

Monash University

Anne M Harris

Lola in the Bathtub

Abstract:

Lola's a woman on the edge. In fact, she's gone over the edge, but she's not quite sure where she's landed. It could be the Hudson River, off the edge of Manhattan, or it might be considerably further. The only thing that's clear is that nothing will ever be the same again. A foiled suicide attempt? Or the beginning of a slow bathtub to Australia? Leaving the familiar may not be as easy as it looks, but Lola's going to give it a hell of a try. This work brings together writing for performance and feminist solo performance as political and personal works of transgression in both academic and artistic terms. It's textual body as a script is a fully-realised work of creative writing, and its prior (and potentially future) life as a performance blueprint reminds readers of the dual nature of writing for performance, and of research creation – itself a deeply personal and creative act.

Biographical note:

Anne Harris is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Monash University and works primarily in the areas of creativity, diversity, performance and digital media. She has worked professionally as a playwright, teaching artist and journalist in the USA and Australia. She has written and edited multiple articles and books that address the arts, culture, and performance. She is a co-editor of the journal *Australasian Review of African Studies*, arts based education editor of the journal *Curriculum and Pedagogy* and is on the editorial board of the journal *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* and a number of book series. She is currently a full-time research fellow funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Award (2014-2016) researching the commodification of creativity.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Playwriting – Writing for performance – Solo performance

Lola in the bathtub

Character

LOLA - 43, American

Setting

A bathtub-boat sits on red sand. Behind, a screen hangs onto which projections are seen. The play takes place over one rising and setting of the sun, on the Pacific Ocean.

SECTION 1 - dusk

(Sounds of waves lapping. LOLA perches on the downstage lip of the bathtub, like she is flying. Blinding light, scorching sun. LOLA screams.

BLACKOUT.)

LOLA
Goddamnit!

(Lights ups. She finds herself face down in a bathtub. She holds her nose as though she's broken it. Pinches it if she can, tries to stop bleeding.)

If there's one thing I hate, it's the sight of my own blood. I've never liked red.

*

Nobody ever tells you - when you're about to step off the edge of the world -
(rubs her limbs)

That it may not work.

That you may wake up floating in New York Harbour with the rest of the garbage.

That something in you,

Life, or instinct, or distaste for garbage....

May cause your arms to thrash, your legs to churn, your spirit to cling to the nearest thing to life you can find.

Sometimes it's a bathtub.

(re her arm, or her nose)

God, I think I've broken it. That would be so me.

I finally decide to take the big plunge

To end it all

To dissolve back into the watery whatever of being

Personless

The final frontier.

I mean, I finally JUMPED.

And what happens?

Face first down into a discarded bathtub floating in the Hudson River off pier 14:

Story a my life.

I mean, in this day and age,

Somebody should warn you about the possibilities.

That the only thing you'll hear is waves

and fear

and regret.

That you might have to open your eyes again

and you won't recognize anything

Not even yourself.

But you won't be dead. Dead never comes.
It's too old fashioned.

I have this recurring dream:
I'm standing on the pier, waving at
Roger as he swims away with this beautiful young
Albino girl.
They are both dolphins. I mean, actually, they were both
dressed as dolphins.
They look funny, but kind of kinky at the same time.
They start to have sex, and I just stand there waving them off.
I don't mind, in the dream I mean, I don't mind that they're having sex
(everyone has sex, even husbands sometimes)
but I do mind that they're swimming away, leaving me.
Then I start to wonder how dolphins really do
have sex, and when I look back again, he's gone.
They're both gone.

One afternoon
instead of going to the laundromat
I was walking down 8th avenue, and I just...
I didn't think about it.
I didn't say to myself "Pick up the washing, or suicide?"
I just...walked along listening to my iPod
And suddenly I was on the edge of Pier 14
And suddenly I was out.
Over the edge.
Falling.

*

(rest. Time passes.)

*

I've been drifting for ten days now.
Which is a long time when you didn't even pack a bag.
But nobody questions how Jonah could breathe in the belly of the whale,
do they?
They just...believe.
So.

I'm drifting and I'm thinking about all the wasted time I spent on diets. And after
having not eaten now for ten days, I feel great.
I feel like I've finally found a diet that works.
I've calculated that I was probably on a diet for 39 of my 43 years.
And I was still a fat pig when I jumped.
Which is probably what saved my life.
The padding.

