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So, "In Your Eyes, I am Complete." A play in one act

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Dominican University of California

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So, “In Your Eyes, I am Complete.”

A play in one act

By K. Michelle Sellers

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts in Humanities

Dominican University of California
San Rafael, California
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This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Humanities. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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Abstract

So, “In Your Eyes, I am Complete” is a one-act play and a one-woman show. I will be playing various characters such as mom, dad and sister where I will address many layers: such as cross-cultural differences, mental health and alcoholism, to name a few.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mom, for giving me such a challenging environment to write about! My thesis readers: Carlos Rodriguez for supporting my idea that I turn my culminating thesis into a one-act play, and Joan Baranow for proofreading my essay. And a special friend who has helped me keep my focus throughout grad school!

Introduction

My dream back in September 2015 went, “Go back to school for Public Policy or Public Health,” Mom said. Mom hardly appears in my dreams, and this dream at the time was prophetic. Before that dream, I was working in the food and hospitality industry, and my job at the time was working as an Assistant Front Desk Manager in a seedy part of town. I was earning good money, and it was a full-time job. It was a job that didn’t have any upward advancement, and yet, I still kept my enthusiasm for learning as I would bring books to read during down time and listen to the talks at night on NPR. I felt that something was lacking in my life, and that I needed to challenge my intellectual curiosity. I couldn’t find it at work, nor within my own circle of friends and family. I was beginning to become irritated and as a result, I wanted to change the people around me so badly at the time. I wanted to have philosophical and challenging conversations other than basic level and transactional level communication. Something inside was troubling me and I didn’t know what to do with the environment around me and how I fit versus where I belonged.

What started out as a personal fulfilment transitioned to an extremely transformative experience that put closure to childhood wounds. In my last semester of graduate school, I realized that, most importantly, addressing the personal narrative never felt so rewarding. The self-discovery began as I wanted to pursue a creative writing project for my thesis. I must have changed ideas three times to come up with, first, a poetry-infused memoir, second, a narrative essay and finally a one-act stage play. This all worked out perfectly because I already had acting experience and a background in theatre. Perhaps I felt at the stage of my life, turning forty, I had

done personal work and healing through childhood issues that had put me in a much more grounded space. Somehow, this lightbulb went off and I had to make my inner-child shine. It was almost a nagging feeling to see myself relive a past using theatre as a medium to interpret what my experience was. I felt that by getting my Master's degree was more than a means to an end, and that there was something else beyond a career change in my life. I had to put closure on something in my past, which I had thought was over and done with.

Initially, I was inspired by another student's culminating project that was a performance. Hearing about how he was presenting his creative piece, I thought to myself, well if he can sing in front of an audience, why not perform my thesis as a one-act play? I brought this idea (very last minute) to my thesis readers. Regardless of the timing, I felt that it was meant for me to be able to tell my memoir in a theatre form. Previously, I had already started an academic paper—close to twenty-two pages. It was my thesis reader who suggested that I could think about each story as mini-scenes from a movie. And that's when I began to think in a visual and also in cinematic form. Each chapter in my life had looked like scenes from a movie.

The trouble with writing my one-act play was that I had to draw on various characters such as family members. It didn't take me long to recall a memory of how my parents were during that tumultuous period in my life. I had to find ways when writing the dialogue to make sure that I empowered that wounded child. I couldn't get wrapped up into being that character or how I was back then. One of my directors mentioned to me that I am playing a character of how I was at fourteen years old. And that is not how I am now. I'm a completely different person compared to that younger self. As all of this unfolds, I'm actually learning more and more about my parents' stories like how their own life was like before my sister and I came along. As the performance got closer and I was wrapping up my creative project I got a revelation. I fully

realized more than ever before, even when I was in therapy, that my parents have their own issues that seriously shaped and guided their decisions. They are two wounded lost people, who didn't have their own personal power and love for themselves in order to reciprocate to each other and, most importantly, their own children. This would be the highlighting take away piece if anything that I have learned from this project. Perhaps just a little tad of empathy, but never to give a pass that they did the best that they could.

