

# ***Paul Gets Eaten by a Dragon***

**Book, lyrics and music by Bjorn Berkhout**

*Paul, an insecure gay college student, has spent his life suppressing his imagination until it unexpectedly manifests in the form of a monstrous dragon made of paper. Soon, the lines between reality and fantasy crumble as Paul is forced to explore his relationships with his family including an ambitious younger sister, a cold relentless mother and a father who has had a greater impact on Paul's life than he remembers. Can he solve the puzzle of who he is before the dragon consumes him?*

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## Cast of Characters

**Paul:** An imaginative graduate student having trouble finishing his dissertation in sociology. He grew up loving Japanese anime and manga comics. He suffers from low self-esteem and now feels stuck in life, not knowing what he really wants. Characters from his imagination begin to surface as he explores the memories from his childhood that may offer him answers to his predicament. 29 years old, soon to turn 30. Singing range B2 to A4.

**Helen:** The intimidating mother of Paul and Rachel. In the middle of a nasty divorce, she is determined that her children will be motivated and successful. She constantly pushes them. Early 60s. Singing range of F3 to D5.

**Rachel:** Paul's younger sister. A baker who recently opened her own business. She is very talented and motivated. 27-28 years old. Singing range of F#3 to D5.

**Rob:** Paul's older, good-looking boyfriend. He has a well-paying corporate job. His hair and clothes are always immaculate. Early to mid 40s in age. Singing range of B2 to F4.

**NOTE:** Helen, Rachel and Rob also appear masked versions of themselves (referred to as the **crowd**) in Paul's nightmarish 'Battel of the Bakers' sequence.

**The Girl/Naomi:** Appearing around the same age as Paul, The Girl is a character existing in his imagination. She has many of the characteristics found in female Japanese anime characters. Her hair appears in vibrant colors that change each time Paul sees her. Singing range of Bb3 to F#5.

She is later revealed to be Princess Nozomi (Princess Hope) and serves as a spiritual guide for Paul as he rediscovers his imagination and the incident of gender shaming that suppressed them. She is often bubbly and seemly innocent in her personality, but she can become darkly serious and ominous when frustrated with Paul's progress.

The same actor also plays Naomi, an aspiring youtuber who shows up to record a video at Rachel's bakeshop.

**John/The Antagonist:** John is Paul's father, appearing only as a memory. The same actor also plays the Antagonist, who is the manifestation of Paul's self-doubt and low self-esteem. Singing register of A2 to F#4. The Antagonist has two forms.

1. **The Paper Dragon:** Represents feelings of insignificance and worthlessness. He appears to be made of white paper filled with words and is modeled on the dragons of Japan. He has an ornate head, supported by the antagonist. He is wingless with a long serpentine body, supported by the members of the chorus.

2. **The Announcer:** Represents our hollow and empty consumer culture. Dressed as a Roman senator with a gold mask, he is the host of Paul's nightmarish 'Food Gladiators: Battle of the Bakers!' dream who appeases the viewers with ridiculous baking challenges and exaggerated back stories of the contestants.

**Jake Hanigan/Cody/Chorus:** The gunslinger from Paul's sketch book. Rugged and impossibly handsome, he represents Paul's ideal form of masculinity. He speaks with a Texas drawl. His gun, however, is comically large. Singing range of G2 to D4.

The actor also plays Naomi's cameraman Cody and sings in the chorus.

**Miss Thang/Customer 1/Chorus:** Played by a trans actor, Miss Thang was originally Paul's ultra-ninja action figure that he and Rachel transformed into Miss Thang when children. Singing register Db3 to F4.

The same actor also appears as Customer 1 in Rachel's bakeshop and sings in the chorus.

**Pookie Bear/Customer 2/Chorus:** Pookie bear was Rachel's. Though short, cute and plush, he speaks in a very blunt and vulgar manner. Singing range C3 to G4.

The same actor also appears as Customer 2 in Rachel's bakeshop and sings in the chorus.

**NOTE:** Collectively, Princess Nozomi, Jake, Miss Thang and Pookie Bear are constructs of Paul's imagination who help him work through his issues with vulnerability, courage, worthiness and shame. At the end of the musical, he begins to see elements of these characters in the people around him.

**OPTIONAL CAST:** Two child actors can be used to portray PAUL when he is seven and RACHEL when she is five. Alternatively, the adult actors can play younger versions of themselves.

## Settings:

The action alternates between an empty stage, five different New York settings (ca. 2015) and three settings entirely within Paul's imagination. Sets in the New York scenes should be kept minimal.

### New York settings:

- *Paul's room*: small, dingy studio apartment above a burger joint
- *Rachel's Bake Shop*: located in Chelsea, small with a few tables and chairs, one being by a large window looking out onto the street.
- *Helen's place*: an upper westside vintage brownstone with the original woodwork.
- *The park*: a small park located on the upper west side with a bench and swing set.
- *Rob's apartment*: located in Tribeca. There are a few pieces of modern, high-end furniture. The walls are white and decorated tastefully with expensive art including a colorful painting by the artist Victor Vasarely.

### Paul's imagination:

- *Inside the stomach of the paper dragon*: A large, cavernous space with two doorways marked by the Japanese kanji for Pull and Push
- *Other side of the pull door*: transforms into two spaces:
  - *The Roman style colosseum*: location where the Battle of the Baker's takes place. Includes box seating for the audience and a baking station for Paul.
  - *Rob's apartment*, but distorted as if in a dream.
- *Other side of the push door*: the shadowlands of Paul's memories. Hidden in both shadows and mist.

## List of Songs

### Act I

No. 1 'Push'	Helen, Paul, Rachel, and Rob
No. 2 'The World Inside'	Paul
No. 3 'Words'	Paul and The Girl
No. 4 'Moving In?'	Paul and Rob
No. 5 'Paper Dragon'	Paper Dragon, the Chorus and Paul
No. 6 'The Good Son'	Paul and the Girl
No. 7 'Mothers, Their Children'	Helen and Paul
No. 8 'The Audition Video'	Rachel
No. 9 'Empty Inside'	Rachel
No. 10 'Married Life'	Helen
No. 11 'Time to Push'	Paul, the Girl and Chorus
No. 12 'Force Majeure'	Helen, Paul, Rachel, Rob, the Girl and Chorus
No. 13 'Ink Flows'	The Girl and Chorus
No. 14 'The Taunting Scene'	Paul and the Paper Dragon
No. 15 'Square One'	Paul, Paper Dragon, Helen, Rachel, Rob and Chorus

### Act II

No. 16 'The World Inside' Reprise 1	Paul
No. 17 'The Battle of the Bakers'	Announcer, the Girl, Miss Thang, Paul, Pookie Bear and the Crowd
No. 18 'In the West'	Paul and Rob
No. 19 'A Moon's a Moon'	John and Chorus
No. 20 'The Broken Boy'	Jake, Paul, the Girl and Chorus
No. 21 'The World Inside' Reprise 2	Paul
No. 22 'Empty Inside' Reprise	Rachel
No. 23 'Push' Reprise	Cody, Helen, Naomi, Paul, Rachel

# ACT I

SCENE ONE: An empty stage.

*(PAUL, HELEN, and RACHEL are placed on the stage like statues. One by one the characters come to life and begin pushing PAUL downstage. The music of song No. 1: 'Push' begins as HELEN speaks her first line.)*

HELEN:

My son, the perpetual grad student.

PAUL:

Mother! Dissertations can take years to write.

RACHEL:

It's just a paper dragon, Paul. Write a few more chapters and call it done.

HELEN:

Rachel's right. Two years younger and your sister already owns her own business!

PAUL:

Well done, mother. But I'm not sure I even have the right topic yet.

HELEN:

You're telling me you've spent six years on the wrong topic?

PAUL:

DON'T PUSH

HELEN, RACHEL:

WE NUDGE  
TO SHOW WE LOVE YOU.

PAUL:

NO, YOU PUSH, YOU SHOVE  
EACH ONE A PENT-UP GRUDGE

HELEN AND RACHEL:

YOU NEED OUR HELP

PAUL:

YOU'RE ALL AGAINST ME.

PAUL, HELEN AND RACHEL:

PUSH, PUSH, PUSH,  
NO ONE MAY REST.

PUSHED BEYOND THE NEST  
BEYOND THE SKY  
WE ALL WILL TRY  
TO SHOOT THE MOON

PUSH, MUST ALWAYS PUSH  
AND SOON, WE'LL FIND OURSELVES  
UPON OUR MOON.

*(music continues)*

HELEN:

No more excuses.

RACHEL:

Slay the dragon!

*(ENTER ROB, appearing beside PAUL)*

ROB:

Don't worry. We'll get you through this.

PAUL:

Thanks, but my prof just spent the day reprimanding me! My topic apparently still isn't 'substantial enough'.

ROB:

Stay the night?

PAUL:

I really shouldn't. I've got get up early and write at least another 20 pages.

ROB:

But there's something important I'd like to talk about.

PAUL:

I'm sorry Rob. Can't it wait?

ROB:

It's just a talk, Pauly.

IT'S LATE  
PLEASE STAY.  
I NEED ALONE TIME.  
WEIRD, BUT CUTE  
I'LL PHONE  
HELEN RACHEL AND ROB:  
HE ALWAYS RUNS AWAY  
PAUL:  
I'M LOSING STEAM  
HELEN, RACHEL AND ROB:  
WE'RE HERE TO PUSH YOU  
ALL:  
PUSH, PUSH, PUSH  
WE ALL MUST PUSH  
PRESSED AGAINST A WALL  
WE CAN'T PASS BY  
LIKE FOOLS WE TRY  
TO SHOOT THE MOON  
PAUL:  
BUT RARELY ASKING WHY  
HELEN, RACHEL AND ROB:  
PUSH  
WE ALL MUST PUSH  
PAUL  
ENOUGH,



HELEN, RACHEL AND ROB:

PUSH

PAUL:

I CAN'T,

ALL:

PUSH  
JUST ONE MORE TIME

*(music continues)*

RACHEL:

You're too easily distracted.

ROB:

I'm here to help you, Pauly.

HELEN:

Finish! Whatever it takes.

ALL:

PUSH, PUSH  
PUSH UNTIL YOU BREAK  
FREE

*(End song. All but PAUL recede into the background and exit as the scene transforms into Paul's apartment. A second-hand chair and table filled with clutter appear. Among the clutter is his cell phone, laptop, a to-go-cup of coffee and a sketch pad with some pencils. Hanging on the chair is his well-worn backpack. PAUL sits and opens his laptop, cracks his knuckles, and begins to type. As he does his typed words and edits appear on a scrim behind him.)*

PAUL:

'Chapter Eight: An Examination of Cognitive Dissonance within Emerging Capitalist Societies and Conflicted Adaptation Processes in a Post-American World.'

*(pausing to takes a sip of coffee)*

'Chadwick and Hart theorize that indigenous populations often experience metaphysical distress when exposed to stimulation foreign to their normal habits.'

*(pausing to think)*

Normal habits. That's a bit dull. Let's try 'foreign to their...*modus operandi*'. Yes. Much better, I think.

*(PAUL grabs his coffee but notices it is empty as his cellphone buzzes. He grabs it and reads the text message. RACHEL'S TEXTS appear as writing on the scrim. PAUL speaks his texts as they appear on the scrim.)*

RACHEL'S TEXT:

Busy?

PAUL

*(snickers and text's back)*

Define 'busy'.

RACHEL:

LOL. Then get your ass down here.

PAUL:

How rude. Crazy face emoji.

RACHEL

I've got free croissants and coffee waiting.

PAUL:

Free coffee? Cool. See you in a few. Goofy smile face emoji.

*(PAUL puts his cell phone in his pocket, grabs his backpack and stuffs the laptop into it. He is about to leave when he pauses and decides to also take his sketch pad and pencils.)*

**(FADE TO BLACK)**

**SCENE TWO:** Morning, inside Rachel's Bakeshop.

*(On stage is RACHEL looking disappointed. Enter PAUL with his backpack.)*

RACHEL:

Good, you're here. Go sit by the window so it doesn't look so empty. I'll bring you a coffee.

PAUL:

*(setting his backpack down on the chair by the window)*

I don't get it. Use to be you never could find a seat here in the morning. What happened?

RACHEL:

*(pointing out the window and speaking in an exaggerated French accent)*

‘Dubois’ Patisserie Extraordinaire’. That’s what happened. Started serving this éclair-donut monstrosity deemed the ‘donclair’.

PAUL:

Are you serious?

RACHEL:

Oh, it’s a thing. Even my most loyal customers got swept up in the hype.

*(Enter ROB)*

ROB:

Good morning, Rachel. What’s with the huge line in front of DuBois’?

RACHEL:

Fuck DuBois’!

PAUL:

Geez Louise! Where did you learn to swear like that, Rach?

ROB:

Pauly? You’re not supposed to be here.

PAUL:

Hi Rob! Surprise.

ROB:

You’re supposed to be home working. Your ‘alone time’?

RACHEL:

It’s my fault. I asked him to come.

PAUL:

DuBois’ stole all her customers. But it’s their loss, right?

RACHEL:

Is it though?

ROB:

Well, if it’s any consolation a storm’s coming. They’re all about to get soaked. Is my order ready?

RACHEL:

You’re usual dozen?

ROB:

Best croissants in town and gone within seconds.

RACHEL:  
(to PAUL)

Cream and sugar?

PAUL:  
Yes, please.

*(RACHEL exits to go fetch the croissants and coffee)*

ROB:  
Don't think helping Rachel or being cute lets you off the hook. I missed you last night.

