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Isaac Pool, *40 Volume Cast*, 2015  
Courtesy of the artist.

*40 Volume*

By Isaac Pool

A reading of the following play, performed by Leslie Allison, David Geer, Summer Shiffman, Max Steele and Isaac Pool, debuted at The Brick Theater, in Brooklyn, NY, in 2016. Due to the experimental nature of the script's layout, the piece is reproduced below with only minor revisions.

Background:

Three vases covered in socks sit on stage, semicircle in silence, total darkness. Spotlights hit each as they speak. Flowing silk drapes in the background. Terracotta planks support the sock-vases. Lush vanitas lighting pads dialogue between isolated spots. A fourth character sits upstage, off center to the open circle: a fennel head.

Characters:

**White** - fag, pig in the city white socks crusting yellow, mouth holds a caucasian rubber dong, a metal chain from the center dangles over the lip.

**Grey** - middle management / bougie A plush selection of grey socks, all in the same make and color. A bouquet of flowers sprouts out of its mouth.

**Dirty** - the work justifying indulgence pragmatism Various unwashed workwear socks, mostly grey, wool and pilling, stained. Mouth holds a bulbous foam croissant, a pink glass edge peeks through.

**Fennel** - white turning green, anise aspiration: the diva A healthy head of fennel with full fronds.

**Narrator** - another voice

*(The three vases mumble consecutive lines of "Good Sister / Bad Sister" simultaneously. Faint spots simultaneously on three vases. Three seconds. Voices are faint, largely unintelligible. {altogether})*

# h a u n t

Hole, "Good Sister / Bad Sister," *Pretty on The Inside*, Caroline Records, 1991 35 seconds.

*(Spotlight on White vase only. Tempo moves from drawl to conversational tone.)*

**White:**

Honestly, for me and I can say this it's donation based, it's not very spiritual, it's just a relaxing way to get exercise. I've had the same feeling with painting but honestly, that's a disaster.

*(Spotlight moves to Grey vase.)*

**Grey:**

Leaning on my metal hip might be  
a conduit for wealthy mothers' needs  
across aisles the help couldn't fit.  
We are all *being* public, waiting for palm trees.  
I'm assuming hers will *be* watered while,  
with neighbors, she wields pillows and adjusts.  
A few gestures of interference between to mark  
that he is still, in fact, a body and not  
a barrier from labor.

*(A spotlight for both the Grey and the White vase.)*

**White:** He's like black he's so into it

**Grey:** You mean like wait, what - so you

**White:** Oh like if interest was a gradient he'd be dark

**Grey:** Like of-color?

**White:** No just black and white, and grey I guess

**Grey:** Yeah gay people face it too, yeah

**Narrator:** A spotlight only for Dirty vase.

**Dirty:**

*"You're glowing"*

when said to a man  
can't equate to congratulations  
to gestation or pregnancy but  
only proximity to that test.

Glowing

more like the cracked snap of a glow stick  
and I'm radiating, vial hot, then murmuring for days.  
Like the speed freaks and bodied techno bo dies it illuminates:  
if I'm glowing am I not just *sweating*—a glistening melt?

No existential, no reparation, no deserving this.  
 Happiness seeks the coupling clump to latch on and to grow.  
 No catharsis, yet  
 I'm fine.

*(A gradual fade into baroque vanitas lighting lasts a full minute before conversation continues.)*

**Grey:** I don't know, I don't plan it I just kind of show up and it's there.  
 Things work for me, I'm not a planner.

**Dirty:** Nailbed didn't touch it, it's still clean and polished divots  
 smoothed, no hills. I've been doing cuticle cream and plucking out the  
 strips. I'm all type of sauce, I'm caroling something festive staying clean.

**Grey:** Only when you say it, like, and I feel like *he* says it—

**Dirty:** Like that?

**Grey:** *Yeab* I mean it's offensive anyway I think.

**Dirty:** But aren't we past all of that, like don't we know better?

**Grey:** I don't think—no, I don't think we do. What we—come on

**Dirty:**

He has too many sisters I literally can't even keep his sisters straight

And next I'll bleach *my* hair  
 the color of dog park in winter,  
 all patches planned and

with a squirrel I was trying to pet.

I'll go back for results.

Accepting the end of my youth I'm  
 a porch goose shopping  
 through a rack of clothes.

**Narrator:**

Someone's denim gets lighter, gets baggier. A carpenter loop holds a hammer, tiny pockets wield dill, brace fennel. A fennel head comes out from behind the jeans, front and center. Lights fade to spotlights, directed on white vase and head of fennel.