*

I couldn't survive in that place anymore.
It's not just Roger. It's the...*uber* Roger. The whole package.

The *rub* of being American these days.
It's not like it used to be, you've got to have an edge.
And me? I've lost my edge. I don't know when,
I don't know where it went. But somewhere here inside these
Hundred and sixty pounds of...nerve endings...
My edge just got duller and duller and duller and then
disappeared altogether.
I won't go back. I can pull the plug at any time, can't I?
but i'm not going back to new york.
come hell or high water.
which actually, now that i think of it,
may very well come on a journey like this,
although i've been mercifully free of high water until now.
You never know what tomorrow will bring.

(rest.)

What really bugs me is that no one even tried to stop me.
You'd think a woman in a bathtub
would attract a bit of attention on the high seas,
but I guess everyone was just going about their buying and selling.
so they didn't notice someone so small.
If they had known what I was doing,
i'm sure they would have stopped me.
That's part of being a superpower. THE superpower:
you have to annihilate anyone in opposition to you.
Even if they're in a bathtub
but they have to notice you first.

When roger and I first divorced, I'd stay in the bath all day.
I'd lay with my head submerged, and my
friend louise would come in and scream,
"Don't do it!!! Don't *do* it! He isn't worth it!"
but I was just relaxing. I liked to hear my own heartbeat.
Which you can do in the bath. Ears under water,
it comforted me.
Louise made me go to her therapist, Dr. Shapiro, who came up with some
stupid theories:
"You're trying to rebirth yourself. You're trying to go back into the womb and
start again."
"Honey." I was like, "Honey, believe me, if I had to do this again I would definitely
not come back as Lola Palatska. Trust me. And I sure as hell wouldn't be doing it in
a bathtub."
But look at me now.
If he thought I was trying to rebirth myself in a bathtub in Brooklyn,
he'd have a field day with the Pacific Ocean.
I do things big. I can't help myself.

I'm Polish. Polish people always do things big. It comes from too much starch in the diet.

*

I've brought two books: one is Cassandra, and the other is my book of brain teasers.

every morning, come rain or shine,

I do a brainteaser. Not that there's been any rain but

I've only got one left after this.

(smiles)

I might start back at the beginning, I'd probably have forgotten the answers by then. Mercifully, I have a very short memory.

Let's see: what's today's going to be?

(she opens her book)

"Crossing the river". Okay.

"Jake was standing on one side of the river, and his dog Scruffy was standing on the other. :come on Scruffy, come, boy!" shouted Jake. Scruffy crossed the river, ran to Jake, and got a treat for being a god dog. The amazing thing was that Scruffy didn't even get wet! How did Scruffy do that?"

Hmm. It was obviously not the Pacific that Scruffy ran across.

Okay. Let's think about this rationally.

I'm terrible at thinking rationally.

Which you may have already figured out.

Obviously Scruffy, unlike me, could swim.

(puts the book down)

I'll come back to it later.

*

when I was in seventh grade my class did a unit on greek mythology.

my favourite was artemis the hunter.

I remember exactly what she looked like, in her little chain mail outfit.

I always hated the ones I was supposed to like, and

liked the dangerous types. dionysis for example. I loved him.

selfish, sure. up himself, fly by night, no real talents, I knew all that.

but he was beautiful, romantic, and free. he had nice hair.

that is, until his mother ripped his head off. but I still liked him.

then there was that whole fiasco at troy. I was supposed to love the beautiful helen,

and feel sorry for her that she got brought to this foreign city.

but no. I thought she was insipid.

a real whinger.

I liked cassandra, the girl with visions.

I liked the fact that no one listened to her.

but mostly, I liked her for going on her journey, even though she knew it would end in tears.

that's why, when it came to standing on the pier

the city coming down around me

flames out over the water
(i'm just making that up. really it was another
grinding summer day in the financial district
and the wheels of capitalism
were busy squashing everyone in their path,
successfully as ever)....
but when I stood on the pier and found myself falling
when I hit the the bathtub
bobbing next to the QE II
I had a moment.
just a moment.
and I thought it might be worth keeping the
cassandra with me after all.
just to steady my heart.
just to remind me that
no matter what happens when you get there
it's the going that's important.
The letting go.
Even if it ends in tears.

