.

Also, please refrain from eating, drinking, or smoking anything in the theatre. There won't be an intermission, so you'll just have to do that on your own damn time. Please take a moment now to notice the exit nearest your seat. *(Mimics flight attendant indicating exits.)*

Should the theatre experience a sudden loss in pressure (*pulls oxygen mask from pocket.*), oxygen masks will drop automatically. Simply place the mask over your nose and mouth and continue to breathe normally. If you're here tonight with a small child, please secure your own mask first, and let the little one fend for himself.

Before we get started, there are so many people we'd like to thank, without whom this production could not have happened. First off, a big thank you to this guy, who went above and beyond to tell us Molly left because she didn't finish her thesis. And I'd personally like to thank everyone who is currently holding my stuff. Please don't take it.

(LEO enters with "random object.")

LEO

I'm just going set this right here. *(He sets it at upstage right.)* Wait til we get to this scene, Brock. It's awesome.

BROCK

I can't wait.

LEO

(Approaches BROCK.) Where did you get that?

BROCK

Get what?

LEO

Is that yours?

BROCK

(Looks at oxygen mask.) Oh this?

LEO

Were you carrying that around?

BROCK

No. *(Pause.)* She gave it to me. *(Indicates someone from the audience.)*

LEO

(To the audience member.) Is this yours?

BROCK

She just threw it at me.

LEO

That's weird.

BROCK

I know, that's what I said.

(LEO takes oxygen mask and hands it to audience member.)

LEO

Everything's set backstage. We're ready whenever you are. *(Exits.)*

BROCK

(Takes oxygen mask back.) At this time I'd like to introduce the rest of the cast. Please join me in welcoming to the stage, the cast of *I See London, I See France!* *(Music begins.)* First up, she once went to an AA meeting because she thought it was all about her: Amber Autry! *(AMBER enters. Dance.)* Oh ho, look at those arms go! Next up, he once went to an LL meeting because he thought it was all about him. He's my best buddy in the whole world. Give it up for Leo LaCamera! *(LEO enters. Dance.)* Now for our third cast member. She has two arms, two legs, and one big heart. Our own dancing queen: McKinley Merritt! *(MCKINLEY enters. Does not dance.)* Lastly, the fourth and arguably most attractive cast member. Where is he? Is he back here? *(BROCK exits and immediately reenters.)* Brock Ward! *(BROCK dances. Everyone dances. AMBER, LEO, and MCKINLEY exit.)* And now, without further ado, we are pretty proud to present *I See London, I See France.*

(Lights down.)

Study Abroad Tips

(Lights up. 70s informational video music. LEO sits in armchair with newspaper. Phone rings. LEO rips newspaper in half and looks at phone.)

LEO

I see you posted another album on Facebook. “Adventures in Rome: Part Seven.”

(Puts phone in pocket.) Congratulations. You’re studying abroad. While the rest of the deprived youth of America will spend their college years twiddling their thumbs and drinking themselves silly within the oppressive confines of their chosen American universities, you are among the elite few who have opted to venture down the road less traveled to brave parts unknown.

(AMBER enters with backpack.) Armed with your passport, a brand new moleskine, and your secret fanny pack, you will explore the European countryside—*(AMBER looks around and heaves satisfied sigh.)* meeting strangers, eating tapas, gazing off a mountain at the horizon as you spiral down into a cavernous hole of pensive self-indulgence.

There’s just one problem. You’re miserable. *(AMBER looks around, terrified.)* You didn’t realize studying abroad would be this hard, *(AMBER runs out.)* and you definitely didn’t expect to be this bad at it.

Whenever someone asks you what you plan to do after college, *(MCKINLEY enters.)* it takes all of your willpower not to say:

MCKINLEY

I’m not a grown up! That’s really more of a grown up thing. *(Exits.)*

LEO

Good job, Susie. But study abroad will fix that, right? Wrong. A working knowledge of adulthood is not something you get in your welcome packet. It has to be learned. You were a baby in America, and you’re a baby here.

But, despite your complete and total lack of spatial awareness, you made it. You’re nearly five thousand miles from home, and you really want to make the most of it. But before you panic and run out to buy hundreds of scarves with matching berets, there are a few things you should know.

First off, no matter how hard you try to disguise yourself, you will always be the gun-slinging, hamburger-chomping American. Maybe it’s your accent, your overly friendly demeanor, or your American flag swim trunks. There’s really no way of knowing. All you can do is get over yourself, eat a hamburger, and embrace it.

(BROCK enters with SCOTT and basket of bread. SCOTT bends over as table.) That said, assimilation is key to succeeding in any foreign country. When dining in a restaurant, it’s important to remember three things: tipping is gauche, to-go boxes are unheard of, *(BROCK takes a bite of bread.)* and the bread on the table is not free.

BROCK

(Mouth full. Eyes wide.) What?

LEO

That's right, Susie. *(BROCK and SCOTT exit.)* In fact, many things we take for granted in America are much more difficult to find in Europe—like public restrooms, peanut butter, your favorite tv shows, and grocery stores open after 8pm.

Something you will find in painful excess? Clubs. Now, I know what you're thinking. "I don't go to clubs. Clubs are dirty, and I have class." First off, no you don't. Secondly, it doesn't matter. If you're in Europe long enough, you'll find yourself wandering through a discothèque. You may not know how you got there, but you're going to have to deal with it.

(BROCK enters.) Now, if you're dancing in a public setting, you may be tempted to let someone in on how awkward you feel. *(AMBER walks by. BROCK taps her shoulder. She stops.)* This is absolutely the wrong answer. *(BROCK talks to AMBER.)* Letting someone else know you feel uncomfortable moving your body around will not alleviate the awkwardness. *(BROCK tries to dance. AMBER joins half-heartedly.)* What it will do is make your partner strangely aware of how your body doesn't move normally. And for a brief period, both of you will be focused solely on where your hands should be. *(BROCK and AMBER look at his hands.)* And no one will be happy about it. *(BROCK and AMBER exit.)*

But it's not all bad. You will explore a whole new world of opportunity. You will meet some amazing people. And you will spend a lot of time in peaceful self-reflection.

(MCKINLEY and BROCK enter with signs.) Maybe you'll fall in love with a beautiful stranger and float off into the sunset with a tandem bike and a baguette. And maybe you won't. Maybe the person you needed to fall in love with all along *(Pats heart.)* was in here. *(BROCK and MCKINLEY raise signs that read 'AWWWW.')*

Unfortunately, even the most worldly and enlightened students must return to the nauseating cesspool of oppression they begrudgingly call their homeland. The key to preserving your newfound intellect and spiritual wholeness is to bring abroad back home with you. I mean, what's the point in finding yourself if you don't talk about it on a daily basis? *(AMBER enters.)* Try slipping unrelatable anecdotes into as many conversations as possible.

AMBER

That's just like this time I was hiking up a mountain to this medieval town, Eze. It was actually the same path Friedrich Nietzsche walked when he was writing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. *(Exits.)*

LEO

Nice work, Susie. You could even write a play and invite all your friends to come watch, so they will literally listen to you talk about studying abroad for an hour without interrupting. Trick them into thinking they wanted to be there. Laugh at them. *(MCKINLEY raises sign that reads*

'LAUGHTER.' BROCK raises sign that reads *'BOO.'* All glare at booing audience. BROCK looks at sign and flips it to *'LAUGHTER.'*)

But, joking aside, through all the bumps and bruises and horrific mistakes you will certainly make, you'll find you can actually take care of yourself. You'll realize that, despite everything you've been through, studying abroad really did change your life, and you're going to miss it. (MCKINLEY and BROCK raise signs that read *'APPLAUSE.'*) Bye bye, now.

