



*LARGE TEXT*

# Creative Writing Portfolio

## Maxim Vinogradov



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# Résumé

(updated Winter 2020)

## HONORS/AWARDS

### **A Night of Stars with Tennessee Williams (*play*)**

- Winner, Partners of the American Theatre Playwriting Award, The Kennedy Center
- Winner, Wilde Award—Best New Script, Encore Michigan
- Winner, Hopwood Award in Drama, University of Michigan
- Winner, Dennis McIntyre Prize—Tier 3 to \$7,500, University of Michigan

### **Четыре самолета кружат над JFK (Four Planes Circling JFK) (*play*)**

- Semi-Finalist, National Playwrights Conference, O'Neill Theater Center

### **Lost in 3 Pines (*play*)**

- Winner, Hopwood Award in Drama, University of Michigan
- Winner, Dennis McIntyre Prize—Tier 1 to \$2,500, University of Michigan
- Nominated, Wilde Award—Best New Script, Encore Michigan

**Pippy Doodle's Ice Cream Party (immediately following The Seagull) (*play*)**

- Winner, Hopwood Award in Drama, University of Michigan
- Winner, Dennis McIntyre Prize—Tier 1 to \$2,500, University of Michigan

**Grand River (*screenplay*)**

- Winner, The Arthur Miller Creative Arts Award, Goldstein Honors

**A Night of Stars with Tennessee Williams**

(*screenplay*)

- Winner, Hopwood Award in Screenplay, University of Michigan
- Winner, Leonard and Eileen Newman Prize in Dramatic Writing, University of Michigan

**A Riot of Flowers (*screenplay*)**

- Winner, Leonard and Eileen Newman Prize in Dramatic Writing, University of Michigan

**THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS**

**Matea:** Production, Slipstream Theatre Initiative, Bailey Boudreau

**Dancing.:** Production, Planet Ant Theatre, Kaitlyn Valor Bourque

**My Dad was Fifteen Feet Tall:** Production, Outvisible Theatre Company, Mykah Artis

**Lost in 3 Pines:** Production, University of Michigan / Basement Arts, Maxim Vinogradov; Production, Slipstream Theatre Initiative, Bailey Boudreau  
**A Night of Stars with Tennessee Williams:** Production, The Regular Theatre, Ellie Conniff; Production, Theatre Nova, Mandy Logsdon; Reading, University of Indianapolis/KCACTF, Maxim Vinogradov; Production, Slipstream Theatre Initiative, Vinogradov / Weatherspoon

## **RESIDENCIES/PROGRAMS**

### **Resident Playwright**

Slipstream Theatre Initiative in Ferndale. MI, 2015—Present.

### **Observing Playwright**

National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, Waterford, CT. 2018.

## **ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE**

### Prod. Intern

- Othello / Twelfth Night / Fire in Dreamland / Cyprus Avenue / Girl from the North Country, The Public Theater

### Director<sup>1</sup>

- A Night of Stars with Tennessee Williams, Slipstream Theatre Initiative

### Actor<sup>2</sup>

- Romeo & Juliet, Slipstream Theatre Initiative

## Composer<sup>3</sup>

- Please Clap, Lightworks Film Festival

## EDUCATION

University of Michigan, BA: English (High Honors) & Film (High Honors); concentrations in Creative Writing & Screenwriting.

**Member of the Dramatists Guild of America.**

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\* To be produced.

<sup>1</sup> Nominated for “Best Play” from Encore Michigan’s Wilde Awards.

<sup>2</sup> Receiving “Best Shakespearean Actor” from the Broadway World - Detroit Awards.

<sup>3</sup> Receiving “Best Original Score” from the Lightworks Film Festival.

## Artistic Statement

I don't create to strike justice into existence. I don't have the wings to better the world or even the medium. I can coil myself in seeds, coat myself in funny honey, fertilize in bellies, and leave behind an unscratchable rash, but where does that put me? I don't create to endure time, to be prophetic, or to challenge our reasoning, but because of an urge to make something enchanting. An artist's ability to dissect us and rearrange our opinions is an occupational hazard; the endgame is pretty. Nothing nobler, neater, or more convenient. I've made work that helped people—they've told me themselves, people. I've championed Queer romance and asserted majority non-male casts and demanded actors of color be half the cast but this wasn't because I believe I can make a difference. It's because straight white men have become ugly and that affects my goals. The fact that my work gets a positive social response makes me swell with pride as a human being who can affect change, but as an artist, my eyes are on how that social response makes the art more beautiful.

It's awful.

I want to find the edges of where the page ends and tap them until they crack. How do you define a spectacle, and to what degree can ninety minutes of circumstances redefine it for an audience? What is at

the core of what makes a heart pound, and what are the most incoherent stakes that still elicit that response? I explore scripts that not only entertain, but elicit an earnest questioning as to whether or not anything like this has ever been done before. Theatre is dying, and my goal is not to resuscitate it but dissect it while it still has a body.

Any artist working in the theatre today needs to relieve themselves of their idea that they are any better than any other human being. If I'm the playwright, I'm bringing Insomnia cookies to the table read. If I'm the intern, I'm bringing those cookies. By G-d, if you so much as put me within earshot of a theatre I will fucking fill the place with Insomnia cookies and that's a threat. I interned for the production team of *Fire in Dreamland* at The Public Theater and Susan Hilferty would drag me out to a window to explain how every building had a water tower at the top, or would send me home with an assignment to figure out why it's called Coney Island for no other practical reason than to be doing so delighted me. If you fit through the door, you're not too big.

Thank you for reading, and thank you for spending time with my writing.

## **Even When It Is Not Shining** (One-Act Play)

CAST: Lena (F, 20s); Jakub (M, 40s).

### Scene One

SETTING: A messy living room in Warsaw. TIME: early 1940s.

(At lights: LENA enters, clutching her belly, silently closing the door behind her. JAKUB works at his tiny desk, not seeing her. She waits. After a bit of time, JAKUB reaches into a drawer, noticing LENA and jumping in his seat. JAKUB chuckles and motions for her to sit down. LENA sits and spreads herself out in the chair.)

### **JAKUB**

Quiet: such a good talent to have now. Every room I go in, everyone knew it was me two flights of stairs away. Shabbat shalom, Lena. Wear a bell.

LENA  
(Curt but charming.)

Shabbat shalom.

JAKUB

Okay. Tell me about your day.

LENA

Mine's been hot.

JAKUB

Then we've been having the same day. So, we—

LENA

What kind of jam you got?

JAKUB

I... Yes.

(Opening a drawer, pulling out a jar and handing it to LENA, who instantly takes it and opens it.)

Ah-ah-ah! Careful! When was the last time you had extra jam?

LENA

Since... last time.

(JAKUB leans over his desk to look into the jar, then

waves his arm, “You’re fine then.” LENA sticks a finger in and starts eating.)

JAKUB

Okay. Now, are you still experiencing dehydr—?

LENA

Mm!

(Pointing to belly.)

I named the lil’ rat, “Zuzanna.”

JAKUB

I... Okay, Lena, you should... you know...

LENA

I don’t.

JAKUB

Don’t name it.

LENA

Well, that’s confusing. How is she supposed to know when I’m yelling at her?

JAKUB

Don’t say “she.” Okay? Just... Never mind.

LENA

You think I’m gonna lose her?

(Smiling.)

G-d, a girl can dream.

JAKUB

I'm not comfortable talking about—

LENA

I bet you three jars of jam not only in half a year will  
I unfortunately launch lil' Zuzanna out, but she *will*  
be a girl. I would shake but I got jam fingeys.

JAKUB

I don't want you to—

LENA

Do you agree to my terms?

JAKUB

Lena, please just—

LENA

Do you agree to my terms?

JAKUB

No.

LENA

Ach. Everyone here is no fun. You know, and this might not be a popular opinion, but I liked Warsaw so much more before the Nazis came.

(JAKUB, pauses, letting out a giggle and shaking his head.)

People used to bet on everything! I would make bets on the weather, on what color shirt Mr. Przewalski was gonna wear, whether or not Mr. Przewalski's kid was gonna throw up that day. And I gotta tell you, I did some really horrible stuff to get that boy to throw up. But I won bets. I mean—

(Beat.)

To answer your doctor questions, everything's terrible. I'm working in the sun. It's hot.

JAKUB

Be careful. Raising your internal temperature even one degree can... be a problem.

LENA

I'll figure it out. How's your own lil' doctor?—  
How's... Julia?

JAKUB

How's...? Uh... She's... I'm only telling you this because... If you really want to give birth, and I'm

suggesting very heavily that you shouldn't, you need more food.

LENA

Look, I don't want to, but there really isn't much else to do around here but—What does that have to with Julia? Are we gonna eat her?

JAKUB

No, she's...

(As much pride as a Jewish parent is allowed.)

Smuggling salami.

LENA

Oh, hell yeah!

JAKUB

I'll try, okay? But a lot of people would want it. A lot of people would pay a lot.

LENA

I'll give those people sexual favors—not like I'll get double pregnant—is that a thing?

JAKUB

No, no, hold on—

LENA

Or would the baby just get bigger? Can I make a super baby?

JAKUB

Lena. You're in a... You recognize this is a terrible situation.

LENA

Everyone recognizes this is a terrible situation.

JAKUB

Lena, would you actually give out sexual favors for salami?

LENA

I mean... probably not?

JAKUB

Right. To nourish the baby, you need food. Food is money. Money is work. Work is hot. Too much hot kills the baby you were trying to nourish. You should... I can...

LENA

That's... pretty solid back and forth, yeah.

JAKUB

Hold on: I can... Can we make this conversation more uncomfortable for a moment?

LENA

I'm not touching your schmuck.

JAKUB

No, I mean... This baby—I adore your... *naïve* energy. It's contagious. It's wonderful. But—and this is very uncomfortable—but being pregnant is... you know, impossible right now. You made a mistake. I can fix that—I don't want to spell it out. You know what I'm talking about.

LENA

(Grimly.)

I don't.

JAKUB

There's people saying things about... about the Germans wanting...

LENA

Schmuck touches?

JAKUB

No. My friend Adam is on the Jewish Council. The Germans have requested assistance in making a system... so that... if they needed to deport people from Warsaw, it could be done quickly.

LENA

What do you mean?

JAKUB

That's the thing. We don't know. But they might not have filled up Warsaw just to put us all to work in one, convenient place.

LENA

Oh, nice. You're talking about work elsewhere?

JAKUB

Maybe. That's what I think. There's going to be a big migration out of Warsaw, which means different jobs, and there's no telling what that's going to look like. It might be easier—it might be a lot harder. You're early on right now. The toll on your body and the consequences are much—It's just much easier if...

LENA

You're talking about nixing Zuzanna.

JAKUB

This is really why you shouldn't name it... Yes. That's what I'm talking about.

LENA

(After a moment of thought.)

Nah, I'm good. Let's talk salami. How much for a stick? If you got one, I'll eat one.

JAKUB

I... It's only going to be harder if you do it later.

LENA

(Beat.)

I know how salamis work.

(JAKUB can't help but  
cackle, LENA joining.)

Why don't people write down what I say?! I'm the  
funniest person here!

JAKUB

Okay, okay... Here's what I can do. I *can* give you  
an examination, make sure everything's okay on the  
surface, but pregnancies are not my specialty. I'm  
gonna take a lot of notes, meet with a doctor who  
knows a lot more about—

LENA

Who? Do you know someone?

JAKUB

You know I can't tell you who. If the Germans find  
you're pregnant *and* healthy, they're gonna ask what  
doctors you know. Trust me, I'm gonna take a  
surplus of notes on absolutely everything and I'll find  
time to meet with him. Okay?

LENA

Okay... Fine. All right! Let's check on the little rat.

(LENA stands. JAKUB gets a stethoscope out of his drawer and stands.  
Blackout.)

## Scene Two

SETTING: the same. TIME: a few months later.

(At lights: a lone JAKUB looks out the window. He's without his nice jacket, now wearing a much older and bigger one, his yellow badge the fanciest part of it. LENA silently enters, closing the door. Her face is thinner and her coat thicker, harboring a fugitive, growing belly. LENA waits, JAKUB looking out the window still. JAKUB sighs, turning and seeing LENA. He goes rigid, then realizes it's her and he steadies himself.)

JAKUB

Shabbat shalom.

LENA

(Charging towards him.)

Shabbat shalom, you old goof.

(LENA hugs JAKUB, who somberly returns the embrace. They release and sit, LENA undoing her coat to reveal her belly's enlargement. She winces, rubbing.)

I know... I'm binding it too tight, but... The guards keep looking at me—This Wagner guy—I don't know. There aren't enough smoke-shows still around so I'm... I'm a bit... It's a special situation. I know it's bad.

JAKUB

Lena...

LENA

Look, the important thing is salami: you got it?

(JAKUB doesn't respond.)

Okay. Jam?

(JAKUB looks down.)

Was that a good “looking down”? Like I’m looking down at a jar of jam? Are you doing one of those?

JAKUB

No, I’m not doing one of those.

LENA

You sound like you've been having a bad day.

JAKUB

Bad few days...

LENA

You sound like you've been having a bad German occupation. It's all right. We'll get through it. Enjoy *this* occupation. We'll probably have another before we're dead. In fact, I'll bet you a stick of salami Warsaw will have two more before we're dead.

JAKUB

Lena...

LENA

And I know what you're thinking: that I would pull the stuff I used to do with bets and sway more occupations into Warsaw. This is true. The Russians would definitely not need much convincing and I got a weird theory about Scandinavia. I could—

(LENA winces, clutching her belly and bending over.  
JAKUB waits to see if he should act.)

That was a good one.

JAKUB

They've gotten more frequent?

LENA

Yeah. Yep. Yep, yep, yep. She... is a fighter. I'm trying to convince her not to fight the lady keeping her alive—but she just doesn't listen. She probably got that from me.

JAKUB

Lena, I found him.

LENA

You...

(Realizing.)

You found your friend? Oh, snap—

(Re: belly.)

Did you tell him about—?

JAKUB

No, not *him*. He... I don't know about *him* still. I found an obstetrician who... I found someone who knows these things well... I gave him my notes, and he talked, and...

(Beat. JAKUB sighs.)

LENA

How's Julia?

(JAKUB looks down.)

I, um... Okay... How is... the weather?

(JAKUB looks back up at  
LENA. Beat.)

Less hot. That's kinda nice. Till it gets, y'know...  
cold.

(JAKUB brings his notes out  
of the drawer.)

JAKUB

The baby is going to die.

(Beat.)

Right now, it's important that...

(Wiping his face with his  
hand; heading into it.)

Right now, it's important that we allow the fetus to...  
um... that we do not interrupt the process that is  
currently happening—and by that I mean not trying  
to speed it up and abort the fetus now. It's a bit late  
given the lack of proper, safe tools at our disposal  
and I... I want to make sure that you live. By  
intervening now, that may not happen. In fact, it's  
looking like, according to my friend, that—

LENA

He's sure?

JAKUB

He's...? Yes. The heat didn't—uh... The heat wasn't the problem—your constant feeling of dehydration wasn't good for the fetus, but it was never at a level that would cause a fatality. The problem is that you haven't been getting enough nutrition. Not by half. And I mean, not just so little that it's not a healthy fetus, but so little that *you* are malnourished, and can in no way survive a fetus. And your body is choosing yourself. It has passed the point of reversal. If you were to suddenly—

LENA

He got this all just from your notes?

JAKUB

As soon as I said I knew a pregnant woman, he started talking about this, and *then* I gave him my notes, and... Based on his reading, it has passed the point of reversal, and if you were to suddenly start eating more than enough, it wouldn't work. At this point, we have to wait for the heartbeat to stop and a few days after before we can... Lena, I'm sorry. But this was going to happen. And I'm sorry you were so optimistic, but... I'm sorry.

(LENA stares, not revealing any emotion. JAKUB reaches into his desk, pulling out a jar, and placing it in front of LENA. After a moment, LENA picks it up, looking down. She opens it.)

LENA

Well... Thank G-d.

(LENA digs into the jam.)

JAKUB

Yeah?

LENA

This sucks for sure but this little kickboxer has been a nightmare, man. And—What kind of jam is this?

JAKUB

I don't know. Lena, are you—?

LENA

It's trash. This is trash jam. I mean—thank you, for sure, and I know how many people would kill for this, but they're not pregnant. Good for them... I mean... Yeah, it's sucked. It's been painful, and... like... I haven't been having any sex even though I *really* want to, cuz—I mean—somebody's gonna

nick my super fragile fetus in the foot or something. Baby would come out with a broken foot just cuz I had to get laid for a sec. Which would maybe be nice cuz then it'd stop kicking, now that it's got a schmuck-shaped dent in its foot. And... and, I mean, I get that you can look around and—

JAKUB

(Finishing her thought.)

Who would want to bring a child into all of this?

LENA

... I don't know, man. Maybe all pregnant people get this sensation but it's just...

(Beat. Looking at the jar in her hand.)

Yeah. The world kinda isn't selling itself very well for me right now. And it wouldn't be the best thing to have a kid's first memories be a line-up. Or be a deportation to Treblinka. That's not a great first memory. Probably in the bottom ten. And they're deporting girls like me left and right so that's coming real soon—I didn't mean anything by that I'm sure your daughter's fine cuz she's clever, mine is a little rat that only knows kicking, and I mean... cuz...

(Setting the jam down on the desk. Beat.)

I've been having these... dreams, I guess. Where it's my regular life but I'm so scared that a kid is gonna die all the time. Like, I gotta go to work and the kid is always way in the distance and I gotta make sure she's at that distance and not near me but still not... being hurt! I'm having these dreams where I'm just scared of this kid dying. And I gotta take this kid everywhere cuz she keeps kickboxing everybody! I'm like, "Zuzanna, Nazis don't like to be kickboxed!" and she's yelling, "No! No!" and keeps kickboxing them! I gotta hide her in cupboards and closets and bar them shut so she can't kickbox right

out of 'em! And Germans keep flooding into the rooms and I gotta act natural around them and pretend I don't know where she went! Not my kid! I am not the mother of the great, feared, kickboxing toddler! That's Pola! She lives upstairs! Go get her and her insistence on wearing heels in her apartment! The woman either needs to get a rug, a deportation, or slippers! And I gotta keep going on and on to them about Pola to make sure they don't get my kickboxing toddler! And I can't explain why I can't let them get her! It'd be so much easier if they got her! Take this child away! She kicks me too!

(LENA grabs the jar, shoving a fingerful of jam into her mouth, but letting it rest there. She can't swallow it or spit it out. Beat. JAKUB pulls a stethoscope out of his drawer, handing it to her. LENA puts the jar down and takes the stethoscope, but still doesn't swallow the jam.)

### JAKUB

I... I'm going to need this back, okay? Listen for a heartbeat. Everyday. From when the fetus dies to when we can get it out of there safely is a *small* window and the day that you don't hear a heartbeat,

come here at the next Shabbas. The *next*. It can't be longer than a week. Do you understand what I'm asking you to do?

(LENA can't respond, mouth full of jam.)

My friend says it'll be less than a month. You'll be hitting... closing on six months by then? You can keep binding yourself but you're putting yourself in as much danger as the fetus. And by that I mean... Right. You're putting yourself in danger. Hide it, make sure no one spots it, keep your work ethic perfect and... healthy... and... Lena, please use your head on this. Don't see this as another tragedy among everything. It's not. This is a good thing. This is the best thing that could happen right now. It would've been better earlier but it's much better than next month—Adam on the Jewish Council stepped down so I don't know what next month looks like but it's certainly not a good time to miscarry. The sooner the better, but don't do anything to...! Please come as soon as you can if you start bleeding, or anything else unusual happens. Okay?

(LENA pauses, pulling a handkerchief out of her pocket and depositing the mouthful of jam into it.)

LENA

Sorry... Can I take the jar with me this time?

(JAKUB pauses, then shakes his head. LENA stands and walks to the door. Blackout.)

### Scene Three

SETTING: the same. TIME: a few months later.

(At lights: JAKUB, not wearing his jacket, has just cut a salami stick in quarters, putting each quarter onto newspaper and wrapping it. LENA enters the room silently, where JAKUB can't see her. She's got on more layers, fully camouflaging her bump. She waits. JAKUB sees her and jumps, holding out the knife. Realizing it's LENA, he gasps and frowns.)

LENA

You gotta stop doing that; Nazis are loud.

JAKUB

You're still here! I figured since you hadn't come you'd been deported or—!

LENA

Shabbat shalom.

JAKUB

Shabbat shalom.

(JAKUB tosses LENA a quarter of salami, which she immediately bites.)

LENA

Ow... My teeth are dumb.

JAKUB

Yes, be careful, please. You don't want to lose any or they'll think you've got anemia. How aren't you deported?

LENA

I'm quiet. When's your turn? Why are you still here?

(LENA sits, gnawing on the salami.)

