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### Publication Date

2023

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Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

The Role of the Adapturgist

and

The Creation of *Black Heart: The Musical*

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

Justin Hammer

June 2023

The Thesis of Justin Hammer  
is approved:

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....iii

Abstract ..... iv

Acknowledgements ..... v

Section 1: Introduction .....1

Section 2: What is Adapturgy?.....3

Section 3: Why Theater? ..... 9

Section 4: Capitalization ..... 11

Section 5: Connection ..... 15

Section 6: Critique .....20

Section 7: Creation of *Black Heart: The Musical* .....27

Section 8: Conclusion .....42

Appendix

    List of Figures .....43

*Black Heart: The Musical* .....46

Works Cited ..... 134



## ABSTRACT

The Role of the Adapturgist

and

The Creation of *Black Heart: The Musical*

by

Justin Hammer

For as long as people have been telling stories, they have been re-telling stories. Every time details change, sometimes small, sometimes larger. Some stories remain in their original medium, others change and expose themselves to new language and new audiences. In theory, the audience for these works are already present and the beats that make the original story work have already been made, the only work needed is modernization.

In spite of this, many modern adaptations feel as though they are missing something. Critical reviews vary greatly, audience reception is tepid, and many adaptations find themselves in obscurity. Netflix shows with only a season, musical adaptations with their run cut short, films with empty audiences. What is to be done about this? What can we as those that partake in adaptation do in order to improve this? The adapturgist, the one partaking in the adaptation as creator or consumer, should consider three components when working with an adaptation: capitalization, connection, and critique.

For capitalization, one might consider "what do we change without isolating the original audience? where is the money involved here?" For connection, one might consider "what new ideas can we connect to this old story?" For critique, one might consider "how can we use this adaptation to critique the source material?" or rather "how can we use this new version of an old story to speak upon an older issue?" With these components in mind, modern adaptations can be improved for the better.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Michael Chemers for his guidance on writing this paper and the creation of *Black Heart: The Musical*. This thanks goes alongside the other members of my committee Amy Mihyang Ginther and Dr. Rebecca Wear, for being willing to participate on my committee whilst being incredibly busy people.

I would also express appreciation to my Theater Arts M.A. cohort, whose immediate enthusiasm, brainstorming, and feedback on my project drove me to complete as much of the script as I was able to.

My greatest thanks also go out to those who participated in the staged reading for *Black Heart: The Musical*. Both those in the audience and also those that lent their voices to this still work in progress script. These being: Joan Young, David Letman, Ian Larson, Sara Sotelo, Asta Baker, Sierra Wypych, and Carl Erez. Words fail to describe how thankful I am that all of them were not only willing to read, but also sing Carly Rae Jepsen music with barely a week to prepare as I cobbled the script together. A special shout out to Joan Young, who read and sang for the lead, David Letman, for being the first to sign on when the script was a mere idea in my mind, and Carl Erez, who I am sure could always hear the Carly Rae Jepsen blasting from my headphones each night as he helped me through writing each and every scene.

Additionally, I want to thank: Carly Rae Jepsen for making wonderful, inspirational music, Colin Cummings, for creating the original *Black Heart*, and Tumblr user hoenngarbage for offhandedly mentioning the concept of a Carly Rae Jepsen musical.

## Section 1: Introduction

This might be a bold, perhaps discouraging statement to make immediately in a thesis paper on the subject of adaptation but I think a lot of adaptation is bad. While I doubt no creator of an adaptation would ever be caught saying it explicitly, so much of it strikes me as merely a way to cash in on nostalgia or renew copyright.

I know a thing or two about adaptation. I have some experience on the subject, having participated in plenty of adaptations in my 24 years of life, watched films, seen plays/musicals, played games, etc.. I have taken a class in my undergraduate education about the differences between staged and filmed versions of the same story. I have even made a few myself, which is where a lot of my feelings on the subject stem from. I have co-written a staged adaptation of *The Most Popular Girls in School*, now touted as *The Most Popular Girls on Stage*, co-directed a devised, virtual Twitch adaptation of *The Yellow Wallpaper*, which became *The Yellow Zoom-paper [Working Title]*, and made a stage adaptation of the song *Magnetic Today*.

When making all of those adaptations, the adaptation of these stories from one medium to another felt rather natural, and not to discredit the effort put in by myself and my collaborators nor overtly flatter myself, but it also felt relatively easy. So what gives? Why do so many other adaptations feel so unsatisfying? What has pushed me away from seeing all these live action Disney movies, or a reboot of an old TV drama, or the umpteenth [blank]: The Musical? These adaptations falter from the very beginning with the failure to answer a few basic questions: Who is this being made for? What about this story is worth telling again right now? What are you going to do that makes this version of the story feel special and current? Why this adaptation now?

In this paper, I discuss the role of the adapturgist, and what their responsibility is during the adaptation process. These responsibilities relate to three key tenets: capitalization,

connection and critique. My studies are largely based in Jane Barnette's *Adapturgy*<sup>1</sup>, Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage*<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Michael Chemers's work in *Ghost Light*<sup>3</sup> and *Systemic Dramaturgy*<sup>4</sup> and Thomas Leitch's *Contemporary Adaptation Theory*<sup>5</sup>. Alongside discussions of these theoretical frameworks, I will be applying them to a number of practical examples of adaptation including, but not limited to: Mary Isabel Cruz's *The Adaptation Of The Western World*<sup>6</sup>; the 2019 revival of *Oklahoma!*<sup>7</sup> directed by Daniel Fish<sup>8</sup>; and *Heathers: The Musical*<sup>9</sup> by Laurence O'Keefe and Kevin Murphy. This discussion and analysis culminate into my own practice into this research with a description and adapturgical justification for my still work in progress jukebox musical *Black Heart: The Musical* based on the TTRPG<sup>10</sup> made by Colin Cummings and utilizing the discography of Carly Rae Jepsen.

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Barnette, *Adapturgy: the Dramaturg's Art and Theatrical Adaptation* (Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2017)

<sup>2</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The haunted stage: The theatre as memory machine* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003)

<sup>3</sup> Michael Chemers, *Ghost Light : An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy* (Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010)

<sup>4</sup> Michael Chemers and Mike Sell, *Systemic Dramaturgy : A Handbook for the Digital Age* (Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2022)

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Leitch, "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory" *Criticism* 45, no. 2 (Spring 2003)

<sup>6</sup> Mary Isabel Cruz, "*The Adaptation of the Western World: Taking Up (Liminal Space)*" (June 2019)

<sup>7</sup> *Oklahoma!*, music and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, dir. Daniel Fish, Square Theater, New York, NY, April 7, 2019

<sup>8</sup> Hammerstein II, Oscar and Richard Rodgers. "*Oklahoma!*" In *Roger's & Hammerstein's Oklahoma!*. Edited by The Theatre Guild, New York, NY: Williamson Music Inc., 1943

<sup>9</sup> O'Keefe, Laurence, and Kevin Murphy. "*Heathers: The Musical*" Produced by J. Todd Harris, Amy Powers, RJ Hendricks, and Andy Cohen. New York, NY: Samuel French. 2015

<sup>10</sup> Cummings, Colin. *Black Heart*. boyproblems.itch.io. Tabletop. 2019.

## Section 2: What is adapturgy?

Before we get too deep into the role of the adapturgist, it would behoove me to first state what in the world that is. To begin with this I would first cite the pioneer in the field, Jane Barnett, from her book on the subject *Adapturgy* where she states: “adaptation dramaturgy, or what I call adapturgy —the cultivation of a reflective, textured research milieu within which adapted works for the stage will thrive.”<sup>11</sup>

Adapturgy is adaptation dramaturgy, ergo, an adapturgist is one who partakes in adaptation dramaturgy. This is still a rather broad definition, one that someone could theoretically write an entire thesis paper about, so let us break it down further. What is an adaptation and in what context are we looking at it? To this I once more refer to Barnett, where she states: “The word adaptation can mean several different things, all related to some kind of alteration or change... At its core... to adapt is to alter or amend— to rework something (usually a text) from one medium to another.”<sup>12</sup> Adaptation is taking a story and putting it into a new context or medium and altering it to best suit the needs of that context and medium.

If you have not guessed by now, this does mean we will be looking at adaptation from a media perspective, not a biological one. As fun as it would be, we will not be discussing things like how certain species of fungi have changed their dietary habits to adapt to excess amounts of plastic found in shrinking wildlands. Barnett believes, in the context of media, and theater specifically, an adaptation is any amount of alteration or reworking of a story. For a disclaimer, for the purposes of this thesis, I will opt to use “story” rather than “text” like Barnett. In order to not confuse it with a text message and to be considerate of stories or histories that are not necessarily written down in a physical text. This mostly harkens to things like oral histories or some non-verbal performances such as dance or clowning.

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<sup>11</sup> Jane Barnette, *Adapturgy: the Dramaturg's Art and Theatrical Adaptation*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Jane Barnette, *Adapturgy: the Dramaturg's Art and Theatrical Adaptation*, 17

With all of this in mind, I would consider any of the following to be an adaptation: a story that began its life in one medium and was then adapted into another, a reboot or a revival, or a “based on [blank]” adaptation. One of the most straightforward examples of this would be something that changed mediums upon its adaptation. Contemporary examples of this would include *The Last of Us*<sup>13</sup>, which is a video game turned into a television show, or the upcoming movie of *Wicked*<sup>14</sup>, which will be a movie based on a musical based on a book based on a different book that also spurred a movie and a sequel.

Next would be the reboot or revival, a story that might exist in the same medium as it did in the past but has been brought back in some manner. William Proctor defines a reboot as something that “aims to purge the system and begin again with...a “blank slate.”<sup>15</sup> If you’re rebooting something, you are starting once again from the beginning with that new context mentioned earlier.

This contrasting with a revival, which is very much grounded in keeping its source material going as defined by a paper by Kathleen Lock on American TV revivals: “Such television shows (revivals), which are derived from other media texts or reactivate a series long after the end of its first run.”<sup>16</sup>A revival sticks to the same continuity as its original but is developed long after the story had been seemingly concluded or canceled.

I lump the two together in spite of their different perspective on what to do with the canon of their original story largely due to the fact that reboots and revivals generally stick to their original medium. The revival of the tv series *Gilmore Girls*<sup>17</sup> remained in an episodic near

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<sup>13</sup> *The Last of Us*, directed by Craig Mazin, Neil Druckmann, Peter Hoar, Jeremy Webb, et al., written by Craig Mazin and Neil Druckmann, featuring Pedro Pascal and Bella Ramsey, in broadcast syndication, HBO and Naughty Dog, aired January - March 2023,

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Schwartz. *Wicked: A New Musical: Original Broadway Cast Recording*. New York, NY :Decca Broadway, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> William Proctor, “Reboots and Retroactive Continuity” *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* (October 2018): 226

<sup>16</sup> Kathleen Lock, “American TV Series Revivals: Introduction.” *Television & New Media* 19, no. 4 (November 2017): 299

<sup>17</sup> *Gilmore Girls*, directed by Amy Sherman-Palladino and Daniel Palladino, written by Amy Sherman-Palladino, featuring Lauren Graham and Alexis Bledel, in broadcast syndication, Warner Bros. Television and Dorothy Parker Drank Here Productions, aired 2001-2007.

hour long format for the revival *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*<sup>18</sup>. The myriad of *Halloween*<sup>19</sup> reboots and timelines have consistently remained films even if Laurie Strode has inconsistently been alive and/or related to Michael Meyers in these different films. Additionally, even if the two go about bringing a story back from the past differently, they are both still caught up in the desire to continue telling a specific older story.

Last but not least would be the “based on [blank]” category of adaptations. These would be stories that follow similar plot structures and/or archetypes/characters to other stories but is largely its own universe with features such as a different social context, a different time period, and (if the adapturgist knows what they are doing) a message/justification grounded in the time in which it was told. An excellent example of this I would consider to be *The Half of It*<sup>20</sup>, which is a riff off of *Cyrano de Bergerac*<sup>21</sup>. *The Half of It* reimagines Cyrano as Ellie Chu, a closeted Chinese-American high schooler that writes other students’ essays for money in spite of her less than stellar social standing. Using the blueprint of *Cyrano*, *The Half of It* reframes Cyrano’s difficulties of expressing his feelings towards Roxanne as Ellie slowly realizing that she is queer and struggles to grapple with her feelings towards Aster, the film’s equivalent of Roxanne, given her small town’s religious nature and the friendship she has developed with the film’s version of Christian.

This contrasts with reboots and revivals in which the given circumstances and canon of this specific story is a re-imagining to such a degree separate from the original that it would not be right to consider it a restart or continuation. As a further example, even if the names of the characters in *She’s the Man*<sup>22</sup> remain the same, the re-imagining of Viola and Sebastian from Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*<sup>23</sup> as students in the early 2000s that know the status of whether or not the other is alive warrants a separate category.

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<sup>18</sup> *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*: directed by Amy Sherman-Palladino and Daniel Palladino, written by Amy Sherman-Palladino, featuring Lauren Graham and Alexis Bledel, in broadcast syndication, Netflix, Warner Bros. Television and Dorothy Parker Drank Here Productions, aired November 25, 2016

<sup>19</sup> John Carpenter and Debra Hill, *Halloween*, DVD (U.S.A.: Compass International Pictures, 1978).

<sup>20</sup> Alice Wu, *The Half of It*, Netflix Film (U.S.A.: Likely Story, 2020)

<sup>21</sup> Edmond Rostand, 1897. *Cyrano de Bergerac*

<sup>22</sup> Ewan Leslie and Andy Fickman, *She’s the Man*. DVD (U.S.A. DreamWorks Pictures, Lakeshore Entertainment, The Donners’ Company, 2006)

<sup>23</sup> William Shakespeare.1601-02. *Twelfth Night*

It would not be a difficult argument to make that just about every story has its inspirations from something else, even if unintentionally so. Marvin Carlson writes in his book *The Haunted Stage* that just about every expression of art has components of what has come before it, he states: "...on the most basic level all arts are built up of identical material used over and over again... these semiotic building blocks carry much of their reception burden in their combinations."<sup>24</sup> (Carlson P.7) It would be impossible to find a completely unique story with no set of tropes, archetypes, plot beats that are used anywhere else. A painter might choose colors they appreciated from another painting. A storyteller might want to hear more stories like the ones they heard when they were younger and strive to tell more like them. A songwriter might absolutely hate a certain album and do everything in their power to avoid making something like it. Inspiration, in all its forms, follows the artist and in that way all stories could be considered an adaptation.

With that, that is the first half of adapturgy defined; what about the other half? What is dramaturgy and what is a dramaturg? Most of my experience with dramaturgy is with theater, it is in the name itself: drama. While the examples mentioned prior go beyond simply theater, largely this paper will be engaged with adaptation in a theatrical context. Dr. Michael Chemers, an expert on this subject, argues in his book *Ghost Light*:

In practice, dramaturgy refers to the accumulated techniques that all theatrical artists employ to do three things:

1. Determine what the aesthetic architecture of a piece of dramatic literature actually is (analysis)
2. Discover everything needed to transform that inert script into a living piece of theater (research)
3. Apply that knowledge in a way that makes sense to a living audience at this time in this place (practical application)<sup>25</sup>

The role of the dramaturg is flexible because they "might be a historian, an aesthetic theorist, a critic, a useful gadfly, a practical problem solver, a teacher, a carnival barker, or

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<sup>24</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The haunted stage: The theatre as memory machine*, 7

<sup>25</sup> Michael Chemers, *Ghost Light : An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*, 3



even a visionary. Dramaturgs are, regardless of the situation, both thinkers and makers.”<sup>26</sup>

One day the dramaturg might be researching the social contexts in which a play was written, another day they are helping out a costume designer pick out the most historically accurate clothing, and another helping a prospective director justify to another why a certain play should be produced in this day and age. This final point thus hoping to answer the evergreen question of “why this play, now?”

Now that I have defined adaptation and dramaturgy. Let us put them together using Chemers’ accumulated techniques to define what adapturgy is.

We can think of the first step, analysis, as determining what made the original story work as well as it did. What resonated with audiences? What moments are key in telling this story again? What tropes and narrative structures were used and why did they work? If we are to put on another production of one of Dickens’ works but have to cut it down significantly in order to fit a certain runtime or appeal to a specific audience? What nuance and line changes must be done in order to address some aspects of *Great Expectations*<sup>27</sup> that have not aged all that well? Enter the adapturg! It is their purview to be asking and answering why this adaptation is important now. What connections can be made with the new version of this text?

Moving forward, we look at the research step. In order to adapt something into another medium or another social context, an amount of research and experimenting must be done in order. How would the montage of Elle Woods from *Legally Blonde*<sup>28</sup> studying for her LSATs be adapted from the screen to the stage? There are numerous time skips, outfit changes, and transitions that could be difficult to adapt to the stage, so what theatrical tools can we use to represent this important story best? How about a musical number where there might be a bit more suspension of disbelief in the audience as this jump in time, place, and

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Chemers and Mike Sell, *Systemic Dramaturgy : A Handbook for the Digital Age*, 4

<sup>27</sup> Charles Dickens, F. W. Pailthorpe, and Frederick Page, *Great Expectations* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Robert Luketic, Karen McCullah Lutz and Kirsten Smith. *Legally Blonde* DVD (U.S.A. Type A Films, Marc Platt Productions, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2001)

character development occurs? Once again, enter the adapturg! They should be considerate of how this adaptation will be told. What can we or can we not capitalize on from the original text to fit this new one? What can we utilize in this new medium or social context that would not have worked before?

Last but not least, the practical application. What are we trying to say with this adaptation? For a non-theatrical example the game *Elsinore*<sup>29</sup>, which puts Ophelia into a time loop and is largely about the effort Ophelia would have to take in order to gain more agency in *Hamlet* should she have been the protagonist instead of Hamlet. *Hamlet*<sup>30</sup> has been told hundreds upon thousands of times so beyond the novelty of adding a time loop to her story, what can be said about the treatment of women in Shakespeare's plays with this adaptation? Enter the adapturg once more. It should be their duty to make sure something new and relevant is being said with this adaptation in order to justify the space it takes up. What can we try to correct from the original text, or what can we critique about a social issue from either right now or from when the original was made now that we have the luxury of time in front of us?

Henceforth, we can now define the adapturg as one that partakes in and thinks deeply with regards to adaptation. This adapturg should partake in adaptation holding in mind what I call my three C's: capitalization, connection and critique. If the adapturg carries these C's in their work it can ideally create better adaptations.

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<sup>29</sup> Golden Glitch. *Elsinore*, Golden Glitch. Windows. 2019

<sup>30</sup> William Shakespeare. 1601. *Hamlet*

### Section 3: Why Theater?

A brief tangent and disclaimer before we get farther in, while we've discussed a few other non-theatrical examples prior to this I must say that most of this paper will engage with theater as a vessel for adaptation. Theater as a medium is simply what I've invested my time into with respect to adaptation. I do believe that what has been discussed and what will be discussed is still applicable to adaptations in other mediums, it will just be told through the lens of theater. My practice as research with adaptation to "prove" my claims takes the form of a musical after all, so scholarly research often led me towards further studies with theatrical adaptations.

From these studies, it became my firm belief that theater is one of the mediums best equipped to do this because adaptation and retelling has always been the name of the game with theater. There is almost an expectation of change when it comes to theater. Referring back to Carlson, he states:

Within the theatre... a related but somewhat different aspect of memory operates in a manner distinct from... the other arts, so much so that I would argue that it is one of the characteristic features of theatre. To this phenomenon I have given the name *ghosting*... ghosting presents the identical thing they have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context. Thus, a recognition not of similarity, as in genre, but of identity becomes a part of the reception process.<sup>31</sup>

Theater is exceptional at this phenomenon because reimagining and re-viewing theater is built into its ecosystem. When you're watching a performance of a theatrical adaptation, you're not just watching a staged version of it. You're watching it in comparison to your experience with the original story and how it has been changed.

For a burgeoning adapturgist that might be wondering where to take an idea of adaptation, theater should be a high consideration. Augusto Boal once said that theater is "the sum of all imaginable languages."<sup>32</sup> If one wanted to potentially merge two non-linear

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<sup>31</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The haunted stage: The theatre as memory machine*, 7

<sup>32</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, translated by Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theater Communications Group, Inc., 1985). 156

mediums into a linear one, then seeing what tools you can use in dramatic action to do so would be prudent. The following is how this should be done.

