

THINGS KEEP CHANGING & IT'S TIME TO DIE

By Amanda F. Martin

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *I had a dream where I was underwater, and didn't know why. Halfway through the dream, my brain came up with a horrifying explanation for why I was underwater: I was the mother of a still-born baby, imagining herself as said baby, eternally underwater. This dream haunted me for a while, so I decided to write about it. I'm also generally interested in how characters "move on" despite the impossibility of ever fully escaping the past. A lot of my plays explore this issue. (Spacing is playwright's own.)*

Things Keep Changing & It's Time To Die
A short play by A.F. Martin

CAST

FIONA - f, 36.

CARL - any gender, any age. Dressed in a poorly made lobster costume.

MAN-BOY - m. Plays 10 years old but can be a person of any age.

MUSTACHED WOMAN - f, any age. Could be in a circus.

FIONA is bathed in blue light while sound/music that somehow gestures to the experience of being in the womb plays. It's peaceful & strange. FIONA is cross legged & her eyes are closed. Maybe she's meditating. Suddenly, the sound/music stops, and FIONA opens her eyes and tries to breathe, but can't. She struggles for a moment but then figures out how to go on without breathing, whatever that might look like. CARL, a person in a poorly made lobster costume, enters with an accordion.

CARL

Oi! Lady!

FIONA notices CARL.

FIONA

Ohmygosh Carl!

CARL

Fiona...

FIONA runs over for a hug. CARL somehow does not allow it.

FIONA

You're not happy to see me.

CARL

... I don't know. I have a very busy day.

FIONA

I could really use a friend right now.

Beat.

CARL

You're standing where I need to put this accordion.

FIONA

Sorry.

She moves over and CARL positions the accordion. CARL is very precise with the work at hand.

How've you been?

CARL

You're only asking me that so you can tell me about yourself.

FIONA

Well... that's very rude.

CARL

Isn't it true, though? You always make this about you.

FIONA

Isn't it about me?

CARL

I HAVE A LIFE, FIONA. I continue to exist when you're not here. You did not create me. This is not the Sims. You treat me like I'm a Sim-lobster. Fuck you.

FIONA

Sorry, I didn't know.

CARL

You never even ask how my kids are.

FIONA

I didn't know you had kids!

CARL

You never asked.

CARL has become sad & sits with the accordion & picks it up and plays something. Maybe it's good or maybe it's horrible. CARL puts it back down.

CARL

I have work to do.

FIONA

Carl...

CARL exits. FIONA picks up the accordion.

CARL (O.S.)

AND DON'T TOUCH MY ACCORDION!

FIONA puts it down as softly as she can. CARL re-enters with a sign that says DONALD TRUMP 2020¹ & looks for a place to put it, but then notices the accordion.

CARL

You touched it.

FIONA

Well... yes.

CARL

You never change, Fiona.

CARL keeps looking for the best place for the sign. Meanwhile:

You're nosy. You're selfish. You never confront your fears or your past. You only come here when something weird is happening up there that makes you remember but then you dream about nothing and nothing ever happens.

CARL puts the sign into the floor aggressively and exits. FIONA looks at the DONALD TRUMP 2020 sign. Then the accordion. She's confused. CARL re-enters with a yoga mat & begins to furiously do yoga. FIONA sits next to the mat, too close.

FIONA

You know Carl... I do think I dream about things. I'm underwater, that's something! And you're here, since you're a lobster. You belong here. But nothing else ever does. That's why I like dreams. Because in real life nothing makes any sense. And here, it's just OK that it blatantly doesn't. Like, when I'm awake, I feel like everything is really... illogical, and nonsensical, and horrible, and sad, and sometimes I go into a coffee shop and a Puerto Rican kid gives me a Danish scone and I'm like, what? You know? No. Maybe not. Anyway. Everything just seems weird to me and everybody goes on like everything is normal when it's definitely not.

Beat. CARL is in a difficult balancing position.

Why did you say I never confront my fears or my past? Carl?

CARL tries to ignore her.

Wow Carl you're super good at yoga.

CARL falls out of the balancing position.

