

*Beneath the Surface: A Memory Play on Asperger's Syndrome*

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Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

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**Abstract**

While academic, formal research proves to give readers an intellectual understanding of Asperger's syndrome, this thesis serves as an approach to understanding the psychology of an Aspie on an emotional level. Through both research from peer-reviewed studies and the personal perception of an Aspie writer, a playwright develops a script inspired by the psychological aspects of Tennessee Williams' memory play, *The Glass Menagerie*, to create an informative, yet engaging story about an Aspie protagonist. The playwright seeks to express that Aspies, despite their stereotypically cold exteriors, are emotionally complex individuals beneath the surface.

*Beneath the Surface:***A Memory Play on Asperger's Syndrome**

Social and emotional development are some of the most essential aspects of ascension into adulthood. When one develops over the course of his life, the person must be able gain the mental capacity to navigate the oncoming challenges imposed by the “real world.” Socialization, relationship maintenance, emotional maturity, basic operational skills, and communicative potential are essential elements that a human being must have to develop a sense of individuality and achieve independence. While individuals typically develop these skills over the course of their childhoods through social endeavors, some people are less fortunate. Some people are born with a dampened capacity to develop these skills. Some people have Asperger's syndrome.

Aspies are generally characterized as being unable to communicate effectively with others, often based on a stereotype that alleges Aspies lack empathy. In essence, a common thought process is that Aspies are emotionless, uncaring, and unempathetic because of their diagnoses. While studies explored in this thesis support the notion that minds of Aspies are much more emotionally resonant than they appear on the outside, much of the emotional complexities of Asperger's syndrome remain a mystery to its researchers. Even though I, as the author of this thesis, am diagnosed with Asperger's myself, I do not see the medium of academic research as a sufficient means to fully dissect the psychology of an Aspie. An intellectual understanding of a disability is certainly an important first step for a neurotypical audience to better understand the mindscape of an Aspie, but, for one to empathize with an Aspie on an emotional level, one must witness the disability through a firsthand experience.

In order to do this, I intend to use playwrighting as the medium of storytelling because of the essential experiential nature of theatre. Therefore, the research in this thesis seeks to comprehend two areas: (1) an understanding of a theatrical genre that explores the emotions and memories of its protagonist and (2) the greatest possible intellectual understanding of an Aspie's psychological development and capacity for empathy through research from peer-reviewed studies. Following this, I marry my intellectual understanding of Asperger's syndrome to my emotional comprehension of the disability (based on personal experiences) to develop a well-rounded, highly informed playscript. The goal of this thesis, then, is to construct a playscript through which neurotypical individuals can gain a deeper understanding of Asperger's syndrome, and, to the greatest extent possible, accurately represent the disability within the story. The play is titled *Beneath the Surface*.

### **Dramatic Form: Memory Play**

If I am to develop a script that portrays the psychology of an Aspie for a neurotypical audience, I must use a theatrical form that explores the emotions and memories of its protagonist. Therefore, I have chosen to draw inspiration from the psychological-based aspects of Tennessee Williams' memory play, *The Glass Menagerie*, to develop a theatrical form for *Beneath the Surface*. Memory and reminiscence are, naturally, the most essential aspects of a "memory play." Williams asserts that, in a memory play, realism is less present in the storytelling conventions because of the involuntary malleability of memory. For example, in his production notes, Williams states that "the lighting in the play is not realistic. In keeping with the atmosphere of memory, the stage is dim" (Williams xiii). Here, Williams notes that the lighting of *The Glass Menagerie* must capture the foggy qualities that memory comes with. In a sense, the atmosphere of a memory play

must have a certain uneasiness, uncertainty, and fogginess to it, for the audience is viewing the production from the protagonist's perspective. When the play opens on the apartment complex of the Wingfield family, the central characters of the work, Williams' stage directions further stress the strange qualities of memory: "The scene is memory and therefore nonrealistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the articles it touches, for memory is seated predominately in the heart" (Williams 2). Given these qualities of memory, a play based around reminiscence will be almost entirely subjective in nature. Because of this, audience interpretation of the plot is inevitable. As an audience experiences a memory play, it is required to act under the assumption that truth has been muddled by the protagonist's perceptions. The objective "true story," then, while not entirely lost, becomes adulterated with personal perceptions, making it hard for the audience to determine what is fact and fiction.

As for how this applies to the dramatic form of *Beneath the Surface*, the story is filtered through the perceptions of the Aspie protagonist. Symptoms are subjective to their bearers, so the play being told in this manner allows the audience to "experience" those symptoms firsthand. The goal of *Beneath the Surface* is not to give an objective, overarching understanding of Asperger's syndrome to a neurotypical audience; instead, I seek for the audience to empathize with the personal experiences a particular Aspie protagonist, Landon, to see how the disability has influenced his life. As seen with the research later in this thesis, Asperger's syndrome comes with a wide range of symptoms, so it would be nearly impossible to capture the entire spectrum of the disability in a one-act playscript. The subjectivity of a memory play allows the piece to explore a

single case of Asperger's syndrome because the disability itself proves to be subjective to its holders.

Subtle storytelling proves to be another essential element of an effective memory play: Early into his production notes, Tennessee Williams describes the following regarding his script: "Being a 'memory play,' *The Glass Menagerie* can be presented with unusual freedom of convention. Because of its considerably delicate or tenuous material, atmospheric touches and subtleties are a particularly important part" (Williams xii). Williams acknowledges here that, because memory is a hidden, subconscious concept, the creative conventions (including the lighting, sound, costume, and scenic design) of the play should reflect hinting at the truth of something rather than directly addressing the reality. Further, Williams notes that the goal of a memory play is not to attempt to hide the truth through unconventional storytelling tactics, but it is an attempt to subtly reveal the truth in a more impactful way than directly addressing something ever could (Williams xii). Following his previous comment, Williams goes on to state that "[t]hese remarks are not meant as a preface only to this particular play. They have to do with a conception of a new, plastic theatre which must take the place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions if the theatre is to remain vitality as a part of our culture" (Williams xii). Based on his musings here, Williams believes his memory play is revolutionary for the art of theatre; In his eyes, the only way to maintain the artful integrity of theatre would be to employ more subtle storytelling. Therefore, when crafting the story for *Beneath the Surface*, I seek to subtly hint at the symptoms of an Aspie's mind while avoiding simply explaining them to the audience. The fact that the term "Asperger's syndrome" is not uttered a single moment during the production is a strategic artistic choice to enforce subtle storytelling; I believe that this forces myself to reveal the symptoms of

Asperger's through plot points, dialogue, and character choices. If the play effectively communicates these symptoms, then the audience should begin to piece together that Landon's personality generally correlates to someone with Asperger's syndrome.