## Section 4: Capitalization

Initially I believed a larger aspect of adaptation was to follow the money, hence why capitalization is placed first in this list. It is not exactly a secret that money plays a heavy hand in getting an adaptation produced. Numerous studies like one performed by The Publishers' Association states that "movies based on books make more money at the box office... Book adaptations historically earn 44% more money in the UK (an extra £5.4m per film) and 53% more globally (an extra \$91m per film) than films based on original screenplays."<sup>33</sup>

There is money in adaptation. If you were a film studio, faced with spending ten million dollars on a new movie there would be less financial risk involved if you were to spend that money on something with a pre-existing audience than something brand new. The study goes on to say that "Films can leverage the popularity of bestselling or well-known books. If there is an existing audience for the book (those who have read it, or at least are aware of it) then it is then easier both to produce the film to begin with and then to market it afterwards."<sup>34</sup> This has the doubled effect of the book boosting movie sales, and the movie boosting book sales for those drawn in by the movie and are curious about what the original story has to say, or look forward to future installments if this is a planned series of books/movies.

This is all an inscrutable truth that would be foolhardy to dispute as hand in hand with utilizing this pre-existing audience is fully marketing and appealing to them and their sense of nostalgia. In an interview for NPR called "New TV Series Rely On Nostalgia To Hook Viewers"<sup>35</sup>, the interviewer Eric Deggans and Norman Lear, developer of the TV show *One Day at a Time (1975-1984)*<sup>36</sup> and then later executive producer for the reboot of the same name *One Day at a Time (2017-2020)*<sup>37</sup>, stated the following:

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<sup>33</sup> Publishers' Association, *Publishing's Contribution to the Wider Creative Industries* (London: Publishers' Association, 2018)

<sup>34</sup> Publishers' Association, *Publishing's Contribution to the Wider Creative Industries*

<sup>35</sup> Norman Lear. Interview "New TV Series Rely On Nostalgia To Hook Viewers" By Eric Deegans. up first, NPR, August 12, 2016

<sup>36</sup> *One Day at a Time*, directed by Norman Campbell, Herbert Kenwith, Sandy Kenyon, Howard Morris, et al., created by Whitney Blake and Allan Manings, featuring Bonnie Franklin, Mackenzie Phillips, Valerie Bertinelli, in broadcast syndication, CBS, aired 1975-1984.

<sup>37</sup> *One Day at a Time*, directed by Pamela Fryman, Phill Lewis, Victor Gonzalez, Jody Margolin Hahn, et al., created by Gloria Calderón Kellett and Mike Royce, featuring Justina Machado, Todd Grinnell, Isabella Gómez, streamed, Netflix and Pop TV, aired 2017 - 2020

“DEGGANS: Lear himself is tapping into the nostalgia trend. He's remaking his own show, "One Day At A Time," for Netflix. This time, it features a Latina family led by a military veteran. He says new shows that reference these old shows can remind viewers of happier times.

LEAR: Their memory of laughing with their parents when people - when families used to watch television together - is very alive and well in them.”

They then discuss other reboots/revivals of popular sitcoms like *Full House*<sup>38</sup> into *Fuller House*<sup>39</sup>, or reference how media like *The Get Down*<sup>40</sup> or *Stranger Things*<sup>41</sup>, while not reboots, still largely utilize nostalgia in order to gather and retain their audience. The familiarity is what draws you in. To that end, I believed that the adapturgist things like: who was the original story made for? What do you owe the original fans? Where is the line with fanservice? All of which are ultimately still good things to consider. It would not do you any good to just outright ignore the original audience. That would not be doing your adapturgical due diligence, as that would mean you were not considering what made the original story work in the way it did. Where the problem lies is to weigh this heavily nostalgia, money-minded adapturgy as much as the adapturgy of connection and critique.

It does a disservice to someone making a new adaptational work to wrap themselves up thinking of ways to appeal to the original audience solely for the sake of money, fan reception, or nostalgia. Additionally, when a lot of these questions are just harken back to our definition of dramaturgy in the first place. There is not much need to apply a fancy word to these as they are just aspects of analysis and research into the source material and its audience that you should be doing anyway, not specifically with money or capitalizing on

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<sup>38</sup> *Full House*, directed by Joel Zwick, Bill Foster, John Tracy, Jeff Franklin, et al., created by Jeff Franklin, featuring John Stamos, Bob Saget, Dave Coulier, Candace Cameron, in broadcast syndication, ABC and Jeff Franklin Productions, aired 1987 - 1995

<sup>39</sup> *Fuller House*, directed by Mark Cendrowski, Katy Garretson, Rich Correll, Joel Zwick, et al., created by Jeff Franklin, featuring Candace Cameron Bure, Jodie Sweetin, Andrea Barber, Michael Campion, streamed, Netflix and Jeff Franklin Productions, aired 2016-2020

<sup>40</sup> *The Get Down*, directed by Baz Luhrmann, Ed Bianchi, Andrew Bernstein, Michael Dinner, et al., created by Baz Luhrmann and Stephen Adly Guirgis, featuring Justice Smith, Shameik Moore, Herizen F. Guardiola, streamed, Netflix and Bazmark Films, aired 2016-2017

<sup>41</sup> *Stranger Things*, directed by Matt Duffer and Ross Duffer, created by Matt Duffer and Ross Duffer, featuring, Winona Ryder, David Harbour, Finn Wolfhard, Millie Bobby Brown, streamed, Netflix and 21 Laps Entertainment, aired 2016-present

nostalgia. Especially because going too deep in nostalgia is a frankly dangerous practice, and can hinder our other two aspects of adapturgy.

Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe states something to the same effect in his book *Observing Theatre: Spirituality and Subjectivity in the Performing Arts*: “However, nostalgia may also turn out to have a considerable detrimental effect on humans, that of supporting escapism, and in the process wasting a huge amount of energy on futile delving into the past without much impact on the present and the future.”<sup>42</sup> If one is caught up reminiscing in the past, trying to harken back to “the good old days” then one would not be placing themselves in a position where they can connect new ideas to an older story or critique something that was wrong with it in the first place. If your staged adaptation of *Mean Girls*<sup>43</sup> only serves to allow actors and audiences to hear the same quotes from the movie, why bother seeing this adaptation at all when you could just watch the movie at home?

A better use of thinking of capitalization in this way is more of a recognition of some problems with modern adaptation. An article in the *Washington Post* by Steven Zeitchik discussing this issue states “[A] study quantifies an aspect of Hollywood — remake sentiment — [and that] the studios might be setting themselves up for fatigue and a box-office backlash.”<sup>44</sup> If an audience member realizes that an adaptation is merely cash grab banking on the nostalgia of the original without improving, changing, justifying itself then the audience can limit their engagement with it, demand better out of these adaptations, and then more effectively spend their time with adaptations that critically engage them.

Before going much further, it would suit to explain my definition of what is and what is not critically engaging to avoid creating a false dichotomy of “if commercially successful, then bad” because that isn’t the case. Some things that are critically engaging can make a lot of money and have a wide appeal, often due to the fact that they are so critically engaging.

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<sup>42</sup> Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe, *Observing Theatre: Spirituality and Subjectivity in the Performing Arts*. Vol. 36 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 20.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Waters and Tina Fey, *Mean Girls*. DVD (U.S.A. Broadway Video, Paramount Pictures, 2004)

<sup>44</sup> Steven Zeitchik, “Hollywood Executives Serve up Remakes Because Consumers like Them. A New Survey Suggests Otherwise.,” *The Washington Post*, July 9, 2019

While the criteria is subjective and will differ from person to person, what I am looking for when looking at a story is how effectively that story goes into its given subject/theme/message/etc. and how many different perspectives one might be able to look at it from to respond to that story. For example, I would say the show *Arcane*<sup>45</sup>, adapted from the game *League of Legends*<sup>46</sup>, to be a critically engaging and commercially successful adaptation because of the nuance it approaches things like psychosis and family and how we can analyze it from perspectives of class and gender.

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<sup>45</sup> *Arcane*, directed by Pascal Charrue and Arnaud Delord, created by Christian Linke and Alex Yee, featuring Hailee Steinfeld, Ella Purnell, Kevin Alejandro, Katie Leung, streamed, Netflix, Riot Games and Fortiche, aired 2021-present

<sup>46</sup> Riot Games. *League of Legends*. Riot Games. PC. 2009.



## Section 5: Connection

This leads us into our second C, connection. Who is this adaptation for? Why is it being done again? As posited earlier, many an adapturg/production company create/fund an adaptation believing that the adaptation is to be done for the original audience. Obviously this is misguided, because things can reach a point where this audience would just rather engage with the original story than this new version. I do not think it is an unfamiliar experience for one to have been walking out of a movie theater having finished watching a book to film adaptation and thinking: “eh, the book was better,” and then walking out of the theater without a second opinion. Unless you are the world’s greatest speedreader or a graduate student on a time budget, broadly speaking theater and films do not take as long to engage with as a book does. Thomas Leitch writes on the very phenomenon in an article labeled *Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory* stating:

The tenacity of the prejudice in favor of novels and against films is due no doubt in part to the impossibility of refuting it. Though it takes less time for most audiences to sit through most feature films than it does for them to read most novels, films, as many commentators realized long ago, can contain quite as many telling details as novels.<sup>47</sup>

If you are merely attempting to appeal to the original audience like this, they will inevitably be disappointed as details have to be taken out to fit the new medium that simply does not have the time to include the nuances and quirks of the old medium. To this, I propose that appealing to a different group beyond the original fans of a story or adapting the story to age alongside the original fans is almost a necessity for an effective adaptation.

The director of the *Trigun Stampede*<sup>48</sup> reboot, Kenji Muto, stated in a press release that his team approached this new series with the intent of "defin[ing] the meaning of creating this work as an entertainment piece in this day and age" (Muto)<sup>49</sup>. Times have changed, and if

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas Leitch, "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory" *Criticism* 45, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 155.

<sup>48</sup> *Trigun Stampede*, directed by Kenji Mutō, created by Yasuhiro Nightow, featuring Yoshitsugu Matsuoka, Junya Ikeda, Sakura Ando, Yoshimasa Hosoya, in broadcast syndication, Orange and TXN, aired 2023-present

<sup>49</sup> Kenji Mutō and Nick Valdez "Trigun Stampede Director Teases Changes to Classic Series for Modern Era." *Comic Book : Anime*, 2022.

there is not something new said with your adaptation (apart from making money or updating copyright) then what is the point? *Trigun Stampede* is an excellent example of this as they were willing to: drastically change the pacing (the first episode of the reboot is equivalent to about the first four of the original,) outright replace a leading character with another to fit a different tone, and immediately introduce the conflict between the lead and his twin to instead make the story more about their differences and strained relationship rather than simply the reputation of the lead. This all done to try to appeal to an audience more accustomed to faster paced episodic narratives or pre-existing fans that might have wanted to explore more of the villain's character.

This is not to say that you should not regard the original audience when creating an adaptation at all, as said earlier there still is merit in acknowledging what made the original story exciting to that audience, but if you have the opportunity to do something new with an older story, why not take the chance (apart from jeopardizing the adaptation's ability to make money)? That could also serve as a way to make up for the details that you might have to shave away to fit the runtime of your new medium. For example, say the year is 2017 and you are trying to adapt the movie *Mean Girls* to the stage. There is some merit in terms of connection by shifting mediums here, as this could potentially get those that appreciated the film more invested in theater by bridging this gap between fans of the movie and theater, and vice versa for fans of theater getting more invested in films.

However, if the only action is changing the medium, is this sufficient enough work to bridge the gap? The original audience for *Mean Girls* has grown up, has a completely different perspective on the movie given how much time has passed and may have different tastes than they did when it first came out. The demographic that this audience used to be has now been replaced with a new generation, with different values, different opinions, and having been raised very differently. Here you are faced with four options: adapt *Mean Girls* wholesale as though no time has passed and let your adaptation fall into the nostalgia trap; reboot bargain bin with the rest that did not take any risks; acknowledge the time that has

passed since *Mean Girls* has released and utilize that distance from the initial creation to say something new; or pivot and appeal to a different audience that you think would appreciate a new spin.

This harkens to something Barnett stated in *Adapturgy* when discussing adaptations with her own work adapting *Red Badge of Courage*<sup>50</sup>:

This approach to knowledge— finding analogies between and making connections across disciplines— is both deeply dramaturgical and ultimately reliant on speculation. Arguing for interconnectedness is not the same as suggesting universality... because... every user will have a different point of view.<sup>51</sup>

When adapting a story, you are not just adapting the story to a new medium, you are adapting it to a new audience. Even if your goal is to appeal to that original audience, they are inevitably going to have a different perspective now than they used to have when engaging with that original story. An adapturg must be considerate of that.

I can think of no better practical example to analyze than that of someone I consider to be one of my adaptation mentors, Isabel Cruz and her work *The Adaptation of the Western World: Taking Up (Liminal) Space*. Cruz's work was creating an adaptation of the Irish play *The Playboy of the Western World*<sup>52</sup> instead adapted as *The Playboy of the Golden West*. The original story follows that of an Irishman, Christy Mahon, entering a town on the Irish coastline, having been on the run under the assumption he killed his father using a loy from their family potato garden. He quickly becomes the talk of the town for his charm and garners the attention of many of the town's women, including an engaged barmaid named Pegeen. His notoriety lasts until it is revealed his father survived the attack and Christy is ousted as a liar.

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<sup>50</sup> Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2008).

<sup>51</sup> Jane Barnette, *Adapturgy: the Dramaturg's Art and Theatrical Adaptation*, 45.

<sup>52</sup> J. M. Synge, and Christopher Collins. *The Playboy of the western world*. London, UK: Methuen Drama, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.

In Cruz's adaptation, Christy retains his name and Irish heritage but instead happens upon a mission village in the Spanish speaking part of 1870s California fleeing from having recently attacked and "killed" the foreman of his railroad crew. The rest of the cast is instead "Hispanic/Californio/Mexican"<sup>53</sup> with names changed to match and certain parts of their dialogue translated into Spanish to mirror the original's use of Hiberno-English<sup>54</sup>.

Cruz is not the first to approach *The Playboy of the Golden West* in this way, having cited productions where Christy is instead from Trinidad and it "customized the language and comedy to the island (ibid), and transplanted the story and cast of characters into another part of the world,"<sup>55</sup> and a production where Christy is still from Ireland but is instead a Nigerian immigrant that spoke "to the current immigration situation in Ireland, the stranger to the village in the original becomes a stranger to the island." (Cruz)<sup>56</sup> To this effect, Cruz quotes an Irish poet, writer, and politician, W.B. Yeats who stated: "All literature in every country is derived from models, and as often as not, these are foreign models. It is the presence of a personal element alone that can give it nationality in a fine sense, the nationality of its maker."<sup>57</sup> This aligns with what we've analyzed from Carlson and the semiotic building blocks he mentions that all art is composed of. In this situation, the building blocks are pieces of culture and oral history that come from the maker of the story and all those that have influenced this maker in their life.

All three of these separate adaptations and productions take this story and tweak it slightly to appeal to a different audience and to fulfill a different, and in this case expanded, obligation to pursue discourses of social justice. In this case, separate ethnic groups who all shared similar experiences with the specificity of the original text. The main character is an outsider, having traveled to the town in which the version takes place to escape persecution, he has a hard labor job (usually farming), and the script is largely bilingual, either in language

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<sup>53</sup> Mary Isabel Cruz, "The Adaptation of the Western World: Taking Up Liminal Space," 18.

<sup>54</sup> the English language as spoken and written in Ireland

<sup>55</sup> Mary Isabel Cruz, "The Adaptation of the Western World: Taking Up Liminal Space," 17.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Isabel Cruz, "The Adaptation of the Western World: Taking Up Liminal Space," 17.

<sup>57</sup> Mary Isabel Cruz, "The Adaptation of the Western World: Taking Up Liminal Space," 17.

or vernacular. Cruz speaks very heavily about the benefit of the specificity permissible in this script, stating: “[t]he specificity of the original work creates identifiable cultural parallels that make the play fecund ground for adaptation.”<sup>58</sup>

These important details give the story an archetypal quality, and when these qualities are given different context new meaning is derived for those who relate to that context. If someone who resonated with the Trinidad adaptation of *Playboy of the Western World* happened to see Cruz’s *Playboy of the Golden West*, suddenly they might realize their experiences as an immigrant to Ireland might not be all that different from someone who is an immigrant to California. By changing these details, Cruz has justified her adaptation by connecting this story to a new audience and contributed to the accessibility that this story has with those that feel like outsiders, connecting those groups as well.

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<sup>58</sup> Mary Isabel Cruz, “*The Adaptation of the Western World: Taking Up Liminal Space*,” 17.

## Section 6: Critique

Moving forward, our third and final C, Critique. How can we use this adaptation to analyze either the source material or use an older story to look at a more modern issue? The adapturgist should always be looking at their source material with a critical lens. If there is an aspect of the original story that maybe has not aged well, the adapturgist should be asking themselves if it is worth it to keep in the adaptation or change it. If they are keeping things, what points can be made with its return or what perspective can we look at this same event to gain new meaning from it? If they are changing things, how do you do so with more nuance? What do you replace it with to still stay authentic to the source material without running into an issue of “Why adapt it at all? Why not make a new story?”

This section will largely be in conversation with “The Task of the Adaptation Critic” by Glenn Jellenik and other similar works regarding adaptation as a space for critique. In a section of Jellenik’s paper labeled The Adaptation Critic Unbound, Jellenik states:

The task of the adaptation critic is to trace, flesh out, and process the ways that adaptation functions as that cultural act. In order to accomplish this shift, the field must move away from the one-to-one case study and toward approaches that center intertextuality and explore the dynamics and products of adaptive cycles as they spring from and feed back into the culture.<sup>59</sup>

In layperson’s terms, Jellenik believes someone engaging in critique, either of adaptation or through adaptation, should be keeping the modern culture in mind when looking at an adaptation. While we might be looking at older stories, “our task is to process adaptations forward.”<sup>60</sup> Adaptation is an opportunity to try and make an older story worth telling again by telling it from a modern perspective and saying something socially or culturally relevant to the modern age.

I could, hypothetically, speak of adaptations that succeed and fail at this aspect of adaptation probably until I die of old age. Most of that time would, unfortunately, be spent

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<sup>59</sup> Glenn Jellenik. “The Task of the Adaptation Critic.” *South Atlantic Review* 80, no. 3-4 (2015): 256

<sup>60</sup> Glenn Jellenik “The Task of the Adaptation Critic.” 256

speaking of the adaptations that I do not find critically engaging or have managed to take out what was critically engaging in the original story. The first example that comes to mind is the musical *Hairspray* (2002)<sup>61</sup>, based on John Waters' film of the same name<sup>62</sup>. While the musical has some of the critiques of the original like calling out the racial segregation of the 1960s and fatphobia in mainstream television, it does not go into quite as much depth as the original film. It does have some of the film's critiques in addition to having a role specifically for a male actor in full drag on stage, something that unfortunately is still controversial to this day, but many other aspects have been taken away.

A review from *The New York Times* for the debut production titled "Through Hot Pink Glasses, a World That's Nice" speaks to my issues with the musical adaptation by stating the following: "For "*Hairspray*" is, above all, Nice... And it feels awfully good to pretend, for as long as the cast keeps singing, that the world really is that way." (Brantley)<sup>63</sup>

Now, I will not say that things are not allowed to be "Nice" like Brantley describes here, I am not the fun police. Though if the biggest takeaway this reviewer has from watching this musical adaptation is solely that it is "Nice" then I can only imagine this to be a small failure on behalf of those in charge of this adaptation. Waters' *Hairspray* spoke of education discrimination, housing discrimination, and at one point displays a race riot that results in the antagonists of the film being arrested for hate crimes. This all coming from a film rated PG by the MPAA when Waters was far more used to his films being rated X for their subject material. If that much has been taken out of the story that a review of the production only has that much to say on the critical aspects of your adaptation, then something is lacking. Anything critical that could have been said with *Hairspray!* has since been removed or mentioned briefly in favor of appealing to a mass audience.

I contrast this with two relatively more modern adaptations that speak to what Jellenik states far more. The first being the 2022 Broadway revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's

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<sup>61</sup>Marc Shaiman, Scott Wittman, Mark O'Donnell and Thomas Meehan. "Hairspray" Produced by Margo Lion. New York, NY: Applause. 2003

<sup>62</sup> John Waters, *Hairspray*. DVD (U.S.A. Stanley F. Buchthal, Robert Shaye Production, New Line Cinema, 1988)

<sup>63</sup> Ben Brantley, "Through Hot Pink Glasses, a World That's Nice," *The New York Times*, August 16, 2002

*Oklahoma!* and the second being Laurence O'Keefe and Kevin Murphy's adaptation *Heathers: The Musical*.