PAUL:  
I missed you too. Meet after work?

ROB:  
Can't. Thursday's happy hour with the coworkers.

PAUL:  
It's Thursday already?

ROB:  
*(fixing PAUL's hair)*

Yes.

PAUL:  
Fine. I'll grab a slice of pizza and come by later. Just text me when you're done.

ROB:  
Great. And we'll finally have that chance to talk.

*(RACHEL enters with Rob's croissants and Paul's coffee. She places them down on a table.)*

RACHEL:  
Here you go, a baker's dozen, made fresh this morning.

ROB:  
*(opening the bag up and inhaling the aroma)*  
They smell incredible.

*(ROB takes money out of his wallet as PAUL turns and looks out the window)*

PAUL:

Be careful out there, Rob. Those clouds look nasty. Like a bad omen.

ROB:

It's only a couple blocks to the office. I think I can make it. Hang in there Rachel.

*(handing RACHEL money)*

And don't worry about the change.

*(fixing PAUL's hair one last time)*

See you tonight.

*(ROB gives PAUL a goodbye kiss, grabs the croissants and exits)*

RACHEL:

I like Robert. He's good for you. Well, help yourself to a croissant.

PAUL:

Can it be a chocolate croissant?

RACHEL:

Have all you want. They're probably stale.

*(Exit RACHEL. PAUL sits at the table by the window, drinks some coffee and takes out his laptop. The light in the bakeshop darkens due to the approaching storm as PAUL resumes work on his dissertation, which is again projected onto the scrim)*

PAUL:

All right dissertation, where were we? 'Chadwick and Hart notes that indigenous populations often experience metaphysical distress when exposed to...

*(pausing as he looks at his backpack)*

Leave it. Don't get distracted.

*(resuming)*

'When exposed to stimulation foreign to their modus operandi.'

*(taking another sip of coffee)*

'In such circumstances protectors of cultural norms may suffer from acute cognitive dissonance. It is in this environment that assumed family relationships begin a process of self-examination of their basic blah, blah, blahs'. Insert some big fancy words here, and in six more years, done!

*(PAUL pushes the computer aside and looks out the window. There's a flash of lightning followed by a clap of thunder. He pulls out the sketch pad from his backpack. He looks through the sketches he's done, which are projected on the scrim in quick flashes.)*

*The sketches show various people on the subway he's encountered, but PAUL stops when he gets to a drawings of a cowboy gun slinger drawn in the stylized manner of a magna comic. PAUL pulls out some pencils from his backpack and continues his drawing, narrating as he goes. The music of song **No. 2: 'The World Inside'** begins as PAUL speaks.)*

Jake Hanigan. Renegade gunslinger.

*(in a twangy tone, like a spaghetti western sound track)*

WHA WHA WHA WHA WHA WHA

*(music continues)*

Heads out into the darkness of the shadowlands.

*(as before)*

WHA WHA WHA WHA WHA WHA

*(music continues)*

He knows the risks and knows the terrible advisory he'll soon face. But he's come prepared. He draws out his gun and checks to make sure it's loaded.

*(erasing the gun he drew and drawing a bigger gun)*

Bigger gun.

*(making it even bigger)*

Still bigger.

*(There's a gust of wind as a heavy rain suddenly begins to fall. PAUL looks out the window. PAUL begins singing.)*

THE WORLD INSIDE MY HEAD  
A WORLD OF CHILD LIKE THINGS  
MY WORDS: THEY TRY TO HIDE  
BUT THE WORLD OUTSIDE FEELS DEAD

*(There's a flash of lightning and the distant rumble of thunder)*

SO WHERE WOULD YOU RATHER BE  
IF YOU WERE ME?  
WITH ALL OF THE THINGS TO SEE  
INSIDE MY HEAD.

*(beat)*

WASTE OF TIME  
RACHEL'S RIGHT  
FIND THE WORDS  
FACE THE BEAST

*(End song. There's another flash of lightning and a loud thunderclap. THE GIRL suddenly appears in the bakery, startling PAUL. Even though it is raining, she appears completely dry.)*

THE GIRL:

Found you, you silly goose.

*(PAUL looks around to see if there is anyone else in the shop.)*

Yes, you Paul. I know, I know. You weren't even expecting to see me. It's been, what...

PAUL:

Um... forever?

THE GIRL:

Exactly.

*(sitting across from PAUL)*

Working on a something new?

PAUL:

*(closing his sketch pad quickly)*

Uh, no. Yes? I don't know. My dissertation?

*(She grabs the laptop and looks at it while turning it sideways and upside down.)*

THE GIRL:

Oh, you've been working on this stupid dissertation for years.

PAUL:

It's become an exploration of the impact comic books our have on culture. With a particular focus on Japanese manga comics. They are unique because-

THE GIRL:

'Modus operandi, metaphysical distress'...

*(setting aside the computer)*

Nothing here about comics... and no pictures.

PAUL:

My prof won't allow them. Said pictures would undermine the work's legitimacy.

*(PAUL pause, staring at the girl hoping to recognize her. She stares innocently back at him, revealing nothing)*

He's encouraged me to go deeper, and suggested comics were only one facet of a larger issue.

*(pausing again as she continues to look back)*  
He insisted I examine the works of Chadwick and-

*(THE GIRL suddenly grabs PAUL'S sketch book)*

Hey!

THE GIRL:  
*(looking through the sketches)*

Look, pictures!

PAUL:  
Yes, pictures. Dumb sketches of random people I see on the subway.

THE GIRL:  
*(pausing on the sketch of the gunslinger)*  
I don't think cowboy dude here was ever on a subway.

PAUL:  
His name's Jake.

THE GIRL:  
*(waving to the sketch)*  
Hi Jake.

PAUL:  
Not sure why I drew him.

THE GIRL:  
Got tired of subway people?

PAUL:  
Maybe. Now give it back. Those aren't intended for public consumption.

THE GIRL:  
*(returning the pad)*  
There's no reason to be self-conscious. You should show them to people.

PAUL:  
I don't think that's wise. I draw more for esoteric, therapeutic reasons. Plus, I suck at drawing hands. Whatever I do they come out gnarly.

THE GIRL:  
Your words are what's 'gnarly'.



*(The music of song No. 3 'Words' begins as the dialogue continues.)*

PAUL:

So, I'm better at drawing than writing and I'm not very good at either.

THE GIRL:

That's not true. You're very good at capturing the eyes.

PAUL:

You know, I do like doing eyes. I suspect that's where we hide our true selves.

THE GIRL:

Oh, I agree.

EYES WILL SHOW THINGS  
WHEN WE KNOW THINGS  
WHO NEEDS WORDS AT ALL?

PAUL:

LOOKS RELAY THINGS  
WHEN WE SAY THINGS  
DON'T NEED WORDS AT ALL

BOTH:

WORDS CAN SAY:  
'TIME FOR ONE MORE TRY'  
BUT EYES WILL SAY:

PAUL:

'NOPE! IT'S DONE, GOODBYE'

THE GIRL:

HEARTS REVEAL THINGS  
WHEN WE FEEL THINGS  
WHY USE WORDS AT ALL?

PAUL:

WORDS LOOK PRETTY  
WITH SWOOPS AND SMALL DOTS  
WHEN SLY AND WITTY  
THEY'LL HELP CONCEAL THOUGHTS

BOTH:

WORDS CAN SAY:  
'TIME TO CLOSE THAT DOOR'  
BUT EYES WILL SAY:

THE GIRL:  
'PUSH FOR SOMETHING MORE'

BOTH:  
PLEASANT SOUNDING  
YET CONFOUNDING

PAUL:  
WHETHER BIG OR SMALL

BOTH:  
TRUE, WORDS CONVEY THOUGHTS  
BUT DEEDS DISPLAY THOUGHTS  
OUR LOOKS BETRAY THOUGHTS

PAUL:  
AND THOUGH I CHOOSE TO USE THEM  
MY WORDS HAVE NO SAY AT ALL

*(End song)*

THE GIRL:  
Could be because they're not *your* words. Well, tomorrow then.

PAUL:  
Tomorrow?

THE GIRL:  
Same time. But not here. He already knows about this place. We'll have to use the park.

PAUL:  
Sorry?

THE GIRL:  
Silly goose. The one where you and your sister always played. And make sure he doesn't follow. Mata ne!

*(Exit THE GIRL. PAUL stands up and goes to the door calling out)*

PAUL:  
Follow me? Who's following me? Why the park? And how do you even know me?

**(FADE TO BLACK)**

**SCENE THREE:** Rob's apartment.

*(On stage are PAUL and ROB)*

PAUL:

It's weird. I know.

ROB:

Weird is an understatement. I understand hanging out at Rachel's. You're helping. I even get 'Alone Time'. But how is going to an old park is better than staying here to work? Explain that to me Pauly.

PAUL:

I don't know if I can put it into words, but the park feels...like the right place to be.

ROB:

Meaning all this feels wrong to you.

PAUL:

That's not it. I don't know. Your apartment feels different when you're not here. Maybe it's all the art. It's nice, but...

ROB:

But I thought you liked art. Particularly the Vasarely. It's colorful.

PAUL:

I do. But all this... It feels like I'm intruding. I'm actually scared to sit on that couch.

ROB:

See, this is what I wanted to talk about. You need something of yours here. Why not bring over your comic book collection?

PAUL:

My mangas? All of them?

ROB:

Yes. All of them.

PAUL:

Can I bring my anime?

ROB:

Of course you can. This place has tons of closet space. *(beat)* See, I want to take our relationship to another level. I think it's time you... considered moving in with me.

PAUL:  
Jeez Louise, Rob. Are we ready for that?

ROB:  
I'm serious. We've been together for almost a year and I want this to feel like your place.  
Our place, because...well...

*(The music of song No. 4: 'Moving In' starts.)*

*(singing)*  
I LOVE YOU, PAULY

PAUL:  
You love me?

ROB:  
You haven't noticed? I switched to heart emojis.

PAUL:  
HE LOVES ME  
THIS CANNOT BE  
I'M AN INSECURE NEUROTIC MESS  
EVERYTHING HE'S NOT

ROB:  
Well?

PAUL:  
CAN HE SENSE  
THE THOUGHTS I HIDE  
ALL THE DOUBT AND FEAR THAT I SUPPRESS  
LOOK AT ALL HE'S GOT  
AND MY GOD, HE'S HOT

ROB:  
You seem on the fence.  
DO YOU MIND  
I'M TEN YEARS OLDER?

PAUL:  
AS I AGE  
WILL YOU GROW COLDER?

BOTH:  
ME AND YOU

LET'S THINK THIS THROUGH:

ROB:

*(aside)*

ALL THE FEAR. ALL THE QUIRKS  
ALL THE TIME SPENT SAD

PAUL:

*(aside)*

LOUNGING HERE, WHILE HE WORKS  
WOULD IT BE SO BAD?

BOTH:

MOVE IN  
WE'LL BE A BONDED PAIR  
MOVE IN  
I'M SURE WE'LL LEARN TO SHARE

PAUL:

YOUR THINGS

ROB:

NO FEE

PAUL:

NO STRINGS

ROB:

HERE WITH ME

BOTH:

LEFT IN SUSPENSE  
THE FEELING'S TENSE  
A SIMPLE YES OR NO

PAUL:

HE WANTS ME CLOSE

ROB:

I'LL KEEP HIM SAFE

BOTH:

IN THIS TRAGICALLY DEPRESSING WORLD

ROB:

*(aside)*

GROWING OLD, AT THE GYM,  
NOTHING FEELS QUITE RIGHT

PAUL:

*(aside)*

LIFE IS COLD, BUT WITH HIM,  
FUTURE DAYS LOOK BRIGHT

BOTH:

MOVE IN  
WE'LL BE A BONDED PAIR

PAUL:

OF TWO

BOTH:

MOVE IN  
SO HE'LL NEVER NOT BE THERE  
FOR ME

PAUL:

HIS PLACE

ROB:

RENT FREE

PAUL:

BIG SPACE

ROB:

TAKE MY KEY

BOTH:

LEFT IN SUSPENSE  
THE FEELING'S TENSE  
A SIMPLE YES OR NO

PAUL:

I OBSESS

ROB:

MUST CONFESS

PAUL:

I'M A MESS

ROB:  
I NEED YOU

PAUL:  
I FEEL THE SAME

PAUL and ROB:  
SO, ARE YOU (AM I) MOVING IN?

PAUL:  
Why not.

ROB  
YES!

*(End song)*

**(FADE TO BLACK)**

**SCENE FOUR:** Empty stage

*(Begin music of song No. 5: 'Paper Dragon'. Enter PAUL with his backpack in an ecstatic mood.)*

PAUL:  
I'M HAPPY!  
I FOUND SOMEONE TO MAKE ME HAPPY  
A BIT OF DOUBT, BUT WE WORKED IT OUT  
WELL, MORE OR LESS  
THEN, ON A WHIM I THOUGHT:  
'I CAN SEE MYSELF WITH HIM'

*(The music suddenly changes mood. Enter the PAPER DRAGON who first is seen as a pair of ominous, glowing green eyes upstage. The dragon gradually emerges, coiling around PAUL, deflating his ecstatic mood.)*

PAPER DRAGON CHORUS:  
REMEMBER ME?  
YOU'RE ONLY ON  
PAGE NINETY-THREE  
THE WRITING'S ROUGH  
AND NOT ENOUGH  
YOU MUST AGREE

YOUR WORDS ARE FLUFF  
YOUR SOURCES LACK  
YOUR PROF IS MAD  
THE TOPIC'S BAD

IT'S TRANSCENDENTAL DISARRAY  
AS YOUR THOUGHTS GO WILDLY ASTRAY

A nice place to live. A warm body to hold. Surrounded by all his expensive art. And so little asked in return. Playing the role of a housewife, are you? That's all your capable of.