Recently, I watched the documentary of the American playwright, Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953). O'Neill wrote plays about his life and troubled upbringing. As painstakingly as it was during a time in the 1950s construct, where silence ruled and discussing feelings and emotions was not the norm, O'Neill found a creative outlet to discuss his lived trauma. He found a healthy way to process his own dysfunctional family. For me, growing up with mixed messages that led to a duality of confusion, decoding language that was very ambiguous and figuring out my own self in the process have been truly challenging. The duality of the educated/uneducated, and the employed/unemployed, to list a few hierarchies, definitely ruled my home life.

It seemed like O'Neill was struggling to tell his own personal story using a stage play. He made sure that his plays marked overarching themes of a troubled family. It bothered him so. In one scene in *A Touch of the Poet* the daughter is at a writing table and she is speaking to her mom about her dad. I could immediately relate to that scene when she tries to suggest for her mom to leave dad. In my own play, *So, "In Your Eyes, I am Complete*, I hint a few times in the beginning of the play that mom should leave dad. As in *A Touch of the Poet*, there is plenty of dysfunction, as the dad doesn't understand because he is an alcoholic and the mom enables his behavior. With my own play, there is a similar theme of enabling an alcoholic and that addiction is heavily addressed. With O'Neill's piece, he portrayed the mom as being passive and always

turning a blind eye to toxic situations. The daughter is affected and it appears that no one even notices how her own reaction is simply caused by what she is seeing around her.

Robert Redford's film, *Ordinary People*, was also a great inspiration for me to seek therapy because the main character navigates where his life begins while balancing the dynamics of his parents. In the therapist's office scene, the main character played by Timothy Hutton says to his therapist, "I want to be in control." Hearing this line for me propelled me to eventually seek therapy. I wanted to be able to discuss what was going on in my own home, and later, to tell my story openly in public. I have expressed this overarching theme in my life--trauma and dysfunctional settings-- through creativity. Many examples have included poetry, short films, prose and one-act stage plays. I believe that in order to heal from these troubled and soul-draining experiences one has no other option but to explore creativity. The character of Timothy is seen as taking on the stressors of the family while no one is paying attention. In his case, he sought therapy to understand the many layers that were going on in his own home. My character deals with the same thing as well. They say in therapy that it is about peeling back the onion, so uncovering the many levels and complexities in order to heal.

Another playwright who also inspired me is August Wilson (1945-2005) whose play *Fences* serves as another example when the character, Troy, who plays the father, definitely shows anger and hostility towards his family. It is the catalyst scene where Troy confronts his son, Cory, one day outside their home. Cory's hopes and dreams, which he thought were safe to share with his dad, were actually hurting Cory every time he thought it was safe to share. Personally, I could relate to him growing up. My own goals and dreams were always shattered because of having an alcoholic dad who thought that dreams and goals were "a waste of time" and that "it takes money." That was the story that ruled the household for many years. Getting

out of the situation at the time seemed impossible. I could see myself in many situations where I wanted to get out and leave, but for my story there was a cultural narrative at work. I couldn't just leave the home setting. With Cory's case, he went to the military. In my story, going off to college for the first time and experiencing being away and living in the dorms was my way out.

Courage was the defining moment of my being my own person and discovering my own existence. I came across many instances of resisting and fighting the layers that the old me was in the process of "shedding." I didn't know what I was going through back then, but looking back from my age now, I was navigating life in my own skin. Many teenagers discover themselves and identity at a much younger age, but for me, it was a serious struggle. I gained friends, and lost friends, I had to make decisions, for example, deciding whether to go shopping with friends or show up for work. Looking back at it, I forgive myself for just being me it was part of the process of learning how to make decisions. Little did I know that I was branching out of my family's narrative and being my own individual despite the chaos in my life. In contrast, with my mom, the only risk that she took in her life was to leave one country, the Philippines, and start a new life in another. That was the only risk that she took in her life.

Background: Mom's Story

Mom's first job upon arriving in the United States was working at a manufacturing plant for insect repellent in Berkeley, CA. Mom had a roommate, Vicki, whom she met at an Asian grocery store. They were in line and mom heard a woman behind her ask, "Are you Filipino?" They started a conversation and that led to my mom being Vicki's roommate. Her rent was \$175 a month for a 2BR apartment in East Oakland. And divide that monthly rent by two--\$87.50--

was what my mom's portion was. Initially, it was nice and smooth sailing for both. Until my mom started dating my dad.

