Hide And Seek No More

Written by

Chloe Luting Huang
CECE BROWN 16-year-old female
ZOE LEE 16-year-old female
SEAN LEE 44-year-old male
JING LEE 38-year-old female
LAURA BROWN 43-year-old female

Time: 2005. Several months from May to November. As the play develops, it gets chillier and chillier.

Place: a small town in Maine
“I am alone and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species and have the same defects.”

-- Monster to Victor Frankenstein in *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley
SCENE ONE

An untidy bedroom in a modest house. Midnight.

LAURA sits in front of a mirror. She is dressed up and applying red lipstick on her lips.

CECE enters the room. She watches Laura applying her lipstick for a second.

CECE

Mama?

Laura is startled.

LAURA

Why are you up?

CECE

You going somewhere?

LAURA

Yes. Go back to sleep.

CECE

It’s dark outside - you going alone?

LAURA

Huh-uh.

CECE

Can I come with you?

LAURA

No.

CECE

Why not?

LAURA


CECE

The doctor said you shouldn’t be left alone.
(Suddenly furious)
What am I? A fucking child?

Cece is startled by Laura’s sudden outburst, but she collects herself in a moment.

CECE
Mother, I saw an empty whisky bottle -

LAURA
Jesus Christ.

CECE
The doctor said -

LAURA
I know what the doctor said!

CECE
Where did you get the money?

LAURA
You should let me be, Cece. I mean it. For your own good. You should walk away, back to your room, and back to sleep. It’s all going to be better tomorrow, I promise.

CECE
The doctor said -

LAURA
I KNOW WHAT THE GODDAMN DOCTOR SAID!
(Beat)
All right. All right. Let’s play a game then.

CECE
Huh?

LAURA
Since you can’t sleep. And you’re not going away. Let’s play a game. Let’s play Hide and Seek.

CECE
Mother, it’s midnight.
LAURA

So?

CECE

I’m already 16.

LAURA

And I’m forty-fucking-three. What’s your point?

CECE

Hide and Seek is kind of a childish game, don’t you think?

LAURA

Games are childish - that’s exactly why they’re fun.

CECE

Why are you all dressed up?

LAURA

Do you like this dress?

CECE

You’ve never worn it.

LAURA

That’s not true. I wore it once. It was the day your father and I got engaged. First day of May. He asked me out to a lawn, in the middle of the night. I snuck out from my house to see him. I didn’t know he was going to propose that night. I mean I knew he might propose someday, but I had absolutely no idea that it was going to be that night. Anyway, I went. He was there. “Let’s play hide and seek,” he said. “You count to ten, and come find me.” And I counted. One to ten. And when I opened my eyes, there he was, kneeling down, with a ring in his hand.

CECE

Mama, can I -

LAURA

Long time ago. You know, when you get older, your memory gets foggy. A lot of things are just - gone. Disappear. But certain moments - they stay. In fact, those moments, they get bigger over time. It’s like a film you’ve seen over and over again. Every frame, every color. No matter how hard you try, they stay, in your memory. I was once young and full of hope. I was once in love. A song of La Vie En Rose was always playing in my head. Of course, that song died the minute he walked out of that door.
CECE
Mama? Can I get you anything? A sleeping pill maybe?

LAURA
Play Hide and Seek with me.

CECE
But - there’s not much room to hide in the house.

LAURA
Then we’ll go outside.

CECE
It’s dark -

LAURA
Cece, just this once. Play Hide and Seek with me.

It is rare for her mother to show her need in front of Cece. Cece is reluctant but she finally gives in.

CECE
All right. And you’ll go to bed after the game?

LAURA
Yes.

CECE
And we just do one round, right?

LAURA
Yes. I’ll hide.

CECE
OK.

LAURA
Okay. Now close your eyes and count to ten.

Laura goes to Cece and kisses her forehead. Laura exits.

Cece watches her mother walk out of the room, and closes her eyes.

CECE
One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight -
Sound of gunshot is heard from afar.

Cece takes a deep breath in horror.

BLACKOUT.
SCENE TWO

Classroom. Day.