This production of *Oklahoma!*, directed by Daniel Fish, often touted as "Sexy Oklahoma!"<sup>64</sup> is an interesting case of adaptation as strictly speaking they have not changed a single thing. I base a large amount of my opinions here on a review written by Soraya Nadia McDonald, who wrote a review of the revival titled: "*The unbearable whiteness of 'Oklahoma!'*" *Oklahoma!* is not yet a part of the public domain and thus rights to produce the show must be paid and the script must be adhered to, so why do I mention it? While it does not change the script and story of *Oklahoma!*, it changes just about everything else that it can. While the lyrics of the songs remain the same so as to adhere to the original, the score is redone just about entirely to emphasize the aspects of toxic whiteness/masculinity present in the original. Where there was once a wishful, graceful score expressing how the heroine is deciding how to go about her romantic endeavors, there is now a far more harrowing and dark score that reframes the lyrics instead as societal pressure for the heroine to marry this man.

Casting is substantially more diverse to call attention to that "unbearable whiteness"<sup>65</sup> of the original as the leading lady, Laurey, is played by black actress Rebecca Naomi Jones. Line readings are given substantially new intention and meaning to match the "shamelessly libidinous"<sup>66</sup> intentions of the white male lead, Curly, to emphasize this characters' prioritization of his own needs and wants over that of their black female love interest. Jud, one of the other characters romantically interested in Laurey who is "characterized not just as a shifty, isolated drifter but as a cultural outsider... played with great sensitivity and quaking instability."<sup>67</sup> This being done to eventually question, and damn at times, Curly's actions as an entitled white man and emphasize how societies and communities like this treat outsiders.

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<sup>64</sup> Soraya McDonald, "The Unbearable Whiteness of 'Oklahoma!,'" *Andscape*, September 26, 2022

<sup>65</sup> Soraya McDonald, "The Unbearable Whiteness of 'Oklahoma!'"

<sup>66</sup> Soraya McDonald, "The Unbearable Whiteness of 'Oklahoma!'"

<sup>67</sup> Sarah Larson, "Daniel Fish's Dark Take on 'Oklahoma!,'" *The New Yorker*, October 15, 2018



The final number in particular reimagines itself as a horror musical scene rather than a comedic one when resolving the love conflict between the aforementioned Laurey, Jud, and Curly, the latter both played by white men. McDonald rounds out her review describing the final scene:

“*Oklahoma!* becomes a jaunty horror show when Laurey is splattered with Jud’s blood on her wedding day after Curly guns him down (this being in contrast to Jud being killed by accident) and the entire company belts out a lively rendition of “*Oklahoma!*.” The residents of the territory ignore the cancer infecting their community in favor of singing, dancing, and the avoidance of discomfort, in much the same way that no amount of tragic deaths seems to spur meaningful action on gun control.”<sup>68</sup>

I choose this particular production as an example of adaptation as critique largely because it speaks to what still can be done with using older media within the constraints of rights for a play. Without changing the dialogue of the play, the revival of *Oklahoma!* uses its runtime to contrast the original’s idealism and really challenge audiences to question what “normal” is in a context like this. In an interview done for the New York Times, director Fish stated that “(t)his production—which, in everything from its staging to its casting to its musical arrangements, emphasizes realism—(and) wasn’t “about trying to push the show” but “about trying to really hear it.” (Fish, Larson<sup>69</sup>) The sunny disposition of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s work is played completely straight here, and with that emphasizes what harm perpetuating this idyllic, entitled, white society has to those that do not fit into that mold.

On the other hand, *Heathers: The Musical* (2010) is a prime example of what can be done from a critique perspective when given a bit more liberty to work with the source

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<sup>68</sup> Soraya McDonald, “The Unbearable Whiteness of ‘Oklahoma!’

<sup>69</sup> Sarah Larson, “Daniel Fish’s Dark Take on ‘Oklahoma!’”

material. When reapproaching an older story, in this case 21 years between the film (1988) and the musical, you have the benefit of a bit of retrospect as to what worked and what did not. If something has not aged well, this is your opportunity to correct that and replace it with something else or leave it in but make more of an effort to discuss and critique why it does not work with this second look at it.

The biggest exemplification of this in *Heathers: The Musical* (2010) is in the song, “I Love My Dead Gay Son.”<sup>70</sup> In both the film and the musical, the main conceit of the story is that the main love interest, J.D., attempts to convince the lead, Veronica, that the only way to shake up the status quo and make a better high school social sphere is by murdering the popular bullies, such as one of the titular Heathers, and staging their deaths as suicides. The second and third murder of the story is against a pair of jocks, whom J.D. frames their death as a “repressed homosexual suicide pact”<sup>71</sup> (Waters) with a shared suicide note and bag of “homosexual artifacts”<sup>72</sup> which includes: a candy dish, a Joan Crawford postcard, lipstick, and Perrier water. The only conceivable black comedy punchline to this really being: “haha that’s gay,” which I take issue with given the AIDS crisis had barely started around 7 years prior. The musical’s song serves almost as a sort of apology for how that aspect of the original screenplay handled it.

The song, based on a joke line of one of the fathers, acknowledges the cheapness of the original’s joke and aims to offer something better in the adaptation. The writers stated that: “[They] needed more surprise, more plot and more heart. Ram’s dad sings not just to declare his change of heart, but to chastise and educate Kurt’s dad, who cannot let go of his own homophobia and shame.” (Murphy, O’Keefe)<sup>73</sup> The song is then turned into a sweet coming out song for the two dads who kiss and openly express affection for one another. All

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<sup>70</sup> O’Keefe, Laurence, and Kevin Murphy, “*Heathers: The Musical*”

<sup>71</sup> Daniel Waters and Michael Lehmann. *Heathers* DVD (U.S.A. Cinemarque Entertainment, 1989)

<sup>72</sup> Daniel Waters and Michael Lehmann. *Heathers*

<sup>73</sup> Laurence O’Keefe and Kevin Murphy, “Heathers Writers Laurence O’Keefe and Kevin Murphy Break down the Musical’s Full Album,” Playbill, September 17, 2022.

while the play is set, at risk of repeating myself, in a time period where the AIDS crisis is still ongoing.

Other aspects of the adaptation speak to other issues with the original screenplay both in pacing and agency for Veronica. The writers stated they had a desire to have Veronica “drive(s) the plot forward more consistently than in the movie, and we didn’t want to take our foot off the accelerator, so we realized it was stronger to have Veronica be the one initiating things.”<sup>74</sup> In the film, J.D. is the one to initiate the sexual side of their romance, whereas Veronica is the one to start things in the musical. Their commitment to Veronica’s agency manifests further in the number *You’re Welcome*. Originally imagined as a number called *Blue*, the song details a plan by Heather Duke and Heather McNamara to effectively pawn off Veronica onto those aforementioned pair of jocks in a scene extremely reminiscent to date rape. The song initially was the jocks attempting to guilt Veronica into having sex with them. After the first run of the show, Murphy and O’Keefe rewrote that section of the musical, stating it was something “we knew we needed to alter or replace... (and that) it lacked any real or human insight into the idea of date rape and the culture of teenage male entitlement that allows it to exist.”<sup>75</sup> Instead they thought to replace the song with one they had conceived for the high school edition of the musical where, instead, Veronica “gets to articulate her fear and her dilemma, and then she gets to solve her problem and score a victory over her tormentors.” (Murphy, O’Keefe) which better suited their intended goal with re-writing Veronica.

The *Oklahoma!* revival and *Heathers: The Musical* speak to what Jellenik stated that adaptations should be propelling these stories forward into modern contexts. If your adaptation does not have something to say, to relate, to critically engage a contemporary audience then you risk pushing away new audience members that do not want to partake in your adaptation. That said there is a fine line with changing too much that you alienate the

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<sup>74</sup> Laurence O’Keefe and Kevin Murphy, “Heathers Writers..”

<sup>75</sup> Laurence O’Keefe and Kevin Murphy, “Heathers Writers...”

original audience who does not appreciate what you have done. Which might result in adaptations of these same stories that will engage with how they were presented right now and put them in a completely new critical light relevant to that time in specific. Thus continuing the cycle of adaptation.

## Section 7: Creation of *Black Heart: The Musical*

Two years ago, when I was pondering what graduate programs, if any, to apply to, I wondered what sort of project I would consider working through this theoretical program. As a theatermaker, the act of doing is one of the most important aspects of theater to me. I knew I wanted to pursue adaptation studies, but what exactly I wished to practically study was not fully clear to me. It was not until one day, whilst scrolling through my social media app of choice, Tumblr, that I came across this interaction by Tumblr user HoennGarbage you see in Figure 2. “They should make a Mamma Mia<sup>76</sup> but for CRJ (Carly Rae Jepsen)!... “She’s ten times better than ABBA!”<sup>77</sup>

At first I laughed it off, a silly little post on my silly little content aggregator website. “Yeah, someone should do that. Part of me is pretty surprised no one has done that.... Wait. I could do that.”

Alright, well if there is going to be a Carly Rae Jepsen musical, what would it be about? I consider myself lucky that Jepsen’s discography has a solid narrative quality to it and is largely centered on love: who you are in love, who you are out of love, loving yourself, loving your friends, what being in love does to your friendships. That sort of thing. However, a lot of pop artists do this and this is not something exclusive to her. To add to matters, musicals about love and romance are a dime a dozen and I would personally want to do something a bit more unique than that if I am going to work on this project long term and as a potential thesis project. Jukebox musicals are not necessarily known for having the most gripping of plot lines. *Mamma Mia!* is a good time, but it and many others like it are often thought of really as another vessel to be able to hear popular music. There is nothing wrong with that, but certainly there must be something this musical could be about that might be a bit more critically engaging. Then I remembered the existence of a TTRPG called *Black Heart*

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<sup>76</sup> Catherine Johnson, Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus. “*Mamma Mia!*” Produced by Judy Cramer. New York, NY: MTI. 1999

<sup>77</sup> hoenngarbage, anonymous”. “THEY SHOULD MAKE A MAMMA MIA BUT FOR CRJ” Tumblr, Sep 23, 2021, <https://www.tumblr.com/hoenngarbage/663160683040522240/they-should-make-a-mamma-mia-but-for-crj?source=s> here.

by Collin Cummings which he describes is:

...the second release in the Carly Rae Jepsen TTRPG trilogy following the successful *Boy Problems*. Work with your fellow cultists, investigate a village and the dark secrets it hides, gain power as the veil between worlds weakens, and finally: summon an ancient god (Carly Rae Jepsen).<sup>78</sup>

For added context, *Black Heart* takes place in a post-post apocalyptic world following the first game in the trilogy, *Boy Problems*<sup>79</sup>, which states that the world may end following a successful heist of Carly Rae Jepsen's secret vault of songs. The world could not handle that much Carly Rae Jepsen masterwork at once, so the apocalypse began. The veil between the mortal plane and the spirit realm weakens, unleashing monsters onto the world and mutating people into horrific versions of themselves. A cult springs up surrounding reviving Carly Rae Jepsen via ritual sacrifice so she might restore the world.

*Black Heart* by all means is an adaptation of its own merit, as the mechanics of the game utilize Jepsen's lyrics as basis for what the players have in their toolset. As that aforementioned veil weakens, characters mutate in ways related to her songs. For example a lyric from Jepsen's song *Boy Problems* goes: "Boy trouble, we've got double."<sup>80</sup> This is interpreted in game as that your character now has a doppelganger that can perform simple tasks for you.

With *Black Heart* now stuck in my mind, I began to think: how might I adapt both of these things into a musical? What can I do and say with a setting like this? What songs do I include?

*Black Heart: The Musical* would follow the love-lorn and subtly named Charlotte Ramona Jasper and the cult attempting to court her as a sacrifice and the second act would be the dramatized plot of the game leading up to the sacrifice itself and a version of the fallout where Carly Rae Jepsen is successfully summoned. The idea is essentially to create two

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<sup>78</sup>Colin Cummings. *Black Heart*.

<sup>79</sup>Colin Cummings. *Boy Problems*. itch.io. TTRPG. 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Carly Rae Jepsen, *E•MO•TION*, with Sia, Mattman & Robin, Dev Hynes, Ariel Rechtshaid, Rostam Batmanglij, Greg Kurstin, and Peter Svensson. Produced by Ariel Rechtshaid, 604 (label), School Boy, Interscope. 2015, compact disk

adaptations at once by adapting Jepsen's music and the game *Black Heart* into a single work. I mostly, nearly exclusively write plays, but it is still worth asking what qualities of dramatic text make theater the best medium for me to do this?

Well for starters, let us just discuss Jepsen's music. The idea of staging a musician's work is not an unheard of concept. The aforementioned jukebox musical, has been thought to exist since the 18th century with *The Beggar's Opera*<sup>81</sup> which, as stated in a The Guardian article for its 2018 revival, is "the original jukebox musical"<sup>82</sup>. While other mediums that could conceivably have showcased a musician's work like film and television did not exist back then, they do now. The aforementioned *Mamma Mia!* that showcases the work of the band ABBA has been put on the silver screen and there is a very easy argument that the show *Glee*<sup>83</sup> was a televised jukebox musical while it remained on the air. Why have my particular jukebox musical remain in the realm of live performance?

My best justification for this was that, if I am going to be doing something with the work of Jepsen, a concert performing pop diva, that it would be more authentic to her if the jukebox musical was live to emulate her concerts. Phillip Auslander writes in his most recent edition of his book *Liveness*: "The visual information provided by musicians in performance shapes the listener's perception and experience of the music... indicating emphasis and expressing emotion."<sup>84</sup> If I want to express a stronger narrative with this jukebox musical, then having it be live and having that affordance of liveness might open audience members to try and pick up on some of the nuances of live performance.

Such nuances include: how lyrics are divided between the characters, how the sound is performed by the musicians, and the work of the actors/director as they inflect intention upon her lyrics. While it is not impossible for a recorded, televised/filmed version of this to

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<sup>81</sup> John Gay. "The Beggar's Opera" Produced by William Davenant. Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, London: 1728

<sup>82</sup> Rowena Smith, "The Beggar's Opera Review – the Original Jukebox Musical Reimagined." The Guardian, August 17, 2018.

<sup>83</sup> *Glee*, directed by Brad Falchuk and Ryan Murphy, created by Ian Brennan, Brad Falchuk and Ryan Murphy, featuring Lea Michele, Cory Monteith, Matthew Morrison, Amber Riley, in broadcast syndication, 20th Century Fox, aired 2009-2015

<sup>84</sup> Philip Auslander. (*Liveness: Performance in a mediatized culture*. 3rd ed.) Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2023. 97

portray this as well, with a pre-recorded, seemingly perfect, version of her song I felt it would more easily be comparable to the pre-recorded, perfect takes that appear on Jepsen's albums and any effort engaging with it would just be spent thinking something like "dang, Carly did it better though" and nothing more. I want to believe that one of the reasons someone would attend a concert where Jepsen is performing would be there because they want to hear her perform it differently than the version they would hear listening to her on a CD or on Spotify, so this should be no different.

As to adapting a TTRPG to the stage, things are a little trickier. Admittedly, the first intention behind adapting *Black Heart* to the stage was because the setting and given circumstances of the game would be extremely fascinating to use for staging Jepsen's music. However, this thinking was perhaps a bit dangerous as I do not believe I answered a few key questions that I had at the start of writing. Going in, I hoped to detail things like: did I seek to canonize a narrative for *Black Heart*, even though the cooperative storytelling nature of tabletop roleplaying games leads to a unique and collaborative experience for each group of players? Will I merely document and elevate my own personal experience with the game? Will I try to make room for other experiences and interpretations of the game? In order to remain authentic to the source material, should this become a Choose Your Own Carly Rae Jepsen? Would that take away from the dramaturgical intrigue that this musical could have due to this potential gimmick?

As my initial outline of the script would set the action of the game in the second act of the musical and the fact that the second act of the musical is still largely incomplete at the time of writing this presents a bit of a problem. When trying to adapt a game to the stage, the first thing I would want to have thought of would be "what aspects of games are the most fundamental to that medium?" To which my answer would be "interactivity and player agency." One of the most important things about a game in comparison to other narrative mediums is, at least in theory, the impact the player might have on their own experience with the game. Chris Crawford describes this phenomenon of agency and interactivity in his book



*On Interactive Storytelling*: “Interactivity: A cyclic process between two or more active agents in which each agent alternately listens, thinks, and speaks—a conversation of sorts”<sup>85</sup>  
(Crawford) If you were hypothetically playing *Black Heart*, then you, a player, would be able to make choices within the constraints of the game and your game master would respond in tow. This back and forth of player input and game response is, in so many words, at the core of games as a medium.

Plays and musicals with a degree of interactivity do exist. The play *Every Brilliant Thing*<sup>86</sup> by Duncan Macmillan and Jonny Donahoe prompts members of the audience to act out memories of the Narrator’s life with them based on a strip of paper with one of the titular brilliant things on it. The musical adaptation of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*<sup>87</sup>, a murder mystery based on an unfinished Dickens novel adapted by Rupert Holmes. Midway through the performance when they get to the point where Dickens was unable to finish the story they have audience members vote on who should be the killer, who should be romantically involved, and who has a secret identity. This gives the audience a feeling that they had a direct hand in how the show’s events played out, and knowing exactly why it did.

However, I opted to go in a different direction. There are certainly cues of interactivity from *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* or *Every Brilliant Thing* that I could have hypothetically tried to include, and one could certainly consider the fact that the jukebox musical, by virtue of using familiar music, has an interactive element of encouraging audience members to sing/clap/dance along with the performers, which to my great joy did happen during my staged reading. Further than that though, I felt making an effort to make *Black Heart: The Musical* interactive would only detract from the themes and message. Other stage plays that have tabletop roleplaying games as a centerpiece, such as *She Kills Monsters*<sup>88</sup>, are still well regarded by fans of *Dungeons and Dragons* despite not featuring interactive elements and

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<sup>85</sup> Chris Crawford, *Chris Crawford on Interactive Storytelling*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2013), 28

<sup>86</sup> Duncan Macmillan and Jonny Donahoe. “*Every Brilliant Thing*”. Produced by Paines Plough and Pentabus. London, UK: Methuen Drama. 2013

<sup>87</sup> Charles Dickens and Rupert Holmes. “*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*” Produced by Joseph Papp. New York, NY: Concord Theatricals. 1985

<sup>88</sup> Qui Nyugen. “*She Kills Monsters*”, Produced by The Flea. New York, NY: Concord Theatricals. 2011

instead use the worldbuilding of *Dungeons and Dragons*<sup>89</sup> as the frame for its story in an effort to connect to that audience.

Following that lead, there lies some expository/world building aspects of *Black Heart* present in what has been written (the entire first act and final scene of the second act:) the post-post-apocalyptic setting, the use of the cult and the planned mutations they would undergo based on twisted interpretations of Jepsen's lyrics, the "Hanged Man" motif for the sacrifice being present in the final scene, and the existence of monsters and those that try to hunt them down. This was done with the intention of writing *Black Heart: The Musical* to connect fans of TTRPGs, with fans of Jepsen and fans of musical theater and covering one of our three adapturgical C's. So let us move onto capitalization.

As a longtime fan of Jepsen's work, I felt a small compulsion to include at least one song from each of her albums and that I absolutely had to include some of her more iconic songs. I thought of Jepsen references and if making things too dark like *Black Heart*, as a horror focused game ought to be, might push away the Jepsen fanbase and what that might do to the commercial appeal of *Black Heart: The Musical*. But as my thinking of capitalization changed, so did my thinking around the nostalgia of using her more iconic songs or Jepsen callbacks. As I realized a large amount of the capitalization/commercialization of adaptation was to cash in on nostalgia and the dangers of that, my larger theme for the musical also began to change.

Initially, the theme was a further exploration into that recurring aspect of Carly Rae Jepsen's work I mentioned earlier, love. Who you are in love, who you are out of love, loving yourself, loving your friends, what being in love does to your friendships, etc.. At the start of the play, Charlotte's relationship with her abusive boyfriend, named Shitty Boyfriend per the recommendation of my cohort members, has deeply affected her sense of self worth and this has begun to fester into her other relationships, especially that of her relationship with her

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<sup>89</sup> Gary Gygax. *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*. Wizards of the Coast. Tabletop. 1978.

best friend, Flora.

