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Dear Lord, I'm Desperate

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Bard College

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Dear Lord, I'm Desperate

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Fiachra McAllister

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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*To Saint Fiachra,
patron of gardeners, herbalists,
and hemorrhoid victims.*

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Thank you to my Mom and Dad for being the biggest supporters and inspirations in my life. I love you both and am so grateful to be your kid.

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OUR FATHER JOHN MISTY,

Who Art Garfunkel in heaven,
Hallowed be thy post popular baby names of 2002;
Thy United Kingdom come,
Thy will be done
For a United Ireland.
On Earth as it is in the movie *Seven*
Give us this day our daily gluten free bread
and forgive us our jackasses
as we forgive those who jackass against us
And lead us not into vacations in Tulum,
but deliver us from upheaval.
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

SEAN PENN.

INITIAL PRAYER

We pray to Our Father to ask God to give us all that comforts us, to forgive us our sins, to guide us away from temptation, and to deliver us from evil. We pray to God to converse with Him and seek comfort to connect with Him. Yet, my unfaithful interpolation of the prayer disrupts every possible calling of communication with God. It is a caricature of the act of praying—not invoking God, but rather musician Father John Misty (whom one could argue is Godlike). Parodying Our Father as a tool of rebellion, I call on popular culture and media, crafting my prayer not through religion but through a greater historical, social, and political lens—whether it's calling on Art Garfunkel, David Fincher's 1995 film *Seven*,¹ or pleading for Irish independence.

I think back to my short-lived experience enrolled in a private Catholic school, an institution where religion interjects with every aspect of education. It was a school that restrained my six-year-old self from creative freedom. During my two years there, I often got in trouble for skipping around instead of walking in a straight line, wearing tinted lip balm, singing the tune of “Low” by Flo-Rida,² and quoting Mad TV³ sketches during lunchtime. I was deprived of innocent, guileless things that just came naturally to me as a curious child.

We were instructed to recite the Our Father each morning, and oftentimes we mixed up the word “trespass” with “dress pass,” instead uttering “forgive us our *dress passes* as we forgive those who *dress pass* against us.” My school, with a very strict uniform policy, would offer dress passes as a golden ticket opportunity to be able to attend school in your own clothes for a day.

¹ Fincher, David, director. *Seven*. New Line Cinema, 1995.

² Rida, Flo. “Low.” *Mail on Sunday*. Poe Boy Entertainment, 2008.

³ Salzman, David, Bahr, Fax and Small, Adam, creators. *Mad TV*. Hollywood Center Studios, 1995.

These dress passes were used as a reward system, which was honored monthly by a teacher who would choose a student that best embodied the character value of the month, such as responsibility or leadership. This practice reinforced the idea that you could possibly be yourself for a day if you were self-controlled and restrained enough. And so, my association with this prayer as a comical invocation emerged at an early age, shaping my distinctive approach to irony regarding religion and social-cultural systems in my relationship to theater and performance.

BIRTH

I began this journey by meditating on the relationship between myself and the world. I knew I wanted to create a satire revolving around myself, a choice I have always made in writing, which I think was born out of my overindulgence in stand-up, where the comic is always the main character. As an artist, I relish satirical forms of expression. I find that comedy is an art form that defies the boundaries of what is appropriate—it dares to challenge our thoughts and beliefs and steers away from a moral high ground.

I started conceptualizing my senior project by thinking about what I love in performance. I have always been drawn to offbeat, eccentric language on stage. The art of the lampoon and violation of conversational rules is my most consumed and cherished form of entertainment.

My artistic vision has also always been loyal to cultural references. As an artist, there's an endless stream of popular culture embedded in my work. I like to include commercialized commodities in my writings, particularly as a punching baseline for jokes. Replacing the biblical declaration of affirmation “Amen” with actor Sean Penn is part of how I twist with accuracy and toy with modern pop cultural concepts. Growing up in Los Angeles, my idea of playtime as a

child was watching TMZ on my family's TV and hanging out with friends whose parents all had IMDb profiles and SAG-AFTRA cards. This concept of "*fame*" was omnipresent, and I believe being in such close proximity to this world brewed my interest and intrigue with the "*celebrity*" as it stands today.

My use of pop culture as a critique traces back to Jack Ferver's *Performance Composition* class, where I honed in on popular media in writing composition and text-based performance. I created a piece that delved into the self and status, inspired by my mornings as a child, where I would listen to 102.7 KIIS FM⁴ with Ryan Seacrest on the way to school. Every morning, I would listen to the show and its prattling segments that provided pop culture updates and tabloid-esque entertainment. In the piece, I reference a KIIS segment called "Ryan's Roses" as source text, where listeners would call in with the suspicion that their significant other may have cheated or is cheating on them. With the listener secretly on the other line, KIIS FM would call the significant other disguised as a fake free flower delivery service and offer them free roses to be sent to anyone they would like free of charge. Then, they would see who the roses were requested to, revealing whether the significant other was faithful or partaking in infidelity. In the piece, I recite the transcript of one of the recorded on-air conversations from Ryan's Roses, where the significant other exposed that he did, in fact, cheat on his wife, being forced to reveal that he got his mistress pregnant.

Artistically, my decision to reproduce this recording was chosen out of my disturbing fascination with media and consumerism. Even as a child, I gave into this mass media that purposely exploited a relationship at the hands of cultural hegemony. There is something so

⁴ Seacrest, Ryan. *102.7 KIIS-FM*, Los Angeles, California

revolting about sharing private information with the world, yet it is so simultaneously indulging. How I see the world of public recognition, media, music, television, and film is a massive element in how I deploy a kind of open irony in my work in theater and performance.

