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## Lifted

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Claire Carson  
Lifted  
Engaged Learning  
Mentor: Dr. Gretchen Smith  
Submitted April 15, 2014

LIFTED  
A play by Claire Carson

*For my Ethiopian family, Afomia and Stephen King*

CHARACTERS

MAMA: A big East African Woman. Knows everything.

SMALL GIRL: In a new place for the first time and having bad dreams.

GIRL IN A BOX: Kidnapped. Never knows whether or not she wants to be alive.

NIGHTMARE: The bad man. Charismatic.

Note:

Dialects, particularly in the case of the actress playing 'Mama,' are not necessary; the language of the play is that of dreams and poems and middle consciousness thinking, the kind of thinking every human does when questioning death and life and the world, a universal language; the connection that Mama and Small Girl share is uninterrupted by whatever dialectical differences could exist there.

*Darkness.*

*Many sounds can be heard. Two dogs barking. A donkey braying and a soundscape of foreign language. A small girl wakes up from a bad dream. She turns on a light switch somewhere.*

SMALL GIRL

I am not sure I've ever felt this small or this alone. It's sort of like I'm drowning and so yeah, that's scary, but there's also this amazing apathy that exists inside me too- when I left you, America, I left everything I ever knew that made me me. My mother who kissed freckles into my skin the day I was born and gave me my little temper, my various friend groups who change my humor and the ways I speak (I am made of them and they of me), my cell phone, internet, my language- the only one I have ever known. I feel like I'm losing the person I've always been a little bit, her judgments and habits (like ingrown hairs) are coming away and I am turning into a new version of myself.

*Mama enters, riding on an elephant. She is wearing shawls. She is regal.*

SMALL GIRL

Mama speaks every language and knows all your secrets. She'll wake you up before the alarm goes off and she'll never believe you've had enough to eat. She's got the Guinness book of world records largest heart and so, with all there is to spare, she cuts pieces of it off and puts them in a pan with olive oil and all these exotic spices and serves her fried heart with eggs for breakfast- gives it to the people that she loves. I love the way her heart tastes- like chicken, but sweeter, like your mother's best homemade dish.

MAMA

Come!

*Small girl goes to mama. Struggles to climb up on the elephant. Mama unfolds a ladder for her. She climbs up and crawls into mama's lap.*

MAMA

Are you cold?

*Small girl shakes her head. MAMA wraps her up in one of her shawls anyway.*

MAMA

Are you hungry?

*Small girl shakes her head.*

MAMA

You need to eat!

*She pulls a date out of her pocket and hands it to SMALL GIRL. SMALL GIRL takes it, smiles up at MAMA and eats it.*

MAMA

You want more?

*Small girl shakes her head.*

SMALL GIRL

No thank you, Mama.

*LIGHTS UP on on a pretty girl sitting in a metal box somewhere raised above the stage. The box and the girl are dirty and she looks like she hasn't been eating. As GIRL IN A BOX speaks, lights fade on SMALL GIRL and MAMA.*

GIRL IN A BOX

I've been in the box for a while now, maybe a week... there's no way to know for sure... and all I am is stuck on the feeling. *Pause.*

This is how it feels to want to kill yourself. It's annoying; it's sort of like when you can't fall asleep and that exhausted nausea makes its way from the middle of your belly to your throat to your temples and some feeling of inability buzzes around your head like a bee. Your whole existence is a bug bite and there is no way to relieve the itch or find the road to comfort and you just keep thinking about how stupid you are and all the stupid things you've done lately and what a gun would feel in your hand or against your temple, would it be heavy?... Would it be cold? It's getting a certain feeling in your gut when looking out windows in skyscrapers or driving over the bridge above the highway or waiting for the train. It's a lot like insomnia: life as a dazed effort to fall asleep. Every sound you hear is painful, especially the sound of a human voice, because there's always something in it that's missing from your own- some joy or confidence or understanding. You don't let the world know about the feeling because everything that comes out of you, your whole persona, is filtered through the idea that nobody understands or cares and your head is full up on thoughts like "gosh, but they're all so nice and social and in their bodies, something's just wrong with me and I shouldn't burden them with that." It's also not something to talk about because if you say something, someone might try to comfort you and that would be worse than anything. If you let one of your death thoughts slip out it comes out like a joke but it's as bitter as old church wine to a child's tongue and it's followed by a terrible silence and eyes to the ground and then someone says something about how they'd never kill themselves because they love their mother too much or have too much compassion. *Pause.*

Before you locked me up I had just finished reading a book in which 4 men travel across the desert to overtake evil. They journey by foot with little food or water and one of the good guys, says something like "you know what, since I've been without all those things I'm used to like cars and prepared meals and tv shows and sex I feel more clean inside than ever before, I got all this new clarity and I'm the best I've ever been." Or something like that and the other three good guys agree. I keep trying to will myself into thinking like that guy. Into thinking that the cold darkness and the hunger and the lack of human connection will turn some light on in my mind or in my soul and I'll be able to understand and accept it all- life and why I should be alive and even the fact that I'm kidnapped and living in a box. But the more I try to be like that the more my bad feelings bloat into something all-consuming- the more I want to rip your throat out. And my own. Both our throats. *Pause.* And I can hear you killing the chickens you feed me for dinner and ok, that's better than

factory farming, but I still don't like eating animals and I still wish I wasn't chained up and so thirsty. *Pause.* I've had the feeling inside me for years but it's worse than ever in a giant, absolute way that makes me think maybe I should have tried harder not to feel it so much before. Maybe instead of wondering if I'd ruin the 7:45 train operator's life by taking my own in the mornings when I worked downtown I could have thought about how it felt to have the sun on my face (my god if only I could see the sun again.) Could have remembered that I had a mom, like all those guys who wouldn't kill themselves because of theirs.

I miss music. I miss the way you can think about a song like sex waiting for the one moment when all the realizations it gives you orchestrate together and you feel something inside you lighten, you feel your stomach rise...

SMALL GIRL (in darkness)

To be fair new, sounds are also pretty special.

GIRL IN A BOX

Did somebody say something? Hello? HELLO?

*Lights up on SMALL GIRL and MAMA on opposite sides of the stage in separating lighting. The elephant is gone.*

SMALL GIRL

Do you know what a family is?

MAMA

Do you know what a family is?

SMALL GIRL

It's your mother and you father.

MAMA

It's the people you need to feed.

SMALL GIRL

Your little brother.

MAMA

Your distant cousin's friend.

SMALL GIRL

It's the people you've known all your life.

MAMA

It's someone you've just met that gives you an especially loving hug.

GIRL IN A BOX

HELLOOOO. Helloooo. Anyone?

*LIGHTS SHIFT, SMALL GIRL goes to MAMA*

SMALL GIRL

Do you hear something, Mama?

MAMA

No, my sweet.