MATA NE, MATA NE

Mata ne Paul. It means 'see you... soon'...

*(Exit the PAPER DRAGON)*

PAUL:

CALM THE MIND  
FIND THE WORDS  
GET IT DONE  
SLAY THE BEAST

*(End song. PAUL is left standing alone as the stage as it transforms into the park. On stage is THE GIRL sitting on a swing.)*

THE GIRL:

You came. I'm so happy.

PAUL:

*(taking a small bag out of his backpack)*

Here, I brought you a croissant.

THE GIRL:

Oh, I can't eat croissants.

*(PAUL'S cellphone buzzes in his pocket. He takes it out and checks the message.)*

PAUL:

Sorry, It's a text from Robby.

*(responding to the text)*

"Went to park after all. See you tonight? Fingers crossed emoji"



THE GIRL:

I don't remember there being a Robby-

PAUL:

Know what? Between you and me, he doesn't like to be called Robby.

THE GIRL:

He sounds like a bore.

PAUL:

Hey, that's my boyfriend you're dissing. You did know I was gay, right?

THE GIRL:

That's been obvious since we were seven.

PAUL:

Was it?

THE GIRL:

You enjoyed your baby sister's tea parties a little too much.

PAUL:

*(phone buzzes, he checks it)*

Ahh, a heart emoji.

*(texting back)*

Goofy smiley face emoji-

*(putting away his phone)*

You know, I'm glad we've had this chance to reconnect, but I must be honest, I don't really remember-

THE GIRL:

Oh, no! I was so sure you'd at least remember the park. That it would give you a new perspective on an old problem.

PAUL:

I wasn't aware my perspective was so flawed.

THE GIRL:

You're writing words like 'modus operandi'.

PAUL:

But those are the kind of words you find in dissertations.

THE GIRL:

So, when did you become such an academic? Remember when you attacked the couch thinking it was a dragon? What happened to that Paul?

PAUL:

Oh my god, I totally forgot about that. Could it be I blocked it out. Either way, I can assure you my mother was not a happy person that day. Not that she's ever been a happy person. Or has been particularly pleased with whatever it is I do.

THE GIRL:

Sounds like an old problem.

PAUL:

She was hoping for a doctor, or lawyer. Maybe an accountant. Frankly, those ideas terrified me, so at the time an advanced degree in sociology seemed like a good career path to follow. Maybe it wasn't.

THE GIRL:

See? A new perspective.

PAUL:

I guess.

*(Music of song No. 6 'The Good Son' starts as PAUL speaks)*

You know, I do remember this park. The trees were smaller back then. But they felt bigger. Look, the leaves. They're already starting to change.

THE GIRL:

WE HOPE TO PLEASE OUR MOTHERS  
WE DO ALL THAT THEY SAY  
AND HOPE IT WILL PROVE RIGHT

BUT WHEN LIFE IS FULL OF COLORS  
YOU'LL SOON ONLY SEE GREY  
UNTIL YOU SPARK YOUR OWN LIGHT

PAUL:

THE GOOD SON  
LOOMS LARGE AND BRIGHT  
COMES BACK HOME  
BOTH TALL AND PROUD

THE GIRL:

ALL THAT SHE PREFERS

PAUL:

RICHLY DRESSED  
HER GALLANT KNIGHT  
A MAN WHO WON'T BE COWED

THE GIRL:  
UNLESS RESPONDING TO HER SPURS

THERE'S NO DOUBT  
SHE'LL BE QUITE THRILLED  
BUT WHOES DREAM  
HAS BEEN FULFILLED?

IS IT YOURS?

PAUL:  
NO, IT'S MORE LIKE HERS

THE GIRL:  
TO LISTEN TO OUR MOTHERS  
TO DO ALL THAT THEY SAY  
SHOULDN'T COST YOU YOUR SIGHT

AND THEY KNOW YOU CANNOT STAY  
SO, FORGE YOUR OWN WAY  
AND TRUST IN YOUR OWN MIGHT

When next we meet, bring me-

PAUL:  
Something other than a croissant?

THE GIRL:  
A memory.

**(End song)**

**(FADE TO BLACK)**

**SCENE FIVE:** Helen's place.

*(On stage are PAUL and HELEN)*

HELEN:  
You're late.

PAUL:  
I stopped by the park.

*(handing her the bag with the croissant)*

Here. Have a croissant.

HELEN:

*(taking the bag and peaking in)*

And how was the bake shop?

PAUL:

Empty.

HELEN:

Let that be a lesson to you Paul. She had a good review in the Times, and then let the momentum slip. You've got to keep at it. Always.

PAUL:

Subtle, mother. I'm doing the best I can.

HELEN:

Are you? In the real world people graduate and have jobs. You're living in a dingy studio above a burger joint. You don't even have money to cover your rent.

PAUL:

That problem's been solved.

HELEN:

Has it?

PAUL:

Do you remember the Fukushimas?

HELEN:

You're changing the subject.

PAUL:

Yes. But didn't they have a daughter about my age?

HELEN:

No. Two sons. One now works for google, the other: an investment broker.

PAUL:

Why do you always feel the urge do that?

HELEN:

Do what?

PAUL:

'One's at google, one's an investment broker'. I get it. I'm your greatest disappointment.

HELEN:

Your father's a disappointment. You? A frustration. Rachel told me you've been spending your days sketching some cowboy comic instead of working on the dissertation. What in God's name is that all about?

PAUL:

Congratulations, you've managed to turn your own children into informants! We're your own personal Stasi.

HELEN:

I don't know what to say anymore. I don't know what I'm supposed to do anymore. I'm at my wit's end.

*(Music of song No. 7 'Mothers, Their Children' starts)*

HELEN:

WANTS A PAT ON THE BACK  
NEEDS A FOOT IN THE REAR  
GET YOURSELF INTO GEAR  
GET IT DONE  
GET IT DONE  
GET IT DONE

MOTHERS, THEIR CHILDREN  
CRAVING AFFECTION  
DEMANDING PROTECTION  
ALL TREADING THE WATER  
ALL THINKING THEY'RE SAFE IN THE POND

GET IT DONE  
SURE, IT'S HARD  
FIRST AN INCH  
NEXT A YARD

PAUL:

PUSH TOO MUCH AND I'll CRACK!

HELEN:

MOTIVATION'S WHAT YOU LACK

PAUL:

STOP PUSHING

HELEN:

MOTHERS, THEIR CHILDREN  
FEARING REJECTION  
YET NEEDING DIRECTION

HOPING WE'LL FIX THINGS  
WITH A WAVE OF A MAGICAL WAND  
DO THE WORK  
SLAY THE BEAST

*(music continues)*

PAUL:

Honestly, I'd rather deal with father when you're like this. At least he doesn't spy on me.

HELEN:

Perhaps then you'd like his young new mistress as your *mommy*? Practically like having another sister.

FATHERS ARE USELESS  
WOMEN?  
THEIR TOYS  
KNOW THAT WOMEN ARE MOTHERS  
BUT THE MEN STAY AS BOYS

YES, I'VE AGED  
JOHN, YOUR FATHER NEVER GREW  
BUT WHO WOULD BE HERE  
IF US MOTHERS HADN'T  
PUSHED YOU ALL THROUGH?

GET IT DONE

**End Song**

**(FADE TO BLACK)**

**SCENE SIX:** Rachel's Bakeshop.

*(On stage are PAUL and RACHEL, filming an audition tape. PAUL appears utterly lost in his thoughts. RACHEL is holding a pie. Paul's backpack and laptop are on the table by the window.)*

RACHEL:

Hello Paul. Focus.

PAUL:

*(PAUL quickly returns to the present and gets out his phone)*

Hold on a sec.

*(while adjusting the angle and image)*

Almost got it...almost...almost...Got it.

RACHEL:

What the hell goes on in that head of yours? It's like you were gone, or something.

PAUL:

Sorry, the move's got me distracted. That's all.

RACHEL:

Are you sure?

PAUL:

Jeez Louise, yes. Let's go. Chop, chop.

RACHEL:

Okay. Food Gladiators: Battle of the Bakers. Rachel's audition video. Take one.

*(Music of song No. 8 'The Audition Video' starts as RACHEL, looking uncomfortable and awkward, speaks and then sings horribly off key)*

Hi my name's Rachel

AND THIS:

*(holding up the pie)*

IS MY FAMOUS STRAWBERRY PIE!

*(The music pauses. RACHEL is clearly annoyed with her performance)*

Again.

*(The music begins again, Rachel is slightly better)*

Hi my name's Rachel

AND THIS:  
*(holding up the pie)*  
IS MY FAMOUS STRAWBERRY PIE!

PAUL:  
I thought that one was pretty good.

RACHEL:  
Paul, Food Gladiators may be the tackiest of the competition shows, but they still have standards. Give me a moment.

*(RACHEL collects herself, and then psyches herself up.)*

I'm ready now.

*(The music begins again. RACHEL, now like an aggressive gladiator now sings perfectly in tune and with confidence)*

Hi my name's Rachel.

AND THIS:  
IS MY FAMOUS STRAWBERRY PIE!  
Get it at Rachel's Bakeshop on the corner of ... fuck-a-duckl! Can't even remember my own stupid street address.

*(RACHEL accidentally drops the pie on the floor)*

Fucking hell!

**(End song)**

PAUL:  
It's okay, I think I can edit that part out.

*(PAUL's phone buzzes with a text message)*

Hold on a sec.

*(PAUL reads the text and looks disappointed as RACHEL cleans up the mess from the dropped pie)*

RACHEL:  
Something wrong?

PAUL:  
Nah, it's all good. One of Robby's coworker's turning thirty, they roped into going out for a quick drink.



*(texting)*

Sad face, heart emoji.

*(putting away his phone)*

Guess I can stay a bit longer if you want to do another take.

RACHEL:

Want anything?

PAUL:

How about a donclair?

RACHEL:

Don't even.

PAUL:

Sorry. You know, I bet in a week no one will even remember the donclair. People are fickle. But not you. You're tenacious. Remember when we were little? How you would always get me to come to your tea parties.

RACHEL:

Where I'd serve those plastic sushi-things and insist they were macaroons?

PAUL:

And how Pookie Bear wasn't allowed to sit next to Miss Thang?

RACHEL:

I forgot about Miss Thang!

PAUL:

She led a very interesting life, for a toy.

RACHEL:

Oh, you were a good sport.

PAUL:

I liked your tea parties. Your imagination was a lot less destructive than mine.

RACHEL:

What made you think about that?

PAUL:

I guess, I'm a little jealous.

*(The music of song No. 9 'Empty Inside' begins as PAUL speaks)*

You always knew exactly what you wanted to be. You make everything look so easy.

RACHEL:

I make strawberry pie. Custard, crust, and berries. That's it. Child's play.

MY STRAWBERRY PIE  
HAS A CRUST THAT'S FLAKY  
THE FLAVORS ARE BOLD  
BUT MY FUNDS ARE SHAKY

DESPITE BEING THE BEST,  
DESPITE ALL I'VE TRIED,  
I'M LEFT EMPTY INSIDE

*(music continues)*

Do you know how many nights I cry myself to sleep? How crazy it makes me to see that line at DeBois?

THE TABLES ARE BARE  
AND THE CHOCOLATE'S BITTER  
RICH CARAMELIZED CREAM  
JUST A SAD NO HITTER

AND WITH NO ONE TO CARE  
IF I CURSE OR YELL  
AS THE WORLD TURNS COLD AND UNFAIR

PLAIN STRAWBERRY PIE  
SEEMS YOU NEEDS MORE GLITTER  
LIFE'S NOT ABOUT SWEETS  
RATHER TWEETS ON TWITTER

SHOULD MY BAKES HAVE MORE ZEST?  
SHOULD I SWALLOW MY PRIDE?  
'TIL I'M EMPTY INSIDE

*(music continues)*

Life doesn't stay imaginary tea parties and plastic sushi. Paul. Look around:

HERE'S AN UNSOLD GATEAU  
ANOTHER MORNING I'M SLOW  
SO, I'LL GO ON SOME SHOW  
HOPING IT MIGHT HELP ME TO GROW

Easy. Right?

**(End Song)**

**(FADE TO BLACK)**

**SCENE SEVEN:**

Abrupt scene change to Helen's place.

*(Enter HELEN as song No. 10 'Married Life' begins)*

HELEN:

MARRIED IN MONTAUK  
TOURED PARIS AND BANGKOK  
A SON, A DAUGHTER  
SO, WHEN DID THINGS GO WRONG?

*(As the music vamps, a scene from PAUL's childhood emerges. Enter PAUL, now appearing as seven and dressed in a cowboy costume, RACHEL, now five carrying a birthday cake with candles and pink icing, and JOHN, hiding a present behind his back.)*

RACHEL:

Make a wish!

JOHN:

Now that you're seven, expect a few more responsibilities. Here, happy birthday, son.

PAUL:

An ultra-ninja action toy! Thanks daddy! Look Rach. He comes with nunchucks.

*(JOHN'S cell phone rings. He looks to see who's calling)*

JOHN:

Sorry, I need to take this.

*(talking on the phone)*

Hello?