Finding the Structure

I went into this process understanding that finding a comedic structure within a script that can effectively work on stage for a live audience is a tricky task. Humor is incredibly subjective, and punchlines and one-liners may not deliver as graciously as a writer had initially hoped for.

What fueled my decision to create two humor based pieces was going to see multitudes of live comedy. The summer prior to my senior project, I visited renowned improvisational troupes throughout the country, such as The Second City in Chicago and Upright Citizens Brigade in Los Angeles. I find myself enthralled by live comedy, and observing these revues of half scripted half improv ensembles transcended my expectations of what can possibly be performed comedically. I also frequented comedy clubs like The Comedy Store and The Laugh Factory, where I watched stand-up comics blur the boundaries of comedy with elements of incongruity and surprise. Observing these live performances made me incredibly intrigued by their unaided discipline of performing and seeing a freshly crafted response to our multifaceted modern world.

In the Fall of 2023, I was enrolled in *How to be Funny and Why: A Comedy Workshop* led by Adam Conover. The course looked at the different theories of humor and what makes us laugh by surveying the structure of comic writing. In the class, we wrote weekly sketches exploring the world of comedy and what makes for a successful script. From this course, I learned the

importance of heightening a script, particularly how to be quicker on my feet when it comes to writing a punchline.

Allured by comedy, I wanted to mimic society, religion, life, and our inevitable fate. I found inspiration in the Irish sitcom *Father Ted*,⁵ which follows the lives and misadventures of three Irish Catholic priests who live in a parish off the west coast of Ireland. Despite being a satire, its themes of rejection, agnosticism, and existentialism experienced by *Father Ted* are also incredibly nuanced. I wanted to hone in on these themes and portray surreal humor in my work by deliberately violating causal reasoning. Surreal humor bends reality, and my goal was to accentuate the nonsensical. For me, that meant attending my own funeral or telling a story of my name that transforms into a pharmaceutical advertisement for Viagra.

LIFE

I find that productive writing always begins with an observation. In the notebook I used for my senior project, which I coined as my “sproj mahal,” I noticed a common theme in my entries, titling them with “THINGS I FIND HUMILIATING,” “THESE ARE THE WORST THINGS THAT COULD EVER POSSIBLY HAPPEN TO ME,” and “WHY GOD WHY” in bold black ink. I am naturally drawn to the dread that comes with life; it's terrible, but I think that the annoyances and mundanity of our existence are the best sources of humor.

In my notebook, I inscribed daily interactions, conversations, habits, and dreams that I experienced on a day-to-day basis. In one of my journal entries, I wrote down a dream I had where I was awarded a Golden Raspberry Award, also known as the Razzies, a parody award

⁵ Linehan, Graham and Mathews, Arthur, creators. *Father Ted*. Hat Trick Productions, 1995.

show that honors the worst cinematic failures. In the dream, I was announced as the winner of “Worst Supporting Actress,” only for my name to be totally butchered when called by the presenter. “And the Razzie goes to... fee-ack-ra!” My melatonin gummy-induced dream was unequivocally absurd; what was worse, the fact that I got an award for bad acting or that they pronounced my name incorrectly? The question of what was more absurd lingered in my mind, and this cryptic fear that crept into my subconscious of having my name mispronounced sort of birthed the premise of my scene.

The Name

BEHIND THE NAME marked my unaccompanied debut on the stage. It is simultaneously a solo performance and a bleeding infomercial. The piece centers around the story of my name, Fiachra. The Irish orthography is rather tricky for the untrained eye, and Fiachra is the kind of name that makes you do a double take. A name that has been butchered and garbled time and time again, I wanted to write a piece sharing the rich etymology and meaning behind my name.

I come from a family that possesses undeniably Irish names. My father's name is Seamus, my mother's is Mairead, my sister's is Saoirse—even our dog is named Shamrock. I am incredibly proud of my name, but possessing such a name can be a disruption when you're trying not to inconvenience others or yourself. Going to a new place, school, and even a Starbucks has always been a rather daunting thing for me.

My name holds such a rich history, but I didn't just want to share the story; I wanted to create a piece out of it by unfolding its meaning in a greater context. As a child, my mom would read Irish legends to me, including one story called *The Children of Lir*, or *Oidheadh Chlainne Lir* in Gaelic. The story follows four children, Aodh, Conn, Fionnuala, and Fiachra, who are

cruelly transformed into swans. Cursed for 900 years, they endured hardships and suffering until they were finally freed, only to die shortly after.⁶ There was something so beautifully haunting about this association that made me want to delve deeper into my name's interrelations.

Patron Saint of Hemorrhoids

When I grew older and first started researching its derivation on my own, I discovered associations of my name, one being Saint Fiachra of Breuil, the priest, abbot, and gardener of the sixth century who was famous for his holiness and skill in curing illnesses.⁷ Upon further research, I found out that not only is Saint Fiachra a patron saint of gardeners, but he is also the patron saint of hemorrhoid sufferers—MY GOD. Over 10,000 saints have been canonized in the Catholic faith, including patron saints of travel, artists, sculptors, and academics, and yet my name is synonymous with the saint associated with rectal bleeding. Not only that, but Saint Fiachra also had a reputed aversion to women and had eternally banned them from his hermitage. It's like the jokes write themselves.

When I discovered this, I knew I had to write about it. What are the odds I share the same name with a woman-hating solitary forest dweller with hydrocortisone strength at his fingertips? I wanted to share this story on stage, not just as myself, but with an amplified persona that's crude, brash, and utterly bold. Comedy requires a degree of fearlessness and ignorance, so I truly wanted to make a mockery of myself. And because I was writing as the sole performer, I knew I had to be okay with making a fool out of my character. The guise I played on stage was the most heightened, dramatized type of myself, a version that exists nowhere else but the stage.

⁶ Gregory, Lady. "The Children of Lir." *Gods and Fighting Men*. John Murray, 1910.

