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Developing *The Voice Within*

by

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Committee of Approval

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This thesis is dedicated to

Norman Schroder and Tara Young

Thank you for your guidance, support, and encouragement.

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Developing *The Voice Within*

Thesis Abstract – Idaho State University (2021)

The purpose of this thesis is to explore playwriting practices by learning the best methods and techniques with the hope of writing my own original play. I have never taken any classes on playwriting, nor does Idaho State University offer a course in playwriting. My methods in learning about playwriting have been an autodidactic process. The sources I have used come mainly from book with a few others coming from articles, and scholarly work. The section on character development is a combination of books and techniques I have acquired from acting courses. I have recorded methods and techniques I have found to be most useful in my writing process. The methods I have included have contributed to my own process of becoming a playwright. This thesis is not meant to be a “How to” guide, my hope is to provide information to help others in their journey of playwriting. Using these methods and techniques I have written a ninety-minute play. *The Voice Within*, can be found in its entirety in Appendix A.

Key Words: playwright; playwriting; theater; play; drama; script; contemporary theatre; depression; play structure; building a play, synopsis; scenario; theme; plot; stage directions; characters; character development; developing characters; character sketch; character arc; dialogue; setting; building space; *The Voice Within*

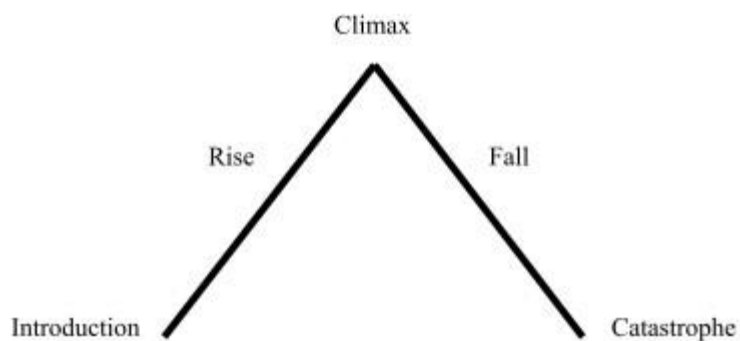
Chapter 1 Structure

Building a Play

All plays begin with an idea. A spark is ignited within a playwright that is so passionate that there is no choice but to express it through the stage. Though there are many ways to start writing a play, I have decided to combine several different strategies in hopes that what I have created will be an effective structure for playwriting.

In his book, *Freytag's Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*, by Gustav Freytag and translated by Elias J. MacEwan, Freytag talks about the five parts of structure. He says “[Drama] rises from the introduction with the entrance of the exciting forces to a climax and falls from here to the catastrophe.” (115) Freytag calls this dramatic structure a “pyramidal structure”. (see figure 1) He continues that each of the five parts could consist of a single scene or a succession of connected scenes, but that the climax is usually composed of one chief scene.

Figure 1 Gustav Freytag’s “pyramidal structure”



In modern play analysis, the introduction is referred to as exposition, and the catastrophe is referred to as the resolution. When using this basic dramatic structure in analyzing plays, it is common to try and identify specific actions that a playwright uses within the rising action to discover how the story moves along. This is a great structure for analyzing plays, discovering

how they work, and writing plays, but David Carter explains in his book, *How to Write a Play*, a slightly more detailed structure that can help a playwright better understand the linear structure while writing.

As stated above, the pyramidal structure can be used for one scene or multiple scenes. In his book, David Carter draws out a better diagram that can help a new playwright understand how to continually move their story along, he calls it the “order and magnitude of complications” or a linear structure diagram. (see figure 2) It addresses the need for continual conflict throughout a story, after all conflict is what propels a story to climax. It is up to the playwright to flesh out conflicts that will keep the audience engaged throughout the entire duration of their play.

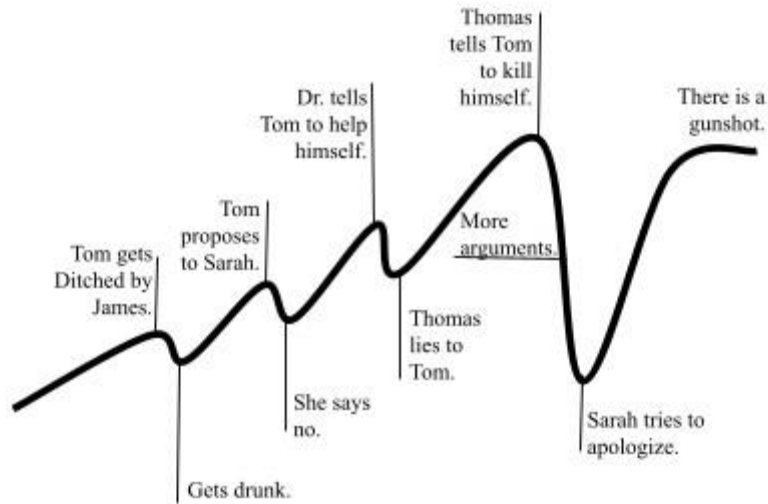
Figure 2 Order and Magnitude of Complications (Linear Structure)



This structure differs from the basic play structure, because it suggests that a play should have growing complications, or crises that are bigger than the last. With each obstacle that the protagonist faces, there is opportunity to triumph or fail. With the raising difficulty of each complication, the consequences of failure also need to increase. Not all plays follow a linear structure, some plays might even end at the climactic moment. Some plays may even include an extra scene after the conflict, following the falling action, which includes a resolution or how the story continues. As I began my own process for writing I felt that the first thing I needed to do

was to create my own linear structure. I felt that it would help me understand where I wanted my story to go. (see figure 3)

Figure 3 Linear Structure for *The Voice Within*



As a new playwright, keep in mind that planning will not stop after the initial ideas are written on the page. In fact, as the writing process commences, it is likely that ideas and thoughts may shift into new ones. It is okay if original plans take on a new form. Adapting while writing will help flesh out a linear structure, synopsis and scenarios. Never be afraid to go back and change or add content. Even after the playwright feels that it might be done, a table read will help put the writing into perspective.

Creating a Synopsis

After playwrights complete a linear structure, they outline to create a synopsis. In *How to Write a Play*, David Carter explains that a synopsis has two main functions. The first function is as a blueprint that will later be used by the playwright to expand their ideas into a scenario, and then into the script. The second function is using it as a sales pitch to theatres. Most theatres receive hundreds of scripts every year, most of which do not get read, that is why having an appealing synopsis helps theatres become more interested in your script.

When the idea of *The Voice Within* came to me, I started to think of how I wanted to tell the story. I had a skeleton of an idea, but as I developed my linear structure it began to be more organized. Creating a synopsis gets the scenes in order, but it does not mean a playwright needs to follow it exactly. It is not important to know every single detail in order to begin a play structure. Once I finished writing *The Voice Within*, I made the necessary changes to my synopsis to be more consistent with my play.

Synopsis for *The Voice Within*

The Voice Within takes place in Los Angeles, California during the spring of 2018. The play addresses sensitive topics such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. Tom is a twenty-six-year-old suffering from depression and anxiety. Throughout the play his friends and therapist try to help him overcome his challenges, but Tom must ultimately identify and address his problems. His relationship with his girlfriend, Sarah is anything but healthy. His best friend, James, tries to help in any way he can. Tom's biggest struggle is with himself, literally. Tom's inner voice is a fully realized and separate character named Thomas.

The play begins with Tom and James meeting up at Tom's apartment for their weekly "guys night" where they enjoy snacking and watching any movies. The night is interrupted when James fails to realize that he accidentally scheduled a date with Carly for the same night. Tom feels betrayed and uses the night as an excuse to get drunk. The following morning, Tom fails to pick up Sarah from her night shift. She arrives and wakes him up by dumping beer from a leftover bottle onto him. She expresses her disappointment in his actions from the previous night. Feeling more guilty than brave, Tom proposes to her. She does not take the proposal seriously and tells him he needs to get his act together before they commit to that kind of relationship.

Sarah leaves, and Tom is alone in his apartment. A moment passes, and he is joined by Thomas who proceeds to berate Tom about everything that is wrong with him.

Later that night, at Sarah's apartment, Sarah and Carly talk about the events from the day. They talk about how Tom can get "better". James comes in late, offering wine as an apology. Eventually Tom enters drunk and causes a huge scene. The following morning James comes to apologize to Tom about ditching their "guys night". When James leaves, Thomas enters and tries to make Tom feel worthless. Listening to the advice from Dr. Jensen about focusing his thoughts, Tom gains a little control over Thomas.

At therapy, Dr. Jensen tries to understand what might be causing Tom's depression. Eventually Tom opens up about his issues and Dr. Jensen encourages him to take care of himself and do things that make him happy. After the appointment, Tom and Sarah talk about some of the issues that they are experiencing in their relationship. The conversation heats up and takes a turn for the worse, Sarah storms out. Thomas again makes Tom feel worthless.

The next morning Sarah and Carly are discussing the next course of action. Their conversation is interrupted by Tom. After a heart-to-heart conversation Sarah decides it would be best for them to take time apart. Tom agrees and gives the engagement ring to Sarah. Tom leaves.

Later that night Tom is trying to decide if he is going to kill himself, Thomas encourages it. Feeling defeated, Tom exits to his bedroom. There is a ruckus off stage as Tom throws his bedroom furniture around, Thomas who is still on stage contemplates whether he should go into the room. A few moments pass and Sarah enters with a box of Tom's stuff. She tries to talk to him through the "door" but does not seem to get through to him. As she begins her exit we hear a gunshot. She runs across the room expecting the worst. The lights go out. End of the play.

Scenario

After the synopsis is complete, Carter suggests that the next step is to create a scenario. A scenario is a detailed scene by scene breakdown that lists all the events in a play. While using the synopsis as a blueprint, each scene will be built with more specific details. This step should not take a lot of time. It does not need to be organized with structured paragraphs or lengthy descriptions of stage action, instead short concise sentences should suffice. While creating a scenario it is important to include the following information:

1. When a new character arrives or leaves.
2. When a character makes a decision (inward).
3. When a character takes a significant course of action (outward).
4. When an item of information is revealed to either the characters or the audience.
5. When an issue is resolved.
6. When the place or time shifts. (46)

Scenario for *The Voice Within*

Act I

Scene 1 Saturday night at Tom's apartment. Tom is cleaning. A buzz at the door. James and Tom quote *2001: A Space Odyssey*. James enters, waters the plant. They talk about Tom and Sarah. They discuss what movie to watch. James gets a text. He must leave due to a schedule conflict. Tom is alone. He gets drunk.

Scene 2 Sunday morning. Sarah enters. She dumps beer on Tom, he wakes up. Tom is hungover and confused. Sarah tells Tom that she is disappointed in him. Guilt causes Tom to propose. She does not take it seriously and says no. Sarah tells Tom that he needs to reevaluate his life before taking their relationship further. Sarah Leaves. Thomas enters and makes snide remarks at Tom. Tom snaps back. Tom goes into his bedroom to change. Thomas continues to yell at Tom. They argue.

Scene 3 Sunday evening at Sarah's apartment. Sarah and Carly talk. Sarah tells Carly about what happened with Tom. James enters, apologizes for being late. They all talk about Tom. Tom enters drunk, Thomas follows. Sarah is frustrated that he is so late. Tom causes a scene. James tries to help. Sarah tells Tom to leave.

Scene 4 Monday morning at Tom's apartment. James comes over to apologize. James tries to make Tom feel better. James mists the plant. James must leave for work. Thomas comes in. The conversation leaves Tom feeling worthless.

Scene 5 Monday afternoon at therapy. Dr. Jensen tries to get Tom to open up. Tom talks about what has happened the last few days. Thomas comments throughout. Dr. Jensen talks about changing perspective, she also tells him that needs to take care of himself. She challenges Tom to do something he loves.

Scene 6 Monday evening at Tom's apartment. Sarah and Tom talk about their relationship. Their conversation takes a heated turn. Sarah storms off. Thomas makes some rude comments to Tom. Tom tries to brush it off. Thomas suggests that Tom kill himself.

Scene 7 Tuesday, late morning at Sarah's. Carly is comforting Sarah. They talk about Tom and the future. Sarah realizes that the best option is a temporary separation. Tom comes in, apologies to Carly. Carly leaves. Tom and Sarah have a tough conversation, they agree that temporary separation is best. Tom gifts the engagement ring to her. Tom leaves. Sarah cries.

Scene 8 Tuesday evening. Tom is trying to sort out his thoughts. Thomas tells Tom to give up. Tom struggles to decide what he really wants. Tom and Thomas fight. Tom points a gun to his head, then at Thomas. Tom exits to his bedroom and causes a ruckus. The sound of large furniture and other items being thrown around. When the competition stops, Thomas exits into the bedroom. A moment passes, Sarah comes in with a box of Tom's things. She tries to talk to

him through the “door” but cannot seem to get through to him. She sets the box down on the coffee table and pulls out a succulent. She offers it to him as a gift. As she gets ready to leave there is a gunshot. She bolts to the other end of the stage towards the bedroom. She exits to the bedroom. She realizes what happened. The lights go out. End of the play.

Theme

In his book, *The Art of Playwriting*, by Alfred Hennequin, he explains that the theme means “the problem, social, moral, political, religious, psychological, or whatever it may be, which the play presents for the consideration of the spectator.” (Hennequin 36) He continues to suggest that drama should not be didactic, but that does not mean that a playwright could not offer questions about human interest.

It is not necessary for a playwright to select a theme before writing, but it is not impossible to choose a theme and deliberately build a play surrounding that one idea. As I began writing *The Voice Within*, I had a very clear theme that I wanted to use. I wanted the theme to be something along the lines of “If you suffer from depression, one of the first things you need to do is learn how to take care of yourself.” As I continued to write, it became harder for me to stick with this one idea throughout the whole play. I found that I was forcing my writing, rather than letting it flow from me. I decided to stop focusing on a specific theme and I just wrote.

Hennequin notes “He [a playwright] may be conscious of his theme, or he may work unconsciously and find with astonishment, when his work is over, that a theme has grown up under his hand unbidden.” (36) Surrendering the idea to have a fixed theme as I wrote freed me from the confines of writer's block. I still experienced a blockage at times, but because I chose to write freely the writer's block I experienced did not last long. It was not until I finished writing *The Voice Within* when I began to fully understand what Hennequin was saying. My play has a

theme, and I did not have to write specifically to address it. It came naturally, and although it is not exactly what I had in mind as I started writing, the theme is still just as effective. If I were to directly state what I believe the theme is for *The Voice Within*, I would say “We all have battles to fight, sometimes we win and sometimes we lose, but we are never alone.”

Plot

Although I have already created the “plot” through making a synopsis and the scenario, there are some important things to know about plot. In *The Playwright’s Workbook* Jean-Claude Van Itallie describes plot as the “...ongoing linear element...” and says that the plot is what “...grounds the play in space and time.” (45) He continues to comment that whatever kind of story that playwrights make, they need to be personally connected to the subject, even if it is not entirely based on personal experience. As stated above, the plot is just a blueprint, or a map, but like all journeys, you do not need to know exactly where you are going if you know the general direction.

In *The Elements of Playwriting*, Louis E. Catron explains that conflict is what propels a play forward. He claims that there is a “law of conflict” or at least a rule that is a permanent part of every successful piece of theatrical writing. He says, “Without conflict there is no movement, no issues, no questions raised and examined, no character changes in response to stimuli, and no suspense to hold audience attention...A play without conflict is, simply, a play without dramatic impact.” (22)

Think of a scene with two characters, and answer the following questions: What are they doing? What do they both want? Do they want the same thing? Do they have to be on the same side for the script to work? If the characters agree, the scene could possibly become

uninteresting, especially if the agreement lasts the entire scene. While writing it is useful to know where the obstacles and conflict are, this is where the scenario helps to outline the play. (Carter)

All stories, regardless of how they are told, have a beginning, a middle and an end. It is the duty of the playwright to provide all the necessary information to help their story flow. This does not mean that the playwright needs to give all the information, but at least enough to keep the audience engaged, and wanting more. A good opening will provide some exposition for the audience, possibly a nibble of backstory that helps them identify: Where we are? Who is present in the space? Why are they there? What is going to happen? Who does the audience identify with or Whose story is this?

All beginnings should have a hook, something that will engage the audience's curiosity and keep them wanting more. After hooking an audience there needs to be a trigger, a moment when the protagonist is left to make a choice or a decision. This decision is what sets the protagonist up for the rest of the play. (Carter)

The "middle" of a play constitutes the majority of the rising action. During these moments of the play the protagonist will be faced with many of the conflicts. While writing *The Voice Within* I discovered a very simple truth; conflict is what propels the plot forward, the decisions that the characters make are equally important. I noticed early on during my writing process that I was setting Tom up to fail often. It gave me a very gloomy perspective of the story and I was losing interest. I ended up going back a little and reworking a few of the scenes, and as I listened to what the characters said rather than forcing them to experience what I wanted them to experience. I learned that when things start to get predictable, and they start to repeat themselves often, then the story begins to become bland and uninteresting.

