

Confronting the Negative Stigma Surrounding Addiction

By Kathryn Heintz

Submitted to the Board of Study of Theatre and Performance

Conservatory of Theatre Arts & School of the Arts

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College

State University of New York

May 2025

First Reader: Jeana Scotti

Second Reader: Michi Barall

Table of Contents

Statement of Goals and Impact	Pg. 2
Research Essay	Pg. 8
Research Essay Sources.....	Pg. 18
Reflection Essay	Pg. 21
Script	Pg. 26
Rehearsal Schedule.....	Pg. 138

Statement of Goals and Impact

As far as goals are concerned, I have many that I hope to achieve during the process of producing my senior project. The most obvious one is to write my first full-length play. This milestone holds a lot of importance for me, considering I was labeled a poor writer growing up. The goal of writing this play is not only about crafting a narrative, it's about proving to myself, not only others, that I have the ability/gift to express complex ideas and emotions through my writing.

From a writing perspective, one of my primary goals with this project is to improve not only the technical quality of my writing, but also my overall flow and structure. While I've always felt confident in writing individual scenes, the idea of weaving those moments into a cohesive, full-scale narrative is a new challenge for me. This play, given how personal and emotionally charged the subject matter is to me, feels like the right opportunity to finally overcome the difficulties that have held me back from completing a full-length play in the past. Another technical aspect I hope to improve through this process is voice differentiation, ensuring each character speaks in a way that is uniquely theirs. While I've experimented with accent writing in the past, I'm less interested in attaching specific dialects to characters and more focused on establishing distinct vocal patterns, rhythms, and tones that reflect their inner lives. The subtle differences in how characters communicate, what they say, how they say it, what they avoid saying, is another thing I love about writing. Some of my favorite plays feature characters

whose voices are so distinct that you could identify them just by reading a few lines. That ability to create character through language is something I strive for in my own work.

To ensure the authenticity and emotional impact of this story, I plan to have multiple table reads throughout the development of my script. These readings will allow me to hear the dialogue aloud, to feel the pacing and flow of scenes, and to receive immediate feedback from peers and collaborators. I've used this method in the past and found it to be incredibly effective. With each session, I'll revise and reshape the piece, allowing it to evolve. I view feedback not as criticism, but as a necessity for creating a believable story. The more voices involved in shaping the piece, the stronger and more layered I believe it will become.

In terms of genre, I am aiming for realism with a few sprinkles of expressionism. I've always been moved by works that blend these two styles, realism for its raw, honest portrayal of life, and expressionism for its ability to tap into the internal, invisible emotional truths of characters. In the past, I leaned heavily into irony and sarcasm in my writing. However, I've come to understand that, while irony has its place, it often skirts around the emotional core of the issue. Addiction isn't ironic. Trauma isn't ironic. They are raw, complicated, deep human experiences that deserve to be portrayed with honesty. While they can be portrayed in ironic ways, for this play, I want to lean into the discomfort of addiction. I want the writing to feel honest and difficult.

A theatre setting, to me, is the perfect medium for this story. It allows for intimacy and genuine human connection, one of the themes of my piece. One of my biggest goals is to incorporate the art of ballet into the play, in a way that complements and elevates the narrative. Ballet is not just a stylistic choice, it's a representation of who I am and what I value. It also

mirrors the play's emotional themes of expression, vulnerability, beauty born out of struggle. Dance, like theatre, communicates the unspoken, and I believe combining these forms can result in something truly powerful, that isn't a musical.

I have observed, especially within my own family, that individuals grappling with addiction are often looked down upon, and unfairly branded as lazy or morally weak for what is fundamentally the result of mental illness. This stigma is deeply damaging, perpetuating a cycle of shame and silence that can trap individuals in their trauma. I hope my play can not only shine a light on the addicts' side of the story but the other people affected by addicts, as this specifically is severely undercommunicated. I have witnessed countless lives wasted due to the side effects of addiction, most of whom weren't addicts themselves. Creating a space for those (often overlooked) non-addict-but-still-affected individuals to be heard is something important to me- being one of those individuals. It is heartbreaking to witness how this negative perception can affect so many people, not just one person, and how the cycle continues.

This brings me to a crucial aspect of my work: my primary goal is to reach the addict community and, in doing so, encourage a shift in some of their own perceptions about addiction. Many addicts are left feeling hopeless and alone, which is the opposite of what I want them to experience after reading my play. I envision a piece that fosters understanding, compassion, and perhaps even a glimmer of cautionary hope. I want to create a space where audiences can engage with the material thoughtfully, allowing them to see addiction not just as a personal failure but as a multifaceted issue that affects countless lives. By presenting authentic stories and "real" characters, I aspire to tip the iceberg-of-change regarding the stereotypes that so often accompany addiction, encouraging empathy and connection instead.

Looking beyond the completion of my play and graduation, I have a dream of opening a dance studio that serves as a safe haven for children, something that the characters in my story lacked. Exploring the theme of childhood/generational trauma through the research process of this project allows me to grasp its impact from a scientific stance, and learn cycle-breaking techniques to pass on. In the end, my dream is a result of what I feel is my purpose in life, protecting vulnerable people- children. I envision this studio not just as a place for dance, but as a nurturing environment where children can express themselves freely, find their own voices, and feel supported as they navigate their lives. The goal is to create a space where children feel valued and understood, enabling them to build healthy relationships with not only others but themselves. If we break the societal cycle we were once taught, and teach the younger generations to be more empathetic, the world could become a beautiful place. I have witnessed firsthand the result of neglected children, the subject of my play, so I believe that the more children we save the more lives we'll save.

As far as writing is concerned, I hope to continue pursuing it for the rest of my life. The process of sitting with my thoughts, shaping them into characters, stories, and moments that feel alive on the page, has become deeply rewarding. It has given me a new sense of agency over how I express myself and how I connect with others. Reading plays written 100 years ago, tackling topics we still read about today, has been life changing for me. It's humbling and empowering to realize that the human condition, its joys, fears, traumas, and hopes, has remained constant enough that a play written a century ago can still feel current. It reminds me that storytelling is timeless, and that my voice, too, can contribute to this ongoing conversation.

Though I've always felt a strong urge to express my voice, my background in dance often made that urge feel constrained. Ballet is beautiful, but it often demands a kind of silence from

the artist, especially when it comes to personal narrative. You're expected to mold yourself into a technique that's been passed down for centuries, one that's rarely changed and often doesn't leave much room for individuality. In many ways, I've spent years fitting myself into roles that weren't mine, or at least didn't fully reflect the range of who I am. What I love most about playwriting is how radically different it is from that experience. In writing, there are no molds to conform to, no fixed positions or measured lines. There are no rules. Not in the way we're taught in English classes, where everything has to follow a five-paragraph, format or avoid certain phrases to be considered "correct." Playwriting thrives on voice, risk, contradiction, and emotion. It's a space where I can be completely myself, unrestricted, raw, and honest. That kind of freedom is rare, and I treasure it.

I believe that Purchase is the perfect place to present this work because of the community we have here. Purchase students and staff are for the most part willing to engage in discussions surrounding mental health, the opposite of the environment I grew up in, the setting of the play. This openness creates a space for dialogue and understanding. I believe that sharing this piece with an audience open to its deeper meaning is essential for spreading its message effectively. The community at Purchase is also diverse, and I know there are some students who share similar stories to mine, as I have found community in them while being here. I hope to start discussions that challenge current stereotypes and create a want for change among those who see the play, encouraging them to reflect on their own experiences as well as the experiences of those around them. Additionally, I hope to collaborate with the RAs on campus by holding overdose awareness events and possibly handing out fentanyl testing strips/Narcan training, as it relates to the play. I am aware of the controversial view on these products, however I feel that Purchase is a place where we could talk about these controversies and create educational conversations out

of them. By combining our efforts, I hope to raise awareness and provide life-saving tools to those who genuinely need them.

My final goal for this project is to memorialize the family members I have lost due to the horrible effects of addiction. If even one person reads my play and it inspires them to seek help or to change their life for the better, that would mean I achieved my purpose in life. In this way, I hope to honor their memory and contribute to a greater understanding of addiction and its complexities, fostering a new chapter of awareness, empathy, and hope. I want my work to serve as a bridge, connecting those who struggle with addiction to those who want to understand, creating a community of support. I want it to resonate with individuals from all walks of life, encouraging them to reflect on their own experiences and to develop a more compassionate society.

As I begin the writing process, I am filled with a sense of purpose, knowing that my work has the potential to contribute to a larger conversation, one that has the power to save lives and shape the future. I hope to leave a lasting impact, not just through the narrative of my play but through the connections it creates and the conversations it sparks. My hope is that this work will encourage others to speak out, share their stories, and recognize the importance of community support in the journey toward healing. And not because I'm Joan of Arc, but because I truly believe in humans. I believe that with a little more understanding, we could create a never ending system of support. In this way, I see my play not just as a personal project but as a catalyst for collective change, inspiration for others to join in the vital dialogue about addiction, recovery, and the human experience.

Research Essay

In confronting the negative stigma surrounding addiction, it is imperative to recognize addicts not as inherently flawed or lazy individuals, but as victims of complex intergenerational trauma. By understanding addiction through the lens of generational trauma, we acknowledge its roots in complex socio-cultural contexts and familial dynamics. Through this understanding, we can foster empathy and support rather than judgment and ostracization. Furthermore, addressing the role of generational trauma underlines the urgent need to prioritize the protection and well-being of children within affected families. By breaking cycles of trauma and providing adequate support systems, we not only mitigate the risk of future addiction but also cultivate environments of healing and resilience. Eradicating the stigma of addiction requires a multifaceted approach that confronts societal misconceptions, acknowledges the complexities of addiction etiology, and advocates for policies and interventions centered on compassion, education, and the safeguarding of vulnerable individuals, particularly children.

In order to address the damaging stigma that goes along with addiction, we must first try to understand addiction's own complexities. Addiction is often misunderstood, and this lack of understanding directly fuels the negative stereotypes that prevent effective support. The mind of an individual struggling with addiction is shaped by complex interactions between neurobiology, psychology, and environmental factors. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines addiction as "a cluster of cognitive, behavioral, and physiological symptoms indicating that the individual continues using the substance despite significant substance-related problems." This definition highlights that addiction is a deep rooted and persistent condition that affects both the mind and body. Addiction encompasses a relapsing cycle of intoxication, bingeing, withdrawal and craving, that results in excessive substance use despite adverse consequences.

The most commonly recognized form of addiction is a substance use disorder, which involves the compulsive misuse of substances like alcohol, illicit drugs, or nicotine. These substances alter brain chemistry and impair judgment, making it more difficult for individuals to control their disorder the more they intake them. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), over 40.3 million people in the United States had a substance abuse disorder in 2020. Of these individuals, only 6.5 percent received treatment. In 2021, about 107,000 people died of drug overdoses, an incredibly exponential number, as the same statistic 5 years prior was around 50,000 people. Black and American Indian/Alaska Native people had the highest rates of fatal overdoses in 2021. It is important to note that these statistics are based purely on public domain records and/or willing testaments, and cannot reflect the true number of individuals living with these disorders. According to the CDC, Men are more likely than women to use almost all types of illicit drugs, and illicit drug use is more likely to result in emergency department visits or overdose deaths for men than for women. However, they also state that women are just as likely as men to develop a substance use disorder. In addition, women may be more susceptible to craving and relapse, which are key phases of the addiction cycle. Research has also shown that women often use drugs differently, respond to drugs differently, and can have unique obstacles to effective treatment as simple as not being able to find child care or being prescribed treatment that has not been adequately tested on women. It is also important to acknowledge that addiction is not limited to substances alone. Behavioral addictions, such as gambling, social media, or sex, are equally as complex and can be just as destructive. These specific forms of addiction share many of the same cognitive and psychological processes as substance addiction.

