

Developed at HERE, NYC (2001).

**ELEMENTAL**  
An eclectic opera in four acts

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**ELEMENTAL**  
by Sheila Callaghan  
music by Sophocles Papavasilopoulos

HOPE / WOMAN / PROFESSOR - female, 30's  
LONNIE- young male, teen-early twenties  
KID ONE / JOHN / MAN / STUDENT - male, 30's  
KID TWO / CLAIRE / STATUE - female, 20's

**Act One: METAL**

HOPE is lying somewhere awkwardly on the jungle gym, back flat, facing up. She sighs heavily. She sighs heavily again.

HOPE

Yes, your assumptions are fitting  
I am a Tragedy of Ancient Proportions.  
Shoe-shaped mazes stamped in dirt across my face,  
size two to five.  
Used bandaids dangling from my ears like jewels.  
Dried fluids in every flavor crusted in the crooks of my joints  
vomit snot blood  
you get the picture.  
I am the victim of a base and puzzling hysteria.  
Preschool.

KID ONE, KID TWO, AND LONNIE come tearing out of nowhere. KID TWO chews on HOPE's arm. LONNIE humps a pole. KID ONE bangs his head against the jungle gym, screaming.

HOPE

It wasn't always this way. I suppose I didn't always mind. Children were different. They wore nice clothes. They didn't bleed as much. There weren't so many of them.

The children continue screaming, changing positions..

HOPE

I dream of summer  
Cut grass and sidewalks

barefoot in a sundress  
walking into the wind

KID ONE

Let's play! I'm a feral biped with yellow fangs and facial warts and I feed on brown grains and soy products!!

KID TWO

I'm a neo-marxist revolutionary on the verge of insurrection who lives in a shed and eats her own poo!!

LONNIE

I'm a fireman!

They take out real oozies and shoot at each other.

HOPE

I was a woman once.

KID ONE

You're dead mother fucker

LONNIE

No I'm not

HOPE

My arms, my hips  
swinging as I walk

KID ONE

You are, I just killed you

LONNIE

Nuh-uh

HOPE

Cotton cloth  
caressing my ankles

KID TWO

He killed you Lonnie, I saw him/

LONNIE

He missed!

KID ONE

Did not

LONNIE

Did to

KID ONE

Did not

LONNIE

Did to

They chase each other.

HOPE

Rain from sprinklers  
On my bare ankles  
bare shoulders  
as I walked

LONNIE pulls KID TWO's hair. She screams.

HOPE

I think of walking a lot.  
Walking...

KID TWO

You aren't playing fair

LONNIE

I don't care, I get to live forever

HOPE

Walking...

KID ONE

No you don't

LONNIE

Yes I do

KID ONE and KID TWO

No you don't!

LONNIE

Yes I do, I do I do, I never ever die!!!

KID TWO

How come?

LONNIE

Cause I'm Lonnie  
I'm an immortal, I am ephemera  
I exist in the invisible universe  
An infinite symphony of motion and light  
I have no belief in matters of flesh or grief  
I elude and obfuscate  
I am Lonnie, a bubble, a non-boy  
Heat rising from asphalt  
Diffracted-glass dust-mite ocean-molecule me  
I am Lonnie  
I am eternity

KID ONE and KID TWO jump LONNIE and beat  
the crap out of him. He dies.

KID TWO

Hey. We killed him.

KID ONE

I knew he was lying. Come on, I hear thunder

KID TWO (to LONNIE)

Neophyte.

They run inside the building.

HOPE

I was a woman once.  
I walked.

HOPE stands and steps over the body of LONNIE.

HOPE

My feet were slender.  
They moved me down the sidewalk in smooth blows.  
One-two-one-two

And in my head, an undulating score  
keeping forever time with my heel to the ground.

And in my core,  
a weightlessness.

A small box of aqua-colored sky with clouds and breeze and sweet air.  
I had a name.