One final aspect of *The Glass Menagerie* that characterizes a memory play is with its subjective narrator and protagonist, Tom Wingfield. As the narrator, Tom notes that the realistic elements of the play are filtered through his own poetic values. For example, he refers to the character of Jim O'Connor, Tom's coworker and potential suitor for his sister, as "the most realistic character in the play" (Williams 3). However, Tom notes he will use poetic license with the character: "...But since I have a poet's weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as symbol; he is the long-delayed but always expected something that we live for" (Williams 3). Further, Tom contrasts his role as the subjective narrator of the piece with the duty of a magician: "He gives you illusion in the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion" (Williams 3). Here, even Tom affirms that he will be serving as a subjective narrator for the sake of the memory play. It is Tom's perceptions and Tom's story that he will be telling, so the objective reality of the world of the play will be filtered through his understanding of truth. In a similar sense, I seek to capture this style of a subjective narrator in *Beneath the Surface* through the scenes in which the Aspie protagonist speaks with his therapist about his problems. These scenes attempt to capture a similar essence of Tom speaking directly to the audience. The only scenes that the audience should be able to tell are "objectively true" in the fictional world would be the moments in which the Aspie engages with his therapist. The rest of the play, a series of flashbacks that occur as the Aspie refers to them, exist within the mind of the Aspie, and, therefore, are bound by the subjectivity of a memory play.



### **Characterizing an Aspie**

Although I have some experience with standard conventions of characterization, writing a memory play with an atypically minded protagonist provides some unique challenges to the character-building process. There is little room for error when representing a disability. If a piece such as *Beneath the Surface* seeks to inform others about a disability, I have an obligation to represent the disability with the utmost accuracy. Therefore, the research here pulls from peer-reviewed studies regarding others with Asperger's to create well-rounded understanding of the disability that extends beyond my personal experiences with the disability. Simply put, this research informs a characterization that reflects a clear, concise, accurate representation of an Aspie within the play. The protagonist is named Landon Anders, a young male with Asperger's syndrome.

### **Life Experiences and Asperger's Syndrome**

As the play makes use of memory as its primary storytelling device, *Beneath the Surface* naturally spans three different periods of Landon's life: at eight, fourteen, and eighteen-years-old. Because the disability afflicts Aspies at every stage of their lives, developing an understanding of how it influences development at certain stages is essential to effectively portraying an Aspie. Often defined as a developmental disability, Asperger's syndrome is associated with autism spectrum disorder, though it often lacks the intellectual and language development issues that those with autism have according to some professionals ("Asperger's Syndrome"). According to the National Children's Hospital, young Aspies generally have the following traits: poor social skills, lack of emotional comprehension, highly specific interests, a high interest in the self, poor emotional management, a weak kinesthetic sense, a tendency to become overwhelmed by sensory

stimuli, and a “rigid” and “repetitive” way of thinking (“Asperger’s Syndrome”). Asperger’s syndrome is four times more common in males than in females, and the diagnosis usually occurs from around ages five to nine (“Asperger’s Syndrome”). There is no known “cure” for the Asperger’s, though treatment is available through therapy sessions (“Asperger’s Syndrome”). In essence, Asperger’s is a lifelong emotional and social struggle for those affected by it, though treatment can be used to help an Aspie cope.

Because Aspies have a rigid way of thinking, transitional periods prove to be times of high stress for them. For example, a study completed by *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities* analyzes an Aspie’s transition from high school to college through a qualitative interview process with Aspies, their families, and those who have instructed the subject Aspies in the past (such as rehabilitation counselors and teachers). The study narrows in on five male students, ages 18 to 22, who have been diagnosed with Asperger’s (Alverson et al. 53). First, friendships proved to be challenging for the subjects of the study during high school. All participants referred to social struggles within their respective high school settings. Two participants who attended a public high school reported being socially engaged during that time, though they all had an underlying sense of social isolation while there (Alverson et al. 56). One student, Irving, reported that he had “friendly” relationships in high school, but he was never able to develop these relationships into anything more meaningful (Alverson et. al. 56). These findings defy the notion that Aspies do not long for friendships; instead, it appears that they do desire friends, though they simply lack the social capabilities to make them. This trait is adopted by Landon Anders in *Beneath the Surface* during his transition into high school at age fourteen; while

he longs for a friendship with an extroverted peer, Max, he struggles to make the connections he intends because Landon does not know how to socially engage with him.

Aspies have similar issues going into college. In the same study, Aspie subjects reported a sense of friendlessness in college just as in high school, despite making attempts to attend social events and participate in social activities. Others reported a preference to remaining socially isolated from large crowds (Alverson et. al. 57). The journal concludes that, in order to be better prepared for these social traumas, an Aspie needs to have the following traits: a desire to attend college, knowledge of the disability, a supportive family unit, strategic preparations for the transitional period, and clear goals for the future (Alverson et al. 60). Simply put, a well-informed Aspie with strategic planning in place will typically be better prepared for transitional periods in their life. By the end of *Beneath the Surface*, Landon has developed many of these traits before going into college. Going into high school at fourteen, Landon proves to be unprepared, untreated, and less clearly motivated for his future; however, by the end of the piece, a college-ready Landon has experienced counselling, explored socialization with his interactions with Max, and determined that he is going to better his social circumstances.

### **Quality of Life and Asperger's Syndrome**

Because of his symptoms, Landon Anders' has a higher chance of developing a weak life satisfaction in comparison to neurotypical individuals. One study completed by *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice* demonstrates this. The study was based on questionnaires given to Aspies and a control group to assess their subjective qualities of life and life satisfaction. Aspie males reported having a lower quality of life than male neurotypicals counterparts (Jennes-Coussens et al. 407). Of the twelve Aspie participants, four Aspies reported

being unable to complete tasks required for independent living (such as properly managing finance). Of the six who had a history with romance in the past, only one third of the Aspies reported currently being in a relationship (Jennes-Coussens et al. 408). Another study published through the same journal measured the quality of life in a group of male Aspies in longitudinal study fashion. This study found that 38 percent of Aspie participants had a history of attending a university in some regard, but about half to these students dropped out before finishing their degrees (Helles et al. 463). Over half of the Aspie subjects reported having an independent living situation from their guardians, though some had the support of a spouse or roommate (Helles et al. 463). Finally, although many Aspies reported high levels of academic achievement, these areas did not correlate with high levels of satisfaction with life (Helles et al. 463).

