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EGO: WRITING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PLAY, DIEGO

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EGO: WRITING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PLAY, *DIEGO*

By

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Honors-in-Discipline Program

East Tennessee State University

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I. Introduction

Ego: Writing the Psychological Play, Diego focuses on my analytical research and educational experiences as a Theatre major and Psychology minor as well as my personal journey over a four year period writing the play *Diego*. Theatre provided background for my writing process, and Psychology provided the basis for the play's main themes. The play's major plot as well as many of the characters and relationships came from a notable time in my own life, such that without those dramatic personal events, the inception of the play never would have occurred. I combined my experiences with my knowledge of playwriting and the mind to create a work that, while drawn from some unorthodox methods, holds true to the universality of human struggle.

II. Inception of an Idea, Birth of a Playwright

When I was a teenager, I liked to come up with ideas. I came up with titles for movies, plots for stories, lyrics for songs, and lines for plays. So naturally did these things come to me, I cannot say that I actively did anything; the thoughts and connections really *did* just form. I came to understand later that this was not entirely unique as this time of discovery is a stage through which most teens go. The issue was that I never gave any further work to these ideas. There might be some passionate thought in the beginning, but that passion, as is its want, would always fade. There were only few exceptions, and this play is barely one.

The inception occurred in February 2014, the same month I decided to pursue a career in theatre. While I was in my first semester at East Tennessee State University, a family friend recruited me

on behalf of Kingsport Theatre Guild to play a minor role in a December 2013 production of the children's play *Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. After seeing my performance in that play, the director of an upcoming show at Kingsport Theatre Guild, Tina Radtke, asked me to play a major role for a locally written play called *Chasing Charming*. During the rehearsal process for the latter production, I felt myself connect with the cast and with myself as an actor in a way I had never felt before. While I had been in a couple high school musicals before, I never saw nor portrayed myself as an "actor." In fact, I had never really been or planned to be truly passionate about any career. I had subscribed mostly to the traditional belief that I should prioritize financial stability over everything when considering a career. But my entrance into the theatrical world represents the first time in my life when I began to form and work towards my own ambition, and not one that others had pushed on me. I quickly became enthralled with that world and did everything I could to get involved. I switched my major to Theatre, became an Honors-in-Discipline student in the department, and began working with professors as well as students to catch up with those I knew had been acting for much longer than I. It was in this exploratory fervor that I pondered the possibility of playwriting; and a ponderance it remained until I was told that I could use the final product as a part of my thesis. This was the inspiration I needed to turn a fantasy into a reality.

The premise began thus: "What if a man thought he was hallucinating, but wasn't?" When I had the idea, there were no special circumstances surrounding it but an overactive imagination; in truth, I cannot even remember where I was or what I was doing that might have inspired it. But I was interested enough to ruminate on it further and form a premise around it over the following days. This man who thinks he is hallucinating indeed is hallucinating, but not about what he

thinks. I was just beginning my minor in Psychology that semester, so my longtime interest in it came to fruition just in time for the knowledge from class to inform my play. In my Introduction to Psychology class I had learned a great deal about Sigmund Freud and his interesting albeit now disproven theories. One of the most interesting and relevant theories for me was that of the *Ego*, *Id*, and *Superego*. Psychology professor Saul McLeod provides an excellent summary of this theory, which essentially states that the mind can be separated into three different motivators: the *id*, which is primal and acts on selfish urges; the *superego*, which attempts to conform to and be accepted by the world around it; and the *ego*, which does its best to reconcile these two to form appropriate behavior (*SimplyPsychology.org*). This was the theory that inspired the true hallucinations in this protagonist's story. One of his apparitions would be a parental figure, constantly nagging him to achieve, succeed, and be overall "the best" he can be. The other would be a friend who just as powerfully pulled him in the opposite direction, to fulfill his wants and needs and act on his emotions.

This premise lay by the wayside for months until, at the beginning of the fall semester of 2014, I realized with the help of theatre professor Patrick Cronin, that I was able to use it as my Honors Thesis; and the formation began in earnest. I then started to struggle to find a plot to go along with my premise for the play. This proved a much more difficult task than just coming up with a clever idea because it required organization and dedication along with effortful creativity. In fact, I began to suspect that the clever idea worked in theory, but may have been impractical. It took weeks of discarded thoughts and idle rumination to understand that the plot for this story could not come from my creativity, but had to be based in my personal experience. This was my first play, and I was working with a novel premise, to the best of my knowledge at that time; I had to

be sure not to overexert my grasp on the natural feel of the play, so I utilized a story with which I was familiar.

The event I drew from occurred during the summer of 2012 and was a classic example of a love triangle. My best friend and I were working at a summer camp where I became infatuated with a female coworker. While it seemed to my hyper-romantic mind that we were destined for each other, she soon began dating my best friend. I was obviously devastated at the perceived loss of my two friends, though I eventually came to forgive and understand them, making those friendships stronger than they were in the first place. While I have changed the setting almost entirely, this simple plot gave me quite a bit of freedom to integrate both the psychological premise and appropriate subplots into the play.

The title of this play, *Diego*, is named after the protagonist; its origin is an anagram that takes the backwards *id* and the *ego* from Freud and combines them. While this is partially a fun surprise for the audience, it also symbolizes the separation and dissonance of Diego's different desires that he cannot seem to reconcile. The character, Diego, is based on myself during the summer of 2012. He is an incredibly passive young man who relies on other people, combined with a vague sense of destiny, to lead his life for him. This attitude is being interrupted by a man named Korben, who shows up from time to time, plays the guitar, and sings to him. Diego erroneously believes this man to be a hallucination and eventually goes to see a psychologist about it, hereafter known as Doctor. He also receives constant advice from both his mother, known as Mom, and his roommate Austin. These two represent the *superego* and *id* and are the true hallucinations he is experiencing, but because they are so integral to his habitual self-

victimization, they are perpetuated through sheer disregard. A large portion of this self-victimization comes from his relationship with his best friend, Samuel, who unintentionally but consistently outshines him in almost every way. The rift caused by Samuel's success grows infinitely wider when Diego realizes that Samuel is beginning a romantic relationship with a girl named Samantha whom he met and became immediately infatuated with at the Doctor's office. His relationship with his father is rocky as well, ever since his father had a car accident which killed Mom two years prior. The experience was so traumatic for Diego that he has repressed it into a simple separation between his parents after the accident. Diego's delusions are challenged from every angle until they are forced to break and he is forced to face the truth about his mind.