JOHN enters. He is HOPE's lover.

JOHN

Hope.

HOPE

I had a love. His mouth made the shape of a grape when he said my name.

JOHN

Hope.

HOPE

The word 'love' curled around his tongue like licorice.

JOHN

I love Hope.

HOPE

He loved me for my walk

JOHN

I love you for your breath  
your waste  
your ease  
your consequence  
I slide into your liquid place and I drown

HOPE

But I didn't believe him. One thick summer night he was walking behind me saying my name and his voice was velvet but it was too hot for such heavy fabric so I hurtled forward and he was breathing behind me at first and then he wasn't and something within me broke so I kept running, I was burning the fuel of cruelty and it was narcotic

I ran until I reached a park and ducked inside. I heard nothing for a long long time. Then his breathing. Then his calls.

JOHN

Hope

HOPE

I clung to something cold and metal. I waited.

JOHN

Hope

HOPE

His sweat-licked skin shone silver in the moonlight. I waited.

JOHN is gasping and crying, possibly on the verge of cardiac arrest. He cannot find her.

JOHN

Hope

HOPE

His eyes were too deep  
His love was too huge  
He was too much of what I wanted  
So I said nothing

My breath stopped moving over my tongue  
my box of sky turned to steel  
and I went metal from the inside out.

For all my cold-heartedness  
I had become  
inanimate.

HOPE lays down on the jungle gym in the position she was before. JOHN gazes around him, his eyes falling on the jungle gym. He does not see her.

JOHN

Goodbye

JOHN touches the metal, then leaves.

HOPE

I cried. My tears clanged like quarters against my limbs. I cried more and sounded a dozen hammers on a dozen water pipes. I cried and clouds of birds shooshed from trees, beetles curled into themselves, dogs peed on carpets. But he never came back. And here I am. Covered in footprints and dried blood. With no one to love me.

LONNIE

Except me

HOPE

You have no love

You think not? LONNIE

You're a dead boy HOPE

You didn't hear my ditty earlier LONNIE

I wasn't listening HOPE

I don't die LONNIE

You aren't breathing HOPE

Neither are you. LONNIE

They're predicting thunderstorms HOPE

Let them LONNIE

LEAVE LONNIE

I love you LONNIE

I don't care HOPE

LONNIE  
I always have. From the instant I perceived you and your primary colors. I thought "now there's something I can play on." I ran to you and gripped this very railing and as my flesh made contact with your alloy I received an electric shock.

Poor thing HOPE

LONNIE

I trampled you then as all the other children did and for thirty solid minutes you received the most severe beating known to mankind. I returned the next day to find you unblemished, all elegance and angles, glowing like a fiber optic queen ... And I realized... you too are immortal

LONNIE begins stroking HOPE. She shocks him.

LONNIE

Fuck!

HOPE

You arrogant little peanut. With your steel-reinforced toes. Who do you think you are? You thunderfoot my back, you clangle my collarbone and knuckle my nodes, and then you expect me to be your metal momma?

A beat.

LONNIE

No. I guess not.

He exits. A beat.

HOPE

My cold-hearted...

A beat.

Boy?

A beat.

Little dirty boy?

A beat.

BOY!

LONNIE reappears, smirking.

LONNIE

You called?

HOPE

You... forgot your bandaid....

LONNIE

I'm sure.

A beat.

What?

HOPE

I get your game

LONNIE

What game...

HOPE

Your little torture-play...

LONNIE

Pretty big words for a little peanut...

HOPE

Your peanut has a hard shell.

LONNIE

Oh?

HOPE

And  
You adore it.  
The fists in your eyes  
The heels in your spine  
The thunderfeet.

LONNIE

HOPE laughs.

You thrive on cruelty and violation.  
You delight in your rippling tragedy.  
You are electrified by brutality.  
Your metal is shiniest when it is most maligned.

LONNIE (con.t)

What can you possibly know of my substance?

HOPE

You were a woman once.

