

I love the smell of gasoline
by Claren Grosz

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Empty space. There is one performer. The show is lit by multiple overhead projectors operated by projectionists, also on stage. Their work occurs in plain sight, is also rhythmic and performative. The sound is also operated from the stage by a projectionist. The show is a self-contained unit.

Projections

A simple pinprick starry night sky. The sky warps and stretches. A moon appears with a child in it. Another projector illuminates a swirling, colorful image of the cosmos, overlapping the night sky. The child is lifted from the moon and held over the cosmos. The focus pulls upward to the suspended child. It is dropped, disappearing into space. The galaxy, with the child in it, comes back into focus.

Spoken Text

The universe is estimated to be 13.8 billion years old.

Almost 14 billion years ago, in the very first picosecond of cosmic time, we don't think the laws of physics even apply. The Big Bang is the conception and expansion of space itself. The universe does not expand "into" anything and does not require space to exist "outside" it. As a child, I lie awake at night and feel dizzy and hollow thinking about the edge of the universe, about true nothingness.

My throat burned when I first read about this picosecond. There are some truths that are too big for me to grasp. They slip through my fingers and the cracks between my teeth. I am lost in the space between an electron and the milky way, between a picosecond and 14 billion years.

I'm trying to package it all a little smaller into a pill I can actually swallow. All I can see is black. I need a bigger frame. I need to see the edges of it. So I'm trying to find the edges.

I can't see the starry night sky from Toronto or Calgary. I wonder if that's why I feel so big, and important.

A circle of light, spotlight.

Welcome to my one-woman show. It's not really a solo show though, because Jesse, Elyse and Steph will be helping me with the projections. I needed their help to make all this magic happen.

Lines of light connect the stars to reveal a capricorn constellation.

But it *is* a play about me! Ahem, I was born in Calgary, in January, sometime around 3am, in 1994. My Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Uranus, and Neptune are all in Capricorn.

Hand drawn landscape with two intersecting rivers (by Emily Jung).

Calgary exists at the *Mohkínstsis*, which is Blackfoot for "elbow." It is the sharp bend where the Bow River meets the Elbow River. One of my favourite memories of the Bow River is rafting with my

family. When my dad tries to pull the raft to shore, he falls in the water, even though it's only up to his knees. Then he proceeds to get dragged along underneath the raft, across the riverbed for like 10 meters while my mom, my sister and I die of laughter. This funny bone has been inhabited by laughing families for over 11,000 years-- including the Siksika, Kainai and Piikani of the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Tsuut'ina, the Stoney Nakoda Nations, the Métis, and likely many more peoples over millennia. Calgary's once very famous and very beloved Mayor Naheed Nenshi once said, "There have always been people here. In Biblical times there were people here. For generations beyond number, people have come here to this land, drawn here by the water. They come here to hunt and fish; to trade; to live; to love; to have great victories; to taste bitter disappointment; but above all to engage in that very human act of building community."¹

My family came here by way of Ontario, by way of Saskatchewan, by way of Britain and Scotland, by way of Germany, Poland and Ukraine.

Illustration of mountains.

Calgary is feeling my frostbite start to thaw out while I'm on the bus. Calgary is eating ketchup chips at the South Calgary pool as a child and breaking into it at night as a teenager. Calgary is driving around, listening to mixtape CDs, pumping the breaks to the beat of the music. Calgary is my parents.

Illustration of Calgary skyline.

My family came here drawn by the oil. Calgary is home to the head offices of Cenovus, Imperial, Enbridge, Suncor, Husky, TransCanada and Nexen. "The oil and gas industry" is not an abstract concept here-- it is your friend from high school, your uncle and aunt, your wife and her cousin. The whole city rides or dies with the cost of a barrel. When it booms... Baby, it booms. And when it crashes...

Brief blackout.

A glowing circle of light.

The Big Bang is followed by something called The Afterglow which is followed by the Dark Age.

¹ Nenshi, Naheed. "Reconciliation Bridge Naming Ceremony - Mayor Nenshi's Speech." YouTube, *CalgaryMayor*, 31 May 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjTPwcPLHYU>.

A few billion years later, amidst several billion other galaxies,
The Milky Way emerges.

And then Earth.

*The CN tower pierces the
screen*

I move to the center of the universe when I am seventeen,
having only been to Toronto once before for less than 24 hours.
I've been here for a decade now, much to my mother's dismay.

*Another landscape, the
Toronto shore made of many
hands (by Emily Jung).*

Toronto comes from Ta'karonto. Toronto is the biggest city in
Canada, a dish and spoon shared by a population made up of
almost 50% first generation immigrants.² Toronto is unending city
and unending water on the lands of the Haudenosaunee,
Anishnabee, Mississaugas of the Credit, Wendat, and the
Chippewa. Toronto is hustle and heat and humidity. Toronto is
learning what a cockroach really is. Toronto is my heart. Toronto
is really far from my parents.

*A collage is built: Seventeen
year old performer, smiling.
An Alberta healthcare card.
The rocky mountains. Wild
roses. Birch trees.*

When I go to the dentist in Toronto for the first time, I hand over
my health care card to the dentist receptionist. "Oh, you're from
Alberta!" She smiles into my little seventeen year old face and
says "I've heard it's beautiful but I think it's disgusting what
they're doing with the oil sands."

*Oil is dribbled across the
collage. A spill drowns out
the imagery.*

*The oil is scraped away
using a pallet knife*

I have a dirty secret. I have a thought that I think, and I think it
right into a box at the back of my brain along with other opinions
no one needs to hear like "you're loading the dishwasher wrong"
and "We need to stop producing Shakespeare plays." I think this
dirty thought and I keep it to myself until I put it in a play and I
stand on the Aki stage and I say it outloud every night and I feel
ashamed every single time. My dirty thought is this: *What if* I
don't think we should leave it all in the ground? What if I'm not
100% against the Canadian oil and gas industry?

² Government of Canada. "Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census." *Statistics Canada*, 18 July 2019,
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-cma-eng.cfm?LANG=Eng&GK=CMA&GC=535&TOPIC=7>.

I am from power.

All the men in my multigenerational Canadian family have worked in the energy industry. My father worked in oil and gas.

A land surveying map is rolled out.