One of the most hindering effects of addiction is its impact on cognitive functioning. The prefrontal cortex, which governs impulse control, decision-making, and planning, is often impaired in those with addiction. Several studies done by the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) have provided evidence for a dissociation between self-perception and actual behaviour in addiction. As a result, individuals struggle with self-control, making decisions that prioritize short-term rewards over long-term consequences. This can lead to cycles of poor choices, further substance use, and difficulties in maintaining healthy relationships, employment, or financial stability. According to research from the American Psychological Association, addiction can also alter one of the most primitive parts of the brain, the reward system. When we eat foods, the reward pathways activate a chemical called dopamine, which, in turn, releases a feeling of satisfaction. This encourages you to eat again in the future. When an individual uses a drug for the first time, the dopamine they feel will be very intense, however, as the person continues to use the drug, they will start to notice they need more and more of the drug in order to get their dopamine levels as strong as the first time they used it. With chronic use of the substance, over time the brain's circuits adapt and become less sensitive to its dopamine. This neurochemical change makes it increasingly difficult for them to experience pleasure from even everyday activities, a condition known as anhedonia.

Beyond the brain's neurobiological changes, addiction is closely tied to psychological and emotional factors. Many individuals with addiction use substances or behaviors as a way to cope with stress, anxiety, depression, or past trauma. This can create a cycle where addiction becomes a form of self-medication, a way of managing overwhelming emotions or pain. According to the NCBI self medicating can cause a number of mood and personality disorders, lifetime suicidal ideation and attempts, and lower mental and physical health-related quality of

life scores. Addicts may also experience cognitive distortions that justify their behavior, such as minimizing the severity of their addiction or denying its impact on their lives. This psychological defense mechanism, often called denial, can perpetuate the cycle of addiction, as individuals convince themselves that they can quit at any time or that the behavior is not as harmful as it truly is. The American Addiction Center explains that though denial may be considered an involuntary process that functions to help a person resolve emotional conflicts or ease anxiety, it can be dangerous when it pertains to addiction and problematic substance use.

The environment in which an addict lives also plays a crucial role in shaping their addiction. Evidence from the National Library of Medicine suggests that racial and socioeconomic inequities in the environmental factors that may engender substance abuse, including access and exposure to substances of abuse, neighborhood disadvantage and disorder, and environmental barriers to treatment, contribute to observed health disparities in rates of substance use disorders and treatment outcomes. Along with these, social factors like peer pressure, stressful life events, and lack of support can make addiction more likely to develop, and harder to overcome. Colleen L. Barry, PhD, MPP, an associate professor in the Department of Health Policy and Management at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health stated “While drug addiction and mental illness are both chronic, treatable health conditions, the American public is more likely to think of addiction as a moral failing than a medical condition. In recent years, it has become more socially acceptable to talk publicly about one’s struggles with mental illness. But with addiction, the feeling is that the addict is a bad or weak person, especially because much drug use is illegal.” Furthermore, society’s response to addiction can lead to social isolation, as individuals often feel an immense amount of shame or guilt about their behavior, which creates a barrier when trying to seek help. The mind of an addict may become

more and more trapped in the cycle of addiction due to these negative social dynamics, making it more difficult to break free without external support.

A large component to the continual shame cycle addicts inherit is intergenerational trauma. According to the American Psychological Association, intergenerational trauma is defined as “the transmission of trauma or its legacy, in the form of a psychological consequence of an injury or attack, poverty, and so forth, from the generation experiencing the trauma to subsequent generations.” The exact mechanisms of the phenomenon remain unknown but are believed to effect relationship skills, personal behavior, and attitudes and beliefs that affect subsequent generations. Traumatic life experience, such as physical and sexual abuse as well as neglect, occurs at alarmingly high rates, and is considered a major public health problem in the United States. Although many who had childhood trauma exposure are quite resilient, a growing number of research studies prove that interpersonal trauma in childhood leads to heightened susceptibility for SUDs in later life. According to the National Library of Medicine, childhood trauma can also effect the sexes differently. Physical abuse in men significantly correlates with current cocaine and lifetime/current heroin use, while in women it is linked to lifetime cocaine and marijuana use. Emotional abuse in men significantly correlates to current heroin exposure, whereas in women it is linked to heavier lifetime cocaine use.

A research trial done by the “Department of Special Needs Education” of Ghent University in Belgium, aimed to focus on on parenting experiences of mothers in recovery from substance use. Their goal was to take into account their own upbringing as a child and the potential aftermath of interpersonal childhood trauma. Five main mechanisms of intergenerational trauma transmission were identified in the trial- early interpersonal childhood trauma experiences in mothers, trauma as a precursor of substance use, substance use as a

(self-fooling) enabler of parental functioning, continued substance use impacting parental functioning, and dysfunctional parental functioning and its relational impact upon offspring. The analysis of data showed an intricate link between early interpersonal trauma, attachment, and addiction in the parenting narratives of mothers with SUDs, indicating the interrelatedness of these concepts. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, adults who experienced trauma were 300% more likely to have substance use disorders than those who did not. On the other hand, a study in the Journal of Traumatic Stress found that more than 70% of adolescents pursuing treatment for substance use disorder were found to have experienced a traumatic event in the past.

As an example of generational trauma, we can look to family members of Holocaust survivors. Due to the severe stress suffered, the trauma and stress responses were passed down through the generations. Another example of this can be seen in families who have long histories of passing down family secrets and histories of abuse. Abuse felt in a mother can actually be passed to a child, some studies show. One reason for this link is that individuals who have experienced trauma may turn to substance abuse to cope with their symptoms. For example, someone who has experienced the horrors of combat may turn to alcohol to numb their pain. At the same time, trauma can impact the brain's reward system before an addiction even “begins”, making individuals more susceptible to substance use disorder. In a healthy family dynamic, the “holder” of intergenerational trauma could be the catalyst for change, motivating the family to address difficult emotions, behaviors, and symptoms stemming from generational trauma. In situations without support, this could be even more traumatizing, as being “the one who needs help” can cause further alienation and lead people even deeper into their addictive cycle.

A person who encapsulates the “hero” archetype is my own mother, Jeanne Heintz. Throughout my research process, I had the opportunity to interview her about these topics. When I brought up intergenerational trauma, she explained “My parents never spoke about any trauma that I'm sure they experienced, and the pain their parents before them God knows never spoke about.” It was interesting for me to see first hand how intergenerational trauma doesn't need to be clearly communicated in order for it to affect families. My mother feels that the communication of traumas her family faced could have brought the issues they had to light sooner, and maybe have prevented repeated trauma. We discussed how her family is from Ireland, as in her grandmother was born in Connemara and moved to Brooklyn when she was 16. We spoke about how back in Ireland a lot of bad things are kept quiet, more so than here in the U.S., due in-part to the overwhelmingly catholic population. So really, there isn't any one person to blame when it comes to intergenerational trauma because it's a continuous cycle. In my mother's family's case, there was shame associated with the fact that her sister endured both emotional and physical incest. The cause of these assaults were the direct result of the perpetrator being a victim of similar events earlier in life, back in Ireland. The events were never spoken about, so nothing was done to prevent another attack. Like my mother said, the clear communication of these traumas were the only way to begin to break the enormous shame cycle that surrounds it.

A theme we encountered repeatedly was shame, especially toward the archetypal scapegoat of addict families. The ADA defines shame as a highly unpleasant self-conscious emotion arising from the sense of there being something dishonorable, immodest, or indecorous in one's own conduct or circumstances. About her own 'scapegoat' sister, she said “Anytime anyone in the family got caught doing anything, knee jerk reaction was “Well what about my

sister? She did worse!” And she holds the entire family's shame on her shoulders alone, even though she was the victim and not the perpetrator.” According to family systems theory, addiction is a disease that arises from dysfunction in a family unit, not just from one individual’s behavior. On the same account, recovery from addiction must include the whole family, not just the person who drinks too much or misuses drugs. She describes the physical actions of the addict/alcoholic family my mother witnessed growing up as unavoidable, but the shame her sister feels, was completely avoidable. Just like before, the clear communication as well as the understanding of her whole family’s trauma could have, in her opinion, made it easier for everyone involved to deal with the situation, and in talking about it openly, lessened the shame that is associated with it. This is why my mother believes that eliminating shame in the first place is the key to a society with less people suffering from SUDs, and I have to agree with her. She believes that shame trauma-based therapy should be a must for any survivors of severe intergenerational trauma, especially if you have/wish to have children, an idea supported by the NIH.

Evidence-based prevention programs are designed to prevent substance use and related negative outcomes. Most strategies are designed to be delivered in specific settings, to specific age groups, and to specific populations. There are a growing number of evidence-based prevention programs available now, all of which prioritizing the well-being of children. Prevention methods aim to protect children in all aspects of life, primarily school, family, and community wise. According to the NIH, current approaches to school-based prevention of substance use can be categorized into three types- social resistance skills training, normative education, and competence enhancement skills training. There are a variety of effective family-based prevention approaches for adolescent substance abuse, some focusing exclusively

on providing parents with the skills needed to keep their children away from drugs, others focusing on teaching family skills with parents and children together. These programs aim to improve family functioning, communication skills, and provide training to help families discuss and develop family policies on substance abuse, along with teaching parents how to effectively enforce these rules. According to the NIH, interventions that place emphasis on both parenting skills and family bonding appear to be the most effective in reducing or preventing substance use. Evidence-based drug abuse prevention programs delivered to entire communities typically have multiple components. These often include a school-based component, family or parenting components, along with mass media campaigns, public policy initiatives, and other types of community organization and activities. Examples of community wide prevention programs include substance bans, law enforcements, and can even be as simple as stricter bartenders.

While evidence-based drug abuse prevention methods are recognized as being highly effective, it is important to address several factors that reduce the impact of prevention programming. It is still the case that most schools use non-evidence based prevention programs, family-based prevention programs often do not reach the families in greatest need, and starting up community prevention programs requires substantial resources. Knowledge about these programs is vital for public health, as the main cause of using non-evidence-based techniques is lack of awareness.

By bringing awareness to effective prevention techniques, we would allow victims of complex intergenerational trauma, the most likely individuals to develop SUDs later in life, the chance to break their cycle and live a shame-free, non addicted life. The most vulnerable people are the children growing up in these “silent suffering” houses. If we not only prevent children from following in their parents footsteps, but also teach parents to address their own

intergenerational trauma, the world could exponentially become a safer, more accepting place for everyone, but especially victims of SUDs. Ignorance to the issue has gotten victims no where. It requires a lot of change, but is undoubtedly an environmental, class, and financial issue that needs amending.

Overcoming the stigma surrounding addiction requires a fundamental shift in how we understand and approach the issue. Rather than viewing addiction as a moral failing, we must recognize it as a complex, multifaceted condition deeply rooted in intergenerational trauma, psychological struggles, and socio-cultural environments. By addressing the role of trauma in addiction, particularly in vulnerable children who are most at risk of perpetuating these cycles, we can foster a more compassionate and effective response. This means not only providing support for individuals struggling with substance use disorders, but also working to break the generational patterns of trauma that often fuel these issues. Through evidence-based prevention programs, education, and a commitment to healing families as a whole, we can offer hope and help individuals reclaim their lives from addiction. In doing so, we build a safer, more supportive society for everyone, especially those suffering in silence, trapped in the cycles of trauma and addiction. The time to confront and address these deeply ingrained issues is now. Only by breaking the silence, confronting the shame, and prioritizing healing can we hope to create a future where addiction no longer holds such a powerful grip on individuals and families alike.