(Lights down.)

Map #1

(Lights up. Music starts. BROCK enters with map. He wanders aimlessly through theatre. He stumbles over audience members. He tries asking for help. He spins in confusion. He ambles to door. Exits. Lights down.)

Language Lesson #1: [u] vs. [y]

(Lights up. MCKINLEY enters.)

MCKINLEY

Language lesson #1: When you were a baby, before you could control the muscles in your own face to form words, your brain was hard at work learning to recognize and understand the phonemes, or sounds, of your native language. By merely speaking to you, your parents and others around you introduced you to the vowels and consonants of the language. So, by the time your face was a slightly less blubbery mess of pinchable cheek fat and you were ready to start forming words, you had been primed for months to produce the particular set of phonemes found in your native tongue.

As a baby, we are sponges for language production. After the critical language period, however, which lasts roughly seven years, it becomes very difficult to learn and reproduce new phonemes with native precision. This is why accents exist. And this leads me into the lesson for today.

The contrast between the phonemes spoken in French and those used in English is so vast that it's often uncharacteristically difficult for English speakers to produce French phonemes without screaming, "I'm American! Listen to how I say hamburger! Hamburger. *(Very poorly.)* It's hilarious and terrible!"

Ultimately, all you can really do is practice, practice, practice. But there are a few tricks to pronouncing those particularly unfamiliar phonemes. Here, I'll teach you one.

In French, there are two vowels in the "oo" family. The first, [u], should not be entirely unfamiliar to you. The problem exists in the second vowel: [y]. For some reason, this is a difficult sound for most English speakers to make.

We'll try it together. Everyone say [i] (eeee). *(The audience responds.)* Good. Now, without changing what's going on inside your mouth, keep your tongue and your teeth where they are, and round your lips like this. *(Demonstrates.)* And you've got it. *(Praise them. Audiences can be very sensitive.)*

This difference can be seen very clearly in words like [tout], which means /all/, and [tu], which means /you/. In some cases, this distinction is critical. For instance, you might say, "Ah, c'est super-cool!" which means "Ah, that's so cool!" If, instead, you say, "Ah, c'est super-cul!" you've essentially said, "Ah, it's super-ass." which is particularly embarrassing because now everyone thinks you have terrible grammar.

(Lights down.)

Theatre

(Lights up. AMBER enters.)

AMBER

Taking all my classes in a foreign language makes me feel an emotion. And that emotion almost led me to the conclusion that I was going to live in France forever and never go home. Now, I'd be willing to bet that the majority of you are of the opinion that this is a positive emotion.

But maybe, just maybe, it's not what you think. Let me explain.

(MCKINLEY and SCOTT push whiteboard onstage and exit. Pictograms AMBER points to images as she speaks.)

As you can see here, we start at the top with classes taught in French which leads to a required sense of hyper-vigilant language awareness. This required language awareness then leads to total mental exhaustion. Total mental exhaustion leads to a paralleled physical exhaustion. Paralleled physical exhaustion leads to abnormal sleepiness which leads to more sleeping which leads to less free time which leads to fewer phone calls home which leads to familial estrangement, crippling depression, and hasty decision-making which is why I bought 2 jars of Nutella and, in a state of panic, nearly canceled my flight home.

Thus, due to the transitive property of equality, where if $A=B$ and $B=C$ then $A=C$, we find that classes taught in French have an inordinate number of side effects.

That's right. These classes almost made me eat 1.5 kilos of hazelnut chocolate spread with a spoon and never go home.

(MCKINLEY retrieves whiteboard and exits.)

That being said...things are good. The classes I do understand, I don't hate. Some of them even seem kind of fun. In fact, I have a theatre class today *(Looks at wrist.)* which I'm really excited—shit!

(AMBER runs offstage. BROCK, LEO, and MCKINLEY enter. BROCK and LEO sit in front of MCKINLEY.)

MCKINLEY

Nous allons continuer à chanter la chanson, "À la Claire Fontaine." (We are going to continue singing the song "By the Clear Fountain.")

BROCK

Madame, omelette du fromage baguette oui oui? (Madam, cheese omelet for baguette yes yes?)

MCKINLEY

(Pause.) Non. (No.)

LEO

Ah bonjour baguette oui oui! (Ah hello baguette yes yes!)

BROCK

Où est la bibliothèque? (Where is the library?)

LEO

Oui, où *est* la bibliothèque? (Yes, where is the library?)

MCKINLEY

(*Whispers.*) Cut it out! (*Assumes character.*) Nous allons continuer à chanter la chanson, “À la Claire Fontaine,” d’accord? Tous ensemble! (*She raises her arms to conduct.*) Un, deux, trois, quatre— (We’re going to continue singing the song “By the Clear Fountain,” okay? All together! One, two, three, four—)

BROCK, LEO, & MCKINLEY (singing)

“Il y a longtemps que je t’aime.
Jamais je ne t’oublierai.”
 (“I have loved you for a long time.
Never will I forget you.”)

(*AMBER bursts through door. She huffs and puffs. She sees the class and sneaks in.*)

MCKINLEY

D’accord, on va le faire encore. Les mêmes deux vers. Tous ensemble! (*She raises her arms to conduct.*) Un, deux, trois, quatre— (Okay, we’re going to do it again. The same two lines. All together! One, two, three, four—)

BROCK, LEO, & MCKINLEY (singing)

“Il y a longtemps que je t’aime.
Jamais je ne t’oublierai.”

(*AMBER looks around and mumbles along.*)

MCKINLEY

C’est magnifique. Mais avant de partir, on va le faire encore une fois, et il faut répéter jusqu’à je dis que vous pouvez partir. Allez-y! (*She raises her arms to conduct.*) Un, deux, trois, quatre— (Before leaving, we’re going to do it one more time, and you will repeat until I say you can leave. Go on! One, two, three, four—)

BROCK, LEO, & MCKINLEY (singing)

“Il y a longtemps que je t’aime.
Jamais je ne t’oublierai.”

MCKINLEY

Répétez! (Repeat!)

BROCK, LEO, & MCKINLEY (singing)

“Il y a longtemps que je t’aime.
Jamais je ne t’oublierai.”

MCKINLEY

Encore une fois! (One more time!)

BROCK, LEO, & MCKINLEY (singing)

“Il y a longtemps que je t’aime.
Jamais je ne t’oublierai.”

MCKINLEY

Une fois encore! (One more time!)

BROCK, LEO, & MCKINLEY (singing)

“Il y a longtemps que je t’aime.
Jamais je ne t’oublierai.”

MCKINLEY

Maintenant plus fort! (Now louder!)

BROCK, LEO, & MCKINLEY (singing)

“Il y a longtemps que je t’aime.
Jamais je ne t’oublierai.”

MCKINLEY

Maintenant plus doux. (Now softer.)

BROCK, LEO, & MCKINLEY (singing)

“Il y a longtemps que je t’aime.
Jamais je ne t’oublierai.”

MCKINLEY

Comme un robot! (Like a robot!)

BROCK, LEO, & MCKINLEY (singing)

“Il y a longtemps que je t’aime.
Jamais je ne t’oublierai.”

MCKINLEY

(Looks at wrist.) La dernière fois. (The last time.)

BROCK, LEO, & MCKINLEY (singing)

“Il y a longtemps que je t’aime.
Jamais je ne t’oublierai.”