My father worked in land surveying, to be specific. To be honest, I don't REALLY know what this means.

If I could survey the land, what would I ask it?

A sprig of wildflowers interrupts the image.

How do you feel about change? Is it exciting or scary? Is it irritating? Do you feel anything about it? Does any of it hurt? The mining, the drilling? Does a child digging a hole to China on the shores of lake Huron tickle? Are you attached to any of your inhabitants?

My dad asked different questions of the land. He asked, where does Joe's property line end? How close are we to the nearest navigable waterway? Where does the geologist want to drill?

A photo album in clear plastic pages, being flipped through. The photos come in and out of focus, layer on top of each other.

Let me tell you about my dad. He runs away from home when he's 16 and drops out of highschool. He's homeless for a couple weeks, sleeping on the Ottawa canal riverbank. His first jobs are manual labour— as a painter's assistant hauling toxic paint up and down flights of stairs, and as a spot welder at a sheet metal factory— no proper training or safety equipment, of course. It's the 70s. He only makes \$1.50 an hour, but the rent is only \$25/week. Imagine.

He turns things around in his twenties, goes back to school and moves across the country to be a land surveyor. He is a bonafide workaholic. When I'm a kid, he goes to work at 6am, comes home for dinner because my mother insists on it, and goes back to work after. He goes in on a new company and puts everything on the line-- including our house. He is honestly miserable.

But the payoff is huge. When it booms, Baby it booms. My dad retires at age 53. Retired Dad is someone new. He laughs and smiles all the time. He no longer surveys the land but he has more conversations with it. He is an avid hiker, cyclist, and skier.

Toy car drives across the projector.

He also golfs but I'm not sure that's a conversation with the land. He drives me to school everyday but it somehow never becomes a given. Everyday I wonder whether he'll offer, and everyday he says something like "I need to fill up the tank in the car, do you want a ride?" or "I'm going to pick up milk, do you want a ride?" or "The car is dirty so I thought I might just drive it around in the rain, do you want a ride?"

The answer is *always* yes.

Toy car drives into the image of a double-exposed gas station.

I love the smell of gasoline. Thick and sweet and chemical. Feminine like nailpolish remover. Masculine like destruction. How could it be so bad if it smells so good? When I google "why do I love the smell of" it autofills with "gasoline" so either google knows me really well or I'm not the only one. Google tells me it's because scent is so closely related to emotional memory. I associate gas stations with good things, like time with my Dad, family trips to the mountains, teenage freedom. I associate them with beef jerky, Aero bars and Coca Cola. I know I shouldn't like those things either.

I love the smell of gasoline. And what is love but a constant potential for loss, an aching reminder of our mortality. Death has stayed far away from me so far. I feel wildly unprepared. As I approach thirty, my parents approach seventy. I wonder if and when I might have a child.

The price of gas at the station carries so much more weight in Calgary. I stand at the pump, watching the little numbers fly upwards. Oil asks, how high can we go, Icarus?

Performer holds up a lighter. The Gas station goes out.

In the light of the lighter, she holds up a small dinosaur, making a shadow on the wall.

There have been five mass extinctions in the history of Planet Earth. The most destructive mass extinction of all time is called The Great Dying. The Great Dying was not the death of dinosaurs, but in fact came just before the birth of dinosaurs.

And the life and death of the dinosaurs led to most of the world's oil reserves being formed.³ One epic era fueling the next.

The Great Dying was caused by greenhouse gases raising the temperature of earth by just five degrees. Sound familiar? Once a certain tipping point was reached, everything spiralled. The oceans turned to acid, uninhabitable, and unleashed a poisonous gas over the land.

97% of life on earth was extinguished.

She blows the lighter out.

Red Sun. Smoke machine.

Floods and fire precede the apocalypse. So say many, many cultures and religions.

In 2020, Australia, the Amazon, and California burn. In Australia alone, 3 billion animals suffer.⁴ I can't watch the video of just one koala. I use the word 'billion' a lot in this play, but my brain isn't actually built to conceptualize what three billion even means.

But it feels different when I can see the smoke myself. When the sun is red in Calgary and red in Toronto. When the land that I call home is also ablaze.

So many homes destroyed. The plants, humans and animals immediately rebuild, right in the line of future fire. Home is home. They've unpacked their dreams here. Found meaning and comfort and decorated the walls with it.

The performer opens a clear umbrella. Spray bottle wets the screen, water droplets trail down.

A glowing figure appears beside the performer. A cityscape made of glowing windows.

My only personal connection with natural disasters is the 2013 flood in Alberta.

I'm 19 years old, visiting Calgary for the summer. The night before, I take the boy I'm in love with to Peter's Drive In. That night, in the North end of Calgary, we kiss in the rain and make out in the car listening to the music mix with the steady drone of the storm. When I drive him home, it's like emerging

³ "Oil Formation." *Energy Education*, https://energyeducation.ca/encyclopedia/Oil_formation#:~:text=70%25%20of%20oil%20deposits%20existing.to%20252%20million%20years%20ago).

⁴ "Australia's Fires 'Killed or Harmed Three Billion Animals'." *BBC News*, 28 July 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-53549936>.

*The windows become
blackened out one by one.*

from a dream. We discover that the roads have been blockaded because the downtown core is a river, the equivalent of Bloor to King, Yonge to Bathurst. The drive home is eerie. The power is out in several neighborhoods, including his when I drop him off.

*A paper doll chain made of
colourful gels unfolds.*

What do people do in the face of that much destruction? Calgary comes together in an incredible act of community. I join my friends in going down to one of the devastated neighborhoods. Everyone's doors are open. You start working on your friend's home, but over the course of the day you'll work on several strangers' homes as well. Ripping out soaked drywall, carrying bins of mud to ground level. Every once in a while you catch the eyes of someone whose life savings is being shoveled out of their basements by very cheery strangers.

In a feat of spectacular management, The Calgary Stampede opens on time, a week later, on July 4, launching the slogan "Come hell or high water".

Newspaper articles.