I have this idea:
That I'll set out, sail away, and finally...maybe...arrive.
(That'd be a first.)
And that when I arrive in a new place, I'll get out of the bathtub,
kiss the ground,
stand upright, and see myself standing on the shore
facing me.
Because like my dad used to say, 'the trouble with leaving is
no matter where you go, there you are.'

*

(she goes back to the brainteaser)
I'm never gonna get this one. I'll just have a peak at the answer:
"There are 2 possible answers. 1: The river was frozen. #2: There was a bridge over
the river, and Scruffy crossed the bridge." Bullshit.
They didn't mention the third possibility:
Scruffy drowned.
And Jake was so in denial, he *imagined* Scruffy made it across
To save himself the anguish.
I'm freezing (even though)
It must be a hundred degrees.
Baking.
But I shake. Funny. So cold.
(rest)
Mrs. Baldwin, my tenth grade History teacher,
Is wiping my face with a damp cloth and pouring sweet tea down my throat.

She wears White Linen perfume from Estee Lauder and her fingernails are painted *mauve*. I didn't know what mauve meant until I was seventeen, but I loved her nails. Mrs. Baldwin is both sexy and sensible, and always knows what to do in a sticky situation.

She's telling me about various Pacific Islands,
about the Contiki
about Captain Cook.

She's been telling me about all these little islands I've been passing...
And what it was like when *she* was 15, back in the day,
Before there were bathtubs.

Well. Practically.

I'm scared, Mrs. Baldwin.

God knows what can happen to me out here. I'm a sitting duck.

Mrs. Baldwin strokes my face and her hand is warm.

There's a trail of heat from her fingers across my skin.

I'm glad I can feel something.

*

It gets lonely when all you've got for company
Is your own dangerous mind.

so I invent people, shipmates, fellow-travellers.

They're perfect companions:

don't talk much

don't take up much of the tub.

I make them up as I need them,

then banish them when I don't.

I've walked a few of them off the plank.

I cast away a few too.

I hope they made it to shore. to some shore.

I love them and leave them.

I'm fickle, moody, totally self-absorbed.

Like Dionysis. God, he had nice hair.

*

That morning, that last morning with Roger,

He was getting ready for work, brushing his hair in front of the
Mirror in the dining room.

Like, really *brushing* it! You know? It was weird.

Roger, what are you doing? You look like you're about to have a big orgasm.

He looked at me.

Then he looked at himself. for a long time.

I'd fuck me, he said. and I knew in that instant I had to leave him.

But after he left?

After he slided out the door in his million dollar suit looking

Really, he looked great, there's no two ways about it,

He did. But who wouldn't in a million dollar suit?

After he left, I went to the mirror, picked up his brush, and

Stared at myself. I smiled.

I'd fuck---I'd---

I couldn't do it.

I hate Roger.

*

I shouldn't be surprised it's come to this. Or not come..to this... as the Case may be.

My mother never taught me anything.

I'm not familiar with the topic, she said.

Didn't want to misinform me.

Of course there were Mrs. Baldwin's fingernails.

They hinted at something more.

And the way she floated around the lake with a wine glass in her hand.

It was obvious she knew a lot.

What's it like?

I finally asked her one day, floating ten feet away in my own Inner tube, staring at my fat thighs.

What's what like? She laughed her Tinkerbell laugh,

Knowing exactly what I meant.

Sex.

She giggled and flicked the water with one mauve fingernail.

It's better than chocolate.

I considered that for a while.

Is it better than music?

She thought about it.

Probably not, but it depends on who you're with.

She didn't mind laughing about sex.

She laughed about condoms and rude positions and adultery.

There was nothing about sex that wasn't hilarious to Mrs. Baldwin.

You'd think it was a goddamned Marx Brothers routine the way she laughed.

It was really annoying.

When Mr. Baldwin came out on the dock to refresh our drinks,

I knew it had nothing to do with him. Her laughter. Her happiness.

And then I knew I could tell her anything and she probably wouldn't have me arrested or tell my parents.

I've slept with Jim. I said.

Oh, I know!

She laughed like a hyena.

Then I started laughing, which annoyed me even more.

I stopped laughing.