III. A Play in Progress

Coming up with the subplots and relevant themes was perhaps the task that involved the most contemplation: I would be sitting and waiting, walking, or even attempting to fall asleep, and the cognition of how the play could be made more intricate would seep into my head. It was not a fast process, but certainly not as difficult as attempting to invent a plot from nothing. I did not realize until later that writing can never take place in a vacuum; it must always have tangible sources from which it draws meaningful themes and relationships. I learned this both by writing a few other creative works and taking advice from my advisor, Cara Harker. This contemplation began in earnest during the Spring semester of 2015 and lasted half of a year. But eventually, this led to another premise upon which I built the story. This was that every scene was to be from Diego's perspective and every relationship portrayed was to have the protagonist at the center of it. This theme of centrality soon evolved, however, to include a rule that became symbolic of Diego's journey: Diego would never be seen alone onstage until the very last scene. The stem of

this growth lay in the sole question that I believe forms the basis of my life's philosophy: "Am I truly alone?" Thus I ventured to create a sort of paradox in which Diego surrounds himself with distractions and delusions until he finally but actively tears them down to the truth of his aloneness. I want to suggest and support both sides of the answer, but another rule I wanted to include (that I believe is integral to all theatre) is that a production should never answer any question, but only present it. This is especially important for "Am I alone?", as I have certainly not found the answer and I hope no one has. But the asking and searching is what matters to the human soul. This was followed by other questions soon after. Though it was not meant to end up this way, each question and theme has aligned itself with a certain character. Samuel's success should incite the audience to ask what qualities make him successful as opposed to Diego. Samantha's relationship with Diego presents the old but still relevant human quality of people often objectifying their romantic interest as someone who can "save" them from their pain and loneliness. The father represents a failure as modern definitions of success would place it and questions the stigma we hold to those who do not fulfill their dreams or what we believe their dreams should be; Diego shows glimpses into that future for himself and speculates its inevitability. Even Korben is a symbol of the unpredictability of reality and the ultimate question of whether one can ever truly know anything at all.

About the same time I began coming up with the themes that I wanted to guide *Diego*, I also started writing the first scene of the play. I had only been to see a psychologist a couple of times and those visits were roughly a year before the conception of the play, but I quickly fell in love with the idea of introducing the play by coercing Diego to see a psychologist. It would be useful for both an interesting hook and exposition of the dynamic relationships already in place. I wrote

the entire scene in February of 2015, but as I rapidly tweaked, removed, and added aspects of the plot in the following weeks the original draft quickly became almost obsolete. I attempted to revise the script as I came up with the new plans, but it proved to be significantly more difficult to put ideas into words and dialogue than to come up with them in one's own head. This was my first truly daunting obstacle in playwriting. Other mental blocks would only inspire me to think harder and longer, and eventually, though rarely because of the long and hard thought, I would get it; but translating those passionate abstractions into a real-life event to be performed and seen was frightening. Almost everything I wrote seemed to be awkward and contrived. As I did not want to go for help out of shame and stubborn independence, and I had no prior experience or education in playwriting, this severely slowed and demotivated my progress. I continued to come up with ideas and individual bouts of dialogue and monologues for another year, but the writing of the play did not sincerely begin again until my Fall semester of 2016; and even then it began with the profuse editing of this first scene.

IV. A History of Playwriting, as I Learned It

Though I began my theatre education at the start of my sophomore year in the fall of 2014, it was not until the spring of 2015 that I was introduced to the history of the theatre. I was taking two classes that focused on theatre history that semester, Theatre History II with Karen Brewster and Introduction to Theatre with Patrick Cronin. As best my memory serves, the theatre history class focused on relatively recent playwrights, starting with Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen is known as the “father of realism,” more because he started and heavily guided a movement than because he truly defined what realism was. Nevertheless, he was the writer of my favorite realistic play in high school: *A Doll's House*. It was this play's protagonist Nora who influenced the romantic

interest of *Diego*, Samantha. Throughout the entire play, Nora is treated like a child by everyone. She tries in vain to show everyone around that she is capable of more than they believe her to be, but years of her masquerading as the stereotype they believe her to be (along with a social barrier that has existed as long as history can recall) stop even the people closest to her from changing their perceptions. Only after she leaves him does her husband Torvald begin to look at things differently, at which point the play ends (Ibsen *A Doll's House*). Samantha's theme, while relatively minor, is very much fashioned after this idea that a woman must find herself as a full and capable person before she can truly be in a relationship. I believe this aspect reigns true with both sexes, but females are traditionally expected not to be fully independent when entering into a relationship; in my experience, this incompleteness is the reason many have believed they need to be in a relationship in the first place. Samantha is a victim of this traditionalist value and, though the severity is not as overt as in *A Doll's House*, she must overcome it in the end. When she confronts Diego in the final scene about how he contributed to that stereotype even with his ideation of her, it contributes to the dissonance he feels about his own victimization. He must consider how his own subconscious has negatively affected the person he professed to love.

In that same semester, I found another play whose structure was like that of my own. It was in Patrick Cronin's Introduction to Theatre, he focused on two plays that he considered to be integral to the theatre experience: *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry and *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller. The latter intrigued me immensely, and though I had heard of it before, that semester was the first time I fully read and understood the play. I also learned here that it was a part of a movement called selective realism, a term used for choosing which elements of realism to emphasize and which to lessen or omit (Goldfarb and Wilson 341-342). This movement inspired me to break some rules I had been subconsciously holding to, especially

regarding the scene order and allowances for the hallucinations. I felt a bit freer in my writing process as I attempted to form settings for the play that felt as natural as possible, but still were clearly incomplete and very subjective. This manifested especially in the alternating chronological layout of the scenes which I like to call the Consonance-Dissonance Structure. The first act of this play appears mostly as exposition and dialogue in an almost presentational style: Diego is basically narrating what has happened to him in situations the audience has not yet seen, but to characters onstage instead of the audience. The only conflicts of the play so far are almost described to the audience in this way. In the second act, however, these previously depicted scenes manifest themselves as they truly happened, and the audience begins to realize that there is not only conflict between Diego and outside forces, but also between himself and his perception of reality. This creates the growing feeling of dissonance with the storytelling itself, not just with what's happening in it.

V. Conclusion: Unconcluded

This play's journey has been long. At one point I thought that this play would only expand and grow. I imagined a tower, getting taller and taller as I added to it with the bricks and mortar made of new ideas and scenes. But it did not expand as much as it grew. A natural part of this growth and what separates it from simple expansion is the inherent change that comes with it. This play was never a tower that I built; it was a living thing that adapted to my own changing ideals and experiences. And I am glad that it has. Without learning and applying what I have learned and applied since I started writing, many of the things that hold the play together and add to its meaning never would have existed. There would be a much less prominent feminist theme. And the innumerable alterations I have made to the dramatic structure of the play to make it new and

interesting would have been tossed away as a bad investment. As I have developed and grown, so has *Diego*, especially because the protagonist is closely linked with myself. And just as I am not finished developing, neither is *Diego*. While this version will live on as a finished play, I have already begun planning for drastic changes to the structure and dialogue as well as the expansion and addition of relationships that will turn the play as a whole into a deeper and richer story. I wish to create much more action that demonstrates the relationships of the play, as opposed to block exposition. I would like to delve deeper into the themes of drugs and their effects, relationship fantasies, and how society treats those who fail and don't get back up. At one point, I was afraid that I might never finish this daunting work. But now that I have reached this milestone of sorts, I know it will be many more years before completion; and I am excited. Every story is a universe, and every universe must keep expanding.