¹ If this is produced after the 2020 election, and Trump won, this sign should say DONALD TRUMP 2024, THAT'S RIGHT Y'ALL HE CHANGED THAT AMENDMENT! AMENDMENT TO THE AMENDMENT, MOTHERFUCKERS! If Trump did not win, this sign should say DONALD TRUMP 2024, THAT'S RIGHT HE'S COMIN' BACK MOTHERFUCKERS! If this is produced after the 2020 election and Donald Trump is no longer relevant or funny, you can just write something in the spirit of this sign.

GODDAMMIT.

CARL

Sorry.

FIONA

CARL

I'm just trying to find my zen. And here you are with your intellectualizing... You should think less about your problems and more about ... Just *feel* what is happening here. Really feel it. Blah blah blah mind-body connection blah blah chakras.

FIONA

I don't know anything about chakras.

CARL

I know. I had to fill in most of that sentence with blahs.

CARL goes back to yoga.

FIONA

Carl... Hey, Carl? I was wondering... maybe you can help me do whatever I need to do here? It's just, I feel uncomfortable somehow... something is very wrong. Something is... missing. Yes, that's it! Something is missing. What am I missing, Carl? Carl?

CARL

I'M CLEARLY DOING A THING.

CARL throws the yoga mat and exits in a huff.

FIONA

What am I missing... What am I ... What...

A hat falls from the sky.

No, I don't think that's it.

A small MAN-BOY being pulled/pushed by MUSTACHED WOMAN (somehow... maybe a wheelbarrow? Or maybe she's pulling him like Lucky in Waiting for Godot?) enters.

MAN-BOY

СТОЙ! (Stoy!)²

MUSTACHED WOMAN stops. MAN-BOY gets out of whatever he is in.

MAN-BOY

(Singing. You can make this song up. Maybe the mustached woman plays the accordion to accompany the man-boy, or some other instrument she has brought along. The song gets faster as it goes on.)

OOHHH MY NAME IS JOHN
I DON'T HAVE A SCHLONG
THAT'S WHY THEY DON'T CALL ME LONG JOHN SCHLONG

I NEED TO PISS
BUT FIRST A KISS
FOR A LOVELY MADAME I'D NEVER MISS
COME HERE YA SLAG
WHO'LL SURELY NAG
ANY MAN TO DEATH WHO FINDS... A...

MAN-BOY realizes he doesn't know how to finish this. He panics.

BAG! A BAG!

MUSTACHED WOMAN laughs at MAN-BOY, who cries. As he cries, MUSTACHED WOMAN laughs harder.

MAN-BOY

SHUT UP! I HATE YOU! I'M RUNNING AWAY!

He runs off, crying. MUSTACHED WOMAN, who has laughed herself to tears, wipes her face calmly and exits with whatever she brought on.

FIONA

Yeah... I don't think that's it either.

CARL re-enters.

CARL

I have collected my thoughts.

CARL sits, calmly.

We've known each other... how long Fiona?

² Russian for 'stop!'

FIONA

10 years.

CARL

A long time for a dream lobster. Usually... we get... usually something is resolved. Existence is very painful, you know.

FIONA

I really didn't know...

CARL

It's not like you can control what you dream about.

FIONA

Thank you. You've become very wise, Carl.

CARL

I've been doing a lot of yoga and meditation. Anyway. It's been a long time since you've been here ... I mean, years? And I was worried, during this time... I was worried maybe you'd pushed me down so far into whatever part of your brain that you'd totally repressed or forgotten about me and I'd just be forced to live here, unresolved and bored and in firey pain for the rest of your life.

FIONA

The pain is firey?

CARL

I mean... yeah.

FIONA

Oh I'm feeling very guilty all of sudden.

CARL

Well there is something you can do....

FIONA

Anything!

CARL

Very good. MAN-BOY!

MAN-BOY re-enters, again pulled by MUSTACHED WOMAN.

MAN-BOY

СТОЙ! (Stoy!)

She stops and he gets off. He begins to sing again. Same music as before.

MAN-BOY

OHHHH MY NAME IS STEVE
I NEED TO SNEEZE
SO YOU CAN CALL ME SNEEZY STEVE

I NEED TO FART
AND THEN DEPART
BECAUSE MY FARTS SMELL RATHER TART

COME HERE YA WHORE
YOU BIG DUMB SNORE
I WANT TO WHACK YOUR.... YOUR

MAN-BOY begins to panic. MUSTACHED WOMAN laughs even harder than before.
YOUR.... CORE??? YOUR DOOR?! YES, I WANT TO WHACK YOUR DOOR!!
MUSTACHED WOMAN laughs so hard it hurts her. Like, she's in actual pain. Maybe she's writhing around muttering things in Russian or faux-Russian.