From my initial outlining and ideation with *Black Heart: The Musical*, I knew I wanted Charlotte to be in an abusive relationship so as to answer what could have Charlotte fall in with a cult in the second act. An article by Kayla Teixeira from Cal State East Bay states that, “many... join cults because they are in a transitional period ... while struggling to form a sense of belonging.”<sup>90</sup> Charlotte needed to be a bit disconnected from those in her life to have her in the mental state where she would run off with a cult leader for the second act to happen. As strange of a sentence as it is to write, why is Shitty Boyfriend emotionally and physically abusive to Charlotte? I did not have much of an answer until I was listening to “Good Time” by Jepsen and the band *Owl City*, a song I had been considering for the second act opener as a high energy song to bring people back from intermission and properly introduce the rest of the Carly Rae Jepsen cult.

An interesting challenge with adapting Jepsen’s work is that the references in her music are very 21st century, so if I am going to include a song like “Good Time” or “Call Me Maybe” there will be lyrics of those songs that will have to be addressed in the fiction of this post-post-apocalyptic world. Namely this includes making sure phones exist in this world, there has to be some form of currency, etc.. A lot of lines would end up being interpreted very literally as a result of this, one of these including the following from “Good Time”<sup>91</sup>:

*Good morning and good night  
I wake up at twilight  
It's gonna be alright  
We don't even have to try  
It's always a good time (Jepsen)*

In “Good Time” there is a main female vocalist, Jepsen, and a male vocalist, Adam Young from the band *Owl City*. The split in lyrics made it easy to cut the song between Charlotte and the cult’s leader, Colton, and this specific line would land with Charlotte. The

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<sup>90</sup> Kayla Teixeira, “Cult Members, Who Are They?” Reflection - Cal State East Bay, no. 6, (2010)

<sup>91</sup> Carly Rae Jepsen, *Kiss*, with Owl City, Justin Bieber. Produced by Josh Abraham, 604 (label), School Boy, Interscope. 2012, compact disk

likely intent of this lyric was that the singer was waking up late from partying but that did not feel like the best fit. I wanted to think of some reason why Charlotte would have such a weird sleep schedule like that. So, looking at the given circumstances, the world ended and suddenly monsters now roam the world knocking humans off the top of the food chain.

If Charlotte and Flora's shared backstory as best friends is that they went through the apocalypse together, they were the only ones watching each other's backs and that is why they are so close and if it is just the two of them, someone has to be awake at all times to make sure they do not get killed. Charlotte became the night guard, and Flora was the day guard, and they traveled around in the middle so they would not starve. This also makes the two physically capable in the event I want more monsters to show in the story, which there would be. Charlotte opting for brute force, whereas Flora would get a sword that would eventually land in Carly Rae Jepsen's hands to repeat the long standing tradition<sup>92</sup> of giving her swords, one of those aforementioned Jepsen callbacks.

Since the musical itself is post-post apocalyptic, another way of driving a potential wedge between the two beside Shitty Boyfriend is that Charlotte wants to be a normal girl again. A normal girl with a boyfriend, who does the dishes, cooks for her partner, and most certainly does not hunt monsters with her bare hands. She sort of "trad-wifes"<sup>93</sup> herself in this endeavor, which Shitty Boyfriend is more than happy to oblige as he wants to return to normal just as much as she does and, for a time, genuinely wants to help Charlotte achieve this both for her sake and his. This all being much to the chagrin of Flora, who wants to continue hunting alongside her now much larger group of hunters to reclaim the world taken away from her and so many others.

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<sup>92</sup>Carly Rae Jepsen Fact Checks The Internet On Carly Rae Jepsen by Vice News  
<https://youtu.be/YFjP3LOi1Y?t=77>

<sup>93</sup> Devin Proctor. 2023. "The #Tradwife Persona and the Rise of Radicalized Domesticity". *Persona Studies* 8 (2):7-26. — "tradwives write blogs and social media posts that promote "traditional" gender roles and family life, wherein the man provides for and protects the family, and the woman has children and takes care of the needs of the family."

Suddenly all four of the leading characters' primary motivations became exceedingly clear because they all have the exact same one: "I want to go back to how it used to be." Charlotte wants to go back to being a regular girl, which her, at times, violent PTSD is seriously dampening. Shitty Boyfriend wants Charlotte back to normal because her PTSD is seriously affecting his state of being and similar desire to go back to normal, so he encourages this trad-wife behavior in her. Flora wants her friend to go back to hunting because she misses her and that is the only time she gets to see her. And Colton wants to bring Carly Rae Jepsen back to life so that she might restore the world in all of her great power. Everyone wants to return to something from the past, to go back to normal, which is not really possible anymore.

Which in a world still addled with COVID-19, seems like an extremely potent dramaturgical/ adapturgical message to be discussing. I still wear a mask to the grocery store, in my classes, and at theater events because I do not know how many immunocompromised people I will interact with. I have gotten every vaccine I am eligible for. I take a rapid test before every family gathering because I could not live with myself if I got my elderly grandparents or my infant nieces sick. COVID-19 is still a presence in my life, as it is with so many others and the futility/irresponsibility of ignoring that is something I felt could be said with *Black Heart: The Musical*.

Is this a 1:1 metaphor? No, but no good metaphor is and I hope through showing this, at times, hopeless struggle these characters have to get back to "normal" shatters the illusion that normal is something you can go back to. Charlotte cannot be a "regular girl" anymore because she has irrevocably been changed by what she has been through and how she dealt with it. In the same way, Shitty Boyfriend cannot change Charlotte into a model girlfriend because she is so much more than that. Flora will not have the hunting, apocalypse survivor relationship with Charlotte anymore because Charlotte wants to move on from that lifestyle. Colton cannot have Carly Rae Jepsen return from the dead to restore the world because she is just a pop singer.

To harken back to Dinkgräfe, he states that: “nostalgia feeds into the sense of the impossibility of return. There is longing to go back, to remember, but those who do go back tend to be in a total state of shock because nothing is as one has imagined.”<sup>94</sup> There is no old self to return to, trauma happens, change happens and trying to chase what once was will drive you as crazy as Colton. Once Charlotte and Flora both realize this, their relationship is better off because the two know life is now different for both of them. Just as my thoughts on capitalization in reference to adaptation changed to recognize the dangers of nostalgia, so too has the main theme of this adaptation changed. What easily could have fallen into a nostalgia bait jukebox musical, has now become something critical of nostalgia and what that can do to ourselves, our relationships, and what happens to the world around us.

Now I have a bit of the critique aspect of *Black Heart: The Musical*, but in addition to this critique of nostalgia there was one more thing I wanted to discuss with *Black Heart: The Musical* and it involves her music.

If there is going to be a Carly Rae Jepsen musical, “Call Me Maybe”<sup>95</sup> has to be in it. It is without a single doubt her most noteworthy song, and oftentimes the only song people know of her long discography. To no fault of my staged reading attendants many stated as such and were happily clapping along to the actors singing it. I know I just talked about nostalgia and not wanting to get too hung up about how the musical is commercially received at this stage in the game, but “Call Me Maybe” is without a doubt her most iconic song. If it is not in the musical, then who knows what the Carly Rae Jepsen fans would do to me. Thankfully, “Call Me Maybe” quickly found its place as the centerpiece of the first act, quite possibly of the whole musical. Given its lyrics, this song essentially has to be a meet cute, which I figured would be a perfect way to get Charlotte in touch with Colton, the cult leader that has been scoping her out as a sacrifice.

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<sup>94</sup> Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe, *Observing Theatre*. 16

<sup>95</sup> Carly Rae Jepsen, *Kiss*, with Owl City, Justin Bieber. Produced by Josh Abraham, 604 (label), School Boy, Interscope. 2012, compact disk

There was something said by Laurence O'Keefe and Kevin Murphy in an interview for Playbill breaking down all of the songs of *Heathers: The Musical*, specifically that heavily informed how I wanted to approach the cult leader, Colton:

This was one of the first songs we wrote and an important litmus for us. We were writing a story in which a smart young woman falls in love with a psychopath in J.D. If we couldn't make the psychopath sexy, sympathetic, and worthy of our heroine's time and interest, we had no show.<sup>96</sup>

Colton had to be charming. There had to be something about him that would make a character like Charlotte, one that went through the apocalypse and would rightfully be on her guard all the time, let this guy into her life and for that to make sense for the audience as well. I do not want to write Charlotte as some lovesick idiot, nor do I want to think ill of my audience and write an obviously evil character to shove in their face. It harkens to the metaphor of the frog in a boiling pot, where if you throw a frog in a boiling pot of water it will immediately try to jump out but if you just put it in water and gradually heat it, the frog will stay until it boils to death. I would certainly hope that anyone that met a self described cult leader to a presumed dead pop star would see the red flag and leave.

I thought of giving Colton "Call Me Maybe" in a bid to make him seem like your regular musical male love interest. This aligns with what I have been quoting from Carlson quite heavily, since with theater everything is constantly being compared. Upon a first viewing, Colton would be a proper boy next door right there next to characters like Fiyero from *Wicked*, Ren from *Footloose*<sup>97</sup>, or Danny Zuko from *Grease*<sup>98</sup>.

From a feminist perspective, "Call Me Maybe" was quite revolutionary at the time for being about a woman openly wanting something in a sexual and romantic way. It reminds me of a quote from Audre Lorde's *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* where she states:

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<sup>96</sup> Laurence O'Keefe and Kevin Murphy, "Heathers Writers Laurence O'Keefe and Kevin Murphy Break down the Musical's Full Album,"

<sup>97</sup> Ross, Herbert and Dean Pitchford. *Footloose*, DVD. U.S.A. IndieProd Company Productions, Silver Screen Partners and Paramount Pictures, 1984

<sup>98</sup> Kleiser, Randal, Bronté Woodard, Allan Carr. *Grease*, DVD. U.S.A. Allan Carr Enterprises, Stigwood Group, Paramount Pictures, 1978

There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives... The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation.<sup>99</sup>

Jepsen is extremely open about her attraction to this hypothetical man. In the music video she is the one to try initiating their relationship, taking the lead in flirting and approaching her object of desire in a way that does not appeal to the male gaze but instead tries to relate to other women by showcasing how silly the desire can come across and how earnest her attempts might be as showcased in figure three. Jepsen also utilizes imagery reminiscent of romance novellas, almost explicitly referencing the actor and model Fabio as another symbol of female sexuality, as seen in figure four.

Due to that however, she was torn apart by misogynistic, bad faith critics that called her a stalker even in spite of the fact that if a man had been singing what she was, it would not have caught a second glance. Such as an article in LA Weekly titled "Carly Rae Jepsen's 'Call Me Maybe': Why This Song Sucks" which states the first and only reason why the song sucks is because the author "asked [their] youngest sister about it. She said it was excellent, which alone proves that it's not."<sup>100</sup>

One might only need to search "*call me maybe parody*" and one would find countless, poor taste parodies of her seminal work that you would not see in near the same quantity as a song by a man as seen in figures five and six. By having Colton, a man, sing "Call Me Maybe", I aimed to point out the double standard. Would people think twice since a man is singing it instead of a woman? Songs like "Glad You Came" by The Wanted or "Shape of You" by Ed Sheeran aren't thought of in the same way as "Call Me Maybe" was. Would this then bamboozle the audience to realize that the man actually does have dangerous intentions for her? Yes, ultimately, he is a cult leader after all but it then becomes a challenge for the

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<sup>99</sup> Audre Lorde. 1978. *Uses of the Erotic: the Erotic as Power*. Brooklyn, N.Y: Out & Out Books. 1

<sup>100</sup> Shea Serrano. "Carly Rae Jepsen's 'Call Me Maybe': Why This Song Sucks." LA Weekly, May 23, 2019.



audience to see if they can recontextualize their older thoughts on the song given how much time has passed since “Call Me Maybe” was released and what they have just seen/heard in the musical.

Having the singer be a genuine villain did have a double effect of validating some criticism of “Call Me Maybe.” Ultimately, he is a stalker that plans on killing the target of his ‘affections’ for nefarious and occult purposes. Those are all the same things that Jepsen was unfairly criticized for and there was a concern of contributing to that. Though as we do have the distance of time, perhaps some of those critiques might be worthy of a second look. From a queer perspective, songs like “Call Me Maybe” do fall into some of the pitfalls of a lot of Heterosexual Love Songs. This pitfall being a sort of implied inevitability when it comes to heterosexuality. Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz writes on the very subject when explaining his concept of queer time which, to summarize, essentially means that queer people have to operate on a different timeline of experiences as they’re not given the space in society to have experiences in the same way, same places, same ages of life.

“Queerness’s time is a stepping out of the linearity of straight time. Straight time is a self-naturalizing temporality.”<sup>101</sup> On virtue of being othered, cast out, and made different by straightness, queerness is capable of opening up completely different paths of life because new options have to be made due to the lack of options provided by heterosexual culture. “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality.”<sup>102</sup>

Being queer implies both a frightening and a liberating sense of freedom. If space isn’t made for queerness in a heterosexual future, then queer people will attempt to make their own room in the present as we strive to reach what queerness means for us.

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<sup>101</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), 25

<sup>102</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1

Muñoz then discusses the difference in how heterosexuality is envisioned in the same society that queerness is so bastardized. Due to the fact that heterosexuality is seen as the default, it is seen as the only option for the future. He states that: “heterosexual culture depends on a notion of the future... (and that heterosexuality) ...is formatted, in part, through the sacrifice of the present for a fantasmatic future”<sup>103</sup>. With what people have been taught of heterosexuality, there is one “correct” path to take. Fall in love, get married, have kids, raise them, and the cycle repeats. Media is often quite guilty of perpetuating this with concepts like soulmates, a one true love, and that very rigid courting cycle. To return to Jepsen, my unfortunately favorite lyric from “Call Me Maybe” goes as follows:

Before you came into my life, I missed you so bad  
I missed you so bad, I missed you so, so bad<sup>104</sup>

Jepsen here is ultimately subscribing to that very concept of a soulmate, that final person you’re supposed to spend your whole life looking for and have your happily ever after with. The lyric describes an incredible yearning, a desire written into her heart that was only truly realized upon love at first sight. It’s what makes the song so meaningful to me as a hapless romantic, but where I have so much issue with it as a queer individual. This pursuit of a stranger with whom one has a romantic interest in is not often an option for queer people, very often out of a concern for safety. While we quickly see in the music video how fast her desire for this man falls apart when she realizes he is actually more interested in one of her bandmates, that context is not present if you’re listening to the song on the radio or on her album. With how prevalent “Call Me Maybe” has been since its release, it and many others have perpetuated the heterosexual inevitability that has the potential for a lot of stagnation.

So, despite the potential for contributing to the same bad faith criticism that Jepsen faced upon the release of “Call Me Maybe,” keeping this perspective on the song opened

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<sup>103</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 49

<sup>104</sup> Carly Rae Jepsen, *Kiss*

*Black Heart: The Musical* to another critical lens that it can be engaged with, that being queer theory and what the implanted heterosexual ideals of the protagonist and her love interest contribute to the plot and her journey. This strengthening the critique aspect of the “wanting to return to normal” want of all the characters as, when society is beginning to crumble, trying to hold on to the notions of what you are “supposed to do” and what things “have always been like”, like Muñoz describes of heterosexual culture, just contribute to a “stultifying heterosexual present.”<sup>105</sup> The obsession with the past dictating the future leaves no room for any other possibilities for what the world might look like.

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<sup>105</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 49

## Section 8: Conclusion

Adaptation is not going anywhere. The way adaptation expresses memory and how humankind might gather new meaning from these memories. But if modern, commercial adaptations continue to proceed in the pace that they are, this expression and meaning may begin to fade away. I place a lot of responsibility on the adapturg, but as creators of adaptation it is their duty to make their adaptations worthwhile and critically engaging. They must justify what about the story they are retelling is worth doing right now, lest it fall into a forgettable cash grab pit. They must not simply appeal to the original audience of the material, lest the story remain insular and fail to express to new audiences what made this story work so well. And if they want to make any sort of impact they must find something new, something critical, something modern to say with their adaptation.

*Black Heart: The Musical* was written with the intention of utilizing the three C's from start to finish by writing something that, theoretically, could appeal to three very separate demographics. While *Black Heart: The Musical* was nostalgic and referential to Carly Rae Jepsen and her fanbase, it was still aware and critical of the dangers of nostalgia. Something I think that is extremely relevant in a world still addled by COVID-19, an extremely hostile political climate, and environmental collapse as more and more people retreat to escapism and try to go back to something that we are too far away from for that to be a reasonable goal. My hope for *Black Heart: The Musical* is that through engaging with it audience members might have a realization that in order to move forward, we cannot be stuck reminiscing on the past. The world is constantly changing, there is no undoing what has happened, and we cannot go back to what once was. To end things with a quote by the great bard, Ms. Jepsen: "*Don't cry, I can't play pretend, wish it hadn't come to this but you know there's some things you can't mend... Sometimes it's best to just fly.*"<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Carly Rae Jepsen, *E•MO•TION*

Appendix A - List of Figures

Figure 1:<sup>107</sup>

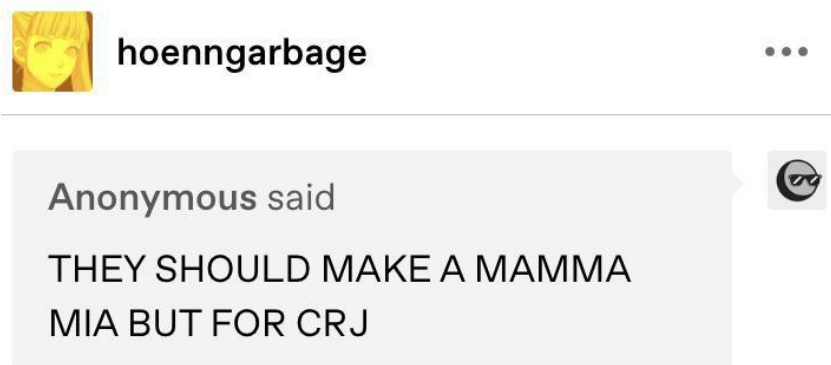
Boal's Chart of the Various Languages of the arts.

*Notes for Chapter 4*

'Chart of Various Languages		
Communication of Reality	Substantiation of Reality	Transformation of Reality
<i>Language</i>	<i>Lexicon</i> (vocabulary)	<i>Syntax</i>
Spoken-written	Words	Sentence (subject, object, predicate, etc.)
Music	Musical instruments and their sounds (timbre, tonalities, etc.), notes	Musical phrase; melody and rhythm
Painting	Colors and forms	Each style has its syntax.
Cinema	Image (secondarily, music and speech)	Montage: splicing, superimposition, usage of lens, traveling, fade-in, fade-out, etc.
<i>Theater</i>	<i>Sum of all imaginable languages: words, colors, forms, movements, sounds, etc.</i>	<i>Dramatic action</i>

Figure 2:<sup>108</sup>

The initial inspiration for *Black Heart: The Musical* by Tumblr user hoenngarbage



She's ten times better than Abba!