GIRL IN A BOX

HELP ME. SOMEONE HELP ME.

SMALL GIRL

No, Mama. I'm sure I hear something. It sounds like someone shouting. A girl.

MAMA

No no no, it's just one of the feral cats. This place is full of sounds. Sounds your ears have never heard before. It's nothing to worry about. Bed time now. Come.

*LIGHTS UP on NIGHTMARE polishing his cowboy boots. He's smiling, but it's hollow, it's the kind of smile John Wayne Gacy smiled when boys got in his car. He shouts up to GIRL IN A BOX.*

NIGHTMARE

Can I get you anything?

GIRL IN A BOX

.....

NIGHTMARE

I'm not trying to trick you. I want you to be comfortable.

SMALL GIRL

Mama, I'm sure I hear something. A man and a woman.

MAMA

No, it's the sounds the ovens make, the rain on the gutters, your ears are deceiving you.

SMALL GIRL

No mama, I can hear these people in the walls and around outside my head. He sounds like he's got blood in his mouth and a grin on his face and she sounds like a ghost. It's making me anxious. It making me feel like I'm going crazy.

GIRL IN A BOX

Are you ever going to let me out of here?

NIGHTMARE

That depends. I'm not trying to hurt you, I'm not trying to scare you, I'm just trying to help you understand.



GIRL IN A BOX

Understand what?

NIGHTMARE (laughing)

If you give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day, but if you *teach* him to fish...

MAMA

Shhh, go to bed. Mama will handle it.

*MAMA gets down on her hands and knees and prays. She rocks back and forth. SMALL GIRL remains on stage and her presence hangs in the air like a lingering scent. MAMA opens her eyes, sees SMALL GIRL still standing there and ushers her away with her hand*

MAMA

Bed!

SMALL GIRL

But-

MAMA

BED!!

*SMALL GIRL groans and begins to exit.*

MAMA

Wait!

MAMA

*Mama ushers her back. She comes reluctantly. MAMA grabs SMALL GIRL and kisses her face many times. Then shoos her off and resumes praying. Small girl begins to exit, but before she gets all the way off she has to tell the audience about her love for mama.*

SMALL GIRL

I've only known Mama for two weeks, but she feels comfortable, like family. I don't usually like being touched, it illuminates some small, afraid part of me right in my middle that closes in on it's self, but when Mama hugs me it's like she's got sunshine in her, like she's heating my heart up with the radiation of her own. She tells me she loves me every day, she told me she loved me the first day she met me and I thought love was reserved for family. But she tells me she's my family too.

*SMALL GIRL exits. MAMA's praying gets more intense and NIGHTMARE looks up from polishing his boots. A moment of fear passes through his face. He overcomes it.*

NIGHTMARE

No food for you tonight.

GIRL IN A BOX

What? What did I do?

NIGHTMARE

“He gets most healed who waits the longest.”

GIRL IN A BOX

Huh?

NIGHTMARE

Clarity comes to the hungry.

GIRL IN A BOX

I have no idea what you’re talking about! This bullshit is not wisdom!

NIGHTMARE

NO FOOD FOR YOU TONIGHT!

*NIGHTMARE exits and re-enters, somewhere away from GIRL IN A BOX now, with a Barbie doll and a bottle of wine. He sets the doll in front of himself. He opens the bottle of wine, pours half its contents onto the doll and presses a thoughtful hand to her plastic, naked, body then chugs the rest of the bottle. Red rain falls over the spot where MAMA sits. She opens her eyes, shakes her head and prays harder than ever.*

MAMA

It will be okay. I’ve got god in me and on my side.

*LIGHTS OUT on NIGHTMARE. Spot on MAMA. The rain stops. Many sounds can be heard. Two dogs barking, a donkey braying and a soundscape of foreign language. SMALL GIRL runs onstage and to MAMA, disrupts her from her praying.*

SMALL GIRL

I had another nightmare! A bad one! And the sounds all around the bad man sounds the scared girl sounds are loud and getting louder and I can not sleep and I think I’m shrinking. It’s giving me heartburn chest pain and-

*LIGHTS UP on GIRL IN A BOX*

GIRL IN A BOX

I keep having this dream about a little girl. I can’t tell how old she is; sometimes she looks ten and sometimes she looks twenty... just one of those timelessly young looking girls because something inside her keeps her that way. She tells me things in my dreams, like to listen better and that it will all be alright and she always tells me to watch out for the bad man and I’m pretty sure she’s talking about you. There’s a woman with her.

*NIGHTMARE tenses up.*

She’s not from America and the little girl calls her Mama, but I don’t think this lady is actually this

little girl's mother because the little girl has skin like milk- so fair it's almost iridescent and Mama has darker skin that looks ancient and beautiful and every time I see her in my dreams I think of that line from Romeo and Juliet about a jewel in an Ethiop's ear.

NIGHTMARE

What you're saying isn't progress, you're regressing, you're not understanding, obviously my work here is going to take longer than expected.

GIRL IN A BOX

She scares you, doesn't she?

NIGHTMARE

What?

GIRL IN A BOX

Mama... When I mentioned her I heard this sharp intake of breath... you were scared.

*NIGHTMARE cut holes in her with his eyes, grins, laughs loudly until he is out of breath.*

NIGHTMARE

I don't experience fear. I am impervious to fear.

*Long Pause.*

You look beautiful today.

GIRL IN A BOX

What?

NIGHTMARE

You're glowing. The box is doing wonders for your complexion.

GIRL IN A BOX

I...That can't be true...

NIGHTMARE

Oh, but it is. You know. You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.

*Pause*

But, I'm getting sidetracked. It's time for your lesson.

GIRL IN A BOX

What?

NIGHTMARE

Time for school.

GIRL IN A BOX

....

NIGHTMARE

Today's subject is trauma. We've all experienced it. The bad things that have happened in our lives that shaped us... when someone died, when we were touched the wrong way, when we were beat on too hard. Something bad like that happens to everyone and it makes them who they are. The next step in this process... our process, your growth... is discussing our traumas.

*GIRL IN A BOX ignores him*

NIGHTMARE

Shall I start then?

