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**Writing/Becoming**

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**Writing/Becoming**

**by**

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**Thesis**

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## **Dedication**

My work here is dedicated to the woman whose name I do not know and whose silence has become the shape around which my life has emerged.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge my professors, all of whom possess the heart of a true teacher and who have given so much during my time here. With their honesty, rigor, generosity, intellect, and spirit they have helped me to grow in ways that would not have been possible otherwise: Suzan Zeder, Steven Dietz, Kirk Lynn, and Scott Kanoff – thank you with all my heart.

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## **Abstract**

### **Writing/Becoming**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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This thesis document contains an exploration of my development as a playwright during the three years of the MFA Playwriting Program in the Department of Theatre and Dance at The University of Texas at Austin. The discussion of my evolution as a writer in the Playwriting Program runs concurrent to the progression of my thesis play *fight* through its inception, development, and production. Also included in this thesis document is the full text of the play *fight* which was written and produced during my time in the Playwriting Program.

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## **PART ONE: *BEGINNING***

“I will tell you the beginning; and, if it please your ladyships, you may see the end; for the best is yet to do...” - Le Beau in *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare

### **Coming to Austin**

Over the past three years, I have made a beginning as a writer, and that is saying a lot. I have worked in the theatre for many years now, and what unfolds in the following pages is a story of what it is to go back to the beginning, to reset expectations, to cultivate a beginner’s mind open to discovery. This story of beginning again runs alongside my account of the inception, drafting, and departmental production of my full-length play *fight* - two narratives that find their roots in the same toil, in the process of becoming.

My husband John and I came to Austin through the desert in late July 2008, in many ways a fitting metaphor for how I came to playwriting – through the desert of my former aspirations to be a professional actor – a profession which somehow never allowed me the full range of my voice and always left me feeling that I had more to give than was asked of me. We arrived in Austin with no furniture but lots of boxes and baggage, both literal and figurative, and proceeded to unpack and settle in for the start of the school year. The 2008 Beijing Olympics were broadcast during those first days in the Texas summer heat, and one afternoon I watched as a 38-year-old long distance runner battled her way to victory in the Women’s Marathon, silencing the commentators’ doubts about her age and abilities. It seemed like a good omen for a 38-year-old aspiring

playwright embarking on an intensive three-year course of study, a marathon of another kind.

### **The Three Year Plan**

With a mostly general idea – necessarily so – of what might happen throughout the three years of the program, I sat down prior to the beginning of my first year and attempted to outline goals for myself. I knew I would not be able to predict how my trajectory would be shaped by various unknown factors, but I hoped to create a malleable travel plan to ensure that I utilized the time in school to the fullest potential possible while staying open to the unexpected. These goals fell into two main categories: Writing Tools and Workshop/Production.

Writing Tools: I entered the program with many questions about the most effective ways to approach the writing task. Although I had a number of years under my belt as an *actor* in new plays, I had only ever written two complete full-length plays. I wanted to learn how to apply tools to the writing, to engage in playmaking as a craft and lessen dependency on a bolt of inspirational lightning. I sought a practical, demystified method for creating characters engaged in a compelling story. And secretly, unconsciously perhaps, I wanted to learn to disguise myself in my writing, because somehow, I felt that to write from my experiences was self-indulgent at best and on-stage therapy at worst. I wanted to become a skilled dramatic mechanic, with a reliable system for crafting plays, and I hoped fervently that acquiring such techniques would enable me to write plays wherein my self was subsumed by vast, “important” issues.

Workshop/Production: I had very modest expectations for production opportunities within the program and was mainly interested in finding different types of developmental and workshop experiences both at UT and elsewhere. One of my primary goals in this area was to increase my effectiveness in a rehearsal or workshop environment. I wanted to acquire the tools to move beyond cosmetic fixes for my writing and begin to interrogate my own work. I had questions about how to make the best use of feedback from collaborators and to understand how to apply those findings to the task of evolving a play.

For the most part, my pursuance of these goals has followed the general description of the progression of the Playwriting Program, as described on the Theatre and Dance Department website. My first year was consumed with generating material, with the second year focused on revision, evolving that work. And in this third and final year I have been fortunate to experience a full production of my play *fight* on the Department's mainstage, which afforded me the invaluable opportunity of seeing the work fully realized in an early stage of its development. In many ways, the evolution of *fight* from inception to full production also traces my development as writer over the three years of the program, as practical experiences tested and re-shaped my goals. The following account traces the arc of my journey with *fight*, a trajectory of learning that will carry forward into life after grad school. I am learning that the conclusion of my three years in Austin is only the beginning of my writing life.

## **PART TWO: *PROCESS AND PROGRESS***

“Writing is an exploration. You start from nothing and learn as you go... It’s like driving a car at night. You never see further than your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.” - E.L. Doctorow

### **Tango with Technique: Whose Voice?**

During my first year, I reveled in being a student once again. Amid a schedule packed with classes and projects, I dedicated myself to experimenting with different approaches to generating new work: committing to a strict schedule of eight pages a day, working from status and time exercises in Steven Dietz’s workshop, and completing a 10-minute play “bake-off” challenge from Kirk Lynn in Monday Night Lab. In Dietz’s workshop in particular, I was delighted to have my preconceptions of the writing process continually upended. Here at last were different departure points for creating story onstage that did not leave me stranded at a psychic bus stop, waiting for the Inspiration Express. Instead, the study of status and time choices opened up an entirely new way to think about and pursue my story as a theatrical event, as well as new tools for troubleshooting and deepening my work. The concept of “motion” as taught by Dietz opened up my ability to recognize and be deliberate with every word, and to craft my plays without the extra freight of unnecessary verbiage.

By the end of the fall semester, I had finished a new full-length play, several shorter pieces, and numerous scenes and exercises. While it was satisfying to finally be producing so many pages and to have new approaches to try, I struggled with a peculiar

internal stoppage as I wrote. I was so excited to learn these new tools, but when actually facing the computer keyboard, I hesitated, unable to – in director Jon Jory’s words – “*strike to the heart of the play.*” Though many of the techniques I learned pointed me away from depending upon “divine inspiration,” I soon realized that while embracing these tools, I had also mistakenly endowed them with a sense of personal control, a feeling that they bestowed upon me some kind of command over the creative act. I understood so much more about the craft of writing, but I was still gripped by doubt about what to write in the first place. My writing process had been blown wide open throughout the year, and I think I experienced a sudden, naked fear that perhaps the doors to my writing voice had opened only to reveal that I had nothing of value to say. How could I apply tools to something that didn’t exist?

In the insistent light of that raw and open question, I went to New York City to serve as the Literary Resident at Playwrights’ Horizons for the summer of 2009. In the world of new play development, Playwrights’ is a hub of vibrant activity and maintains relationships with hundreds of working writers. Through my staff position in the literary department, I was exposed to work from playwrights of all ages and levels of experience. And in the course of the wide-ranging scope of reading I did that summer, I began to wonder. Perhaps I did not suffer a lack of something to say, but a lack of permission to say it. And then I chanced across a play called *Brooklyn Bridge* by Melissa James Gibson and once again, the doors of my mind were blown sky high.

Melissa works in very specific form, without traditional punctuation. She layers her characters' language with a physical shape on the page that conveys the mental and emotional shape of thought in flight. Her use of the geography of white space and black type creates striking, distinct voices portrayed with a unique visual clarity. One can see *who* the character is in *how* the character speaks, and the native rhythm that is present in all language pulses through the words on the page. The following example is taken from the first monologue in *Brooklyn Bridge*:

SASHA  
Hi mom  
Sorry  
Hi *mamochka*  
Yes  
I came straight home  
Yes  
I turned three times  
Yes  
I locked the door  
No  
I won't go out  
Yes  
I'll eat what's there  
No  
there wasn't mail  
Yes  
I spent it all  
Yes  
of course it's done  
Yes  
I'm sure I'm sure I'm sure I'm sure I'm sure I'm sure Do you know what  
happened to all our pens  
Pens  
Pens as in  
No I looked there  
No I looked there  
No I looked there  
Nevermind

I'll talk to you later  
Bye *mamochka*

(Gibson, *BB* 1-2)

Seeing Melissa's pages for the first time made the top of my head warm, as I realized that something in me had been straining toward that type of structure. In *Home*, the full-length play that I wrote during my very first semester at UT, the character Daniel writes letters home from Iraq. In the letters, I allowed his language to range freely over the page, employing line breaks to trace his thoughts and very little traditional punctuation:

DANIEL  
It might be for real this time  
Stay tuned  
L.T.'s on our asses real tight  
No short-timer's bullshit here.  
Patrols everyday until we leave  
And no one wants to fuck it up.  
Outside the wire  
We all walk a little faster  
Work a little harder  
Look a little closer.  
No letting our guard down now  
We're so close to home  
So close to home  
We can taste it.  
Sometimes  
Especially at night for some reason  
Being here feels like a movie  
Like I'm watching myself up on a screen  
Doing things  
Saying things  
And this place is like a fucking movie set  
Brown buildings, white cars  
Brown buildings, white cars  
As far as the eye can see

“Hands of Victory”  
A made-up city.  
And the nights are like dreaming  
You don’t fucking sleep  
But you dream the whole night through  
Red tracer rounds  
Red tracer rounds  
Falling through the dark  
Like the fireflies on Irving’s pond  
How they flew across the road  
Shooting falling  
Diving through the dark.

(Lee, *Home* 35)

I had been tiptoeing toward Melissa’s structure instinctively without knowing it. The idea that I could write a whole play in this way had never occurred to me, and seeing Melissa’s work for the first time was like being invited to a party.

Emboldened by this encounter, I sat at my computer and pulled up an old file from a Lab project discussion I had had with Kirk Lynn, and began to work my fingers into the material that would become *fight*. Also during this time, I read an interview with Melissa James Gibson in *The Dramatist*, the journal published by the Dramatists’ Guild. When asked to give advice for playwrights who were starting out, she said simply, “Be kind to your impulses,” a statement that has proven to be useful in my process over and over (Gibson, Int 6). It felt like the balance to what I had been absorbing throughout that first year in the program, so that now I had a holistic way to explore my own unique creative process: to stand in that raw, open place with my new bag of tools, ready to utilize them in tandem with whatever impulses that kindness might bring from within. In this way, my growth as a writer has become inextricably linked with my ability to extend

kindness to my first thoughts, the necessary material to begin practicing the craft as I have been taught.

### **Border Crossing: A Thought Becoming A Play (*Fight Inception*)**

My love for boxing started in sound and sweat. Gloves hitting mitts and heavy bags, t-shirts soaked through, gym clock bell ringing the rounds, aspirated breathing. I came to the sport for a way to stay in shape and was hooked by a deep fascination with the combination of spiritual and physical struggle embodied in the relentless demands of the training – a daily struggle not at all dissimilar to the work of a playwright. The world of a fighter is so physical and yet so intimately connected to deep emotional and spiritual reserves – resources that all humans carry within them, whether they draw upon them or not. Stepping into the ring is the embodiment of a thought, the culmination of a commitment to a single goal that drives the fighter through months of grueling work in service of the idea of the coming event. Every training session left me physically and spiritually spent, but feeling somehow purified by the rhythms of the gym and the satisfaction of having made it through, having tapped into reservoirs of determination that I did not know I possessed. The boxing gym was a crucible and it felt like home to me.

A few years passed, and through my regular 6-day training week, those boxing rhythms insinuated themselves into my physical being, became part of my muscle memory. Images began to float up through my body to my writing brain: A fighter's inner mantra as he jumped rope. The rhythm and sweat of a busy boxing gym. The precise beauty of mittwork. The dance-like grace of shadowboxing.

During my first semester, Kirk Lynn taught our Monday Night Lab and each of us were given the opportunity to bring a project to our Monday meeting times. One of the ideas that rolled around in my brain was to stage a site-specific performance at my boxing gym, which would consist of several short pieces. Each piece would be exactly three minutes long (the length of one round of boxing in professional matches), and would be performed at various stations in the gym: the heavy bags, the speed bag, the jump rope, shadowboxing. The audience would walk from location to location, using the one-minute rest period to move between stations, and eventually come together as one group to see the culminating scene, which would take place in the ring.

The idea never made it out of the gates, but it gave me an outlet for experimenting with a few scene ideas that were then set aside as the demands of the semester overtook my intentions. I dropped the scene ideas in a folder I have on my desktop, a place to store false starts. False starts exist in a strange half-life in my writing mind, some of them floating like icebergs with unseen weight below the surface. Though I did not know how to make sense of those first impulses at that time, I felt the draw of all that weight dangling underneath. Putting those few thoughts down on paper and getting them in front of myself in black and white was the crucial first border crossing between thought and the page, toward beginning the play that became *fight*.

### **Following The Headlights: Finding the Play By Writing It (*Fight* Writing Process)**

I don't remember exactly how many days passed after reading *Brooklyn Bridge* to the writing of the first pages of *fight*, but one evening, I sat down with my laptop in my

little blue and green room in Brooklyn and allowed myself to play with Melissa's page architecture. In my writing process prior to that time, I had never experienced such freedom – ranging over the page with words that sculpted silence from the white space, silences laden with meaning, hearing the speech of the characters and then being able to *see* their speech and their thought in the physical shape on the page.

PAPI

Only thing stop you is you and that is the plain fact

You your own worst enemy you know that

Oh

What

You think I say this shit for my health

You think I ain't got better things to do than come here and listen you suck wind because you not doing your fucking road work

You *thinking*

Look do me a fucking favor

Stop

Stop thinking

No one needs you thinking

You get in that ring

No thinking Just do No time for thinking

You listen to me

Shutup

Listen

You gotta beat that body into submission You hear

You carve this out of your flesh and your blood and your fucking bones so when the times comes

No thinking

Only the body's knowledge

Only the body's knowledge any good Your feeble mind ain't keep up You hear

Only the body's knowledge can save you in there

Get ropin'

Get your ass ropin'

Go on

I want four rounds no rest period

Move your ass

(Lee, *Fight* 8)

From the very first moments, writing in this way opened an internal avenue that allowed me to access particular kinds of rhythm and silence – elements that were so crucial to creating the world of *fight* and which remain primary areas of interest for me as I continue to develop as a writer. I am often most interested in the continuation of thought and inner language that protrudes in silence, the driving need that penetrates and speaks to another person through what is *not* said in the moment. Words become diving boards into a silence that illuminates rather than obscures, and the force of that silence can then carry the character into a moment of speech, a monologue situated in the text like an aria – something so urgent it must be sung through the language.