Mom tells me the story of how she met my dad. They met at work. She arrived early. The employees waited in the lobby before the gate to the manufacturing area was opened. She noticed a new hire: a black guy. They sat next to each other in the waiting room. While waiting, she sensed that dad wasn't comfortable in starting a conversation as he just sat there quietly. Mom initiated a conversation and asked, "Are you new here?"

"Yes. I start today."

Mom began to feel comfortable as if there was a connection of some sort. As the employees were waiting to punch the time clock, mom noticed that dad was still standing there looking to find his name on the punch card. She noticed everyone taking their punch card and following the clock-in procedure. My dad was just there looking for his name and he appeared to have a hard time knowing what to do. That was the hook. That's how they met. They met over a time clock.

Mom tells me the story where she would invite dad over to her apartment and Vicki didn't like him—because he was black. Vicki complained of dad smoking in the room. They had a white male neighbor upstairs who was married to a Filipino lady. One day, the man turned to my mom and said, "Hey, you left the window open—close it." They lived on the second floor and at the time robberies in the area were happening.

One late afternoon, Vicki caught mom and dad kissing. The next day, Vicki confronted her, "I lost respect for you. I looked up to you." Mom started crying. She called her dad.

"Why are you crying? Just come home." her dad said.

“Tell her not to marry a Negro,” her uncle said in the background as they were talking.

Mom was oblivious at the time. Her mind was in the here and now, never worrying about the future and the ramifications of life. She was set on a utopia, where life somehow worked itself out. No need to put up a fight for change, as there was a natural order of things—according to God. Just let it be. This eventually became a problem. Mom left her country because of the political climate and to start a new life in America. She was in for a surprise.

Background: Dad’s Story

The sound of the steam coming from an iron and a can of Faultless Heavy Spray starch sprayed on immaculate clothing. This was Dad. Motown music always piped in the background when he would iron. Dad took this chore seriously and treated this task as if he were at work. Dad would polish his shoes to perfection, tie his shoes not missing an eyelet. Everything my dad did had to be perfect. No such thing as mistakes or accidents according to him. Mistakes led to bad things happening and consequences unfolding—he wanted to avoid that. Yet throughout his life, he managed to avoid his own pitfalls and challenges by hiding behind mom. Mom sheltered him to the point where dad’s behavior was double masked behind drinking. And drink, he did. He’d rarely interact and hold meaningful conversations with the family.

Dad was born in 1953 in Monroe, Louisiana. His goal was to come to California in hopes for a better education. And he did just that, in the late 1960’s, as he ventured out by car with other relatives, leaving his mom behind—as she arrived in California a bit later.

As I am telling my story for this thesis project, I uncover many complexities such as racial and cultural differences, and even educational differences between mom and dad which show a disparity amongst the two cultures. Things start to unfold, and the more I take a step

back at my life's story on a page, I realize that these two people, two extremely different people, had their own personal issues.

There were so many layers to deconstruct. At the time, my parents were dealing with the Great Migration of the South, my mom arriving in America just at the tail end of when mixed race marriages were considered illegal. When my dad arrived from Louisiana to Oakland, California, there were a lot of things going on as well, such as the Black Panther movement, the rise and fall of Seventh Street in West Oakland--I later found out that my dad played Congo drums at one of the popular jazz clubs during that time. Seventh Street in West Oakland in that era was considered the Harlem of the West. Its cultural narrative was unfortunately disrupted by economic changes and racism. My dad had to deal with leaving life in the south, a different pace compared to city life, and being able to "keep up" with how things were in California.

The backstory of my parents doesn't give a free pass on how they parented; as the trite saying goes, "we did the best that we could." Not sure if I can agree with the best, when dad was always drunk, and mom always turned a blind eye on things when it got chaotic. The chaos can be best described in a poem that I wrote for a graduate creative writing class. It is titled, "That Kitchen."

That Kitchen.

The dim kitchen light that is always on above the stove
Mustard greens
Collard greens
Black eyed peas
Somedays lumpia and rice

Pancakes
Fucking pancakes
That reminded me of
How your role was of the 1950's *Leave it to Beaver* housewife

“You’re not ready! The food is cold! You can’t cook!”—The conversation goes
 As dad’s daydreams died along with mom’s—
 What happened to the writer and your dream?

