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DAUGHTER FIRE

MAX SIMONE
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Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Judith Mckelvey
Senior Lecturer of English
Thesis Supervisor

Lisa Sternlieb
Associate Professor of English
Honors Advisor

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

ABSTRACT

This is a play about art. It follows in the footsteps of infinite other works that range from transcendently profound to hackneyed and pretentious. It's a difficult tightrope to walk when dealing with such a metaphysical topic.

I've been afraid of art for some time. Not only afraid that I wasn't any good or that I'd never find success but also the terrifying implication of what art is and how it can claim one's life. Thought after thought filled my head over the years of just how much of a monster the concept of art can be. Finally, it became so great that I did the only thing I could do: I wrote my fears down in a play.

While I cannot say with certainty that this play is art, it definitely is the work I am most proud of. The fear still lives in my mind but thanks to this play, I feel alleviated and strong.

Enjoy.

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DAUGHTER FIRE

By

Max Simone

Max Simone
501 Vairo Boulevard
Apartment 1424
State College, PA
mes5514@psu.edu
4129161324

CHARACTERS

Daughter Fire (f): Her real name being Etoile Petit, she is the famous sculptress who endeavors to complete the greatest sculpture of her career

Ward Hannigan (m): The narrator of the play and the equal parts unfortunate and fortunate man who has been selected to assist in Daughter Fire's project. An alcoholic Art School dropout, he warily accepts the job offer

Doctor Scott Myers (m): Daughter Fire's physician who appears only once to warn both Hannigan and Daughter Fire about the implications of what they are attempting

Young Daughter Fire (f): A mostly non-speaking role who represents Etoile Petit as she transforms into Daughter Fire

Sam Reynolds (m): A likewise mostly non-speaking role representing the closest a human being has ever come to being completely embraced by Daughter Fire

Setting

The play alternates between three locations: The office of Daughter Fire, the studio of Daughter Fire, and realm of the ambiguous where Ward narrates events in both his and Daughter Fire's lives that will be acted out in a variety of ways. All three locations are simplistic and only require a few pieces of furniture or props to distinguish them. Much debris and necessary props occupy random areas of the stage to both add to the aura of disorganization as well as being within arm's reach for when they are needed.

ACT I, Scene 1

Lights shine on Ward Hannigan, a mid-twenties, disheveled man who appears to have just gotten out of bed. He holds a file in his left hand with several papers. Shrouded in the darkness stage left is an office desk with a chair on either side. A small wastebasket stands against the side of the desk while a small bowl of candy rests on top of it. Daughter Fire sits in the farther chair, sharing the darkness with the desk.

WARD

"There's a dark purpose to the completion of a work. Something complete is the embodiment of the end of a process. Of termination. To finish something is to kill it. I sought to make my work live forever."

(Ward takes a moment and looks around at the audience. He breathes deeply both taking in the quote and preparing for the story he is about to tell.)

That was purpose statement of her final work. "Purpose statement" is too in the lines and not chaotic enough a term for what Daughter Fire would do. No... It was her manifesto. Her... her middle finger to everything.

(Ward takes out a flask and drinks from it)

I had just thrown up when I first heard from Daughter Fire. It was via an email telling me she wanted to meet with me about a project. Obviously I thought it was a prank and ignored it. A few days later I received a phone call. I recognized the voice immediately. This time Daughter Fire was-

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Foaming at the mouth)

You better get your inertia ridden buttocks over here or I'll come over to that piss stained hole you call a home and grate it away with a chisel and cast in bronze. Then I'll sell it for six figures to a museum. I've done it to others. I've been wanting to do it again. I'll do it to you!

WARD

-more convincing. Needless to say, I quickly got dressed, assembled a makeshift portfolio, and ran out the door. For reasons I could only attribute to selling my soul when I was blackout drunk, I was on my way to meet with Daughter Fire. I, Ward Hannigan, might just be working with the greatest sculptress of the modern era.

(Ward moves stage right. The lights rise on the Desk Stage right the center lights fade out. Daughter Fire sits in the chair)

DAUGHTER FIRE

Mr. Hannigan?

WARD

(Walking over and offering his hand)

Hello!

(Daughter Fires takes it, holding on for a bit too long)

DAUGHTER FIRE

You have a very weak handshake... That is discomfoting.

WARD

It's strong when it needs to sculpt.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Very discomfoting.

(She sits down, Ward does the same)

I'm thankful my call prompted more action from you than the email. I hope you weren't thrown off by it.

WARD

Well at first I thought you-

DAUGHTER FIRE

I'm usually far angrier.

WARD

Sorry?

DAUGHTER FIRE

I'm usually far angrier. I'm rarely as motherly as I was on the telephone while speaking to you.

(She takes out a file from her desk, opens it, and reads a note)

Ah!

(Shows a sticky note on her file)

I put a sticky note on my file so I would remember to ask you something. Sticky notes are so useful. Like following your own directions... what does this one command?

(Reads it)

Ah, right away I have to ask you about your... I don't know what to call it... your home. I was correct on the phone? When I described your home?

WARD

It's not that pissed stained. I promise.

DAUGHTER FIRE

So you're attached to it?

WARD

Not terribly.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I ask... right off the mark like this because working on this project... the project for which you have been asked to be here for... it necessitates that you LIVE in this studio.

WARD

(Taking a look around)

Live here?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Nodding)

I don't mean that hyperbolically. You must live, eat, exercise, drink and god willing shower in this studio.

WARD

For how long?

DAUGHTER FIRE

In between tomorrow and the rest of your life....As long as it takes to make the sculpture. What's more, due to the secrecy of the project... "Secrecy" isn't the best work but it will do... due to the secrecy you will not be permitted to leave here.

WARD

Ever?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Except for one obligatory beginning of the year gala that you will attend with me. That is, if you are willing to accept these terms of... artistic commitment.

WARD

Let me get this straight.

DAUGHTER FIRE

By all means, straighten away.

WARD

I'm not allowed to leave this place. Ever. For any reason?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes.

WARD

I don't think I can agree to this.

DAUGHTER FIRE

This may sound cruel, Mr. Hannigan, but why not? What's wrong with the arrangement? You'll be paid a gratuitous amount of money. Far more than a typical lazy alcoholic would get paid working at Wal-Mart.

WARD

There are quite a few reasons.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Name them.

WARD

My place would need to be subletted...

DAUGHTER FIRE

I'll pay the rent for your home during the duration of the project. It is fine, I believe I have a twenty somewhere in my desk.

WARD

I need food-

DAUGHTER FIRE

I will provide.

WARD

And a bed and bathroom-

DAUGHTER FIRE

I will provide.

WARD

And a-... A-

DAUGHTER FIRE

I apologize sincerely for this but I cannot purchase a prostitute for you.

(Ward stares at her)

On the plus side: your hands will be very numb from working all day here. VERY numb.

(Ward stares at her as she suggestively picks up a pen on her desk)

Turn a plus into a negative.

WARD

Can I contact anyone?

DAUGHTER FIRE

No.

WARD

What about my friends?

DAUGHTER FIRE

That you don't have?

WARD

Or my family-

DAUGHTER FIRE

That are all dead or don't talk to you?

(Pause)

I've spent quite some time researching you, Mr. Hannigan. That's why I know the real reason you don't want to agree to such a term. It isn't family, food, or friskiness that discourages you... Anyway, we don't need to talk about living arrangements quite yet. We'll jump that chasm when we come to it. Let's get started with the interview then.

WARD

Alright.

(Ward lifts his stack of papers and putting it on the desk.)

DAUGHTER FIRE

You brought it with you?

WARD

Yes. It's right here on the desk.

DAUGHTER FIRE

No, Mr. Hannigan. Not this on my desk. I meant the flask in your pocket.

WARD

I...

DAUGHTER FIRE

Mr. Hannigan, I smell the alcohol from the sip you *needed* to take before entering the building and before you brilliantly disguised it with one tic tac... Please let me see it.

WARD

Uh...

(Daughter fire taps empty space on the top of the desk. After a moment Ward takes out his flask and places it where she gestured)

DAUGHTER FIRE

What's your liquor, Mr. Hannigan?... Vodka? Scotch? Are you the type of fraternity enthusiast who would chug rubbing alcohol from a used toilet if it came to it?

WARD

(Smiling)

Anything you have would be fine.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Smiles subtly, A brief, penetrating chuckle escaped from her lips)
You must have a preference.

WARD

Is this part of the interview?

DAUGHTER FIRE

It is vital information I must know in order to determine how to adequately work with you. What do you think of tequila?

WARD

Never actually had it.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Really? Then you've never had sex.

WARD

Yes I have.

DAUGHTER FIRE

How?

WARD

I.. Um... I have my portfolio here...

(Gestures to the folder on the desk)

I did most of these while I was at Lore Art School, studying under-

DAUGHTER FIRE

Please get that off of my desk.

WARD

What?

DAUGHTER FIRE

I'm a bit of a neat freak so I don't enjoy unnecessary clutter. Take it off the desk.

WARD

Where can I put it?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Pointing to the trashcan)

In the portfolio basket.

(Ward looks at her for a moment then obliges)

Wow... That quick to throw away what you created. You'd go very far in Hollywood. And don't worry I've seen your... your "work", I feel dirty calling it that, I've seen your "work" before. It's what led me to you...What is your drink of choice?

WARD

I don't have one.

DAUGHTER FIRE

What's in the flask?

WARD

A few things mixed together. I forget what. Listen, if you don't want to see my work then why am I here?

DAUGHTER FIRE

I'm asking question about your alcohol preferences.

WARD

Why? Do you just want to get me drunk and have sex with me?

DAUGHTER FIRE

That's ridiculous, Mr. Hannigan. We don't have any tequila.

(Takes a long, dissecting look at Ward)

For the final time or you aren't considered anymore for a job... What is your favorite drink and why.

WARD

(Takes in a moment's thought and a breath)

I like anything that burns my stomach and freezes my thoughts. Honestly, that's it. And I don't have a favorite drink. I have a favorite ten drinks. And I know that's my problem but... but I'm going to the meetings and I'm going to be... I will do what I can to be sober. If you give me this job I will quit drinking cold turkey if I have to, It'll kill me mostly, but for this job I will...

DAUGHTER FIRE

Mr. Hannigan, you're drowning.

WARD

Just please give me this one chance. Please. I will give you one hundred-

DAUGHTER FIRE

-and ten percent? I've heard that line before from many people. Guess how many end up giving around thirty five.

WARD

I just need to....

DAUGHTER FIRE

Please halt.

(Ward halts for a moment)

WARD

I'll stop. I'll go to even more meetings.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You will do no such thing.... Do your hands shake when you haven't had a drink for a while?

WARD

...Yes.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Well, I can't have a sculptor who does that, can I?

(She writes something down in the file)

Tell me a story.

WARD

A story?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes.

WARD

I.. I'm not really good at stories.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Every artist, no matter what field, should be good at stories. Simple spoken stories.

WARD

I.. I guess I'll work on that then.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Oh, please Mr. Hannigan. Tell me something about your most embarrassing moment as an alcoholic at Lore Art School. And it better be true. And it better be good. Your job depends on it.

(Ward takes a moment to think)

WARD

Alright. I got it. This one time, my second year, I had procrastinated on a project. I ended up getting blackout wasted right before the class, just to gain enough courage to tell my professor I hadn't done my project yet. You know Dom, the teacher over at Lore?

(Daughter Fire nods)

It was in one of his classes. I drank so damn much that when it was time for me to come up and present, I stumbled up almost breaking everyone else's projects. I finally got myself standing up there and then... well then... I throw up everywhere

(Daughter Fire chuckles which entices Ward to gain more enthusiasm in his speech.)