Sources:

- “Health, United States, Annual Perspective, 2020-2021.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/122044.
- “How an Addicted Brain Works.” Yale Medicine, Yale Medicine, 25 May 2022, www.yalemedicine.org/news/how-an-addicted-brain-works.
- “NIDA IC Fact Sheet 2024.” National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 13 Mar. 2023, nida.nih.gov/about-nida/legislative-activities/budget-information/fiscal-year-2024-budget-information-congressional-justification-national-institute-drug-abuse/ic-fact-sheet-2024.
- Grant JE. Impulse Control Disorders: A Clinician’s Guide to Understanding and Treating Behavioral Addictions New York, NY: Norton Press,2008.
- Goldstein, Rita Z, and Nora D Volkow. “Dysfunction of the Prefrontal Cortex in Addiction: Neuroimaging Findings and Clinical Implications.” Nature Reviews. Neuroscience, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 20 Oct. 2011, [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3462342/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3462342/).
- Turner, Sarah, et al. “Self-Medication with Alcohol or Drugs for Mood and Anxiety Disorders: A Narrative Review of the Epidemiological Literature.” Depression and Anxiety, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Sept. 2018, [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6175215/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6175215/).
- “Addiction Denial: Symptoms, Behaviors & How to Help.” American Addiction Centers, 7 Feb. 2024, americanaddictioncenters.org/rehab-guide/addiction-denial.
- Mennis, Jeremy, et al. “Risky Substance Use Environments and Addiction: A New Frontier for Environmental Justice Research.” International Journal of Environmental

Research and Public Health, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 18 June 2016,
[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4924064/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4924064/).

- “Study: Public Feels More Negative toward People with Drug Addiction than Those with Mental Illness.” Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, publichealth.jhu.edu/2014/study-public-feels-more-negative-toward-people-with-drug-addiction-than-those-with-mental-illness. Accessed Nov. 2024.
- Meulewaeter, Florian et al. “Mothering, Substance Use Disorders and Intergenerational Trauma Transmission: An Attachment-Based Perspective.” *Frontiers in psychiatry* vol. 10 18 Oct. 2019
- “Apa Dictionary of Psychology.” American Psychological Association, American Psychological Association, dictionary.apa.org/intergenerational-trauma. Accessed 22 Nov. 2024.
- Khoury, Lamya, et al. “Substance Use, Childhood Traumatic Experience, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in an Urban Civilian Population.” *Depression and Anxiety*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Dec. 2010, [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3051362/#sec7](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3051362/#sec7).
- LaBoon, Drew. “Understanding Generational Trauma and Its Link to Addiction .” Country, Country Road Recovery Center, 29 Apr. 2023, www.countryroadrc.com/blog/generational-trauma-addiction-treatment.
- “Trauma Therapy - the Role of Generational Trauma in Addiction.” All Points North, 25 May 2022, apn.com/resources/the-role-of-generational-trauma-in-addiction/.
- “Breaking Generational Trauma and Addiction: Phoenix House Florida: Substance Use Treatment in Tampa.” Phoenix House Florida | Substance Use Treatment in Tampa |

Hope. Healing. Recovery., 30 July 2021,

www.phoenixfl.org/breaking-generational-trauma-and-addiction/.

- Heintz, Jeanne. Personal Interview. November 29, 2024.
- “Children of Addicted Parents Guide: The Impact of Substance Use on Families and Children.” American Addiction Centers, 1 Oct. 2024,
americanaddictioncenters.org/rehab-guide/guide-for-children.
- Evidence-Based Programs & Strategies,
oasas.ny.gov/approved-evidence-based-prevention-programs. Accessed 9 Dec. 2024.
- Griffin, Kenneth W, and Gilbert J Botvin. “Evidence-Based Interventions for Preventing Substance Use Disorders in Adolescents.” Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, U.S. National Library of Medicine, July 2010,
pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2916744/.

Reflection Essay

Completing my senior project has been one of the most challenging and rewarding creative experiences I've ever undertaken. From the very beginning, I set out to prove something to myself, that I was capable of creating a complete, impactful, and resonant piece of art that wasn't dance. That goal stayed at the heart of this process from start to finish, and I found out a way to (sort of) incorporate dance! Looking back now, after months of writing, revising, questioning, and pushing myself, I can honestly say I not only achieved many of the goals I originally set, but also discovered new strengths, confronted personal truths, and developed a deeper relationship with writing, storytelling, and myself.

I started this project with a long-standing belief that I wasn't a strong writer. I would often second-guess my choices, overanalyze every word, and rewrite scenes obsessively, worrying they wouldn't sound "real" or "right." There were moments where I felt like I wasn't good enough to write a full-length play. But gradually, something shifted. As I immersed myself in the story, I began to trust my instincts. The more I focused on simply telling a human, truthful story, one rooted in lived experience, the less I worried about sounding like the kind of writer I thought I needed to be. It became less about impressing everyone, and more about writing something that felt honest. That change in mindset was one of the biggest turning points in the process.

One of the more technical challenges was figuring out how to build a cohesive story arc across a full-length format. Before this project, I was more familiar with writing short scenes or individual moments. Stretching a narrative across multiple acts and ensuring each moment served a larger purpose forced me to think differently about structure. I had to learn when to slow

the pacing and when to move the story forward, when to linger in emotion and when to build tension. It took several drafts (and a lot of overthinking) to begin to understand how those choices impacted the audience's experience. In this way, the table reads were crucial. Hearing the play out loud gave me an entirely new perspective on what was working and what needed to be reworked. They helped me hear what the audience would hear: how characters spoke, how emotion built or fell flat, and whether or not scenes flowed into one another in a believable way. This live feedback pushed me to be sharper, more intentional, and more thoughtful with every edit.

One of the goals I feel most proud of meeting is creating distinct voices for each character. Early drafts blurred together, but as the play evolved, each character began to emerge with their own rhythm, language, and emotional vocabulary. I paid close attention to the speech patterns of people in my own life (especially those who inspired the characters) and tried to capture the nuances of how people speak when they're being vulnerable, defensive, evasive, or honest. For a subject like addiction, what's left unsaid often speaks louder than what is spoken. I tried to weave that subtlety into each voice, letting silence, interruption, or hesitation say as much as the words themselves. The characters, while fictionalized, are very real to me, and I hope they felt that way to others, too.

Genre-wise, I stayed true to my original vision. The play is considered realism with hints of expressionism, which felt appropriate for the subject matter. I used symbolic elements like ballet and mirrors to express emotional truths that dialogue alone couldn't always capture. The incorporation of dance was particularly meaningful to me, not only because of my background, but because movement provides a nonverbal channel for emotion. It allows characters to reveal their inner states physically, offering the audience an additional layer of connection. Mirrors, too,

became a recurring image, reflecting both literal and metaphorical self-examination. These stylistic choices helped elevate the narrative and made the play feel like a unique expression of who I am, both as a writer and a dancer. Although we couldn't incorporate these elements into the staged reading, I can clearly imagine the full production of the script in my head, and am pleased with how it would play out.

One regret I have from this experience is not incorporating the dancing into the staged reading. I feel that if I had started the rehearsal process earlier, we could have found a way to integrate it, however with the limited time available, we weren't able to make it work. I truly believe that seeing the ballet performed would have changed the dynamics of the story. There's a world of a difference between speaking about someone performing a breathtaking solo and actually having your breath taken away. It was one of the aspects of the piece I was most excited about, and I do think it would have added a powerful layer to the performance. In the end, though, I recognize that focusing on the writing was probably the right choice for this phase of the piece. Now, I see how movement could amplify the emotional depth of the play, and that's something I'll keep in mind as I move forward.

Writing this play wasn't just creatively demanding, it was sometimes personally difficult. The story asked me to return to memories and emotions I hadn't fully processed. It required me to write about addiction not as an abstract concept, but as a lived reality, something that had affected me and my family in profound and painful ways. There were times I needed to take breaks from the material. It was heavy. But I kept returning to the page, not out of obligation, but because I felt a need to finish telling the story. Writing became a way of gaining clarity, a form of reclaiming agency over something that once felt beyond my control. It allowed me to transform pain into something meaningful, something that could be shared.

One of my core goals was to shine a light not only on the experience of addicts but also on those often left unspoken, family members, friends, and especially children. That perspective is so often overlooked in media and art, and I felt compelled to give it space. I wrote from that place, being someone affected by the repercussions of addiction, and did my best to portray the complexity of those dynamics. I didn't want a clean-cut narrative, or heroes and villains. I wanted characters who were layered, hurt, and most importantly, trying. I also wanted to confront the stigma that surrounds addiction, how easily society reduces it to a lack of willpower or character. By framing addiction through the lens of trauma, generational cycles, and mental health, I hoped to challenge that perception and create a story that encourages empathy and understanding. I didn't write a "happy ending," but I did try to write toward hope. Even if it's messy, even if it's incomplete, hope matters.

This process has also changed the way I see myself as a writer. What began as a personal challenge has become something I want to pursue more seriously in the future. I've found that writing, particularly playwriting, gives me the freedom to explore emotion, identity, and connection in a way that feels deeply authentic. It invites collaboration, experimentation, and risk. Unlike the rigid rules I've experienced in academic or ballet spaces, playwriting allows for contradiction, messiness, and rawness. That space, where imperfections are welcomed, feels like home to me now. It feels like something I could even incorporate into my dance training! I'm proud of the feedback I've received on this piece, and even prouder that I plan to continue revising it beyond graduation. It feels like the beginning of something, not just a senior project.

One of the most unexpected gifts of this project has been how it's served as a tool for real-life connection. In sharing the play with my family, we found new ways to talk about things we hadn't been able to say before. It opened up conversations, allowed space for reflection, and

created a shared language around things we'd previously only "danced" around. That impact, seeing the piece become more than just a performance, is something that is truly priceless, and something I'll never forget.

This project has reinforced the power of storytelling for me. Not just as a creative act, but as a means of healing, understanding, and collective growth. I now know that writing can be a bridge, between people, between ideas, and between past and future. I began this project unsure of where it would go. I had come up with the plot in a single afternoon, thinking it was a cool concept worth exploring. I never imagined it would become something this personal, this impactful, or this significant.

Looking back, I feel very prideful. Not because the play is perfect, but because I faced the discomfort, uncertainty, and doubt head-on and created something real. I wrote this play not just for myself, but for the people I've loved, the people I've lost, and for those who are still trying to make sense of everything. Throughout the entire process, I've told myself over and over that if this play helps even one person feel seen, understood, or less alone, then I know it's been worth it. I hope to carry this mindset forward throughout my life, and I hope to pass it on to others as well.

HABITUALLY US

By Kathryn Heintz

CW: Mentions of illicit substances, self-harm, and incest.

CHARACTERS:

AGNES: Perfectionist ballerina preparing for college auditions. Matilda's daughter/Dolores' niece. Her addiction is doing everything to the best of her ability, at her own expense.

MATILDA: The rock of the family. Is the person everyone goes to in need. Agnes' mother/Dolores' older sister. Her addiction is putting others above herself.

DOLORES (DODO): The scapegoat of the family, and the burden of unfathomable trauma. Agnes' aunt/Matilda's younger sister. Her addiction is Percocet.

MOMMO: The insufficient matriarch. It's almost as if she doesn't know how to be a mother. Matilda and Dolores' mother/Agnes' Grandmother. Her addiction is deflection.

NOTES FOR ACTORS*

- *The use of “//” indicates an interruption/overlap of dialogue.*
- *When the word “nice” is used as a response, it is meant sincerely, not sarcastically as it may appear. These women have a hard time articulating appreciation for each other.*

FAMILY TREE:

MOMMO+DABBA - parents of MAC, MATILDA, LIAM, and DOLORES (AGNES and CHRISTOPHER's grandparents)

MATILDA - AGNES' mother, CHRISTOPHER's aunt, DOLORES and JOHN

LIAM - CHRISTOPHER's father, DOLORES and MATILDA's (and MAC's) brother, AGNES' uncle

SETTING: *Late 2010's in Staten Island, NY*

ACT ONE**SCENE 1:**

Dolores' Apartment. MATILDA is on the floor, folding clothes with her phone pressed between her cheek and her shoulder. On the phone is MOMMO, standing in a separate space SR.

MATILDA

I know you're hesitant because of what happened this summer, but this is a good start for her!

MOMMO

Well, how am I supposed to trust Dolores? You said it was a good start before she ended up in the hospital for a month!

MATILDA

(On the phone) I know, Ma. Alright.

MOMMO

How's her new place coming along?