*Beneath the Surface* addresses Landon's specific quality of life in several areas. For example, his quality of life proves to be low at the age of fourteen. Despite the academic success that Landon achieves during the play, this does not bring Landon the satisfaction that he desires out of life. His academic success, in fact, makes him feel like a "robot," for he struggles to make friends but thrives in repetitive, intellectually based tasks. What he longs for, however, is simply the ability to understand himself and be accepted by his peers. Another area in which quality of life is explored is through Landon's parents, Diana and Mason Anders. The couple, struggling to find the support Landon needs due to not understanding how his mind works, worries that Landon will end up unable to support himself in the future. Diana wishes "to see [Landon] grow up and start a family. I want to see him go out every Friday night with his friends. I want him to work a job that brings him the great joy in the entire word. I want to see him smile" (pg. 40). However,

she fears that Landon will be stuck with the couple for the rest of their lives (pg. 40). Diana and Mason acknowledge they must do something to help their son as a result.

### **Anxiety and Depression**

Anxiety is another aspect of Asperger's syndrome explored within *Beneath the Surface*. In another study completed by *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, the impact of anxiety on the lives of Aspies are scaled against the impact of anxiety on those with general anxiety disorders and a neurotypical control group in a questionnaire-based research experiment (Farrugia and Hudson 27-28). The study seeks to determine how negative thoughts and general anxiety affects the lifestyles of each of their subjects. As for the results of the study, the Aspie and general anxiety disorder individuals scored significantly higher on the anxiety scale than members of the neurotypical group, except on the scale that assessed fear of personal injury (Farrugia and Hudson 29). The Aspie group had general levels of anxiety on par with individuals with general anxiety disorders, and they both far surpassed the levels of anxiety for the neurotypical group (Farrugia and Hudson 31). Despite these findings, those on the Asperger's sample reported much higher levels of negative thought patterns than both the neurotypical and anxiety disorder samples (Farrugia and Hudson 30). In the script, Landon struggles with anxiety in situations in which a stimulus sends him into a state of panic. Landon's anxiety is onset by events in which too much information overwhelms him, such as when he attends an emotion-filled funeral with dozens of attendees or witnesses an argument between two peers. Landon flees these scenes in order to reduce the anxiety that he is experiencing.

In addition to this intense anxiety, Aspies also struggle with depression. A study by the *Journal of Adolescence (London)* looks at the friendship experiences and loneliness and depression

histories of 35 Aspies by comparing them to a neurotypical control group (Whitehouse et al. 309). Drawing from the results of the questionnaires presented in the study, Aspies generally reported less motivation for making friends and higher levels of depression and loneliness than the neurotypical control group (Whitehouse et al. 315-16). Higher friendship qualities were negatively correlated to higher amounts of loneliness for both the Aspie and neurotypical groups (Whitehouse 316). In other words, the higher any individual ranked the quality of their friendships on the questionnaires the less likely they were to be found struggling with loneliness. Landon's depression comes in the form of a personified character in the play. Described only as a "Voice," the character serves an embodiment of every insecurity and depressive thought that Landon has, and it latches onto any negative stimulus it can to tear Landon down. The voice makes Landon question his capacity to make friends, his capabilities of success, his worthiness of having friends, and the status of his humanity. The voice stands in direct contrast to the character of the psychologist, the objective voice in Landon's life, because nearly every statement it makes proves to be a lie.

### **Special Interests and Asperger's Syndrome**

Another defining symptom of Asperger's that Landon has is specialized interests ("Asperger's Syndrome"). Although this symptom is commonly stereotyped as the "savant" ability that every Aspie apparently has, Aspies typically have an average intellect ("Asperger's Syndrome"). A paradox exists with those with Asperger's: while some might have highly specialized interests in certain areas, the other areas that exist outside of those few interests might be more challenging for the Aspie than a typical individual (Cohler 210). According to a qualitative interview study on young Aspies and their parents conducted by *Remedial and Special*

*Education*, these special interests are incredibly important aspects of an Aspie's life. Through the transcribed interviews of children with Asperger's regarding their special interests, the children's interest areas could be placed into several categories: "transportation, music, animals, sports, video games, motion pictures, woodworking, and art" (Winters-Messiers 144). Despite their children's interest in such subjects, some parents considered those interests inappropriate due to being either socially unacceptable or taking too much of their children's time. However, the interviews also showed that Aspies were often much more positive about themselves when they were involved in their favored activities (Winter-Messier 144).

Special interests are touched upon in *Beneath the Surface* as an area of conflict for Landon. When Landon's father ends up in the hospital, an eight-year-old Landon does not react in a noticeable way; instead, he remains focused on his specialized interest, his Pokémon card collection, to escape the reality of his father's suffering. An older Landon reminisces, however, that he escaped to the cards because they were more important to him than his own father: "Pokémon cards. That was what was important to me as my dad suffered" (pg. 43). Landon uses his single-minded focus on his specialized interest as an example for why he believes that he, in fact, lacks empathy.

### **Empathy and Asperger's Syndrome**

The highest point of contention in *Beneath the Surface* comes with the Landon's inability to accept his humanity. Because Aspies can appear as cold and distant at times to the outside world, Landon begins to believe the notion that he, as an Aspie, does not experience empathy. So, do Aspies truly experience empathy and altruism for other individuals? The research shows that there might be some levels of diminished empathy in Aspies, though not in the way one might

expect. According to a study with the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, empathy has two core components: cognitive empathy refers to one's intellectual comprehension of the emotional states of others, and affective empathy refers to one's appropriate resonance with another's emotions (Davis 1983, as cited in Rogers et al. 709). In other words, there are two parts to recognizing emotional states: the intellectual recognition of the emotion, cognitive empathy, and the ability to adopt an appropriate emotional response, affective empathy.