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VII. *Diego*: The Script

DIEGO

by

Nathaniel Couper

DIEGO: ACT I (CONSONANCE)

(LIGHTS UP ON A MINIMALIST STAGE. A COUCH, STAGE LEFT, ANGLED SLIGHTLY TOWARD CENTER; AN OFFICE CHAIR BESIDE A DESK ARE POSITIONED OPPOSITE IT ON STAGE TO CREATE AN ALMOST ADVERSARIAL SYMMETRY; THESE ARE AS CLOSE TO THE AUDIENCE AS IS REASONABLE. THE LIGHTING IS COMFORTABLE AND WARM, BUT ISOLATED TO THE FURNITURE. ENTER DOCTOR FROM STAGE RIGHT FOLLOWED BY A VISIBLY ANGSTY DIEGO.)

DOCTOR

(referencing the couch)

Please, make yourself comfortable.

DIEGO

(sarcasm pulses through his words like histamines in an allergic reaction)

The couch?

DOCTOR

If you like.

(DIEGO sits cautiously down on the couch, upright. The DOCTOR settles and confidently begins.)

How are you?

DIEGO

I'm in a psychologist's office.

DOCTOR

Indeed. And, according to the receptionist, because you are hallucinating.

DIEGO

Apparently. Allow me to explain. There is a... man who has been following me around and playing guitar and singing for me every few months or so.

DOCTOR
(writes)

And singing for you.

DIEGO

He's quite good, too.

DOCTOR

And you believe him to be a hallucination.

DIEGO

Well, I went to the local Catholic priest, but he says it's actually not a soul-sucking demon. So yeah, hallucination is fine.

DOCTOR

You do realize that street performing is an actual activity that real people do.

DIEGO

Yes. But he's happy all the time. Nobody's happy all the time.

DOCTOR

Actually, I know these people called psychiatrists who can provide you with things that can make you very happy for a virtually indefinite amount of time.

DIEGO

Okay. Fine. But I'm the only one who sees him. Ever. And I've tried to give him money before but he just gives it back. That does not sound like a junkie to me.

DOCTOR

Diego, hallucinations with the consistency and integrity which you describe are incredibly rare.

DIEGO

Interesting.

DOCTOR

When did this "man" first start showing up?

DIEGO

It was about two years ago now.

DOCTOR

So it's been a while. Did you always have the inclination that he was not real?

DIEGO

Well, not the first couple times. But he kept doing it. After I told my mother, and then my best a friend about it. They convinced... coerced me to come here.

DOCTOR

Was there a significant change or event in your life at the time of his first appearance?

DIEGO

I guess it was right after my parents... separated. (begins talking to himself) They fought all the time, so there was a divorce right after the crash. It was kind of like the last straw. He was driving home from one of his late night meetings, and... He was fired the next day. My mom went to look for a job up north after the split, but moved right back down and got a house close by when she heard I was moving into a dorm. It's not horrible; she at least helps me stay on task while he just... well, he's depressed, so... wait.

(gets up and looks quizzically around, and rests his critical gaze on the Doctor)

DOCTOR

(looking up from writing)

Hmm?

DIEGO

(Still uncertain)

How are you doing that?

DOCTOR

Doing what, exactly?

DIEGO

Making me... I never talk about this. Like, with anyone.

DOCTOR

Never?

DIEGO

Well, except with my roommate.

(Sinks back into his previous position)

He and I just kind of get each other. Austin. He's a bit of a troublemaker, but he always finds a way to just... help me forget about everything that's going on. Then there's my other friend, Samuel. He's been there for a lot longer, but we've kind of grown apart lately. You know, we both started out with these big dreams, and he made them happen for himself, but I feel like I've fallen behind somehow. I just can't discipline myself to do the hard stuff. But he just never stops; he's like a freaking roller-coaster, that doesn't have to stop for passengers, or maintenance, and defies the laws of gravity, so really a lot more like not a roller-coaster and something else that fits better with those other descriptors... I mean it's not like we've stopped being friends or anything, but he's been really busy with these great things lately and I... just can't keep up...

(Sits up and stares at the Doctor again; returns to reality)
Oh, I get it! You're a hypnotist.

DOCTOR

(unsure how to respond)

I'm a... psychologist. this is the stage at which I listen to and help you talk about everything that comes to your mind. The fact that you can let your words flow this freely is a very good sign. Trust me. You're doing very well.

DIEGO

At what? What am I doing well at? Look, I'm still sitting here on this stereotypical soft couch, and you're still sitting there with your stereotypical soft voice and stereotypical pad and pencil, and I'm no closer to what I came here for than when I walked in here and gave you fifty dollars to do God knows what.

DOCTOR

And what did you come here for?

DIEGO

I came to find out whether or not I'm insane.

DOCTOR

(matter of fact)

Clinical insanity doesn't exist. Far too simple to describe the entirety of one's mental state.

DIEGO

Okay, fine, smart-ass. I came to find out whether I'm hallucinating or not.

DOCTOR

No, you didn't.

DIEGO

(As his frustration grows, so does the intensity of his sarcasm)
Ah, hypnotist and psychic. Well, that is just-
(claps mockingly)

DOCTOR

You are here because you want to understand why you are hallucinating.

DIEGO

So he is a hallu-

DOCTOR

It doesn't matter. What matters is that you think you are.

DIEGO

You're crazy. I'm leaving.

(begins to stand)

DOCTOR

I understand that asking you to be vulnerable with a complete stranger is not exactly typical in the commonplace environment, but that is not where you are. Consider this room a physical representation of your mind, not the one anyone else out there sees, but the multidimensional one you struggle with every moment. This room is your fortress. I am just another stone in the wall that listens when you converse with yourself. It is essential that you feel free to be you, all of you. Even your darkest parts.

DIEGO

Ooh, that's deep. I'm adding poet to your resume.

DOCTOR

I know it's cliché, but it has to happen otherwise I can't observe, I can't obtain data, I can't test the different hypotheses, and neither of us can understand nor fix your dilemma.

DIEGO

Excellent. I'm your science experiment.

DOCTOR

No. No. You are your own experiment. I am here to provide you with an objective and knowledgeable basis for your-

DIEGO

God, would you stop evading the real issue! All I came into this place for was to get rid of Korben. If you won't do that, you've already wasted my money;

(gets up to leave)

I'm not going to let you waste any more of my time.

DOCTOR

Korben?

DIEGO

That's his... its name.

EXIT DIEGO. BLACKOUT.

(THE FURNITURE IS REARRANGED TO INDICATE A CHANGE OF SCENE. THE SOFA HAS MOVED STAGE RIGHT AND FACES DOWNSTAGE. THERE IS A YOUNG MAN ABOUT DIEGO'S AGE LYING ON IT QUITE CARELESSLY AND EATING A CONCOCTION THAT WAS CLEARLY MADE EVEN MORE CARELESSLY. THE DESK AND ROLLY CHAIR HAVE MOVED UPSTAGE CENTER, BUT STILL FOLLOWING THE "CLOSE TO DOWNSTAGE" RULE. AN ARMCHAIR HAS TAKEN THE SOFA'S PLACE STAGE LEFT, AGAIN ANGLED ONLY SLIGHTLY TOWARD THE CENTER. DIEGO ENTERS FROM STAGE LEFT AND PLOPS DOWN IN THE ARMCHAIR.)