There are two major parts of an ending, a climax and a resolution. In *How Plays Are Made: The Fundamental Elements of Play Construction* by Stuart Griffith, he explains that the climax is when the rising tension and emotions have grown so big that it results in an explosion, or in other words it is the moment of highest intensity and excitement. Throughout the play the audience will have watched the protagonist work through the consequences of their choices and how they have navigated their obstacles. Carter outlines four possible outcomes for the protagonist:

1. They succeed and are happy emerging stronger, wiser, richer, etc.
2. They succeed but are unhappy, emerging sadder but wiser, stronger, more self-aware, bitter, and resentful.
3. They fail and are unhappy, emerging bitter and resentful, broken spirited, wiser but sadder.
4. They fail but are happy, aware of the goals they once had are immature, irrelevant, etc., emerging wiser, more self-aware, more mature, and with a new set of goals or philosophy. (63)

Following the climax is the resolution, or denouement, where all subplots are resolved and the consequences of the events in the play are tied up. Through my research, there is no suggestion that indicates how long the resolution should be, I can assume that it should at least be a few moments, but not a full scene length. Regardless of the length it is important to remember that the final moments of a play contain the feelings and emotions that the audience will take away with them as they leave.

As I was finishing *The Voice Within*, I decided on a short resolution. This is my climatic buildup: At the end of scene six Thomas indirectly suggests to Tom that he should kill himself but does so in a way that makes Tom think that it was his idea. In scene seven we see that Tom and Sarah make the painful decision to temporarily separate but having already anticipated that this was going to be the outcome, Tom gives the engagement ring to Sarah as a gift, symbolizing that he is saying goodbye without saying it. Scene eight exudes the highest intensity. After Tom

and Thomas physically fight, they yell at each other, while Tom has a gun in hand. The scene moves off stage, but the high energy continues as Tom throws his things around. To me, this is the climactic moment. The resolution is when Sarah comes in to try to make peace, while also confirming that they are going their separate ways. The play ends with a gunshot and Sarah running into Tom's bedroom which is located off stage. My climatic moment is when the gun goes off, but because it happens off stage and no one states that Tom had shot himself, it leaves the ending a bit ambiguous. I want the audience to question what happened.

Stage Directions

Although stage directions are not presented to a live audience, they provide descriptions for the director, actors, and reading audience. Some stage directions describe what the stage looks like, how some lines might be said, and where characters enter and exit the stage. The playwright decides on how descriptive they want to be, some playwrights might include an entire page while others may only give very minimal directions.

One thing to remember while writing stage directions is that there is a much higher chance that someone else will be directing the play. Longer stage directions take away from the director's creative freedom; let them do their job by staging and blocking scenes. A playwright does not need to stage the entire play. A plethora of stage directions limits the creative freedom of director's and actor's and can end up restricting them. and it is good to keep in mind that not all theatres have the same space.

While writing stage directions in dialogue, it is best to only include emotional directions when they go against the grain of speech. One example might be during a serious conversation and one character needs to deliver a line sarcastically. The playwright should use their best

judgement not to dictate more than what is needed. Remember to let the director and the actors do their jobs.

While writing entrances and exits it is important that they are logical and well-motivated by the characters. (Griffiths) If the playwright creates a play that has one fixed location, such as a house living room, they should establish all entrances and exits from that room. If it is established that the entrance to the house is on stage right, it only makes sense that characters coming in or going out use the same entrance or exit. If other characters are in said house, but in another room, they are free to use the other entrances or exits that have been established.

Although I had read a little bit about stage directions before I started writing, I did not understand it enough as a writer. It was only after I paused writing and researched it more in depth that I began to understand that I did not need to write lots of descriptions throughout my script. At the start I wanted the audience to see it exactly how I imagined it, but it became too taxing. I reminded myself, I was writing a play not a novel, not only that, but it was also never going to be staged the exact way I imagined it, unless I directed it. I shifted my writing and I started to better understand the phrase “less is more”, at least when it comes to stage directions. For more on my process of stage directions please see “Building the Space” on page 46.

Chapter 2 Characters

Developing characters

According to Sam Smiley, the author of *Playwriting: The Structure of Action*, a writer composes characters, meaning that they make them up. He emphasizes that, although characters may resemble actual people, they are in fact, not human beings. While creating life-like characters, playwrights need to understand living persons as well as the principles of characterization, or in other words, consider the qualities of a human personality and how they would translate to the qualities of a dramatic character. The difference between real humans and characters is the ability of change; a human personality is infinite and always changing, while a dramatic character is finite and never changes. Although the interpretation of a character may change from reader to reader, a character is limited within the confines of the play. This means they cannot act according to anything that is not written.

Before I jump straight into my process on creating characters, I feel that it is important to discuss characterization and how it can help a playwright plan for their story. While creating a protagonist is essential to a story, it is equally important to create an antagonist, other opposing characters and all supporting characters. In short, a protagonist is the character that the audience identifies with, after all the audience will be involved with the characters' dilemmas and actions. The antagonist is the character or force (outside or internal) that obstructs the protagonist from achieving their goal. Supporting characters are also known as mirror or reflection characters. They often are in the same predicament as the protagonist and share the same goals. It is important to note that not all opposing characters are considered antagonists. (Carter)

Although I have already discussed the plot for *The Voice Within*, one of the very first steps I took was creating the characters. Before I had created my characters, all I knew was the

very basic idea of the story. The only character I knew I wanted was Tom/Thomas, but even then, I originally thought of calling him Tim/Timothy. One of the first books I looked at that talked about building characters was *The Playwright's Workbook*. Van Itallie described an exercise for developing characters that he calls “creating the who”. The object of the exercise is to imagine a character standing in an empty space in the room, and not to relate them to any specific setting. After seeing the character in the empty space that was created, it is time to answer the following questions:

1. Who is there in the space?
2. What is the character's gender?
3. What is their name? (Mr. or Mrs. Something keeps the writer and audience at arm's length from that character. Everyone lives at the center of their own world)
4. How old do they appear to be?
5. How do they move? Easily? Hesitantly? Defiantly?
6. Note only what the audience can see or hear when that character first enters. (if the audience cannot know by seeing, do not include that information. A full biography is great but not what we are doing here.)
7. Note specifics that would interest a director and an actor. (example: it is worth noting whether your character is attractive. Their race may or may not matter. You can note if they have a commanding air, but to specify height would limit casting and be disregarded by a director anyway. Note clothes that reveal behavioral and emotional tendencies, ambitions, and idiosyncrasies. Omit unneeded detail, specifics can help, but a list of everything your character is wearing is not wanted)
8. Make notes on who for ten characters.
9. Do not relate the characters to each other.
10. Include characters of different ages (but none less than twelve, younger characters may be more difficult to cast.) (33)

Before I did this exercise for the characters for *The Voice Within*, I wanted to try it with characters that had no relation to my story. I looked at the examples that Van Itallie had written out, to make sure that I understood what I should do. I took a moment to clear my mind, take a deep cleansing breath, and when I was ready the first character started to appear, when I had answered all the questions, the first character faded away and the second character started to

appear. I continued this process for all ten characters, not relating them to anything or to each other. This is the list that I created:

1. Jordan, female, 16, dressed in black, heavy make-up, goth feel, black boots, standoffish, does not care.
2. George, male, 37, shoulder-length black hair, glasses, a plain t-shirt, cargo shorts, kind smile, slightly overweight.
3. Beth, female, 30, plump, lots of makeup, cheerful, tidy, floral dress, small handbag.
4. Jon, male, 18, sun-bleached hair, tan, muscular, board shorts, flip flops.
5. Jennifer, female, 27, high bun, lipstick, pantsuit, designer bag, eye makeup.
6. Matthew, male, 48, long hair, short, overweight, button-up shirt with a bow tie, dress pants, lab coat, quirky, glasses.
7. Edith, female, 87, short white curly hair, sweet smile, cane, hunched, old people clothes.
8. Alyx, female, 22, pixie cut hair, minimal makeup, hoodie sweatshirt (not baggy), ripped up jeans, skater shoes.
9. Ben, male, 54, business suit, neat hair, clean-shaven, charming, happy.
10. Scott, male, 33, tight curls, scarf, cardigan, jeans, smolder.

Note that I did not write down a description for question 5, ‘How do they move?’, this was more of a visual aspect for me rather than descriptive. When I completed this exercise, I was filled with excitement. I had just created some of my first characters, given them personalities, and I know what they look like. It was so much different than building a character on the spot for improv games, these characters had some dimension to them. I was ready to do the exercise again, but this time I was specifically creating the characters for *The Voice Within*.

Before I started the exercise for the second time, I decided to take a moment to figure out exactly what I was looking for. As I thought about what the story needed, I ended up deciding that I was creating a cast of six characters. As I was preparing, I cleared my mind, took a breath and stared into nothingness. As I said above, I knew my protagonist was going to be Tim, but I had no idea what he would look like. As I waited for Tim to emerge out of thin air, I could see the outline of a figure coming into focus. Once this figure was standing in front of me, I realized it was not Tim, I wondered what happened, this was not the guy I thought it would be. It was at this moment I realized that I should not try to force out characters or scenarios. Once the metaphorical dust settled and I got a good look at the character standing before me, he introduced himself as Tom. That is when I knew *The Voice Within* was not going to be Tim's story, it was Tom's story. Just like that Tim became an afterthought and was no longer being considered for the "main character". After I addressed all the questions with Tom, he faded away and the next characters started to appear one after the other, until I was left with my character list:

1. Tom, male, 26, average, plain, goofy, jeans, t-shirt, slouchy.
2. Thomas, male, 18-35, tall, muscular, scowl, fashionable, handsome, total "dude".
3. James, male, 25, slim, hipster, kind eyes, charming smile, laid-back, scruffy face.
4. Sarah, female, 25, professional, organized, beautiful, serious, exhausted.
5. Carly, female, 24, cute, energetic, short, happy, optimistic, spunky.
6. Dr. Julie Jensen, female, 36, confident, honest, caring, empathetic.

As I continued my research for building characters, I once again turned to David Carter and his book *How to Write a Play*. He had developed a character contrast chart that contains the main characteristics and the counter-characteristic of characters. The purpose of this chart is to

create a balance with the characters temperament, for example giving supporting characters opposite characteristics then the protagonist. These columns helped me by adding additional emotional depth. The counter-characteristic column is used as the “but” column, for example, Sarah is determined and kind, but she is proud. It is not necessary to include all the characteristics for each character, but it is a great starting point. My character contrast chart can be seen below in figure 4.

Figure 4 Character Contrast Chart for *The Voice Within*

Character	Sex and Age	Characteristics	Counter-Characteristics
Tom	Male, 26	Stubborn, dependent	Strong Willed
Thomas	Male, 18-35	Dismissive, stubborn,	Persistent
James	Male, 25	Strong, loyal	Charming
Sarah	Female, 25	Determined, kind	Proud
Carly	Female, 24	Energetic, Spunky	Empathetic
Dr. Julie Jensen	Female, 36	Caring, compassionate	Blunt

Once a basic outline of characters has been created, it is time to flush out more details about the characters. While taking an acting class at Idaho State University, I learned a lot about creating and establishing characterization. Vanessa Ballam, one of the acting professors, created a character sketch that I feel touches on just about all elements of characterization. Although this character sketch was outlined for actors to understand their role, I felt that it would be a great tool for a beginning playwright to develop characters. After filling out these character sketches

with my own characters, I received permission from Ballam to include them in this thesis. I have included the sketches of all six characters because I feel that understanding each of them will help identify their motives and actions throughout the script.

My intention was to never include my character sketches in my script and this idea was fully reinforced as I read *An Actor Prepares* by Constantin Stanislavski. In it, Stanislavski asks “Does the dramatist supply everything that the actors need to know about the play? Does the author give sufficient details of what has happened before the play begins? Does he let you know what will happen when it is ended, or what goes on behind the scenes? “. (55)

He continues by saying “no”. The details that a playwright creates while making characters are not necessary for the story to continue, and the details that are given are presented throughout in the form of given circumstances. These given circumstances allow actors to glimpse into what might have happened before the play began. If a playwright were to give actors all the details about the characters they were playing, it would rob the actors their freedom of interpretation, and how they might make a role their own. Allow the actors to do their own research by reading the script and understanding the given circumstances. This helps ensure that all productions will be different and unique to their own.

Character Sketch: Tom

A. Physical Silhouette

- a. Age: 26. Height: 6'. Weight: 230lb. Body Type: Average/a little overweight.
- b. Type and quality of speech. Dialect. Vocabulary. Register: Learned, higher chest voice, Western United States.

- c. Characteristics of Walking: Leads with his shoulders. Sitting: slouches. Running: Does not run often, easily out of breath. Dancing: Simple movements to the beat. Laughing: Lightly. Crying: Silent, minimal tears.
- d. Sensitive/insensitive: Sensitive. Joyful/defensive: Defensive. Physical demeanor: A little standoffish.
- e. Mannerisms or idiosyncrasies: Tries to be kind but loses his temper easily.
- f. Nationality, section of the country, province, or region: Caucasian, Western United States, Los Angeles.
- g. Level of vitality: Not strong, not confident, energy level depends on the situation.

B. Psychological Silhouette

- a. What is the character's environment that would impress upon their psychology?
 - i. Tries to adapt to the situation, weather affects his mood, a night owl.
- b. What is the character's self-concept?
 - i. Tom is stubborn, dependent, and a rationalizer.
- c. How does the character behave under emotional stress?
 - i. Fear: Gets startled but tries to laugh it off. Anger: Has a short fuse, can get loud, might make hurtful comments. Love: Hidden love, is not very affectionate. Greed: Takes what he can get. Jealousy: Gets frustrated when he does not get what he wants.
- d. What is the character's outlook on life?
 - i. Pessimistic

C. Character Biography

- a. Childhood, Adolescence, Adulthood, Middle Age, Old age.

- i. Childhood: Tom was a happy kid. He loved playing with his toy cars. He is the middle child of three, so he did not get a lot of attention. Grew up in the lower middle class.
- ii. Adolescence: Around 10 years old, Tom started to notice that his parents were fighting a lot, it started to affect his mood and his outlook on life. At 13, his parents split, and a year later they filed for divorce. Around this time Tom started to show symptoms of depression. He met James in high school. He lived with his mother and stayed at his Dad's on the weekend. Home life was not easy. At 16 Tom got a job at a local fast-food joint so he could make some extra money. The day he turned 18, he moved out and got an apartment with James. They lived together for five years. At 18, he also got a new job at a local retail store. At 19 he met Sarah.
- iii. Adulthood: At 20, Tom and Sarah started dating. He started at the local community college, but shortly dropped out. At 22, James offered Tom a job, but he declined because he felt that it was a handout. Soon after Tom was promoted to a department supervisor. At 23, he was making enough money to get his own apartment, it was around this time that Tom's depression started to get unmanageable. Over the next three years, Tom had several serious depression phases. He is currently 26 and hits another serious depression phase when Sarah rejects his proposal.
- iv. Middle Age: N/A
- v. Old Age: N/A

- b. Educational background: Tom struggled to graduate high school but managed to pull through. He took two and a half years off to work. At 20 he got in at the local community college but dropped out after the first semester.
- c. Occupation: Retail Department Supervisor.
- d. Religion: Christian, non-practicing
- e. Political beliefs: No affiliation with any political party. In 2012, when he was 20, he voted for Obama.
- f. Family background:
 - i. Grandparents: Did not have much of a relationship with his grandparents. His maternal grandfather passed when he was 2, and grandmother passed when he was 5. Paternal grandparents are still living, but they live across the country and have not been very present in his life.
 - ii. Parents: After their divorce, Tom took more to his mother, and even then, their relationship was not very strong. When he was at his dad's house he was usually left alone. Since he moved out, Tom has little to no contact with his dad. He talked occasionally with his mom, but they have not maintained their relationship, as a result it has been about three years since they have talked.
 - iii. Siblings: Tom is the middle child of three. His sister is 3 years older, and his brother is 4 years younger. Growing up, his sister picked on him, but their relationship has matured, they talk about 2-3 times a month. Tom picked on his brother a lot when they were younger, it may have damaged their relationship as adults. They do not talk often.

