

# CENTER for EXPERIMENTAL LECTURES

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New Windsor, NY  
<http://experimentallecures.org>

## ***Deep Black Lakes***

by Em Rooney with Mariana Valencia

### CHARACTERS:

Teddy: Em Rooney

Randy: Mariana Valencia

*Lecture begins with Teddy [Em Rooney] sitting on the ground, script in hand. On the ground (or on the side of the podium/ low coffee table) there are an assortment of props:*

A toy gun

A pack of cigarettes

A drop cloth folded like a flag

A plate with a cooked steak (a fork a knife)

A cowbell

An iPhone

2 stacks of paper:

(one with the use of force continuum phrases on it)

(another stack, the bigger one, is blank, it is just for effect, for the Budd Dwyer scene)

A lighter

A glass of milk

A bong

A leather jacket

A suitcase

Em Rooney: Hi everybody. Mariana and I are going to be doing a piece called *Deep Black Lakes* eleven short stories and it begins over there.

[Rooney points towards garden]

*Randy [Mariana Valencia] is wearing a leather jacket and is at the house to get and turn on the hose. Randy [Valencia] drags the hose into the garden and begins watering. Teddy [Rooney] begins Scene 1.*

## SCENE 1

Em Rooney: I'm in the car with my mom. We're on 91 northbound driving away from the Howard Johnson's parking lot in Greenfield, Mass. where my parents used to exchange my sister and I after weekend or summer visits. It's a humiliating event, ending in public hysteria, salt in open wounds. My mom wants to hear ballads. She is always only playing 98.9 soft rock through central Vermont or 94.5 KAT country on the radio in the car. She's got a good alto voice, but the music she's singing along to turns my stomach. I've got my face plastered to the window, away from her. Only glass visible between the raindrops and my eyeballs.

Martina McBride's 1993 hit, "Independence Day," is playing on the radio and my mom knows all the words. While mom is belting her patriotic ballad, Kurt is chewing my steak and putting it back in my mouth with a french kiss. His pupils have become so dilated that I stand on the edge, and dive in the left one. It's a deep black lake. I'm naked and loving the feeling of the cold water between my legs—I was always the first one in, in the spring. But now it's late August and there's a storm coming. Dark clouds are low on the mountains. At the first thunderclap a beaver appears out of nowhere and escorts me back to the shore, synchronizing his head movements with mine in long, parallel breast strokes.

## SCENE 2

*Randy [Valencia] leaves the garden and walks back through the crowd without the hose. Randy [Valencia] returns to sit down next to Teddy [Rooney] and takes stock of the props, moving a couple of them around, then puts on the leather jacket, and begins cutting the steak.*

Rooney: "Independence Day" relates the story of McBride's mother's freedom from her abusive, alcoholic father. In the song Momma McBride burns the house down with daddy McBride in it, while kiddo McBride escapes the pain of seeing her mother's battered face by attending the town's 4th of July parade. The song lyrics suggest that Martina agrees with her mother's actions and there is a conflation alluded to between her father's murder and the freedom our country gained by detaching from British rule. Flags appear as waving, full-screen, double exposures. It's not the story, exactly, that my mother is relating to, I think, but the bear-it-all openness of Country Music. I realize that all these years it's not been the American-loving qualities of the genre that's repelled me, or corny storytelling lyrics, but the memory of the feeling of my mother singing in the car. It's something I always connected to her heartbreak, and therefore the inside of her.

## SCENE 3

*Sitting next to Teddy [Rooney], Randy [Valencia] slowly masticates the steak.*

Rooney: Hilary Swank takes her dick out of her pants and penetrates Chloe Sevigny in a field behind the old tampon factory downtown. I see myself in Chloe Sevigny's character and though I can't relate to her fear of Brandon's gender, I see it, or something similar, in the fear of the girls around me; the dairy farmer girl, the field hockey girls, the burn-outs with crooked, painted on eyebrows that I spend my all time with. Dirty and fucked up as they all are they'll still call you a dyke and kick you out of the bed if you look at their tits for a half second too long. And it's not just that type of desire I relate to—the desire for the other/same—but the way that desire is constrained by fear.