*(White vase, singing in the style of Billy Idol.)*

Billy Idol, "Eyes Without a Face," Rebel Yell, Chrysalis Records, 1983.

3 minutes 54 seconds.

*(A spotlight remains only on the head of Fennel.)*

# h a u n t

**Fennel:**

Face

Vaaz

Vace

Central focus

Balance

I'm making an in and want it to stay like this

I'm spraying it, setting powder it's

*The End.*

So I make it again.

*(A second spotlight is shined on the Dirty vase.)*

**Dirty:**

Is that what galvanized looks like?

A synonym for abalone or oil spill?

Something I can pour on any metal

to make it swirl in pools?

**Narrator:** Fade out back to vanitas lighting.

**Dirty:** There's a seam between breaks.

**Grey:** Use a piece of tape.

**Dirty:** That's not chic, and the residue—

**Grey:** You're seeking another product.

**Dirty:** I'm just expecting things to *work*.

**Grey:** Except *yourself*.

**Dirty:** I have plenty of self esteem.

**Grey:** Right...

*(Lighting shifts to a single spotlight on the White vase.)*

**White:**

Eleuthero, schisandra, rhodiola, basil—I got my mood in check.

Twice a day, sometimes *with* meals, sometimes not.

Can I borrow that bb creme? Oh wait you're too dark right?

**Grey:** *(speaking from the darkness)* I don't know maybe you should try it anyway.

**White:** I'm not sure I want to look painted. This is for *whose* benefit?

**Grey:** Your own.

**White:** I don't tho.

**Grey:** I guess you um.

**White:**

*I guess* I'll just look busted.

My sleeveless blouse and cup-a-wine,  
numerology can't fix it.  
Prediction can't make  
the heart grow fonder.

I'm asking questions: box dye or salon?  
Not thinking through the root.

Heavy lifting 40, but waits to carry me away.  
Calories gone if skipped meal—

hens pecking out, scratching.

Authorship disavowed or ignored can't make it out,  
decisions are a barrier reached.  
Wire marks the fence: *chicken*,  
and maybe I am.

*(The spotlight shifts to the Dirty vase.)*

**Dirty:**

This tubb shaker is a  
salad making difference.  
Lady boons bauble:  
A tupperware seal.

*(A spotlight is added to the White vase.)*

**White:** They should really change the language from “Bumper Bully” to  
“Bumper Buddy,” you know it's helping not hurting.

**Grey:** Or people just shouldn't drive.

**White:** But we all need vehicles.

**Grey:** Yeah I guess, but what about the bullies? Where do they go?

**White:** A retreat? A detox? Something friendly-

**Grey:** Something *expensive* - you're so bougie.

**White:** Helping not hurting, that's all that I'm saying.

**Grey:** Sure.

*(A spotlight on the Dirty vase and head of Fennel. Both the Dirty vase and White vase mumble simultaneously.)*

# h a u n t

## Dirty:

Jell-O shot in a terracotta pot  
peeling an ear of corn.  
Hot, shy foil falls.  
Contingency means rolling in same bag:  
if one falls the rest spills out.

Stilted by a lavender chalk line  
and walking into a pile of refuse opting  
to see the cherry blossom branches  
stretching out of black bag.

There's construction, not filming.  
The lines aren't taped instructions  
but paving bounds:  
the new way not to trip

**Narrator:** The Dirty vase resumes normal diction and tone.

## Dirty:

Trundle pulls out  
adding to the soup,  
removing yesterday's rind.  
Blood on half an onion,  
the flavor is taking over.  
Just want to maintain,  
just want to extend taste.

## Fennel:

I have hair it has to dry.  
I'm combing cause *can't* brush.  
Just joking—I only have a brush.  
Wouldn't blow dry if it *wasn't* below freezing,  
wouldn't damage myself if I didn't have to be so efficient.  
I think about myself pulled back and one tendril falling:  
how to *be* the wisp you *want* in the world,  
how to be windswept and breeze...

*(The spotlight for Grey falls out and the spotlight on the head of Fennel remains.)*

## Grey:

She grew up in a two story house but it was an addition,  
a masquerade to play with guests.

## White:

Would like to walk without oil,  
without stepping in oil,  
without slipping on it,  
without leaving a trail.  
Save the blotters for my face -  
can I get a carpet sample or loose rug?  
Something in the useless sop,  
something unlike my foot,  
my shoe.

