



CAPSTONE

by John Bray

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CHARACTERS

Gillian, a senior in high school, the “normal” twin, the one with the plan.

Jessica, a senior in high school, the “weird” twin, the one who doesn’t get credit for being more attuned.

Patrick, father to Gillian and Jessica, a grieving widower, principal, and older brother to:

Carl, uncle to Gillian and Jessica.

Voice, Trudy (Tennis Player, Dancer), Student

SETTING

Not too long ago/ A number of locations represented in a unit set, but there should always been a classroom feel (two high school desks and chairs moved around to change the space, etc., and the ever present twin lights upstage, being a nod to Tribute in Light).

History

Capstone was commissioned by the San Francisco Olympians: Rome Festival (Artistic Director, Stuart Bousel) as part of a series of staged-readings based on Roman mythology. It was inspired by the myth of Romulus and Remus (though playwrights were invited to take their story in any direction they desired). The reading was held on October 11, 2018 at EXIT Theatre's EXIT: Stage Left. It was directed by Juliana Lustenader and featured the following cast:

Alisha Ehrlich - Gillian

Ciera Eis - Jessica

Vince Faso - Patrick

Scott Lettieri - Carl

Heather Kellogg - Trudy

Sara Briendel - Stage Directions

She was born under the sign of Gemini. And that stands for the good and evil twin. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde both hiding and residing inside her heart. Her good twin was not bad at all. But her evil twin was even better, and showed up to be way too fatal!

— Ana Claudia Antunes, *Mysterious Murder of Marilyn Monroe*

In the darkness, music plays. Something mono-tonal, repetitive. As if we're in the bleakest casino. Numbers and letters project around the room in darkness. Lights come up a little bit. Twin girls, Jessica and Gillian, sit at two desks. Behind them, two blue beams of light shoot to the sky. Patrick and Carl, move into the center of each light. They look up.

GILLIAN I used to think I was smart.

GILLIAN and JESSICA lift their tests.

JESSICA Not think.

BOTH Feel.

JESSICA I used to feel smart.

GILLIAN I used to feel...

JESSICA Heart. Hands. Fingers. Feet.

GILLIAN I used to feel...

JESSICA Smart.

GILLIAN Connected. We were part of something, weren't we?

JESSICA Were we?

GILLIAN It's not nostalgia. Nostalgia is like...waving a flag because you're told by someone older it's the thing to do.

JESSICA There's a story of a temple of monks. They were very old. A cat used to come in and disturb their prayer. So one of the monks tied up the cat. It became his responsibility each day to tie up the cat to a post in the room and let it go when the prayer had ended. Then the monk died. And another took his place. And another. Until all of the old monks passed away and new monks took over the responsibility. And one day the cat died. They buried the cat. And the next day, someone bought a new cat to tie up during their daily chants. That's nostalgia. That's waving a flag. I used to feel smart.

Sound of a school buzzer.

GILLIAN Adults sound like French horns in the Charlie Brown Peanuts cartoons we stream.

JESSICA Because they sound that way in life.

GILLIAN One sound fits all.

JESSICA McEducation. McTests. McAmerica.

GILLIAN The scores go into a black hole.

JESSICA Princeton Review publishes the study guides for the GRE.

GILLIAN And creates the GRE tests.

JESSICA That you pay for.

GILLIAN Buy the guide, increase your score.

JESSICA It's something I now know.

GILLIAN Something I can pass onto my daughter. If I have a daughter. If I get married.

JESSICA And before that.

GILLIAN If I get into grad school. If I pass undergrad.

JESSICA And before that.

GILLIAN If I pass high school. If I make it through senior year alive alive alive I don't feel ALIVE.

JESSICA And before that.

GILLIAN If I pass THIS TEST!

JESSICA I will never have a daughter.

This is something I know now.

This is something I wish I could tell my younger self sitting at a desk.

You will never have a daughter.

A beat. Suddenly!

VOICE (*emulating French horn*) Charter vision!

JESSICA Common core.

GILLIAN More tests.

JESSICA Less common.

VOICE (*emulating French horn*) Common core!

GILLIAN More black holes. Make the tests fit the black holes.

JESSICA (*Beat. Looking at test.*) It's a pattern.

GILLIAN I can't see it...

JESSICA Just look at the page. It's a bubble dance.

Sounds of NYC at night.

CARL I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M SEEING IT!

PATRICK WHY ARE YOU SHOUTING?

CARL BECAUSE. I'M AWED.

PATRICK BY WHAT?

CARL THE MAJESTY!

VOICE (*emulating French horn*) Never forget.

At the sound of the VOICE, CARL'S eyes grow with awe and inspiration.

CARL Remember when they said I had to come up with a patriotic pageant for the investors for our awesome Charter School?

PATRICK (*Beat.*) No.

Sounds of NYC and mono-tonal music continue.

JESSICA It's a movement. Gillian –

Jessica rises from her seat. She looks up as if someone is talking to her.

JESSIC (*Contd., to an unseen person*) I'm not cheating. It's a movement. There's a pattern to the answers.

CARL I'VE SEEN THE LIGHT!!!

GILLIAN Jessica, sit down!