And I mean *everywhere*. Over the floor, over the nearby tables, even over a bit of Dom. Don't feel bad, I also got it all over myself. And I never vomit mind you. At least I didn't back then. It was just the nervousness mixed with the drinking that got me real sick. And it smelled so bad!! It *reeked*. Like two hundred and twenty proof. It was so strong smelling I would have... I probably would have drunk it back up if I wasn't in a room with so many others

(Daughter Fire lets out a louder chuckle as Ward starts laughing a bit more)

The best part was... Dom sent me home. He excused me from presenting that day. He told me I could do it when I was feeling better. So I get out of there quickly, like a bullet out of hell... and the very first thing I do when I get home, before even showering, is... You guessed it... drink even more in celebration. I got so damn drunk I threw up again.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Well... That is hysterically pathetic. I'm definitely not going to have sex with you now.

(She picks up the flask off the table)

Ward Hannigan. The hysterically pathetic dropout.

(She unscrews the cap and smells the mixture)

That *smells* hysterically pathetic.

(Looking at him)

WARD

Listen if you're just going to insult me all day-

DAUGHTER FIRE

Of course I'm going to insult you all day. What do you think Academia is?

(Puts the flask down for a moment)

I know Dom pretty well in fact. Nauseatingly well. Dom told me that while you were a student at that overpriced finishing school you keep on name dropping in my direction you never turned in an assignment in his class. Not one finished assignment. NOT. ONE. He also tells me that yet you were failing, you were the most artistically promising student in the class.

WARD

He said that?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Imitating Ward's clueless tone)

"He said that?"

(Shifting back)

Yes he said that. He must've said that to you several times as well so don't act as if you're unaware of the talent you're wasting.

(collecting herself)

Where was I? Oh, yes. The most promising student without finishing one assignment. That doesn't make any sense. How are you the most promising student and yet you couldn't bring your lazy, drunken mind to complete one assignment? Obviously since you dropped out of the school it means you can't cut any rocks when it comes to art!

WARD

I showed him my outlines of what I was attempting-

DAUGHTER FIRE

-Yes, "attempting"! He's told me about you're amazing "attempts". How they are, like you, promising.

(Daughter Fire takes a breath and, oddly enough, puts her hand over her left breast and presses down on three points along her shoulder blade. She will do this many times throughout the play when she gets angry or even just contemplative)

I despise this bohemian glorification of meeting halfway. You failed to complete an assignment so that means you failed your assignment. However, you were very lucky have a professor such as Dom. Do you know why?

WARD

Why?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Because fortunately Dom does not possess any testicles.

(A moment passes)

I have testicles. Everyone respects testicles! But men, I mean men like you, they respect them so so so much more if they are on a woman! Shaft and testicles on a man is fun for pretending it's a small elephant but it spontaneously explodes in the presence of a woman's! And Ward, mine are dynamite. As big as melons and they cut like diamonds.

(A moment passes)

Well...

WARD

Um...

(Thinking of an appropriate response)

What?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Motioning to his speechlessness)

Case in point! I bet the setup in between your legs is all exploding right now. I bet you want to see them? Mine I mean. Not yours. By the end of what we will do together, I'll let you see

them. That's right. I'll let you have a look and show you exactly how to grow a pair just like them. Stay with me. Then you can use them to carve up some sculptures with them. Would you like that? Would you like some new tools?

WARD

(Once again thinking of an appropriate response)

...What?!

DAUGHTER FIRE

Stay with me, Ward.

WARD

I'm confused... Does... does this mean you're going to pick me to work with you?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Glaring at Ward)

Have some candy.

WARD

No thank you.

DAUGHTER FIRE

It's to make sure you don't talk for a while. You've said a few things and each one has wasted time. I don't like wasting time. That's why I don't do it. Wasting time would be me calling you to this lovely office when you're not the one I want. That would be idiotic. They cut off your testicles for things like that.

(Taking a deep breath and collecting her thoughts)

You are the one I have chosen to sculpt this with me. We are going to build one of the most volatile and potentially game changing things the art world has ever seen! Make no mistake: WE ARE GOING TO BUILD IT! None of this "attempting" nonsense. No one cares about your designs of work. You're not Da Vinci. This isn't Da Vinci's era. This is the era of fire and me crushing your tongue against a stone slab for the next few months!

(She picks up the flask again, waving and taunting it in front of Ward)

We both know this job is your only option, so please let us forgo the tedious stage of you contemplating the offer some more when we both knew what your answer was from the beginning. See the flask, Ward? You get this when you deserve it. I won't keep you completely from it. I don't want to risk my assistant dying from withdrawal. I'll nurture you. I'll care for you. Like a mother. But you will not get any yourself. No need to nod if you understand. You have no choice but to.

(Puts the flask away in her desk)

The next thing I want you to realize is that you will do what I say. Even if that means breaking the law or, even worse, making you work. You have to understand that what we are going to

undertake means so much more than either of us. I mean that with no ego. There is no other situation on Earth that will let *you* do what you can do at this moment.

(Looks at Ward for a moment)

Now is the time where I want you to ask me any questions you have about this. Make sure we're on the same page. Don't waste any breath on unnecessary questions.

WARD

I just have one.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Then say it.

WARD

Why? Why am I the one you picked?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Gazing, not glaring, at Ward)

I was touring the Lore studio a week or two ago. The testicle deprived Dom sometimes hangs up in his office pieces he finds impressive. Did you know that one of your designs was in there?

WARD

I thought he would've taken it down after I dropped out.

DAUGHTER FIRE

That's what I would have done. Your ceramic design caught my eye.

WARD

The one with the donkey eating a hammer.

(Daughter Fire nods)

It's kind of an animal farm-slash-union worker piece. I was trying to-

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Holding up her hand)

I lack the capacity to care about that. I just wanted to answer your question. That design, in particular, was the main sell for you. There were other factors, don't feel bad about the way you dress, but none as strong as that one. After I learned about your family, your home, and your valuable weakness I knew you were the perfect candidate.

WARD

Why then? What about a donkey with a hammer makes you so committed to a pathetic alcoholic dropout?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Smiling, she takes from her desk a charcoal drawing)

I want to show you something. It's a work I did when I was about your age. For some reason, I never really had enough time to wonder why, I never showed it to anyone. Really it's the equivalent of a doodle.

(She opens up the drawing to reveal a Donkey holding a hammer in its mouth. Ward is in speechless shock)

You see this?

(Ward is still silent. Daughter Fire snaps her fingers)

Hey! You see this.

WARD

What...what the hell?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Hell.

WARD

Huh?

DAUGHTER FIRE

It's what I offer to you. Hell on a platter.

(Daughter Fire leans forward)

Would you like to see what we're going to build?

WARD

Yes, please.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Opening her desk drawer)

In that case, Mr. Hannigan. I will now call you Ward. And I bestow upon you...

(Takes out a notebook)

Your sole reading assignment.

(Ward takes it from her)

WARD

What is it?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Intimate details of my life. If we are to work on this, it's only fair that I give you the opportunity to know me as well as I know you.

WARD

...Thank you.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Let me get the contracts ready, and then I'll show you where you'll be sleeping.

(Daughter Fire gets up and exits)

ACT I, Scene ii

The stage right area fades as Ward gets up and travels to center stage. His monologues take place in a narrative playground.

WARD

Maybe I should have just left. Maybe I should have flat out ran away but I couldn't. I couldn't because there was nowhere else in the world I would run to other than back into this office... That and she had my flask.

(On the stage left side of the stage YOUNG DAUGHTER FIRE enters still cloaked in darkness. Ward looks at the book)

During my first year at Lour I took an art history course, a prescribed course designed to teach the foundations of art and give pretentious assholes a chance to insult Jackson Pollack in a university setting. At the end of the semester we had to write a report on our artist. I picked "Daughter Fire". It was mostly random, I wasn't too familiar with her work but... I thought her name sounded cool. You can call it fate that I chose her. You can. I won't because fate seems to hate me a lot.

(A demonic PowerPoint plays on the background right above Ward.)

Daughter Fire was born Etoile Petit.

(The PowerPoint displays "étoile Petit" with the accent prominently displayed)

Eh-Twal Pah-teet. At least, that's what she would have been called had her parents not been very careless and failed to explain on the birth certificate that étoile has an accent over the E. So instead of Eh-twal Pah-teet being born

(The accent over the first e disappears)

E-toil was born.

(As Ward cycles through the names the PowerPoint displays each one as they are said) Later going through nicknames and mispronunciations such as et-oil pet-it, eat-all pee-tit, e-toilet pee pee, and finally being known through High School by the name "Eat-all-the-poop".

(Screen goes back to Etoile Petit)

Her first name was meant to mean star and her last meaning small.

(Screen shows "Petite=small" and " étoile=star")

The little star. Her parents decided upon it to establish her beauty while saluting her French heritage...

(Screen shows " étoile petit")

The French heritage her parents evidently knew nothing about because in French in order to say "small star" the "petite" must go before "étoile"

(petite and étoile switch places)

and also the family name petit does not have the needed "e" at the end to mean small in French under the circumstances

(The "e" in "petite" vanishes)

because the family name "Petit" without the e isn't even French it's German. It's the family name of dairy farmers. Mr and Mrs. Petit later realized all this but found the entire dilemma, quote, "too hilarious to change". As it turns out all these consecutive failures would foreshadow the miserable first eighteen years of

("Eat-all-the-poop" appears on the screen)

"Eat-all-the-poop".

(A large capital "E" appears on the screen)

In Art School, at Lore, she went by E. A big "E" in lieu of a little star.

(The lights rise on YOUNG DAUGHTER FIRE, who holds the same basic physical qualities as her older self except for her obvious youth and a lack of poise in regards of how she holds herself. She slouches somewhat lazily and half smiles with a glazed look on her face. As Ward states the rest of this, he puts on a blazer that is located at the back of the stage. He also picks up a large clump of materials that will be put at the center of the stage as the beginning stages of the artwork)

She had showed quite a talent for sculpture. Her teachers were interested in how she "attacked" blocks of marbles and other sculptures. More than once she ruined a project or two by being rough with it. Breaking off cupid's bow by chiseling too hard or accidentally melting two lovers faces together in the kiln.

(Thumbs through the book)

According to this book it wasn't because of any violent tendencies. Instead it was, quote:

YOUNG DAUGHTER FIRE

A frantic desire to free others. Michelangelo saw David trapped in stone and freed him. I see prisoners like that all the time in every bit of clay, ceramic, and Mache. I see them all trapped and am rushing so fast to free them. But I end up cutting them instead.

(Ward closes the book. Truly thoughtful.)

WARD

The first eighteen years had been rough on her. They had cut her. They had shaped her into something quite unlike anything that had come before.

(Young Daughter Fire exits)

She had the misery in her system to produce art. She only lacked restraint. The guidance.

(He puts the book in his pocket. Throughout these scenes he will keep it there and take it out again when needed)

ACT I, scene iii

The lights shift to occupy the entire middle of the stage. This is the studio of Daughter Fire. Daughter Fire enters looking exhausted and disgusted.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Did you enjoy yourself, Ward?

WARD

I suppose...

DAUGHTER FIRE

Why do you suppose?

WARD

I never really took galas to be something you have fun at. I mean, you get to drink and stuff but you're also told to analyze and really look close. It seems less like fun and more like casual Friday.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Anything you see their catch your eye?

WARD

I liked the exhibition with the glass elephants.

DAUGHTER FIRE

It was sewage.

WARD

...The giant faces on the wall..

DAUGHTER FIRE

That was also sewage.

WARD

What was it called...the Plaster cast of the condor?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Uh! I can still smell that.

WARD

So you thought they all were shit?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Every gala has to have a unifying theme. There's was sewage.

WARD

I didn't think they were that bad.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes you did.

WARD

No, I-

DAUGHTER FIRE

You did. You're just afraid to sound pretentious. You don't want to step on anyone's esteem. But esteem without reason *is* pretentiousness so you owe it to the art community to-

(Stomps as she talks)

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! You got me Ward? Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! All over their flaccid penises! Stomp! Stomp! Smear 'em all over the ground.

WARD

Now *that* would be an evocative exhibit.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Don't slant away from what I'm telling you.

WARD

Fine. I thought they all sucked. I... honestly didn't know what the hell we were doing there.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Aha! Perfect!