Which is not to say that this discovery removed struggle from my writing process. The very ease that I felt while working this way made me extremely suspicious. How could writing that came from such a smooth flow possibly be any good? Where were the long, drawn out, head-bashing-against-wall sessions? My ability to assess the play that was emerging was completely askew. I spent a significant amount of time arguing with myself. I felt fraudulent and vaguely embarrassed for myself. I wondered if I was wasting my time on something that made no sense, and generally kicked up a nice little tempest of self-doubt. But in the midst of those rocky moments, there were my guides – Gibson’s “Be kind to your impulses” on one side and Dietz’s tools on the other – like little lighthouses in the storm, a blinking light to steer toward. Slowly, I relaxed. I mused over those very first little moments written for Monday Night Lab, following the character James in my mind as he moved through his training, feeling into the world

through the sound of his exertions, watching the world of the gym gradually emerging around him. And that is how I met Papi.

Although James was the first character who appeared in those early scenes written for Monday Night Lab, when I started to work in earnest on the play, Papi instantly emerged from the shadows of the gym. His ability to speak non-stop and to articulate the physical will of a boxer provided a strong counterpoint to his inability to express verbally his deep emotional life. The muscular pop of boxing lingo underscores and amplifies the ever-present aural texture of a working boxing gym, and those two elements provided a dynamic and physical platform for exploring the deep undercurrents of what the characters could *not* say to each other. Papi's voice and presence became the axis of the world of the gym, and though in the early stages of writing I assumed his speeches were directed to James, when Dani showed up at the gym it was immediately very clear that all of Papi's words had always been meant for her.

Concurrent to the perpetual motion and sound of the boxing gym, I began to see a girl. She got up alone every morning at 5:00 am, rolled out of bed, and ran four miles. She shadowboxed awkwardly as she ran. She was slow and out of shape. But she did it. Every morning she got up and ran that four miles, driven by something internal, something she could not name, something that was going to emerge when she finally found the nerve to go into the boxing gym and find Papi. She existed in silence and the rhythms of her feet pounding the pavement, her breath coming in and out. She watched everything around her with hungry, determined eyes, searching. This was Dani, and she

came into the world of the play through silence as much as the boxing gym entered through sound.

Dani was a girl who had been raised in the potent air of the unsaid, and the facts of her life were shrouded in silence. Eventually, the unspoken history of her mother and the inexpressible pain of the present emerged as the play began to take shape, but her presence in the play, especially at the beginning, came to me very specifically through held moments, where the inarticulate pain of her circumstances could only be expressed through an empty space where words should be. Dani's encounter with the physical language of boxing and her development as a boxer are what eventually gave her names for the things she had always felt, translating the oppressive silence of her life into a fighter's rhythms: the whistle of a jump rope, the beat of a speed bag. She had finally found a language she could speak, and the courage she finds to get in the ring gives her the courage to break the silence and speak about her mother.

My original idea for the play followed the progression of a growing romantic relationship between Dani and James. I had vague ideas about a writing a boxing love story – perhaps some vestiges of my ever-present intention to write a romantic comedy – and was therefore completely surprised when Dani's father, Daniel, popped up in the course of her first exchange with Papi.

Daniel's appearance, like so many elements of the play, was oblique and heavy with the past. With that first mention of him, the story opened up farther along the road to both the past and future, and a more detailed context arose around Dani. When she mentions Daniel, there is quick, sharp moment of recognition, and an unspoken

understanding passes between her and Papi. That silent moment between Dani and Papi became a pivot point in the writing of the play, shifting the central concerns of the story toward Dani's metaphorical search for her father, search for family and home. I was not able to grasp and manifest this shift immediately, and it took many more drafts and workshops to fully understand the trajectory of Dani's search for her dad, but I am still struck by the utter clarity of that loaded moment when Dani and Papi looked at each other and the emerging world of the play shifted around them: they knew something about Daniel that I didn't. And it pained both of them, deeply. So much for writing a romantic comedy this time around.

You'd think that the entrances of James, Papi, Dani and Daniel would give me at least a trifling confidence in the writing process and in making myself available to whomever wanted to speak next. When the character Gina had crashed her way into the first group scene in the gym, it surprised me slightly that everyone seemed to know her because I had not anticipated her arrival at all. Ah well, I thought, a brief appearance from one of the neighborhood characters, nothing major. But then a few pages later, Gina came back, this time by herself, wanting a whole speech, in her own space, on the whole stage. I argued: she's not a major character, I don't see how she fits with the rest of the story, that's not what this play is about, I'm worried that she's a stereotypical black character, and she scares me because she *talks* in this world of crafted silences.

Several times I tried to write past her, but I swiftly met a complete standstill. Melissa James Gibson's words came back to me – *be kind to your impulses*. So I took a deep breath and let Gina speak, and what came out not only surprised me, but provided a

way to illuminate the hidden and repeating history of Dani's family, which bears witness to the cyclical nature of human existence. Gina's clear-eyed view of her choices also amplifies Dani's need to break the cycle, a driving force in Dani's quest to become a boxer.

While my writing process will never approach the "angels singing, heavens opening" sort of bliss one might hope for, I feel that the writing of *fight* has opened up a way for me to at least become friendly with what I do. Each of the characters in *fight* demanded a voice in the story and, in many ways, charting the territory of the play became an exercise in trust, letting the people who showed up have their say. It is probably worth noting that during the initial writing of *fight* I did not write any character that has been cut in subsequent drafts. The people who had a stake in the story refused to be left out and the ones who didn't, never showed up. And as I pushed ahead into the task of refining and evolving the play, the writing task itself became a fierce loyalty to those characters who had spoken up and a promise that I would not abandon them.

There were still moments of despair, but I have begun to recognize that for me – in any process – these moments carry a measure of personal necessity. I am not sure that I would know how to trust or navigate a process without them. Struggle tests the depths of your determination and shows you where you can dig deeper than you thought possible. It expands your resources and creates new competencies by making you use them all up and still keep going, a deeply human resiliency that one can see on any given day in a boxing gym as fighters exert their will against incredible odds. Facing that despair and pushing onward despite the loneliness of the task mark the determination of

both the writer facing the blank page and the last boxer still working late into the night in an empty gym.

And of course, the journey of a boxer is not complete until you step into the ring, where you will learn moment to moment whether your fight plan will succeed or fail. With my play *fight*, I was fortunate enough to “step in the ring” with a production at the University of Texas at Austin Department of Theatre and Dance in the fall of 2010. Within the collaborative context of a production, I was able to enter the next stage of developing the play, to open it to the creative contributions of an artistic team and to learn if my “fight plan” would succeed in the moment to moment demands of performing for a live audience.

### **Embodied Language: Sound and Silence (*Fight Production*)**

There is a particular combination of joy and terror that visits any production experience I have had as a playwright. I never cease to be amazed at the creative contributions of designers and actors: lighting that perfectly sculpts the emotion of a moment, an actor’s multi-dimensional speaking of a line, the texture of the world of the play made tangible in wood grain on the deck. I always stand in wonder and awe at the emergence of a thought, of a word on a page as solid flesh and wood and metal and light.

And then there are the moments of disturbing divergence, when communication becomes charged with anxiety, and the path from thought to embodied act is suddenly uncertain. Somehow, through all the twists and turns and unexpected detours of the production process, one arrives at opening night, more or less intact. These are all

elements that seem to be fairly consistent throughout the limited number of production experiences I have been lucky enough to have, and the UT production of *fight* was no exception. What was different this time around was my determination to make use of the process in some very specific ways.

Only a few months have passed since the production closed, and I am still unraveling the experience, looking for common threads and information that will aid me as I continue the development of the play. Because the production was so recent, I do not yet have clearly articulated thoughts or solid conclusions to discuss. Instead, I would just like to highlight several moments from the process that stand out in my mind as questions and confirmations.

This play came to me initially in sound and silence. The rhythms of a boxer's training tools have been ingrained in my mind and body, and I was very interested in conveying those rhythms on the page. I wanted to translate them into a narrative soundscape for the stage, where aspects of the sound – repetition, rhythm – could grow and function as an aural form of character development, as inhabited physicality of those driving beats: a jump rope, a speed bag, gloves striking mitts. To that end, I wrote several “training symphonies” in the play, which were passages made entirely of the sounds of a busy boxing gym. Dani was present, and her progress in the world of boxing could be traced through her growing ability to be “on beat” in these symphonies. The silences and sounds of the play in concert with Melissa's page architecture gave me a mechanism for exhibiting voice and thought patterns, and to place silences and unspoken thoughts in narrative tension with each other.

The production gave me one interpretation of the symphonies in action, from which I learned a great deal. It was a relief to see that the audience was not bored by the symphonies, and even responded to them with applause on occasion, almost as if someone had just sung a song or played a guitar solo. But gradually, I came to realize that I was not making as much use of them as I could, as windows into the internal development of Dani's character. The narrative thrust in the rhythms has to be centered on Dani, on her perspective, her ability to participate (or not) in the flow of the training. This will allow me to pursue an exploration of Dani through both sound and silence, to create a journey for her that does not primarily consist of her speech, an avenue for conveying meaning in her lack of speech, in a silence heavy with what she thinks but cannot say. Great possibilities are still open to a director's vision in the symphonies, but the production gave me new insights and ideas for developing them in terms of what they accomplish narratively.

Another question, perhaps the biggest and most glaring question hovering over any full production of this play is the non-choreographed amateur boxing bout between Dani and Alicia Vargas that occurs near the end of the play. The outcome of this bout is not pre-determined, and the play goes on afterward with the same dialogue whether Dani wins or loses. When I was writing the first draft and I came to this moment, it appeared with the same uncalculated nonchalance as the characters in the play. It felt like the natural next step for Dani in her development not only as a boxer, but also as a young woman trying to break out of her past. I debated with myself, but again the insistent

voice of the play would not be ignored. *Be kind to your impulses*, said Melissa James Gibson. So I laughed and wrote it in, believing as I did so that the chances of it ever actually happening were very slim. I wondered how it would function within the specific trajectory of the story: would it distract an audience from the play, making them too aware of the juxtaposition of illusion and reality? Would it seem like a gimmick, a stunt? On a practical level, would actors be physically capable of boxing every night?

This moment in the play became a source of many discussions about its necessity, the dramatic function it served, and safety concerns. In the course of the earliest of those conversations I could not always articulate specifically what I was after with the fight, but the certainty that it was dramaturgically right for the play remained. After training the actors intensively for five and a half months, we entered the production phase and performed the bout as scripted. Despite late-breaking controversy within the Department which forced us to make some last minute adjustments, I had seen enough to know for sure that the fight works. The actors were energized and determined to do well, and because of their extraordinary dedication during the training and rehearsal period, they went through the three-round bout with ease.

Due to Departmental concerns, I was required to be in attendance at every performance, something that I might not have done otherwise. I am grateful for this now, because in the course of watching that show unfold on stage every night, and particularly during and immediately after the bout, I began to understand the purpose and importance of the fight as an event within the play and within the audience. For the most part (and there are always exceptions), the bout galvanized the audience to be more than observers.

Instead of pulling them *out* of the play, the bout seemed to invite them much further *in*, allowing them to become part of the story for that brief space. They rooted for Dani in that fight because they had seen her struggle and they knew what it cost her emotionally and physically to be there. And the unpredictable aspect of it resonated on the deeper thematic elements of the play: life offers no guarantees, but win or lose, you *can* keep going. You can make a choice to never give up.

Perhaps the most important realization post-production has been that because my process for writing a play has shifted fundamentally, my understanding of how to grow a play beyond that initial first draft must evolve as well. There is no substitute for the clarity one can get from seeing an idea put into solid form, an experience which generates an enormous amount of data for a writer. An overwhelming set of circumstances overall, and I am now in the process of learning how to put the raw material gleaned from that production process to practical and effective use in growing and developing the play further.

### **PART THREE: *THE PAST IS PROLOGUE***

“The past is a burning house.” - Steven Dietz

All of which brings me to the present moment, as I find myself a little more than halfway finished with my final semester of graduate school, and about to embark on the next stage of development for *fight*. I am currently in the process of marinating and activating crucial pieces of feedback that I received from Maria Goyanes (Associate Producer, Public Theater), a professional respondent for *fight* who attended the production in the fall, and a more recent encounter in New Orleans. The play was selected as one of two finalists for the newly established Ruby Prize and part of the award was a developmental reading of the play at Southern Rep Theatre in New Orleans. While in New Orleans, I was happy to encounter Seattle director Valerie Curtis-Newton who gave me valuable insights on avenues for amplifying the play’s effectiveness on stage. There are strong beginnings of a new draft of the play, and I will have an opportunity to workshop those changes with actors and a director at the Playwrights’ Center in Minneapolis this coming May 2011, through the Core Apprentice Program.

This May brings my departure from the Playwriting Program at UT. Looking back these three years of work and growth does not engender a feeling of summation, but rather a strong push toward the next stage of learning in this life of writing. I leave school eager to discover how my time here will inform the writing that is still to be done, and grateful for the opportunities I’ve had that have opened up the craft to me in ways that I may never have come to on my own.

Before I came to grad school, my reach was very modest, like a Nazarene at a church potluck – polite helpings of good plain food. My understanding of what was possible and what sort of impulses were allowed was strictly bound by my limited range of experience with writing conventions, and with the act of writing itself. I had only written two plays prior to graduate school, and working on both of those plays followed a somewhat ineffective path to becoming, both in the initial stage of writing and in revisions. It was a bit like learning to swim by being tossed into the deep end: I did a lot of flailing and managed to stay afloat, but just barely.

The writing of *fight* represents a departure from my formerly limited way of thinking about writing plays, both in terms of the aforementioned page structure and in the beginning of my exploration of how to capture the dramatic movement and size of the human thought process and inner life through the externals of the stage. The production process similarly broke new ground on many levels: working from this new page structure with actors and a director, organizing logistics for the boxing bout, living with the play in its embodied form. The insights gathered while working on this play continue to inform and enlighten further development as well as the continual evolution of my overall writing process.

