

Running head: A Play in Progress

A Play in Progress

By

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Abstract

This thesis contains two distinct halves; the first being an original play entitled Cupcakes and Carnage, the second half being an essay looking at the author's creative process and examining the details for playwriting. The play is a short two act play compiled of five scenes. It explores many themes such as family, fear, and guilt through the interactions of Talbot Kelly and his twin sister Talia Lansing along with her family. The play also takes a look at mental illness through the character Talbot, who is a diagnosed schizophrenic. The second half of the project, the essay, begins by explaining the themes the author finds most important in the play. The essay goes on to explain in detail the author's process for writing the play. This is done by explaining how the author actually writes in general and then goes on to expand on that to detail how this particular play was written. The evolution of this play is examined and many of the large changes the author made to the play are shared. While explaining her process the author also discusses some aspects of playwriting from other author's points of view by looking at other plays and at how-to books. The essay also explores differences the author found between playwriting and short story writing. These differences include changes in dialogue, details, and visualization of the material. The essay concludes with the author discussing what she learned through the process of writing her play.

Keywords: Playwriting, Mental Illness, Twins, Creative Process

Cupcakes and Carnage

Characters

Talia Lansing (nee Kelly) 40 years old

Young Talia 16 years old

Talbot Kelly 40 years old

Young Talbot 16 years old

Eric Lansing Around 40 years old

Timothy (Tim) Lansing Around 13 years old

Emily Lansing Around 7 years old

Nurse

Introduction

Act I

Scene I: Control

Scene II: Chaos

Scene III: Cupcakes

End of Act I

Act II

Scene I: Carnage

Scene II: Closure

End

INTRODUCTION

Two young teenagers sit together on a bench set by itself slightly off center stage. A boy and girl, they are twins. They sit comfortably with one another and are often touching. The curtain opens when they are in the middle of a conversation.

Talia: I don't think it's a good idea... I mean sure it sucks now but we can't just leave dad like that.

Talbot: I'm going, I have to leave.

Talia: No, no we're not going. She already left him, we don't need to do the same damn thing. We just have to *Talbot talks over her*

Talbot: *he is fidgeting* Lia you don't get it, I'm going.

Talia: stick it out for a few more years. We're only 15, if we just wait a while then we can move to college. I'm sure it will...

Talbot: Stop! You don't get it, Lia. He doesn't look at you like he does me, he doesn't say the same things to you. I'm starting to get like she was and he sees it... he hates me for it.

Talia: We're twins Tal, he would hate me too if he hated you, we're the same.

Talbot: *Scoffs* No we're not, you know we're not... *she can't look him in the eye* Come with me.

Talia: ... just stay here

He just shakes his head no

Talia: No! You have to stay here, you don't just get to run away

Talbot: Lia...

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Talia: No, no we can fix it I'm sure it's not like mom was. We can get you help, real help, not like they helped her. And he won't care anymore... dad will just go back to not knowing we're here and it'll be fine.

Talbot: Help? No! It will be just like the damn help she got. Which in case you didn't notice that sure as hell didn't work. No, I just need to get away from here, we can move to the city get away... Together.

Talia: We can change it here, I know we can.

Talbot: I'm going Lia, with or without you.

Talia: ... You're going to leave me?

Silence

Talbot: I have to leave here, it's not my fault if you won't come with me. That's your choice, Lia. I just...

Talia: Not your fault?!? If you walk away from me it is your fault, you're the one leaving!

Talbot: Lia... it's not like I'm leaving because of you.

Talia: No, but you're still leaving even after I asked you to stay.

Talbot: You know I have to le/

Talia: *heated* Go ahead! You're right, you must be just like her since you're going to walk out on us just like she did!

He looks as if he has been slapped

Talbot: *Quietly* Bye Lia.

He walks off stage and leaves her sitting on the bench crying.

ACT I

Scene I: Control

A woman stands in her kitchen packing two lunches as footsteps are heard running around off stage.

Talia: Kids! Stop it, hurry up and get down here. You have to get some breakfast before we leave!

The footsteps rush into the room. Tim and Emily rush into the kitchen pushing at each other, racing to the table. Emily has a ratty blanket in her arms, and places it on the table as she sits down. They bicker with one another, playing tug-o-war with a plate. Talia looks annoyed and continues to rush around the kitchen getting things together, sighing audibly.

Talia: Stop fighting and just eat your breakfast please. *They ignore her as she hollers into another room.* Eric! Everyone is going to be late if you don't hurry up! *She goes back to moving around the kitchen.*

Tim: Hey, I was here first it's mine!

Emily: Nuh-uh!! Mine!

The plate goes flying away from the table and crashing to the floor.

Everyone stops moving, Talia slowly turns around and the children look at her with guilty faces.

Talia: That is enough! Both of you sit down right now and eat, I do not want to hear another word. And Emily, take that blanket off the table right this second, you are not bringing it with you again. *The girl starts to complain.* No, I don't know why you took it out of the laundry but it is getting washed and it will stay in the house. *She cuts off the conversation and turns around*

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gripping the counter with her eyes closed and takes a deep breath. The children sit down and eat in silence.

Eric enters the room trying, and failing, to put on a tie.

Eric: Hey honey, can you do this freaking thing for me? *He stops walking when he sees his family* Ummm, is everything alright...?

Talia: *Sighs and looks up at Eric* Well, the kids broke a plate, and for some reason, even though I know I asked you yesterday to wash it, Emily's blanket is still filthy and she is still carrying it around.

Eric: Oh... Well, I can clean up the plate no problem, and as for the blanket I don't really see why it's such a big deal...

Talia: We aren't talking about this again, you know perfectly well why it's a big deal. That blanket is nasty and she doesn't need to be carrying it around, and even more than that I have asked you so many times to wash it and yet you still let her sneak out of the house in the morning with it. I'm getting really tired of it, Eric... *the phone rings cutting her off. As she answers it Eric goes over and cleans up the plate.*

Talia: Hello?

Pause for caller.

Talia: *Confused* Yes...

Pause for caller

Talia: Ok, yes, I understand, uh I can come down this morning... No, no it's fine.

Phone hangs up

Talia continues looking away from Eric with a pained look on her face.

Eric: Who was that?

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Talia doesn't respond for a moment then turns quickly back towards Eric speaking in her normal voice and smiling.

Talia: It was just Nancy.

Eric: Nancy?

Talia: Yeah, you know Nancy. You met her at the last fundraiser for the PTA at the kids school... anyways she's having a bit of a PTA emergency. Not really a big deal but you know Nancy, she gets a little frazzled. So you have to take the kids this morning ok? *She rushes over to Eric and gives him a quick kiss and ties his tie for him, grabs her purse off the counter and leaves quickly.* Thank you!

Eric: Um.. yeah alright. *He looks around at the mess and starts laughing* You kids just want to run by the drive-thru?

Kids: Yeah!

Eric: Ha, ok get your stuff together let's get going. Mom will be mad if we're late. *They start to get their stuff together to leave, and Emily grabs her blanket.*

Tim: Hey! Mom said you can't bring Blankie anymore!

Emily starts whining, Tim starts trying to take it from her and they run around the kitchen.

Eric: Tim, just leave your sister alone.

Tim: Mom said you can't have it anymore!

Emily: Give him back! I want my blankie, you don't get to have him!

Eric: *laughing, he grabs Tim and takes the blanket from him* Give me that. Now stop it. You don't have to pester your sister. It's ok Em, you can take it just for today ok? We will wash him when we get home later. Sound good?

Both kids nod

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Eric: Alright then, I don't know about you two but I'm starving. Let's get going.

They walk out the door as the curtain closes

Scene II: Chaos

Talia enters walking up to a counter set stage right; a bored looking woman sits behind the counter. A medium sized room takes up stage left (it is separated by a wall with a door set between the two rooms). The room is currently dark. Talia walks hesitantly to the counter as the woman looks up from her work.

Nurse: Can I help you?

Talia: Oh... uh yeah. I uh, got a call earlier about a man who was brought here this morning... *she trails off and begins fidgeting with her bag and her jacket.*

Nurse: Ok... What's his name?