WARD

Perfect?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Did you know that fifty percent of that toilet farm has already been marketed and sold to the dumbest bidder?

WARD

No shit... Well, I guess actually all the shit.

(Ward chuckles)

DAUGHTER FIRE

This isn't a laughing matter! Art is an endangered species!! We are doing what we are doing here to save it! And to stomp those who would suffocate it into the ground.

(Stomps again)

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

(Halts)

What we are a part of...Our project...will be the tide that turns it back.

WARD

You know... if you're so confident in it...in the "project" we're doing together. Why can't you tell me more about it?

DAUGHTER FIRE

More about it?

WARD

Yeah...like what's the point of it?

DAUGHTER FIRE

The point?

WARD

Yeah...I mean...

(Picks up the plans next to him on the floor)

Look, I get what you want to build and... it's interesting...but

(Points to everything on the ground)

Why? Why all this? Why are we using sponge? Why use something so soft and put it inside the actual stone? And why all the different spikes and needles? Why the Gothic design of the face? It's beautiful and nice but...

DAUGHTER FIRE

But?

WARD

The things we saw tonight were beautiful. But I hated them. So...

(Motioning once more to everything)

What the hell is it about?

DAUGHTER FIRE

It doesn't matter what it's about.

WARD

I...what?

DAUGHTER FIRE

It doesn't matter what the art is about.

WARD

I kind of disagree.

DAUGHTER FIRE

"Kind of" disagree? Well, I "kind of" think that you are acting too much like a eunuch right now and now I "kind of" feel a bit angry at your uncertainty and now I..

WARD

Look, I just want to know-

DAUGHTER FIRE

DON'T INTERRUPT!!

(She stops herself and takes a deep breath. She presses the three points around her shoulder area just like before. After a moment she takes out Ward's flask)

How much did you have to drink today?

WARD

Only a little.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Only a little. Does that mean I should give you "kind of" all of this flask or "kind of" none of it? What do you think?

(she unscrews the cap)

WARD

Don't. I'm sorry about what I said.

DAUGHTER FIRE

What did you say?

WARD

The...whatever is making you mad at me.
 (Daughter Fire tilts the flask over)
 Don't!

DAUGHTER FIRE

Why do you like alcohol? Why do you need it? What's it "about"?

WARD

I just do....I need it.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Then come over here and drink up the rain that I bring down.
 (A moment of hesitation, then Ward slowly comes over and crouches below Daughter Fire, with his mouth open to where the stream from the flask will fall)
 It doesn't matter what alcohol is "about". It doesn't matter what my art is "about". I don't mean that Art shouldn't be about anything or that it's wrong if it is... you're simply asking the wrong questions...

(She begins to slowly pour the flask into his mouth)
 It's what Art *does* that matters. What alcohol does. It is meant to captivate us.
 (She halts after a few moments, cutting him off mid drink)
 Those "artists" at the gala created some things that were "about" something but had no point. Had no point to cut up against the audience. That's what matters. That's what you should wonder about my design.

WARD

(Getting up)
 Alright fine. What is the point?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Why don't you start inventorying the supplies and see if you can find a point.
 (She points to the area of supplies in center stage that Ward had previously put down. Ward does so.)
 Look long and hard at the design I gave you. Look at the materials and think...use the mind that is so like mine and think...what can a work like this do to someone? What is its point?
 (Daughter Fire exits as Ward picks up an IV needle with a bag attached. He looks at it perplexed and then glances at Daughter Fire who now is gone. He then gets up and walks over to the design plan and picks it up with the other hand. He analyzes the IV and the plans trying to put two and two together)

ACT I, scene iv

Like he did before, Ward addresses the audience as the lights shift to indicate the change of focus. He still holds the IV needle and Design plans and plays around with each accordingly as he talks.

WARD

I was kind of underwhelmed by it when I first saw it. It's a beautiful design. Very ambitious but, still very plausible. I just... can't understand it. It looks like an Iron maiden but on the inside there's sponge for some reason. And getting that stable is going to be far more trouble than it's worth.

(Looks at IV)

And I guess these are for "thematic effect" or something.... You know, Ancient Greeks used to believe in bloodletting to heal most sicknesses. They thought the human body was not so much a layout of unique systems but more a chemical interaction of "humors"...essentially all the human liquid inside you. These "good" humors fought against the bad "humors" inside you. The better the balance, the healthier the human being... To them...a human being was nothing more than a liquid fight that must be perpetually sustained. Heh...

(Holds the catheter up high)

The Human being... Just one long battle.

(Places the catheter down)

One thing that could upset these humors was good old fashioned alcohol.

(Ward takes out the book as lights rise on Young Daughter Fire holding a tumbler and dressed in a fancy yet by no means conservative outfit. She seems to be enjoying herself quite a lot)

Something the young Etoile Petit seemed to really enjoy just as much as I do.

(SAM REYNOLDS appears in the darkness of stage right)

Alcohol it turns out, would be the substitute for water during her baptism. Her baptism where she became "Daughter Fire". The baptism wasn't at a church with sacramental wine but instead at a gala with hard liquor and small amounts of ice.

(Young Daughter Fire stumbles into Ward's arms. She finds this hysterical)

The gala happened to feature one section devoted to Etoile. More specifically, to a recent sculpture of hers that had so encapsulated the art faculty that they felt compelled to present it:

(The PowerPoint shows the sculpture, which is a self sculpture of the young Etoile surrounded by flames)

It was a self portrait...called Daughter Fire.

(Young Daughter Fire stands back up and wanders over closer to Sam Reynolds)

The statue was quite an accomplishment considering her age of nineteen. She wasn't one to let that go to her head though. While other artists celebrated with sipping cocktails and discussing different details about art, Giselle honored the open bar and the leniency of her minority age by drinking enough scotch-

(Nods conformingly)

Yes...Scotch. I don't know why she went right to the finish line at that age, the book doesn't say.

(Young Daughter Fire takes a sip)

-Enough scotch to match the amount of water in her body. By the time her work was presented, she could barely stand.

(Young Daughter Fire clears her throat. Sam and Ward look at her with anticipation. a moment passes where it looks like she is about to speak but she instead laughs awkwardly then takes another speech)

Whether she drank to excess or out of nervousness, I don't know. But I do know that the amount she had drunk would pave the way for the now famous intoxicated folly of saying

YOUNG DAUGHTER FIRE

Ahem... Hello!... Hello, I'm Daughter Fire and this is my work Etoile Petit.

(She takes a moment where she realizes what she said, but smiles and takes another drink)

WARD

She refused to correct herself. She also refused to talk about her work, instead requesting to go to the restroom with a dignified

YOUNG DAUGHTER FIRE

I do believe these shoes are ass-fucking my feet. I shall be right back. Nobody take my statue!

(She laughs to herself about this obnoxiously)

...Statue...

(As Ward speaks, Etoile rips off her shoes off and punches them each with her left fist before leaving them on the ground)

WARD

It could have ended right there. No future artworks. No game-changing discoveries. No job offer for me to add IV's to a statue made of sponges. Nothing at all.

(Etoile travels over to near Sam Reynolds, yet she remains in the light while he is still in the darkness)

This night would have meant the end of her career had it not been for a man.

(Etoile downs the drink)

As Etoile downed that tragically misused gulp of scotch, either trying to put out the fire of anger or drown herself, someone walked right up to her.

(Lights rise on Sam Reynolds as he walks up next to Etoile. Sam is a dapper, middle aged man who is now holding a glass of champagne)

He smiled in front of the smashed Etoile and proudly stated, loudly:

SAM

It is an honor to meet you, "Daughter Fire". You clearly are an amazing artist. I hope your future artworks are as amazing as your comical personality.

(He grabs her elbow and pulls her in closer)

WARD

At this, people turned and took note at what the well-respected man was saying.

SAM

I hear you quite a prankster at your art school. I say, it's very refreshing to have someone lighten the mood with a little performance at one of these Shindigs. Let's just hope you didn't scare anyone away.

WARD

And people took it in. Suddenly, Etoile wasn't the disrespectful drunk but instead a comedic and eccentric artist. One worthy of tolerating. He then, still smiling, pulled her in close and quietly yet viscously whispered:

SAM

Don't be art's abortion.

(Sam takes the tumbler out of her hand and replaces it with the champagne glass)

You have to *earn* a tumbler.

(He then exits stage right into the darkness, leaving a buzzkilled Etoile in his wake)

WARD

His name was Sam Reynolds and he had just saved Etoile. He continued to spread the good word across the gala that night. As Sam spoke a mile minute with praises to everyone, the plastered Etoile sobered up throughout the night as others came to meet the visionary "Daughter Fire". The critics took note and marveled at her work "Etoile Petite".

(Ward looks through the books some more)

It would be quite some time before Daughter Fire drank from a tumbler again. And when she would it would not be Scotch. The name "Daughter Fire" stuck for the rest of her career as every single statue she made let her fame and notoriety rise.

(Etoile exits) main reason she would curb her outlandish behavior during her early years.

It would prove to be a destructive relationship by the end, but yet another factor that somehow resulted in the security of Daughter Fire's rise to prominence.

Sam Reynolds would take a great interest in her career, often being the

(He puts the book away)

ACT I, scene v

The lights rise again on the studio. Ward takes a three ceramic spheres and places them on the ground near the center. Daughter Fire enters holding another one.

DAUGHTER FIRE

How goes it?

WARD

Just finished a fourth one. I think they'll be ready to be glazed in an hour.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You made them all the same way?

WARD

Each one more the same than the last.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Holding up her sphere)

This one is cracked.

WARD

What?

DAUGHTER FIRE

It's cracked.

WARD

No way.

(Looks at it)

It wasn't cracked before.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I didn't repeatedly hit it with a hammer before.

WARD

You... what?!

DAUGHTER FIRE

Honestly, just three hard whacks and it split open like a coconut.

WARD

(Shocked)

Why...Why the hell did you do that?

DAUGHTER FIRE

I wanted to see how tough it was.

WARD

What the... Why does that matter?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Are you angry at me?

WARD

Yes! You ruined it.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I ruined it...

WARD

You ruined it for nothing-

DAUGHTER FIRE

Oh, it is never ruined

WARD

Because you were fucking bored!!

DAUGHTER FIRE

Don't you dare lay that down in front of me.

WARD

Why did you...What are you... What the fuck?!

(Daughter Fire slaps him across the face. A bit of silence.)

DAUGHTER FIRE

Not quite a hammer is it? A fifty five year old hand. But you shut your lips quite instantly.

(Holds the sphere up)

This took about three whacks to fracture. And it still hasn't shut up. It's still talking a mile a minute about a great number of things.

WARD

You just slapped me.

DAUGHTER FIRE

...Are you sure?

WARD

Pretty sure.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(She does her three point on the shoulder motion)

I'm sorry I hit you. I'll try not to do that as much in the future.

WARD

Thank- wait, what?

DAUGHTER FIRE

We only needed three.

(Takes the sphere and places it next to the others. She takes a hammer out from her pocket)

You seem confused.

WARD

What the hell were these things for?

DAUGHTER FIRE

To see how strong you were.

(She hits them each with a hammer very hard, marveling at their strength.)

You can take a break if you want, I'll be done soon.

WARD

You're insane.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Looks up and seems to contemplate)

...Yes.

(Slight pause, then she goes back to hammering. Ward takes a seat)

WARD

Can I uhh... It's been a while since I had my last drink. I'm starting to get the shakes.

DAUGHTER FIRE

If you have to ask for it, you'll never get it.

(She keeps hammering)

WARD

I'm just... I can't carve any more if I can't control my hands.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Still hammering)

What was that?

WARD

(rubs his shoulders to warm up)

Hysterical.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Stops hammering)

You're balls are pretty damn hard.

(Ward just looks at her. She stands up and takes out the flask)

Here's a sip.

(Ward assumes the position as before)

WARD

What's the special today?

DAUGHTER FIRE

I got a nice little bourbon for you. I don't know what it was but it came free with some glassware.

(Pours a little down)

WARD

(Slurping it up)

Good. Very good.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Pulling it back up)

That's enough for now.