MCKINLEY

Merci, tout le monde. (*LEO and BROCK gather belongings. AMBER remains seated.*) Bon weekend. À la semaine prochaine. La dernière chose, n’oubliez pas de m’envoyer les devoirs par email. (*Pause. MCKINLEY looks at BROCK.*) À tout à l’heure. (Thank you, everyone. Have a good weekend. I’ll see you next week. The last thing, don’t forget to send me your homework by email. See you later.)

(*BROCK, LEO, and MCKINLEY exit. AMBER remains seated. Pause.*)

AMBER

And then my class started about five minutes after that one. (*Stands.*) And it was fun, despite the fact that I was the only one not wearing all black. I stuck out like a very sore, very blue and pink, thumb.

We started with monologues. Unfortunately, I did not, and still don’t, have anything French in my repertoire. In fact, the only monologue I had on hand involved me berating the listeners for sucking so much. I don’t know if they knew what I was saying. I like to pretend they didn’t. I like to pretend no eyebrows were raised when I shouted that they “took all the good drugs and had all the good sex.” I like to pretend they didn’t notice when I repeated the same sentence three times because I couldn’t remember what came next. But I like to pretend a lot of things that aren’t real. But I like to pretend a lot of things that aren’t real. But I like to pretend a lot of things that aren’t real.

As one girl was performing her monologue, the professor made us circle around her and repeat her lines back to her. I’m not sure what I was saying. Probably a whole lot of nothing. The exercise devolved from there. By the end, we were all rolling around on the floor whispering something about being old.

(*Lights down.*)

Ghost Story

(Lights up. BROCK stands onstage. Twilight Zone music intro.)

BROCK

Hello. Please, watch your step, as we journey to another dimension—a dimension that will challenge your senses and open your mind. Here you'll find substance in the darkness and power in your fears, as we push forth limited only by the confines of imagination. We journey—

AMBER (O.S.)

Whoa, whoa, whoa!

(AMBER runs onstage. Music stops.)

Brock, I don't think you can say that.

BROCK

Why not?

AMBER

I'm not sure what the rules are.

BROCK

It's an adaptation.

AMBER

Well, try adapting it a little more.

BROCK

Right.

(AMBER exits. Music resumes.)

A journey into a land of imagination. What's that? A street sign? What does it say? You are now entering the Tw...the Gray Area.

(Lights down. Music stops.)

(Whispers.) Was that better?

AMBER (O.S.)

Yes, it's fine. Just tell the story.

(Lights up.)

BROCK

A group of college students journey from point A (*Crosses.*) to point B. But this is no ordinary journey. For little do they know, this trip will lead them to a dark and mysterious place. A place where fears materialize and shadows come to play.

The place was Dublin. The year, 2011. It was a night like any other—cool, clear. The October moon hung low in the sky over the Irish landscape—waxing, waning, watching, waiting.

The students left their hostel for a ghost tour. After all, it was almost Halloween.

They joined a small group—along with the tour guide, a young couple, an older gentleman, and two teenage boys—and set off into the night, fully prepared for unimaginable haunts. They were not prepared for what they saw.

About 15 minutes into the tour, the young boys shoved their way to the front of the group. Propelled by something fierce, the taller one yanked his friend's jacket and pushed him into the young couple. In an effort to retaliate the tiny one flailed his arms around, snickered something terrible, and the two raced off into the night.

Now, no one wanted to be the one to pass judgment, but everyone was pretty on board with the new group dynamic. And the tour continued, the unfathomable haunting creeping slowly out of the future and into the present.

As they rounded a corner, a disturbing calm fell over the group. It was quiet. Too quiet. Their ears rang with nothingness. Then, without warning, a rustle from a nearby bush slashed through the silence, and they were met face to face with destiny. (*BROCK stomps his foot on the ground and grabs it.*) Ah! Scott! Scott, help! My foot! It happened again! Scott! (*Footsteps scramble backstage. SCOTT runs on with a first aid kit.*)

It was a boy. (*SCOTT freezes.*) A small, dirty red-haired boy. He emerged from the bush, and stood frozen, eyes locked on the group. (*BROCK approaches SCOTT.*) His mouth curled into a smile. Then, without looking away, he shouted “OY!” (*Nudges SCOTT.*)

SCOTT

(*Weakly.*) Oy?

BROCK

And disappeared back into the bush.

(*SCOTT runs off.*)

The group looked around at one another, their eyes seeking an explanation for what they had just witnessed. But before they could find solace in the silence, their ears rang with a different tune. A slow and steady rumble filled the air. Footsteps whispered all around them.

(*AMBER and MCKINLEY crawl toward stage from aisles wearing hoodies.*)

Before they knew what was happening, dirt-covered children were emerging from bushes, creeping out of alleyways, climbing over fences, and crawling out of trashcans. First it was one. Then dozens of pre-pubescent street urchins surrounded the tour group. And they were angry.

(AMBER and MCKINLEY circle the stage.)

They circled the group, shouting and taunting, z-snapping in hilarious repetition. They shrieked undecipherable threats, their voices thick with Irish heritage. Just then, the leader of the lost boys burst through the circle, his eyes red with rage!

(LEO bursts through curtain.)

LEO

WHICH ONE O' YOU'S BEEN TOUCHIN' ME COUSIN?

(LEO circles the stage.)

BROCK

He circled the tour group, sniffing the air for who had indeed "tooched his coosin." A shout from the crowd directed him to the older gentleman. *(MCKINLEY points to audience member.)*

Without hesitation, he crossed to the man and punched him right in the jaw. *(LEO crosses to audience member, and raises arm to punch. Slow motion.)*

The police arrived soon after and took the ringleader away. *(Slow motion ends. AMBER and MCKINLEY pull off hoods and "drag" LEO offstage, mid-punch.)*

LEO

You'll never get away with this, you dirty cousin toucher! I'm the only one that gets to touch me cousin!

(AMBER, LEO, and MCKINLEY exit.)

BROCK

The others crept back into the darkness from whence they came. And, at last, they were alone.

This story has no moral, no message, no universal maxim: just a simple statement of fact. The survival of civilization depends on humanity's ability to remain civilized. Also, be wary of children who crawl out of trashcans. From tonight's tale of men, masks, and mayhem, we find solace in the silence of our world, far from the chaos of...the Gray Area. *(Lights down. Music outro.)*

Language Lesson #2: Circumlocution

(Lights up. MCKINLEY enters.)

MCKINLEY

Language lesson #2: The funny thing about language and fluency is that the more you learn, the more you realize you don't know. Now there's a chance this principle applies to life in general, but we'll just save those existential conversations for the philosophy classroom and focus on the question at hand: Can anyone really become fluent in a second language?

When you first start taking a language class, your teacher will introduce you to your new best friend: circumlocution. Now, for those of you who don't know what that is, circumlocution is essentially a method of talking around vocabulary you don't know. Say, for instance, you don't know the word for "Europe," which is a stupid example because it's the same word. But bear with me. Instead of saying "Europe," you could say, "The continent where France is," and anyone with half a brain or a globe will know what you're talking about.

But the fluency question is still important, and it is so frustrating. Because, yes, I can express an idea using standard verbs and phrases, and if I can't think of a specific word I need I can usually find a way to "circumlocute" it. But when you're speaking French for hours and days and weeks and months, circumlocution becomes tedious, and you realize just how little you actually know.

(AMBER enters.)

AMBER

I bought one of those, you know, those things that you...um...you can open a tuna thing...like a tuna box...a box of tuna...you have a box of tuna, a closed box of tuna, and you want to open it...you're hungry, and you want some tuna and a sandwich, and the box of tuna is not open...you want an open box of tuna, so I bought a small thing, it is metal, it is also silver, and it is not soft, for to open the box of tuna that is not open...I touched it with my finger, and now I have a hurt finger because it is not soft...like a knife because a knife is not soft, and this thing I bought is not soft too...I bought...oh forget it.