Talia: Talbot Kelly

Nurse: *she gets up and looks through some papers behind her, pulls out a file and sits back down* Ok looks like he was brought in late last night. He's on a 72 hour hold and has a pending case with the SPD. We've got his criminal history on file and he has been checked in here a few times before, but we are wondering if you know his history prior to 3 years ago?

Talia: Oh... Uh... Yeah I uh don't know actually, I uh, I'm not sure, I didn't know...

Nurse: Ok. Aren't you Talia Kelly?

Talia: It's Lansing now. But yeah... *trails off awkwardly again.*

Nurse: Alright, well I guess I will just leave that blank for now...

Talia: *Interrupting the nurse* Do I just need to sign something, or you know, what do you need from me?

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Nurse: Well... *stands* Talbot is here on a hold after getting into a fight at a shelter downtown. He was arrested and...

Talia: What? He got arrested? Am I supposed to be at the police station then?

Nurse: No, no he was arrested on a minor assault charge. There was a group of them from the shelter who were brought in but they aren't pressing charges against any of them. They just needed to break up the fight. A few of them, Talbot included, have a history of mental illness so we can hold them here for up to 72 hours instead of them spending 24 hours in county lock up. After his 72 hours Talbot can either choose to leave or check himself in with us. We try for the latter of the two options and since he's a repeat offender we hope to get him to stay this time especially. *Talia is fidgeting even more, pulling at her jacket, she seems uncomfortable and confused.* He had his evaluation this morning and the new doctor confirmed his diagnosis of Schizophrenia, but he doesn't want to tell us if he's been treated before and he has never let us treat him here. The doctor went ahead and started him on a low dose drug regimen, which is showing signs of calming him already. If you can help us to convince him to stay...

Talia: What? No I can't, he isn't going to listen to me. I don't think I can see him, I mean I don't think he would want to see me.

Nurse: *Annoyed* Why did you come down here then? If you weren't going to see him?

Talia: I... I just thought I needed to sign him out or something... I didn't think I had to see him.

Nurse: *proceeds formally* Oh I see. Ok well Mrs. Lansing, is it? It looks like I called the wrong person. Do you know of any other relatives in the area I could get a hold of?

Talia: *Affronted* Well, no, we don't have any relatives here.

Nurse: Hmm. Ok well, I don't think we need anything else from you. Have a good day. *She sits back down and goes back to working on her paper work. She does not look back up at Talia.*

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Talia stands frozen for an awkward amount of time. She finally fidgets and leans over the desk slightly, opening her mouth as if she is about to speak. She hesitates then just backs away and walks out the door. After a moment she returns, waking briskly to the counter, and speaks a little too loudly to the nurse, startling her.

Talia: I haven't seen him since we were much younger. I don't think he wants to see me... or listen to me... or... or...

Nurse: He is in room 88 if you would like me to bring you to see him. *Silence.*

Talia: Yeah... *more forcefully* Yeah... yes, I would like to talk to him.

The nurse stands up and leads Talia to the door separating the rooms. The light changes, darkening the nurses' station and lighting up the second room. A man sits at a desk with his back to the door. There is a small simple bed in the back corner and an arm chair under a tall lamp right inside the door. Talia walks hesitantly into the room. Talbot sits facing away from her, he whispers to himself too quietly to be understood.

They speak with sporadic awkward silences throughout the whole scene.

Talia: Talbot?... Talbot?

Talbot: *He doesn't look up at her* I told you I don't want to talk about this anymore. *To himself* I have to get out of here... out of here... don't want to be here anymore, don't want the help this time. *Talia walks around into his line of sight* You can just leave me alone, I need to leave soo... *stops abruptly as he sees her.*

Talia: Talbot!

Talbot: No, no, no, no...

Talia: Talbot stop it, calm down.

Talbot: No! I don't want to see you anymore...

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Talia: Anymore?

Talbot: You went away, the doctor said you'd go away after I took his pills. Said you'd stay away this time if I stayed here. I just want you to go away this time.

Talia: No? I didn't leave... you left me.

Talbot: Don't try to guilt trip me again! I don't need that. Just go away Lia, I told you I don't want to see you anymore I don't have to listen to you anymore.

Talia: I don't understand what you're talking about.

Talbot: Don't try and confuse me like that again, you're always the same. Telling me the same things over and over and over and over again! I know I'm wrong, it's always me wrong, wrong, wrong. I know already it's my fault, it's always my fault.

Talia: Talbot! I'm not trying to confuse you, they called me and asked me to come down. I didn't even know I was going to see you.

Talbot: No! They told me they would take you away... said I would feel better, I was feeling better *to himself* I was better... what happened? She left... Did I mess it up again?... *mumbles*

Talia: Talbot stop. You're confused. I haven't seen you since you left when we were in high school.

Talbot: Talia?

Talia: Yes...

Talbot: *gingerly touches her and then backs away quickly* What are you doing here?

Talia: They called me this morning to tell me you were here.

Talbot: Why would they call you? They've never called anyone before.

Talia: I don't know... Have you been here before then?

Talbot: Yeah. I've stayed here a few times since I moved here.

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Talia: What? When did you move back here?

Talbot: I... I don't know a few years, four or five maybe I can't really remember things like that. *Mumbles to himself incoherently*

Talia: You've been back here for years?!?

Talbot: Yes... what do you care?

Talia: It's just been a long time... I've wondered about you.

Talbot: Long time? Yeah, it's been a long time... of course it's been a long time.

Talia: I... I mean...where have you been?

Talbot: Where have I been?! Look at me. Where do you think I've been? Off living on the beach maybe? I look good, right? Like I've been living the high life?

Talia: Are you mad right now?

Talbot: Ha! Mad at you? No, no of course I'm not mad at you. *To himself* She asks me if I'm mad, I know she's back to tricking me again I don't want to talk to you anymore. *Starts mumbling again.*

Talia: Talbot! *Startling him* Do you want me to just leave?

Talbot: *after a moment* No, no I'm sorry I'm still just a little out of it, it's disorienting. *He takes a deep breath and seems to focus* So what did you say you we're doing here?

Talia: I got a call this morning from the hospital telling me you were here.

Talbot: So you came to see me?

Talia: Um, I didn't know I was going to see you.

Talbot: Why did you come here if you weren't going to see me?

Talia: I just thought they needed to have me sign something.... Or...

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Talbot: Ha! Perfect just perfect. Come to sign your long lost brother out of the looney bin, but God forbid actually seeing him.

Talia: That's not fair.

Talbot: You're really going to use the word fair with me, Lia? Look at us, which one of us can walk out of here today?

Talia: What am I supposed to say to you Talbot?

Talbot: I don't know. You could at least act like you want to see me, like you're my sister.

Talia: It's been a long time, it wasn't yesterday that you left.

Talbot: So you don't want to see me because it's been a long time? Because if that's the case you might as well leave right now.

Talia: I didn't say that, and of course I'm your sister, but I haven't even heard from you in twenty years. We can't just pick up where we left off. It wasn't just yesterday that you left.

Talbot: I get that! But every time I've imagined seeing you again I figured that you would actually care about seeing me.

Talia: Care? Of course I care. Don't start making me the bad guy, Talbot.

Talbot: Well did you ever even wonder what happened to me? Ever even look for me?

Talia: It's not like you went missing. You left! You left me, I didn't leave you, so don't start accusing me of anything Talbot. And so you know, I did look for you. I took busses into all the cities around trying to figure out where you went. I checked all the shelters, and talked to hundreds of people asking if they knew you, if they had seen you. I stopped talking to everyone I knew in school! All I wanted to do was find you, I lost control of everything else in my life because I was looking for you! I'm actually surprised I ended up even being able to go to college

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after that. I finally had to give up and move on, I had to get my life back together. And you! You could have come back any-damn-time. Don't put this on me.

Talbot: You didn't want me to come back!

Talia: What?!? Of course I wanted you to come back. Why would you even think that?

Talbot: You said I was just like her and neither of us wanted her to come back.

Talia: We were 15, and I was mad! What was I supposed to do? Just be happy that you were running off?

Talbot: You were supposed to come with me!!

Talia: Apparently we can start off right where we left things... I couldn't come with you, there was nothing I could do, and you could have stayed! You didn't want to stay.

Talbot: I had to leave! All I wanted was for you to help me.