Sound of class bell.

Sean (44) stands in the spotlight. He is a high school literature teacher who looks exactly the part.

SEAN

Why do we read literature?

The first time I felt the magic of literature, I was ten. I grew up an only child. I was lonely and sensitive. Unfortunately, my childhood sensitivity turned into a great deal of pain. Pain that I wasn’t equipped to digest. I didn’t understand what I was feeling, and had absolutely no idea how to deal with it. I was confused and miserable.

Until one day, I remember it was after my mother and father had a huge fight, and they decided not to talk to each other for months. There was this unbearable silence in my house, and this silence drove me to my father’s study. I needed something to fill the vacancy of words in the air. So I opened this book. It was Norwegian Wood by Haruki Murakami.

And my life was changed. I could hear the characters. I could feel the characters. And I could see myself as one of the characters. And I realized: I wasn’t the only one feeling all this pain. It suddenly dawned on me that I wasn’t alone. Somebody out there was feeling the exact same thing that I was feeling. And I was relieved. I was saved.

Why do we read literature? Fitzgerald once said, part of the beauty of literature is - “you discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong.” This is why I live in books. This is the magic.

All right. Here’s what I want you to do. I want you to sit down for an hour today, and really contemplate on the one book which you think is having a big impact on your life right now. And think of how this book has brought or might bring changes in your life. Write an one-page essay. Class dismissed.
SCENE THREE

Sean and Jing’s bedroom. Night.

Jing, Sean’s wife, is doing her evening beauty routine in front of a mirror, while Sean is reading student papers in bed.

SEAN

(writing Ds on each paper)
D. D. D.
I can’t take it anymore. This year’s students are all hopeless imbeciles.

JING

You say that every year.

SEAN

This year in particular. Listen to this: “The book I’m reading right now is Twilight. It teaches me true love can really happen to everyone. Even vampires.”

JING

I would kill to be in a Twilight movie. Imagine the money we’d get -

SEAN

Every year, I thought I could get something out of someone sitting in the room. Just. Something real. Something inspirational. Something tells me that I’m not the only one in the room who cares. And they all let me down. One by one. All of them.

Jing goes to bed, sits next to him. She watches him for a while and starts to kiss his face, his neck with desire. Sean is absent-minded for her kisses.

Don’t. Honey. I’m reading.

JING

(continues kissing)
Have I told you that you look particular sexy when you’re reading?

SEAN

No. Jing, please!

Jing stops kissing him and looks at him with frustration.
JING
Do you know what I’m reading now? *Anna Karenina*.

SEAN
That’s good.

JING
You used to say I was Anna Karenina. Remember?

SEAN
I did?

JING
When you were trying to save me from my boring rich husband. You called me Anna once when we made love.

SEAN
Huh- I don’t recall it.

JING
You were reading *Anna Karenina* the whole time when we were secretly seeing each other. You were so obsessed with the book that I feared you would expect me to throw myself in front of a train.

SEAN
I expected no such thing. I married you. Unless you think marrying me equals throwing yourself in front of a train. (*laughs*)

Jing just glares at him. *Meeting his wife’s glare, Sean drops his laughter.*

Pause.

What is Zoe reading?

SEAN
She didn’t take my class.

JING
Do you know how she’s doing in school?

SEAN
I’m sure she’s doing fine.
JING
You’re sure? Do you even know who she hangs out with at school?

SEAN
Well - I’m not good with names, you know that.

JING
Only good with names in books. Yes, I do know.

SEAN
I don’t care for your tone. What’s the matter with you?

JING
The headmaster called me today and said he was concerned that our daughter is a loner at school. She doesn’t talk to anyone and doesn’t engage in class discussions.

SEAN
Why didn’t he talk to me?

JING
He said it was better for me to know. He was concerned that you thought it was normal.

SEAN
What was that supposed to mean?

JING
You don’t interact with your co-workers. He was concerned that Zoe was so isolated because of her paternal role model.

SEAN
Who wants to interact with those insufferable bores?