(Lights down.)

Adama

(Lights up. Scuffle offstage.)

LEO (O.S.)

No, stop pushing me.

BROCK (O.S.)

The first rule of improv. Yes and, Leo. Yes and.

LEO (O.S.)

No, I get that. But this is clearly a story written for a girl.

AMBER (O.S.)

McKinley and I are getting ready for the next ones.

LEO (O.S.)

All I'm saying is this will be very confusing coming from me.

MCKINLEY (O.S.)

Leo, just do it.

BROCK (O.S.)

(Laughing.) Yeah, Leo, just do it.

LEO (O.S.)

(Pause.) Thanks, man.

BROCK (O.S.)

You got it, buddy.

(LEO enters.)

LEO

This is a story about a boy. It's not a long story. And it's definitely not a love story.

(BROCK's head pops through curtain.)

BROCK

You be the judge. *(Exits.)*

LEO

No, I'll be the judge. It's not a love story. His name was Adama, or Adam as I was instructed to call him. He was a student at the university. Half Moroccan. Half Mauritanian. 100% total stranger.

We met one night outside a discotheque, and he was instantly hypnotized by my...feminine mystique. He told me repeatedly that I was unlike anyone he'd ever met. After the fifth time, I started to wonder if it really was a compliment anymore or if he was just highlighting the fact that I was weird and didn't belong there.

Nevertheless, we eventually found ourselves at the beach without any of the friends I had originally brought with me. (*Sits.*) Just the two of us. Circumstances were not ideal.

(*BROCK enters. Calmly. Sits next to LEO. LEO pauses.*)

LEO

What are you doing?

BROCK

I'm being Adam.

LEO

God dammit. Why—

BROCK

Yes and, Leo. Yes and.

(*BROCK leans back and gazes at the "stars."*)

LEO

Yes and we sat together at the water's edge and gazed up at the stars. Well, he "gazed." I was more "fixated on seeing how many stars I could count while trying desperately to pretend I didn't notice when his gaze latched on to my right ear." (*BROCK arcs glance to LEO.*)

As I counted to 17 for the third time, I began to notice the space between us disappearing. (*BROCK scoots toward LEO.*) Call it...woman's intuition. (*Scoot.*) Call it watching him move toward me. (*Scoot.*) Call it whatever the hell you want. The point is I was here, he was there, but the longer he sat *there*, the closer he scooted to *here*. And time wore on. (*Looks up.*) 18, 19, 20.

(*BROCK stands, arms outstretched to LEO. Pause.*)

No, I'm good. (*Pause.*) Are we really doing this?

BROCK

Yes and...

LEO

(*BROCK grabs LEO's hands. LEO stands.*) All right, well, at some point Adam led me into the water. We stood there, hand in hand. He stared deep into my eyes as if to suffocate my soul with his gaze. I stared at the sky too much, lost my balance, and fell in the water. (*LEO sits back down. BROCK follows.*)

As time crept closer to 3 in the morning, he began whispering sweet nothings into my ear. (*BROCK turns and mimes whispering.*) I say “sweet nothings” because whispered French just kind of sounds like a gusty wind. (*BROCK whispers bird “caws.”*) And apparently sea gulls. After several minutes, I finally caught what he was saying.

Can I tell you a secret? BROCK

If you want. LEO

You can't tell anybody. BROCK

Okay. LEO

You promise you won't tell anybody? BROCK

I promise. LEO

Then, before I knew what was happening, he grabbed my chin (*BROCK grabs LEO's chin.*) and smushed his face into my cheek. (*BROCK smushes his face into LEO's cheek.*)

I sat there frozen.

Wait, really? BROCK

It's a plot point I remember very clearly. LEO

So what now? BROCK

The line? LEO

Oh right. Damn. (*Exits.*) BROCK

LEO

So then Adam...(*Watches BROCK go. Turns back.*) ...stayed...and essentially berated me for having watched too many romantic comedies wherein you don't kiss until the very end.

(*Stands.*) Now, I'm well aware this is not a romantic comedy. If this were a romantic comedy, you'd be the unexpected, exotically charming French fling I had before suddenly realizing that I loved my best friend all along. Instead, you're a little bit creepy, I have rocks stuck to my butt, and— (*LEO stomps his foot on the ground and grabs it.*) Ow! Scott! Scott, help, Scott! (*Footsteps scramble backstage. SCOTT runs onstage with first aid kit.*)—and I think that guy over there is peeing on the wall. No, he's definitely peeing on the wall. (*SCOTT glares at LEO and exits.*)

Eventually we walked back to the dorm. He gave me his number and asked if I wanted to hang out again. I said yeah because come on. You don't say "no." And we parted ways.

One week and two ignored text messages later, it was Saturday night again. As fate would have it, I was at the beach.

I was engaged in some form of forgettable conversation when I looked up. You guys are not going to believe who I saw. (*Pause.*) I'll give you a minute. (*Puts hand above eyes, peers into audience.*) Just think about the story I've been telling. (*Pause.*) Nobody? (*Improv til someone answers.*) Yeah, it was Adam.

I decided the best plan was to pretend I didn't see him. It may surprise you to know that this was not a good plan. But all there was to do was play it cool. Real cool. Maybe he didn't see me. Maybe—oh, I got a text message. (*Pulls out phone. Reads message.*) No, he saw me. He definitely saw me.

(*Turns screen to audience.*) "Hi." A truly romantic gesture. Fearful that Captain Effort would see me ignore it, I responded. (*Texts.*) "Salut." (*Pause.*) Ah, another message. (*Reads.*) "In front of you."

(*Looks up.*) He was about 2 feet in front of me, peering wide-eyed and crazy around a group of strangers.

(*BROCK's head peers through curtain.*)

Lips pursed, his gaze pierced mine in a much less romance-y way than before.

(*BROCK disappears behind curtain.*)

He approached me and started ranting about how I had lied and "didn't you say you wanted to see me again" and "no, but seriously, didn't you say you wanted to see me again." And I just stood there and took it. I mean, what do you do when a person accuses you of doing something you most certainly did?

Eventually, after my fifth “I don’t understand,” he backed off, creeping slowly back into the darkness, bug-eyed and fummy.

I believe that something can be learned from any situation. For instance: “Sometimes people are nice. And sometimes they’re psycho.” Was our relationship strained after that? If by ‘strained’ you mean ‘nothing because we pretended we didn’t know each other,’ then, yes, it was strained.

(Lights down.)

Map #2

(Lights up. Music starts. BROCK enters again with map. Still lost. He wanders aimlessly through theatre. He stumbles over audience members. He tries asking for help. He spins in confusion. He ambles to door. Exits. Lights down.)

Poetry Slam

(Lights up. AMBER stands at center.)