Talia: I tried to help you! I tried to get you to stay, Tal, we talked about it for weeks before you finally broke down and ran off.

Talbot: If you had just come with me, everything would have been ok *to himself* I would have been ok.

Talia: Are you blaming me for this? *Gestures around the room*

He doesn't answer

Talia: Seriously?!? You're going to blame me, after you left and never came back? After you refused to let me help you when we were in school? You don't get to blame me, I... I don't know why I even came here.

Talbot: You obviously shouldn't have.

Talia: Yeah ok sorry I tried, I uh, I'll just leave then. I think it's just been too long. I'm sorry Talbot, I really am. For what it's worth, I think you should probably try and stay here for a while.

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Talbot: You're really just going to leave?

Talia: Don't act like you want me here. This isn't going anywhere, I'm not going to sit here and pass the blame back and forth with you... bye.

She hurries out of the room leaving him alone. He sits with his head in his hands as the curtain closes.

Scene III: Cupcakes

Eric moves around the kitchen absent-mindedly cleaning. There are baked goods scattered all over the kitchen, on the table and the counters. Eric has flour on him and keeps checking his watch. A car door is heard shutting and Eric looks out the door, sighs heavily, and then begins cleaning the counters again, without really cleaning anything. Talia walks in, puts her purse in a chair, takes off her jacket and looks around the kitchen.

Talia: What are you doing?

Eric: What does it look like I'm doing, Tal?

Talia: *Annoyed* It looks like you've destroyed the kitchen baking again.

Eric: *Eric looks around at the baking and shrugs* I suppose so, the kids and I felt like some cake after dinner...

Talia: *walking around the table, picking at the plates of baked goods ...* And some muffins, some cupcakes,... oh look, lemon bars too. *She holds up a tray and huffs, slamming the tray back down on the table a little too hard.* What is going on, Eric? The last time I came home to this many baked goods your grandfather had just died.

Eric: I just felt like baking, Tal.

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Talia: Oh really? Well, how nice of you... *Talia sits down with a sigh and looks up at Eric with a look of anger on her face.* We won't even be able to eat half of this... *she puts her head in her hands* I just don't understand why you can't be bothered to think about things like whether or not you're being wasteful. Or if any of this is good for the kids? Can't you think about that for one second? We can't just be giving them everything they want, *mocking his voice* Sure honey, you can play with that filthy blanket all day, here have some sugar... no, no, it's ok, we don't need to eat dinner we'll just have fucking cupcakes! *Going back to her voice* I just think you should... *Eric abruptly interrupts her as he wrings his hands still gripping the wash rag.*

Eric: Where have you been tonight?

Talia: *Stunned* What?

Eric: Where were you tonight?

Talia: I told you this morning I had to help...

Eric: I ran into Nancy when I was picking up Tim and Emily. She asked how you were, didn't seem to have seen you today at all. *Eric looks at Talia expectantly as he continues to fiddle with the rag.*

Talia: *She is stumbling over her words* Oh... Um yeah it uh turned out that... uh she didn't need any help this morning after all, so I uh just ran errands all day.

Eric: Did you? What errands.

Talia: *She stands up, walking behind the chair and putting her hands on her hands on the back of it.* Just random stuff, nothing all that important.

Eric: So what, you can't tell me what you were doing?

Talia: No, it's not that I just... it doesn't really matter what I was doing.

Eric: I just want to know, even if it doesn't really matter *he says in a mocking tone.*

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Talia: *She is pacing now she keeps picking up muffins and putting them back down quickly.* Eric it doesn't matter, ok? Just drop it.

Eric: *Starting to get more and more agitated he flings the rag back down on the counter hard* How am I supposed to just drop it, Tal? You come home late, won't tell me where you've been, and are acting really suspicious. Obviously you are hiding something from me. *He stops and looks at her, staring, there is a pause for a while. Talia walks around the chair again and sits down agitated. She doesn't look at Eric.*

Talia: *Exasperated* Eric just leave it alone. And stop calling me Tal, please.

Eric: I will not leave it alone!

Talia: *jumps in surprise at Eric's outburst* Eric just listen to me, it doesn't mat...

Eric: *Breathing heavily* Tal.

Talia: Please don't call me that.

Eric: How am I supposed to do that? If you won't tell me what you were doing today, what am I supposed to think? *Talia begins to talk but he talks over her.* At first I thought maybe you were helping with something that Nancy hadn't talked to the other girls about yet. But as the day went on, my mind jumped to worst case scenario after worst case scenario. The obvious option would be you're having an affair *Talia gasps and sits down next to him grabbing his hand and shaking her head no, he moves his hands and stands up pacing.* I mean I do work a lot and I know I'm not all that great at helping with them *he gestures towards the kids rooms* I can't even wash a damn blanket. I don't know what's going wrong...

Talia: Eric no...

Eric: *he continues as if she hasn't spoken* Or maybe she isn't with anyone else yet, maybe she has just decided she wants a divorce. Maybe she has been sneaking off to see a lawyer. I also thought maybe you were...

Talia: *She cuts him off this time, grabbing his shoulders and forcing him to look at her.* No! None of that is true Eric I promise you, I do; it's nothing like that... really. *He doesn't respond but stares at her in silence, stepping back away from her.* I just... I... I had to go see someone today. It wasn't a big deal. I just didn't want to bother you with it.

Eric: Didn't want to bother me? Tal, that is a ridiculous excuse, I am your husband, where we're you?

Talia: Eric, it really doesn't matter...

Eric: *Raising his voice* Of course it fucking matters Talia... and apparently I can't even call you what I've been calling you since we were 18 anymore!?!?

Talia jumps

Talia: I just... I mean... Eric it really isn't, it's just personal... *Eric looks at her enraged she stops.*

Eric: Personal? Talia, I am your husband, personal includes me.

Talia: Y-yes of course it does, but really it's nothing that will affect you, and the name... it's just, never mind it doesn't matter... anyways I took care of it on my own. Everything is fine.

Eric: No, no it is not 'fine'. How long have we been married? You can't expect me to be ok with your refusal to tell me what you did today. It doesn't matter that you took care of it, whatever that means. The fact that you are keeping secrets from me is just not alright...

Talia: Eric please just...

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Eric: *cutting her off* Just what! I am not dropping it, so you might as well stop asking me to and just tell me what is going on!

Talia: Fine! I went to see my brother! *She drops to a seat with a defeated huff*

Eric:... What?

Talia: My brother, I went to see my brother.

Eric: You don't have a brother.

Talia: ... Yeah, I do have a brother.

Eric: No *manically laughs* I've known you for over twenty years and you have never had a brother.

Talia: Eric, listen, it's not something I tell anyone about. We're not close now.

Eric: Not something you tell anyone about? Talia I'm not just anyone! I am your husband. I am the father of your children. And somehow I didn't know that you have a whole brother.

Silence Talia cannot look at Eric as he paces. He stops abruptly and just stares at her for an uncomfortable amount of time. Finally he takes a deep breath and speaks in a calmer voice than before.

Eric: How old is he? What's his name?

Talia: *whispers too quietly to be heard by the audience*

Eric: What?!? *Angry and confused*

Talia: *louder but timidly* Talbot... his name is Talbot.

Eric: Talbot? So he's Tal too? *Shakes her head yes* Is he older or younger than you?

Talia: He's 40...

Eric:... So you're... you have a twin?

Talia shakes her head yes

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Eric is stunned and doesn't speak.

Talia: *after a moment of silence she speaks* Eric, let me explain...

Eric: *angrily* Explain what exactly? That you've been sneaking around, or that you have kept the fact that you have a twin brother from me?! Or maybe explain if the you I know is really you?

Talia: *getting angry back* How can you even say that?! Of course you know me!

Eric: Really? Because I think finding out about a mysterious brother of my wife's 14 years after we got married is a bit of a shock.

Talia: I know... I know it is, but it doesn't mean anything. I haven't seen him since well before I even met you.

Eric: So why did you randomly see him today?

Talia: I got a call this morning from the psych ward at St. Michaels asking if I was related to a Talbot Kelly. He was placed there last week and they've been looking for his family.

Silence, Eric just stares at her.

Talia: Eric...

Eric: What?!?