⁷ Mulcahy, Cornelius. "St. Fiacre." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 6. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909. <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06067a.htm>>.

The persona I created was heavily inspired by the British sitcom *Absolutely Fabulous*, starring Jennifer Saunders and Joanna Lumley.⁸ *Absolutely Fabulous* centers around the lives of two red wine-drinking, drug-taking, cigarette-smoking, self-absorbed middle-aged women. The show feeds into this unruly woman archetype that is disruptive and self-indulgent—they are cruel, vain, and uncensored, but their questionable personalities are precisely what fuel comedy. With *Absolutely Fabulous* in mind, I aimed to mold my character as an audacious, morally depraved woman. I wanted to create a version of myself who would dare ask the tech and lighting team to install UVA and infrared heating panels for just an 8-minute performance. I wasn't just Fiachra; I was an ignorant, fake tan-loving, hemorrhoid-suffering, unable-to-keep-a-plant-alive Fiachra.

I knew the story of my name couldn't just stand alone, so I thought of ways to elevate my anecdote by turning my script into a walking ad that keeps interrupting the intended plot. My story interjects with an array of commercials that promote things all ending with an undesirable outcome: *death*.

The incorporation of music and sound has been a crucial aspect in the development of my creative pieces. Since 2021, I have hosted a weekly radio show, Scantly Clad, through Bard College's free-form experimental radio station WXBC. My show is a blend of music and commentary on culture, media, and music. My approach to sound, driven by my passion for music, allowed me to incorporate playful sound for puckish intent.

What truly makes an advertisement an advertisement is music, particularly a non-threatening musical backdrop that lightens the mood and diverts attention away from the

⁸ Saunders, Jennifer, creator. *Absolutely Fabulous*. BBC Productions, 1992.

selling product's negative aspects. Adding a buoyant but irritating, royalty-free pop instrumental was the perfect sound to accompany my commercial breaks.

The mini commercial begins with an obnoxious hair flip as I turn away and then back toward the audience. I play a vivacious, overly performative salesperson who's blindly promoting their product. I promote Jersey Shore reality star Snooki Polizzi's "Sugar Babe Ready to Go Spray Tan," exclaiming, "Once confidence is sprayed, beauty is displayed!" and proceed to mandate a fast-paced list of major side effects and contraindications that would obviously repel someone from the item, such as "skin damage, headaches, nausea, identity crisis, gender crisis, middle age crisis, and even death." My character is not only a storyteller but an oozing infomercial intending to promote a product where the bad outweighs the good to lessen liability.

If I start to appear more sun-kissed or oompa-loompa-like throughout this, it's because I use...

Snooki Polizzi's Sugar Babe Ready to Go Spray Tan in a Bottle. Because once confidence is sprayed, beauty is displayed! Product is suitable for people ages 18 and up. Side effects include skin damage, headaches, nausea, identity crisis, gender crisis, middle age crisis, and even *death*.

I'm not too worried about the last one, though.

There's an existential awareness that my character has, but I am impassive to my inevitable fate. I accept the risks of headaches, blurred vision, a false sense of reality, harassment, and even death for the sole sake of my ego.

DEATH

For the spring semester, I knew I wanted to expand upon the themes I explored in my fall work-in-progress by creating a final disposition. I started by breaking down the themes of religion and death I instilled in *BEHIND THE NAME*. I noted that my inevitable demise was a

side effect I was not afraid of; in fact, it was something I was "not too worried" about. *BEHIND THE NAME* inspects the risks and side effects—so what would happen if I had to face the consequences of indulging in these risks?

This is where *GRAVE SCENE PT. 2* was born—or rather, this is where *GRAVE SCENE PT. 2* died. I used my Our Father parody as a pathway for developing my second piece, bringing my religious pastiche to a final conclusion: a funeral. The purpose of a funeral is to honor and commemorate a person who has passed, not defame them. Inspired by macabre humor, I aimed to concentrate on the irrational fear of having unfavorable things said about you at your burial.

I remember saying to my friend Sadie, "I feel like no one will show up at my funeral when I die," to which she replied, "Well, I'll be there!" When it came to casting the one and only eulogist in my piece, I immediately thought of Sadie. We have been friends since the first week we met via Zoom for Bard's Language and Thinking program, way back when I was mandated to quarantine for two weeks in a dodgy Best Western in Kingston during August of 2020. I knew we had solid chemistry that would transcend the stage, so when I asked her to be in my performance, she happily obliged. With Sadie in mind, I tried crafting a funeral attendee that wouldn't think too fondly of my character; in fact, I created an attendee whose eulogy was borderline disparaging to my character:

Dearly beloved, we gather here today to bid farewell to a soul whose presence was as bold as the very essence of life itself. Fiachra, a name that, I'm sure evokes mixed reactions from many people here today. A daughter, a sister, a friend, a co-worker, a comrade, a somewhat of a provocateur. There will never be enough words to describe her. Fiachra lit up every room she walked into. Seriously, she became a huge chain smoker once she got to college.

People try to be the most selfless versions of themselves. Or, at least, I think we try to be, so there was something so hilarious to me about making myself a narcissistic and borderline sociopathic character who is inherently selfish. My goal was for Sadie to stab at my superficiality, like calling me a person who evokes mixed reactions and a provocateur. The false sincerity in her words is revealed through typological errors, with Sadie saying, “One of her most defining qualities was that she was selfless. Oh, sorry. TYPO. She was *selfish*. Incredibly selfish.” I wanted her to prod at my character with these backhanded compliments that were questionable and rightly offensive.

For my piece to succeed, I aimed to heighten my character by having her face her bouts of narcissism and try to atone for her sins. I had already created a character that possessed a blithe, heedless attitude toward life and religion, so my goal was to have her face the consequences. This fictionalized version of myself was my new approach at using self deprecating humor.