MATILDA

Pretty good, not for nothin'. It doesn't have a washer or dryer though.

MOMMO

Oh boy, she'll probably start bringing it back over here!

MATILDA

I worked it out with her, Ma. She's gonna do it at my place.

MOMMO

Typical Dolores, always exploiting us.

MATILDA

It's alright with me, Ma.

MOMMO

And that damned floral thing for Macky's funeral. Why on *Earth* would we order a "Rolling Stones" themed arrangement?!?

MATILDA

Cause that's what Mac liked, Ma!

MOMMO

How much is this gonna cost me?

MATILDA is trying to hang up the phone when AGNES enters.

MATILDA (Cont.)

I'll call the florist in the morning, they're already closed. \\\

AGNES

(Waving out the door) \\\ Bye, Alexa! See
you tomorrow! \\\

MOMMO

// Well, make sure you remind them to NOT
let Dolores write anything on the card, she's
given us enough drama as it is. //

*AGNES removes her coat and hangs it on a coat rack, revealing she is wearing a leotard and
tights [under sweatpants.]*

MATILDA

(One the phone) Yes, I know, Ma. I'll take care of it. Aggie just got home.

MOMMO

Oh! Tell her I said hi!

MATILDA

I will, Ma. I'll see you at Liam's sobriety party//

MOMMO

//Speaking of! Christopher's not able to go. He has to work.

MATILDA

Really? I thought he took off for it?

MOMMO

The audacity to miss your own father's ten-year sobriety... You know the last time Christopher came over all he did was lay on the couch and sleep. I don't know what's gotten into him. He's my favorite grandkid, now he barely calls me anymore..//

AGNES is signaling for MATILDA to wrap up the conversation.

MATILDA

//Ok, Ma. I gotta go.

MOMMO

Okay, Matilda. See you tomorrow.

MATILDA

Loveyabye.

MATILDA hangs up the phone and huffs. Lights out on MOMMO.

MATILDA (Cont.)

Did you thank her dad for driving you?

AGNES

In the car.

MATILDA

Here, help me with the last of this.

MATILDA motions to the pile of laundry sitting on the floor. AGNES sits on the floor and starts folding.

MATILDA (Cont.)

How was dance?

AGNES

Fine. Gabby F totally shouldn't be in Hip Hop 5 though, like *I'm* better than her at hip-hop...

MATILDA

Nice. Ballet?

AGNES

Good. As always. I'm starting to stress about the conservatory though.

MATILDA

Don't stress, you'll do great babe.

AGNES

Still, my audition needs to be *perfect*. What did you guys get done today?

MATILDA

Dolores painted the bedroom, and her landlord came and installed the stove. I've just been trying to get this goddamn laundry taken care of.

AGNES

Where's Dodo now?

MATILDA

I don't know, she said she needed to go get a coffee. Probably smoking pot again.

AGNES

Nice.

MATILDA

I told her to pick up some bagels while she was out. Your usual.

AGNES

Nice.

(Pause.)

MATILDA

Mommo arranged a date for Uncle Mac, by the way.

AGNES

For when?

MATILDA

She was able to work it out so it'll be the Saturday *between* your two big try-outs.

AGNES

Auditions, mom.

MATILDA

Listen. She worked it out for YOU. You know how much she's going through right now. Uncle

Liam's sobriety party is tomorrow, then she'll be all worried about your try-out, and then the

//funeral,

AGNES

//I thought Mommo wasn't gonna have anything for Uncle Mac because of how he went out.

MATILDA

Mommo says a lot of things. Just because someone overdoses doesn't mean they shouldn't get a funeral.

AGNES

I know. I was just asking.

Beat.

AGNES (Cont.)

How is Aunt Dodo holdin up?

MATILDA

I don't friggin know. She tells me one thing and then goes out and smokes pot on her way to the bagel store.

AGNES

I thought she gave that up ever since the scare this summer?

MATILDA

Aunt Dodo says a lot of things honey.

AGNES

What does that mean?

MATILDA

I don't know. She's holding up as best as she can.

AGNES

I'm just wondering if all the work we're doing to this place will be worth it.

MATILDA

Hopefully, this is a good thing for her. She couldn't live with Mommo forever.

DOLORES enters, holding a bag of bagels and a cup of coffee.

DOLORES

Ohhhhhhhhhh (*As if to say hello*), what's up?

AGNES

Hey, Aunt Dodo.

MATILDA

Hey, Doe.

DOLORES

Back from dance?

AGNES

Yep.

DOLORES

Nice. You gotta let me know when your next show is, I wanna come.

MATILDA

Remember I told you, she has the try-outs for the conservatory she wants to go to the week before AND after Mac's thing.

AGNES

Auditions. And technically, I only get to go to the second one if I get a callback.

DOLORES

Callbacks? Wow. So this must be like a real serious place then!

AGNES

Oh it's super serious. One of the best dance programs in the nation. If I get in, I'd get to dance all day, every day! In the city! Plus soooo many dancers in the conservatory have graduated and went right onto joining ballet companies.

DOLORES

Wow! Sounds like a dream!

AGNES

It is- which is why I have to be PERFECT at my audition!

MATILDA

You'll do great, babe.

DOLORES

Can you believe it Aggie? I cant believe you're going to college already. You were just "attack of the two foot baby."

AGNES

I know. I'm really nervous about it though.

DOLORES

You'll get in. I feel it.

MATILDA

Did you get the bagels?

DOLORES

Oh. Here they are.

DOLORES places the bag of bagels on a fold out table, while AGNES and MATILDA clear clutter off of the table. The trio sit down and eat their bagels.

DOLORES (Cont.)

It's coming together isn't it!

MATILDA

Yeah, besides all the damn shit laying around!

DOLORES

What shit? All this stuff is important to me!

MATILDA

You really need your stockpile of failed children's animal-themed toilets?

DOLORES

Hey! Toilet Buddies woulda made it big if it weren't for that bastard Joe!

AGNES

You could say- it went to shit.

MATILDA, AGNES, and DOLORES all laugh.

DOLORES

Nice.

AGNES

No, but it looks nice. I didn't see the bedroom yet.

DOLORES

Oh yeah! It looks great!

MATILDA

I was thinking, what if Aggie put a mirror in there and used it as a practice space while we finish the reno?

AGNES

Oh that would be perfect! I could really use more space than my room!

DOLORES

Back there?

MATILDA

Yeah- just while we finish fixing up the place... If its alright with you of course.

DOLORES

Oh yeah, I guess that would be fine.

AGNES

Thank you!!! This will really pay off for me trust me!

DOLORES

I know it will.

MATILDA

Thank you Doe.

DOLORES

Of course. How could I refuse?

MATILDA

Aggie, why don't you go get the Wii from out of my trunk? We'll bowl.

AGNES

Aight.

MATILDA hands AGNES her keys. AGNES begins to exit.

DOLORES

(Calling After AGNES) Love you!!

AGNES exits.

DOLORES (Cont.)

Has Aggie been acting differently lately?

MATILDA

In what way?

DOLORES

I don't know. She used to be more excited to see me, I guess.

MATILDA

Well, she's getting older. She's picking up on more things.

DOLORES

What is that supposed to mean?

MATILDA

Nothing, nothing.

DOLORES

I used to pick her up from the bus stop every day after school!

MATILDA

I know, Doe. She's just going through a stressful time right now, though.

DOLORES

What is she stressed about?

MATILDA

Her auditions?

DOLORES

Oh. Right. I just don't want anyone giving her a bad impression of me.

MATILDA

Like who?

DOLORES

Like who? Like Mommy! All she did was shit-talk me to the neighbors- by the time I left I had zero respect left from anybody on the block!

MATILDA

Aggie isn't Mommy. She makes her own opinions. She's just- very intuitive.

DOLORES

I know, I know. I just don't want to lose her too.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 2:

Dolores' Unfinished Bedroom. The following afternoon. AGNES stands in front of a narrow full length mirror, using a folding chair as a make-shift ballet barre, working on tendus. MATILDA enters.

MATILDA

You should really take a break, baby. You're gonna end up hurting yourself.

AGNES

My tendus aren't sharp enough! Lauren keeps telling me over and over again. It's like I literally can't get my body to move in the way she wants me to!

MATILDA

Do you want me to schedule an extra private with her this week?

AGNES

No, no. It's too expensive. I can correct myself.

MATILDA

If you say so. Your dress came in by the way. For the wake.

MATILDA hands AGNES an Amazon box. AGNES opens the box to reveal an extraordinarily plain black dress.

AGNES

Let's see how it looks.

AGNES slips the dress over her leotard and tights and looks at herself in the mirror.

MATILDA

Perfect fit.

AGNES

(Sarcastically.) Yep. Perfect funeral dress if you ask me!

DOLORES enters the room, looking distraught when she sees AGNES' attire.

AGNES (Cont.)

Whaddya think Aunt Dodo?

DOLORES

Oh! It looks great. I just came in here to get my um- bag. 'Scuse me.

DOLORES hurriedly collects her things and exits the room.

AGNES

What was that all about?

MATILDA

She's having a harder time about Uncle Mac than I thought.

AGNES

She seemed fine yesterday.

MATILDA

Yeah. Cause she was stoned.

AGNES

Nice.

MATILDA

Sorry baby... the dress looks great.

AGNES

It puts the fun in funeral.

MATILDA

I'll let you get back to practicing now.

MATILDA exits. AGNES looks back at herself in the mirror. She smooths the dress onto her body and then resumes her tendus, getting frustrated with her form.

SCENE 3:

Dolores' Living Room, Immediately after: MATILDA enters to find DOLORES searching through her bags for something. As this goes on, we still see AGNES practicing in the bedroom.

MATILDA

Hey, what's up?

DOLORES

I'm fine Tilly.

MATILDA

Our brother died, it's okay not to be okay.

DOLORES

I'm fine. I'm going to a meeting.

MATILDA

The meeting doesn't start until 3.

DOLORES

I know... I just need to go early so I can get some coffee.

MATILDA

Doe.

DOLORES

I'm fine! I am!

MATILDA

Right! Because someone who's fine would snap like that!

DOLORES

Because you keep attacking me when all I want to do is get some coffee!

MATILDA

Then make coffee at home!

DOLORES

Huh?

Beat.

MATILDA

I got you a coffee maker. So you could stop wasting money at the deli.

DOLORES

Oh.

MATILDA

So make coffee here. I can even make it for you!

DOLORES

But the coffee at home doesn't taste like deli coffee... You get that, don't you?

AGNES stops practicing and puts her ear up to the Bedroom door.

MATILDA

Doe.

DOLORES

What do you want me to say Matilda?! Lie and say that I'm not okay?! I told you I'm fine! Just respect what I tell you!

MATILDA

Okay!

DOLORES

I'll be right back.

DOLORES takes her bags and exits the apartment.

MATILDA

(Calling after DOLORES) Doe, wait!

DOLORES continues. MATILDA sinks into a chair. AGNES steps back in front of the mirror.

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE 4:

Dolores' Apartment, after Uncle LIAM's 10-year sobriety party. MATILDA, DOLORES, and AGNES are gathered around the TV, all holding Wii controllers. "Waiting for Tonight" by Jennifer Lopez is playing in the background.

AGNES

So, Uncle Liam has been sober for 10 years now?

MATILDA

Yep.

MATILDA stands up, aims, and bowls. Split.

MATILDA (Cont.)

Dang it!

DOLORES

Thank god! I needed that!

AGNES laughs, MATILDA lines up her second shot. She only hits one of the pins.

MATILDA

Ugh!

DOLORES

Haha!

AGNES

Like, Uncle Liam hasn't drunken ANY alcohol in the last 10 years???

DOLORES stands up to take her turn.

MATILDA

Yes, baby. That's why Mommo bought him a Rolex.

DOLORES

(With a sense of annoyance) An engraved Rolex!

STRIKE!

DOLORES (Cont.)

Woo hoo! Waiting for Tonight! Woooooaaaaah!