Talia: I don't know what I should say to you.

Eric: *Scoffs* You don't know what to say? Ha! Do you think I know what to say to you right now? I mean, you have a fucking twin brother? I have known you for more than twenty years, we have been married for fourteen, for God's sake, we have two kids together. And somehow after all that I didn't know about a whole other person in your life! But somehow you are the one at a loss for words. Your kids have a whole damned uncle they don't even know about.

Talia: He isn't a whole other person in my life. I don't even know him now. I haven't seen him since before I even met you, Eric. It's not like I've been lying to you about anything. I just didn't tell you about him. I haven't even seen him since we were 15.

Eric: HA! Yeah, you're right you haven't exactly lied, you just chose to hide an entire sibling when we we're getting to know each other, and while we were building a family.

Talia begins crying

Talia: I wasn't trying to hide anything. He just isn't, and hasn't been part of my life.

Eric: *Defeated* Fine! Putting all of that aside for a minute, what's changed now?

Talia: I got a call from a hospital this morning. He has been detained there. They tracked me down because he didn't have any listed contacts or relatives.

Eric: Why would he be there?

Talia: Apparently he had been living on the street here for a few years.

Eric: So you have an ill brother who you just haven't looked for or given a damn about in more than twenty years?

Talia: That is not fair. *She stands angrily* You don't know anything about why I haven't seen him.

Eric: *cutting her off* Of course I don't, I didn't even know you had a brother. Let alone what's become of him after you abandoned him.

Talia: I wasn't the one who left him!! He left me and there wasn't a damn thing I could do about it!

Eric: For over 20 years you haven't been able to do anything about it? Except cover it up obviously.

Running head: A Play in Progress

Talia: *Panic rising in her voice* No! It's just... It's... It's done anyway... Eric... I just can't deal with this right now.

Eric: You don't just get to back out of this conversation, because you're upset. You are not the only one here who is upset, believe me.

Talia: I know that, I realize you're upset, Eric. I understand that I'm the bad guy today... but I think we just need to calm down, sleep, and talk about this in the morning.

Eric: I don't think I can do that, Tal *She flinches*. We are talking about a major part of your family that you just left out, what else haven't you told me? This obviously affects our family, I can't just ignore that.

Talia: You are acting like you have never had a family problem in your life, never been ashamed of anything. This isn't the end of the world.

Eric: I. Have. Never had anything in my life that I didn't share with you. Never hidden anything from you, never tried to run away from a conversation, and I certainly have never done anything to make you question our marriage.

Talia: *shocked* Are you saying you're questioning our marriage right now?

No response

Eric, I uh, I just can't deal with this right now. I don't know what, I just, I don't know what I should do.

Talia grabs her purse and rushes outside, a car is heard starting and driving away. Eric paces for a while around the kitchen then walks over to the phone. He dials a number and then lets it ring; a muffled woman's voice is heard on an answering machine.

Eric: Talia, we're going to have to talk about all of this... Come home when you can. *He hangs up and places his head in his hands, defeated.*

Close curtain. End of ACT I

ACT II

Scene I: Carnage

As the lights come up on stage Talia is seen in front of Talbot's door. He can be seen sitting at his desk again, facing away from the door. Talia is pacing back and forth, she goes to open the door a few times and stops short each time. She finally opens the door and stands staring at Talbot. He looks back at her in silence for a moment.

Talbot: ... You came back.

Talia: Yeah... yeah I did.

Talbot: Why?

Talia: Why what?

Talbot: Ha. Why did you come back?

Talia: Oh uh... I don't know, I just, I just didn't want to leave it like we did.

Talbot: So what? You came back to fix it?

Talia: I guess, I think we should talk some more.

Talbot: What are we supposed to talk about Lia? We already made it pretty clear how we feel.

You might as well just leave again right now. I don't want to deal with this.

Talia: You think that conversation made anything clear? Seriously? I don't even know how I feel about all this, let alone how you really feel about it.

Talbot: Lia just let it alone. Just let me alone.

Talia: No! I won't. We're going to talk about this... we can fix it.

Running head: A Play in Progress

Talbot: Fix it? *Laughing* We're not going to just be able to fix "it". We might be better off going our separate ways again, let's just act like this never happened.

Talia: Stop it! Stop it. We can at least try to have another conversation.

Talbot: Why? Why do you care so much more about this now? You left without a problem earlier. What's so different now?

Talia: Nothing... nothing's really different it's just that... I just wanted to talk to you. There isn't anything different.

Talbot: Lia, I'm crazy, not stupid. You're acting strange. What's going on?

Talia: It's fine, I'm fine I just want to talk to you okay?

Talbot: Why?

Talia: Can't I just want to talk to you? We used to be so close. Don't just shut the door on this.

Talbot: You mean shut the door again? Right? Because we did it easily enough the first time huh?

Talia: Don't just discount this. You know it wasn't easy for either of us.

Talbot: Oh, I don't know, everything seems to be working out ok for you. I think it was probably easier on you than it has been on me.

Talia: Are you kidding me? It hasn't been easy for me! And I don't need you making me feel bad about this too. Eric already did that enough. So stop acting like it's been so easy on me, I don't know how your life has been, but you don't know how mine has been either!

Talbot: Eric?

Talia: It hasn't been easy for me, Talbot. I lost everything when you left me! It took me so long to get to where I could even function right. Every day I had to work not to think about you all the time. Just trying to...

Running head: A Play in Progress

Talbot: Stop! Lia, who's Eric?

Talia: What?

Talbot: Eric? Who is that?

Talia: Um oh, Eric is my husband. I didn't mean to bring him up. Never mind it, sorry.

Talbot: No, what do you mean he made you feel bad about this?

Talia: It's nothing, we just fought a little last night.

Talbot: Last night? After you left here?

Talia nods

Talbot: So that's why you came back?

She nods

Talbot: *Scoffs* So what? He guilt tripped you into coming back here to fix this?

Talia: No, it's not like that.

Talbot: What is it like then?

Talia: He uh, he didn't know about you.

Talbot: ... Didn't know about me? Like he didn't know I was here?

Talia: Not that...

Talbot: He didn't know I was sick?

Talia: No, he uh he just didn't know about you.

Talbot: Oh... oh he didn't know about me at all?

She nods again

Talbot: How long have you been married to this guy?

Talia: Fourteen years.

Talbot: You've been married to a man for fourteen years and he doesn't know you have a twin brother?

Talia: He knows now.

Talbot: I can't believe you! You used to tell me that I didn't have to be weighed down by all this *he gestures around the room* that I didn't need to be ashamed of it. And here you are so fucking ashamed of me that you hide me from the man you're married to.

Talia: No, no that's not why.

Talbot: Really? You're going to sit there and tell me that's not what this is? That you didn't hide me, then forget about me, because you're ashamed?

Talia: I never forgot about you.

Talbot: Ha! I get it. What would people say about you if they knew? Would they pity you? 'Oh poor Talia with her sick brother', or maybe they would be suspicious instead. 'Well if her brother has those problems maybe she does too, maybe there's something wrong with her too.'

Talia: Stop it.

Talbot: What? You don't want to think about this? I'm so sorry to make you uncover everything you've worked so hard to hide! Sorry to ruin your perfect damn world.

Talia: Stop it! Stop it!

Silence

Talia: *Quietly* I'm not ashamed of you, I was never ashamed of you.

Talbot: Don't try and...

Talia: *Hysterically* No you want to know the truth? Huh? You want to know how I feel. Yeah! I'm ashamed ok? But stop thinking everything has to be only about you. I'm ashamed of myself!

Crying I know this is all my fault ok? I get it. I couldn't get you to stay, I couldn't get you to listen to me! I couldn't help you and I couldn't find you again. I should have kept looking, instead I gave up, and I lost control, and I had to move on with my life. If I was going to move on I couldn't hold onto you too tightly I had to let it go, stop trying to control my brother who wasn't even in my life anymore. So just stop it! It's done now I know I'm the problem ok? I get it! You and Eric made that perfectly clear, I'm the bad guy here. I'm always the bad guy, because God forbid somebody listens to me once in a while. I told you to stay and you wouldn't so I'm the villain because I couldn't find you again!?! *She breaks down. Talbot doesn't say anything for a long while, just watching her.*

Talbot: Lia... Lia it's ok, stop, stop crying. It's going to be ok.