WARD

(Wiping his mouth)

I heard you used to drink Scotch.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You heard wrong.

WARD

It's in your diary.

DAUGHTER FIRE

My what?

WARD

The book you gave me.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Oh... that. Yes, it would be in there.

WARD

You drank scotch a lot when you were young.

(Daughter Fire shoots him a half angry-half joking glare)

Younger.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Not so much drank as suffered.

WARD

You never liked it?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Of course not.

WARD

Then why'd you drink it then?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Why did you go to Art School if you knew you would never be able to finish a single work?

WARD

I thought it's what you had to do to become a great artist.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Right on the nose.

(Ward rubs his eyes to keep from falling asleep)

Right on the nose...

WARD

I didn't know you dated Sam Reynolds.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(A pause)

We kept it secret. You are one of about twenty who know.

WARD

I thought you two hated each other?

DAUGHTER FIRE

We did. Are you a fan of Sam's writings?

WARD

For the most part. I didn't get a chance to read the last book he wrote.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Well, let me know what you think when you do.

WARD

Were you sad when he died?

DAUGHTER FIRE

I was there when he died. Don't take that the wrong way.

WARD

Oh I didn't mean...

(Rubbing his eyes)

I didn't mean anything like that...

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Walking over to Ward)

Are you feeling tired.

WARD

A bit....Can I rest?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Answer me one question.

WARD

...Oh no.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Why... just why were you never able to finish a single project.

WARD

Nothing I ever did was the way I wanted it.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I'm not your limp-sausage professor. I need more of an answer than that.

WARD

Well, sorry to disappoint, but that's it.

DAUGHTER FIRE

That's it.

WARD

Yep. Can I sleep now?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Stares at him for a while, then picks up and tosses him a broken sphere)

Think fast!

(Ward catches it)

Is this the first thing you have ever done?

WARD

Since before art school.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Is it the way you wanted it?

WARD

No.

DAUGHTER FIRE

But it's here, nevertheless. Finished.

WARD

Yeah well... you designed it, not me.

(He starts to put it down)

DAUGHTER FIRE

If you put that down you're making another ten before you sleep!

WARD

(Holding it back up)
It's heavy.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Then tell me the real reason.

WARD

I just did.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Tell me the *real* reason.

WARD

What do you want from me?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Hold up the sphere. Do it!
(Ward holds it up)

WARD

What the hell do you want?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(She takes the hammer and hits the sphere, almost sending it out of his hands)
What's the reason?

WARD

I told you!

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Hitting it again)
Is it fear?

WARD

In a way yes.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Again)
Fear of what?

WARD

Just fear. I'm afraid.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Raising the hammer the highest it has been)

Of what!?

WARD

(Puts the Sphere down)

Of you!

(Daughter Fire slowly puts the hammer down)

Of you. Of the "art" community. Of pretentious art students and random assholes who just happen to look at it. I'm afraid of them owning it.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Owning what?

WARD

My work. The moment I complete it. The very moment I let myself say "It's done". It doesn't belong to me anymore. It belongs to the critics to tear it apart, the people to misinterpret it, and for society to ignore it and deem it irrelevant. That's why!

DAUGHTER FIRE

What? Would you prefer to share your art with no one?

WARD

Yes...Obviously.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Wow... how extremely disappointing.

WARD

Yeah well... you shouldn't of hammered away.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Just the most disappointing thing. You're a perpetual apathetic. People like you are where great art goes to die.

WARD

(Looks at the sphere in his hands)

It feels weird to hold this. Every time at Lour when I finished a stage I got so overwhelmed and just had to destroy it. Kill it and forget about it.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You're selfish.

WARD

Huh.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Daughter Fire grabs his head)

Your mind and mine are alike. You have amazing ideas in here. You have a duty to express them to the world but you're too spineless to do anything. Too pretentious to care about the others who need it.

WARD

Don't call me pretentious Etoile.

(A long silence)

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Taking her hands off his head)

What did you call me?

WARD

I called you by your embarrassing name, and not the *pretentious* nickname you love. Okay? Whenever you start to shrill into me just remember how pathetic *you* are. You're the one passing judgment on everyone. Saying everyone produces trash or is completely...completely spineless but what about you, Etoile? You are *pretentiously* cruel. You think all artists need to have a temper so you fit yourself to it. And it works pretty well since you hate people! What are you other than a bitter old woman who can't tell me what we're building because you don't even know? You just believe it's the best thing in the world because that's the only thing you could ever see yourself making. It's just art, Etoile. We're not curing cancer.

(A bit of silence)

So I guess you're going to make me work more or yell at me or something even worse so just do it already because I've had a long fucking night.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Collecting her thoughts and touching her shoulder at three points)

I suppose the dramatically appropriate thing would be to leave without a word. To show I'm defeated but still standoffish while leaving you to wallow in your own misery but...No...No, that's not going to work.

(She picks up a Sphere and throws it hard on the ground, causing it to break a bit and for Ward to jump)

WARD

Fuck!

(She throws another at his legs)

Stop it.

(She throws the third one)

Jesus Christ!

(He readies the one he has in his hand)

DAUGHTER FIRE

Toss it. Toss it and you can have all the terrible things in your life back.

(She takes out the flask)

Destroy your own creation. Just like you've always done. And I'll give you all of this. And then you may leave.

(Ward contemplates)

Do it.

(Ward slowly sets the sphere down then looks at Daughter Fire defiantly)

I'm proud of you Ward.

(She then pours out the remainder of the alcohol onto the floor)

WARD

(Diving for it)

No!

DAUGHTER FIRE

That's all there is for you for a while.

(Ward slurps it up.)

When you're done mourning. Get rest. Tomorrow we're going to work for quite some time.

ACT I, Scene vi

The lights shift to focus just on Ward with the alcohol. Throughout his speech he continues to slurp off the floor.

WARD

Oddly enough this is the average in terms of a Daughter Fire collaboration. She always was a bit of a livewire when it came to working with people.

(He takes off his shirt)

Her collaboration with an Italian sculptor named Fabrizzio ended when she poured quick cement over all his Ferrari engine. All Italians have Ferrari's. She ended up having to pay for it but later won lots of acclaim for sculpting Fabrizzio's reaction to the entire ordeal in bronze.

(He soaks up the alcohol with his shirt)

Then there was another partner. An architect who accused Daughter Fire of making ceiling mobiles look like spiders. After a long fight, the architect demanded she change it even if it meant spending all night working. She spent all night working. She crafted hundreds of realistically shaped spider sculptures and placed them up against the door so they would come falling down on her partner the moment the door opened. There was never a louder scream...ever.

(Continues to soak it up)

There's never a single partnership that has ever worked out for Daughter Fire. She's an artist who is destined to be alone. It's really quite sad and pathetic.

(Holding the shirt up high, he wrings the alcohol out into his mouth)

I didn't always destroy my work. There was this one sculpture of a frog- no bigger than the palm of your hand- that I kept in my pocket. I always had my hand in there wrapped tightly around it. Never took it out. I never wanted others to see it. It felt nice to touch it though. Something unique and mine. Just mine and no one else's... Then one day when I went to shake someone's hand I forgot to let go.

(Takes another sip of bourbon ala shirt)

They saw it in my hand. I could feel their eyes judging and dissecting, so I quickly tossed it in the nearest trash can.

(Smells the shirt. Then puts it back on)

Maybe I do live a sad life.

ACT I, Scene vii

Lights return to Daughter Fire's office where she sits in her chair. She gazes at Ward as he walks in.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Get any sleep?

WARD

Never.

(Changes his tone to serious and no-nonsense)

Listen, I can't work this way. I didn't know you were going to be this abusive-

DAUGHTER FIRE

I've tried not to be.

WARD

Yeah, that's what's terrifying. Part of the reason I didn't sleep last night.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I'm sorry for last night. I don't want you to forgive me. I would prefer it if you held a grudge, I think it would help you grow a backbone.

WARD

I'll try my best.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You probably noticed I did not get you to do any work this morning.

WARD

Yes.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I had to go to the doctor's.

WARD

Oh?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Don't you want to know what it was about?

WARD

I don't want to pry.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You don't want to pry...

(She takes from her desk the flask and hands it over to Ward)

There you are.

WARD

What? Have you put a little cyanide in it?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Ward, what poison could I have put in there that you haven't already drank?

WARD

Good point.

(Takes it off the table)

But why?

DAUGHTER FIRE

I have to tell you something and I want you to be able to walk away if you can. It wouldn't be effective for you stay on afterwards if you felt tied down. I'd need commitment not enslavement.

WARD

What, are you dying?

(Silence. Daughter Fire blankly looks at a suddenly shocked Ward)

Oh, fuck.

DAUGHTER FIRE

It's really disgusting how you guessed so quickly. I was trying to build it up but you had to go ahead and defecate everywhere.

WARD

I'm sorry.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Why are you sorry? You didn't invent cancer.

(A moment)

Did you invent cancer, you bastard?

WARD

How long have you known?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Two weeks ago. Didn't get the one hundred percent until just now. Looks like chemo must be done soon.

WARD

(Putting two and two together)

Two weeks ago...

DAUGHTER FIRE

A few days later I emailed you.

WARD

So...

(Ward turns toward the work)

The stature. This is a work... a work about your cancer.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Aggravated)

About...About! You saying "about". It's not a sculpture "about" cancer it's a sculpture that will slice up and suffocate cancer.

WARD

That being said, it's a sculpture "about" cancer.

DAUGHTER FIRE

If you have to label it...

WARD

Why didn't you tell me this right away? It wouldn't have mattered.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Rubbing her forehead, knowing she must confess the truth she has been dreading this entire project)

Yes it would have... I've been trying to get you to figure it out. Ease you into the idea.

(Looks at Ward)

Take a close look at what we have so far Ward. At the work. Stand up, get inside it and tell me... What will it *do*. Not "do" as in "what will I do to my heart or my soul when I look at it." I mean "how will it physically change your body?".

WARD

(Looking confused)

Listen, I get this is important-

(Daughter Fire motions sternly for him to get up. He obliges and stands in the middle of where the statue will be.)

Alright. I feel claustrophobic. Does this represent how cancer makes you feel?

DAUGHTER FIRE

It represents nothing! Please, Ward. Use that mind and answer... what is the point?

WARD

(Frustrated)

I don't know! I'm in here, surrounded by sponge. Locked in an iron maiden. I suppose that we put the IV's around me and-

(Thinking back, Ward looks at Daughter Fire, who stares blankly at him and nods.)

The IV.

(Looks into Daughter Fire's eyes then back at his arms in the formation of the future statue.)

The IV sucks up theIt drains it to the sponge.

DAUGHTER FIRE

That's right.

WARD

The sponge turns red.

DAUGHTER FIRE

The artwork and I as one.

WARD

(Breaking away from the artwork)

No. This... this is a suicide booth.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I wouldn't call it suicide.

WARD

I would. The police would.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes. They'd be obligated to. But I wouldn't.

WARD

You're serious about this. You're actually going to... to...

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes.

WARD

This is insane.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Why?

WARD

You... you could survive.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Having fun)

Wait... I could survive?! I never thought about that. I just jumped instantly to suicide so fast I forgot to weigh my options. Thank you.

WARD

Don't kill yourself.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I'm not killing myself. Cancer is destroying me.

WARD

You can beat it. Don't be afraid.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Afraid? I am terrified, but not of the pain.

WARD

Of what?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Of being claimed by it. Me and everything I've ever done. I am terrified of a PSA for cancer which groups me together with all the other artists that have died and labels us "defeated by cancer." I'm terrified that my artwork will always be tainted with the conditions of my death and scholars will try to find the cancer in every single one. I won't let cancer win. I won't let my death claim my life.

WARD

So... so people who actually do get treated. Who actually do fight cancer... are they just pathetic to you?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Don't twist my words.

WARD

Well it just seems you don't have respect for the "cowards" who actually die of cancer. Or the ones who survived it.