MAN-BOY

I WISH YOU'D DIE, YOU BULLY! I'M TELLING ON YOU!

MAN-BOY tries to run off in tears, but CARL grabs the back of his shirt. MAN-BOY continues to run but gets nowhere for a while before he notices that CARL is holding him back.

MAN-BOY

I hate all of you! All of you are so mean to me!

MAN-BOY cries into a pile on the floor. FIONA sits next to him. FIONA & CARL comfort him together.

FIONA

Hey hey hey.... It's going to be OK.

MAN-BOY blows his nose into CARL's lobster costume.

CARL

Can you tell us your real name?

MAN-BOY

(Kind of making it up) Jeremy?

CARL

And how old are you Jeremy?

MAN-BOY

I'm 10.

FIONA stands up.

FIONA

Oh... no....nonononono

CARL

Fiona-

FIONA

Nonono Carl I'm not ready for this

CARL

I AM READY TO DIE FOR THE LOVE OF GOD -
FIONA DO YOU WANT ME TO LIVE IN FIREY PAIN OR DO YOU WANT TO SET ME
FREE

FIONA

Oh... the latter.

CARL

THEN SIT THE FUCK DOWN. Sorry, Jeremy.

FIONA sits.

FIONA

But he's... he's not... is he?

CARL

You tell me.

FIONA

(To Jeremy) I'm not trying to replace you.

MAN-BOY

Who are you?

FIONA

I didn't want you to end up like this.

MAN-BOY

Like what? A terrible singer-songwriter??!?!

MAN-BOY cries and buries himself in CARL's lap. CARL looks at FIONA like, what can ya do?

FIONA

Look ... honey... I liked your song.

MAN-BOY

Really?

FIONA

Uh, yeah.

MAN-BOY

What was your favorite part?

FIONA

The... lyrics.

MAN-BOY

(Sitting up, encouraged) Yeah... I'm a pretty good lyricist.

*MUSTACHED WOMAN chortles but MAN-BOY doesn't bear her. CARL shushes her.
MUSTACHED WOMAN exits angrily.*

FIONA

Do you want to sing me something else?

MAN-BOY

There's this other song... it's stupid though.

FIONA

I'm sure it's great.

MAN-BOY

OK. So it's like -

*From somewhere (behind CARL somehow?), he pulls out a stringed instrument - guitar or ukulele probably.
The melody here is different from the last 2 songs but still very childlike and rough.*

WATER IS A PEACEFUL-SCARY ELEMENT
A CROCODILE-SNAKE OR A SLEEPING ELEPHANT
LIKE A BIG ANIMAL THAT COULD EAT YOU WHOLE
AN INCONSPICUOUS BOOBYTRAP, LIKE A SINKHOLE

MY LIFE DIDN'T REALLY GO AS PLANNED
BUT THAT'S OK, I STARTED A BAND
I LIKE TO SING MY LITTLE SONGS
DON'T KNOW WHERE ELSE I COULD BELONG

WHERE ARE MY FEET I CAN'T FIND MY FEET
SOMETIMES I WONDER IF I EVEN NEED FEET???
EVERYTHING'S A BLUR DOWN UNDER
AND SOMETIMES I CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER
WHY I'M HERE?

CARL bursts out crying.

MAN-BOY, cont.

Um... I don't know about that last part. But that's my song.

FIONA

I loved -

CARL

(Sobbing) It's the most... it's the most beautiful thing I've ever heard.

MAN-BOY

Thanks everybody. That means a lot.

CARL

Fiona, tell him how much you loved it.

I was just trying to!

FIONA

You are a bad mother.

CARL

FIONA
WHAT.

MAN-BOY
What?

CARL
You don't know how to support a blossoming international talent like Jeremy. *(To Jeremy)* Can I adopt you?

MAN-BOY
What is happening.

FIONA
I'm... your mother?

MAN-BOY
Oh I don't have a mother.

FIONA
Let me explain -

MAN-BOY
(To Carl) You told me I didn't have a mother!

CARL
Oh. I was lying.