During my time here in Austin, I have gained practical tools for working as a writer, accompanied by varied experiences in all aspects of production, all stages of developing a play. I have participated in a vibrant, innovative community of theatre artists who have constantly challenged me to be better, go deeper, be bolder. The fullness of my three-years of growth has far exceeded the hopes I carried when I entered the

program, and I will leave with a much broader, much more practically useful vision of the writing craft in action. Graduation does not seem like an ending, but instead a passage into the next stage of growth, another new beginning. I leave school equipped with the tools and resources to fully engage with the work to be done, and more of the long patience required to shepherd a play – and myself as a playwright – through the sometimes awkward, always unpredictable, but extremely worthwhile process of becoming itself.

# *fight*

by  
kimber lee

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## **characters**

DANI. 17. Korean and Puerto Rican.  
PAPI. 65. Puerto Rican.  
JAMES. 20. Black.  
CARO. 21. Latino.  
GINA. 20. Black or Latina.  
TIA. 42. Puerto Rican.  
DANIEL. 39. Puerto Rican.  
ALICIA. 22. Latina.  
MRS. CARROLL. 45.  
BEN. 35. Korean American  
HALMONI. 70. Korean  
OTHER FIGHTERS/REFEREE/JUDGES

## **setting**

an old boxing gym in brooklyn, new york and various additional locations

note: the only fully realized space should be the boxing gym. all other locations should be suggested simply, so that scenes flow one into the other with no breaks for set changes.

## **a few items**

new sentences begin with capital letters

things in parentheses are not meant to be spoken, just thought

line breaks sometimes mean a new thought or a turn in the same thought but do not *always* require a pause

white space within one character's line belongs to that character

'pause' means a brief silence

'silence' means a slightly longer pause

pauses or silences in this play are not negative space, they are held moments - they hold the space of a thought just as a rest in a musical score holds the space of a note

**[DANI]**

In the black, the sound of a photo being ripped into pieces.  
The tearing sound fills the theatre.

Lights up.

A bus station.

DANI sits on the floor, back against the wall, next to a large garbage can.

She is very still, forehead down on her knees, breathing like a small wounded animal, shallow and quick.

There is a small suitcase next to her.

She wears a jacket and a backpack.

She murmurs, almost inaudible.

DANI

I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry

Abruptly, she stands and rips the cover off the garbage can, pawing through the contents until she comes up with several ripped pieces of a photograph.

She sits back on the floor, holding the pieces, trying to put them back together, but there are too many missing.

MRS. CARROLL, wearing a bus employee uniform, enters.

MRS. CARROLL

Well that was

I spoke with uh

Your grandma was it

I didn't understand a word she said but she called someone who did

So there's your ticket

you'll go on the 10:35 bus and they

Someone

Your Uncle Ben I think

will pick you up at the station in Newark

You ever gone alone on a bus

Don't worry

I told the driver to watch out for you

So you're all set now

All set

Pause.

MRS. CARROLL

Don't worry

Your mom

you know I'm sure she just

You'll understand someday when you have your own kids What it means to be a parent

You have to be ready for the responsibility

because children are

well look at you

You didn't ask to be born now did you

and now here you are

DANI stands and the photo pieces fall on the ground.

MRS. CARROLL picks them up.

MRS. CARROLL

You dropped

What is this

A picture

DANI takes the pieces.

She saves one of them and throws the rest back in the garbage can.

She stares at the photo piece a beat, then puts it in her pocket.

Lights shift.

DANI crosses to another chair.

Sound of the bus station parking lot in Newark.

MRS. CARROLL morphs into BEN, sets a chair by DANI.

A car.

BEN walks around the car, gets in the driver's side, backs carefully out of a parking spot.

BEN drives down the freeway during the following.

BEN

Well this is

Man

What a way to meet your uncle huh

It's a

A uh

I tell you

Look your mom just

She

She's just a mess you know

And she was just never ready for that

For you For the whole

Thing

Kid Husband Responsibility in general

She's just a mess you know

She was only a kid herself when she ran off with your dad and

And I told her

Nuna

that's Korean

Do you know Korean

You

You look Korean you know

Anyway

Nuna

That's what you call your older sister in Korean

Did she teach you any Korean at all

Yeah Nah

Anyway

I said Look Nuna

He's a kid You're a kid Think about it You bring a child into this and

It's not fair

And now look

Here you are huh

You didn't ask to be but here you are

But you know sometimes in life with some people you just can't talk to them

and even though we were so close like like

like we used to take you know *baths* together

This was when we were *babies*

but still

You're close to someone So close to them like

so close for so long

and then

Not

So

You thirsty or

DANI shakes her head.  
BEN gets out of the car, then morphs into HALMONI.

Lights shift to HALMONI's apartment in Weehawken.  
HALMONI crosses to a chair next to DANI slowly, using a walker.

They sit in silence.  
They both stare down and a little out.  
For a while.  
The room darkens.

HALMONI coughs, and softly thumps her chest a few times, murmuring in Korean.  
She reaches up and clicks on the lamp.  
DANI glances at HALMONI, looks out the window, then back at the floor.

DANI  
is  
ah

HALMONI  
Geogjeonghaji maseyo eolin i gwaenchanhayo

More silence.

DANI shifts in her chair.  
HALMONI speaks and puts a hand out toward DANI, palm down, with a little flicking wave of her fingers.

HALMONI  
Gwaenchanhayo

DANI is unsure what this means.  
She sits very still, barely breathing.  
HALMONI sighs deeply, shaking her head.

Silence.

A car horn.

HALMONI nods and waves her fingers at DANI again.  
DANI opens the door.

TIA enters, a whirl of bright energy in the silence.

TIA

All right all right all right I got caught up at the corner akay The numbers I couldn't find the number I kept going the wrong way and I mean The numbers akay They were going up and then down and then up and Just so confusing But anyway I found you Finally And

Where is she Where is that girl I wanna see that girl

Dani

Dani

HALMONI nods toward DANI.

TIA turns and sees her, standing partially behind the door.

TIA (oh god don't cry you'll scare her)

Oh

Will you look at this girl Look at this face Will you just

Look

Your father's eyes staring at me from

Oh

I

He

I'm ya Tia

Dani

I

All right

All right akay come on now we're going Thank you very much missus Park for lettin her stay over after she got in I got everything sorted out at work so that won't happen again

And don't you worry you can't keep her akay We'll take good care a her Dani tell you grandmamma thank you akay

DANI

Thank you

TIA

Akay we gotta make moves girl Grab ya bag and say goodbye akay

We gotta get home and get you settled and

Daniel is so excited to meet you

he

akay come on

Come on  
Come on

TIA exits.  
DANI and HALMONI stand silently, staring at the floor.  
DANI turns to go.  
HALMONI suddenly puts out a hand, touches her arm.  
Touches her head softly.  
Beat.  
DANI exits.

Lights shift.

DANI and TIA walk into an apartment.  
Sounds of a TV.

TIA  
It was just I mean So sudden that we heard you was on your way okay so I didn't get a chance to clean up like I woulda under normal circumstances but you understand right

TIA turns and grins at DANI, who grins back.  
TIA gets misty again.

TIA  
I just can't get over

TIA hugs DANI fiercely, smiling with tears in her eyes.  
DANI relaxes into the hug, smiling back.  
TIA touches DANI's face.

TIA  
So you been boxin too you said  
Startin out in the family business huh  
Ya gonna have to tell ya pop about it okay  
He'll be so excited

They walk into the living room.

TIA  
Daniel  
You in here  
ah

DANIEL sleeps in a wheelchair, slumped to the side.  
TIA crosses to him, picks up a blanket that has fallen on the floor next to the wheelchair, puts a hand on his shoulder.

TIA  
Hermanito  
Daniel  
Hey  
Look who's here

DANIEL stirs slowly, rubbing his face.  
He looks at DANI, who stares, stunned.  
TIA looks between them, smiling.  
She holds her hand out to DANI.

TIA  
Come on over and say hello  
Don't be shy

TIA waves DANI over, then exits to the hallway  
DANI crosses hesitantly to DANIEL, who glances up at her.

DANIEL  
Hey

DANI nods at him, unable to speak or return his glance.  
DANIEL looks away.

Silence.

TIA comes back with some mismatched sheets and a blanket.  
She beckons DANI to follow her up a few steps.

TIA  
I'm a get her settled upstairs then you two can have a long chat akay  
Come on Dani

TIA leads her up some stairs into a very small bedroom.  
A couple of boxing posters hang on the walls.  
Amateur boxing trophies sit on a bookshelf.  
A Puerto Rican flag hangs in the tiny window.  
Old boxing gear is piled in a corner.  
TIA puts the pile of sheets and blanket on the bed.

TIA  
Here ya go baby girl

DANI stands at the threshold, still in shock, looking back toward the living room.  
TIA's smile fades as she studies DANI's face.

TIA  
Your mom didn't tell you what happened

Silence.  
DANI looks away.

TIA  
Ay coño  
your mother

TIA takes a deep breath.

TIA  
Akay look  
I know this must be ah  
He's fine akay it was all pretty fucked up for a while scuse my french but he's fine now  
and  
He just stays up too late watchin tv and then he gets tired in the afternoon  
but  
he is for real very *very* excited to see you  
akay  
Now don't worry about all a Daniel's old clothes and shit up in here and  
The bathroom is downstairs akay  
I cleared out a shelf for you in the cabinet behind the door  
Aysh Musty up in here Well don't worry  
I'm a borrow a steam cleaner from Lessie at work and we get the smell out akay  
I'm a go to work now but I left my number on the kitchen table so you call me  
You need anything at all  
you call akay  
Well and ah  
I know this is  
It's not ah  
Akay anyway I'll be home later and you just ah  
Make yourself at home Dani

TIA envelopes DANI in a brief, fierce hug and exits.

DANI looks around the room slowly.  
She sits on the bed.  
Sounds of the tv drift upstairs.

DANI goes to the stairs, creeps down and peeks into the living room.  
She stares at DANIEL's back, he's asleep again.  
She ducks out of the way as TIA enters, wearing her nurse's uniform.  
TIA pulls a blanket over DANIEL, kisses his cheek, and exits.

DANIEL moves in his sleep and DANI creeps a bit closer, staring at him.  
DANIEL shudders in his sleep and DANI retreats to the bedroom.

She stands in the room, looking around her.  
She takes the torn piece of photograph out of her pocket, stares at it, looks toward the sound of the TV, then throws the photo scrap in a small wastepaper basket.

She opens an old closet, a few of DANIEL's old clothes hang there, musty.  
She looks at the posters on the wall.  
She looks at the pile of old gear, picks up some dusty sparring gloves.  
She sits on the edge of the bed, holding the gloves, looking around the room.  
Sounds of the tv float up to her.

Lights fade into season shift.

[FALL]

An alarm clock.  
Sound of a hand hitting alarm clock.  
Lights up on DANI in her bedroom at TIA's.  
She sits up, throws her feet over the edge of her bed.  
Sound of a garbage truck, then silence.

DANI puts on sweat pants, hat, mittens, sweatshirt.  
She walks down the stairs.  
TV light flickers over DANIEL, asleep on the couch.  
DANI picks up the remote and turns off the TV.  
She looks at DANIEL for a beat, watching his chest move up and down with his steady breathing.

Silence.

Then, faintly, the sounds of the boxing gym float in slowly.  
Shadowy shapes move in the gym, indistinct in the darkness.  
PAPI enters, a shadowy figure, takes up his usual place, leaning against the ropes of the boxing ring, watching fighters training.

DANI exits the apartment.  
She stands in the crisp air and takes a deep breath and lets it out.  
She begins her morning run.

Sounds of someone working a heavy bag come up, rhythmic.  
DANI runs.  
The sound of punches hitting a heavy bag becomes faster and fiercer, beating time with DANI's footsteps.  
She is winded and can't keep the rhythm.  
She stops in front of a doorway, bends over breathing hard.  
She stares up at the door and the sounds of the gym bump up louder.  
DANI shakes out her arms and continues running.

PAPI speaks from the shadows.  
Throughout his speech, lights come up slowly on the gym, shapes and sounds emerge from the darkness – the everyday rhythms of boxing training.

PAPI

Only thing stop you is you and that is the plain fact

You your own worst enemy

Oh

What

You think I say this shit for my health

You think I ain't got better things to do than come here and listen you suck wind because you not doing your fuckin road work

You *thinkin*

Look do me a fuckin favor Stop

Stop thinkin

No one needs you thinkin

You get in that ring

No thinkin Just do No time for thinkin

You listen to me

Shutup

Listen

You gotta beat that body into submission You hear

You carve this out of your flesh and your blood and your fuckin bones so when the time comes

No thinkin

Only the body's knowledge

Only the body's knowledge any good Your feeble mind ain't keep up You hear

Only the body's knowledge can save you in there

Get ropin

Get your ass ropin

Go on

I want four rounds no rest period

Move your ass

Sound of a boxing gym clock bell.

Lights are up fully on an old school boxing gym: a raised ring, some beat up heavy bags, double-end bags, speed bags, etc.

A few guys work out on the heavy bags.

JAMES is jumping rope, beautifully: double-unders, criss-cross, etc.

DANI enters quietly.

She turns and leaves.

She enters again.

She stands shifting her gym bag from hand to hand.

She pretends to read the posters on the wall.

She watches the activity in the gym.

She sees PAPI.

PAPI crosses to JAMES.

PAPI  
Where is he

JAMES  
Yo  
Am I my brother's keeper

PAPI  
What

JAMES  
I don't know where he is

PAPI glares at him, JAMES grins and does some extra fancy moves.  
PAPI shakes his head and leans against the ropes, watching JAMES work.  
DANI approaches PAPI.

DANI  
You Papi

PAPI (watching JAMES)  
Depends

DANI  
On what

Pause.

DANI  
Um I was told to ask for Papi

PAPI  
Eh Maybe he's not here today

DANI  
Oh

Pause.

DANI  
You know what days he comes in

PAPI

Eh Maybe he keeps his own hours you know Maybe he not coming back

DANI

Okay

Pause.

DANI

Do you mind if I wait

PAPI

I'm Papi

DANI

Yeah I guessed

PAPI

What you want

DANI

I was told

I was told to ask for you That you are the um the trainer to ask for

PAPI

Nah

How'd you guess it's me

Are you my daughter I don't know about or what

DANI

No

No no no

Of course not

PAPI

You sure

DANI (I think I am)

Yeah

PAPI (yes or no girlie)  
Yeah

DANI (yeah okay, old man)  
Yeah

PAPI  
Okay

Pause.

DANI  
So

PAPI  
So

Pause.

