

Learning to Fly

A Collective Creation
by NBCHS Students

Characters:

J
ID
The Father
The Mother
The Sister
The Grandfather
The Eternal Bully
The Friend
The Date

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Setting:

Opening musical sequence - lights come up on J, sitting, or rather slumped in a chair, staring sightlessly at a flickering television.

The stage is divided into three parts: left - family and professor set, four stools, a 10 foot kite suspended from the ceiling in the background; centre - a tv/dream machine with strobe light down stage; right - J's home, a soft chair and a second 10 foot kite suspended in the background. There are two small kites attached to the upstage curtain centre which can be moved and manipulated during the Dream sequences.

Behind the stage right kite, near the back of the stage, trapped in a shadow cage, is Id, similarly slumped, disconsolate. Id's "shadow cage" behind the kite is

visible at all times, Id miming reactions of pain, rage, sadness, despair to what is J. is enduring. (In the initial stages of the play, Id is mute, unable to communicate with J. With each outrage, Id grows stronger until it is roaring, battering its restraints and, finally, breaking through and establishing contact with J.)

Script:

Scene 1: J's Monologue

J :

Silence... One of the most underrated things in life. The problem is that you don't even know that you miss it, until it's gone... Now I find myself waiting for those moments when everything is silent, and MY thoughts can ... exist... Even if it is only for a few seconds. Moments with serenity like this make me feel comfortable and safe... away from the nagging...

A voice calls out from the audience.

THE ETERNAL BULLY:

Shut up!

Characters stand up in the audience and take turns yelling at J.

J:

(silence) I know that you're not even there. You're just voices, an hallucination, a product of the chemical imbalances in my brain, just like we talked about in psych class.

THE DOCTOR:

Actually, that's a bit of an over-simplification. The actual physical and electro-chemical processes are far more complicated and cannot be reduced to mere--

THE SISTER:

You wet the bed till you were eleven!

J.:

That's not true... (Anger) How could you possibly know that?!
(moaning) Leave me alone, go away, I don't understand...

THE ETERNAL BULLY:

Shut up! I'm just sick and tired of all the moaning and whining. What you need is a good swift kick in the--

THE MOTHER:

He's just sensitive, that's all! One big, open wound, just like his mother. He needs love. He needs acceptance. But I do have to admit, dear, the constant whining does get to me a bit after awhile--

THE DATE:

He kisses like a fish!
(the others look at her)
I just had to say that.

THE FATHER:

If you can't stand the heat get out of the kitchen !

THE GRANDPA:

Enlist in the army boy! That'll give you some balls! *(farts loudly)*

The masked characters make their way to the stage, arguing among themselves, directing most of their venom at J.

THE ETERNAL BULLY:

I don't know why the rest of you put up with the little puke. Just looking at him makes me want to beat him to a pulp.

THE SISTER:

I look at him now and I just want to cry. When I think of what he could have been. A doctor, a lawyer maybe...

The characters continue the voices on stage, surrounding J and speaking at the same time. One by one they leave - the Sister is left calling to J.

THE SISTER:

J! Are you listening J? Earth to J, come on I'm talking to you...

Scene 2: The Sister and J

THE SISTER stands onstage close to J. Her gaze is tender, sympathetic. The lights subside, the others fade into the background, assume positions under a kite suspended near the rear of the stage, pretend to grasp "strings". J. looks up his sister, the bond between them obvious.

J: Huh what ? When did you get here?

THE SISTER:

I've been standing here for ages ! What were you doing? You're just staring off into space.

J: Uh I don't know, I just (pause, thinking to himself)

THE SISTER:

You seem to be so distant these days. I think you're working too hard - you know, "all work and no play makes J a dull brother!" .

(looking at him, seeing he is not paying attention)

I know! Let's take a trip, hey J? Just like we did after your graduation. That was sooooo much fun! Just the two of us again - Yeah! *(sees he still is not listening)*

Yeah and then maybe we could join a circus - you could be the bearded lady and I'll bite the heads off chicken

(getting frustrated, jumping around, waving her arms at him)

J? J? Are you tired or something? ... You look like you're losing weight. Are you taking care of yourself? J?