DAUGHTER

I am not those people. Those people have... beauty in their life. Family, friends... other people who they would sell their car, house, clothes, hair, teeth, and skin ten times over in order to spend time with them. They have a reason for fighting...

(Pauses)

And I don't. All that I have, Ward, is my art. And I will never ever let cancer have that. So cherish your breath instead of wasting it to convince me.

WARD

...But you can't expect me to...

DAUGHTER FIRE

To be an accessory to my work?

WARD

Yeah. You can't expect me to do that.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You're right. I can't. You are free to go and get yourself miles away from this as fast as you can. This is an artwork far too big for you to handle.

WARD

Don't try to guilt me into murdering you.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You believe this is a revolutionary work.

WARD

No I don't.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes you do.

WARD

No I-

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes you do because we have the same minds! Working with you has been so frustrating. In you I see all the flaws I had when I was young and even more I see the flaws I was never able to change. We are so alike, Ward.

WARD

I don't slap people when I'm angry.

DAUGHTER FIRE

If you're stronger than me you never will. If you listen to me you never will.

WARD

What the hell does this have to do with killing you?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Because it's the crossroads, Ward. The chance for you to be a part of something extraordinary. I can't do it without you. I thought I could, but you need to know... This is your chance to be something amazing.

WARD

A murderer.

DAUGHTER FIRE

No, Ward. A savior. A savior of art from the clutches of mediocrity, a savior of me from the torment of cancer... A savior of yourself fading away into nothingness.

WARD

I can't do it.

DAUGHTER FIRE

If you can't, you can't. And nothing can be done. But think it through. What happens if you say no. You leave, I die. I'm dead either way but if you leave I'm robbed of my art. Because of your decision.

WARD

(Ward turns around, heading for the exit.)

Goodbye.

(Daughter Fire, desperately picks up what resembles a hollow cast for an arm, only very artistically made with unique designs carved into it.)

DAUGHTER FIRE

Ward!

WARD

I can't.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Just look at me.

(Ward turns around and sees Daughter Fire holding the cast.)

This is beautiful Ward. What you made last week. And really in no time at all.

(Daughter Fire puts the cast around her arm.)

Beautiful. And the designs you carved onto it... I'm not sure I could have done it myself.

WARD

You're just trying to sway me.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I don't need to.

WARD

You don't?

DAUGHTER FIRE

No. Because right now this image of myself and your work- the two pieces in an incomplete puzzle- now it is branding itself across your retinas. Soon this unfinished art will be all that you see. All that you see when you wake up. All that you see when you work and, if you leave me now, what you will see and be tortured with the rest of your entire life: the fleeting glimpse of what you can accomplish.

WARD

Don't try to guilt me.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Only you can guilt yourself. Because you know that when you leave you will never be able to sleep in that roach infested hell hole of an apartment. There won't be enough drinks in the world to drown away the regret you'll face from walking away. And each day after this a little bit of you will chip off. Day by day you'll waste away until there is nothing left of you. All that potential reduced to ashes. You stay and we'll create something immortal. You leave now and

both of us die. This is the day that you may look on as the moment for something extraordinary that came and went.

(A pause. Ward glares at Daughter Fire)

Are you mad at me, Ward?

WARD

(Picking up the designs)

I'm mad enough to kill you.

END ACT I

ACT II, Scene i

The lights rise on a fast working Ward in the center and an idle Daughter Fire at sitting down near the statue. Many weeks have passed since the end of ACT I. Daughter Fire wears a bandana over her head and is noticeably frailer while Ward is in amazing shape, a far cry from the sloppy alcoholic at the beginning of the play. The work in the center is almost complete, now starting to resemble an Iron Maiden of sorts. Ward is hammering while working with measuring tape. After a bit of hammering, Daughter Fire chimes in.

DAUGHTER FIRE

What are you working on now?

(Still hammering)

Excuse me!

WARD

(Hesitating and then putting down the hammer)

Yes?

DAUGHTER FIRE

What are you working on now?

WARD

...Maybe you should get some rest.

DAUGHTER FIRE

What?!

WARD

You can get some rest if want...

DAUGHTER FIRE

You don't...

(Gaining her composure though its apparent she is losing touch)

You don't tell me what I can do...

WARD

I wasn't.

DAUGHTER FIRE

This is *my* project. My hand clasped all over it.

WARD

I know.

DAUGHTER FIRE

It's mine. I have my hand all over it and I'm squeezing tight.

WARD

Great.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Squeezing tight!...Squeezing tight...

(Trails off again. A pause)

What are you doing?

WARD

Good fucking god!

DAUGHTER FIRE

Why won't you tell me what you're doing.

WARD

(Pointing to the plans next to her)

I'm building the statue. The plans are over there.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I don't need to read the plans. I see the plans always. They're mentally branded

(motioning to her eyes)

All over my corneas.

WARD

Yeah...

DAUGHTER FIRE

Just underneath my pupil. I see the plans before I see you. I don't need to see them. I've got my... my....

WARD

You're hand all over them? Squeezing tight?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Don't flicker with me.

WARD

I'm not trying to flicker.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You're flickering. You're telling me I should go to bed and leave you alone to drink up all our turpentine.

WARD

I wasn't telling you to go to bed.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Mix it together with some-

WARD

I wasn't even asking you to go to bed. I was simply informing you that if you were willing you could continue your manic exclamations in your bedroom.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I'm going to throw something very sharp at you.

WARD

You did that already. You're out of things to throw now.

(Daughter Fire looks around. There is nothing near her. She checks her feet. Neither of them have any shoes on. Immediately after that Ward holds up both shoes over his head to show her without looking behind him)

DAUGHTER FIRE

Why won't you tell me what the hell you are doing?

WARD

I've already told you, the statue.

DAUGHTER FIRE

What *part* of the statue?

WARD

I've already told you that too! Three times now. But you keep on asking! You keep on asking because you are too tired to work, too tired to stand, and too tired to pay attention yet not too tired to have the smallest amount of confidence in me that I won't fuck everything up without your hawk eyes stabbing at the back of my head.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Pause)

How many times have you told me?

WARD

I'm not sure. I have spent more time telling you what I am doing than *doing* what I am doing.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Oh...

(Ward senses her vulnerability and puts down his hammer and goes toward her)

WARD

Look, you're not losing it. You've just been up for too long looking at me being up for too long. But you need your rest and I-

(As soon as Ward gets close Daughter Fire slaps him across the face stopping him mid sentence. There is quite a pause where Ward and her stare daggers at each other with Ward showing a never before seen ferocity)

DAUGHTER FIRE

My, how my sculptor has grown and hardened like a perfectly erect metal cock.

(smiling)

I should put you on David's crotch to create the utter manly perfection.... I am not rupturing, Ward. I know that extremely well. I am not losing my mind. Throwing shoes and asking the same damn questions over and over again are things I've been doing well before chemotherapy. My mind wanders, but it does not wander to the green pastures of dementia. It goes to death. This sculpture and my mind's deviations are one in the same.

(massages her eyes)

I am focused.. I have my hand clenched around it.... Clenched around it...

WARD

(Ward grabs Daughter Fire's hand)

I respect you. You are in control. But don't ever slap me again.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Fine...

(Ward lets go)

It was out of frustration.

WARD

You always say that like it makes it all better.

DAUGHTER FIRE

It doesn't. My hand still hurts.

(Ward goes back to work)

Oh it was just a joke. Why don't you laugh anymore, Ward? You haven't laughed for weeks.

WARD

I haven't *not* been building a coffin for weeks.

DAUGHTER FIRE

A sarcophagus?

WARD

Yes. A very extravagant coffin. That's all this is.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You see it as a sarcophagus. That's a bad idea.

WARD

Why's that?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Egyptians took their servants with them to the afterlife.

(Ward pauses for only one second, then continues working)

I think I understand why. It isn't the servitude they want... it's the healthy body. What a unique and fixating torture it is right now to see your body do the great work I cannot. To be so weak I can't even claim it for my own. Those Pharaohs always thought ahead.

WARD

Ominous history lessons aside, can you get to bed? I've upgraded to flat out asking you now.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I can't sleep and sculpt at the same time.

WARD

Then I'll get to bed too.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Not until you're hands bleed.

WARD

(After a moment and a smile, Ward holds up his clean hands)

Oh they bleed. But not with my blood.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Pausing)

You aren't going to have to kill me, Ward.

WARD

I'm not?

DAUGHTER FIRE

No. You don't even have to watch me die. Just leave me be.

WARD

And then I go to jail.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Oh... even if they do charge you... jail will be nothing after these past few weeks with me. Especially after the celebrity status you will achieve. I know that graffiti artist last year got a full pardon with the people behind him...

WARD

He sprayed paint over buildings, not his mentors blood. This is different.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes, it is. It's far more important and destructive. The people will cling to it.

WARD

And if they don't? What if it's just the law that "clings" to it? The law that clings to it and me.

DAUGHTER FIRE

If you really are terrified by that why are you still hammering?

(A moment, then Ward raises his hammer high, mustering energy to bring it down)

WARD

I don't know. I really don't know what the hell I'm doing.

(Drops the hammer down)

I'm sorry. I need to go to bed now.

DAUGHTER FIRE

It's not time to sleep.

WARD

Oh, I'm not sleeping. I'm just going to my bed.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Giving the arm back to Ward)

Can you tell me a story, Ward?

WARD

No.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Remember in the beginning when I said every artist should be able to tell a story?

WARD

Well, I hate stories.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Why?

WARD

The ones I heard growing up... they seem to tell you that what you're doing is wrong. Like no matter what you do it's a mistake.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Really?

WARD

I knew this one story that my grandmother told me. More or less, an old man tries to make a boy's life better but ends up killing him instead and then goes insane. The moral being "don't try to play god". Or I guess... "just let the little fucker die because you're powerless either way."

(Looks at Daughter Fire)

What about you? You have any stories?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes. They're in that book I gave you. Get some rest Ward. And think of a story.

(She stands up and begins to exit)

Get some good rest.

(She exits)

ACT II, Scene ii

Just as before with alternate scenes, the focus sharpens to Ward.

WARD

She was out for an entire week after that for chemo. Usually she has it arranged that they do it here... somehow. I've never seen it done. Not this time though. It's a bit too serious now.

(Putting the now more advanced looking arm cast around his own arm, it doesn't fit)

Small arms she has. She's gotten frailer since her initial designs so I'll have to compensate for that somehow. She should have told me that the measurements were old. Taken from when she was twenty four years old. The toast of the sculpting world, the disowned child of two parents too out of touch with what she was going through, and the unrequited love all too familiar to any aspiring artist. The world was lifting her up to tear her apart and eat her alive.

(Young Daughter Fire enters distraught. Ward places the arm down and takes out the book)

She tried to lose herself in her work, failing because every single cut and scrape she made against the stone she wished desperately to have the courage or the clumsiness to do it upon her own flesh. To carve herself into the desired shape of the deceased. This went on for a few months until the yearning of self mutilation had flooded every facet of her work space.

(Young Daughter Fire approaches the center of the audience and looks out as if it were a precipice she was about to jump off of.)

So she got up and left. Not bothering to talk to Sam Reynolds or her parents. Not wanting some of her last moments to be futile grasps for pity. She just wanted the thoughts of misery and pain to end. The precipice was right in front of her and all she had to do was keep on walking.

(Ward turns towards Young Daughter Fire)

She would have killed herself. But fortunately and unfortunately something was following that would save her life. It was a thought. A thought she had many times before when contemplating suicide. So much that she utilized it as a vicious anecdote during galas. It was a thought she was now brusquely walking away from towards the bridge. Walking towards and across the bridge, over the banister and down onto the watery death below.

(Young Daughter Fire is about to jump off)

But she hesitated. Hesitated just long enough for the thought to reach around and grab her tight

(Ward does so)

And, with its forked tongue, applied its poison in her mind to work slowly. Whispering the words spoken by her before in far less depressing times.

(Ward whispers in her ear)

It said, taunting her, "How dare you rip off Spalding Gray! And all the other unique artists who have exited the world in such bland and formulaic way.