Newspapers across Canada publish stories calling the Calgary flood a wake up call— it's time to take climate change seriously. I've heard the sentiment that oil-barren Calgary got what was coming to it, and that kind of hurt my feelings. If that's the case, it's a city ready to handle what comes. This hostility isn't rare— when Fort McMurray was on fire in 2016, there was similar mutterings, the notion they were facing the deserved consequences of their own actions. The Toronto Star publishes an article that states about half of Canadians polled believe human-caused climate change was behind the flooding in Calgary and subsequently Ontario. They make special note that while 68% of Atlantic Canadians believe that Climate change is caused by human activity, only 41% of Albertans believe it.⁵

*Math tools, protractor,
compass and ruler.
Projectionist copies out an
equation.*

I want to apologize for how many numbers and charts I'll throw your way tonight. Several very respectable, smart people told me there were way too many numbers. I did away with most of them, but there are still a lot.

I love numbers. I'm a math tutor.

⁵ "Climate Change Caused Calgary, Ontario Flooding, Majority Believe." *Toronto Star*, 24 July 2013, https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2013/07/24/climate_change_caused_calgary_ontario_flooding_poll.html.

I know many people don't love numbers. I'm a math tutor.

Numbers help me quantify. Even if data are malleable and not objective. That just makes them like the rest of life. Numbers help me digest the world, and they help me communicate.

A chess board.

Numbers also help me assert myself. They're a power move. Or a defense mechanism. I arm myself with them. No one will accuse me of not having done my homework. I can't be patronized if I memorize the unemployment rate in Alberta, the vacancy rate in downtown Calgary, the percent breakdown of energy sources in every province in Canada.

I feel like there's a lot at stake-- if I stutter, the person I'm talking to will at best, write me off as a basic bitty who's internalized neo capitalism. At worst, he'll make note of my seriously flawed moral character.

Hands of transparent playing cards. The screens alternate with who's talking.

It's summer 2014 and my close friend from university and I are getting together to make dinner. He's from BC. We get into an argument.

"You would consider working on a rig for fast money? Ha. That's fucked."

He tells me that working on the rigs is absolutely an irredeemable sin. He says that working in oil and gas is unethical on all levels like he has sour milk in his mouth. A thick knot of things I don't know how to atone for leaps into my throat. I ask, well what about the fact that you use oil and plastic every day of your life, isn't that equally unforgivable?

"Ha. No. That's a dumb comparison. You can't actually argue that it's a realistic choice for me to not have a laptop in the twenty-first century."

I'm not arguing that, I'm arguing that someone has to make the laptop he can't live without. Someone has to drill.

"Nooo, no. If you willingly participate in an industry that is destroying the world, that's not morally okay. There's no way around that."

He speaks in hard absolutes, with the cocky assuredness of a 20 year old man. For the sake of our friendship I agree to disagree. He wipes his hands clean of the dirty energy sector.

Cellophane, with watery red dye in it's folds, stretching and ripping.

We go to the grocery store and buy meat on white styrofoam trays. We can almost forget what animal body it was carved from and by whose hands.

The performer washes off bloody hands at a projector

What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?

Like everyone else, I perfected the art of handwashing in 2020.

It was easy for me to work from home. My parents, retired, locked themselves away as well. In March, I berated my mother over the phone til her voice started cracking in an effort to get her to get the groceries delivered. You can afford it, I told her.

From safe vantage points, we watch the limitations of individual responsibility rip through the country. Particularly Alberta.

But what can I do? I sign petitions lobbying for a better paid sick day program and tip the Instacart delivery people generously.

A thin line slowly rising.

In the future the equator boils people alive. The countries most affected will be the ones who have barely contributed to global warming.

Whose fault is it?

Infographic.

Corporations. Seemingly every marxist environmentalist's favourite infographic on Instagram is this: 70% of the world's carbon emissions can be traced back to 100 unforgivable

companies⁶. They are all fossil fuel extractors. Four of those companies have head offices in Calgary.⁷ These are the folks getting rich off the upcoming apocalypse.

But that statistic includes the emissions released by the consumption of their productions.⁸ So, an oil company generates some amount of pollution getting their product out of the ground, refined, and sent out. The majority of the pollution is generated when people burn their product to heat their home or drive their car.

So, my fault.

Pie chart showing Carbon emissions: 30% from China, 14% from America.

Or... China's fault? Each year, China churns out a whopping 30% of global carbon emissions. Nearly half of the world's emissions is being generated in just three countries. Canada is eleventh on the list. China is number one by a landslide.⁹

Line graph.

But if we zoom out to the last 300 years, China is less responsible than the States¹⁰. I love to blame the States for things.

World map pictograph.

And let's take one more angle: if we zoom back into the present, and we zoom in to emissions *per person*, Canada is fifteen on the list and China is forty two¹¹.

⁶ Riley, Tess. "Just 100 Companies Responsible for 71% of Global Emissions, Study Says." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 10 July 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jul/10/100-fossil-fuel-companies-investors-responsible-71-global-emissions-cdp-study-climate-change>.

⁷ Decolonial Atlas. "Names and Locations of the Top 100 People Killing the Planet." *The Decolonial Atlas*, 22 Sept. 2019, <https://decolonialatlas.wordpress.com/2019/04/27/names-and-locations-of-the-top-100-people-killing-the-planet/>.

⁸ Thomson, Stuart. "So You Think Corporations Are Responsible for the World's Emissions? It's Not That Simple." *National Post*, 14 Oct. 2014, <https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/so-you-think-corporations-are-responsible-for-the-worlds-emissions-its-not-that-simple>.

⁹ Ritchie, Hannah, et al. "CO2 Emissions." Our World in Data, 11 May 2020, <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-emissions>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Also, it should be factored into our finger pointing that China is the world's top manufacturer-- they burn that much fossil fuels making goods we consume the world over. Goods I consume.

So, my fault. How can I blame this dirty dirty industry for giving me exactly what I need and want?

Out of focus bird silhouettes

When I wait for the streetcar, I like to look up and watch those beautiful small black bird silhouettes, flying in a cloud, a smudge on the sky. They expand and contract like one organism, swoop and dive and soar. No one bird leads. They decide together, and yet none of them really decides. What are they doing? Where are they going?

A group of starlings flying together is a murmuration. My poet friend Jessica, who also made these plastic bag installations, taught me that. She said she wished that humans would start murmuring together. But we are, always. When you see someone at a streetcar stop looking upwards, you look upwards too.