*GIRL IN A BOX ignores him*

NIGHTMARE

Alright. My first trauma occurred when I was seven, when I lived in the desert with my parents and the heat and the two of them were alright with me. I had just been to the zoo with my father and we were eating ice cream, walking along the side of the highway and I can't remember why we didn't have the car that day, just that it was nice to kick the dirt up with my cowboy boots on the shoulder of the road and feel the wind the fast cars made on my face- and to feel my father's presence to the right of me. Larger. Protective. A car pulled off right, behind where we were walking and a man came up behind my father. He tapped him on the shoulder and asked if he had the time. When I looked at this guy I felt cold. I felt like I was going to get sick- he gave me the heebie jeebies. I tugged at my Dad's hand because I had a bad feeling like little kids get when they walk into a basement with no lights on. I wanted to scream to my Dad "let's go let's go let's go let's get outta here, the bad man's come to get us" but all I could do was tug at his hand. As dad looked down at his watch to check the time for this guy, the bad man put a gun to Dad's head and told him to give him his wallet, but Dad wouldn't because I think he was trying to be brave or something, trying to make some statement to me, like, "look son, don't let anybody push you around." But maybe he should have let that cold guy push him around a little bit because when he refused to give this guy his wallet the bad man shot him five times in the head and I watched as my father's face turned into spaghetti-o's. The bad man looked at me then. For a long time. He could see something in me. Some apathy, something other than just fear and he put a hand on my shoulder and said "it'll be okay kid. You'll get over it. And someday you'll understand." There was real sincerity in his voice. He knew I really would understand someday and the frankness with which he said it made this part of me- a teeny tiny part start to forgive him. And then he ran away, bolted off and I never saw him again. You'd be surprised how long all the cars kept passing with no notice of the dead guy or the little boy twiddling his thumbs on the side of the road. Maybe a half an hour went by before someone finally pulled over, screaming. By then Dad's brains had started to really smell- the kind of sweet and rotting smell that the kitchen gets when you forget to run the garbage disposal. My first trauma. The day I had the taste of my father's brains in my mouth because the smell was so strong after thirty minutes. The first day of the rest of my life.

GIRL IN A BOX

Why are you telling me this?

*NIGHTMARE starts to laugh.*

GIRL IN A BOX

UGH!

NIGHTMARE

It'll be okay kid. You'll get over it. And someday you'll understand.

*LIGHTS UP on SMALL GIRL and MAMA*

SMALL GIRL

You've dreamt about her too, haven't you? I know because every night you show up in the nightmares alongside me, holding my hand, making me stronger, less afraid and then when I wake up I hear the water in the sink in your bathroom running and know you're awake too. Always at the same times as me. Like we went on the same dream journey together and woke up together- not our bodies, but the rest of us, and you're in your room and I'm in mine, but we're together. And when I hear the strange things I hear- the sound of a woman's voice in the wind and the creaks in this house telling me that something is wrong, I'll peek into your bedroom and see you praying and you're praying for her, aren't you?

MAMA

I am a very old woman. I don't sleep much. My bladder is weak.

SMALL GIRL

Well what about the praying?

MAMA

I'm very spiritual, if you couldn't tell by now.

*Long pause*

SMALL GIRL

Alright... it's just, I've never before in my life had a recurring dream. But that's not what this is, really... it's a progression, it's a story and every night is a new terrifying chapter and this man's face... It's so... hollow. He always looks like he's about to burst into laughter, but that, if he does, a bunch of spiders will fall out from between his teeth. And then I tell you about the dreams and your brows furrow and you start to concentrate on something and I don't ever know what, which is frustrating, and then you pray or tell me to go to bed and that it will all be okay and not to be scared and that you will take care of it, but you never acknowledge them, you just push me away with this mysterious look in your eyes. It makes me feel like you don't trust me. Sometimes I can even hear them when I'm awake... like they're in some far away room or the back of my mind.

*BLACKOUT. The sound of a woman's little snoring. Lights up on GIRL IN A BOX in a field of grass talking to a cow.*

COW

I grew up knowing you'd eat me for dinner. And so every time a human walked by I'd get a shiver up my long spine because I just chill out eating grass and you guys trap us and kill us and eat and eat and eat us. Did you know the average American eats roughly 22 whole cows in their lives? I'm an African

cow, so it's different here, safer for us, but still empty. I knew my life span was limited, but instead of coming to terms with the fact, the longer my life let on the more I wanted to live it. The less I wanted to give up sun on my face and sweet grass breakfast lunch and dinners.

GIRL IN A BOX

I won't eat you for dinner! I don't eat meat. I have great sympathy for animals. I love animals! I don't eat them! I swoon over them! I watch all the PETA videos! I took my animals to the vet regularly! I love animals! I promise!

COW

But you drink my milk.

GIRL IN A BOX

I know, but that's only because I'm so busy and so poor, I don't have time or money to buy soy milk. It's not like they kill you for your milk.

COW

You don't have time to buy soy milk?

GIRL IN A BOX

No, you know what I mean- I don't have time to drive to the fancy grocery stores. To change out of my sweat pants and go to the fancy grocery stores. It's exhausting.

COW

You don't have to change out of your sweatpants to go to whole foods.

GIRL IN A BOX

Yes I do! If I go there looking the messy way I look all the rich people will judge me and then I'll just start thinking about killing myself.

COW

Oh come on. You don't want to kill yourself.

GIRL IN A BOX

Yes I do! More than ever! Since I've been living in the box, it's all I can think about.

COW

I don't believe that for a second.

GIRL IN A BOX

You don't know me. I have wanted to kill myself for a long time, maybe forever. *Pause.* Other people get better... but all my life I've been cut open from the inside, been hurt and hurt and hurt and the thing that makes me different is that I don't know how to heal. All this... blood- this soul blood inside me started to pool in my consciousness and bad things just kept happening and I just kept hurting and not being able to get better, to feel safe or healthy or okay. Ever. And then an idea grew- dangerous and fascinating and addicting and always there in the back of my mind and then suddenly it was just a fact of my life. I wanted to kill myself. Always wondering how many pills it would take and how I could get my hands on them or whether or not I'd be too squeamish to slit my own wrists. I

do want to kill myself! I do!

COW

If you really wanted to kill yourself, you'd be dead already. You want to live just as much as I do. You're just like a cow: your subconscious is bathing in desire for more sunshine. In thoughts of summer and all the changing of the seasons and sex and maybe one day finding love and someday, when you get out of here, becoming someone who cleans and imagining how you might rearrange your house and starting to have regular phone conversations with your mom or maybe even taking a cooking class. In fact, you want to keep on living more than you ever have in your life.

GIRL IN A BOX

...I'm only thinking about all that stuff right now because I'm in the box. Because anything sounds better than all this darkness and fear. But I know that when I get out I'll try to do all that stuff and be that new person and I'll just fail like I always do at everything and I'll be stuck like a broken record on all the stuff that happened here and I'll be permanently living in fear. I've seen the dateline specials about girls who get kidnapped! They never get over it! I've seen the lifetime original movies! I'll be the most mad at myself I've ever been and I'll end up doing it for real.

COW

This is the way he wants you to think, you know.

GIRL IN A BOX

What? He wants me to want to die? No. He wants me to want to struggle. To give him a game to play, something to fight for and against.

COW

No... He wants you to see life the way that he sees it. As dispensable.

GIRL IN A BOX

You mean with all that "if you teach a man to fish" stuff?

