

Making a Scene

APTP has many techniques for collectively developing performance texts based on the original words of our storytellers. Here, we illustrate the method we used to “write” what we referred to as “The Cupcake Scene” in God’s Work. First, read the excerpt from the transcript of Rachel’s storytelling upon which the scene is based. Next, read a transcript of an improvisation between two actors asked during play development to narrate this scene from the point of view of its two characters. Finally, read the scene as scripted for performance.

Storygathering Transcript

Told October 14, 2003 by Rachel Floarea

Excerpt: The Cupcake Scene

[My father] actually had a chain and a lock on the refrigerator....He measured the milk. He made like a little dot where the milk was left each time. And if that milk passed lower than that line, it means somebody drank it. So one time I took some. And I also took, I think, a cupcake. And my sister, I was crying so bad because I knew he was going to find out. I was over there by the door, I was like, “I can’t tell him, I can’t tell him I did it.” Because I knew how much he hated me. He hated me so much. So my sister, she went in and she told him, “I did it.” Like that she did it. And I just, you know, I watched her get beat. And I was just, I felt so guilty.

Play Development Transcript

Improvisation: The Cupcake Scene

Jennifer Nguyen & Krystina Mikolowski

The cupcake episode from Rachel’s story stayed with all of us, even though it represented just a few sentences amid a hundred transcript pages. Rachel didn’t provide much detail, so directors David Feiner and Laura Wiley assigned ensemble members Jennifer Nguyen (as Rachel) and Krystina Mikolowski (as Naomi) the task of imagining the episode more completely. David and Laura asked the actors to lay on the floor on their backs, to close their eyes, and to try to see the episode in their minds. The actors were asked to narrate what they saw in their minds, in the first person, from the perspective of their characters. They were encouraged to trade narration back and forth, as inspired by the storytelling. The resulting improvisation gave us text from which to craft dialogue for the scene, character motivation for each of the actors, and description of the episode’s physicality from which to build choreography.

RACHEL: I saw him leave. I was hiding, and I saw him take a cupcake with him. And I was really hungry. And I remember seeing all the kids at school bringing these types of cupcakes with them, and I always wanted one.

No one was around. And I knew I shouldn’t have done it, but I thought, “This happens to me everyday. So I can bear the punishment.” I just didn’t care, I just saw it there and I was hungry. I craved it. Everyone was just gone, and no one would see me. And maybe he would think it was someone else who did it. Or maybe he would forget and not realize.

So I went to the kitchen. And I was just staring at it. And I climbed onto the refrigerator. And it was there. And I remember smiling and thinking, “Finally.” I could just taste it already. And I didn’t want to tell anyone because everyone would be jealous. Or they would stop me and I didn’t want to be stopped. So I opened the plastic case gently. There were eight of them. I counted. I wondered whether or not I should just take a little piece of each of them. It would just look like he bought them like that. I just grabbed it. I closed the box. I looked once again out

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the window to see if he was there. He wasn't. I wasn't scared when I had it. I was really happy. And I opened the fridge and I didn't even care about a glass, I just drank the milk out of the bottle. And I was just holding the cupcake with both of my hands. I wondered what he would do. But then I just remembered seeing commercials for it, for the Hostess. With chocolate. With the white cream inside and little curly designs on top. Every child wanted that. And I just took a huge bite, it was just half of it already gone. And I chewed it really quickly, so the chocolate was still stuck to my teeth. And I just enjoyed the taste still on my taste buds. I wondered if I should save the other half, for later. Maybe this one I'll eat slower. No wonder Tata always smiled when he ate it. It's so delicious. Now I know how the kids felt when the parents packed it in their lunches. Maybe I'll do this every day, I don't care. I'm hungry and it tastes good. And the other half, I just picked it with my fingers, just ate it piece by piece. But first I licked the cream inside. And then I would eat the rest of the chocolate. And then the crumbs would fall to the floor, and I went to the floor, I would just take all the crumbs back and eat them. To hide the evidence and to enjoy every piece I got. I didn't want it to go away. I shouldn't have taken any more milk, but with chocolate you have to have milk. The milk was cold and soft in my mouth. It felt like relief. When I drank it, it just felt like I could breathe. And when I drank it, it was just a perfect mix with this cupcake. I just put my chin up, and I opened my mouth wide. I took whatever was left in my index finger and my thumb and I just dropped it in my mouth and just swooshed milk around with it.