JAKUB

I was found out to be a doctor—ratted out, really—and the mighty Officer Wagner found out he put his salami in something too spicy. As it turns out, my assistance and sworn confidentiality might burden me with a lifetime in Warsaw, but my, am I glad you're still here. And at the right time! I was just about to make some deliveries. Please tell me you're here with my stethoscope.

(LENA pulls out her pockets:  
empty.)

LENA

I'm really starting to think I just have two hearts.

JAKUB

I told you to at least bring it! I need to hear for  
mys—

LENA

You think I'm carrying a stethoscope in a coat  
pocket? Are you kidding me? That thing is worse  
than having a bomb!

(Pulling the stethoscope out  
the inside of her skirt and  
handing it to JAKUB.)

She hasn't been kicking—but there's definitely still a  
“*guh-gunk*” in there!

JAKUB

There's still...? That's not... Okay, can you please  
take off your coat?

LENA

Cool it for a sec, all right? It's a long walk. I don't  
eat a lot. I'm seven months pregnant with some kind  
of super baby. We can give me a sec. I get to ask  
you something: why am I holding salami?

JAKUB  
(Smiling.)

Oh! She was never deported or... Julia was fine.  
She'd been caught by the Gestapo, she got out of it,  
she went right back to being a clever girl.

LENA

She got caught and got out of it?

JAKUB

She's a clever girl.

LENA

I... Hold—Wait a second. How?

JAKUB

It's not important how! It's important that she's—

LENA

It *is* important! The reason I'm not smuggling is cuz they'd boil me alive. Smuggling means eating as much as I want—How'd she get out of it? Was it through the sex?

(JAKUB pauses, smile drooping a bit, then continues wrapping the salamis.)

Jakub, what'd she do?

(JAKUB shakes his head, smile still loosely hanging on his face.)

What'd she...?

(JAKUB keeps wrapping.)

Jakub, did she sell out...? Who? What—Like her cohort?

JAKUB

Just...! If she didn't name people, you wouldn't be eating that right now.

(Holding open hand out.)

You don't want it?

LENA

(Pulling salami away.)

No, it's good.

JAKUB

Right. There you go. I... I wish it weren't exactly this way but... Julia's okay. And I know I'm not supposed to be happy about that because of what it cost but I am.

LENA

You need to give some of that to—

JAKUB

I know that! And I'm doing that—of course I'm doing that. I... I'm never going to let them go without meat. I'm still a Jew. I'm a Jewish parent.

(Beat.)

I'm very glad you're still here. I talked to my friend about... Well, *if* you were still here, not coming to my apartment just meant that the fetus still hadn't given up... And he says... He said... Well, we have to be sure, so...

(JAKUB stands, crossing to LENA and putting the stethoscope into his ears. He waits for LENA to remove her coat. She doesn't.)

I... Can you please remove your coat?

(LENA shakes her head.)

I know this is hard but I don't have too much time to—

LENA

Can I finish my salami first? Where'd I put it?

JAKUB

I believe you ate it. Come on; let me hear the super baby.

LENA

You can listen next week! Or it might just give up by next week. Jakub, I... Can we please verify that next week? Or, if that's a bad holy day for you, then the week after?

JAKUB

There might not be a next week for us to meet and there are steps we need to take if—

LENA

I figured, but... I...

(JAKUB waits. LENA slowly touches her coat, unbuttoning. Once it's off, she reveals another coat, which she unbuttons. Under that is her blouse—belly the same size as last time.

JAKUB stares down at it, then kneels, placing the stethoscope under the blouse.

They wait. After a moment, JAKUB moves the stethoscope. After another, he moves it again. And again. He stands, returning to his seat. LENA waits.)

LENA

Just... Just don't say anything. Don't tell me anything. Please.

JAKUB

I have to.

(Taking a breath.)

I'm sorry. You were right. We now must assume you'll have to give birth in this place.

(LENA stares, trying not to reveal anything, then immediately breaks. She covers her mouth as sobs tumble out, bending over to hide herself.)

I'm so sorry... I'm... I'm so sorry.

LENA

(Through sobs.)

G-d... Oh, my *G-d*.

JAKUB

I'm... I don't know what to say to—I—I—I know this feels... Please, just...

LENA

I'm just... I'm sorry, I'm just so... *happy*. Oh, G-d...

(JAKUB frowns. LENA can't stop crying.)

She's going to be *alive*...?! Oh, my G-d... *Oh, my G-d*, she's going to be alive....

JAKUB

Lena—

LENA

She's going to *feel things*... She's going to *feel blankets* and... and she's going—she's going to feel the *sun* on her stupid, bald head! And... *Oh, my G-d, I'm so happy*.

(LENA can't talk from crying. JAKUB doesn't know what to say.)

Oh, my G-d... Oh, my G-d... *Thank you*... *Thank you*... *Thank you*... She's gonna have *birthdays*...! Oh, my G-d, she's gonna have birthdays! She's gonna be *alive*!

(LENA cries as JAKUB stares. He stands, going to the door, taking his wrappings for delivery.)

### JAKUB

I'll... give you a moment. I'll be back, I just... Lena, don't... Lena, what if you go to Treblinka?! Don't get your hopes up just to get them crushed ag—!

### LENA

There's still *sun* there. There are sunrises; G-d still visits Treblinka! She's gonna see *sunrises*... She's gonna see—*Oh, my G-d—Thank you.*

(JAKUB stares, then nods and exits. LENA stands, pacing around the room. She stops and looks down at her belly.)

Oh... Hello, Zuzanna, you little, fighting rat—who is surviving on what I assume is just eating my stomach lining or something—I don't care—I don't need it—It's yours—You can have it—Just... Oh, G-d, you're gonna see this place... Oh, my G-d, you're gonna see this place... It's so beautiful here... Oh, it's so beautiful here. There's rain and gray skies and there's loud women upstairs and so many things you shouldn't kick. You're gonna feel the walls with dried, periwinkle paint and feel cold water on a

faucet and it's all so beautiful and you get to touch it. You get to come see the world... and...

(Wincing; sitting in JAKUB's chair.)

You're kicking! You're kicking! You're kicking—  
You're kicking—You're kicking! Oh, you're so  
good at kicking! I can take it, babe—just keep  
practicing—Please don't ever stop doing that again.  
Promise me, if I never meet you, you'll kick Nazis.  
Ohhh, kickbox Nazis all day, and if they say you  
can't do that, tell them your mother said you could...  
Two more things—and you gotta do 'em. One—  
open a bank. Own a bank. Own *them*. Never let  
them own you. We're *so* good at banks; you'll be a  
pro... You need to own a bank. That's a promise and  
you're—

(Wincing.)

Yeah, you're allowed to kick me! Oh, boy... But  
more than that—more than anything—you *have* to  
celebrate your birthdays. You have to celebrate them  
so loudly. You can *never* in your life be quiet...  
*Never*... Especially not on your birthday.

(Loud footsteps come up the  
stairs.)

Jakub will be supplying your birthday cake. Make  
sure you told him I said that cuz if I'm dead cuz of  
you then guilt cake out of him. Guilt cake out of  
people, then share it with them on your birthday.

(The footsteps arrive at the door. Blackout.)

END

## **Forever Boy (10 Minute Play)**

**CAST:** Bartender (F, early 20s); Woman (F, early 20s); Man (M, 40s).

**SETTING:** A dive bar. **TIME:** the present.

(Nobody but the  
BARTENDER and a  
WOMAN at the bar. The  
BARTENDER never sees the  
WOMAN. In walks a MAN,  
his face shrouded by his coat  
and hat. The WOMAN at the  
bar never stops staring at the  
MAN. The MAN sits at the  
bar and the BARTENDER  
comes over.)

BARTENDER

Hello, sir—What can I get for you?

MAN

A, uh... Uh...

(He sees the WOMAN  
staring, trying to ignore it.)

A Tom Collins.

BARTENDER

Great. Can I see your I.D.?

MAN

What do you mean?

BARTENDER

Your picture. Little picture. Got your birthday on it.

MAN

I'm... I'm clearly old enough.

BARTENDER

Sorry, sir. We gotta I.D. everyone who looks like they're under forty.

MAN

I... I look older than forty.

BARTENDER

Eh... I dunno. Hard to see when you're hiding it all like that, but you look like you could be somebody in their late thirties who just aged real bad.

MAN

Then I'm in my late thirties. Can I please just get a drink? I don't have my I.D. with me.

BARTENDER

Nah. Sorry. No I.D., no drinking.

MAN

There's nobody else in here but you and...! Okay, just...! Just hold on!

(The MAN pulls out his wallet, providing his I.D. The BARTENDER squints at it.)

BARTENDER

What?

(Looking between MAN and I.D.)

Is this supposed to be funny?

MAN

(Extending hand to get I.D. back.)

I don't have a driver's license.

BARTENDER

"Treated as a legal adult"—The hell? Am I supposed to take this?

MAN

(Flailing for I.D. back.)

I guess not! I'll just go somewhere else!

BARTENDER

Hold on... Do I recognize you?

MAN

Please just give it back!

BARTENDER

(Realizing.)

Oh, my G-d! Hold on! You're Forever Boy!

(The MAN sighs, retracting his arm.)

MAN

Can I please have it back?

BARTENDER

Have it back? Sir, ya drinks are free!

(The MAN frowns as the BARTENDER returns the I.D., getting to making a Tom Collins.)

Oh, my G-d. Oh, my *G-d*—I just... I just have to thank you for everything you've done. Honestly. Look, my pop was there in '09—when Doctor Canine took the Brooklyn Bridge. If you hadn't've showed up... Look, my family owes you everything. My pop actually went to the Times and fought for you to get that Peace Prize last year, y'know?

(The BARTENDER provides the Tom Collins.)

MAN

Well... Tell your pop I said, "Thank you."

BARTENDER

*You never have to thank that man in your life. G-d, I could kiss ya.*

(After a moment, the MAN takes the hat off and lowers his collar. He sips the drink.)

Wow. You were younger in '09.

MAN

You know, everyone was.

BARTENDER

Yea, but... Weren't you, what, in your late teens?

MAN

Not—exactly.

BARTENDER

How old are you right now?

MAN

... Sixteen.

BARTENDER

(Laughs, then abruptly realizes and stops.)

Oh, you're not kidding. Is it cuz of your powers?

MAN

Yes.

BARTENDER

Really? What's that all about?

MAN

... When you... stop time, you keep aging. I was born in two thousand and three. But, I'd spent a lot of my youth stopping time.

BARTENDER

No kidding... Oh, my G-d, if I could do that shit as a kid—make a second last *forever*—I would've robbed Wall Street over 'n' over.

(She chuckles. The MAN joins her.)

G-d, just—Good for you to use it to save people. My family prays for you every night and we thank G-d that you're a good guy—Oh, G-d! Did that I.D. say your real name?

MAN

You can't have it back.

BARTENDER

Ha! Yeah, you probably like ya privacy after all that bullshit that happened.

(Now the WOMAN chuckles.  
The MAN winces.)

Y'know—and I want you to know this for real—  
nobody in my whole family ever believed a word of  
it.

MAN

It's fine. I'll just... Thank you.

BARTENDER

Don't thank me—Y'know, all we talked about when  
they were saying you shouldn't get that Nobel  
Prize—all everyone in my friend group, my family—  
was this lady's worse than fucking Doctor Canine  
with what she did to you. She's just a fucking liar the  
whole time. Spelled it out on her face.

MAN

I... It's fine. Thank you. Thank you for the drink.

BARTENDER

It's not fine! Who in the world's an easier target to  
accuse than you, y'know? "Oh, I just *felt* different  
when I saw him"? The fuck is—That's not even a—  
What? It was cuz you were winning that Prize that  
she *suddenly*—Fucking it's been five years and *now's*  
a real easy time to—We all think, honest to G-d,  
everyone in my family—She's one of Doctor

Canine's minions. And that's just the fucked up thing. I'm glad the bitch is dead.

(The WOMAN chuckles again. The MAN shifts.)

You should've seen my pop's blood boiling. Said he wished he was the one who shot her. Guy never touched a gun in his life but he'd've done it to a Doctor Canine minion, and that's what she was.

MAN

Please, I just... I'm sorry, but I came here for some quiet.

BARTENDER

Oh, yea—You deserve it. I'm right over here when you need anything.

(The BARTENDER takes inventory as the MAN shifts and tries to enjoy his drink. He doesn't—feeling the WOMAN's eyes all over him.)

MAN

Uh...

BARTENDER

Yea?

MAN

Uh, what was your dad wearing?

BARTENDER

Whaddyu mean?

MAN

Well, when you're carrying people one-by-one across the Brooklyn Bridge, you tend to get exhaustingly familiar with them.

BARTENDER

Uh... I dunno what he was wearing—You remember what every person had on?

MAN

It's a long bridge. Took me almost a month to get everyone off it as the laser was approaching. You... I don't know.

BARTENDER

*Oh!* Y'know what? Brown leather jacket. And, uh, I think also a Nets cap. We got a picture of him off some kind of article.

MAN

I think... I *think* I remember somebody like that.

BARTENDER

Shut up. No, you don't.

MAN

Yeah, uh...! New shoes? Red Nikes?

BARTENDER

Oh, my G-d. He's got an old pair of Red Nikes—wears 'em everywhere—says they're lucky. You remember my pop!

MAN

Uh... I do! Yeah!

BARTENDER

I dunno how ya lifted that guy! Is everyone just weightless when ya stop time?

MAN

Uh, no—People are still... If they're heavy, you have to drag them, unfortunately. Some people get scraped up, but...

BARTENDER

Fucking better than dead! Y'know what—We were saying the *reason* we knew that Angela girl was lying is cuz if time's stopped, you're frozen. You can't move your own parts. So, I mean—not to be crude but, come on, y'know? Nothings going up there. It's frozen shut. Like a statue.

MAN  
(Beat. He feels the  
WOMAN's stare.)

Hey! It's... Let's please not talk about that. Come on.

BARTENDER

You're right. You got enough of that last year with the press and all that. Who the hell does the media think they are claiming anything 'bout how time-freezing works? Only *you* know and that's who I, for one, will be listening to!

MAN

I, um... How much do I owe you for this?

BARTENDER

Not a cent.

MAN

Right, uh... Ha-ha... Can I get another?

BARTENDER

You're Forever Boy—You're getting top shelf.

(The BARTENDER turns her back to the MAN and reaches for the top shelf. She doesn't move from there. The MAN breathes heavily. She still

doesn't move. The MAN gazes.)

MAN

Stop looking at me.

(The WOMAN doesn't.)

Could you just stop looking at me?

(The WOMAN doesn't. The MAN rises from his seat. The WOMAN still stares. The MAN sits.)

You don't know what it's like to try to give it up. It's... You get to look at somebody. Not have them stare back. It's... Being in public is like owning an art gallery. If I'm the only person that's capable of appreciating that then it's wasteful to give it up. I'm the only one that really knows what people look like...

(Beat.)

I'm the one who knows people are hideous. Just oily and covered in hair... You were the only person I'd seen in years that I thought looked pretty again and I—I didn't know how to—I don't mean like that was a nice thing for me to say...

(The MAN rises again, staring at the BARTENDER.)

Stop staring.

(Beat. He sits.)

Nobody ever asked me to save people and nobody ever *paid* me. I was willing to keep at that forever. You thought you were more important than citizens having a hero and kids having a role model and that you were more—Do you get that? None of the other girls... Because they cared more than you did—*No*—They didn’t think anything happened! That’s the whole point! I would never do that to a person while they knew it was happening and that’s all the difference in the world.

(Beat.)

People I carried off bridges and buildings will never be anything but grateful. Those headlines’ll never be replaced.

(The MAN rises; re:  
BARTENDER.)

I saved her *dad*... And she *said*, “She could kiss me”... *She*... She... talks... a lot...

(The MAN sits. Beat.)

Keep staring. I don’t care. You’re not better than me, you’re just untested... Nobody ever is who they really are until they’re a hero.

(Beat. The WOMAN chuckles.)

Stop. I won’t... *do* anything—I swear. Just stop looking at me.

(She doesn't. The MAN gives up. Beat. The BARTENDER unfreezes, bringing down the bottle and making the drink.)

BARTENDER

Same way?

(The MAN nods.)

Yeaaaa—I like'm with all kinds of lemon in it too.

MAN

(Barely audible.)

You're very good at it.

BARTENDER

What's that?

MAN

I said, uh... It's just that you are the first person who's talked to me... in a while.

BARTENDER

G-d, that just... You deserve better. I'm sorry for the way people act.

MAN

It's not your fault... Do you know that I once met Doctor Canine?

BARTENDER

Shut up. Really? Like, no mask?

(The MAN nods.)

G-d—What's he look like?

MAN

Puzzled, when I saw him. Maybe even disappointed. This was before he'd even been caught. And then once I'd brought him to the station... You'd wanna believe that somebody so capable of annihilation would be... sturdier. Cunning. Venomous. But he was just so nice to me... I've faced off against villains and I've worked with heroes and all of them looked at me like I was their son.

(The MAN buries his face in his hands as the  
BARTENDER frowns.  
Blackout.)

END

## The South Will Rise Again (One-Act Play)

SETTING: Local—with local accents unless specified. TIME: the present.

(JANE, F, lies in a hospital bed, her arm slung up and cast. Her NURSE, F, enters.)

NURSE

Dr. McCorvey is going to be in soon to talk at you.

JANE

Drugs are making it pretty numb—Wish I could take advantage of that and masturbate so it feels like someone else is doing it but I think that'd upset the whole, y'know, infection.

NURSE

(Looking closer; grimacing.)

You fisted a lawn mower, didn't you?

JANE

Guy shot me at a traffic stop last week—I cut him off and at the light and he... I mean, I sped off but dude had a shotgun so it blew half my arm in, y'know?

(DR. McCORVEY, F, enters with a clipboard.)

DR. McCORVEY

Jane! How's the arm? Still look like pizza?

JANE

Drugs are making it pretty numb—Wish I could take advantage of that and mastur—

DR. McCORVEY

Great. Let's peek at it—Yep, that's gross. Okay. I have good news and bad news. Order doesn't change what they are, but I was trained that it's good to give you an illusion of choice in your mortality.

JANE

Uh... Good news first.

DR. McCORVEY

Okay—

(Looking at clipboard.)

The infection has been spreading.

JANE

... Sooooo, does that mean—?

DR. McCORVEY

Yeah, out loud it sounds kinda rough. Then let's call *that* the bad news. The good news is, "We're gonna lob off her arm."

JANE

That's...

DR. McCORVEY

Y'know, out loud, that one didn't—I was so sure when reading this that I had... Oh well!

(Pulling a pocketknife out.)

The thing's pretty mangled up so this is probably gonna be along the lines of cutting cooked salmon.

JANE

Woah! Okay! Great! But we stuff drugs in, like, every single hole first, right?

DR. McCORVEY

If we don't hurry, the infection will spread to the rest of you and then you might die of...

(Checking notes.)

—“infection.” I’m just gonna trim some off the top.

JANE

Great way to lose ten pounds! But give me the procaine first so I know you’re cool!

NURSE

Oh, I love when patients think they know things! I’ll just make sure...

(She readies JANE’s arm, then freezes. She puts two

fingers to JANE's wrist, then  
gasps.)

Doctor McCorvey, call the police.

DR. McCORVEY

I'm cutting the arm first. I've kind of got momentum right now.

NURSE

You can't cut this arm, Doctor. It's...

(McCormey feels the wrist then looks to JANE in horror.)

DR. McCORVEY

Jane, you diabolical monster.

(Throwing the pocketknife across the room.)

I almost cut that thing! Nurse, call 9-1-1! No! Call a bigger number!

(The NURSE runs to the room phone, dialing.)

JANE

Woah! What is going on, hospital friends?! Are we out of drugs? Do we order more?!

NURSE

Hello, is this the government? Please send someone who's already upset.

JANE

What did my arm do?!

DR. McCORVEY

Don't blame the poor arm, you reckless little minx. I could've lost my license!

JANE

What's going on? What are you doing?

NURSE

We'll be waiting right here. Thank you.

(She hangs up.)

They're not sending anyone.

DR. McCORVEY

You got away with it this time, Jane. You come into my hospital with your big dumb eyes and distracting teeth and want me to amputate your arm while it's still *alive*?

JANE

... Are you *out* of procaine? I know of some creative solutions.

DR. McCORVEY

Did you think we wouldn't notice? I'm so furious I could make out with you!

NURSE

Thought you could slip that your arm has a *pulse* right by us, huh?

JANE

Yeah, it has a pulse! It's an arm! If we don't have procaine we need WD-40 and a latex glove! Let's move, people! This thing's weighing me down!

DR. McCORVEY

What's next? I run down the street cutting off *everyone's* arms?

NURSE

You're not taking *my* arms.