<sup>107</sup> Boal, Theater of the Oppressed

<sup>108</sup> hoenngarbage, anonymous". "THEY SHOULD MAKE A MAMMA MIA BUT FOR CRJ"

Figure 3:<sup>109</sup>

A screencap from the “Call Me Maybe” music video, Jepsen herself featured



Figure 4:<sup>110</sup>

A screencap from the “Call Me Maybe” music video, Jepsen featured once more, emulating a romance novel cover



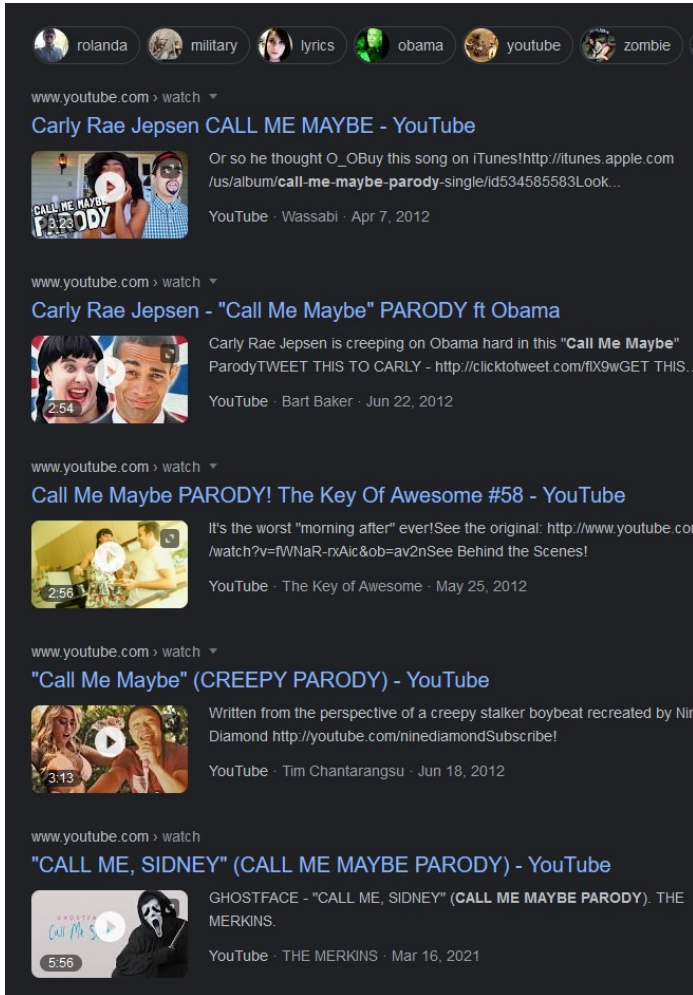
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<sup>109</sup> Carly Rae Jepsen, *Kiss*

<sup>110</sup> Carly Rae Jepsen, *Kiss*

Figure 5 and Figure 6:

A selection of "Call Me Maybe" parodies



 **alfredtheherothatwho**

I THREW A KID IN THE WELL  
DONT ASK ME ILL NEVER TELL  
I WILL REGRET THIS IN HELL  
BUT HE WAS IN MY WAY

 **valerieparker**

I'LL TRADE YOUR SOUL FOR A WISH  
DAMNATION AND SIN FOR A KISS  
I WASN'T LOOKING FOR THIS  
BUT YOU WERE IN MY WAY

 **girlwiththekey**

*YOUR GLARE WAS HOLDIN'  
RIPPED SPLEEN, SKIN WAS ROLLIN'  
DARK NIGHT, BLOOD WAS FLOWIN'  
WHERE YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING, BABY?*

 **lucykrap**

*HEY I JUST KILLED YOU,  
I'M FUCKING CRAZY  
BUT THEYLL NEVER FIND YOU  
SO ROT THERE MAYBE*

## Black Heart

Based on the music of Carly Rae Jepsen  
and  
the TTRPG of the same name by Colin Cummings

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2021-2023 - Draft



### Character Breakdown

- Charlotte Ramona Jasper (Joan Young)
- Flora Barron (Asta Baker)
- Shitty Boyfriend (Ian Larson)
- Colton James (David Letman)
- Inquisitor Julien
- Candy Store Owner (Sierra Wypych)
- Various Party-Goers
  - Planning Party-Goer (Sara Sotelo)
  - Preparing Party-Goer (Sierra Wypych)
  - Patronizing Party-Goer (Sara Sotelo)
  - Parsimonious Party-Goer (Sierra Wypych)
  - Peculiar Party-Goer (Sierra Wypych)
- Various Cult Members
  - Camden Myra (Sara Sotelo)
  - Ava Tai (Sierra Wypych)
  - Riley Fraser (Sara Sotelo)
  - Lincoln Yancey (Sierra Wypych)
  - Yoshiro Kael (Sara Sotelo)
  - Charlie Raymond Jones (Sara Sotelo)
    - Flora's "Therapist"
- Carly Rae Jepsen (Ian Larson)

### Content Warnings

- Graphic violence and death
- Abusive relationships (physical and mental)
- Pop music
- Cults
- Ritual suicide

## Scene and Song List

- Act 1
  - Prologue
    - Black Heart
  - Scene 1
    - Store
  - Scene 2
    - Sour Candy
    - I Didn't Just Come Here to Dance
    - So Nice (Instrumental)
  - Scene 3
  - Scene 4
    - Call Me Maybe
    - Boy Problems
    - Run Away With Me
    - Black Heart (reprise)
- Act 2
  - Scene 1
    - Good Time
    - [I Really Really Like You](#)
  - Scene 2
    - The Sound or Now That I've Found You
  - Scene 3
    - When I Needed You
    - Warm Blood
  - Scene 4
    - Emotion
    - Party For One
- Curtain Call
  - Cut to the Feeling and/or Julien

## Act 1 - Prologue

[Lights up on a blank stage, several hooded figures enter.]

CAMDEN

The old world... is gone. Torn by calamity after calamity.

AVA

There is one who wants to leave her boyfriend.

RILEY

Monsters growl in a horrifying chorus in the nighttime.

LINCOLN

She misses spending time with her best friend.

YOSHIRO

Chaos reigns. The natural order long since overturned.

CAMDEN

But we may bring it all back.

AVA

With her, we can bring The Dedicated One back once again.

RILEY

Her heavenly melodies might save us all from this state of perdition.

LINCOLN

Her darkened heart shall serve as the perfect vessel. He has sworn this to us.

YOSHIRO

Then shall we call upon our goddess once again.

[The hooded figures begin to dance on stage singing the first section of *Black Heart*.  
During the number, the ensemble assembles set pieces for a blossom tree shrine to  
CARLY RAE JEPSEN and praise it.]

ENSEMBLE

*I don't care about your good intentions  
I care more about your bad dreams  
I want a love on a new dimension  
You know I'm gonna be*

*Under the blossom tree  
Come a little closer, won't you come a little closer to me  
You're my miracle (ale, ale, ale)*

*Under the blossom tree  
Come a little closer, won't you come a little closer to me  
'Cause you're my miracle (ale, ale, ale)*

*In your black heart, is where you'll find me  
Cutting through the cracks of the concrete  
In your black heart, is where you'll find me  
Waiting, oh*

[As the final lyric is sung, it echoes real  
creepy like. After a beat, the set pieces are  
flipped into a bedroom. With CHARLOTTE  
RAMONA JASPER and SHITTY BOYFRIEND  
sleeping in it.]

Act 1 - Scene 1

[Sunlight creeps into the bedroom, and CHARLOTTE wakes up and begins to sing *Store*]

CHARLOTTE

*Sunlight, moves upon my skin  
Wake up and I'm next to you  
But I wish that I was next to him*

[CHARLOTTE pulls out a framed photo of an obscure male celebrity that looks like the actor for COLTON, or maybe like, a line cook and hugs it closely. The photo is projected next to her so the audience can see it more clearly.]

CHARLOTTE

*Looks like this could be the end  
Know that you'll be alright  
Maybe one day we'll be friends  
But you know me, I'm*

[CHARLOTTE looks wistfully at her SHITTY BOYFRIEND, contemplating if he is that shitty. He is.]

CHARLOTTE

*I'm not that good at goodbyes  
Sometimes it's best to just fly  
Ask where we're going, oh, I  
Can't talk about it, can't talk about it 'cause*

[CHARLOTTE jumps out of bed, fully dressed, grabs some reusable shopping bags and begins to walk in place. The bedroom set is rolled away, SHITTY BOYFRIEND included.]

CHARLOTTE

*I'm just goin' to the store, to the store  
I'm just goin' to the store  
You might not see me anymore, anymore  
I'm just goin' to the store*

[The ensemble, in regular people's clothes, begin to hand CHARLOTTE groceries and other things she needs at the store.]

CHARLOTTE and ENSEMBLE

*I'm just goin' to the store, to the store*

*I'm just goin' to the store*

*You might not see me anymore, anymore*

*I'm just goin' to the store*

[The music pauses. CHARLOTTE stops at a candy store, and inspects a bag of sour candy.]

CANDY STORE OWNER

(spoken) Ah Charlotte! Good to see you again. I see you eyeing the sour stuff? 'fraid I'm all out of free samples for the week.

CHARLOTTE

Oh! Haha, yeah. Birthday present for a friend.

CANDY STORE OWNER

Well happy birthday to them! It's yours for six bottle caps.

CHARLOTTE

Oh shoot, but I heard these cost four last week.

CANDY STORE OWNER

Well tell that to the sugar farmer up north. She's the one that started upping her prices. I'm just trying to break even.

CHARLOTTE

Shoot, well here.

[CHARLOTTE hands them the bottle caps.]

CANDY STORE OWNER

This is eight! Here take these back.

CHARLOTTE

No, consider it as payment for all those samples you gave me and maybe some juice to go give the sugar farmer a piece of your mind!

CANDY STORE OWNER

Aw jeez' Charlotte, thank you! I'll give her what for, and you say hey to your boyfriend for me! You two are so sweet together.

CHARLOTTE

(cringing) I will!

[CHARLOTTE leaves the candy store in a hurry.]

CANDY STORE OWNER

(confused) Uh, goodbye!

CHARLOTTE

*(singing starts) Don't cry  
I can't play pretend  
Wish it hadn't come to this  
But you know there's some things you can't mend*

*But you know me, I  
I'm not that good at goodbyes  
Sometimes it's best to just fly  
Ask where we're going, oh, I  
Can't talk about it, can't talk about it 'cause  
I'm just goin' to the store, to the store  
I'm just goin' to the store  
You might not see me anymore, anymore  
I'm just goin' to the store*

CHARLOTTE and ENSEMBLE

*I'm just goin' to the store, to the store  
I'm just goin' to the store  
You might not see me anymore, anymore  
I'm just goin' to the store*

[CHARLOTTE returns home, placing things on a table. The bed her SHITTY BOYFRIEND is sleeping on is brought back on as well, he's still asleep. She takes a moment to compose herself before waking him up.]

CHARLOTTE

*Alright, I'm so alright with you  
I just wanna say, I'm sorry  
I just wanna say, I'm sorry  
Alright (alright), I'm so alright with you*

[CHARLOTTE moves over to the bed, her SHITTY BOYFRIEND still isn't awake.]

CHARLOTTE

*I just wanna say, I'm sorry  
I just wanna say, I'm sorry  
I'm not that good at goodbyes  
Sometimes it's best to just fly*

*I'm just goin' to the store, to the store  
I'm just goin' to the store  
You might not see me anymore, anymore  
I'm just goin' to the store*

CHARLOTTE and ENSEMBLE

*I'm just goin' to the store, to the store  
I'm just goin' to the store  
You might not see me anymore, anymore  
I'm just goin' to the store*

CHARLOTTE

*I'm just going to the store  
I'm just going to the store*

ENSEMBLE

*(I'm just going to the store)  
(I'm just going to the store)*

[SHITTY BOYFRIEND wakes up, and sees CHARLOTTE.]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Oh hey, you actually got up early. Did you go to the store?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, like you asked... Good morning by the way.

[CHARLOTTE begins unloading her groceries. Beat]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND



Hey.

[CHARLOTTE stops for a moment.]

What?  
CHARLOTTE

C'mere.  
SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Why? I need to put these away.  
CHARLOTTE

Just c'mere.  
SHITTY BOYFRIEND

[CHARLOTTE acquiesces.]

Good morning.  
SHITTY BOYFRIEND

[SHITTY BOYFRIEND kisses CHARLOTTE on the cheek.]

I'm proud of you for getting up early.  
SHITTY BOYFRIEND

CHARLOTTE  
(softening briefly) Thank you. I— I still don't get why I should be getting up so early.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND  
Because the apocalypse is over, and you don't have to be the night guard anymore. You can get back on the regular people schedule.

CHARLOTTE  
Is it over?

SHITTY BOYFRIEND  
Yes. I promise. No more freak climate events, no more looking behind your back, and no more monsters. You can rest at night again, like the rest of us... You're stressing

yourself out for no reason. We get to be normal people again, it just takes some practice.

CHARLOTTE

(comforted) Right. Normal people.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Normal people! Who go get groceries first thing.

CHARLOTTE

Go to dinner parties.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Use tupperware.

CHARLOTTE

And don't have to fight off blood-thirsty monsters every night.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Exactly.

[The two embrace, CHARLOTTE seems far more comforted than SHITTY BOYFRIEND. His eyes wander to the groceries.]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Now what'd ya get?

[SHITTY BOYFRIEND bounds to the grocery bags, leaving CHARLOTTE on the bed, and begins rifling through them. He spots the candy, and pulls it out.]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Oh nice! This is the good stuff.

[SHITTY BOYFRIEND immediately opens the bag and sticks candy in his mouth.]

CHARLOTTE

Hey wait!

[CHARLOTTE tries to grab the bag out of SHITTY BOYFRIEND's hands, but he sweeps away with it and eats another piece of candy. With sudden quickness, CHARLOTTE turns on and grabs the bag of candy, unintentionally knocking SHITTY BOYFRIEND back.]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Woah! What was that for?

CHARLOTTE

Sorry! Just, this is for Flora's birthday tonight.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Oh. Of course it is.

CHARLOTTE

She loves sour candy.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Oh I know. I just don't get why you're still hanging out with her.

CHARLOTTE

She's my best friend.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Yeah your best friend that sends you back in attack mode.

CHARLOTTE

What's that mean?

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

I don't like who you are when you're with her. You go backwards, and that's not what you want.

CHARLOTTE

B-b-

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Plus I'm pretty sure when she was over here last, a goose died when she started laughing at her own joke.

[SHITTY BOYFRIEND begins rifling through the rest of the groceries but just leaves them on the table when he finishes looking at them. CHARLOTTE puts them away not too long after. Silence until CHARLOTTE finishes.]

CHARLOTTE

...I should go. I said I'd help her set her party up.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Look. I say this out of love and you don't *have* to listen to me. But I think I know you pretty well at this point, I'll just say that.

CHARLOTTE

Yeah... Yeah.

[CHARLOTTE grabs her grocery bags and starts to walk out the door. SHITTY BOYFRIEND sneaks up behind her and hugs her, kissing her on the neck.]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

I love you.

CHARLOTTE

... I love you too.

[CHARLOTTE embraces him back. SHITTY BOYFRIEND lets go of her, and flops back on the bed.]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

And don't stay out too late! You always regret it!

[CHARLOTTE closes the door, takes a long breath, and walks off. Lights down.]

## Act 1 - Scene 2

[ Lights up on CHARLOTTE and FLORA holding several full bags of party items. FLORA moves ahead of CHARLOTTE with much enthusiasm, with her sword in its scabbard on her back.]

FLORA

God I wish you could've been there! Our torches were out, we were bleeding everywhere and Avery and Luma were getting dragged away by Molders but the whole group just instinctively knew exactly where they were and what to do. Carson ran forward to flank them since Molders HATE the leather of that whip he still uses, and then Stella figured out how to do that distracting cry none of us have been able to do since Daphne lost her voice which totally saved Carson's life. Then Avery and Luma got themselves free, and they cleared a path for me to just get in there and WRECK HOUSE.

[FLORA whips her sword out, re-enacting the house wrecking and nearly drops some of the shopping bags. CHARLOTTE helps her keep things off the ground.]

FLORA

Whoops. Thank you.

CHARLOTTE

So Carson and Stella are still good?

FLORA

Not anymore! They started fighting again!

CHARLOTTE

What? No! They were doing so much better!

FLORA

Not since the last trip into the mountains.

CHARLOTTE

What happened?

FLORA

(slightly disappointed) They got stuck in that cave together? Remember? I told you when we brought that huge fifteen legged deer thing back. It had so many teeth, but really good meat.

CHARLOTTE

Right! I helped cook that. My boyfriend helped too, the teeth really freaked him out. Crud, sorry I forgot.

FLORA

Don't be sorry, I mean you had your hands pretty full with that, and... him. You remember how we took it down though, right?

CHARLOTTE

Oh! Uh... yeah. I mean all the teeth and legs were broken by the time you got it to me. So I assume you tripped it, right?

FLORA

(slightly more disappointed) No. Not quite. It's not important.

CHARLOTTE

Wait! Wait I remember, you texted me...

[CHARLOTTE whips her phone out, feverishly looking through her favorite photos.]

CHARLOTTE

... a video of you and someone else riding on top of it...

[Sounds of random videos from CHARLOTTE's phone play.]

CHARLOTTE

Aha! Here.

[Sounds of chaos are heard from CHARLOTTE's phone, FLORA sounds like she's having the time of her life.]

FLORA

God yeah it was like the closest thing to a car crash you can get right now, but like substantially more fun. Sweet of you to still have that saved.

CHARLOTTE

I appreciate all the little video adventures you send me, it's like my own little hunting social media.

FLORA

If it makes your life a little more exciting, I'm happy to continue. I know I've said it before, but thank fucking god the people that know how to make cell services work survived everything.

CHARLOTTE

Wish we could say the same about people that knew how to make pasta. You'd think it'd be easy.

FLORA

I mean it was just... you take flour, eggs, butter and... salt? Then you make that little tower and... Shit I can't actually remember.

CHARLOTTE

Neither can anyone else. And all those fancy pasta presses are broken beyond repair, and no one knows how to make more. Plus trying to flatten it manually is way more effort than anyone is able to muster right now since that bandit group used all the rolling pins for firewood. For some reason.

FLORA

Damn. I miss spaghetti.

CHARLOTTE

We have spaghetti squash.

FLORA

It's not the same.

CHARLOTTE

It isn't.

[The two laugh, and get to a location where they can set aside all the bags. CHARLOTTE then picks up her present bag, FLORA notices the ribbons.]

FLORA

(knowingly) Whatcha got there?

CHARLOTTE

It's uh.. Your birthday present. It's just—

FLORA

Aw sweet thank you!

[FLORA grabs it quickly, and grabs a half bitten piece of candy.]

FLORA

Oh, what happened? Budget cuts at the candy store?

CHARLOTTE

Well yes, but... Sorry, my boyfriend thought these were for him and just started eating them.

[FLORA drops the half bitten candy on the ground in disgust.]

FLORA

That sounds like him.

CHARLOTTE

Oh he didn't know, probably didn't see the ribbons and stuff. Sorry.

FLORA

Hey, it's... okay. There's still plenty left, and this is my favorite stuff. So thank you.

[FLORA finds a non-bitten candy and eats it.]

FLORA

Well, I've mostly been talking about me. What have you been up to? Anything fun besides getting me presents and lamenting the loss of one of humanity's greatest achievements?

CHARLOTTE

Mostly that. But actually, I've just been doin' the normal person thing still. I work at the kitchens in town, pick up some stuff, then come home. Stay the night in, cleaning and organizing. That sort of thing.



FLORA

Right. The *normal* person thing.

CHARLOTTE

I mean, I can now. We can now. Things aren't as bad as they were, I want to go back to what things were. Me and him are going back to—

FLORA

I know. I know. You're happy together.

CHARLOTTE

(with dwindling enthusiasm) Yeah. Yeah. It's good. We're good.

FLORA

She said with much enthusiasm.

CHARLOTTE

No really we're good! We're being normal. Together....

FLORA

(extreme doubt) Mhm.

CHARLOTTE

Well I guess there's just one thing, it's just—

FLORA

We don't have to get into it—

[The floodgates have opened.]

CHARLOTTE

He's been having me get up early and I think he means well, like I do need to get my sleep schedule back on a regular one. Being up as late as I have been the last few years does a number on your digestion, and messes up work timing and eating times but he's just really harsh about it and I don't know if he's putting in the same effort I am. Which I don't know, it just feels unfair and it's just a bunch of self-doubt and I don't think I should feel trapped but I do and ughhhhhhhh.

FLORA

Charlotte.

Charlotte.

Charlotte! I know he's terrible, I've always thought he was terrible.

Everything he does is fucked up and I don't really feel listened to right now and that any advice or feelings I have on the matter just kind of get ignored because I also feel like he actively despises me because we have a very different relationship and UGH ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME?

[CHARLOTTE steps aside from FLORA and the music starts for *Sour Candy*. FLORA looks so done.]

CHARLOTTE  
*Sour candy endings*  
*Coffee stained but aware*  
*Oh, I'm so tangled up in my big sunglasses*  
*And bed hungry, second-day fare*

FLORA  
Charlotte.  
  
Charlotte please stop.

[SHITTY BOYFRIEND is literally wheeled on stage, he is playing an acoustic guitar like a total tool. FLORA is incensed.]

CHARLOTTE and SHITTY BOYFRIEND  
*No, we went under*  
*The weight was too much to carry and*  
*I felt the thunder*  
*Mister, don't look so scared*  
*I never knew, I never knew that I could be so*  
*sad*  
*We went under*  
*So sad (we went under)*  
*So sad (we went under)*  
*So sad we went under*

FLORA  
  
Wh- what the fuck are you doing here?  
  
Charlotte!  
  
(groaning)  
  
OH MY GOD. CHARLOTTE.

[The music stops abruptly, SHITTY BOYFRIEND continues.]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND  
*So sad we went underrrrr*

FLORA  
Fuck off! You're not even here right now! (muttering). Break up songs are NOT THE VIBE right now, fuck that. Get out!