Images are pulled into focus, hovering. Beehives and skyscrapers. Dancers and birds. Mamas and cubs. Ant hill and city grid. Fighter jets and fighting rams.

Are humans super-natural? Is "Man made" the opposite of organic? Is it possible for human activity to be "unnatural," and is "unnatural" inherently bad? Robin Wall Kimmerer, a Potawatomi botanist and poet, teaches me in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, that we can't heal our relationship with the land if we view ourselves as separate from nature, innately dangerous to it.

What is written in our animal DNA? Across the planet from each other, without communication, humans accomplished the incredible feat of building pyramids. Like bees build hives. Like the beaver builds a dam. Humans discover fire, invent wheels, train plants to grow in neat lines and fruit bountifully, and... drill for oil.

Robin makes the distinction that oil drilling, unlike harvesting fruit, is stealing from the earth rather than reaping what is freely given. I'm reminded that in some places, oil does come to the surface of its own accord as a special and powerful gift, and has

been harnessed for centuries by peoples like the Seneca. I know that's not the same thing as fracking. Robin says that because we're an animal blessed with exorbitant cleverness, it's our duty to ensure the balance of our world. And we are super, super out of balance.

In a square of light, the performer slowly strips to her undergarments. Dresses begin to fill the frame around her.

She is dressed in the dresses one by one, like a paper doll.

All screens light up. They are all covered in dresses/clothes.

I haven't talked about the women in my family at all. The women in my family have *all* worked in retail. I used to work at the Eaton Centre Banana Republic where I was the queen of the fitting rooms. Fits is the tender heart of an otherwise toxic industry. One time a woman comes in to try on a bunch of work dresses and has to ask me for a size up several times. When I go to check on her, she opens the door with tears in her eyes. She tells me in a manner that warns against sympathy that she is sick, and that she's put on a lot of weight. She explains she just needs a dress, something, anything, to wear to work-- it doesn't even have to look good it just has to not look terrible. I bring her this dress that women always avoid because it's so form fitting, but it surprises a lot of women with it's thick, structured fabric. When she opens the door again, she looks amazing. The dress is sexy, and beautiful, and elegant and work appropriate. She laughs because I am excited and because she is excited too in a nervous way. She's wary of believing she looks as great as she does, scared of being the butt of a joke she's not in on. She asks whether she looks like a sausage (This is the most common question I get asked). I promise her she looks amazing. She leaves with dry eyes.

The dress is made with polyester and spandex: durable, stretchy, inexpensive materials woven from petroleum that take tons of energy to produce. It was made in Bangladesh by underpaid labourers and comes shipped to Canada in huge batches in several layers of plastic, also made from petroleum. One of hundreds of dresses that will be sold at the Eaton Centre Banana Republic *that day*, purchases I will personally enthusiastically encourage, even though I don't make commission. Dresses that will rip and never be mended, be outgrown, go out of style, never fit *quite* right and never get tailored. Dresses that will end up in landfills. *And* dresses that will make people feel beautiful and brave.

The projectionists light tealights. An oil rig shrine, oil-slicked birds and red roses around it.

Walking home after a successful date, the woman I was with lit up a cigarette. I was just drunk, rude, and bold enough to tell her I didn't want her to smoke. It was bad for her health, didn't she know? And, it wouldn't taste good, and I wanted to kiss her. She looked me in the eye, tossed the freshly lit cigarette on the ground without taking a single drag and kissed me.

My father tells me one of the hardest things he did was quit smoking-- which he did before me or my sister was born. It's a complex struggle. There's dealing with the nicotine but there is also dealing with the ritual, social, physical aspects. They give you suggestions like eating peanuts because it busies your hands and mouth.

How do we busy ourselves while we overcome our fossil fuels addiction?

One piece of plastic packaging is layered on top of another. The pile builds, the shadows intensify.

Another projector turns on and is also swallowed by plastic.

And another.

Netting, flexing and entrapping the performer.

Okay. No more petroleum disguised as plastic. I switch to glass milk jugs and shampoo bars and LED light bulbs and laundry detergent strips and fabric napkins. I tell my roommate we should stop using bottled hand soap and she is insulted. She tells me we should use less paper towels and I am insulted. We start religiously composting. I feel guilty about taking long showers but at least I pee in the shower so that's one less toilet flush although I suppose I could have peed in the toilet and not flushed it but *that* seems gross. I started getting grocery delivery service but everything comes individually wrapped in plastic. My recycling bin fills to the brim with things I know will never be recycled. Did you know that only 9% of plastic has ever been recycled, ever?¹² But I don't have the time and energy for meal planning. I am too busy spending hours lying in bed thinking about the sex I had over the weekend. Every time I see a cute baby I wonder whether I'll ever get to have one. When I see people with more than one kid I burn a little bit inside like *how dare you?* At least I don't drive a car. But I've never said no to a

¹² Parker, Laura. "A Whopping 91 Percent of Plastic Isn't Recycled." *National Geographic Society*, 20 May 2022, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/whopping-91-percent-plastic-isnt-recycled>.

ride in my life. I think about that as I let someone drive me to the subway station while talking about the impending apocalypse and how Alberta's massive carbon footprint is to blame. Actually we're kind of butting heads because I kind of feel like they're hating on Alberta and I kind of think that's a little hypocritical and I don't think they know anything about the energy sector or the Albertan economy but anyway thank you for the ride. I tell my parents they should put solar panels on the roof. Just think how that would shut people up, I think. Then I could say "my Dad put solar panels on the roof, so what if Mike worked in oil?"

Soft orange gel. Subway runs underneath the performer.

Summer 2020 and I'm sitting in Christie Pits. Enjoying the humid heat licking my bare arms even in the shade, and the comforting rumble of the subway as hundreds of people pass underneath me. I'm on a socially distant Tinder date and I tell the guy that the men in my family worked in oil and nuclear. I have strong roots in the energy industry.

He laughs. "Energy is a nice euphemism."

Euphemism?

A frame is sliced by string, creating smaller and smaller triangles.

I'm working with a theatre company that is trying to set up a creative exchange between Toronto and Montreal. They initially call this a creative pipeline, but then they change it to a creative corridor. On account of "pipeline" very strictly being a dirty, dirty word.