JANE

What? No! Just this—I want this one gone! It looks like it has a final boss track mark!

NURSE

It has a pulse!

JANE

*I'm* giving it a pulse—I am not discussing this until I have an anesthesiologist present.

NURSE

I bet she got shot just so she could get amputated!  
Were you not wearing body armor?

JANE

If need be, I can bring my own anesthesiologist, but none of you are allowed to ask McKenna questions! Now, unless I can use this thing as a big, festering dildo, it's going!

DR. McCORVEY

How dare you! That arm has a whole future!  
Anything could happen!

JANE

So let's get rid of it if anything could happen! Isn't that why we pissed all over Cuba?! Nurse, have you called McKenna yet? I know her number starts with a plus sign.

NURSE

But that means something good could happen! What if this infection is the one we use to learn how to cure infections?

JANE

Has *any* infection before done that? Out of the *billions* that have already happened?

NURSE  
Doctor?

DR. McCORVEY

No, best cure we've learned so far's secession. *You*, on the other hand, have perfect eyes!

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

(Unseen; Italian accent.)

Did somebody-a say you were going to-a cut off-a some arms?

(AMERIGO VESPUCCI, M, enters.)

DR. McCORVEY

Amerigo Vespucci! What are you doing here?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

I like-a the roaming hospitals. They-a make-a me hungry. Now, I see-a this lady has a stupid arm.

JANE

Aw, man, McKenna—Where'd you get an accent?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

No. I am Amerigo Vespucci. I am-a really famous so you are-a the stupid person to ask that. Tell me-a, lady, how you-a ruin this arm?

JANE

I got shot. Why is Amerigo Vespucci alive?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

Do you-a wear any armor?

JANE

Ar...? Like, body armor...? No...?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

Then it is-a her fault! Ah! We-a burn her, yes?

NURSE

Agreed.

JANE

You can't burn me—!

DR. McCORVEY

It'll damage the arm.

(To JANE.)

You sick, smart animal. I could kiss you so hard. I'll have you know I have had two beautiful arms for years and the thought of cutting them never—Ugh, just the thought!

JANE

Uh! You never *had* to! It's *my* arm! It's literally mine—Okay, I accidentally swallowed the Xanax

I've been keeping under my tongue, so imagine I'm angrier.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

Would you-a please stop interrupting when we are-a talking about you?

NURSE

I'm Team Burn Her. The arm'll get hurt but at least *she'll* know not to get her arm hurt.

DR. McCORVEY

We need to be unanimous and I am against burning.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

Drat! Foiled again by democracy! Lady, you go-a driving-a the car. Why you-a do this?

JANE

It's... What?! It's necess—I can drive a—The other guy's the one who shot me!

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

Okay, she emotional which means she is-a the bad person. She is-a the child of Satan—

JANE

So what would you do if somebody shot your arm and it got infected? Would you—?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

Shut up. I don't-a care what your point was. Okay, we are still not-a unanimous on-a burning the witch?

DR. McCORVEY

I'm afraid not.

(To JANE.)

Stop smiling or I'll pounce on you and cry into your hair!

NURSE

Why did I go through nursing school if we weren't gonna light up some witches?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

It is-a okay. The important thing is we have-a the democracy.

DR. McCORVEY

I will protect your right to vote for her burning to my dying day.

JANE

Okay—I drove without wearing armor—but not because I *wanted* to get shot at!

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

Okay, I am just going to-a smack-a the witch!

(He raises his arm and it flies right off: it was fake. He

responds before JANE can ask.)

No.

JANE

Did...? Did *you* have an arm amputated?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

Sometimes in-a my exploring days, I get in-a the pickle! Exploring!

NURSE

G-d bless Amerigo Vespucci.

CONGRESSMAN DICK

(Unseen; Southern accent.)

Who said G-d?!?

(Enters. M. Assault rifles in both hands.)

Was it you, you foreign lookin' cock jacket?!

(DICK forcefully points at VESPUCCI, which fires his rifle and shoots VESPUCCI in his one arm.)

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

My-a mistress!

(VESPUCCI crumbles as  
DICK accesses the situation.)

CONGRESSMAN DICK

What's goin' on? Who was that?

DR. McCORVEY

Congressman Dick! A pleasure to have you!  
Oxycontin's in the next room.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

I am-a Amerigo Vespucci! You shot-a my arm!

CONGRESSMAN DICK  
(Pointing at VESPUCCI's  
chest; shooting him.)

I don't know who that is. Who is that?

NURSE

I think he discovered America—*That* was  
Columbus... *He*...

DR. McCORVEY

Well, neither of them *discovered* America—

(DICK slowly raises a rifle at  
McCORVEY.)

—because G-d already did.

CONGRESSMAN DICK  
(Lowering arm; to  
VESPUCCI.)

Sorry 'bout that. Honor to shootcha. So, you're from  
Different? What are you, Russian?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI  
(Gargling through mouthful  
of blood.)

Ita—Ital—It—

CONGRESSMAN DICK  
Ain't they cute when they try to speak Normal?  
Somebody call the government?

NURSE

We didn't think you were coming!

CONGRESSMAN DICK

Oh, I always come. What's up?

DR. McCORVEY

She wanted to amputate her arm while it had a pulse.  
She deserves to be spanking me.

CONGRESSMAN DICK

You evil—I'll teach you to get rid of your arms!

(DICK shoots JANE in the  
arm.)

JANE  
*Ow!*

CONGRESSMAN DICK  
Try to get rid of your arms—You know where we are?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI  
(Gargling; pumping fist in air.)

America!

CONGRESSMAN DICK  
Damn right, Marigold Fishpussy.

NURSE  
That's why I voted for you, Congressman Dick! You represent my dad!

(DICK shoots the NURSE.  
The NURSE collapses.)

JANE  
If you get me the Oxycontin in the next room, I won't tell anybody you did that.

CONGRESSMAN DICK  
They know it happens sometimes.  
(Extending rifle.)  
The name's Congressman Richard Incest.

JANE  
(Shaking his rifle.)

Good to meet you... Mr. Incest.

CONGRESSMAN DICK

Aw, please—Mr. Incest was my father. Call me Richard. Look, liddle' miss.

(DICK pulls up a chair by the bed. It's difficult for him with his rifles so McCORVEY helps. DICK sits and holds JANE's slung hand in his rifles. JANE winces.)

I came here not to yell at you or shoot you, but because, in the end, we're all in this together. Now, we can scream about who's doin' this and who's shootin' the yada yada yada. I know this ain't my country. It's ours. Compromises. That back and forth is what makes us superior to Rome. Now, yes, you're gonna have to live with that oopsy doopsy arm that'll probably make it so you can never drive again and you'll have to once in a while watch somebody get shot, but if you're willin' to be a fair American and make those compromises, then I will make the compromise of not burnin' you alive.

JANE  
(Beat.)

Is this because you can't masturbate while holding the guns?

CONGRESSMAN DICK  
(Beat.)

Burn the witch.

(VESPUCCI and the NURSE cheer from the floor as DICK wheels JANE's bed out. The rifles give him difficulty.)

DR. McCORVEY

I don't support this and I voted as such!

(McCORVEY helps DICK with the bed. The two of them exit with JANE.)

JANE  
(Unseen; voice fading.)

Hey! Cut it out! Okay, if you keep wheeling me towards that fire I'm gonna vote you out! You better be scared!

NURSE  
(Gargled.)

I'm so happy we finally won one. The Founding Fathers would be proud.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI  
(Gargled.)

I too still have-a the issues with my Papa.

NURSE  
(Gargled.)

Do you wanna sleep together?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI  
(Gargled; crying.)

I haven't had-a the sex in centuries.

NURSE  
(Gargled.)

Mood.

(VESPUCCI struggles to crawl over to the NURSE, laying his bleeding body on top of her. VESPUCCI pulls his penis out as he dies on top of the NURSE. The NURSE wraps her legs around his waist and masturbates with

AMERIGO VESPUCCI's  
dead body. McCORVEY  
reenters.)

DR. McCORVEY

Oh, no! Oh, no, no, no, no—What are you doing?!  
Hurry!

NURSE

I'm going as fast as I can!

DR. McCORVEY

The Buck just came into the hospital!

(The NURSE flings  
VESPUCCI off and jumps to  
her feet, grunting in pain.)

NURSE

But this room doesn't have a patient in it!

DR. McCORVEY

If we lose our budget I'm gonna have to move back  
in with my children!

(The NURSE and  
McCORVEY see  
VESPUCCI's corpse, then  
heave him into the bed.  
DICK enters with BUCK, F.

BUCK has a trophy deer head  
with a bullet hole in it for a  
head, and is covered in blood  
from head to toe.)

CONGRESSMAN DICK

Sir Buck! We're real grateful you're hauntin' us!  
Great hospital here! Needs lots of funding for all the  
folks coming in in! I make sure myself the beds are  
filled!

(BUCK moves to the bed,  
looking down at VESPUCCI.  
When she speaks, three  
voices spill from her at once.)

BUCK

This man is dead.

(McCORVEY and the  
NURSE feign shock, then  
rush into action.)

DR. McCORVEY

(Preparing a defibrillator.)

Nurse! Ready the corpse for life! I promise, Sir  
Buck, we usually don't have dead people in our  
beds—But if that happens along the way, you can  
trust that we'll finish.

(The NURSE collapses in pain.)

Clear!

(McCORVEY shocks VESPUCCI's corpse. No response. The NURSE moans on the ground.)

Congressman Dick! Would you please lend a hand?  
(DICK rushes to replace the NURSE. He shoots VESPUCCI in the chest, spraying blood, as McCORVEY readies another shock.)

Clear!

(McCORVEY shocks VESPUCCI's corpse. No response. McCORVEY readies another shock as DICK shoots VESPUCCI again. Blood. Unnoticed, BUCK goes to the NURSE on the ground. McCORVEY and DICK continue shocking and shooting VESPUCCI in rhythm. Beat. They freeze in the background.)

BUCK

You're going to die soon.

NURSE

No, *you're* gonna die soon.

BUCK

Do you know who I am?

NURSE

If you're a cop, I plead the whole fucking handle.

BUCK

I am your G-d. I am the Alpha and the Omega.

NURSE

Sick—I rushed Kappa.

BUCK

I am responsible for the blood in your veins and the blood on the floor. I am what turns the lights off. I am what burns the earth into earth. I am America's witness.

(Beat.)

The first murder was not of siblings, but of convenience. Cain could have asked me for a new human he could have murdered, but Abel was already there. Guns were made to be fired and people tend to be in the way. This is not evil. This is congestion.

NURSE

Do you think if I asked the Congressman to shoot me again right next to this hole, I could get a like big, bullet belly piercing?

BUCK

When America ran out of places to aim, it aimed at one another. You are victims of an elaborate mass suicide. You are a plethora of ancestors. There will be a day when America is down to its last two citizens. Do you think they will be rivals? Lovers? Or on opposite coasts, both falsely positive they carry the distinction of solitude?

NURSE

(Poking at bullet hole.)

Like Lead Belly... Hey, Mr. G-d, sir, do you wanna have sex with me before I die?

BUCK

I made you in my image. Of course I do.

(BUCK grabs a folded hospital blanket off of a counter, covering herself and the NURSE. They have sex on the floor.)

NURSE

Why does your penis feel like mine?

BUCK

Because it's a vagina. I bear witness to America's behavior not to seek eventual justice, or even to ensure future civilizations do not fall to cryptomnesia, but because America *will* be forgotten. Your records are for vanity, not history.

NURSE

Can you go a little faster?

BUCK

Sure—No one will sculpt your victories, defeats, and poems. America won't even have the participation ribbon that is an unmarked grave. America must continue its passionate self-destruction, must continue its mutilation of its environment, slaughtering in your shopping malls, ravaging in your parliament—for this parade America throws now is humanity's only eulogy. The earth is approaching orgasm, and when it happens, there will be no final year of your life, for none of you will survive to mark it.

(BUCK dies on top of the  
NURSE as the NURSE lets  
out a great breath of pain.

Simultaneously, VESPUCCI  
gasps to life and all unfreeze.)

DR. McCORVEY

Holy Harvey Oswald! It worked!

NURSE

(Wheezed.)

G-d just died on top! He's super heavy!

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

I was just in-a the Hell for a hundred-a years!

DR. McCORVEY

Did the Buck say we were approved for better  
funding before dying? I don't like the color of our  
walls, floors, or faculty.

NURSE

His arm is *super* deep inside me—like pickpocketing  
my uterus.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

I *just* get-a the advice from-a the Satan! She say we  
must-a do-a certain things now!

CONGRESSMAN DICK

I don't trust you, Elizabeth Foreign. But even more I  
don't trust the Devil. We should do the opposite of  
what she says! What was first?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

I-a do not-a know. I-a was not-a listening to her.  
But! I-a now know what-a the Hell-a look like! I  
can-a work-a the backwards to make-a the perfect  
society!

NURSE

Okay... I'm just gonna wriggle around till I have a  
good ol' snatch sneeze before dying.

DR. McCORVEY

(Readyng clipboard and  
pen.)

And I'll write it all down, you sexual intellectuals.

CONGRESSMAN DICK

If you mention your Communist Manifesto one more  
time, I'm gonna kill everyone I haven't killed yet.

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

The first-a thing: Hell is-a full of-a the water.  
Every-a-where. You are-a always swimming. It is-a  
super inconvenient because there are-a no boats! To  
stop-a this, we must-a drain-a the oceans!

DR. McCORVEY

Where would we put the water?

(DICK shoots McCORVEY  
in the chest, struggling to take

the clipboard. McCORVEY lurches over to a cabinet, popping it open and grabbing fistfuls of morphine vials. She begins the process of injecting herself with every vial.)

CONGRESSMAN DICK  
(Struggling to write with rifles in hands.)

“Drain... the... oceans...”—Wait, hold on. Where do we put the water? Boston?

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

What if-a we-a set-a the oceans on fire? Dry-a them out.

CONGRESSMAN DICK

That's what I like to hear. Both creative, doable, and maintainin' a brand.

(The NURSE dies as BUCK gasps back to life. She speaks normally now.)

BUCK

What and who am I inside right now?!

(BUCK frees herself from the  
NURSE and deer head,  
revealing herself to be  
JANE.)

CONGRESSMAN DICK  
(Readyng rifle.)

Hey! You're not G-d! You're a lady!

AMERIGO VESPUCCI

G-d *is-a* the lady?

CONGRESSMAN DICK  
(Beat; flabbergasted.)

I... I need to redo my personality. Gimme a minute.

JANE

Everybody I ever loved was there! And those that weren't, I was told not to love anymore! But... I just didn't need to! I...! I found a window and out of it there was a vast ocean of people drowning and around that window were thousands of boats rusting and an angel said that that window itself *is* half of Heaven! Half of Hell for them was drowning, and half was their view of the window. But they all swam near it. Even cheered when we walked by... I was told all my life that the righteous go to Heaven, but the other half of what made Heaven, *Heaven*, was building more boats just to—

CONGRESSMAN DICK

Done! I've decided my team!

(DICK shoots JANE, who dies.)

That's what you get for tryin' to interfere on my manhood, G-d.

(DICK shoots VESPUCCI, who dies.)

That's what you get for convincin' me America was imperfect, you I-talian Commie. And *this* is close as I'm ever gonna get to killin' my pappy.

(DICK shoots himself and dies. McCORVEY, sedated, smiles to the audience and masturbates.)

DR. McCORVEY

Oooooaaaaaaaiii usually numb myself so it feels like someone else is dooooing it, but I've known too long that the vocal yyyyyyet complicit are the oonly ones who will survive Ameeeeerica till its end... I'm just kidding. Do you wanna know the most horrifying thing about America ending? That it isn't going to happen.

(Beat. Blackout.)

END

# A Night of Stars with Tennessee Williams

## (full-length play)

### CAST (*in order of appearance*)

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TENNESSEE WILLIAMS	(M, 30s)
EDWINA	(F, older)
FRANK MERLO	(M, 20s)
MARLON BRANDO	(M, 20s)
Greta Garbo	(F, 20s)
DIANA BARRYMORE	(F, teens)
ELIZABETH TAYLOR	(F, 20s)
ROSE WILLIAMS	(F, 20s)
TRUMAN CAPOTE	(M, 40s)
BETTE DAVIS	(F, 20s)
KATHARINE HEPBURN	(F, 20s)
ANDY WARHOL	(M, 20s)
POLICEMAN	(M, 20s)
PAUL NEWMAN	(M, teens)

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All alterations to gender or age are not only permitted but celebrated.

Stage directions are to be entirely ignored. Shred them. Eat them with marinara. Lines should be tailored to suit actors. Improvisations and ad-libs are encouraged. If the lights, set, props, etc., written here

are not to your liking, happily explore. These words now belong to you. Flaunt it.

If you produce this play with at least half a cast of non-male actors, at least half a cast of actors of color, and have a seat occupancy of 50 or less, please inquire about having your rights' fees waived by the playwright.

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*The set has a chair in the center for anecdotes. On the left side, there's a dining area with two stools and a telephone. On the right side there's a functioning window, a bar with a wine rack, and another two stools. Near the window is a drawer, be it in a dresser, nightstand, etc., to be filled with various objects. Behind the center stage is a room covered with a scrim. To the far right is a seat near a "Star Machine": an old projector to be pointed at the scrim.*

*At lights TENNESSEE WILLIAMS enters clutching a bottle tightly—as though loosening his grip will make the bottle explode into shrapnel. He's in his thirties, mustached, his lungs adopting New York but clearly born of a Mississippi drawl.*

## TENNESSEE

Memory: (*beat*) it's like youth. Elusive. A luxury that one forfeits when one submits himself to the eroticism that is alcohol. I think I have more memories that have been stolen by the bottle than I have stowed around my attic. And the ones that persist only do so hazily. They're more dreams than memories. And when you wake up, you haven't the slightest idea of what they meant. You remember a boy and a girl and... All stars have their final bow and they spread across the cosmos to make our atoms.

*EDWINA enters, heading to her seat manning the Star Machine. She's in her sixties and pleasant as peaches. Turning on the Star Machine, she fills the scrim with connected constellations.*

## EDWINA

Hello, ladies and gentleman! Welcome to our one night engagement; running only this month! Tonight shall be a tour of the stars with a man that knows the stars better than anybody alive or dead: Tennessee Williams!

## TENNESSEE

Hello, hello, hello! Hello. Folks, my name is Thomas “Tennessee” Williams and I’m here to take you on a tour of the stars! This is what happens now. This is what we do. You get to a certain age, and then you have to give people tours of the universe. (*pointing*) This, right here, is the universe! It’s got stars... And we’re gonna look at ‘em... If any of you thought that we would be looking at actual stars tonight, (*drinks instead of finishing the sentence*). Right-o! Lil’ Edwina! Where do we wanna launch off tonight?

## EDWINA

With more introduction!

## TENNESSEE

More introduction! My name is Thomas “Tennessee” Williams and I am seventy-one years of age. (*referring to his youth*) My secret is wine. Yes, you’re gonna pretty quickly understand that things don’t look how they happen. It’s fantasia... Lil’ Edwina, why do these things happen?

## EDWINA

More introduction!

## TENNESSEE

More introduction! My name is Thomas “Tennessee” Williams, I write plays, I make people famous, I

grew up in Mississippi so I didn't masturbate till I was twenty-six—

EDWINA

Sufficient introduction!

TENNESSEE

Wonderful! (*pats his pockets*) Where the hell's my point-point?

*EDWINA produces a laser pointer and hands it to him.*

TENNESSEE

Thank you. This, right here, is the universe! Now, to begin our tour, we'd like to start—Oh, meet Lil' Edwina! She...?

EDWINA

I'm a student.

TENNESSEE

A student. She's a student of astrology.

EDWINA

Astronomy.

TENNESSEE

Forgive her: she's a Scorpio. Now, I don't know a whole ton about anything I see in front of me right

now, so Lil' Edwina's gonna correct me whenever necessary.

EDWINA

It's gonna be necessary!

TENNESSEE

We're starting! This, right here, is the universe! The universe is full of stars. There are some you know. There are some only some know. We neglect the ones that no one knows because they're so g-ddamn boring. We like to begin with one everyone knows. (*laser pointing*) This star here... this is... Polaris. (*off EDWINA's reaction; different star*) This one's Polaris... (*different*) Polaris?

EDWINA

Oh, heavens...

TENNESSEE

Well, I don't know! I know if you draw lines between these ones y'get Aries! I'm an Aries. Typically Aries have tempers, but, (*drinks instead of finishing the sentence*).

*EDWINA takes the bottle away.*

TENNESSEE

That's my dancing juice, g-ddamn it!