Based on the results of the study, the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* reported that Aspies scored significantly lower on scales measuring cognitive empathy than a neurotypical control group. However, Aspies fared better on scales that measured affective empathy than they had on the cognitive scales, placing their emotional understanding closer to the neurotypical control group than their intellectual recognition (Rogers et al. 712). Another study, completed by the *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, further supports this point. In terms of the relationship between cognitive and affective empathy, the journal states that "the current study shows that a dissociation between cognitive and affective empathy exists, with the latter relatively preserved" (Rueda et al. 92). These findings demonstrate that, while both aspects of an Aspie's empathy proved to be dampened in comparison to neurotypical individuals, the affective portions of empathy were not as seriously impacted by the disability. In a sense, these study shows that, while Aspies have trouble intellectually recognizing the emotional states of other individuals, they are still capable of adopting the correct emotional response when they are aware of another's emotional state (Rueda et al. 92). This is Landon's core misunderstanding within the piece; he dislikes himself for being unable to empathize and experience emotional connections with other people, but, beneath the surface, he has had the capacity to do so the entire time.



Communication and education are key to helping Aspies further develop their empathetic sense. A study carried out by Ofer Golan and Simon Baron-Cohen of *Development and Psychopathology* on Aspies suggests that they might be able to be taught intellectual recognition of emotions through strategic, repetitive exposure to emotional stimuli. The tests used Mind Reading technology, an interactive computer software with 412 basic emotions and 24 emotional groups that teaches its users how to recognize emotions based on video clips, audio recordings, and written scenarios (Golan and Baron-Cohen 594). The first study showed that Aspies who used the Mind Reading software over the course of several weeks scored significantly higher on the emotional recognition tests of visual and audio cues than those who had not participated in the software use. This provides some insight into the fact that Aspies might be able to learn to recognize emotional states (Golan and Baron-Cohen 603).

Though *Beneath the Surface* does not stress the use of technology to assist an Aspie's ability to empathize effectively, the piece does make the case for neurotypicals to help Aspies develop a stronger empathetic sense through consistent, enlightening communication with the Aspie. For example, when Landon asserts that he, as an Aspie, has an unchangeable psychology, the psychologist asserts "It's about time you take initiative, carve your own path, and defy any notion that your brain is unchangeable. The mind can be trained into learning all sorts of things..." (pg. 45). Here, the psychologist encourages Landon to attempt to make changes to his own mind, for he understands that Aspies can be taught to further their empathetic sense.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this thesis seeks to use the research regarding memory plays and the psychological aspects of Asperger's syndrome to accurately represent the mindscape of an Aspie.

The play seeks to be an exploration for neurotypicals into a foreign mind, and a chance to see the world through the lens of someone with the disability. Because developmental disabilities are a sensitive topic to cover in any form of creative fiction, I have made it my highest goal to represent Asperger's with respect, care, insight, and, most of all, accuracy. If the play's theme successfully comes off to its audience, then they should leave the theater with a better comprehension of the complexity of the Aspie mind, and, hopefully, the makings of a redefined understanding of Asperger's and empathy. While there are clear limitations to any medium that tries to capture the essence of human psychology, I believe that the interpersonal nature of theatre allows for a different angle from which people might come to understand human beings with disabilities. However, it is only a matter of bringing the piece to life onstage that will determine if it truly captures the essence of an Aspie's psychology.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

SCENE ONE

AT RISE

A near empty room. LANDON ANDERS, eighteen, sits in a cushioned chair. He focuses on something, though it is hard to tell exactly what. A PSYCHOLOGIST sits nearby holding a pen and notepad. A male VOICE whispers in the distance, though it is hard to discern what it is saying. A slight ringing sounds as the voice speaks with a hushed tone and gets louder as it begins to talk. The VOICE can be heard from all sides of the room and echoes as it grows in volume. Although it echoes, LANDON still seems to focus on a single direction, as if he knows exactly where the voice is coming from.

VOICE

I know who you are.

(LANDON glances around the room.)

Who do you think you are?

LANDON

I don't know.

PSYCHOLOGIST

What? Landon?

VOICE

Don't lie to me! Who do you think you are!

LANDON

I'm nothing.

VOICE

Nothing? No, you're not nothing.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Landon, are you alright?

You're definitely something.

VOICE

I'm—

LANDON

Different? We both know that.

VOICE

Do you need me to get someone for you?

PSYCHOLOGIST

You'll never be like them.

VOICE

I'm fine!

LANDON

No, you're not.

VOICE

Are you sure?

PSYCHOLOGIST

You're unchangeable.

VOICE

I'm fine!

LANDON

(The ringing dissipates. The VOICE is gone. LANDON makes eye contact with the PSYCHOLOGIST.)

You don't seem fine.

PSYCHOLOGIST

I've just got a lot on my mind....

LANDON

Do you want to talk about it?

PSYCHOLOGIST

LANDON

I don't know.

PSYCHOLOGIST

This is a safe space. You can tell me anything.

LANDON

I'm worried.

PSYCHOLOGIST

About what? Worried about your future? Graduation?

LANDON

I don't know how to even begin....

PSYCHOLOGIST

Tell me the story. Start from the beginning.

LANDON

I couldn't tell exactly how it all went down.

PSYCHOLOGIST

That doesn't matter. What matters is what you think happened. I am here for you to talk about you.

LANDON

Alright.

(Suddenly, a flash of light. What was once LANDON and the PSYCHOLOGIST can now only be discerned as their shadowy silhouettes that remain motionless in the space. The murmuring whispers of the VOICE echo throughout the space and grow in potency as before. A YOUNG LANDON, however, does not know which direction they are coming from this time. A YOUNG LANDON, fourteen years old, enters followed by DIANA, his mother, wearing in a black dress. YOUNG LANDON wears a suit and tie. He takes deep breaths. They are clearly dressed for a funeral.)

DIANA

Landon?

(He continues to breath heavily.)

Landon? Look at me. Hey, listen to me. It's going to be alright.

VOICE

You can't do this!

YOUNG LANDON

I can't do this!

DIANA

Shhh! Do you know where we are, Landon?

VOICE

You don't care!

YOUNG LANDON

I don't care! Get me out of here!

DIANA

Quiet, please!

VOICE

The voices! The noises! The emotions!

YOUNG LANDON

So many people!

(YOUNG LANDON breaks down into tears on the floor. He is unable to restrain his sobs. MASON, his father, rushes in towards DIANA.)

DIANA

Mason!

MASON

I know.

(DIANA and MASON help YOUNG LANDON off the floor. He shudders a bit as they touch him but allows their help. He catches his breath as the ringing begins to quiet down and the VOICE dissipates. They help YOUNG LANDON find a seat on a bench. MASON and DIANA sit on each side of their son.)

MASON

Hey, bud, I think you scared Great Aunt Willow.