J: I had the dream again last night.

SISTER dissolves away as he begins his recollection, sound fx of wind, flapping kite, music.

And I knew it was going to happen again, I had that 'here we go' feeling. Just a cascade of thoughts, assimilating at this incredibly fast rate, super computations and... extrapolations. And then I'm asleep and there I am. Hanging there, this kite of human skin, stretched across a frame.

(arms outstretched)

And I'm looking down with perfect vision, perfect perspective, a bird's eye view of all of creation. With a string through my belly button.

(J does mime of string coming out of belly button)

Scene 3: J & Professor Confrontation

(Professor cuts J off abruptly and rudely)

Prof: J, step into my office.

(J. startled from his reverie, walks over to Professor - Id is also startled)

J: Ok.

Prof: I would like to discuss this paper you handed in. This is not the kind of work I am expecting.

J: What do you mean?

Prof: In fact, I've found that this is a reoccurring pattern in your work. The past three assignments you've handed in have been difficult to comprehend as well. But this, this is really the worst paper, if you can call it a paper.

J: (confused) What exactly was that paper on?

Prof.: I have to ask, did you bother to read the novel, because your essay shows no evidence of this. You do, however, talk a lot about yourself, your opinions, and a dream you've been having. Now unless you are using metaphors that are simply beyond my grasp I'm fairly sure that this has nothing to do with the book.

J: Well, I've been really tired.....

Prof: Look - this is really about the accusations you make. My, you have a few bones to pick! You mention me quite specifically here on pages three, four and again on page ten. Not in a particularly flattering light, mind you. I had no idea I was following you. No wait, I do believe the word you chose was spying.

Id noises - "she knows" ..

J: I don't remember that....

Prof: Well why don't I help refresh you. Here we are, a little quote: "My professor has gone so far as to spy on me. She has even bugged my apartment. The telephone, the smoke detector. She knows about me & my dreams." Am I missing something here? Did you not understand the assignment?

J: I'm sorry sir.

Prof: Is this just a sick little game to you?

Id is trembling and making small noises of fear. "No. No."

J: No, no I'm sorry sir.

Prof: Because this isn't the first time, and frankly, you need help.

J: I'm sorry....

Prof: You're sorry all right! I'm not about to let a little brat like you take your jack-off attitude for life into my classroom. This is unacceptable and I will not tolerate it any longer. I have wasted enough time on you and your paper.

J: It won't happen again, I promise.

Prof: You're right, it won't. I've spoken to the Dean and you are no longer welcome on this campus.

J: What?

Prof: You heard me. Now if you'll excuse me, you've taken up enough of my time.

Professor picks up a piece of paper and begins to read it, no longer paying attention to J. J exits, crosses to apartment, turns on t.v. sits, paces and rants about the professor, fixes TV and hat while mumbling to himself about conspiracies, finally falls asleep in his chair.

Scene 4: Dream Sequence #1

Music begins - J rises, steps up onto his TV/Dream Machine, closes his eyes, pulls the string from his belly, raises arms and flies - a smile on his face - it turns to fear as he fights to not fall off the TV. He panics and arms are flailing. During the dream, two kites (about 5 feet across) are moved to look as if they are floating behind him. The movement is fluid and light and gradually turns more menacing and aggressive as the music changes.

Scene 5: The Friend's Betrayal

Friend enters and finds J on "ledge" (on t.v.). A discussion ensues regarding their relationship and the changes in J's personality. J speaks emphatically about his mistrust of others and his absolute trust of the Friend. Friend is obviously shaken and begins to make excuses, slowly backing off and putting the mask into place. Id is making noises, warning. J is left alone again. Id is pacing and becoming louder which is a mirror of J. J. collapses into his chair and falls asleep.

Scene 6: Dream Sequence #2 with Id

Music begins - J rises, steps up onto his TV, closes his eyes, pulls the string from his belly, raises arms and flies – a smile on his face - it turns to fear as he fights to not fall off the TV. He panics and arms are flailing. The other characters are whispering to J. - Id tries to talk but it sounds like gibberish to him. They are getting louder. The dream is becoming more nightmarish and bizarre. The kites are swooping at him in an attacking manner. J is finally yelling and screaming for help.