DIEGO

You were right.

AUSTIN

Oh, no. He did the thing?

DIEGO

Yep.

AUSTIN

That bastard. I hate him already. I told you that you wouldn't get anywhere.

DIEGO

Yeah. I know. What the hell are you eating?

AUSTIN

Whipped cream on potato chips.

DIEGO

That sounds disgusting.

AUSTIN

Then it's a good thing I'm not eating it with my ears.

(Diego reconsiders a moment, then reaches for Austin's meal. Mom enters quickly)

MOM

Put that down. It's unhealthy and it's certainly not going taste good.

AUSTIN

I beg to differ.

MOM

Yes. Two of your favorite things, it seems.

AUSTIN

What's wrong with liking chips and whipped cream?

MOM

No. I meant the begging and differing. You were quiet the entire ride, Diego. What happened?

DIEGO

He did the fixy thing.

MOM

He tried to fix you?

AUSTIN

He tried to get in his head and do weird experimenty stuff. It was unnatural and pointless.

MOM

I wasn't asking you. I was asking my son.

DIEGO

He's right though, Mom. I told him I was hallucinating and he tried to get me to tell him all about my past, like he was going to reconcile something there. I'm not broken, Mom, I just... my brain's just sick. All I need is a remedy.

MOM

That's just procedure, Diego. He's a psychologist. His job is just to make sure nobody gets sued when you get the drugs you need from the psychiatrist. That's the difference. You know that.

DIEGO

It cannot seriously be that difficult to get a random hallucination out of my head, especially if I know he doesn't exist.

MOM

(slight tension)

Well you're going to have to talk to him in some respect.

AUSTIN

Or just deal with him until he goes away. That's what I'm doing with your mom. Why are you in here, by the way?

MOM

Because you are. And I wish to keep your unbridled influence on my son to a minimum.

(to DIEGO; AUSTIN recedes to other duties, primarily eating)

Speaking of bad influences, when are you going to see your father?

DIEGO

I was thinking tomorrow. He gets his unemployment check then so maybe he won't be as depressed.

MOM

Even still. Don't spend too much time with him. I know it's cruel to say, but you can't give him a false hope that he's still allowed to be your father when he's in this... state. You deserve better, Diego, and he needs to know it.

DIEGO

I know. I just don't want him going off the deep end. I care...
I worry about him.

MOM

So do I. But I worry about you, too. And I can't watch you grow
up to be like him. Anything like him. I'd even rather you turn
out more like Austin than your father.

AUSTIN

Oh, my god, Diego; did you just hear a heartbeat from that
general area?

(points at Mom)

MOM

(ignoring him)

Trust me. When he realizes that he's going to lose you like he
lost me, he'll do what's necessary to come back to the real
world. He'll have to. And you will be the one who saved him.

AUSTIN

You don't have to be responsible for your dad, dude. If
anything, he should be taking care of you. In fact, I'm coming
with you. To make sure none of his cooking goes to waste.

MOM

As terrible as he is with money, I'm not sure how he pays for
his lifestyle at all, even with the check. Don't encourage his
bankruptcy, Diego.

AUSTIN

Why not? By the time your dad goes bankrupt or whatever, Samuel
will probably have enough to send you a mansion in the mail.

MOM

You do understand that the main reason people attend college is
to establish a basis for a career that will eventually land them
in relative financial stability, don't you?

AUSTIN

Not if you have a crazy ambitious best friend you can secretly
kill later for his money.

DIEGO

Remind me to unfriend you before I win the lottery.

MOM

How is Samuel, by the way? I didn't see him when you were talking to that girl.

AUSTIN

(immediately intrigued)

Girl? Bro, you didn't tell me you could talk to girls.

DIEGO

(His face lighting up gradually and clandestinely)

Yeah, well, it wasn't like "talking," it was like talking.

(a sentimental difference obvious only to himself)

AUSTIN

Ah, yes. I see the distinction.

DIEGO

I mean, it wasn't like flirting. It was like... connecting.

(glad to have found the word)

Like realizing that we knew each other. From somewhere. I don't know. It was... it was special.

MOM

And have you considered that perhaps the reason you connected so well was because you are both mentally ill?

DIEGO

No, mom, she's not crazy. She's just there for her anxiety... wait, I'm not crazy either!

AUSTIN

Yeah, he's just seeing crazy people. Who also happen to not exist. And besides, who better to be with and understand someone going through a tough time than someone who's doing the same? You're perfect for each other.

DIEGO

I am seeing one person who happens to not exist. But thanks, I guess.

MOM

Well, does she like you?

DIEGO

What do you mean?

MOM

I mean did you make a good first impression?

DIEGO

(faltering as his secret connection is shattered)
Well, I don't know. It wasn't about that.

MOM

It's always about that, Diego. She's not going to care about a connection if she can't remember who the connection is with. You should have done something to make her think you're special.

AUSTIN

Being crazy is special.

MOM

Good special. Now you know for next time. I have to get to the office. Go to bed on time. Do your homework. Don't eat anything that Austin does. Don't spend too long with your father. I'll check on you tomorrow.

(small addendum)

And if there turns out to be no next time with Samantha, make one.

(EXIT MOM)

AUSTIN

You know, cool people have a name for the likes of your mother.

(The roommates begin settling into their afternoon activities, Diego to his homework and Austin to his sitting and eating, as the dialogue and lights come to a close.)

AUSTIN

So. Samantha.

DIEGO

Yeah.

(similar clandestine happiness)

Samantha.

(FADE TO BLACK.)

(A LONE PARK BENCH, CENTER STAGE. DIEGO SITS IN THE CENTER OF IT. AUSTIN SLOUCHES ON HIS LEFT. MOM STANDS JUST ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF HIM. IN THE BACKGROUND, FAR UPSTAGE LEFT, A MAN SITS ON ANOTHER PARK BENCH FACING UPSTAGE, PLAYING A SOFT BUT SLIGHTLY SAD MELODY.)

DIEGO

He is so noble.

MOM

He's right. He is doing what is good for him.

AUSTIN

And that makes it right? He's screwing you over. He's taking what's yours. We had her first.

MOM

What's ours? He never owned her. She's a person and she gets to decide who she likes best. Right now, she likes Samuel. If anything, you need to work on getting her back.

AUSTIN

No. We get back at both of them. Both of them betrayed us. Both of them knew.

MOM

Oh, so because she had coffee with him, she owes him her love. You can't demand her loyalty just because she showed some interest in you. She gives it to whomever she thinks deserves it.

DIEGO

But I lost. I obviously don't deserve it.

MOM

You can't think like that. You can still win her over. It's a game, and a long one; you've lost a round, win the next one.

AUSTIN

The game has changed. They just changed it. It's not love anymore. You loved her and she spat in your face.

MOM

Your melodramatic hyperbole isn't getting us anywhere.

(to DIEGO, leaning to him)

Decide, Diego. You have two options. Pick one.

(A small silence as Diego ruminates)

DIEGO

How should I get her back?