Yep, I Bit the Dust

I wanted the set design to replicate a meager execution of a funeral. The stage was adorned with LED candles, faux flowers, a framed black-and-white picture of myself, and an overwhelmingly inauthentic-looking coffin, which I describe as a “pretty pitiful-looking coffin.” My idea of this amateur-looking funeral erupted from what I had imagined my character's dream funeral would look like. Because I believe this fictionalized version of myself romanticized the glamor of death, I pictured my desire for a funeral procession beginning with a tolling of a bell, signaling my untimely departure, a highly publicized burial, and an endless crowd of people

wailing and weeping, enshrining my soul. I took this idea and totally axed it, using the process of envisioning and then subverting the expected, leaving just one person in attendance with a setting that looked like it was chosen as a cost-cutting measure.

Because of this stage design, I desired to revel in tacky and kitsch outfit couture. For *GRAVE SCENE PT. 2*, I donned Sadie in a black lace fascinator and dress with a comically oversized black leather jacket. I entered the stage with a vintage black fur coat, platform boots, lace gloves, a veil, and a cigarette. The fashion is an assemblage of 80s fashion that oscillates between glamor and tackiness.

I Want to be Immortalized

During the script development, I was drawn to English filmmaker Tony Richardson's 1965 black comedy *The Loved One*⁹. Based on Evelyn Waugh's 1948 short novel *The Loved One: An Anglo-American Tragedy*,¹⁰ *The Loved One* is a mortuary satire that looks into the bewildering funeral business in Los Angeles. It follows an Englishman named Dennis Barlow, who navigates through Hollywood's obsession with image and superficiality as he finds himself thrown into surreal situations involving the funeral business. A black-and-white film, *The Loved One* is absurd and perverse and deals with mortality in a hard-bitten manner.

The Loved One was shaped by Evelyn Waugh's experiences visiting Hollywood in 1947, during which he discussed a film version of his novel *Brideshead Revisited* with studio executives at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. There, he visited cemeteries and found himself “simultaneously disgusted and fascinated with the American film industry as well as the nearby

⁹ Richardson, Tony, director. *The Loved One*. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1965.

¹⁰ Waugh, Evelyn. *The Loved One: An Anglo-American Tragedy*. Little, Brown and Company, 1948.

Forest Lawn Memorial Park, a cemetery that, with its gaudy memorials and piped-in music, struck him as more like an amusement park than hallowed ground.” Waugh inscribed his critique in two articles, *Why Hollywood is a Term of Disparagement*, an “excoriating critique of the Hollywood studio system,” and *Half in Love with Easeful Death: An Examination of Californian Burial*, a “mock-anthropological profile of Forest Lawn.” Waugh then fictionalized these subjects in his novella.

This satirization of the glamor of death in Waugh’s writings that helped produce Richardson’s film *The Loved One* heavily stuck with me. Growing up, my parents would frequently take me to Hollywood Forever Cemetery and Forest Lawn, two of the oldest cemeteries in Los Angeles. Resting places for celebrities and prominent people from the industry, these cemeteries are essentially the Hollywood (*Burial Ground*) Walk of Fame. These gravesites fascinated me from a young age; I viewed graveyards as a spectacle and the body as something that lives forever. Cemeteries are typically characterized by stillness and sorrow - but these sites are a celebrity necropolis where stars are “refashioned, reconstructed, exhibited, and visually consumed.”¹¹ From a young age, I associated death with celebrity, and there is an irrefutable assertion that celebrities are forever eternal. And so, I wanted my character to live and die as this temperamental prima donna whose greatest wish was to be immortalized.

They Put Me in a Ziploc Bag

I die in a way that is both egregious and comical—I was burnt to bits VIA a tanning booth. I had asked for a “UV level that could give me a Miami spring break bronze complexion,”

¹¹ Todd, Ian Scott. “Editing Corpses in Evelyn Waugh’s Hollywood.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2013, pp. 414–40. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24246908>. Accessed 30 Apr. 2024.

and instead, I got a “rather charred, burnt look in the end.” My goal was for my character to leave this earth due to the consequences of their indulgence in vapidly and shallowness.

I label it not as my death but as a “tanning booth departure,” which was an aleatory tribute to the horror franchise *Final Destination*.¹² The *Final Destination* films are set around the premise of a group of people who elude impending death by avoiding a calamitous accident, only to be hunted down by death itself in a series of grisly accidents. In *Final Destination 3*,¹³ two characters are burnt alive in malfunctioning tanning beds. The humor lies in the tragedy of it all—yes, I died, but being burnt to a crisp meant that it just made it easier for the cremation process anyway. There is an indifference to the acceptance of my death—my character is astonishingly cold and forbidding. I interrupted my own funeral by saying, “Figured this was gonna go down someday.”

The aesthetic of my piece is heavily drawn from religious themes and imagery, aiming to take and manipulate it for absurdity. When I visited Ireland with my family this past year, I visited a plethora of cathedrals, parish churches, and chapels and found myself in awe of the sacral architecture. Particularly, I noticed how embedded Catholicism is in Ireland.

During my trip, my Nana gifted me two religious booklets: *Dear Lord, I'm Desperate*¹⁴ and *I Want to Go to Heaven the Moment I Die*.¹⁵ I thought to myself—is my Nana trying to tell me something? I know that I may listen to too much nu-metal and slowcore, and have a resting face of pensive sadness, but do I look like I really need to find God that badly? There was

¹² Reddick, Jeffrey, creator. *Final Destination*. New Line Cinema, 2000.

¹³ Wong, James, director. *Final Destination 3*. New Line Cinema, 2006.

¹⁴ Doyle, Thaddeus. *Dear Lord, I'm Desperate*. 2002.