AMBER

I can't believe I'm up right now, this early in the morning.
My body started panicking without a fucking warning.
My room feels like a sauna and my hair's stuck to my face.
I don't know why I came here to this God-forsaken place.
Yeah, no one ever told me that the res hall had no AC.
And now I'm feeling murderous like Se7en's Kevin Spacey.
It feels as if I'm drowning as the air swims through my chest.
It's possible I'll suffocate unless I get undressed.
Just outside my room it's warm but there's a pleasant breeze.
Inside feels like Hades' ass and kind of smells like cheese.
I'm sweating through my pj's, and I'm sweating through my bed
I don't have sheets or blankets, so I use a coat instead.
Well, if you're really curious, I'll just explain the switch.
The front desk res hall manager is quite the royal bitch.
He yelled at me when I asked if they sold sheets "pour le lit."
So now I sleep quite nakedly with coats draped over me.
But not tonight, as I'm not sure how long I've been awake
Praying Mother Nature would just give a girl a break.
I feel the salty hand of death but know within my gut,
There must be something I can do. But what? But what? But what?
So I throw open the window, and I tear open the door
Cause I will melt if I lay here another minute more.
To my disdain this doesn't change the temperature at all.
That's when I see my lucky star set up against the wall.
I know I don't have lots of time. The heat is getting worse.
So I wrench the fridge door open wide to let the cold disperse.
I curl into a tiny ball, and crouch there on the ground,
A tiny, nearly naked girl who doesn't make a sound.
The snowy songs of angels dance across my burning skin
Then swirl and twirl into my lungs, so I can breathe again.

(Snaps from backstage. Lights down.)

Language Lesson #3: English

(Lights up. MCKINLEY enters.)

MCKINLEY

Language lesson #3—

(Music starts. BROCK crosses upstage with map, glances at map. Bass drops. BROCK dances violently. AMBER runs onstage, motions music to stop, and pushes him to exit.)

Language lesson #3: *(Pause. Looks around.)* If you do it right, there will come a day when you will unexpectedly hear your native tongue, and you won't understand it.

I remember the first day I heard English in public.

(MCKINLEY sits. BROCK and LEO enter.)

BROCK

Ya jur. Mokee to fly punnel ay bly call.

LEO

Yur's line. Nosay toona romavathat?

BROCK

T-phone. Mona's yorokin here pola wasta day.

LEO

Rounds cud furleen.

(MCKINLEY listens.)

BROCK

My forsie light meeda rondite hola soo pore nation.

LEO

Oh. Puck.

BROCK

Yeah, uh dosin ray manna face. For da wally miner dun elton.

LEO

Shore. I shin may gree mider offra lita day. I cole fim bry lay tree.

BROCK

Nos, luh razy blurder cannash marine.

LEO

McKinley! Duru montoo lo peet fithus?

MCKINLEY

Pardon?

LEO

Duru montoo lo peet fithus?

(MCKINLEY motions that she doesn't understand.)

LEO

Do you want to go eat with us?

MCKINLEY

Oh! Yeah sure.

(Exit. Lights down.)

Conscience

(Lights up. BROCK sits.)

BROCK

I haven't slept in 3 days—which is to say that I haven't slept in seventy-six hours, twenty-four minutes, and *(Pause. Looks at wrist.)* fifteen, no...eighteen seconds.

I read an article that said a man in China stayed up for eleven days to watch every game of the European Championship. And he died. He was perfectly healthy, and he died.

Am I going to die?

It's not that I don't want to sleep. I've been lying here *(Lies down.)* for seventy-six hours, twenty-five minutes, and *(Pause. Looks at wrist.)* seven seconds, but all I can think is "Why aren't you sleeping, Brock? Why aren't you sleeping, Brock? Go to sleep, Brock!"

(Sits up.) As you can see, this method of lulling myself into a peaceful slumber is not entirely effective.

I tried to explain what's going on to my family and friends, but their responses were always the same. "Maybe you're just not sleepy." "I'm not not sleepy," I would reply with what I hoped was an icy glare. *(Icy glare.)* "I'm exhausted. But I can't sleep. Riddle me that." One friend even asked me, "Are you drinking coffee before bed?" I was a little offended that he had so grossly underestimated my ability to reason through that particular scenario. "No, I'm not drinking coffee before bed."

Maybe they'll take me a little more seriously when they find my lifeless corpse rotting under the covers in a last ditch effort to go the fuck to sleep. *(Lies down.)*

(Looks at wrist.) Seventy-six hours, twenty-seven minutes, and fifty-three seconds. Go to sleep.

(Enter LEO. He wears a halo. He prances around room. BROCK sits up. He looks around room, but always manages to look where LEO isn't. LEO hovers over BROCK, pulls "fairy dust" from his pocket. BROCK turns, and LEO blows dust in BROCK'S eyes. BROCK clutches his eyes and shouts series of curses. LEO sits and watches BROCK cry, smiling and unfazed.)

LEO

Hey what's up.

BROCK

Hey there...tooth fairy? *(LEO shakes his head and points to halo.)* How's it going...angel...of death? *(LEO shakes his head.)* Angel of truth! Angel of music! *(LEO shakes his head.)* The Ghost of Christmas Past! Christmas Present! Christmas Yet to Come! Clarence, Casper...

LEO
 Conscience.
 BROCK
 Cooonnnsssooorrrssseeennccce

BROCK & LEO
 Conscience.

BROCK
 Conscience. Right, of course. You're a conscience.

LEO
 I'm *your* conscience.

BROCK
 You're *my* conscience.

LEO
 Mhm.

BROCK
 (*Gets it now.*) And you're here because I'mmaarrgaanaa—

LEO
 Upset.

BROCK
 Upset!

LEO
 Exactly.

BROCK
 I should be more freaked out that this is happening.

LEO
 Maybe a little.

BROCK
 (*Feigns surprise.*) Oh, ah, this is so crazy. Is this a dream? Where did you come from, ghost man? This is so—this is so unexpected.

(*LEO pulls "fairy dust" from his pocket, and blows it in BROCK'S eyes. BROCK clutches his eyes and shouts series of curses, more profane and oddly sexual.*)

LEO
 All right, that's probably good. Brock, I'm here to help you. It seems you're having some trouble adjusting, and, as your conscience, I want to give you some advice.

BROCK

Okay. Shoot.

LEO

Well, I can't just...first you have to tell me what's wrong.

BROCK

I can't sleep.

LEO

Maybe you're not sleepy.

BROCK

I'm not not sleepy. *(Icy glare.)*

LEO

Are you drinking coffee before—

BROCK

Look! I'm exhausted, but I can't fall asleep. I've been lying awake on my bed for seventy-six hours, *(Looks at wrist.)* thirty minutes, and fourteen-seconds. I have no appetite. Sometimes I force myself to eat a forkful of pasta, but we both know my heart's not in it.

(LEO picks glitter off the floor and recycles it into his pocket.)

I have no energy to do anything. I just lie here, staring at the ceiling, praying that the icy hand of death will pick me up and shake me til I can't feel feelings anymore.

(Pause. BROCK looks to LEO.)

Hey.

LEO

(Looks up, caught.) I know what's wrong.

BROCK

You do?

LEO

Yeah. You're in love.

BROCK

What? No, I'm not.

LEO

Oh, wait really?

BROCK

Of course not. Have you even been listening? It looked like you were recycling your glitter.

LEO

(Guiltily.) I was listening. No, you're right, you're right.

BROCK

This is a serious problem.

LEO

Well, Brock, are you stressed? You know, sometimes when I'm anxious it's difficult to sleep.

BROCK

No! I'm not stressed! My schedule hasn't been this open since I was a baby.

LEO

You seem a little stressed.

BROCK

Well, I am now that I'm not sleeping, but I don't think that's what's causing it.

LEO

Are you bored?

BROCK

I'm in a foreign country that I've seen zero percent of. How could I be bored? It would be ridiculous for someone in this situation to be bored. *(LEO raises fist of "fairy dust" as threat.)* Okay, a little.

LEO

(Puts glitter back in pocket.) Yeah. Maybe don't lie to your conscience.

