

**KATE CRACKERNUTS**  
**by Sheila Callaghan**

PAUL-- male, early 20's  
KATE-- female, early 30's  
ANNE-- female, late 20's  
KATE'S MOTHER / BABY / FATHER-- male, 30's-40's  
MISS PRIMA-- female, early-mid 40's  
CLUB KID / LAVENDER / WILHEMA-- female, 20's  
RALPH / RAVER BOY / DAVID-CHILD-- male, 20's  
PAUL'S VOICE—female, 20's-40's  
A HEADLESS SHEEP-- 20's-40's

**0. HEAVING BROW, ACHING LUNG**

KATE places one hand to her heart, one hand to her throat.

KATE

This. And this.

A swollen infinity. Beginning here. Rising to here. The space between filling, not filling, but becoming. It isn't rust, it isn't waste. I taste its growth. Like cinnamon. A flavor becoming.

It is huge. Can you see it? You must. It is huger than this little body channel. And it is still growing. Bubbles my blood and goose-pimples my skin. The big unnamable ache. I could maybe fly. No, it is huger. I could... maybe dive into the Aegean Sea and lift an entire sinking ocean liner filled with people, and hoist it onto my back and deliver it to the shore. I could release a stream of hot breath into the sky and cushion the fall of a dropping airplane. Keep babies from being strangled by umbilical cords with just the laser currents of my thoughts. Bite through burning metal with my teeth and cool the flames with my tongue. I could do. I could. I.

I don't know what I could do. But the becoming in my small space tells me a secret: You have this, Kate. Use it.

Do you understand?

**1. FLAYING THE BEAST**

PAUL is dancing violently by himself to a loud techno beat. He is sweating and looks awful.

PAUL's VOICE is nearby. She has no legs.

PAUL's VOICE

Do you miss me Paul

PAUL continues to dance. CLUB KID and RAVER BOY dance up on either side of PAUL. They circle PAUL.

The HEADLESS SHEEP dashes past. PAUL falls to one side. CLUB KID catches him and holds him upright, fanning his face. RAVER BOY blows into his whistle.

MISS PRIMA enters. She is glitter and skin and carries a baby's rattle. She approaches PAUL and licks his neck, tasting.

MISS PRIMA

You're leaking your salt... it's so early

PAUL slips and drops to the floor.

MISS PRIMA (cont.)

The night is drinkable yet...

MISS PRIMA opens the rattle and takes out a blue pill. She strokes PAUL's neck from his chin to his collarbone. His mouth opens mechanically and his tongue slides out.

MISS PRIMA places the pill on his tongue. He swallows. She strokes his hair and lifts his head to her breast. He feeds.

BABY crawls by, giggling. He plops himself down and begins laughing and grabbing his feet and clapping with the music and the lights.

BABY

Boom boom boom! Candy candy! Boom!

PAUL's VOICE

Do you miss me, Paul? Do you?

CLUB KID and RAVER BOY yank PAUL to his feet. His legs wobble and he begins to dance again. BABY squeals in delight.

BABY

FUCK BOOM FUCK!!!

MISS PRIMA

Good boy.

## 2. WATERCOLORS BLEED

Sobs are heard. Lights up on ANNE. She is laying on the ground weeping with her head completely wrapped in cloth. A picnic basket sits by her side. She is bawling.

ANNE

KATE....

Kate knows things. Like plaid. Like wreckage. Kate understands lawns and bridges and hammocks and vegetables and can hold it all in one fist. She is the mightiest cleverest person I know.

KATE....

She is four-dimensional. She can think with wings. She always gets what she wants.

When she was born she beat her way from between her mother's legs with her tiny crunched fists and as the doctor was about to slice through her cord she wriggled onto the floor and landed with a splat by his feet and banged her forehead on his toes again and again until he dropped the scissors. Then she closed her little pink lips over their handle and it took four nurses, three doctors, a receptionist and a burn victim to pry them free.

Fucking KAAAAAATE....

Lights up on KATE.

KATE

When Anne weeps: Molecules swell and burst and the air fills with debris, and we all choke. When Anne weeps: Her hair drizzles down the windshield of her face and her jaw rests on a battered hinge that flaps open in her sorrow-hurricane. She weeps and a caravan of starving children with sunken eyes explode from her and everything is sticky with her pain.

When she was born she slipped all silvery and wet from between her mothers legs and the left lens of the doctor's spectacles shattered and her father's knees buckled and the nurses bit their tongues and bled all over each other and every tear duct in the room opened and first they were knee deep in

their own fluids and then waist deep and finally they had to hold baby Anne above their heads so she wouldn't drown and here's why: they had never seen something so unendurably beautiful.