DANI  
Are you

Pause.

DANI  
Do you  
Um

PAPI  
What

DANI  
You got a like a  
A uh  
You know A paper says how much

PAPI  
How much for what

DANI  
To train

PAPI  
To train here

DANI  
Yeah

PAPI  
What for

DANI  
I don't know

PAPI (what's wrong with you)  
You don't know you don't know  
Why you askin you don't know

DANI  
I don't know

Pause.

PAPI  
No paper

Silence.

DANI  
I saw a picture a you once

PAPI  
Oh yeah I'm famous you know Been in all the papers on TV in magazines

DANI  
Nah it was a Polaroid of you and my pop

PAPI  
Your pop

DANI  
Yeah

PAPI turns and looks at her fully for the first time.  
They look at each other.

PAPI turns away.

PAPI  
Your pop huh

DANI  
Yeah

PAPI (to JAMES)  
Pick up your goddamn feet Go Go Go

Pause.

PAPI  
Heard about that

Your pop

DANI  
Yeah

What you hear

PAPI  
All about that

DANI  
Yeah

Pause.

PAPI  
How's ya mom

Pause.

DANI  
I dunno

Good

PAPI  
Yeah

DANI  
Yeah I dunno

PAPI  
Yeah or no

DANI  
Yeah  
She just

She ain't here

Pause.

PAPI  
Okay

Silence.  
They watch JAMES.

DANI  
That your fighter

PAPI  
Yeah

Pause.

DANI  
He looks good

JAMES smiles.

PAPI  
Oh izzat so That's what you think huh You been here two seconds that's what you think

DANI  
Well  
Yeah

PAPI  
That's what you think

DANI  
Yeah I dunno

Yeah

PAPI  
Yeah

DANI  
Yeah

Pause.

PAPI  
Move ya bag

DANI  
What

PAPI  
Move ya bag Don't leave it in the way

PAPI moves away.  
DANI moves her bag.  
Bell rings.  
JAMES shadowboxes, PAPI leans against the ropes.

PAPI  
Chin down  
Come on Come on  
Work

JAMES moves around the ring.

PAPI  
Move your big fat head  
Move your fuckin head  
Work

JAMES moves around the ring.

PAPI  
Ay coño  
You wanna get timed  
Stop slipping the same way  
Move  
Move  
Move

There you go

JAMES moves around the ring.  
PAPI steps in with him, quick as a snake bats JAMES on the right side of his face.

PAPI  
You drop your right hand  
You gonna eat left hooks  
Mess up that pretty face  
Come on

PAPI shoots a jab, cross, hook, JAMES slips and rolls, fires back a right cross, left hook, right cross – which PAPI catches expertly.

PAPI  
*Eso*

The 30-second bell rings.

PAPI  
Thirty seconds come on go go go go go

JAMES begins throwing non-stop combinations, rolling and slipping.  
The bell rings to finish the round.  
PAPI pulls out some loose change.

PAPI  
I want three rounds on speed bag  
Go

PAPI exits to the coke machine.

JAMES  
Hey  
Yo

What's your name

DANI  
Me  
What  
Dani

JAMES  
Dani  
You help me outta these

DANI  
Oh  
Yeah

She unties the laces on his gloves.

JAMES  
Thanks  
Dani

He drinks from a water bottle.

JAMES  
You a fighter

DANI  
I  
What  
Oh  
Sorta

JAMES  
Sorta

DANI  
I mean  
Yeah

Yeah

JAMES (you're adorable)  
Yeah

DANI (no I'm not)  
Yeah

JAMES  
Aight then

How long you been fighting

DANI  
What  
Oh

Not long

Pause.

JAMES  
So  
You

You live around here

DANI  
Yeah  
Um  
Well

Sunset Park

JAMES  
Aight

And  
What  
Papi knew your dad

Pause.

JAMES  
You Chinese

DANI shakes her head.

JAMES  
Japanese

DANI  
Korean and Puerto Rican

JAMES  
No shit  
Some great fighters outta Puerto Rico  
Felix Trinidad Miguel Cotto  
Hector Camacho You heard a him

DANI  
Nah

JAMES  
Great fighter yo  
Big mouth  
Great fighter

You gonna work out then

DANI  
Oh  
Uh  
I

JAMES  
Might as well right  
Brought your gear

DANI  
Yeah  
Well  
Yeah

But

JAMES  
What

DANI  
I don't

I don't uh

Pause.

JAMES  
You scared a Papi

DANI  
No

No  
I

JAMES  
Then wrap up yo  
Come on

D' you need help

DANI  
No

JAMES  
Aight then

JAMES goes to work on the speed bag.

PAPI enters, drinking a Diet Dr. Pepper in a smiley-face foam cup holder.

PAPI  
What's she doing

JAMES  
's it look like

Pause.

PAPI  
For what

JAMES  
What you think

PAPI  
Ayyyshh

DANI sits on a wooden bench, gets out her wraps.  
CARO walks in, drops his bag.  
PAPI walks over, DANI ends up in the middle of this exchange.

PAPI  
You late

CARO  
Yeah  
I was  
I had a um

Yeah

PAPI  
I ain't doing this with you Caro  
One more time I'm done You hear me

Hey  
You *hear* me

CARO  
Yeah

Pause.

PAPI

Go on

I said *go on*

You better be a fuckin *blur* in my sight next four rounds or I swear to god

Phone rings in PAPI's office.

DANI escapes to the side.

CARO

Yeah okay

Sorry

PAPI

Sorry ain't cut shit with me

You hear

Shutup

Listen

You want this or not

That simple

You show up late you don't listen what I say

Thassit

Don't come crying to me about shit You do it to yourself and I ain't got no room for sorry up in here now go on get your ass working

PAPI exits into the office.

JAMES

You been *told*

Where the hell were you

CARO

I

GINA enters.

GINA

The *fuck* Caro

CARO

Oh man

GINA flies at CARO, pummeling him with her fists.  
DANI again ends up in the middle.  
She tries to get away, but somehow always ends up between them.

CARO  
Shit  
G  
Come on yo

GINA  
Fuckin walk away when I'm talkin to you

CARO  
I hadda go G  
I told you

GINA  
I saw you

CARO  
What you talkin about I don't know what you talkin about

GINA  
The fuck you don't  
*I saw you with her*

CARO  
Who

GINA  
Rey's sister

CARO  
What

GINA  
Don't fuckin play innocent with me Caro I know you know who I'm talking about  
That bitch moved up from Paterson

DANI  
Maritza

GINA  
Yeah Maritza

Who the fuck are you

DANI  
What  
Me  
Oh  
Dani

GINA looks DANI up and down.

DANI  
She  
Maritza  
I work in in the sandwich shop  
On Wednesdays and Saturdays and she always comes in for a  
um

Everyone stares at DANI for a beat.  
GINA turns back to CARO.

GINA (to CARO)  
I saw you in the Jamba Juice with *Maritza* in your fucking lap

CARO  
Oh come on

GINA  
You callin me a liar  
The entire fuckin block saw you Caro

CARO  
Come on baby We was just talkin Ain't nothin happen

GINA  
Bullshit That's bullshit  
The fuck you think I am  
*Stupid* a something

JAMES  
Shoe fits

GINA  
What'd you say

JAMES (who me)  
Huh

GINA  
The fuck you just say to me James

JAMES (ah yes I remember now)  
Oh  
Yo  
I said  
*Shoe fits*  
Meaning  
If the shoe fits  
*Wear it*

GINA narrows her eyes, then lunges at JAMES right across DANI who tries to get out of the way.  
Lots of shouting, JAMES laughing.

DANI somehow gets tangled up with GINA, who pushes DANI away as she reaches for JAMES.  
CARO grabs GINA around the waist, holding her with one arm as she flails ineffectually at JAMES.  
DANI gets behind a bench, in a corner, trying to stay out of the way.

GINA  
Let  
Go  
A  
Me  
YOU COCKSUCKERS

PAPI enters.  
CARO sets GINA down.  
Silence.

PAPI  
What is this  
Happy play time  
Why is nobody working

Hey Gina

GINA  
Hey Papi

PAPI  
You here to train

GINA  
Uh no I

PAPI  
Then get out

GINA opens her mouth, PAPI gives her a look.  
She exits.

PAPI (calling after her)  
Tell your tio I said hello

CARO and JAMES exchange a look.  
PAPI saunters past them, hits CARO on the back of the head sharply, sits  
in a folding chair.

PAPI  
Let's go  
Come on  
I wanna see some WORK

PAPI sees DANI hiding behind the bench.

PAPI  
You

Hey you

DANI  
Dani

PAPI  
Whatever  
You gonna work or not

DANI  
Uh

PAPI  
You here

DANI  
What

PAPI  
work  
or get out

DANI stands trying to think what to say.  
PAPI turns away from her.  
JAMES tosses her a jump rope.

PAPI  
Hey  
Mind your own business

JAMES  
What I'm just giving her a

PAPI  
Shut up  
Go on Go

DANI picks up the rope, her wraps are falling off.

PAPI  
What's  
Ay coño  
What did you do  
Come here

DANI (please don't look at me)

I'm fine

I

PAPI

Shutup Come here

What

You don't know how to wrap your hands

Why dint you say

DANI (look away, look away)

Um

I

PAPI

Why your pop dint show you right

DANI

I

PAPI

Shutup

I'm gonna show you the proper way

Pay attention okay

Hey

You paying attention

DANI

What

Yeah

PAPI

Yeah

DANI

Yeah

PAPI wraps her left hand.

PAPI

Not too tight not too loose

Okay

Wrist

DANI  
Wrist

PAPI  
Knuckles

DANI  
Knuckles

PAPI  
Through fingers  
One Two Three

DANI  
One Two Three

PAPI  
Wrist

DANI  
Wrist

PAPI  
Thumb

DANI  
Thumb

PAPI  
Finish on your wrist

He finishes her right hand, gives her the other wrap.  
DANI wraps her left hand, with PAPI watching.

DANI  
Wrist

PAPI  
Yeah

DANI  
Knuckles

PAPI  
No look  
Back of your hand  
Not too tight

DANI  
Fingers  
One

PAPI  
Make a fist

DANI  
Two

PAPI  
Open

DANI  
Three

PAPI  
Eso

DANI  
Wrist

PAPI  
One time

DANI  
Thumb

PAPI  
Two times

DANI  
Finish on your wrist

PAPI  
Make a fist

DANI makes a fist, PAPI pats her knuckles.

PAPI  
There you go

Now rope  
Go

TRAINING SYMPHONY #1.

Two more fighters come in to train.

The sounds of shadow boxing, jump rope, speed bag, heavy bag, double-end bag and aspirated breathing fill the gym.

At moments, the sounds are random noise.

At moments, they coalesce into a rhythmic symphony of maximum effort.

On the outside of the activity, DANI watches and listens for a few moments. She feels the rhythm, and then -

DANI tries to jump rope.

Her rope hits an irregular beat completely out of sync with the rest of the gym.

She is stiff-legged and winded almost immediately, raggedly out of breath. She looks at the guy next to her, who is jumping with ease, almost dancing.

She keeps trying but forgets to breathe while she jumps so she is constantly winded.

Bell rings. Rest period. Heavy breathing.

Bell rings.

Another round begins.

DANI moves over to a mirror to shadowbox.

JAMES shadowboxes near her, in slow motion, moving with ease through combinations and footwork, watching himself in the mirror.

DANI watches him.

PAPI comes up behind her.

PAPI  
What  
You buy a ticket  
You watchin a movie here

DANI tries to shadowbox.

She throws a jab-cross, slipping right then left, trying to imitate JAMES' effortless grace.

She does not breathe and is winded almost immediately, again on the outside of the gym's work rhythm.

At the 30-second bell she tries to throw non-stop but keeps stopping, trying to catch her breath.

Bell rings. Rest period. Heavy breathing.

JAMES

Slow down if you have to  
But don't stop

DANI

Huh

JAMES

When you workin that bell  
Don't let yourself quit  
Don't stop mama

PAPI glares at JAMES.

PAPI

Eh what I say  
Mind your own business

JAMES

I'm just

PAPI

You just nothing

JAMES

Oh come on Papi

PAPI

Shut up  
Get back to work

JAMES rolls his eyes.

PAPI sees that and throws a mitt at his head, which JAMES rolls under expertly.

JAMES winks at DANI, she turns red.  
PAPI rolls his eyes.  
Bell rings for a new round.  
DANI moves over to the heavy bag.  
She is awkward, but again, she won't quit.  
PAPI watches her surreptitiously.

30-second bell.

DANI tries to throw non-stop straight 1-2s.  
She is exhausted, but she forces herself to keep throwing, though she is barely tapping the bag by the end.

Bell rings to end the round.  
DANI's face is red, she bends over and puts her elbows on her knees.

JAMES and CARO are getting into gear for sparring.  
PAPI watches CARO and JAMES fastening buckles, etc.  
DANI watches PAPI.

PAPI  
Sometime in this year I would like you ladies to stop primping and get in that ring  
A small wish Not a big wish  
A small wish  
You think  
What you think about that Caro  
Huh  
You think my wish come true this year  
Huh  
Before I get old

JAMES  
Too late

PAPI  
Watch it son  
I may be old but I can still drop you

JAMES  
Yeah

PAPI

Believe it

I know all your secrets You wear them on your body like neon lights Wanna know what you sellin All anyone gotta do is read the signs baby

CARO shakes his head and ducks between the ropes, holds them open for JAMES.

PAPI

All right now

JAMES and CARO jump lightly on their toes, staying loose, shaking out their arms.

The bell rings.

They come out of their corners, touch gloves, and begin circling.

DANI watches as she unwraps and puts on a worn sweatshirt.

JAMES works inside behind his jab, gets in a quick combination down low and inside, CARO steps back.

DANI takes a step toward PAPI, then hesitates.

She turns away, puts up her hood, and exits quietly.

Lights come down to shadow on the sparring, though we still hear the sounds: the aspirated breathing, impact, occasional grunts.

Lights on DANI as she walks to the subway, practicing punches.

PAPI's voice from the shadows.

PAPI

Just that No Come on

Come on come on come on

Work that with him Just that

Come in behind the jab

Jab

Move ya *head*

Slip slip

Up Hook Cross

Back to the jab

Slip slip

Come on come on come on

Let ya hands go

Up the middle up the middle  
Come on  
Thassit  
There you go  
Eso  
Come on  
Work

Subway sounds fade up, covering the boxing sounds, then out.