There are currently enough pipelines running through Canada to wrap around the equator 20 times.¹³ You very well may have one in your backyard if your house uses natural gas heating. Does anyone here have a gas stovetop? **Audience/Projectionist interaction here**

In the last decade, not a single major pipeline has been built to completion in Canada-- not any of the ones you've heard of-- the

¹³ Chen, Rachel. "Everything You Need to Know about Pipelines-and Why They're so Controversial." *Chatelaine*, 4 Feb. 2020, <https://www.chatelaine.com/news/gas-oil-pipelines-in-canada/>.

Energy East, Trans Mountain Expansion, Keystone XL, Mackenzie Gas Project or Northern Gateway. Stay tuned on Coastal Gas Link. Billions of dollars of investment leave the country every year. Encana leaves for America. Teck Resources withdraws a plan a decade in the making. The money is spent elsewhere in the world extracting fossil fuels. Likely, under lower standards than the ones we have in Canada.

I know that the end goal is to be off fossil fuels, and a recent study showed that most Albertans also know that. But that transition is going to be economically difficult. But developing new technologies, building infrastructure, taking care of the people who will be displaced in the transition-- that is going to take huge amounts of money. Surely oil and gas could fund that transition if the right taxes and incentives were implemented. Because resource extraction is the only industry in Canada that is bringing money into the country on any meaningful scale, as opposed to just moving money around the country, my personal anxiety is that *only* oil and gas could fund that massive transition. And we're running out of time to capitalize on that resource.

*Three compartments of light
that pull in and out of focus.*

Images of family vacation.

When I was little, my parents rented a houseboat from a less than reputable company. Me, a small child; my sister, a teenager; and my parents all crammed into the tiny but mighty but definitely falling apart Alisha Violet. My dad blew out his back on the first day, and had to stay horizontal all day while my sister and mom struggled to dock the boat each night. Poking fun at his failure as the only masculine figure in our household, he'd whisper to me as they worked, "Claren, close the curtains! I can't be seen lying down while they pull the boat in!" I would shriek with laughter, indulging in his and my favorite shared hobby-- making fun of him.

We puttered around the Shuswap lake for a week. I didn't know this at the time, but "Shuswap" is a colonial word for the Secwepemc people. I remember sitting with my legs dangling off the back, my feet in their cold water.

Where am I going with this? I'm thinking of petroleum. My toes in the lake water repelling the sheen of gasoline from the boat's

exhaust, scattering rainbows. *Petroleum*. It was equally beautiful and sickly. I'd sit and wait for it to dissipate.

Petroleum. Petroleum. Pet-rol-eum.

I've heard it said that it's not a matter of *if* there's an oil spill, it's a matter of when.

A graph

The waste from any houseboat is pretty negligible compared to the amount of oil that has been spilt by tankers. Which is nearly 6 million tonnes. In 1979 tankers spilled 636,000 tonnes of oil. By 2003, we were down to spilling under 5,000 tonnes per year.¹⁴ This is all horrific. But this drop... is incredible. It makes me feel... we can do better, we *are* doing better.

A chart: 150,000 barrels = 20,000 tonnes. Drawing a spike in 2020.

But I think spills are inevitable. Nothing can operate 100% without malfunction. In May 2020, 150,000 barrels of crude oil spilled from a storage tank in Russia and spread to the Arctic Ocean, the worst place it can be.¹⁵

1,195 barrels = 160 tonnes = 190,000 litres

I find out about the Russian spill because I'm actually googling an oil spill in BC that same month from the Trans Mountain pipeline, 1,195 barrels of crude oil spilled on land due to a pipeline malfunction.¹⁶ The newspaper publishes the volume in liters for a much bigger number. The newspaper is in the business of outrage. But in barrels, by comparison, this feels small. In comparison to the 300,000 barrels this pipeline transports every single day, this feels small. A cost that *could*, potentially, be outweighed by the benefits.

But who bears the cost? In Canada, ten times out of eleven, Indigenous peoples. And it isn't small if 1000 barrels spill in your own backyard, or if petroleum is in your own tap water.

Right now, Michigan is demanding that Enbridge immediately turn off Line 5-- a pipeline that runs through the

¹⁴ Roser, Max, and Hannah Ritchie. "Oil Spills." *Our World in Data*, 4 May 2022, <https://ourworldindata.org/oil-spills>.

¹⁵ Nechepurenko, Ivan. "Russia Declares Emergency after Arctic Oil Spill." *The New York Times*, 4 June 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/04/world/europe/russia-oil-spill-arctic.html>.

¹⁶ "Trans Mountain Pipeline Spill in Abbotsford Estimated at 150,000 to 190,000 Litres." *CBCnews*, *CBC/Radio Canada*, 15 June 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/trans-mountain-pipeline-spill-abbotsford-150000-190000-litres-1.5611973>.

Great Lakes. The pipeline transports the majority of Ontario and Quebec's oil. Turning it off would be a national energy and economic crisis. But there is no benefit that outweighs the cost of an oil spill in the great lakes. And how can I trust a company like Enbridge that is known to lie about the state of its pipelines?

Diagram

My father teaches me about pressure valves. When a leak causes pressure in a certain section of a pipeline to decrease, it automatically triggers a closure, stopping oil from flowing into that section of the pipeline. This is one of the reasons transporting 300,000 barrels a day by pipeline is considered the safest method of transport. If it travels by rail or boat, an accident could result in a much more dire situation. As we drive to Banff, Dad points out the tanker train that passes by. I watch it worm its way through the mountain valley, a trail of smog stretching over its black pill shaped cars. It never occurred to me that the trains I see are carrying things like oil and grain across the country.

Tanker derailment.

Tanker train cars.

Oil pills spilling.

I teach my father about how a Heart Lake First Nation company called Wahpaki Energy created something called Canapux-- big pellets made from recycled plastic to safely transport oil without fear of spillage.

I'm not really equipped for any of this cost benefit analysis. I shut my laptop and plug it into the wall to charge.

Tinder man face.

May, 2020, and I'm entertaining myself by going on virtual dates. On facetime with a progressive, art-loving feminist, the man asks where I'm from, I describe Calgary as being big-city-meets-small-town. It's really clean, everyone drives everywhere, and the people are friendly.

The performer steps in front of him and lifts a paper to her face, he becomes her mask, she becomes him.