COW

He sees how little you care and have cared about living and how with a gentle push you could be brought over the edge to an existence blank as a white piece of paper. But what if you really chose to be that new girl who drinks soy milk and doesn't ignore the positive force voices inside your head? You get sick when you eat chicken eggs, but don't have enough faith in yourself to give them up entirely. It's why he picked you- because you had so much of it inside yourself already, but then you got here and the opposite started happening. You starting finding meaning in things, missing your mom and music and started coming to an understanding and appreciation of life without even knowing that was what was happening. You were headed in a good direction. But then he got to you.

GIRL IN A BOX

With that stupid story about his father.

*COW turns into SMALL GIRL*

SMALL GIRL

Forget that story! He'll tell you more, but don't listen. Listen to what's happening above you- listen for the sound of morning birds and crickets. The crickets will tell you it's night time and the morning birds will tell you it's a new day. Start keeping track of how long you've been in the box from here on out. It's important not to give up on time. Listen more for morning and night BUT DO NOT LISTEN WHEN HE TELLS YOU HIS STORIES.

*MAMA enters and walks up to SMALL GIRL and grabs her hand*

MAMA

Fear no evil.

*GIRL IN A BOX wakes up. MAMA and SMALL GIRL disappear. GIRL IN A BOX Shivers. Lights up on NIGHTMARE opening up a closet full of denim shirts. He fingers through them, clearly looking for one in particular. He finds it, makes a sigh of contentment and pulls it out. Looks at it slowly, examining it fully. Smells it. It's a little boy's shirt and there's something red on it- little red spots. Climbs a ladder to GIRL IN A BOX*

NIGHTMARE

I brought you something special.

GIRL IN A BOX

Food?

NIGHTMARE

No. Something better than food.

GIRL IN A BOX

Water?

NIGHTMARE

Better than that.

GIRL IN A BOX

My mother?! You brought my mother to see me?

*NIGHTMARE looks at her with disgust burning like sun rays out of his eyes.*

NIGHTMARE

Better.

GIRL IN A BOX

I give up.

NIGHTMARE

Good, because you'd never guess.

*NIGHTMARE hands her the shirt.*



NIGHTMARE

For you, my princess.

*GIRL IN A BOX turns it over in her hands.*

GIRL IN A BOX

What is it?

NIGHTMARE

Something special from my past.

GIRL IN A BOX

Ew... was this...?! Ew!

*NIGHTMARE grins*

GIRL IN A BOX

Listen... I'm sorry your dad died... I really am, but-

NIGHTMARE

Is that why you thought I told you that story? To make you feel sorry for me?

GIRL IN A BOX

....

NIGHTMARE

That day... the day of my father's blood splattered shirt was the first time I got close to touching on the right idea of death... to what it really means. For an instant, when that guy who killed my Dad put his hand on my shoulder, I *got* it. Pause. Of course it went away when I fell into the stupid fucking mourning trap that everyone around me was pushing me towards.

GIRL IN A BOX

You weren't sad when your own father died?

NIGHTMARE

I was a little boy, of course I was sad, but I didn't have to be. I wasted years on grieving when moving one was easy and attainable.

GIRL IN A BOX

Moving on is not that easy.

NIGHTMARE

Why not?

GIRL IN A BOX

It's just... change is.... it's complicated! It involves processing feelings. Like when I was a child, my cat died... got eaten by a fox and I cried every night for a whole three months.

Why did you cry?  
NIGHTMARE

Because I missed my cat...  
GIRL IN A BOX

Isn't that selfish?  
NIGHTMARE

No, I wished he was still alive.  
GIRL IN A BOX

Selfishly?  
NIGHTMARE

No... he was young, it wasn't fair to him that other cats got to live long lives and he died so young, that's not fair.  
GIRL IN A BOX

Why was he worse off dead?  
NIGHTMARE

What?  
GIRL IN A BOX

Why would your cat have been better off alive?  
NIGHTMARE

Because he would have been with me! Because we would have had each other! *Pause*. His life was too short. He missed out.  
GIRL IN A BOX

On what?  
NIGHTMARE

Life!  
GIRL IN A BOX

Come on... life isn't really much to miss out on, is it?  
NIGHTMARE

Life is everything. It's all we have.  
GIRL IN A BOX

You don't have to pretend like you believe that. Not in front of me.  
NIGHTMARE

GIRL IN A BOX

It is what I believe!

NIGHTMARE

Really? Then why do you want to kill yourself?

GIRL IN A BOX

I'm not suicidal anymore. I want to live. I had a dream about it. I came to terms with things... I want to live now. I know that.

NIGHTMARE

It's okay. You don't have to hide around me. I understand. I feel the same way about life that you do. That's why I brought you here.

GIRL IN A BOX

You mean why you *kidnapped* me?

NIGHTMARE

Why I saved you.

GIRL IN A BOX

From what? What did you save me from? Life? Nope, still here, still kicking, still miserable and worse than ever because I LIVE IN A BOX NOW and I barely eat and I miss everything I miss sunshine and my family and everything- food, music, sex, sun, rain, showers, I MISS EVERYTHING.

NIGHTMARE

Do you want a shower? I'll let you shower... you just never asked.

GIRL IN A BOX

That's not the point.

NIGHTMARE

What is?

GIRL IN A BOX

That I miss living.

NIGHTMARE

But you're alive right now.

GIRL IN A BOX

No, you know what I mean... doing things.... existing out in the world, making choices and encountering things kind of living.

NIGHTMARE

Really?

GIRL IN A BOX

Yes.

Really? NIGHTMARE

Yes! GIRL IN A BOX

Why? NIGHTMARE

Because it's better than this! GIRL IN A BOX

NIGHTMARE  
But before I put you in the box, you thought death was better than that. Before, *that* made you sick... made you miserable...made you want to slit your wrists.... Right?

Yeah, but back then I didn't really get it. GIRL IN A BOX

What didn't you get? NIGHTMARE

LIFE! I DIDN'T GET LIFE. GIRL IN A BOX

What didn't you get? NIGHTMARE

Fuck off, I don't want to kill myself anymore. GIRL IN A BOX

So I saved you? NIGHTMARE

No you kidnapped me. GIRL IN A BOX

And brought meaning to your life. NIGHTMARE

No! I just...the *circumstances* made me think about some stuff I'd never thought about before. GIRL IN A BOX

I created the circumstances. NIGHTMARE

GIRL IN A BOX

Stop.

NIGHTMARE

I'm just trying to get you to understand-

GIRL IN A BOX

WHAT? UNDERSTAND WH-

NIGHTMARE

YOU'RE NOT LISTENING.

*GIRL IN A BOX cowers a little*

NIGHTMARE

What is life?

GIRL IN A BOX

What?

NIGHTMARE

What is life?

GIRL IN A BOX

I don't! I... ugh.

*Pause.*

It's morning and day time and night... it's just *living*.

NIGHTMARE

What is living?

GIRL IN A BOX

When souls spend time in bodies.

NIGHTMARE

Elaborate.