DANI in TIA's kitchen, still in her sweatshirt.  
She fiddles with a microwave.  
Sounds of the TV in the other room.  
DANI goes to the doorway, peeks in – DANIEL sits in his wheelchair,  
watching TV sleepily, hunched over to one side, head on a pillow.  
She enters and looks at DANIEL.  
She crosses over and looks up the stairs.  
She crosses back, looks at the TV, looks at DANIEL.  
She takes a breath to speak, but stops when DANIEL shifts impatiently in  
his wheelchair.  
She looks at the TV.

DANI  
Um  
Is Tia

DANIEL  
She's here  
Somewhere

Beat.  
They both stare at the TV.  
DANI goes back into the kitchen and pushes more buttons on the  
microwave – no dice.  
DANIEL's eyes drift shut, he sleeps.  
TIA crosses through the living room.

TIA  
Dani

DANI  
Yeah

TIA  
You get dinner

DANI  
Yeah uh  
I can't get the microwave to

TIA enters the kitchen.

TIA  
Aaaaaaaaaa  
Piece a shit but you know I got it for ten bucks at Milly's sidewalk sale  
You met Milly

DANI  
Nah

TIA  
Oh well  
You will  
She's ya cousin  
we used to see her more often but since Daniel had his  
He don't like the noise Her kids you know  
Like wild animals  
Anyway you'll meet her akay

She jiggles the microwave door, pushes buttons rapidly.

TIA  
So how was it huh  
Did you find the place akay

The microwave clicks on.

DANI  
Yeah

TIA  
Yeah and  
You talk to Papi

DANI shrugs yes.

TIA  
Aright aright aright  
How was it

DANI  
all right I guess

TIA  
Well akay then that's  
Ya gotta tell ya pops about it  
He'll be so excited  
He will  
I think he's  
Yeah  
I think he's sleepin but  
He should be up later on

Pause.  
DANI looks away.

TIA  
He'll be up later kid  
Tell him later akay

Silence.  
TIA watches DANI.  
The microwave dings.  
DANI gets her dinner out.

TIA  
Hey  
You wanna see something

DANI shrugs.  
TIA looks out into the living room, then crosses to a very old computer in  
the corner of the kitchen.

TIA  
You can use this whenever you want but the mouse is broken akay  
You gotta turn it upside down and use ya finger akay

TIA shows her the mouse, she clicks on the keyboard, the modem dials.

While the dial up connects to the internet, TIA gets up and wipes down the table and counters, pours herself a glass of water, looks out the window, waters a sickly plant.

TIA  
I know I should get a new one but you know  
We never use this thing  
Maybe I would if I had it you know  
I got my sisters in Florida always sayin  
Ya gotta get the skype akay so we can do the skype  
You heard a that skype thing Nah

TIA clicks around on the keyboard, then beckons DANI over.

TIA  
Sit here

TIA clicks on something, and after a pause, we hear the muffled sounds of a boxing match.  
TIA watches the screen, her face sad and proud.

TIA  
This was your father akay  
Ain't he beautiful

DANI watches the computer, rapt.

Lights up on the boxing ring, DANIEL in silhouette.  
The sound of DANIEL's silhouette fight is the sound coming through the computer.  
In slow motion, DANIEL moves with ease and dexterity, fighting circles around his opponent.

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)  
"Daniel Perez  
young fighter out of Brooklyn  
been causing a little stir as he moves up the ranks  
and things are really getting interesting here  
You can see Ricky Barrera feeling quite a bit of urgency now  
he keeps trying to come forward and make things happen  
but when he does Perez is counter punching him so effectively  
You see how Perez uses his jab to set up his right hand  
I think Barrera has not used his jab enough in this fight

And that has allowed Perez to just dictate the  
OH MY”

With a feint, he moves like a snake and his opponent walks into a right  
uppercut, falls to the canvas.  
DANIEL is pulled back to his corner while the ref declares the fight over.  
TIA smiles, and grabs a box of Cheez-Its and her water.

TIA  
Ya wanna come in and watch Biggest Loser with me

DANI  
Nah

TIA  
Akay

DANI clicks a few times, then we hear the same opening to the same  
video.  
DANI is glued to the screen.  
She watches the video again, turning up the volume.  
Sounds of the crowd cheering strain the crummy computer speakers.  
TIA calls from the other room.

TIA  
Dani honey  
Too loud akay

DANI  
Sorry Tia

Lights fade on DANIEL watching the bout, until just her face is visible by the  
light of the computer screen, full of longing.

DANI stands and moves downstage.  
The echoes of the crowd cheering on the video and the computer screen  
light carry her into the gym.

Lights and scene shift from Fall into Winter.

TRAINING SYMPHONY #2 – Fall into Winter.  
The rhythm of the gym comes up, already in motion, fighters training.  
Speed bag, heavy bag, jump rope, guys on mitts.

DANI is trying to jump rope.  
PAPI watches her surreptitiously.  
Again, her roping rhythm is outside the beat of the gym, but she is getting better.  
She stops, winded because she still is not breathing.  
She takes deep breaths. She starts again.  
On her exhales, words begin to escape with her breath – vocalizations that find the rhythm of the gym that still eludes the rest of her body.

DANI  
Don'tstop  
don'tstop  
don'tstop

She breathes.

DANI  
Don'tstop  
don'tstop  
don'tstop

She has to stop, bends over, breathing heavily.  
Lights shift.

## **[WINTER]**

An alarm clock.  
Sound of a hand hitting alarm clock.  
Lights up on DANI.  
She sits up, throws her feet over the edge of her bed.  
The lonely dark of the early morning.  
Garbage truck beeps.  
DANI dresses extra warmly in coat, hat, mittens, scarf.  
She walks downstairs.  
DANIEL sleeps on the couch, TV on softly.  
DANI picks up the remote, turns off the TV.  
She picks up a blanket that has fallen onto the floor and covers DANIEL with it gently.

She goes out the front door.  
DANIEL rolls over and raises his head, looking toward the door.  
He lays his head back down and goes back to sleep.

DANI begins her run.

GINA steps into a pool of light, she watches DANI run past her.

GINA

My mom said  
Two ways outta this neighborhood  
School and the army  
And I wasn't good in school  
And I sure as shit wasn't going into no white man's army  
So I stayed and she never forgave me

DANI stops running by an iron gate to catch her breath.  
She leans on the gate, breathing heavily.  
She adjusts her hat and scarf and continues running.

GINA

Even after she dead and gone for good  
I still see her looking that guilt at me outta every damn picture in my granmama house  
Shakin her head  
Clearin her throat  
But never sayin nothin  
Never come right out and say nothin  
I know she thinkin it  
But she ain't say it Just do it with her eyes  
Her eyes said  
Why dint you go  
Why dint you take your chance  
Why you blew it like that over  
What  
A *man*  
her eyes said  
Really for real  
Over a man you gon do this You know he gon stay Do you No you don't But that's what  
you want huh That's what you want to go ahead and do now is it Give away your whole  
life All these many years you got in front a you like buds not even blossomed You gon  
give that to the dust all for the love of one man  
Yeah I heard

Though she ain't say it I *heard* it  
And I said  
Yes  
Yes  
Yes I will  
Yes  
I said Yes

Lights shift, come up on the gym.

From her pool of light, GINA watches DANI enter the gym.  
GINA's lights fades and she exits.

DANI surveys the activity, gets out her gear, and wraps her hands.  
PAPI watches her surreptitiously, then moves away to work with another  
fighter.  
DANI puts on her gloves and begins working on a heavy bag, awkwardly.

JAMES watches DANI.  
A couple other guys work out nearby.

JAMES  
Stop leaning back

DANI  
What

JAMES  
You leaning back Don't lean back mama  
Go into him  
Look

JAMES demonstrates.  
DANI tries it.

JAMES  
Nah  
Look

JAMES holds his hands up.

JAMES  
Jab

DANI jabs.

JAMES  
One two

DANI throws a jab, cross.

JAMES  
Jab cross  
slip my left  
slip my right

DANI throws a jab, cross, and JAMES tags her with his left.

JAMES  
Again

DANI throws the combination again, JAMES stops her in the slip right.

JAMES  
Right here

He moves his hand down her back, putting her in the correct position.  
He's very close to her.

JAMES  
You throwin almost soon as he does Make him pay for a lazy jab Be faster  
Slip  
Get inside and then  
BAM  
Right up in here  
You feel the difference

DANI  
Yeah

They look at each other, their faces are very close.  
DANI straightens.

JAMES  
Jab cross slip slip  
hook down low hook up top

DANI throws the combination, adding the hooks.

JAMES  
Again

DANI throws the combination.

JAMES  
There you go  
Jab  
Come on  
Jab  
Move your head  
Don't stay Don't stay  
Down low  
Up top  
Come on  
Work that bell mama  
Come on

JAMES calls out more combinations, DANI works non-stop.  
Bell rings.  
DANI leans on the ropes, exhausted.

JAMES  
You're not breathing out when you throw

DANI (I beg to differ)  
Uh  
What

JAMES  
You're not That's why you get tired so fast mama  
You gotta breathe

DANI (whatever)  
Uh huh okay

She fumbles with her water bottle.

JAMES  
Gimme that You thirsty why don't you ask  
Here

JAMES gives her a drink, wipes her face gently with a towel.  
They are standing close again, he smiles at her.

JAMES  
The fuck's wrong with you  
Gotta be so independent all a time  
Shit girl  
You don't expect nothin from the world Ain't gon get nothin  
Right

Beat.  
She smiles back.  
They are very close.

PAPI enters, counting change from his pocket.  
DANI moves away from JAMES quickly.  
JAMES grabs some mitts.  
PAPI exits to the coke machine.  
Bell rings.  
JAMES and DANI work the mitts.  
PAPI enters with a Diet Dr. Pepper in his smiley-face foam cup holder.

PAPI (*to JAMES*)  
You finish speed bag

JAMES  
Yeah

PAPI sips his soda and pretends not to watch them.  
DANI throws a combination slowly, with awkward effort.

PAPI  
She's holding her breath

JAMES  
I know  
I said

PAPI  
Tell her to stop

JAMES  
You tell her

PAPI sips his soda.  
JAMES and DANI work.

JAMES  
Come in behind that jab

He demonstrates.

PAPI  
Tell her to the side

JAMES  
What

PAPI  
Go to the side  
Get out the way deliver the shoulder

JAMES  
Yeah  
Anyway

JAMES turns back to DANI.

JAMES  
Hook to the body  
Hook to the head  
Right hand

DANI does the combination.

PAPI  
Tell her reload after hook to the body

JAMES  
You tell her Papi

PAPI  
Nah nah  
None a my business

JAMES  
Don't seem like none a your business

PAPI  
Nah Just tell her to

JAMES pulls the ropes open.

JAMES  
You tell her  
Come on

PAPI  
Nah nah

JAMES  
Nah nah  
Yeah  
Get your old tired ass up in here and tell her yourself

PAPI pauses.  
Bell rings.  
PAPI sets down his soda and steps up into the ring.  
JAMES grins at DANI behind his back, making a "crazy" gesture.

PAPI  
Okay  
Watch me  
You watchin me

DANI  
Yeah

PAPI  
Nothin you do for no reason  
You come in  
Go downstairs  
Hook to the body  
Reload  
Go upstairs  
Hook to the head  
All a way through  
Take ya head out the way see

Give him your shoulder  
Hit don't get hit that's the game  
See  
Watch me  
James come here  
Watch  
Throw a straight right

JAMES throws a straight right at PAPI.  
PAPI slips left, delivers a hook to the body, hook to the head, right straight.  
PAPI does it again, faster, and JAMES catches him expertly.  
PAPI gives JAMES a look, nods his approval, then steps back.

PAPI  
Now you  
Go

DANI steps over to JAMES, goes through the combination.

PAPI  
Again  
Go *into* him on the slip not back  
Don't drop your right hand

DANI throws it again.

PAPI  
Again  
Faster  
Don't lean back

DANI throws it again.  
JAMES tags her on the right side of her head.

PAPI  
Again

DANI throws it again.  
JAMES tags her on the left side of her head.

PAPI  
Guess you like to get hit huh  
Bring that left back to your face not down here  
Don't drop your right hand  
Come on

DANI throws it again, faster.

PAPI  
Again

DANI throws it again, faster, and keeps her hands up.  
JAMES adds a left hook, right straight, which DANI slips and rolls  
instinctively.  
JAMES grins.

PAPI  
*ESO*

Good  
Very good Dani

DANI grows about two inches under his praise.  
PAPI just looks at her, with a strange longing.  
Beat.

PAPI  
But you still not breathin  
You wanna get all tired out huh  
Let some other guy run you round the ring while you suckin wind  
Huh  
Don't forget to breathe

PAPI throws some straight punches, making the aspirated breathing  
sound.  
DANI imitates him.

PAPI  
There you go

CARO enters, wearing street clothes, no gym bag.  
He greets JAMES and nods at DANI, looks over at PAPI.

CARO  
Hey Papi how ya doin

PAPI  
What

CARO  
Yeah  
I'm good  
Thanks for askin  
PAPI  
Funny  
Ha ha ha  
Like Santa

JAMES  
Santa's  
Ho ho ho

PAPI  
What

JAMES  
Nothin

CARO  
Listen Papi I  
I got a  
Um

Pause.

PAPI  
Nah  
You know what  
I don't wanna hear it

CARO  
Come on man

PAPI  
No Come on man  
Thassit  
I'm done

CARO  
Papi  
Listen

PAPI  
No  
No  
No  
I told you before  
One more time  
Thassit That's done I'm done

CARO takes a crumpled cheap cigar out of his pocket, holds it out to PAPI.

PAPI  
What's that what is that

CARO  
That's for you

PAPI  
Why for me

CARO  
To celebrate

I'm a dad

JAMES  
No shit  
Congrats dude

JAMES jumps out of the ring and dude-hugs CARO.

DANI  
Congrats Caro  
Wow  
Just  
How's Gina doin

CARO  
Aw she's good Real good  
They hadda do a c-section

JAMES  
C-section

CARO

Oh that's

They cut the belly open cuz I guess my little man was just a little too comfortable up in there But she's good now Baby's good It's all good

Pause.

CARO looks at PAPI, who is silent.

DANI grabs a card from her gym bag.