Talia: Don't humor me, Talbot. I'm sorry I came back, I'm just going to get out of here. I'm done.

Talbot: No, wait... don't go. You know I don't actually think this is all your fault. I know that I made choices that got me here alright? I know I am the one who left, I walked away. I should have stayed, or tried to get help earlier than this. I've been in places like this before but I don't ever stay. I should . I know I should stay... but I don't like being lucid. , I always end up thinking about you. That's just too hard. It's so much easier to just make it your fault. If it's Lia's fault then I don't have to think about what I did wrong. I don't stay in places like this so I don't have to think about that, so I don't have to face myself ok!? So stop blaming yourself I... I'm sorry you're right. I made sure you couldn't find me, that's not on you. We both could have done things differently, me especially and I can be different this time, I can I know I can. We can stop going back and forth like this.

Talia: Yeah ok...

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Talbot: Will you stay for a while? We can try talking like adults again.

Talia: That sounds good.

Silence

Talbot: So you're married?

Talia: *laughs* Yeah. Eric and I met freshman year of college but we waited for a while to get married.

Talbot: Do I have nieces or nephews?

Talia: Yes, one of each. Emily and Timothy-- although they go by Em and Tim most of the time.

Talbot: How old are they?

Talia: Em is 7 and Tim is almost 13.

Talbot: What do you and Eric do? *The curtain begins closing as they continue speaking.*

Scene II: Closure

Talia walks into the kitchen where the kids and Eric sit around the table. Everyone is in their pajamas. It's clearly late.

Emily: Mommy!! *She runs into Talia's arms*

Talia: Hi, honey. What are you still doing up?

Eric: They didn't want to go to sleep without saying goodnight to you.

Tim: Where have you been anyhow?

Talia: I was visiting a friend of mine.

Emily: Can we meet your friend?

Talia: Uh yeah honey, of course.

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Emily: Yay! When can we meet your new friend?

Talia: Soon honey, I promise.

Emily: What's your friend's name?

Talia: Talbot.

Emily: I can't wait to meet him. I like making new friends!

Talia: That's really great, honey.

Emily: Hey mommy, guess what daddy and I did today?

Talia: What?

Emily: We washed blankie!

Talia: *Laughs* That's great honey! Where is he?

Emily: On my bed.

Talia: That's perfect, let's go get you tucked in, huh? It's way past bed time. *She starts to walk off stage* Come on, you too, Tim. *Tim follows her and Eric sits onstage by himself for a minute fidgeting. Talia re-enters and sits next to Eric at the table.*

Eric: Did you go see him again?

Talia: Yeah...

Eric: You're going to introduce him to the kids, then?

Talia: I mean I'd like to introduce him to you first, but yeah, we're going to try and be in each other's lives again.

Eric: Talia, I don't know how I'm supposed to...

Talia: I know that I kept something big from you, and I'm not trying to make up excuses, but when I met you I had just stopped trying to find him and it was too much to talk about. And by the time we actually started dating and I realized that I was falling for you I didn't want to mess

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it up with my crazy family history. Then we got serious and got married and had kids and it just wasn't ever the right time to bring it up. I let it get out of control, and I rationalized it by telling myself I would probably never get to see him again anyway. It's done now and I made a lot of mistakes, but that doesn't make this any less of a real marriage. I want to work it out with you.

Eric: I'm not just going to drop out or anything Talia, but this is going to be a lot to talk out and get used to.

Talia: I know...

Eric: I'm glad you're home, though.

Talia: Me too, we'll figure it out.

Eric: I hope so.

She picks up a cupcake from the table and starts eating it.

Talia: These are really good *laughing*

They laugh together as he takes her hand while lights start to go down

Eric: How soon can I meet him?

Talia: We can go up there tomorrow if you want...

The curtain closes

End

A Play (Continually) in Progress

An Artist Statement: Cupcakes and Carnage

Over a year ago (July 2012) I sat down and wrote up three distinct ideas for plays I called them my play skeletons, and they were the start to what eventually became my play, Cupcakes and Carnage. These three ideas were all different when it came down to story lines and characters; however, looking back I realized that they all contain themes surrounding fear. One explored the fear of loss, one the fear of an invasion of privacy, and the last one the fear of mental illness and of self. It was this last skeleton that has now grown into Cupcakes and Carnage, it was originally titled Psych Ward. The other two ideas weren't without merit, and I may revisit them later for another project; however, there was something about the play surrounding mental illness that spoke loudly to me. It was through this exploration of mental illness that I wrote my play that deals with loss, control, privacy, and many other themes. Personally I have always been interested in the field of Psychology and the social stigma that is placed on people suffering from mental illness. Even more personally, I have a large fear, which may be a touch irrational, of having or developing a mental illness myself. It is from this interest and this fear that I began writing this play.

Writing Cupcakes and Carnage turned out to be a great way for me to express myself creatively, while also giving me a therapeutic outlet for my own fears. The original concept was centered on a man, who eventually evolved into my character Talbot was confined to a psychiatric ward suffering from severe hallucinations. The other characters were rather minor and more as sounding boards for Talbot to speak to than as individual characters. One of those sounding board characters evolved into a female family member of Talbot's, at first it wasn't important to the story exactly how she was related to him but gradually I added the twin element

with Talia. Eventually the play shifted to have Talia and her husband Eric as other central characters, while the idea of Talbot's hallucinations took a backseat to the exploration into family, fear, and guilt. It is these three themes that have finally shone through in Cupcakes and Carnage, a fact that I am immensely happy about. From my point of view these three themes are subjects that encompass feelings and thoughts that are part of our human nature, even if they are presented in a fictional play.

The first of the themes I found most important in Cupcakes and Carnage is a rather obvious one, family. I have found that it doesn't matter whether or not you are close to your family; they still have a big impact on the way you live your life. Some people spend their lives running from their family while others spend it trying to find theirs. Either way our families make a large contribution to our lives. That contribution is something I wanted to explore with this play. There are a high number of complications when it comes to family. What exactly makes someone your family? How are you supposed to interact with your family? How does your family affect your life? How is your family supposed to affect your life? None of those questions has one answer, but for me trying to answer those questions for myself and for my characters was a powerful and inspirational process.

Having Talia's old family collide with her new family was the way in which I chose to dissect different parts of what it means to be a family. Exploring family through fiction can be a great way to reflect on both the positives and negatives on one's own family. Looking at what constitutes a family in my play was done by having the twins separated early in their lives and reunited later. By the time they see each other again they are different people than they were, and Talia has grown her own family with Eric and the kids. They now are faced with how to

integrate Talbot back into their family. By the end I believe the characters are left with a lot of mixed feelings, which I think is how many people in the real world feel about their own families.

A second large theme in my play is fear, a subject that I find easy to write about. There are an infinite number of things that people can fear, I personally find myself grappling with my fears each and every day. Because fear is such a prevalent entity in our lives it makes for a theme that can have many components. My characters fear many things in this play, confrontation, rejection, history, themselves, and each other; among many other things. It is these fears that drive them to make the mistakes that they make, but more importantly it is by facing these fears that they experience personal growth. I believe this growth is one of the most important things that I can write about. Both in my fictional world, and in the real world, I think growth is an important part of our lives. I find it extremely important to look at if a character, or person (myself in particular) has experienced any personal growth. That for me is the marker of success are you better, even in a small way, than you were before? Hopefully my characters are all a tiny bit better by the end of my play, even if they still have a lot of work to do.

I am also interested in the feeling of guilt, which is obviously another heavy theme in this play which is entangled with fear. I have found myself feeling guilty over a multitude of things, from my overwhelming procrastination problem, to many things about which it is not logical for me to feel guilty, yet I still do. Guilt is exceedingly complicated and surrounds some people on a daily basis. It is through this feeling of guilt that I explored the inner fears of my characters. There is Talia's guilt surrounding her years without Talbot, Eric's guilt over the fight with Talia, compounded with his anger over the lies, and Talbot's guilt over leaving in the first place. Asking why someone is feeling guilty is a great way to get them to reveal their fears and ignite

arguments, which is a helpful way to move a story along. Exploring guilt through fiction can also be a helpful way to discover people's underlying fears in real life.