What do you mean you know?

I can just tell.

That was enough to terrify me.

Do you think my mother knows then?

No! she says. *You have to have sex to recognize it on other people.*

My mother might have sex.

Trust me, she doesn't.

It took ten years, but my mother finally confirmed the horrible truth, and it was then I decided if there was a god in heaven I wouldn't turn out like my mother.

But I have.

I fucking have!

When did it happen? Who knows.

It could have been that Wednesday in March when I

Finally wore track suit bottoms to the supermarket.

I knew that was a mistake.

Roger said he didn't want to have sex anymore.

By then we weren't having sex anyway, so it seemed like a

Statement of fact, not a declaration of independence.

I went along with it because...I was busy.

I was...trying to do the right thing.

My fingers went numb first.

Then my legs.

Then my mind.

My heart was the last to go.

Who knew that sex was connected to so many bits of yourself?

We need to spend time together, Roger, I said. I was my mother.

I still couldn't say *fuck*.

We spend loads of time together. We're connected at the hip.

Yes, but that's not where I want to be connected at.

He laughed.

He laughed a Mrs. Baldwin laugh and went out for the evening.

And then I knew.

It was the girl in the dolphin costume.

Well, not exactly, but what's the difference?

She was sleek, wet, shiny skin.

By then I was numb anyway.

I don't know why I bother thinking about this shit.

*

What *bugs* me about it is, I guess....

It's just--

Where did I go?

I went back to being 15.

I went back to dreaming about sex, merging with someone,

Being stroked and seduced and undressed and fed strawberries.

I started to live more and more in my mind.

Arching backs. Tender lips.

Sweat.

I dreamt hot dreams. I was the only one who knew what I wanted.

I ran my hand along my thighs, my belly,

I laid in bed and I cried

While Roger played racquetball.
He's very fit, Roger.
Looks great for his age.
I started watching Roman Polanski films.
Which is never a good sign. I did try:
Roger, my body is dying.
Are you sick? It's just a cold.
Roger, my body is shutting down to me. I can't feel anything. I'm cold.
Put a scarf on. You don't look after yourself very well, do you?
By the time I started going to McDonalds for breakfast,
I knew I was in trouble.
But by then it was too late.
I wore big clothes with long sleeves so I didn't have to
see any part of myself that looked beautiful, tender, hungry.
I started smoking.
But sometimes, just once or twice maybe,
In the middle of the night,
Laying there awake,
I'd get up
Take off my flannelette pajamas
And dance around the living room.
Dance.
Dance for my life.

END OF SECTION 1

SECTION 2 - high noon. Scorching.

It's the blue that scares me.

Sometimes I just wish I could...

(she experiments with tipping her toes out into the water)

Not swim, just walk, skate around. taste it.

I wish I could eat the blue.

(she bails the boat, plays in the water)

This boat is leaking. I'll probably end up in the water soon enough.

*

Why wasn't I frightened?

even when I was sure that

this leaving would be the end of me.

of the me that was in brooklyn with roger

and lentil soup simmering and the fresh market on Sundays

and the new york philharmonic on the great lawn in Prospect Park -

I knew this one would die then.

and I walked away. happily. eagerly.

with no more worries than when I was leaving

my dirty washing at the laundromat.

it wasn't until just now that I realized

how much I love the person that I was,

how much grief, how much terror

makes a person fall away like that.

my dreaming mind tricked me.

because you know, it withholds.

until it's too late to change your course.

your own course of history.

*

ever since I left the pier, my dreams are all about opening.

I have dreams about being wide open. I want to be so wide open I take in the whole world.

I take in tongues and fingers and dicks and oceans and fishes and blenders and holdens and subcontinents.

I'm serious.

my sex life is a phantom limb. it keeps aching, even though I know it's gone.

I am trapped in my skin,

trapped in my bones,

trapped in this leaking tub.

frozen.

sailing through life a thousand miles away from others.

but

when the wind blows,

out here,

when the wind strokes me,

moves my hair,
ruffles my clothes,
I realize how badly I crave to be touched.

I'm in a retirement home in my heart.
I'm isolated and aching.
I wait for the carers to come in at 8 am and hope they will
Touch me, move me, bathe me, dress me.
I pretend I'm paralyzed just to get them to touch my skin.