¹⁵ Doyle, Thaddeus. *I Want to Go to Heaven the Moment I Die*. 2008.

something about the phrase “Dear Lord, I’m Desperate” that was so unintentionally comical that I felt impelled to integrate catholic despair and repentance into my work’s overall aesthetic.

My entire family is from Ireland, and culturally, I find that the Irish and Irish diaspora use humor as weaponry to confront discomfort. Laughter is a language, and humor is a crutch for emotion. The Irish inclination to wield humor always draws me back to a quote from Samuel Beckett’s novel *Molloy*, where he writes of a woman whose dog had just died: “I thought she was going to cry, it was the thing to do, but on the contrary she laughed. It was perhaps her way of crying. Or perhaps I was mistaken and she was really crying, with the noise of laughter. Tears and laughter, they are so much Gaelic to me.”¹⁶ Beckett’s writing encapsulates how we laugh because we suffer. Laughter is a complex emotional response, and this depth of emotion is ingrained in Irish culture, where humor and weeping are intertwined. There is a cultural inclination to supplement humor as a response to hundreds of years of oppression, colonization, famine, and religious guilt—And I feel that I, too, carry this inclination.

In order for the Catholic guilt in my pieces to shine, the choreography was relatively minimal and kept inside the restrained bounds of religion. I wanted to emphasize the initial Our Father by using a church kneeler to bow down and pray for my one moment of questionably religious devotion.

My character uses this humor as a weapon for combating pain. I rationalize the refusal to cry by saying “vanity over sanity” and even go as far as applying a menthol tear stick under my eyes just as a way to force emotions out of myself.

¹⁶ Beckett, Samuel. *Molloy*. Grove Press, 1955.

In this last earthbound moment, I deal with deflection and the refusal to acknowledge my wrongdoings, trying to hold on to my material existence by making excuses as a beg for forgiveness. I reflect on life, saying, “Yes, being alive is like being detained, declawed, severed, ripped open, and ball-gagged all at the same time, but life is also a highway, as Rascal Flatts once put it.” I propose for a greater reincarnation, that in my next life, I will finally do good things for the world, like “finally attend my state-summoned jury duties or be in a remake of *We Are The World*.”

I end my performance by going into a rather respectful rendition of “We Are the World,”¹⁷ the 1985 charity single written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie. I invite my eulogist, Sadie, down the stage to lip sync and dance to our prerecorded cover of “We Are the World” as the lights dim to multi-colored moving headlights. My “We Are the World” finale was a subtle nod to the last scene in *This Is the End*,¹⁸ the 2013 apocalyptic comedy horror film. *This Is the End* follows the premise of the fictionalized cast of James Franco, Jonah Hill, Seth Rogen, Jay Baruchel, Danny McBride, and Craig Robinson as they attempt to survive a global biblical apocalypse in Los Angeles. At the end of the film, several characters ascend to Heaven, where 90s boy band sensation Backstreet Boys appear and gleefully perform “Everybody (Backstreet's Back)”¹⁹ at the pearly gates of Heaven.

This delirious idea of having the Backstreet Boys greet you at the gateway to Heaven is a chaotic, absurd culmination of life, and my decision to cover “We Are The World” was my swan song performed as a surrealist way to conclude my life.

¹⁷ Jackson, Michael, and Lionel Richie. “We Are the World.” Columbia Records, 1985.

¹⁸ Rogen, Seth and Goldberg, Evan, directors. *This Is the End*. Columbia Pictures; Mandate Pictures; Point Grey Pictures, 2013.

¹⁹ Backstreet Boys. “Everybody (Backstreet's Back).” Millennium, Jive Records, 1997.

REINCARNATION

My artistic goal was to capture the biological life cycle and teeter through life and death, drawing on the equation that tragedy plus time equals comedy. My two pieces, *BEHIND THE NAME* and *GRAVE SCENE PT. 2*, symbolize my birth and death as an artist and performer. To exist as not just myself but as a fictionalized version on stage was an incredibly reflective testament to the ego. Making myself an emotionally absent reveler who aspires to a life of indulgence allowed me to see what it's like to *be* the caricature.

I look back at what I have created as a theatermaker and understand that going forward, I want to continue using satire to dissect the personal and interpersonal. I find it compelling to immerse myself in my work, using it as a tool to expose not just my own hypocrisy but also the world's through the lens of surrealist, absurdist values. Uncovering these cultural, religious, and societal ties in my work is a restorative and healing process, a way of creating my artistry. By attaching my own character and identity to my work, I establish an aesthetic that showcases how I use humor as a veil for transparency as well as a strategy for coping with our existence.

BEHIND THE NAME

Written by

Fiachra McAllister

Characters:**Fiachra - Fiachra McAllister '24****Announcer (V.O.)***INT. – STAGE*

Lights enter on FIACHRA as she gleefully walks downstage center. ANNOUNCER voice over begins to play.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to the stage, FEE-AK-RA!

FIACHRA

Oh no it's actually/

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

/Uhhh oh I meant *FIGH*-AK-RA,

FIACHRA

No, no that's not actually how you pronounce it/

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

/Is it FEE-CRAY?

FIACHRA

Nope.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Fernando?

FIACHRA

That's not even close/

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Firecracker?

FIACHRA

That's not even *a* name.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Well, you're on your own with this one, sorry about it.

ANNOUNCER voiceover ends. Fiachra appears totally defeated.

FIACHRA

That was.. *humbling*.

(beat)

Well, I would like to start this off with a prayer.

The London Fox Taize Choir's adaptation of Our Father (The Lord's Prayer) begins to play. Fiachra bends down on both knees in a submissively prone position. She places both hands in prayer, employing prostration as an act of worship to God. She looks up, envisioning speaking to a higher power.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Our Father John Misty
 Who Art Garfunkel in Heaven,
 Hallowed be thy post popular baby names of 2002;
 Thy United Kingdom come,
 Thy will be done
 (beat)
 For a United Ireland.