LONNIE

A beat.

I... HOPE

I heard your song. LONNIE

But you were dead/ HOPE

I. Don't. Die. LONNIE

LONNIE begins stroking HOPE again.

And neither do you. Because you have become the one substance you most understood. Nothing of the immortal world is tender, Hope. It is how we resist the ravages of humanity.

I am tender... HOPE

Apathy is a gift LONNIE

I believe in summer... HOPE

Maybe you did once... LONNIE

I wore... sundresses... HOPE

LONNIE  
No sundresses. No sunshine and jello and hard candies and strawberry-scented shampoos. We are larger. Those animals, they have no shells. They squiggle and squirm and get goo everywhere. But you and I... we clash like gods and call it gold, call it hail, call it cancer and glory and thunder and we're lucid in the uproar, lucid and impenetrable.

He kisses her. VOICES are heard.

We'll resume later. LONNIE (cont.)

LONNIE bites HOPE, then drops to the ground and plays dead. CLAIRE. appears, carrying a large

purse. She approaches HOPE and touches her lovingly.

CLAIRE

It's been so long... You're filthy. Don't they clean you? I'll bet you don't even remember me. The girl with the long golden braids, so long they used to dangle at the back of her knees? A clean child, a very very clean child, so clean you could eat off her? And so chaste and lovely that butterflies flew from her mouth when she sang?

Remember how she'd loop her braids through your chains and pretend she was part of you? And those little grubby fuckers who used to trample her hair and shove handfuls of dirt down her pants, remember when she'd curl up inside you to protect herself from them? You'd cradle her in your metal embrace until they all crawled away in a cloud of foulness...

She embraces HOPE.

I've missed you so... I'm meeting my lover here. We wanted to "consummate" ourselves on top of you. He's been trying to "consummate" me for months now—seventeen to be exact—but I wanted to wait until we found a place of purity and supreme rectitude... and then I thought of you. Oh, my metal moma, you are sublime, you are sturdy and dirty but you're all mine...

She rubs HOPE.

It is so good to touch you again. I'd forgotten how calming the feel of steel is on the flesh. I can't wait to be penetrated against you.

She takes out a bottle of Lysol from her purse and sprays HOPE down, wiping her with a rag.

There. That should do. Gosh, I hope it doesn't rain. I'm going to hide now. I want to watch his reaction when he sees you for the first time. Goodbye, beloved Jungle Gym.

CLAIRE kisses HOPE, then hides, watching HOPE.  
JOHN enters.

JOHN

Claire? Claire? Where's my golden buttercup? My pristine petunia, my tidy little tit-mouse?

He surveys the park, including HOPE.

So this is where we're gonna get nutty.

He looks around.

Kinda sweet. Kinda dirty. Kinda... sad.

He notices LONNIE.

A dead boy. Maybe he grew there. Claire? Butter muffin? Sugar tooshie?

He looks at the sky. To himself.

Looks like rain.

To the air.

Claire sweetums, it looks like rain, we should probably...

Something about HOPE has caught his attention.  
He touches her tentatively at first, afraid of a shock.  
Then he inspects her more closely. He runs his  
hands all over her, exploring.

Something... familiar...

He explores her more.

Summer...

JOHN strokes HOPE all over, from the bottom,  
from the top, her chains, her swings, her cement  
blocks. He crouches, he stretches, he touches.  
Curious. Sensual.

CLAIRE sings to the audience from her hiding  
place.

CLAIRE (to audience)

Seventeen months of celibacy  
Demanding our union be sanctified  
Seventeen months searching  
For pure and sacred ground  
It is she  
Her metal arms  
Her icy stare  
My refuge, my saving one  
It is she

JOHN

I wake wet beside her in moonlit grass,  
her sundress damp and clinging,  
her body shivers in a night breeze

I press my mouth to her shoulder  
and breathe a hot shape  
her applesauce goosebumps melt  
a small circle in my warmth  
and she says

Thank you

HOPE

And closes her lids again

JOHN

CLAIRE emerges, slowly.