*

The first time I summoned him was about a week after the divorce.
Oh sure, I'd seen him around.
But that was the first time I'd invited him *in*.
I think it was the moustache.
I like a guy with a moustache.
I don't know why: Roger never had a moustache,
and my mother couldn't stand men with facial hair.
She said it made them look shifty, but I suspect it was really more about hygiene.

I liked the way he smiled.
He looked like a little boy.
Like he had a secret.
I used to talk to him, play with him in my mind.
Nothing very...intimate, not then.
But out here.
Well.
The sky's the limit.

He's got a dubious past. Doesn't like to talk about it.
That's the old me. He says. *That one died. He doesn't exist anymore.*
He's irrelevant.
But you know.
Girls like to talk.
And you can't just sit in the tub all day.
Tell me a story, I begged him.
That was in the early days, soon after I lost sight of North America.
I went to New York to start over, was all he'd say.
But I wanted more.
That's always been my trouble.
I couldn't breathe. When I first got to New York, it took me three years to
Remember how to breathe.
Three years? I say. *What were you thinking?*
And he says, (I love this, it makes me laugh every time), he'd say
I wasn't.
But three years...
Life's long, he says. *I'm a slow learner.*

But he's different from me. He *wants* to breathe.

Do you know how to breathe? He asks me.

Do you know how to breathe under water?

I don't answer. I don't know what to say.

But I sink into his words like a...well, yeah,

Like a warm bath.

*

My father doesn't like my Mystery Man.

Of course.

I don't trust him, he says.

Don't trust him as far as I can throw him.

But out here, distance is relative.

And you doesn't trust anyone, do you?

The tub's getting a little crowded.

The problem is, I can't choose.

I mean, I can't walk my own father off the plank, can I?

And I'm not ready to part with Mystery Man just yet.

Sure, sometimes he goes too far. But he's mine.

*

So who am I?

Ok, I was born to certain parents, with certain siblings,
in a particular place and time, and so for all intents and purposes
these are my people. this is the landscape of my heart.

I may leave them

I may hate their guts.

But my earliest childhood memories are impregnated here.

in my mind. in my heart. in my blood. irrevocable.

My people become the only ones who Know The Whole Story of Me.

And in some weird way, this...fact...becomes more important
as life ebbs away.

You knew that much, at least.

*

What? You know what I'm talking about. * It's like this:

*

You went from West Texas to Death Valley.

You thought they were the same, because they looked the same.

You was fooled.

You thought you were getting a new life.

Instead, you lived with ghosts from the age of thirty instead of
from the age of seventy.

You had a wide circle of friends - in your mind.

You travelled widely - in your dreams.

There was no difference between your dead and your living -
everyone who was important to you was **gone**.

If not literally, then geographically.

And rather than help to go home on visits,
it was like a great tear,
a great gaping tract of scar tissue up your
guts, across your belly, through your heart -
and every time you **saw** or **spoke** or **held** or listened to someone from **home**,
this great wound split open and threatened to destroy you.
So you began to leave it further and further behind.
And the truth was that even **before** you had left West Texas
your heart was already on this path,
because you had never known your people,
being an orphan.
You had never known the heartbeat that you listened to in the womb
had never heard the laugh of your first days
had never gazed into a face like your own
and so even before you chose exile, you had **been** exiled.
the geographical move just confirmed and externalised what you
had felt for so long inside.
You were a stranger in your own land.
And then a stranger in a **strange** land.
finally you lived so much in your head
that you would look around at the rest of us:
your wife, your children, your neighbors and friends,
with a look of **utter incomprehension**.
and although it looked to us like contempt
I realize now that it was fear.
you didn't know how you'd arrived in this place.
you didn't know where you were, nor who **we** were.
nothing looked familiar.
Now I have the same view
on sleepless nights. when the ocean's calm.

We come into a strange land alone, in a mystical and mysterious manner.
We don't know how we arrive, nor when and how we'll depart.
We grow accustomed to some things and some faces,
But by and by they leave or change or die,
And we're reminded that we're just visitors here.
And our stay is short and tenuous.

*

it's been a long time now since any fish came by.
at first, it was constant - every day,
fish jumping, singing out, ushering me along.
now, for the past four days, only silence.
I'll call him.
Mystery Man! Oh Mystery Man!
just for company.
but he's a tease.