"Really?! Hmm. I wouldn't have thought so."

Why not?

Blank screen when she speaks as herself.

"Because of like, the election? How they voted? They're very conservative, right?"

I talk about how Alberta is angry that the federal government is failing their economic crisis. (*AD LIBBED RAMBLING*)

“Oh, it has nothing to do with the government. It’s the global crash in oil prices. I guess they don’t know that? I don’t know. Maybe they just need to be educated more on how the oil industry works.”

My knee jerks so hard I kick my foot right into my mouth, blurting out “I’m pretty sure Albertans know more about the oil industry than you.” Then I remember that I’m talking to a man from Iran, one of the most oil rich countries in the world.

Hands, drawn by Emily Jung.

I love Calgary, I love Alberta. I must defend them. Us. It bothers me that half my favourite Albertans fervently, loudly hate Alberta, separate themselves from this identity that connects us as if they themselves aren’t the very thing that makes Alberta beautiful and complex. I mean, we are not all oil barrens and rednecks. No, that’s not... that’s a classist defense. What do I mean? I mean there are plenty of diverse, young, educated, creative urbanites in Alberta, too.

I imagine the people who are older, blue collar, rural types, the people in small towns, where the entire economy was built around a coal plant that’s been phased out, they’re also tired of being dismissed for being “redneck” by people like me. I’m guessing. I don’t actually know them.

A map of Canada pieced together across three projectors.

One fun thing when you’re tutoring kids, you get a sense of the politics of their parents because they parrot little phrases their parents must say, because you know they didn’t come up with it themselves. While teaching a charismatic and precocious twelve year old boy how to calculate tax, I remind him that it won’t always be 13%, that tax rates are different everywhere. I say, I’m actually zooming from Calgary right now, and here the tax rate is just 5%. He says:

“Pfft. And you guys wonder why your economy is crashing.”
Wowww

I start writing this play in the Fall of 2019: Federal election season.

I try to get my parents to vote NDP, but my Dad says he can’t vote for a leader who didn’t bother to visit Alberta on his campaign trail. Besides, he says, it won’t matter what he votes. He’s referring to the fact that elections are usually decided before they even start counting Alberta’s votes.

Colorful gels (red, blue, orange and green) loosely indicating how each province votes, come on to screen.

Canada votes in a Liberal minority while a sea of blue swallows the prairies. The West-wants-in sentiment of previous decades is replaced with a frightening West-wants-out movement: Wexit. My facebook lights up with memes mocking redneck Albertans for getting what’s been coming to them. On CBC, I watch Ontarians act shocked. Even though it’s a *national* broadcasting service, they frame Ontario as “we” and everywhere else as “they.” What the hell is going on over there? They want to know.

What’s going on is really high unemployment rates. The province wants pipelines built, and support, and they think a conservative government will make it happen. I actually think the Liberals *do* seem to like pipelines despite selling themselves as environmentally progressive, but I digress. This perceived direct connection between voting and economic repercussions is most clearly embodied by the fact that the day after the Liberals are re-elected, Husky makes sweeping layoffs.¹⁷ My mother tells me on the phone that our family friend has been laid off in his late fifties.

Checkered floor. A thin layer of tea in a plate that slowly drains (a projectionist drinks it via a straw)

I watch the election coverage from the Portuguese bakery with the American man I’m sleeping with who wants to keep things casual. The bakery is playing the news. We sit in silence and listen as our post-sex buzz drains out of us into pools of fluorescent light on the dirty checkered floor. Finally, sort of just to fill the silence, but also to hint at this deep well of existential angst I am churning into butter inside of me, I say,

“I wish that there was more opportunity for people with different opinions to have constructive conversations”

¹⁷ Giovannetti, Justin, et al. “Frustration Rises in Alberta Oil Patch after Liberal Election Win.” *The Globe and Mail*, 23 Oct. 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/alberta/article-frustration-rises-in-alberta-oilpatch-after-liberal-election-win/>.

Without missing a beat he deadpans back, “I don’t think conservatives should be allowed to speak.”

I want to clarify something:

I’m not a staunch anything, but I would say I’m a leftist. A friend once asked if I set my political beliefs on my dating profile to “moderate,” and I was baffled. But maybe you’re also picking up moderate vibes. I don’t agree with much conservatism at all, I’m just trying to humanize it. In general, I try to break bread with the people I disagree with.

*One one screen, a hand with
a glass of red wine.*

*On another, hands rolling a
joint. (alternating)*

“Yes, I will have more Pinot Noir, thanks. Do you honestly think anything Canada does has any impact on global warming? We don’t even make 2% of global emissions. Nothing changes for the world unless China changes.”

Well actually, China *is* changing. They’re the world’s largest producer of wind and solar energy¹⁸.

“And they get the rest of their energy from coal. Coal is twice as bad for carbon emissions than gas.¹⁹ In fact, building a pipeline to export gas to China could help them reduce their carbon footprint. But no one’s talking about that. We’re too hung up on anti-pipeline discourse to talk about coal. Did you know Vancouver is the continent’s biggest coal exporter?²⁰ No. Did you know Alberta and Saskatchewan’s electricity grids are running on 40% coal still?²¹ No. Pipelines are a symbol, disproportionately paid attention to.”

¹⁸ Chiu, Dominic. “The East Is Green: China’s Global Leadership in Renewable Energy.” *CSIS | Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 16 Oct. 2017, <https://www.csis.org/east-green-chinas-global-leadership-renewable-energy#:~:text=China%20is%20already%20leading%20in.by%20Chinese%20companies%20in%202016>.

¹⁹ Volcovici, Valerie, et al. “Explainer: Cleaner but Not Clean - Why Scientists Say Natural Gas Won’t Avert Climate Disaster.” *Reuters*, 18 Aug. 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-gas-climatebox-explainer-idUSKCN25E1DR>.

²⁰ Hopper, Tristin. “Yes, Anti-Pipeline Vancouver Really Is North America’s Largest Exporter of Coal.” *National Post*, 12 Apr. 2018, <https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/yes-anti-pipeline-vancouver-really-is-north-americas-largest-exporter-of-coal>.