She's gorgeous, isn't she?

CLAIRE

How do you know her

JOHN

She rescued me  
time and time again  
from the snarling little beasts

CLAIRE

I'd cling to her skeleton  
as they tore my lace  
and stomped my lovely braids

and afterwards  
I'd coil into a ball  
within the blue balm  
of her sweet shadows.

JOHN continues stroking HOPE.

Do you like her?

CLAIRE

She's perfect.

JOHN

CLAIRE starts to undo JOHN's trousers.

But... wait...

CLAIRE pushes JOHN against HOPE.

I want you touching her

CLAIRE

Claire..

JOHN

Can you feel her cold pressing into your back

CLAIRE

Yes

JOHN

Her rods on your spine... does she chill you...

CLAIRE

Claire

JOHN

Feel her, John...

CLAIRE

CLAIRE begins making love to JOHN.

John...

HOPE  
(quietly)

Hope...

JOHN

Yes...

CLAIRE

Hope

JOHN

Yes... and faith... and love... all that is holy....

CLAIRE

LONNIE screams and leaps up.

AAAARRRRRGGGGGGHHHH!!!!

LONNIE

What- CLAIRE

The dead boy JOHN

I am not dead LONNIE  
I am Lonnie  
Evanescent and astral  
A particle zoo, a parable  
I exist beyond your swamp of sanity  
I curse your cochlea, wither your wisteria  
I am Lonnie  
I am perpetuity

You shall not defile my bride!

Your bride CLAIRE

My bride LONNIE  
We are ancient companions  
We walk together in dark tunnels  
and our breath stops  
we twist like rubber until our bodies squeak  
we claw the papered walls  
and plaster one another with the torn bits  
You have no dominion

JOHN strokes HOPE. Thunder is heard loudly above.

JOHN  
(to Hope)

Can you feel me

Filthy dead boy CLAIRE  
I knew her metal years before you  
She is my savior  
She arches to my causes and  
curves above my cries  
She has been mine since my honey-colored braids  
Dangled within her angles

Your hollow metaphors sag and fade  
You have no dominion!

I can feel you

HOPE  
(to John)

Thunder is heard again loudly above. CLAIRE and LONNIE grab HOPE. The following is screamed or sung.

LONNIE

She is my bride  
We walk together in dark tunnels  
and our breath stops  
we twist like rubber until our bodies squeak  
we claw the papered walls  
and plaster one another with the torn bits  
You have no dominion!

CLAIRE

She is my savior  
She arches to my causes and  
curves above my cries  
She has been mine since my honey-colored  
braids  
Dangled within her angles  
Your hollow metaphors sag and fade  
You have no dominion!

A huge flash of lightening. All except HOPE scream and convulse as they are electrocuted. LONNIE and CLAIRE fall to the ground, twitching, then dead. JOHN clings to HOPE.

All is quiet for a long burnt moment.

HOPE (to audience)

In the velvet aftermath  
my once-again lover clings to me  
in a sublime electric embrace

I missed you

JOHN

He is not alive  
but he is not dead like the others

HOPE

I am part of you

JOHN

HOPE

His will is steel  
as is his heart  
and now his arms  
and now his back  
and he becomes a living metal  
much like myself

JOHN

I am you

HOPE

We wind around each other  
as we wait for the storm to pass

A silence.

JOHN (quietly)

Hope?

HOPE

Yes

JOHN

Nothing. I just wanted to say your name

HOPE

Yes.

A silence.

JOHN

Hope?

HOPE

Yes

JOHN

Can I stop breathing now?

HOPE

Yes. Yes, love.

They cling to each other and wait for the storm to  
pass.

**THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**  
**Contact the author ([sheila.callaghan@gmail.com](mailto:sheila.callaghan@gmail.com))**  
**to read more...**