YOUNG LANDON

Huh?

MASON

I mean, she was white as a sheet the whole time you were upset.

YOUNG LANDON

(He chuckles.)

Dad, it's her viewing. Is now really the appropriate time to act like that?

MASON

Great Aunt Willow didn't seem to care.

DIANA

Alright, alright. You won't be laughing when your Great Aunt Tracy kicks the bucket. Landon, you sure you don't want to try to go back in there?

YOUNG LANDON

I don't think I can.

MASON

...We gonna head out then?

(DIANA nods as all get up to leave. YOUNG LANDON follows his parents as they exit the space, but he stops in his tracks as, gradually, murmuring whispers sound from all sides of the room. He tries to find the source of the whispers. In a flash of light, a figure appears nearby. The VOICE, male, stands there, wearing black with few discernible features. LANDON makes eye contact with the figure. Although taken aback a bit, YOUNG LANDON is not surprised to see the VOICE.)

YOUNG LANDON

Who are you?

VOICE

I'm a part of you. I'll be with you until the end of time.

YOUNG LANDON

What do you want?

VOICE

Call me your judge. Your prosecutor. Call me whatever you want. It doesn't matter.

YOUNG LANDON

I won't let you stay here...with me.

VOICE

That's not your choice to make.

DIANA (off)

You coming, Landon?

YOUNG LANDON

Sorry!

(The VOICE disappears, and YOUNG LANDON rushes off. The world shifts once again as two individuals come back into the forefront of view. LANDON and the PSYCHOLOGIST resume their talk.)

PSYCHOLOGIST

Voices?

LANDON

Yes. Well, more like a single voice. It's been with me since that day.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Is it an audible voice?

LANDON

Like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Something along those lines.

LANDON

Not exactly like that. I don't actually hear any voices. It's more like...malicious information. I know it doesn't make a lot of sense.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Do you feel like, for you to be happy, things have to make sense?

LANDON

Yeah. I'd say that.



PSYCHOLOGIST

Interesting... You know what they say makes the most sense?

LANDON

What?

PSYCHOLOGIST

A coin-making machine. It just makes cents.

LANDON

Wow. Just wow.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Sorry. That was my poor attempt at humor.

LANDON

You should stick to psychology.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Right. Anyway, so this voice, does it only show up during times of major loss?

LANDON

No. It can be the little things, too.

PSYCHOLOGY

Like an upcoming test? A stressful week at school?

LANDON

Sometimes all it takes is a single word.

(Another flash of light, and LANDON and the PSYCHOLOGIST become silhouetted in place once more. Two teenagers, MAX and CARTER, enter the space carrying their backpacks).

MAX

Come on, molasses, we've got classes.

CARTER

Don't ever say that again.

MAX

What's got you in a muck?

Biology exam. CARTER

Ouch. I'm sure you'll be fine, though. MAX

Already failed, Max. CARTER

Well, dang. MAX

My dad's gonna kill me. CARTER

Hey! Look who it is. MAX

(CARTER points as YOUNG LANDON enters with his backpack.  
He walks in the opposing direction to the boys.)

Hey, Landon! What's up? MAX

Do I know you? YOUNG LANDON

It's Max. From Spanish class? MAX

Right. Hi, Max from Spanish class. YOUNG LANDON

¿Donde esta la biblioteca, mi amigo? MAX

What? YOUNG LANDON

Pretty sure it's Spanish for "what's crackalackin', buckaroo?" MAX

YOUNG LANDON  
(He chuckles)

Right.

MAX  
Oh, and this is—

CARTER  
Carter. We have Biology together.

YOUNG LANDON  
I recognize you. You sit in the back, don't you?

MAX  
They don't call him "Back-of-the-Class Carter" for nothing.

CARTER  
Who has ever called me that?

MAX  
I just did. Right now. No worries, Carter, I'm sure everyone struggled on that exam.

YOUNG LANDON  
I didn't.

MAX  
I'm sure most people struggled on that exam.

CARTER  
Whatever. I've got to go. See you later, Max.

(CARTER brushes past YOUNG LANDON.)  
Congrats on another perfect score.  
(Muttered.)

*Robot.*

(CARTER exits. The ringing begins again and the whispers sound in the background, though they remain at a low volume this time. The VOICE speaks at a casual volume. LANDON looks makes eye contact with the VOICE.)

VOICE  
"Robot." A fitting nickname.

MAX

Carter, that was uncalled for!

VOICE

I'm going to remember that one: "Robot!"

YOUNG LANDON

That's enough.

MAX

What?

YOUNG LANDON

Sorry. It's nothing. I've got to go too, but it was great to see you, "Max from Spanish class."

(YOUNG LANDON goes to leave, but MAX stops him. The ringing begins to lessen, and the VOICE dissipates.)

MAX

Hey, wait, do you want to hang out sometime?

YOUNG LANDON

What?

MAX

You seem just like a fun guy, Landon. We cool for Thursday night?

YOUNG LANDON

Sure! I can do that! Where?

MAX

Maybe Beaufort's Creams or something?

LANDON

Sure!

MAX

Awesome! See you there. ¡Hasta la pasta, mi amigo!

(MAX pats LANDON on the back. LANDON shudders a bit from the touch.)

You alright, man?  
MAX

Yeah. I'm good.  
YOUNG LADON

Alright, see ya.  
MAX

(MAX leaves the same direction as CARTER.)

Yes!  
YOUNG LANDON  
(To himself)

(YOUNG LANDON leaves. Like being drawn into another reality,  
LANDON and the PSYCHOLOGIST'S silhouettes dissipate, and they begin  
to converse once again.)

So I had the opportunity to make a friend.  
LANDON

I see.  
PSYCHOLOGIST

For the first time in my life.  
LANDON

For the first time? Ever?  
PSYCHOLOGIST

Correct.  
LANDON

Am I supposed to believe this?  
PSYCHOLOGIST

What?  
LANDON

Am I supposed to believe that you have never once had the opportunity to make a friend before the  
age of fourteen?  
PSYCHOLOGIST

LANDON

I mean, nobody had ever approached me like that before.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Have you ever tried to approach someone yourself?

LANDON

I mean, I don't know. People make me—

PSYCHOLOGIST

Nervous?

(LANDON and the PSYCHOLOGIST disappear once again. MAX enters, holding a melting ice cream cone. MAX sits at a bench. He looks around for someone. After a few moments, YOUNG LANDON rushes in.)