[SHITTY BOYFRIEND is unceremoniously rolled off. FLORA meets CHARLOTTE.]

CHARLOTTE  
I'm sorry.

FLORA

Look. Charlotte. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have yelled. It's just... You know how I feel about him.

CHARLOTTE

Not positive feelings.

FLORA

Yeah, and he doesn't like me either. What'd he say about me today?

CHARLOTTE

That your laugh makes geese want to kill themselves.

[FLORA raises an arm in a "told you so" kind of way]

CHARLOTTE

... Wait, how did you know he said something about you earlier?

FLORA

I just have a sense for it, cause I hate that guy, a lot. But I love you. I love you, you're my best friend. Charlotte the harlot and Flora the whore-a, two peas in a pod, there is no one I would've rather fought off the end of the world with than you. Together 'til the end of the world and beyond that and any other day I would be happy to talk this out. Just. It's my birthday, I can't talk about him anymore right now. Is that alright?

CHARLOTTE

No, yeah. Yeah... Sorry.

FLORA

No more sorries tonight either. This is a fun night! Partying in the woods with a bunch of hunters, just like old times?

CHARLOTTE

Just like old times.

FLORA

Exactly!

[Some party go-ers arrive.]

FLORA

So if I might be so bold, I might request to see party animal Charlotte. I know she's in there somewhere, and she only needs to be out for tonight.

CHARLOTTE

(ramshackled) Well you got her.

FLORA

Yay! It's gonna be great, this is gonna be a perfect night. We're gonna party like crazy, be up all night and—

PLANNING PARTY-GOER

Flora, I noticed this venue is... right on the lip of the forest. Are you sure this is the safest place to be?

PREPARING PARTY-GOER

Yeah, drunk hunters and a monster invasion aren't exactly the best mix. Historically.

FLORA

Nah we're gonna be fine. We've got the best in the business here tonight.

[FLORA gives CHARLOTTE a playful punch on the shoulder.]

PLANNING PARTY-GOER

I still want you to exercise caution, we've got that expedition coming up to reclaim the Bass Pro Pyramid from that huge pack of Fester Ferrets soon. It wouldn't do us any good to get hurt.

PREPARING PARTY-GOER

Agreed. That's a long journey, through some unincorporated territory. We should be in top form before we leave. Here, there's this place not too far from here that we could—

FLORA

If it's your grandmother's basement again, I'm gonna scream. We've been dealing with shit after shit for years now. If any monsters show up we'll take care of it. Who's the gal that got everyone out from that quicksand mall while wearing the finest clothes that Marshall's had to offer?

[The two party-goers are silent.]

CHARLOTTE

Flora did. Those jeans did look really nice on you.

FLORA

Thank you Charlotte. And who got everyone to cover when those weird green portals were dropping meteors filled with those chess-beasts on everyone?

PLANNING PARTY-GOER

You did. And then we made chess sets from the carapaces.

FLORA

And we still use them. Who turned saving all those non-mutated animals from that pet store into a competition?

PREPARING PARTY-GOER

You did. And I still have that pet bunny at home.

FLORA

Point being! I know how to have a good time while keeping everyone alive. We might come out of it with a bump or a bruise, but nine times out of ten the bruises will be from something we can laugh about later.

PLANNING PARTY-GOER

(overly dramatic) But what if there's also electric earthquake floods again?

PREPARING PARTY-GOER

( laughing) Or the volcanic eruption underneath a power plant?

FLORA

Or the solar flares that caused tornadoes to come from the ozone layer?

CHARLOTTE

(awkward laugh) Or those plagues?

PLANNING PARTY-GOER

Hey.

PREPARING PARTY-GOER

Not cool.

CHARLOTTE

Huh?

FLORA

(aside) They're really sensitive about those, we don't usually joke about them.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, sorry. Do you think any monsters would show up at a gathering like this tonight?

FLORA

Probably not, I passed through the woods before we met up earlier. Though if they do, we have party animal Charlotte ready to go, and of course I have THIS!

[FLORA whips out her sword again. The two party-goers flinch.]

PREPARING PARTY - GOER

Ahh! Why do you just have that right now?

CHARLOTTE

She always has that, that's just Flora.

FLORA

Damn right.

[Gradually, more party go-ers enter.]

FLORA

I'll be right back, just gotta make sure some party stuff is taken care of. Stay here, mingle and try to get your mind off of him for a bit. For both our sakes. Oh and here's this!

[FLORA pulls out a frog masquerade mask from one of her bags, it's a bit cartoonish. CHARLOTTE accepts it but doesn't have time to put it on before FLORA hugs CHARLOTTE, and then charges off stage. Beat. CHARLOTTE feebly waves to the other party goers, they wave back and then pointedly turn away from her.]

PATRONIZING PARTY GOER

So *she's* Flora's best friend?

PARSIMONIOUS PARTY GOER

Yeah. I mean apparently for a long while, they were the only two each other had. You gotta be close to get through all the shit of the last few years.

PATRONIZING PARTY GOER

I mean only so close, the regular hunting party never sees her anymore.

PARSIMONIOUS PARTY GOER

Yeah, they get through the entire apocalypse together then she just ends up dating that guy? Some friend she is.

PATRONIZING PARTY GOER

Oh god yeah, why does she let him treat Flora like trash like that? I would've broken up with him a long time ago if I were her.

PARSIMONIOUS PARTY GOER

Right? She just, like, lets it happen. How does someone like that let themselves get declawed like that? She used to be such a beast, and now?

PATRONIZING PARTY GOER

Isn't it just kind of pathetic?

[CHARLOTTE puts on her mask. After a beat, FLORA returns with alcohol and more party-goers.]

FLORA

LET'S PARTY!

ENSEMBLE

Cheers! Hell yeah! Let's go! (other party words I don't really go to them)

[FLORA and the party go-ers don their masquerade masks, the lights shift, and they begin to sing *I Didn't Just Come Here to Dance*.

FLORA and her hunters do not discriminate with whom they dance with. It's very bisexual.]

FLORA

*I didn't just come here to dance*



*If you know what I mean  
Do you know what I mean?  
If you just give me a chance, you'd see what I see  
Do you see what I see?*

[Someone is voguing at some point. I demand it.]

ENSEMBLE

*(to CHARLOTTE) It's your fault  
Baby boy, 'cause you're the one that sparked this  
Shine a light with your eyes onto me in the darkness*

[CHARLOTTE looks like a fifteen legged deer in the headlights.]

FLORA and ENSEMBLE

*Hey, Joe's calling me over  
Tino is calling me over  
I only came here for you (you)*

*It's you boy, you in the corner  
Something is taking me over  
I only came here for you (you)*

FLORA

*I didn't just come here to dance  
If you know what I mean  
Do you know what I mean?*

FLORA and ENSEMBLE

*If you just give me a chance, you'd see what I see  
You'd see what I see*

[COLTON enters, opposite of CHARLOTTE. He's in a particular monochromatic outfit, with a matching mask.]

ENSEMBLE

*I didn't just come here to dance  
If you know what I mean  
Do you know what I mean?  
If you just give me a chance, you'd see what I see*

*You'd see what I see  
I didn't just come here to dance*

[After a dance break several ensemble members all get closer to CHARLOTTE, all with a mix of intentions. None good.]

ENSEMBLE

*Baby I, I'm not going anywhere without you  
Drive me home, 'cause I like every single thing about you*

CHARLOTTE

*Hey, Joe's calling me over  
Tino is calling me over*

ENSEMBLE

*I only came here for you (you)  
It's you boy, you in the corner  
Something is taking me over  
I only came here for you*

*I didn't just come here to dance  
If you know what I mean  
Do you know what I mean?*

*If you just give me a chance, you'd see what I see  
You'd see what I see*

[COLTON slowly peels away people from CHARLOTTE, discreetly pairing them with others. CHARLOTTE picks up on this and tries to do the same.]

ENSEMBLE

*I didn't just come here to dance  
If you know what I mean  
Do you know what I mean?*

*If you just give me a chance, you'd see what I see  
You'd see what I see  
I didn't just come here to dance*

[FLORA and the ENSEMBLE have been moved away from CHARLOTTE. Leaving a path for COLTON to reach CHARLOTTE.]

ENSEMBLE

*Hey, Joe's calling me over  
Tino is calling me over  
I only came here for you*

COLTON and CHARLOTTE

*It's you boy, you in the corner  
Something is taking me over  
I only came here for you (you)*

COLTON

*I didn't just come here to dance  
If you know what I mean  
Do you know what I mean?*

*If you just give me a chance, you'd see what I see  
Do you see what I see?*

[COLTON and CHARLOTTE share a moment on the dance floor, everything else freezes around them. The music continues, slightly quieter. Things have shifted into slow dance territory, an instrumental of *So Nice* plays.]

CHARLOTTE

(stunned) S-sorry you had to do all that.

COLTON

Don't mention it.

CHARLOTTE

Have we met before?

COLTON

I'm from out of town, so probably not. Though I've heard plenty about you.

CHARLOTTE

You have?

COLTON

How could I not? You're the kickass best friend of the host. You're *the* Charlotte Ramona Jasper. Right?

CHARLOTTE

That's me. I'm not that exciting though.

COLTON

I've heard otherwise. I'm glad I was able to meet the famous Charlotte before 3am hit. We've been out for so late and I don't know if I can be up for much longer—

[The background music stops, gradually more and more people notice the conversation between the two which halts the festivities.]

CHARLOTTE

Wait what?

COLTON

We've been out for awhile—

CHARLOTTE

No. What time is it?

COLTON

Uhh... 2:30am? Why?

CHARLOTTE

Shit! I have to go home right now.

COLTON

But the night's just starting.

CHARLOTTE

No it isn't. Crap! I have to go! Now!

[CHARLOTTE begins looking for her bags. FLORA has noticed the commotion by this point.]

FLORA

You're leaving? But you said you would stay!

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry. I can't be up this late, my sleep schedule and... He's gonna be so mad at me.

FLORA

So you're leaving for *him*? That shithead is gonna be mad at you for living your life? You're a hunter Charlotte! You'd stay up til sunrise every night and now you're, what, concerned about your sleep schedule? Who cares?

CHARLOTTE

I care! It's not just for him! I'm trying to be normal again and normal people don't—

FLORA

So we're not normal, that's what you're saying?

CHARLOTTE

I didn't say that.

FLORA

Seems pretty implied to me.

[Various party-goers agree with FLORA. The PECULIAR PARTY-GOER hears a noise off stage, and walks to investigate it.]

FLORA

This is normal to us. It's normal to you. I know you Charlotte, this can't be what you want. He's controlling you!

CHARLOTTE

I can't... I can't do this. I have to go.

FLORA

Charlotte!

[CHARLOTTE grabs her bag and begins to run off.]

FLORA

CHARLOTTE!

[FLORA begins to run towards her when the PECULIAR PARTY-GOER returns in a panic. Their shirt is shredded and they're bleeding a lot. A horrific growl emanates from the woods.]

PECULIAR PARTY-GOER

HELP! There's a monster in the woods!

[Several party-goers find makeshift weapons from party materials or pull them out of their clothes. CHARLOTTE keeps leaving.]

FLORA

Wait Charlotte! We need you! We don't know how much is out there!

CHARLOTTE

You'll be fine without me! I have to go!

FLORA

Charlotte please!

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry!

[Another growl is heard from the woods, louder and seemingly from multiple sources. It steals FLORA's attention long enough for CHARLOTTE to run off.]

FLORA

Wait! Charlotte please!

[homegirl is gone]

PLANNING PARTY-GOER

Flora! We need to go after it before it gets further into town. Are you coming or not?

FLORA

I'm...

[FLORA can't see CHARLOTTE anymore.]

FLORA

Yeah, I'm ready.

[FLORA pulls her sword out and charges, screaming alongside the rest of the hunters. Lights down.]

### Act 1 - Scene 3

[Lights up on CHARLOTTE and SHITTY BOYFRIEND's apartment. CHARLOTTE is cleaning something, SHITTY BOYFRIEND reads a newspaper at the table in a bathrobe. It's silent for a while, until CHARLOTTE yawns.]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

I told you, you'd regret being out that late.

CHARLOTTE

I know. But that was three days ago, it was just a long day at work. Not the party.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Wouldn't have felt that long if you had gone to sleep earlier.

[CHARLOTTE returns to cleaning. SHITTY BOYFRIEND notices a peculiar headline.]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

(reading) Local hunters save party-goers from Behemoth Poodles. (scoff) They'll name any rabid animal after whatever the fuck just to freak people out... Something something, coordinated hunter effort... Something something Flora Barron, ugh... Something something, severe injuries... something something, Bass Pro Pyramid? What? Why?... Why am I reading this? I don't care.

[SHITTY BOYFRIEND begins to turn the page. CHARLOTTE stops cleaning and rushes over to the table.]

CHARLOTTE

What was that last part?

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

They want fishing supplies and an ATV I guess? Of all the things to get.

CHARLOTTE

No, before that.

[CHARLOTTE gestures for the paper, SHITTY BOYFRIEND sighs and hands it to her.]

CHARLOTTE

(reading, panicked) Famed hunter Flora Barron led the defense against the beasts; many were nearly felled by the attack...

[SHITTY BOYFRIEND rolls his eyes.]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

(to himself) It's always about Flora.

CHARLOTTE

(relief) But due to Barron's heroics, none were killed but the monsters themselves...

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Can I have that back?

CHARLOTTE

Barron made it out with only a cut on her leg and a scraped wrist.

[CHARLOTTE breathes a sigh of relief, and sinks into a chair. SHITTY BOYFRIEND pulls the paper from her hands.]

CHARLOTTE

God I was so worried I messed everything up. She's fine. They're all fine. A little hurt, but... alive.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

What are you talking about?

CHARLOTTE



Uh... Nothing. Forget I mentioned it.

[CHARLOTTE starts to get up. SHITTY BOYFRIEND grabs her wrist, stopping her from leaving.]

CHARLOTTE

Ow! What are you doing?

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

What would you have messed up?

CHARLOTTE

Nothing. It's not a big deal.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Charlotte, normal people don't lie to their boyfriends.

[beat]

CHARLOTTE

I... I promised I would've helped out if a monster showed up.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Of course you did. What were you thinking?

CHARLOTTE

It was Flora's birthday! And I flaked out, it's not a big deal!

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

It's like you don't *want* to get better!

CHARLOTTE

I didn't go hunting though! I left right before...

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Yeah, and when did you get home?

CHARLOTTE

It was a mistake. I lost track of time, normal people stay up late sometimes!

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Well you're not normal Charlotte! You still have a long way to go before you get there.

CHARLOTTE

I'm. Trying! It's not as easy as you're making it out to be!

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Well try harder. All you had to do was say no to Flora, and you didn't. Hardly the behavior of someone trying to be more normal.

CHARLOTTE

(starting to cry) Well what about you? Huh? What effort are you putting in? 'cause from my end it doesn't look like much.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

I'm putting in plenty of effort.

CHARLOTTE

You: don't have a job, you just sit around the house all day instead of doing ANY amount of chores, and you still can't kill a fucking bug when it gets in the house.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

One: I've always hated bugs and you know that. Two: this effort you're not seeing is because I've been taking care of you!

CHARLOTTE

Yeah right.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

You don't even realize how patient I am with you. I've been helping you unpack all your apocalypse trauma for months and months. Other guys would've given up on you a long time ago.

[CHARLOTTE is deeply hurt by this.]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

You're constantly on edge and that's pushed you away from all of my friends. Your only friend is a fucking psycho who relishes killing animals and PEOPLE still.

CHARLOTTE

Don't talk about her like that!

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

(ignoring her) And you still kick and scream when you sleep because you're so used to fighting and killing shit every night. If you're wondering why I sleep in so much later is because it's the only fucking time I can get any rest sleeping in the same bed as you! It's exhausting being around you!

CHARLOTTE

That's not fair and you know it.

[CHARLOTTE attempts to pull away from SHITTY BOYFRIEND. He tightens up his grip on her wrist.]

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

You're messed up Charlotte. It's never going to be fair because you're so messed up. You know you are, you're never gonna stop being in apocalypse mode unless you stop doing all this shit!

CHARLOTTE

Let go of me!

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

I'm just trying to help you! And clearly you can't tell what's good for you!

CHARLOTTE

I said let go!

[CHARLOTTE instinctively grabs and then twists SHITTY BOYFRIEND's wrist. He screams in pain. CHARLOTTE then stomps down hard on his thigh and a sick crunching noise is heard. She then pushes him backwards, tripping him on the chair. Beat. CHARLOTTE quickly realizes what she's done.]

CHARLOTTE

Oh my god, oh my god I'm so sorry. I'm so so sorry. Let me help you.

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

Get away from me!

CHARLOTTE

Wait, please. I'm sorry! I-I'm...

SHITTY BOYFRIEND

God you're fucking insane! We're done! Get out! Now!

CHARLOTTE

I— Um—

[CHARLOTTE breaks down crying, and runs out the door. SHITTY BOYFRIEND remains on the floor.  
Lights down.]

Act 1 - Scene 4

[Lights up on CHARLOTTE sitting next to a wishing well, she sighs. Life sucks.]

CHARLOTTE  
Life sucks.

[Extremely conveniently, but wondrously, COLTON enters. He and CHARLOTTE lock eyes.]

COLTON  
Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE  
Oh, it's you. From the party.

[The music for *Call Me Maybe* starts.]

COLTON  
*I threw a wish in the well  
Don't ask me, I'll never tell  
I looked to you as it fell  
And now you're in my way*

*I trade my soul for a wish  
Pennies and dimes for a kiss  
I wasn't looking for this  
But now you're in my way*

*Your stare was holdin'  
Ripped jeans, skin was showin'  
Hot night, wind was blowin'  
Where you think you're going, baby?*

*Hey, I just met you, and this is crazy  
But here's my number, so call me, maybe*

[COLTON pulls out a slip of paper, and hands it CHARLOTTE.]

COLTON

*It's hard to look right, at you baby  
But here's my number, so call me, maybe*

[The music abruptly stops. CHARLOTTE takes the paper, and COLTON begins to walk away.]

COLTON

Think about it, alright?

[COLTON is nearly offstage, the music starts again. He smirks.]

CHARLOTTE

*Hey, I just met you, and this is crazy  
But here's my number, so call me, maybe  
And all the other boys try to chase me  
But here's my number, so call me, maybe*

COLTON

*You took your time with the call*

CHARLOTTE

*I took no time with the fall*

CHARLOTTE and COLTON

*You gave me nothing at all  
But still, you're in my way*

COLTON

*I beg and borrow and steal  
At first sight, and it's real  
I didn't know I would feel it  
But it's in my way*

CHARLOTTE

*Your stare was holdin'  
Ripped jeans, skin was showin'  
Hot night, wind was blowin'  
Where you think you're going, baby?*

CHARLOTTE and COLTON

*Hey, I just met you, and this is crazy  
But here's my number, so call me, maybe  
It's hard to look right, at you baby  
But here's my number, so call me, maybe*

*Hey, I just met you, and this is crazy  
But here's my number, so call me, maybe  
And all the other boys try to chase me  
But here's my number, so call me, maybe*

COLTON

*Before you came into my life, I missed you so bad  
I missed you so bad, I missed you so, so bad  
Before you came into my life, I missed you so bad  
And you should know that  
I missed you so, so bad*

*It's hard to look right, at you baby  
But here's my number, so call me, maybe*

CHARLOTTE and COLTON

*Hey, I just met you, and this is crazy  
But here's my number, so call me, maybe  
And all the other boys try to chase me  
But here's my number, so call me, maybe*

CHARLOTTE

*Before you came into my life, I missed you so bad  
I missed you so bad, I missed you so, so bad  
Before you came into my life, I missed you so bad  
And you should know that  
So call me maybe*

CHARLOTTE

I can't believe I got to see you again. What a coincidence.

COLTON

Yeah, our last conversation got cut off a bit.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, right. Sorry about that. What were we talking about?

COLTON

No apologies necessary. And I think we were talking about you actually.

CHARLOTTE

Oh right. Well, we don't have to keep up that conversation. I don't think it'd be that interesting.

COLTON

I wholeheartedly disagree. I mean, legend says that Charlotte, in a blink of an eye, could take on a pack of monsters by herself in the complete darkness of night. Looking good while she did it too. Are those legends fake?

CHARLOTTE

(blushing) I mean... they are now, I don't really do that sort of thing nowadays. I've settled down... Sort of. Who are you to know all these things?