BROCK

I just spend so much time alone. It's hard to keep myself entertained for so long. And I can't take a hint to give myself a break. Sometimes you just need a break from people, even if people is you.

LEO

I know what's wrong.

BROCK

You do?

LEO

Yeah. You're in love.

BROCK

Are we even in the same room anymore?

LEO

No, hear me out. *(Sits next to BROCK on bed.)* You've fallen in love...with yourself.

BROCK

(Pause.) That's stupid. *(Turns away.)*

(LEO pulls "fairy dust" from his pocket, and raises it to BROCK. BROCK turns and blows the dust in LEO'S eyes. LEO clutches his eyes and falls to the floor.)

LEO

Ah! My eyes!

BROCK

I didn't want to have to do that. You just wouldn't listen. *(Etc.)*

LEO

No! Brock, you don't understand!

BROCK

You had to know how it feels.

LEO

Ah! Brock! It's real! Pineapple, Brock! Pineapple! This is for real!

BROCK

Wait, pineapple? Scott!

BROCK & LEO

Scott! Scott! Help us, Scott!

(SCOTT opens curtain upstage, looks at BROCK and LEO, scoffs, shakes his head, and closes the curtain.)

BROCK

Scott, you adorable bastard!

LEO

I trusted him! Oh God it hurts!

BROCK

Are you gonna be okay?

LEO

Yeah, I think so. *(Sits up.)* Listen, you've never spent this much time alone with yourself before. And now that you have that kind of time, you realize you're meant to be together. And that scares you. It's a classic movie plotline.

BROCK

I guess that makes a little sense. But it still doesn't explain the no sleeping thing.

LEO

No, it doesn't. But maybe you're worrying about it too much. When I was growing up, my dad always said, "If you think about sleepin', you ain't gonna sleep." Which is a ridiculous piece of advice because as soon as you tell someone not to think about pink elephants, they're pretty much only going to think about pink elephants. I think Dale Carnegie put it best when he said, "If you can't sleep, then get up and do something instead of lying there and worrying. It's the worry that gets you, not the loss of sleep." Or perhaps the words of Shakespeare are more poignant.

(LEO looks to BROCK. BROCK is sleeping.)

Of course he is.

(Looks at wrist.) Seventy-six hours, thirty-two minutes, and forty-five seconds. Good night, sweet prince. *(Kisses BROCK on forehead. Exits.)*

(Lights down.)

Masks

(Lights up. AMBER, BROCK, LEO, and MCKINLEY sit in semicircle. TRIFFAUX is a recording.)

TRIFFAUX

C'est un exercice de l'expression de mouvement. Avez-vous vos masques? (This is an exercise in movement. Do you have your masks?)

(AMBER, BROCK, and LEO nod and raise their masks. They turn to MCKINLEY. She wakes from daydream. She looks around.)

MCKINLEY

(Whispers.) Me?

(LEO waves mask.)

Oh!

(MCKINLEY jumps up, runs offstage, and reenters with mask. She raises it.)

TRIFFAUX

Super. Vous êtes les étudiants de théâtre. Donc, amusez-vous bien, mais faites attention à ce qui se passe à l'intérieur. Si vous vous sentez quelque chose à l'intérieur, n'ayez pas peur de la montrer! (Awesome. You are students of theatre. So have fun, but pay attention to what is happening on the inside. If you feel something on the inside, don't be afraid to show it!)

Bien, la première chose que vous allez faire *(All stand, except MCKINLEY.)*: laissez le masque sur scène *(MCKINLEY jumps up.)*, venez au fond de la salle, et faites face à votre masque. *(All place masks on stage and move to back of house. MCKINLEY lags behind.)* (Good, the first thing you're going to do: leave the mask on stage, come to the back of the room, and face your mask.)

(Voice trails off.) Respirez-vous. Regardez le masque dans ses yeux. Derrière ses yeux...
(Breathe. Look at the masks in its eyes. Behind its eyes...)

MCKINLEY

(Pause.) What in God's name are we doing right now? *(To TRIFFAUX.)* I don't understand what the masks have to do with the exercise! *(To the audience.)* I don't understand the exercise.

This happens every class. I come in, and I want to understand. Really, I do. I give myself listening headaches from all the listening I'm doing. But it doesn't help. *(To TRIFFAUX.)* You make a lot of sounds I recognize, but then you go and put them in an order that makes zero sense to me. *(To audience.)* It's not entirely helpful to hear what I assume was "I something plate that something something baby?" *(To TRIFFAUX.)* Wait, did you say "inside" or "tooth?" I have no context clues!

She finished talking. Are we starting? *(Puts her game face on.)* Alright, let's do this. Now, what is everybody else doing? Staring at their masks? I can do that. *(Stares at her mask. Pause.)* I have a sneaking suspicion I'm not going to glean very much from this exercise.

(Pause while everyone stares at masks. One by one they approach their masks. MCKINLEY follows, watching them intently.)

And now I go on stage to...*(BROCK picks up mask.)*...pick up my mask. *(MCKINLEY picks up mask. AMBER and LEO pick up masks.)* And I...*(BROCK puts on mask.)*...put it on my face. *(Everyone puts on their masks, and lies down. MCKINLEY lags behind.)*

TRIFFAUX

Maintenant, vous serez reincarnés avec le masque. Et vous allez redécouvrir le monde dans votre nouveau corps. *(Now, you will be reborn with the mask. And you will rediscover the world in your new body.)*

MCKINLEY

(Rises, with mask on.) Oh! I understood something! *(Lifts mask.)* Sorry. I understood something! "You will be reborn with the mask." That makes sense.

TRIFFAUX

Sentez vos bras, vos jambes, votre nombril pour la première fois. *(Feel your arms, your legs, your belly button for the first time.)*

MCKINLEY

Feel your bellybutton?

(MCKINLEY pulls mask back on and lies down. Pause. Slowly but deliberately, she places finger in bellybutton. MCKINLEY rises, looks around, lies back down. Pause. MCKINLEY rises halfway and immediately lies back down. Pause. Others begin to stir. They wallow and feel their surroundings. MCKINLEY watches them and mimics their movements. Everyone rises to all-fours one by one and explores the room.)

TRIFFAUX

Enseignez les jambes comment marcher. Comme un faon, vous marchez! *(Teach your legs how to walk. Like a fawn, you walk!)*

(AMBER, BROCK, and LEO "teach their legs to walk." MCKINLEY follows.)

Maintenant, vous avez échoué sur une île déserte. *(Now, you have been stranded on a desert island.)*

MCKINLEY

(Lifts mask.) A desert island! Wait a desert island?

(AMBER, BROCK, and LEO explore the island—the sand, the trees, the water. They search for food, build shelter, scavenge, etc. MCKINLEY tentatively follows.)

TRIFFAUX

Un bateau! Un bateau! Il y a un bateau! (A boat! A boat! There's a boat!)

(Boat horn. All jump and wave to signal boat.)

Aw, le bateau est parti. Quel dommage. (Aw, the boat left. What a shame.)

(AMBER takes charge and delegates tasks. MCKINLEY builds a fire. She rejoices. In a hurry to hunt, BROCK and LEO walk over the "fire." MCKINLEY builds another fire.)

Mais faites attention. Il n'y a plus de nourriture. Et vous avez faim. (But be careful. There's no more food. And you're hungry.)

MCKINLEY

(Lifts mask.) Hold up, what?

(LEO charges at BROCK and AMBER with invisible spear. MCKINLEY jumps up.)

Freeze! *(AMBER, BROCK, and LEO freeze. Music stops. MCKINLEY steps forward and lifts mask.)* Why? Just why!