DOLORES does a victory dance as AGNES laughs and pushes her out of the way, playfully. The song changes to "Here Comes the Hotstepper" by iNi Kamoze and Salaam Remi.

AGNES

Alright, alright. It's not over yet, we still have two frames.

DOLORES dances over to AGNES, blocking her view of the screen.

DOLORES

C'mon dancer girl! Dance with me!

AGNES laughs.

AGNES

Move! I can't see!

DOLORES dances toward AGNES again.

DOLORES

I'll move once you dance with me!

AGNES

Fine!

AGNES joins into DOLORES' dance, laughing. MATILDA dances in her seat.

AGNES (Cont.)

Alright, now move! I have a game to win.

DOLORES dances her way to her seat. The song changes to “Calabria 2007”. AGNES takes her shot. STRIKE!

DOLORES

Wooooooo hoooo! Nice one, Aggie!

AGNES

And that’s how it’s done!

AGNES does a victory dance, before MATILDA “booty bumps” AGNES out of the way.

MATILDA

Don’t get all coky, now. This is where I make my big comeback.

AGNES sits. MATILDA aims, and shoots.

AGNES

If Uncle Liam is sober, does that mean Christopher is too?

STRIKE!

DOLORES

Wooooooooooooo hoooooooooo! That's my sissy!

MATILDA

How bout them apples?

AGNES

Like, if your dad is sober, you should be sober too, right?

MATILDA and DOLORES swap places.

DOLORES

C'mon double!

DOLORES shoots.

AGNES

Right?

STRIKE!

MATILDA

Nice!

DOLORES dances her way to her seat.

AGNES

Why won't anyone answer me?!

DOLORES

It's complicated, Aggie.

AGNES

I don't get why it is. I just want to //know-

MATILDA

//No, honey. Your cousin Christopher isn't sober.

AGNES

Is that why he didn't go to the party?

MATILDA

Chris had to work. That's all.

AGNES takes her position.

DOLORES

Alright! The 10th! For all the marbles!

AGNES takes her shot. STRIKE. MATILDA and DOLORES celebrate while AGNES stands still.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 5:

About a week later. The Audition. A blank stage.

AUDITIONER 1 (Offstage) (MATILDA)

Next!

AGNES enters from offstage and faces the audience. She is responding to the two offstage AUDITIONERS, played by the same actors playing MATILDA and DOLORES. AGNES takes a deep breath and fake smiles.

AGNES

Hello! My name is Agnes Hobbs, I am 18 years old, and I am from Staten Island, New York.

AUDITIONER 2 (Offstage) (DOLORES)

It's okay Agnes, you can relax. Everyone's nervous today.

AGNES takes a deep breath.

AGNES

Right.

AUDITIONER 1 (Offstage) (MATILDA)

Do you have an idea of which concentration you'd like to be a part of? If you were to attend the conservatory, that is.

AGNES

Oh! Ballet of course.

AUDITIONER 1 (Offstage) (MATILDA)

Excellent. Do you have a cd with your music?

AGNES

Oh yes, its right here.

AGNES crosses and hands her cd to an offstage hand.

AUDITIONER 2 (Offstage) (DOLORES)

Alright. You can take your beginning position and let us know when you're ready to begin.

AGNES

Thank you!

AGNES takes her place. As she walks across the stage she feels a sharp pain in the bottom of her left heel. She motions to her injury to the audience. She takes another deep breath.

AUDITIONER 1 (Offstage) (MATILDA)

Ready Agnes?

AGNES quickly gets into her starting pose and nods.

AGNES

Ready.

The music begins and AGNES begins her audition routine. She has flawless technique, however something is missing. Something in her face is wrong. She finishes the routine and walks back to the center of the stage.

AUDITIONER 1 (Offstage) (MATILDA)

Thank you Agnes. That was wonderful.

AUDITIONER 2 (Offstage) (DOLORES)

Yes, very well done. Do you mind if we ask you a few questions before you leave?

AGNES

Oh! Of course!

AGNES leans onto her right foot.

AUDITIONER 2 (Offstage) (DOLORES)

How long have you trained for?

AGNES

I started dancing when I was 3 1/2, so about 15 years, give-or-take.

AUDITIONER 2 (Offstage) (DOLORES)

Excellent.

AUDITIONER 1 (Offstage) (MATILDA)

And where did you train?

AGNES

Oh, just my neighborhood studio, Dance Sensations.

AUDITIONER 1 (Offstage) (MATILDA)

Ha! Very nice.

AUDITIONER 2 (Offstage) (DOLORES)

Alright just one more. Why do you dance?

AGNES

Why do I dance?

AUDITIONER 1 (Offstage) (DOLORES)

Yes, what pushes you to continue training?

AGNES

Why do I dance?

Well, I guess the obvious answer is that I dance because I love it so much. But its more than that.

It's because my dog bit me on the foot when I was 10.

AUDITIONERS laugh.

AUDITIONER 1 (Offstage) (MATILDA)

I don't think I follow.

AGNES

Well, there was a point in my life where I actually quit dance. When I was 8. Cause I was going through a lot, and didn't think I could handle it... I know- I was 8, but I had a lot of fear in my

head. A lot of anxiety that I wish I didn't have. And not fears just about dance, but about everything. Everything... And then two years passed, and nothing got better. I thought if I just took out this one, single aspect of my life that was causing me stress, causing me problems in other aspects of my life, dance, that it would solve everything, but it kind've just off-kiltered things instead. I hadn't realized until that point how much I genuinely loved dance... And I can't even put my finger on why. Dance was my life. It *is* my life. I've done it so long that it became ingrained in who I am as a person. I was called "ballerina girl" in school, all my closest friends were from dance, all my compulsions were to dance, I was *expected* to dance. By everyone. So I went back. And it wasn't easy. Y'know, I'd always been told I had the right genetics to be a ballerina, like, look at my arches, but never anyone to really help me achieve that dream... Anyways, there's this story I like to tell, kind've as a joke, kind've not: A week before my first ballet class back I was bit on my right foot by a dog. I thought it was an omen that I was making the wrong decision. I accepted the fact that maybe I'll never become a professional ballerina, y'know, ever. But then the doctors at the ER told me it was a miracle he didn't bite an essential vein or whatever. That God, or someone with ultimate power must've wanted me to take that ballet class... So, I don't know, I guess I dance because I feel like I need to. My body needs to, my brain needs to, but mostly because i think it's my role in the world: to be a dancer. Like, if I did anything else, I'd be kidding everyone.

Beat.

AUDITIONER 2 (Offstage) (DOLORES)

Thank you very much, Agnes. You should hear back by the end of next week about callbacks.

AGNES

Thank you so much!

AGNES exits the “Audition Room” to find MATILDA.

AUDITIONER 2 (Offstage) (DOLORES)

NEXT!

LIGHTS UP on MATILDA. AGNES limps over to her.

AGNES

Something is wrong.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 6:

LIGHTS UP on Dolores’ Living Room, a little more put together than the last time we saw it.

MATILDA is on the couch, MOMMO stands SR.

MATILDA

She has a cyst in her heel bone, ma.

MOMMO

Well, what are you going to do about it?

MATILDA

It's gonna need surgery eventually, but for now she's good, as long as she doesn't overdo it.

MOMMO

Well, is she listening?

MATILDA

Are you kidding? She's practicing right now.

MOMMO

Is she on meds?

MATILDA

Yes. Oxycodone.

MOMMO

For an 18 year old?!

MATILDA

Her heel bone is paper thin, ma!

MOMMO

You really need to get a handle on your kid! She's doing too much!

MATILDA

I tried, ma!

MOMMO

Listen! Your sister is missing! Your brother is //dead!

MATILDA

//Sorry. I'm sorry. I know. You're going through a lot. I'm sorry.

MOMMO

Yes, I am. I'm meeting with Christopher later to discuss what to do about Dolores. Of course she's doing this again. Let me know if you hear anything from her.

MATILDA

Okay, ma.

MOMMO

She's got some nerve doing this the day before Mac's funeral.

DOLORES enters. She is visibly upset.

MATILDA

Hold on, she's here!

MOMMO

Well, thank the Lord! At least that's settled with! //Let her know-

MATILDA

//Yeah, Ma, I gotta go.

MOMMO

Oh alright. Let me know what happened to her.

MATILDA

Okay, I'll call you back later.

MOMMO

See you tomorrow.

MATILDA

Okay, Ma. Loveyabye.

MATILDA hangs up the phone. Lights down on MOMMO.

MATILDA

Where have you been?! Mommy and I have been trying to get you all morning.

DOLORES

I was out.

MATILDA

Okay, Dolores!

DOLORES

I was just getting the paper!

MATILDA

Where is it?

DOLORES

What?

MATILDA

The paper. Where is it?

DOLORES

Oh. I must've left it in the car.

MATILDA

Oh, stop lying to yourself, Dolores! You're not okay! Everyone can see that! You reek of weed!

DOLORES

Oh please! Says you!

Little miss perfect!

You aren't! You aren't perfect!

Mac wasn't perfect!

Look at our other brother! Liam's lying to you all! He's not sober! He was drinking at
Christophers wedding!

MATILDA

What did you just say?

DOLORES

Yes! Our perfect sober Liam has been lying to you! And Mommy! And he broke sobriety at his
own son's wedding!

MATILDA

Dolores, stop trying to deflect.

DOLORES

Deflect? Deflect! But that's all everyone else does isn't it?! Just blame everything on me?!

MATILDA

Doe, please-

DOLORES

No, its okay. I'm used to it! That's me! Dolores Welch! Professional Scapegoat! Meanwhile Liam's over here being a hypocrite, getting wasted at Chrissy's wedding, maybe that's why Christopher's wife left him! Cause he's just like Liam!

MATILDA

Dolores!

DOLORES

We both went through the same shit growing up and you just get to pretend you're fine and go on to have a perfect life, with your perfect daughter! But I know the truth Matilda! I know you remember what happened to us!

MATILDA

Doe, calm down! You're just upset about the funeral!

DOLORES

What?! You know it's true!

MATILDA

Maybe, so!

...

But look at what I'm trying to do here! I'm trying to fucking help you for christ's sake!

DOLORES

Why?! So you can feel good about yourself? So you can play your little miss perfect superhero part that you play? So you can pretend you aren't facing the same demons I am? Or is it- so that

Mommy can get away with not doing it?

MATILDA

Dolores you won't let me get a single word in!

DOLORES

You're right! How does it feel!

MATILDA

Dolores, //I-

DOLORES

//Tell me a single thing I've said in the last five minutes was a lie!

MATILDA

Dolores! You lied about getting the paper! I'm just trying to help //you!

DOLORES

// Shut up! I don't need help! I don't need a lecture from you! You're not my mother! STOP
THINKING OF ME AS A DRUG ADDICT!

MATILDA

FINE.

MATILDA rushes to the front door.

Have fun driving yourself to Mac's wake.

MATILDA slams the door and exits, DOLORES runs to her bedroom door, crying.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 7:

LIGHTS UP on two car seats. AGNES is in the passenger seat and MATILDA is driving.

Both are wearing funeral attire.

AGNES

You gotta admit, it was a little overkill.

MATILDA

What was?

AGNES

Aunt Dodo! All the “Come back to me! Come back to me!” Bullshit. Like, didn’t she hate uncle
Mac?

MATILDA

It’s complicated.

AGNES

Well, it was embarrassing. Has she always been like this?

MATILDA

Pretty much, honey.

Beat.

MATILDA (Cont.)

How are your meds working?

AGNES

Pretty good, I guess. Gets me through class.

MATILDA

Just make sure you don't lose those. And make sure //you ta-

AGNES

//”Make sure I take only one a day.” I know, Mom. “It’s not a joke.”

MATILDA

Seriously. Be responsible with those.

AGNES

I am!

MATILDA

Okay.

There is a pause.

AGNES

Is Aunt Dolores a lesbian?

MATILDA

Why do you ask that?

AGNES

I don't know, it would just make sense.

MATILDA

It's complicated.

AGNES

How so?