MOM

Be consistent. Don't annoy her, but let her know that you haven't given up. That you are just as good if not better than him. Remind her that you like her as often as you need to, do not let her forget. And show her you. Your strengths and talents. They may not be as visible, but they are just as valuable. It will take time. A lot of it. But she will eventually see your worth. And your relationship will eventually be all the better for it.

AUSTIN

Time? Nothing takes time. Things take action. So act. Do. Let them know that they hurt you. Or you will fade from their memories. Both of them will forget you even cared for them, let alone that they took that care and used it up on their own happiness. That's what happens when people get happy. They actively repress everything that doesn't add to it. Don't let them forget you, Diego. If you just keep going the way you have, the way your mom wants you to, they'll walk on you.

DEIGO

Please. I don't need this. Just agree on something, please. I need you both but not like this.

MOM

Fine. Sulk. Sit here while she gets away. But as you watch them ride off into the sunset, know that you could have changed it. I have to get back to my office. Call me when you're done here.

MOM walks off SR. The man at the other park bench slowly stands and begins sauntering downstage, still slow and still playing softly.

AUSTIN

You deserve better than this. They'll see it soon enough. Hang in there.

(small pause, he looks up and to the right)

Excuse me. I have girls to go and stare at.

(AUSTIN begins to follow MOM off. As he does, DIEGO stands and takes a few steps in that direction, but stands surprised and offended that they have left him)

DIEGO

(immediately following AUSTIN's line)

Wait, Austin, you don't have to leave to look at- Mom, I can come with you if you need...

(trails off)

(DIEGO turns slowly as he realizes who is walking slowly toward the bench behind him)

DIEGO

Korben. What do you want?

KORBEN

To be wanted. You?

DIEGO

Oh, you're clever.

(KORBEN sits on the bench, leaving room for DIEGO and still playing his tune, very quietly now. DIEGO looks at him for a long time, but KORBEN now looks at his guitar)

DIEGO

(giving in)

Turns out that's what I want, too.

KORBEN

Yeah. We all do. In the end, I suppose.

DIEGO

I don't know why I'm talking to you.

KORBEN

Your friends are gone?

DIEGO

Yeah. Wait, you saw them?

KORBEN

No. But I saw you. Why?

DIEGO

I don't know how hallucinations work.

KORBEN

Neither do I.

DIEGO

And you're not offended I think you're a hallucination?

KORBEN

What difference does it make? And besides, for all I know you could have been talking about your friends. What happened?

DIEGO

I failed.

KORBEN

I've done that before.

DIEGO

I lost her. I had her and then I lost her.

KORBEN

I lose things all the time.

DIEGO

But it's inevitable. This failure. Not the concept. Me. I've failed and I've succeeded. Sure. But I've never learned. I've always known that passion creates nothing, but never learned, never incorporated it into my being. It does nothing. It can inspire discipline. But it will never summon real progress. Not in me. I had always wanted to believe deep down that passion could create the vision of myself I cling to. That "new" and "exciting" and "surprising" were mine to show the world. For a time, that might have been true. I might have been impressive. Maybe. But it never changed anything. It was talent. When you are young, talent can get you so many places. And your parents or environment teach you to use that talent and passion to inspire discipline. And it should work. It did not. I missed all the moments I should have become a man. I may have tried; I can't remember. But now I sit here and cannot recall one single thing I have ever dedicated myself to. Except escaping. Running from and never toward. I am a quitter. I have quit everything I have ever put my hand to. I have quit every sport. Every language. Every culture. Every discipline. Nearly every person. I have all but quit college. At the beginning, I still believed that my passion, my interest would carry me through. I remember

being interested in almost everything I learned, everything I discovered. I wanted to use it, manipulate it, control it. But I never really wanted to understand it. Perhaps I did but that desire never translated to action. Because action has always taken something more. Some driving force: work ethic, professionalism, determination, that something every employer is looking for. I thought I had it once. Patience. Perseverance. The ability to force my mind to submit to my will. I never did. All I ever had was hope. Hope that I could change the world. Then that hope was only to change my situation. Then only myself. Then just my habits. Eventually I gave up on even that. With every failure I was more disappointed and less hopeful, and I did not understand that I was allowed to fail. I always wanted to be the best, never to become it. Slightly ironic that the only way you can be the best is to accept that you're not. Now my greatest ambition for which I have any remaining hope is at least to be the worst. At least be noticeable in some other regard. It's backwards but my mind finds solace in that. Only one thing kept me afloat. Her. What I feel with her. What I feel for her. And it is not even my own. Even in love I have nothing to give. Just passion. Just emotion. And failing attempts at making those things I feel with her and for her last forever. What happens when all else has fallen away and there is nothing there but what I was before the passion? And what happens when that, the only thing I am without, is nothing? When all that is left of me is my past. And any future that could have been I murdered with these words.

(A silence)

KORBEN

Then take them back.

DIEGO

I can't.

KORBEN

Then take them on. Challenge them. To a duel. One by one. You're not a quitter. You may be a loser, but you're not a quitter. Think about it. If I'm a hallucination, then I'm your conscious and I'm still here. If I'm real, you haven't left me. Or killed me. Either way, we are here together.

(LIGHTS FADE SLOWLY TO BLACK AS KORBEN'S PLAYING, WHICH HAS PERSEVERED THROUGHOUT THE DIALOGUE, GROWS TO ITS ORIGINAL VOLUME)

DIEGO: ACT II (DISSONANCE)

(A HORIZONTAL LINE OF ABOUT SIX CHAIRS ACROSS THE "BACK" OF THE ROOM, PROBABLY JUST DOWN OF CENTER STAGE. BEFORE IT STANDS A SHORT COFFEE TABLE WITH A FEW MAGAZINES STREWN ABOUT ON IT. THIS IS THE LOBBY OF A PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE. SAMUEL SITS AT ONE END, READING A DSM. SAMANTHA ENTERS STAGE LEFT PICKS UP A MAGAZINE, AND SITS AT THE OPPOSITE END OF HIM. THEY MOVE TOWARDS THE CENTER, SEAT BY SEAT, UNTIL THEY ARE SIDE BY SIDE. SHE BEGINS THE CONVERSATION AS IF NOTICING HIM FOR THE FIRST TIME.)

SAMANTHA

What are you in for?

SAMUEL

A friend.

SAMANTHA

Imaginary?

SAMUEL

Oh, if only. Then I wouldn't have had to drive him here.

SAMANTHA

Oh, I don't know. It seems an imaginary friend wouldn't have access to a car either.

SAMUEL

(he pauses only for a moment; he's not used to such playfulness)
I suppose. But we'll see for sure in a few minutes. He went in there a while ago.

(he motions stage right)

SAMANTHA

Ooh, and what's he in for?

SAMUEL

Let's just say he has his own imaginary friend and keep it at that.

SAMANTHA

Best friend confidentiality?

SAMUEL

Naturally. And what about you?

SAMANTHA

Just anxiety. Nothing like hallucinations.

SAMUEL

Nothing is just anything when you're at a psychologist's office for it.