(Ward backs away, as does Young Daughter Fire)

So many artists, so much depression, and so many self-inflicted deaths all bland and uniform. These are the ways the worlds end. With a bang, a cut, or a rope burn and then a whimper.

(Young Daughter Fire turns to Ward)

Many conversations in galas you had promised strangers, if you would do it... if you would take the cowards way out... you would make your mark.

(Young Daughter Fire smiles)

Give your life the exit it deserves."

(Ward looks at audience as Young Daughter Fire exits)

And with that she went back home and began to plan her... her way out. Ironically it stopped her suicide. Gave her something to live for as demented as that sounds. It was only recently when her magnum opus received its imminent deadline that she brought it out. By then it had all been planned out perfectly. She just needed someone with the strength to craft her suicide.

(He puts the book away)

ACT II, Scene iii

The lights shift back to the studio. DR. MYERS enters with his suit and bag. He is an older man with a few grey hairs but still a lot of spirit in him. He walks over to the distracted Ward.

MYERS

Mr. Ward?

WARD

Yes?

MYERS

She's done. Checked her all out. She needs to get more rest, but I'll be back in three days to check up on her.

WARD

Is that a bit soon?

MYERS

Perhaps, but I didn't like letting her go from the hospital so soon so... better safe than sorry.

WARD

Thank you, Dr. Mayor.

MYERS

Myers.

WARD

(Rubbing his eyes)
Right, right... Dr. Myers. I'm sorry.

MYERS

You look like you could use some rest as well.

WARD

Heh. Yeah maybe.

MYERS

(Taking a look at the work in the center)
Pretty taxing, huh?

WARD

What?

MYERS

Whatever you're working on.

WARD

Yes it is.

MYERS

You may end up killing one of yourselves if you keep up like this.

WARD

(Hesitating)
Possibly.

MYERS

(Looking at him for a while)
How long have you been working for Miss Petit.

WARD

You call her Miss Petit?

MYERS

I call her what's on her file. Diseases do not care about nicknames. How long have you been working for her?

WARD

About two months.

MYERS

Hmm.

WARD

Hmm?

MYERS

That's about the time she was "officially" diagnosed.

(He walks over to the statue)

This is pretty interesting. How long have you been working on this?

WARD

About two months.

MYERS

Well, that is odd.

WARD

What's odd about it? She needed help for her last work.

MYERS

Oh no, not that.

(Gestures to the work)

This is very odd to me. Not that I know much about art.

(Points to the IVs imbedded in the statue)

Though these I recognize. IVs.

(Turning to Ward)

This is her last work?

WARD

Obviously.

MYERS

Why obviously?

WARD

Well... she's dying.

MYERS

(Eyes dart to Ward)

You're sure? Are you a doctor?

(Nervous pause)

Just busting your chops.

(Looks at statue again)

She may die. Not soon though. Not with the right care. With the right chemical care she may pull though.

WARD

She doesn't feel that way.

MYERS

Of course not. Who wants to live, right?

(Looks at statue again)

You know, I used an IV just today to drain a patient's blood. Took quite a bit out of her with just one. How many have you got here?

WARD

About twenty.

MYERS

About twenty. That would just about kill her.

WARD

(A long stare)

Kill who?

MYERS

My patient from earlier. She was a college student. That many IV's could potentially kill her. That's all I was trying to say. What you are building that could potentially kill someone?

WARD

That's not a crime.

MYERS

I would argue with you and say that suicide, which is what I am getting at, is one hundred percent against the law. Also, being an accessory to suicide is a bit of a no-no as well.

WARD

This isn't meant to kill...

MYERS

Don't fucking lie to me like you're one of my residents. You're a grown man so do us all proud and act like it.

WARD

I can see why you're Daughter Fire's favorite doctor.

MYERS

(With a sarcastic tone)

Golly, she said that about me?

(Dropping it)

And her name is Etoile Petit. That's what was on her Birth Certificate and that's what I will one day put on her death certificate.

WARD

But not on her tombstone or obituaries.

MYERS

I plan to read neither though I suppose the papers will read something like "Daughter Fire psychotically killed by Art School Dropout" or "Sad pathetic wannabe murders icon". I have a feeling that's what it is going to be followed by your immediate death sentence followed by the sudden increased appreciation for the deceased Daughter Fire.

WARD

(turning away)

You can't prove anything.

MYERS

You're fucking right. I can't. I've tried. I've begged in fact to have her re-examined by psychologists. The very moment she told me what was going on. Don't you think she asked me? The very moment the words "You have cancer" came out of my mouth? Oh she threw a fit demanding suicide booths and cyanide so I told my superiors and they made sure she was sound in the mind. They said she was and... she actually did seem to change her mind. I found that extremely suspicious.

(Looking at the work)

Until now.

WARD

Are you going to report back to the superiors? Call the cops?

MYERS

I tried that already. Miss Petit is crafty with her lies and acting. You see when someone is having suicidal thoughts the immediate action is to put them in the control of others. You know, shift the blame. That can't be done with Miss Petit at our hospital because... well... guess who's one of the main players on the board of directors. So it seems this whole situation is out of my hands.

WARD

Then what do you want?

MYERS

(Shifts his body position to less threatening. He speaks as if talking to his teenage son.)
Listen. She's disease. An enigma that cannot be classified and should never be trusted. All she wants from you... all she's ever wanted from anyone... is for you to make her greater. Even if that means playing you like a sucker and leaving you for dead.

WARD

You don't know what we're creating.

MYERS

And neither do you. Listen kid, off the record, you're not one of my patients. You're just one of the random others I don't have to care about so I'm telling you this as a favor and as a warning: You are killing someone. Legally and technically. You will have to live with the both the legal and moral consequences.

WARD

I know that.

MYERS

You know that but you haven't thought about it. You've been afraid to.

WARD

Listen, I was holding my tongue back of kindness but you're a doctor so this is probably a pretty common thing people say to you: Fuck off. I have been thinking about this. Every single moment of the day. I've thought about the jail time and the needle that goes in my arm. Each arm. I know exactly what'll happen when they strap me down and you know what? That's fine. That's just fine. Compared to how life was before, that's A-okay as long as I get to be a part of this. And as for the "moral" implications, don't even try to act like you wouldn't have helped her do it if you could.

MYERS

You're that willing to throw down your life?

WARD

If it comes to that.

MYERS

Well... You've come a long way from the "useless sack" she told me about at the beginning.

(Looks at the statue)

If she asks you to do it. To, "finish" whatever it is you've been doing. Will you do it? Will you pull the trigger or whatever?

WARD

I won't have to.

MYERS

But can you imagine yourself doing it. If you can't... If you can't visualize yourself doing it then you should run! Run as fast as you can because you don't have what it takes.

WARD

... Maybe I do.

MYERS

Christ.

(Looks at the work)

I wouldn't want to kill her, Ward. Not because of any morality but because of this thing. What's going to happen when the media finds out about it? I have colleagues who have to deal with kids who slash their wrists for attention. Soon after this they'll be draining themselves in the bathtub

trying to emulate their hero and die an "artist". Brand new suicides to challenge the norm. That's what I have to deal with. A mass suicide wave because of Miss Petit.

WARD

(Pause)

That's a good point.

(Approaches the statue)

MYERS

Are you willing to usher in that kind of hell just so you can be an artist?

WARD

It's not suicide. She has cancer-

MYERS

She can survive.

WARD

You don't know that.

MYERS

I'm a doctor.

WARD

Yes. You're a doctor who stands there and dares to tell me that suicide is illegal when it is clearly not and you know it.

MYERS

What are you trying to say?

WARD

People kill themselves every day. Please, Doctor Myers. You're going to tell me that as a doctor you don't see so many fat fuckers who get a heart attack then smoke eighty cigarettes an hour while murdering themselves with fast food, stagnancy, and lung and liver poison? Just like I, everyday committed genocide on my brain cells with whiskey and draining myself in the bathtub in hopes of being thought an artist? And this was all in accordance with the law, mind you. Suicide is legal as long as somebody is making money off of it. If it was really illegal you'd have far less work. The mass suicide wave that you fear, Doctor Myers, has already happened. And given the choice between apathy's way and Miss Petit's way... well I'd choose Miss Petit's way.

MYERS

...What is Miss Petit to you, Mr. Hannigan? Is she your role model? Your mother figure? You're goddess?

WARD

She's a soldier who fought a thousand battles and wants a blaze of glory.

MYERS

Everyday I'm reminded how fucked up the world is. Children come in to the hospital from beatings, motorcycle riders scraped off the asphalt, men who shove entire ketchup bottle up their asses...But this...

(Taps the statue with his hand)

I save lives. I keep people alive. That's what I do, but I'm no artist. You... you're going to kill someone and that makes you an artist. That's pretty odd to me.

(He turns and starts to leave but stops)

How are you doing it?

WARD

I'd rather not say.

MYERS

Kevorkian, when he did it, induced a coma with sodium thiopental. Then he injected Potassium chloride. You can find both of these-

WARD

Not how we're doing it.

MYERS

That's a painless way to do it.

WARD

How do you know?

MYERS

I just know.

WARD

She doesn't want it painless. She wants it with a bit of fire.

MYERS

Oh god.

(Myers exits)

ACT II, Scene iv

The lights shift once again. Ward faces towards the audience.

WARD

I think part of him wanted to let it happen. I'm pretty sure the Hippocratic oath wouldn't excuse this.

(Looking at the work)

Would I have what it takes. If I had to start the machine. If I had to be there for it... would I finish it?

(Shakes his head)

I don't know why he didn't stop us. There's got to be something he could have done. I can only assume Myers took comfort and drew leniency from Daughter Fire's lack of kin. Her mother had died years ago while she was out of the country and her father...

(Young Daughter Fire enters again)

Her father hadn't spoken to her in quite some time. About ten years since the graduation and about two since her mother's death. This would be the last conversation before her father's heart attack would claim his life. Yep... pretty depressing.

(Ward picks up the diary given to him at the beginning of the play)

There are only two pages ripped out of this book. I can see little paper ridges sticking out. Only two pages out of the entire book ripped out.

(Looking at audience)

Why these two?

(Young Daughter Fire enters as if meeting her father)

If I can follow the loose narrative, it would describe the meeting between Etoile and her father. She was in her hometown due to a layover flight and asked if she could stay for a day. Her father obliged and...

(He closes the book)

That's it. Nothing else but two jagged edges that once held descriptions of the meeting. She kept the suicidal thoughts, the getting wasted before a gala, and all the poop jokes about her name but not these two pages...

(looks at Young Daughter Fire, trying to read her)

Maybe the content was too embarrassing. She could have walked right in, been the same insufferable "artist" her father had grown to resent and her father would ignore her in the same fashion he had for the past decade. They'd say snipe after snipe at one another until the mention of her mother is made and... surprise... something gets thrown. She leaves, vents it all in a book only to rip it out later out of shame for the person she is.

(Young Daughter Fire walks over and takes the diary from Ward)

Maybe the content was too personal. They sat down from one another after a few small baby steps just asked the big questions: "Why did you leave us?" "Why weren't you there for me?" "Where were you when Mom was sick?" "Why the fuck did you name me Etoile Petit?" "What's wrong with Etoile Petit?" And after a few hard words and maybe a few harder drinks they finally get out whatever was torturing their minds and just cry in each other's arms... mourning for the family they had broken. Something so personal and, from one's perspective, pathetic would be worth it to rip out.

(Young Daughter Fire rips out the pages)

But no matter how it happened, I'll never know. And because I'll never know I can only assume the extraordinary. But... if I really think about it... use logic and knowledge of who Daughter Fire is... who Etoile Petit was with her father... I can figure what happened: Nothing. A good double sided two pages worth of nothing. They probably just sat down across from one another, stared a while, and shot back polite, civil, and cowardly questions to one another while thinking of daring questions to ask if only they had the balls.

(Looking into Daughter Fire's eyes)

No... the time had come and gone for something extraordinary to happen. And to Daughter Fire that would be the most unforgivable thing she could do.