COLTON

Colton James at your service. A humble farmer from up north.

CHARLOTTE

And how does a farmer know this much?

COLTON

Stories travel on trade routes, and it's not like the crops are telling me much of interest.

CHARLOTTE

What? The potatoes don't whisper gossip to you?

COLTON

Only about the carrots unfortunately.

[They both laugh.]

CHARLOTTE

Well how are you liking our town?

COLTON



It's pretty nice. Plenty of stuff to do here, better stores and you all throw way better parties. Plus the people here are a lot cuter.... Though I will say, there's a waaaay bigger threat of monsters down here. Not used to such a big hunter population.

CHARLOTTE

There's no way you haven't had to deal with monsters or bandits at some point up north.

COLTON

Here and there, but we just don't really have them up north.

CHARLOTTE

And how could that be?

COLTON

Truth be told? I think it's the people.

CHARLOTTE

(jokingly) Oh, are people the real monsters?

COLTON

(laughing) No, really I think it's the people. I don't mean to bad mouth this place, but it's something about how people act that makes monsters more prone to go after them. If people are constantly on edge, prepping for the worst, it's almost like inviting calamity. Knock on the devil's door and he'll come answer. Y'know? My village is too relaxed for that to be the case...

CHARLOTTE

I hadn't thought about it like that.

COLTON

At least that's my idea. I don't think I'll be able to stick around to test the theory any further. Not that I'd want to.

CHARLOTTE

How long are you in town for?

COLTON

I'm leaving today actually. Got the last bit of supplies I needed before I head back to the quiet hamlet of Arcadia.

CHARLOTTE

What's it like?

COLTON

Oh nothing special, pretty rural farm town. Surrounded by forest, and people just working hard to go back to what we lost.

CHARLOTTE

Sounds nice.

COLTON

It's pretty cool. I think you'd fit in there honestly.

CHARLOTTE

You think so?

COLTON

It's really tight-knit there, we're like a family. Everyone knows everyone, and we all help each other out.

CHARLOTTE

I might take you up on that offer.

COLTON

Really?

CHARLOTTE

I mean I shouldn't, I couldn't just pack up and go like that. Sorry, I didn't mean to get your hopes up, it's just been a shitty couple of days. I just don't really have any family here. Anymore, at least.

COLTON

What happened?

CHARLOTTE

Well my family didn't make it through the end of the world and all. Plus, you were at that party, I don't really have many friends. I pretty royally messed stuff up. Flora and I haven't talked in days since I left the party early, I just broke my boyfriend, and now I don't have anywhere to stay.

COLTON

You mean you broke up with him?

CHARLOTTE

Technically yes, but I... I think I broke some of his bones right before we broke up...

COLTON

Before?

CHARLOTTE

...and there's no way he lets me stay at the apartment anymore. It's technically his. He sucked, and everyone always said he sucked.

COLTON

Sounds like he sucked.

CHARLOTTE

He did! He just kept rushing me to be normal again. I wanted to do that, be normal and stuff, don't get me wrong, but he just didn't have the patience for me and things were bad before they ever got to be good or normal. It just took me too long to notice that and make the push to leave him... That's probably in poor taste.... But there's no way I can ask Flora if I can stay at her place, she must be so mad at me.

COLTON

Have you asked?

CHARLOTTE

Well. No.

COLTON

Couldn't hurt to.

CHARLOTTE

She's probably busy.

COLTON

I heard that the trip to reclaim the Bass Pro Pyramid got postponed because of the forest attack, she's probably just recovering right now. I bet you could call her.

CHARLOTTE

You really think so?

COLTON

She's your best friend right?

CHARLOTTE

I hope so.

COLTON

I'm pretty sure she is. What was that little tagline the two of you had? Charlotte the something and Flora the... something else? I couldn't really hear it.

CHARLOTTE

Charlotte the harlot and Flora the whore-a.

COLTON

Sounds like something best friends would call each other.

CHARLOTTE

Fair point... I'll call her.

COLTON

Atta' girl.

[CHARLOTTE pulls out her phone, dim lights on COLTON and CHARLOTTE. On the opposite side of the stage, lights up on FLORA at the therapy office of CHARLIE RAYMOND JONES. She's on a fainting couch. This is a regular occurrence for her.]

FLORA

Doctor Jones. I—

CHARLIE

Please. Just call me Charlie.

FLORA

Charlie, it's just— (groan) Like at this point, I don't know what else I can do.

CHARLIE

Why do you feel that way?

FLORA

Because I've made it so clear, in so many different ways, how I feel about this douchebag she's dating! And I know, *I know* that he isn't my boyfriend and she can do what she wants with her life... I just...

CHARLIE

And why is this important to you?

FLORA

Because I want my friend back. I want my *best friend* back. Things aren't the same as they were without her. Everything always comes back to him, or ends early because of him, he just ruins all of it. He's ruining her! If he wasn't around then Charlotte could've helped us fight off those beasts at the party. I can't keep doing this.

CHARLIE

Doing what?

FLORA

Being her friend like this! Like, it feels like SHIT to say that but it just feels like there's no willingness to listen to what I'm saying on this. I mean, she's going through it. We all have been. It's just so frustrating. (loud groan) I didn't mean to yell.

CHARLIE

It's perfectly alright to yell in here, I know it's not personal.

FLORA

Right, it's like you said. I can't get a good grade in therapy.

CHARLIE

Hm?

FLORA

Back when we were doing sessions over the phone, "you can't get a good grade in therapy." I shouldn't put up any sort of front when I'm here, I have to be fully honest with you and myself to get anything out of this process.

CHARLIE

Right. Yes. I did say that. Mhm.

FLORA

So I am feeling... pissed. I am feeling... unheard. I am feeling... abandoned, in more than one way, by my best friend.

[CHARLIE writes on his therapist clipboard.]

FLORA

Any insights Doc?

CHARLIE

It's Charlie, and yes I do.

[CHARLIE sets the clipboard to the side, and gets on eye level with FLORA.]

CHARLIE

Are those the feelings you should be having about someone you consider your *best* friend?

FLORA

... say more.

CHARLIE

Alright. Let's say, with your pack of hunters. What do you look for and value with your hunting group?

FLORA

Quick thinking, good aim, and strength.

CHARLIE

Is that all?

FLORA

...Those are the big parts.

CHARLIE

Now, Flora. What'd we talk about?

FLORA

Honesty.

CHARLIE  
So what else do you value?

FLORA  
Loyalty. Having my back. Trust.

CHARLIE  
Do you see those things in Charlotte?

FLORA  
(hesitantly) Yes.

CHARLIE  
Let me rephrase. Do you *still* see those things in Charlotte? What has her recent behavior shown you?

FLORA  
She doesn't keep promises...

CHARLIE  
Anything else?

FLORA  
And... she prioritizes her boyfriend way more. And when the going gets rough, she'll just run away. Which doesn't make any sense with what I know about her!

CHARLIE  
Does that line up with what you want and what you expect out of the people in your life?

FLORA  
No. It doesn't.

CHARLIE  
And is this limited to just your birthday party?

FLORA

No. She's been getting more and more sparse these past few months. The only times I really see her is when the hunting party drops off game at the kitchen she works at. I've really, really tried to get us together to hang out but it's never for very long, or she cancels on me the day of, or she brings her stupid boyfriend with her. Fuck that guy. Nothing about their relationship makes sense to me. The only times she does call me is to complain about him or to have a place to stay when they get into an argument. And I'll worry, and plead, and beg, but she always goes back to him.

CHARLIE

And how does that make you feel?

FLORA

Like shit? Like what is he doing to her?

CHARLIE

Well that's the thing Flora. This is her choice. She's choosing to be with him. Choosing to go back to him, to move in with him. All of these choices she's actively making instead of being the kind of friend you need. I think your past relationship is clouding your judgment here.

FLORA

What are you trying to say?

CHARLIE

I think she's moved on. It's time you do too.

FLORA

But...

CHARLIE

She only contacts you when she needs you, she leaves when you need her, and you don't feel heard. Are these things true?

FLORA

(begrudgingly) Yes. They are.

CHARLIE

Your boundaries and needs aren't being met here Flora. You're trying to reason with, and I'm sorry if this is harsh, a very toxic friend.



FLORA

Really?

CHARLIE

From what *you've* said, I don't think she can be reasoned with. It'd be a wasted effort. She's chosen someone else.

FLORA

Well how should I do this?

CHARLIE

Just stop talking to her. Cold turkey.

FLORA

If she contacts me?

CHARLIE

Tell her off. It's what she deserves.

FLORA

That feels cruel.

CHARLIE

It's what's best for you. *You* deserve better.

[FLORA takes a moment. Contemplating, she's very much in her feelings. Suddenly her phone rings.]

FLORA

Speak of the devil.

CHARLIE

Is that Charlotte?

FLORA

Yes. She can call me back if it's important. We're talking.

CHARLIE

Answer. You know what to say, now's a perfect time and I'm right here if you need me.

[FLORA answers the phone and puts it on speaker. Occasionally, she covers the mic to speak with CHARLIE, lines delivered to CHARLIE are denoted with a \*. Otherwise they are directed at CHARLOTTE over the phone.]

CHARLOTTE  
Hello? Flora?

[beat]

CHARLOTTE  
Flora are you there?

FLORA  
Yes. What do you want?

CHARLOTTE  
I wanted to check on you... See how you're doing after the party. Say I'm sorry I left... I'm sorry.

FLORA  
Thanks. I guess. Did you need something?

CHARLOTTE  
Uh. Yes actually, I wouldn't be asking if it weren't an emergency...

\*FLORA\*  
Ugh you were right. Half assed apology just so she can get something out of me.

CHARLOTTE  
I just got into a huge fight with my boyfriend, and I think we broke up because I broke his femur and...

[CHARLIE gives a very professional "I told you so" gesture.]

FLORA  
So are you actually sorry for ditching me on my birthday? Or are you just apologizing because you need something from me?

CHARLOTTE

No, I really am sorry!

FLORA

It's hard for me to believe that Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

What can I do to fix it?

FLORA

How can you fix it? Well you can explain why it took you three days to talk to me after you left me to deal with monsters you *promised* you would help us with.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry. I hadn't asked about it because... because I knew he'd yell at me if I tried to find anything out—

\*FLORA\*

Always goes back to the boyfriend.

CHARLIE

Do you see what I mean?

CHARLOTTE

—but we're done and I'm talking with someone else. He was at the party that night.

\*FLORA\*

Crystal clear.

CHARLOTTE

Remember Colton? He's the one that told me I should call you. I know I've messed things up Flora, and I wanna make things right. And you don't have to, but you're the only other person I can go to in town right now. If not, he did offer to help me move up north with him.

FLORA

You're moving? You've known this guy for what, three days and you're considering moving in with him?

CHARLOTTE

I don't know. I mean, it sounded nice but I just met him/it's probably a bad idea.

\*FLORA\*

She's moving! She's just gonna leave me! After all the shit we've been through together.

CHARLOTTE

Wait, can we slow down? I don't want to move—

FLORA

The fact that you'd even consider that! Why bother being here with your best friend when you could follow some stupid boyfriend! Look, just go. I don't care. You're a lost cause.

[The music for *Boy Problems* begins. Some ensemble members line the stage for chorus parts. COLTON stands awkwardly. CHARLIE just writes on his therapist clipboard like this is a totally normal session.]

CHARLOTTE

Slow down... wait—

FLORA

*Listen, just leave or stay  
But I'm done listening to it*

*If you're gonna go then go*

CHARLOTTE

*She said to me on the phone*

FLORA

*So tired of hearin' all your boy problems  
If you're gonna stay then stay  
He's not gonna change anyway  
So tired of hearin' all your boy problems*

CHARLOTTE

*And I know she's right  
And I should not be offended*

*Yeah, I know what it looks like  
From the outside*

FLORA

*And I know she's right  
And I should not be offended  
Yeah, I know what it looks like  
From the outside, from the outside*

CHARLOTTE and FLORA

*Boy problems, who's got 'em?  
I've got 'em too (na na na na na)  
Boy trouble, we've got double  
Don't know what to do (na na na na na)*

CHARLOTTE

*I think I broke up with my boyfriend today*

FLORA

*And I don't really care  
I've got worse problems*

ENSEMBLE

*(I broke up with my boyfriend)*

CHARLOTTE

*I think I broke up with my boyfriend today*

FLORA

*And I don't really care  
I've got worse problems*

ENSEMBLE

*(I broke up with my boyfriend, yeah)*

FLORA

*"[Char], gotta let it go!"*

CHARLOTTE

*She said to me on the phone*

*So tired of hearing all your boy problems*

FLORA

*It could be the perfect day  
He'll just make it rain anyway  
So tired of hearin' all your boy problems*

CHARLOTTE

*And I know she's right  
And I should not be offended  
Yeah, I know what it looks like  
From the outside*

*And I know she's right  
And I should not be offended  
Yeah, I know what it looks like  
From the outside, from the outside*

CHARLOTTE and FLORA

*Boy problems, who's got 'em?  
I've got 'em too  
Boy trouble, we've got double  
Don't know what to do*

CHARLOTTE

*I think I broke up with my boyfriend today*

FLORA

*And I don't really care  
I've got worse problems*

ENSEMBLE

*(I broke up with my boyfriend)*

CHARLOTTE

*I think I broke up with my boyfriend today*

FLORA

*And I don't really care  
I've got worse problems*

ENSEMBLE

*(I broke up with my boyfriend, yeah)*

FLORA

*What's worse  
Losing a lover or losing your best friend?  
Oh oh oh oh oh*

CHARLOTTE

*What's worse is when you discover  
You're not good for each other  
She's been giving, you've been taking, taking, taking*

CHARLOTTE and FLORA

*Boy problems, who's got 'em?  
I've got 'em too  
Boy trouble, we've got double  
Don't know what to do*

CHARLOTTE

*I think I broke up with my boyfriend today*

FLORA

*And I don't really care  
I've got worse problems*

ENSEMBLE

*(I broke up with my boyfriend)*

CHARLOTTE

*I think I broke up with my boyfriend today*

FLORA

*And I don't really care  
I've got worse problems*

ENSEMBLE

*(I broke up with my boyfriend, yeah)*

CHARLOTTE and FLORA

*Boy problems, who's got 'em?  
I've got 'em too (noo)*

*Boy trouble, we've got double  
Don't know what to do (noo)  
Boy problems, who's got 'em?  
I've got 'em too (noo)*

[The music ends. Despite it being a phone call, FLORA looks directly at CHARLOTTE.]

FLORA

Don't call me again. We're done.

[FLORA hangs up. CHARLOTTE looks devastated.]

CHARLIE

Did that feel good?

FLORA

Honestly? Yeah. It did.

CHARLIE

I'm glad.

[FLORA looks really sad, CHARLIE gives an evil smile out of her sight. Lights down on the therapy office. Spot on CHARLOTTE, until COLTON approaches her.]

COLTON

What happened?

CHARLOTTE

It's over.

COLTON

You and Flora?

CHARLOTTE

Yeah. It's over, I fucked it up! I just ruined my last relationship. I don't have anyone.



COLTON

That isn't true.

CHARLOTTE

Yes it is! Flora said "don't call me, we're done." That sounds like it's over to me!

COLTON

You still have someone.

CHARLOTTE

Who?

COLTON

Me.

CHARLOTTE

Colton, no. I can't just uproot my life and go up north with you.

COLTON

Why not?

CHARLOTTE

My whole life is here! My work and everyone I... everyone I knew.

COLTON

If it's about work, I'm sure that we can find something for you to do. We cook our own food, we have plenty of chores around town, and you can do all of it at your own pace.

CHARLOTTE

I can't. I...

COLTON

Run away with me Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Colton...

[COLTON sticks out his hand.]

COLTON

I mean it. Run away with me.

[The music for *Run Away With Me* starts.]

COLTON

*You're stuck in my head, stuck on my heart,  
stuck on my body, body  
I wanna go, get out of here, I'm sick of the  
party, party  
I'd run away  
I'd run away with you*

CHARLOTTE

No, Colton. I can't.

ENSEMBLE

*Ooh~*

COLTON

*This is the part, you've got to say all that  
you're feeling, feeling  
Packing a bag, we're leaving tonight when  
everyone's sleeping, sleeping  
Let's run away  
I'll run away with you*

CHARLOTTE

But, what about—

ENSEMBLE

*Ooh~*

COLTON

*'Cause you make me feel like  
I could be driving you all night  
And I'll find your lips in the street lights  
I wanna be there with you*

CHARLOTTE

I have to stay, I can't just leave—

ENSEMBLE

*Ooh~*

COLTON

*Baby, take me to the feeling  
I'll be your sinner, in secret  
When the lights go out*

COLTON and ENSEMBLE

*Run away with me  
Run away with me*

COLTON

*Baby, every single minute  
I'll be your hero and win it  
When the lights go out*

COLTON and ENSEMBLE

*Run away with me  
Run away with me*

[The music pauses briefly.]

COLTON

You said you had nowhere else to go. But you're wrong. You have me. My village, my family would accept you with open arms, I know you'd fit in with us perfectly... Please. Think about it.

[CHARLOTTE thinks real hard, she thinks of all she has here. All she has lost here. She makes up her mind.]

CHARLOTTE

*Up in the clouds, high as a kite, over the city,  
city  
We never sleep, we never try, when you are  
with me, with me  
I wanna stay*

COLTON

Oh.

CHARLOTTE

*I wanna stay here with you*

ENSEMBLE

Ooh~

CHARLOTTE

*'Cause you make me feel like  
I could be driving you all night  
And I'll find your lips in the street lights  
I wanna be there with you*

COLTON

Really?

You do?

ENSEMBLE

Ooh~

CHARLOTTE

*Oh baby, take me to the feeling  
I'll be your sinner, in secret  
When the lights go out*

COLTON and ENSEMBLE

*Run away with me  
Run away with me*

CHARLOTTE and COLTON

*Oh baby, every single minute  
I'll be your hero and win it  
When the lights go out*

ENSEMBLE

*Run away with me  
Run away with me*

[CHARLOTTE and COLTON embrace.]

CHARLOTTE

*Hold on to me  
I never want to let you go*

ENSEMBLE

*(Run away with me, run away with me)*

COLTON

*Over the weekend  
We could turn the world to gold, oh oh*

ENSEMBLE

*(Run away with me, run away with me)*

CHARLOTTE and COLTON

*Over the weekend  
We could turn the world to gold*

COLTON

*Oh oh*

CHARLOTTE

*Oh oh*

[CHARLOTTE and COLTON face the audience. Love has bloomed.]

CHARLOTTE and COLTON

*Oh my baby, take me to the feeling*

ENSEMBLE

*(Take me to, take me to it)*

CHARLOTTE AND COLTON

ENSEMBLE

*I'll be your sinner, in secret  
When the lights go out  
Just run away with me  
Away with me, yeah, yeah*

*Run away with me  
Run away with me*

CHARLOTTE and COLTON

*Baby, every single minute  
I'll be your hero and win it  
When the lights go out  
Run away with me  
Run away with me*

[CHARLOTTE and COLTON share their first kiss. They laugh, embrace. The ensemble dances around them in wonder.]

ENSEMBLE

*Run away with me*  
*Run away with me*

*Run away with me*  
*Run away with me*

[Time slows down, CHARLOTTE and COLTON freeze on stage in their embrace and lights change all around them. The cult members return on stage in their robes, and begin reassembling the blossom tree shrine to CARLY RAE JEPSEN. The music to the second stanza of *Black Heart* begins once again.]

ENSEMBLE

*You think love is a destination  
Like a show on your TV  
You're a cry to your generation  
But don't you cry to me*

*Under the blossom tree  
Come a little closer, won't you come a little closer to me  
You're my miracle (ale ale ale)*

*Under the blossom tree  
Come a little closer, won't you come a little closer to me  
'Cause you're my miracle*

*In your black heart, is where you'll find me  
Cutting through the cracks of the concrete  
In your black heart, is where you'll find me  
Waiting, oh*

*In your black heart, is where you'll find me  
Cutting through the cracks of the concrete  
In your black heart, is where you'll find me  
Waiting*

[Lights down except the spot on CHARLOTTE and COLTON, the light gradually gets darker until it fades out. End of Act I]

## [Summary of Act 2 Scenes 1-3]

Charlotte is fully in Colton's village now, and it is not so subtly revealed that it is actually a cult village. A la Midsommar. To emphasize this, they sing "Good Time". The good times don't last as an inquisitor named Julien has arrived from out of town, investigating a particularly occult demon that killed a fellow inquisitor. The village is hostile to this; they're perfect things are perfect, why would they not be perfect?