*(to HELEN, who is looking suspiciously at JOHN)*

It's a patient.

*(back on the phone)*

No, it's okay to call.

*(Fade to black, except for a light on HELEN)*

HELEN:

MY HUSBAND COULD BE SWEET  
BUT OFTEN HE WOULD CHEAT  
BETRAYED, I FELT ALONE

*(Music continues. Enter JOHN. HELEN looks at him with disgust. A bar cart appears. JOHN begins to make himself a drink)*

Another long day at the ‘hospital’ dear?

JOHN:

Don’t start with me, Helen.

HELEN:

HE PROMISED THING’S WOULD CHANGE  
AN ADAGE MEANT FOR ME:  
SOMETHING ABOUT  
‘A BIRD IN THE HAND BEATING  
TWO IN THE BUSH.’  
BUT I DISAGREE  
I KNEW I HAD TO PUSH

*(Music continues. HELEN goes to the bar cart and begins to make herself a drink as the next scene unfolds, now at Christmas time.)*

RACHEL:

Merry Christmas daddy! I made you cookies.

JOHN:

You did? I’m so proud of my baby girl! Here, for you.

RACHEL:

A Pookie Bear!

JOHN:

You can program him to say things.

RACHEL:

What did you get Paul?

PAUL:

Yes! The entire Dragon Ball Z collection!

*(JOHN’s cell phone buzzes)*

HELEN:

Don’t answer that. It’s Christmas for God stakes.

*(JOHN answers the phone and exits. Fade to black, except for a light on HELEN, who proceeds to mix herself another drink)*

HELEN:  
WE DRANK EACH NIGHT WE FOUGHT  
WHICH MEANT WE DRANK A LOT  
MY HEART BECAME LIKE STONE

*(Music continues. Enter JOHN, who pours himself a drink)*

JOHN:  
Don't put all of this on me, Helen. If you weren't so cold.

HELEN:  
You want warm and fuzzy? Eat a peach. I want a divorce.

JOHN:  
It's not going to be that easy, Helen.

*(Music continues. Exit JOHN. HELEN puts down her drink.)*

HELEN:  
HERE COMES THE LAWYERS  
HOPING I MIGHT CRACK  
INSTEAD, I'LL FIGHT BACK  
I'M PUSHING TO BE FREE  
PUSH BACK  
PUSH BACK  
PUSH BACK

*(End Song. Enter PAUL, holding a bag containing cannels from Rachel's Bakeshop)*

HELEN:  
Why do powerful men feel entitled to be bastards? Doctors are the worst.

PAUL:  
We knew this divorce would be contentious.

HELEN:  
Your father is beyond contentious.

PAUL:  
I get it. He's a puffed-up, egotistical misogynist.  
*(handing her the bag of cannels)*  
Here, Rachel made you some cannels.

HELEN:

Those little cakes with the caramelized exterior?

PAUL:

Mm-hmm.

HELEN:

*(taking the bag)*

Was it busy there today?

PAUL:

Well, why don't you go down and see for yourself?

HELEN:

And the reason for this visit? You must want something.

PAUL:

Charming as always mother. Do you remember the incident with the couch?

HELEN:

Talking in tongues now, are we? What couch incident?

PAUL:

When I was little, how mad it made you when I broke the couch?

HELEN:

Oh, that. Why on earth do you want to talk about that?

PAUL:

Humor me. Do you remember?

HELEN:

Of course. You were an absolute terror. Jumping up and down until the beams cracked. Something about a dragon kidnapping a princess. You even got Rachel involved in the shenanigans. And it was your father that was furious. He became red as a beet.

PAUL:

He always turned red when he was drunk.

HELEN:

What do you want me to say? Things were difficult back then.

PAUL:

But it affected us mother. Or didn't you notice?

HELEN:

It was hard on all of us, Paul. But if it makes you feel better, go ahead and blame me for it. I know you do.

PAUL:

That couch was old. We were going to replace it anyway. Why would father be so mad? He never sat in it.

HELEN:

I don't know, your father never liked 'theatrics'.

PAUL:

Theatrics? What does that mean?

HELEN:

You made us call the couch General Dracos. For god's sakes Paul, you even made costumes.

PAUL:

I forgot I named him General Dracos. Do you remember if the princess had a name?

HELEN:

What does it matter? It was more than twenty years ago. You're impossible.

PAUL:

I need to go to the park.

*(Exit PAUL)*

HELEN:

The park? What's at the park? There's something wrong with you Paul!

**(End song)**

**(FADE TO BLACK)**

**SCENE EIGHT:** Back at the park

*(PAUL is sitting on a park bench with his backpack next to him. He has a jacket on as it is getting noticeably colder. He pulls his laptop out)*

PAUL:

Continuing with Chapter Eight. More pretentious musing on the dangers of cultural suppression by the esteemed sociologists Chadwick and Hart, revealing how cognitive dissonance often leads to processes of-

*(slamming the laptop shut)*

Nope. I can't stomach any more 'cognitive dissonance' today.

*(PAUL puts the laptop aside and takes out his phone and texts)*

'Bringing over last boxes tonight. See you for dinner? Goofy smiley face.' And a whole bunch of heart emojis. (pause) Perhaps a few less emojis...

*(PAUL puts away his phone. There's a sudden gust of cold wind. He pulls his jacket tight, takes out his sketch pad and starts drawing. The images are projected onto the scrim.)*

Jake, the renegade gunslinger scales the steep canyon walls as a foul odor begins to permeate his nostrils. The stench tells him he's drawing closer and close to the elusive shadow gate. Though repulsed, he knows he must enter this world of despair and recover the other half of his soul.

*(He then turns the page in the sketch book and begins drawing again)*

Then, at last, he spots its. Cold and foreboding.

*(Enter the PAPER DRAGON, unnoticed by PAUL)*

Draining him of the last nuggets of any residual hope he may have had left. The dreaded shadow gate. Made of human bone and wrapped in the sinew of a hundred lost souls.

PAPER DRAGON:

*(coiling around PAUL)*

And are you not the very definition of a lost soul?

PAUL:

Why can't you leave me alone?

PAPER DRAGON:

Tell me: as Rachel works tirelessly to save her business, as Rob continues his impressive climb up the corporate ladder, what's little Pauly up to?

PAUL:

I'm earning a Ph.D. People will call me 'doctor'.

PAPER DRAGON:

Or are you writing words like 'modus operandi' and drawing silly comic book doorways? Oh, they'd be right to call you a 'disappointment'.



PAUL:  
I'm not a disappointment...I'm a frustration.

*(Enter THE GIRL)*

PAPER DRAGON:  
Who invited her to this party? Act like you don't see her.

PAUL:  
It's too embarrassing. I can't even remember her name.

PAPER DRAGON:  
Good. Ignore her. She'll dissipate.

PAUL:  
Why don't you dissipate?

PAPER DRAGON:  
How? I live in the spongy parts of your brain.

*(Exit the PAPER DRAGON, looking warily at THE GIRL, who spots PAUL and waves to him.)*

The GIRL:  
There you are, Paul. You silly goose. I knew you'd come back to the park. Who were you talking too?

PAUL:  
Um...

THE GIRL:  
*(looking in the direction the dragon left)*  
Are you sure you weren't followed?

PAUL:  
I think I might be losing it.

THE GIRL:  
Well, I'm here to help you find it.

PAUL:  
No, I mean 'losing it'; going crazy.

THE GIRL:

Yeah, words are funny, but I knew what you meant. So, what did you discover?

PAUL:

Nothing. It's all the same 93 pages of worthless, wordy nonsense.

THE GIRL:

No memories to share?

PAUL:

Not unless you want to hear about imaginary tea parties and broken couches-  
(*grabbing and opening his sketch pad*)  
Don't look at that. I told you not to. It's personal.

THE GIRL:

Cool doorway. What's Jake going to do?

PAUL

I don't want to say.

THE GIRL:

Your eyes tell otherwise. Besides, if you didn't want people to see you wouldn't have brought it.

PAUL:

(*speaking self-consciously as if embarrassed*)  
He needs to enter the shadowlands to reclaim the other half of his soul.

THE GIRL:

See? Way more interesting than that academic mumbo-jumbo you insist on scribbling.

PAUL:

(*regaining his confidence*)  
Really? You see, he lost it in a poker game with a shadow demon. But Jake is clever and only gave him half.

THE GIRL:

Smart move. But can you survive on half a soul?

PAUL:

No, it's a stupid story. Rachel's right. I need to focus. Let's tackle the real beast in the room.

THE GIRL:

Tell me about this beast, then.

*(The music of song No. 11: 'Time to Push' begins as the dialogue continues.)*

PAUL:

Okay. Well, the dissertation talks about how capitalist forces, the comic book industry being just one representation,

THE GIRL:

Cool, 'capitalist forces' -

PAUL:

Yes. Capitalist forces push disassociated cultures,

THE GIRL:

Right, disassociated cultures -

PAUL:

Correct. Into artificial narratives, pulling them further and further from their historical constructs -

THE GIRL:

Historical constructs are very important. I probably represent at least three -

PAUL:

You're not taking any of this seriously.

THE GIRL:

Because these words aren't coming from you.

PAUL:

But where are they coming from, if not me?

THE GIRL:

Finally. Now you're asking the right question.

TIME TO PUSH, PAUL, TO KNOW YOURSELF  
TO FIND OUT WHY THINGS CHANGED. PAUL.

PAUL:

(WHO ARE YOU?)

THE GIRL:

TIME TO PUSH, PAUL  
TO FIND OUT WHEN THINGS CHANGED PAUL.

PAUL:  
A MOONBEAM THAT HELPS GUIDE ME THROUGH

THE GIRL:  
THESE WORDS YOU USE  
CAN'T BE WHAT YOU WISH TO SAY  
TOO THICK AND GREY  
WHEN ONCE THEY FELT LIGHT AND GAY

PAUL:  
I LOOK FOR ANSWERS IN THE VOID  
WHERE DISTANT MEMORIES LIE  
BUT THESE WORTHLESS EMPTY THOUGHTS RISE UP  
THAT MAKE ME QUESTION WHY.  
SHOULD I EVEN TRY?

BOTH:  
TIME TO PUSH, PAUL, TO KNOW YOURSELF

PAUL  
WHO AM I?

THE GIRL:  
REMEMBER:

BOTH:  
TIME TO PUSH, PAUL, AND SOON YOU'LL FIND  
A MOONBEAM CAN HELP GUIDE YOU THROUGH

THE GIRL:  
AND SOON YOU'LL FIND:

THE GIRL and OFF-STAGE CHORUS:  
IT'S WHAT YOU WANT  
NOT WHAT THEY WANT  
IT'S *YOU* WE WANT

THE WORDS YOU CHOOSE  
DON'T FEEL LIKE THE BOY I KNEW  
BECAUSE YOU GREW  
AND TOOK A PATH NOT QUITE YOU  
YOU'VE GONE ASTRAY

A BILLION STORIES LEFT UNTOLD  
AS PEOPLE FADE AND DIE,  
WHILE A TRILLION WORTHLESS GADGETS  
FILL THE STORES FOR US TO BUY  
SOME MAY NEVER FIND THEIR WAY

THE GIRL, PAUL and the CHORUS:  
SLOW DOWN YOUR MIND  
AND SOON YOU'LL FIND  
AN ANSWER WORTH LOOKING FOR

THE GIRL and the CHORUS:  
TIME TO PUSH,  
TIME TO PUSH,  
WE MUST PUSH,  
PUSH  
WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

KEEP IT HONEST  
FIND WHAT'S TRUE:  
AND PUSH UNTIL YOU'RE (I'M) THROUGH

PAUL:  
AND SOON I'LL FIND  
WHAT?

*(music continues)*

THE GIRL:  
You're like Jake.

*(Enter ROB, as the scene splits into two different locations, the park and what is assumed to be ROB's office. ROB appears to be in mid-conversation with his boss who is off-stage. His side of the conversation is the only one heard as THE GIRL continues to interact with PAUL in the park)*

ROB:  
It's good to hear my work has been appreciated.

THE GIRL:  
Half your soul is missing.

ROB:

Excuse me? You want me to transfer where?

THE GIRL:

It's this dissertation. It's pulling you in two. You have to delete it. All of it.

ROB:

I'll have an answer for you next week.

*(Exit ROB, looking unsettled)*

THE GIRL:

Push to find the memory. That's when it all went wrong. Discover what really happened that day you broke the couch before it's too late.

*(Exit THE GIRL)*

CHORUS:

TIME TO PUSH PAULY

**(End song. Enter the PAPER DRAGON)**

PAPER DRAGON:

You're pathetic.

PAUL:

Is she insane? I'm not deleting six years of hard work. Mother would kill me. This is weird. I'm going home.

PAPER DRAGON:

Whose home?

PAUL:

Jeez Louise, I just moved in. I haven't even unpacked my things. It'll start to feel like home. Soon. I think.

*(Exit the PAPER DRAGON)*

I hope.

**(FADE TO BLACK)**

**SCENE NINE:** Back at Rob's apartment.

*(On stage are PAUL and ROB. PAUL is starting to unpack a box of manga comics and is only half paying attention to ROB.)*

ROB:

You know Pauly, I've been thinking. You're young, and this might be a good time for change. I mean, you're done with the class work and almost done with your dissertation.  
*(noticing that PAUL is not listening)*

Paul!

PAUL:

What?

ROB:

Are you even paying attention? I'm trying to talk to you!

PAUL:

I'm listening!