JING
Sean, what I’m saying is that Zoe is isolating herself from her classmates, and it would be hard for her to break the habit if you’re doing the same thing -

SEAN
Zoe can do whatever she wants to. If she doesn’t want to talk to her classmates, then she doesn’t have to.

JING
Honey, can you please pay more attention to our daughter? I have to go to auditions all the time. And those endless on-set hours.
I don’t have much time home. And when I am home, tons of housework needs to be handled. I hardly have any time to read my scripts, and you’re so close to her -

SEAN
You shoot commercials. You don’t need to read scripts.

JING
That’s not a nice thing to say.

SEAN
Can we not argue now? I still have papers to grade.

JING
Not after you attacked my career, you don’t.

SEAN
Honey, you know what? Let’s stop right there. I’m sorry if I said anything that upset you. I didn’t mean to. All right? Now, I have an early class tomorrow, and you need your beauty sleep. I’m sure the camera loves well-rested flesh.

*Sean lies down. Jing doesn’t.*

*Pause.*

JING
You know, it’s been a while since we last - you know -

Mm?

SEAN

JING
You know -
*(Beat)*
Sean?

*Sean murmurs in his sleep. He is apparently unconscious.*

*Jing looks at him, completely defeated.*

*LIGHTS SHIFT.*
SCENE FOUR

Classroom. Day.

Zoe and Sean are sitting face-to-face at a big table. They are obviously very uncomfortable. There’s a book on the table next to Sean - The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Silence.

Dad.

ZOE

Huh?

SEAN

What am I doing here?

ZOE

Your mother asked me to talk to you.

SEAN

About?

ZOE

Beat.

SEAN

Uh... Zoe. How are you?

ZOE

Fine.

Awkward pause.

SEAN

I just feel like it’s been forever since we last talked.

ZOE

OK.

SEAN

I’d love to get to know you better. After all, we spend a whole lot of time together in the same places.

Awkward silence again.

SEAN

What are you reading lately?

ZOE

What am I reading? Really?

SEAN

Uh-huh.

ZOE

I don’t read much.

SEAN

Hm. You know, Zoe, it’s good for a young lady to read literature. Let me tell you why I read literature -

ZOE

Dad.

SEAN

The first time I felt the magic of literature, I was ten -

ZOE

Dad!

SEAN

Yes, Zoe?

ZOE

I already know what happened the first time you felt the magic of literature.

SEAN

Oh.

Sean doesn’t know what else to say. He looks around and sees the book he had been reading before Zoe came in - The Great Gatsby. Sean picks up the book.

Have you read The Great Gatsby?

ZOE

No.
Sean passes the book to her.

You should read it.

Zoe doesn’t take the book.

I know what it is about.

What’s it about?

It’s about a guy who wants a girl and never gets her.

It’s a little bit more than that. You know, Zoe. Gatsby actually is somebody who is in love with an unreachable ideal. He is very much like - me.

You know, Fitzgerald once said -

Am I in trouble?

No, of course not. Why would you say that?

You’re giving me a lecture. I just assume that I’m in some kind of trouble.

No. No. I was just - trying to - bond.

By giving me a book to read?

Well... we can certainly talk about something else. For example...Who do you hang out with in school?

Nobody.
SEAN
Good. That’s... good. Well, your mother seemed to think it’d be good for you if you find some friends.

ZOE
You don’t have any friends.

SEAN
That’s true -

ZOE
So what’s the problem?

SEAN
No problem. No problem at all.

Cool.

*Awkward silence.*

Anything else?

SEAN
No. That’s all.

ZOE
Can I go now?

SEAN
Sure.

Zoe exits.

I’ll see you at home!

Sean looks at *The Great Gatsby* on the table, picks it up and starts reading it again.

*LIGHTS SHIFT.*
SCENE FIVE

School rooftop. Day.

Cece sits on the edge of the building, smoking a cigarette. Zoe enters from the side and sits next to her.

They sit in silence for a moment.

What are you doing?

Walking birds.

Right. I come here to do the exact same thing.

Beat.

Can I have a drag of that?