Charlotte tried to ignore Julien by expressing how much she loves being here, like she really really likes it and thus sings "I Really Like You." But quickly realizes that the ensemble is only singing the "really really realies" part of the song. This freaks her out, and she begins to get more involved with Julien as an investigative force.

For this curiosity Julien is murdered. Charlotte quickly realizes it's too late, and that shit is hitting the fan. She tries to contact Flora but to no avail.

Flora realizes that her therapist is a lying piece of shit, kills him and heads to save Charlotte.

The cult members sing Warm Blood and they capture Charlotte and prepare Charlotte for sacrifice.





[The chorus continues, unstopping, unchanging. Their choreography repeats, and repeats, and repeats. The musical backing gets gradually more distorted. They smile the entire time, hardly acknowledging CHARLOTTE.]

CHARLOTTE

I– I need to get out of here. Where’s Colton?

[CHARLOTTE runs off. Lights down, the ensemble doesn’t stop until midway through the set transition.]

## Act 2 - Scene 4

[Lights up on CHARLOTTE tied up in the middle of a summoning circle. Candles line the circle, flickering as CHARLOTTE comes to. Her instincts kick in and she tries to free herself, but to no avail. Several cult members enter.]

CAMDEN

Try all you might. The attempt will be for naught.

CHARLOTTE

Get me out of here!

AVA

Why would we? We've put in so much effort bringing you here.

CHARLOTTE

Why? What makes me so special? I'm nobody!

RILEY

Exactly! That's what makes you so perfect.

CHARLOTTE

Huh?

LINCOLN

She can't even tell. How sweet.

CHARLOTTE

Tell what? Answer me, what am I doing here?

YOSHIRO

You have the right initials too. That helped.

CHARLOTTE

What?

CAMDEN

Oh I can't take it anymore. You're getting sacrificed dear.

AVA

To our goddess.

ALL CULTISTS

CARLY RAE JEPSEN.

RILEY

Same initials!

[The cultists laugh, and start getting ready. COLTON enters in the same robes, holding a staff and grimoire. He doesn't acknowledge CHARLOTTE at first.]

CHARLOTTE

Colton! Thank god you're here, they'll listen to you tell them to stop this right now!

COLTON

Hm? And why would I do that?

CHARLOTTE

Because we're— Don't tell me.

COLTON

Thank the goddess the vessel didn't need to be smart.

[The cultists and COLTON laugh.]

COLTON

We're not anything, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

But...

COLTON

Oh like I'd want anything to do with you.

CHARLOTTE

(heartbroken) So you've been in on this the whole time?

COLTON

Yes, Charlotte. From the start.

CHARLOTTE

Why me? Please, you owe me an explanation at least.

COLTON

Wrong, I owe you nothing. The lengths I went to get you here, to get us all here. Truly the goddess herself will commend me.

[COLTON looks around.]

COLTON

But we have some time to kill, and our goddess is a benevolent one.

[COLTON squats down to CHARLOTTE's eye level, and holds her chin.]

COLTON

We needed someone... exactly like you. Someone with no one. Someone who has experienced heartbreak after heartbreak, let me tell you it's not easy finding someone in truly the worst relationship I've ever seen. Flora was a problem, you two are so close. Well, you were close anyway, we made sure to break that off. All we needed was a fresh heartbreak, on the final day of our blessed week. And I was more than happy to make that happen, I'm very dedicated to the cause.

CHARLOTTE

You're insane.

COLTON

True! Tell me, how does this heartbreak feel? This betrayal?

[CHARLOTTE stares at him in defiance.]

COLTON

Perfect answer.

LINCOLN

Preparations are ready sir.

COLTON

Excellent. Into positions everyone. Remember! Your sacrifice will be seen by the goddess, and she will return your gift with life and a new world. Have not fear in your hearts, but love.

ALL CULTISTS

Yes sir!

[The cult members get into position, the ones closer to the circle ready their sacrificial knives. A commotion is heard from offstage.]

FLORA

(offstage) Charlotte? Charlotte! Where are you? I'm here!

CHARLOTTE

I'm down here! Help!

COLTON

What? How is she here?

[COLTON gestures to the non-sacrificial cult members.]

COLTON

Stop her at all costs. Nothing can interrupt us. Do not fail us like Charlie so clearly has.

[The cult members quickly run around the ritual and off stage. Fighting is heard not too long after.]

CHARLOTTE

Please don't hurt her! She didn't do anything wrong, just take me. Leave her out of it.

COLTON

Oh believe me, you'll be disposed of shortly. As for Flora? I don't believe there's room for her in our utopia. (to the others) Let's begin, there's no time to waste.

[COLTON bangs his staff on the floor, the remaining cult members snap to attention and begin to chant in an unknown language, chanted in the tune of the final verse of *Black Heart*. The lights flicker.]

COLTON

Oh dedicated one, hear us. Return us to the glory days of olde.

[The first cultist stabs themselves. They slump to the floor, their blood lining the  
summoning circle.]

COLTON

Now that we've found you, please accept this: our offering of warm blood.

[More and more cult members begin to sacrifice themselves.]

COLTON

We have given love! Given touch! Please accept our offerings!

[The lights flare.]

FLORA

Charlotte! I'm almost there!

CHARLOTTE

Hurry!

[Sounds of violence are heard off stage.  
CHARLOTTE is lifted in the air, she tries as hard as she  
can to escape. There is massive energy and air whirling  
around her. COLTON raises his staff.]

COLTON

Please accept this! Our final offering! One in her loneliest time! We surrender this  
heart, this vessel to you, the one BLACK HEART!

[A single spotlight on CHARLOTTE, aimed at her heart. A dead cultist is flung into the  
room as FLORA enters sword ready, a moment too late. She has to watch as the light  
lingers on CHARLOTTE for a moment, then turns a deep, dark color.]

COLTON

Our goddess return to us! Become more than a memory! WE REALLY, REALLY LIKE  
YOU! RETURN TO US CARLY RAE JEPSEN!

[CHARLOTTE is flung to the ground, the light snatched from her. FLORA immediately runs to her, and uses her sword to untie her.]

FLORA

Charlotte, oh my god, you're okay, you're gonna be okay.

CHARLOTTE

(weakly) You made it.

FLORA

Of course I did.

COLTON

But you were too late, everything has gone our way, poor, poor Charlotte will disappear, and our goddess will return in her place.

CHARLOTTE

I'm not ready to die, Flora. I...

FLORA

You're not going to. You aren't. You can't.

[The ritual finishes as the final ensemble cultist slumps over to the ground, dead. All action on stage stops, there is only silence. CHARLOTTE cowers in FLORA's arms, both are terrified. COLTON awaits in a vile impatience.]

[Beat]

FLORA

Nothing is happening.

COLTON

Shut. Up. It has to work. It's going to work.

FLORA

No it won't! You're crazy.

COLTON

SILENCE.



[Beat]

[There is an intense, rumbling earthquake. Set pieces fall, the lights shake, COLTON smiles maniacally. FLORA and CHARLOTTE can't believe it.]

FLORA

No way.

COLTON

She's here!

[Suddenly, a large beating black heart appears. With every beat of the heart, everything shakes, the lights flicker, and the heart beat echoes. The heart begins to split, and a female figure appears in the center. The cacophony reaches a tee, and then the first beat to *Emotion* begins to play. The music is bass-boosted and horrendous, CHARLOTTE and FLORA recoil from the sound.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

*Be tormented by me, babe  
Wonder, wonder how I do  
How's the weather? Am I better?  
Better now that there's no you?*

*Drink tequila for me babe  
Let it hit you cold and hot  
Let your feelings be revealing  
That you can't forget me*

[The figure grows and grows.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

*Not a flower on the wall  
I am growing ten feet, ten feet tall  
In your head and I won't stop  
Until you forget me, get me not*

[The figure shrinks back down, emanating a strange power.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

*In your fantasy, dream about me  
And all that we could do with this emotion  
Fantasy, dream about me  
And all that we could do with this emotion*

[The figure floats down to the floor, then stands up.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

*This emotion  
I feel it  
This emotion  
You feel it  
All that we could do with this emotion*

[CARLY RAE JEPSEN casually walks on stage, she's got headphones on singing along to her own music. She's wearing an iconic outfit. When she arrives on stage, she takes her headphones off.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

Hey! It's me, Carly Rae Jepsen.

[Beat.]

FLORA

Huh?

CHARLOTTE

What?

[FLORA looks down at CHARLOTTE.]

CHARLOTTE

I'm alive? I'm alive!

FLORA

You're alive!

COLTON

(ignoring them, laughing) It worked! It worked!

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

What worked? Where am I?

COLTON

Our ritual, my goddess!

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

Ritual? What does that mea—

[CARLY RAE JEPSEN notices all the corpses strewn about. She audibly flinches.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

Ohhhh my god.

COLTON

We have done this for you! All of this for you, oh dedicated one! So that you might return the world to its former glory!

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

To do what?

COLTON

Restore the planet! Undo the devastation and cataclysm that has befelled this world all those years ago!

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

...I don't know how to do that.

COLTON

But we've brought you back from beyond the veil my goddess! From a land beyond mortal comprehension, back into flesh!

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

That's... a weird way to describe Vancouver.

CHARLOTTE

(aside) Is this really happening?

FLORA

I think so?

COLTON

Van...couver? That matches no descriptions of the afterlife in the sacred texts...

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

Yeah, I was just in Vancouver. Wait, did you say afterlife?

COLTON

Your death threw the world out of balance. Without you there has been naught but chaos!

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

Well I am very much alive, and have been. Jeez, that's a lot to put on one person.

[COLTON looks dumbfounded.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

Again, sorry, but where am I?

COLTON

No. This isn't right. Something must've gone wrong.

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

(to CHARLOTTE and FLORA) Do you two know where we are? You haven't been talking crazy.

[CHARLOTTE and FLORA look at each other.]

FLORA

North? -ish? State lines don't really exist anymore, it's mostly just towns and villages now.

CHARLOTTE

This place is called Arcadia, I don't really know if that means anything to you.

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

It sounds familiar.

[The three shrug, COLTON grabs a knife from one of the dead cultists.]

COLTON

Clearly the ritual wasn't quite enough. Maybe there wasn't enough warm blood, or we grabbed the wrong person... And as always, it's up to me to clean up the mess!

[COLTON pulls the knife and starts running towards CARLY RAE JEPSEN. She screams.]

FLORA

Oh shit! Carly! Catch!

[FLORA slides her sword across the stage, CARLY RAE JEPSEN quickly grabs it and raises it upwards.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

OH YEAH! A SWORD!

[She points it towards COLTON. There is suddenly thunder and lightning, he is struck dead in his place. All are shocked.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

What just happened?

FLORA

Maybe the ritual... had some side effects?

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

I guess so. Huh. Cool.

[CARLY RAE JEPSEN wanders around just lightning blasting nothing with the sword. Despite the circumstances, she's having the time of her life. FLORA helps CHARLOTTE to her feet.]

FLORA

Do you feel any different?

CHARLOTTE

Physically? No, I don't think so. I'm just... Sorry.

FLORA

No. It's okay.

CHARLOTTE

It's not. I hurt you, I took you for granted. I let some shitty guy get into my head for months, and didn't listen to you. And now look where we are, we almost died!

FLORA

You can't blame yourself for what he put you through or any of this. Like what the fuck, I don't think anyone on the planet could've anticipated anything like this.

[FLORA gestures to everything around them.]

CHARLOTTE

But I do blame myself for being so caught up in "normal." I don't even know what that really means, truth be told. There is no old self to return to. It's a hard pill to swallow, but it's true. All this time I wanted things to go back to normal but that's... impossible. It's probably a good thing ultimately, how am I going to get better if I'm constantly comparing thinking about the past? I'm no better than Colton if I think that way.

FLORA

Well then I'm sorry too!

CHARLOTTE

For what?

FLORA

The same thing! There was something my therapist said, fake therapist? I don't really know, he was full of shit but there was something he said that was genuine I think. You're a different person, so am I. You're allowed to choose other things. Putting you on a pedestal and expecting you to stay there isn't right. We're on different paths, and if you want to change and be a better and brighter Charlotte and we have to let each other go, then I'm okay with that.

CHARLOTTE

I could never. Even if you want to go hunting all night, and I want to settle down, I want you in my life. I'm sorry all these guys have gotten in the way of that, I really gotta re-evaluate my taste in men.

FLORA

My tragically straight best friend.

[The two laugh.]

CHARLOTTE

You're always going to be a priority for me, maybe I'll go hunting again one day or maybe it's just making us a meal. I don't know, I have to figure that out. But I hope we can figure that out together, you're my best friend, Charlotte the harlot...

FLORA

And Flora the whore-a. Til the end of the world...

CHARLOTTE

And beyond that.

[They do a fun handshake, and then hug. CARLY RAE JEPSEN taps one of their shoulders.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

Sorry. Not to eavesdrop but y'know... This reminds me of a song of mine actually.

[CARLY RAE JEPSEN, with her newfound powers, manifests a keyboard in a puff of smoke. She cracks her knuckles and begins to play. The keyboard has all the necessary sounds needed to make this work, because it's magic.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

Do you mind if I sing it?

CHARLOTTE

Feel free.

FLORA

Go ahead.

[CARLY RAE JEPSEN begins to play *Party for One* on the magic keyboard.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

*If you didn't know that you were right for me  
Then there's nothing I can say  
Tried to call you out to spend some time to see  
But somebody's in your way  
Tried to let it go and say I'm over you*

*I'm not over you  
But I'm trying*

*Party for one  
If you don't care about me  
I'll just dance for myself  
Back on my beat*

*I'll be the one  
If you don't care about me  
Making love to myself  
Back on my beat*

*You don't want my love  
If you don't care about me  
I'll just dance for myself  
Back on my beat*

*Party for one  
If you don't care about me  
Making love to myself  
Back on my beat*

CARLY RAE JEPSEN AND ENSEMBLE

*Ahh, ahh, ahh  
Ahh, ahh, ahh  
Ahh, ahh...*

[FLORA and CHARLOTTE start to dance along.  
At some point the corpses do as well, no one notices in  
the moment.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN  
*Once upon a time, I thought you wanted me  
Was there no one else to kiss?  
  
Was it all a dream I let myself believe?  
I'm not over this  
  
But I'm trying*

ENSEMBLE  
*(No one else to kiss)  
  
(I'm not over this)  
  
Party for one*



(hey)

*If you don't care about me  
I'll just dance for myself  
Back on my beat  
I'll be the one*

*If you don't care about me*

*(You don't care that I'm)*

*Making love to myself  
Back on my beat*

*You don't want my love  
If you don't care about me  
I'll just dance for myself*

*Back on my beat*

*(Back on my beat)*

*Party for one*

*If you don't care about me  
Making love to myself  
Back on my beat*

*(You don't care about me)  
(hey)*

CARLY RAE JEPSEN AND ENSEMBLE

*Ahh, ahh, ahh  
Ahh, ahh, ahh  
(Back on my beat)*

*Ahh, ahh, ahh  
Ahh, ahh, ahh  
Ahh, ahh...*

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

ENSEMBLE

*Back on my beat  
Back on my beat*

*Party for one*

*'cause you don't care about me*

*Back on my beat  
Back on my beat  
Party for one*

***Back on my beat***

*You don't want my love  
If you don't care about me*

*You don't care about me*

*I'll just dance for myself  
Back on my beat*

*Back on my beat*

*Party for one*

*If you don't care about me*

*(You don't care that I'm)*

*Making love to myself*

*Back on my beat*

*Ahh...*

*Back on my beat*

*(ahh)*

*Back on my beat*

*(ahh)*

*Party for one*

*Back on my beat*

*Back on my beat*

*Back on my beat*

*Party for one*

*Ahh...*

[The corpses all fall down to the ground again. CARLY RAE JEPSEN screams.  
CHARLOTTE and FLORA stop dancing and notice the corpses have all moved, they  
scream too.]

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

Hey. Um, those corpses were totally just dancing earlier right? I'm just the slightest  
bit freaked out, do you know how to get out of here?

FLORA

Yeah, let's get out of here. I came in this way. Jesus christ.

[FLORA leads CARLY RAE JEPSEN offstage. CHARLOTTE takes a moment to kick COLTON's corpse, and then catches up with the others. Lights down. End of play.]

[For curtain call, the cast sings *Cut to the Feeling*.]

FULL CAST

*I had a dream, or was it real?*

*We crossed the line and it was on*

*We crossed the line, it was on this time*

*I've been denying how I feel, you've been denying what you want*

*You want from me, talk to me, baby*

*I want some satisfaction, take me to the stars*

*Just like ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah*

*I wanna cut through the clouds, break the ceiling*

*I wanna dance on the roof, you and me alone*

*I wanna cut to the feeling, oh yeah*

*I wanna cut to the feeling, oh yeah (woo)*

*I wanna play where you play with the angels*

*I wanna wake up with you all in tangles, oh*

*I wanna cut to the feeling, oh yeah*

*I wanna cut to the feeling, oh yeah*

*Cancel your reservations, no more hesitations this is on*

*Can't make it stop, give me all you got*

*I want it all or nothing, no more in between, now give your*

*Everything to me, let's get real, baby*

*A chemical reaction, take me in your arms*

*And make me (hey) ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah*

*I wanna cut through the clouds, break the ceiling*

*I wanna dance on the roof, you and me alone*

*I wanna cut to the feeling, oh yeah*

*I wanna cut to the feeling, oh yeah (woo)*

*I wanna play where you play with the angels*

*I wanna wake up with you all in tangles, oh*

*I wanna cut to the feeling, oh yeah*

*I wanna cut to the feeling, oh yeah*

*Take me to emotion (hey), I want to go all the way (all the way)*

*Show me devotion and take me all the way*

*Take me to emotion, I want to go all the way*

*Show me devotion and take me all the way (all the way, all the way, all the way)*

*Take me, take me, take me all the way, ah-ah-ah*

*I wanna cut through the clouds, break the ceiling*

*I wanna dance on the roof, you and me alone*

*I wanna cut to the feeling, oh yeah*

*I wanna cut to the feeling, oh yeah (yeah, yeah, yeah)*

*I wanna play where you play with the angels*

*I wanna wake up with you all in tangles, oh*

*I wanna cut to the feeling, oh yeah*

*I wanna cut to the feeling, oh yeah*

*I wanna cut through the clouds (mmm, cut to the feeling)*

*I wanna dance on the roof (oh, yeah)*

*I wanna cut to the feeling (I wanna cut to the feeling)*

*I wanna cut to the feeling (I wanna cut to the feeling)*

[If the audience calls for an encore, then they sing *Julien*. JULIEN should be spotlighted and he is encouraged to actually do the silly leg movement.]

FULL CAST

*Woke up this mornin', it feels like everyday  
I got the blues, babe, not going away  
Another bad dream when you were running away  
I'm forever haunted by our time*

*We had a moment, we had a summertime  
Asked me to leave with you, but I could never decide  
I've been so torn up, I've been so out of it  
I'm forever haunted by our time*

*I've been all alone, on my own  
Every single night, I pray  
When you coming home? Coming home?  
'Cause I've been livin' for that day*

*Julien, in your heart, yeah, you must believe  
Julien, it was more than a fantasy  
To the end, through the last breath that I breathe  
I'll be whispering, "Julien"*

*I'll be whispering, "Julien" (Julien, Julien)  
Through the last breath that I breathe (Julien)*

*I tried another to keep me satisfied  
But all your colors are still dancing in my mind  
More than just lovers, I  
I'm forever haunted by our time*

*I've been all alone, on my own  
Every single night, I pray  
When you coming home? Coming home?  
'Cause I've been livin' for that day for*

*Julien, in your heart, yeah, you must believe  
Julien, it was more than a fantasy  
To the end, through the last breath that I breathe*

*I'll be whispering, "Julien"*

*I'll be whispering, "Julien" (Julien, Julien)  
Through the last breath that I breathe (Julien)*

*Julien, to the last breath that I breathe  
Julien, in your heart, yeah  
Julien, it was more than a fantasy  
To the end, to the last breath that I breathe*

*Julien, in your heart, yeah, you must believe  
Julien, it was more than a fantasy  
To the end, through the last breath that I breathe (Julien)  
I'll be whispering, "Julien"*

*I'll be whispering, "Julien" (Julien, Julien)  
Through the last breath that I breathe (Julien)  
(Ah yeah, all night, yeah, Julien, Julien)  
(Julien, Juli—, Julien)*

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