She is a clock marking time. A prism.

ANNE  
KAAAAAAAAATE, PLEEEEEEEASE.....

KATE approaches ANNE.

KATE  
I'm here, okay... take that off

ANNE  
No

KATE  
OFF!

ANNE  
NO!!

KATE tries to remove the cloth from ANNE'S head. ANNE screams.

ANNE  
AAAGGGGHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!

KATE  
All right/

ANNE  
Kate-crate!

KATE  
You are glass in my throat

ANNE  
I fucking care!

KATE  
Just tell me/ what

ANNE  
I've been un-lovlied!

What do you mean/ KATE

You don't know, you just/ don't ANNE

You've got a pimple on your/ nose KATE

Fuck off/ ANNE

How bad could/ it be KATE

How bad/ ANNE

It can be fixed. KATE

How do you know ANNE

Everything can be fixed. KATE

You promise? ANNE

Show me. KATE

The HEADLESS SHEEP appears.

Have you seen my head HEADLESS SHEEP

We're a little busy/ KATE

I might have swallowed it. Still, never hurts to look HEADLESS SHEEP

I'll keep an eye out KATE

HEADLESS SHEEP

Thanks...

The HEADLESS SHEEP runs off.

Did he see me ANNE

Who KATE

That person ANNE

It was a sheep KATE

Did he see me ANNE

Couldn't see KATE

Why ANNE

No head KATE

ANNE begins wailing again.

The noise! KATE (cont.)

I'm uglified ANNE

SHOW ME KATE

If I take it off, will you scream ANNE

The day I scream at my step-sister's beauty is the day my saliva turns to motor oil KATE

ANNE very slowly removes the cloth. She has the head of a sheep. KATE covers her mouth.

You said ANNE

What... now... KATE

Don't/ ANNE

That's... I mean/ KATE

Horrid/ ANNE

No now wait KATE

Kate ANNE

You look, uh... KATE

I'm broken ANNE

Where's your head? KATE

ANNE lifts up the picnic basket. KATE peers inside.

It fell off. ANNE

Do you have any idea/ KATE

I think... not to blame... I know she's not fond of me/ ANNE

KATE

My mother	
Your mother.	ANNE
Mother fucker. How	KATE
No idea	ANNE
Something you ate?	KATE
Haven't eaten	ANNE
Since when	KATE
Breakfast	ANNE
She cooked?	KATE
Omelettes	ANNE
She ate	KATE
Corn flakes	ANNE
Where did she get the eggs	KATE
The bird lady in the trailer	ANNE
The mystic	KATE
She's a mystic?	ANNE

KATE

I'll be back

KATE exits. ANNE peers into her basket at her head.

ANNE

Who will love me now?

### 3. PARTURITION ANXIETY

PAUL is walking home. He is a rubber band. His eyes are half-closed, his mouth cracked and white, his skin egg-shell colored.

PAUL's voice follows behind him. She still has no legs.

PAUL's VOICE  
(singing)

We might not make it home this time  
The earth will lick your sinking tide  
A tongue of mud around your head  
To lay you down, and lay you down

PAUL

Rest...

PAUL and PAUL's VOICE sink to the ground to rest. The HEADLESS SHEEP runs on. They ignore him.

HEADLESS SHEEP

I've got a phantom-head that itches. My phantom nose twitches and my phantom ears grow cold when night comes. I can smell things but only softly. I can see shadows in quiet relief. My phantom sight is Monet-colored. My senses are tinged with memory acid and all the corners are dark. I'm a spectacle host. A fear-hole. I run in circles because my sense of direction fell off with my head.

The HEADLESS SHEEP runs off. He runs back on.

And this boy you see here has lost his milky way and thinks he found another. But it is not glitter in the sky, it is sawdust.

The HEADLESS SHEEP hands PAUL a book and a pen, then runs off. PAUL's VOICE vanishes. PAUL changes dramatically. He his full of energy and sorrow, scribbling furiously away into the book, frustrated and panicked. THE HEADLESS SHEEP runs on again.

HEADLESS SHEEP

This is not now, incidentally. It is, oh, say yesterday. Or two days ago. Or last year.

PAUL

it's different this time Paul it's different and the Asians are crumbling no the agents are crumbling no crundling though the through my through me my lungs hurt Paul I can't read I can't breathe I can't can't

HEADLESS SHEEP

He can't write fast enough. The blood of his lost mother drains on the page. It is the wrong color. He's been here for days and days, since the very moment they pried him from his Mother covered in swirls of black ink. Came right here and sat beneath this tree and began beginning. Until.