GIRL IN A BOX

I don't know what you want me to say!

NIGHTMARE

I just want your take on it.

GIRL IN A BOX

Life is just life, that's my take on it!

NIGHTMARE

So why is it so important that we stay alive?

GIRL IN A BOX

Because we only have one chance at it! We only live once!

NIGHTMARE

And you know this for sure?

GIRL IN A BOX

No, but... But if we don't exist with that kind of thinking then we just waste our lives... they just slip away and they're meaningless and sad.

NIGHTMARE

Like yours is?

GIRL IN A BOX

I'm going to sleep.

*GIRL IN A BOX lays down and pretends to fall asleep.*

NIGHTMARE

Meaningless like yours?

*She ignores him*

NIGHTMARE

Like yours?

*She sits up angrily.*

GIRL IN A BOX

FUCK OFF.

*Lights up on MAMA and SMALL GIRL asleep in separate beds, across the stage from each other. Sounds of two dogs barking, a donkey braying and a soundscape of foreign language. SMALL GIRL wakes up from a bad dream.*

SMALL GIRL

I left America to find myself. I felt lost and little and so I cannonballed over here to see if I could connect the messy puzzle pieces of my inside mind together and maybe grow up a bit. I didn't have much of a plan, just show up and find something to do, someone to help or new food to eat. I got to the airport and realized that I had nothing to do and nowhere to go and Mama walked up to me and looked at me like she could see far beyond my eyeballs and face to the fear inside, told me she'd take care of me while I was here and made me believe that it would all be alright. When I come to her about the dreams, she doesn't laugh at me or tell me to grow up, she listens, but she never confirms or denies that she's having them too. They're getting clearer. The girl in the box looks skinnier and I'm more and more certain everyday that these dreams and sounds and when my mind drifts away to her face in the middle of the day are like...premonitions or something. Like they are telecasts of what is actually happening and sometimes the voice in the back of my conscience whispers "save her, save the girl in the box"... but she's far away in America, I can tell because of the

bad man's cowboy boots and his belt strap and his red back pocket bandana and the way the dreams smell. And if we do have to save her, how will we?

*She walks to MAMA's bed. She sits at the end of it.*

SMALL GIRL

I feel like shit, Mama.

*MAMA wakes up*

MAMA

What?

SMALL GIRL

I don't feel well. I've lost all motivation. I'm sick of dealing with poor people and I think I have an ulcer.

MAMA

Take some deep breaths.

SMALL GIRL

Ugh.

MAMA

Tell me what's the matter.

SMALL GIRL

I just told you!

MAMA

Bad dreams still bothering you?

SMALL GIRL

Everything is bothering me.

MAMA

Want to talk about it?

SMALL GIRL

Not really.

MAMA

Okay, go back to bed then.

SMALL GIRL

Mama!

MAMA

What?

SMALL GIRL

I'm lonely...

*Pause*

MAMA

Come here.

*SMALL GIRL crawls in bed with MAMA.*

SMALL GIRL

I'm lonely and tired of waking up in cold sweats and I'm tired of the fear. I feel alone in this.

MAMA

I'm right here with you.

*LIGHTS UP on NIGHTMARE and GIRL IN A BOX*

NIGHTMARE

What's the point?

GIRL IN A BOX

To...be good.

NIGHTMARE

Be good? What does that even mean?

GIRL IN A BOX

It's important to be good to the world and to people.

NIGHTMARE

To who?

GIRL IN A BOX

Ourselves and others!

NIGHTMARE

Why others?

GIRL IN A BOX

Stop interrogating me, I don't want to talk to you anymore.

NIGHTMARE

But you have to talk to me.

*GIRL IN A BOX ignores him.*



NIGHTMARE

You have to.

*GIRL IN A BOX ignores him.*

NIGHTMARE

You have to.

*GIRL IN A BOX ignores him.*

NIGHTMARE

Because I have the power here. *Pause.*

You will do what I want you to do because that is the power dynamic established here... you'll talk if I want you to and you'll eat animals if I want you to and you'll die if I want you to.

*Pause. Smiles.*

But I don't. Because we're friends right? Because I like you... Hell, I love you, if we're being honest. So none of that will be necessary... if you just talk to me. I just want to understand you. Want to get to know you and want you to get to know me, because I think we can help each other... teach each other. I think we can be a team. Can we try that? Just for a little?

MAMA

I'll tell you a secret.

SMALL GIRL

Okay, mama

MAMA

But only if you promise to breathe deep again. Alright?

SMALL GIRL

Okay, mama.

MAMA

No more letting all that anger build up in your tummy like indigestion.

SMALL GIRL

Okay, mama!

MAMA

Okay. The bad man lives in the land of distraction technology and blood money, the land of big signs and neon blinders. The clarity of the rising sun extends to us quicker and we're blessed with a special magic and those of us who work at it can see so clear our seeing hits the future, hit's the world's trouble spots.

SMALL GIRL

You've got that special seeing?

MAMA

And so do you.

SMALL GIRL

But I'm from America.

MAMA

But you have something huge in you... a love and an empathy and a bravery that makes you listen extra well. You came here and instead of ignoring the dreams because you were afraid or pretending like you weren't hearing the things you were hearing and feeling the things you were feelings, you honored the voice in your heart. You came here and clarity hit you.

SMALL GIRL

You think she's real?! I knew you did!

MAMA

I don't know any better than you, but I don't see why God would give us these dreams without reason. So I'm choosing to believe. Like you.

SMALL GIRL

Why didn't you want to tell me before? That you believed? I knew you did, knew in that way parents know their kids are lying, even if they're doing a good job of it.

MAMA

I'm your Mama while you're here... Just trying to put the weight of your world on my shoulders.

*Pause.*

SMALL GIRL

Has this kind of thing happened to you before?

MAMA

I've had dreams that turned into some sort of truth before. I've had nights when I woke up like lightning with a feeling in my stomach that some heavy change just struck someone I loved only to find out the next morning that a family member was sick or dying... but it's never been this clear. You know how radio's work? And about frequencies and all that? You and I are on the same frequency, I think. Inexplicable. Can only be explained by all that good energy that can flow between two people.

SMALL GIRL

Is that why you saved me from the airport? Because you knew we had the same kind of magic inside us?

*MAMA laughs.*

MAMA

No. I took you home because I had never seen someone look so lost or scared. I'm a mother. It's what I've always been, even since before I bore children, I took care- took care of my siblings, of the poor, of strangers for as long as I can remember. And I saw you and knew you needed to be taken care of. Needed to be fed and hugged- needed a family. So you became my daughter.

*They smile at each other. They sit in silence for a moment, digesting all that was just put into the room.*

SMALL GIRL

Home feels like a lifetime ago.

MAMA

What?