## EDWINA Language!

### TENNESSEE

I....! All right... (*cooling*) This here's Aries: these four. Aries are born between March 21st and April 20th. They are adventurous, courageous, maybe a bit unable to express their emotions in a conservative manner. We do not punish them for this; they are incapable of change. Let's start tonight with one of the first stars I made... His name, at the time, was Bud. He was also an Aries. That's why I'm thinking 'bout him; ol' Tenn idn't just defective in the attention span. Now, I had just written and'd had produced *The Glass Menagerie*. This was a play about my growing up... I... (*thinking*) Mm...

*Lights up in the scrim room, revealing FRANK MERLO, standing where TENN doesn't notice him. The room is seemingly lit by a sky full of stars. FRANK is in his 20s and disarmingly handsome, his eyes gently exploring every surface of the room.*

### TENNESSEE

That play went really well. It took me a while to write the next one, surrounding a woman named Blanche. This was *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

*Lights down on FRANK.*

TENNESSEE

Now, this—

*TENN looks behind himself, confused.*

TENNESSEE

Did something just... just—okay, well. Streetcar. I'd wanted John Garfield for the lead male. We could not get this man. Instead, a no-name was referred to me by the great Elia Kazan, hereafter "Gadg," whom Gadg called one of the best young actors he'd ever seen. Best anybody had... But memory is elusive. Everything I remember, I remember it with a rum-soaked filter. When I remember them all, they're beautiful. They're young. Did you ever notice that? As soon as a star dies, all their pictures become young again.

BRANDO

What's wrong with the lights in here?

*Lights up on MARLON BRANDO, young, thin, and playful. He flips a switch to no avail.*

TENNESSEE

That young. Hello, sir I've never met!

BRANDO

Why don't your lights work?

TENNESSEE

Because when you flip the switch they don't turn on.

BRANDO

Mmm... Where's your box?

TENNESSEE

Excuse yourself.

BRANDO

In here?

*BRANDO leaves to locate the electrical box.*

TENNESSEE

Now, everyone, this was way before anyone had ever heard the name... Hold on, what was his name...?

*Lights turn on.*

TENNESSEE

Goodness, the lights work.

*BRANDO enters, turning the lights off again.*

BRANDO

I liked it like this anyways. (*extending hand*) Bud.

TENNESSEE

Bud? Your name's—? No, what's the one on the paper? The one they know.

BRANDO

Marlon?

TENNESSEE

Marlon! Everyone, this is—Marlon, is that you?! Jesus G-d, were you ever this thin...?! Oh! (*putting on an act*) You're the no-name actor who wants to take on the role of Stanley Kowalski. How reasonable.

*TENN opens the drawer, producing audition sides.*

TENNESSEE

I'm not interested in a no-name like "Marlon Brando." That sounds more like a canned tuna company.

BRANDO

I don't wanna read either! Gadg gave me twenty bucks to do this, and then I'm outta here!

TENNESSEE

(*looking at sides*) Oh my, well—Wait, this is Menagerie...

*TENN crumples up the paper and throws it in another drawer. He gets the correct sides.*

TENNESSEE

Oh my, well I guess this read's gonna just smart, isn't it? You look nothing like Stanley Kowalski! He was a middle-aged man, you know.

BRANDO

Well, I'm not too sure about this part either! I figure I'm a pretty decent guy and this is just... a harsh guy.

TENNESSEE

Then I guess that's that! Good day to you, Starkist!  
(*throwing the sides back in a drawer*) Oh, all right! If you insist! (*pulling out sides*) But only because Gadg—Wait, this is Menagerie again. Who put Menagerie in here? Hey, who put...? (*after reading some*) Laurette Taylor read off these sides...

EDWINA

(after *BRANDO* doesn't respond) Eh-hem.

TENNESSEE

Right, uh. I just—hold on. Laurette Taylor read off these sides... I wanted Greta Garbo, but she denied me flatly.

EDWINA

Finish the Brando memory!

TENNESSEE

Uh...

EDWINA

We'll get to Garbo later!

TENNESSEE

Brando's nervous and sweet on the inside but reads so well as a bad man that it redirects both of our histories; really, all of entertainment history. He fixes my plumbing and sleeps on my floor and in the morning we walk up and down the beach in total silence. Wadn't that fun? I'm sorry, but I remember Garbo and I had this excellent conversation about celebrities; the audience'd love to hear it. We were at this party, or, no it was a bar—

EDWINA

You can't leave the memory until Brando agrees to read.

TENNESSEE

Oh, right. (*to BRANDO*) Would you like to read?

EDWINA

(*after BRANDO doesn't respond*) That isn't what you say to him. Come on.

TENNESSEE

Uh... Toughen up! Be a barrel-chested behemoth and read this! What, you can't confront the—(*to EDWINA*) Sorry, Charlie; this is no fun to say. He was avoiding becoming his father.

EDWINA

Wow, maybe we should just skip Garbo tonight.

TENNESSEE

(*to BRANDO*) What, you can't confront your fears? Life needs these ugly things; that's what makes it so perfect! Be the ugly man and for as long as you have stamina you can run from the later consequences!

*BRANDO takes the sides and studies them for a moment.*

BRANDO  
You Blanche?

*Blackout on BRANDO.*

TENNESSEE  
Wonderful, wonderful! Wadn't that trivial. Now, I'd always admired Greta Garbo—even as a young boy. She was a Virgo.

*GRETA GARBO enters in a huff.*

TENNESSEE  
Ahh... Greta!

GARBO  
Sorry, sir! I'm so sorry: rush!

*GARBO blazes past and exits.*

TENNESSEE  
And that, folks, is how I met Greta Garbo! She was hurrying down the street as I was trying to get her to see a play of mine: Small Craft Warnings, but the Swedish tend to keep their distance. Don't worry: we'll see her again... Now... the next... uh... Jesus, what was it... This, right here, is the universe?

EDWINA

(whispered) Pisces!

TENNESSEE

Next was a Pisces! Pisces are sweet as caramels but oh so sensitive.

*DIANA BARRYMORE enters, permanently clutching her luxurious purse. She's smaller than the others in every way that one can be—her voice desperate to overcome its squeak.*

TENNESSEE

Now, I met Elizabeth Taylor a long—Who the hell are you?

DIANA

Um... I'm sorry. Diana Barrymore.

*TENN looks to EDWINA, who looks to the Machine.*

DIANA

Are you Mr. Williams? I've—I'm sorry, I've been meaning to ask you about reading for—

*Blackout on DIANA.*

EDWINA

There we go.

TENNESSEE

Who the hell was that?

EDWINA

I don't know. Machine misfired a bit—Wrong Pisces  
I guess? Just give me a second. Tell a joke or  
something.

TENNESSEE

Uh... Where do animals go when their tails fall off?

EDWINA

Fixed it!

TENNESSEE

Good; don't remember the punchline.

*ELIZABETH TAYLOR enters, pacing.*

TENNESSEE

Ah! Now that looks more like Elizabeth Taylor,  
doesn't it? She was pleasant as peaches that day, as  
we—

*TAYLOR shrieks—absolute disarray.*

TENNESSEE

No, no, no. Lil' Edwina?

EDWINA

Yeah, I'm working on it. What is up with this thing tonight?

TENNESSEE

Pardon me for a moment, Liz, we're having some technical—

TAYLOR

They're gonna find out... They're gonna find out about Eddie.

TENNESSEE

Eddie...

TAYLOR

Debbie's husband. The singer.

TENNESSEE

Debbie...

TAYLOR

Reynolds. The dancer.

TENNESSEE

Eddie Fisher...? What about him?

TAYLOR

We're involved. They're gonna find out. I'm done for, Tenn. I'm finally becoming Maggie.

TENNESSEE

Oh, I'd recommend that one avoid becoming my female characters. Lil' Edwina, this is way after she and I met!

EDWINA

My favorite part was when I said I was working on it.

TENNESSEE

What should I do?!

EDWINA

Whatever you did right then! I don't know!

TAYLOR

First the divorce... then Mike...

TENNESSEE

Yes, Mike... Divorces... People get divorced to Mike—I don't know what I'm doing—I don't remember what I said to her! Should I tell another joke?

EDWINA

It's fascinating how much easier it is to fix the Machine while I also talk to you.

TENNESSEE

Mike... Mike. Mike? (*remembering*) Helicopter crash, train—plane crash! Mike died in a plane crash. We were discussing you being unable to do Suddenly, Last Summer. I probably have to stay here until you agree to doing it. (*to EDWINA*) Yes? (*off her glare*) Let's try that. (*to TAYLOR*) I'm sorry about your new dead husband.

TAYLOR

Ha. G-d, you should write yourself more. I'm sure the rest of us are becoming stale stimulus. Dried up... You're in a queer mood today. I don't know what you started taking, but I'm in need. You got anything?

TENNESSEE

Pills...? I don't know. I'm not sure if I'm there yet.

EDWINA

Shh! The kids don't need to hear about that!

TAYLOR

You can just say no. I like that you care about me. You're a better friend than you need to be... I'm going to do it.

TENNESSEE

Wow, that was easy! Are we done here?

TAYLOR

I expected... resistance.

TENNESSEE

Why? I did want you to do it!

TAYLOR

Oh, that's good to hear... I know you care about me.  
I felt terrible.

TENNESSEE

Stop worrying about others. Worry about yourself.

TAYLOR

Thanks for stopping by, you have no idea what  
you've done for me. It'll be good to see Mike again.

TENNESSEE

Yes—I'm sorry, what?

*TAYLOR gets a gun from the drawer.*

TENNESSEE

Liz, what is that!? What are you doing!?

TAYLOR

Did you want to leave the room? I can wait; I don't  
want to scar you.

TENNESSEE

Don't do that!

EDWINA

I don't know how to fix it!

TAYLOR

I'm doing it. I'm finally doing it. This is for me. I deserve it.

TENNESSEE

You don't! Don't do that! (*after LIZ takes a step away*) Hold on... No, hold on... I don't think you can actually kill yourself here, 'cause you don't kill yourself here, right...? (*to EDWINA*) Right? Liz Taylor doesn't (*pantomime gunshot*), right? Liz... you don't kill yourself. I have... nothing to worry about.

*After a moment, TAYLOR crumbles to the ground, crying.*

TENNESSEE

Well, I certainly understand remembering this one.

TAYLOR

You of all people don't deserve this right now... I'm sorry...

TENNESSEE

What are you talking about?

TAYLOR

Bette told... I heard about Frank.

TENNESSEE

You what?

TAYLOR

I'm sorry; I heard about Frank and you don't need more of this than you've got; I'm sorry. I'm so sorry...

*Lights up on FRANK in the scrim room,  
smoking and staring up at the stars.*

TAYLOR

I'll do Summer, just... don't let this be Liz. Don't let this be...

*TENN moves to the room. Blackout on  
TAYLOR.*

EDWINA

Uh, Tenn, I didn't... He's not 'cause of me so... So... Frank. This is Sinatra?

*TENN enters the scrim room.*

EDWINA  
Kapra.

TENNESSEE

Merlo... Have you ever heard such a stupidly pretty name? Frankie Merlo. He was a Capricorn. (*to FRANK*) Anybody ever told you you're the most gorgeous thing to ever strike upon his life?

FRANK

I'm sure you say that to every boy you meet out here.

TENNESSEE

No, I don't... If I did, that was stupid; I meant it with you.

FRANK

And I'm sure that's never been the accompanied explanation.

TENNESSEE

You speak like... somebody who's good at words.

FRANK

You seem like the village idiot.

TENNESSEE

Yes.

FRANK

Which village?

TENNESSEE

Mississippi. Well, New York now. Now... Look at you... It's really now again... Oh, I'm Thomas. They like calling me Tennessee. I'm fond on it too.

FRANK

Tennessee from Mississippi, now New York? Frank Merlo.

TENNESSEE

Look how beautiful your skin is.

FRANK

Sicilian.

TENNESSEE

Sicilians make for exciting actors.

FRANK

You're an actor too?

TENNESSEE

I gave that up a while ago. Writer.

FRANK

Ah, life was too banal in the frying pan... As in now you're in fire. Frying pan, fire.

TENNESSEE

I don't remember you being so intellectually stimulating, Frankie Merlo.

EDWINA

(*reminding*) Tour.

TENNESSEE

We were standing on a Massachusetts sand dune,  
looking up at the stars, and, all I could think was... I  
really want to sleep with you.

FRANK

I thought I was Frank.

TENNESSEE

(*becoming a puddle*) That is such a stupid pun!  
Excuse me, why have you not kissed me yet? I'm  
very sure that at this point you and I should have  
kissed.

*TENN pulls out a nasal spray and takes a sniff.*

TENNESSEE

My nasal spray! Oh, it's just preventative; I'm not sick. I was real sick when I was a boy. But I'm not now! And it wasn't contagious. It still isn't, because I don't have it anymore. I'm not sick; you won't get sick.

FRANK

Never been a day in my life.

*This strikes a nerve in TENN.*

EDWINA

What have I seen him in?

TENNESSEE

Uh... What did we talk about?

FRANK

Your plays?

TENNESSEE

No, next topic, if you would.

FRANK

Your plays?

TENNESSEE

We're skipping that. Let's let the folks get to know you.

EDWINA

If you talked about your plays then...

FRANK

Your plays?

TENNESSEE

I don't want to talk about my plays.

FRANK

Why?

*A ghostly spot lights up ROSE WILLIAMS stage right, whom TENN sees over FRANK's shoulder. She's a burnt up shell and there's blood all over her hands. TENN exits the scrim room to look at her.*

TENNESSEE

(terrified) Okay! Lil' Edwina, that's enough!

EDWINA

What do you mean?

*Blackout on ROSE.*

TENNESSEE

He's not a star! We shouldn't be here; I'm sorry!

EDWINA

He just said he was an actor!

TENNESSEE

He didn't become a star; we should go!

EDWINA

What happened to him?

TENNESSEE

I said that we should go! I... She's...

*TENN goes back into the scrim room.*

TENNESSEE

April Is The Cruelest Month! That one's from when I just started college; it's an odd one! (*no response*)

Battle of Angels: first one to actually be staged somewhere: Boston. Critics hated it. (*no response*)

Stairs to the Roof: that was back in... (*beat; knowing what the answer has to be*) The Glass Menagerie.

FRANK

What's it about?

TENNESSEE

It's a very cruel play...

FRANK

It has a plot, doesn't it?

TENNESSEE

An abused child and her brother... and... and a gentleman caller.

*Blackout in the scrim room. TENN reenters the main stage.*

TENNESSEE

I... I need to... When's Capote?

EDWINA

Why?

TENNESSEE

Capote always cheered me up! I need to see Truman Capote! He was a Libra!

EDWINA

Truman Capote isn't next on the schedule!

TENNESSEE

G-ddamn it, Edwina!

EDWINA

Language!

TENNESSEE

I'm sorry, just... please.

EDWINA

You'll be fine! Here, let's get back on track.

*GARBO enters.*

GARBO

Let's go where it isn't so loud.

TENNESSEE

Greta! (*hugging her*) We're... we're at the party?

GARBO

And I'd love for us to be elsewhere.

TENNESSEE

Yes. I'd love to talk to you, yes.

GARBO

(*window area*) Up here?

TENNESSEE

Wait—!

GARBO

What, are we afraid of heights all of a sudden?

*GARBO goes to the window and opens it, putting her back to it and enjoying the breeze. She's in her twenties and looks around the room with a similar absorption as FRANK, but with much more desperation: every room she's in is her last ever.*

GARBO

You remember the first time we met?

TENNESSEE

You ignored me on the street.

GARBO

I don't recall that. Well, I'm sorry.

TENNESSEE

You wouldn't do a... a play I wrote.

GARBO

I don't remember that either. My age must be doing its damage, isn't it? It's so peculiar what our judges choose to remember; I'm referring to when Streetcar just opened. That parlor at the Ritz. You had a new screenplay and wanted me in it. Five years ago...? My, how time vanishes.

TENNESSEE

Yes... Yes! You should be in one of my screenplays. They're excellent.

GARBO

My... the room is stifling.

TENNESSEE

(*can't remember*) We had a conversation about... something... (*trying to move back to the tour*) We talked about the nature of celebrity. Who made you interesting rather than what.

GARBO

(*stopping him*) I love the way you talk, Tenn, but I'm going to need you to stop it. I'm interesting because I'm interesting. I don't want to be... this anymore.

TENNESSEE

(*agreeing*) Celebrity is a disease!

GARBO

Not celebrity, darling... Acting.

TENNESSEE

Hah?

GARBO

I love walking into a room, not making a first impression. I love it. I resent acting.

TENNESSEE

I don't remember our conversation going like this...  
You're an actress.

GARBO

Actress is a disease, my dear. It's made me unholy.

TENNESSEE

This isn't right. This can't be what we discussed.

GARBO

This breeze is sensational...

TENNESSEE

What are you talking about?

GARBO

I can't be in your work, Tenn. I hadn't felt anything in ages until I resigned as an actress. (*leaning back*

*out the window, looking down)* I love the way the cars all together make a gold and a red stripe, like a Chinese dragon. And then the ones way in the distance... the ones that shine 'cause they're separated from the herd, the cars that look like lightning bugs, like birds that don't fit in the V. Those sweet birds...

### TENNESSEE

*(nerve struck)* Those sweet birds...

*Lights up on ROSE. She's different. Lively. Clean. She has a parakeet.*

### GARBO

When you die... what do you want to be?

*TENN shuffles to ROSE, trying to get a look at her hands.*

### GARBO

I think I want to be one of those cars...

*Lights down on GARBO. ROSE reveals a hand to be clean.*

ROSE

We were wondering when you were going to show up. Well, I was wondering. Antoine's incapable of recognizing objects outside his spacial awareness.  
*(babying parakeet)* Yes! Yes, you are!

TENNESSEE

How... How old are you?

ROSE

Are you drunk?

TENNESSEE

*(nodding)* How old are you?

ROSE

Nineteen.

TENNESSEE

Oh, my goodness. Rose. *(hugging her)* You haven't even had the stomachaches.

ROSE

I don't know if I've told you this enough, but I don't like drunk you. You become far too sentimental and even condescending. It's obstructive to conversation.

TENNESSEE

Can we have one? At nineteen you were the most wonderful person with which to have a conversation.

ROSE

What shall we talk about?

TENNESSEE

Anything. Anything, anything, anything.

ROSE

Let's talk about mother not being able to accept that my uterus is my own uterus, and any desire she has to lay partial claim to it simply won't be entertained.

TENNESSEE

She was an old bat.

ROSE

Pretend you don't adore her.

TENNESSEE

No, I have never once adored that woman.

ROSE

Yes, you're so rebellious in the shadows. You do everything she says; did you even want to apply for college?

TENNESSEE

I hate that woman with everything in me.

ROSE

Ha! Have you ever said that to her?

TENNESSEE

Of course not.

ROSE

I have. She screamed and scolded then tried to tell me a story about when she was sixteen. Ah, how I loved not listening to it.

TENNESSEE

I do not enjoy her!

ROSE

Well, she enjoys you. Men can be bunny rabbits. Women... women need to be—You're going to college, what animal am I looking for?

TENNESSEE

I haven't the faintest idea.

ROSE

Oh! Parakeets! Very pretty and entirely useless.  
*(babying)* Yes! Yes, you are pretty and useless!

TENNESSEE

She didn't take kind to my nature either.

ROSE

The woman's got horse blinders on. She hasn't an idea.

TENNESSEE

Not yet, at least.

ROSE

She'll be in the ground before she even has a passing thought about it. Now then, while you're at college, it's important that you have sex with as many men as possible. As many. As possible.

TENNESSEE

I'm not like you are.

ROSE

Mm... No, you're discovering alcohol—a much more rotten habit. At least mine is social.

TENNESSEE

You're so full of life.

ROSE

Stop being so sentimental; it's ruining our discussion.

TENNESSEE

I can't help it. You're so beautiful.

ROSE

Now, I'll only tolerate your perversions to a certain level. What I liked most about them was that I was left out of it.

TENNESSEE

You're so... full of language.

ROSE

You and your obsession with language.

TENNESSEE

You had one once, too.

ROSE

I currently am obsessed with language.

TENNESSEE

Exactly... (*re: parakeet*) How do you like him?

ROSE

You're typically g-d-awful at gift giving, but he's a darling. I believe you've awoken the maternity in me. I'll always hate you for it... I just want to squeeze his little cheeks!

TENNESSEE

(*same nerve struck as earlier*) I... I need to go. I'm sorry.

ROSE

I know; don't miss your train. Go get an education. Become even more pretentious.

TENNESSEE

I need to go—I have to—I'm not abandoning you.

ROSE

You don't think I know that? Of course you'll be back; you're obsessed with me. You'd never leave me alone with the Wicked Witch longer than I can handle her. And I can handle her for a long time. (*off his reaction*) Go to your train, you big crybaby. I'll always be here.

*TENN hugs her.*

ROSE

Yes, yes, you're so very blubbery.

TENNESSEE

I don't remember if this is the last time I saw you like this...