Fiachra winks cheekily in reference to the idea of Irish independence.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

On Earth as it is in the movie, *Seven*
 Give us this day our daily gluten-free bread
 And forgive us our jackasses
 As we forgive those who jackass against us
 And lead us not into vacations in Tulum,
 but deliver us from upheaval.
 In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Sean Penn.

Our Father (The Lord's Prayer) ends. Fiachra promptly arises back up.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Welcome. I present here in front of me, the *bread and wine*.

A followspot light centers on a bottle of Chateau Diana wine and can of tinned fish placed downstage left. The tinned fish is used as a substitute for the bread; referencing the "five loaves and two fish" biblical miracle found in the New Testament.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

The bread is actually an artisanal, gluten-free, grain-free, soy free, peanut free, basically just *fun-free* focaccia, and the wine is a full-bodied cabernet Chateau Diana screw top 5% wine I got from a Sunoco gas station.

Light centers back on Fiachra.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Hello! Hi.

She begins to tug at her shirt and fan her face irritably, insinuating that it is overwhelmingly hot on the stage.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Oof. It's a *bit* hot up here. Is it just me?

She takes a beat; as if she's waiting for a response from the audience.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

It's just me, huh.

(beat)

Hah, what, you're saying I'm the hottest in the room? Stop it... stop! You guys are so cheeky. Please, stop. I did ask the tech and lighting team to change the lights to tanning bed infrared lights.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

So if I start to appear more sun-kissed or "oompa-loompa like" throughout this, it's because I use...

Lights adjust to a warm, dreamy atmosphere. Fiachra tilts her body upstage, then abruptly flicks back with a strong and volumized hair whip. A bouncy royalty-free commercialized instrumental begins to play.

FIACHRA

Snooki Polizzi's Sugar Babe Ready to Go Spray Tan in a Bottle! Because once confidence is sprayed, beauty is displayed. Product suitable for people ages 18 and up. Side effects include skin damage, headaches, nausea, identity crisis, gender crisis, middle age crisis, and even...

(beat)

Death.

Lights go back to standard lighting. The bouncy royalty-free commercialized instrumental stops.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Not too worried about the last one though.

Fiachra winks to the audience.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

It's nice to meet you all! My name is Fiachra, which is spelled F-I-A-C-H-R-A. It is an Irish Gaelic name. My family pronounces it like *FAY*-cra. This is because the real pronunciation is kind of *harsh*, especially when said with an American accent.

Apparently, you're supposed to say it like

(Mocks an exaggerated Irish accent)

FEA-CRA.

But that would just make me sound like an idiot.

Like, just imagine a girl from the San Fernando Valley who's like...

(Mocks an exaggerated valley accent)

"I'll have an iced almond milk latte, please. Thank you. The name? *FEA-CRA.*"

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

When you look at the spelling of it, you kind of read it like FIGH-AK-RA, but I guess it was just easier for my geriatric chemistry teacher to call me *Viagra*, probably because it's just something he's used to.

Lights adjust back to a warm, dreamy atmosphere. Fiachra whips her hair again. Bouncy royalty-free commercialized instrumental plays again.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Viagra. The love elixir that always delivers! Side effects include dizziness, blurred vision, indigestion, chest pain, diarrhea, bleeding, prolonged erection, coughs, sexual frustration, a false sense of reality, and even *death*.

Lights go back to standard lighting. The bouncy royalty-free commercialized instrumental stops.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

You would think, though, with such a rare, unique name, it would mean something really special. And it does. Funny enough, I share the same name as Saint Fiachra, who was a 6th-century Irish saint. He was a patron saint of gardeners, known for protecting forests and the growth of plants, flowers, and vegetables. Very beautiful, right? I was always so fascinated with the background of my own name, so then, as I grew up, I decided to do some research on my own and find out about my own background because... call me nosey.

Fiachra winks at the audience.

Upon my research, I found out that not only is Saint Fiachra the patron saint of gardens, but he is also the patron saint of people who suffer from *hemorrhoids*.

Lights adjust back to the commercial setting.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Hemorrhoids. Also called piles! Symptoms include swelling, blood clots, bowel symptom discomfort, and if left untreated, *death*.

Lights and music end again.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

You gotta give it to Catholicism; they really have a patron for everything.

(beat)

What I always loved about being named Fiachra was that it was technically a boy's name. I thought it was super progressive that my parents decided to switch it up; they didn't care what I was going to be. My parents were like—let's remove the stereotypical gender name divide. Our kid is just going to be Fiachra. So what if I'm a girl with a boy's name? Like, literally, who cares? And so, as I was continuing to conduct my research on the life of Saint Fiachra, it said, and I quote, that Saint Fiachra had a

(Cites with air quotes)

“STRONG aversion to women.”

(beat)

Yeah, women were not allowed in his chapel - some lady villager pissed him off so much that he just decided to ban them for life. He had a hatred for women as well as a refusal to admit them into his presence.

Lights adjust back to the commercial setting.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Women! Side effects include being catcalled, wage inequality, harassment, and sometimes having to lie and say “yes I did go to the women's march” just to make yourself look better. And also maybe *death*.

Commercial sequence ends.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Yeah, his reputed aversion to women is believed to be the reason that he is *also* considered the patron of victims of STDs. Women were cautioned to stay away from his hermitage or else they would have been cursed with bodily illnesses.

But yeah, that is who I'm named after! It makes sense though, it really does.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Because I can't keep a plant alive, and I just keep getting hemorrhoids.