*Teddy [Rooney] and Randy [Valencia] bring their mouths close together, like for a kiss, and Randy [Valencia] drops the masticated steak into Teddy's [Rooney's] mouth. Teddy [Rooney] chews it and swallows it, and washes it down with a gulp of milk. There is a little steak left behind on the plate.*

#### SCENE 4

*Teddy [Rooney] and Randy [Valencia] move away from each other across the props and Randy [Valencia] picks up a microphone.*

Randy [Valencia]: hey Teddy, I love you.

Teddy [Rooney] *in a a southern accent*: Randy, I've been wanting this for a long time.

Randy: I was hoping it was you when I heard the knocking.

Teddy: I woulda left it all for you, ya know.

Randy: Yeah, well I'm glad you didn't have to. I brought you something. *Randy picks up the plate to reveal the half-masticated steak.*

Teddy: *Eats the masticated steak of the plate.* Oh Randy, you've always known the key to a man's heart's through his stomach.

Randy: Why buy the cow if you can get the milk for free?

Teddy: Daddy always said, "in dreams and in love there is no impossibilities."

Randy: Love me, Teddy, and the world is mine.

#### SCENE 5

Rooney: I lay awake in bed at night thinking about Rand Paul. I'm replaying his responses during the last debate in my head. I'm trying to remember them word for word.

*Valencia plays a karaoke version of Soul Asylum's "Runaway Train" off of an iPhone, humming and singing along, reading the lyrics off of the phone, while Rooney speaks.*

Rooney: It's a calming mechanism, something I did as a kid, with *Jurassic Park*—I'd seen it so many times that I would try to remember it word-for-word before bed, like counting sheep—and Soul Asylum, "Grave Dancer's Union," a tape played over and over again for months, to block out the sounds coming from the apartment building, or whatever was happening in the living room.

Rand says he's believes the war on drugs has disproportionately affected African Americans, and that marijuana should be decriminalized. He makes a persuasive argument for not arming Syrian rebels. He's against the bulk collection of cell phone data. Don't shut down mosques he says. It's not the right approach. Mr. "I'm proud to be a wacko-bird" Cruz starts talking about green eggs and ham, and Rubio's got one eyelid slightly lowered, in an apparent attack of nerves, and he's drinking a glass of water.

I'm riding in a convertible with a disembodied daddy Christie and listening to Jersey Girl. Meanwhile, Rand is still filibustering my mind. He's back on the topic of defeating radical islam....

*Valencia finishes singing and the music fades out.*

## SCENE 6

Rooney: Sam, her dad, and I. We're at a Brazilian Restaurant in Nevada it's 2003, it's Sam's 21st birthday.

*Valencia takes off her leather jacket and drinks a sip of milk.*

The Welfare Reform bill comes up, and despite all our practiced efforts at avoiding disagreements with her dad she can't let it go. She starts talking about the women she's worked with as volunteer at Planned Parenthood: their needs, their life circumstances. When she's done with her diatribe, her dad calls her "a bleeding-heart liberal."

*Valencia begins playing the cowbell in 3/4 time.*

He's disgusted, and enraged; his face melts into the goat fondu like mozzarella slapped against a burning hot wall. We pick him up from the hospital the next day and only his eyes and mouth are visible through the bandages wrapped around his face. When we pull in the driveway he asks if we can come inside and help make him dinner and put him to bed.

*Valencia picks up the bong and takes a "rip."*

Linked with him, arm and arm, at both sides, there's a shuffle to the kitchen table, and he's nodding off, drool wetting the outside of his bandages. Cabinet after cabinet is empty.

*Valencia returns to playing the cowbell in 3/4 time.*

Finally we find one, under the kitchen island, that has cereal, vodka, and two semi-automatic rifles. So we pour the pathetic, old bastard a bowl of vodka-soaked Fruit Loops and go outside to shoot his guns.

## SCENE 7

Rooney: Back in bed with Rand I'm thinking about that phrase "bleeding heart liberal," and that first time I heard it. Richard Attenborough's idealism in the first *Jurassic Park* turns into Bryce Dallas Howard's greed in the second. Bleedin' hearts, bleedin' out. And for a minute I think I understand fiscal conservatism, but then I lose the thought, left in utter confusion, like when you open the fridge but can't remember what you want to eat, I'm just staring into my third eye—and there's a knock on the door.

*Valencia abruptly stops playing the cowbell, and gets up to collect a large piece of blank drop cloth folded like a flag.*

## SCENE 8

Rooney: Suddenly I'm aroused. I'm Laura Dern laying on the bed thinking about Nick Cage.