I took a deep breath, and I just swallowed it.

I jumped back on the cabinet and looked at the cupcakes. Now there were only seven. There weren't eight anymore. I thought maybe I was dreaming and I didn't really eat it. But I did eat it. And there was the milk, the line—the milk wasn't touching the line anymore. I closed my eyes, and I counted, and when I opened it was still the same. I just kept counting the cupcakes over and over again—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven—hoping the eighth one would come back, but it wouldn't. I just closed the milk right away and just threw it into the fridge and just closed the door. "He probably won't remember, he won't realize. He eats them all the time." I remember thinking I was going to die, but maybe die happy because I got to enjoy the cupcake, enjoy the milk lasting in my body. But what was he gonna do? What if now I can't ever get food?

He was gonna kill me. And God was probably mad at me too. Because I disobeyed my father.

I just started crying. I was counting the cupcakes, and I was crying. I imagined him there, I was begging with him, pleading. "Sorry, sorry, sorry."

NAOMI:

I was in the basement cleaning, and I was really tired. And I was wondering when the day was going to end so I could just pass out and finish with my work. And I could hear from above running. I could hear running back and forth. I saw Rachel come in, and Rachel leave, and Rachel come in, and Rachel leave. And every time I asked what was wrong, she never answered *me*.

I made my way up to the kitchen where she was sitting, and looking at the box of cupcakes, and Rachel was just sitting. And she had chocolate on her lips.

RACHEL:

I was just sitting there, rocking back and forth, when I saw Naomi. And she just

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looked at me.

NAOMI: And I was like, “Rachel, what is this? What happened Rachel?”

And Rachel just started crying even more.

RACHEL: She just started yelling at me. Just like Tata, just yelling at me.

NAOMI: I didn’t believe she ate it. Did she know what was going to happen to her? “We’re not allowed to touch the cupcakes, Rachel.”

RACHEL: I said, “I’m sorry Naomi, I’m sorry Naomi.” And I ran to her, and I clutched her, and I said, “What am I gonna do? He’s gonna kill me, he’s gonna kill me.” I said, “I’m sorry.”

NAOMI: And a lot of me felt sorry for her and wanted to help her. But I know a little part of me was envious cause she was bold enough to eat it.

RACHEL: She was gonna tell on me, she was gonna tell on me. I knew I shouldn’t have told her.

NAOMI: Rachel was shivering. And the refrigerator was buzzing as if it was talking to me. And it was saying, “Naomi, be a good sister, don’t tell on Rachel.” And I opened it, and I saw how the milk was missing. And I was like, “You drank the milk too, Rachel? You drank the milk too?”

RACHEL: She kept asking me questions like if I drank the milk and if I ate the cupcake. I didn’t answer her, but she just kept asking me and asking me. But she knew that I did. I started feeling guilty. I started thinking, “He should beat me. I shouldn’t have disobeyed him. I deserve it.” And I started getting angry at myself. And I started getting angry at Naomi because she should have been there when I did it so she could stop me. She’s always with me.

NAOMI: Rachel was sitting on the kitchen counter, and her feet were wagging because she was too short to reach the floor. And she had that box in her hands, just looking at it, counting it. And I didn’t know what to tell her. I didn’t want her to get in trouble for this. She was skinny, and she was pale. Even more than I was. And she was younger. And inexperienced. And I said, “Rachel.” I said, “Rachel, you don’t worry about this.”

RACHEL: She told me not to worry about it.

NAOMI: I told her not to worry about it.

RACHEL: She told me not to worry. I wasn’t listening to her. How could I not worry?

NAOMI: I grabbed her close to me. She was sitting on her knees, trying to throw up the cupcake. And she had her finger down her throat. And she’s like, “I have to put it back together, I have to get rid of it. I’ve committed a sin. Dad’s gonna get mad at me. What have I done?” And I slapped her fingers out of her face and I said, “Rachel, stop it. You don’t deserve to feel this way. I’m glad you ate that cupcake.” And I told her I would take the blame.

RACHEL: I knew it was still in my stomach and I tried to take it out. She hit me. Was she mad at me? She told me she would take the blame. But I still kept trying to take it out. She can’t take the blame. That would be lying. It was my sin. But maybe she should take the blame, because I can’t get hurt anymore. Just let her take the blame. But why would she do this for me,” I remember thinking.