YOUNG LANDON

Hey! Sorry I'm late.

MAX

No problem, dude. What was the hold up?

YOUNG LANDON

I couldn't get a ride.

MAX

Your folks don't drive?

YOUNG LANDON

They do.

MAX

Did you get stuck in wet tar on the way over?

LANDON

No.

MAX

Abducted by aliens?

YOUNG LANDON

It's just, I kinda didn't ask them for a ride until last minute.

MAX

How come?

YOUNG LANDON

I...this meeting...is...I've never—I don't think I've ever asked them to drive me for anything like this.

MAX

(Patting the seat beside him.)

Sit with me, Landon.

(YOUNG LANDON sits.)

You want to know a little secret of mine?

YOUNG LANDON

What's that?

MAX

People make me nervous, too.

YOUNG LANDON

“Too?”

MAX

Yes, “too.” As in you and me.

YOUNG LANDON

What makes you so nervous?

MAX

(He chuckles.)

I have a few... “dark secrets,” I would like to keep hidden.

YOUNG LANDON

(He chuckles.)

Like what?

MAX

You really want to know?

YOUNG LANDON

Yeah.

MAX

You sure you want to know?

LANDON

Positive.

MAX

Do you really, really want to know?

LANDON

I really, really, really, really want to know.

MAX

Alright I confess! I still sleep with a nightlight!

YOUNG LANDON

What? What a weirdo!

MAX

It's just a comfort thing, okay! I'm not afraid of the dark!

YOUNG LANDON

I completely understand.

MAX

You're being sarcastic.

YOUNG LANDON

I'm not!

MAX

Are too! You're gonna spill the beans, aren't you?

YOUNG LANDON

Of course not! Sarcasm is not my thing anyway.

MAX

Why not?

YOUNG LANDON

I take everything a bit too literally. It's just who I am.



MAX

So, if you heard the expression “Holy Cow,” you would think of—

YOUNG LANDON

A cow with some bullet holes.

MAX

How about “a blessing in disguise?”

YOUNG LANDON

Jesus Christ wearing glasses and a mustache.

MAX

“Don’t cry over spilt milk?”

YOUNG LANDON

“We gather here today in remembrance of Senior Leche. We don’t think he fell to his death...he was pushed!”

MAX

“Leche?”

YOUNG LANDON

It means “milk,” Max from Spanish class.

MAX

Right. I knew that.

(They both laugh. MAX pats YOUNG LANDON on the back. YOUNG LANDON allows his touch.)

MAX

Look, Landon, all I’m saying is I know what it’s like to feel different from—

(A subtle ringing plays in the background. Some whispers and murmurs underlay the space as CARTER, carrying his own ice cream cone, enters.)

CARTER

(Pointing at LANDON.)

Max? What is he doing here?

MAX

Right. I forgot you were here.

CARTER

This is supposed to be our time to hang.

MAX

What's wrong with one more person?

CARTER

Well, nothing, but—

MAX

You have a problem with Landon?

CARTER

I don't have a problem with anybody.

YOUNG LANDON

You sure about that?

CARTER

What did you say to me?

YOUNG LANDON

You know what I said.

CARTER

(To LANDON)

Hey, what's your problem, man? I don't think I've ever seen you crack a smile.

(The ringing increases. A flash. The VOICE appears in the space, in person, still as indistinguishable as before. YOUNG LANDON does not notice the VOICE'S "physical" presence at this time.)

VOICE

"Never cracked a smile!" Sounds like a robot to me!

YOUNG LANDON

I cracked a smile when I crushed you on that test!

MAX

Ouch.

CARTER

How about I crush you right now, *Robot*?

VOICE

(Begins doing robotic dance moves)

Beep. Bop. Beep. Bop.

(CARTER takes a step towards YOUNG LANDON. MAX attempts to get in his way. LANDON begins to have a panic attack. He notices the VOICE at this point.)

MAX

Cut it out, Carter.

VOICE

He hates you! And who can blame him!

YOUNG LANDON

(To the VOICE.)

Knock it off.

CARTER

He started it!

(He glares at YOUNG LANDON.)

MAX

Dude, you need to chill.

CARTER

How can I be chill when you're—

MAX

What? Making new friends? I don't think you get how this works, Carter. I can have multiple!

VOICE

Max will hate you, too! He just doesn't know you well enough yet!

CARTER

Shut up, Max.

MAX

Nah, you're the one who needs to shut up.

(YOUNG LANDON begins to breath heavily and tense up from stress. Reality blurs and lights flash. The ringing reaches its climax.)

VOICE

You're pathetic. You're undeserving. You're annoying. You're useless. Robot! Android! Computer! Cyborg! Machine! What a waste of good hardware you are!

YOUNG LANDON

Not true! Not true! Not true! Not true!

VOICE

You don't get to decide what's true.

(YOUNG LANDON bolts away, leaving the two behind. A flash, and the VOICE is gone, and the ringing has stopped. MAX notices.)

MAX

Hey, wait up!

(MAX exits in YOUNG LANDON'S direction. CARTER follows. The PSYCHOLOGIST and LANDON are drawn back into the forefront of reality as the space begins to settle down.)

LANDON

I bailed on him.

PSYCHOLOGIST

You didn't try to meet up with him later?

LANDON

No.

PSYCHOLOGIST

So you haven't talked with him at all in—

LANDON

Four years? Yeah.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Alright, well that's no good. Any other chances to make friends since then? Possibly an acquaintance?

LANDON

Not really.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Have made any attempts to reach out to people?

Sort of.

LANDON

What does that mean?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Maybe.

LANDON

Landon.

PSYCHOLOGIST

It means no.

LANDON

So, following that panic attack, you avoided making friends?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Yeah, I guess.

LANDON

One incident was enough for you to give up on yourself for four years?

PSYCHOLOGIST

I didn't give up. I just didn't need them.

LANDON

Friends?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Yeah. Maybe I'm just not cut out for friendships.

LANDON

These next few years are going to be a challenging time in your life, Landon. You need all the support you can get.

PSYCHOLOGIST

I have support.

LANDON

Yes, Landon. Your parents are support, but there's no guarantee they will always be around to help you.

PSYCHOLOGIST

LANDON

I have you.

PSYCHOLOGIST

I'm expensive.

LANDON

Well, I have—

PSYCHOLOGIST

A problem, Landon. One that needs solving. You say don't want to be seen as a robot. So, show people that you're not. Show them who you really are.