MATILDA

Honey, I don't want to out your aunt... As far as I know, at the moment- she's asexual.

AGNES

Really??

MATILDA

I don't know! Why do you care?

AGNES

Everything is just so confusing! Like did something happen to her to make her act the way she does?

MATILDA

Aggie, there have been points in your Aunt Dolores' life where she wasn't safe in her own bed.

AGNES

So why doesn't she go to therapy?

MATILDA

Honey, I've been trying to help your aunt for the last 40 years at this point. You gotta give her some grace.

AGNES

Grace? We're literally setting up her apartment for her while she goes smokes weed! The least she could do is show that she's trying to do SOMETHING to fix herself!

MATILDA

Listen. We're doing her this favor to help her get on her feet. This is a lot for her at once- moving out of Mommo's AND Mac's death.

AGNES

Oh, but it's not a lot for me with my audition, and the wake. Not to mention the callback I have to nail even though I can't put any pressure on my left foot without crying!?

MATILDA

I know honey. We're all going through a lot right now. Just try to use those emotions in your callback.

AGNES

Like, with all these meetings she's going to, how doesn't she have the money to afford that place??

MATILDA

Honey, those aren't business meetings, they're AA meetings.

AGNES

You let her take me to AA meetings when I was little?! How did I not know that?

MATILDA

There's a lot you don't know, baby. For the better.

AGNES

It's just annoying. I mean first, we're helping her fix up the place for a better life, then she loses her job so YOU have to start paying her rent. Like, what did she do to deserve this?

MATILDA

Honey, trust me. Homeless Aunt Dolores is a lot worse than if we just help her out a little bit.

AGNES

She's been homeless?

beat.

MATILDA

Yes, honey. There's a lot you don't know.

Beat.

AGNES

Just don't kill yourself trying to save her... I wouldn't forgive her.

MATILDA

What's with everyone doubting me? I've been doing this my entire life, baby. You're just becoming more keen to it now.

AGNES

Just because you've been doing it you're entire life doesn't mean it's healthy!

MATILDA

I know what I can and can't handle! Okay?!

Beat.

AGNES

I know, I'm sorry... I just worry sometimes.

MATILDA

Don't, baby. Everything will be fine.

Beat.

MATILDA (Cont.)

Oh, and we're gonna start saying I love you to eachother more. Dodo suggested it after Mac's
thing.

AGNES

Okay.

Beat.

AGNES (Cont.)

Does Chris go to AA meetings?

MATILDA

No honey, he's not really into drinking as much as hes into other things.

AGNES

So does he go to "whatever drug he uses- anonymous" meetings?

MATILDA

I don't think they'd have what he'd need, baby.

Beat.

AGNES

I think I have OCD.

MATILDA

How could you? Your room's a disaster.

AGNES

No, really. Like sometimes, I'll count 6 pumps of shampoo at a time.

MATILDA

What does that mean?

AGNES

Whenever I wash my hair, I have to pump 6 pumps at a time. Like, if 6 pumps isn't enough, I'll have to use 12. I sometimes have to use 18.

MATILDA

What was your point honey?

AGNES

I don't know, I think I have OCD.

MATILDA

You don't, baby.

AGNES

Well there must be something wrong with my brain! Like anytime I go// to do a pirouette-

//AGNES is interrupted by Matilda's phone ringing. MATILDA answers.

MATILDA

Hey Liam! We were just talking about-

(Annoyed) Oh my god.

Okay.

Which one?

Alright. I'll visit her after I drop Aggie at home.

Okay.

You too.

Okay. Love you too. Bye.

AGNES

Where are you going?

MATILDA

To visit Mommo. She's in the hospital.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 8: Dream Sequence. Matilda's fully furnished apartment, spotless. AGNES is practicing in front of the mirror in the bedroom. She has no injury. DOLORES bursts in.

DOLORES

AGNES! COME NOW! MATILDA WAS HIT BY A CAR!

AGNES

WHAT?! WHERE?! WHAT HAPPENED?!

DOLORES

ON HER WAY INTO THE HOSPITAL!

AGNES

IS SHE OKAY?????????????

DOLORES

I'm sorry Aggie. It didn't look good.

AGNES

FUCK YOU!

GENUINELY, FUCK!!!!!! YOU!!!!!!!!!!

YOU SHOULD'VE BEEN THE ONE TO GO, NOT HER!!!!

THE FUCK AM I GONNA DO WITH YOU??!!!!!!!!!!

YOU NEVER RESPECTED HER FOR A SECOND!! THE ONLY TIME YOU'D EVER CALL,
EVER, WAS WHEN YOU NEEDED SOMETHING!!!!!! YOU HATE YOUR LANDLORD
YOU HATE YOUR JOB YOU HATE YOUR LIFE YOU HATE EVERYTHING SO FUCKING
WHAT??!!!!!!!!!! MAKE YOUR LIFE FUCKING BETTER YOU INCAPABLE PIECE OF

FUCKING SHIT!!!!!! AND YOU KNOW WHAT SHE DID???? SHE HELPED YOU YOU
FUCKING LOSER!!!!!!! YOU'RE A LOSER!!!!!! SHE PAYED YOUR RENT FOR A YEAR
SHE LET YOU DO LAUNDRY AT OUR HOUSE, SHE EVEN GAVE YOU A FUCKING
CAR!!!! AND YOU CRASHED IT!!!!!! YOU CRASHED THE FUCKING FREE CAR YOU
HAD GIVEN TO YOU!!!!!! I USED TO FUCKING RESPECT YOU BRO!!!!!! NOW I DONT
EVEN GIVE YOU THE RESPECT OF CALLING YOU AUNT! YOU'RE NOT MY
AUNT!!!!!! I DONT EVEN KNOW WHO THE FUCK YOU ARE ANYMORE!!!!!! ALL YOU
DO IS TAKE TAKE TAKE TAKE TAKE TAKE TAKE TAKE TAKE TAKE TAKE TAKE!!!!!!
YOU TOOK HER LIFE AWAY FROM HER FOR CHRIST'S SAKE!!!!!! HER FUCKING
SENIOR THESIS WAS ABOUT YOUR FUCKING ISSUES FUCKING UP HER LIFE AND
LOOK AT ME!!!!!! THAT'LL PROBABLY BE WHAT MINE'LL END UP BEING TOO YOU
FUCKING LOWLIFE!!!!!! WAKE THE FUCK UP AND REALIZE THAT I WISH YOU
WERE DEAD! NOT HER!

AGNES runs out of the Bedroom. DOLORES grabs a pill bottle, without reading it, opens it, and empties the bottle directly into her mouth. LIGHTS OUT on the Bedroom.

A SPOTLIGHT suddenly appears on AGNES waking up, on Dolores' couch. She's shaken. Nothing else is visible. She reaches for her phone to check the time before rolling over and hugging her knees.

END OF ACT 1

ACT TWO**SCENE 1:**

Dolores' Apartment. AGNES is stretching on the floor while DOLORES fiddles with a clock radio. The radio shuffles through different songs, "Payphone" by Maroon 5, "My House" by Flo Rida, "California Girls" by Katy Perry.

DOLORES

Stupid piece of shit.

DOLORES smacks the clock radio. It didn't fix it.

DOLORES (Cont.)

Ugh!

DOLORES takes the batteries out of the clock radio.

AGNES

What are you doing?

DOLORES

Trying to fix this stupid radio. *(Half-joking)* I need my KTU.

AGNES

(Half-joking) Yeah, I've noticed.

DOLORES

I guess I could stop by the dollar store on my way to work.

AGNES

What do you do again?

DOLORES

Oh, well, it's off the books. My friend needed someone to take care of her mother- she's 97.

AGNES

What do you have to take care of?

DOLORES

Well- I prep her meds, prep her meals, give 'em sponge baths... And y'know... just keep 'em a little company.

AGNES

Isn't that hard?

DOLORES

Well, when you get over the sponge baths// its not that...

AGNES

//No, I mean- when they die.

DOLORES

Oh, well it's all a part of life I guess... When Dabba got sick and was supposed to be admitted, he stayed at home with a nurse instead. He didn't want to spend his final days cooped up in a hospital room. And I'd help Mommo with him of course, so did your mom. And it was hard. It's not easy to watch your dad die... especially with a lot left unsaid... but its all a part of life... At least he got what he wanted before he went out.

AGNES

So Dabba died IN Mommo's house?

DOLORES

A lot happened in that house.

AGNES

Wow. I suppose it's good that you moved then. A fresh start, you know?

DOLORES

She was ready for me to get out of there. I dont know if I was...

Beat.

DOLORES Cont.

How's your foot been?

AGNES

(Joking) Wow, I can't remember the last time you asked me about myself.

DOLORES

(Joking) Take it easy! I remember things!

AGNES

It's not good. We put off the surgery until after my callback, but its making me nervous.

DOLORES

What even is it?

AGNES

It's a bone cyst. In my left heel. Just a hole in my bone that keeps getting bigger and bigger.

DOLORES

What caused it?

AGNES

The doctor says “Overuse”. If you ask me, there’s no such thing as a dancer overworking.

DOLORES

Just don’t push yourself too hard, you’ll regret it.

AGNES

Says you and everyone else.

Beat.

DOLORES

Hey! Did I show you what Mr. and Mrs. Gannon got me as a housewarming gift?

DOLORES goes to grab a small keyboard. She plugs it in.

DOLORES (Cont.)

They read something online about music helping loneliness, some BS, so they got me this little
guy!

AGNES

Nice! Does it really work?

DOLORES

Of course!

DOLORES stretches out her fingers above the keys.

DOLORES (Cont.)

Remember this one?

DOLORES begins to play the lower half of "Heart and Soul".

AGNES

Oh my god! I haven't heard that song in like, years!

DOLORES

Do you remember your part?

AGNES

Start over, let's see.

AGNES and DOLORES play Heart and Soul on the piano. They laugh.

DOLORES

Did I ever tell you the story of the day we found out your mom was having a girl?

AGNES

Only a million times.

DOLORES

Mommo and I were still living together. Your mom called us and told us it was a girl, and we ran right out the doors to go buy all the pink things we could find!

AGNES

And then you had to throw half of it out because I was huge.

DOLORES

Oh, you were a turkey!

They laugh.

DOLORES (Cont.)

I'll never forget the day I met you.

AGNES

And I'll never forget this song apparently!

DOLORES

It's like dance! It's muscle memory.

AGNES stands up and winces in pain.

DOLORES (Cont.)

You okay?

AGNES

Yeah, just forgot to take my pain meds today.

AGNES grabs a pill bottle from her bag, takes one pill out of the bottle, and puts it back into her bag.

DOLORES

Do you need some water?

AGNES

Yeah, I can get it.

AGNES exits. DOLORES hesitates at first, but then rummages through AGNES's bag and takes out the pill bottle. DOLORES reads it, swallows a few of the pills, and pockets the bottle.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 2: Car ride to McDonald's.

MATILDA

So remember, you need to get a ride home today.

AGNES

I know. Chris is gonna drive me.

MATILDA

And tomorrow. I have to drive Mommo home.

AGNES

I know. Chris again.

MATILDA

Y'know, you could show a little enthusiasm for your grandmother coming home from the hospital.

AGNES

Aunt Dodo is gonna be the next one to die anyways, I'm not worried about Mommo.

MATILDA

What has gotten into you lately?! That was so rude!

AGNES

I know. I'm sorry. I'm just in a bad mood. My foot is killing me!

Beat.

AGNES (Cont.)

I also got a mean text from Amanda.

MATILDA

What do you mean?

AGNES

Well, she wanted me to cover her shift so she could go to a Yankees game with her boyfriend, but it was the day we had to help Aunt Dodo move her things out of Mommo's, so I told her I couldn't.

MATILDA

Right.

AGNES

So I tried to help her out, I was like can Sophie cover your shift, and she starts sending me paragraphs about how I'm selfish, and that she told me Sophie was going with her, and of course I forgot because that's the kind of person I am, and I just can't anymore! Like no one realizes what I go through!