MAN-BOY
I HATE YOU CARL. Are you really my mom?

FIONA
I don't know.

CARL
What do you think? He's 10 and he's been drowning his whole life in your subconscious.

FIONA

I'm your mother.

MAN-BOY

Wait... is this why I'm such a good musician? Because I have a childhood trauma and abandonment issues??

FIONA

Yes, probably.

MAN-BOY

Cool.

CARL

You know what you need to do, Fiona.

FIONA

But we're just meeting!

Beat. She looks at MAN-BOY. A beat. And then, with difficulty...

I used to dream about you a lot, but *you* were never here before. I'd just dream... that I *was* you, kind of. I'd wake up in the dream underwater, drowning, and I'd just go on drowning until I got used to it, eventually in the dreams I'd forget, I'd honestly forget what it had been like to be me, a person who was born into a world, onto land, not water. I'd forget what breathing was, but I still knew, even though all I'd ever known was drowning, that I needed something, I had a felt absence of *something*.

And I'd wake up, and ... I'd miss you so much.

And I'd feel so bad that all you ever knew was drowning. All I wanted, for both of us, was to wake up in a world where you'd have taken a breath. Just one would have been nice.

Or maybe that would have been worse.

I don't know.

Beat.

FIONA, cont.

Breathing feels really nice. I wish I could explain it to you.

Beat.

I loved you for 9 months.

I loved you more than -

Just, so much.

Beat.

I don't want this to happen again.

CARL

You can't control that.

FIONA

I know. But I'm still terrified.

CARL

Is Mike?

FIONA

Um... no. Mike, um... a few years ago... it was hard, after... Anyway. I got a donor. Which I mean, I think it's good this way, but I'm 36 now, which I know isn't old-old, but did you know that if you get pregnant after you're 35 it's technically a 'geriatric pregnancy' and I mean, they write 'geriatric pregnancy' on your medical forms? Which is like, I get that it's true but it's kind of fucked to see it written there, like it makes you think of all the risks, so when I went to my first appointment today and saw that and was like... Terrified.

MAN-BOY

I'm sorry you are a sad lady.

FIONA

Me too.

MAN-BOY hugs FIONA. It's long.

MAN-BOY

Can I sing you another song?

FIONA

Sure.

MAN-BOY

OH IT WON'T BE THE SAME
IT'S NEVER THE SAME
THE NIGHT IS LONG AND THE TUNE GOES ON AND ON AND ON
THE LEAVES KEEP GROWING
ON ALL THE PLANTS YOU'VE EVER KNOWN
THINGS KEEP CHANGING
AND IT'S TIME TO DIE
Did you like that?

FIONA

Um...

CARL

He has a point.

FIONA

Are you really ready?

MAN-BOY

It really is firey pain.

FIONA

Ohmygod I'm sorry guys.

CARL and MAN-BOY improvise some like 'yeah yeah it's fine, cool cool cool cool no doubt's while MUSTACHED LADY enters with a broom. She whacks MAN-BOY on the head with it.

MAN-BOY

OW!

MUSTACHE LADY

Пойдем! Давай! (Pie-ee-dyom! Da-vi!) (*repeats while she smacks him off*)³

FIONA

I can't promise you I'll move on right away. Like I'm pretty sure I'll have this dream again. As things go on... get closer to the end, you know. I can't promise anything.

CARL

Yeah... I guess it's important to be realistic.

FIONA giggles a bit.

CARL

What?

FIONA

It's just... you're a dream-lobster, is all.

³Russian for 'let's go! Come on!'

CARL

Wha- oh, haha. Yeah I guess that is pretty funny.

Beat.

FIONA

Thank you, by the way. I'm sorry you've felt scared and neglected and in horrible, fiery pain. I don't really know how to say this... but I love you, Carl.

Sexy music begins to play.

FIONA

Oh... no no no

CARL

Yeah that's not ... right.

The sexy music stops.

FIONA

Sorry. I think... just the hormones.

CARL

Yeah. Probably.

*The look away from each other uncomfortably, into the audience.
End of play.*

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Amanda Faye Martin is an American writer and dramaturg. She attended Kenyon College where she learned how to think by wandering around Amish cornfields, and holds an MFA in Dramaturgy from the A.R.T. Institute at Harvard University. She is currently the Playwriting Fellow at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand.*