²¹ “Provincial and Territorial Energy Profiles.” *CER, Canada Energy Regulator / Régie De L’énergie Du Canada*, Government of Canada, 28 July 2022, <https://www.cer-rec.gc.ca/en/data-analysis/energy-markets/provincial-territorial-energy-profiles/provincial-territorial-energy-profiles-alberta.html>.

It isn't just about carbon though, it's also about Indigenous sovereignty.

"There are plenty of Indigenous people that rely on and work in oil and gas and are in favor of a pipeline."

Sure, that's true. But it's also true that the oil and gas industry and pipeline construction in particular involves setting up "man camps" which correlate with an increase in violence against Indigenous women.²²

"Fine, so we won't build any pipelines, we can just keep importing oil from Saudi Arabia in New Brunswick instead."²³

We do that?

"You want to end oil, but I don't see you giving up flying home to Calgary twice a year."

My plane rides are frankly negligible

"So you're exempt from any personal responsibility."

Not exempt, but we need to be focused on actual systemic change, building renewable energy infrastructure, retraining oil and gas workers to make it happen. No one has to suffer.

"That's a great idea, so who is going to pay for that?"

*A frame in the shape of
Alberta.*

September 2021. Alberta's United Conservative Party leader, at the time, Jason Kenney has been silent for a month. No one has heard from Premier Kenney for over a month, while the province is drowning in COVID cases. There are now 1700 cases per day²⁴, which is 3 times as many as Ontario was having at the time, despite Alberta having a third of the population. And the premier is silent.

²² Stern, Julia. "Pipeline of Violence: The Oil Industry and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women." *Immigration and Human Rights Law Review | The Blog*, 28 May 2021, <https://lawblogs.uc.edu/ihr/r/2021/05/28/pipeline-of-violence-the-oil-industry-and-missing-and-murdered-in-digenous-women/>.

²³ "Market Snapshot: Crude Oil Imports Declined in 2021, While Refined Petroleum Product Imports Rose Modestly." CER, *Canada Energy Regulator / Régie De L'énergie Du Canada*, Government of Canada, 17 May 2022, <https://www.cer-rec.gc.ca/en/data-analysis/energy-markets/market-snapshots/2022/market-snapshot-crude-oil-imports-declined-in-2021-while-refined-petroleum-product-imports-rose-modestly.html>.

²⁴ "Covid-19 Alberta Statistics." *Government of Alberta*, <https://www.alberta.ca/stats/covid-19-alberta-statistics.htm#total-cases>.

I'm in Calgary. I'm in Calgary because my father has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I'm visiting because he's scheduled for a life-saving Whipple surgery. The healthcare system is straining but we're told that my father's procedure is very urgent, a top priority. They assure us they don't think he will be affected if they start triaging patients. And then, the day before my Dad's surgery, after he's already fasted for 12 hours, the hospital calls to say his surgery-- all surgeries-- are canceled. There are no nurses. There are no rooms. It's all hands on deck to take care of people on ventilators. From my parent's condo downtown I watch anti-vax protests each weekend that stretch blocks and blocks. My desire to break bread with the people I disagree with is waning quickly.

Projectors out. Projectionist uses a work lamp to light the stage. The performer grabs a an oil drum. She sits centre stage on it.

A poem for Climate Action. Ahem.

Transition them out of fossil fuels
Throw millions of dollars at it
Nevermind where the money will come from
It *should* come from the billionaires
Nevermind that it *won't*
Fuck money, and fuck your job, honestly
The big picture remains the same
We can't keep burning this shit
We have to pick our losses
And you are our loss
It has been democratically decided
Even you must admit
Next to the end of the world
Your life means nothing
Neither does mine!
And I say that compassionately as an arts worker in Ontario
Who has a bachelor of fine arts in empathy
That I use to make art with your tax money
It's not me you're mad at
It is the CEO who gets rich while you struggle to retire
Capitalism won't fall in a day
But irreversible climate change will fall in 30 years
Time is of the essence
I'm sorry you got caught in the middle

But I'd
Rather not
Talk about
YOU

I don't want to talk about it.-I don't want to talk about any of it.

*A column of light getting
tighter*

But we have to talk about it. We have to talk about it.

It's going to be a drawn out crumble. Mass emigration due to climate change has already begun. As the globe heats up, droughts will leave entire cities without access to water. Capetown, South Africa has already been flirting with Day Zero-- the day their water runs out. Completely. Taps off. There will be widespread droughts in all the places where we currently grow food-- worse than the dust bowl. It's already starting in California. Crops will need to move North, but they won't be able to because the soil won't be hospitable. Millions and millions of people will die of starvation.²⁵ And Google tells me that only 1 in 5 people with pancreatic cancer who undergo a Whipple surgery live longer than five years.²⁶

*Circle of light. A discoball
eclipses it, creating a
crescent moon, scattered
light everywhere.*

What did you feel as you stared down the comet that would end your life? Did 187 million years feel like enough? My bloodline only started three hundred thousand years ago. Does that make our downfall more or less tragic?

I burn you in my barbeque as coal. Ashes to ashes. We are both made of stardust. Who comes after us? And who else is out there, made from stardust? Do they have the answers? Why haven't they visited us? Is our planet not worth it? Or is any advanced species destined to burn out its resources and

²⁵ Wallace-Wells, David (see footnote 5)

²⁶ Speer, Antony G, et al. "Pancreatic Cancer: Surgical Management and Outcomes after 6 Years of Follow-Up." The Medical Journal of Australia, 7 May 2012, <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2012/196/8/pancreatic-cancer-surgical-management-and-outcomes-after-6-years-follow>.

collapse entire ecosystems within a handful of years? Is there not enough time in these billions of years?

There has to be enough time.

Return to column of light, this time expanding.

As Capetown got closer to Day Zero, they organized, regulated, cooperated and sacrificed. Each household was limited to enough water for one two minute shower, and a large bucket of water for everything else. They were able to stave off Day Zero indefinitely. Not that I think that sounds fun, and not that their water problems are gone, but when faced with devastating circumstances, they found a way to turn things around.²⁷

Squares of light with emails and social media posts appear and are sent sliding across the screen with each line, a dance with the performer.

The projectionists stretch out a line of red yarn between them. One pulls it, wrapping it around their knuckles, the other forced to release their grip.