When he senses – and he’s got excellent senses –
When he senses that I need him most,
He stays away.
Sulks.
Silent treatment.
It drives me crazy.
He likes to hear me calling for him.
Mystery Man!
(*nothing*)

I’m gonna pull the plug.

Oh! That got your attention!
Mm.
You know what?
Even you’re getting on my last nerve.
Get lost.
I don’t care what you heard, I didn’t say it.
(beat)
Well if you heard it, why ask me what I said?
Hmm? Ha! Gotcha there.
(rest)

I want someone to touch me like that again,
I said.
That’s what I said, okay? Happy? Fine.

This is the way we carry on, day after day. so
this morning I walked him out the plank.
But now he’s back, begging like the dog he is.
a girl could lose her...(virginity). mind.

Get out.
what do you mean, *no*? I said get out.
this is my tub.
go on now go.
Don’t turn around now,
you’re not welcome anymore.

(beat)
Dad, this is none of your business, okay?
I’m forty-three years old and I can see who I want.
*

I don’t have to put up with your
(choking)
get your hands off me

(gets away, frightened)

you're nothing. you're a figment of my--

(flips out of the boat)

Oh, my legs.

I can't swim. *I can't swim!*

Let go (of me)----

(in the water, hanging onto outside of boat)

Pull me up, you cunt.

Pull me up.

(he is smashing her fingers, one by one, and she is letting go.)

I--stop--that--

(she is trying to swim)

(she starts to drown. Somehow she emerges. Half-into the boat. Collapses.)

[REST]

(whoosh! a big faceful of water)

Whoa!

in slow motion, a black shape rises out of the water.

slowly, smoothly, thick and black and dripping.

"Take cover!" screams Dad. "Killer whale!"

keep still, I tell him. *Go to sleep.*

As usual, he does.

(watching)

I can hear the whale's heart beating.

He could capsize me, so easily,

like a leaf in a creek,

like...he wouldn't even feel it.

five feet to the right, and I'd be

shark food.

but here we are.

staring, waiting, *breathing.*

(she does)

as the biggest eye, the biggest softest eye

ever created, ever opened or blinking,

not even an eye, but a window on the whole world

on the past, present and future

surfaces out of this bed of water, this

calm black fathomless water,

and looks me straight in the face.

(she goes to meet him)

OK. Come on.

(challenge)

You got something to say to me?

(they square off)

it hangs there motionless.

We breathe together.

(smiles)

“IT’S JONAH!!!” Dad screams.

I never knew he was such a scaredy-cat.

It’s not Jonah, I whisper, but I don’t look away.

Jonah was the guy, not the whale.

This is the whale.

Dad goes back to sleep.

Maybe it’s the same whale.

Maybe the whale is remembering.

Maybe he’s sizing up the bathtub for indigestion.

He must have made up his mind because

(he takes a swipe at her)

Aghhhh!

He’s out of the water, his mouth is huge, wide open.

The earth.

The milky way.

The cosmos.

Me.

I want to be inside him.

Now.

No fear.

*

(they prepare to battle.)

Don’t just hang there, over me,

with your hot breath

and your hot hunger!

I’m not cold anymore.

Let’s go!

(they battle)

(samurai) I surrender!

(in the belly of the whale)

I’m gone.

END OF SECTION 2

SECTION 3 - dawn

(she wakes up in a bathtub in the middle of the ocean)

Where am I?

What am I doing in a bathtub in the middle of the ocean?

There's a joke there somewhere.

A bad joke.

About a girl who has to open her eyes *again*. Oh god.

Help!

Hey! Anybody!....

*

okay.

(she sits)

breathe.

Why don't I ever have my mobile when I really need it?

(sunflash)

*

white.

Blinding white.

It felt like I was falling for years.

When I left the pier, there was a short rush of air

And then...nothing.

Until I hit the water.

It wasn't until I hit the water that I remembered.

Five years old and standing in Crystal Lake with twenty other

Five year olds.

Cutting the water like skin.

Practice swimming, it was, just to get used to the motion.

Pretty daggy.

But when it came time to go *under*....

When I had to stick my face below the surface,

And my body wanted to sink

My brain wanted to run

And my arms wouldn't work.