SMALL GIRL

Just...I know it sounds strange because I haven't been here for very long, but the harder I try to adapt to these surroundings and understand the nightmares; the more I lose the old me. I feel so wonderfully...brightly, terrifyingly new. Sort of grown. Some of the smaller parts of me are being stretched, being forced to be something better, forced to be more accepting. It's a lot of pressure to feel like you have someone's safety in your hands, but also that, in the end, total control is not yours, not even close to yours.

MAMA

Imagine what it's like to be a mother.

*Pause*

SMALL GIRL

You're always talking about God. And that confuses me... people talk about knowing God and I try to know God, I've tried my whole life, but when I look up for comfort or understanding, all I see is clouds, not some man in the sky sitting in heaven there to help me.

MAMA

That God is not my God.

SMALL GIRL

What do you mean?

MAMA

My God is the invisible force that pulls two lost souls together, my God is the gift of the rising sun, my God is positive forces and praying because you believe there's something inside yourself or outside yourself that can make miracles and my god is everything on this earth we can't understand. A higher power, but something we all can attain. My god is love, a child being born, a special foresight, a smiling stranger, my God is the presence of these dreams.

SMALL GIRL

Wow.

MAMA

What is it?

SMALL GIRL

Just a lot of new things to think about. A lot to digest.

*Pause.*

So what do we do about the dark man and the girl in the box?

MAMA

Wait and see. We keep living our lives and eating our breakfasts and counting our blessings and falling asleep at night and dreaming and paying attention to our dreams. I think, for now, it's all we can do.

SMALL GIRL

Okay, so hypothetically speaking, we figure out where she is and then we just... go there? Do we make a plan? Do we call the police? What do we do?

MAMA

I think we'll know what to do. We have to trust that our hearts and our good instincts will show us the way.

SMALL GIRL

Well what if we do have to get to America? If we decide that's the only way.

MAMA

We get there. We fly, I guess.

SMALL GIRL

But mama, you can't afford those plane tickets and neither can I.

MAMA

We'll have to depend on the kindness of strangers then. We'll have to get some help. This is a very generous country. We'll just have to pray as hard as we can and love even harder. Give as much as we can and hope with all our bellies.

SMALL GIRL

You mean begging?

MAMA

No, I don't mean begging. We may have to stand on street corners with open palms, but as long as we're grateful and as long as we're loving, we'll never have to beg.

*LIGHTS DOWN on SMALL GIRL and MAMA and up on NIGHTMARE and GIRL IN A BOX.*

NIGHTMARE

So, why others? What do you mean?

GIRL IN A BOX

I mean that if you live selfishly karma will come to get you.

NIGHTMARE

STOP RETORTING BACK TO ME THE THINGS YOU'VE BEEN TOLD ALL YOUR LIFE ABOUT GOOD AND BAD. These are thoughts other people have put into your head... thoughts you've been socialized to think... have you ever thought about what *you* believe? What, inside yourself, you know to be true?

GIRL IN A BOX

I DON'T KNOW WHAT I BELIEVE! Okay? I feel dead inside, I feel thoughtless and I don't have a theory about who we should live for and why we should be alive because my mind is this messy vacant hotel room and I feel like shit all the time and I do want to kill myself! I want to die! You're right! You found me out! You win.

NIGHTMARE

Thank you for your honesty. And, if I'm correct, you want to die, because you, like a younger version of myself, can't find meaning or purpose in life.

GIRL IN A BOX

I guess.

NIGHTMARE

Do you think it could be because you're living for others and not yourself?

GIRL IN A BOX

No...

NIGHTMARE

You mean that big smile that you plaster onto your face every morning is for yourself and not for the rest of the world?

GIRL IN A BOX

I...

NIGHTMARE

All that decorum is something you do for yourself? Straightening your hair? Wearing all that makeup and those expensive clothes? Smiling when you buy your groceries even if you woke up crying? Saying thank you to the ass hole cashier? Answering "fine" when someone asks you how your day was? These are thing you do for yourself? For your own fulfillment?

GIRL IN A BOX

I... yes, it's for others, but making other people happy makes me happy...

NIGHTMARE

My god, you really have been brainwashed, haven't you? You don't have to say what the rest of the world wants and has taught you to say. Not to me. Alright? *Pause*. Since you're trying to be honest with me, I'm going to be honest with you. I kill people. I'm a murderer.

*Pause*

NIGHTMARE

So what?

GIRL IN A BOX

You're taking lives! Your hurting people! Ruining families!

NIGHTMARE

I'm just existing for myself and not for others... just doing what makes me happy, which is the most natural and pure thing one can do in this life... we all live in pursuit of happiness, for some, happiness comes in the form of a hug or a kiss, I just happen to feel a rush of endorphins when I hold a neck between my two hands and break it... when I feel a soul leave a body, the ultimate release. Physical touch means many things to many people... people fuck and that brings the great joyful release of a good orgasm... people hug and that provides warmth and comfort and to take a life... to free someone from this burden, is the ultimate the most intense connection two souls and bodies can share. I bring joy to my own previously meaningless life. I set souls free. Have you ever read any Zen philosophy?

GIRL IN A BOX

...No.

NIGHTMARE

Basically, zen thinking states there is no right and no wrong that things just are... that we should take everything at face value and try to pass as little judgment about it as possible. Because things just happen. Sometimes it rains, sometimes it's sunny, animals kill each other to eat, people get hit by cars, people have babies, people get cancer, planes crash, people fall in love... things just happen in this life.

NIGHTMARE

You want to know why I brought you here? *Pause*. I saw you kill the yellow bird.

GIRL IN A BOX

What?

NIGHTMARE

It was an early morning... it was a Wednesday and I was waiting for the 7:45 am train. I had been watching you for weeks. Every weekday morning I'd stare at you from a distance and you never noticed me. You were so captivating. I liked the way you slouched. The way you stared at things, like everything in front of you was empty, like you wanted it all to go to hell. I liked the way you looked like someone who'd been rained on. I liked the way you dressed for gloomy weather even when the sun was shining. I hated to watch you change... watch the process of you getting on the train. You having to acknowledge and interact with other people. The fake smile that spread across your face. The way you'd let someone else take the seat and you'd stand, holding the hand rail. I started

wanting to save you from that. Wanting to enable you... liberate you. And then that wednesday I knew... I was watching you from my usual hidden spot behind the stairs. You thought the coast was clear. I watched you stare at something like you were trying to burn holes in it with your eyes and then I watched you lean down to pick it up... so I snuck up closer. I saw you had a bird in your hands, a small yellow bird. I watched you stare at it for a while... and I watched you snap it's neck. That's when I knew we were the same.

GIRL IN A BOX

That bird was dying already. It had flown into the train window. It was going to die anyway, I just put it out of it's misery.

NIGHTMARE

And that's not the same as what I do? I just put people out of their misery... not birds.