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Albany Park Theater Project

- NAOMI:** “Rachel, if you keep blaming yourself, what was the point of eating it in the first place?” I told her, “I’m just going to take the blame. It’s happened before, I’ve got punished before. It’ll go away.”
- RACHEL:** He was coming home. She said that I should be happy that I ate it.
- NAOMI:** I took some of the frosting and put it on my face, put it on my clothes.
- RACHEL:** She started covering herself with frosting, and I told her, “No, no don’t.”
- NAOMI:** And I just told her to shut up, to go in the basement. “Rachel, just go in the basement, he’s coming home already, just go.” And I pushed her in there.
- RACHEL:** And I just ran in the basement.
- NAOMI:** And I remember thinking to myself, “What did I do? I didn’t even get to enjoy it. There was no reason for taking this blame. I’m going to get hurt now for something I didn’t do. And he’s going to think less of me.” And I was confused.
- RACHEL:** Maybe this is okay. But that was awful of me to think.

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God's Work
Production Script
Excerpt: The Cupcake Scene



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Albany Park Theater Project

...RACHEL sneaks up the stairs.

At the top of the stairs, RACHEL opens the door. She sneaks into the empty kitchen. She approaches the refrigerator. She eyes a box of cupcakes sitting out of her reach atop the refrigerator. She returns to the kitchen door and closes it quietly.

RACHEL returns to the refrigerator, She climbs the refrigerator, sits on the top of the refrigerator, and takes the box of cupcakes in her hands. She leaps off the fridge and sits on the table, the box of cupcakes in her lap. She opens it. She surveys the cupcakes.

RACHEL: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.

RACHEL makes her decision. She grabs a cupcake out of the box and all at once she devours half the cupcake. She eats greedily and messily, getting icing and cupcake all over her face.

RACHEL contemplates the remaining half of her cupcake. She makes a decision. She licks the icing from the cupcake. Then she picks at the remaining cupcake with her fingers, eating it one small piece at a time. She eats the final piece of cupcake, lifting her chin high, opening her mouth wide, and dropping the last morsel of cupcake into her mouth, relishing it, and finally swallowing. RACHEL breathes.

RACHEL leaps up, pacing the room with the box of cupcakes in her hands. She stares into the box.

RACHEL: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. One two three four five six seven.

RACHEL closes her eyes tight. She opens them, looks back in the cupcake box.

RACHEL: One two three four five six seven. Onetwothreefourfivesixseven. Onetwothreefourfivesixseven.

RACHEL begins crying. She sits, holding the box with seven cupcakes, crying, and she begins rocking.

In the basement, NAOMI hears unusual sound coming from the kitchen. She climbs the stairs, opens the door, and cautiously enters.

NAOMI: Rachel? Rachel, what happened here?

RACHEL continues crying and rocking.

NAOMI: We're not allowed to touch the cupcakes, Rachel.

RACHEL: Don't yell at me.

NAOMI: What did you do, Rachel?

RACHEL: Don't yell at me.

NAOMI: We're not allowed, Rachel. We're not allowed.

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RACHEL: I'm sorry, Naomi, I'm sorry. Don't tell on me, please don't tell.
RACHEL leaps off the table. She drops to her knees, sticks a finger down her throat, and starts to gag.

NAOMI: Rachel, what are you doing?

RACHEL: I have to get it out of me. I have to put it back together. I have to put it back.
NAOMI slaps RACHEL's fingers out of her mouth.

RACHEL: You should have been here. You should have stopped me.
NAOMI tries to hold RACHEL, tries to soothe her.

NAOMI: I'm glad you ate that cupcake. I'm glad. I'm glad.
NAOMI holds RACHEL close to her.

NAOMI: Rachel, you don't worry about this.
With her fingers, NAOMI wipes the icing and cupcake off of RACHEL's face and smears it instead on her own. RACHEL watches.

NAOMI: Go back downstairs.
RACHEL gets up and moves to the door.

NAOMI: Go downstairs. Go!
NAOMI shoves RACHEL through the doorway and onto the stairs, then closes the door behind her.
RACHEL stands for a moment at the top of the stairs, then hurries down to the basement.
NAOMI sits on the kitchen table. NICU enters. He sees NAOMI sitting on the table, cupcake smeared all over her face, the box of cupcakes in her hands. Lights fade on NICU and NAOMI in the kitchen....