Legs, sure. Kicked and kicked, I was always good at kicking.

But the rest of it just went downhill from there...

I never learned to swim.

To my mother and Mrs. Johnson's dismay.

It never bothered me.

I figured there was enough to occupy me here.

*

(she is drowning)

When my head went under the water this time,

The oil slicked water off pier 14,

Heartbeat in my ears.

I was sinking fast in water so blue it surprised me.
How polluted does a river have to become before it stops being blue?
I was drowning.
Everything came rushing in, all I had been trying to avoid:
Water. Voices. Silence.
And then, as suddenly as everything went quiet,
It exploded.
Loud, like fireworks, and white.
Enamel.

*

Last night the moon came out.
Stars.
I lay here,
Like a baby.
And just looked, just took it all in.
Like I'd never seen the sky before.
I lay in my tub
And I thought about Dad
And Mrs. Baldwin, and Roger,
And Mystery Man,
And all the others.
All the others.
All the millions of others I've been filling up my life with.
(rest)
it was a clear night, you know?
Crystal clear.
Not a single breeze,
Not a bird, no voices, nothing.
For the first time,
Silence.
Couldn't hear my heartbeat.
Didn't feel afraid.
Didn't feel cold.
I thought for a minute I'd died.
I thought I'd finally done it.
After all that trying, I thought
Well, you've finally done it now, just when you figured out you wanted to live.
But you know.
Timing is everything.
Look at the sky.
Did you ever notice a kind of...skin around the moon?
There were these lovers once...in a movie.
And the boy was telling the girl the difference between a liar's moon
And a lover's moon.
One of them has this kind of skin, this haze around it.
That's what the moon has.

A big white full moon with a skin.
(But) I can't remember if it's a lover's moon or a liar's moon.

*

*Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon.
The little dog laughed to see such sport,
And the dish ran away with the spoon.*

*

I laid there and watched that moon for a long time.
I didn't think about the brain teasers
Or Cassandra, or anything.

the *me* was gone.

The noise.

I liked it.

I felt the moon rays on my body, on my skin,

I drank in the moonlight, like it was water.

I bathed in it.

I rubbed and scrubbed my skin, and turned and rinsed in it. I breathed it into my lungs, and stretched out my spine in it.

(she bails water out of the tub)

The owl and the pussycat went to sea

In a beautiful pea-green boat:

They took some honey and plenty of money

Wrapped up in a five-pound note...

I reckon I'm losing this bailing game.
There must be some cracks where I can't see
Because it keeps filling up with water.
Last night, with the moon and all that
I decided I'd pull the plug.
Just to see. You know. What happens.
Water outside, water inside, what's the difference?

So. Today's the day.

It's funny, a person can get used to anything.

You start to think that's the way it's always gonna be. Drifting.

And then one day you just wake up and you know.

(rest. Breathe.)

Today's the day I pull the plug.

*

(without emotion)

I was five years old when I sat at the dining room window
and decided I would never surrender again.

My parents had gone out to dinner.

Suzie the babysitter was watching a movie in the living room.
She'd put me to bed, but I snuck out.
I sat at the window, staring into the full moonlit night,
Down the driveway to the road, searching for the headlights.
I waited and waited and waited.
(whisper) Don't move a muscle!
I can still feel the anxiety in my belly like a hard rock, like a stone
Like a piece of granite clenched in my teeth, grinding,
I can feel the stone turning in my belly, sucking up the warmth.
I can feel the stone sucking up the warmth of my blood and replacing it with mercury.
I can feel the mercury pulsing around my veins, my limbs with the fear of death and
abandonment.
Cold.
I am staring out the dining room window down the long long
Driveway of my shit-scared childhood hoping and beseeching whatever god there is
not to let me be left alone again.
I can see the blue blackness of the snow.
I can see the moon on the silver waves of snow. I can see the fear
Between me and the blackness and the silver waves, and the headlights never come.
There is no light. No end. Only the tunnel. Only my clamped shut tight jaw vowing
vowing never to open again.
Not to scream, not to swallow, not to eat, not to cry, not to moan.
I've always kept my promises.