Nothing more than a master bedroom missing a bath,  
 but a set of stairs would do the trick.  
 Only her best friends ever went up  
 to find the great reveal: a bed and a set of family photos  
 framed and standing, not hung.

Wood paneling one shade darker than the finished basement—  
 most just saw the portrait of Jesus looking up in rapture,  
 painted on a log. He was the guardian of the top of those stairs,  
 an interlocutor for the closed door.

Hollow as the other bedrooms and open in the summer months  
 to circulate air from the oldest and most powerful fan in the house.

She didn't often consider its power,  
 choosing to spend her hot afternoons in the basement  
 seated on linoleum floors, playing Genesis or  
 dreaming of a heavier bedroom door.

*(A spotlight on White vase and Fennel. Fennel sings a medley of song fragments.)*

Hole, "Softer, Softest," Live Through This, DGC, 1994. XRay Spex,  
 "Germfree Adolescents," Germfree Adolescents, EMI, 1978. Mariah Carey,  
 "Heartbreaker," Rainbow, Columbia, 1999.  
 2 minutes 30 seconds.

*(The Fennel head exits the stage. A spotlight appears only on the Dirty vase, speaking normally.)*

**Dirty:**

Can't stand the train  
 `gainst my winded  
 down jacket in the rain.

Chinos smelled like purell,  
 all berry alcohol holding  
 plastic nub

the same color of every dick drawn in wet cement:

pink bedding forced a hint.  
 A baby sits in crochet, she holds aloof,  
 thinking cool mom until she took a sip.

A reason for eye exam or expanded coverage,  
 a reason to look twice. I'm hovering all buried in this text.

# h a u n t

*(Lighting returns to a vanitas spread.)*

**Narrator:**

Hi.

Building prop to make the downward gaze unpredatory, not a hover after all.

Saying I love you to the facing wall  
as you pass through the door.

Only face can receive.

All surfaces bounce out, refract response,  
but the subject of address throws *other* sonar.

The wall is a sponge and spoiled and the air is all dizziness.  
Performativity makes sense `cause I'm so self conscious, I'm  
only free when I'm at work.

A spotlight only on the Grey vase.

**Grey:**

I need a class to train my feet,  
to shift the weight even,  
to make my core a place and *not* an idea.  
All of this efficiency makes me want to sit.  
Are we going to Kacper's class at ten?

**Narrator:**

Sooooooooo-

hummmm

I am that.

That I am.

*(A spotlight added to the Dirty vase.)*

**Dirty:** Ho-hum.

I ain't that,  
that ain't HAM.

43 pounds ago I would not be climbing this rock.  
A pile of denim sitting in a spotlight,  
someone told me I had to wash my clothes -  
they meant generally, but of course I took it personally.  
Assessing smells, stains, wrinkles,

a vodka spray and shower steam can't always do it.  
 I guess  
 it's *fog*  
 or *smoke*.

(*A spotlight added to White vase and Fennel of stage.*)

**White:**

How many yogurt cups are left? That's the extent of MY week.  
 If I run out I'll quit my job,  
 can't deal with the protein dip.  
 Not doing soy, not going back to that.  
 Keep my natural balance diet:  
 starch potato at night  
 and capsaicin churns it through  
 the, ummm  
 Good vibrations.

I'm very Christian,  
 I'm all about a home makeover show.  
 I buy that narrative,  
 even the color scheme - khaki and sky.  
 A dove sitting on burgundy,  
 waiting room upholstery  
 eating Tic Tacs.  
 I feel like I live in a remodel,  
 before and after.

Just asked myself how to dust,  
 couldn't find the handle  
 then thought:  
 but *am I* molting?  
 So gross, the wind in corners.  
 At least fur is honest, vocal.  
 I'm knitting it now.

(*The Grey, White and Dirty vases sing a repeat round of "Good Sister / Bad Sister" simultaneously.*)

Hole, "Good Sister / Bad Sister," *Pretty on The Inside*, Caroline Records,  
 1991  
 1 minute 15 seconds

† Isaac Pool, a native of Detroit, is an artist and poet based in New York. His recent performances include *DSM-V* and *Carry Out Stage* at the Knockdown Center, and *Beet Joy*, with Jessica Posner as "maybe," at the Judson Memorial Church. A published book of his poems, titled *Light Stain*, is available from What Pipeline, Detroit, and an eBook, *Alien She*, is available from Klaus eBooks.

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