ROB:

Good. As I was saying, you're working on your dissertation.

PAUL:

And teaching.

ROB:

But only the one class, right?

PAUL:

I know it's just the one class, but it's still good experience. It helps build my resume.

ROB:

Right. But my point is, nothing is really keeping you here in New York. I mean, you could move and keep writing. And there's no reason you couldn't get a part time job teaching outside of New York. Maybe at a community college somewhere. So yeah.

PAUL:

I don't like where this is going.

ROB:

Look, maybe unpacking your things right now isn't necessary...

PAUL:

Are you breaking up with me? It's the whole 'park thing' isn't it?

ROB:

No. Pauly, God no. The opposite. The company wants to transfer me.

Transfer? Where? PAUL:

To a branch. In Denver. ROB:

Denver? PAUL:

But I want you to come with me. ROB:

I need to sit. PAUL:

*(The stage transforms into the empty stage as the music of song No. 12: 'Force Majeure' begins. Enter HELEN. PAUL's attentions are divided between ROB on one side and HELEN on the other.)*

HELEN:  
It's official. Your father and I are divorced.

PAUL:  
So, it's happening.

HELEN:  
We worked it out. I get the Montauk house and he gets the cabin in the Adirondacks, which is admittedly a bit too rustic for my tastes. And then we're selling the New York apartment.

PAUL:  
*(to HELEN)*  
But we grew up in that apartment! Our memories are there.

HELEN:  
Along with closets full of outgrown clothes and forgotten toys.

PAUL:  
You can't throw those away!

ROB:  
Pauly, I only have a week to decide, and then-

HELEN:



You can't cling to the past, Life has ways of pushing even if you do

HELEN and ROB:

IT'S CALLED  
FORCE MAJEURE  
THINGS BEYOND OUR CONTROL  
THERE'S NO STOPPING

HELEN, PAUL and ROB:

FORCE MAJEURE  
THINGS BEYOND OUR CONTROL

HELEN and ROB:

OUR WORLD'S TECTONIC PLATES.

ROB:

REARRANGING US

PAUL:

EVER-CHANGING US  
A BILLION STORIES LEFT UNTOLD  
AS PEOPLE FADE OR DIE,

HELEN and ROB

BOTH PUSHING YOU,

PAUL:

WHILE A TRILLION WORTHLESS GADGETS

HELEN and ROB:

AND PULLING YOU,

PAUL:

FILL THE STORES FOR US TO BUY.  
SO, TELL ME WHY EVEN TRY?

*(Enter RACHEL)*

ALL SUCCUMB TO

FORCE MAJEURE  
PUSH, PULL, PUSH

RACHEL:  
(*showing PAUL her phone*)

Read that.

PAUL:  
(*reading from an email*)

‘Dear Applicant: We bequeath upon you title of Food Gladiator!’ Rach, you’ve been selected.

RACHEL:

I know. It’s awful!

PAUL AND HELEN:

A BILLION STORIES  
OF SIMPLE HOPES AND DREAMS.  
ALL OUR HOPES AND DREAMS  
SO MANY STORIES  
ALL UNDOING AT THE SEAMS.

HELEN:

What’s this about Rachel’s being on T.V.?

PAUL:

Crazy, right?

RACHEL:

It’s insane. Filming starts in *two weeks!*

COMPANY:

IT’S PUSHING US TO WHERE WE NEED TO BE  
BUT NEVER DARED TO BE  
CLEARLY SCARED TO BE  
PUSHING US RELENTLESSLY ON OUR WAY

PAUL AND RACHEL:

A BILLION STORIES  
CURSING US WITH HOPES AND DREAMS  
A BILLION STORIES

COMPANY:

FORCE MAJEURE  
PUSHING US RELENTLESSLY  
LEAVE THE NEST

SHOOT THE MOON

COMPANY:

THERE'S NO STOPPING  
FORCE MAJEURE  
THINGS BEYOND OUR CONTROL

LOVE CAUSING LOSS  
CAUSING FEAR CAUSING WAR  
EACH A DOOR

*(The GIRL appears upstage illuminated by an eerie light)*

LIFE WILL TAKE ALL AND MORE.  
FORCE MAJEURE

THE GIRL:

FORCING YOU TO PUSH, PAUL  
TIME FOR YOU TO PUSH, PAUL

HELEN, RACHEL and ROB:

PAUL, BEWARE FORCE-

PAUL and THE GIRL:

-ING YOU

HELEN, RACHEL and ROB:

MAJEURE

PAUL and THE GIRL:

TO PUSH

HELEN, RACHEL and ROB:

FORCE-

PAUL and THE GIRL:

-ING YOU TO PUSH

HELEN, PAUL, RACHEL and ROB:

PUSH, PUSH, CRACK!

*(End song as the stage goes dark. PAUL's phone buzzes as the lights come up on PAUL, who is looking at the GIRL, but she cannot be seen.)*

PAUL:

*(addressing the GIRL)*

What do you want from me?

*(his phone continues to buzz as the light comes up on the GIRL)*

I don't have any memories to share.

*(phone buzzes)*

I told you, my minds empty. Blank.

*(PAUL finally looks at his phone, and reads his text message)*

No, not this. Not now.

THE GIRL:

I warned you that life would close in on you.

PAUL:

The college just announced an opening for a fulltime prof.

THE GIRL:

So?

PAUL:

I thought there wouldn't be a search for at least another year. If it gets filled, that's it. I won't be needed as an adjunct anymore. My job: gone.

*(pacing around like a caged animal)*

If only I could-

THE GIRL:

Finish that stupid dissertation.

PAUL:

Right! Then, I could apply. If only I didn't need to worry about-

THE GIRL:

Moving to Colorado?

PAUL:

Exactly! Should I stay? Do you think Rob and I could make it work even if I-

THE GIRL:

Don't go.

PAUL:

But I have to. He loves me. And I've no place to live. I ended my lease. Jeez Louise! I can't even move back home with Mother. She's selling it. Why would she do that? If only-

THE GIRL:

*(putting her hand up to PAUL to stop him)*

*If only you stopped moving in the circles. If only you stopped the noise and slowed down your mind, you'd see it's all a distraction from the towering wall in front of you.*

*(The music of song No. 13: 'Ink Flows' begins)*

*If only you'd let me help. Observe.*

*(Two doorways descend one on each side of the stage. Then using only her hand, THE GIRL begins writing on the first door the kanji for 'pull'.)*

WE PRESS,  
INK FLOWS  
LINES FORM,  
INK FLOWS  
ONE CANNOT DICTATE  
WHERE LIFE GOES

*(THE GIRL then goes to the other door and writes the kanji for 'push')*

THE LINES MOVE,  
THE INK FLOWS  
A SHAPE FORMS,  
THEN DRIES,  
UNFIXABLE,  
LIKE A PETAL ON A DYING ROSE.

*(music continues)*

PAUL:

Who are you? *What* are you?

THE GIRL:

Shodo. Japanese calligraph marks each door. But these doors are merely paths, not destinations.

PAUL:

*(mystified by what he's seeing)*

What do they say.

THE GIRL:

They pose a question: Are you going to travel as the Paul I remember or the Paul you've become?

PAUL:

What do you mean the Paul I've become? Where are you going?

THE GIRL:

WE DIP,  
WE PRESS,  
WE PAUSE  
WE BREAK THE RULES  
INK POOLS  
SHADOWS FORM  
THE IMAGE DIES  
WE CANNOT DICTATE  
WHERE LIFE GOES

*(The GIRL begins to disappear upstage into shadow)*

Find the memory.

*(End song as THE GIRL exits. PAUL examines the doors. Enter the PAPER DRAGON)*

PAPER DRAGON:

Pay no attention to those doors. They can't help you. Memory isn't the problem. It's your lack of discipline and talent.

PAUL:

You're nothing but words on paper. A few more chapters and you're gone.

PAPER DRAGON:

Oh, how wrong you are. I'm more. So much more-

*(The PAPER DRAGON suddenly stands erect; its voice booming and terrifying)*

I've been scribed into the substance of your soul. My claws cut deep,

*(It's claw swipe at PAUL making a slashing sound as PAUL reacts to it)*

honed by your trivial existence. My tail snaps-  
*(cracking its tail like a whip.)*  
at each insipid utterance you make. My coils crush-  
*(coiling around PAUL)*  
with the force of a thousand meaningless thoughts. And my breath:

*(It breathes a cloud of gas into PAUL, who collapses onto his hands and knees)*

A toxic cloud of insignificance and self-loathing.

*(The PAPER DRAGON backs away in triumph as the music of song No. 14 'The Taunting Scene' begins.)*

PAUL:

DON'T BE LOUD  
DON'T BE BLUNT

PAPER DRAGON:

You cannot defeat me.

PAUL:

TOO AFRAID TO CONFRONT

PAPER DRAGON:

All that's left is for me to swallow you.

PAUL:

MUST BE LIKED WAS MY CREED

PAPER DRAGON:

Indeed, I just might.

PAUL:

BUT SOMETHING NEW IS WHAT I NEED

PAPER DRAGON:

*(suddenly alarmed)*

What's that? What did you say?

PAUL:

I said, one way or another, I *will* defeat you!

PAPER DRAGON:

With what? A cliché?

*(End song, as the music song No.15 'Square One' begins attacca)*

PAUL:

MIGHT I TURN AN INVESTMENT IN TIME  
I'LL NEVER GET BACK,  
TO AN INVESTMENT IN HOPE  
AND TAKE A NEW TRACK?

BUT STRESSED, BENT OUT OF SHAPE  
NOT ABLE TO COPE

NOT WILLING TO BE DONE,  
NOT WANTING TO RESET,  
EITHER OR  
IT'S BACK TO SQUARE ONE  
EITHER OR  
I'M BACK TO SQUARE ONE

WHAT IS THE MEANING?

CHORUS:

A LIFE WITHOUT MEANING

PAPER DRAGON

JUST PUSHING A WHEEL

PAUL, PAPER DRAGON and CHORUS:

NEVER KNOWING WHAT'S REAL

CANNOT WIN  
CANNOT HIDE  
NO ONE CARES  
THAT YOU TRIED

MINDS WILL AGE  
BODIES ROT  
WHAT'S THE POINT?

PAUL:

I FORGOT!

SUCH WORDY THOUGHTS  
FILL A VOID IN THE HEART  
MY LIFE IS A MESS



WHO HERE'S WILLING TO HELP  
A SOUL IN DISTRESS?

ALL STUCK IN POINTLESS LIVES  
SURVIVING THE GRIND  
WE'RE LEAVING BONES BEHIND  
WITH NOTHING MORE TO FIND

WHEN IT'S DONE  
IT'S BACK TO SQUARE ONE

PAPER DRAGON WITH CHORUS:  
COME BACK TO SQUARE ONE!

PAUL:  
GUESS I'M DONE  
SO, SHOW ME SQUARE ONE

*(The stage transforms into three different scenes: Helen's place, Rachel's Bakeshop and Rob's apartment. Enter HELEN, ROB, and RACHEL. HELEN is home looking through divorce papers and debating whether to remove her wedding ring. ROB is at his home packing and RACHEL is wiping a table in her empty bakeshop.)*

CHORUS:  
LIFE WITHOUT MEANING

PAPER DRAGON:  
NOTHING HAS MEANING

HELEN, ROB, and RACHEL:  
JUST PUSHING A WHEEL

PAUL  
WE'RE TRAPPED IN A CIRCLE

HELEN, ROB, RACHEL and PAUL:  
FORGETTING WHAT'S REAL

HELEN, ROB, and RACHEL:  
PUSH, PUSH, PUSH

PAUL, PAPER DRAGON WITH CHORUS  
BE A BLOB  
TWEET SOME HUGS  
WHY NOT DRUGS?

GET A JOB. PAUL:  
PUSH HELEN, ROB, and RACHEL:  
PULL PAPER DRAGON WITH CHORUS:  
MAKE A PIE HELEN, ROB, RACHEL and PAUL:  
TELL A LIE  
PICK A FIGHT  
HAVE A CRY  
START A WAR  
LET'S IGNORE  
OFF TO BED  
WANTING MORE

PAUL:  
THINKING THAT'S ALL THERE IS

COMPANY:  
LIFE

PAUL:  
WITHOUT MEANING

COMPANY:  
IT'S BACK TO SQUARE ONE

PAUL:  
LIFE HAS LOST MEANING

*(HELEN removes her ring and drops it into the stack of divorce papers. ROB pauses his packing as he gets to PAUL's comic books. RACHEL drops her rag down on the empty table she's wiping.)*

ALL  
AND HASN'T IT BEEN FUN

HELEN, ROB, RACHEL and PAUL:  
THE SINKING SUN  
RESETS THE CLOCK

PAUL:  
AND WASN'T IT A GOOD RUN?  
NOW SHOW ME THE QUICKEST WAY BACK

PUSH CHORUS, HELEN, ROB AND RACHEL:

BACK PAUL:

PULL CHORUS, HELEN, ROB AND RACHEL:

BACK PAUL:

PUSH CHORUS, HELEN, ROB AND RACHEL:

BACK PAUL:

BACK CHORUS, HELEN, ROB AND RACHEL:

PAUL:  
FROM THE BLEAK  
INEVITABILITY OF SQUARE ONE

*(The PAPER DRAGON moves center stage and opens its great maw.)*

BEWARE ROB:

BEWARE RACHEL:

BEWARE HELEN:

SQUARE ONE CHORUS, HELEN, ROB AND RACHEL:

*(PAUL turns, walks in and is swallowed in a single bite.)*

**END OF ACT ONE**

# ACT II

SCENE ONE: Inside the stomach of the dragon.