In 2020, people across the country block railways in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en resisting the Coastal Gas Link pipeline. Michelle Robinson, a Dene activist and Alberta based Liberal politician, tells me that her husband-- who worked in oil and gas-- was paid to attend pro-pipeline counter protests. They provided the signs and everything. Within a year, he was laid off. She says to me, "you can love oil and gas, but it doesn't love you back."

Stage Manager calls lights and video cue on mic.

A digital projector turns on. The analogue projectors turn off. A rapid montage cycles through all the images from the show and footage of the oil industry.

Fuck. And here I am standing in the Aki studio telling you that I love oil and gas. I love oil and gas, because I owe them so much. I love oil and gas because they mean power and prosperity and I am a puppy worshipping at the tail of the bitch goddess of success. I want to love oil and gas. I want it to be okay. I want there to be a solutions that harmonize oil and gas

²⁷ Posner, Joe. "Explained: The World's Water Crisis." *Vox Media*, Explained, season 1, episode 2, 12 Sept. 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C65iqOSCZOY>.

labourers with environmental progress. I want to believe that most people care more about the world than profit. I want to hold on to the lifestyle that oil and gas allows me to live. I want to lie down in the shower and let it rain hot, coal heated water on my anxious body for a fucking hour straight. I don't want to feel guilty about it, I don't want to feel guilty every flight home to Calgary. I don't want me and my loved ones to be the reason the world is ending. And I don't want the world to end.

Blank digital screen

Denial is an important evolutionary development. If you don't live with a healthy sense of denial, you are paralyzed by fear.

I think it *is* the end of fossil fuels. You can feel it out West, like a bandaid being slowly peeled off.. It doesn't feel like a *victory*. But it feels... *nods*.

And I think the world *is* ending, at least as we know it, thanks to this industry that I've endorsed and benefited from, thanks to carbon-intensive lifestyles like mine, thanks to my ancestors.

I don't know if we can stop the apocalypse, but I think that might be beside the point. The world could end. That isn't a reason to be complacent. Listen, life ends. That's a guarantee. I'm learning how life is brief. We can make it worth living, regardless of how long it lasts. For *all* of us, the plants and animals included. Clean drinking water and air and oceans. Less forced displacement. Better immigration laws. Equality.

It's not going to be easy. I don't want to be flippant about the costs of overhauling society. But it's necessary, and it's possible. There are people out there actioning real solutions. I've put some of these solutions in the program if you need a dose of hope and direction.

A projector turns on, little figurines are spilled onto the screen. They come into focus. The projectionist begins arranging them.

Climate change is a top ballot issue now. People like Michelle Robinson are campaigning to repurpose abandoned oil wells as geothermal sources. We're implementing comprehensive composting strategies and banning single use plastics and getting the TTC to run on renewable energy. Solar power is finally cheaper than fossil fuels, and the town of Raymond, Alberta became the first wee Canadian municipality to run

entirely on solar power.²⁸ Costa Rica derives already almost 100% of its electricity from renewable sources while still maintaining economic growth²⁹.

Individually we have very little impact, sure. I try and use that as comfort when I order supplies for this play off Amazon. But corporations, nations, industries, governments are made of individuals. I'm thinking about the starlings flying in murmuration again.

A Dandelion being blown out.

*An illustrated garden is
revealed in layers (Emily
Jung)*

Last summer I accidentally grew a tiny forest in my small Toronto-sized garden: 7 maple saplings and one elm. My 6x10 plot is probably not the place to start reforestation, and after an entire summer of everyone telling me so, I come to accept this.

On a panic-whim in the fall, I decide to take action. The elm, which is already as tall as me, obviously does not even begin to uproot when I yank at it with my hands. Frustrated, I wrestle with this sapling, squat and tug and kick and step on it. This scrapes the bark, exposing its green underbelly. In the end, that is all I accomplish.

Weeks later, still ashamed of my needless aggression, I go outside in my short housecoat and flip flops. We face each other, both nearly naked and quivering in the frosty breeze. I ask for its forgiveness. I promise to find it a new home with lots of room.

This Elm has no business forgiving me, but I think it will. Even though it has lived less months than I have years, it already knows: the only way forward is to keep reaching out.

Black out.

²⁸ Weber, Bob. "Alberta Town Becomes Solar-Powered Net Zero Community: 'the Math Makes Total Sense'." *Global News*, The Canadian Press, 2 July 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/5439656/ramond-alberta-solar-net-zero/>.

²⁹ McKenna, John. "Costa Rica Ran Entirely on Renewable Energy for More than 250 Days Last Year." *World Economic Forum*, 20 Apr. 2017, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/04/costa-rica-ran-entirely-on-renewable-energy-for-more-than-250-days-last-year/>.

Garden back on.

The garden scatters.

That felt like a good ending. Right? Actually, it turns out the tree is an invasive species so I cut it into small pieces and put it in a black garbage bag for the city to collect.

Don't worry, the play is almost over. I'm going to finish with a story about a break up.

Frame is placed down.

*A photograph of a wintery
Toronto waterfront.*

In the middle of a relationship that was falling apart, in the middle of a terrible fight, I took my boyfriend for a walk to the waterfront. It was February. We sat on snow-dusted boulders and let our seats slowly go numb while he flipped through a rolodex of why he might be unhappy in our relationship-- I wasn't sure I wanted kids, he didn't know if I was going to move home to Calgary, I kept getting into arguments with his brother-in-law at family gatherings. We sat on snow dusted boulders and let our seats slowly go numb and he eventually got to the real truth of it-- he wasn't sure he was attracted to me anymore.

*The photograph is pulled up,
a quick slideshow through
various seasons, to a shot of
summer.*

I remembered then how that summer I had lay with his head on my lap and seen tears in his eyes. When I asked why, he had said that that moment was so beautiful it broke his heart because he knew it would come to an end. This feeling, this day, this way of existing together, all of it is fleeting. I had told him that I didn't understand the feeling. The temporal nature of it all didn't make me sad.

*The photograph reel is pulled
back down to winter.*

*A sun appears on the
horizon, its rays expanding
out over the photo.*

Booms. Busts. Growing pains. Endings. And absolutely none of it matters in the grand scheme of things.

*The moon and stars return,
blocking out the photo.*

But it matters to me. And probably you.

It matters to us.

And we get to do what we can about it.

Black out.