*LIGHTS OUT on NIGHTMARE and GIRL IN A BOX and UP on MAMA and SMALL GIRL on opposite sides of the stage in separating lighting*

MAMA

Do you know what it is to love?

SMALL GIRL

Do you know what it is to love?

MAMA

It's keeping a watchful eye out for those who struggle all around you.

SMALL GIRL

It's finding someone and giving your heart to them.

MAMA

Its making someone dinner.

SMALL GIRL

Its kissing and hugging.

MAMA

It's the feeling that swells in your heart when someone treats you with great kindness.

SMALL GIRL

It's the way you feel about your family.

*LIGHTS DOWN on MAMA and SMALL GIRL and up on GIRL IN A BOX alone in the box in the middle of the night*

GIRL IN A BOX

I love animals because they don't have the capacity for evil that humans do. I love animals because they are innocent. I love animals because they just do what comes naturally to them. I love animals because they are beautiful and because I don't understand them. I love animals because of the

animal sounds they make- because they're primal, I love animals, which is why I don't eat them.

COW VO

But you drink my milk.

GIRL IN A BOX

I know and I'm sorry about that and if I get out of here I promise I'll only drink soy milk and rice milk and almond milk from now on.

YELLOW BIRD VO

But you snapped my neck.

GIRL IN A BOX

You were dying already! I was trying to save you! I didn't want you to be in pain! You weren't going to get better!

YELLOW BIRD VO

You don't know that.

*LIGHTS DOWN on GIRL IN A BOX and up on SMALL GIRL AND MAMA in MAMA'S bed, once more.*

SMALL GIRL

What can we do while we wait for understanding?

MAMA

We can pray.

SMALL GIRL

I...I guess this is silly but... I don't know how to.

MAMA

Well. You clear your mind and fill your belly up with the feeling of possibility. Try to make yourself impartial enough about something so that you can twist its fate anyway you like, imagine the outcome you desire and paint it like a picture in your head and know with every certainty inside yourself that fate will hear your prayers. It's how you get God inside you and sometimes, if you think this way and if you're practiced at it, your prayers come true.

SMALL GIRL

Like the secret?

*MAMA laughs*

MAMA

No. That is a dangerous kind of thinking because it's selfish, because you're spending all your time trying to will yourself into knowing that you'll soon become wealthy or you'll get the job you want or the boyfriend you want. Prayer is not some trick into acquiring the perfect life and it's not just positive energy, it's sacrifice and love and giving.



SMALL GIRL  
So we pray for other people?

MAMA  
We pray for other people.

SMALL GIRL  
For the girl in the box?

MAMA  
Yes. We focus as hard as we can on various ways the bad man could mess up... could forget himself.

SMALL GIRL  
Like what?

*LIGHTS UP on NIGHTMARE bringing GIRL IN A BOX water. She's sleeping. He quietly opens the box and sets a bottle of water next to her sleeping figure. He leans over and kisses her forehead. She stirs, but doesn't wake up. She rolls over. He quietly picks her empty dinner tray up from inside the box, closes and locks the box and sets the keys down next to where he's sitting and places the tray in his lap. He just sits and watches her for a few moments, in some sort of lover's trance. Shakes his head, gets up and exits.*

*Lights stay up on GIRL IN A BOX, asleep in the box and come up, also, on SMALL GIRL sleeping in her bed. Another dream: GIRL IN A BOX sits across from SMALL GIRL in a corn field.*

SMALL GIRL  
You said you wouldn't listen to him, but you are.

GIRL IN A BOX  
I know and I'm sorry, but he's like an infection, like I try to ignore him but he gets me arguing with him and infects my mind with his own bad thoughts and I'm trying to be strong, but sometimes he says things that almost make sense to me and it's terrifying, because it makes me feel like I'm just as evil as he is.

SMALL GIRL  
We're trying to come to you, but we don't have enough to go on right now... we need to know where you are... do you have any idea? What does it sound like up there?

GIRL IN A BOX  
I hear lots of animals and I can hear him killing them sometimes... maybe a farm? Maybe I'm on a farm? It smells like something musty... like cedar... maybe like hay... definitely like animal shit.

SMALL GIRL  
Okay, we can work with that.

GIRL IN A BOX

And I'm from Oklahoma. He kidnapped me in Oklahoma and I know I was knocked out for part of the drive to the box, but I'm not sure how long. We drove for about an hour after I woke up.

SMALL GIRL

And you couldn't see anything when you got there? When he brought you to the box?

GIRL IN A BOX

No, he knocked me out again before we got out of the car.

SMALL GIRL

Okay. Be careful, alright? Don't do anything stupid and don't listen to him... don't play his games. We're coming for you. Have you been keeping track of how long you've been in the box?

GIRL IN A BOX

It's been 5 days since you told me to listen better.

SMALL GIRL

Good job.

GIRL IN A BOX

I want you to know something. The yellow bird...I really did kill it because it was suffering... I just wanted it to be free.

*The dream ends. In the early hours of the morning SMALL GIRL and GIRL IN A BOX wake up. SMALL GIRL lays sleepless in her bed, trying to pray. She gets up and kneels down.*

SMALL GIRL

I need to know what to do now...I can't sleep and I don't feel you inside me, God. I'm listening as best as I can, listening for the still, small voice in my heart, but all I hear is the wind and the sound of the veins in my neck circulating too fast blood... the sound of my own fear.

*SMALL GIRL puts her hands over her eyes, leans forward and prays harder. She falls asleep again. Another dream: she is now in a field of grass outside an old barn. NIGHTMARE appears behind her.*

NIGHTMARE

Hello.

*SMALL GIRL jumps*

NIGHTMARE

If you try to mess this up, I'll come for you, little girl. I'll run you and your "Mama" like dogs run deer. I am all the things you dream about and more. I *am* the bad man and and Your God has no power over me.

SMALL GIRL

No! Not true! Our strength is the strength of ten!

*NIGHTMARE grins and draws closer to her and SMALL GIRL shrinks back from him. MAMA enters behind SMALL GIRL. She shakes her finger at NIGHTMARE and he recoils in fear. He shrinks away from her. The projection ends. Lights down on SMALL GIRL. Lights up on GIRL IN A BOX. GIRL IN A BOX wakes up. She notices a small set of keys just outside the bars of the box. Could they have been there the whole time and she just didn't notice? She reaches for the keys and can't quite get to them. She rips off the hem of her dress and uses it as a rope, fishing the keys out. She succeeds. She holds the keys in her hands, afraid of them at first. The sound of their jingling worries her. Makes her scared that NIGHTMARE will wake up. She sits in silence for a moment and then begins hurriedly trying the various keys in the lock of the chain around her ankle. She finally finds the right one and, with shaking hands, frees herself from the chains. She reaches around the metal bars of the box, tries various keys and unlocks the box. When she makes it out, she runs for her life. BLACKOUT. Lights up on GIRL IN A BOX standing in the middle of NIGHTMARE'S farm in Texas. She is sitting on her knees with her mouth slack jawed as she looks into a barn filled with three cows. She watches the cows carefully and falls in love with each of them as they do sweet things like nuzzle each other and slowly blink their big eyeballs and stare at her and fall asleep. She thinks about every time she ate beef. Any time she ate flesh. Realizes that, if she were still in the box, she probably would have eaten one of these cows for dinner. She shakes her head. Suddenly, as if waking up from hypnotism or a trance, she realizes she needs to be running away and she gets up and begins to bolt off. She runs off stage. BLACKOUT. LIGHTS UP ON NIGHTMARE sleeping restlessly in bed.*

MAMA VO

We're winning.