CARO

Anyway

I wanted to stop by and let y'all know whussup

DANI hands CARO the card.

CARO takes it without looking at her.

CARO

Thanks Dani

CARO still looks at PAPI, who turns suddenly and walks out.

CARO is crestfallen.

JAMES claps him on the back.

JAMES

Know what

Don't even worry about it man

CARO

Nah

I ain't

JAMES

For real

He come around

Just a cranky ass old man is all

CARO

Nah

I know It's cool

I ain't worry about it yo

It's cool

Pause.

JAMES

So you back after the weekend then

Pause.

JAMES

Or

CARO

I don't know man

I got the job you know and they offerin me some extra hours now because of the holidays  
so

I

I want to

But

Long pause.

DANI

What's the baby's name Caro

CARO smiles proudly.

CARO

Michael Alfred Carroman

JAMES

Strong

Those fighter names yo

CARO

Oh

Hold up yo

I gotta gotta

Look

He holds out a picture on his cell phone.

DANI and JAMES oooh and aahh.

CARO  
Yeah  
My little man

DANI  
Already making a fist at the world  
Little fighter huh

CARO  
Yeah  
You know

Not if I can help it You know  
Better ways to get by in this world  
I mean I hope  
I think that for him I would hope that

Pause.

CARO  
Aight then

JAMES  
Be seeing you soon yeah

Slight pause.

CARO (no you won't)  
Yeah

JAMES (I feel you)  
Yeah

CARO (thanks)  
Yeah  
Sure  
Yeah  
Later J

They dude-hug again.  
CARO bumps fists with DANI, looks after PAPI once, then exits.  
Beat.  
Bell rings.

DANI watches JAMES who stands looking after CARO.  
PAPI crosses from the office to the pop machine.

JAMES

How about three rounds shadowboxing

DANI starts to shadowbox, moving around the ring lightly.  
She is much improved since the last time we saw her, in better condition,  
but still awkward, not quite flowing.  
PAPI comes back from the pop machine.  
JAMES steps to him, blocking his path.  
30-second bell rings.

JAMES

You trained that boy from the cradle

PAPI

So

JAMES

He worked hard for you and it ain't right how you treatin him

PAPI

I'm not treatin him nothing

JAMES

Papi it ain't right yo  
You gotta respect he got his reasons and just  
Look  
Only reason you gettin so mad is you know I'm right

PAPI

I'm not

JAMES

You are

PAPI

You're not not *I'm* not  
I'm not

JAMES

What

PAPI  
I'm not mad

JAMES  
Papi come on now man

PAPI  
*That's not me I'm not mad You make me mad I'M NOT MAD*

JAMES  
He ain't do nothin wrong  
Man tryna take care a business is all and you  
You just

PAPI steps up onto the ring apron, watching DANI, sipping his soda.  
JAMES steps up next to him.  
Bell rings to end the round.  
DANI looks over.

JAMES  
Twenty pushups  
(to PAPI)  
You just sore 'cuz a some shit ain't got nothin to do with Caro  
And you know that's right so don't even front

PAPI looks at JAMES, they both look at DANI.  
She starts to do knee pushups.

PAPI  
Get off your knees  
What you think

DANI does regular pushups, slowly, two at a time.  
Bell rings to start a new round.  
DANI finishes the pushups and shadowboxes a second round.

JAMES  
Roll under and pivot mama

PAPI  
Light on your feet come on

JAMES  
Papi  
man  
You gotta get over

PAPI  
I am  
(to *DANI*)  
Keep ya hands up

JAMES  
That's some old shit you turnin over in your mind  
You look at her and I see it on your face  
How she gonna play me  
And I know you look at me and wonder the same thing  
But that ain't me Papi  
And she ain't her dad

DANI looks over.

JAMES  
Keep throwing mama  
Hands up

DANI shadowboxes.  
PAPI watches her.

JAMES  
Aight look  
Forget it Just  
I know you got that other spot comin up  
Those guys outta Florida puttin together that undercard on the Manfredo fight so  
What you thinking

You thinkin you gonna go ahead and make that fight

Pause.

JAMES  
'Cuz I'm ready

Silence.  
DANI stops shadowboxing and watches them.

JAMES  
Papi come on man

Yo  
Look

I know Caro was your boy and I been fine Right All this time You trained both of us but  
he was your fighter yo Everyone could see And I been good with that  
And I stayed  
And I been workin

yo man  
Caro  
Caro just

He just a dude with fast hands but he ain't got the heart for it He never wanted to Never  
had the heart for it And you know that's true  
But I

Pause.

JAMES  
I'm ready is all  
And I feel like I shouldn't have to tell you that after all this time Feel like I earned my  
shot but if you don't then

Silence.

JAMES watches PAPI, who steps down from the ring and heads up to his  
office.

JAMES watches him go, shakes his head once, and exits.

DANI stops and watches him go.

PAPI comes out of his office, pauses, stares at the front door, rubbing his  
head, agitated.

He sees DANI staring at him.

PAPI  
Get on the heavy bag  
One two one two  
Slip slip

JAMES bursts back in the door.

JAMES  
Yo Papi  
Look man you gotta listen to

PAPI  
Okay

JAMES regroup.

JAMES (wait what)  
Okay you  
okay

Pause.  
PAPI sighs and rubs his head.

PAPI  
Yeah  
Okay

JAMES  
Aight then

JAMES and PAPI bump fists, PAPI exits to his office.

Bell rings to end the round.  
JAMES turns back to DANI.

JAMES  
Get on the speed bag mama  
Three rounds  
I'll be right back

JAMES exits, dialing on his cell phone.

DANI looks up toward PAPI's office.  
PAPI sits at his desk, lost in thought.

DANI works on the speed bag.  
Her rhythm is getting more steady, but is still slow and labored, like a sluggish heartbeat.

Lights fade on everything but DANI, who doggedly works the speedbag.  
Her uneven rhythm carries over into:

Lights up on the apartment.  
Sounds of the TV from the other room.  
The speedbag fades out.

Light from the TV comes up and illuminates DANIEL, sitting in his  
wheelchair.  
TIA enters, wearing a nurse uniform.  
She gathers up her cigarettes and lighter, puts them in her bag.

TIA  
Hey  
Hermanito  
You seen Dani yet Nah  
Akay well when she gets back let her know I left her a dinner in the freezer she can put in  
the microwave akay But tell her remember to leave the plastic on just cut a hole in the top  
but leave it on so it don't get all over akay There's one in there for you too in case you  
hungry later akay  
Daniel  
You hearin me

TIA pauses by DANIEL's chair.  
DANIEL keeps his eyes on the TV.  
She touches his head softly.

TIA  
Ya killin me here hermano  
Ya gotta give us a break  
Her and me akay  
I mean  
You ain't see how she looks at you  
Like a dry sponge lookin at water

DANIEL fidgets impatiently away from her touch.  
TIA sighs and kisses the top of his head.

TIA  
Akay  
Have a good night

TIA exits.  
Sounds of a TV laugh track.

Sound of footsteps on stairs, key in lock, door opening.  
DANI enters, puts down her gym bag, gets a glass of water.  
She peeks in the other room, pauses in the kitchen, drinking her water.  
She holds an internal debate.  
She refills her water glass.  
She pauses, then marches into the living room and sits in a chair next to her father.

DANI  
Hey Pop

DANIEL  
Hey

They both watch the TV.  
Laugh track.  
DANI glances at DANIEL.  
He keeps his eyes on the TV.  
Laugh track.

DANI starts to speak at the same moment that DANIEL reaches for a glass of water on a tray beside him and knocks it over.

DANI  
I'm

DANIEL  
Shit

DANI jumps up and runs to kitchen.  
She comes back in and hands him some napkins.  
She tries to help him mop up around his chair, but he waves her away.  
His shirt is soaked.  
He sits very still for moment, sighs, a hand rubbing his forehead.  
He wheels himself over to a laundry basket, struggles to reach into it from his chair.  
DANI watches him, stepping toward him and then back as he starts impatiently throwing clothes out of the basket until he finds a t-shirt.  
DANI hovers, not knowing how to help.  
He takes off his wet shirt, and feels DANI hovering.

He looks, not at her, but in her direction – DANI turns away quickly.  
He puts on the dry shirt, but it has ketchup on the front.  
He runs a hand over his eyes briefly.

DANIEL  
There's a uh  
clothes drying rack

DANI jumps up.

DANI  
rack

DANIEL  
Upstairs in your Tia's room  
My t-shirt  
Can you

DANI  
Oh  
yeah

DANI runs upstairs and comes back almost instantly with a shirt.  
The shirt has a gold lame tiger on it.

DANIEL  
Ah that's  
I think that's  
ain't mine

DANI  
Oh  
Sorry

DANIEL  
There should be a grey one  
Maybe

DANI bolts from the room and comes back with the shirt.  
She stands by his chair awkwardly, wanting to help.  
DANIEL starts to pull off his shirt to change, then pauses until DANI  
goes back to her chair.

DANIEL gets changed and throws the dirty shirt on the floor with the wet one.

He wheels himself back over to his spot.

She sits.

They both watch the TV for dear life.

DANI glances at him, then back at the TV.

He glances, not at her, but in her direction, then back at the TV.

Lights fade until only the TV light illuminates their faces, both staring at the screen, both set in the same expression of deep longing.

Laugh track.

Lights fade into season shift and the gym.

The light from the TV and the sounds of the laugh track carry DANI into the gym.

TRAINING SYMPHONY #3 – Winter into Spring.

The rhythm of the gym comes up, already in motion, fighters training.

Speed bag, heavy bag, jump rope, guys on mitts.

DANI starts to work a heavy bag.

Her rhythm is still slower than the beat of the gym, but we can hear that she is finally on beat, just at half time.

She stops, winded because she still is not breathing.

She takes deep breaths, in through her nose and out through her mouth.

She starts again, and this time her breathing is regular.

Words escape with her exhales, in rhythm.

She is starting to develop timing in her movement.

DANI

One one two

Slip

Body head out

One one two

Slip

Body head out

She breathes.

DANI  
Get in Get out  
Get in Get out  
Get in Get out

PAPI watches her.  
He gestures for her to keep her hands up.  
DANI adjusts and keeps working.  
PAPI throws a hook at her body and she blocks.  
He nods and moves away, DANI keeps working, but with a little flush of pride.

Lights fade on the gym, snow drips from the roof outside, melting.  
DANI's rhythm continues a bit in the black.

**[SPRING]**

An alarm clock.  
Sound of a hand hitting alarm clock.  
Lights up on DANI.  
She sits up, throws her feet over the edge of her bed.  
The lonely dark of the early morning.  
DANI dresses lightly, no coat, no mittens, no hat.

DANIEL sleeps in his wheelchair.  
DANI tiptoes through the living room, holding her breath.  
She trips over the rug and knocks over a picture on a side table, which makes a loud crash.  
DANIEL sits up, startled awake.

DANI (*whispers*)  
OhshitI'msorryI'msorry

DANIEL rubs a hand over his face, glances at her.  
He turns away, and hunches back down, head on a pillow.

DANI (*whispers*)  
sorry

She quietly puts the picture back and tiptoes to the door.  
He pretends to go back to sleep.  
DANI exits.

DANIEL watches her through the window.  
She stands in front of the house and takes a couple of deep breaths.  
She begins her run.  
Lights fade on DANIEL, who stretches his neck to watch her all the way  
down the block.

DANI breathes, exaggerated to remind herself, but she breathes.  
She runs past a bus stop, GINA sits hunched on a bench crying.  
DANI stops.

DANI  
Hey Gina

GINA (not looking)  
Fuck off

Pause.  
DANI turns to leave, then turns back.

DANI  
It's me Dani

GINA  
Oh  
oh

Sorry

DANI  
You okay

GINA  
Yeah

fine just

DANI  
Waitin for the 41

GINA  
Yeah it's

late

Pause.  
A sob rises in GINA's throat.

DANI  
Oh don't worry that bus is always late it don't mean nothin it'll be here

Pause.

GINA  
Thanks

DANI  
Yeah  
How's Caro and the baby

GINA (get off me)  
Good good real good

How's ya mom

DANI (what's your problem anyway)  
Good

Yeah I don't know actually  
How she is  
But you knew that

Pause.  
They look at each other, then away.

GINA  
Yeah

sorry

Silence.

GINA (help me)  
Do you ever  
want

a

I wish

Pause.

GINA  
the bus would come

GINA manages a fake brave smile.

DANI  
It will

GINA  
Okay

I'm okay now

DANI (are you)  
Yeah

GINA (go away)  
Yeah

DANI  
Okay

See ya

GINA  
Yeah

DANI continues her run.

GINA wipes away tears that keep rolling silently down her face.

TIA steps into a spot pool, watches DANI run past her.

TIA

Just ah

Akay

Unusual for me to be at a loss for words Trust me when I say there's quite a few people who'd like to be around to see this one akay

Quite A Few

Starting with my beloved father may he rest in peace but then you know the shock of it Of me with no words The shock might kill him akay

DANI runs on, shadowboxes in the ring, lights on her separate from TIA.  
TIA watches DANI shadowbox.

TIA

So you know

Uh

Um well

We got postcards from her for a while

From here and there

Tucson SantaFe Eugene Encinitas

Crazy right

They was from all over the map

And Daniel used to go nuts just NUTS when these postcards came akay  
It was it was it was it was

Akay

You know

It was like

Daniel was so good at stuff

At sports

He was just

Anything he tried he made people's fuckin jaw drop he was so good

Basketball Football Baseball

Anything akay

and people just went on and on and on and on

Talkin about

He so gifted so talented such natural ability like from god and blah blah

Well

They were right akay

But sometimes you know

when you play a sport for serious you have times

Everyone has times You have *times* akay

When you in a slump You know

Like you can't hit shit Can't do nothin for shit

And that happens to everybody It's life okay  
But Daniel  
He couldn't have that  
When his gift deserted him he

It was like a big curtain come down between him and the rest a the world okay  
And he couldn't see out  
And we couldn't see in  
And it was like that until

It wasn't

And that's how he was about Dani's mother  
When it was good  
It was a gift from god  
But when the curtain come down between those two  
Aaaaaaaaaa

And when it did  
She just  
Disappeared  
Then one time she disappeared and she didn't come back  
She was gone for good and the only time we knew she was even still alive was when  
we'd get one a those postcards  
And that's how he found out he was a father  
From a postcard

TIA and DANI make eye contact.  
The sounds of the gym fade up slowly.