Scene 7: Landlord Confrontation

A loud knock on the door - J and Id stop yelling and J opens the door to the Landlord.

LANDLORD:

What in the hell are you doing in there?

J: Nothing I'm just ...

LANDLORD:

What do ya mean Nothing?! You're screaming and making a crazy racket! You are keeping half of the building up all night. I got a kid with the chicken pox down there screaming her head off now cuz YOU woke her up! Looking around she sees the condition of the apartment.

What have you done to this place? Who said you could paint the windows black? What are you, some kinda Freak?!

And what's with the garbage everywhere and the tinfoil ya nutsoid homo? And that TV! You got that stupid TV blarin' all hours of the blessed day.
(reaches over to touch the TV - J reacts strongly) (Id growls)

J: Don't touch my stuff! Get your fat, greasy, germ-infested hands outta here!

LANDLORD:

Excuse me! I don't need this crap. I got people complaining, ya know? Take that tinfoil of your head!

(grabs his hat off his head, J reacts strongly, Id growls louder)

I don't have to put up with this anymore. I want you out of here.

(J. protests) No, you heard me. I want you gone by tomorrow. (Landlord pushes J.)

Scene ends with shoving match and Landlord pushes J into the next scene.

Scene 8: Home for Thanksgiving

J lays on the floor downstage of the family sitting down to dinner. J looks confused and somewhat dazed, the family don't seem to even notice him there until he comes and sits with them.

THE GRANDFATHER:

So I'm at the Bridge Club and the girl right across from me, she's leaning over just about to kiss me! I swear!!!

THE SISTER:

Oh Grandpa she was not.

THE GRANDFATHER:

And she was pretty, too. But then, I just have to go and spoil the moment. I had to fart so bad, a big one too. But I'm trying to hold it. I'm squeezing and squeezing, but then I go and let it all out! Just like this: *(big fart noises)*

Family makes gestures and reactions about The Grandfather's bodily noise.

THE FATHER:

Oh Dad talk about spoiling the moment. I could smell the sweet aroma of turkey before you let that fly. I always told you dad that I would find a woman that could cook a turkey like ma.

THE GRANDFATHER:

And you did, you did!

THE MOTHER:

Would anyone like some coffee, I just made a fresh pot?

THE GRANDFATHER:

Sure, that'd be great

THE FATHER:

That sounds great honey.

THE SISTER:

No thanks mom, I'm trying to cut back on the caffiene.

THE FATHER:

That's good, I've noticed that you've been putting on the pounds.

THE SISTER:

DAD! You're a fine one to talk, look at you.

THE FATHER:

That's a man's belly!

THE GRANDFATHER:

That's right, every man has got one.

THE MOTHER:

Well I'll go check on the turkey to feed those man's bellies.

THE FATHER:

So how's the new job going dear?

THE SISTER:

Oh, it's there, I made some new friends, same old same old. So what about J.? How is university going?

THE MOTHER:

The turkey is ready everyone.

The family makes gestures and reactions to the turkey being ready.

THE MOTHER:

Do you mind carving it for me dear?

THE FATHER:

I would love to, where is the knife?

THE MOTHER:

Here it is.

THE SISTER:

So J., tell us about university.

THE FATHER:

I betcha he's been working that campus shaking his, what do they call it now.... his bon-bon?

THE MOTHER:

You are such a hipster dear.

THE FATHER:

I am certainly down with that lingo.

THE SISTER:

Yes you certainly are.

THE GRANDFATHER:

Yeah.

THE SISTER:

So J. are you gonna tell us about university?

THE MOTHER:

Yeah, how is my little boy doing in such a big university?

THE GRANDFATHER:

Yeah we all want to know son.

J:

You really want to know?

THE MOTHER:

Yes, of course dear, tell us.

THE GRANDFATHER:

C'mon boy, let us in on things.

THE FATHER:

Your mother asked you a question boy.

J:

OK, fine. I'll tell you. I quit!

(family reacts with shock, in huge slow motion melodramatic gestures - with each announcement there is the sound of a cymbal).

And I got kicked out of school, and my landlord threw me out, so I've been living in the backseat of a car for about a week. There. Now you know.