SAMANTHA

I know. I just mean self-diagnosed anxiety is pretty common among us millennials.

SAMUEL

Well, at least you're here, getting help from someone who actually knows about it. Most people consider themselves experts on the brain just because they have one.

SAMANTHA

And you're not most, I gather?

SAMUEL

I don't self-diagnose. When something goes wrong I fix it or me and then move forward. It's simple, and it doesn't turn you into a self-fulfilling prophecy machine.

SAMANTHA

While you're here, you might get yourself checked out for narcissism.

SAMUEL

Is it a problem?

SAMANTHA

(overt flirting)

No. It might even be a bit attractive.

SAMUEL

Besides, a psychologist can't diagnose anyone with personality traits. Only disorders. Specifically, when that trait impedes your happiness, general well being, or others around you.

SAMANTHA

Is that from your... textbook?

(motions to the book he still holds in his hand)

SAMUEL

(holds it up)

DSM.

SAMANTHA

You read a diagnostic manual of psychological disorders in your down time? You might need to be here after all.

SAMUEL

As a doctor or a patient?

SAMANTHA

Both, I imagine. Why are you reading it?

SAMUEL

I saw it when I peeked into the doctor's office before Diego's session started. It looked big and, moreover, important, so it beat checking my phone constantly or reading mostly false things about mostly false people.

(motions to coffee table)

SAMANTHA

You just asked to read it?

SAMUEL

I'm pretty sure that's what it's for.

SAMANTHA

You're very... disruptive.

(SAMUEL gives a questioning look, but then realizes its other implications. It is a compliment to him regardless. Before they continue, shouting is heard offstage right. It quickly becomes discernible as the end of act I, scene i)

DIEGO

(offstage)

I'm not going to let you waste any more of my time!

DOCTOR

(offstage)

Korben?

(DIEGO enters stage right but turns for the rebuttal as soon as he is visible)

DIEGO

That's his... its name!

(A door slams. DIEGO turns and immediately notices SAMANTHA. And then his previous show of emotion. Embarrassment washes over him)

SAMUEL

(after a significant awkwardness)

Look! I made a friend.

DIEGO

Hello. Nice to meet and simultaneously alienate you with my shouting, friend.

SAMANTHA

Nice to meet you. And I'm certainly not alienated by your shouting because I'm liable to do the same thing after I'm in there for a bit. Diego.

DIEGO

So, he introduced me.

SAMANTHA

No, but he mentioned you and I figured from there.

SAMUEL

Hey, best friend confidentiality is important.

DIEGO

I didn't catch your name.

SAMANTHA

Oh, it's Sam.

SAMUEL

What?

DIEGO

Huh.

SAMANTHA

Yeah. Samantha.

SAMUEL

That's right, we didn't even get each others' names. Hi. I'm Sam.

DIEGO

(half joking)

You guys are not allowed to hang out together. I'm not dealing with two different Sams at the same time.

SAMANTHA

Oh, it wouldn't be that bad. Some people call me Sammy.

DOCTOR

(barely entering stage left)

Samantha? Are you ready?

SAMUEL

(before she can answer)

Actually, doctor, since Grumpy here didn't finish with his half hour, could I use the rest to talk about the DSM?

(DOCTOR reflects the question back to SAMANTHA and DIEGO with her eyes)

DIEGO

(bitter from the reminder of what brought him here)

Whatever.

SAMANTHA

(to SAMUEL)

I told you you were disruptive. Sure, it's fine with me.

SAMUEL

You sure, Diego?

DIEGO

(realizing it will mean more time with a cute girl)

Yes, yep. Absolutely. You go right ahead. Take your time. Or mine, I guess.

SAMUEL

Sweet.

(grabs the textbook and exits stage left with the DOCTOR)

I was specifically wondering about Narcissistic Personality Disorder...

(SAMANTHA'S eyes follow SAMUEL as he leaves and chuckles at his last remark. DIEGO'S rest on her the whole time)

DIEGO

He's quite good at making new friends, actually.

SAMANTHA

I can imagine.

(she slowly shifts her focus to DIEGO)

Speaking of friends... Korben?

DIEGO

(disappointed at the subject)

Oh, yeah. He's just... well, I guess he's just my brain. Doing really weird stuff.

SAMANTHA

Any idea what's causing it? Or him?

DIEGO

Well, that's a pretty loaded question.

SAMANTHA

I'm okay with a loaded answer. I don't think he's coming out anytime soon.

DIEGO

Well, there's my parents. They've been split for two years. I'm an only child so maybe that plays into it. My father's unemployed and my mother is overprotective. School stresses me out like crazy, and that keeps getting worse. I'm getting over a girl- but that's pretty much behind me. Oh, and my roommate is bent on keeping our dorm a pigsty, so who knows what toxins I could be living with in there.

SAMANTHA

(chuckling again, but more sympathetic)

I get that. I get a lot of that actually. Home life isn't great, but I don't think it's quite toxin-level crazy. I still live with my parents. They're... holding on. I'm getting over someone, too, though probably not as successfully as you. But school. That's where it really gets hard to keep hold.

DIEGO

Keep hold of what, if you don't mind me asking?

SAMANTHA

Not at all. My hold on my anxiety. It's why I'm here, actually.

DIEGO

Hmm. Not as controversial as a hallucination.

SAMANTHA

Yeah. I suppose it doesn't have the same "insanity" brand to it. But we all have our vices.

DIEGO

Almost all of us.

(he looks stage left; so does SAMANTHA)

SAMANTHA

He does seem above it all, doesn't he? Well, you're his best friend; is he?

DIEGO

Oh, absolutely. He's a machine. Doesn't stop for anything or anyone. I used to think I was like that. Now, I struggle just to feel like I am that for a moment.

SAMANTHA

(looks back at DIEGO)

Why did you storm out?

DIEGO

(taken aback)

Well, I just... it feels like he's trying to fix me, fix my hallucination, just by letting me talk about it.

SAMANTHA

Hmm. At least he does listen though. Just lets you talk, while everyone else just looks for every opportunity to use their opinions as putty to fix and fill the cracks of your life.

DIEGO

(seeing an opportunity)

I don't know. I could do that. If you need someone when you don't have money for a guy with her education.

SAMANTHA

(not quite genuine)

Thank you. Same goes for you. Since you can't talk to doctors. Us crazies have to stick together.

(gives a friendly wink)

DIEGO

(after waiting for her to bring it up)

You wouldn't happen to have a way to contact you, considering I may never come back here?

SAMANTHA

Oh, yeah, of course.

(DIEGO hands SAMANTHA his phone from his pocket and she puts her number in, then hands it back to him)

SAMANTHA

There you go. For all your venting needs.

DIEGO

Thanks.

(MOM pops her head in from stage left)

MOM

I'm done with errands, honey; are you and Samuel almost done?

DIEGO

Hey, Sam! You almost ready?

MOM

I'll be in the car when you are.

(MOM exits)

DIEGO

(to SAMUEL)

We'll be in the car whenever you're done.

(to SAMANTHA)

It was really awesome to meet you... We should do... something. Eventually.

SAMANTHA

Agreed. See you later, fellow crazy.