ROSE

Dearest, you're drunk. (*hugging him back for a few moments*) I believe we're suffocating Antoine. (*they release*) Don't worry. I'll be here, Tomcat.

*TENN taps his temple in agreement.  
Blackout on ROSE.*

EDWINA

What happened to her?

TENNESSEE

I need to see Capote.

EDWINA

He isn't next on the—

TENNESSEE

I don't give a damn about the schedule! Take me to Capote!

EDWINA

Just hold on... Look, the Machine's—!

*DIANA BARRYMORE enters.*

DIANA

Are you Mr. Williams? Diana Barrymore... I was... I...

EDWINA

I don't know how to fix it; just figure out who this is and get rid of her!

TENNESSEE

(to DIANA) What do you want?

DIANA

To read. Sweet Bird of Youth. West End production. If you'll have me.

TENNESSEE

You need sides?

DIANA

If you have ‘em.

*TENN fishes through the drawer and pauses, pulling out a bottle of pills.*

TENNESSEE

The sleeping pills... Now that's why I can't remember anything... Why in the world would I remember you? (*no response*) I've auditioned a million actors... One fixed my plumbing and became my friend. You did neither. Why do I remember this? (*no response*) Sides.

*TENN produces them and hands them to her.*

DIANA

(*re: sides*) No, sorry... No, it's fine... No, it isn't—I was reading for Princess.

TENNESSEE

And?

DIANA

I don't... These aren't...

TENNESSEE

Read whatever I gave you. You were probably too old for Princess. How old are you?

DIANA

Thirty-eight.

TENNESSEE

Thirty-eight?! You're so young! Princess is, what—?

DIANA

I'm well old enough in actress years. This is the right time for me. I... relate to her, Mr. Williams.

TENNESSEE

Don't relate to my female characters; please can this stop being a thing?

DIANA

Oh, certainly!

TENNESSEE

Don't agree with me.

DIANA

Right!

TENNESSEE

You want to read for Princess? (*getting new sides*)  
Blow me out of the water.

*TENN sits on a stool as DIANA reads, trying to keep the script steady in her hands. She's horrible:*

DIANA

“The face of Franz Albertzart, a face that tomorrow’s sun will touch without mercy. Of course, you were—” (*readjusting; retrying*) “The face of Franz Albertzart, a face that tomorrow’s sun will touch without mercy. Of course, you were crowned with laurel in the beginning, your gold hair was wreathed with laurel, but the gold is thinning and the laurel has withered—”

TENNESSEE

Stop... (*to EDWINA*) Tell me I can leave now.

EDWINA

Nope... Guess she's reading more!

TENNESSEE

(*to DIANA*) How long did you say you've been doing this? Acting?

DIANA

I've had my heydays. But I've got another one coming up.

TENNESSEE

Yes. Look, Princess Kos is dried jerky. She doesn't have the energy to be nervous. Do exhausted.

DIANA

Exhausted? No, I'm... Yes, I think I'm exhausted but what true daughter of the stage sleeps?

TENNESSEE

Sure! Now we're talking! Use that drive and just read it.

DIANA

Oh, with pleasure...! Am I driven or am I exhausted?

TENNESSEE

Surprise me!

DIANA

(terrified) “Face it—pitiful monster... Of course, I know I’m one too. But one with a difference. Do you know what the different is? No, you don’t know. I’ll tell you. We are two monsters”... “We are two monsters”... “We”... “But with this difference between us. Out of the passion and torment of my existence... I have created a thing that I can unveil, a sculpture, almost heroic, that I can unveil, which is true. But you? You’ve come back to the town you were born in, to a girl that won’t see you because you put such rot in her body she had to be gutted and

hung on a butcher's hook, like a chicken dressed for Sunday.” (*off his reaction*) I can do it again.

TENNESSEE

(*to EDWINA*) Please tell me she doesn't do it again.

EDWINA

No, you need to... give her something. I don't know what.

TENNESSEE

There's no way it's the part.

EDWINA

I don't know what.

TENNESSEE

I am not giving you the part.

DIANA

Right...

TENNESSEE

(*to DIANA*) Oh... I'm sorry, you're a phenomenal actress; this is not the part for you.

DIANA

(*beat*) Thank you, Mr. Williams. This was an absolute honor that I'm glad I did. I... I'd love for you know... that I wanted this role—Oh! I didn't mean it like that!

TENNESSEE

The role doesn't go to who wants it the most—

DIANA

Yes! Right! I know that. I know—I'm... I'm very, very good at... Believe me, this is just... Stupid. I'm stupid—I'm so sorry.

TENNESSEE

You'll be fine. It's all right. Get some sleep.

DIANA

My father's John—! I... Yes. I will. I'll go. Thank you for being so... (*beat*) I can read it again. I would like to do that.

TENNESSEE

I'm in a rush.

DIANA

I can rush! I'm a daughter of the... I'm...

*TENN looks around, producing the sleeping pills and handing them to her.*

TENNESSEE

Darling, you need sleep. I have helped you. Mm?

DIANA

Mr. Williams.

TENNESSEE

Mrs. Barry...? Barry...? You did your read. This isn't your part. You've been in this business long enough to understand that you'll just have to deal with booking the next one.

DIANA

(beat) Oh, certainly! I'll get the next one, just you...! You'll see me in the next one! Don't you come knocking once I've...! Because I'll be...!

TENNESSEE

You will. You're an excellent actress and an absolute darling. You'll break their hearts next time. Thank you for coming in, Mrs...

DIANA

“Darling...” That was just my favorite word for the longest time... I don't know why I had to say that aloud—my apologies.

TENNESSEE

Queer thing to say. That why I remember you?

DIANA

I just don't think anybody knew that about me... What my favorite word used to be...

*DIANA puts the pill bottle in her purse and moves away.*

TENNESSEE

Bless her dainty heart.

EDWINA

(*looking through Machine*) Huh... I'm not seeing her again. I think you got rid of her!

TENNESSEE

Okay. Sorry, folks. Small detours; not gonna happen again. Who's next on the schedule?

*TENN puts the sides back in the drawer. DIANA pulls the pill bottle out of her purse, opens it, and peeks at its contents. Looking to TENN, she exhales and lets all the pills tumble down her throat.*

TENNESSEE

(*re: EDWINA's reaction*) What? What are you—?

*TENN sees what DIANA's doing and gasps.*

TENNESSEE

What?! No... no, no, no...

*DIANA exits, stumbling.*

TENNESSEE

Oh, no... We gotta go back.

EDWINA

I...

TENNESSEE

We're doing that one again.

EDWINA

What did she...?! Oh, Tenn, no matter! Don't—You can't change what—

TENNESSEE

I don't give a shit!

EDWINA

What happened to—?!

TENNESSEE

I don't rem—no, I...! I get a call a week later from her manager saying—apparently—she really wanted to be the Princess! And that isn't my g-damn fault! I auditioned a thousand actors and one kills herself; that isn't my fault! Plenty of them took it great! Took it professionally...! I was not too hard on her; this is a hard business... And it wasn't like I killed Audrey fucking Hepburn! It was Diane Barry... Diane Baritone... Bari...

*TENN lets what he just said sink in.*

TENNESSEE

Again...

EDWINA

What?

TENNESSEE

Please, just try to find her again.

EDWINA

I'm sorry about the Machine.

TENNESSEE

Find her again! Just... Put her back!

EDWINA

We're gonna—here. (*before TENN can interrupt*) It's all right. It's all right...

*TRUMAN CAPOTE enters holding a pair of wingtips. He's in his forties and pompously dismissive of any and all things in sight.*

CAPOTE

You know, I was thinking that I was going to be on this big boat with not a single interesting soul and my goodness gracious here's the great Tennessee Williams.

*TENN hugs CAPOTE, who doesn't respond to it at all.*

TENNESSEE

Truman Capote. Why, I don't remember you being young and beautiful at all.

CAPOTE

And you're porcelain swamp trash, but it's only polite to keep certain observations to ourselves.

TENNESSEE

You and I still get along, don't we?

CAPOTE

We get along famously. You're by far the silliest person I've ever known. Now, the captain ordered that until we reach New York I'm not to be served one more drop of liquor, so it'd be wonderful for you to find somewhere in your black heart to sneak me a bottle of something ancient. Something that rotted.

TENNESSEE

I forgot you used to be charming.

CAPOTE

I'm the most exciting thing on the Atlantic.

TENNESSEE

Whose shoes?

CAPOTE

Well, I found them outside a gentleman's room, so I assumed he was sick of them. It's not like they smell or anything.

TENNESSEE

And he didn't want them shined?

CAPOTE

Well, of course he wanted them shined, you goof, why on Earth are you trying to derail my act? I've spent the whole morning taking people's shoes and putting them elsewhere. It's just a malicious activity and I think it might replace alcohol.

TENNESSEE

When did you stop being funny?

CAPOTE

I'm hilarious. I'm also dry as a fingernail and want something rotten.

TENNESSEE

(remembering) Bleached wine.

CAPOTE

Oh, I know what that is—but you should still describe it.

## TENNESSEE

Winemakers bleach their corks cause it looks better.  
Sometimes, bleach filling in the cork holes doesn't  
allow necessary aeration, and the wine is tainted.  
Smells like soil.

## CAPOTE

Stop it. We're searching this entire boat—

*CAPOTE drops the shoes and leaves,  
halting at the nearby wine rack.*

## CAPOTE

Oh, my goodness—how convenient. (*inspecting bottles*) This here is a Burgundy bottle. It's got these shoulders 'cause this wine throws sediment like it's paint. It's a horrid vintage. I would not once put this inside me.

## TENNESSEE

This is a Bordeaux bottle.

## CAPOTE

Please stop this slander. I know that I'm a fraud.  
You're a writer; you should find the adventure in  
playing along. I'm going to see your play as soon as I  
get the chance, by the way. I hear you've found some  
kind of acting demig-d. Is he a homosexual?

TENNESSEE

He isn't opposed. (*off his reaction*) We haven't. He would never do it for a role.

CAPOTE

That's such a pity.

TENNESSEE

You've got roles to give out now?

CAPOTE

Well, they're certainly making Other Voices, Other Rooms into a film someday. I'm not sure if I'm in need of a brute, but if I'm doing the adaptation, I'll write one.

TENNESSEE

He isn't a brute.

CAPOTE

More pities. None of these corks are—I feel so betrayed! If I have to drink regular wine now I'm going to throw myself into the Atlantic, and I want you to speak at my funeral and explain to them that it's all your fault.

TENNESSEE

That's fine.

CAPOTE

(beat) How's your friend doing?

TENNESSEE

I'm sorry?

CAPOTE

You're right. "I'm sorry for asking, but" how's your friend doing?

TENNESSEE

Which?

CAPOTE

Am I wrong? Was it not you? Who's the one with the...?

*Lights up on FRANK in the scrim room, smoking.*

TENNESSEE

(going cold) Someone else.

CAPOTE

Oh, well that's good. I'm wretched at grief. If I ever get cancer, the thing that's gonna kill me is all the people crying. People are so oily when they cry. I'm going to my cabin. (*grabbing a bottle from the rack*) This is going to have to do, but I promise you that I'm hysterical.

*CAPOTE exits.*

FRANK

Tommy Williams...? Long time no see. What are you doing in Cape Town?

TENNESSEE

(*going to scrim room*) You recognized me after years. After only seeing me one time on a sand dune, my face only lit by starlight. And you recognized it. Why would you do that? (*no response*) Why didn't you try to reach me?

FRANK

Streetcar made you golden, and I'm not one for hopping on bandwagons.

*TENN kisses FRANK with force, surprising him.*

FRANK

Wow... I've been thinking about you since as well. Glad that's settled.

TENNESSEE

This... I can't do it to you again. (*no response*) It'd be very polite of you to stop looking at me like that; it's intoxicating and unfair. (*no response*) Do you want to see a show with Bette Davis in it?

FRANK

You know Bette Davis?

*TENN grabs FRANK's hand and the scrim room goes black. TENN reenters the stage not holding anybody anymore.*

TENNESSEE

What? Where did he—?

*BETTE DAVIS enters, drunk. She's visually in her twenties but behaviorally senile.*

TENNESSEE

Bette! Where's Frank?

DAVIS

Ugh. I hate his name, Tenn. Don't even whisper him around me.

TENNESSEE

What!? What are you talking about?! (*taking bottle*)  
Where's Frank?!

DAVIS

Hopefully New York, back to that Actor's Studio he crawled out of.

TENNESSEE

What...? Frank Corsaro! Right, he's directing Night of the Iguana, uh-huh?

DAVIS

And I'm not starring.

TENNESSEE

Yes, you are—'cause I brought Frankie to opening night!

DAVIS

Not a whisper!

TENNESSEE

Frank Merlo. That's why I'm here. It was before anything bad happened and I think I deserve to relive one good memory from my wretched personal life!

DAVIS

I'm not going on while that fucker claims to be a director!

TENNESSEE

You can't switch director night off—that defeats the purpose!

DAVIS

No.

TENNESSEE

G-d fucking damn it, Bette!

EDWINA

Language!

TENNESSEE

She just said the fuck word too! Bette, what's his problem?

DAVIS

The problem is that you told me Gadg was directing, not this Method creep!

TENNESSEE

Tell me what you want. Whatever gets you onstage.

DAVIS

I want him gone!

TENNESSEE

He's not going!

DAVIS

I want to have sex with Jimmy!

TENNESSEE

Farentino? Who doesn't?!

DAVIS

Put in a good word—I want you to do one mean thing to Tallulah Bankhead.

TENNESSEE

Gladly.

DAVIS

I should've been your Blanche. Oh! I want to play  
Amanda Wingfield.

TENNESSEE

What? How old are you?

DAVIS

People have been playing her as sixty!—Fifty!—I'm  
thirty-seven!

TENNESSEE

Why does Amanda keep getting older?

DAVIS

Next Menagerie; West End, Hollywood, nickelodeon  
smut; I'm your girl.

*KATHARINE HEPBURN enters, vibrantly  
twenty but dressed for her seventies.*

KATHARINE

Bette! Marvelous work!

DAVIS

Kat! You're still alive!

KATHARINE

Mr. Williams, I would like to ask you for something.

TENNESSEE

Katharine, I'm not giving you anything, I'm not waiting till you agree to anything; you get the hell out of this room.

KATHARINE

I would like your blessing to play Amanda Wingfield.

DAVIS

Uh-huh.

TENNESSEE

G-d. Damn it. (*to EDWINA*) How do I get Frank in here?

EDWINA

Bette Davis just needs to go onstage and you need to watch your language.

TENNESSEE

I am not giving her to Katharine Hepburn! (*to KATHARINE*) No!

KATHARINE

You didn't like my work in Suddenly?

TENNESSEE

Everything about it was terrible. Especially you. You spit in Mankie's face.

KATHARINE

You never sent me a thank you note for that one.

TENNESSEE

You're not Amanda Wingfield. Congrats, Bette!

KATHARINE

Mankiewitz bullied Montgomery Clift, and I don't take kind to watching the abuse of others artists.

TENNESSEE

You being Amanda would abuse me.

KATHARINE

You hated Mankiewitz.

TENNESSEE

Mrs. Hepburn—

KATHARINE

Ms.

TENNESSEE

I'm gay.

KATHARINE

I'm widowed. The studio won't have me if you don't want me. It's a television movie; it's beneath me.

DAVIS

Wait, so they're already planning one? Tenn!

KATHARINE

The only reason I would have to do it would be because... to have your script—and especially your blessing.

TENNESSEE

The script can be acquired with a library card.

KATHARINE

What other reasons do you have to detest me?

TENNESSEE

I promised it to Bette.

DAVIS

He did.

KATHARINE

You hate Bette.

DAVIS

You hate Bette?

TENNESSEE

Bette's my favorite. I hate your acting.

KATHARINE

Four Oscars.

TENNESSEE

You hate my favorite people.

KATHARINE

Who? Bette? You like her because you hate her—  
I've read your work.

TENNESSEE

Why can't you just die already?! G-d! I'm in a rush!  
It's yours!

KATHARINE

You surprise me.

*KATHARINE exits.*

DAVIS

In my presence you give Amanda to Katharine  
Hep—?

TENNESSEE

I'm writing a play called Sweet Bird of Youth. (*using hand signals*) Jimmy Farentino's got the part if he rides the D-Train right into Broadway.

DAVIS

I can perform tonight.

TENNESSEE

A thousand blessings.

*FRANK enters.*

FRANK

That was really something incredib—

*TENN jumps and kisses FRANK passionately.*

TENNESSEE

Hi.

FRANK

Hi. Wonderful work again, Bette.

DAVIS

Mm. (*pretending to see something offstage*) Would you look at that? Oh, it's so interesting.

*DAVIS exits coyly.*

TENNESSEE

We go to my place now. (*smiling*) No, wait! We have to play through it, don't we? Frank Merlo, would you like to see my apartment? (*no response*) What? No, wait... what did I say? I know I said something adorable and he went to my apartment. It was...

EDWINA

I don't think this is your first date...

TENNESSEE

Yes, it is! What? (*to FRANK*) How'd you like Bette?

FRANK

Two's Company was better. She's gotta stick to the screen, honestly. Never tell her I said that. But tell Tally I said that, if you could.

TENNESSEE

You know Tallulah Bankhead?

EDWINA

I went to your next memory with Frank!

TENNESSEE

No, no. Frank. Capricorn.

EDWINA

Yeah... This is the next thing you remember with him.

TENNESSEE

What are you talking about? I wouldn't have introduced him to Tally until... G-d, years in.

EDWINA

This is... well, I don't know. This is just the next thing you remember.

TENNESSEE

There's... that... no.

*Lights up on dining area. CAPOTE stands with WARHOL and a POLICEMAN.*

CAPOTE

Tenn, please explain to this man that you know who we are.

TENNESSEE

No... no, no, no.

CAPOTE

(to POLICEMAN) That doesn't bode well for my claim, but he knows me.

FRANK

We know him! It's fine!

TENNESSEE

What are you doing here?!

CAPOTE

I couldn't get in the front door so me and my painter friend climbed up the balcony. This policeman thought it was appropriate to intervene on our visit. I think it's improper to allow yourself in uninvited like that, but I'm being funny right now and no one is laughing.

POLICEMAN

Do I have reason to believe there are narcotics in this apartment?

FRANK

There are no narcotics in this apartment.

CAPOTE

Of course there aren't...

WARHOL

Of course, no...

POLICEMAN

(*exiting*) I'm searching the toilet tank.

TENNESSEE

No...

FRANK

(*once he's out of earshot, whispered*) You brought narcotics?!

CAPOTE

Well, I know you don't keep any in your apartment and my friend here brought enough to ruin our careers twice.

FRANK

Where are they?!

WARHOL

(*fidgeting*) A safe place.

POLICEMAN

(*entering with the sleeping pill bottle*) What are these?

TENNESSEE

Oh, Christ... It's fine!

POLICEMAN

Why were they in the bathroom?

CAPOTE

Bathroom pills are a delicacy that is our right as Americans to enjoy.

POLICEMAN

I'm sorry; did you want to say something?

WARHOL

Don't say anything, they have long memories.

TENNESSEE

Christ, just please get them out of here. (*no response*) Take the sleeping pills away from here, could you just...

*TENN nervously takes a sniff of the nasal spray. The POLICEMAN snatches it.*

## TENNESSEE

It's nasal spray! It can't get you high! Believe me, by this point I've tried.

*The POLICEMAN smacks the pill bottle and spray around in his hands then hands them to TENN. Unable to use anything, the POLICEMAN exits with a huff.*

## CAPOTE

(beat; re: spray) A friend of mine once inhaled the cap from one of those things. Got caught in his glottal. Took him hours to totally asphyxiate. I'm almost positive he cried the whole time and I'm being funny again because these silences do things to me and no one is laughing again and let's please get settled.

## WARHOL

(patting pants) I have it, and soundly too.

*All but TENN go to sit.*

## TENNESSEE

Go to a different memory with Frank. A good one. Just us.

EDWINA

Okay, let me look... (*frowning at Machine*) Uh... I only have one more memory with just you two.

TENNESSEE

That's bullshit.

EDWINA

Hey...! Now look here: there's still one with just you two.

TENNESSEE

One...?

EDWINA

You wanna go?

TENNESSEE

No! Have you not figured out that the random bits I'm remembering was 'cause it was too fucked up to forget!?

EDWINA

Language! We'll skip through the sniff-sniff—'cause the kids don't need to see that—and just jump an hour! Frank's still here and we get our stars in! Who wins? Everybody wins!

TENNESSEE

You don't get it! This isn't a good memory. This is where... I am not meeting him.

EDWINA

Who?

CAPOTE

Oh! Tenn, have you met my friend, Angel? Of course his real name isn't Angel, that's just what I've been calling him out of spite. Andy Warhol, Tennessee Williams; Tennessee Williams, Andy Warhol.