He runs off. MISS PRIMA enters. She approaches PAUL.

MISS PRIMA

Well. Aren't you the ardent scribe?

PAUL looks up at her, startled and paralyzed.

I've been watching the pearls of sweat tremble at the tip of your nose for hours. You might split in two with all that fury. May I ask what you're writing?

PAUL's pen and book fall from his grasp. He opens his mouth but cannot speak.

What is your name?

PAUL doesn't answer.

Can you not speak?

PAUL doesn't answer.

What deadens your tongue?

PAUL doesn't answer.

Is it me?

PAUL nods.

Do you think I'm beautiful?

PAUL nods.

People generally do. But I only scatter my pennies for the incandescent. And you are one of them. Have a taste

She runs her finger in the crease of her elbow and wipes it on his lips. He licks them. His eyes grow wide.

My sweat is candy... I've got sugar in my blood. You like?

He grabs her arm and licks it.

Come with me. I have many things to show you.

He hesitates.

Don't worry. I'll bring you back if you don't like it.

PAUL takes her hand. They exit. PAUL rushes back on to grab the pen and book. He holds it a moment.

PAUL

Mother...

He places it back down on the ground. A ripping sound is heard from inside his heart. PAUL's VOICE crawls out from inside PAUL's body. She is a little moist, and missing her arms and legs. They stare at each other, horrified.

PAUL's VOICE

What have you done?

PAUL

I don't know.

The HEADLESS SHEEP runs back on.

HEADLESS SHEEP

We're back now. It is now now.

PAUL and PAUL's VOICE collapse onto the ground as before, PAUL's VOICE with arms again. The HEADLESS SHEEP runs off.

PAUL's VOICE  
(singing)

We might not make it home this time  
Your mother rattles in your lungs  
Her phlegmy cries collapse your stride  
And lay you down, and weigh you down

Shall we try again?

PAUL

A moment... more.

PAUL's VOICE

Very well.

She strokes his hair as they rest.

### **3.5 HEAVING BROW, ACHING THRONE**

KATE'S MOTHER is on her knees in her garden tending her vegetables, which are turning blue. She speaks quietly to an eggplant.

KATE places one hand to her heart, one hand to her throat.

KATE

This. And this.

And the becoming takes a form. It names itself. INJUSTICE.

Oh, you mother, on your knees in the garden talking to your vegetables and reincarnating a lost self. You are peanut brittle. Our fabrics are woven from different threads. Once I saw a fruit ripening within your breast. It made your eyes shine with sweetness. The fruit was a mirror to me. But this deed... it is miasmatic, Mother. The tunnel from my heart to yours has caved.

I will build a ladder rung by rung and climb away from your soiled universe. I will release a hot stream of air from my lips and keep my beautiful sister aloft until she calls me to bring her down again. And when I have righted all our fallen buildings and replaced our manhole covers and cleaned the sand from our corners and curbs, I will stand atop a mountain with my hair blowing and smile into the wind as you and your ugliness disintegrate.

Do you understand?

#### 4. IGNORING LADY RATSTAR

(cut)

#### 5. A WATERY SILENCE

PAUL lays on a bed, arms and legs dripping over the sides. He is pale and spent. PAUL's VOICE is nearby, still with no legs.

RALPH and FATHER enter, arms loaded with books.

FATHER

Look how he spills onto the floor. His skin is transparent

RALPH (to audience)

Once upon a time

FATHER

His eyelids flutter

RALPH

There were two healthy brothers

FATHER

His hair is so thin, his veins

RALPH

Then one day it changed

FATHER

Lips cracked

RALPH

And now there is one healthy brother

FATHER

skin is ice yet he sweats

FATHER mops PAUL's brow.

RALPH

And one spent piece of punctuation who drips from the bed and changes colors by the hour and flutters and wheezes and mumbles and loves nothing

FATHER (to Paul)

We went to the store for you, that store you like... I thought maybe the reason you got sick is because you ran out of things to read. We were very clever, we went through your coat pockets and found old receipts... you haven't been there in so long. So we decided we'd go for you, didn't we?

RALPH

Oh yes, we did

FATHER

I like the covers. Some have fabric on them. Some have gold letters. One of them has a painting of a naked lady. I put her on top. They're heavy. All those words. Who would have thought a bunch of words could be so heavy?

PAUL says nothing.