It died along with a childhood of what was
 Supposed to be—
 Societal norms ended your dreams along
 With alcoholism and mindless chatter--
 Of cookie cutter Nestle Toll House and
 Peanut butter morsels.

Looking back at the poem and on my life, the role of domesticity was definitely a challenge to both my mom and dad. They both viewed the role of being in the kitchen as similar, but very different as well. With my dad, he grew up where it was a woman’s job to be in the kitchen and cook. And to make sure that food “turned out right.” There was always an issue when dad would get a burnt pancake from mom, soup that was vegetarian, and just food that wasn’t to his liking. But for mom, it is part of the Filipino tradition to cook and to cook a lot of food and to share the food. It didn’t matter if the food was perfect, just that there was a “bountiful blessing” as she’d always call it. She always said grace before sitting down at the dining table. Dad would just show his disgust by picking at the food with his fork only to go to the garbage can and throw it out, instead of being thankful.

A traumatizing memory that is mentioned in my play is when my sister and I were little and dad would come home drunk with a bag of chips only to flush it down the garbage disposal. What did all this mean? How can one throw food away like that? How can someone have no gratitude? We were poor, and there were times that we had only a can of soup in the cupboard. I remember it was dad’s birthday and mom and I took the time to make chocolate cake for his birthday. We had no frosting. Instead of dad showing his appreciation, that his family took the

time to make a cake for his birthday--I recall it clearly--he smashed the cake against the wall. I was standing in shock, and in anger. I hated him for that.

In “That Kitchen”, we see the tension of the gendered roles at work, ending with baking peanut butter cookies. That moment I do remember, maybe at six years old. I watched my mom bake peanut butter cookies and I loved eating the morsels right out of the package. Perhaps that was my early connection with baking. As I grew up, I collected recipes, always trying to bake and cook alongside mom, regardless if dad was around or not. That’s how I learned to bake. It wasn’t until a few years after I received my Bachelor’s degree that I took a job as a food server. I remember watching one of the cooks use a heavy duty mixer and I saw orange colored batter. That moment called me to take cooking classes at a community college. I did just that. That opportunity opened up a lot of doors for my career. I had internships in hotels and worked both front of the house and back of the house in the food industry. Who would ever thought that I ended up gaining work experience in a small hotel in Southern France as a Prep Cook! Maybe this was one of my many ways of challenging my childhood poverty narrative and re-writing it subconsciously.

The Two Cities: Mer Rouge and Manila

Mer Rouge

In 2010, I set out on a road trip with my boyfriend and his friend. We took a drive to the southern states—Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Georgia. The goal was for each of us to visit our families in the south. I never been to the south, and it was definitely an eye opener. The slow-paced vibe in Louisiana made me feel like not doing anything. We visited my dad’s relatives in a rural town, Mer Rouge, Louisiana. My dad hasn’t been back since he left—some forty plus years ago and he didn’t have any plans on visiting nor returning. He never

encouraged my sister and me to visit our relatives there. It was like he kept his culture to himself.

In Louisiana, I remember seeing lots and lots of railroad tracks and open space and the skyline was free from skyscrapers and commercial buildings. I met up with my aunt and we drove past the house where my dad and his mom used to live. I cannot place it as it is now a blur, but I remember an open space, and a small house. My aunt showed us where she and dad and their other relatives hung out. I was given my dad's story. It was fascinating at the same time, almost a mystery, as dad hardly shared his upbringing. Looking forward to hearing about my dad's life story, I only ended up with bits and pieces. Still ending up with an incomplete picture of my dad's childhood. However, I was able to take pictures to capture the moment and the trip ended with a very nice dinner at my aunt's house. That was 2010. I can say that at least I was able to get the history. To know even if it's just a snippet of my dad's cultural roots—I was ok with that.