*Valencia begins unfolding the "flag."*

Rooney: Randy barges in, in a Bobby Peru disguise and says he wants to piss on my head. He takes the cigarette from between my lips, bends down (keeping his eyes on me) and stubs it out on the indoor/outdoor carpet.

*Valencia lays down on the flag in a manner suggestive of Laura Dern in Wild at Heart.*

Rooney: He says it smells like vomit, asks me if I'm pregnant, grabs my throat and breathes down it—with my head clipped back at 90 degree angle I can see all of his turtle-head teeth poking through his diseased gums. Threateningly he mouths, [in a whisper] "a----bor-----tion----is----mur----derrrrrrrrrrrrr..."

## SCENE 9

*Rooney and Valencia both stand and face the audience. As Rooney speaks, Valencia rotates to face different sections of the encircled audience, pausing to let them read the titles from the Use of Force Continuum, before dropping them one by one.*

Rooney: On January 22, almost 20 years ago, the day before the Treasurer for the State of Pennsylvania, Bud Dwyer's sentencing hearing, he said what follows—along with many other pained and desperate words—in a long, pleading statement, to a room full of his staff, reporters, and camera operators before he pulled out a gun, shot himself in the mouth and died in a corner behind the podium where he'd been speaking:

I stand before you today as an absolute example that in 1987 in the United States of America our legal system can be used for political persecution and that innocent people are found guilty. Words do not exist to express the feeling of disbelief, shock, numbness, illness, dismay and sadness for my family and me when the judge read the first "guilty." No one could possibly imagine that feeling except other innocent persons who have been convicted of crimes they did not commit. That moment, and the days that follow as friends and family make calls, send notes or come to visit to express disbelief and sympathy is as close as one can come to dying and attending their own funeral. In my case, it was not only the destruction of my life but the destruction of everything I believed, and taught my students and my family about regarding this country. I had been very naive. I had been raised to believe that if I obeyed the law and was a good citizen that I would never become entangled with our legal system.

## SCENE 10

*Valencia continues reading from the stack of papers and dropping them, without showing them to the audience.*

Rooney: I haven't really spoken to anybody for days. There's nothing to say. Everyone in the house feels the same way about it all, more or less...

I wake up in the morning and drip snot onto my toast while I sob, chewing and dripping over the keyboard in the living room, reading the news. Occasionally I share a sob with a person who passes me in the hallway, the laundry room, or on the stairs...

I drag the hose out to the garden, with my earbuds in listening to the news, sobbing--- in a daze as I water the garden...

The house is quiet.

The landscape is empty.

...Back in the garden, the next day, I notice a new colony of potato bugs. I squash the soft, bright orange beetles between my fingers, picking them off like a momma gorilla caring for her children, but I cry for each life lost. On Thursday, I'm digging a hole for the scarecrow with my hands; it starts pouring. I spread my legs like a child and let the mud splatter all over my them—I let the rain wash away my tears. In the studio the wind blows through the screen, with the rain. The mountains are hidden by trees on all sides, but through the opening in the trees I can see group of deer and an osprey swooping through.

Amy Goodman sits at the table with me. She's covered in a sheet of soft, thick transparent vinyl, like a rain cape without any openings for body parts. Her silver hair, static-y and stuck to her forehead, is glowing purple from the light bouncing off her Star Trek blazer.

## SCENE 11

*Valencia clears off dropped papers from the flag and begins refolding it.*

Rooney: My friend sent me an image of one of her recent paintings. She'd gone to the The Grove Mall where there was a public self-defense class, being run by the LAPD, and painted a volunteer getting tased for fun. To the side of the mats that had been laid out for the demonstration there's an easel with a display board reading USE OF FORCE CONTINUUM across the top. The volunteer gets held up by two men on either side, so that when his body freezes from 50,000 volts he won't fall on himself and shatter like glass. Teeth gritting and eyes bulging-- the room holds their breath with him for five seconds...until the trigger is released.

*Valencia begins packing away other props along with the flag into a suitcase.*

Afterward the volunteer, a ginger guy, is rosy and at ease. The audience claps and cheers. Mr. Ginger walks away with his friends laughing. The tasers at the event (though this isn't represented in the painting) were pretty, she'd told me over the phone, like they'd been designed for young girls with matching Kaboodles.