(Young Daughter Fire exits)

What if she read the book of my life? How many pages would she tear out of that? Would there be any left of me? Is most of what I am better left not reading at all?

ACT II, Scene v

The lights shift back to the studio. Daughter Fire is sitting in the same seat as in scene II-i. The Statue is almost complete, with only superficial touches. Daughter Fire is sipping some alcohol from a tumbler while Ward puts a few more touches on the statue. The layout very much mimics II-i.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Ward...

(Ward keeps working)

Ward...

WARD

Yes?

DAUGHTER FIRE

What are you working on now?

WARD

(Sighing)

For. The. Fifth. Time. I am putting the finishing touches on the statue.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Make sure that-

WARD

-The IV's are all secure.

(Daughter Fire reaches towards her feet)

Your shoes are over here. You cannot have them back.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Dying woman's wish?

WARD

You already used that to get the shoes back. And then you threw them at me again!

DAUGHTER FIRE

I really am terrible sometimes.

WARD

Yep.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Picking up the bottle)

Would you like some alcohol?

WARD

No... I'm trying to drink less.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Really?

(Ward nods)

And you never had tequila? What a shame.

WARD

I'll live.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I think I have some in the back.

WARD

(Turning around)

I'm not having sex with you. Even if you are dying tomorrow.

DAUGHTER FIRE

That's cruel.

WARD

Yeah, well... go call the make a wish foundation.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I think I'm going to miss sex the most when I die.

WARD

Well, maybe they have it where you're going.

DAUGHTER FIRE

And tequila.

WARD

They got a whole ocean of it. Lime trees grow nearby with salt mines. People are fucking each other inside of it. You're in for a great time.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You know who wanted to fuck a lot?

WARD

Um...Who?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Hamlet.

WARD

Really?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes. It's why he didn't kill himself during the "to be or not to be".

WARD

Don't think I follow.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Standing up)

There he is looking over a ledge about to jump off saying "oh woe is me" and "I should jump off" and then he thinks of Ophelia and that sweet sex he had with her. And then he thinks "Oh, god! I've only had sex with one person. Maybe life is a lot better than I think!" What does he do after that? He pushes around Ophelia and soon after tries to hump his mothers brains out while the ghost of his father masturbates in the closet.

WARD

Wow... I uh... I missed that when I read it.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You got to know how to translate Shakespeare's worbs.

WARD

Worbs?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Worbs! Worbs! Worbs!
(Chuckles to herself)

WARD

I think you need to get to bed.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I think you need to have sex with a goat!
(She breaks out into hysterical laughter)

WARD

(getting up)
...Alright! You need to get to bed.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Angrily throwing down her beverage on the ground)
No!

WARD

Fuck!

DAUGHTER FIRE

Don't tell me to get to bed. I am dying tomorrow. Tomorrow I will be dead. For the first time in my life.

WARD

I know. Believe me. I am very well aware of that. Because tomorrow, for the first time in my life, I will have killed someone.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes...

WARD

(Ward walks over with the glass and hands it to Daughter Fire)
After all this time... you're still throwing things at me.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Until the end.

WARD

Until the end...
(Ward turns back but stops in front of the statue)
What do you think?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Looking at it)
It's a very sturdy ship. I think I'll be in good hands.

WARD

I didn't screw it up too much?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Well, there are still quite a few problems with it. For one the outer shell is cracking off and the-

WARD

Etoile!
(Daughter Fire stops)
Don't make me kill you.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Objections aside, I think you did some of the best work I have ever seen. And I am very proud to depart in such a way.

WARD

Thank you.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You're welcome.

WARD

How are you feeling.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Excited. Tomorrow's Christmas for me.

WARD

Glad to hear it. I think I'm pretty spent. I'm going to go to my bed and either sleep or stare at the ceiling for six hours. I'll see you tomorrow.

(Ward begins to exit)

DAUGHTER FIRE

Ward.

(Ward stops, not turning around)

Stay with me a little bit longer.

WARD

Why?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Because I'm terrified and so are you.

WARD

(Turning around)

We don't have to do this tomorrow.

DAUGHTER FIRE

No, we have to.

WARD

Look. It's done. The work is done and can be used anytime you want.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I want to do it tomorrow. I need to do it tomorrow.

WARD

You could survive. You could live for a few more years and... do this later.

DAUGHTER FIRE

So Myers picked your brain a bit, did he?

WARD

This isn't about what Myers may have said to me...

DAUGHTER FIRE

People were killing themselves for artistic attention long before me just like they will long after me.

WARD

This isn't about them or Myers, this is about you being terrified.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I'm not terrified.

WARD

But what you just said-

DAUGHTER FIRE

I meant-

WARD

It's alright to be terrified. It's human to be terrified.

DAUGHTER FIRE

There's nothing left for me to do here. I'm not having reservations of whether I want to leave or whether there's something I still need to do. There's nothing. I have to leave tomorrow because it's the only thing I can do.

WARD

There are other things you can do. Other works of art to be made-

DAUGHTER FIRE

Don't lie to me just because you're afraid for me.

WARD

Well, let's not forget that you lied in order to get me here.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I never lied.

WARD

You lied because you needed a killer, so you tricked me because I was some loser who desperately wanted to believe I still had a future. You tricked me into thinking I was an artist.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Tricking? I let you be what you wanted to be, what you came to me to be: an artist. And for good measure I made you work hard and sacrifice almost everything. Those were the two consummately crucial actions you were unwilling to do.

WARD

You made me an outlaw.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Wake-up sweetheart, you wanted to be artist. Artists lose everything, almost always suffer or even die for their work or because of it and often are demonized after death by the society they did everything to improve. I've given you everything you wanted to be and more.

WARD

And thank you for that. But... but I don't know if I can be there tomorrow. Both personally and... legally.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Putting her hand over her should like before)

You don't have to be here tomorrow Ward. I completely understand. But don't use society as a shield for your own cowardice.

WARD

You don't need me to finish this.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You're right I don't. So ask yourself: Why do I still demand you be here? Hmm?

WARD

Every martyr needs a murderer.

DAUGHTER FIRE

...I am no one's martyr. I... will be a work of art. With or without you.

(She gets up to leave, very tenderly.)

You shouldn't stay here tonight, Ward. Leave now and forget the whole thing. Maybe you can call the police. Make it look like you had no idea what the statue was for. It was just the commands of a crazy woman now far outside their jurisdiction.

WARD

Thanks for the offer, but Dr. Myers knows all about what I've done.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Myers won't talk.

WARD

You don't know that.

DAUGHTER FIRE

He won't.

WARD

How do you know that.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Because I told him not to. He'll honor my dying wish. So you're free, Ward. You don't need to be here. Thank you for your hard work but now you can go. I have an artwork to unveil tomorrow.

(She starts to leave. There's a pause before Ward pipes up.)

WARD

(quietly)

It's my artwork too.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I thought you were abandoning it just like all the others.

WARD

It's my art too!

(Daughter Fire keeps walking)

Why are you afraid?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Stopping)

“The undiscovered country from who's borne no traveler returns.”

WARD

Meaning?

DAUGHTER FIRE

I've always loved Hamlet. I understand why there are those who would hate him. Just like I understand there are those who would hate me. I love it because no matter what, no matter how cowardly or how monstrous he becomes he never stops doing one thing. He never EVER stops doing the one thing he is most famous for...

WARD

Crying?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Turning)

Thinking, Ward. Thinking. It's what we do. What human beings keep on doing every moment we are alive. Think think think think think. We endlessly create thought after thought and in doing so weave the tapestry of who we are. Ever since I was born I have been weaving, but tomorrow that could stop. The voices in my head may be silenced forever.

WARD

It'll be good rest for you, I hope.

DAUGHTER FIRE

What will happen when I see death? Will I be able to think? Perceive it?

(pauses)

I haven't the faintest idea.

(Looks square at Ward)

Thank you, Ward. For everything. You should go now.

(She starts to exit)

ACT II, Scene vi

Lights shift again. Ward picks up the diary and flips to the last page

WARD

(Pointing to the page)

There's a sentence scribbled on the last page. Actually... just one word. I thought it was just a simple note, probably just a random thing written during a brainstorming session but... after listening to her and her... thoughts on thinking... I think I understand why she wanted me to read this. It wasn't self indulgence.... It couldn't be because...

(Young Daughter Fire enters again, pushing with her Sam Reynolds in a wheelchair)

Because this wasn't written by her. Every single detail of her life had been confided in a man she loved and trusted almost as much as she hated and ridiculed.

(Young Daughter Fire pushes Sam Reynolds clear into view. He is very disheveled, old, and looks as if he may die at any moment, completely delirious. Young Daughter Fire is much more mature and closer in composure to the old Daughter Fire. Ward hands the book to Sam)

Sam Reynolds had written all the personal things Daughter Fire had told him. Maybe to publish... maybe to keep for himself. Either way, for his crimes against a fellow artist the gods of fitting punishment struck him down with a case of Alzheimer's, so every word he had written down, every grand connection and postulation, everything he understood and cherished about the world would melt away. It was Daughter Fire who was there for him. Maybe out of guilt or maybe she learned something in the missing two pages.

(Young Daughter Fire takes the book from Sam)

She found it in the desk of his study. An unfinished handwritten manuscript. At first she was angry. Betrayed. After everything, Sam would take her life and make it his own somehow. Enslave her. And to top it all off rob her of any vengeance by allowing the Alzheimer's to transform him into something too vulnerable to attack. She wanted to leave. Leave him to die.

(Daughter Fire opens the book and silently reads. She grabs Sam's chin to force him to look at her.)

Instead, she read it to him. She would read it to her over and over to him. Even while he slept. Over and over until the final days where he died on March 29th.

(Looking over Daughter Fire's shoulder and pointing to a date on the page)

Dated March 29th, the final entry remains, fittingly haphazard in its writing style. The same one word that I mentioned earlier.

(Sam motions wildly to give him the book and pen)

I imagine in the midst of the end, Sam clawed at Daughter Fire's hands and, through chokes and gasps, demanded the book. Daughter Fire handed it to him and he roughly took the pen and wrote. He wrote one word and then, blankly staring off, slowly passed away.

(Daughter Fire stares as Sam dies. Ward takes the book.)

The one idea he felt compelled as a writer and a human being to communicate. The very last thing this titan of literature was able to think about and ponder was...

(Reading from the book)

"Tits."... At least he's in a happy afterlife.

(Young Daughter Fire wheels off Sam)

I wonder what I should do.

(Ward puts the book inside the work and, after contemplation, walks off stage)

ACT II, Scene vii

The lights shift for the final time. The statue is finally complete. It seems to reach up towards the sky like an open hand ready to clench whatever comes into its grasp. Leather straps are placed where one should go. IV needles shoot out of the front of the work so that if one is strapped in and pushed back the needles would puncture the skin. Daughter Fire enters. She looks around for a moment, then inspects the work. She notices a switch by the work. She presses it and the IV needles shoot forward several inches. Daughter Fire takes a deep sigh at such a display and presses the button again, causing the needles to retract. She then walks in front of the work in the path of the needles. She takes a deep breath and reaches towards the button...

WARD

(Offstage)

You're going to need to strap yourself in.

(Ward enters as Daughter Fire looks on with a slight smile)

You need to strap in. Otherwise the needles won't puncture. They'll just knock you forward. Cause you to trip.

(He walks up and shows Daughter Fire the straps)

Safety first, after all.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Thank you.

WARD

Oh please stop thanking me. It complicates my understanding of you.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You don't have to do anything. I can figure this all out. You can just sit in the corner and keep your hands clean.

WARD

(He holds up his hands and looks at the statue then her)

Don't think that's possible. You see my fingerprints are all over this thing.

(He knocks on the statue)

Why don't you get ready? I'm going to test a few things out.

(Slowly, Daughter Fire removes some of her clothes so that a lot of open skin is showing to where the IVs will be attached. As she does this Ward preps the IVs. After her clothes are removed she approaches the Statue and marvels at it. She then notices the book in the work. She picks it up)

DAUGHTER FIRE

How did you find the read?