This play has been more work than I could have imagined, a fact I find myself being grateful for. I struggled with these characters, alternating between loving them more than some real people I know and hating them with every single ounce of my being. This struggle is what ended up making the project worth it for me. I have come up with a play that I think explores many aspects of life that are very real and that hopefully shows my particular flavor of creative writing, and more importantly I have a play that helped me gain insight into my own life. While this play is not autobiographical by any means there were elements of my play that I experience in my own life, mainly issues with the three large themes of my play. This play has helped expand my knowledge surrounding psychological issues as well as enhance the way that I look at issues that I believe are present in so many people's lives. We all struggle with our families, with guilt, and with fear; and that's ok. Overall I am very happy with this project I think it has expanded my capabilities as a writer as well as being an entertaining and compelling story.

My Creative Process:

The word 'process' to me suggests more of an organized ordeal than I would call my play writing experience, but I suppose that even an unorganized and chaotic process is still a process. I believe the easiest way to explain my creative process is to spit it into two sections. The first section being how I actually write, my personal process of writing. The second section being the evolution of my play itself, where my story started and what it took to get it to this final product.

Truthfully my exact process of writing differs almost every time I sit down to write. I am not a very organized writer, and am often stuck due to lack of inspiration or sometimes an overload of inspiration. Many times I would find myself either having nothing in particular I wanted to

write about, or I would have so many stories going on in my head I wouldn't be able to focus on one enough to write it down. Although I have discovered that I tend to stick to a bit of a pattern with my writing, it is as follows.

1. Think of an idea
2. Write haphazardly about that idea
3. Read through that 1st draft and delete any part I don't like (usually at least 50%)
4. Adapt my idea based on what parts survived my 1st edit
5. Write haphazardly again, and repeat steps 1-4

I usually repeat these steps over and over again until I am either left with enough product still standing to fully construct a good story, or if I have more time, until I am happy (mostly) with my story.

It is because of this that I often end up writing and re-writing a story multiple times, and through these re-writes the original story does not always survive. Aside from doing multiple re-writes another byproduct of my writing style is an overabundance of extra words. After completing my play I went back through and did a word count on all of the typed documents I have written from the start of this project. The total number of words ended up being over 65,000 words; this total excludes the work I hand wrote but never typed up and this essay. If I were to put all of these documents together that would be approximately 175 double-spaced pages. Out of all that work my final thesis project does not even reach 25% of that total word count. After figuring out those numbers I looked back on how I have written other projects and I realized that as a creative writer I like to over write and then spend a lot of time wading through all of my

extra words until I find the part of my original idea that works the best; even if I only get one small paragraph worth of good ideas out of a thousand words.

While speaking of editing it is important for me to discuss my timeline. This project started with Dr. Steve Smith's Thesis Research course that I took in the spring semester of 2012. Dr. Smith helped push me to figure out what direction I wanted to take my thesis, and encouraged me to continue pursuing my creative thesis even if it was sometimes difficult. After his class I began writing the play skeletons and eventually settled on one idea to base my play on. At the same time that I was writing these skeletons I spent time reading other plays and play writing guides in order to figure out exactly how to write. I then began writing versions of my play in September 2012 and continued to revise these ideas editing my play for the following year. Finally after all of my editing of my play I moved on to writing this essay to cap off my project. After more than a year I now have a full thesis project to show for my efforts.

Though this whole process I have learned many things about writing, playwriting in particular. The first thing is that this was not as easy as I had been expecting. I learned quickly that playwriting is a completely different type of writing than I have ever really experienced. Before writing this play my personal experience with writing had mostly been in short stories. I have been writing short stories since high school I enjoy writing them even if I am not writing them for a particular project. I assumed that playwriting would be a similar experience to short story writing, I soon discovered that I was wrong. For me playwriting is a whole new animal which I had to very carefully learn to work with.

There are many aspects of these two ways of writing that differ, for me the most impactful of these differences has been the use of dialogue and the way you express detail. In a short story

you can potentially have no dialogue at all, while a play is more than three-quarters dialogue. With the detail the mediums from which you are presenting your story to an audience are so different that you cannot express detail in the same way. My audience for a short story will be reading my detail while a play's audience will only get detail from what the actors on stage say or do. Before I really started looking at how I would personally adapt to these differences I first had to look at what other artists had done before me, and what advice other authors might have.

I started this by reading other plays by playwrights that I liked. Some of those plays included A Streetcar Named Desire, Good, Lost in Yonkers, The Misanthrope, Tartuffe: Born Again, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Death of a Salesman, Doubt, Proof, Getting Out, The Playboy of the Western World, The Cherry Orchard, Ivanov, The Wedding, 27 Wagons Full of Cotton, Here We Are, The Still Alarm, A Marriage Proposal, and A Memory of Two Mondays. I also read a few guide books such as *Backwards & Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays*, *The Playwright as Thinker*, *Creative Writer's Handbook*, and *Writer Your First Play*. At first the purpose of these readings was to try and figure out how to write a play, although I actually ended up being a bit more confused about how to write a play the more I read.

I knew that I would face some discrepancy in writing styles because some of the plays I read were modern while others were classic. What I also found was that even with plays written around the same time each authors writing was drastically different, and even sometimes plays by the same author were written in differing styles. I thought that reading the guide books would help with this confusing, but I soon found many conflicting ideas about writing between those books as well. What all of this actually ended up teaching me was that there is no hard set rules for writing. Each author will have a different style and each play can be written in different ways. Although that was still something that took me a long time to get over.

Mostly I was hard for me to realize that the tricky part about doing a creative project is how different each project and each person is. People might have similar styles or similar stories but their process for writing and what they think is the right way to do things is always different. There are guidelines that other people have written on how to “properly” write a play but reading these books brings up the question of what is the proper way to write? And when it comes right down to it I would argue that there really isn’t a correct answer for that question. There are so many ways to write that more often than not reading “how to” guidelines ended up helping more with figuring out what doesn’t work for me personally than figuring out what does.

For example, I do not know exactly how other authors processes work, however through reading some how-to guides I found that more often than not the process comes across as being much more organized than the way I find myself writing. Collectively the guides that I read suggest a few different ways to keep yourself organized, such as regularly keeping a journal and scheduling yourself specific time slots to write in. When I tried applying these techniques to my own writing I ended up struggling against myself. While I can be organized when I need to be I have discovered that with my creative writing it is hard for me to write when I try and force myself to write.

When I first started this project I attempted to journal consistently every day, as many of the guides suggest, but I soon got out of the habit of doing it every day because I felt like I wasn’t writing anything worth the time every day. I then reverted back to my old journaling habits, which include writing late into the night when I should be sleeping, or waking up at odd hours and dragging myself out of bed because I was struck by an idea. When it came to scheduling myself time for this project I was naively optimistic about my personal habits. I figured that I would treat this project like another class, blocking out three hours a week at specific times that I

would sit down and work on my play. For the few frustrating weeks that I tried to keep myself on this schedule I found myself starting at a piece of paper, or my screen, with no words written down. Or worse with the most random things that had nothing to do with my project written down. When I finally gave up on the strict schedule and just started writing when it worked my ideas flowed much better. Some weeks I found that I would only have worked on my play for a few hours, while others I would spend the majority of the week putting in time on it. Freeing myself up from strict scheduling made it very inconsistent but I got much more done in the hours that I wrote than I was getting done before.

Another big example of this is that many playwriting guides talk about minimalizing stage direction and author input outside of dialogue. I understand the reasoning behind that advice, however I believe that if there is a particular direction or way you want a character to act it is necessary to write down those specifics. Many playwrights who wrote before these how to guides became popular wrote plenty of detail around their dialogue. Anton Chekhov is one of those playwrights that opts to write in more detail in his work. In his play The Cherry Orchard he is very specific about how each character speaks and he gives details about movement and the set throughout his dialogue. J.M Synge is also an author who likes to place details in throughout the play. On the other hand Tennessee Williams tends to have very detailed introductions and scene set ups, but is very minimal with stage direction throughout his dialogue. Seeing how different each playwright approaches detail helped show me that it is ok for me to add in more detail if I find it necessary. Reading other plays made it easier for me to realize that my style doesn't match anyone else's precisely, and that's alright, because no one else's does either.

