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# Mandala Springs

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

MANDALA SPRINGS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Juleen Collins

2018

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This thesis, written by Juleen Collins, and entitled Mandala Springs, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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John Dufresne

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Vernon Dickson

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Debra Dean, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 22, 2018

The thesis of Juleen Collins is approved.

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Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

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Andrés G. Gil  
Vice President for Research and Economic Development  
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2018

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DEDICATION  
for Mom and Dad

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

MANDALA SPRINGS

by

Juleen Collins

Florida International University, 2018

Miami, Florida

Professor Debra Dean, Major Professor

MANDALA SPRINGS is the small town setting for a story that explores the nature of secrets, lies, revelations, and the damage each can cause. The narrative follows Bodhi MacLachlan, a young woman who struggles with Borderline Personality Disorder, back to the psychiatric hospital where she has resided in-patient multiple times. The long-term association with her psychiatrist becomes complicated when she reveals details of her affair with a secretive man. Meanwhile, she becomes obsessed with uncovering the mysteries of the relationship between a new patient, Scott, and his much younger sister, Ollie, to whom he is guardian.

As Bodhi proceeds, she unintentionally but irreparably damages her relationships with each of these characters. Ultimately, she must come to terms with the consequences of her actions. To reflect the complicated, upside down world of psychiatric illness, the story is written in the hybrid form of a playscript-novel.

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## PROLOGUE

(ARTHUR *enters stage right, downstage of curtain; the stage is dark; houselights fade out as a follow spot comes up on him; he clears his throat several times to start the show*)

ARTHUR (*to audience*): Good evening. Welcome to The Asylum Theatre. I am Arthur, the theatre's resident ghost, trapped in the interlife between past and future incarnations. This is not my story. Nor am I its narrator. The prologue is mine; assigned, perhaps, as an obligatory nod to a wizened elder of the tribe (*exaggerated bow*). Perhaps because no one else would accept the role. Regardless, I am here to introduce you to Mandala Springs.

Our Virginia State Mental Institution, the building in which you've made yourselves comfortable tonight, closed in 1981—eventually replaced by the Lake Point Psychiatric Hospital across town. Some of the former patients with nowhere to go established themselves near the former institution in the mostly desolate Mandala Springs. The local boardinghouse was renovated into studio apartments and eventually a rundown restaurant became the Ghost Light Diner.

Several of the new residents bucked the stereotypes that haunted them for so many years and petitioned the county to donate to the town the then-abandoned mental institution. As perhaps you've seen, the former administrative building became the Mandala Springs Public Library. The grounds were landscaped for a public park, and the main building was converted to the *pièce de résistance* in which you sit, our non-profit theatre, The Asylum. Nearby patrons of the arts soon discovered the theatre's avant-garde entertainment, and word traveled all the way inside the beltway of the nation's capital.

Artists, misfits, and nonconformists were drawn to the physical and psychic space of the revitalized Mandala Springs. The town birthed itself from the lunatics and rejects

of a society that had left them nothing else. I am fortunate that many of the young people who travel here, hoping for work at The Asylum Theatre, have become my family.

Tonight's story begins in 1992 with the arrival of two strangers.

(ARTHUR *exits*; *music up*: Sonia Dada—"Amazing Jane"; *follow spot fades out*; *curtain out*)

## ACT ONE

### SCENE 1

*(Lights up; music fades; Lake Point Psychiatric Hospital, adult unit lounge; a cluster of heavy-looking oak furniture with burgundy upholstered cushions; couch, square wooden table, half a dozen scattered chairs; a small bookcase stuffed with beat-up board games, playing cards, and a Rubik's cube missing most of its stickers; two stage left doors, i.e., the audience's right, lead offstage; the down stage door is the nurses' station, it is divided horizontally, the top half is open; a group of patients enter from a downstage right hallway, returning from dinner)*

Scott is barefoot the first time Bodhi spots him. The frayed edges of his ragged jeans curl down around his calloused soles. Three words are printed in black Sharpie down his jeans:

PEACE

PIECE

PEAS

He perches atop the back of the couch, one blackened foot on a seat cushion, the other propped on its arm. Head down, he's riffing on a beat-up acoustic covered with fading stickers from obscure bands. It's a familiar, kind of Dave Matthews sound. As he plays, Scott rests the battered guitar flat on his knee like a keyboard. Curling his left hand around the neck, he brushes the strings with his right, an awkward posture executed with what Bodhi guesses is a feigned nonchalance.