(family resumes normal speed)

THE MOTHER:

Well, that's OK! You can have your old room back (she exits).

THE SISTER:

Why didn't you come to us for help, J? You tried so hard, how could you just give up?

THE FATHER:

I didn't raise you to be a quitter, boy. A mind is a terrible thing to waste.

THE GRANDFATHER:

I think I know why you've been acting so crazy lately, J. We've a history of craziness in our family.

THE FATHER:

Now, dad, don't you start.

THE GRANDFATHER:

Don't you deny it. You remember old Aunt Beatrice? She was crazy, crazy as a loon. She used to run around, quackin' like a duck, wearing underwear on her head. She was crazy if I've ever seen crazy.

THE FATHER:

Dad, that is nonsense. Nobody in this family is crazy, and I will not have that kind of talk at this table. If you're gonna continue in this way, I'm leaving.

THE GRANDFATHER:

That's fine. You just leave if that's what you wanna do. *(farts)*

THE SISTER:

Oh grandpa, you're such a stinky old man. This whole family's crazy. *(she exits, leaving J and Grandfather alone)*

Grandfather motions J over to tell him something private, they walk downstage, looking out for The mother as she scurries by with his blanket for J's room.

THE GRANDFATHER:

Come over here son, I got something to tell you. Shhhh! Come here, don't be afraid.

Grandfather reaches up and carefully lifts his mask up off his face and J stares at him in wonder.

Now you listen to me son, You gotta stop caring so much about everyone else and what they think. You have to listen to your own heart, believe in your own self. Everything's going to be okay. You'll see, you'll be fine.

J is nodding softly and then slowly reaches up to touch Grandfather's face, when he suddenly jumps back and readjusts the mask on his face.

And if that don't work, you can join the army boy! Have a few bullets whizzing past your head - that'll give you some balls! Heh Heh!

THE MOTHER:

C'mon Grandpa, it's time for your bath.

THE GRANDFATHER:

Oooooooh, you just want to see me naked!

They exit and J slumps down on the tv.

Scene 9: Sister Sets J. Up

THE SISTER:

All you need is a little distraction from everything that's been happening in your life. A little romance is just what the doctor ordered. I have a friend from work... she's really nice...pretty..... well, okay she's not bad looking.... you'll really like her. She has a great personality. Very outgoing and smart too.

(ignoring J's look of concern)

Let's make it nice and intimate in here.

Do you have Celine Dion? She's really into Celine Dion. Some nice, soft music, a little wine...

The Sister crosses to The Date as she arrives, they high-five as they pass. J. reluctantly comes over to meet her: nervous energy, awkward, uncomfortable.

THE DATE:

(braying, obnoxious, already in mid-sentence)

--so anyways, I said "only if you're prepared to marry me and only if you quit doing so many drugs". And so we left it like that because when you have two wills, two karmas inextricably entwined and yet butting heads with this explosion of total cosmic opposites and there's the attraction and at the same time total repulsion...ya know what I mean?

(Barely waiting for a response.)

Because it's like Celine says in one of her songs, I forget which one, something like "love never forgets", love is like this great, big elephant and I picture it like that just boom-boom-boom and you never know when you're going to get, like, flattened because it's fate and like the man says, y'know, the fate is in our stars. What's your sign, by the way?

J.: (with great concentration, trying to communicate)

Actually... I believe that any thought of predicting or controlling our fates is meaningless in the context of the larger forces which control our lives. Seen in that light, any concept like free will is revealed to be a mythical construct, more opium for the masses. We're all pawns, numberless and without purpose.

THE DATE: *(staring with mouth open)*

You really believe that?

J: Absolutely.

THE DATE:

Let's neck!

(She begins to paw him, chase him. J runs and bats her away, yelling and scared, hiding under a blanket.)

Oooh, playing a little game are we? I like games.

J is covered with a blanket and babbles some gibberish about a bomb, scrubbing at his arms. Date gets freaked out.

I've had a really Great time, it was FUN. Call me! *(exits at a run)*

He no longer has to "enter" the dream - it seems to be in progress all the time. J is quite lost and spiraling down.