(DIEGO smiles, more inside than out, and exits after MOM. SAMUEL enters from stage right)

SAMANTHA

Well? Are you a narcissist?

SAMUEL

Hmm. Alas. Not yet.

SAMANTHA

(getting up)

Don't worry. There's always next time. Besides I try not to flirt with narcissists.

(SAMANTHA exits stage right, and as she crosses SAMUEL, she slips him a piece of paper)

SAMUEL

(to himself)

What the... oh, phone number. That was so smooth.

SAMUEL EXITS SL. FADE TO BLACK.

(Lights up on the park. Exactly as before but the stage is free of people. DIEGO and SAMUEL come running on from stage left, out of breath and DIEGO slightly behind. They have been exercising.)

DIEGO

Whooh. Holy cow, it's been way too long since I've done that.

(DIEGO goes to sit on the center stage bench, but SAMUEL remains standing)

SAMUEL

Since we've done that. Remember when we used to do that every week?

DIEGO

Yeah, and we made that Facebook group for it.

SAMUEL

Hmm. That lasted about a month. Actually, it's been a while since we've done anything together.

DIEGO

Well, there was the field trip to the psychologist's office the other day.

SAMUEL

That doesn't count. We barely spoke to each other and we never actually talked. It was partially due to that girl, Sam.

DIEGO

She's not that girl.

SAMUEL

Sorry. Sam.

DIEGO

And let's use Samantha to clarify.

SAMUEL

Good plan. In fact, that's kind of what I wanted to talk to you about.

DIEGO

Samantha? What about her?

(he starts to become suspicious)

SAMUEL

Well, you know I don't have the best of luck with women.

DIEGO

That's not even remotely true.

SAMUEL

I mean I don't have the best of luck in keeping women.

DIEGO

Okay.

(SAMUEL sits down beside DIEGO, who is becoming more standoffish with every sentence SAMUEL speaks)

SAMUEL

Sam... Samantha seems like the kind of girl I could... go steady with.

(a silence)

I'm really excited about it.

(another silence)

DIEGO

Do you think she feels the same way?

SAMUEL

Well, I'd think her behaviour was pretty odd if not; we went on a date yesterday.

(DIEGO becomes stone. If a fade-out of SAMUEL's voice as he continues were possible, it would be happening here)

SAMUEL

And she wants to go on another this weekend. It's been really new. She's really the first girl that I've gotten to be intimate with both emotionally and mentally. And she's clever. Maybe not super intelligent, but she's witty, you know. We can talk or not talk for hours. Or it feels that way. And her hair. It's so... blonde. Just looking at it while we're talking feels like I'm staring into light itself. I never knew it could feel so good to want someone just as much as you know they want you.

(At that, DIEGO gets up and begins to walk off stage right, all slowly, so as not to set something off in himself)

SAMUEL

I couldn't tell you one specific thing that...

(with pauses for DIEGO's response, which never comes)

Diego? What's up? Are you alright? Do you feel nauseous from the running?

(SAMUEL gets up to follow, concerned and confused. He lays a hand on DIEGO's shoulder)

SAMUEL

Diego.

(DIEGO turns and swings a punch at SAMUEL's face. Partly because of his aim and partly because of SAMUEL's quick dodge, DIEGO misses. But SAMUEL backs up, bewildered)

SAMUEL

Diego, what the Hell is wrong?

(DIEGO's eyes are on fire. He is tearing up from an emotion, but he cannot tell which one. But SAMUEL figures it out after a couple seconds)

SAMUEL

Oh. You love her, too.

(LIGHTS CUT TO BLACK)

DIEGO: ACT III (RESOLUTION)

(THE PARK. SAME AS I, SCENE IV, BUT THE UPSTAGE BENCH IS GONE. DIEGO AND AUSTIN ARE SITTING ON THE OTHER BENCH, BUT ARE QUIET AND STILL. AUSTIN IS OBVIOUSLY STILL WITH DORMANT ANGER. BUT DIEGO IS ALMOST BLANK. AFTER ABOUT TEN SECONDS, AUSTIN BREAKS THE SILENCE)

AUSTIN

Do you need me here?

DIEGO

(looks at him, uncertainty washing over him, and we see fear.
But then a glimpse of courage)

No. I'm... I'll be okay.

AUSTIN

(not moving)

Sure. Honestly, I kind of just want to stay to make sure they're not. Okay.

DIEGO

(sad smile)

I know.

AUSTIN

Well, I'll be over there. Signal me if things start to get rough.

DIEGO

What's the signal?

AUSTIN

Nah, doesn't matter. I'll know.

DIEGO

(looks off stage left)

Here they are.

(looks at AUSTIN)

AUSTIN

(waits, unaware)

Oh, right. Remember. I'm here for you. Or there for you.

(refers to exit stage right and proceeds to go off)

(Before AUSTIN fully exits, SAMUEL enters SL, and stops SL of the bench, not wanting to infringe on his friend's emotional state)

SAMUEL

Hey, budrow.

DIEGO

(not unfriendly, but perhaps just ambiguous)

Hi.

SAMUEL

I told her I wanted to talk just the two of us first. She definitely is set on having a group reconciliation, but I wanted to let you know... something you need to know. If you say the word, I'll break up with her.

DIEGO

So we can all end up alone?

SAMUEL

I'm serious, Diego. You are my best friend even if I'm not yours right now, and I won't risk that because of a romantic relationship. Even with someone for whom I care very deeply.

DEIGO

I was serious too. What am I when I say "do it." I'm the guy who not only destroyed a chance at love for himself, but for the two people I care about the most on this planet. Besides, the thing that makes it painful isn't you with her. It's that it reminds me that I failed, you won, and she's just not with me. And she won't be. Ever. Even if you break her heart.

(MOM enters USR, but stops once fully onstage. She stands, waiting for the break. DIEGO notices her and SAMUEL notices DIEGO's distraction)

SAMUEL

I suppose. Well, the offer stands. Alright if I get Samantha?

DIEGO

Yep.

(SAMUEL exits SL as MOM crosses to DIEGO, who stands at her approach)

DIEGO

Mom, is something wrong? Why are you here?

MOM

Wrong? This is wrong. What you are doing here. You're giving up.

DIEGO

You weren't here, Mom, you don't know. I'm not giving up; I'm just trying to make them friends again.

MOM

I do know. I know you. And trust me, this is not how to correctly repair a relationship. You will be their toy if you just appease their collective guilt without making any demands yourself and teaching them that what they did was wrong.

DIEGO

I thought you said it wasn't wrong, they were just acting on their self interest?

MOM

It was wrong if they think that what they did didn't affect you.

DIEGO

They don't believe that, Mom. I don't think they do. They're coming anyway. I need to do this myself, Mom. Please. Go argue with Austin instead.

MOM

You don't need to do anything yourself, honey. That's what I'm here for. I'll be sure to intervene if I see things getting out of hand.

(SAMANTHA enters SL as MOM exits SR. SAMANTHA and DIEGO share an awkward gaze before SAMUEL follows. When he appears, SAMANTHA immediately assumes the role of a leader)

SAMANTHA

Hi, Diego. First, I want to apologize for the pain and confusion we've caused you. We didn't mean for you to get hurt.