Manila

I remember the phone call home to my dad that when I was five. "Daddy, I miss you." Mom, my sister and I went to the Philippines without dad. I don't know why he didn't go. I just knew that we had spent a month in the Philippines and I was missing my dad. I got a chance to get to know my relatives and there was definitely a connection and even though we are more than 2000 miles away—we still keep in touch to this day. I understand the language barely, but can translate in English, especially when someone is gossiping. I am still learning the different varieties of Filipino pastries and many variations of noodle dishes—Pancit Canton, Pancit Malabon, and the list goes on. Perhaps I can say that I know more of my Filipino side than my

African-American heritage. Friends say that I look more like my mom and my sister looks like my dad.

As a college graduation present, in 2000, mom, my sister and I went to the Philippines again. This time I remember it well and it was fun! We went to a few cities and even Subic Bay, northwest of Manila Bay. It used to be the U.S. Naval Base Subic Bay. We hung out by the beach with relatives and connected like it was yesterday. We all had grown up. They remembered us and it wasn't difficult to place memories and share a laugh here and there. Our relatives took us to Shoe Mart, which is a huge mall in Manila. The tropical weather was definitely different from California's weather. I recall that we were indoors when it would rain, the rain would come down hard on the tin roofs. The thunder was much louder and seemed much closer to the ground than I had experienced. The word *mainit*, meaning hot in the Tagalog language, would always be accompanied by a bamboo fan and straw hats. I remember we went to the mall just for the air-conditioning, and in that huge crowd of people, I spotted a former Dominican University student and we both screamed in excitement that we had "recognized" each other even though we only saw each other around on campus in passing.

Connecting with the two cultural differences made me feel like I had roots. It offered me a sense of grounding. I didn't have to be the one who was unsure or conflicted as I identified with both sides of my family equally. I knew more of my mom's family tree than my dad's, which I'm still learning, and that side of the family is tricky because there are many layers and a possible slave narrative. I still have to get the story on that as my dad did mention that his great grandfather on his mom's side arrived by ship. I am still getting the story on that.

My Story: Re-writing Scenes

As I grew up, I found ways to do better, as if it were ingrained in me that I was destined not to be like my mom or my dad. I was actually different. I talked different, and my viewpoint on the outside world was much different from my parent's. I was always the inquisitive one and I always saw that there was a better life ahead. It was a matter of time that my parents' old stories would wear off, and that I would be in a place to create and re-write my old wounds. In addition, the environment around me propelled me to get out and go for higher education, and that was definitely the way out. When I saw the students in high school dropping out at an exorbitant rate, I knew that wasn't ever going to be me, and that I had to keep my focus even more. The '90s were challenging times, especially going to a public high school that was situated in the black community of industrial town—the remnants of what used to be a thriving city.

I remember looking in a newspaper once and talking to a classmate in junior high, that one could buy a Victorian house in West Oakland for no more than \$100,000! Totally unheard of today. These houses were passed down from generation to generation and the stories that were told were passed down as well. But then came the drugs along with unemployment, along with the city bulldozing a community to build housing “projects.” I remember the old apartment building where we lived was situated between West Oakland and a few blocks from downtown Oakland. At night, we would hear bullets pierce through the air and conversations around the dinner table would be to guess where they were coming from.

I had my own complexities as well, dealing with a community whose spirit had died and only ghosts were the ones who were alive. I had to deal with the arguing and fighting of mom

and dad as they could never see eye to eye. Dad's mental health was masked through drinking and him being gone most of the time. I had to put my teenage years on hold to become a parent to my parents. Instead of celebrating milestones properly in my life, I always had them cut short as someone in my family would have an issue with me being a kid. I had to grapple with what having fun meant and that it was ok to enjoy, celebrate, and most importantly, to be in the moment.

Today, as I write this on May 6, 2018, I needed to find an ATM, and my particular bank's branch was out of order so I drove to the nearest one in El Cerrito. It turned out that lobby area was locked on Sundays. I decided to go to the next nearest one which was in downtown Oakland. I thought to myself, let me drive down San Pablo Ave—the street where my high school is close to. Wanting to find a liquor store to buy *Now and Laters* candy, which was a prop for my one-act play that I am performing today, I decided to just go for the drive instead. I didn't recognize the area so much. I drove past San Pablo and 55th Street where a small park that the homeless used to hang out in is now blocked by a yellow gate to keep people out. Yet, there were people congregating outside—perhaps a drug deal was going on. A woman sitting on the curb looked disheveled—I kept driving. I took a right turn and ended up on Myrtle Street. The high school still looked the same except that the windows that once looked like a jail cell had changed—same color, but different design. The houses across the street were the same, and the blue Victorian crack house didn't look blue anymore.