WARD

(Looking up at the book in her hands)

Your boyfriend could write.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes... He had his moments.

WARD

Do you like the book?

DAUGHTER FIRE

No.

WARD

Why not?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Because it reminds me of just how much I've failed to be a sculptress. I've spent so much time cutting away the rough edges on statues that I never took the time to work away my own rough edges. Even the rough edges that cost me a lot.

(Looking at the book)

I hate this book.

WARD

Then why'd you give it to me. Why have you kept it for so long?

DAUGHTER FIRE

Because it's all true. This book...it's me. I hate it. I want to burn it... but I can't... because it's the closest anyone on Earth will ever get to understanding me.

(Places the book back inside the work)

WARD

Talk about hysterically pathetic.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Do not joke or I will have your testicles before I go.

WARD

Honey bun, you couldn't get these testicles with a chainsaw. Not anymore.

(He presses the button again, the things IVs shoot out)

You may feel a sting.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes. Let me feel it.

WARD

We can always get something to numb it. I know you don't-

DAUGHTER FIRE

I want to be in pain.

WARD

Yeah but the-

DAUGHTER FIRE

I want to earn it. The same way you earned getting to build this.

WARD

I know... just felt I'd ask one more time before it was too late.

(Daughter Fire walks into position inside the work. As she talks, Ward takes out a camera and sets it onto a tripod, framing it to record the occurrence)

I must admit... I cannot wait for this all to end

DAUGHTER FIRE

Yes.

WARD

You should get something to numb yourself. You don't want your "last thought" to be "ow these things really fucking hurt."

DAUGHTER FIRE

(She puts her three fingers along her shoulder)

My mind will wander. I know pain.

WARD

(Gesturing to her hand position)

Like your heartburn?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Taking a moment)

You don't know why I do this with my hand?

WARD

I mean, I've never really wondered. Just figured it's what you do.

DAUGHTER FIRE

...Yes.

(She turns away as Ward continues to inspect the work. After a few moments she speaks up.)

When I was twenty I was walking at night in a bad part of New York. Typical idiotic thing I did back then. I met someone I shouldn't have and they did something they shouldn't have. Long story short I ended up being stabbed three times.

(Points at the scars along her shoulder)

The knife wasn't an IV but it almost drained enough blood to kill me. I'd never felt more vulnerable in my life. Inches away from death.

(Emphasizing with her hands how close the wounds are to her lungs and heart)

Literally Inches. Just a little to the left or right and it would have been over.

(Places her hands back on her shoulder)

So sometimes, when I lose control over my anger... and I need to be reminded of what it is really like to be in pain... I take my hand over my shoulder and press very hard up against the scars.

(She does so.)

And I'm back in that alley. And suddenly the present doesn't seem so bad.

WARD

This wasn't in the diary.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I never told Sam about it.

WARD

Why not?

DAUGHTER FIRE

It wasn't worth bringing up to him.

WARD

Then why did you tell me just now?

DAUGHTER FIRE

I don't know. I think it's an interesting anecdote. Someone should know about it after today.

WARD

I'm honored. I'm disturbed and freaked out but I'm honored. Please let me know if this is too tight.

(Ward now begins strapping Daughter Fire into the contraption. He fastens her very tight)

WARD

Here we go then.

(He puts his hand on the switch. Daughter Fire motions to stop him.)

I need to do this.

DAUGHTER FIRE

I never asked you for that.

WARD

I need to finish it. I need to finish it.

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Nodding)

...Alright.

WARD

(Daughter Fire loosens her grip. Ward tenses up and starts breathing heavily. This is the moment that he's been waiting for. Dreading and anticipating. This is the moment.)

Are you ready?

(Silence)

Daughter Fire?

(More silence)

Daughter Fire?!

DAUGHTER FIRE

(Very quiet. She seems perhaps more nervous than Ward)

Maybe you're right, though. Maybe I shouldn't...

(With that Ward presses the switch. Daughter Fire lets out a large moan of pain but quickly collects herself)

You fucker!

WARD

No way out for any of us.

DAUGHTER FIRE

You could have given me some warning!

WARD

Consider it petty vengeance for all the bitchslaps.

(Looking at the work as the machine starts to work)

The draining is about to start. That's your warning.

DAUGHTER FIRE

Just... Just talk to me.

WARD

Alright...

(He walks in front of Daughter Fire. He looks deeply into her eyes.)

Just breath in and out. Look at me. Just me. Visualize everything I'm saying and nothing else. Everything's all right.

(The draining begins. From here on out Daughter Fire grows paler and paler)

Once upon a time there was an old man who lived in the woods. Now this old man, he was a very skilled carpenter. Whatever part of his day wasn't spent working and foraging was spent on carving wooden sculptures. All the time he'd make them. So much that his house was filled to the brim with wooden birds, horses, dogs, cats, oxen, mules, sheep, goats, anything you could name he sculpted it. In order to feed his hobby he needed a lot of wood. Being in the forest he was never in a small supply so whenever he needed to he'd take his giant axe and cut down a

nearby tree. Then he'd chop that up into smaller pieces so it would be easier to carry to his home. He'd do that again and again whenever he ran out of wood to carve.

(He starts to pantomime a bit while talking)

So one day, after a long time at work, the old man returns home to see no wood there. Naturally he walks outside taking his axe with him. He spies a small tree in front of him. It was a tree he swore he had never seen before. About three feet tall but extremely thick. He readies his axe and brings it swinging down against the bark. He barley makes a notch in it. He swings it even harder this time. Only a little bigger notch is made. Not wanting strenuous work, he turns to leave when suddenly he hears a voice from inside the tree. The voice of a little boy. The voice cries out. "Help me! Please help me mister, I'm trapped in this tree!" Thinking he's a bit too old he shakes it off and keeps on walking. The voice shouts out again "Help me mister! I'm trapped and I can't move!!" At that, the old man came back to find out what the hell was going on. He approached the wood and asked who was there. "It's me" said the boy...

(Ward trails off)

Oh... The boy was put there by a witch... maybe it was an angel or demon or something. I should have started with that part. Anyway, a witch stuck him inside the toughest tree in all the land with only enough space to breathe. He also made it so that while he would always feel hunger and thirst, he could never die from it.

(Gaining his composure)

Anyway... The old man saw that the boy was a prisoner and promised to cut him out of the tree. So he began cutting. But soon he heard a voice from high above saying "Leave it be. You Are but a man and should not tamper with this". Although afraid of this heavenly warning, the Old Man continued cutting, being equal parts careful and strong in order to cut just the right place on the tree, so not to nick the boy. It took several hot days and cold nights as little by little the tree was whittled away the outline of a small boy. As he approached the finish line the old man started carving even faster and even a bit more recklessly. He freed the boy's face first, then his left and right arms, then the chest, soon after that one leg... then finally the last one. He cut as carefully as his now fragile mind would let him at the time. But the wood wouldn't budge. Desperate for the job to be done he raised his axe and hit it very very hard upon the wood... But the old man had cut too far. And his giant axe hand splintered through the dense wood and onto the vulnerable flesh of the little boy. And with such a forceful blow he completely severed the boys leg off. As the boy cried in so much pain, the detached leg lay on the ground with chunk of wood still wrapped around it. Blood flooded out of the boys wound as the old man raced to fire place to grab the hot metal heating up in there. He clenched the handled in his hand and did to the boy what he had seen done to countless others in the war he had tried so hard to forget about. Pressing the metal up tight to the wound, the boy cried even louder. Begging for it to stop. The old man cried tears of frustration and pity as he held the cauterizing metal up to the boy's wound. By the end of the night, the boy was still alive, but unconscious. The old man was in a state of depression. He had failed. All those years carving and he had failed the one thing

he was supposed to do. And then he heard from up above "If only you heeded my advice and did not tamper with fate you cannot control".

(Looks at Daughter Fire)

Stay with me because that is not the end of the story. It's not because the old man who cut around an indestructible tree would have been determined for this story not to end sad. He took up his axe again and looked at the remaining wood from the tree around him. He held his axe ready. He'd cleave the boy to the leg just as he cleaved them apart. And with that manifesto of determination he began whacking and carving all night, being careful with detail this time. He hit the wood so hard with his axe that his hands began to bleed, not that he noticed. He was cutting all night. Cutting and shaving and refining. Cutting, shaving, and refining....until it was morning and the boy had woken up, miraculously unaffected by the loss of blood and a leg. The boy stretched his arms for the first time in quite a while. He heard every joint crack with painful appreciation. He then remembered what had happened the night before and quickly threw off his covers....That's when he saw it. A perfectly realistic looking wooden leg. Shaped and cut in duplicate to its counterpart. Shell-shocked, the boy stood up and danced around proudly with it. Then he looked to his left to see the old man dead with an axe in his hand. Smiling. He walked over to the old man and kissed him gently on the forehead. He promised that he would send other men back to give him a proper burial that he deserved, with all his wooden sculptures as well. And with that. The boy walked off into the open world, not only free, but with a wooden leg taken from the toughest tree in all the world and carved by the greatest carpenter whose name would soon, thanks to the grateful boy, pass into legend.

(Daughter Fire looks blankly at Ward with the faintest traces of happiness on her face.

After a she gazes out lazily towards nothing)

I stayed up all night thinking of that. I hope you liked it. I hope it lets you know where to go after this. And what to keep on doing.

(No motion from Daughter Fire)

What do you see? Daughter Fire, what do you see?

DAUGHTER FIRE

(She turns her head, looking directly at Ward. After a moment she smiles brightly at him)

My work of art.

(The lights fade very very slowly to black)

THE END

ACADEMIC VITA

Max Simone

501 Vairo Boulevard The Pointe

Apartment #1424

State College, PA 16803

mes5514@psu.edu

Education

B.A., English and Film/Video, 2013, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA

Honors and Awards

- Member of Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi Honor Societies
- Recipient of The Excellence in Communication Certificate (ECC), which recognizes Liberal Arts students who demonstrate superior skill in various types of communication (oral, written, visual, and electronic)
- Writer of award-winning one act plays:
 - Paradise
 - 2003 Finalist for the Pittsburgh Young Playwrights Festival.
 - 2004 Ithaca Theatre Winter Festival Finalist
 - 2004 Alternate in Edward Albee's *Lost Horizons* Theatre Workshop
 - The Gateway
 - 2005 Finalist for the Pittsburgh Young Playwrights Festival.
 - 'Til Death Do us Part
 - 2010 Reading of Outlaws Theatre Workshop
 - Three Sentinels
 - 2012 Dramatic reading by Cultural Conversations 2012
- Winner of No Refund Theatre Performing Awards:
 - Best Actor, 2011 and 2012
 - Best Director, 2010
 - Best Supporting Actor, 2012
 - Best Set, 2011
 - Best Lighting, 2012
- Invited to apply to and accepted into The Penn State School of Theatre's 304 Sitcom writing room. There I wrote, edited, delegated, and script supervised two seasons of the Sitcom.

Professional Experience

- Invited to apply to and accepted into The Penn State School of Theatre's 304 Sitcom writing room. There I wrote, edited, delegated, and script supervised two seasons of the Sitcom.
- Worked as a freelance recorder and editor of Penn State University lectures, Theatrical performances, Online Lessons, and generally anything at all.
- Served as Producer/Editor for the Student film *Restart*, which was endowed with the Samuel Abram's Film grant.
- For No Refund Theater I have served as President, Vice President, and Technical Chair of the organization. These duties involve being a liaison to the University and other student organizations, coordinating auditions for every semester, fixing and maintaining theatre equipment, and above all finding new innovative ways to better the club

Research Interests

When it comes to writing, I am fixated on the legacy of an individual's life at end of their long journey. I enjoy investigating the thread of one man or woman's influence as it weaves through the lives of countless others. There's a universal joy in weaving such a tapestry of life and an equally universal tragedy in witnessing the destruction caused by unraveling it. Such a drama is endlessly epic but also intimately personal. One doesn't know how powerful a legacy is until it destroys almost everything it has touched.