- iv. Children: No children
- g. Marital Status: Girlfriend is Sarah. It is complicated.
- h. Sexual orientation: Heterosexual
- i. Hobbies: Video games, watching any movies, letting plants die.
- j. Home/Social life:
 - i. Homelife: When he is not working, he is usually at home. When Sarah has time off, they can be found at either his apartment or hers. He spends most of his free time inside playing video games or watching movies.
 - ii. Social life: Every Saturday night Tom and James have a guy's night where they order some pizza, get a few beers and select a movie based on the previous week's criteria. Aside from guy's night, occasionally, the four friends will get together for a date night.
- k. Style of dress: Tom is very casual. When working or in public, he usually wears jeans and a t-shirt. At home he changes into joggers or athletic pants.
- l. Time Period: The play opens on the evening of April 14, 2018. (Same for all)
 - i. Los Angeles News: April 14, A fire inside a music studio in Studio City, two dead, two in critical condition.
 - ii. US News: April 14, the US and its allies fired 100 missiles at Syria in response to the chemical Attack that took place a week earlier.
 - iii. World News: April 12, at least 30 people in Malawi have died from a cholera outbreak. Another 893 people have fallen ill according to the health ministry. The outbreak was due to contaminated water and poor food hygiene.

Character Sketch: Thomas

A. Physical Silhouette

- a. Age: 18-35. Height: 5'10"-6'3". Weight: 160-220lb. Body Type: Fit/athletic.
- b. Type and quality of speech. Dialect. Vocabulary. Register: Learned, chest voice, Western United States.
- c. Characteristics of Walking: Leads with his chest. Sitting: either straight up or relaxed back. Running: Quick and easily. Dancing: Does not dance. Laughing: Loud and boastful. Crying: Does not cry.
- d. Sensitive/insensitive: Insensitive. Joyful/defensive: Defensive. Physical demeanor: Prig.
- e. Mannerisms or idiosyncrasies: Jerk, does not care what others say or think, very self-centered.
- f. Nationality, section of the country, province, or region: Caucasian, Western United States, Los Angeles.
- g. Level of vitality: Very strong, tough, confident, high negative energy.

B. Psychological Silhouette

- a. What is the character's environment that would impress upon their psychology?
 - i. Stays consistent with himself in most situations, weather will affect mood, and is alert at all times of day.
- b. What is the character's self-concept?
 - i. Thomas is dismissive, stubborn, and persistent.
- c. How does the character behave under emotional stress?

- i. Fear: Does not fright easily. Anger: Quick to anger, gets hot and loud.
Love: Only loves himself. Greed: Very greedy, will try to manipulate others to get what he wants. Jealousy: Only gets jealous when it seems that Tom is happy, he will try to ruin that happiness.

d. What is the character's outlook on life?

- i. Pessimistic.

C. Character Biography

(Keep in mind that Thomas is Tom's inner thoughts projected as a character. This character biography may be very similar to Tom's with minor alterations.)

- a. Childhood, Adolescence, Middle Age, Old age.
 - i. Childhood: Thomas was a happy kid. He loved nothing more than playing with his toy cars. He grew up in a lower middle-class family. As the middle child of three, Thomas was not given much attention, he started to feel neglected.
 - ii. Adolescence: At age 10, Thomas noticed his parents fighting more, it started to affect his mood, he often wondered if would be like this for him. At 13, his parents split up and a year later they divorced, Thomas started to show signs of depression. His thoughts were becoming more negative, he was negative about his body image, and it was harder to make friends. At 16 Thomas got a job at a local fast-food joint. He did not care about the job much, but he was making his own money. At 18, Thomas moved out and got an apartment with James. He enjoyed living with his best friend.

They lived together for five years. At 18 he got a new retail job, and at 19 he met Sarah.

- iii. Adulthood: At 20, Thomas and Sarah started dating. He started at the local community college, but things became too difficult, and he dropped out. At 22, Thomas was promoted to a department supervisor. At 23 he decided he wanted to get his own apartment. He really enjoyed the time he lived with James but felt that he was ready to try to take care of himself. Depression started to become unmanageable. Thomas was not happy anymore. He was growing tired of bottling up his feelings. Over the next few years, Thomas had several serious depression phases. His current depression phase started when James ditched him on their guy's night, and then snowballed the next day when Sarah rejected his proposal.

- iv. Middle Age: N/A

- v. Old Age: N/A

- b. Educational background: In grade school, Thomas loved to learn. When his parents were splitting up, he became less interested in school and started to struggle. Graduating on time was looking impossible, but he managed to pull through. College was proving to be much more challenging so he thought it would be easier to drop out.
- c. Occupation: Retail Department Supervisor.
- d. Religion: Christian, non-practicing
- e. Political beliefs: No affiliation with any political party.
- f. Family background:

- i. Grandparents: His maternal grandparents passed when he was young, and because his paternal grandparents have not been very present in his life, he does not care about them much.
 - ii. Parents: Thomas hates that his parents divorced. He used to talk to his mother occasionally, but it has been about three years since they have talked. He resents his father. Due to his parents' divorce Thomas is hesitant on getting married to Sarah, in fear that their marriage would end the same way.
 - iii. Siblings: Thomas does not have the best relationship with either of his siblings. He occasionally talks to his older sister, but the conversations are not very meaningful. He treated his younger brother poorly and that has hindered their relationship.
 - iv. Children: No children
- g. Marital Status: Thomas is not an actual person.
- h. Sexual orientation: Heterosexual
- i. Hobbies: Yelling at Tom, being rude to Tom, and saying anything negative to Tom.
- j. Home/Social life:
 - i. Homelife: Likes to sulk around the house. Tries to get Tom in bad moods. Does not like when Tom is happy.
 - ii. Social life: Only likes to go out to drink.
- k. Style of dress: Thomas will most likely mimic what Tom is wearing, to depict that he and Tom are the same person.

Character Sketch: James

A. Physical Silhouette

- a. Age: 25. Height: 5'10". Weight: 160lb. Body Type: Fit.
- b. Type and quality of speech. Dialect. Vocabulary. Register: Learned, throat voice but not raspy, Western United States.
- c. Characteristics of Walking: Leads with his head, a little bounce in his step.
Sitting: Relaxed. Running: Runs well. Dancing: Knows how to move. Laughing: Rich, fun, and energetic. Crying: Not afraid to let tears flow.
- d. Sensitive/insensitive: Sensitive. Joyful/defensive: Joyful. Physical demeanor: Friendly, welcoming, attractive.
- e. Mannerisms or idiosyncrasies: Always kind, apologetic.
- f. Nationality, section of the country, province, or region: Mixed race half African American/half Caucasian, Western United States, Los Angeles.
- g. Level of vitality: Physically and mentally strong, confident, passionate, a little oblivious.

B. Psychological Silhouette

- a. What is the character's environment that would impress upon their psychology?
 - i. Does not let anything get him down, can be very sympathetic.
- b. What is the character's self-concept?
 - i. James is strong, loyal, and charming.
- c. How does the character behave under emotional stress?
 - i. Fear: Easily spooked, laughs it off. Anger: Does not get very angry, it takes a lot to get him mad. Love: Young love, puppy like. Greed: Never

greedy, is very thankful for what he has. Jealousy: He is confident in his relationship and does not get very jealous.

d. What is the character's outlook on life?

i. Optimistic.

C. Character Biography

a. Childhood, Adolescence, Middle Age, Old age.

i. Childhood: James grew up in a one parent home. He was raised by his mother, and never met his Father. His mom provided him with everything she could. Many of his possessions were hand-me-downs from neighboring families.

ii. Adolescence: As an only child, James learned young to help his mom. At the age of 12, he would make a little money by mowing lawns and doing other yard work around his neighborhood. James and Tom met in high school. They connected very quickly and became best friends. When James graduated high school, he and Tom moved in together. At 18 James got accepted at the local university. At 20 his mom passed away from cancer; he did not let her passing get him down and by 21 he received a business degree. He turned his old yard care services into a successful business. After Tom moved out, James moved in with his girlfriend Carly. He is currently 25, happy, and living his best life.

iii. Middle Age: N/A

iv. Old Age: N/A

- b. Educational background: His mom told him when he was young that if he worked hard, he could succeed, James has never looked back.
- c. Occupation: James owns and operates his own lawn care business.
- d. Religion: Lutheran, attends services often, but not every week.
- e. Political beliefs: No political affiliation. He will research elections and vote for who he thinks would be the best candidate.
- f. Family background:
 - i. Grandparents: His maternal grandparents are a constant in his life, they were always around. Since his mother's passing, they continue to love and support him. They invite him over for dinner often.
 - ii. Parents: He had a great relationship with his mother. She was his foundation and encouraged him to follow his dreams. Although she is departed, he continually thinks of her, and believes that when he talks to her that she is nearby.
 - iii. Siblings: No known siblings
 - iv. Children: No children
- g. Marital Status: Girlfriend is Carly
- h. Sexual orientation: Heterosexual.
- i. Hobbies: Playing games, watching movies, and doing yard work.
- j. Home/Social life:
 - i. Homelife: Since moving in with Carly, home life is great. He has everything he wants.

- ii. Social life: Loves to go out. James and Tom have a reoccurring guy's night every Saturday. He goes on dates with Carly all the time.
- k. Style of dress: For work, James wears worn out jeans (no holes, rips or tears), and a work polo (basic polo with the work logo on the pocket). If James is staying in, he likes to be comfortable, sport shorts and a tank. If he is going out, he likes to look nice, slacks button up shirt, dress shoes, (does not always have a tie).

Character Sketch: Sarah

A. Physical Silhouette

- a. Age: 25. Height: 5'8". Weight: 140lb. Body Type: Thin, but not fit.
- b. Type and quality of speech. Dialect. Vocabulary. Register: Educated, high chest voice, Western United States.
- c. Characteristics of Walking: Quickly, leads with her head. Sitting: Good posture. Running: Does not run a lot, but she is quick on her feet. Dancing: rocks out when she is alone, has some social dancing skills. Laughing: good strong laugh, an occasional snort. Crying: Tries not to cry in front of others.
- d. Sensitive/insensitive: Sensitive. Joyful/defensive: Joyful. Physical demeanor: Professional, friendly, kind.
- e. Mannerisms or idiosyncrasies: Proud of her accomplishments, thinks she knows what others need.
- f. Nationality, section of the country, province, or region: Caucasian, Western United States, Los Angeles.
- g. Level of vitality: Mentally strong at work, but when that is wounded it seeps through, decisive, confident.

B. Psychological Silhouette

- a. What is the character's environment that would impress upon their psychology?
 - i. Because of work she has learned to be strong on the outside. A rainy day would not alter her mood, but she would use it as an excuse to stay in and read a book or watch a sappy movie.
- b. What is the character's self-concept?
 - i. Sarah is determined, kind, and proud.
- c. How does the character behave under emotional stress?
 - i. Fear: Can get really spooked, avoids situations where scary things happen, hates horror movies or haunted houses. Anger: She only really loses her temper with Tom, but it is usually his fault. Love: She loves a lot, but sometimes has a hard time showing it. Greed: Not greedy at all. Jealousy: Jealousy only comes when Tom is not doing what he needs to or is not where he needs to be.
- d. What is the character's outlook on life?
 - i. Optimistic.

C. Character Biography

- a. Childhood, Adolescence, Middle Age, Old age.
 - i. Childhood: Sarah grew up as an only child. Her father is a doctor and her mother stayed home to raise her. She had everything and every opportunity that she wanted. Although she had everything growing up, her parents taught her to work hard and to study harder.

- ii. Adolescence: Sarah was the top of her class throughout school. She was not necessarily the “popular” girl, but everyone knew her. She graduated high school a few months before her 18th birthday and started college the following semester. She met Tom when she was 18, and they started dating when she was 19.
 - iii. Adulthood: By 22 She finished college with a degree in nursing and got a job at the same hospital as her father. She is currently 25 and thinking about pursuing med school to become a doctor.
 - iv. Middle Age: N/A
 - v. Old Age: N/A
- b. Educational background: Sarah was the top of her class. Graduated college in nursing, is considering going back to school to become a doctor.
 - c. Occupation: Nurse
 - d. Religion: Catholic, non-practicing
 - e. Political beliefs: Democrat
 - f. Family background:
 - i. Grandparents: All her grandparents are still around. Growing up they were all very present. Her grandparents are around during holidays and special occasions.
 - ii. Parents: Sarah is a daddy’s girl; she wants to be just like him. He is her role model. She loves her mother, they have a very close relationship, they do everything together. Sarah and her mother’s favorite pastime is shopping.

- iii. Siblings: No siblings, she is an only child.
- iv. Children: No children
- g. Marital Status: Boyfriend is Tom. It is complicated.
- h. Sexual orientation: Heterosexual
- i. Hobbies: learning new things, reading, dancing in her apartment when she is alone.
- j. Home/Social life:
 - i. Homelife: Sarah lives by herself. She is very independent. She goes home to her parents' house whenever she can. She splits her free time equally between her apartment and Tom's.
 - ii. Social life: She loves spending time with her friends. Carly is her best friend, when Sarah is not with Tom, she is with Carly.
- k. Style of dress: Very professional. Usually in scrubs because of work. When she is not at work, she likes to wear jeans and a nice top. She likes to dress formally for special outings.

Character Sketch: Carly

A. Physical Silhouette

- a. Age: 24. Height: 5'4". Weight: 140lb. Body Type: average, a little overweight.
- b. Type and quality of speech. Dialect. Vocabulary. Register: Educated, head voice (not annoying high, bubblier), Western United States.
- c. Characteristics of Walking: Leads with her chest. Sitting: Comfortable. Running: Does not run unless she needs to. Dancing: Yes, life of the party, will dance to anything. Laughing: Giggly, cute. Crying: Sobs.

- d. Sensitive/insensitive: Sensitive. Joyful/defensive: Joyful. Physical demeanor: Very bubbly, friendly, and caring
- e. Mannerisms or idiosyncrasies: Apologetic, a little ditzzy, fun.
- f. Nationality, section of the country, province, or region: Caucasian, Western United States, Northern California.
- g. Level of vitality: Very caring, loves her friends, will do anything for them, strong willed, indecisive.

B. Psychological Silhouette

- a. What is the character's environment that would impress upon their psychology?
 - i. She always tries to make light of situations, never wants to be in a bad mood. Rain is a chance to run outside and jump in the puddles.
- b. What is the character's self-concept?
 - i. Carly is energetic, spunky, and empathetic.
- c. How does the character behave under emotional stress?
 - i. Fear: Gets scared very easily, but it is never serious, likes an occasional scary movie or haunted house. Anger: Never angry, ever. Love: Young love/loveey dovey. Greed: Never greedy, gives to others when and what she can. Jealousy: Does not get jealous often, only when James is not around, never negative jealousy.
- d. What is the character's outlook on life?
- e. Optimistic.

C. Character Biography

- a. Childhood, Adolescence, Middle Age, Old age.

- i. Childhood: Carly had a good childhood. She is the youngest of four. She was able to rely on her older siblings a lot. From a young age she has always had a lot of energy. She loves to sing and dance around the house. Her family was not poor, but they were not very well off. Two income household.
- ii. Adolescence: Because of her high energy, it made school a little difficult. She was still a good student but was often called out for talking in class. When she was 16, James was hired to care for her family yard, they became friends, but did not start dating for a few years. When she graduated high school, she went to community college.
- iii. Adulthood: Carly was in community college for three years, she opted for her associates degree. At 22, She got a job working as a receptionist at a local real estate office. She is currently 24, lives with James and is still a little ball of energy.
- iv. Middle Age: N/A
- v. Old Age: N/A
- b. Educational background: Struggled a little in K-12 because of her hyperactivity. She went to college for three years and got an associate degree.
- c. Occupation: Receptionist at a local real estate office.
- d. Religion: Christian, goes to church when James goes
- e. Political beliefs: Green Party
- f. Family background:

- i. Grandparents: Both her maternal grandparents are living. She has a good relationship with her grandmother, and an okay relationship with her grandfather. Her paternal grandmother is deceased, and her grandfather is a constant support for her. He has attended all her important life milestones.
 - ii. Parents: Both of her parents' work, they did their best to provide for the family. She loves her parents very much. She looks up to her mother the most, it is where Carly gets her courage from. Her father was busy working while she was growing up, but since she is an adult now their relationship has been growing.
 - iii. Siblings: As the youngest of four, and the only girl, she got picked on, but her older brothers have also been very protective, the "nobody can pick on my little sister, but me" mentality. Now that they are older, she tries to see them as often as she can. She tries to have her siblings over occasionally for family gatherings.
 - iv. Children: No children
- g. Marital Status: Boyfriend is James
- h. Sexual orientation: Heterosexual
- i. Hobbies: Watching sappy movies with James, yoga, watching musicals, and crafting
- j. Home/Social life:
 - i. Homelife: Carly is very happy. She gets to see James every night. They go on dates often. She is not very tidy.

ii. Social life: Loves to go out, does not care with who. Likes to hang out with Sarah.

k. Style of dress: Anything that she thinks is cute. Has often found outfits while thrifting.