I wanted to find the liquor store that was close to my school where during lunch break all the students would flock to buy chips, candy and soda—the only meal of the day for most. As I passed by it, the store was there, but for some reason, I couldn't recognize it. I couldn't recognize that area. There were still people hanging out who looked like they were high. The

sad thing was that they were close to my age—30's to 40's. I didn't stop to look long enough, it just felt like a blur—just like my high school years. Were these the same kids that I went to school with? In my freshman year, our class started out with about 356 students; in four years sadly, only 56 of us graduated. I began to realize that area was still the same and yet different at the same time. The same apathetic vibe was still present. The only two things that I can say that has changed was time, and my own personal progress.

Upon reflecting on my one-act play, it dawns on me that my script addresses a reflection of knowing only surface level bits and pieces of my parents at the time. I didn't get all the information when I was a kid. I was just going through life and experiencing a troubled situation. In the play, I also mentioned the historical context that was happening at the time when I had my own issues at home--the chaos of growing up in West Oakland in the '90s. Perhaps there was a reason that I stumbled in that neighborhood for one last time. I had to reflect. I had to remember those who, also, experienced a challenging time during their adolescent years. I had to be the one to give a voice to those who simply couldn't. Thinking back about that dream I had three years ago, perhaps that was the meaning. To pick up where my mom left off—to further my education and to put the icing on the cake, to heal that wounded story in my life.

Conclusion

As I typed the two cities of my parents' background—Manila and Mer Rouge I began to realize that they never really told their stories. Do parents ever really tell their stories? What I started to learn from my parents and their ways of knowing and how their upbringing and culture shaped them, in a way shaped me too. Someone had to be the one to tell the story. Someone had

to be the one to type these words across the page, even as they painstakingly evoke memories both positive and negative. I suppose that I had to be the one with the pen to write the story. That I had to be the one who had that prophetic dream to return to a place of personal healing. This all came about because I went to graduate school!

My one-act play has been beyond a healing piece. I was able to re-write my own personal narrative which was to heal the inner-child and bring back the power that my younger self always wanted and deserved. I never thought that it was possible to re-write empowering scenes as a way of closure to that stage in my life. This one-act play has been one of my most exciting and fulfilling pieces of writing that I have ever done. It is a very nice and rewarding feeling that I can finally say that I made peace with my inner-child as that relationship within myself transformed. I am complete.

So, “In your Eyes, I am Complete”

The following is an excerpt from my one act play

So, "In Your Eyes, I am complete."

written by K. Michelle Sellers

A play in one act
March 21, 2018

All characters played by one actor:

Kristy, (13)

Kristine, (15)

Lynn, (16)

Michelle, (30s)

8th grade history teacher, (26)

Father, speaks with a southern accent, (28)

Mom, speaks with a Filipino accent, (32)

Sis, (13)

Tag Line:

Can't rewrite our inner-child, but can update scenes in our personal narrative which empowers us.

Synopsis:

Opening scene set in the '90s, mostly in one location that is Kristy's room. Kristy is a young girl wishing what life would be like-if only she were much older, and to experience the outside world instead of dreaming it. Kristy uses imagination and creativity to keep hope alive for herself in those trying times. Time passes--the location changes, but the personal narrative doesn't.

SCENE 1

Adult Michelle enters and begins addressing the audience. She is carrying a tote bag that has a toy in it.

[runs towards the stage]

MICHELLE

But wait. Is it really over. Toys 'R' Us is going out of business and I have no way to connect to my five year old. Luckily, I found this just in time.

[takes out toy from bag]

I see the little five year old just standing there in awe, wearing her favorite red dress with the star on it. She really loves the stars.

(beat)

What do I say to her? Little Kristy wants to learn more, she wants to know what the world around her is. Hope she got a chance to have all the toys in the world and dream and imagine.

[Putting toy back in the tote.]

But sadly, she had her hopes cut short. Always left alone at home by herself as mom had to work and dad was

(beat)

Part of that generation of other dads who thought it was ok to walk out of a child's life, and return and leave--a messed up pattern.