Cece hands the cigarette to Zoe. Zoe takes a puff, and coughs - she obviously never smoked a cigarette before. Cece takes the cigarette back.

Sorry (coughs) just a cold that I caught... I know how to smoke, I swear.

Right. Just keep it down. People might hear you.

You’re Cece, right?

Yes.

I’m Zoe.
Hi.

Beat.

Cece is a pretty name.

Thank you.

You have pretty hair.

Thank you.

And pretty eyes.

Are you here to watch the birds or me?

Well... the birds.

Anything starts with a "well" has to be a lie.

I’m telling the truth. I promise.

Anything ends with “I promise” has to be a lie.

You’re cynical.

Thank you.

You’ve been here for two weeks and you didn’t say a single word to anyone.

What do you think I’m doing with you right now?
ZOE
I mean, yes, you say words, but they’re only words. I don’t feel like you’re actually talking to me, to anyone. I’ve been watching you. You’re closed.

CECE
See? I was right.

ZOE
About...?

CECE
A sentence that starts with a “well” has to be a lie. You need time to process a reasonable bullshit answer that might sound less bullshit. Hence, you say “well” before you start bullshitting.

ZOE
No, I’m not -

CECE
All right. What do you see?

ZOE
Huh?

CECE
You said you came here to watch the birds. What do you see?

ZOE
I see... birds.

CECE
We can’t talk to each other. Sorry.

ZOE
Why not?

CECE
You can’t see the fun.

ZOE
All right. What do you see?

CECE
I see the wings unfolding, spreading out, pointing downwards, and piercing upwards, far away into the sky. I don’t see birds. I see flying.
A beat.

ZOE
You’re not thinking of jumping off the building or anything like that, are you?

CECE
You’re odd.

ZOE
So are you.

CECE
That’s true. I’m odd because my mother shot herself in the summer. What’s your excuse?

Awkward silence.

ZOE
I don’t talk to my dad.

CECE
Ever?

ZOE
Pretty much.

CECE
Cool. I don’t talk to my dad, either. I don’t even remember him.

ZOE
Your life is pretty rough.

CECE
Just a tad.

Beat.

ZOE
Cece, do you think we can be friends? I mean, since neither of us have any.

CECE
I don’t think that’s a good idea.

ZOE
Why not?
CECE
Because you only see birds here.

ZOELights Shift.
So?

CECE
So obviously you can’t see magic.

ZOENights Shift.
That’s not true. I see you.

Cece turns to look at Zoe. They look at each other.

LIGHTS SHIFT.
SCENE SIX

Classroom. Day.

Sean is reading in an empty classroom.

Somebody knocks at the door. It is Cece.

CECE

Mr. Lee.

SEAN

Cece. Oh. Hello. Um.. How can I help you?

CECE

Can I talk to you?

SEAN

Sure. Come in.

CECE

I wasn’t sure about the grade I got on my paper.

SEAN

Oh? If my memory serves, I gave you -

CECE

An A - and I’m not sure why.

SEAN

Okay... What do you mean?

CECE

I’m not sure why you gave me such a good grade.

SEAN

It’s a good paper.

CECE

Why?

SEAN

Beat.

It’s a good paper.
CECE
Let me put it this way - you don’t think I’m insane?

SEAN
(laughs) That’s - I’m - No, Cece. I don’t think you’re insane.

CECE
It’s just - I’ve never got a good grade on my papers. In my old school, teachers always told me that my thoughts were too “peculiar.” I mean, normal kids probably wouldn’t say crazy things like “I want to be Frankenstein and create my own monster.” So I was actually expecting a whatever grade. But you gave me an A. Honestly, that never happened to me before.

SEAN
All right... let’s try this. Now, tell me. Why do you want to be Frankenstein?

CECE
He can create a living creature.

SEAN
You do realize this creature is a monster. It destroys his family.

CECE
But his family doesn’t understand him. He’s lonely, until he creates his own monster.

SEAN
He died because of the monster.

CECE
He died with somebody who truly understands him. I think that’s more than many people can say about themselves.