JESSICA Look at it. Imagine, you're trying to learn how to dance. Think of those really old cartoons where they would have the shoe prints of where you're supposed to step, and when you're supposed to step, and how...once you see the pattern, the questions don't matter. It's step, step, step –

GILLIAN (*Toward an unseen test monitor downstage*) She's just special – please, don't –

JESSICA Failed? I didn't fail. The pattern is right –

GILLIAN Don't touch her!

JESSICA DON'T TOUCH ME!

Music out. The girls freeze.

CARL TWINS, PATRICK! THE TWIN THING! I see it! The Tribute in Light. Oh, you'll see what I have in mind. Man. Kind of makes you proud. (*Beat.*) Man, what do you know, you're still looking for a way out. Aren't you?

PATRICK glares at him. LIGHTS CHANGE.

GILLIAN (*unfreezing*) Dad?

CARL'S LIGHT turns off as PATRICK approaches GILLIAN.

GILLIAN (*Contd.*) Jessica's has in school suspension. And, um. Principal Rua says we both have to report to detention.

PATRICK Oh. That's....oh.

JESSICA (*to us*) I don't think I've ever felt...connected.

BLACKOUT. A voice in the darkness.

VOICE (*robotic*) Choice. Choice is a freedom. You have the freedom to be innovative. You have the freedom to be creative. You have the freedom to ask. To think. To build. As part of education reform, you now have the choice to attend a school that is tailored to suit you. Our student. Our customer. Our community. Welcome to Rome Charter: Balance, Discipline, Strength!

GILLIAN I can't believe *I* have detention.

JESSICA Guilt by association.

GILLIAN Twin discrimination.

JESSICA Is that a thing?

GILLIAN It's the twin thing.

LIGHTS CHANGE. The girls remain in their seats. They're both doing work. GILLIAN pauses, takes out her cell phone and looks. She's somewhere between panicked and mortified. She says nothing. JESSICA continues working. LIGHTS UP in a different area: instead of being near the former site of the towers, we're near a high school tennis court – entirely suggested by a costume worn by PATRICK, a coach, and the sounds of the game. Occasional grunts can be heard by an offstage TRUDY who is not doing well on the court. PATRICK watches, but he's not fully invested. He has an old laptop and is typing a bit, and returning occasionally to look at the off-stage practice. CARL enters carrying a box of props. One can immediately tell that whatever he teaches, he must be involved with HS drama.

CARL Dinner tonight?

PATRICK I can't, I have –

CARL A paper due?

PATRICK I have to argue why the school day should or should not be extended. It's an argumentative essay I'll need to present both to the Board of Education and to parents.

CARL Actually present or just as a hypothetical?

PATRICK Hypothetical, but...it's worth considering.

CARL Career suicide.

PATRICK Maybe. Maybe not. I don't know.

CARL You sure you really want this degree?

PATRICK If I want to be an administrator.

CARL I don't think you really need an online PhD –

PATRICK It'll help. Right now, we need all the help we can get. (Beat.) Thank you for...for helping Jessica out of her, you know. Her jam.

CARL Hey! I get a patriotic pageant, she gets a capstone project. Pretty good as far as punishment goes. Rua says he might consider doing this as a creative alternative to one of the tests.

PATRICK I know. Social Studies. Is he allowed to do that?

CARL He's the principal so he can do whatever he wants. So sayeth the board.

PATRICK The corporate investors.

CARL Don't start.

A ball bounces hard. TRUDY groans in frustration off stage.

CARL (*Contd.*) Trudy can't find her feet out there. Look.

PATRICK It's like she's wearing clogs.

PATRICK claps.

PATRICK (*Contd.*) Good energy, Trudy! Don't lose your focus!

CARL Great coaching there.

PATRICK Shut up.

CARL The girls inside?

PATRICK Yeah, they're ready for you. (*Beat.*) Hey. Gillian mentioned. (*Struggling.*) She said. She said for your Patriot's Day Pageant. I can't believe I'm saying this out loud. She said that she and Jessica are playing the Twin Towers.

CARL Yes!

PATRICK Why?

CARL I told you when we visited Ground Zero – the twin thing!

PATRICK The twin thing.

CARL Yes. Come on, it's apropos!

PATRICK Of what?

CARL Everyone is playing someone or something, you know, American. And they're twins, isn't it spectacularly obvious? And they're going to wear American Flag sashes, but they're going to be like, at different angles. They'll be mirror image twins like those G.I. Joe guys...what were they called...

PATRICK Tomax and Xamot.

CARL Tomax and Xamot! Yes! And Trudy out there – she has a part. She's a dancer...

They look at Trudy. A missed ball and a grunt. CARL and PATRICK wince.

CARL (*Contd.*) All your girls need to do is stand. Tall. Proud. Twins.

PATRICK (*Not convinced.*) Just stand.

CARL Just stand, that's right. Just stand.

PATRICK As the Twin Towers.

CARL Right. They just stand there. (*Beat.*) Until the airplane dance.

PATRICK !!!!

CARL No, I know how it sounds, but it's tasteful. It works.

PATRICK It works?! It can't possibly work!!!

He looks at the court apologetically.

PATRICK (*Contd.*) Not you, Trudy, you're doing great!

Back to CARL.

PATRICK (*Contd.*) You know how much trouble they're...(*lowers voice*)...they're having trouble here. Relating. They get...bullied.

CARL Oh, you mean the picture thing?

PATRICK What picture thing?

CARL They made a meme out of the girls.

PATRICK Who did?