(beat)

That five year old, that was filled with wonder, and awe was in for a surprise. As little Kristy grows up, her days and nights would be filled with weather that even the forecaster couldn't predict. With thunder looming over...

[walks to radio and turns on before laying on table]

The thunderous introduction to Peter Gabriel's "Red Rain" is coming from a radio/cassette boom box. Indistinct noise outside of Kristy's room is heard in tandem to the music. It is late evening.

KRISTY

I can't sleep--

[tosses and turns]

Am I Filipino or Black? Both?

Sings the line

"It's so hard to lay down in all of this."

[listens to the wall or the door]

Dad's out again.

(MORE)

KRISTY (CONT'D)

He'll get drunk and come home to only bring home a stupid stuffed teddy bear from some damn bar. Same shit. Wish mom would leave him. She can't Mr. Gabriel. I mean-Peter. You're the only one who hears me. You know exactly how I feel at that right moment. Mom doesn't get it. She thinks it's unholy for me to speak bad about my dad. He is never here and whenever he is, he doesn't talk to me. Only to say that I don't have any friends and people don't care about me. What kinda dad says that. Do you hear that? It just gets louder.

[Walks anxiously over to the radio and presses stop.]
(screams at door)

Shut up. Stop fighting!

[KRISTY walks around.]

Only you, and my diary know what's really going on. Deep stuff's in here Peter. Yesterday, I bought my first camera, a Vivitar 110 hot pink one. I can't wait to go to school. Since, I never get to go outside. We don't have trips to the beach, mom won't let me go to Outward Bound. Mom and dad are always afraid of outside. That's bullshit. No one knows how crazy it is here! That I want to kill myself. And when I do talk, dad says,

(beat)
(in deeper voice)

"Kristy please!"

But what I'm really saying is that this family needs help.

SCENE 2

[Motown music is playing. There is a can of spray starch meticulously placed on an ironing board in the living room.]

DAD

(in deep monotone voice)

You go to school and come home. That's it. No hanging out. It's dangerous outside.

(beat)

Learn all you can.

[Sets iron upright]

[MOM walks in the living room uncomfortable.]

MOM

Why don't you tell Kristy that. You don't tell her that you are proud of her.

(beat)

That's enough. You've been ironing that same shirt for twenty minutes already.

DAD

Well, you ain't doing it. I cook, clean, you don't do 'nuthing around here.

MOM

Not true. I'm the only one working.

[DAD stops ironing. He quickly takes the iron and starch and walks away with it in hand.]

[KRISTY walks in wearing a backpack. She looks around the room and notes the ironing board being out. She wraps her arms around herself as if cold.]

[KRISTY walks over to the chair and adjusts it.]

Peter Gabriel's "This is the Picture (Excellent Birds)" is playing. The setting is a schoolyard. She is talking amongst her classmates.

[Pulling out a magazine from her backpack.]

I want this house; these things. See all that--

[showing the magazine to her imaginary classmate. Turning pages.]

See this. Yes, Jamilia. I want that haircut.

(beat)

Look too old. What do you mean look too old? We're only in the 8th grade and I feel like an old lady. Oops. Here comes Mr. History teacher.

[looks over shoulder]

Ugh.

[puts the magazine away and ignores him]

I like it when it just rained, and it's sunny out. I'm at the beach, and I feel the breeze...can you picture that? The seagulls are out. Are you even listening?

HISTORY TEACHER

(sarcastic voice)

Really? This place is a playground.

[moves chair back. Puts backpack on the floor next to chair.]

Kristy is dancing in her room to Paula Abdul's "Knocked Out." She tries and then stops suddenly.

KRISTY

Why do I keep stopping? I can't dance.

(frustrated)

Forget it!

[SIS walks in.]

KRISTY (CONT'D)

Sis, listen. Mommy won't let me go. You know that. Yeah, I know, you go, you're much braver than I am. Mommy says stay home, and I stay. I know. Maybe I'll go with you next time to the skate shop. We'll take the 51 bus to Broadway and College Ave. That dance I think I got that stepping dance. See. Ugh. I know, my coordination is off. Practice later? Well, you better go. You know how dad is when he gets back. Ugh.

Lights fade.