SEAN
Cece, what you have for Frankenstein is empathy. That’s what great literature does to us. We see ourselves through the characters. We empathize, even with the unforgivable ones. I can see this book really has a genuine effect on you, I must say that I’m very impressed with the level of emotional investment you have for the book. Don’t reject it. Let it in. Take whatever ride it gives you. Discover yourself in the process.

CECE
Okay.
SEAN
I’m really glad that you’re taking this class. You’ll get a lot out of it.
Do you have any other questions for me?

CECE
No. Yes. Mr. Lee, when you were talking about your childhood at the end of last class.

SEAN
Yes?

CECE
I haven’t been able to shake your speech out of my head since.
You see, the reason I ask - not to pry or anything. I really need something to guide me, now. I recently lost my mother.

SEAN
Oh, I’m sorry. What happened?

CECE
It’s nothing. She left. A couple of months ago. Now I’m living with my aunt and uncle.

SEAN
Cece, I’m terribly sorry -

CECE
Thank you. My point is, if you can offer me some insights on how to digest pain. That would be helpful.

SEAN
Well, I’m not sure if I know the answer to that question - I guess everyone has a different coping method facing trauma. Mine is - reading. It’s simple as that. Once in a while, I will bump into a line that sounds just like something I would say but failed to. When that happens, the pain goes away for a moment, because the loneliness goes away. Does that make sense?

CECE
Somebody out there feels exactly what you feel - that is exactly what Frankenstein is about, isn’t it?

Sean is stunned by Cece’s comment for a second.

SEAN
I think you’re right.
CECE
Thank you, Mr. Lee. I think I got it now.

Cece stands up to leave.

SEAN
My mother walked out on us.

Cece stops leaving.

SEAN
When I was fifteen, she left my father and me. They didn’t really talk to each other, so it was actually for the best.

CECE
Yeah, I know what you mean. My parents didn’t talk to each other, either.

SEAN
Come talk to me whenever you want to, okay?

CECE
Thanks, Mr. Lee.

SEAN
You’re very welcome. And - call me Sean.

CECE
Sure. Sean.

LIGHTS SHIFT.
SCENE SEVEN

School rooftop. Dusk.

Zoe and Cece are sharing a cigarette, watching the sunset.

ZOE
(after taking a puff of cigarette)
I don’t think I like cigarettes.

CECE
Me neither. But I like to hear the burning sound on my finger tips when I smoke.

Cece takes the cigarette and smokes.

ZOE
Ce, have you ever dated any boys?

CECE
Boys? No.

ZOE
Why not?

CECE
I just never felt that way about a boy, or about anybody.

ZOE
Never?

CECE
Well, there was one in fifth grade. His name was Leo. He was like in love with me. He bought me little candies and waited for me at the school gate everyday for two months. I loved those candies, so I didn’t stop him. We spent an hour eating candies holding hands every day after school. But of course I couldn't stay late because I had to go home take care of my mother, who might get drunk and drown in a bathtub.

ZOE
That’s rough.
CECE
Anyway, later Leo’s mommy found out that he had been stealing money from her to buy candies. He couldn’t afford candies anymore. So I stopped holding hands with him after school.

ZOE
That’s mean.

CECE
I know. Poor Leo. He had good taste in candies though. How about you?

Me?

CECE
Have you ever fallen in love?

ZOE
Yes. I mean, no. I mean, I don’t know. What is love, really?

CECE
According to Romeo and Juliet, it’s supposed to be a feeling that you want to stick a knife into yourself for the other person.

ZOE
Sounds dangerous.

Pause.

CECE
My ma used to say, love is a feeling that makes you high and nauseated at the same time. It’s longing mixed with fear. You fear because you have something to lose once you’re in love. Well, of course, her fear came true. After my dad walked out on us, her love becomes hate. She used to say, love might be easy to wear off, but hate is something here to stay. The hate for my father built her a cage. She never managed to get out of it.

Cece takes a puff on the cigarette.

CECE
I guess you’re right, Zo. Love is quite dangerous.

Zoe puts her hand on Cece’s hand.

Pause.