(AMBER, BROCK, and LEO unfreeze. LEO stabs AMBER.)

(MOLLY enters with basket of bread. She freezes.)

(BROCK grabs spear. They rejoice AMBER'S death. In his excitement, BROCK accidentally stabs LEO. Elaborate slow motion music sequence. BROCK mourns LEO's death. LEO nudges him on the chin. BROCK stabs himself. Both lying on their backs, BROCK and LEO reach toward one another and grasp hands. Pause. MCKINLEY looks around and dies.)

How to End?

What the hell is going on? MOLLY

(Removes mask and stands.) Molly? AMBER

Amber? MOLLY

Molly! AMBER

(Removes mask and stands. Looks to AMBER.) Molly? LEO

(Points LEO to MOLLY.) Molly! AMBER

Leo? MOLLY

Molly! LEO

(Removes mask and stands. Looks to LEO.) Molly? MCKINLEY

(Points MCKINLEY to MOLLY.) Molly! LEO

McKinley? MOLLY

Molly! MCKINLEY

(Removes mask and stands.) Brock! BROCK

Brock? MOLLY

Yeah! BROCK

(Pause.)

MOLLY

Is that everybody?

(Everyone mumbles in agreement.)

AMBER

Wait, where have you been?

MOLLY

What do you mean, “where have I been?”

BROCK

We were looking for you like 45 minutes ago.

LEO

We even checked backstage.

MOLLY

I was in the greenroom.

MCKINLEY

Um, totally unrelated point, I may have forgotten to check the greenroom.

MOLLY

What are you guys doing?

TRIFFAUX

Quand vous croyez que vous êtes finis, retirez vos masques et cherchez une feuille de papier.
(When you believe you’re done, remove your masks and get out a sheet of paper.)

MOLLY

(Pause.) Was that me?

(The following section moves quickly.)

AMBER

They had your recordings up in the booth.

MOLLY

My recordings?

MCKINLEY

Yeah, we thought it was empty, but it wasn’t.

AMBER

We found the poster outside.

LEO

But we almost left because Brock wanted Taco Bell.

BROCK

So much!

AMBER

But instead we tried to fix it, which involved a lot of improvisation.

MCKINLEY

The first rule of improv: you never say no. It's always "yes and."

BROCK

Yes, and Leo had to play a girl.

LEO

You're just going to keep bringing that up.

BROCK

As much as I can.

MOLLY

Hold on...what?

AMBER

(To MCKINLEY.) Where's Scott?

MCKINLEY

I think he's backstage.

AMBER

(To backstage.) Scott! Could you bring out the script?

(SCOTT enters with script. He opens his mouth to speak.)

MOLLY

Wait a minute. The script. The masks. The Scott. The audience. *(Points to booth.)* The me.

AMBER

Wait for it...

Oh my god. MOLLY

There it is. AMBER

Are you guys performing my thesis? MOLLY

Surprise. LEO

Why? MOLLY

Honestly? I have no idea. Did we think it would be fun? LEO

Once we figured out what all these people were doing here, it seemed like the only option we had. AMBER

I feel like there were other options. MOLLY

So many other options! MCKINLEY

You know it's not finished, right? MOLLY

I feel like someone may have said that. BROCK

We hadn't crossed that bridge yet. AMBER

I already did this monologue, so I'm not going to do it again. But, no, it's not finished. MOLLY

Are you sure? LEO

You were just doing the mask scene? MOLLY

ALL

(Jumbled agreement.)

MOLLY

Well, that's it.

AMBER

That's it?

MOLLY

That's it.

LEO

That's it?

MOLLY

That's it.

BROCK

That's it?

MOLLY

Yes! That's it! I couldn't find any logical conclusion to a series of stories that, apart from happening within nine months of one another, lack any sense of cohesion.

(SCOTT whispers to AMBER.)

BROCK

But without an ending, what are we even doing?

AMBER

Guys—

LEO

You don't have ideas? I have ideas.

AMBER

Guys—

MCKINLEY

Surely, this wasn't a complete and total waste of time.

AMBER

Guys! Why don't we write an ending right now?

MOLLY

Right now?

BROCK

(Hands pencil to MOLLY.) Write now.

MOLLY

I don't think you understand the writing process. There were countless drafts and rewrites, all crafted to make sure there were no typos and that everything was perfect.

AMBER

What other options do we have?

(MCKINLEY opens her mouth to speak but decides it's not worth it.)

LEO

You know, a quick brainstorming session is not a bad idea.

AMBER

This could save the play.

MOLLY

Okay, no, we can do this. *(Starts walking. Pauses. Looks at bread basket. Glances around for place to put it.)*

BROCK

No, watch this. *(He takes basket and hands it to audience member.)* See? They'll hold anything you give them.

MOLLY

He's/She's not going to eat it, is he/she?

BROCK

I don't know!

AMBER

Brock, will you grab my backpack from the wing?

(BROCK and SCOTT exit.)

MCKINLEY

So we're brainstorming?

LEO

Yes, but don't give anything away. We don't want to lose the element of surprise.

(AMBER, LEO, MCKINLEY, and MOLLY edge slowly into a huddle. BROCK reenters with backpack. He grabs bread from audience member, sits on edge of stage, and eats. He sings.)

[The huddle is not the focus of the scene. The audience will hear only bits and pieces of the conversation. Though they are happening simultaneously, BROCK's singing will be the focus.]

LEO

No, see it's like you're underwater, but you're not.

MCKINLEY

Hold up, I am not doing that.

MOLLY

Veto.

LEO

And without blinking, you just tear it to shreds.

AMBER

It's not a question of how much you'll be eating.

MCKINLEY

Can't we just end it here?

LEO

It would only be for five, maybe six, seconds.

AMBER

I will not be playing a tree.

MCKINLEY

Can we just agree that the crab idea is not happening?

MOLLY

First of all, no. And secondly, this is not helping.

(The huddle disperses.)

MCKINLEY

It would work if we actually had any good ideas.

LEO

Okay, to be fair, the crab idea was amazing.

MCKINLEY

We'll agree to disagree.

AMBER

What if we each wrote down an idea and put it in a hat. Then we draw one, and that's our ending.

MOLLY

That's incredibly risky. But at this point, I really just want to not be onstage anymore.

MCKINLEY

Do we have pens and paper?

(BROCK slowly raises his gaze and turns to audience member holding his paper and pens.)

BROCK

I do. Well, one of them does.

(BROCK takes pens and paper from audience member, and distributes them to cast.)

MOLLY

Perfect. So everyone write down an ending. And when you're done...*(LEO holds out mask.)*...right, you'll put it in this mask. Then, we'll draw one at random, and that will be the ending of my thesis. And nothing could possibly go wrong. *(LEO sets mask at center.)*

(Jeopardy music. Everyone writes an ending and places it in the mask. LEO picks up mask and raises it to MOLLY.)

The moment of truth.

(MOLLY draws a slip of paper. Lights down.)

Brock's Ending

(Lights up. MOLLY pokes head through curtain.)

MOLLY

Are they gone?

(AMBER, BROCK, LEO, and MCKINLEY poke their heads through curtain, one on top of the other.)

LEO

I think so.

(Curtains open. Pile disassembles.)

MOLLY

Good. Thank you, guys, so much for doing this.

MCKINLEY

I can't believe we actually pulled it off.

AMBER

And I don't think the audience knew we improvised the whole thing.

LEO

(To the "audience.") Because we didn't.

MOLLY

I mean, thank God you walked through the theatre when you did.

MCKINLEY

It was a shortcut. My idea.