*(PAUL is collapsed on the floor looking utterly depressed. The two marked doors are on either side of him but are hidden in darkness. The music of song No. 16: 'The World Inside' Reprise 1 begins.)*

PAUL:  
THE WORLD INSIDE MY HEAD  
A WORLD OF HOPELESS DREAD  
MY WORDS CANNOT DESCRIBE  
HOW I'VE BEEN BROUGHT DOWN,  
CHOPPED UP AND FED  
TO THE DRAGON INSIDE MY HEAD

DON'T BE LOUD, DON'T BE BLUNT  
TOO AFRAID TO CONFRONT  
MUST BE LIKED WAS MY CREED  
NOW SOMETHING NEW IS WHAT I NEED.

*(Music continues as JAKE enters. He struts in with a comically large gun strapped to his back. A desert rock appears. He sits down, removes his gun and leans it up against the rock. He takes out a cigar, bites off the end and spits it out. He puts the cigar to his mouth, takes out and strikes a match. End song.)*

PAUL:  
Not once have I ever drawn you smoking a cigar.

*(JAKE takes the cigar out of his mouth and blows out the match.)*

How are you even here?

JAKE:  
Caus' ya got yerself into trouble. Again.  
*(standing up and looking around)*  
And from what I can see, it looks like you've been chewed up and swallowed like a hunk of carrion.

PAUL:  
I got eaten by a dragon.

JAKE:

Dragons are tough! But the stomach's the most vulnerable part. We can end this real quick.

*(grabbing his gun)*

Let's see how he likes eating bullets.

PAUL:

Wait! Something tells me that's not a good idea.

JAKE:

But it's what'cha want, ain't it? To end it. Quick.

PAUL:

Yes.

*(JAKE cocks his gun.)*

I mean, no!

JAKE:

Yes? No? Make up yer mind.

PAUL:

I don't know what to do.

JAKE:

Well, I'm out of ideas-

PAUL:

Then you're not much help.

JAKE:

Ya drew me with a big ass gun. Not a big ass brain.

PAUL:

So, I'm a size queen.

JAKE:

I don't think ya know what'cha are. Time fer some shootin'.

*(PAUL braces himself as JAKE aims at the dragon's stomach. Suddenly, the 'Pull Door' begins to glow. JAKE pauses and lowers his gun.)*

Well, I'll be. Ya didn't tell me there's a door.

*(The 'Push Door' starts to glow as well.)*

PAUL:

There're two.

JAKE:

*(examining the pull door)*

Two's better than one.

*(examining the kanji on the door)*

Them strokes sure are purdy. That's the kanji for 'Pull'.

PAUL:

You can you read kanji?

JAKE:

I'm drawn in the style of a manga comic. I think I can read Japanese.

*(going to the other door)*

This one here says push. Sure a lotta signage on yer' doorways. Y'all be better off with one of them saloon type doors. Push or pull. Either way gets ya in.

*(The 'Pull Door' suddenly opens outward. A blinding light emits from it, and a looped collage of voices from Paul's life -his professor, his mother, Rob and Rachel- in several different speeds can be heard. PAUL retreats from the door)*

JAKE:

Don't be afraid. Them's just voices.

*(closing the door with the butt of gun)*

I don't trust voices. Stay there. I'm gonna check the other one.

*(JAKE approaches and pushes open the 'Pull Door'. A frightening incomprehensible noise fills the room as PAUL covers his ears. Shadows and mist pour out.)*

Well stitch me up and call me a Jackalope. Ya done found the shadowlands. Shucks, half of me's in there already.

*(PAUL begins to hear a soft chanting emanating from the 'Pull Door' -PAUL, PAUL, PAULL, PULL, PULL. He gets up, stares at the door, sighs and pulls it open.)*

Fixin' to go with the voices are ya? I can't help ya if ya go in there.

PAUL:

Do I have a choice?

JAKE:

Always.

*(PAUL, enticed by the voices, enters the pull door. The stage transforms to the next scene)*

**FADE TO BLACK**

**SCENE TWO:** The Colosseum.

*(PAUL looks lost and confused at his new surroundings as the doors disappears. Enter THE GIRL)*

THE GIRL:

Paul! I was so worried. I saw that horrible, nasty dragon swallow you. I knew he was following you. I warned you about him following you. Didn't I? I'm sure I did.

PAUL:

I don't know this place.

THE GIRL:

Come with me, I brought some old friends.

*(Enter MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR)*

MISS THANG:

My, my, but didn't he grow into a fine young fellow.

PAUL:

Miss Thang?

POOKIE BEAR:

He smells like an adult!

PAUL:

Pookie Bear?

MISS THANG:

Manners Pookie Bear! They all end up smelling like adults.

PAUL:

What are you doing here?

MISS THANG:

We're here to be dazzled by your culinary creations.

*(MISS THANG begins to dress PAUL into a corny gladiator costume and arms him with various baking implements)*

POOKIE BEAR:  
There better be cake!

PAUL:  
You're toys. You can't eat.

MISS THANG:  
I said 'be dazzled'. Not fed.

POOKIE BEAR  
(*aggressively*)  
Bake me a fucking cake!

PAUL:  
Jeez Louise! Chill out Pookie Bear.

THE GIRL:  
You'll have to forgive him. He's been stuck in an old dusty bin smooshed against Rachel's Burp-and-Feed-Me Mindy Doll.

POOKIE BEAR:  
She burps. And her breath smells like ass!

THE GIRL:  
It's true. It does.

*(The music of song No. 17: 'The Battle of the Bakers' begins.)*

MISS THANG:  
Come Pookie Bear, It begins...

*(MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR go to the viewing box to watch the competition as THE CROWD, comprised of dream versions of HELEN, RACHEL and ROB with faces obscured by masks, also begins to sit in the viewing box)*

PAUL:  
Wait, where's Rachel? This is her competition.

THE GIRL:  
Silly goose, you're the one who's competing.

*(A baking station appears in front of PAUL, who looks terrified at what is about to happen. THE GIRL stands by his side. Enter THE ANNOUNCER to much fanfare.)*



MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE  
CROWD:

TIME TO BEGIN OUR SHOW  
SHOW US WHAT YOU CAN DO

THE ANNOUNCER:

Welcome Gladiators to ‘The Colosseum’. Will your licentious flavors enter our esteemed  
athenaeum?

*(staring and pointing at PAUL)*

Or condemn you to the darkness of the mausoleum. Let’s find out.

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE  
CROWD:

PICKLED CURRIED KUMQUAT SCONE?

THE ANNOUNCER:

Yes?

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE  
CROWD:

SOUNDS INTRIGUING.

THE ANNOUNCER:

Excellent.

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE  
CROWD:

CLICHÉD BACON ICE CREAM CONE?

THE ANNOUNCER:

Yes?

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE  
CROWD:

PLAIN FATIGUING.

THE ANNOUNCER:

I agree.

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE  
CROWD:

GIVE US FLAVORS YET UNKNOWN.

THE ANNOUNCER:

*(approaching PAUL.)*

Let's meet our first contestant. A family torn apart by infidelity, alcoholism and abuse. While little Pauly found peace through baking.

PAUL:

There's been a mistake. You must mean my sister, Rachel. And it wasn't that black and white.

THE ANNOUNCER:

Nuance doesn't sell. Stick to the narrative. Round one: cookies. Ingredients include flax seed, rosewater and suet.

*(PAUL, like a child at play, performs each baking challenge.)*

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE CROWD:

START THE CLOCK

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE GIRL:

TOAST THE FLAX  
HINTS OF ROSE  
NOT SO SWEET

PAUL:

WHY THE SUET?

THE CROWD:

MAKE IT WORK

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE GIRL:

SCOOP THE DOUGHS  
LAY OUT NEAT  
SPACIOUS ROWS

THE CROWD:

YOU'RE NEARLY OUT OF TIME

THE ANNOUNCER:

Round two, A true test of the baker...macaroons!

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE CROWD:

YUM!

THE ANNOUNCER:

But nothing worthwhile in life comes easy. No, these little packages of sweetness must be made in one hour, and blindfolded...

*(PAUL, looking surprised, is blindfolded by the ANNOUNCER.)*

THE CROWD:

START THE CLOCK  
Go!

PAUL:

BAKING BLIND

THE GIRL:

UTMOST HASTE

PAUL:

SEEMS INSANE

THE GIRL:

STILL MUST TASTE

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE  
CROWD:

HOW REFINED

PAUL and THE GIRL:

WHILE WE CHAT  
SOMEONE'S EGGS  
JUST WENT 'SPLAT'

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE  
CROWD:

A BROKEN LIFE  
WHAT A WASTE

*(PAUL removes his blindfold.)*

THE ANNOUNCER:

Round three: cake.

CHORUS:

AH, CAKE

POOKIE BEAR:

Finally, cake!

THE ANNOUNCER:

Done without the use of sugar, flour or eggs. And one hand behind your back.

*(PAUL places his hand behind his back.)*

PAUL and THE GIRL:

AN IMPOSSIBLE CONFECTION  
EACH IMPERFECTION  
EXPOSED BY

*(THE ANNOUNCER suspiciously inspects PAUL to make sure one hand is behind his back)*

SPECIOUS INSPECTION

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE  
CROWD:

PUSH, PAULY PUSH  
PAULY PUSH

MISS THANG:

*(leaning over the box, catching PAUL's ear)*

Psst. Here, I snuck in a vegan sugar and gluten free cake mix.

*(handing him a cake box followed by some plastic sushi)*

And some plastic sushi to brighten things up.

PAUL:

But these aren't edible.

THE GIRL:

Doesn't matter. They can't eat.

PAUL:

*(relaxing his hand)*

Oh, right. Done!

THE ANNOUNCER:

Are you?

THE CHORUS:

HOW DID YOU LET  
IT GET THIS FAR?

THE ANNOUNCER:  
But now the finale and your signature bake. What will it be? I wonder...

THE ANNOUNCER:  
A SOFT SILKY FLAN?  
OR A FLORENTINE LATTICE?  
COQUETTISHLY MADE  
IN THE HOPES OF HIGH STATUS?

PAUL:  
TRAPPED IN A DREAM  
AND IT KEEPS ON SPINNING

THE GIRL:  
TRY STRAWBERRY PIE  
THAT'S THE KEY TO WINNING

PAUL:  
TRAPPED IN A DREAM  
AND IT KEEPS ON SPINNING

THE GIRL:  
TRY STRAWBERRY PIE  
THAT'S THE KEY TO WINNING.

THE CROWD:  
WE DEMAND MORE THAN THAT  
WHY NOT:  
ALMOND CAKES WITH GARLIC FOAM

THE ANNOUNCER:  
Yes?

CHORUS:  
SOUNDS INTRIGUING!

PAUL:  
No. It doesn't!

THE CROWD:  
OYSTERS BAKED IN HONEYCOMB

THE ANNOUNCER:  
Yes?

THE CROWD:  
NOTHING BETTER

PAUL:  
Have you all gone mad?

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE  
CROWD:  
MUST SHOW US WHAT YOU CAN DO

THE GIRL  
Don't listen to them! They're just voices in your head!

THE ANNOUNCER:  
EVEN IF 'NOT QUITE YOU'

THE GIRL:  
Stick to the Pie

PAUL:  
Strawberry pie won't beat honeycombed oyster.

THE ANNOUNCER  
*(making a suggestion to PAUL)*  
Chocolate liver crème brulee, perhaps?

PAUL:  
You're disgusting.

THE ANNOUNCER:  
The crowd says otherwise.

ALL:  
HOW OUR TASTES  
EVEN SHAME  
ANCIENT ROME

DON'T BE SO PROUD  
MOLLIFY THE CROWD

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE  
CROWD:  
BACK TO BAKING

MISS THANG:  
HE LOOKS NERVOUS

MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR and THE  
CROWD:  
HIS HANDS ARE SHAKING

DON'T GIVE UP  
MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR

GET IT DONE  
PUSH YOURSELF  
THE GIRL:

PUSH, PAULY, PUSH  
POOKIE BEAR and MISS THANG:

WE KNOW YOU'LL BE GREAT  
THE GIRL, MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR:

MUST COMPETE FOR THE TREASURE  
DOES THIS CHAOS BRING YOU PLEASURE?  
PUSH  
THE CROWD:

What should I do?  
PAUL:  
*(becoming flustered)*

Stick to what you know.  
THE GIRL:

I don't know anything!  
PAUL:

SLICE THE FRUIT  
WHIP THE CREAM  
STIR THE POT  
THE GIRL, MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR:

CRUST IS HOT  
PAUL:

CUSTARD'S NOT  
THE ANNOUNCER and CROWD:  
*(looking at PAUL shaking his head)*

WHY SHOULD MAYHEM BRING SUCH JOY?  
THE CROWD

THE ANNOUNCER:

Times up! Present your creation.

PAUL:

Hi my name's Paul.

AND THIS IS MY FAMOUS

Wait! this is all wrong! Rachel's the one who loves baking. Not me!

*(End Song as MISS THANG 'gasps' and POOKIE BEAR lets out an awful screech.)*

THE ANNOUNCER:

Couldn't even present a simple pie. Such a disappointment.

*(Exit THE ANNOUNCER)*

PAUL:

But this isn't me.

THE GIRL:

Is sociology 'you'?

PAUL:

No.

THE GIRL:

Is teaching sociology and all its *historical constructs* 'you'?