SAMUEL

No.

(DIEGO struggles with "I forgive you" but is unable to express it. He simply gives a short smile)

SAMANTHA

We want to know your side, what you think about this... about us. I mean do you have any problems with it happening?

DIEGO

(easier than expected)

Nope.

(A long awkward silence)

SAMUEL

Samantha, can you stay here while I go to the bathroom real quick?

(He goes to kiss her but stops, thinking better of it, then exits SL. SAMANTHA and DIEGO are left alone onstage. After a few seconds, the latter breaks the silence)

DIEGO

So. Did that go like you wanted it to? The counselling session?
(he tries to make conversation, but he knows what he is in her eyes)

SAMANTHA

Are you okay?

DIEGO

(dropping his disguise of civility)
What does that mean?

SAMANTHA

It means... are you feeling suicidal? I don't know. I don't know how to let you know I care without worrying that you'll take it the wrong way.

DIEGO

I... I get that. But I do learn, I think. I understand now. You don't have to treat me like the only thing I ever was was wrongfully in love with you.

SAMANTHA

We did that to each other.

DIEGO

I never treated you like a child.

SAMANTHA

Maybe not. You did objectify me though. I'm not just someone who can save or love you. I need too.

DIEGO

I never thought you didn't.

SAMANTHA

But you never understood that I did. It wasn't a choice, you know. I didn't choose him. He... he's what I need right now. I couldn't... I can't need you because you need me.

DIEGO

Hmm. Turns out I need him too. I do hate him, right now, but I need him.

(glances SL)

And here he comes. By the way, yes. I'll be okay.

SAMANTHA

You mean you won't kill yourself?

DIEGO

No. It takes courage to gamble like that. And that is not something I have much of right now.

(SAMANTHA attempts to retort but simply stands there, staring at him. She knows he is wrong. He knows he is wrong. But they both understand the sentiment. SAMUEL enters SL)

SAMANTHA

I'll see you later, Diego.

DIEGO

Goodbye.

(SAMANTHA exits SL. And there is a silence)

DIEGO

Yeah. I still love her.

SAMUEL

And I love you.

DIEGO

And her.

SAMUEL

And her.

DIEGO

And she loves you.

SAMUEL

And you.

DIEGO

I guess. I love you, too.

SAMUEL

Love sure is a strange thing. Or things.
(gives a playful grin)
Let's hang out soon.

(SAMUEL exits SL. This is the first time DIEGO has been onstage alone. His face contorts suddenly and he groans with anger and pain as MOM and AUSTIN enter from SR. They begin speaking quickly and with desperation. But he does not look at them again)

MOM

What the Hell?

AUSTIN

That wasn't all, right? You're not finished with them.

DIEGO

No. I'm not.

MOM

Good. I told you, darling, that wouldn't get you anywhere. Why do you think it still hurts?

AUSTIN

You should have hit him. Hell, you should have hit her! The moment they tried to play themselves off as trying to help you. They can't do that.

MOM

(to AUSTIN)

And what would that have done? Gotten him in jail?

AUSTIN

(to MOM)

It would have felt good. We wouldn't be in this kind of pain if we'd had some sort of vengeance.

DIEGO

(DIEGO begins to understand)

Why did you say we?

MOM

Well, we can have vengeance now, or we can the woman of our dreams with just a bit of patience. It's the same situation with your mental health, honey.

(DIEGO slowly moves downstage)

AUSTIN

His mental health is fine, he just needs to do something drastic to get Korben out of his head.

MOM

What he needs is to stop being influenced by other mentally unstable people like you and his father.

AUSTIN

We aren't the ones who can't stand not controlling him every second of every day.

MOM

And where would he be without my influence? He would have dropped out of college were it not for me "controlling" him!

DIEGO

(with all the courage and mercy he has)
Thank you, mother. But you are dead.

(MOM and AUSTIN look at him)

MOM

What?

DIEGO

You died. Two years ago. In a car crash. My father was the driver. And he was under the influence of the drugs he took for you. Because you wanted him fixed. You wanted him whole. And you died for it. And for two years, I've been using those same drugs to keep you alive. To trick my conscious mind into believing there was someone in control. Thank you. But I need to be me now. I love you. Goodbye.

(The lights illuminating MOM go out. She has faded back into DIEGO)

DIEGO

You too, Austin. You only ever existed in my mind. I live by myself. I have since I moved out of my father's house. I needed you just as much as I did mother... her shade. You taught me to enjoy life as it is, not for what I can make it. You took care of me. You understood me.

AUSTIN

I don't understand.

DIEGO

That's alright. You've been a good friend. Thank you. But it's time for goodbye.

(The lights illuminating AUSTIN go out. DIEGO is alone in a line of light confined to the front of the stage)

DIEGO

I am afraid now. No one else can be afraid; the other two of me are gone. Terrified of that one word that haunts me now.

(beat)

Alone.

(beat)

They were my wall. The stone barrier keeping out that word, "alone" battering on it like a raving madman, like... a nomadic musician. He searched for even a crevice by which to whisper reality in. But together they kept the truth out, drowning with the wind. (a pause) God, I am so afraid. But they can't exist anymore. Even if when I was abandoned and hopeless and wanted to end, they kept me going. Even if they were my only friends, my angels, my demons when all others were outside. I can't allow them power again or I... I'm just a shade. A channel for their dichotomy. Their war. They have done their job. They have kept me safe. But safe is no longer what I need. Safe is no way to live. I have to be. Exist. Trust that the things I find and understand will not consume my heart. I must become myself. Even if to be myself means to be alone.

(He sits at the edge of the stage and cries. After a few moments, a guitar is heard offstage left playing "VICE". Lyrics are sung as KORBEN appears. He sits beside DIEGO)

LYRICS TO "VICE"

Hello old friend, it's time for goodbye;
Time for goodbye.
Goodbye.

We've had our fun, but I'm headed home;
I'm headed home.

I've been talking of leaving this town for twenty years now,
But as I lay dying here on the ground,
I'm not quite down and out;
I'm not down and out.

Hello again, I'm moving on;
I'm moving on,

Moving on.

Follow if you want, but I've set my course,
'Cause no, I'm not yours anymore.

I've been talking of leaving this town for twenty years now,
But as I lay dying here on the ground,
I know I'm not down and out;
I'm not down and out.

'Cause I've got a home that I'm headed for,
And you can't stand in my way;
And I've got a home that's headed for me,
And you can't stand in its way;
No, you won't stand in its way.

Hello old friend, it's time for goodbye.
Goodbye.
Goodbye.

(A PASSERBY- who looks remarkably like DOCTOR and is played by the same actor- enters stage left, crosses the stage just behind DIEGO and KORBEN, and almost exits stage right, but turns to look at them. He takes a dollar bill or two from his pocket, walks to KORBEN and places the money on the ground beside him. DIEGO notices. It takes him a couple moments, but he does a double take and realizes the implications of that interaction. KORBEN is real)

(LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK)