

FIREFLIES

by Philana Imade Omorotionmwan

*There is some kiss we want
with our whole lives,
the touch of spirit on the body...
At night, I open the window
and ask the moon to come
and press its face against mine.
Breathe into me.*

—Rumi

CHARACTERS (5W)

THEN-SELF	the child; full of youthful enthusiasm and hope while also being a little bit whiny; believes all the things she dreams for herself are possible; all heart
NOW-SELF	the adult; cold, detached, dispassionate; she knows better; all head
THE MOON	THEN-SELF's first light; also plays BLUE and WORKER 1
SHINEs 1-2	sweet; a little rough around the edges; ideally, she resembles THEN-SELF and NOW-SELF in some way
GLOWs 1-3	charming; used to getting what they want; everyone wants their attention/to be near them; also reads WORKER 2; androgynous

TIME

Now and then. Then and now.

PLACE

Here and there. There and here.

I. This is the basin

(An empty stage. The night songs of insects.)

THEN-SELF'S VOICE

This...
is the Basin.

(The swamp appears. Cypress knees, duckweed, etc. Maybe a sleeping alligator or two. And finally, the full moon.)

This is the Basin.
And it's twilight time.
Just before when the glow of full moon
and the dark of swamp will meet.

This
is where alligators sleep.
[(Eyes open.
I think.)]
But tonight, we turn our attention
to the small, winged things—
like lovebugs and roaches and—
Look! There goes a firefly.
Now at this very moment
in this very place
a creature is just beginning to be.

([A large white egg appears.] A heartbeat begins. Ideally, the actors create this sound by beating on their chests, rather than it being a pre-recorded sound cue of a heart beat.)

A creature with skin and hair
and legs and eyes and teeth.
And a light
that the creature cannot see.

(The egg begins to glow.)

So in the beginning, she is in darkness.

(She waits.)

I said, in the beginning, she is in darkness.

(Darkness.)

There. That's more like it.
In the beginning, she is in the darkness.
Where she is warm and wet.

[Where her heart beats as one with another.
Where they breathe as one breath.]

(A moments as the heartbeat continues.)

But that darkness cannot be darkness forever.
It has to be left.

([The egg begins to pulse in and out until it breaks open.] THEN-SELF emerges slowly as THE MOON appears. THEN-SELF stretches into herself. She tests out her limbs. THE MOON begins to hum the melody to "This Little

*Light of Mine” as THEN-SELF moves. THEN-SELF discovers a flashlight
somewhere on her body, but she doesn’t know what it’s for.)*

Now the creature isn’t quite sure where
or even why she is,
or what she’s meant to do.
But then she hears a voice from the sky,
and she looks up to the heavens.
And she sees...

(THEN-SELF gasps.)

the moon!

(The heartbeat stops.)

THE MOON

(singing)

This little light of mine
I’m gonna let it shine
This little light of mine
I’m gonna let it shine
This little light of mine
I’m gonna let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine
Everywhere I go
I’m gonna let it shine
Everywhere I go
I’m gonna let it shine
Everywhere I go
I’m gonna let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

*(THE MOON returns to humming as she lays THEN-SELF to sleep. She
continues to hum for a moment until there is calm and stillness. THE MOON
moves away, causing THEN-SELF to jolt awake.)*

THEN-SELF

And the creature cannot understand
why the moon has moved away.
But now she knows
the whole reason for her being
is to find the light!
And to have its arms around her again!

(THEN-SELF runs off. A heart beats three times.)

II. Spiders... are not insects...

(THEN-SELF returns. Perhaps she wears a fanny pack. THEN-SELF reaches into a fanny pack around her waist and pulls out a white scarf. She throws it out toward the audience while holding on to one end, but it falls. She repeats this several times. Note: If money were no object, the audience would be given wristbands that are programmed to light up at this time because... why not?)

THEN-SELF

The creature throws out line after line
thread after thread
time after time.
She tries to latch onto some light. Hey!
Any light. Hey!
Someone. I said hey!
Anyone?

Hi.

(THEN-SELF repeats this act of throwing scarves.)

Some light. Hey!
Any light. Hey!
Someone. I said hey!
Anyone?

Hi.

(THEN-SELF sits down defeated. A long, still silence. SHINE 1 enters. THEN-SELF is too transfixed by SHINE 1 to move. SHINE 1 picks up one of THEN-SELF's scarves and follows its path to THEN-SELF. They stand face to face.)

SHINE 1

Hi.

THEN-SELF

Hi.

(An awkward silence.)

SHINE 1

What's your name?

THEN-SELF

Then-Self.

SHINE 1

I'm Shine.

(A heart beats three times.)

III. Mosquitoes

SHINE 1

So, what do you wanna do now?

THEN-SELF

My mom got me a new baby doll that we could—

SHINE 1

Ew. Gross. No. I hate baby dolls.

THEN-SELF

Okay. Well, how about if we—

SHINE 1

I can show you something boys do. It'll make us blood brothers.

THEN-SELF

But we're girls.

SHINE 1

Fine. Blood sisters then.

THEN-SELF

Okay. What do we have to do?

SHINE 1

First, you have to promise you won't tell on me. [Pinky swear and ankle shake.]

THEN-SELF

Okay.

[(They pinky swear and ankle shake.)

SHINE 1

(taking out a pocketknife)

Look at what I got!

THEN-SELF

Ooooooh! I'm telling.

SHINE 1

But you just ankle shooked!

THEN-SELF

But where'd you get a knife?

SHINE 1

None of your beeswax.

THEN-SELF

I don't think I like this game.

SHINE 1

We haven't even started yet. Don't you wanna be blood brothers?

THEN-SELF

But we're girls.

SHINE 1

Fine. Blood sisters then.
Now gimme your hand.

THEN-SELF

What are you gonna do?

SHINE 1

What do you think?
Give me your hand.

THEN-SELF

I don't know...

SHINE 1

Fine. I'll go first. Sometimes you can be such a baby.

(SHINE 1 cuts her own hand and extends it to THEN-SELF.)

Here.

THEN-SELF

What do you want me to—

SHINE 1

What would a mosquito do?

THEN-SELF

Boys do this?

SHINE 1

No, they just rub their fingers together because they're gross. But this is way better. None of the blood drops on the ground. So come on. Do it.

(THEN-SELF takes SHINE 1's hand hesitantly and quickly "sucks" blood from it.)

THEN-SELF

How does that make us brothers?

SHINE 1

We're girls, remember.

THEN-SELF

Sisters then. How does that make us sisters?

SHINE 1

We aren't. Not yet. Not all the way. You still have to do it. Gimme your hand.

(THEN-SELF gives SHINE 1 her hand.)

Promise you won't be a baby?

THEN-SELF

I promise.

(SHINE 1 cuts THEN-SELF's hand. Maybe she sucks air through her teeth.)

[Ow! You hurt me.]

[SHINE 1

My mom says that everything that feels good hurts a little at first.]

(SHINE 1 takes THEN-SELF's hand and sucks blood from it.)

See?

Now my blood's in you. And your blood's in me.

(SHINE exits. THEN-SELF looks at her hand.)

THEN-SELF

And the creature begins to think

about who she is underneath.

About the life that flows there.

About who she might be.

(THEN-SELF begins to pick at her hand as THE MOON appears. She bristles at the pain.)

And that always hurts a little.

But all the moon sees

is that the creature is—

THE MOON

Are you crying?

THEN-SELF

No ma'am.

THE MOON

I've told you not to do that. I've told you not to feel where anyone can see.

THEN-SELF

But it hurts, m—

You heard me. THE MOON

THEN-SELF
And the moon begins to worry
about the creature very much.
So from this moment,
she rarely lets the creature out of her sight.
Not to slumber parties, or to sleep away camp,
or to anything that means the creature
will be away from her light.
Anytime the creature asks to go somewhere,
the answer is always no. "Can I...?"

No. THE MOON

THEN-SELF
"But what if I...?"

No. THE MOON

THEN-SELF
"How about if I...?"

No. THE MOON

THEN-SELF
But the creature is persistent
and she never gives up hope.
"Can I... go to Girl Scout Camp with Shine? I just wanna ride horses and make smores and
swim in a lake and—"

THE MOON
"Get your hair wet?"

THEN-SELF
"I won't."

THE MOON
"Well, alright then. Fine."

THEN-SELF
The moon finally agrees!

But not before warning the creature
to be careful of certain things.

THE MOON

Don't let anything get too close to you out there.
You better watch out for black bears and snakes.
They'll sneak up on you in the dark if you aren't looking.
And don't change clothes in front of Shine.
She might be a lesbian.
And they'll sneak up on you in the dark if you aren't looking.

THEN-SELF

Now, the creature isn't quite sure what lesbians are,
but she figures they must be
just as easy to see
as black bears and snakes.
And she doesn't want the moon to change her mind.
So the creature agrees.
She won't get too close to or
change her clothes in front of anyone.
She will be safe from bears and snakes. And lesbians.

(A heart beats three times.)