Even though I sometimes disagreed with the how to guides they did have many helpful hints and guidelines that also helped me hone my writing style. In more than one book about writing I

found advice that ended up helping me greatly in the long run. Philip K. Jason and Allan B. Lefcowitz wrote the second edition of the *Creative Writer's Handbook* when discussing character development in plays they say "The playwright who attempts to show a character with the same narrative subtlety as one would in fiction is attempting to provide what the medium is not intended to carry" (279). I did not realize it when I was reading this book before I started my play or when I ran into that same advice in a few other books, but that advice ended up being one of the most important steps in my process. I had to figure out how to shift my characters from short story to a play. What that meant for me was that I couldn't put detail into my play characters in the same way that I would my short story characters. In a short story you can leave more to the audience's imagination, while in a play you may have to be more explicit if you want to get a certain detail across to your audience. As I wrote more and more of my play I gained a better understanding of how to shape detail through character actions and words in the play format.

I had more experience in writing short fiction stories than I had with playwriting before I started this project. Due to this when I first started writing down this particular story I found myself writing down my ideas as short stories and then having to go back and change that story around until it fit in play form. I didn't think that would end up being such an exhausting experience, but it was what I spent the bulk of my time doing. There are many differences between writing short stories and writing plays, differences that I found quickly while writing this play which shaped the way I wrote.

One of the first of these large differences I took notice of was how dialogue works in a play versus a short story. If you're writing a short story you are not required to have dialogue. A short story could conceivably be 100% comprised of just the words of a narrator. Either an omniscient

narrator looking over the story and depicting it to the audience or the thoughts of a character from the story can make for an interesting short story. If you do choose to write a short story with dialogue it is not always the most prominent aspect because you can mix in thoughts from inside characters minds with each dialogue section. With a play it is pretty much all spoken dialogue.

The increase in dialogue and the fact that it is intended to be spoken out loud to the audience instead of being read a play complicates the use of dialogue. I quickly got into the habit of speaking out loud to myself, or anyone that happened to be in a close vicinity to me, while I wrote dialogue for this play. The reason for this is to figure out if the words will sound realistic to an audience out loud. While writing stories it matters if it makes sense being read so speaking out loud isn't always a needed technique. For me at least I learned that in order to properly write my play I had to spend more time outside of my own head than I do writing short stories.

With short story writing an author does not necessarily have to think as much about his audience. While many short story writes care greatly about what his audience is thinking it is much easier to be a self-contained writer when writing short stories than with plays. When writing a short story it matters what exactly is written on the page because that is how the audience will receive your story, by reading it. Due to this a short story author may not really have to look at the story from an outside perspective. Plays on the other hand will not be delivered to their audience in a reading format, instead they will be observing the action take place. This was a strange change for me to get used to, I had to switch the ways in which I looked back at what I had written in order to see if my story was playing out realistically. What I mean by having to step out of my own head is that I had to learn to look at what I was writing as my audience might see it. When writing a short story I am already seeing it as my audience

would, with a play I had to imagine how it would look on a stage instead of plainly being happy with how the words looked on the page. Many times I would write a scene and be content with it, until I went back to edit it and made the effort to visualize it as my audience would see it. When I made that effort I would often see plot holes, or flaws with my dialogue that made the play seem unrealistic or made the story flow poorly. Having to push myself to look at my work in an unfamiliar way made it easier to catch my mistakes and to make my play into a more profound piece. Although it was not always easy.

I found that for me having to take how my audience will be presented with my story into account was difficult. With short stories my audience will most likely be reading my work themselves. This means that they take liberty in their minds with my story, so if there is something I want to make sure they take notice of I can write it in more detail or draw more attention to it in my writing. With playwriting people may read the piece, but more likely it will be performed and seen by the audience. The performance aspect of plays makes it more difficult to focus on small details that you might explore heavily in a short story.

For example say I am exploring a story about a woman whose grandmother has just died, let's name the woman Anne. Anne was very close to her grandmother and during the course of the story returns home after the funeral and looks through her grandmother's jewelry box, which is filled with important trinkets of hers. As a short story I can give the audience heavy detail about everything in the box, explaining what each piece looks like and giving the audience a story behind it. I might choose to explain in detail a silver locket with a sentimental engraving that her grandmother only wore on special occasions, or a cheap bottle cap necklace that Anne had made for her grandmother as a small child. Aside from describing the jewelry in detail exactly how I want them to look I can also give them sentimental value by telling the back stories behind each

piece. Taking the same story and writing it as a play changes the way I show the value of these objects to my audience. The audience of a play cannot see the item that Anne is picking up out of the box, so if I still want the details of the items to be a central part of the story I have to shift both the way I show the audience the items and possibly slightly shift my focus.

Although a shift has to be made it doesn't necessarily mean the story quality or detail has to suffer, it just has to change. There are a few different options for this change. Since I have to write under the presumption that the audience will be seeing the work I have to figure out a way to express to them what is important in the story. I might choose to have Anne speak out loud to either the memory or ghost of her grandmother, she could be describing her memories fondly and explaining the details of the pieces as she does. Or if I don't want to have Anne speaking to herself I might choose to add a character that wasn't in the short story for Anne to speak to. The options for that added character are limitless; it might be her husband who trying to cheer Anne up by having her recall good memories, or perhaps a sibling who Anne fights with over who gets which pieces, I could even add in the grandfather whose memory is failing so Anne tells him about all of his wives things in hopes of helping him remember. The point is changes have to be made in order to adapt the story into a play.

I made many changes from the start of this idea to the (current) finish in order to get the story closer and closer to what I wanted it to be and to expand on the character traits I wanted to focus on the most. It was through these changes that I developed my play into a final product that I am happy with. I wanted to have a simple play that explored complex themes through characters that seemed like they could be real, dealing with situations that seem realistic as well. After finishing the play and looking back on my characters I realized that I would not have ended up with the

complex characters that I ended up with had it not been for all of the large changes I went through.

With Cupcakes and Carnage I started with the psych ward idea that revolved around a man who had hallucinations. In that original idea those hallucinations were going to be characterized themselves and could be seen by the audience. I was going to use those characters to explore Talbot's fears and wants. I was going to have the bulk of the play be Talbot talking with these hallucinations in a way that made them seemingly real to the audience. Leading up to the only other "real" character, a doctor, who would reveal to both Talbot and the Audience that he had been talking with hallucinations the whole time.

The first major change I made to that idea was to add a female character that was related to Talbot. I added this character because of the problems I was having with the doctor's dialogue. Having Talbot speaking to his hallucinations worked from a dialogue standpoint, but when dealing with the doctor I either had to only have her in scenes with Talbot or add a character for her to talk to. In the short story version I could have the thoughts of the doctor written down for my audience to read, having someone else there for her to talk to was not necessary. Adding a character for the doctor to discuss Talbot with and to explain his diagnosis to made it possible for me to add some of the details I had in the short story version, such as having the doctor explain why Talbot was in the psych ward. Adding in this relative also brought in the familial aspect of my play, which gave my play another dimension by exploring how mental illness also affects the family members of patients. I didn't know it at the time but the familial aspect would eventually become a main theme.

After the addition of Talia I started working on writing all of the dialogue, where I promptly ran into another problem. I had envisioned Talbot in a room talking to his hallucinations while the doctor and Talia looked in from another room and talked about him. In my short story that wasn't a hard task, I simply switched back and forth from an omniscient narrator's point of view. As a play it made the logistics of that scene more complicated. I played around with the idea of having both scenes set up on stage at the same time and switching lighting between the two. Through discussion with Dr. Dworkin combined with re-writes of that scene I decided that was too complicated for the story I wanted to tell. I wanted to show my audience a story that is realistic, and while there are very real people with real hallucinations, showing that on stage gave it more of a detached feeling than I wanted to portray. So I yet again adapted my story to in order to get closer to the picture I had in my head.