FATHER (cont.)

I also got this...

FATHER places a beautiful, ornate pen on top of a book pile.

FATHER (cont.)

Maybe you'll remember how to use it soon.

PAUL says nothing.

FATHER (cont.)

If you want anything...

PAUL says nothing.

FATHER (cont.)

Goodnight, son.

FATHER exits.

RALPH

“Good night, son.” Gosh, I must have mis-counted.

RALPH examines PAUL.

RALPH (cont.)

You're sooo sick, aren't you? I could be sick too. I could paint my eyelids yellow and fill my mouth with jellyfish. I could dangle from my bed and refuse to eat and watch my skin turn to parchment. But I don't. It's a choice. A CHOICE.

PAUL remains silent. RALPH grabs the pen from off the book pile. He places it gently into PAUL's hand.

RALPH (cont.)

Remember, you and mom sitting on the kitchen floor, scribbling and laughing, you couldn't even read yet but she pretended your lines and loops were words, she'd read from your pages aloud and suddenly you and she had created a fierce overgrown universe. She was magic. You both were.

You can be magic without her too. You can do it for her. Just try.

A beat. The pen slips from PAUL's hand and drops to the floor.

RALPH (cont.)

Fine.

RALPH grabs the pen and breaks it open, smearing ink all over PAUL's face and body. RALPH hurls the broken pen across the room.

RALPH (cont.)

Enjoy. Tell him I've gone outside to walk in circles until I drill myself to hell.

RALPH exits.

PAUL's VOICE begins wiping the ink off his body with a rag.

PAUL

Thank you.

A beat.

PAUL's VOICE

Is this what you want?

PAUL

You mean the ink? No

PAUL's VOICE

You know what/ I mean

PAUL

Yes. I have everything I want.

PAUL's VOICE

You're dying.

PAUL

Like I said.

PAUL's VOICE

There are many other less complicated ways to kill yourself... the big knife is in the top drawer in the kitchen... do it in the bathroom so it's easier to clean up.

Too wet a death for you? In the bathroom cabinet lined up like soldiers are all her prescription bottles, still half-full...

You don't want to die.

PAUL

I don't want to die.

PAUL's VOICE

You want.

PAUL

I want...

PAUL's VOICE

WANT...

PAUL

Her eyes, the color of a copper pot

PAUL'S VOICE

Oh sweetie...

PAUL

She opens them and her fear floods me, her skin moves dry and loose over her knuckles as my hand guides her pen

PAUL's VOICE

You have me / Paul

PAUL

Try it. Try it now.

A beat.

PAUL's VOICE

"it's different this time/ Paul it's"

PAUL

different/

PAUL's VOICE

"different and the aphids are grumbling no the acrids are fumbling though the through my through me my dung hurt Paul I can't read I can't breed I can't/ can't"

PAUL

CAN'T. GET IT. RIGHT.

A beat.

PAUL's VOICE

I'm sorry.

PAUL

I know

PAUL's VOICE

I miss you.

PAUL

I know

PAUL's VOICE

Lying in a coil behind your tongue

PAUL

Miss

PAUL's VOICE

The rumble and spring, the heft of your thoughts... did I not carry them well

PAUL

Once...

PAUL's VOICE

Does she carry them any better? Your new electric mommie?

She does not

PAUL

Then why do you need her

PAUL's VOICE

It's temporary

PAUL

How temporary

PAUL's VOICE

Until I shriek it out of me

PAUL

I have arms, Paul. I will grow legs soon... And walk away.

PAUL's VOICE

You can't... they don't understand me unless you speak too

PAUL

It's already happening

PAUL's VOICE

You have nowhere to go

PAUL

I'll whisper soothing words into the ears of orphans when they are in pain. A voice not tethered has many places to be.

PAUL's VOICE

You belong with me.

PAUL

Then help me find my way back

PAUL's VOICE

I don't know how.

PAUL

## **6. WITHIN THIS A SAGGING MOMENT**

LAVENDAR is seated on a toilet with her pants at her ankles. She strokes a black crow. She wears many layers of clothing and an eye patch. Her grey hair trails onto the ground.

KATE knocks.

LAVENDAR

Come in.