Fiachra flares her nostrils and furrows her eyebrows, questioning why she just said that out loud.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Okay, I feel gross now can we get some cleansing music?

The London Fox Taize Choir's adaptation of Our Father (The Lord's Prayer) begins to play again. Fiachra bends down again as an act of prostration.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Our Father of Mine, by the American rock band Everclear
 Who Art Garfunkel in Heaven
 Hallowed be thy aspartame (I love a diet drink! Sue me...)
 The United Kingdom come
 Thy will be done
 For a United Ireland
 On Earth as it is in the TV show, Succession
 Give us this day our daily meds (guys don't forget to take them!)
 And forgive us for passing gas
 As we forgive those who pass gas in front of us
 And lead us not into dehydration
 But deliver us from free refills
 In the name of the Father, the Son, and the holiday spirit.
 Cayenne.

Fiachra bows her head down as lights go out.

END SCENE.

GRAVE SCENE PT. 2

Written by

Fiachra McAllister

Characters:**Fiachra - Fiachra McAllister '24****Sadie - Sadie Bernard '24***INT. – CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL*

Organ instrumental chiming in, a funeral is set. The stage is dimly lit with a somber atmosphere. Downstage left, a framed black and white picture of FIACHRA is placed on a photo stand. Center stage, a coffin lies with faux flowers and candles surrounding it. Center left, SADIE enters stage and stands behind a podium.

SADIE

Dearly beloved, we gather here today to bid farewell to a soul whose presence was as bold as the very essence of life itself. Fiachra, a name that, I'm sure evokes mixed reactions for many people here today. A daughter, a sister, a friend, a co-worker, a comrade, a somewhat of a provocateur. There will never be enough words to describe her. Fiachra lit up every room she walked into. Seriously, she became a *huge* chainsmoker once she got to college.

Fiachra enters downstage right with a cigarette loose in hand.

FIACHRA

Oh. Am I interrupting something? KIDDING, I know I am. Figured this was gonna go down someday.

Downstage center, a church kneeler is set.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

May I? It's an Irish catholic tradition to say a proper prayer.

The London Fox Taize Choir's adaptation of Our Father (The Lord's Prayer) begins to play. Fiachra bends down on both knees and places both hands in prayer, employing prostration as an act of worship to God. She looks up, envisioning that she is speaking to a higher power.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Our Father, John Misty
Who Art Garfunkel in Heaven
Hallowed be thy most popular baby names of 2002

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Thy United Kingdom come
 Thy will be done...
 (beat)
 For a United Ireland

Fiachra cheekily winks in reference to the idea of Irish independence.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

On Earth as it is in the movie, Seven
 Give us this day our daily gluten free bread
 And forgive us our jackasses as we forgive those who jackass
 against us
 And lead us not into vacations in Tulum
 But deliver us from upheaval.
 In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
 Sean Penn.

Our Father (The Lord's Prayer) ends. Fiachra stands up and away from the church kneeler.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

That's how you do it.
 (beat)
 Well, this is kind of a lame turnout. How...

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

(cites with air quotes)
"intimate."

(beat)
 Better than having too many cooks in the kitchen. You know, as
 they say, too many cooks spoil the stew! Which, truly, come on,
 how could you spoil a stew?

Fiachra erupts in an ongoing tangent about cooking ingredients.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

You only really need some cream or salt or mirepoix to fix it.

Fiachra quickly notices her thoughts are drifting away.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Oh, sorry—I've been watching a lot of Food Network.
But, which in my case, to fix THIS would be adding some more people—to attend my funeral. But—once you cease to exist in your body, *you* are no longer present, so why does it even matter anyways?

(beat)

Well, except it matters for me because my prosecutor always said I have a

(Cites with air quotes)

“BIG PRESENCE.”

Fiachra glances back at the stage, assessing the funeral scenery. She begins to peruse over to upstage center, eyeing the funeral setting up and down.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

I'm loving this mournful vibe we've got going on over here. The faux flowers—I would have preferred Orchids, but it's fine. Some fake IKEA candles,

Fiachra quickly notices the framed portrait of herself and her jaw drops, clearly in awe of her own beauty.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Oh, and a *GORGEOUS* picture of me, dare I say? Wow. HUBBA WUBBA. I look great. I always had such a flawless side profile.

She looks down at a shabby looking coffin.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

And a pretty *pitiful* looking coffin,

(beat)

Hey, someone call Barry Keoghan, am I right?

(laughs at her own joke)

The coffin's just there for aesthetic purposes. They actually put me in a Ziploc bag.

(beat)

Heavy-duty, don't worry.

Fiachra winks at the audience and walks back downstage center.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

If you're wondering why this little "shindig" is happening...Tanning booth incident.

Stage lights quickly change to a dark, burnt red color for a split second.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Yeah, I asked for a UV level that could give me a Miami spring break bronze complexion and instead got a rather charred, burnt look in the end. But it actually just made it way easier for the cremation process anyways.

Oh, and if you're wondering, I did indeed use...

Commercial background music begins to play. Stage light switches to a dreamy, cool color. Fiachra tilts her body back and whips her hair to the front of the stage, imitating the vibe of a TV commercial.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Snooki's Sugar Babe Ready to go simply sun tanning! Because life's better with a tan. Device suitable for people ages 18 and up. Side effects include skin damage, internal damage and yeah, even *death*.

Commercial background music stops. Fiachra flips her hair back. Stage goes back to dim lighting.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Yep. I bit the dust. Truly, I'm such a cinephile for the way I went out. My tanning booth departure was an aleatory tribute to the critically acclaimed franchise, Final Destination, of course.

Fiachra takes a beat as a moment to reflect on her passing.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Accepting my mortality in such a way is rather strange, I'll admit. I guess that's what you get for ignoring all the mandated side effects.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

But looking at it now, I'm realizing I still had so much more left to do in this life. Like, getting my own Costco membership, or trying ayahuasca, or becoming a landlord, or visiting North Korea, maybe even drug deal one day.