His unkempt, rusty hair falls in a shaggy, pseudo-surfer triangle across one eye and just past his chin. He wears a grungy, once-white thermal shirt and a sleeveless navy

sweatshirt. His appearance speaks volumes about his state. He's been sleeping on the street, it seems, or someplace less hospitable.

Tessa realizes first.

“Smoke...” She points to the lit cigarette balanced between his fingers. “Smoke. No. No, no.” Tessa wears a childish jumper and Mary Janes. Her age is unclear but some gray streaks run through her dull brown hair. A rigid follower of rules, she appears slower than most of the people Bodhi has met at the hospital, but when Tessa manages to match the thoughts in her mind with words that the rest of the patients recognize, the group gets to see glimpses of the mayhem beyond her simple-minded facade. Often she seems less than present, as if her thoughts are more entrancing than anything the outside world can offer her. Or maybe her meds simply dull her brain.

She shuffles to the nurses' station and taps on a laminated sheet posted on the window. “Smoke. No. No, no.” Her voice is rising in pitch and volume as she calls to the young man across the room. He seems unaware of her agitation.

“Tessa is showing you the unit rules.” Bodhi tries to catch this new patient's eye, but he doesn't lift his head. Maybe he didn't understand. “Dude. There is no smoking outside of that room.” She gestures to the smoke room. “Besides, Tessa has asthma. She's standing up for herself, and that's new for her. The patients need to support her. She knows we're not supposed to smoke in the lounge. It's one of the hospital's rules. Not to mention,” she adds under her breath, “the fire marshal's.”

There is no response.

“Hey.” Bodhi takes a step toward him. His hair coloring is as disturbing as the texture of polyester. A man-made accident. With his head down, the disheveled mess masks his face entirely. She feels like she’s talking to a naughty dog.

Bodhi’s mood can race from zero to rage in a matter of seconds. She is supposed to be working on it in therapy, but it seems so far out of her control that she generally feels defeated by it. Of her symptoms, it is the one that most makes her unlikeable to some, including herself. But when it takes over, she doesn’t care about being likable.

“Put it out.”

He stops picking at the strings and sits without moving, without lifting his head. Bodhi waits. Earl, who’s trailed behind her out of the cafeteria, seems ready to enjoy a good showdown. Tessa recognizes the stillness, and she quiets.

Scott holds the full attention of the room. He raises his head to reveal the diagonal third of his face that is not draped in orangey shag. He locks his one, visible eye with Bodhi’s, but still, he does not speak. Or put out his cigarette, she notes.

“What are you, deaf?” she sneers.

The new intake tosses his head, flipping back the deep triangle of hair and raising his chin to her. His bare face reveals a glazed, mucousy film where his right eye belongs. Bodhi tries not to flinch. Even as she feels the brunt of what she has said belt her in the gut, she knows he wants a reaction from her. She blankly stares him down, and he takes a drag off the cigarette.

“Wha’ happen your eye?” Tessa pipes up, and Bodhi’s courage deflates.

His defiant, one-eyed glare turns on Tessa. His answer is sharp and deliberate.

“What happened your manners?”

In the silence that follows, Bodhi takes a second, slow step toward him. She absorbs the strong musky scent, the leather choker that surely violates hospital regulations, and the rough, bitten nails. As she focuses her gaze away from his own and onto the instrument between them, Bodhi feels the un-eye too close to her face. But she reaches toward him and grips the neck of his guitar with one hand and its body with the other. Why doesn't he struggle? She wills her hands to stop trembling. What is she going to do next? When she speaks, her voice is lower and quieter than she expected.

"You don't *ever* talk to her like that." Bodhi yanks the guitar from his hands. Scott climbs down off the couch maintaining eye contact, and she steps back involuntarily. He takes a final drag from the cigarette, removes it from his mouth, and methodically presses its tip to his forearm. Bodhi is frozen until he carefully removes the guitar from her hands.

She quickly turns away, calling, "C'mon Tessa." With a hand on Tessa's back, she guides her offstage right. As they exit, she hears the music resume.

*(Music: Dave Matthews Band—"Rhyme & Reason"; lights fade to black)*