KATE

I walk in and she is sitting on the can like Buddah and before I can turn to blush she says

LAVENDAR

Don't feel kooky, I'm not using it right now, I just hate to keep getting up, my knees are old, I was a dancer you know, that's how I lost this eye, my other eye doesn't work so good either, I went colorblind during that bad storm last year

KATE

I notice the bird she is stroking in her hands is dead and I assume she knows this but I feel obliged to mention it just the same and she says

LAVENDAR

Juniper. He helps me to think, he was my favorite crow, I had a bunch but they all fought and killed one other, one morning I found Garrison hanging from a noose off the trailer hitch, next day caught his brother wrapped in a bunch of those wire twist-ties and plugged into an electrical socket, but not Juniper here, Junie was a tough old bird, he hung in there even when they shaved his feathers and locked him outside in the dead of winter

KATE

I decide not to beat around the bush because I know my sister Anne is in great anguish so I ask her if she remembers a woman coming to her recently and asking her to change a girl's head into a sheep's and she says

LAVENDAR

No darling, no woman asked for such a terrible thing, I don't do terrible things, but a lady came in recently who was sick and she wanted something but I got confused because sometimes I pick up talk radio from the static electricity in my hair and I can't tell who is saying what so I cooked her some eggs in one of my special pots and wrapped them in a woolen sweater and gave them to her and that's the last I heard of her, would you like some tea?

KATE

I tell her I have to find a way to get my sister's head back in place and she says

LAVENDAR

Have some tea.

LAVENDAR points to the stove. KATE pours herself a cup of tea. LAVENDAR motions for her to hold the mug out. LAVENDAR unscrews the crow's head from its body and taps some dust from its body into the cup.

KATE

How will this help

LAVENDAR

What have I been telling you, the bird here is good luck, now drink it dear

KATE

But my sister

LAVENDAR

Drink your tea and walk home, everything will be fine, you'll make the right decision, people don't trust their ability to make good decisions, I never forget I know how to make a good decision, I just forget I haven't already made it.

KATE

So I finish my tea, sharply aware that somewhere a breeze is blowing through my sister's wool and for a timid moment she feels joy

ANNE appears in a pool of light, bawling. She pauses a moment and sniffs the air. She is amazed.

ANNE

A scent, honey-roasted peanuts and alfalfa... I have sonic smelling, clarity like a smelling-lens to my nose

She sniffs the air again.

ANNE (cont.)

My inner skin is drenched with something vast... honey roasted peanuts and alfalfa and sweat, I am smelling the future

## **7. A SHEEP MARKING TIME TWO**

HEADLESS SHEEP

And somewhere else a mature animal has lost his way, but many do nowadays and do not make good stories. I refuse to parade my wants before you like a string of bad puns. But for those of you with heads, here's a thought: Try Anne Bolyne-ing it for an afternoon. You'll have a gracious smear of a day before you. There is something to be said for blurring the lines. The End.

(And they will say "look at him without the head, isn't he pleasant, doesn't he take his predicament in stride, he is even tempered and handles change well." And I will titter with my phantom throat at their approving glances. And when my head is returned to me I will marinade their feet in bile and eat their toes one by one.)

## 8. BABY LEARNS A LESSON IN LIFE

BABY is sitting on an office floor, playing with the rattle. He smacks the rattle on the ground. It opens and out spills a bunch of pink and blue pills.

BABY

Candy.

He takes a handful and shoves them into his mouth. MISS PRIMA dashes in, flustered, searching for something.

MISS PRIMA

Have you seen my-- No, Baby, no! Bad! You'll spoil your dinner.

She smacks BABY on the back until he spits out the drugs. BABY begins to wail. MISS PRIMA puts the pills back into the rattle and resumes her search.

BABY

But I'm hungry! You never feed me! I haven't eaten in eleventy-seven days!

MISS PRIMA

That's not a number.

BABY

You save all your milk for your stupid boys, they aren't even yours

MISS PRIMA

Of course they're mine

BABY

You didn't make them

MISS PRIMA

Not in my belly, no, I made them in a different way.

BABY

How

MISS PRIMA

Not now

BABY

You never tell me anything

MISS PRIMA

I'm very busy right now

BABY

TELL ME!!

MISS PRIMA

What do you want

BABY

A story. About your boys

MISS PRIMA

After I find my diaphragm

BABY

You still use one of those? You're old

MISS PRIMA

Who told you to say that

BABY

No one

MISS PRIMA

Someone told you I was old, who was it

BABY

I made it up

MISS PRIMA

I'm not old because I use a diaphragm, lots of younger women use them too, they're very reliable

BABY

Then how did I get here?

MISS PRIMA

You... dammit. No more television for you. And no dinner. And I AM NOT OLD, you hear me?

**THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!!**

**Please check [playscripts.com](http://playscripts.com) for the  
published version.**

**Thank you for reading!**