The choice to delete the hallucinations as tangible characters was the next step. In order to make the play more grounded in real life I decided to shift and have Talbot and Talia discuss his illness, while showing the audience how it affected him through his actions, rather than having Talbot talk to his hallucinations the whole time. It was through this shift that the idea to have them be twins was born. Sometimes in families with a history of mental illness you find members who live with the fear that they will wake up one day and be afflicted as well. For some people this is a terror, while others cope well. By having these characters be twins I could add this element in. Why is Talbot the one who has schizophrenia and not Talia? And how does his illness affect them both? This idea was the next one that I focused on, looking at how the illness shaped their lives.

As I began to explore how mental illness had affected their lives I started to compare how Talbot and Talia's lives had differed. I imagined that Talbot, being an untreated schizophrenic,

had a life that was chaotic and that he had yet to start a family on his own. On the other hand Talia had gone to college, met a man, got married, and had kids. Eric and the kids were a natural addition when I decided to broaden my scope to look at the twin's lives and compare them. Talia's family also added in more family complications to explore. With that comparison the question arose as to why their lives might have turned out so differently. That made me think about the concept of nature vs. nurture; was one of the twins destined to get the illness or did their environment change how they turned out? In order to integrate this idea in my play I came up with an introduction that depicted the twins as children.

In the first introduction scene I showed the twins as children around the age of 6. They were listening to their parents violently fighting, the fight soon moved into the room where the twins were. The father, who was mentally stable, was attempting to take the children from their mother who had an implied mental illness. During the fight their mother grabs Talbot while their father grabs Talia, eventually the father gives up and just takes Talia promising to come back for Talbot which he never does. This separation allowed me to look at how the twin's lives progressed without the other and with very different parents. As the story progressed, and with the addition of having the twins separated, Talia's family became an even more prominent aspect.

With the short story I envisioned switching back and forth between the twins lives at different ages. Showing them as young teens (14 or 15), Talia as a well-liked girl in school who seems happy while Talbot is clearly having trouble in school. As older teens (18 or 19), Talia starting college and meeting Eric with Talbot having a menial job and showing the first signs of his schizophrenia. When Talia is getting married at age 26 Talbot has already been institutionalized once and is now living on the streets, the same can be said of him as the next 14 years pass and Talia has her kids. They are finally reunited with each other at age 40 and they have to adjust

their lives accordingly. In the short story version I merely switched back and forth like I would if I were telling their story out loud. Moving it into play format I wrote up scenes that would have taken place in split stages, having little dialogue, and showing the twin's lives simultaneously. While that was an interesting idea it ended up being too complicated and messy for the themes I wanted to project.

While I deleted a lot from the play I decided to keep a medical professional, although I changed her from a doctor to a nurse, to explain Talbot's diagnosis and situation to both Talia and my audience. It was important to me to figure out a way to explain the factual details of Talbot's case to the audience. In the original idea I had the doctor for that, I had envisioned her going into much more detail about schizophrenia specifically when the illness itself was more of a central theme. As the story evolved I found that it was not as important for me to go into detail about schizophrenia but it was going to be important for Talia to know how and why Talbot came to the facility, and for her to understand how important it is to try and get people to voluntarily check themselves in for help after an incident such as Talbot's. The nurse ended up being a perfect way to introduce these legal ideas to both Talia and my audience. I purposefully made sure that the nurse's part was minimal and that she didn't show up again because I wanted to briefly explain the factual details while still leaving Talia and the audience with questions. The change I made in regards to the nurse stayed fairly consistent throughout the process, although one of the last things I wrote into the play was a short expansion to the nurse's dialogue to clarify some of the legal issues.

Since I decided to delete the split stage idea the bulk of the play that I had written was severely cut. I was left with the introduction of the twins being separated, and the idea of them being reunited many years later after their lives took drastically different paths. While working

with these aspects I decided to change the age that they were separated, to make them older. The reasoning behind this was to have them be old enough to be more greatly impacted by the events. At first I was going to have them be separated as young teens, but the more I thought about it the more I wanted to minimize the parent's parts in the play's main action. I achieved this by having Talbot leave when they were older teenagers, I also took out the mother from the equation by having her leave the family some years before. Having her leave also gave me a parallel to show with Talbot choosing to leave because of his illness showcasing his fear that he would end up just like her and that Talia would hate him for it. This also added conflict to my story between the main characters, rather than having their separation be their parents' fault. They were now forced to assess their own choices instead of blaming them on parental circumstances.

The conflict between Talbot and Talia became the central focus, and helped me to add in more feelings of guilt and fear making my themes well-rounded. By adding conflict between Talia and Eric I expanded on these themes more and more. Having Talia hide part of her past makes Eric a sympathetic character while also dealing with Talia's control issues. Through all of these changes and evolutions I eventually got to the point where I currently am. Cupcakes and Carnage finally arrived at a point that I am happy with; the story feels real, compelling, and hopefully entertaining. I did have to make a few more edits to clarify certain details such as slightly expanding the scene with the nurse to make the legalities of Talbot's situation clearer. There are also still parts of the play that I might go back and tweak later, but truthfully I have never written any creative piece that I finished with the thought that it was 100% done. I can however say that I have a "finished" play that tells a story I am proud to be telling.

Looking back on my project I have come to more than a few realizations. The first of those is that even though I sometimes didn't feel like it at the time I am exceedingly happy that I choose

to complete a creative project. When I first began this whole thing I considered going the traditional route and writing a large traditional scholarly paper. There were many nights when I was trying, and failing, to write scenes that I wished I had picked an impactful book or an inspirational author and spent the year researching and analyzing my chosen topic. I wasn't wishing that because I think those types of projects are any easier than the one I did. However those projects present you with a different type of challenge than I faced writing this paper. Had I chosen to take on a traditional scholarly paper I would not have been faced with my own creative fears. Yes I would have been concerned with grammatical correctness, essay cohesiveness, and the validity of my sources but I wouldn't have had to worry incessantly about the merit of my own creative expression. A worry that I am still facing now. I would not have held on to the fear of my personal style being rejected, and I wouldn't have had to get over my fear of having other people read my own creative work. Strangely enough writing a play that ended up being highly concerned with fear helped me to start getting over my own fears.

Another realization that relates to those fears is my realization that my personal process for writing can produce valid work. As I discussed earlier in this paper I write in bulk only to be left with a small portion of my words in my final product. After I first saw this I was worried that I was somehow wasting time and effort by having to write so much and edit down to so little. That feeling continued for a long time until I sat down and took another look at my completed play. I am very happy with my final play, I think that I condensed it down to a polished story that includes all of the little details I found along the way that ended up being important to me. My process reminds me of how a jewel is made, through compression. It takes a lot of pressure on a rock to turn it into a diamond, and while I am not sure my play is comparable to a diamond I do believe that it took the same type of pressure pushing down on it to finally reach the version I

have completed. Had I not had all of those extra ideas and words pushing down on top of the play I do not think I would have come up with the condensed and solid final play that I did. Digging through all of that excess made finding the good ideas and the perfect characters more gratifying than I think it would have been had it been easy.

A final realization that I had was that this project has truly been exhausting for me on more than one level. There were plenty of nights when I stayed up much later than I should have, or just didn't go to bed at all, in order to keep my writing going. Other nights I would wake up suddenly seized with inspiration for this project and pull my tired body out of bed, grab a notebook or my laptop, and trudge back into this story. Aside from sleep deprivation I found myself being mentally exhausted as well. I would stare at my pages and think about my characters until I was thinking nothing but gibberish, or worse thinking about ways I could ruin my story. This sometimes ended with me hating my story and my characters. I would get to the point where I felt as if I never wanted to look at this play again, never think about these characters, and never care how my plot turned out. But then I would wake up with another bout of inspiration and go back to them. I always ended up being happy that I went back, which I suppose was a mark that I truly loved writing this even if it didn't always feel like it.

In the end all of the challenges were worth it. I have written a play that I think is a solid story; with relatable characters, and realistic events. Aside from my actual written work I think this project has greatly increased my creative abilities. I have started to worry less about my worth as a creative author and I find myself liking my own work more than I have previously. I also believe that the choice to write a play, rather than a short story, has helped me more with my writing than anything else. Having to adapt my writing style to write a play has expanded the

way that I look at my writing, which will hopefully help me to write more well-rounded stories in the future. While this project has been a lot of work it has been worth it.

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