LANDON

Who I really am?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Yes, you are unique, Landon. There is no other person in the universe that shares even a semblance of your distinctive molecular makeup.

LANDON

Come again?

PSYCHOLOGIST

People will love you for you, Landon

LANDON

That's cliché.

PSYCHOLOGIST

How would you know? You've never tested it.

LANDON

I did test it. I did try.

PSYCHOLOGIST

You like science, don't you?

LANDON

Yeah?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Then you should know that a good experiment needs to be repeated several times before any conclusions can be drawn.

LANDON

How dare you use the scientific method against me.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Going to college can be a time of high stress, Landon. You'll need all the help you can get.

(LANDON and the PSYCHOLOGIST fade away. MASON and DIANA enter together.)

MASON

He was sent home?

DIANA

Yeah.

MASON

It's his first day of classes!

DIANA

I know.

MASON.

He had another meltdown? This has to be a new record.

DIANA

Hey!

MASON

Sorry.

DIANA

This is serious, Mason, He's overwhelmed. It's the people and the noises.

MASON

I get that. I just don't know what we should do for the poor guy at this point.

DIANA

He's going to need help going into high school. We need to look into counseling.

MASON

How about his school counselors? We could set up an appointment with one of them.

DIANA

No. Private counseling. He needs undivided attention.

(MASON nods.)

I just want what's best for him. I want to see him grow up and start a family. I want to see him go out every Friday night with his friends. I want to see him smile. The more I think about it more I fear—

MASON

That he'll be stuck with us?

DIANA

For the rest of our lives. And then what happens after that? We can't coddle him forever.

(Something loud, perhaps a stack of books, falls somewhere out of sight. A distant ringing sounds. MASON and DIANA turn towards the noise. The scurry of feet up a flight of stairs. The ringing fades out as the footsteps grow distant.)

MASON

I'll go talk to him.

(MASON rushes off, and DIANA follows close behind. The PSYCHOLOGIST and LANDON appear once more.)

LANDON

I just don't know anymore.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Know what?

LANDON

What to do about any of this. Even my parents have lost faith in me.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Are you sure you overheard them correctly? It's easy to only hear what you want to hear when eavesdropping.

LANDON

"What I want to hear?"

PSYCHOLOGIST

You are only listening to the gloom and doom.



LANDON

I don't think that you get it. I'm stuck like this. I'm fated to live this way. My mind is a computer algorithm constantly producing the same results and incapable of being reprogrammed.

PSYCHOLOGIST

You keep comparing yourself to a robot, Landon. Why do you think that is?

LANDON

Because I am one?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Do you not feel? Do you not love?

LANDON

No. I don't know.

PSYCHOLOGIST

You are feeling something right now, are you not?

LANDON

Huh?

PSYCHOLOGIST

That feeling inside of you. That anger. That rage. Tell me about it.

LANDON

I don't know about that.

PSYCHOLOGIST

You have nothing to lose by telling me.

LANDON

I DON'T FEEL LIKE A HUMAN BEING...that good enough for you?

PSYCHOLOGIST

There it is. You don't *feel* like a human being. So you do, in fact, feel things.

LANDON

I don't know about that.

(LANDON and the PSYCHOLOGIST move out of the forefront once again. DIANA enters along with an even YOUNGER LANDON, eight years old, carrying a binder full of cards. DIANA sits on a bench as LANDON plays on the floor with his cards. DIANA is clearly worried, though she tries to hold it back.)

DIANA

Landon?

(He remains absorbed in his binder.)

Landon?

YOUNGER LANDON

Oh, uh, yeah, mommy?

DIANA

How are you holding up?

YOUNGER LANDON

Huh?

DIANA

How are you doing, Landon?

YOUNGER LANDON

Oh, good.

DIANA

Are you listening to me at all?

YOUNGER LANDON

Uh yeah, mom.

DIANA

Do you know where we are?

YOUNGER LANDON

The doctor's office. Daddy's sick.

DIANA

You and your cards.

YOUNGER LANDON

Look at this one!

(He pulls a card out and shows it to DIANA.)

DIANA

Looks cool, Landon.

YOUNGER LANDON

One day, I'm going to collect all the Pokémon cards in the world!

DIANA

I'm sure you will, Landon.

(Suddenly, YOUNGEST LANDON and DIANA freeze in place. Appearing from a dark corner of the space, the oldest LANDON enters and walks towards his younger self. He pries the binder from YOUNGEST LANDON'S grasp and flips through the pages.)

LANDON

Pokémon cards. That was what was important to me as my dad suffered.

(LANDON moves over to a trash can, and he begins tearing pages out of his binder. After he has torn out the last page, The PSYCHOLOGIST reappears in his seat.)

PSYCHOLIGST

Landon, that's not your fault. And you were so young.

(Ringing once more. The VOICE enters and looms behind the PSYCHOLOGIST.)

LANDON

I know it's not my fault.

LANDON & VOICE

But this is the way it had to be.

(LANDON makes his way over to the PSYCHOLOGIST, though he remains standing. Any time LANDON and the VOICE speak in unison or interact, they make "eye contact" with one another.)

PSYCHOLIGST

What do you mean?

LANDON

My mind. My brain. It's stuck.

LANDON & VOICE

Stuck. Stuck. Stuck. Stuck.

PSYCHOLOGIST

You can change the way your mind works, Landon. It just takes time.

VOICE

You can't.

LANDON

I can't.

PSYCHOLOGIST

You have to. Do you want to be independent someday?

LANDON

Yes.

VOICE

You can't be independent. You don't deserve that luxury.

LANDON

Maybe.

VOICE

You don't have that choice!

LANDON

I don't have that choice. I'm not—

VOICE

You're not—

LANDON & VOICE

In control.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Landon, I know having a disability can be hard, but that doesn't give you an excuse not to try to make changes. There are many like you who have less of a choice than you do.

LANDON

What do you think I can do?

PSYCHOLOGIST

It's about time you take initiative, carve your own path, and defy any notion that your brain is unchangeable. The mind can be trained into learning all sorts of things. Let's start by learning what is within your mind already and hard wiring in what is not.

LANDON

What do you think is "already in me?"

PSYCHOLOGIST

Love. The desire to be loved and to show it.

VOICE

He's lying to you. How could you ever love?

LANDON

I just don't feel it like other people do.

VOICE

Didn't you hear me? He's lying to you!

PSYCHOLOGIST

"Like other people do." So don't love people that way. Love people the way Landon knows how.