*Lights go dark on all but TENN. Beat. TENN walks towards the table and sits, relighting it. An hour has passed and they're in a drunken conversation. WARHOL is, as always, seemingly dead sober. He observes TENN as a casual predator, his eyes cold and uncaring in who discovers them staring.*

CAPOTE

And I hate this cat with every precious fiber in me! I want it dead. I can't write because I spend all day fantasizing about shoving it in a freezer or burning it alive and the two are very mutually exclusive, so every time I get home I can't do a thing but seethe at it in indecision!

FRANK

What's its name?

CAPOTE

It doesn't deserve one.

WARHOL

So. Tennessee, you write plays? That's riveting.

CAPOTE

We don't need to hear about that. We need to hear about this novel I'm almost done writing—novella. Novella and three short stories. It's about a prostitute who doesn't have sex with the men—maybe—they call these girls “call girls”—and that's how I know its going to make a dapper film as soon as it's published—and the woman, this woman's name is Holly—I'll tell you who's playing her, fantastic actress if I get my way: Monroe. Have you met her?

WARHOL

Tell me about your Sweet Bird of Youth. Right?  
That's such a nice name.

TENNESSEE

How 'bout I don't talk to you. (*no response*) We just sit here and don't go past this point and (*to FRANK*) why aren't you holding my hand back? Or did I not even grab yours that night? 'Cause that blond kept looking at me with his hungry eyes. (*no response*) Did you even once look at me that night? Or were you drooling at meeting another star...?

EDWINA

Tenn, is ev—

TENNESSEE

Sweet Bird of Youth is a play.

FRANK

It's an amazing play; my favorite so far.

WARHOL

What's it about?

TENNESSEE

No! G-d...! It was that g-ddamn painter I go to Key West with, then... then that dinner where you leap across the table, and I call the police... It's a play about a man heading to Hollywood to pursue his glossy-eyed dreams, but romance obstructs.

CAPOTE

Stories about Hollywood are the next big thing. Good on you.

FRANK

Regular people can't help but get starstruck.

TENNESSEE

There's you admitting it! Maybe that's why I don't have good memories of just us together? 'Cause you just wanted to go stargazing. Oh, shut up!

WARHOL

Oh, finally some photogénie.

CAPOTE

I want Holly Golightly to sweep people off their feet.

TENNESSEE

I am choosing to blaze through these great memories with these fabulous people to try to spend them with you, and you don't look at me during them. You always look at them. You're right, Angelboy: photogentry.

CAPOTE

Breakfast is going to be on my tombstone. I adore it.

*TENN grabs a bottle off the table and leaves, blacking the dining area. After a bit, WARHOL follows him.*

EDWINA

Where are you going?

TENNESSEE

What if we only remember past loves as being magical 'cause our brains pick the most self-sabotaging things to remember? He always wanted to see the stars and I always obliged. Like I do everything. And now I gotta renegotiate that... he

only kept me around as a magnet... and then I kept him around to keep me warm. To give me a home base in every starlet-studded evening. To tell me my life had some purity in it.

WARHOL

Excuse me, mustache man, have you ever been to Florida? I think you'd like it; it's hot.

*TENN grabs WARHOL's hand and leads him. WARHOL gets ahead of TENN, letting go and exiting, smiling back.*

EDWINA

You ran?

TENNESSEE

I... Look, I...

NEWMAN

So I'm in the running?

*PAUL NEWMAN enters, trying to stay charming through his nervousness.*

NEWMAN

Look, that's all I'm asking... I... I know I'm nobody; but you specialize in nobodies! Look at Brando and Tandy and just... give me a shot.

TENNESSEE

How many random actors off the street only came to  
me for parts?

NEWMAN

This is different! I'm perfect for it!

TENNESSEE

And that was always the accompanied explanation.

NEWMAN

Just... I just want to work with you.

TENNESSEE

Oh, was that ever true?

NEWMAN

No, I want to work with Liz Taylor. But I know that  
you can't have good acting without good writing!  
Ask anyone; I have always said that!

TENNESSEE

I don't care. I don't care about any of it.

NEWMAN

I'm a failure, I've certainly recognized that other men  
can be attractive, I'm not the most keen on the bottle  
but I'm willing to make further inquiries; I'm Brick!  
I'm perfect for this! I know it wasn't written for  
me—

TENNESSEE

I don't care!

NEWMAN

(full stop) You... I... I'm sorry I wasted your time.

*TENN shakes his head and goes still, finding the bottle of sleeping pills still in his pocket. He looks to NEWMAN, hiding the pills.*

TENNESSEE

What do you even want out here? Why do you want to be in this place? You're a failed actor? Great! Save up and go buy an ice cream shop; sell ice cream. You know who gets betrayed in the ice cream business? Fucking nobody.

EDWINA

Language.

TENNESSEE

(to EDWINA) I—! I'm sorry... (after cooling) Where are you from?

NEWMAN

Nowhere. Ohio.

TENNESSEE

Go home to Nowhere, Ohio. Nobody wants to hurt you in Ohio.

NEWMAN

Look! Okay, yes, that's what everyone's told me, but when you were in my shoes, and if somebody like Tennessee Williams told you not to chase it—told you to keep your distance—would you have listened to him?

TENNESSEE

(beat) No... But I wasn't after the chase.

NEWMAN

(agreeing) I ran away for as long as I—

TENNESSEE

I didn't run! I left! There's a difference! You're too young to know what you're talking about.

NEWMAN

Maybe I'm always gonna be a failure, that's... I can't go back there... I don't even remember what my mom looks like and my... There's just some things I can't face yet.

*Lights up on ROSE. We can't see her hands.*

NEWMAN

Maybe someday, if I'm ever able to be you.

*TENN moves to ROSE.*

TENNESSEE

Yes, you're in the running, Mr. Newman.

NEWMAN

(smiling; exiting) Call me Paul.

*Before TENN can reach her, blackout on ROSE.*

WARHOL

(in darkness) I was getting worried.

*Lights up on WARHOL, who goes to kiss TENN. TENN averts.*

WARHOL

Don't worry, I won't do it when Frank's here. I'm a simple monster; we both are, you know. Now, I'm not one for things being healthy, but this seems like a very healthy thing for everyone. Get the stink out in the open. Ease Frank into it, the poor boy.

CAPOTE

(entering with a very sick FRANK) My goodness, I thought I'd be spending this whole evening bored to tears, but look who arrived. I'm going to get the wine.

*CAPOTE exits. FRANK immediately goes to sit, the occasional cough curling him like a pill bug.*

WARHOL

How are you feeling, sweetie?

*WARHOL sits, TENN staring only at FRANK. CAPOTE enters with wine and a corkscrew.*

CAPOTE

Angel, this cork is milk white. How did you know?

WARHOL

Because you don't shut up.

CAPOTE

This bottle's only for me. And maybe a sip for Tenn: pallet royalties.

TENNESSEE

No. (*no response*) No, of course I'm drinking.

WARHOL

Frankie, would you like some soup?

CAPOTE

Soup?! It's a thousand degrees outside!

WARHOL

The Arabs drink hot tea on hot days. Eases the blood.

CAPOTE

(popping cork out) I'll keep mine cold, thank you.

WARHOL

I know you will—I was asking Frankie. (*to FRANK*)  
You like it hot, don't you?

CAPOTE

Oh, speak of the fucking devil! Guess who's Holly  
Golightly, my call girl: Audrey fucking Hepburn.

WARHOL

Yes, congrats.

CAPOTE

I'm beside myself! I ask for Marilyn and they give  
me the least Southern, least gritty actress on the  
entire market! They all want me to overdose!  
Imagine that woman as Holly; it's going to spoil the  
entire thing! (*beat; to FRANK*) I noticed you weren't  
smoking, Frankie. How's your lung?

WARHOL

Oh, gosh!

CAPOTE

What! When it's quiet too long I play "I Spy" with  
the room's elephants!

FRANK

My lung isn't good.

CAPOTE

I'm sorry to hear that. I... (*beat*) I love my lungs. I don't know what I'd do without them.

WARHOL

This is becoming divine.

FRANK

(*filling with rage*) You think this is funny?

WARHOL

Not funny, but the photogénie is delicious.

TENNESSEE

Frankie...

CAPOTE

This is fine soil. Just my kind. Mazel tov, Angel.

WARHOL

I'm an artist; I notice beautiful things. And all I was saying is this is simply a moment, albeit heartbreaking.

TENNESSEE

I'm sorry.

WARHOL

I'm sorry. I shouldn't be talking. I've done enough to you.

FRANK

What? What did you do?

WARHOL

(looking to TENN) He doesn't know?

*FRANK looks to TENN, who can't look away. FRANK turns back to WARHOL, leaps, and strangles WARHOL. CAPOTE jumps out of his seat, crying out "Stop! Stop it!" again and again as TENN watches.*

TENNESSEE

Frankie, stop... Please just... (*shaking his head*)  
STOP!

*EDWINA slams the machine and the scene freezes.*

TENNESSEE

This is the last time I saw my boyfriend Frank when he was strong enough to leap across a table. Look at those arms. I remember when they were still that thick... G-d, just one more—just of us lying around

on a beach together, but I don't have it. I poisoned all of them. I'll never feel 'em again... Frankie, we went together like two jagged edges... I hoped you loved it like I did. (*hugging FRANK*) When you see me next, say something sweet to me.

*TENN goes to the phone and dials.*

TENNESSEE

(*struggling to put on the act*) A man I don't know... A man I don't know is strangling my boyfriend. Take him far away from here.

*FRANK lets go, succumbing to a coughing fit. WARHOL falls to the ground, gasping. Blackout on the dining scene. Lights up on ROSE, hands still unseen. TENN begins to hurry to her, then cautiously slows. Upon reaching ROSE, TENN discovers her hands to be clean.*

ROSE

And here I was believing you'd never return.

TENNESSEE

Oh, my G-d... (*hugging her*) Oh, my G-d; you're still in there.

ROSE

Ah. You're drunk again.

TENNESSEE

I didn't think I had anything left of you. You're still in there.

*ROSE's "ghostly spot" flashes.*

TENNESSEE

What was that?

ROSE

(to EDWINA) Is everything all right?

EDWINA

It's acting up again! I don't know how much longer we're gonna be staying here.

TENNESSEE

(to ROSE) Look here, if you and I were to have only—

ROSE

(rapid) I would get the point quicker. Have you had sex with men?

TENNESSEE

Yes. You?

ROSE

More. Have you been drinking?

TENNESSEE

Too much.

ROSE

Ask me about Antoine.

TENNESSEE

How's Antoine?

ROSE

He's beautiful. The parakeet heartbreaker. How was the play?

TENNESSEE

G-d, I don't want to talk about the play; it was cruel.

ROSE

Despite its title, it wasn't at all.

TENNESSEE

What? Menagerie should be given to folks on death row!

ROSE

Menagerie...?

TENNESSEE

Which play did you read?

ROSE

April Is The Cruelest Month.

TENNESSEE

April... What year is it?

ROSE

I'm gradually understanding that you've climbed the  
booze ladder since we last spoke. Is this absinthe?

TENNESSEE

Do... do you have stomachaches?

ROSE

Who told you?

TENNESSEE

So this is the last one then... I don't suppose it would  
do me any good to tell you to run away from home,  
would it?

ROSE

It would be a marvelous idea.

TENNESSEE

You don't though... And to never let mother discover  
your promiscuity.

ROSE

I'm sure she'd throw me in the loony bin for it.

TENNESSEE

That she would... That she would. And should there ever be a discussion about solving your promiscuity with a lobotomy, you stick a hot iron in her face and run away from here... You're the most perfect thing there ever—

*Blackout on ROSE. Immediate lights up on WARHOL screen-printing.*

WARHOL

Oh, why didn't you tell me you were coming down?

*WARHOL goes to kiss TENN, who averts.*

TENNESSEE

No... No, no, no.

WARHOL

*(still trying to kiss) Yes, yes, yes!*

TENNESSEE

*(throwing WARHOL off) NO...! No, that wasn't the end. There was more!*

WARHOL

Sounds like you're on something fun.

TENNESSEE

There was more... I had her; I know I have more of her...

WARHOL

Switching teams again? I don't think they'll take you back.

TENNESSEE

Get away! Get away; I don't want to see you!

*WARHOL stands, staring at TENN thinking.*

WARHOL

Well, ouch, Tommy; that wasn't very kind.

TENNESSEE

Shut up! (*to EDWINA*) That wasn't the last of her. I remember more when she was... When she was...

*WARHOL wraps himself around TENN from behind; gently, romantically.*

WARHOL

That wasn't very kind... I'll excuse you on account of... whatever you're on. Do you know where we are?

*TENN doesn't shove him away, ashamedly soaking in WARHOL on him.*

TENNESSEE

Don't... We're... warm... I came down here because it was warm...

WARHOL

Warm's a cute word for it; I'm sweltering down here. I wasn't meant for Florida humidity—probably why I love it so much.

*WARHOL leaves TENN, who doesn't move.  
WARHOL takes notice.*

WARHOL

You don't like me asking, so I won't... Yes, I will: is this about Frankie?

TENNESSEE

About...?

WARHOL

I won't ask... Bedroom?

TENNESSEE

No.

WARHOL

All right, but let me get out a visqueen—

TENNESSEE

No! I don't...!

WARHOL

It sounds like you're gonna need convincing and my head's in my print—so just take the Yellow Snakes.  
*(re: TENN's confusion)* Drawer.

*TENN goes to the drawer, finding pills.  
WARHOL holds his hand out. TENN doesn't move.  
WARHOL looks back up to TENN.*

WARHOL

If you take them, I can pretend to be Frankie.

*TENN doesn't move.*

TENNESSEE

Why was I here?

WARHOL

Frankie's just about gone... You don't deserve that; you deserve me.

TENNESSEE

No, I don't.

WARHOL

You deserve someone who cares about you. I can be Frankie for you. We can do it right here—I hated this print anyways; Truman wouldn't shut up about her. Let's ruin her right here.

TENNESSEE

I don't want to ruin anyone... not her...

WARHOL

(pulling *TENN*) Come on!

TENNESSEE

(throwing him off) NO! G-d, no!

WARHOL

(pulling again) Tommy! Just do it!

TENNESSEE

(throwing) You didn't love me! You just pretended!

WARHOL

(grabbing *TENN*) What's the fucking difference to you, huh? What's the difference? Who actually loves you and can get it hard—'cause Frankie barely fits half that bill. You wanna feel whole again? You want love. I'm the best thing you have... (*softening grip*) Stop blaming yourself for Frankie being sick. You blame yourself for everything.

TENNESSEE

I... I do blame myself for everything.

*TENN stops resisting.*

WARHOL

You deserve this.

TENNESSEE

I deserve this.

*WARHOL kisses TENN, then stops, TENN limp in his arms. WARHOL takes the pill bottle from TENN, popping a pill, then handing one to TENN. TENN slowly puts it in his mouth.*

WARHOL

(smiling) If you left me, where else could you even go?

TENNESSEE

Nowhere.

WARHOL

Right. You'd just run till you're back the starting line. And you don't want that, right?

TENNESSEE

The starting line.

WARHOL

Back in Mrs. Mississippi's arms.

TENNESSEE

The starting line...

EDWINA

(*looking at Machine*) Tenn, I'm gonna try to get us out of here!

WARHOL

You still think I'm a monster, don't you? No, you think I'm an even bigger monster than you?

TENNESSEE

I guess I'm just used to you...

*WARHOL goes for a love bite as DIANA enters, clutching her purse.*

DIANA

Are you Mr. Williams? Diana Barrymore... I was... I...

*EDWINA gasps. TENN squirms in WARHOL's arms, who stops.*

WARHOL

Why do you always look away?

TENNESSEE

Edwina, make this stop!

EDWINA

(*looking through Machine*) I... I...!

DIANA

To read. Sweet Bird of Youth. West End production.  
If you'll have me.

WARHOL

I'm exhausting everything that usually works. Can  
you just for once not need this bullshit moral  
foreplay?

DIANA

If you have 'em.

WARHOL

(*holding out pills*) Just take another.

TENNESSEE

(*to WARHOL*) Get those away! (*running to DIANA*)  
Run away from me, sweet child!

*DIANA takes the pills from TENN, who snatches them back.*

TENNESSEE

No!

DIANA

This is the right time for me. I relate to her, Mr. Williams.

TENNESSEE

(to EDWINA) Edwina, get her out of here!

EDWINA

I'm sorry about the machine! It isn't me!

WARHOL

Are you kidding me? What disease do I need to get for you to just fuck me?

TENNESSEE

(to EDWINA) Edwina! Please!

DIANA

The face of Franz Albertzart—

*DIANA pulls another pill bottle out of her purse, to which TENN runs and grabs.*

TENNESSEE

No!

DIANA

—a face that tomorrow's sun will touch without mercy—

WARHOL

Why do you always look away?!

DIANA

Of course, you were crowned with laurel in the beginning, your gold hair was wreathed with laurel—

*DIANA pulls another pill bottle out of her purse; TENN grabs it. WARHOL hisses into TENN's ear, driving him the opposite way from DIANA.*

TENNESSEE

STOP! Frankie—help me!

WARHOL

I don't need to look like him—I look like me!

DIANA

(*another pill bottle*)—but the gold is thinning and the laurel has withered—

TENNESSEE

(*running to her; grabbing it*) STOP! FRANKIE!  
HELP!

DIANA

Out of the passion and torment of my existence—

WARHOL

And I paint him—How many times do I need to paint him?

DIANA

I have created a thing that I can unveil, a sculpture, almost heroic—

*TENN falls to his knees, arms filled with pill bottles.*

TENNESSEE

Stop... Frank... Frankie...

EDWINA

(getting up) It wasn't me! (exiting) I didn't do this!  
I'm sorry!

WARHOL

Why can't you just write me, Tenn?! The wicked need to find holes too!

DIANA

(another pill bottle)—you put such rot in her body she had to be gutted and hung on a butcher's hook, like a chicken dressed for Sunday.

TENNESSEE  
FRANK!

*DIANA empties the pill bottle down her throat. BRANDO runs in, clutching a trembling TENN, as DIANA and WARHOL slither away.*

BRANDO

Can you tell me your name?

TENNESSEE

Frankie...

BRANDO

Tell me your name.

TENNESSEE

Thomas “Tennessee” Williams.

BRANDO

Birthday.

TENNESSEE

No.

BRANDO

What's your birthday...? Hey! Hey!

TENNESSEE

Aries! And we have that in common, Bud. Let me go.

BRANDO

You're quitting these pills. (*re: TENN crying*) Hey... stop doing that. Where's your barrel-chest?

TENNESSEE

Dead... He's dead.

BRANDO

You're still crying about that? G-d, it's been years.

*BRANDO picks TENN up and sits him on a stool. This older BRANDO is no playful Stanley—bearing the black weight of some aging trauma in every movement and facial expression. TENN indecipherably cries some words into BRANDO's shirt.*

BRANDO

Hah?

TENNESSEE

I did it to you too. You... You raped someone... You raped a girl, Bud...

*Beat. BRANDO tries to say something but doesn't.*

## TENNESSEE

Do you remember when we first met? We walked on the beach and talked and talked and talked about how your father raped your mother and she wasn't able to stop drinking and he let her because it meant she wasn't able to stop him... And you'd never put yourself somewhere where you could become your father and Stanley was that... I gave him to you. I took you here and you raped a woman with a stick of butter... I gave him to you.

## BRANDO

No... No, I took him... And when we didn't talk on that beach, you wouldn't ever become your mother. And look at you.

## TENNESSEE

I can't remember what she looks like... I can't remember the face that my muse away from me.

## BRANDO

(feeling his face) Lucky you... (aggressive) I can't sleep either, but you know why I don't take these g-ddamn sleeping pills?! You know why!?

## TENNESSEE

I can't—

BRANDO

Your boyfriend is dead! You did not kill him but you tortured him because you're an ugly man! Accept it! We're ugly men! What, you can't confront your fears? Life needs these ugly things; that's what—!

TENNESSEE

That was bullshit, Bud! I just wanted you to be Stanley!

BRANDO

Stop dismissing everything that scares you as bullshit! Your mother ruined your sister after you ran; you ruined Frank and ran!

TENNESSEE

Why did I do that?

BRANDO

Stop crying! Face what happened! You're not gonna stomach you—your skin won't even fit—until you accept what you did and separate it from Tom!

TENNESSEE

That's all I was though! That was me running! Tom ran!

BRANDO

(*gripping TENN's collar and tugging him in*) You are not what you've done, but what you do!

*TENN stares into BRANDO's wrathful eyes, revealing unrestrained fear of them. BRANDO sees this and closes his eyes, placing his forehead against TENN's.*

BRANDO

G-d, I hope that's right.

