Novel and play 8

Subtext

1. If someone says, “I love my husband” as she aggressively chops the blood-red tomatoes for dinner.
2. Suppose you ask your friend, “How are you?” and he replies, “Fine, very well, thank you” as he packs up his belongings to leave the office, having just been fired.
3. “Dating is subtext, marriage is text” (from psychotherapist Dr. Rachel Ballon)

Create a scene

“Oh, [she says] I’ve been planning this for weeks. It’s all I’ve had to think about. I won’t harm you if you’ll let me talk. I’ve been thinking about devils. I mean, if there are devils in the world, if there are people in the world who represent evil, is it our duty to exterminate them? I know that you always prey on weak people. I can tell. . . .”

Loss of face

A fair, sweet, and honest country face was revealed, reposing in a nest of wavy chestnut hair. It was between pretty and beautiful. Though her eyes were closed, one could easily imagine the light necessarily shining in them as the culmination of the luminous workmanship around. The groundwork of the face was hopefulness; but over it now lay like a foreign substance a film of anxiety and grief. (from Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*)

Inflection

“Welcome to Dinosaur World,” he said. “We are about to go into a land that existed before time began.” He had spoken the line so often that it had turned into one word. “Weareabouttogointoalandthatexistedbeforetimebegan.” He then began to speak into a microphone. “Fasten your seat belts,” he said, unnecessarily. “Lemmeknowifthereareanyquestions.”

At the climax of the tour, close by an eight-foot-high killer dinosaur, he mumbled, “This is the fearsome Tyrannosaurus Rex.” Then he yawned.

Unheard melodies

*“Love?”* Hadn’t they done this already? “I don’t know.” She chewed thoughtfully and swallowed. “All right. I’ll tell you what I think about love. Here is a love story. This friend of mine—”

“You’ve got something on your chin,” Said Earl, and he reached over to touch it.

The subterranean

What does Captain Ahab want?

**Action**

**Middle**

1. We arrive in my room, the Kierkegaard. I sat down on the bed expecting him to join me, but he hunkered down in the dusty paisley chair. That chair. How old was it? Fifty years?

I felt the ball in the base of my throat hardening as I watched him pull a cigarette from his pack and stick it between his lips. He leaned back and sighed. “Just before you went into the ICU, I started to feel this ache in my hip.”

“No,” I said. Panic rolled in, pulled me under.

1. “You’re okay,” I told him. I could hear the sirens.

“Okay,” he said. He was losing consciousness.

“Gus, you have to promise not to try this again. I’ll get you cigarette, okay?” He looked at me. His eyes swam in their sockets. “You have to promise.”

**Scene**

**Ending**

1.

“If you want to be treated like a mother,” I said, “you should act like one.”

Dad seemed to be waiting for me to drop my eyes, to apologize and tell him I was wrong so we could go back to being like we were, but I kept holding his gaze. Finally, to call his bluff, I turned around, bent over slightly, and I rested my hands on my knees.

I expected him to turn and walk away, but there were six stinging blows on the backs of my thighs, each accompanied by a whistle of air.

. . . like Lori, I was going to get out of Welch. The sooner, the better. Before I finished high school if I could. I had no idea where I would go, but I did know I was going.

2.

“I should go now.”

“After we’ve thought it through,” Dr. Swenson said. “First there has to be a plan.”

Marina shook her head, thinking of Karen Eckman and what she had said about Anders not being comfortable with the trees. . . . “I don’t think tomorrow’s going to be any better.” And with that she left, Easter trailing behind her.

The plan was a blind risk—not to mention illegal, immoral, crossing the line of even the slackest ethics of investigative reporting, totally outrageous. It could very well get one of us arrested—or injured. For me, it could mean a new low of professional disgrace. . . .

“Okay, troops. Let’s go over this one last time.”

I unzipped the backpack, removed the map.

Our carefully hatched plan—it was the rope for us to hold on to.

And that was when the arrows came raining down on either side of them, half of them making sharp clicks as they hit the deck while the others parted the water like knife blades and slipped inside.

“I’ll never get out of here,” Lori kept saying. “I’ll never get out of here.”

“You will,” I said. “I swear it.” I believed she would. Because I knew that if Lori never got out of Welch, neither would I.

**Emotion**

**Beginning**

Christ Jesus appeared to [my mother] as a white octopus, luminescent in the darkness, deep in the middle of the night in our small town of Menomenee, Wisconsin. . . . My stepfather was the one in charge, not God. He was a doctor in our provident town and owned a small hospital and clinic, which treated half the populace, who granted him authority over their lives. . . . Money walled us in, I thought. It afforded my stepfather a manner of universal disdain.

A young-looking woman in overalls, a hard hat on, brown braided hair handing out the back, was leaning into a wrench nearly as long as she was tall. Her presence gave the machines a terrifying sense of scale, but she didn’t seem to fear them. She threw herself into her wrench, her body frightfully close to the roaring unit. . . .

As everyone knows, I was the model for Orange Nude. Even though it’s an abstraction, there’s no denying my long, unmanageable red hair or the paleness of my skin and brown eyes. If I hadn’t thrown it out the door when we broke up, I’d probably be living in a condo in Back Bay instead of renting in an industrial building in SOWA. But then again, I’m not the Back Bay type. “Don’t tell me how much you got for it.”

“I’ll spare you the pain. But the sale started me thinking about you, about the raw deal you got.”

“So I decided to come down and see what you’ve been up to,” he continues. “Maybe I can help.”

“I lost all that. I blew it. But you also blew it. We can get it back. We’re gonna get it back. . . .”

I don’t break the stare. “I thought you said it was all opportunity to do good?”

“The end is good. It’s just the means that are a bit iffy.”

“Illegal?”

“There’s illegal and there’s illegal.”

“And which one is this?”

Markel looks across the room at the Degas and Pissarro.

And now it all makes sense. “Oh” is all I can say.

The *New York Times*. Sales Commissions. Studio visits from the Met. My heart actually hurts.

The king stood in a pool of blue light, unmoored. This was act 4 of *King Lear*, a winter night at the Elgin Theatre in Toronto. Earlier in the evening, three little girls had played a clapping game onstage as the audience entered, childhood versions of Lear’s daughters, and now they’d returned as hallucinations in the mad scene. The king stumbled and reached for them as they flittered here and there in the shadow.

“Down from the waist they are Centaurs,” he said, and not only was this the wrong line but the delivery was wheezy, his voice barely audible. He cradled his hand to his chest like a broken bird.