LEO

Brock and I were just on the way to pick up his sister.

BROCK

Oh my god! Emma!

LEO

Oh shit!

(BROCK and LEO jump forward. Lights down.)

(Lights up. BROCK and LEO stand quivering in frozen exit pose.)

MOLLY
No.

BROCK
(Reenters.) What?

MOLLY
That's not how we're ending show.

BROCK
Why not?

MOLLY
There's no resolution in that.

BROCK
Come on. It's hilarious.

MOLLY
No. Veto.

AMBER
Where's the mask? We'll draw another one.

(LEO grabs the mask from behind the curtain. MOLLY draws another slip of paper. She reads.)

MOLLY
Run out shouting "Emma." This is Brock's again. *(Draws another. AMBER draws one too.)*
Wait, this is Brock's too.

AMBER
They're all Brock's.

MOLLY
Brock, what happened to our ideas?

BROCK
Oh, did we all write the same thing? That's weird.

MOLLY
Brock, that's hilarious, but it's neither the time nor the place. What happened to our ideas?

(BROCK sighs and looks to LEO. BROCK nods and performs secret code movements. LEO mimics secret code movements, removes ideas from his pocket, and drops them in the mask.)

MOLLY

Okay. Let's try this again.

(MOLLY draws a slip of paper. Lights down.)

Scott's Ending

(Lights up. Burlesque music plays. Think "All That Jazz." SCOTT enters. He dances with the intro. MOLLY enters. SCOTT opens his mouth to sing.)

MOLLY

Scott, what are you doing? You don't get an ending. You're not in this play.

(SCOTT sighs. Lights down.)

Leo's Ending

(Lights up. The stage is empty for 10 seconds. MOLLY enters.)

MOLLY

What is this?

LEO (O.S.)

No, don't go out there.

MOLLY

Is this nothing? Because it looks a whole lot like nothing.

(LEO enters.)

LEO

It's this new thing I'm working on where the absence of theatre *is* the theatre. Can theatre exist in the void we leave when we take it away? What is left when everything is gone? It's brilliant. It's raw. It's anti-theatre.

MOLLY

It's nothing.

LEO

Exactly.

MOLLY

I applaud your efforts to be innovative, but, again, this is neither the time nor the place. *(To backstage.)* Guys, can you bring out the mask?

(AMBER, BROCK, and MCKINLEY enter. BROCK holds mask.)

BROCK

(To LEO.) It didn't work?

LEO

The world isn't ready yet.

BROCK

I know, buddy.

MOLLY

That's enough of that. Amber, let's just do your idea.

AMBER

Um, I don't think... why don't we try McKinley's?

MOLLY

Okay, McKinley?

MCKINLEY

I want to know what Amber's was now.

AMBER

It's nothing. It was a stupid idea.

LEO

No ideas are stupid. (*Glares at MOLLY.*)

MCKINLEY

Some ideas are stupid.

(*BROCK opens a slip of paper from mask and reads.*)

AMBER

No, it's really okay. Let's move on please.

BROCK

Was this your idea? (*He holds slip out to AMBER. She looks at it.*)

AMBER

Ugh. Yes.

BROCK

(*Laughing.*) It's amazing!

MOLLY

Let me see. (*Takes slip from AMBER and reads.*) Yeah that's stupid.

AMBER

I told you.

MCKINLEY

Okay, now I have to read it.

(*MCKINLEY takes slip. She and LEO read it.*)

LEO

It's not terrible.

MCKINLEY

It's pretty terrible.

LEO

(To AMBER.) It's not terrible.

(Pause.)

MOLLY

(To audience.) You're probably wondering what we're talking about. *(AMBER covers her face with her hand.)* For Amber's brainstorming idea, she was inspired by...*(To AMBER.)* Was it the Sopranos? *(AMBER nods.)*

(To audience.) The Sopranos. You know where they cut off the final scene right in the middle of—

(Lights down. Sopranos Theme.)

(Lights up.)

So now we know that isn't going to work.

BROCK

There's still one more idea.

MCKINLEY

I'll show you how it's done.

(MCKINLEY grabs the final slip of paper from the mask. Lights down.)

McKinley's Ending

(Lights up. Curtain call music. AMBER, BROCK, LEO, and MCKINLEY enter. They bow and smile and wave. MOLLY lags behind.)

MOLLY

Wait, that was your idea? The play is over?

MCKINLEY

I have made no secret of the fact that I want to go home.

MOLLY

There's even less resolution in that than there was in Brock's ending.

(BROCK mouths "yes" in victory.)

MCKINLEY

Look, you wanted to get off the stage. What better way than a curtain call?

MOLLY

Yes, I want off the stage, but this project is a grade for me. My advisor has to read this. And the Honors people. They might even be here right now. What are they going to think if...*(Realization.)* if I don't tell them what it all means?

MCKINLEY

Didn't you walk out on your thesis like an hour ago? I'm pretty sure you're exaggerating where "getting a good grade" is on your list of priorities.

LEO

I still think we should go with the crab idea.

BROCK

I don't know. Amber kind of sold me on the Sopranos thing.

AMBER

I can't tell if you're joking.

MOLLY

Guys, I've got it.

(Lights down.)

Molly's Ending

(Lights up. MOLLY sits at table. She writes.)

AMBER

To whom it may concern.

BROCK

My name is Molly Kessler, and this is the final submission of my Honors thesis project.

MCKINLEY

For this project, I decided to write a play, which in itself is daunting. I mean, who has that kind of time?

LEO

Then I decided I wanted to direct that play using real people and things. I made this decision at age 20 and have spent the past two years working to fulfill the goals made by a 20-year-old.

AMBER

I'm sure you see a lot of these fly through your office every day.

BROCK

Oh look, it's another thesis project. Guess I'll put it on this pile of things I have to do.

MCKINLEY

And maybe that's all this is to you. I have no way of knowing.

LEO

But for me, it was something so much bigger.

AMBER

This was an exploration—an exploration in collaboration, in international relations, and in socially acceptable narcissism.

BROCK

This play was originally written as a series of vignettes about my time abroad. Nothing more. Nothing less.

MCKINLEY

However, the process of writing and crafting the story was so valuable that I wanted the audience to experience the creative process with me.

LEO

As I wrote more and more of the play, it felt somewhat inadequate to simply present the series of vignettes that I had originally intended. The uncertainty of everything surprised me, and I knew that's what I wanted the play to be about.

AMBER

Plus, it paralleled seamlessly with my experience in Europe. Everything is uncertain all the time. You don't know what has happened, what is happening, or what is going to be happening, but that's what makes it so exciting, right?

BROCK

I also learned something very cheesy.

MCKINLEY

And I almost don't want to talk about it because it sounds dumb.

LEO

But I haven't left anything out so far, so why stop now?

AMBER

I'll just say it real fast, and we can move on.

BROCK

I learned the value of friendship. There. I said it. Moving on.

MCKINLEY

I don't know what this project will mean to you.

LEO

Maybe you'll laugh. Maybe you won't.

AMBER

Maybe you'll find some deeper meaning that you can apply to your own life.

BROCK

Maybe it's a chance to escape from everything that's stressing you out.

MCKINLEY

There's really no way of knowing. Because everyone experiences theatre differently.

LEO

But, you know, I like to think it's more than just paperwork.

(MOLLY looks up from. She stands. Everyone turns.)

MOLLY

We got it.

AMBER

There are no loose ends.

BROCK

No questions left unanswered.

LEO

And we didn't forget anything.

ALL (jumping)

Yeah!

(Lights down.)

(Lights up on "random object." Lights down.)