*BRANDO releases TENN and exits. Lights up on a bar, where GARBO sits with a glass of milk. TENN crawls to her with CAPOTE's bottle of wine and sits.*

TENNESSEE

Greta...

GARBO

I've been waiting for you. The great Tennessee Williams...

TENNESSEE

I don't know... You're still beautiful.

GARBO

Ah, who cares? How's life been treating you?

TENNESSEE

Like I killed its puppy with a lawnmower.

GARBO

(*choking on her milk*) Goodness, you never liked subtlety.

TENNESSEE

You never looked so dapper. What did you need?

GARBO

What?

TENNESSEE

A role? Spoiled booze? What did you need?

GARBO

I wanted to say hello... It's all right. You never were very good with people.

TENNESSEE

This is an absolute lie. I'm practically a savant.

GARBO

You're fantastic with... celebrities. Not people.

TENNESSEE

(*remembering*) This is where we have that conversation; I really need to stop with these.

GARBO

You do. Switch. (*replacing his bottle with her milk*) Try this.

TENNESSEE

(*sipping milk*) What is this? Virgin eggnog?

GARBO

Yeah, people call it “milk.”

TENNESSEE

Ugh, G-d... (“*go on*”) I was good with celebrities.

GARBO

You look at the shiniest nickel and dismiss the others as somehow being worth less.

TENNESSEE

Did I do that?

GARBO

I was surprised at you not dating a star. Figured the boy would be neglected.

TENNESSEE

Oh, I didn’t neglect him.

GARBO

Of course you did. He tells me about it—all the time.

TENNESSEE

Frank talked to you?

## GARBO

He talks to me—all the time. I feel as though he always resents being in those rooms, but thinks I'm nice. I'm not sure.

## TENNESSEE

I didn't neglect him; I was helping him do everything for the last month. He's already lying in the bed he never walks out of... This is the last month... I stopped seeing Angel, but Frank doesn't care. Like always.

## GARBO

Ha! I'm sorry... Like always? That boy's been your secretary, accountant, arranges meetings and calls, makes sure you get to see all your stars.

## TENNESSEE

What? No, I don't—Well, I don't remember it like that.

## GARBO

Oh my; I never would've guessed. Drink more milk. (*as TENN does*) No bias here: Frank takes care of you. Practically raises you. He's allowed to die first because of it.

## TENNESSEE

That isn't how I recall it.

GARBO

You couldn't. Every time he takes care of you, you're filled with everything behind a bathroom mirror.

TENNESSEE

No... No, well, it's his word against mine.

GARBO

He's much better at words.

*TENN stops and thinks, looking to GARBO.*

TENNESSEE

I'm the one who wanted to see the stars?

GARBO

I don't know if you realized it, but that's all you ever care about: words and stars. He's like a charity you keep close; he owes you everything for spending time with a no-name.

TENNESSEE

No... No, I've always said that his name alone—

GARBO

'Cause it's a pretty word. His name isn't what makes him. Yes, you were what made him interesting, but you didn't make him. Drink the milk.

## TENNESSEE

(after drinking) The only thing I can remember is his deathbed... We fight, then he says, “I guess I’m just used to you.” Then I leave and he dies. That was the last thing he said. “I guess I’m just used to you.” Like I’m no more or less than a disease... (re: *milk*) This is disgusting, by the way.

*TENN places the milk down. Then gives it a little push out of reach.*

## TENNESSEE

Why are you drinking that?

## GARBO

(deciding) No one in my family went to primary school and we worked all day. We couldn’t afford anything so my mother bought milk. It was the cheapest thing and it “lasted the longest.” My father got sick and died when I was fourteen... When I came here and learned how quickly milk spoils, I grew this rage at my mother, at how she killed my father because she didn’t know anything. (*shivering memory away; smiling*) I hate telling stories. Do you understand why I’m saying this to you?

TENNESSEE

It doesn't pertain. My mother lobotomized my sister out of wrath, not ignorance.

GARBO

The devil never had a more loyal advocate.

TENNESSEE

I, never a more respectable critic.

GARBO

A role I'll gladly accept.

*GARBO uses the bottle to go to clink glasses, remembers TENN pushed his away, and clinks with that resting glass.*

GARBO

I'm saying visit your mother.

TENNESSEE

Oh, absolutely not.

GARBO

You might find something resembling yourself.

TENNESSEE

You don't think that's what I'm afraid of?

GARBO

Can you remember her?

TENNESSEE

No.

GARBO

Wishful thinking?

TENNESSEE

(*re: milk*) If this is what caused you all the hardship, why are you drinking it?

GARBO

What are you talking about?

TENNESSEE

I would've sworn off milk forever... How can you drink that?

GARBO

Mm... Because I know that milk's very good for you.

*Blackout on the bar. Lights up on ROSE sitting on the floor, her hands hidden.*

TENNESSEE

Rose?

*She's a zombie. Completely incapable of speech or a fully conscious facial expression.*

TENNESSEE

Where are we then? The asylum? (*no response*) The old bat did it... Well, I remember you had a garden here. Pleasant for walks. Are you at the point where you can walk? (*no response*) I remember you still being fond on Antoine. Always giddy whenever I visited and you dragging me to his cage. I know you'd want me to ask how he's doing.

*After a moment, ROSE reveals her hands to be soaked in blood.*

TENNESSEE

Rose... What did you do?

*She presses them together and squeezes.*

TENNESSEE

Christ... Why did you do that to the poor fellow?

*She starts blubbering up as she shrugs.  
TENN hugs her.*

TENNESSEE

You beautiful star, why would you do that? (*as she cries*) Why would you do that...? Why would you... Hug me back, Rose.

*She cries and keeps her arms at her sides.*

TENNESSEE

Hug me—Please, just hug me...

*EDWINA enters. TENN lets go of ROSE, taking in EDWINA.*

TENNESSEE

And here I was thinking I'd forgotten what you looked like... Couldn't handle the fact that your daughter was fucking boys so you scrubbed her brain clean?! You lunatic! Look at her: is this better? This is what you wanted? This doesn't stain your reputation like your gay, alcoholic son, huh?

EDWINA

Your alcoholism can be fixed—

TENNESSEE

You shut your mouth... You know what would've happened if you weren't the way you were? None of it. I wouldn't have met any of them because I wouldn't have run. Rose wouldn't have spent her life in a fucking monkey cage. It's you.

EDWINA

Are you finished?

ROSE

(terrified) Yes!

*Both freeze and look to ROSE. It's clear that random speaking spells have occurred, but are infrequent enough for EDWINA to cover her mouth with her hand.*

TENNESSEE

(fuming) Leave. Go. You're supposed to be a coward. You always ran away from arguments.

EDWINA

I've gotten too old to run. You'd know that if you visited more often than once or twice a lifetime. Thomas, Rose had a train ticket. She has neither the intellectual capacity nor the access to a telephone that would find her with a train ticket. Did you give it to her?

TENNESSEE

I don't remember.

EDWINA

Who was going to take care of her in New York? You were...? Do you remember me taking care of you when you were sick, Thomas? Did you never appreciate that I took care of you all those years?

## TENNESSEE

You didn't take care of me.

## EDWINA

I did. I didn't know how to but I did it. Your father couldn't handle the fact that you'd never be a strong, capable boy—if the diphtheria didn't take you, he was going to. How many times did I take your beatings so he couldn't kill you...? And all I could think was... if I had let him do that, you never would've had the chance to grow up and be a sinner. The Lord would smite me for standing idly by but you would spend eternity in paradise. That's all I ever wanted for you. But you were stubborn and all you ever wanted to do was hate me... And I suppose I didn't help... I just wanted you and Rose to be safe during your time on this earth. Rose was running away with boys—

## TENNESSEE

So you clipped her wings—

## EDWINA

I made her safe! Will I go to hell because of it? Yes and I carry that! The important thing is that she won't! Am I paranoid? Am I a lunatic...? But are my children safe?

TENNESSEE

I... I don't remember you saying any of this.

EDWINA

Every single day I wonder if I did the right thing.  
You know how highly I hold your opinion, so I need  
you to tell me I did.

TENNESSEE

You didn't!

EDWINA

(nodding) The things you choose to remember...  
When you have children, you'll understand why I'm  
so terrible. I know you will... You just need to find a  
nice girl first.

TENNESSEE

(almost ready to chuckle) Did you ever love  
anybody?

EDWINA

My children.

TENNESSEE

No... No. Romantically.

EDWINA

Romance is sin.

TENNESSEE

Of course it isn't.

EDWINA

When it wasn't with your father, it is.

TENNESSEE

Well, you never did that in your life.

*EDWINA sits in the chair TENN uses for anecdotes, ROSE looking her in the eye. EDWINA doesn't hide from it.*

EDWINA

It was before I met your father... Women weren't supposed to go on trips alone in those days... I wanted to see a college that was a few days away, told my parents I was visiting my mother's sister, when a boy knocked on my hotel room door. Told me there was no vacancy and he'd pay for mine twice over. I told him that if there were no vacant rooms I obviously wasn't leaving. He agreed that was reasonable... I was just a girl. I was sixteen and every boy was terrified of my father's sermons. But this town and this boy didn't know my father; I couldn't dare let him leave... I wouldn't let him sleep in the same bed as me, which he understood, but we talked all night. Just about everything. The night sky. The

cattails growing on the road. How much we hated horse apples—

ROSE

(as if trying to finish story) Goodnight, dreamer...  
(beat) Goodbye.

EDWINA

(staring at ROSE) When I woke up midday all my things were gone. My money, my bags, my ticket home: gone. Took me forever to get home, and even longer to recover from my father's wrath. (beat) If I knew what I know now, would I have let that boy sleep in my room again? (beat; holding back) Yes...

*EDWINA rises from the chair.*

EDWINA

I don't know how much time I have left; be gentle when you remember me. (goes to exit, stopping herself) But more than anything, I wished I never knew what I know now.

*EDWINA goes to exit again, but TENN stops her and hugs her. She nods and exits. TENN goes to ROSE.*

TENNESSEE

My G-d... You know what's the difference between a plastic and a glass figurine? A glass one is pretty because of how easy it is to break the g-ddamn thing. (*kissing ROSE's head*) I'll write you so they name every constellation after you. You'll look up and point and say "Rose" and no matter which you point to, you'll only be right always.

*ROSE points to the scrim room.*

TENNESSEE

(correcting her finger to the sky) "Rose."

*She shakes her head. ROSE points to the room again, lighting it full of its stars—revealing FRANK on his deathbed. TENN hugs ROSE a final time.*

TENNESSEE

Thank you for fueling my adventurous heart. I'm sorry for the sentiment.

*She points again. TENN backs away to the scrim.*

TENNESSEE

I won't be far. Just right here.

*ROSE points to her temple, tapping it twice, as her spotlight goes out. TENN arrives at FRANK and caresses his arms. He scans around the room, settling indefinitely on FRANK's closed eyes.*

TENNESSEE

This right here is the universe...

*TENN wraps himself around FRANK. The stars fade to black.*

## **Onto Mockeries (short story)**

The silly creatures always moved as a tribe, crushing along the soggy snow and whisking through pine trees to avoid detection. It was a plum, clouded sky—the bright ground illuminating the starless nighttime as the creatures crept from backyard to backyard, clumsily collapsing onto one another and shushing all things that peeped. They reached their goal locale and routinely stacked themselves against the crimson-brick house so that their ambassador could reach its bedroom window. With some shoves, the window came open, and this creature flailed about, tumbling into the home. The remaining tower of creatures then fell upon itself and they shoved one another up, scrambling to find their own entrance.

Simon woke with a yelp as he glanced all around his bedroom, recognizing it piece by piece. It'd been another nightmare, and Simon would make sure this time he wouldn't cry. His parents didn't come for him anymore and contemplated that babying him was the source of his lack of development. While other kids at his daycare were able to have full, albeit simple, conversations about an item in the room, Simon knew only about eighty words. The adults once wouldn't give him his train unless he was able

to articulate “train,” and that day, Simon didn’t play with any trains.

Instead of being able to say “train,” Simon had constant nightmares and a vilified habit of sucking his thumb. Removing it now, Simon watched the saliva bridge his lips and fingernail then collapse upon itself, leaving a darkened streak on the front of his T-Rex pajamas. Simon slid back onto the bed and wiped his glazed chin on the pillow, which matched the comforter with its cartoons of assorted sports equipment.

On the wall near the foot of his bed was a decal of a beanstalk, upon which his parents would annually measure his height, this new notch being significantly higher than its two predecessors. Close to this was a plush Big Bird, hanging its head alongside a handful of smaller stuffed animals. Outside the window, pine needles accumulated on the snowy ledge. A sharp breeze tickled the pine trees, making them twirl their skirts at Simon, who then faced away from the window, afraid their dominating presence would trigger new nightmares and leave him no other alternative but to cry. Instead, Simon focused on the slits of his closet door. His parents had told him time and again that his closet was the last place a monster would be, as monsters are chic and closets are too obvious. The same argument was used about underneath his bed. The real monsters, they

explained, exist in taxes and liberals, and Simon should've been much more goddamn satisfied that he didn't have to pay rent to live here and could at least return the favor by learning some English.

One boy at his daycare, Antoine, was exceptional at language. His communications about episodes of *Dragon Tales*, which even included using the characters' names, garnered much admiration among the adults. Simon felt as though he'd never be capable of such precise diction. This envy of Antoine had bittersweetly concluded that week, following an incident of accidental arson. Antoine tried to use his command of the vernacular to acquit himself, but was instead deemed both a juvenile arsonist *and* a poor sport who'd resort to lying about it.

As Simon was trying to remember the word "lie," a ruffle rumbled out of his closet. A rigid Simon peered into the closet's dark crack, where two eyes met his; they were milky-white with black dots that appeared to jiggle as they dove out of Simon's sight. Simon maintained his focus as a blue, fuzzy hand wrapped itself around the closet door and creaked it ajar. The eyes reemerged, perfectly spherical and resting atop the creature's head, as the creature brought itself into the bedroom.

It was covered in blue, yarn-like fur, and stood at roughly six feet tall. The googly eyes looked down at

Simon, who sat up in bed in delight, recognizing this creature.

“Key!” Simon bellowed.

The creature muzzled the boy with its fuzzy paw, placing the forefinger of its free hand to its lipless mouth, a non-verbal command Simon recognized. Removing both hands, the creature focused on Simon and whispered in its gravelly baritone, “See...”

It preyed around the room, opening drawers and looking under Simon’s bed. Unsatisfied, it placed a paw on Simon’s ankle. “Seeeeeeee...” it reaffirmed. Simon giggled. The creature fully wrapped the paw around Simon and tugged softly. Simon giggled again. Using its free hand to shush Simon, the creature gave a more forceful pull.

Coming out of bed, Simon waddled over to Big Bird and brought it to the creature in offering. The creature shoved the plush toy into his mouth, but it wouldn’t go in. Simon could see now from the light of plum sky that its mouth seemed to not have an opening like the boy’s own, and therefore the creature couldn’t insert anything down it.

Frustrated, the creature dropped Big Bird and skulked to Simon’s door, twisting the knob and putting Simon on red-alert; Simon was not supposed to leave his bedroom until eight-thirty in the morning. Panicking, Simon flew over to door, only to be halted by the creature’s bushy, blue arm. The creature

opened the door fully, then indicated for Simon to exit the room.

Nervously obeying, Simon went out and found another one of the creatures at the end of the hallway, anticipating him. It was identical in every way to the bedroom creature, and upon this visual contact, it signaled to what must have been more of them at the foot of the stairs.

Simon and the bedroom creature tiptoed through the hall, passing each room with tripwire caution. Arriving at the end, Simon's suspicions were confirmed when he saw two more creatures standing slouched below, both gazing up at him in the stalled light of the front door's opaque window.

“*Seeeeeee...*” the bedroom creature whispered into Simon's ear.

The two creatures at the bottom stacked atop one another and fell forward, laying themselves across the entirety of the wooden staircase, allowing Simon to descend without making a single creak, his tiny, bare feet pushing into their soft, furry bodies.

Turning to the main hall, Simon squinted at the light of the kitchen, through which he could see five of the creatures seated at the dinner table. Advancing with his regrouped entourage, Simon discovered there were nearly fifteen in the kitchen total, some patiently awaiting Simon's arrival and others playing

patty-cake, among other games, their paws making muffled thumps as they collided.

“*Seeeeeee...*” the bedroom creature announced as it entered the room.

“*Isss...*” a creature at the table answered, its pale eyes lighting up at the sight of Simon in the doorway.

“*Forrr...*” Two standing near the oven patted each other in excitement at the entrance. At this point, the entire room was both aware and exhilarated at this knowledge.

“*Coooooookieeeee...*” a scattered few answered in harmony.

“*THAT’S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME!*” the whole room sang in gaiety, a random trio producing a cymbal, trumpet, and tambourine. They played as this chant repeated and grew in strength, to which the frantic Simon threw his hands in the air and shushed the room with trembling passion.

The kitchen celebration fell silent, a couple creatures echoing Simon’s shushing.

Finally, the bedroom creature pushed Simon forward and pointed to the oven. “*Seeeeeeee...*” it explained.

Another creature was about to answer the call as it was shushed by its neighbors.

Simon looked up at the bedroom creature and frowned.

“*Seeeeeeee...*” it repeated in its gravelly baritone.

Simon pointed to the oven in confirmation, to which a handful of creatures opened it and removed all its trays, pots, and pans, and set them on top of the kitchen island. The bedroom creature nodded as the others awaited further instruction. Still confused and under pressure, Simon pointed to the cabinets, to which creatures raided them for the ingredients, assembling them on the counter.

The kitchen was lined with creatures glaring at Simon in anticipation, a few holding eggs, one anxious to preheat the oven, another with chocolate chips, others with sugar, salt, vanilla extract, flour, all of them drooling for Simon's next point.

Nervous, Simon extended a finger to a flour-bearer, which poured it into a bowl. Then, the salt-bearer, which joined in. Finally, Simon whirled around the room, pointing to all and freeing himself of responsibility.

The kitchen was aflutter with creatures maneuvering around one another, pulling out rolling pins and baking sheets and mashing ingredients together in the bowl. Creatures climbed atop counters and contributed fuzzy pokes at the mixture until it was thick and doughy, then smacked dollops of it onto a sheet-covered pan, spacing them with precision and vigor. A crowd of jobless creatures formed behind them, watching every placement with wrecked nerves.

Once the pan was ready, they all looked to Simon with ferocity, who pointed to the oven.

Thrilled, the creatures bounded to the oven with their pan, only to discover the creature with oven responsibilities gloomily pressing its face against the oven's dim window.

"*Seeeeeeee...?*" the creature holding the tray asked.

Grim, the oven creature shook its head.

Simon frowned over the change in the room. It was as if a shared, tragic knowledge relaxed upon all of them at once. There was a bowing of heads and a murmur of "*Seeeeeeee*"—a murmur of a shared promise and reaffirmation of their goals here.

A few creatures broke from the group to act upon this, including one that took the batteries out of the smoke detector above the stairs. Others went about the landlines and ripped their wires free from the walls. One shuffled through drawers until it was found: a butcher knife. One gathered some of the leftover dough to gum around in its dry, furry mouth as it knelt on the floor and closed its googly eyes. The butcher creature looked down with sorrow as a dishtowel was shoved into the kneeling creature's mouth, inciting a minor whimper.

The bedroom creature turned Simon away as the kneeling creature's throat was slit, spilling a flurry of cotton. This creature kicked its legs and tried to bellow through its gag as its insides flowed onto the

kitchen floor, which were then scooped up and tossed into the oven.

As this mound of cotton caught fire, the tray creature placed its contribution into the oven and shut the door, smoke seeping out its crevices. Another creature creaked open a bi-fold window and used assorted rags to redirect the smoke outside as efficiently as it could manage.

Simon watched as the popping dots of dough inside the oven vanished in a cloud of black, the tribe of creatures turning lustfully to the obscurity. The kneeling creature had been reassigned the lying creature, and its once thick leg had finally stopped its tremors. Its skin lay there on the floor with its googly eyes aimed nowhere, lifeless as they ever were.

A ball of fire grew inside the oven, prompting a creature to pry the door oven and remove the burnt contents. Each creature scrambled to get its treat as the blaze trickled out the oven and up the counter. Simon watched as the flames licked the cabinets dry and made their pilgrimage both down onto the floor and up onto the curtain, taking with them the blue-furred, lifeless skin.

The bedroom creature was the last out the sliding door when Simon noticed his abandonment and hurried to follow them outside.

Not long after Simon's exit, the entire kitchen was engulfed in flame, which had moved onto curling

the paint outside and rising up to the second floor. Backing away from the house, Simon stared as the creatures took time between worship of the growing inferno to enjoy their coal-black treats, which wouldn't go down their necks, but crumbled against their mouths and fell in pieces onto the mixed mush of snow and grass.