MATILDA

This is all because you wouldn't cover her shift?

AGNES

Apparently! ... I don't know! But I just can't constantly be spreading myself thin for people!
Like no one at McDonald's even knows about Aunt Dodo!

MATILDA

What a bitch.

AGNES

Like we practically housed this girl for a summer! Selfish?! Like why do I have to do it?! I'm always the one who just gets left to do the bullshit no one else wants to! And for a Yankees game?! Please!

MATILDA

I'm sorry you have to go through all this, baby.

AGNES

Like little does she know she's not the only one with a fucked up family!

MATILDA

Aggie, honey, I don't want you to worry about the family.

AGNES

How can I not? It's all you worry about lately!

MATILDA

Because that's *my* job. Not yours.

AGNES

Well, it's unfair.

MATILDA

I don't want you to worry about it. Okay?

Beat.

MATILDA (Cont.)

If you want to get your feelings out about it, write a letter.

AGNES

A letter?

MATILDA

Yeah! Write a letter about how you feel, and when you're done, decide if you either want to send it, or rip it up and burn it.

AGNES

I'll take that into consideration.

They arrive at McDonald's.

MATILDA

Alright, you got everything?

AGNES

Yep.

AGNES gathers her things.

MATILDA

Alright, have a good shift. I love you.

AGNES

Love you too.

AGNES exits the car.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 3: Dining Room. AGNES is sitting with a pencil and paper in front of her. She thinks out loud:

AGNES

Aunt Dolores...

No...

Aunt Dodo.

She scribbles down the words.

It has come to my attention that you need help...

No...

She writes.

I'm annoyed...

My mother is spending all her time on you now...

You're not even worth her time...

If my mother dies before you, that would mean she had spent her ENTIRE life worrying about you. Im genuinely terrified that mom will die first. And YES. I will blame you if it happens. I

wish I didnt't have to, but...

She sighs, and erases what she wrote. She looks over the paper in front of her and crumples it up.

She takes out a new piece of paper and begins writing.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 4: *A fully visual scene, The stage is split. On one side, AGNES is practicing for her callback. On the other side, DOLORES is in her back room, "Sparking up." The mirror of Agnes' studio is back to back with the mirror in Dolores' Back Room.*

AGNES uses a dining room chair as a barre, and begins to warm up. The flowy movements reflect DOLORES' movements, and excited emotions.

She finishes rolling her joint and begins to smoke. (Obviously using a fake joint on stage) As she begins to smoke, AGNES' movements slow down as she begins Pliés. AGNES messes up, and she gets frustrated when DOLORES has a cough attack.

DOLORES chaotically drinks a glass of water as AGNES moves onto tendus, with sharp movements. As DOLORES soothes her cough by drinking the water, AGNES' port de bra reflects the calming feeling.

AGNES moves onto soutés, DOLORES has another coughing attack, this one heavier. AGNES stops suddenly, feeling a sharp pain in her heel. DOLORES suddenly stops and catches her reflection in the mirror. The two women look into their respective mirrors, but to the audience it appears the women are looking at each other. AGNES turns and goes to find something in her dance bag, her pain meds, but they aren't there. DOLORES stays at the mirror, frozen.

DOLORES starts to touch her face, picking at blackheads, and making different facial expressions. AGNES angrily throws her bag on the floor, and DOLORES flinches and turns away, as if she saw something scary in the reflection.

Both sink to the floor, looking back at their reflections.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 5: Dining Room. AGNES is in her usual seat, surrounded by sympathy gifts (care baskets, flowers, cards, etc.) She has a paper in her hand, reading the page. She picks up a pencil to begin writing, but starts crying. MATILDA enters, as if by instinct.

MATILDA

What's wrong?

AGNES

It's my foot. I can't find my meds.

MATILDA

What?! What did I tell you about //being-

AGNES

//I don't know what happened to them! They were in my bag one second, and the next, they weren't!

MATILDA

How long ago did this happen? Why didn't you tell me?

AGNES

I don't know? I was scared.

MATILDA exits briefly and re-enters with a pill bottle. MATILDA hands the bottle to AGNES.

MATILDA

Here, take two of these.

AGNES

(Reading the bottle) But they're prescribed to you?

MATILDA

It's from when I got my teeth done last year. It's just ibuprophen, it's okay.

AGNES swallows two of the pills, and hands the bottle back to MATILDA.

AGNES

I took your advice. I started writing Dodo a letter.

MATILDA

Is it making you feel better?

MATILDA sits next to AGNES.

AGNES

I don't know, in the beginning, it did. Now I don't even think I want to finish it.

MATILDA

And that's perfectly fine.

AGNES

Can I read you what I have so far?

MATILDA

Of course, baby.

AGNES

Okay... (Picks up letter and reads, holding back her emotions.)

My favorite aunt,

Almost all of my favorite childhood memories include you. It would be a lie to say you didn't play an integral part in my upbringing. From my purple phase to my love of green tea, to your name being my password, you were always someone I adored and looked up to. I think the sheer overwhelming amount of love I have for you is why I feel so conflicted as of lately.

Recently, your name has been brought up more and more for bad reasons. I'm aware I'm not technically involved in anything, but I have been affected by it all. I wanted to write this letter because there are things I want to tell you, that I didn't know how to, until now. First off, this isn't a quit doing drugs PSA, but I am aware of your habit. I've known since elementary school. And just to be clear, I passed you smoking pot in your car on my way home from school and put the pieces together myself. No one told me, and I don't think anyone even wanted me to know. I

think you have this idea that people in the family try to make me feel a negative way about you, and certain people may try, but I have always made my own opinions based on my own feelings towards a person. My mother has done an amazing job (with my generation at least) of breaking generational ideology, and continues to fight for you, reminding me that you are a victim of trauma, and how you are the strongest person she knows. Now, I have never been told, and I will never ask, what you have endured throughout your life. Literally all I know is that you are not the bad guy. You are a victim. I really don't have any place talking about it anymore, but I just wanted to tell you that anything you have been told about what you've been through could be completely different now, so if you never healed from your trauma, there are genuine tools that can help you be genuinely happy. That being said, this Summer scared me. I know you went MIA for a bit, ended up in the hospital, I know you were depending on other people for rent money, and when Mommo called mom to tell her about Uncle Mac, my immediate thought was that it was you. And no, it wasn't ridiculous of me to think, because I wasn't the only one who had the same thought. All I wished in that moment was that you were in a better place than you were when you died. I don't even think you see the untapped potential you have sometimes...

Thats about where I got angry and left it.

MATILDA

Wow.

AGNES

Do I change anything so far?

MATILDA

Absolutely not.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 6: The stage is split in the middle, the Dining Room on one side, the Apartment on the other. AGNES is at the table, writing her letter. DOLORES is on her couch. DOLORES is relaxed, visibly high. MATILDA's phone rings. She answers.

MATILDA

Hi, Ma.

MOMMO

Something bad happened.

MATILDA suddenly leaves the room. AGNES can sense something is wrong. She stands up and tries to eavesdrop on the conversation being held in the other room.

DOLORES picks up a prescription bottle and pops a few pills, without water.

MATILDA barges into the room, sniffing. She's already collected herself. AGNES immediately springs back, she knows someone is dead.

AGNES

Is Aunt Dolores dead?

MATILDA

Christopher's gone.

AGNES freezes, that's that last person she expected it to be.

AGNES

What?!

MATILDA

(Almost emotionless) They found him in his car. His neighbor called the police because he saw him passed out in his car, and then in the same spot the next day.

AGNES starts shaking her leg. How could her mother be this calm?!?

AGNES

What happened?!

AGNES looks directly at MATILDA, as if begging her to look back.

MATILDA

They have to do a toxicology report, but... it looked like an overdose.

AGNES starts biting her thumb nail.

AGNES breathes heavily. DOLORES' phone rings. Surprised to see who's calling, she picks up.

She talks slowly.

DOLORES

Ooooohhhhhh! Ma!

MOMMO

Dolores, are you sober right now?

AGNES

Oh my god-

DOLORES stands up quickly. Her heart beating a million miles a minute.

DOLORES

Woah. Ma, slow down.

AGNES

Does Uncle Liam know?

MOMMO

Christopher's dead, Dolores.

At this point, DOLORES' voice gets louder, but its as if there is a disconnect to her body, she is frozen.

DOLORES

What?! What happened?!

MATILDA

Yes, the police went to his house to tell him. Luckily they stayed with him until his sponsor got there.

MOMMO

An overdose.

DOLORES gets a sudden jolt of energy to her body, as if her initial reaction to the news was delayed. She paces around before flinging herself onto her couch.

DOLORES

You're lying!

MATILDA

Honey, I have to go pick up Mommo and go to Uncle Liam's house. This could be bad.

MOMMO

Oh, are you really surprised?!

DOLORES

What does that mean?!

AGNES

What do you mean?

MATILDA

Uncle Liam hasn't been sober as long as he says he's been. He had a relapse a few months ago.

MOMMO

Look at how he acted at Mother's Day! Just slept on the couch the whole time! I bet he was high!

DOLORES all of a sudden jolts up, she is extremely nauseated at this point. She leans over her garbage can.

DOLORES

Ma, slow down...

AGNES

What are you gonna do?

MATILDA

Right now I'm just gonna make sure Uncle Liam makes it through the day.

MOMMO

And now I have to deal with Liam!

DOLORES

I need to come over.

AGNES

Does Dodo know?

MOMMO

Please don't come.

DOLORES' heart breaks in this moment.

DOLORES

What do you mean don't come?

MATILDA

I'm not sure.

MOMMO

You of all people, would just add to it.

DOLORES

I wouldn't add to it.

AGNES

What can I can do?

MATILDA

Nothing really, baby. Why don't you try to take a nap? I'll wait until dad gets home to go over.

MOMMO

See! You're already stressing me out!

DOLORES

I'm not trying //to-

MOMMO

//Please Dolores!

AGNES

Alright.

DOLORES

Who knows?

MATILDA

Mommo should be calling Aunt Dodo now.

MOMMO

Why does that matter?!

DOLORES

Because am I the last to find out?

AGNES

Do you want a hug?

MATILDA nods. AGNES and MATILDA hug.

MOMMO

I guess you are!

AGNES exits. MATILDA starts to cry again. MATILDA tries to stop her tears, by taking a few deep breaths, but starts to sob.

DOLORES

Of course I am! Is Matilda allowed over?

MOMMO

She's picking me up shortly.

DOLORES

Oh! Of course! Of course she is!

MOMMO

Dolores, you need to calm down!

DOLORES

No! I will not calm down! You just told me my nephew died //and-!

MOMMO

//This is exactly why you can't come over right now!

DOLORES

You're literally the one causing me to act this way!

MOMMO

I have to go, I'm getting another call.

DOLORES

Fine! Goodbye!

DOLORES hangs up the phone.

DOLORES (Cont.)

(Sarcastically) Love you too!

DOLORES begins sobbing. The LIGHTS FADE on the crying sisters.

SCENE 7: *Lights up on MATILDA sitting in her Dining Room. She is drinking a cup of tea when AGNES enters.*

MATILDA

Morning, baby.

AGNES

Morning.

AGNES sits across from her mother.

I had a dream about Uncle Mac last night.

MATILDA

What was it about?

AGNES

Well, I walked through this big shrub arch-thing into a hedge maze, kinda like the one in Harry Potter. And there was like, mist... and then out of no-where, all these people started walking towards me. They like, sorta looked familiar, but I didn't know who they were, but I knew they were all dead, because then I saw Uncle Jack with them. Anyways, all of a sudden Uncle Mac started walking towards me, and was like "Ohhhhhhh! Agnes! Wassup bro!" And I was like, "Is this real?" and he said "Yeah, look" and I saw all the people I'd see in the photographs at Mommo's house standing around us. And then he kept talking, and he said he was trying to get in contact with Dodo.

MATILDA

What exactly did he say?