Character Sketch: Dr. Julie Jensen

A. Physical Silhouette

- a. Age: 36. Height: 5'10". Weight: 140lb. Body Type: Slim/fit.
- b. Type and quality of speech. Dialect. Vocabulary. Register: Educated, high chest voice, Western United States.
- c. Characteristics of Walking: Leads with shoulders, one foot in front of the other. Sitting: Great posture, never slouches. Running: Runs daily. Dancing: Social dancing. Laughing: Lightly and only when appropriate. Crying: Never in public.
- d. Sensitive/insensitive: Sensitive. Joyful/defensive: Joyful. Physical demeanor: Professional, compassionate, friendly.
- e. Mannerisms or idiosyncrasies: Great listener, can be very blunt, but kind about it.
- f. Nationality, section of the country, province, or region: Caucasian, Western United States, Los Angeles.
- g. Level of vitality: Very strong willed, always willing to help others, confident.

B. Psychological Silhouette

- a. What is the character's environment that would impress upon their psychology?
 - i. Does not let the environment impress her psychology. Keeps herself emotionally separate. When it rains, she likes to cuddle up under a blanket, watch a movie and eat ice cream.

- b. What is the character's self-concept?
 - i. Dr. Julie Jensen is caring, compassionate, and blunt.
- c. How does the character behave under emotional stress?
 - i. Fear: Only afraid of clowns and thunder. Anger: Never shows her anger out right, can be a little frustrated but never condescending. Love: She keeps most of her love live at home, might have a picture of her husband and two kids on her desk. Greed: Not greedy, always trying to help others. Jealousy: She does not have anything to be jealous of.
- d. What is the character's outlook on life?
 - i. Optimistic.

C. Character Biography

- a. Childhood, Adolescence, Middle Age, Old age.
 - i. Childhood: Julie grew up in a military household. She was raised all over the country. She was well taught and was expected to perform well. She is the oldest of five. She had to learn responsibility at a young age.
 - ii. Adolescence: When Julie was around 10, she was expected to help more around the house, this included taking care of her younger siblings. She did very well in school, but because of moving around she was not able to form many friendships. At 16 she decided she wanted to join the military, but her father advised her to continue her education. When she graduated high school. She took a year off to work and try to figure out what she wanted to do.

- iii. Adulthood: At 19 she was accepted into a four-year university where she began to study for the military. Halfway through she discovered a natural yearning to help people, which drove her to switch towards a medical profession. She completed her bachelor's degree at 23, finished her master's degree by 25, then continued for her doctorate which she finished by 30. She met her husband at college at the age of 22, they got married when she was 25. She had her first child at 28.
 - iv. Middle Age: After getting her doctorate, she and her family moved to California where she got a job as a therapist. At the age of 32 she had a second child. Julie is currently 36 and working at the same office. She has been working with Tom for about a year.
 - v. Old Age: N/A
- b. Educational background: Bachelor's degree in Political Science. Master's degree in counseling. Doctorate degree in Clinical Psychology.
- c. Occupation: Therapist
- d. Religion: Believes in God, does not actively practice any religion
- e. Political beliefs: Democrat.
- f. Family background:
 - i. Grandparents: Did not really spend much time with any grandparent during her youth. Communicated to them by phone or birthday card.
 - ii. Parents: Julie's mother stayed at home to raise the family. Aside from school Julie learned everything from her mom. Her father was a bit tough

on her, he was the driving force for her to succeed. He was a bit more “tough love”. She loves them both.

- iii. Siblings: As the oldest of five, she was very present in their upbringing. She has maintained a good relationship with all her siblings, even though they may not speak or see each other often.
- iv. Children: Two children, 8 y/o and 4 y/o.
- g. Marital Status: Happily married
- h. Sexual orientation: Heterosexual
- i. Hobbies: Reading, helping others, playing with her kids.
- j. Home/Social life:
 - i. Homelife: Stay at home husband who cares for the kids. She loves spending evenings with her family. When the kids go to bed, she enjoys a nice glass of wine, and spending time with her husband.
 - ii. Social life: Does not go out much, would rather spend time at home with her kids.
- k. Style of dress: At work she is very professional. At home she likes to dress comfortably.

Character Arch

Regardless of how playwrights create their characters it is important to know who they are. What information the playwrights choose to include in the script is up to them, but there should be some notes on how the characters change. This is also known as a character arc. As I mentioned before, conflict is what propels a play forward, and the way that a character responds to that conflict is what determines how they change throughout the play. To understand this

concept of change during conflict, I like to think of it as winning or losing. However a playwright decides to keep track of this information is up to them, for myself, I have created a simple table so that I can immediately see the transitions that my characters make. I am only including my table example for Tom, but it is a good idea to keep a record of all characters. See figure 5.

Figure 5 TOM - Character Arc - *The Voice Within*

TOM - Character Arc - <i>The Voice Within</i>			
Scene	Major Conflict	How They Respond	Win or Lose
1	James suddenly has to leave.	Tom gets upset, gets drunk.	Lose
2	Tom proposes, Sarah says “no”.	Tom is confused then gets passive.	Lose
3	Tom interrupts game night with Sarah, Carly and James.	Tom shows up drunk and causes a scene.	Lose
4	Thomas tries to make Tom feel bad about himself.	Tom tries to collect his thoughts by using a breathing exercise.	Win
5	Dr. Jensen Tries to get Tom to think positively about himself.	Tom creates a pro and con list for work and thinks about the things that make him happy.	Win
6	Sarah and Tom talk about their future.	Things get heated, Tom yells at Sarah.	Lose
7	Sarah and Tom talk about separating.	They agree and talk calmly, Tom gifts the engagement ring to Sarah.	Win
8	Thomas and Tom fight.	Tom contemplates killing himself, he goes to the bedroom and there is a gunshot.	Depends on the message the director wants to give.

Chapter 3 Dialogue

The first thing we need to understand before writing dialogue is the difference between the written word and the spoken word. There are a lot of rules to obey when it comes to the written word. In this paper for example, the words that I am typing are well thought out and structured, they are part of a precise plan. When I speak, my responses are genuine, and authentic. In writing I can take my time to formulate a well sound response. Both can be very effective ways to communicate, but each can have different meanings behind what is being said.

Van Itallie compares a playwright to a composer. He says if a composer writes music, then a playwright is a composer of the spoken word. Spoken words reveal emotion, the information that our words convey is what makes them dramatic. When we speak, our words vibrate within our bodies and in the space around us. Our tone is what helps us color those words with emotional meaning. When we listen to others speak, we can listen for the true meaning by understanding their tone and deliverance. In some cases, we can listen for the feeling hidden in peoples' words. Playwrights should take any and every opportunity to speak the words that they have written, it will only enhance their power.

From my research I have learned that when writing dialogue, it is not necessary to follow the rules that accompany normal writing. The only rule to follow is that it should sound like speech. I like to think about how speech can change, for example, how would someone speak with their mother, verses, how they would speak with their friends?

Van Itallie says "If you try to conform to an idea of how people should speak...the results will be dull. When you listen to your characters in your mind's ear, write down what you "hear", your characters will be strong, and your writing style will be most likely to receive praise." (18) I really like that he suggests that you listen to the character rather than trying to talk for them.

Similarly, Carter stated, “Don’t force character conversation, don’t assume what they are saying, don’t talk for them. Listen to what they say and simply record.” (68) He continues to suggest that dialogue does not need to be grammatically correct. Imperfect grammar in speech reflects how people talk and can be used as a trait for developing a character. The most important thing about writing dialogue is to make it sound authentic.

Before finding this gold nugget of information from Van Itallie and Carter, I had tried on several occasions to write dialogue and felt that I was trying to force the conversation along. Using their suggestion of listening and recording gave me one of my first successes in writing *The Voice Within*.

One night, before I even began writing the play, I woke up at four in the morning, I did not understand what was going on. I closed my eyes and tried to drift back into my slumber but the only thing I could hear was Tom and James talking in my head. I suddenly realized that this is exactly what Van Itallie and Carter were talking about. I jumped out of bed, grabbed my computer and without thinking I just started typing. The voices seemed to finish, I looked at the time and was surprised to see that I had written for about forty minutes. Without going back to look at what I had just written, I closed my computer and went back to bed. When I finally got up that morning, I did my usual routine. When I was ready, I went back to my computer to check what I had done just a few hours before. It was terrible, but that was okay, after reading through it I made some edits and a few changes, and I thought it sounded pretty good. Since then, the first scene went through about four or five revisions, but the majority of what I had written that night remained, it was just formatted better after the revisions.

The primary purpose of dialogue is to advance the action of a play. The most basic scene set up is like a tennis match. Character A speaks to character B who then replies, then it

continues back and forth. Each line is triggered by the previous line, which is either commented on, answers or avoids a question, or to pursue a different line starting from where the other character left off. Characters need to be consistent throughout the entirety of the play. If they have specific beliefs, they cannot go back on them. They need to use action and dialogue to stand for what they believe. (Griffiths)

Chapter 4 Setting the Scene

Building the Space

During my research I have discovered that not many “play writing” books talk about creating the physical environment. A few books briefly talk about, setting, such as period, place, and passage of time. I personally feel that creating the physical environment is just as important as creating the characters or the dialogue. Getting a glimpse of the character’s environment can help us understand some of their characteristics. Out of these four elements of space, the three that may take the least amount of effort for a playwright is the period, place and time. Period represents when era or date in which the play takes place. Place is the location, this can be a real location such as New York City, or when writing fantasy, the setting could be imaginary such as Middle Earth used in *Lord of the Rings*. The passage of time is represented by the time frame in which the play takes place. Time is an interesting concept for theatre because the audience does not see every moment of a character’s life on stage. What the audience sees is a heightened and dramatized version of life. Unless the playwright feels it is necessary to the story, they do not need to show characters brushing their teeth, waiting for the bus, or ordering coffee at the cafe.

The physical environment of a play is where the scenes are happening, like a bedroom, a kitchen, or park. Any of these locations would have physical characteristics to help establish where they are. From the sources I have used, the only one who includes an exercise on creating a physical environment is Van Itallie. Like his structure for “creating the who”, he has an exercise for “creating the where” which provides a list of questions to consider the physical environment. This exercise could prove helpful to some, but I chose to approach creating the physical environment a little differently. (For those interested in the exercise “creating the

where” outlined by Van Itallie, the instructions can be found on page 35 in his book *The Playwright's Workbook*)

Using a combination of Van Itallie’s “creating the where” and an exercise I learned in an acting class, I created my own physical environment exercise. Like imagining a character appearing in the empty space, I imagined what kind of space I wanted to use in my script. Rather than imagining what the space would look like on the stage, I first thought of it as an actual location. The example below is the description for Tom’s apartment living room described for the first scene of *The Voice Within*.

As I looked around this empty space, I began to see the things that Tom had in his living room. I began listing in detail the entire contents of his apartment living room. My description includes everything hanging on the walls, all the furniture in the room, and everything that might be on the furniture. After imagining the space as an actual living room, I removed the “fourth wall” and opened the space. Due to changing scenes, I feel that it is not necessary to include walls, which means anything hanging or leaning on the walls are not necessary to help tell the story (see description below). Once I imagined how the space would look on the stage, I needed to describe the space as if it were written in actual stage directions. During this step it is important to describe the scene simply and effectively. Some essential directions are great, something to get the scene started, but do not get too carried away with details. (Van Itallie)

Visual of Tom’s Living Room (actual living space)

A 15x15ft space, A well-used couch sits in the center of the room on top of a large throw rug. A slightly beaten-up coffee table sits just in front of the couch. The front wall houses a medium size entertainment stand on top of which sits a 55in LED 4k television, and a modern abstract painting hangs on the wall left of the television. A medium sized wilting plant takes up

the front right corner of the room just barely in front of the window on the right wall. In the front left corner, against the left wall, leans a large bookshelf, a row of books lines the top shelf, the shelf below has some collectable items like a few action figures and toys, video games and movies line the third and fourth shelf, the fifth and bottom shelf is lined with additional books, some of them oversized and undisturbed. Centered on the left wall is a door leading to Tom's bedroom. Toward the back of the left wall hangs a second frame, this one containing a simple photograph of his parents. Below the photo on the wall sits a medium sized dining table, which has two chairs, one at the back, and the other to the right. The kitchen sits off the back of the living room but will not be included in the set design of the play.

Visual of Tom's Living Room (audience/actor perspective)

Everything stated above is what Tom's living room would look like if it were an actual living room. For this space to be on a stage there are changes that need to be made to account for visibility and movement. Due to the different locations throughout the play, walls are not actually needed, and thus the need for items hanging on or next to walls are not needed. This includes, the painting, the photo, the bookshelf, the entertainment stand, and the television. Also having worked as an actor and a stage technician, I know the struggle of having a throw rug on stage and trying to remove it between scenes. The rug is not needed unless a director decides to include it. The essential things to have are the couch, the coffee table, the dining table with two chairs and the wilting plant.

Because the room is now on the stage the dimensions should not match the original idea of a 15x15 ft square room, the floor plan is much more open to utilize as much stage space as the director wants. The couch and the coffee table will still be placed in the center of the stage. The dining table should sit up stage right with the chairs on any side of the table except for the down

stage side. The wilting plant can be placed up stage left. Additional items that could be added to the space can include a trash bin, near the dining table, and a coat rack near the apartment entrance, stage right.

Tom's Living Room Script Description

Tom is tidying up his living room apartment. A well-used couch is in the center of the room, a few pieces of dirty clothes draped on it. A slightly beaten-up coffee table in front of the couch, a few books or magazines lay on top. A few pairs of socks can be seen on the floor around the couch. A dining table with a few chairs are USR, a bag of chips, a six-pack of beer bottles, and a few snacks rest on top. A neglected wilting plant placed in the back USL. As Tom cleans around, a buzzer sounds. Tom walks over to the apartment entrance SL and presses the intercom button.

As for the other elements of setting such as period, place, and passage of time. As I said, these three elements do not take nearly as much time to create. I knew my story was pre-Covid, I decided to set the period in 2018. I had a few issues arise when deciding on a location. I wanted to give any director the option of relating the story to their own personal geographical area, but having an ambiguous location was proving to be more difficult than it needed to be. I quickly decided to set the place in Los Angeles. I wanted to set the time in early spring and decided on April, after looking at a calendar to make my dates correct, I settled that the play starts on the 14th and ends on the 17th. When producing *The Voice Within* it is not necessary to have the dates exact, because I never mention the days. James, however mentions that spring had come early that year, but still does not mention April.

Having a good description of the physical environment can help with the flow of the scene, especially since the playwright will know where everything is in the space. Although I

have created visuals of each location in the scene, I felt that it was unnecessary to include them all here. Tom's apartment, being the main location throughout my script, should give enough information for anyone who might be following along to understand the basics of environment building.

Chapter 5 The Revision

Workshopping

Once a playwright has finished writing a script, it is still far from being complete. It is important to back and reread everything. Look for descriptions or dialogue that might need to be changed in order to help the story flow better. While I entered my revision phase I looked for suggestions on how to begin my revision. Catron writes two separate sections in his book, the first titled “Working Alone To Revise Your Play”. While working alone, he suggests reading the finished play aloud to yourself rather than silently. Become the characters, shout the explosive lines, whisper the tender moments, and experience the emotions. Avoid looking for minor changes and focus on the overall effect of the play. As I did this with *The Voice Within*, I found minimal edits, but I was finding it difficult to disconnect from being a playwright to being a reader.

The second section by Catron is “Working With Others To Revise Your Play”. He suggests that the playwright find actors to read the play aloud. Avoid directing the actors and encourage them to use their creativity to interpret the characters on their own. The playwright should consider recording the read so that they have it for future study. As the actors read, the playwright should mark the play with revisions, but not to change things during the read so that they do not miss anything. After the actors finish the reading, they should be invited to comment and question the play. This should not be a time for critique, but rather an opportunity to listen to others about how the play impacted them. Similarly, Kathleen George emphasizes the importance of workshopping in her book *Playwriting: The First Workshop*. Here are a few rules that she suggests while having a workshop: (This list is paraphrased. The full list can be found in *Playwriting: The First Workshop* on page 25)

1. Read the play whenever possible, as the playwright you can read the stage directions. Do not act the play, just read and listen.
2. Let others read the play aloud, do not try and act the play, this way there is more emphasis on the play rather than the actors.
3. After you read the play, allow others to react to it, let everyone share.
4. The playwright should not speak. Listen and take notes. Most importantly listen to the reactions.
5. Comments are meant to help. Discussion should focus on what the writer was attempting and if the attempt was successful. If not, discuss what would help make it successful.

The Voice Within Workshop

For my workshop I found a few actors to read aloud the script for me and I found it invaluable because I was able to listen to others read my words and I did not need to focus so much on the script itself. I had five actors helping, one of them read for two characters and I followed along marking for changes as well as reading the stage directions.