PAUL:

No.

THE GIRL:

Then how was this any different?

MISS THANG

What fun! I really thought you were going to pull it off the win, but then...oh well.

*(MISS THANG begins to 'shoo' and wave the sets away until there is an empty stage. THE CROWD also exits, except for RACHEL, who and approaches PAUL)*

POOKIE BEAR

You don't belong here!

*(Exit MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR. PAUL looks at THE GIRL who shrugs and then exits.)*



Still think I have it ‘easy’?

RACHEL:  
*(RACHEL takes off her mask as PAUL suddenly notices he’s still dressed in the gladiator costume. He takes it off and hands it to RACHEL, who puts it on.)*

Do you really *want* to do this?

RACHEL:  
What? Wear a stupid costume? Compete in some inane, idiotic challenge? No, I don’t want to do any of this. In fact, I fucking hate it.  
*(beat)*  
But I love baking. So, I do it. What do you love, Paul?

I don’t remember anymore...

You look great.

PAUL:  
*(Looking at RACHEL, who is now fully in costume)*

I look ridiculous. Well, wish me luck.

PAUL:  
You don’t need it. Just show them what you can do.

Ahh, thanks Paul.

RACHEL:  
*(PAUL grasps RACHEL’s hand. But both of his hands ‘pop’ off as she exits, taking them with her. PAUL looks disbelievingly at his handless arms. Enter ROB as the room transforms to ROB’s apartment, but everything seems distorted as if in a dream.)*

ROB:  
Pauly, Pauly, hello in there. Remember me?

Sorry, Rob. My hands are gone.

ROB:  
Follow me.

Where?

PAUL:

ROB:

To Denver, remember? This move will be good for you. I'll get a nice apartment, with a view of the mountains. You'll like the mountains. And when you finish your degree, we can frame it and put it above the mantel.

PAUL:

Instead of the Vasarely?

ROB:

Well, next to the Vasarely.

PAUL:

But then I'll always compare myself to Vasarely.

*(The music of song No. 18: 'In the West' begins)*

ROB:

EVERYBODY FINDS THEMSELVES IN THE WEST  
LEAVING ALL YOU KNOW  
AND LEARNING HOW TO GROW

PAUL:

THOSE PARTS OF ME I'VE LOST.

ROB:

EVERYBODY FINDS THEMSELVES IN THE WEST  
YOU COULD LEARN TO DOWNHILL SKI

PAUL:

THAT MIGHT BE HARD FOR ME

*(waiving his stumps in ROB's face)*

SEE? BITS OF ME ARE LOST

ROB:

IT WILL BE MY TREAT,  
AND OUR LIFE WILL BE SWEET  
WHERE THE PRAIRIE GRASS AND MOUNTAINS MEET

SO, PACK UP, AND LET'S GO  
TO COLORADO

WITH IT'S OLD SILVER MINES AND IT'S  
COLD-WATER CREEKS, AND THE  
TALL FOREST PINES HOW THEY  
SPRAWL UP THE PEAKS

WITH ALL THE WONDERS OF THE  
WEST YOU'LL HARDLY MISS ME

PAUL:

Miss you?

ROB:

WELL, MY JOB IS LIKE A CLUB  
SO, A QUICK ONE AT THE PUB

PAUL:

Ahh, so there's the rub.

ROB:

WHY NOT LEARN TO MOUNTAIN CLIMB  
WHAT'S TO FEAR?

PAUL:

THAT EVEN MORE OF ME

ROB:

I'LL EVEN BUY

PAUL:

WILL DISAPPEAR

ROB:

ALL THE GEAR  
ALL THE THINGS YOU'LL FIND TO DO

PAUL:

WHERE ARE YOU?

ROB:

TRY MOUNTAIN HIKES  
OFF ROAD BIKES?

PAUL:

YOU SURELY JEST

ROB:

WELL, IT'S NOTHING BUT THE BEST  
FOR MY LOYAL

PAUL:

LONELY

ROB:

CHERISHED

PAUL:

GUEST

ROB:

No, my beau.

SO, PACK UP  
TIME TO HEAD OUT

PAUL:

WHERE TO?

ROB:

WITH ME TO COLORADO

WITH IT'S OLD SILVER MINES AND IT'S  
COLD-WATER CREEKS, AND THE  
TALL FOREST PINES HOW THEY  
SPRAWL UP THE PEAKS  
WITH ALL THE WONDERS IN THE WEST  
YOU'LL HARDLY MISS ME

PAUL:

SEEMS I'LL ONLY SEE YOU  
WHEN CONVENIENT  
ALWAYS YOUR TERMS  
TELL ME HOW I FIT IN

ROB:

YOU'LL FIT IN FINE  
ONCE OUT WEST  
YOU'LL BE MINE  
I LOVE YOU PAULY

*(End song as ROB fixes PAUL's hair)*

PAUL:

I suppose I can learn to...No. No, Rob. I'm not a skier. I never will be a skier. I don't like snow.

ROB:

Then stay home, read your comics if you'd rather.

*(PAUL becomes off balanced)*

PAUL:

I just felt my leg detach...

ROB:

Watch anime all day. It won't make any difference-

PAUL:

Rob, I'm falling apart

ROB:

I love you, and I don't care what you do as long as you're with me.

PAUL:

You say that as if it's a good thing. You should care! How can you love me when it doesn't even matter what I do? Don't you see? I'm disappearing into your collection.

ROB:

My collection?

PAUL:

Your collection. I see it now. You surround yourself with pretty things. Your furniture, your art. Me. All patiently waiting at 'home'. All part of the collection.

ROB:

But I don't want to lose you.

PAUL:

You don't want to lose the Vasarely either. ~~And what happens to me when I'm no longer pretty?~~ Rob, it's not your fault. I let myself be collected. I let a lot of things happen that I shouldn't have.

*(regaining his balance)*

I'm going to lose myself if I stay with you.

*(PAUL regains his hand, which now holds the key to ROB's apartment.)*

Even though you're good to me, you're not good for me. I'm sorry, Rob.

*(PAUL hands back the key as ROB recedes into the distance. PAUL tousle's his hair. The pull door materializes. PAUL walks through it and back into the dragon's stomach where JAKE has*

*been waiting for him, sitting on the rock. He slowly pushes the door closed and it disappears.)*

This isn't the way. It may seem easier, letting others define you. But...

JAKE:

It leaves you hogtied.

PAUL:

So, the only other choice-

JAKE:

'Fraid so.

*(PAUL looks JAKE in the eyes.)*

PAUL:

Is it weird I'm attracted to a comic book character?

JAKE:

Like four aces at a poker table. More common than ya think.

*(JAKE goes to the push door, and slowly opens it. The din returns, as PAUL covers his ears. It stops as both mist and shadows emit from the doorway. PAUL approaches the door and apprehensively looks back at JAKE.)*

I've got yer back.

*(Both PAUL and JAKE enter the door into the shadowlands)*

**FADE TO BLACK**

**SCENE THREE:** In the shadowlands

*(PAUL and JAKE walk through the shadowlands, as memories begin to swarm around them. A collection of books flies by, flapping their covers like wings.)*

PAUL:

A lot of old fears are in here.

JAKE:

Fear is one of the strongest memories we hold on ta...

*(The sound of a shower can be heard and a dark, menacing figure appears in the shadows)*

PAUL:

Communal showers, book reports.

JAKE:

Read'n ain't never been my strong suit

PAUL:

Is that my horrible bully from second grade?

*(A figure, hidden in mist and shadows begins to materialize. JAKE takes a protective stance but relaxes once it's revealed to be THE GIRL)*

THE GIRL:

Me again!

PAUL:

Wait. You're here too? But, you were-

THE GIRL:

Silly goose. I've never not been here. Haven't you figured it out yet?

JAKE:

We *all* live in yer brain.

THE GIRL:

Jake! It so good to see you.

JAKE:

Howdy, Princess. In trouble again?

PAUL:

You know each other.

JAKE:

Tarnation! He doesn't even smell what he's steppin' in.

THE GIRL:

I know. He doesn't remember me. And don't think I didn't notice.

PAUL:

I remember!

THE GIRL:

Do you? Who am I?

You're a Princess...

PAUL:

Princess what?

THE GIRL:

uhm...

PAUL:

THE GIRL:

It's Princess Nozomi. I'm Princess Nozomi! How could you forget? It's like I wasn't important at all.

PAUL:

Jeez Louise, give me a break. I've been swallowed by a dragon. My memory isn't great right now.

*(A new scene emerges. A young five year-old RACHEL is sitting at a small table where she has placed an assortment of plastic sushi and a tea pot. Sitting in a chair is the ultra-action NINJA, covered completely in black ninja garb holding nunchucks.)*

Wait. I remember this.

*(JAKE places his cowboy hat on PAUL and gently pushes him into the scene, where he becomes -or observes- the younger PAUL)*

Rach, that's my ultra-ninja warrior action figure. What's he doing here?

RACHEL:

He's on a tea break.

PAUL:

But he doesn't fit in.

RACHEL:

I know. Let's put him in heels.

*(PAUL goes and gets a pair of pink heels. The NINJA looks at them, discards the nunchucks, puts them on, and stands up)*

And a pretty dress.



*(PAUL begins to unwarmp the ninja from his black ninja outfit, revealing it be MISS THANG underneath)*

MISS THANG

Yes! Finally.

*(removing the rest of the ninja outfit).*

And give me some rainbow eyelashes! Something with color. Make me beautiful.

RACHEL:

That's so much better!

PAUL:

Now this is a tea party. Let's invite Pookie Bear.

RACHEL:

Pookie Bear's being punished for saying bad things. But I can ask him if he wants to come.

*(Exit RACHEL)*

PAUL:

I'm going to call you Miss Thang!

MISS THANG

I love it!

*(Enter RACHEL)*

RACHEL:

Pookie Bear says it's *his* honey'. And you all can all 'go to hell'.

PAUL:

Rach! Pookie bear shouldn't say those words.

RACHEL:

Mommy says them.

MISS THANG:

Oh, I'm not sitting by that vulgar bear. I think he has mange.

*(Enter JOHN, as MISS THANG goes back into a toy position. JOHN looks at MISS THANG and then looks at PAUL with concern)*

JOHN:

What's this...all about?

PAUL:

We're just playing.

*(handing JOHN a piece of plastic sushi)*

Want a macaroon?

JOHN:

Paul, you have homework to do. Make sure it's done before dinner.

PAUL:

Yes, father.

*(The scene disappears into the mist and shadows)*

I don't think he liked Miss Thang.

*(The horrible sound from before returns, causing PAUL to cover his ears)*

God, what is that noise!

JAKE:

It ain't noise. It's yer memory.

PAUL:

It's coming too fast...

THE GIRL:

Slow down your mind. And remember.

*(A scene forms in the mist as PAUL recalls being seven. It's night time, but a moonbeam illuminates the scene as the couch materializes. PAUL dresses in his princess costume made of colorful construction paper strips. He replaces his cowboy hat with a tiara and then puts on some bright lipstick borrowed from his mother's purse. He hides behind the couch and waits in silence. Enter HELEN, holding a drink.)*

PAUL:

*(startling her)*

Boo!

HELEN:

Paul, what are you doing?

PAUL:

Look at me? I'm a princess.

HELEN:

So now you're a princess?

PAUL:

Princess Nozomi. It mean's 'hope'. I made the costume myself.

HELEN

*(thinking awhile before responding)*

Well, you look very nice.

PAUL:

And that's General Dracos.

HELEN:

What, our couch?

PAUL:

No! It's General Dracos.

HELEN:

Well, keep the noise. It's late and your father's already in a bad mood. And be careful. General Dracos is already half broken.

*(Exit HELEN. Enter five-year old RACHEL)*

PAUL:

Come on Rach, you can be Jake the gun slinger.

*(taking the cowboy hat and places it on RACHEL's head)*

You have to save me.

*(PAUL goes to the couch, lays down, and starts to 'struggle')*

Help me, Jake! The dragon's kidnapped me!

RACHEL:

That's not a dragon. It's our couch.

PAUL:

No. It's General Dracos. Watch out, He's mean!

RACHEL:

*(making a hand gun)*

Pew Pew, Take that! Phew Pew. I shot him! He's dead now.

PAUL:

No, you missed. I still need saving! I'll distract him. You shoot.

*(PAUL starts to jump up and down on the couch yelling 'take that General Dracos' and such as RACHEL shoots when there is a sudden cracking sound.)*

PAUL:

Oh oh!

RACHEL

I think something broke.

PAUL:

That means we're winning!

*(PAUL continues jumping as RACHEL continues to fire her gun)*

RACHEL:

Pew pew. Take that you mean old dragon-

*(The buffoonery continues as HELEN enters)*

HELEN:

What are you both doing? Paul! I told you that couch was unsafe!

*(Enter JOHN, red in the face with a lowball drink)*

JOHN:

What's all this screaming and yelling?

PAUL:

We were just playing!

HELEN:

*(going to the couch)*

He broke the couch, look here. The supports have cracked. He could have easily ended up in the emergency room with a broken your leg.

JOHN

*(looking at PAUL, coldly)*

What is he wearing?

PAUL:

I'm Princess Nozomi.

RACHEL:  
I'm a cowboy!

HELEN:  
It's a costume, John. He's proud of it.

PAUL:  
I made it myself...