AGNES

He just said “ I’ve been trying to get in contact with Dodo.” So I said, “Where’s Chris?” And he had no idea what I was talking about.

MATILDA

What do you mean?

AGNES

I said “Where’s Christopher?” and he said “What do you mean?” and I remember I could see everyone looking confused, like they hadn’t seen him.

MATILDA

Weird. Maybe he has some unfinished business before he finds them?

AGNES

I guess so, I just wonder what Uncle Mac was trying to tell Dodo.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 8: Dolores' Apartment. DOLORES bursts through the back room door, crying. She rapidly breathes, unable to slow her heartrate down.

She starts throwing things. Glass shatters. A bookcase is tipped over, spilling its contents everywhere.

DOLORES is silent other than a few outbursts, driven from a deep feeling of sorrow.

After the space is fully trashed, she looks around, terrified.

DOLORES gathers what she can of her things, running through the back room and living room, before catching one last glimpse of herself in Agnes' mirror. As if from a fight or flight instinct, she punches the mirror, shattering it. She finally calms down for a moment, analyzing her surroundings.

She picks up most of the items she dropped and exits, running.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 9: Dolores' Apartment. Two days later. MATILDA is on the phone with MOMMO again.

MATILDA

No, ma.

MOMMO

When's the last time anyone's seen her?

MATILDA

Her landlord said he hadn't heard anything down here since Tuesday.

MOMMO

Isn't that kind-of normal for her?

MATILDA

Well that's why he came down to check!

MOMMO

And?

MATILDA

Like I said, he started bangin on the door, bangin on the door, bangin on the door, no answer.

MOMMO

So he called you to come over?

MATILDA

Well he didn't wanna walk in on her dead.

MOMMO

Oh, but you can?!

MATILDA

Well, she's not here so it doesn't matter!

MOMMO

You know, she was freaking me out the other day. Talking about Mac.

MATILDA

What was the last thing she said to you?

MOMMO

I don't know, some ramblings like "Mac's coming to get me."

MATILDA

And that didn't concern you?

MOMMO

I figured this is just like this summer! She'll run away for a few weeks, forget what planet she lives on, and then come back to reality when she realizes she's out of money again.

MATILDA

Alright, ma. Alright.

MOMMO

Just let me know if you hear anything.

MATILDA

I will, ma.

MOMMO

And tell Aggie I said good luck on her callback!

MATILDA

Alright.

MOMMO

Love you, sweetheart.

MATILDA

Alright ma, loveyabye.

MATILDA begins to look around Dolores' apartment, as if looking for clues. She finds a wad of cash in a cookie jar, a bag of weed, etc. She picks up AGNES' prescription bottle and immediately her expression changes. She finds another orange bottle, and reads it. She has a look of both anger and disappointment on her face. She gathers the bottles in a plastic bag, and exits.

SCENE 10: *MATILDA and AGNES are cleaning up the mess at Dolores' Apartment.*

MATILDA

I can't believe she fucking stole your meds... I'm sorry she did that... Could you try calling her again?

AGNES

Sure.

AGNES picks up her phone. She dials, puts it on speaker and sets it on the table. After ringing for a bit, an automated message plays-

AUTOMATED VOICE

I'm sorry. The person you are trying to reach is unavailable at this time. The mailbox is full and cannot receive anymore messages at this time. Goodbye.

AGNES hangs up the phone and sighs.

MATILDA

They're all from you, you know.

AGNES

What?

MATILDA

The messages. She saved every single one you left her. That's why no one else can leave any messages.

There is a pause.

AGNES

Can I ask something?

MATILDA

Of course, honey.

AGNES

Why do you keep helping Dodo?

MATILDA

What do you mean honey?

AGNES

I mean, look at what we're doing. She trashed the apartment we fixed up for her to have better life, just for us to swoop in and fix it while she denies everything.

MATILDA

You understand that addiction is a disease.

AGNES

I know, but with other diseases, like cancer, when people get diagnosed, they cut the cancer out.

MATILDA

Honey this isn't really a decision you can make.

AGNES

I know, but it's like, I worry. Not about her. About you. About how long you've already tried to help her for, and how much longer you're gonna waste your own life on her.

MATILDA

Honey- I have been dealing with this a lot longer than you know.

AGNES

Yeah! That's becoming increasingly more clear to me the more I see how undeserving she actually is!

MATILDA

What makes you think she's undeserving?

AGNES

Oh I don't know?! The fact that she stole my pain meds when my callback is tomorrow?! The fact that she just takes and takes and doesn't give us anything back in return other than stress?!

The fact that you're literally enabling her addiction by paying her rent and cleaning up her messes for her?!

MATILDA

Listen! Don't get mad at me for loving my sister!

AGNES

I'm not mad at you! I'm scared! I'm scared that she's gonna drive you so crazy to the point that you literally decline in health and die! What would make that worth it?! The fact that you helped out a person who HAPPENS to have the same parents as you?! Since when does blood mean you kill yourself for the other?!

MATILDA

Why don't you think I can handle this?! Everyone doubts me all the goddamn time!

AGNES

Because look at her! You found Percocet in her apartment! What has fuckin changed?!

There is a moment of silence. Matilda starts to cry.

MATILDA

She doesn't deserve THIS! This judgement! She's a victim! To shit you couldn't even fathom!

So just stop!

AGNES

And you don't deserve to constantly worry about her!

MATILDA

Aggie honey, I know you mean well. Things have not changed much with your aunt. She's been like this her entire life. The only person who's changing in this situation is you. You're catching onto things I didn't want you to. You're smart. You just gotta trust me on this one.

A shorter moment of silence.

AGNES

I just don't know if I can trust her.

Beat.

MATILDA

Honey, your aunt has been hurt by a lot of people.

AGNES

So have a lot of other people that don't drain everyone's bank accounts!

MATILDA

Please, honey.

AGNES listens.

MATILDA (Cont.)

Your aunt was assaulted by your uncle Mac.

AGNES

Uncle Mac, like the one who just died two weeks ago, Uncle Mac?

MATILDA

Yes, honey.

AGNES

Oh.

MATILDA

I'm sorry, baby. I had to bring it up to you eventually.

AGNES

I know.

There is an uncomfortable pause.

MATILDA

Has he... done anything to you?

AGNES

No! No! I would've told you!

MATILDA

Good. I found out that he did some things to Christopher, so. Just wanted to check.

There is another uncomfortable pause.

AGNES

Did Christopher kill himself? Because of Uncle Mac?

MATILDA

I can't convince myself of that, honey.

A shorter pause.

AGNES

Did Uncle Mac hurt you?

MATILDA

Yes, honey.

Beat.

AGNES

Does Mommo know?

MATILDA

She chooses not to.

AGNES runs to hug MATILDA.

AGNES

I love you, mom.

MATILDA

I love you too, Aggie.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 12: A different space. Some choice decor shows that we're in a funeral home. AGNES barges through the doors, breathing heavily, eyes wide. MATILDA enters shortly after.

MATILDA

You okay? What's wrong?

AGNES

It doesn't look like him.

MATILDA

Who?

AGNES

Chris...

MATILDA leads AGNES to the opposite side as the door.

MATILDA

Shhhhh, shhhhhh... Uncle Liam agrees. He kind've had a blow up on the owner before everyone
got here.

AGNES starts to cry.

AGNES

Like, are we sure that's really him?

MATILDA

Yes, baby.

AGNES

How can he look like that?! Like that isn't my cousin!

MATILDA

Shhhhhhhh...

MATILDA hugs AGNES.

MATILDA (Cont.)

Everything's gonna be okay.

Beat.

AGNES

I didn't even know Chris knew this many people...

MATILDA

Yes, it's definitely impressive. He was surrounded by a lot of love for sure.

AGNES

Do you think *he* knew that?

MATILDA

I don't know, honey...

I don't know.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 13: The Apartment set is slightly off centered, toward one side of the stage, leaving space on the other. Lights only on The Apartment. There is a knock at the door.

MATILDA

(Offstage) (Knocks. Waits.)

Doe! It's me! Please, let me in!

(Knocks again. Waits.)

Doe! I'm coming in!

MATILDA enters the apartment, wearing another black outfit.

Today's the last day to see Christopher!

MATILDA knocks on the bedroom door.

You have thirty minutes to get ready!

MATILDA Huffs, and wearily enters the bedroom, scared of what she might find.

Dolores?

Lights up on the empty bedroom as MATILDA enters.

What was I thinking?

MATILDA slumps into the couch, when she suddenly stands up, and starts moving the furniture out of the way of Agnes' old dance space. She stands in front of the shattered mirror pieces and looks at herself.

At the same time, Lights up on AGNES' Callback. AGNES' ankle is wrapped, and she faces MATILDA as she performs. As the performance begins, all stage lights come up, revealing a closed casket in the empty stage space. DOLORES enters that space, in black, with tears already on her face.

DOLORES

Oh my god...

DOLORES steps closer to her nephew. AGNES is still dancing. MATILDA is still looking.

Chrissy...

DOLORES sobs, hurling herself over the closed casket. AGNES dances on.

No!

...

Not you!

Anyone but you!

...

It should've been me!

IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN ME!

AGNES finishes her performance crying. Its is unclear if it is a result of pain or emotion.

MATILDA (As AUDITIONER 1)

You shouldn't have come here if you knew you weren't fully healed.

AGNES

I'm sorry! I have to dance! I can't not!

DOLORES

Come back to me...

MATILDA (As AUDITIONER 1)

I'm sorry Agnes, we cannot offer you a spot in our conservatory.

AGNES has a meltdown. She flings her body around like a toddler, reacting very unprofessionally. The lights fade out on AGNES and MATILDA, leaving DOLORES alone with the casket.

DOLORES

(Singing)

Baby Beluga...

Baby Beluga...

Is the water warm,

Is your mama home,

With you so happy?

LIGHTS FADE on DOLORES.

BLACKOUT

EPILOGUE - 5 YEARS LATER

AGNES is in her college apartment, surrounded by some items packed up in boxes. On one of the walls remains a newspaper clipping that reads "NEW DANCE PROGRAM BY AGNES HOBBS WOWS THE PUBLIC- A SAFE HAVEN FOR CHILDREN". She picks up her phone and calls someone. She is holding back her emotions.

AGNES

Hey, Mommo!

MOMMO

Hi Aggie! How've ya been? Graduation is pretty soon, huh!

AGNES

Yep! Mom's up here helping me move some of my stuff out.

MOMMO

Oh that's great! How's your senior project coming along?

AGNES

It's good. It's good. Yeah, speaking of it, I just wanted to say, I love you.

(Pause)

This project made me realize we don't say it enough.

MOMMO

I love you too, Aggie. Are you alright?

AGNES

I've never been better actually.

MATILDA enters holding a birthday card.

MOMMO

Good to hear Aggie! You're moving up the totem pole of favorite grandkids!

AGNES

Thanks. I gotta go, but I'll call you soon, okay?

MOMMO

Okay. Take care, Aggie. And enjoy your last few weeks as a college student!

AGNES

I will, Bye!

AGNES hangs up the phone.

MATILDA

Look, I found an old birthday card from your 21st.

AGNES

From who?

MATILDA

Aunt Dodo.

MATILDA hands AGNES the card, and picks up a full box.

MATILDA (Cont.)

I'll take this out to the car.

MATILDA exits. AGNES opens the card.

DOLORES (Offstage)

Dear Aggie-kins,

OMG & Holy cow! I can't believe that my "squirrel friend" is turning 21!

WOO HOO!

I remember when we were anxiously awaiting your arrival... and boy was it big!

Attack of the 2-foot baby!

Sending you TONS of birthday wishes and LOVE!

Enjoy your special day!

Celebrate, and of course, DANCE!

The world is your oyster.

So keep being the FABULOUS YOU and GO GET EM!

I love you.

Aunt Dodo.

AGNES begins to cry.

The End.

Rehearsal Schedule:

Tuesday, May 6:

CMFT 2nd floor classroom

5-7

Friday, May 9th:

CMFT Performance Studio

6-7