After the reading, I got a lot of positive feedback from my actors. Many of them felt that the depiction of depression and anxiety were very realistic. I allowed them the opportunity to comment on anything, as well as ask me any questions they had about the play or the characters.

Two weeks after the first table read, I was able to organize a second read for a live audience. This read served more as a showcase of my work by providing the Theatre faculty at ISU an opportunity to see and hear my work. As per Covid-19 regulations I was allowed a space with a total of fifteen people. I wanted to share my work with more than just the faculty, so I provided a Zoom link for the rest of the department to watch virtually. Despite the online link losing audio for several minutes, those who had attended the reading in-person showed very positive responses. For this read I had four actors who had read with me on the previous table read. I was able to find two other actors a few days previous. I shared the script with them so that they could look it over and be prepared that day for the reading.

Follow this second read, I once again opened it up for the spectators to ask questions or to comment on the play. Again, there was a lot of positive feedback and people had a good response to the play. It felt great to share my work with my colleagues. I received a lot of great questions, which I hope I answered adequately for those who were spectating. Here are a few of the questions I got, and my response to them.

The Voice Within Workshop Q&A

1. What are the rules that allow Thomas to be present or not?
 - a. Thomas is present when Tom feels the most vulnerable. We first see Thomas in scene two after Sarah has left. By this time Tom has experienced rejection from both James and Sarah. The next time Thomas comes out is scene three during the group “party”. During this scene Thomas has a firmer grasp on Tom and ends up controlling what he says. In scene 4, Thomas leaves when James enters. I felt that it is important that Tom can shut Thomas up when he wants to. When James leaves, Thomas returns representing that Tom is left alone with his thoughts. By the end of the scene Tom has completely silenced Thomas, who can do nothing by mumble. Scene five, in therapy, is when Tom learns that thinking more positively will help Thomas think the same way. This is one of the only times we see that Thomas is supportive to Tom. Scene six, Tom feels very vulnerable again during his conversation with Sarah. After she leaves Thomas begins to treat Tom the worst we have seen so far. I chose not to include Thomas in scene seven to represent that the conversation and actions were genuinely Tom’s. The final scene, scene eight, Thomas is what causes Tom to rise to his breaking point, which for me represents that we are our worst critic.

2. How have your thoughts about the ending changed since where you began to where you ended?

a. Throughout the entire process, I have probably had about five different endings.

At one point, I would think “this is how I want it to end” but a day later I would have a different idea. I eventually settled on this ending because it was the story I wanted to tell. Moments before the gun shot, Tom points a gun at himself and then at Thomas. It goes back a fourth a few times, and then I have Tom exit the stage. When the gun goes off and Sarah runs into the room, I do not state whether Tom had shot himself or if he had shot Thomas. I leave it a bit more ambiguous for two reasons. One, I want people to talk about it, and two, I am leaving it open for interpretation. If I have to share if I think Tom lives or dies at the end, to me he lives, and his story continues. I just have not written that story.

3. What does the succulent represent in the end?

a. At the beginning of the play, there is a dying fern plant up in the corner which represents Tom and the care that he gives himself. The only person who does anything to it is James. He comes in and waters the plant, representing that James is trying to take care of Tom. The succulent that Sarah pulls out from the box to give to Tom represents change, and new life. With the addition of the succulent, I am very subtly hinting that Tom does not kill himself.

4. What is your hope for the future of this piece?

a. My first step is to do research on copywriting, and publishing. I hope that one day I would be able to send *The Voice Within* to theatres around the country until one decides to produce it.

5. Why did you choose such a heavy subject?

- a. I feel that depression is very misrepresented in the theatre world, especially since many people who live in the theatrical world suffer from depression. I mostly wanted to bring awareness to mental health and reinforce that there are people out there who are willing to help.

Rewriting

When a playwright finishes a play, it goes into a process of revisions. As stated above, a playwright can work on revisions themselves, or through the help of others and a table read.

Another option is to have someone you trust read and edit anything that might need attention.

Allowing others to read through the script can allow for suggestions if questions arise. When playwrights are ready to make revisions, they should read through the script a few times. The first time, without making any notes, do nothing but read. This read through should give the playwright a good feel of what the script might do to a first-time reader. (Carter)

When playwrights are ready for the rewriting process, they should go through the script and check for intelligibility, structure, characterization, dialogue, theme, and style. This is to ensure that the playwright is completely satisfied with their work. While checking intelligibility, it is important to make sure that the characters are making logical decisions, this includes that their choices are believable. While looking at the structure of the play, the playwright should check exposition, development, and the resolution. Part of checking structure includes the pacing, how it flows and if there is anything that needs to be addressed, this is the time to do it. (Carter)

While checking characterization, it is good to look at the protagonists' goals and motivations, their reactions to the events of the play should be clear and consistent. Supporting

characters have less stage time and might not be as complex, but it is important to make sure they also have clear motivations. Check for problems in dialogue. Make sure that what the characters are saying are logical and make sense, confusing dialogue can be reworked. Make sure that the play has a theme, audience members might pick up different themes than the one the playwright chooses but having a central idea for a play helps the story move along. Checking the style means that the play is consistent throughout its entirety. This mostly addresses that the playwright has stayed true to the genre they had started with. Ultimately, the rewriting phase comes down to the playwright deciding what, if anything needs to be changed, and then deciding that what they have written is the story that they wanted to tell.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Concluding Thoughts

As a senior in high school, I took a painting class, a similarity that I share with Tom. The most important thing that I learned in that class had nothing to do with painting, rather I learned a truth that I have carried with me ever since. Whether any artist feels the same way, or if they think I am crazy for thinking it, my teacher, Ms. A said “An artist is never finished with a project, there comes a time when they need to step away and admire it for what it is.”. My interpretation of this is that I will always find things in my projects to change or to alter, the revision process is never actually completed. I work and work until I feel that I am satisfied with the outcome, a result that I feel I can share with others.

As I revisit *The Voice Within*, I continue to think of things that I could change, or add, but my fear of altering it to the point of no longer being recognized is what keeps me from continuing this journey, and what a journey it has been. I have experienced a roller coaster of emotions. I have had highs and lows. Times when the words flowed out of me, and times when I stared blankly at my computer screen, for who knows how long, waiting for something to magically happen.

Since I have completed *The Voice Within* a thought keeps coming to mind. I know that the story and the characters that I have created are all made up. They might have similar characteristics to real people I know, but they are not real. Like Smiley explains, these characters are not human beings, but as I have both created and written about them, there has been one truth for me; these characters are real, they are real to me. Their story might start for the audience on page one and end on page fifty-four, but as the creator of these individual characters, I know that they had a life before the play “starts”, because I gave it to them. In my character sketches

outlined in chapter two, I have described how these characters met each other, as well as their families, backstories, past jobs and education. *The Voice Within* is only a small window of the full life of these characters. They have lived before the play begins and they will continue to live after the play ends. I just have not written that story yet, and I may never write it, but that does not mean I have not thought about it. I certainly could write another scene, but I have written what I have written because this is the story that I wanted to tell. I am proud to say that the life of all these characters continue after, but as for the details of that story, they will remain with me.

There have been so many things that I have learned from this process. I have gained a better appreciation of storytelling through theatre. I have learned that if I want to become a good writer, I must keep writing. I have learned that I should never be ashamed to write what I believe. I have learned how important it is to plan before you write. I may not have written the most amazing play of the twenty first century, but for someone like me, who has never taken a playwriting class or anything above an introductory creative writing course, I can confidently say that anyone can write a play. I may never know what kind of impact *The Voice Within* will make, my hope is that it will reach at least one person who can learn and grow from it. I plan to continue making art through creative writing and theater not only because it has the power to bring people together, but because it is an art form that brings me joy.

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Appendix A

The Voice Within
An Original Play
By Richard Aufdermauer

Cast

Tom, 26, retail supervisor, average, a bit goofy, suffers from depression, anxiety, and alcoholism.

Thomas, 18-35, taller than Tom, and a big bully.

James, 25, landscaper, kind, hipster(ish) and charming.

Sarah, 25, nurse, professional, organized, serious, and exhausted.

Carly, 24, receptionist, spunky, energetic, and sympathetic.

Dr. Julie Jensen, 36, therapist, confident, honest, and empathetic.

Notes

1. A slash (/) is an overlap of speech. This means the character with the next line of dialogue begins their speech, and the line with the slash finishes their line.
2. A dash (–) means the character with the line is being cut off by the next line of dialogue.
3. Thomas is the head voice of Tom manifested as a separate being. Tom is the only character that can hear and communicate back with Thomas. If other characters say ‘Thomas’ they are referring to Tom.
4. Ethnicity should not play a factor in casting. All ethnicities should be considered for roles.
5. *The Voice Within* explores sensitive topics such as depression, anxiety, alcoholism, and suicidal thoughts.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, business, and incidents are the products of the author’s imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.

Act I
Scene One

Tom is tidying up his living room apartment. A well-used couch is in the center of the room, a few pieces of dirty clothes draped on it. A slightly beaten-up coffee table in front of the couch, a few books or magazines lay on top. A few pairs of socks can be seen on the floor around the couch. A dining table with a few chairs are USR, a bag of chips, a six-pack of beer bottles, and a few snacks rest on top. A neglected wilting plant placed in the back USL. As Tom cleans around, a buzzer sounds. Tom walks over to the apartment entrance SL and presses the intercom button.

TOM: Yeah?

The next several lines James (offstage) and Tom both imitate lines from 2001: A Space Odyssey. James talks like Dave, Tom talks like HAL.

JAMES: Open the pod bay doors, please, Tom. *(pause)* Hello, Tom, do you read me? *(pause)* Do you read me, Tom? *(pause)* Do you read me, Tom?

TOM: Affirmative James, I read you.

JAMES: Open the pod bay doors, Tom.

TOM: I'm sorry James. I'm afraid I can't do that.

JAMES: What's the problem?

TOM: I think you know what the problem is just as well as I do.

JAMES: What are you talking about Tom?

TOM: This mission is too important for me to allow you to jeopardize it.

Imitation stops.

JAMES: But I brought cookies.

TOM: Ooo, cookies.

Tom buzzes James in. He proceeds to clean up the mess on the floor, a moment passes, and James enters SL.

TOM: Welcome to my humble abode.

JAMES: Hmm, I've seen better.

They laugh.

TOM: Take a load off, mi casa es tu casa.

James notices the wilting plant in the corner.

JAMES: Whoa, when was the last time you gave that thing water?

TOM: I don't know.

JAMES: You know who you're talking to right?

TOM: (*sarcastic*) Oh no, the fern police. Take me away, I'm a terrible person.

JAMES: (*sarcastic*) Uh it's pronounced tracheophyta, and this is attempted murder.

TOM: (*sarcastic*) Whatever shall I do?

JAMES: Oh, that's easy, about one to two inches of water a week, but make sure it gets some sun, we don't want it to die on us.

TOM: (*sarcastic*) Thank you doctor.

JAMES: You're welcome. (*exits USR towards the kitchen*)

TOM: You want a beer?

JAMES: (*offstage*) Yeah, hook me up

TOM: (*grabs two beers, places them on the coffee table and sits down*) So what's been going on?

JAMES: (*re-enters with a small glass of water, waters the plant, then sits on the other side of the couch*) I've had a ton of yard evaluations this week, and since spring was early this year, I guess people got tired of doin' it themselves.

TOM: Well yeah. Why mow my own lawn when I can just pay you to do it for me.

JAMES: First off, you don't have a lawn. Second, I don't just mow, and you know that.

TOM: Yeah, whatever.

JAMES: You know...you can always come work for me.

TOM: I don't know man. I'm pretty comfortable with my job right now.

JAMES: A floor supervisor at Ollie Mart...You complain about it all the time.

TOM: I know, but it pays the bills.

JAMES: The offer is always on the table. (*short silence*) What about Sarah? Did you finally propose?

TOM: No, not yet.

JAMES: How are you two supposed to get married if you don't ask?

TOM: I don't know, we...we haven't really talked about it yet.

JAMES: You two have been dating forever.

TOM: Six years.

JAMES: Who cares how long. Do you love her?

TOM: Yes.

JAMES: Do you want to spend the rest of your life with her?

TOM: Well, yeah.

JAMES: (*suggestive*) Do you wanna make sweet, sweet love with her?

TOM: How many times are you gonna ask me about my sex life?

JAMES: It doesn't matter, what matters is that you and Sarah are perfect for each other.

TOM: I just / don't

JAMES: You just, what?

TOM: (*pause*) I don't know what to do.

JAMES: (*Laughs*) That's the easy part! (*pantomimes a proposal*) You pull out the ring, get down on one knee, and say (*in a high voice*) "Oh Thomas will you marry me?"

TOM: Get up...I just...(sigh)...I don't know if I'm ready yet.

JAMES: What do you mean? You've been carrying that ring around with you everywhere since you bought it.

TOM: I know.

JAMES: What happened to that "go get 'em" kid back in high school?

TOM: I'm not sure...I guess he grew up.

JAMES: Well, do yourself a favor and borrow some courage from that 16-year-old kid I used to know, and ask her. *(long pause, Tom is visibly thinking)* She's not gonna wait around forever.

TOM: I know...I know...

Brief pause.

JAMES: *(sympathetic)* If you need to, just talk to her, she'll listen. And who cares if it takes another year or whatever.

TOM: Thanks.

JAMES: No problem, what are best friends for anyway?

TOM: Well in your case added stress...and great support, I guess.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah whatever. Let me know if I can help, okay?

TOM: Yeah, I will.

JAMES: Alright, what do we got?

TOM: *(picks up a few movie cases and places them on the coffee table as he reads them)* We're going classic tonight. We have...Vertigo, A Fistful of Dollars, Singin' in the Rain, and Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.

After Tom sets the last one down James leans forward to study the movie cases. Tom walks over to the dining table and grabs a few more beers.

JAMES: Hmmm...*(Tom hands James a beer)* All four, totally different. *(weighs the options on his hands like a scale. Taking a long time to decide)* Thriller...Western...Musical...Comedy....hmmm.

TOM: Come on old timer, the end of the world is coming and if you don't pick soon the last thing I'd have watched is your slow ass making a decision.

JAMES: *(imitating a kung fu master)* Patience, young grasshopper. He who rushes his master is most disrespectful. *(bows)*

TOM: *(imitating a kung fu master)* And he who takes too long, dies a slow and painful death. *(bows back)*

JAMES: (*surveying the options one last time*) Uh, uh, uh (*points*) let's do Strange Love, I need a good laugh.

TOM: Good choice.

Tom grabs the movie case and starts towards downstage, James's phone chimes a text notification, he checks.

JAMES: Shit!

TOM: What?

JAMES: I was supposed to meet Carly at Oliver's fifteen minutes ago! (*jumps up and throws his jacket on*)

TOM: What about guys night?

JAMES: Rain check?

TOM: Seriously? We do this every week.

JAMES: Sorry, I must have gotten my days mixed up when I scheduled this. I owe you! (*runs out*)

TOM: (*slumps onto the couch, looks at his beer*) I guess it's just you and me tonight. (*picks up James' beer and clicks them together*)

Lights out.

Scene 2

Same scene, the following morning. Tom is passed out on the couch with several beer bottles and trash from the snacks around him, on the coffee table and the floor. Sarah enters SL wearing her nurse scrubs, she has a light coat and a bag.

SARAH: I've been trying to call....(*sees Tom on the couch. She is visibly annoyed.*) Are you kidding me? (*gets closer*) Tom. (*louder*) Tom. (*louder*) Tom! (*little to no movement from Tom, she picks up a bottle that still has beer in it and pours it on him*) Get up!

TOM: (*jolts awake*) What the hell?

SARAH: What the hell? What the hell? You were supposed to pick me up from work an hour ago.

TOM: (*still waking up*) Sorry.

SARAH: You're sorry? What happened to not drinking, huh? (*pause*) Tom, what happened? I thought we talked about this.

TOM: I don't know, it...it wasn't a good night.

SARAH: What do you mean? You and James seem to have a great night every guy's night.

TOM: James bailed on me.

Short pause.

SARAH: You know he has a life, right?

TOM: I know.

SARAH: Do you? The world doesn't revolve around you. We all have problems. (*silence*) I don't know what to do with you anymore.

TOM: I'm trying.

SARAH: Yeah, I know that you're trying, but you've been trying for two years.

TOM: You don't know what it's like.

SARAH: Depression? I know exactly what it's like.

TOM: (*doesn't say anything*)

SARAH: I tell myself every day that I'm not good enough. I look in the mirror and I think about how ugly I am, and that no one would love me.

TOM: I love you.

SARAH: Do you? We've been together for six years and our relationship hasn't gone anywhere. Meanwhile I get to watch how happy Carly is. Every day she says something amazing about James. "James got me flowers today." "James says he has a surprise for me." "James got me lunch." I don't even remember the last time we went out to eat together.