THE SISTER:

(enters as Date leaves, crosses to J)

What going on J? Why was she so upset? What did you do?

J: *(very upset, panicking and pacing) (ID is moaning)*

Why did you do that to me? What are you trying to do to me? She contaminated me. It's all wrong! All wrong! It's your fault!

J is getting very aggressive - he pushes THE SISTER and hits her - she falls to the floor. She is afraid of him.

THE SISTER:

You need help J! *(she exits)*

Scene 10: Labeling J

The Doctors enter and a surreal scene of them “fixing” J is enacted. The Doctors congratulate themselves and place a sign around J’s neck that says “Loony”.

The Doctors shake hands and depart -- and J. is left in the glow of a TV.

Scene 11: Family visits J

The Family enters from one side of the stage, approaching J. with some caution, as if he is contagious. They watch him for awhile but he doesn't acknowledge them, only stares at the TV. They take turns giving short monologues about their concern and who is to blame, as they speak they remove their mask to show the “real” person:

1. Sister 2. Grandpa 3. Mother 4. Father (Father removes mask, is overcome by his emotions and is unable to speak, instead he slaps his mask back on in defense). The Father says “Gotta be strong”, pats Mother on the shoulder.

In reverse order, each character puts their mask back in place - Mother, Grandpa, Sister, each repeating “Gotta be strong”. They walk in and try to talk to J and express concern at his condition.

Doctor with a clipboard enters.

THE DOCTOR:

Ahem... it’s time for his next round of meds, I’m afraid you’ll have to leave.

THE SISTER:

What’s going on here? Why is he sitting here like that? What are you guys doing down here?

THE FATHER:

Now SISTER, I think Doctor’s know best. Let’s leave the medicine to the medicine men.

THE DOCTOR:

Listen, what J is suffering from is a separation and individuation of the family, and what we’re trying to do is a variation and specification of medication in order to achieve the desired affect. We’re professionals. I think we know what we’re doing. ...(blah blah, doctor talk improv)

Family exits, say goodbye to J. The DOCTOR mimes medicating J.

Scene 12: Dream/Nightmare Sequence # 3

The dream is getting much scarier and out of control. Id is shaking and vibrating. Music begins - J rises shakily, tries to step up onto his TV, closes his eyes, pulls the string from his belly furiously, raises arms and flies - a grimace on his face - he fights to not fall off the TV. He panics and arms are flailing. The other characters are whispering to J. - Id tries to talk but it sounds like gibberish to him. They are getting louder. The characters are pulling on him from different directions. The dream is becoming more nightmarish and bizarre. Music stops, characters fall to the floor. A heartbeat is heard. J is panting.

Scene 13: ID

ID:

Sick. Sick of listening ? Expectations, dreams, concerns. Doesn't have to be this way. Tired. Tired of alone?

J: *(shaking head)* The voices. Why? Who?

Id: J.

J: It's me? I want it to stop.. make it stop. I just want it to be over. I'm so tired.

Id: Want. Need.

J pauses and considers. Finally sits down on the tv, breathing is more quiet.

J: I imagine this place, where the sky is a crystal blue, the sun warm against my face. And I see myself, being me, without help from everyone else, the voices just cease to exist and for the first time that I can remember...

Id: Yes?

J: I can just be.... my true self - think how I want to. I close my eyes I see myself as normal, accepted by the people around me.

Id: It can happen.

J: No. Not possible. Not now.

I've made a complete fool of myself. They all think I'm crazy. I've embarrassed my family - I know they love me, they just want to help, but...

It wasn't supposed to be like this! I had goals, dreams. Now it's gone. (pause)
Isn't it?

Id: No. Remember the dream. Flying. Ability to crash and burn... or fly... free.
Is here. Dream has an ending.... why
afraid?

J: Because I'm the one going higher and higher. Until the sky is no longer blue
and the air is thin and cold. I feel this border, a point where if I go higher, I can
never come back down... I'll start to plummet. How does it end?
Do I fly, or fall?

Id: Accept me. Accept J.

Pause, J considers - listens.

J: Do you hear it?
Silence. It's quiet now.
Yet I'm not alone.

Alright, I'm ready...

Lights fade.

FIN

Learning to Fly