Lights shift, fade out on TIA and come up fully on the gym.  
PAPI sits in his office, sips on a Diet Dr. Pepper.  
He holds a shoebox full of papers, takes out a Polaroid picture.

JAMES enters. He watches DANI for a while before she sees him.

JAMES  
That's lookin better mama  
Don't forget to move your head  
Slip  
Slip  
Roll

DANI crosses to him, he kisses her.  
They smile at each other.

JAMES  
You about ready to get on up outta here yo

DANI  
Almost  
Why don't you stay a minute

JAMES  
He here

DANI  
In his office

JAMES starts to leave.

DANI  
You gonna talk to him

JAMES  
What you think

DANI  
I'm a tell him you're here

JAMES  
Oh man  
You know

Pause.

DANI  
What

*What*

JAMES  
You ain't uh you ain't ever seen when he uh

Yo  
Why you care so much I talk to Papi or not

DANI  
Come on  
it's two months already

JAMES  
So

DANI  
He misses you

JAMES  
Oh man  
You do not know Papi  
That man freeze you out  
You done like  
Done *done*  
you out the door on your ass  
and he don't even remember the first letter a your name

Pause.

DANI  
Okay so I'm a go tell him you're here

JAMES  
Suit yourself mama

DANI  
And then you can talk to him  
You can tell him what happened 'cuz you never got a chance to tell him what happened

DANI exits to PAPI's office.  
JAMES sits on the edge of the ring, looks at his cell phone.

DANI  
Papi  
Hey yo Papi

What's that

PAPI  
Nothing  
Mind your own business

DANI crosses around the desk and takes the Polaroid picture.  
She sits in a chair, staring at it.  
PAPI rubs his head, stares up at the wall.

DANI  
This is just like the one I had  
Or  
Nah  
Mine was like this but  
Who's that next to my pops

PAPI  
Guy he fought  
Ricky Barrera

DANI  
Nah that other one  
The commentator guy

PAPI  
Who's that  
Who's *that* guy  
You don't know

DANI  
No

PAPI (are you crazy)  
How you don't know

DANI  
I dunno  
Who is it

PAPI (you are ridiculous to be a boxer and not know this)  
Sweet Pea

Pernell Whitaker

DANI  
Who's that

PAPI (what am I gonna do with you)  
Ayyyshhhhh

Silence.  
DANI stares at the photo.

PAPI  
Keep it

DANI  
nah

Silence.  
She continues to stare at it.

DANI  
I never seen him lookin like uh  
He don't look at me

I wish I got to see him fight

PAPI  
Ah  
Beautiful fighter

DANI  
Yeah

PAPI  
Sure sure  
Eh So what  
Get your ass ropin

DANI  
James is back

Silence.

DANI  
You should talk to him

PAPI  
You talk to him

DANI  
I do

PAPI  
So okay it's no problem

DANI  
No it is a problem

PAPI  
What

DANI  
You  
Both a you

PAPI  
Listen  
Shutup  
Listen  
You wanna train we train  
You wanna talk Go to Starbucks

DANI  
Papi

PAPI  
Oh come on  
What

DANI  
What am I supposed to

PAPI  
What you what  
What

DANI  
How'm I supposed to train

PAPI  
What you mean how  
How you always do

DANI  
You gonna let him train here then

PAPI  
Ehhh

DANI  
Aren't you even gonna  
Come on

PAPI shrugs noncommittally.  
DANI shakes her head.

DANI  
Fine

DANI down at the photo again, pauses, then tosses it onto PAPI's desk.  
PAPI picks it up.

PAPI  
God what a fighter your pop

First fighter was all mine  
I trained him from the first day he put on gloves  
Walked in here  
Thirteen years old wants to fight don't know shit don't listen don't know how to work  
don't know shit  
He's here two days  
He wants to get in the ring and go with Benny Marquez  
Pro fighter  
Real heavy right hand and quick like a snake  
And your pop wants to get in the ring with him  
Jumpin out his shoes to get in the ring  
He's at me for three days straight  
Why I can't go with Benny I wanna go with Benny I can go with Benny Let me go with  
Benny  
Benny Benny Benny  
So I let him  
And I ain't tell Benny shit You understand  
Not go easy Not nothing  
I said

Okay fine  
You wanna go  
Go  
Your pop gets up in there  
Bell rings  
BAM  
Benny drops him before he can throw one shot  
Steps in  
Right upper cut to the belly  
Right up in here just  
*BAM*  
Your pop goes down like a bag a bricks  
Gasping for air  
Kept trying to stand back up but he about to pass out  
Benny helped him out the ring and he sat on a bench for about a half hour with his head  
between his knees then  
gone  
without one word to nobody  
Next day  
School's out  
Three-thirty  
Your pop walk in the door like nothing ever happened  
Goes straight up to Benny and shakes his hand and not a word  
But he listen to me and do everything I say and he work hard  
Every time he come in the door  
He come to work  
And I knew

Boy's a fighter

PAPI looks at DANI closely.

PAPI  
What's that  
You cryin

DANI  
NO  
No I

PAPI  
Get your ass working  
Go on

DANI  
Talk to James

PAPI  
Ehhhh

DANI  
Papi come on

PAPI shrugs.

DANI  
I can't train here if you don't let James

PAPI  
My gym My rules

DANI  
That don't even make sense  
James didn't do anything wrong if you'd just

PAPI  
Hey listen  
I ain't keeping you here  
You wanna leave with James  
You free to go

DANI  
Why can't you just fuckin talk to him  
why you gotta be so

PAPI shrugs and looks away, stubborn and silent.  
DANI turns toward the door, then turns back.

DANI  
I wanna spar  
You said I could spar

PAPI  
Yeah so

DANI  
Okay  
I wanna spar

PAPI  
No one here for you today  
No girls your size and

DANI  
Okay then I wanna get in with James

PAPI  
Ayyy

DANI  
I wanna spar with James

PAPI  
Ayyysh what you  
Why you got  
You can't spar with James

DANI  
Why  
You said I could start sparring  
I wanna go with James

Pause.  
They glare at each other.

PAPI  
Okay fine

DANI  
Yeah

PAPI (FINE YEAH)  
Okay

They exit into the gym.  
DANI goes to her bag, gets wraps.  
PAPI leans casually on the ropes.  
JAMES shadowboxes lightly.

PAPI and JAMES studiously ignore each other.

PAPI

Ask him does he have his headgear

DANI

No

You ask him

PAPI

I don't wanna

JAMES

I got my headgear

Why

PAPI

Ask him he wants to go a couple rounds

JAMES

What

DANI

Papi

For fuck's sake

PAPI

Ask him

DANI

You wanna spar

JAMES

With who

DANI

Me

JAMES looks at PAPI.

PAPI shrugs, but still refuses to meet his eye.

JAMES

She ready

PAPI shrugs.

DANI  
Yes  
She is

Pause.

JAMES  
Aight then  
Come on with it

JAMES and DANI put on sparring gear: headgear, mouthpiece, etc.

PAPI  
Come on come on come on  
Let's go let's go

JAMES and DANI touch gloves, start circling.  
JAMES has better defense and much more control of the ring, but DANI  
has good handspeed and learns quickly from her mistakes.  
They feel each other out.

PAPI  
Come on come on come on  
Let's go  
What is this  
A barn dance  
Get in there  
Let's go

DANI throws a few jabs, tries to work inside and down low, but JAMES  
pivots away.

PAPI  
Cut off the ring  
Don't let him get

DANI tries to walk him down, but he moves too well, and she can't get a  
glove on him.

PAPI  
Come on come on  
You thinking too much  
Jab while you thinkin  
Jab Jab Jab

Bell ends the round.  
They go to their corners.  
PAPI gives them water.

PAPI  
Don't let him pace you  
Cut off the ring and keep moving in  
Get in get out  
Bam bam bam  
Let ya hands go

DANI  
He's not trying  
You ain't trying

JAMES  
I am

DANI  
You not  
If you don't hit me I ain't doing this with you

JAMES  
Come on mama

DANI  
Fuck you  
Tell Papi what happened

Bell rings.  
DANI walks JAMES down.

DANI  
Tell him

She throws a combination, almost catches JAMES on his heels.

JAMES  
What

DANI  
You know what

She throws another combination, grazes JAMES' face.

DANI  
Tell him

JAMES  
I ain't telling shit to no cranky ass old man

DANI  
You don't I'm gonna

PAPI  
Shutup shutup shutup  
I wanna see some damn boxing

JAMES comes after DANI for real.  
She bobs and weaves, gets hit a lot, but gets away.

DANI  
Papi

PAPI  
No Papi  
I don't care Papi  
Shutup and box

DANI rolls under and pivots, gets a half step on JAMES and comes after him hard and fast, backs him up to the ropes with a flurry, throwing lightning-quick, non-stop combinations.  
JAMES covers up.  
DANI finishes with a wicked right uppercut, knocking the wind out of JAMES.  
She turns to PAPI.

DANI

James waited for you

And those Cavallo promoters were after him for months

Did you know that

He turned them down for months

They offered him the Manfredo undercard before you did

But James said no he wouldn't fight without you

He waited for you to say yes to him because he was not gonna leave you

But then Cavallo told you not to come to the training camp in Florida

They lied

They told you James said not to come to Florida and he didn't know until it was too late

He waited for you Papi

He didn't know

And you shoulda listened to him after the fight You shoulda listened to him

He didn't leave you for a bigger promoter

He didn't do like my pop did

He wouldn't do that to you He never would and he didn't

They are all very still.

PAPI looks at DANI, who looks at JAMES, who looks away.

Bell rings to end the round.

Heavy breathing in the silence.

DANI takes her gloves and headgear off, packs her gym bag, and exits.

PAPI sits on the edge of the ring.

Pause.

JAMES moves down and sits next to PAPI.

PAPI helps him take off his headgear and his gloves.

They look studiously away from each other, but sit companionably: the air between them has shifted.

JAMES breathes hard from the sparring.

PAPI takes one deep breath and lets it out.

Lights shift.

TRAINING SYMPHONY #4 – Spring into Summer.

The rhythm of the gym comes up, already in motion, fighters training.

Speed bag, heavy bag, jump rope, guys on mitts.

DANI jumps rope beautifully in rhythm with the gym, managing a few criss-cross and double-unders.

She breathes better, but still forgets and holds her breath when doing difficult moves.

Lights shift to silhouette on the gym.

**[SUMMER]**

An alarm clock.  
The pre-dawn light of an early summer morning.

Silhouette: in the gym, PAPI watches while JAMES works the mitts while DANI throws non-stop, slipping, blocking, and rolling (the Mayweather pad work).

The mittwork beats out a complex rhythm which is perfectly in sync with the gym rhythm.

But – DANI is still not remembering to breathe, and ends up sucking wind by the end of the round.

PAPI bats her on the head and demonstrates: breathes in deeply through his nose, exhaling through his mouth.

DANI imitates him.

The alarm beeps but no one turns it off.

TIA stumbles into the room, half asleep, hits the alarm clock, looks at DANI's empty bed.

A high school graduation cap lies on the floor, TIA puts it on the night stand.

TIA sits on the edge of the bed, looking around the room.

Bell rings.

DANI stops, breathing hard.

PAPI enters drinking his Diet Dr. Pepper.

PAPI  
Again

JAMES smacks the mitts together, DANI starts throwing.

PAPI watches, leaning on the ropes.

The rhythm of the padwork underscores the following:

TIA goes into the kitchen.

DANIEL sits in his wheelchair at the table, looking out the window.

TIA sets the table.

TIA  
So hermanito  
What's your plan today huh  
You got big plans huh

Pause.

DANIEL glances at her and then back out the window.

TIA

Oh okay I see

Gotta real busy day of self-pity huh

Gonna get good and caught up on ya wallowing are ya

Or ya maybe gonna call Ricky

See if he still got that job

Maybe take a little ride with me down to the gym later

See ya baby girl doin her thing

what ya think

Lights and sound shift to:

DANIEL'S SYMPHONY.

A bubble of light on DANIEL.

Differently shaded bubbles of light on TIA, the gym, CARO and GINA.

Everyone but DANIEL moves in slightly slow motion – not too pronounced, but definitely slower.

Sounds become amplified and somehow cleaner, isolated.

These sounds only pierce DANIEL's bubble periodically, and only one at a time:

- TIA making breakfast: dishes clinking, coffee pot steaming, eggs frying
- DANI and JAMES: punches landing on the mitts, breathing, grunts, heavy steps on the ring
- CARO and GINA: diaper tabs ripping, baby bottle shaking

The rest of the time, there is silence except for DANIEL's lines.

In moments when the outside world punctures DANIEL's inner world, we hear sound and see things at regular speed – but only brief moments that just happen to sync up with and underscore DANIEL's thoughts.

During DANIEL's lines, TIA continues to talk and make breakfast, DANI and JAMES continue to work, PAPI watches them, CARO and GINA argue while she changes the baby.

DANIEL

Everything happens so fast

And then slow

Jesus how long have I been sitting here

Oh

Oh man

I gotta I gotta

get a grip cuz this is

Man I'm tired

TIA pours orange juice – the sound fills the moment.

DANIEL

I don't know how she does it Working nights and then getting up for breakfast I mean that's

It ain't human Yeah She may be a alien Something I wondered about all these years I mean why else would she be able to go without sleep for so long Why Why I'll tell you why ALIEN that's why Probably also why she was so popular and president of everything in school She put her alien powers on everybody's brain

TIA

What would you like

TIA looks at him, the fridge door open.

DANIEL looks at her silently, looks away.

TIA shakes her head and pulls out eggs.

TIA

Scrambled it is

DANIEL

What would I like

I would like

I would like

I would

like

My head is too full of the same thing

That left hook

DANI throws a left hook, we hear it land.

DANIEL  
And what she said

GINA stands.

GINA  
I been here for it  
For this  
For all this shit you got for me day in day out  
and you know that and I ain't never lied to you  
so you better listen close cuz I am tellin you for real  
I can't see  
I can't see straight I can't see what's comin  
You got me runnin at walls and I won't  
I won't  
For this child you understand me  
I won't allow this for him so you better decide  
What you want  
What do you want

GINA takes the baby and exits.  
CARO starts to follow her, stops.  
He pauses, then exits the opposite direction.  
Their light goes out.  
TIA exits, her light goes out.