TOM: I'm sorry, I'm trying.

SARAH: Yeah, you said that.

TOM: What can I do to make...this better?

SARAH: You can start by thinking about others and not just about yourself.

TOM: What do you mean?

SARAH: When was the last time you did something for me? Or for James?

TOM: I got beer and snacks last night.

SARAH: Yeah, and it looks like you ate them all.

TOM: Yeah, because he left.

SARAH: Don't use that as an excuse not to take care of yourself. You know what happens when you drink a lot.

TOM: I don't care.

SARAH: You're supposed to care! I care. How do you think I would feel if something happened to you?

TOM: Nothings gonna happen.

SARAH: I'll believe that when you start taking care of yourself.

TOM: I do fine.

SARAH: When was the last time you cooked for yourself? Or showered before I told you to?

TOM: I do fine!

Silence.

SARAH: I love you...but you are not doing fine.

TOM: I'm just...(buries his head in his hands)

SARAH: I know. (*embraces him*) It's okay...I'm sorry.

TOM: (*looks up at her, pulls a ring from his pocket*) Marry me.

SARAH: What?

TOM: Marry me, Sarah.

SARAH: Tom...(silence)...Tom...we...we can't...not yet.

TOM: What do you mean?

SARAH: I want to, I really do, but...you need to get better first. How do you expect to take care of me if you can't even take care of yourself?

TOM: But...I thought it's what you wanted.

SARAH: It is. I've been waiting for you to ask me since you bought that.

TOM: You knew I got it?

SARAH: I'm not stupid.

TOM: So why not?

SARAH: Tom, I love you, and I want this, but it's not time. Soon, maybe, but not right now.

TOM: So, what now? Are you just going to leave me?

SARAH: No, please don't interpret this the wrong way. I want to get married. I feel that you've come a long way, but you still have some work to do with Doctor Jensen.

TOM: Yeah, I guess.

SARAH: Don't forget your appointment tomorrow.

TOM: Whatever.

SARAH: Oh, before I forget, Carly and James are coming over to my place tonight, don't be late.

TOM: Okay, fine.

SARAH: (*getting her things together*) I'm going to go get everything ready, don't worry about coming with me, I guess I can go to the store without you, just...take a shower before you come over, you smell like beer.

TOM: I have you to thank for that.

SARAH: Sorry. I'll see you tonight.

TOM: Yeah.

Sarah exits. Tom sits silently for a moment trying to collect his thoughts. Thomas enters USR.

THOMAS: Wow, that was pathetic. Rejected by your best friend and then your girlfriend. You're such a loser.

TOM: Leave me alone.

THOMAS: Oh, I wish I could, anywhere would be better than here.

TOM: I said leave me alone!

THOMAS: (*tenderly*) You know I can't just leave you alone. What kind of caring inner voice would I be if I just abandoned you?

TOM: Caring? All you do is berate me.

THOMAS: Well, yeah. That's my job.

TOM: Why?

THOMAS: Because you hate yourself.

TOM: No, I don't.

THOMAS: Yes, you do, you were just thinking it.

TOM: What is wrong with you?

THOMAS: Nothing is wrong with me, but everything is wrong with you.

TOM: I just want some peace and quiet to process what just happened.

THOMAS: Oh, thats easy. James bailed on you. You got drunk. You almost shit yourself proposing to Sarah, I don't know why you asked her to marry you anyway it's not like things are going well for you two. She left you alone and I couldn't hold myself back anymore.

TOM: Thanks

THOMAS: (*sarcastically*) You are so welcome.

Short pause

TOM: What did I do wrong?

THOMAS: Is that rhetorical because I will gladly tell you.

TOM: No! Just shut up for one second! (*sits on the floor cross legged, closes his eyes and starts to take deep breaths, another short pause*)

THOMAS: (*starting to get antsy*) Uggh, this is so boring! I want to do something.

TOM: Shhh! I'm trying to focus. (*continues to breath*)

THOMAS: Oh, I know! There's more beer in the fridge, we can get drunk again. You're more fun when you're drunk.

TOM: (*takes another deep breath, ignores Thomas*)

THOMAS: You suck, you know that right.

TOM: (*takes one last deep breath*) I'm a good person.

THOMAS: (*kindly*) You're a good person...(looks dumbfounded) What the hell did you just do?

TOM: If you just paid attention in therapy, you'd know that Doctor Jensen asked me to do these breathing exercises. She said that if I can focus on my breathing, I can control my thoughts.

THOMAS: You can't control me. I forbid it!

TOM: I can, and I will. (*closes his eyes and starts deep breaths again*)

THOMAS: Stupid. Doctor. Jensen. Doctor Julie Jensen (*mocking*) "Oh Tom. I'm going to help you. Let's face those inner demons together!" (*straight faced*) Bitch.

TOM: (*takes one last deep breath, shouts*) I can do this!

THOMAS: (*cheerful*) You can do this! Shit!

TOM: I think I can get used to you being nicer to me.

THOMAS: You will never tame me. Not now, not ever.

TOM: I will win.

THOMAS: You won't if you keep skipping your therapy appointments.

TOM: I won't. (*stands up, exits SR to his bedroom*)

THOMAS: (*slumps on the couch, a short pause*) You know, Sarah doesn't really love you.

TOM: (*returns wearing a cleaner shirt*) Yes she does.

THOMAS: If she loved you, she would have said yes.

TOM: What do you mean?

THOMAS: Usually if you were to ask your "girlfriend" to marry you...if she loves you, she would have said yes.

TOM: We have things to work out first.

THOMAS: Do you? I'm just saying she could have said yes, and still worked things out. I think she's just letting you down easy, you know, she doesn't want anything to...happen to you...

TOM: What are you saying?

THOMAS: Maybe there's another guy...or a girl.

TOM: She wouldn't do that.

THOMAS: How would you know, it's not like you try to go out of your way to see her every day.

TOM: Sarah isn't that kind of person.

THOMAS: She's capable of many things, like taking care of herself, unlike you.

TOM: I can take care of myself.

THOMAS: Can you? You're having an argument with your head.

TOM: Shut up.

THOMAS: She's probably desperate for intimacy because you haven't touched her in months.

TOM: That's not true.

THOMAS: Isn't it? When was the last time you two had sex?

TOM: I don't know.

THOMAS: You don't know?

TOM: I don't remember!

THOMAS: Face it, she didn't want you to come with her today because she's looking for a new boyfriend. Someone who can actually take care of her.

TOM: Shut up!

THOMAS: Make me!

TOM: Leave me alone!

THOMAS: She doesn't love you!

TOM: Shut up!

THOMAS: She'll never love you!

TOM: Leave me alone!

THOMAS: You're a pathetic loser.

TOM: No, I'm not.

Lights begin to fade.

THOMAS: You'll never find true love and you'll die alone.

TOM: No, I won't.

Lights out.

Scene 3

Later that night at Sarah's apartment. A couch sits DSL, a dining table with a few chairs SR. Sarah and Carly are sitting at the table, each has a glass of wine, and there's a bottle on the table.

CARLY: You said no?

SARAH: Well, I didn't really say no...I told him he has to learn to take care of himself before he can take care of me.

CARLY: Oh my god.

SARAH: It came out of nowhere.

CARLY: He just proposed?

SARAH: Kind of.

CARLY: Kind of?

SARAH: I found him hungover, and we kind of argued a little. Things were pretty heavy, and he just asked me to marry him.

CARLY: I think you handled it the right way though, don't be too hard on yourself.

SARAH: I just don't know what to do anymore. I try to help him, but I don't even know if he wants to get better.

CARLY: Is he still seeing Julie?

SARAH: He has an appointment tomorrow, but he's missed a few weeks.

CARLY: What about work?

SARAH: I'm sure his boss has almost had enough. He has a few weeks to get his act together, if not I don't know what he'll do.

CARLY: James is always looking for help.

SARAH: That's kind, but Tom has to make that decision...Speaking about James, how are you two?

CARLY: Oh no, don't try and change the subject. We're talking about you.

SARAH: There's not much to talk about. It feels like my life is at a standstill.

CARLY: Well, it's never too late to think about other options.

Brief pause.

SARAH: Like...leave? I couldn't do that to Tom, I still love him.

CARLY: I get it, he's working through his thing right now, but you deserve to be happy.

SARAH: I know, but... I feel that he's on the right track, and soon he'll be back to his old happy self.

CARLY: This isn't healthy, and you know it.

SARAH: I don't want to hurt him. He's super vulnerable right now.

CARLY: He's coming tonight, right?

SARAH: Yeah, he should be here any minute.

Carly's phone chimes a text notification, she checks it.

CARLY: James is on his way. He's running a little late.

SARAH: Is everything okay?

CARLY: Oh yeah, he tries to visit the cemetery every Sunday so he can talk with his mom.

SARAH: Oh, I'm so sorry.

CARLY: Don't be! It's just a thing that he likes to do to stay connected.

SARAH: And you don't go with him?

CARLY: Occasionally. He usually just monologues to her about his week. I think it's really sweet, she was an amazing woman.

SARAH: I wish I had been able to meet her. How long ago did she pass?

CARLY: It's been about five years.

SARAH: And his dad?

CARLY: James never knew him.

SARAH: Oh wow.

CARLY: It's never bothered him.

SARAH: I've known you both for so long and I never knew that.

CARLY: It's not your fault, we don't talk about it much.

SARAH: I'm a terrible friend.

CARLY: You're not a terrible friend! Aside from Tom, what else is going on?

SARAH: Ugh, my dad has been pestering me about med school.

CARLY: And?...

SARAH: I want to go, and if I get in right now it will only take four years.

CARLY: Do it!

SARAH: And after I graduate and do my residency, I'll be able to open my own pediatric practice.

CARLY: So, if I've done my math correctly, you can graduate by the time you're thirty, and have your own office by thirty-four, thirty-five?

SARAH: Don't even say those numbers! Sometimes I wish I could stay twenty-five forever.

CARLY: Immortal youth sounds good to me. *(They laugh)*

There is a knock at the door.

SARAH: It's open!

James enters SR with a bottle of wine in his hand.

JAMES: Hey, sorry I'm late. *(offers the wine)*

SARAH: Thank you so much. *(takes the wine and sets it on the table)*

JAMES: *(turning to Carly)* Hey babe!

CARLY: Hey good lookin'. *(Carly and James kiss)*

SARAH: *(exaggerated)* Eww, get a room you two!

JAMES: Down the hall and to the right...right? *(They all laugh)*

SARAH: It's good to see you James. *(Sarah and James hug)*

JAMES: Where's Tom?

SARAH: I have no clue. He was supposed to be here already.

CARLY: I hope everything is alright.

SARAH: I'm sure he just lost track of time. If you'll excuse me for a minute.

Sarah excuses herself from the others, pulls out her phone and moves down stage. She puts her phone to her ear. During the phone call Carly and James are heard talking.

JAMES: Is everything okay?

CARLY: She found him hungover this morning.

JAMES: Oh...I think that's my fault.

CARLY: Don't blame yourself, he made the decision to get drunk.

JAMES: I know, but –

CARLY: Stop, it's not your fault.

JAMES: Okay, okay.

CARLY: Tonight is supposed to be a good night.

JAMES: You're right. Tom will get here, we'll play some games, have some snacks, everything will be fine.

CARLY: See that's the right attitude to have.

TOM: *(Tom's voicemail is heard)* Hey, this is Tom sorry I couldn't – *(Sarah hangs up and calls again)*

JAMES: Sorry, I can't stop thinking that something might have been my fault. I mean, I was the one who scheduled our date the same night we do guys night.

CARLY: Babe, stop trying to solve everything, I get it you guys watch weird movies and hang out every weekend, but we are all dealing with life right now, and you shouldn't feel bad for missing one "bro date".

JAMES: Thank you, you always know how to put my mind at ease.

CARLY: Anytime sweet cheeks. (*winks*)

JAMES: Hey! There's more to me than this gorgeous face and a sweet ass.

CARLY: Is that ass something you're willing to share?

TOM: (*Again Tom's voicemail*) Hey, this is Tom sorry I couldn't get to the phone, leave a message, I guess...(beep)

SARAH: (*trying not to be heard by James and Carly*) Where the hell are you? James and Carly are here and we're waiting. You better not be at home playing video games, just get your ass over here. (*hangs up*)

CARLY: Everything okay?

SARAH: Yeah, he didn't answer so I left a voicemail.

JAMES: (*jokingly*) What the hells a voicemail?

SARAH: I'm surprised that a sophisticated homo heidelbergensis like yourself is uneducated in the scientific development of cellular communication. (*Carly laughs*)

JAMES: Ooo low blow, Doctor Barnett.

SARAH: Sorry, my father is out of the office, but you're welcome to strip down and wait for him in the back. (*Carly laughs again*)

JAMES: Should I undress in the back or would you rather watch?

CARLY: James!

They all laugh.

JAMES: I didn't realize I was in the presence of a professional jokester. (*Sarah bows*)

SARAH: I'm always available for a battle of the wits.

JAMES: I'll have to take you up on that.

CARLY: You two are so weird.

JAMES: I guess weird is better than normal.

There is some banging and clumping off stage. Tom stumbles in SR, he is drunk, Thomas is sober and follows immediately after.

THOMAS: What's / up bitches!

TOM: What's up bitches!

SARAH: Tom!

THOMAS: Why are / you so shocked? You did this to me.

TOM: Why are you so shocked? You did this to me.

SARAH: Tom what the hell happened?

THOMAS: After / you left me by myself I realized something.

TOM: After you left me by myself, I realized something.

Tom starts to lose his balance but recovers.

JAMES: Hey man, sit down. Everything's going to be okay.

TOM: Fuck you man!

CARLY & THOMAS: (C: concerned, T: proud) Whoa!

JAMES: (calmly) It's okay. Tom, have a set, let's talk through this. (Tom slumps on the couch and lets out a groan) Sarah, would you grab a glass of water?

SARAH: Yeah. (exits USR)

JAMES: Tom, everything is okay, we just want to help you. You need to calm down.

THOMAS: I'm / calm

TOM: I'm calm.

Sarah re-enters with a glass of water, hands it to James.

JAMES: (to Sarah) Thanks. (to Tom) Here drink this, it will help.

Sarah and Carly retreat to the table.

THOMAS: Eww, water!

TOM: I don't need that! (*tries to swipe at the glass, but James pulls it away*)

JAMES: That's okay, it's here if you need it. (*sets the glass aside*) You said you realized something?

TOM: Yeah, I did.

JAMES: What is it?

THOMAS: (*to Tom*) They're not your friends.

TOM: You guys aren't my friends.

JAMES: What do you mean?

THOMAS: They don't really want to help you.

TOM: You guys say you want to help me, but you don't.

JAMES: Tom, you have to explain to us what's going on.

Short pause.

TOM: Why did you leave last night?

THOMAS: Because he doesn't care about you!

JAMES: I told you, I had to meet Carly.

TOM: But Saturday night is guys night.

JAMES: I know, I know, and it's my fault. I forgot to look at my schedule.

TOM: And you, (*gestures to Sarah*) I thought you wanted to get married.

THOMAS: Apparently to anybody else but you.

SARAH: I do, but I think we need to work a few things out together first.

TOM: Yeah, but you didn't need to say no.

SARAH: I'm sorry, I shouldn't have been so short with you. We can talk about it more tomorrow night, I promise.

TOM: And you. (*gestures to Carly, a pause*) Who are you?

CARLY: (*confused*) Uh...Carly...

TOM: Oh yeah....what did you do to me? (*Carly shrugs*) Whatever.

SARAH: Tom.

TOM: What?

SARAH: I think it's best if you were to go home.

TOM: Huh?

SARAH: I think you should go home and get some rest.

THOMAS: But this is a party.

TOM: Oh, we're not playing games.

SARAH: Not anymore.

JAMES: I'll make sure he gets home safely. (*helps Tom up from the couch*)

THOMAS: Hey, don't touch me!

TOM: You guys are my friends, huh?

JAMES: That's right, and we care about you.

THOMAS: No, they don't!

TOM: You do?

CARLY: Of course we do. We want you to be happy.

THOMAS: I make you happy!

TOM: It's been a while since I've been happy.

SARAH: Get some rest, I'll come over tomorrow night and we can talk, okay?

TOM: Yeah...yeah okay.

JAMES: (*helps Tom towards SR to exit*) Let's get you home. (*James, Tom and Thomas exit*)
(*offstage*) Watch your step.

Lights out.

Scene 4

Tom's apartment the next morning. As lights come up Thomas is laying on the couch. The buzzer sounds, there's no answer. Buzzer again, no answer. Buzz, buzz, no answer. Long buzz.

THOMAS: *(yells to Tom who is offstage)* Get the door!

TOM: I'm coming! *(enters SR, still waking up. Has a huge hangover headache)* Jeez!