VOICE

Landon, listen to me!

LANDON

Where do I even begin?

PSYCHOLOGIST

By taking the first step.

(In an instant, the three figures are gone. An OLDER MAX enters the space carrying an ice cream cone, less melted than before. He looks around. LANDON enters the space with his own ice cream cone and sits down beside MAX.)

OLDER MAX

Hey, there you are!

LANDON

Sorry for the wait, Max. It's a long line.

OLDER MAX

You're not going to run off on me again, are you?

LANDON

(He chuckles.)

No, don't worry.

OLDER MAX

So, uh, how have things been these past few years?

LANDON

Pretty crazy. Ups and downs. Highs and lows.

OLDER MAX

Life is like that. You looking into colleges?

LANDON

Yeah, I want to go into game design, actually.

OLDER MAX

Video games?

LANDON

No.

OLDER MAX

Card games?

LANDON

(Chuckling.)

Yeah.

OLDER MAX

I expect nothing less from you, Landon Anders.

LANDON

I didn't want to at first. But now I'm thinking I should.

LANDON

Why wouldn't you pursue something that you obviously love?

LANDON  
Exactly. So, what about you?

OLDER MAX  
What about me?

LANDON  
You going to college?

OLDER MAX  
Oh, actually, no.

LANDON  
What?

OLDER MAX  
Yeah. I'm gonna go into the marine corps.

LANDON  
Well...That's great!

OLDER MAX  
College is—

LANDON  
Expensive? Trust me, I know. Where are you going to be stationed?

OLDER MAX  
I'm hoping Hawaii. Hoping to ride the waves in Honolulu, you know?

LANDON  
For how long?

OLDER MAX  
Can't really say. I really don't know what comes after all of this, either.

LANDON  
Well, I wish you the best of luck. Thank you for your future service.

OLDER MAX  
Well thanks, Landon, but I haven't done anything yet.

(A bit of silence. OLDER MAX examines LANDON.)

OLDER MAX  
You okay, Landon?

LANDON  
Yeah.

OLDER MAX  
You sure?

LANDON  
Actually, I don't know.

OLDER MAX  
What's on your mind?

LANDON  
It's just that I thought this meeting—

OLDER MAX  
Could get back what you missed out on all those years ago?

LANDON  
Yeah. Exactly. I feel like I let you down running out like that. How did you know?

OLDER MAX  
Because I feel the same way. I feel like I missed out on meeting the real you. But, you know, Carter was a jerk and all.

LANDON  
What ever happened to Carter?

OLDER MAX  
Arrested.

LANDON  
Figures.

OLDER MAX  
Kidding. He now works at Walmart. Going to anger management therapy.

LANDON  
Ah. Gotcha. Poor therapists.



OLDER MAX

I haven't spoken to him in a while. He hates me now because I'm too "down to Earth."

LANDON

What does that even mean?

OLDER MAX

I have absolutely no idea. You know, we can still stay connected, Landon. You've got my phone number?

LANDON

Yeah.

OLDER MAX

I'll give you a call whenever I'm back in town. My folks still live around here, ya know? Maybe this ice cream thing could be our little tradition.

LANDON

I'd like that.

OLDER MAX

And, look Landon, this is a scary time for the both of us. We're both about to adventure into the unknown. But it's also a fresh start. So let's make a pact.

LANDON

Sure.

OLDER MAX

(He reaches out his hand.)

Let's not miss out on anything.

LANDON

(He shakes the hand.)

Deal.

OLDER MAX

For the record, Landon, I think you are better with people than you give yourself credit for. I mean, here you are, being social.

LANDON

Thank you. Seriously.

(OLDER MAX goes to give LANDON a hug, and LANDON hesitantly accepts it. They break away.)

LANDON

(Poking fun at himself.)

I've never been much of a hugger.

OLDER MAX

Which is exactly why I made you do it. See? We're already treading new waters.

(The duo shares a laugh, and they exit together. In one final image, the PSYCHOLOGIST and LANDON reappear. The VOICE looms around in the background. LANDON makes eye contact with the voice any time he engages with it.)

PSYCHOLOGIST

I'm sorry to hear about Max leaving town. That's no good.

LANDON

That's okay. I'll be alright.

VOICE

I won't allow this!

PSYCHOLOGIST

Are you sure? You say that a lot.

VOICE

You should be devastated!

LANDON

Genuinely. I don't know what's coming next with college, but I think I'm ready.

VOICE

Incapable!

LANDON

I think I have what it takes.

VOICE

Social outcast!

LANDON

I'm nervous about making friends, but I'm going to give it a shot.

VOICE

Robot!

LANDON

Maybe some people won't understand me, but I am starting to think...I am a human being.

VOICE

No. No. No. No! This is all wrong! I make the rules!

LANDON

(Making direct eye contact with VOICE.)

And I am choosing to break them.

VOICE

I'll be with you until the end of time!

PSYCHOLOGIST

(Making direct eye contact with VOICE for the first time.)

Get out! He doesn't need you barking at him anymore!

LANDON

(To the PSYCHOLOGIST)

Thanks, but let me handle this.

VOICE

I won't let you take my rightful place!

LANDON

Enough! You don't own me. I won't let you own me!

VOICE

I'm everything that you hate about yourself! Fear me!

LANDON

Not anymore.

(LANDON stands, walks over to the VOICE, and grabs him by the lapel.)

LANDON

Out.

(A sudden flash, and the VOICE is gone.)

PSYCHOLOGIST

He'll be back.

LONDON

I know. But, this time, I will be ready for him.

(He takes a deep breath in.)

This is a fresh start. A new beginning. And I am ready for anything.

END OF SCENE

END OF ACT

END OF SHOW

### Summary

*Beneath the surface* seeks to explore the psychology of an Aspie mind using the theatrical genre of a memory play. With inspiration from Tennessee Williams' memory play, *The Glass Menagerie*, in mind, I seek to use marry an intellectual understanding of Asperger's syndrome with my personal experiences with the disability that will create an engaging, entertaining one-act playscript through which the audience might view an accurate portrayal of a single case of Asperger's syndrome. The Aspie protagonist, Landon Anders, engages with his psychologist in a series of memories throughout his life that make Landon question his ability to feel and express empathy and emotions. A personified "voice" in Landon's head tears the Aspie down with the insecurities that he faces imposed by the disability. Landon seeks to discover his humanity, and, by the end of the show, he begins to accept it.

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