There are shadows and fear and the stone in my stomach and the headlights never
come.
I cry and cry and cry and mostly even more than this I feel my fingers
Tightly gripped
Like little claws, gripped on the windowsill
On the three-tiered windowsill of the diningroom window of my childhood all of
which is now gone
And the cold
Waiting for the headlights that never come.
There's a man, walking slowly, his outline, toward me.
But then the moon comes out from behind a cloud and he disappears.
Was never there.

Suzie puts me back to bed, and sometime later, out of child's sleep
My bedroom door opens, the crack of light grows and fills with my father's face
And he is home.

I'm grown up now I guess. A woman.
I'm an adult, running my own life, taking care of myself
Or not.
Because adults get to choose.
Because I'm an adult and that's what adults do and yet.

Every act of the adult carries within it the act of the child.

(aha! The answer...)

Brainteaser!

(she pulls the plug. Nothing happens. Rest.)

That's weird.

The water's not coming in.

(she looks closer at the drain hole)

What the hell!

I wish I'd paid more attention in science. There must be some law of physics or something about water on the outside versus water on the inside.

Or maybe it's that old saying about the tub being half empty.

Half full.

Hmm. Very strange.

I don't understand.

I thought once I----

(she hits land)

Shit!

This was unexpected.

How could I have missed it?

(she looks around. Not sure if it's a mirage.)

Hmm.

(touches the sand outside)

Looks like land.

Feels like land.

Smells like land.

Must be land.

Hmm.

(she doesn't move right away)

I wonder what I'm supposed to do.

Where am I?

(she stands. Stretches. Stiff.)

Oh, ow. I need to get out more.

(tentatively puts out a foot, tests the land)

Seems okay.

(other foot)

Nice.

(rubs her sore butt, physicalises)

That feels good.

(does a few stretches, looks back to sea, fondly)

Funny.

(it starts to rain a tropical rain.)

Mmm, rain. Finally.

(she bends, kneels down into the ground and sniffs.)

I want to taste it.

(She kisses the ground. She takes some sand in her hand and puts it to her lips, into her mouth. Swallows.)

I'm gonna keep some of this new land.

For my kids.

I'm going to make them eat the dirt when they're born,
gonna shove a thimbleful of sand in their little mouths,

make them swallow

and that way they'll never leave.

they won't need to.

(she kneels, wraps some sand, somehow)

It'll be in their blood.

They'll belong.

(she stands, walks inland)

*

I wonder what will happen to my whale.

To Cassandra.

To me.

I wonder why we tell stories,

Why we listen to them.

To movies, books, brainteasers, myths.

When we can't even listen to ourselves.

To ourselves.

(she notices someone)

Hello.

Fancy meeting you here.

And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand

They danced by the light of the moon,

The moon,

(The moon),

They danced by the light of the moon.

(END OF PLAY)

Research statement

Research background

This work uses solo performance text to explore themes of sexuality, gender, aging and migration. The work shares a new kind of reflective knowledge creation with its audience. The play models a new way in which research may draw upon the past, the imagined future and a cast of not only ‘real’ characters, but imagined (and non-human) ones as well – as does research in emerging areas of sensory research methods, social fictions, autoethnography, performance ethnography, spoken word research, personal narrative and feminist research performance. This script is one example of this new kind of knowledge creation in which the characters become research subjects and research outputs. As Boal (2000) argues of lived experience (as agentic and reflexive), this performative ethnography (Spry 2011) continues to evolve in and as ethnographic research through additional interviews, micro-performances and evolution of the script.

Research contribution

This play represents the ways in which literature, interculturality, migration, gender and sexuality can be present in research in evocative ways. This play shows how ‘the fiction is embedded in the ... interviews, collegial conversations, and creative collaborations ... experienced in ... arts-based research’ (Harris & Sinclair 2014: 2). The work represents the multiple experiences and perspectives present in this research informed by gender and sexuality, migration and multicultural education, in innovative ways which are characteristic of contemporary new materialist and sensory research.

Research significance

Lola’s journey-as-research contributes to these fields in extending the limits of performance writing and how fictional characters might not only represent but ‘talk back’ to creative researchers and audiences. She as a character and as an ethnographic amalgam of research data represents what Leavy’s core text *Method Meets Art* (2008), and others (Cahnmann-Taylor and Seigismund 2008, Barone and Eisner 2012) have mapped as the potential of practice-led and arts-based research.

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