Commercial background music begins to play again. Stage light switches back to dreamy, cool color. FIACHRA tilts her body back and whips her hair to the front of the stage again.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Drug dealing. Invite some thrill into your life! Side effects include legal consequences, health risks, and yeah, maybe death. I don't really know though because I never got to actually do it.

Commercial background music stops. Fiachra walks downstage right, signaling the return to Sadie's eulogy.

SADIE

Fiachra was a person of remarkable character. Whenever I was feeling down, she would just say to me, "It's 5 o'clock somewhere."

Fiachra lip syncs to Sadie saying "5 o'clock somewhere" and cheekily winks as she thinks fondly of her old days of carousing.

SADIE (CONT'D)

She always knew how to cheer me up. She embodied certain characteristics that really set her apart from most people around her. One of her most defining qualities was that she was... selfless.

Brows furrowed in confusion, Sadie glances back down at her eulogy script and notices a spelling error.

SADIE (CONT'D)

Oh. Sorry. Typo. She was *selfish*. Incredibly selfish.

Fiachra is bewildered by Sadie's choice of word.

FIACHRA

Okay, let's maybe soften that word choice a little bit there. *Selfish*? Really? Uh, maybe, *shellfish*, yeah. Lobster rolls are impeccable, but. I would instead maybe say I was self-*preserving* or self-*focused*. Like JLO once said, "to thine own self be true." I was NEVER selfish. I refilled our Brita once. Took the lint out of the communal dryer. Or, or, remember, we went to that bar that one time? I bought you a shot. That's the epitome of kindness.

SADIE

Yeah, and after, you Venmo requested me for it. Including the price of *your* own shot.

FIACHRA

Okay, it's called a "convenience" fee? I was simply a convenience at that given moment. So then after, I charged a fee. It's common sense.

SADIE

And then, you asked for an angel shot. That's literally code for letting a bartender know you feel uncomfortable with the person you're with.

FIACHRA

Look, I'm sorry it has such an appealing name. I thought it was some sort of aperitif or a liqueur, like vermouth. You know I love vermouth. And you were being really clingy that night and my social battery was just running low.

SADIE

Fiachra lived by the motto "nobody's perfect."

FIACHRA

This is libel! I mean, maybe *some* of those things are true. They're very true, actually. I just have crafty approaches to things. But I was never this greedy wench that you're framing me to be. Like, so what if I never put the shopping cart back? That's *their* job.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Or so what I purposely wouldn't tell someone if they had food in their teeth? It's a really awkward thing to do and I don't know, maybe they were just saving it for later...? It's called leftovers for a reason. Look, at the end of the day, this is in honor of *me*. And I am sensing a *bit* of spite here. I thought the whole point of this was to acknowledge the good things someone was known for. Like my extraordinary talent, or my pert derrière. I thought I was going to have someone trusted to applaud and rave about me. Like Oprah, or...or *Socrates*? He's still alive right?

SADIE

No.

FIACHRA

Okay, you know what—can we just switch up the vibe here? I was thinking we could maybe play with the granularity of emotion a bit more—some acting exercises to get us into a more mournful state, maybe? I know losing me is like the greatest devastation to mankind; you're probably just in shock. But can we start opening the floodgates or something? Bring out the... Kleenex?

Commercial background music begins to play again. Stage light switches back to dreamy, cool color. FIACHRA tilts her body back and whips her hair to the front of the stage again.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Kleenex. For every sneeze and snuffle. Side effects include skin irritation, environmental impact, and, yeah, in this case, *death*.

Commercial background music stops.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

This is for you.

Fiachra walks upstage left and grabs a single tissue out of her coat pocket to pass to Sadie.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

I'm not gonna cry because this is about *me* and I don't want my eyes to be puffy. Vanity over sanity, as they say.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

But, if you are so grief stricken, which is why I'm guessing you're not crying over me, fear not, because just in case, I also brought a knife, an onion, and a menthol tear stick.

Fiachra searches for a menthol tear stick out of the same coat pocket.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

You just apply lightly under the eyes like this.

She presents the tear stick directly to the audience as she demonstrates how to use it by applying it directly under her eyes.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

It's what all the actors use. I mean like, c'mon, how do you think Meryl got all those Oscars?

Sadie nods.

SADIE

That's actually a great tip. Wow, I'll write that down.

FIACHRA

So clever, right?

Fiachra starts widening her eyes due to the menthol tear stick clearly irritating her eyes. She begins to accidentally tear up.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Oh. Well, the menthol tear stick is clearly working. Usually, I exit the stage wanting to leave you all with an aftertaste akin to downing a shot of bottom shelf vodka. But I have grown emotionally since, with the help of my menthol tear stick.

Yes, being alive is like being detained, declawed, severed, ripped open and ball-gagged all at the same time, but life is also a highway, as Rascal Flatts once put it.

A highway with bumper-to-bumper traffic, unpaved roads and a road rage that is on par with buying a piece of cheap jewelry that leaves a gangrene looking imprint on your skin.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

I hope that in this next life, I'll offer more to the world...

Fiachra looks back to Sadie.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

...and to you, I guess. And do great things, like finally attend my state summoned jury duties, or...

Fiachra contemplates for a split second, thinking about what her ultimate dream would be.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

...be in a new remake of We Are The World.

A beaming smile begins to appear on her face.

FIACHRA (CONT'D)

Music, please?

Fiachra reaches her hand out to Sadie. Sadie walks downstage center alongside Fiachra as she passes her a microphone. Stage lights dim to multi-colored moving headlights, and We Are The World begins to play as they lip sync.

END SCENE.

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