DANIEL  
I miss her  
I wish I had a seen that hook coming

I miss her  
I miss her  
I miss her

He sighs.  
Lights come up more on DANI, the gym sharing space more equally with DANIEL.  
During the following, DANIEL's world bleeds into then becomes the gym.  
The sounds of DANI's padwork underscore the following, becoming louder and more present throughout.

At first the sounds only pop out at certain moments, punctuating something DANIEL says; then by the end, they are providing a rhythm under his words.

DANIEL watches DANI during his speech, as if he is talking to her.

DANIEL

It plays over and over in my head

Could I stop it

I could stop it

but I don't wanna you know

I don't wanna

because for one thing

It's her

and maybe she's sayin a sad thing

but it's still her

There In my head Clear as a bell

I don't know

I don't know why the happy ones won't stay in my head

Only this

Only this one Clear as a bell

and it's sad but I have her

Every time I have her for one more moment

And for another thing

There is a part of my brain

and I ain't crazy don't fool yourself

But there is a part of my brain

that seems to believe

that if I play it over

and over and over and over that

One day

if I can be fast enough to get inside

I can make it turn out different

that one time when it plays

when she starts to slide past me to the door

One time

I can be fast enough I can turn I can step in I can touch her arm soft and strong enough to hold her there so I can say it I can say it What I was thinking that day but couldn't

No

Wouldn't

Wistful, DANIEL watches DANI laughing with JAMES.

DANIEL

I would say it now

I would say it for you a thousand times now

I'm sorry (please stay)

I'm sorry (I didn't mean it)

I'm sorry (I love you)

I'm sorry (come back to me)

I'm sorry (come back to me)

I'm sorry (come back to me)

DANIEL sits in his wheelchair in the gym, and weeps silently.

DANI stops her pad work, crosses to him.

DANI

Pop

You okay

JAMES

What's up

DANI

I don't know

DANIEL's head is bent forward.

DANI

Pop

hey Pop

DANIEL (I shoulda told you sooner)

I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry

DANI

For what

Pause.

DANI

Pop

Come on

It's okay everything's okay

why

what's

TIA enters in a flurry.

DANI

Tia  
He's

TIA

Aaaaaaaa He's fine don't worry about it  
Got the car around front akay  
Somebody strong help me with the safety gate  
It's stuck but don't worry girl  
We get ya there before the weigh in

DANI

Hey Pop  
Pop  
I'm a be right back

TIA, DANI and JAMES exit.

PAPI crosses down, brings a chair, sits by DANIEL.  
They sit in a full silence, both looking out and down.

DANIEL

god

I wish I'd a seen that left hook comin

PAPI smiles a small sad smile, pats DANIEL's arm once, nodding.

Lights shift.

The gym becomes the tournament space.

DANI'S FIRST FIGHT.

Stools are set next to the corners.

Two judges sit by the ring.

A referee talks to the coaches.

In the locker room, PAPI takes white tape and gauze out of a bag.

DANI pops her head in and out of the locker room door, looking out at the small crowd.

PAPI  
Stop that  
Come here

DANI crosses to him, sits on a chair, backwards.  
PAPI sits on a stool across from her wraps her hands with the tape and gauze throughout the following.

DANI  
They ain't here yet

PAPI  
Eh so what

DANI  
I thought they'd be back by now

PAPI  
so

DANI  
What if they can't get in

PAPI  
What you think  
You think you at Madison Square Garden  
You Floyd Mayweather at the MGM Grand

DANI  
No but

PAPI  
They'll get in

Silence.  
Sound of tape spooling, tearing.  
DANI's knee jiggles up and down nervously.

PAPI  
Ayysh  
Hold still mija

DANI stops jiggling.

DANI  
Do you think I should go out and wait by the front

PAPI  
I think you should hold still

DANI  
But

PAPI  
Ay coño  
It don't matter

DANI  
What

PAPI  
They come  
They don't come  
You still fightin today right

DANI  
Yeah

PAPI  
Okay then

DANI  
But

PAPI  
But nothin  
Shutup and hold still

PAPI rips the tape with his teeth, finishing one of DANI's hands.  
He starts on her other hand.

DANI  
I thought

He would be here but

PAPI darts a keen glance at her, she looks at her hands, the tape winding around her wrist, her knuckles.

PAPI  
Mehhhh it don't matter

DANI  
Does to me

PAPI  
Forget that  
hey  
Get focused

DANI  
But

PAPI pauses with the tape, glares at her.

PAPI  
Forget it

DANI  
Were you there

PAPI  
What

DANI  
His last fight  
When he got hurt

Pause.

PAPI  
No

DANI  
Do you think  
It woulda been different if you were there  
Do you think he mighta

PAPI  
Ay coño  
Yes No  
How should I know  
It's past okay Leave it alone  
Why you gotta stir shit that's past

DANI  
Because no one talks to me  
No one will tell me  
what did I do

PAPI  
Mija

DANI  
They look at me  
I can feel their eyes on my back when I leave the room but  
No one fuckin talks  
You all know but  
No one will fuckin say it to my face and  
I'm here I'm here I'm here  
*Why won't anyone say it to my face*  
I'm here because she left me  
She left me  
She left me in a bus station outside of fuckin Albuquerque with ten dollars in my pocket  
and Halmoni's phone number and I don't speak Korean and even if I did how do you say  
My mother left me in a bus station  
what language makes that fuckin sentence work  
what language should I learn so I can talk to him  
what language would make him talk to me  
No one talks  
there's no fuckin language for this shit  
There's no  
no language  
no air there  
no way for me to say

how I wish  
how I know I know I know  
I should not have asked her that  
because she left  
I should not have asked her about him  
I asked her about him and she left me  
So so  
Yeah  
I should keep my mouth shut right  
And I can sit on that couch in that room  
I can sit on that couch all night with my mouth shut watching TV with him and Tia  
and and  
and wonder the whole time  
what was it like when my pop was alive  
because he might still breathe the air  
but he is dead

PAPI looks at her, she looks back.  
He nods at her and she nods back.  
He continues wrapping her hand.

Silence.

PAPI  
Okay  
You get in there  
Deep breaths  
Move ya head  
Pump that jab

DANI nods.  
Her knee jiggles again.  
PAPI slaps her leg and she stops.  
She stares at her hands, watching the white wraps layering over her skin.

PAPI  
Listen to me mija  
Shutup  
Listen  
You are ready  
You trained hard  
You put in the work  
And you ready for this I know you are  
And if not

Pause.  
DANI looks up at him, he grins broadly.

PAPI  
Thassit  
Too late now baby

He laughs and DANI rolls her eyes.

DANI and PAPI enters from the locker rooms, looking very nervous but determined.

DANI scans the room – no DANIEL.

She sees JAMES and TIA and crosses to them, JAMES checks her gloves, PAPI smiles at her.

TIA and JAMES take seats in the very small crowd.

ALICIA VARGAS enters with her coaches. She wears a silk hooded robe, and handles herself with confidence.

DANI tries to act casual and knocks over a folding chair.

JAMES picks it up, smiling and shaking his head.

PAPI and the other coach confer with the ref.

THE FIGHT.

This will be a 3-Round bout, standard USA Boxing amateur regulations, Sub-Novice: 1 minute rounds, 1 minute rest between.

The outcome of the fight is not pre-determined.

The bout will be fought, in real time, and is not to be choreographed.

The fighters will focus on scoring points, in keeping with amateur boxing style, rules, and safety regulations.

It will be very physical and real, and both actors should maintain extreme awareness of each other at all times.

Depending on who prevails, the REFEREE will have a slightly different speech following the bout.

The boxers go through final preparations in their corner.

Lights come up on the house; the REFEREE steps into the center of the ring.

REFEREE

Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for coming out today for the tournament

to support these young men and women and all their hard work

As mentioned in your programs

The outcome of the contest you are about to see

Has not been pre-determined  
This will be a 3-round bout conducted according to  
Amateur boxing scoring rules and safety regulations  
We encourage you to take part in this story  
By cheering for the boxers  
Alicia Vargas  
and  
Dani Ahn Perez  
Thank you as always for your support of our fine young men and women  
and the great sport of boxing

The REFEREE calls DANI and ALICIA into the center of the ring for  
instructions.

REFEREE  
All right ladies  
You have received your instructions in the dressing rooms  
I want a nice clean fight  
Obey my commands at all times  
Protect yourself at all times  
Understand Any questions  
All right  
Touch 'em up  
Let's go

DANI and ALICIA touch gloves and return to their corners.  
The bell rings, they come out fighting.

**\*IF DANI WINS**

Bell rings to end the bout.  
The fighters return to their corners.  
The JUDGES confer.  
The REFEREE walks to the center of the ring.

REFEREE  
Ladies and gentlemen  
After three rounds  
The judges have scored the bout  
Fifteen to thirteen  
For the winner by unanimous decision  
Dani Ahn Perez

The REFEREE holds up DANI's hand, puts a small medallion around her neck.

**\*IF ALICIA WINS**

REFEREE

All right

After three rounds

The judges have scored the bout

Fifteen to thirteen

For the winner by unanimous decision

Alicia Vargas

The REFEREE holds up ALICIA's hand, puts a small medallion around her neck.

DANI gets a ribbon.

**\*AFTER ALTERNATE SCENE, RESUME HERE\***

PAPI hugs DANI.

PAPI

Eso mija eso

Shutup

Listen

You

Did

Good okay

Thassit

You did good

JAMES and TIA also hug DANI.

DANI looks for DANIEL, but he's not there.

She separates herself from everyone and walks downstage, looking.

Lights shift: down on the ring, a pool of light around DANI in the locker room.

She sits on a bench, suddenly very tired.

She begins to unwrap her hands, pulling tape off.

DANIEL sits in his wheelchair in the shadows.

DANIEL  
I couldn't watch

DANI  
*Shit*

DANIEL  
Sorry

DANI  
No I  
You scared me

DANIEL  
Oh  
Sorry

Pause.

DANI  
You didn't see any of it

DANIEL  
Nah

sorry

Silence.

DANI  
Nah it's okay I guess I mean yeah No problem I understand

DANIEL  
Nah I don't think you do but

Silence.

DANI starts removing the rest of her wraps.  
When she's finished, she balls up the tape, tosses it in the trash.  
She packs her gym bag, takes off her medallion or ribbon, packs it away.

DANIEL  
Can I see that

DANI takes it over to him.  
He holds it gently, gives it back to her.  
She turns to leave.

DANI  
Keep it

We're going for pizza with Papi  
You comin

DANIEL  
Nah

DANI  
You want me tell Tia you down here

DANIEL  
Yeah if you could

Pause.

DANI  
See ya at home I guess

DANIEL  
Yeah

See ya at home

Pause.  
They both look studiously at the floor.

DANI glances his way quickly, pauses, then exits.  
DANIEL stares at her medallion (or ribbon) as the lights slowly start to shift.

TRAINING SYMPHONY #5 - Summer into Fall

DANIEL sits alone in the gym.  
The speed bags, heavy bags, jump ropes, mitts, ring – all empty and silent  
in the dim light.

The sounds and rhythms of DANIEL's big fight come up: the announcer's voice, the waves of the crowd cheering, the sound of blows landing, breathing, grunts.

DANIEL wheels himself over and places DANI's medallion (or ribbon) on the edge of the ring, then exits.

Lights and sound fade to black.

**[FALL]**

An alarm clock.  
Sound of a hand hitting alarm clock.  
Lights up on DANI.  
She sits up, throws her feet over the edge of her bed.  
She puts on warm clothes and a hat, and begins her run.

She shadowboxes as she runs, her breathing perfectly in time with her movement.

Sound of the gym training symphony rhythm come up – she is perfectly in time with the beat.

She stops running and throws non-stop combinations, bobbing and weaving, moving with light grace and speed – breathing deep and strong.

PAPI enters, speaks from the shadows of the gym – lights slowly come up on him and the gym throughout the following.

PAPI  
While you sleep  
Someone else  
Is training to Beat Your Ass  
And that is the simple fact so  
You gotta ask yourself one question  
Am I willing  
Thassall  
Simple  
Are you willing  
Are you willing to do what it takes  
Day in day out day in day out

Never gonna quit comin on  
You got that in you  
Cuz not many do

DANI runs on and begins to shadowbox around PAPI.

PAPI

People you know alotta people they see some guy comin out the tunnel Entourage a mile deep  
Crowds cheering Music blaring Step in the ring wearin a fancy silk robe Float over the canvas nice and easy like a Sunday stroll in the park  
And people think  
Hey  
I wanna do that  
But they don't  
They don't wanna get up at five in the morning rain or shine and run that 4 miles  
They don't wanna do pushups until they arms growing out the floor  
They don't wanna throw the same punches over and over until those combinations so natural they like taking a breath  
That moment in the ring  
That fight you see so beautiful like a dance  
That fight started the first time that guy put on gloves and said in his heart  
I am willing  
I will do what it takes  
Day in day out  
I ain't never gonna quit

PAPI glares at DANI.

PAPI

You hear me

DANI

Yeah yeah

PAPI

No yeah yeah

I tell you these things you listen okay I tell you important things

DANI

Oh what come on

I listen

PAPI  
No you not  
You dancing around like a chicken

DANI  
*Excuse me*  
*A chicken*

PAPI  
Yeah  
You do like

He makes a few chicken moves.  
DANI laughs.

PAPI  
And you not listen  
I'm not gonna put my gems to the swine

DANI  
Wait  
What  
Did you just call me a swine

PAPI  
*You not listen*

DANI  
I did too

PAPI  
Okay then what I say huh

DANI stops, and looks PAPI in the eye, puts her hand over her heart,  
sincere and simple.

DANI  
I am willing  
I will do what it takes  
Day in day out  
I ain't never gonna quit

I ain't never gonna quit on you Papi

Pause.

PAPI  
Okay

Thass good  
Okay then

You my girl

DANI  
Yeah  
Stuck with me  
Too bad for you

Pause.

PAPI  
Okay then get your ass on that heavy bag  
Come on  
Move

DANI starts on the heavy bag.  
JAMES enters, starts getting into his gear.

PAPI  
Let's go let's go let's go  
Come on  
I wanna see some work

DANI and JAMES work.  
As the lights fade, we hear their breathing and the sounds of punches landing, the symphony of noises in a boxing gym.

Blackout.

The symphony lingers a bit in the dark, then fades into the sound of one person breathing.

**[END OF PLAY]**

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