THOMAS: Hurry up, or they'll keep buzzing.

TOM: Don't you ever shut up.

THOMAS: Nope!

Buzz again

TOM: I'm coming! *(presses the intercom button)* What?

JAMES: *(offstage)* It's James.

Tom buzzes him in. Goes over to the couch and slumps down.

THOMAS: What do you think he wants?

TOM: I don't know, just shut up and leave me alone.

THOMAS: Fine, I don't want to be here anyway. *(exits SR)*

Tom sits in silence for a moment. James enters SL.

JAMES: Hey, Tom.

TOM: Yeah?

JAMES: I just wanted to check on you, make sure you were doing alright.

TOM: I'm doing fine.

JAMES: That's good. After last night I was getting a little worried about you.

TOM: I don't really remember much from last night. Was it bad?

JAMES: You were pretty drunk.

TOM: I'm sorry if I said anything mean.

JAMES: It's okay. I'm sure nobody took it seriously.

TOM: Yeah, I hope.

JAMES: Look, the reason why I stopped by is because I wanted to apologize about guys night. I wasn't paying attention to my schedule and I'm sorry.

TOM: Don't worry about it, it happens.

JAMES: I feel like this is all my fault.

TOM: It's not your fault Sarah said no when I asked her to marry me.

JAMES: She really said no?

TOM: She said, "we can't, not yet".

JAMES: That's rough.

TOM: Yeah, well, not much I can do now.

JAMES: Don't give up. I know things are tough right now, but I know that Sarah loves you. You two will work things out.

TOM: Yeah, I guess.

JAMES: Well, I gotta go. Those lawns aren't going to mow themselves.

TOM: Yeah.

JAMES: I promise I won't schedule anything this weekend and we can do a double feature to make up for it.

TOM: You better keep that promise.

JAMES: Oh, and before I forget, Sarah told me to remind you about your appointment today.

TOM: (*sarcastic*) Great.

JAMES: Don't sweat it, Doctor Jensen is just trying to help.

TOM: Yeah, I just...I don't like talking about my feelings.

JAMES: Who likes talking about their feelings?

TOM: Sarah does.

JAMES: Ooo, I know what you mean. Carly likes to discuss our feelings weekly....Hey, it's like my own weekly therapy appointments.

TOM: Shut up and get the hell out of here.

JAMES: Oop, gotta run.

James goes to exit SL.

TOM: Have fun playing in the dirt.

JAMES: You can join me if you want.

TOM: Sorry, therapy.

JAMES: How could I forget so soon.

TOM: Later man.

JAMES: See ya.

James exits SL. Thomas enters SR.

THOMAS: Do you think that he wanted to apologize so he didn't seem like a bad friend.

TOM: I don't know, but then again, you do most of my thinking for me anyway.

THOMAS: Yeah, that's true...you suck.

TOM: Thanks. *(sits on the couch)*

THOMAS: No really, I mean it. Like this has probably been the fastest I've seen you go from ten
to zero.

TOM: Yeah, well...it's all your fault.

THOMAS: Correction, it's your fault.

TOM: Yeah, I get it. Just leave me alone so I can think to myself.

THOMAS: What do you call this?

TOM: I don't want to think about Sarah, James, my shitty job or any of my problems right now, I just want some peace and quiet before I have to go to this stupid therapy appointment.

THOMAS: Okay, fine I'll leave you alone. No need to pay any more attention to me. (*ducks behind the couch*)

TOM: (*lies down, sigh*)

Long Silence

THOMAS: (*from behind the couch*) Remember that time in first grade? (*Tom groans, Thomas stands up and starts pacing the room*) You had a huge crush on Emily Cartwright. You got super brave one day, walked right up to her and asked her to be your girlfriend? (*laughs*) She said no, and you got nervous and peed your pants, oh so embarrassing.

TOM: Thanks for the reminder.

THOMAS: Oh, or that time you were eight years old, and you tried to steal a candy bar from the gas station! You were eating it in the back seat of the car, and when your mom asked you where you got it, you told her you bought it. (*laughs*) How dumb could you be? She knew you didn't have any money!

TOM: Shut up.

THOMAS: Ooo! What about in seventh grade when you had to run the mile in gym class. You had a huge lunch and just as you were crossing the line to finish you projectile vomited all over the track. If I remember right, you even got a little bit on Mr. Kramer. Oh my god that was awesome!

TOM: It wasn't awesome, it was embarrassing.

THOMAS: You know, all of these were embarrassing for you.

TOM: Will you just shut up for a few minutes?

THOMAS: I can't forget my favorite.

TOM: No.

THOMAS: Candice Jones...

TOM: Don't you dare.

THOMAS: The first girl to see your penis. She just laughed. (*laughs*)

TOM: Shut up!

THOMAS: You can't shut me up! I'm here to stay bitch.

TOM: I'm not a bitch.

THOMAS: No...you're right...you're worse. You're a pathetic loser, whose friends only stick around because you're damaged. They don't care about you, they never did.

TOM: They do care.

THOMAS: No they don't! James left you for some girl and Sarah said "no" when you asked her to marry you, hell, she even told you to leave her apartment because you were so unbearable.

TOM: I'm sick of the way you talk to me! James is my best friend, and he has a life outside of our friendship. That girl's name is Carly and I feel terrible that I didn't recognize her last night, but she is one of the nicest people I know.

THOMAS: That was embarrassing.

TOM: Shut up, I'm talking. Sarah is amazing, yeah, we argue sometimes, but I know how much she loves me.

THOMAS: Loved.

TOM: What?

THOMAS: How much she loved you...she doesn't anymore.

TOM: Ugh! Just stop. I'm tired of you dragging me down every day and making me feel like shit!

THOMAS: You feel like shit because you are shit!

Tom angrily shuts his eyes and starts to take deep breaths.

THOMAS: Oh, not this again. There is no way that I'll let this work.

TOM: *(another breath)* I'll never know unless I try.

THOMAS: Face it, you're too emotional right now. Getting me to be nice to you is a waste of time.

TOM: *(another breath)* Who said I was trying to get you to be nice to me?

THOMAS: Well then what the hell are you trying (*Thomas suddenly can't move his mouth*)
mmm mmm. Mmm? Mmm mmm? Mmm, mmm mmm! (*mumbling translation should be along
the lines of "to do. What? What the? Hey, stop it!"*)

TOM: (sigh of relief) Huh, I think it worked.

THOMAS: Mmm mmm mmm mmm mmm mmm? (*What have you done to me?*)

TOM: Oh, I'm sorry, I can't hear you. Did you say something?

THOMAS: Mmm mmm mmm mmm mmm mmm mmm. (*You know damn well what I'm
saying.*)

TOM: Sorry, I don't know what you're saying.

THOMAS: Mmm mmm! (*Fuck you!*)

TOM: (*checks his watch or phone*) Look at the time, we don't want to make Doctor Jensen wait
for us. (*Tom grabs his coat*)

THOMAS: Mmm mmm. (*You suck.*)

They both exit SL.

Lights out.

Scene 5

In Dr. Jensen's counseling office. A desk is SL, a couch SR, and an armchair is between the two. A side table is next to the couch on the down stage side, a glass of water or coffee for Tom is on top. Tom is sitting on the couch. Thomas is behind the couch out of sight from the audience. Dr. Jensen is sitting in the armchair, a pen and notebook in hand, a coffee mug within arm's reach on the corner of her desk.

TOM: I don't know what to do anymore.

DR. JENSEN: How do you mean?

TOM: I don't know...I...I'm tired of feeling helpless.

DR. JENSEN: What makes you feel helpless?

TOM: Everything.

DR. JENSEN: Can you be specific?

TOM: Sarah.

DR. JENSEN: What about Sarah?

THOMAS: Mmm mmm mmm. (*She's a bitch.*)

TOM: I feel that all we do is argue.

DR. JENSEN: What usually triggers these arguments?

TOM: I guess it's usually because I've been drinking.

DR. JENSEN: And what makes you drink?

THOMAS: Mmm mmm mmm mmm. (*I make him drink.*)

TOM: ...That stupid voice in my head.

THOMAS: Mmm, mmm mmm. (*Yeah, blame me.*)

Thomas stands up and hovers around Tom.

DR. JENSEN: Your head voice tells you to drink?

TOM: Well...no...not really. I guess being drunk drowns him out.

DR. JENSEN: What kinds of things are you trying to drown out?

THOMAS: Mmm mmm mmm mmm. (*You're a loser.*)

TOM: That I'm a loser, I'm dumb, I hate myself, Sarah doesn't love me, my friends don't care about me, I'll never be successful, I'm worthless, I'm ugly, There's no such thing as happiness. I don't know...there's...a lot.

DR. JENSEN: It takes a lot of courage to share that.

TOM: Thank you.

DR. JENSEN: This voice you have. Is it always mean?

TOM: No...well, recently it has been.

DR. JENSEN: And why is that?

TOM: I don't know...I've been feeling kinda down that last few days and it seems to be more prominent during these times.

THOMAS: (*mocking Tom's*) Mmm mmm mmm mmm mmm. (*Please help me Doctor.*)

Short pause.

DR. JENSEN: Tom...We all have inner demons that we need to fight occasionally, some are harder than others, and I know it feels like you're fighting these battles on your own, but with what you've been describing to me, it seems like your friends, including Sarah, really care about you.

TOM: You think so?

DR. JENSEN: Why do you think Sarah came over to your apartment the other day?

THOMAS: Mmm mmm mmm mmm. (*To yell at me.*)

TOM: ...Because I got drunk, slept in, and didn't pick her up?

DR. JENSEN: That could be a reason but try thinking about her perspective. What might she have been thinking?

TOM: Uhh, I didn't answer my phone when she called me...

DR. JENSEN: Okay, what else?

TOM: I wasn't where I was supposed to be.

DR. JENSEN: Do you think she could have come by because she was worried about you?

TOM: I guess, but she did yell at me.

DR. JENSEN: Why would she have done that?

TOM: ...I'm not supposed to be drinking.

THOMAS: Mmm mmm mmm. (*Yes you are.*)

DR. JENSEN: Why not?

TOM: I promised her I wouldn't.

DR. JENSEN: How do you think she felt when she found you hungover?

TOM: Probably upset.

DR. JENSEN: Why?

TOM: Because I lied to her...

THOMAS: Mmm mmm mmm. (*Yeah you did.*)

DR. JENSEN: It's so easy for us to be focused on our perspective that it becomes difficult or even impossible for us to consider what others might be experiencing at the same time.

TOM: Yeah, I guess that makes sense.

DR. JENSEN: Correct me if, I'm wrong, but I'm getting the feeling that you might be a bit tense right now.

TOM: Is it that obvious?

DR. JENSEN: It's okay, let's take a few deep breaths and try to release some of that tension.

Tom takes a few breaths. He seems to relax a little bit. Tom releases Thomas from silence.

DR. JENSEN: How do you feel?

TOM: Better.

THOMAS: Free.

DR. JENSEN: Good...How's work?

THOMAS: Terrible.

TOM: Uh...It's complicated.

DR. JENSEN: How so?

TOM: Well, I've already used up my sick days for the year.

DR. JENSEN: Oh, wow...I sense that you probably weren't actually sick?

THOMAS: Not one day!

TOM: (*shrugs*) What are you gonna do?

DR. JENSEN: That's a good question. What are you going to do?

TOM: I have no idea...Sarah doesn't even know...and when she finds out I'm sure she'll flip.

THOMAS: She'll be pissed.

DR. JENSEN: (*motions for Tom to continue*)

TOM: I'm pretty sure at this point my manager is looking for any reason to fire me.

DR. JENSEN: Do you want to get fired?

TOM: ...Well no... not really...

DR. JENSEN: You sound unsure.

TOM: I guess I am.

DR. JENSEN: Why don't you make a list?

TOM: Like a pros and cons list?

THOMAS: Lists are dumb.

DR. JENSEN: Why not? It might help with some clarity.

TOM: Yeah, sure.

Dr. Jensen hands Tom a pen and a piece of paper.

TOM: Let's see...uh...pro, I like getting paid.

THOMAS: No shit, who doesn't like money?

TOM: Con...my manager sucks.

THOMAS: Yeah, Brain's a dick!

TOM: Uh, pro, employee discount.

THOMAS: Hey, ten percent is ten percent.

TOM: Con...it's retail.

THOMAS: (*blows a raspberry*)

TOM: Pro, there are a few people I enjoy working with.

THOMAS: Patty is okay, I guess.

TOM: Con, working just about every holiday.

THOMAS: Yeah, that sucks.

TOM: Pro... (*thinks for a brief moment, doesn't write anything*) ...con, limited time off.

THOMAS: It's funny they expect everyone to work all the time.

TOM: Pro...uh, I can't think of any more pros.

THOMAS: There are no more pros.

TOM: Uh, con, stocking shelves.

THOMAS: Eww

TOM: Super short breaks, that's a con.

THOMAS: Lame.

TOM: Getting yelled at is a con.

THOMAS: But I like yelling at you.

TOM: You know what, the rest of these are just cons...cleaning up stupid messes.

THOMAS: Clean it yourself Brian!

TOM: Customers are never right.

THOMAS: I can't use your expired coupons, Karen!

TOM: Staying late because someone called in.

THOMAS: Hey, I do that.

TOM: Go backs are always a mess.

THOMAS: We should just throw them away.

TOM: Customer service is just terrible.

THOMAS: It's the worst!

TOM: You know what, I think I'm finished with this list.

DR. JENSEN: Yeah?

TOM: It seems pretty clear to me that Ollie Mart isn't a good fit.

THOMAS: It was never a good fit!

DR. JENSEN: I'm glad that you've discovered that for yourself. You're making some good progress.

TOM & THOMAS: Thanks.

DR. JENSEN: Any thoughts about where you might want to work?

TOM: James keeps offering me a job with his landscaping business, but I'm not quite sure about it.

DR. JENSEN: Why not?

THOMAS: I'd get dirty.

TOM: I don't want it to feel like a handout.

DR. JENSEN: Like I said, better communication starts with understanding each other.

TOM: What do you mean?

DR. JENSEN: If you talk to James and express your feelings about his job offer, maybe the two of you can come up with some kind of mutual understanding.

TOM: Okay, I can do that.

DR. JENSEN: What else is on your mind?

TOM: Um...I was wondering, that breathing exercise...

THOMAS: Not breathing exercises.

DR. JENSEN: What about it?

TOM: How can I use it to change what my head voice says to me?

THOMAS: You want to change me?

DR. JENSEN: ...It's not necessarily a tool to change your thoughts, but more of one to focus them. You can't really force yourself to think differently. Changing your thoughts begin with changing your mindset.

TOM: How so?

DR. JENSEN: Right now, it seems like you are experiencing self-negativity, is that right?

TOM: Yeah, like a lot of negativity.

THOMAS: I'm not negative.

DR. JENSEN: Alright, so instead of focusing on the things that you don't like about yourself, what are some things that you do like about yourself?

TOM: Uh...I like my hair...

THOMAS: Your hair is stupid.

TOM: Even though I don't style it much.

DR. JENSEN: Why do you like your hair?

TOM: Growing up when my mom thought it was getting too long, she would usually just buzz my head. It wasn't until I moved out when I could actually grow it out or cut it the way I wanted it.

DR. JENSEN: That's great! You like your hair. What else do you like?

TOM: I think I'm creative.

THOMAS: Ehh, kinda.

DR. JENSEN: How so?

TOM: In high school I took an art class and learned how to paint a little.

DR. JENSEN: Do you still paint?

TOM: Not really, but I really liked doing it.

DR. JENSEN: I'd love to see some of your art someday.

TOM: Okay, yeah!

THOMAS: Yeah! Huh?

DR. JENSEN: Give me one more thing you like about yourself.

TOM: Uh, movies.

THOMAS: I love movies.

DR. JENSEN: What about movies?

TOM: Well, James and I have a movie night every week.

DR. JENSEN: Uh-huh.

TOM: I feel that I know a lot about movies, and I can remember quotes pretty easily.

DR. JENSEN: How does it feel to think about all these good things about yourself?

THOMAS: Feels pretty good.

TOM: It feels really good, actually.

DR. JENSEN: Could I give you a challenge this week?

TOM: Of course.

DR. JENSEN: I want you to do something every day this week that makes you happy, and you can report them to me next week. Can you do that?

TOM: Yeah, I think I can.

DR. JENSEN: Great. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

TOM: Um...I think I'm okay, you gave me a lot to think about.

DR. JENSEN: All good things, I hope.

TOM: Yeah, all good things.

DR. JENSEN: Great. I'll see you next week?

TOM: I'll be here.

THOMAS: Thanks doc.

Lights out.

Scene 6

Later that night at Tom's apartment. Tom is on the couch, Sarah is frustrated and walking around the space. Thomas is standing near Tom.

SARAH: (*frustrated*) You didn't have to tell her that.

