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## **Moonbird**

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Moonbird

by

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Bachelor of Arts  
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## Abstract

Love is a formless entity. Transformative and elusive, it can wreak havoc in one's life if misplaced. Unrequited love has potential toxicity, rage can stem from the most loving of places, and countless crimes of passion are committed every year.

However, in its base nature, love is formative. It has the potential to bring two separate energies together, the ensuing combination is what people dream of. The chemical process of love, the intellectual understanding of attraction and the visceral pit-in-stomach when one looks across the room at their lover are all worth exploring, especially in the theater.

In this piece I have attempted to synthesize the nature of love through the mode of grief. The experience and understanding of having loved one can change everything. The impossibility of certain physical and emotional trials must be faced with the fullness of one's heart and body.

Through music, words and movement I have attempted to explore the full weight of grief.

This piece is a snapshot of a man who has loved and the void created when love ends.

The man who survives war has questions that must be answered.

The survivor's apology to those who have passed must take form.

## Research & Rehearsal Process

This piece originally began as a single phrase. During the group brainstorming process I was struck by the phrase “Sisyphean endeavors.” In relation to any number of experiences in life, the weight of circumstance and situation becomes seemingly impossible. As we continued to free-write I found myself dwelling on a number of themes. Family, “the good son” and the insidious nature of mental illness all stuck in my mind as I began to form my show.

My original concept was a physical piece with a largely impossible task to be achieved. I would be performing a string of monologues about my childhood as I found a way to tax my body without injury, whether it was push-ups or jumping jacks. The Sisyphean component would be derived from the fact that I would never be able to “achieve” the task and therefore would exhaust my body in the attempt. My goal was to allow the flow of the text to mirror my physical state over the course of the piece – the speech would directly correlate to my being.

As we continued to work the piece I realized that I wanted my piece to represent an internal struggle more than the external process of exhaustion. As I began to sit and write a character was struck by the concept of “soldier.” Having grown up in a military family I have always been keenly aware of the presence of war, being drafted was one of my nighttime fears as a child. I was hesitant at first because I have never felt particularly suited for military service but I was immediately able to use that sensation into my piece. I could write a man who enters the war but does not belong. Through the lens of someone with all of my insecurities and fears thrust into war, immediately I had a lot to write about.

After a few short free-writes he fell in love. The minute I opened myself up to the possibility of a love story, I had my final concept. The narrative had formed itself, through months of brainstorming and reworking. The final edits were purely stylistic – in

my final draft I pared down the writing and gave it a much more simplistic color. The story could tell itself.

## Script

*Lights up – late afternoon / evening ~ the end of a clear, warm day. The sun will be setting soon.*

*Enter with full satchel – of his belongings, the things he promised to take care of.*

*Cross from behind audience SR toward stairs. Singing The Way I feel Inside – not whole song – leave it unfinished.*

**He:** The moon was our eyes. By the river. Fireflies, dry grass underfoot.

How did we get there? Snuck away from some compulsory meet and greet, draining the sake bottles we had tucked away. Head in lap. Getting sleepy. First touch. Laughing until it filled the sky.

Champions of a night. Not conquerors, yet. I know who you are. Were. Are.

*Cross up stairs – stop at turn in the steps, place an object, breathe, beat.*

**Interruption:** I was wondering if you had any problems with ghosts? I was reading this website about the school and they said the spectral life here is unbelievable. Like – in the 2<sup>nd</sup> percentile of hauntings in the COUNTRY. This university has more ghost-sightings per capita than any other school in Iowa. I'm just interested in ghosts, I guess. I haven't seen one but I've felt a lot.

You know that cold shiver you get when you get out of the shower? That's the ghosts. I've felt one ghost so far. It passed through me, and I turned to my mom and said "MOM! GHOST!" And she knew what I was talking about because I've taught her all this already, but she didn't believe me. Maybe next time I can get a picture They want to talk to you when you're at your most vulnerable. I think I'd like to study education – I want to be a history teacher someday. But right now I want to find some ghosts.



*Take in something distant – time to move! Still more work to do. Up stairs, sit looking through bars. Take out second object, eat a bit.*

**He:** My mother brought me a gift once. A toy.

A small wicker basket and three marbles. I had no idea what to do with them. I couldn't think of a way to play with them, I held them out to her, wondering how to make a game. "Make it work", she said.

My brother could build. Intricate, small cars. A replica of our small town, complete with running water in the bathhouse. A tank, when he was fourteen. I watched. I would rather read.

Father said that I would learn more by enlisting than I ever could from the mountain of books in my room. A year of service would change me for the better. The only reason I wasn't interested is because I had no idea how different I would be on the other side of the year. No. Go. Now.