*(RACHEL starts to giggle but stops abruptly when JOHN gives her a stern look as the music of song No. 19 'A Moon's a Moon' begins)*

JOHN:  
*(cold and deliberate)*  
SOME THINGS SHOULD NOT BE DONE  
ON THIS I HAVE SOME SAY  
ONE SIMPLE RULE HE MUST OBEY:

A MOON'S A MOON  
AND A SUN'S A SUN  
HE BROKE OUR COUCH, ALRIGHT  
THERE ARE CLEARLY THINGS WORSE

MUSTN'T RUDELY YELL 'MINE!'  
SHOULDN'T EVER SCREAM OR CURSE  
BUT WE DO, THAT'S FINE  
BUT A SUN IS NOT A MOON

*(music pauses)*

HELEN:  
It's the anime he watches. It's normal John.

JOHN  
Is it?win

*(music resumes)*

I KNOW WHAT NORMAL IS  
SOME NORMS ARE HERE TO STAY  
OR SOON ITS MENTAL DISARRAY

A BROKEN COUCH  
DOESN'T MAKE ME MAD  
A BROKEN LEG IS BAD

WHAT HE'S WEARING'S MUCH WORSE

FOR THE NEIGHBORS WILL SCOFF  
AT HIS BRIGHTLY PAINTED LIPS  
AND THESE SILLY CUT-UP STRIPS?  
TAKE IT OFF, RIGHT NOW  
FOR A SUN IS NOT A MOON

*(PAUL quickly takes off his costume)*

PAUL MUST DO  
AS HE'S TOLD  
TAKE IT OFF  
PLAY TIME'S DONE

Now go to your room. Forget about the couch, but let's have no more *theatrics*.  
Understood?

*(PAUL nods. JOHN Smiles and tassels his hair.)*

Good boy.

**(End Song** as the scene begins to disappear into the mist. Exit  
*HELEN, JOHN and RACHEL, who hands JAKE his cowboy hat. A  
tiny paper dragon emerges, crawling up onto PAUL's shoulder. It  
hisses in his ear, before crawling away. The music of song No. 20  
'The Broken Boy' begins as the dialogue continues)*

PAUL:

His eyes. They were so cold. I remember crawling under my bed that night and thinking:  
'I had just done something...unforgivable'.

JAKE:

You lost yer soul.  
SOME SAD, BROKEN BOY  
A BOY SCARED TO BE

PAUL:

'MY SON'S A FOOL' DECLARED THE KING  
WHO MADE A RULE 'THOU SHALL NOT SING'

*(music continues)*

THE GIRL:

We didn't see each other again after that.

JAKE:

I'm sorry I couldn't save ya.

THE GIRL:

There was no more Princess Nozomi...

PAUL:

THE KING HAS STAINED HIS THRONE  
MOCKED THE WORLD THE FOOL HAD KNOWN

THE GIRL:

THE SOURED QUEEN, NOW PLAYS HER PART  
CRUEL WORDS Demean, AND HIDES THE HEART

*(music continues)*

JAKE:

You're on the right trail Paul. Keep pushin'.

THE GIRL:

The Paul I know must still in there.

PAUL:

THIS LOST AND BROKEN BOY

JAKE:

DOIN' THE BEST YA COULD

THE GIRL:

KNOW THE KING CAN BREAK HIS CROWN,

JAKE and THE GIRL:

KNOW THE FOOL CAN TAKE HIM DOWN.

*(Enter MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR as the music continues)*

MISS THANG:

People love telling you what *they* need you to be

THE GIRL:

But there are so *many* things you can be.

JAKE:

Remember, when they try to hogtie ya, look em in the eye and say:

POOKIE:  
LICK MY SALTY BALL SACK  
YOU FUCKING DICKWEEDS

ENSEMBLE (except for PAUL):  
SO, LET'S ADMIRE A HUMBLED BOY  
A BOY WHO RIGHTLY KNOWS  
NO MATTER HOW BIG LIFE GETS  
ONE MUST FIND THEMSELVES IN THE LOWS

*(music continues)*

PAUL:  
My dissertation isn't me. My words, my life...nothing's really 'me'.

JAKE:  
I think he's startin' ta get it.

THE GIRL:  
I knew he would, eventually.

PAUL and JAKE:  
MOVE PAST THE BROKEN BOY  
MOVE PAST THE SHAME HE WROUGHT

PAUL, JAKE, MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR:  
THE KING GROWS OLD AND WEAK

JAKE, MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR:  
NOW WITTLED DOWN

PAUL:  
AS THE FOOL

PAUL, JAKE, MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR:  
GRABS THE CROWN

JAKE, MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR, and THE GIRL:  
YOU'RE PUSHING THROUGH THE INEVITABLE GREY.

PAUL:  
A KING WHO'S QUICK TO ATTACK.

JAKE, MISS THANG, POOKIE BEAR, and THE GIRL:



PUSHING THROUGH THAT REGRETTABLE FRAY.

PAUL:  
A KING ON TOP OF THE PACK  
WILL CONQUER ALL

MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR:  
HE'LL CONQUERE ALL

PAUL, JAKE and THE GIRL:  
YET NEVER KNOW

MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR:  
THE BROKEN BOY

PAUL, JAKE and THE GIRL:  
ALL THE MISERY HE'S CAUSED

PAUL, JAKE, MISS THANG and POOKIE BEAR:  
NOT ALLOWED TO BE ME  
BUT NOW WE CAN SEE  
I'VE BROKEN FREE

THE GIRL:  
FREE

*(End Song as JAKE, MISS THANG , POOKIE BEAR and THE GIRL begin to fade away)*

PAUL:  
Wait! Where are you going?

JAKE:  
Yer the one that's goin'.

THE GIRL:  
Don't forget us! Look and we'll be there for you.

JAKE:  
Be careful, though! There's a dragon still on the loose.

*(JAKE and THE GIRL disappear. PAUL now stands alone on an empty stage.)*

PAUL:  
Not for long. General Dracos! Face me you coward! I challenge you!

*(THE PAPER DRAGON suddenly emerges from hiding.)*

I swallowed you!  
THE PAPER DRAGON:

Father may have created you-  
PAUL:

I'm all your doubts  
THE PAPER DRAGON:

But i nurtured you-  
PAUL:

I'm all your fears  
THE PAPER DRAGON:

And so, you grew and grew.  
PAUL AND THE CHORUS:

I'm part of you  
THE PAPER DRAGON:

*(THE PAPER DRAGON breathes on PAUL but it has no effect)*

PAUL:  
NOT AFRAID TO CONFRONT  
NOT AFRAID TO BE BLUNT  
Choke on some Chadwick and Hart, you bloviating, puffed up dragon. Pages 1-20, delete.  
*(The back third of the PAPER DRAGON tears away from the body and dissolves)*

PAPER DRAGON:  
What are you doing?

PAUL:  
Cutting you down to size. Pages 21-40 delete!

*(The middle section of the PAPER DRAGON tears away from the body and dissolves)*

PAPER DRAGON:  
Stop it! I'll never not be here...

PAUL:

Maybe, but you won't be so big. Pages 40-to 93 delete, delete, delete.

*(The remaining portion of the PAPER DRAGON dissolves as its voice both diminishes in volume and becomes higher in tone, until it disappears entirely)*

PAPER DRAGON:

No, no, no, no...

**(FADE TO BLACK)**

**SCENE THREE:** Helen's place.

*(On stage are HELEN and PAUL)*

PAUL:

Well?

HELEN:

Well, what?

PAUL:

Say something, Mother.

HELEN:

What could you possibly want me to say?

PAUL:

Say you're disappointed. That you're angry.

HELEN:

I'm all those things. How could I not be?

PAUL:

But it doesn't matter. I've quit school, and there's nothing you can do about it.

HELEN:

But why? Paul, you were so close to finishing. All that time, effort. And for what? I suppose you'll be wanting money

PAUL:

No. I'm taking a job at a yarn shop.

HELEN:

A yarn shop?

PAUL:

It's colorful. And in the evening I'm taking a drawing class-

HELEN:

Paul, you're a mess. In your thirties and back to square one.

PAUL:

No, You're wrong, Mother. I'm not back to square one. I'm finally on the other side of a wall that's been there for a very, very long time. I don't really know what lies ahead, but I'm not scared of it anymore. And you of all people should understand that. Tell me. Did leaving father set you back or did it set you free?

*(There is a shared silence between them as the truth of PAUL's words sink into HELEN)*

HELEN:

At least tell me where you'll be living.

PAUL:

Right now, I'm couch surfing till I find a place I can afford.

HELEN:

Couch surfing? What on earth is couch surfing?.

*(beat)*

Hmm...curious how the mind works. Your princess.

PAUL:

What?

HELEN:

The night you broke the couch. Your princess. You named her Nozomi.

PAUL:

You remembered. Thank you.

HELEN:

For what? A name? A memory?

PAUL:

No. For defending me that night. Goodbye mother. I'll call.

*(The scene transforms to the empty stage as HELEN recedes and disappears as 21: 'The World Inside' Reprise 2 begins)*

THE WORLD INSIDE MY HEAD

A WORLD OF REBORN DREAMS  
MY WORDS MIGHT NOW DESCRIBE  
A WORLD TOUCHED BY MOONLIT BEAMS  
SO, WHERE WOULD YOU RATHER BE,  
IF YOU WERE ME

**(End song)**

*(PAUL's cell phone buzzes as he receives a text message from RACHEL)*

Free now?  
RACHEL:

Thumbs up emoji.  
PAUL:

Could you swing by the bake shop? I could use a shoulder to cry on-  
RACHEL:

Sure thing.  
PAUL:

**(FADE TO BLACK)**

**SCENE FOUR:** Rachel's Bakeshop.

*(On stage are PAUL and RACHEL, sitting at the table by the window as the music of song No. 22: 'Empty Inside' Reprise begins)*

RACHEL:  
MY STRAWBERRY PIE  
BUTTERED CRUST THAT'S FLAKY  
IT FELL ON THE FLOOR  
BECAUSE MY HANDS WERE SHAKY

**(End song)**

To make it all that way and then...splat.

You could hear the judge's gasp.  
PAUL:

Oh Paul, what am I going to do.  
RACHEL:

PAUL:

What you always do. Find a way. Hug?

RACHEL:

Thank you. It's silly, it helps.

*(beat)*

So, how did the big meeting go?

PAUL:

Well, he got this smug look on his face. The kind father would get. He shook my hand and said, 'It's for the best'. So, I said 'Fuck you, you asshole'. And left, slamming the door on the way out.

RACHEL:

You slammed the door on your professor?

PAUL:

Geez Louise, Rach, I said fuck!

*(Two customers suddenly enter the bakery)*

CUSTOMER ONE:

Look, there she is. It's actually her. It's Rachel.

CUSTOMER TWO:

*(to Rachel)*

You're my hero.

RACHEL:

Can I help you?

CUSTOMER TWO:

We wanted you to win.

CUSTOMER ONE:

Your pie looked so amazing; I would have eaten it off the floor.

CUSTOMER TWO:

Me too.

RACHEL:

Well, I wouldn't. That floor was filthy.

PAUL:

Have the cannels. They're incredible.

*(RACHEL goes and gets the customers the cannels as NAOMI and CODY enter. Cody is recording Naomi on a small camera)*

NAOMI:

*(waving to the camera)*

Hello loyal viewers. It's Naomi and my trusted cameraman Cody. And here's Rachel's Bakeshop. Super adorable. You'll find it just across from the line at Dubois, which you'll want to avoid unless you like to wait an hour for something that tastes like a stale Boston cream from Seven Eleven. And look, it's Rachel! Yes, the same Rachel who dropped her signature bake on the floor. Super sad, we know.

*(CODY lowers the camera as NAOMI approaches RACHEL)*

Is it OK if we interview you? I've got a YouTube channel, 'The Hidden Gems of New York'. It has like only 300 subscribers, but it's growing. I've only just started. Actually, you're my second video.

CODY:

Our first was this tiny burger joint in Hell's Kitchen. Boy, they sure knew how to make a hamburger.

PAUL:

Was it Char Burger?

CODY:

That's right. You know it?

PAUL:

I do. And of course, you can interview her.

NAOMI:

*(looking at the display of pastries)*

It's all so exquisite.

CUSTOMER ONE:

You must get the cannels.

CUSTOMER TWO:

They're yummy!

NAOMI:

Cody, see if we can film by the window.

*(The music of Song No. 23: 'Push' Reprise begins as Cody speaks)*

CODY:

*(moving towards the table by the window, noticing PAUL)*

Yeah, light's good here.

PAUL:

You can use this table. I need to be going anyway.

*(getting up to leave)*

CODY:

I'm sorry, but do I know you? You somehow seem familiar.

PAUL:

Hi. My name's Paul.

*(The scene transforms to the empty stage)*

PAUL:

REBORN.

RACHEL

AFRAID

CODY and NAOMI

A NEW BEGINNING

RACHEL

MIGHT LOSE

*(Enter HELEN)*

HELEN

MIGHT WIN

ALL

PERHAPS BECOME DISMAYED

NAOMI

MIGHT NEED SOME HELP

PAUL

WHEN LIFE'S AGAINST US

ALL

PUSH, PUSH, PUSH,  
NO ONE MAY REST

PUSHED BEYOND THE NEST



BEYOND THE SKY  
WE ALL SHOULD TRY TO  
SHOOT THE MOON.

PAUL:  
YET RARELY KNOWING WHY

COMPANY:  
PUSH, PUSH, PUSH, PUSH  
JUST ONE MORE TIME  
PUSH, PUSH  
PUSH UNTIL YOU BREAK  
*(pause)*  
FREE.

**END OF THE MUSICAL**