TOM: But it was true.

SARAH: Look, I know that therapy is kinda helping you, but why did you have to tell her that we argue all the time?

THOMAS: Because it's the truth.

TOM: Doctor Jensen has been encouraging me to be truthful and honest when we talk.

SARAH: So you can be "truthful" and "honest" with her, but not with me?

TOM: She's my therapist.

SARAH: And I'm your girlfriend.

TOM: Yeah, well, you're not really acting like it.

THOMAS: Ooo good one.

SARAH: Excuse me! I'm not acting like your girlfriend? I'm the one who checks in on you every day. I call, I text. I come over to this dump (*gestures to the whole room*), and I'm the one not acting like a girlfriend!

TOM: What do you want from me?

SARAH: I want you to care about me as much as I care for you?

THOMAS: But I don't care about you.

TOM: Of course I care about you?

THOMAS: I said I don't care!

SARAH: Well, you do a terrible job at expressing that.

THOMAS: Thank you!

TOM: Sorry, I'm such a disappointment!

SARAH: It's not the first time you've disappointed me.

TOM: (*sarcastically*) Oh please, tell me about all the times I've disappointed you.

SARAH: This isn't a joke.

THOMAS: This is kinda funny.

TOM: Do you think I don't know that? All I was trying to do was have a conversation with you!

SARAH: This wasn't what I expected either!

TOM: You asked me how therapy was, and I told you. You are a part of my life so it's only natural that I talk about you in my therapy sessions.

SARAH: You don't need to share everything.

TOM: Yes, I do! That's how therapy works! I sit down and I talk about my problems!

SARAH: Oh, so I'm a problem!

THOMAS: Yes!

TOM: I didn't say that!

SARAH: You just said you talk about your problems. You talk about me, so it sounds like I'm a problem to you!

TOM: You are not a problem! Sure, we have problems but all I'm trying to do is be more open with you.

SARAH: Yeah well, you're hurting my feelings.

THOMAS: Oh, boohoo.

TOM: I'm sorry I hurt your feelings, but you asked me how I was feeling and I'm just trying to be real and truthful with you right now.

SARAH: Okay, so if you're being truthful right now what's our future going to be like together?

TOM: What do you mean?

SARAH: Is this what our life will be like? I get home from work and we fight?

THOMAS: Absolutely.

TOM: No! I told you that things are getting better. Doctor Jensen is helping me focus and I'm learning how to manage my depression.

SARAH: It doesn't seem like you're managing it very well right now.

TOM: No shit! I'm pissed off.

SARAH: I'm sorry, I can't do this right now. (*turns away from Tom*)

TOM: What do you mean?

SARAH: (*turns back to him*) We are both upset, and things are just getting worse.

TOM: So what? Is that it?

SARAH: Yeah, that's it. (*grabs her bag and coat*)

TOM: You're just gonna go?

SARAH: Yeah.

THOMAS: Go! I don't care.

TOM: Fine!

SARAH: Fine!

THOMAS: Fine!

TOM: Fine!

SARAH: Fine! (*storms off SL*)

Long pause of silence

THOMAS: Wow, that was crazy.

TOM: What the hell is your problem?

THOMAS: My problem? Last I checked we have the same problems, idiot.

TOM: Stop calling me that!

THOMAS: An idiot? Well you are. You literally chased your girlfriend out the door.

TOM: I know what I did!

THOMAS: (*sarcastic caring*) At least you're trying to stand up for yourself.

TOM: Yeah, something that you've never done before.

THOMAS: Hey, I support you.

TOM: Only when you try to benefit from me.

THOMAS: That's not true!

TOM: You constantly try to get me to drink.

THOMAS: Yeah, because you are more fun when you're drunk.

TOM: What about when you made me smoke pot?

THOMAS: You got super relaxed didn't you?

TOM: It's a drug.

THOMAS: Yeah, so?

TOM: I've been trying and trying to feel better, but every time some stupid little thing happens you blow it out of proportion.

THOMAS: That's how anxiety works!

TOM: I know how it works!

THOMAS: Well, excuuuuuse me. (*short pause*) What's the point?

TOM: The point of what?

THOMAS: Of living?

TOM: Uh...to live...

THOMAS: Well, to be honest you aren't really doing any living.

TOM: What are you talking about?

THOMAS: I mean, come on. Isn't it obvious?

TOM: What?

THOMAS: Your friends don't care about you. Your job sucks ass. Your girlfriend just left you. You're miserable, sad, depressed, angry, / pathetic.

TOM: Shut up.

THOMAS: Look, all I'm trying to say is that...wouldn't it be much better to just...not be here?

TOM: Like...kill myself?

THOMAS: Oh, that's a good idea.

TOM: That's a terrible idea.

THOMAS: Just think about. Your life sucks, no one will miss you, all your problems will go away, and best of all you won't have to listen to me anymore.

TOM: I'm not going to think about that!

THOMAS: Come on, just a little...

TOM: No!

THOMAS: Eh, party pooper (*long pause*) She's not coming back, you know that right.

TOM: Why do you do that?

THOMAS: Do what?

TOM: You point out the most obvious things...I know she's not coming back!

THOMAS: I just wanted to make sure you knew...

TOM: (*sarcastic*) Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

THOMAS: You're terrible and you should feel bad.

TOM: Thanks, you only tell me every day.

THOMAS: Again, I just want to make sure you know.

Lights out.

Scene 7

Sarah's apartment the following day.

CARLY: So that's it?

SARAH: That's it.

CARLY: He didn't try to stop you?

SARAH: No.

CARLY: So...what's next?

SARAH: I'm not sure.

CARLY: Maybe separation for a little while could be a good thing.

SARAH: You think so?

CARLY: It will give you both a chance to think about how you want this relationship to continue...or not.

SARAH: I don't want to end things with Tom.

CARLY: Well, what do you want?

SARAH: I want to be happy...I want to be in a stable relationship...I want to feel loved.

CARLY: Do you feel any of that when you are with Tom?

SARAH: No, but things are changing. I feel that he's actually making progress with therapy. I think that once Tom figures out how to deal with his depression things might go back to how they used to be.

CARLY: Things will never go back to what they used to be.

SARAH: What do you mean?

CARLY: Tom is changing, and you need to let him change. He shouldn't be expected to "deal" with his depression, but he can definitely learn how to manage it. (*Sarah nods*) Ultimately it comes down to how you want to handle the situation. You even said that he's super vulnerable right now. No one is going to judge you if you decide to get out of a relationship that doesn't make you happy, but you also need to consider what you can and what you need to do if you decide to stay.

SARAH: Yeah, I know.

CARLY: It's definitely something that you should think about.

Sarah takes a moment to think to herself.

SARAH: I love him...

CARLY: ...But?

SARAH: ...But...I think it might be best to take some time away from each other.

CARLY: And that's perfectly fine. You guys have been together forever.

SARAH: Six years is not forever. You and James have been together for almost the same amount of time.

CARLY: That's beside the point. I think you're right about wanting to take some time.

SARAH: I just don't know how Tom will handle it.

CARLY: You need to stop worrying about him and worry about yourself.

SARAH: Yeah?

CARLY: Yes. I know he's struggling too, but you need to let him figure things out himself.

SARAH: You're right

CARLY: Of course I'm right. Just find some time to talk to him about everything, and don't hide your feelings. Straight up tell him, like you just told me.

SARAH: You make it sound so easy.

CARLY: Easier said than done.

Short silence.

SARAH: What if I can't?

CARLY: You can.

SARAH: I don't know what I would do without you.

There is a knock. They both look confused.

CARLY: Are you expecting someone?

SARAH: No, are you?

CARLY: Uh, it's your apartment.

SARAH: Oh duh.

Another knock.

CARLY: Are you gonna answer?

SARAH: I don't know. What if it's some weirdo.

CARLY: At least check the peephole.

SARAH: Right.

Another knock. Sarah steps off SR.

SARAH: *(Offstage)* Tom, what are you doing here?

Sarah and Tom both enter.

TOM: Sorry, I didn't wanna just walk in. *(sees Carly)* Oh, sorry, am I interrupting? *(starts to turn back to the door)* I can come back later.

CARLY: No no no, it's okay. I was just leaving. *(reaches for her bag)*

SARAH: *(loudly whispers to Carly)* What are you doing?

CARLY: *(whispers back)* What are the odds. Just talk to him.

SARAH: Come on in Tom.

CARLY: I'll see you later Sarah.

SARAH: Yeah, see you.

Carly starts to exit towards SR.

TOM: Hey, Carly.

CARLY: Yeah?

TOM: Uh...I...I'm really sorry about the other night.

CARLY: It's okay...It's fine

TOM: No, it's not okay. I was a jerk and I'm sorry for being rude. I should have behaved better.

CARLY: Thank you.

Tom nods his head, Carly waves to both Sarah and Tom, she exits. Tom and Sarah stand in a long awkward silence, a moment that feels forever.

SARAH: Oh, sorry, come in.

TOM: Thank you.

They both sit, but away from each other, a short pause.

SARAH: So, uh...what's up?

TOM: I wanted to talk to you.

SARAH: I don't want to fight.

TOM: No...no, I don't...I don't want to fight either.

SARAH: What do you want to talk about?

TOM: You left so suddenly last night.

SARAH: Yeah, you were yelling at me.

TOM: I'm sorry. I'm trying to be better.

SARAH: So, what's up?

TOM: Oh, I uh...I wanted to talk about us.

SARAH: What about us?

TOM: Is there an us anymore?

SARAH: I don't know.

TOM: Oh...okay...

SARAH: Tom, (*short pause*) I feel like we are at different stages in our lives.

TOM: Yeah.

SARAH: Yeah? You agree?

TOM: Yeah, yes, I agree. I definitely have some growing up to do.

SARAH: And I have some growing to do too.

TOM: So, what do you think we do?

SARAH: I love you / but

TOM: I love you too.

SARAH: ...But...

TOM: ...But?

Short pause.

SARAH: I think it's time for us to take some time apart.

TOM: ...Oh...

SARAH: I'm sorry.

TOM: I...I understand.

SARAH: I'm sorry, I just feel / that...

TOM: It's okay, really it is.

SARAH: You're not upset?

TOM: I'm more disappointed, but I get it, it's hard.

SARAH: This doesn't mean we're through.

TOM: No?

SARAH: No, we'll just take some time to get things worked out.

TOM: Yeah. I can do that.

SARAH: Yeah?

TOM: Of course. (*short pause, Tom reaches into his pocket and pulls out a ring box*)

SARAH: (*sad*) Oh Tom...

TOM: I'm not proposing.

SARAH: What are you doing?

TOM: I wanted you to have this.

SARAH: Tom, I can't.

TOM: Regardless of what happens, it belongs to you.

SARAH: I can't take this.

TOM: It's okay. It's yours. (*Sarah sits stunned, Tom gets up.*) I should get going.

SARAH: Tom / wait.

TOM: It's okay. (*he starts to exit, stops and turns around.*) I love you.

Exits. Sarah starts to cry as the lights slowly fade out.

Lights out.

Scene 8

Tom's Apartment later that night. Tom is sitting in the center of the couch; a gun is on the coffee table in front of him. Thomas wanders around the space.

THOMAS: Well?

TOM: What? It's not that easy.

THOMAS: Come on, we've talked about this.

TOM: Yeah, I know, it's still a big deal.

THOMAS: Problems, poof, gone.

TOM: Why does this feel like my only option?

THOMAS: We've already gone through this. Your life is a complete shit show. You have no friends, your girlfriend rejected you, your job is a joke, you literally have nothing to live for.

TOM: My problems might go away, but it will just cause issues for everyone else.

THOMAS: Who cares. You'll go away, I'll go away, your "friends" will be sad for like twenty minutes and then they won't care anymore.

TOM: My parents...

THOMAS: You haven't talked to them in three years.

TOM: So.

THOMAS: They don't care. How many times do I have to say it? Nobody. Cares. About. You.

By now Tom is nervous and anxious, his leg is bouncing.

TOM: I care about me.

THOMAS: Do you?

TOM: I mean...yeah.

THOMAS: What do you care about?

TOM: Doctor Jensen told me to stop thinking about the negative things and focus on the positive.

THOMAS: Oh yeah, and what positive things are you thinking of?

TOM: I like my hair...I'm creative...and I love movies...

THOMAS: (*sarcastic*) Oh wow, the same three things you said in Doctor Jensen's office.

TOM: Shut up, there's more.

THOMAS: Name one more positive thing in your life right now.

TOM: Uhhh...I...uh...

THOMAS: See, you can't think of another single thing in this world that makes you happy.

TOM: Video games!

THOMAS: (*sarcastic*) You escape this life to live a virtual one, so exciting.

TOM: At least it's something.

THOMAS: It's nothing because you're nothing.

Brief pause.

TOM: I don't think I can do this.

THOMAS: Stop being such a pussy and do it.

TOM: I don't think I can.

Thomas charges at Tom, they struggle together for a minute or two, the following dialogue can be spread out to fit the fighting time.

THOMAS: Do it!

TOM: Get off of me!

THOMAS: Just do it, you'll be doing everyone a favor.

TOM: What the hell is your problem.

THOMAS: I'm not the problem, you are.

TOM: Back off!

THOMAS: Coward!

TOM: Get off!

THOMAS: Do it!

TOM: Okay!

Tom gets the upper hand and pushes Thomas off. As Tom quickly gets up, he grabs the gun from off the coffee table and points it to the side of his head, Tom has reached his breaking point.

TOM: Is this what you want! You want me to shoot myself?

THOMAS: I want you to stop talking about it and make a decision for once.

TOM: Stop telling me what to do!

THOMAS: Hey, you asked a question. You can't expect your conscious mind not to answer it, you dumb dumb.

TOM: I'm sick and tired of the way you treat me.

THOMAS: Get over it! If you actually do it, you won't have to worry about me anymore.

TOM: You know what, your right! *(points the gun at Thomas)*

THOMAS: How stupid can you be? You realize nothing will happen if you shoot me!

TOM: I don't know what will happen if I shoot you!

THOMAS: Nothing! I don't exist!

TOM: You are me. I am you. If I'm not around, you're not around. If I don't shoot myself, you'll still be here. *(points the gun back at himself)* But if Doctor Jensen is right, I can learn to manage you. You'll have no choice but to be nice to me! *(points it back at Thomas)*

THOMAS: Look Sherlock, you're much too deranged to actually think that you can control me, let alone think that I will be nice to you.

TOM: Shut up. Shut up! *(brief pause. Tom begins to pace the room. He is noticeably anxious.)* Sarah's not coming back. James doesn't care. Carly's only around when they are. My job is shit, I barely make enough to pay for rent. Everything is a joke. My fucking life is a joke! UGH!

Tom quickly exits SR towards his bedroom. Thomas stands on stage almost frozen. From offstage we hear Tom grunting and throwing things around. Clunks of larger furniture are heard being flipped or knocked over as Tom continues to let out some grunting. As things begin to settle Thomas moves towards the SR exit.

THOMAS: Holy shit, I hope you don't expect me to clean all that up... *(he exits SR)*

A few softer sounds continue to come from off stage, smaller and less noticeable commotion. The buzzer sounds. Nothing happens. The buzzer sounds again, nothing. Buzz buzz, nothing. The commotion has died down from Tom's bedroom. The stage is still and silent for a moment. Sarah slowly enters from SL; she is carrying a box.

SARAH: Tom? *(brief pause)* Tom? It's Sarah...I know I have a key, but it's unexpected so I buzzed, but you didn't answer. Tom? *(she walks SR towards Tom's bedroom; she doesn't go in the room.)* Tom? I'm sorry I didn't call, I just wanted to bring some of your stuff back. Tom? Look I know you're probably upset about what happened earlier, but I just wanted to let you know I don't want to give up on you. *(pause)* I...I still think we need a little time apart, but I'd really like to try again when we both feel like we're ready. *(pause. She sets the box down on the coffee table)* I know you've been going through a lot recently and I feel awful about earlier, if there is anything I can do for you, please let me know. *(pause)* Oh, *(opens the box and pulls a succulent out)* I know it's not much, but I got you a new plant. It's a succulent, so you won't need to water it as much. *(let's out a light laugh.)* I know that James will make some stupid scientific joke about it when he sees it, but I thought you might like it. *(pause. She goes back towards SR but keeps her distance from the "door".)* I know I'm probably the last person you want to talk to right now, but I just wanted to let you know that everything will be okay. *(pause)* Well...I guess I'll go. *(pulls out a key)* I'll leave my key on the coffee table with your box. *(sets it down)* I think that's it, I guess I'll see you later. *(Sarah turns to leave, as she is walking towards the SL exit there is a gunshot. She whips around.)* Tom! *(sprints across the stage and exits SR into Tom's bedroom.)* Tom! Oh my god, Tom! what the hell!

Lights out. End.