*NIGHTMARE sits up, suddenly wide awake. Wipes some sweat off his forehead. Runs out of bed, climbs the ladder to girl in a box and sees, horrified, that she is not there. He checks his pockets for the keys and realizes they are gone.*

NIGHTMARE  
SHIT.

*NIGHTMARE runs offstage.*

*LIGHTS up on SMALL GIRL running to MAMA, where she is sleeping in bed. Shakes her awake.*

SMALL GIRL

I think something happened, Mama, something good. I had a really scary dream and the bad man told me he'd get us, that he'd take us down with the girl in the box, but then something made him scared and he ran away and I woke up and something came over me and I felt better so I prayed, like you said, I prayed that he'd mess up, I emptied my head and thought of what it would look like if she escaped, what the look on her face would be like and I saw it as clear as I could and then, I saw these keys I kept seeing these keys and imagining them falling out of dark man's pockets or her stealing them from him when he fed her dinner and I concentrated on knowing with my everything in me that

he'd mess up and thought about how he'd react if he did and forced myself into seeing the future and then I woke up and I guess it's just a hunch, but I feel like she made it. I feel like she escaped.

MAMA

Alright, calm down.

SMALL GIRL

Let's go and see! Let's go see if she did!

MAMA

Okay, okay.

SMALL GIRL

Let's make the money! Let's get the help we need!

MAMA

Let me get my thoughts together!

SMALL GIRL

I think, regardless, it's time for me to go back! Before I left America I didn't have any idea about how vast and beautiful the world is and how much pain exists and how much love and I thought that a family was just your mom and your dad and I thought that to love was to lose your virginity or find a prom date, but to love is to hope for the best for someone, to care about others and yourself and this country and you showed me that. I'm so glad I woke up and ran away from home because the culture shock was so special that it made me psychic... and there were bad days, of course, but that pain is a part of it all. I just want to get to her and look into her eyes and tell her that when you want to shoot yourself it's better to just go inside yourself and give yourself a hug, take care of all the sore spots inside yourself because sometimes no one else will do it for you, but it's important that it gets done... that we take care of ourselves. It's important that we love ourselves. Right?

*MAMA smiles at SMALL GIRL.*

*Blackout. The sounds of something sizzling in a frying pan. The sound of a hug goodbye. The sound of feet running through grass. The sound of a plane taking flight.*

*LIGHTS UP on SMALL GIRL back in America.*

SMALL GIRL

Mama opened up a café out of her living room and sold her heart breakfast for money and the way she loves is so delicious that it didn't take very long at all to make enough money for a plane ticket. We decided that we only needed one ticket, that she didn't have to come with me, that our connection was so strong that the invisible string that tied our souls together back when we first met would stretch all the way from her to me no matter how many countries or oceans separated us. And so I said goodbye to Mama and only cried a little and when I got home I went looking for her. I stopped for lunch at a whole foods and sat down to eat and saw this person, this small frame, this woman. It was her. She was pale and thin and different and the same as I imagined all at once and she was sitting across from someone, a woman who looked about 50, short and round and smiling- her mother, I think. She didn't look like someone who'd been kidnapped, but like someone who'd just woken up from a bad dream and only felt glad to be awake and somewhere other than the nightmare. I hadn't dreamt about her since the dream about the keys so I wasn't sure what had happened. As she

got up to throw away her trash she saw me and we touched eyes and I watched her experience the same moment of fear that I did when I first saw her in real life, the same astonishment. She almost smiled, almost cried and so did I. We sort of nodded at each other and then looked away and for the rest of our close proximity time she kept to her mom and her coffee and I kept to my sandwich and I never saw her again and understood that everything had been settled and that it was all inexplicable, like life. The feeling of needing to fix something washed away all at once and the only thing I could think to do was go home. So I drove the three hours back and had dinner with my parents and my little brother and felt safe and thankful for them in a more profound way than I ever have before. That night I saw on TV that a farm in Texas had been burned down and that the owner died, with all his animals, in the fire. They showed a picture of the owner on the news and the man I saw on the TV was the same one I saw so many times in my dreams. I wondered if she killed him. If she burned the farm down after she escaped and I wondered about death and whether or not it's okay to take a life if it makes the world a better place, if it's okay to kill a bad guy... and I don't think I'll ever understand death or evil or good, so I'll just have to settle on believing what my conscience tells me, what it guides me towards from moment to moment. It's strange- before, I felt so certain I had to save her, that I was dreaming about the girl in the box because of something I had to fix on her behalf, but with the way everything worked out I'm beginning to understand that maybe I was having the dreams because there was something inside myself that I had to save or preserve or nourish or grow. I don't know why things worked out the way they did, just that I feel safer at night knowing he isn't around to "run me like dogs run deer." I was glad to see the girl in the box eating healthy and talking to her mother, but I don't know if that means she won't kill herself someday. I hope she won't, of course. I hope she stays good like this forever and I'll actively hope for that and maybe that will guide her towards a more consistent happiness, but I can't know for sure. I think each person's relationship with life and death is something extremely personal. If she does kill herself because she can't get that bad feeling to go away I don't think I'll judge her; I'll never understand what it's like to feel what she feels or know what beauty and sadness looks like through her two eyes. It makes me sort of queasy to think about, so I try not to, just to focus on how full her smile looked when I saw her in whole foods and the joyful moment that existed between she and her mother. Because that afternoon of happiness and communication was as real and important as her time in the box or any suicidal thought that that's ever passed through her head.

*LIGHTS UP ON NIGHTMARE. He is out of breath. All the jolly corruption and any grin that was there before is now missing from his face. The GIRL IN THE BOX was his last hope for any kind of love or companionship or someone who shared his beliefs, whose existence in this world could compliment his own and isn't that what we all want in this life to some degree? He goes to the barn and slaughters the three cows. It doesn't make him feel better. He goes to a shed and gets a can of gasoline. He covers the shed in gasoline and throws a match in and the barn lights on fire. He pulls the wine drenched Barbie doll that is now dirty and sticky and tacky out of his back pocket. He brushes her hair back with his hands, kisses her doll forehead, throws her in the fire, douses himself in gasoline and walks into the fire himself.*

End of Play.