*Sing a bit of The Vagabond. Crawling. Not agony, just need to take some time. Cross overhead, stop halfway down stairs.*

**He:** *A short whistle, a few notes to call. No response.*

**Interruption:** I think when we're dealing with a one-syllable word, we have some factors we have to deal with when we're talking about sexiness. One syllable is regular-sexy, right? Hey. Two syllables is sexier. He-ey! That's the sort of thing you want to hear piercing through the boozy hip-hop-infused air at the club. Two syllables is exponentially sexier than one. But get this. Three syllables? He-e-ey! The least sexy thing that could ever happen. It's like dividing by zero. You'd never want to hear that from anyone. That's what people yell from their free candy van.

*Set down a big object. One of the important ones. Look. Breathe. The sun begins to set, twilight.*

**He:** I used to watch the soldiers walk by. Rows and rows of legs. They never looked at anything. Their eyes set forward as they marched.

Did they think? When I walked down the street I thought about how I could convince my mom to get me a puppy, so which puppies were the soldiers thinking about? Did they miss their moms?

That day that Ken fell over because he forgot to drink water I asked you why.

“You’re the man on the train.” That’s what you said.

**Interruption:** You trained me to hit my head. Every few months when I was a kid I would see you with a new gash on that bald head. You didn’t even know you were bleeding sometimes. You walked in like death and poured a glass of milk as we all watched dad slowly bleed out. Yeah, you were fine though. Tough as nails, right? So now I hit my head all the time, as if it’s my birthright to live with avoidable injuries caused by overthinking. It’s always when I’m trying to figure something out. I’m so far down the rabbit hole that I can’t possibly see the door hurtling towards me, jagged white corners.

But the important part is afterwards. After you yell obscenities and stamp your feet and curse the day you were born you keep working. The job’s gotta get done, even as the blood trickles down.

*Cross down to center in front of grate. (Grate gone?) Sit. Breathe. Look. Take out uniform. Fold it nicely. This is what he asked. Sitting in front of the waves. “Burial at sea” as tongue-in-cheek.*

**He:** I saw you first. Huckleberry Finn. Legs splayed out over the table like you were the only one in the room. Assuming you weren’t worth watching. My legs shook a little as I walked over to your table. This was my third attempt. The first two ended with me passing by, coughing, pretending I needed some water.

I sat down that day. As you looked up at me your hair fell over your eyes. You hated the nuisance of moving it, but kept it long. I didn't have a way to start but you took the conversation. Books, brothers, warm Spring on its way.

Our first meal. Chicken over burnt rice. Seared and blackened by the cook's younger sister, there was a flu bug going around the barracks. We were ok, but the smell of bile was everywhere. I would go out of my way to see you. An extra lap around the building after my shower so I could catch you coming in. Then they called me Mr. Butterfly. I kept daydreaming during drills. Your butt looked so good in those pants.

When we went back to the river – the day we could finally swim – I bit my tongue. I was going to say it all but I had my excuses pinned to my chest. It wasn't the right time. So we watched the clouds. You rubbed my feet. Talked about Ken falling down again. God he fell a lot.

I'm leaving you here, ok? You said you wanted to fly. Go ahead.

*Night-time. Stand. One look to uniform. Last verse of Breeze Off the River. Step over it, towards the moon. In the waves. Lights.*

### Post-Performance Analysis

Regarding the future of this piece, I would love to expand upon it someday. Over the course of the performance weekend I found a number of places where the work could be a fuller theatrical experience.

My inclusion of “interruptions” as a narrative device worked conceptually because in my mind the grieving psyche could not focus too long on any given memory. The man who is finding his way to his lover’s funeral could not give the amount of time and attention he wanted to his task so his mind wandered to more comfortable thoughts.

This worked as a wonderful literary device but in regards to the performed piece I found that the audience had a hard time following the narrative. These interruptions muddled what I believed to be the most important part of the piece, the love story between the two soldiers. The small “commercial breaks” as a friend called them did not further the story I was trying to tell, in fact causing the opposite to occur. One audience member remembered the ghost boy much more vividly than the protagonist, which I would never wish.

In future productions or expansions of my work I would love to minimize these interruptions and find a way to insert them without breaking up the main narrative. Through some physical or textual device I would love to further delineate the characters so there is no recognition between them. The interruptions should not resemble the main

character's journey. This could be done through lighting, syntax or any number of physical acting choices.

I would love to expand this into a longer piece. I believe the play could be supported through more specific memories, more songs and some physical life that would give the piece a bit more "flesh." I am going to revisit the work sometime next year when I've lived away from it for a while and restructure the work for a second production. Having produced my own work I am now confident that I have the means to see my own writing on stage.

As a first attempt, this was an illuminating experience. With insecurities at bay and a greater understanding of my writing process I am empowered and excited to continue writing.