Once a corner of the roof caved in, the creatures cheered and danced around the house, hopping and skipping and bellowing, "*Seee isss forrr coookieee, that's good enough for me!*" again and again, followed by a "*Oooh! Cookieee, cookieee, cookieee starts with seeeeeee!*"

They remained chanting and dancing until the house collapsed entirely, at which point they stopped and stared in fascination. After a few moments of observation, they shushed one another and rejoined as a group, crossing Simon's street over to a neighboring house, where a girl from his daycare, Tabbey, lived. Simon watched from a distance as the silly creatures stacked themselves on top of one another, the bedroom creature shoving open Tabbey's bedroom window, flailing about and tumbling into her home.

## Seabeer (short story)

Jacey and Alex were splitting a pair of flip-flops—Alex on his right foot and Jacey on her left. They were Alex's, but Jacey stepped on a glass bottle last week when they were building sandcastles and couldn't go barefoot for a bit. They didn't have any other kids around to ridicule them about it or claim they were in a relationship for sharing shoes; all the kids their age had moved away in the past few months to start the first grade. Neither of them were old enough to dislike the discomfort of wearing only one flip-flop, more enthused by the prospect of doing it than by analyzing whether it was a practical solution. It was a black flip-flop with a raised, yellow stripe along its strapping. Jacey didn't like its look, and wouldn't have worn them both as that would've implied that she liked it, but again, couldn't contain her excitement at her and Alex walking down the street, splitting a pair of flip-flops, squishing over sunbaked cigarette butts. They'd arrived at the liquor store.

Orbin was the cashier and had moved to Tampa after housing costs plummeted in the late 2020s, midtown now beachfront property and the stench from the red algae adding to the mold of the wasting away condos where the sand used to be. If you were born in it, like Jacey and Alex, it smelled like air.

Alex visited relatives in Georgia and told them Georgian water tasted like blood. His relatives visited once and told him the air tasted like rotting shrimp. Orbin was used to it by means of fluid standards of living; if it weren't for the smell, the Florida coastline could've been the new Venice. If the water hadn't gotten so much hotter over the years, the red algae couldn't have exploded all over the coast like it did and killed everything swimming—made the canal aesthetic lose its touch. But folks tried to have fun with it. There used to be a law thrown together saying you couldn't ride anything aquatic with a motor outside people's apartments, but that fell out of enforcement when just about everybody moved out of those apartments. The people left, people like Orbin, at first got a certain high jet skiing through dead traffic lights on his way to the liquor store, like wearing one flip-flop. But the adults lost their pragmatic gloss.

Jacey and Alex used Alex's shirt to collect as many beer bottles as they could from the liquor store's fridge. They'd wanted to get green bottles to make them easier for people to see and not step on, but all that were left at the store were clear ones. It was a real moral sacrifice for the two, real personal for Jacey, but it'd be worth a couple bloody feet. They were able to hold an even ten bottles in Alex's shirt, Jacey having only four dollars stuffed in the

belly of her one-piece swimsuit as they approached Orbin at the counter.

Orbin asked how many beers they were buying.

Jacey said six.

Orbin told them it'd be eight dollars.

Jacey said four, take it or leave it.

Orbin said six; four if they wanted to buy three beers instead.

Jacey agreed, pulling three beers out of Alex's shirt bundle and placing them on the counter. Jacey gave Orbin the money and the two departed, Orbin popping one of the countered beers after he was nice and alone.

Jacey and Alex trudged back towards the water, which puddled up around Flores St. and got up to their knees at DeLappe. Where the beach used to be was just about at their chests, around adults' thighs. It'd been a celebrated project between the pair of them to pull sand from under the water and onto floating pallets, letting it dry in the sun for a few days, then carrying that to an old, beachfront balcony where they'd been collecting it and building castles out of it. A mini bottle had snuck through their inspection of their last load, and the sand they'd played with since still had blood on it, but no glass—it took a few afternoons of sifting without playing before they were confident enough in that.

Jacey and Alex reached the ocean—the real ocean. The one their moms played by. “Where it was before. Over there.” The whole trip, Alex had been groping at the beers to ensure they were still cold. They were. Alex’s mom was lying on their balcony when the two of them arrived. She was having her noontime nap, but she usually liked seeing what the kids were up to. If she were awake, she’d call out and see if they needed anything to drink. Make sure Jacey’s foot was doing better. But she took up on that morning to slurp up the last of the Bloody Mary Mix. Barely enough for half a drink. Had to pour vodka right into the Mix bottle to make sure none of it got wasted.

Jacey and Alex had seawater up to their chests, the red algae in a concentrated clump a bit ahead of themselves. It’d been another one of the hottest summers on record, making Jacey and Alex have to shower whenever they got home to not get itchy. Alex opened his shirt fold, taking four bottles for himself and giving three to Jacey.

Alex threw the first bottle, splashing in the middle of the algae and bobbing around. The bottle wasn’t cold as much as it was in the fridge, but the two could see a clear hole forming around it. Jacey threw another bottle, hitting Alex’s, causing his to dip under for a moment. Alex threw another. Jacey threw another. Alex threw another. Jacey reared to

throw her last, then saw Alex's first bottle not come back up. They frowned as the rest of the bottles sank. They waited, and, sure enough, the Florida sun baked away. The algae refilled the holes.

Jacey and Alex waddled back to town with their two beer bottles.

Jacey and Alex re-arrived at the liquor store, asking Orbin if they could have a refund on the last two bottles of beer.

Orbin was about to open the third bottle on the counter when he explained that all sales were final, and that he already spent their money on two lottery tickets.

Alex asked if they could trade each bottle for something in the store.

Orbin said that was fine, as long as it wasn't any of the upper end porn magazines, and that if they wanted one of the lower ones then they couldn't tell people they got it from him.

Alex was quick, going right up to Orbin and asking for one of his lottery tickets, to which Orbin agreed. Jacey walked around the store for a few minutes before deciding on a pair of flip-flops, which Orbin refused, saying two flip-flops meant two beers. Alex wouldn't give up his ticket, so Jacey ripped one flip-flop from the pair and gave Orbin her beer.

Jacey and Alex were outside the store when Jacey realized she'd taken a left flip-flop, and she already had one of those.

It was the first time Amanda had sex that she had Alex. She was fourteen when a razor-jawed boy with light eyes and a car stopped to talk to her while she was drinking an Arizona Iced Tea and eating sour candy shaped like sharks. He was quick with words, knowing everything he had to say to get her in the car. He was quick in bed, getting off of Amanda before it even stopped hurting. She tried to stick around his motel room, but he started calling her names and she left, crying on the walk and crying when she got home. Nine months later, there was Alex. All the restaurants packed up shop when all the people left, taking all the jobs with them, so she "moved" into one of the old beachfront condos. A nice one. No rent in a ghost town. She picked up a boyfriend once in a while who worked online and he'd make sure Alex ate a ton. All of them were darlings to her. They spoiled her and adored her and ended up leaving because they couldn't stand the smell from the red tide and Amanda couldn't leave Tampa. Tampa had always been home.

It was a cool night as she sat in a Tommy Bahama chair on the balcony, a gibbous moon rippling through the ocean. She'd been vaping more.

Funny enough, once she stopped with the flavored oils, sick of how fast Alex would blow through them, she'd picked up the pace herself. It was nothing: no flavor, not even smoke in lungs. It was just warm in there. And for the moments that she breathed it in, she wasn't swallowing up an air full of fish. Before this, she'd forgotten what nothing smelled like. It smelled so clean. Like tomorrow was gonna be the first page in a notebook. When she turned twenty-one, she'd have no tattoos, no kid, and it'd smell like nothing.

When she took Alex to Georgia, she was happy that Alex didn't like it. She was worried she'd have to defend living in Tampa when they got back. But Alex hated Georgia. He said it smelled cold and that his cousins were making fun of his skin to his face. That was the only time Amanda told Alex to be proud of his skin, advice which she now couldn't tell if she regretted. She barked at Alex to shower when he got home, but the boy always "forgot." Amanda showered as much as she could, but the liquor store had been holding less and less water jugs when she went. She knew the day was coming where she'd show up and it'd be closed.

She exhaled, watching the dark air cloud up the moon. Alex picked Tampa over Georgia. If he had the call, he'd never leave Tampa. Amanda leaned forward, sticking her face in between the balcony

railing's bars. She spat. After a moment, she heard the *plip*.

## You Better Watch Out

(opening excerpt of novel)

The star on top is dimmer than all the lights below it. They designed the Workshop's windows to look like a tree from a distance, all coming up to the star on top: the singular, dim window for the one room on the twelfth floor. Below it are luxurious, flashing lights to display to the rest of us sitting over here—outside those windows—that the folks who live over here are nothing like the folks who live over there.

A garbage elf grumbles something at me from across the counter. His eyes are pitch black, skin grayed and bald like the rest of the ugly fucks, ears drooping in thin haired points. I pretend I didn't hear him.

The garbage elf growls, holding a hand out. I'm not even done eating and he's already expecting me to bolt. I don't speak his language and I don't want to. There are too many languages in Kringleton and that's half the reason these folks can't stop burning each others' apartments down.

"This was shit," I tell him, showing off the burger. I pull a full roach leg out of the patty, waving it in his face. "I could'a choked."

He scowls and carps on. His gums look slippery, like they couldn't even be holding his teeth, like he's

got a symbiotic relationship with slugs. Spit slides through them like an instant tide, towards and away from his brown tongue. In the red, neon lighting adorning his stall, he looks like a wrinkled chili come to life, his long, cracked, chili fingernails flailing about as he demands I pay before I finish eating his awful roach burger.

I can't look at him anymore. I tug at my coat, its black suede water-stained and crusted, as I fish around for cash. The garbage elf thinks he's slick, arm reaching under the stall, as if I can't tell there's a flare gun bolted to the inside. I can see the goddamn hole in the stall right at my crotch. I'm not assuming it's the world's slimiest glory hole.

I pull three deer from my wallet and lay them flat on the counter, one by one, their edges crumbling or ripped in half and taped back together. He can see I've got plenty more and the garbage elf scowls.

"Feev," he hisses, clacking his fingernail twice beside my three.

I stare. I put one thumb on the first deer, other thumb on the third deer, and pull them both back to me. Garbage elf gasps and throws both hands over mine, letting go of the flare gun. His hands feel like hard, wet sand as I can now drive the top of my skull into his long, drooping nose, launching him back against his grill. He shrieks as his greasy forearms catch fire like cotton kindling. He flings his arms

around, collapsing his body over them to smother them.

I leave the three deer.

The problem everyone has when they get to the eleventh floor is that there's that twelfth. Only ever been one inhabitant on the twelfth floor. And nobody replaces Him. Nobody goes in there but Him. Nobody else looks up and sees absolutely nothing. Though maybe the twelfth has a ceiling. It'd be cute if it was styrofoam. Maybe one of the elves could pop in through its tiles and peep down at Him in His chair, if He's got one. Look down from a height even He's never seen.

Only light in there's orange and faint, like a single lamp, probably still gas. Not like He could hire somebody to fix it up without them seeing what goes on up there. When I look at the window of the twelfth, I see the reflection of a hundred neon signs in a hundred languages each screaming the exact same thing: I'm not like you at all.

I arrive at the Naulist. When you're looking around the Atrium, you can see the shiny, beautiful Workshop, and can see the Naulist on the opposite wall. Used to be the prison for Kringleton before Permission came about. Now that it's been abandoned, place is free real estate. Nobody in

Kringleton comes here since they think it's full of serial killers, spirit addicts, all that jazz. Fact is it's full of nobody. When I got here about five months ago, I found the highest cell up. Got accents carved along the ceiling, a counter with a sink, a freshly broken door, and most importantly, a balcony.

There's a toilet but I covered it up; no plumbing. Gotta use the bathroom down the hall, one that was for the regular prisoners: just a hole going down all eight floors of the Naulist. The good thing is nobody lives on my floor. Nobody lives on the floor below. Pretty sure an elf lives a few floors below me, maybe the fourth floor, but he barricaded the doors from the stairwell. Once in a while I hear a crash from different spots below. Figure it's a wire exploding in the walls.

Looking at the Workshop from my balcony, I'm not sorry for the sucker that flew. An elf thrown off the eleventh floor is an elf born on the ninth at the absolute lowest, more likely the tenth. Elves in the Workshop are just about all "tolk" elves—tall, pale, light but thick hair. Tolks are the type of elves spending all their lives thinking they're gonna make the next red wagon. For one to fall down the whole atrium is for one to pass by the fourth floor for the first time in his life, see where he gets his wood, his plastic, where he get his complaints that there's half a

finger and half a pint of blood in this bucket of uncut Lincoln Logs. I'm told that he hit about half a dozen signs on his way down and only one Kringleton elf's complaining. Most signs in Kringleton are for dead businesses that the city keeps running—trying to keep the Atrium lighting up pretty. That one complainer's sign was level with the ninth floor; apparently they've got Workshop-front visibility.

First thing tomorrow, I'll take the train to the eleventh floor and get to ask a lot of fat elves why they didn't know anything. Way I figure the eleventh floor to be, all of them grabbed the elf at once, all of them threw the elf at once, all of them are planning on another sacrifice. They're being blackmailed by the highest performer on the tenth, or on the ninth who wants to be on the tenth. Things tend to slide up nice and linear on that side of town. Long as you're tolk.

I found a lawn chair a few weeks back that just fits the balcony. I found a wheel of eggnog cheese this morning at a stall down in Kringleton. I stare down at the neon-riddled city, chewing. Kringleton is the place where you work hard in order to leave as soon as possible. Problem is, you go in one direction, you hit the Workshop Wall, and they're not taking you in. Turn left, you're hitting the Mayoral Wall. Turn left again, you got my Naulist Wall. Turn left a last time, you're hitting the Maintenance Wall, or the

Brokes, where the garbage elves live. Underneath you's the sewers and ruins of the old garbage elf civilizations. Above you's the ceiling, featureless in its darkness. 'Bout a hundred years ago now, some lady tried flying a hot air balloon up to the ceiling to prove it wasn't even there. She hit it. Balloon went up in flames. She fell down to Kringleton, Lady Icarus landing in an ornament store and sending the whole thing up in flames. Good thing about the Atrium being a closed space is fires in Kringleton tend not to spread with the limited oxygen. Worst that'll happen is a few buildings catch and die out and you avoid going outside for a couple days as more air's pumped in from the Workshop.

No, you can't escape this place. I can only be thankful for the rumors about the Naulist, giving me room to breathe from all of them. I make sure never to have a flashlight or anything. Keep myself invisible. Soon as I'm at the Workshop tomorrow, I gotta ask how they found out where I was. Half the reason I agreed to helping them is 'cause I figured it'd be easier than disappearing even further. Nothing but the ceiling's darker than the Naulist.

Spent two hundred and five years living in the Workshop. Spent the last six months living outside of it, five of 'em on this balcony.

Silly how we build our lives on Jenga towers; one reckless moment and your life's done—leaving

you with maybe a quarter of what you had. Not even the decency of falling into ashes or better yet, nothing. You still got a quarter left and it's the part you never wanted to touch. Nobody keeps playing the game with the wreckage; takes one time for your life to fall apart for you to stop.

Now I'm living in a prison. Least, where they had prisons before Permission came about. I chew the cheese and look way left to the mayor's office. The forest green Capitol dome rests proud among pillars and arches and all kinds of hullabaloo on that wall. Nicest part of Kringleton are the blocks closest to that wall. But living there's its own kind of dangerous—headbutt the wrong burger vendor and wake up with a mayor's office flag impaled through your esophagus.

Coming close to fifty years ago, back when the Workshop had open doors and was on its worst behavior, soon-to-be Mayor Grenshaw ran on fighting wealth inequality, arguing that incarceration was encouraging poverty and criminality: prison was a system run by tolks to keep it so no outsiders could climb floors. Grenshaw won by some unclear majority and went rogue, decriminalizing *everything*. Everybody expected Him to come out and reverse Grenshaw—first time He'd shown His face since anybody here had been alive, and we'd been alive a long time. He didn't come out. Everybody had

Permission to do anything and for a while, nobody left their homes. Took a while for the Atrium to calm down and ease into the idea. That was the last time tolks interacted with Kringleton elves. Soon as Kringleton criminals had no punishment, tolks made their windows harder—really put their own society up in the Workshop. All the more impressive that they managed to break an elf through one.

Grenshaw tossed out limitations on term limits and now he's serving his third, no-contesting into a fourth soon. Rumors are that he was killed and his son took his place, keeping the facade alive. Doesn't matter: campaign still paints Permission like it's the nectar that keeps Kringleton going. It's hard to decide if Permission was good or bad for Kringleton. I don't think it's fair to pick good and bad. It was a change. For Kringleton to go back is another change. After thirty years, you got whispers of that being preferred.

I get to a green spot in the eggnog cheese and stop, eating around. Ends up being a solid fourth of the wheel. I toss it off the balcony. It won't hit anything but concrete.



It smells terrible on the train. The only Kringleton elves allowed to visit the Workshop are Kringleton elves delivering Kringleton food. The

exotic kinds you can't get in the Workshop. Tolks typically have cookies with ribbons of chocolate over 'em, rice fried up so it makes all kinds of sounds when you pour milk on it, bread that doesn't go bad but tastes like you're eating a brick of dried paint, and that's just about it. It's simple but it's clean.

Kringleton has deep-fried goldfish, mulled wine with spiced honey, ground cockroach burgers, hot cinnamon bourbon, curried guinea pig with mistletoe, cuttlefish cooked in its own ink, cookies covered in green and red sugar and shaped erotically, rats on sticks, roaches on sticks, elf ears on sticks, baked and peppered eggnog cheese, marijuana-infused fruit cake bites, and ground up reindeer antlers—lotta tolks have been swindled into believing that last one can replace medicine. They've also been swindled into believing that last one is actual ground up reindeer antlers.

So, it smells terrible on this train.

Elf in front of me has a big order. Tolk who ordered it paid extra for it to be gift-wrapped. Tolks in the Workshop love that shit; still feel like life has *good* surprises.

That big order's ribbon moved again. You can tell from ribbons: they don't bounce at all from the bumps on the train, but always jiggle from internal vibrations. There's an elf hiding in the package. Probably a kid. If you can sneak a kid into one of the

lower floors, they might just go unnoticed as an unsocialized factory worker. And making that happen's just about impossible: security'll X-ray incoming food packages to the point of cooking it again. Most tolks even order things a little rawer just to prepare for it. Most kids you try to sneak in fry like that.

There are better ways to sneak 'em in but nobody should be doing it. Life isn't good on the lower floors, especially if you're small and can reach into harder places. You don't want a job recalibrating Rubik's Cube factory lines—those things get back to work fast enough to swallow a kid by their fist and dice them in less than eight seconds. Best you're gonna get is dyeing Play-Doh, and that'll give you cerebral hypoxia in sufficient doses in the short run, full on pneumoconiosis by the end of your first decade working there. Like you've been huffing coal. You're better off dying in a box in an X-ray machine. Casket and cremation.

The train stops at the first checkpoint. It's a bullshit one. Guard walks through each car. Okays the whole train. Nobody gets a random inspection—least not tolks, keebs, or krisps. Garage elf might. It's really just for the tolk guard who was promised he'd die on the eighth someday, and here he is, three hundred years old and living on the sixth still. They need to rough up garbage elves once in awhile to

keep themselves from grabbing an air rifle, walking into a factory, and shooting everyone's eyes out.

Keebs are your Kringleton natives. Short. Real short. They got myths that they used to live in trees. Interbreeding with tolks gave you krisps—heights varying, hair and eye color varying. Who knows where the hell the garbage elves fit into that. For a lotta centuries there, garbage elves worked pest control. Only time you ever let a garbage elf in your apartment was to kill roaches and rats and the garbage elves did it without a single chirp. Now that everybody's pockets have gotten a littler draftier, garbage elves have been making bank whipping up roach burgers. A garbage elf kid'll never even make it on the fourth floor. Real easy to look at and figure that they deserve a bit of a busted lip.

Guard walks through. No trouble.

Next checkpoint is the same. If they're actually looking for something, they don't want us knowing what it is. One of these days, six hundred elves armed with twelve hundred firecrackers are gonna be on this train, ready to slaughter every tolk from the eighth floor up. Seventh if they're ambitious. You ever seen anybody shove a firecracker up somebody else's nasal cavity? Makes you really recognize how we're all built too. We're cutesy, meaty toys.

Till that fun day, two checkpoints is security theater.

We get out at the station on the Workshop's fifth and form a line, saying where we're delivering packages to. I gotta explain that I'm going to the eleventh and I don't have any packages and they gotta explain that that's impossible. They ask for my ID. I know I gotta do it. I still give them a hard time.

They look at it. First tolk to see it doesn't recognize my name. That's good.

Second does. He keeps quiet.

Third does too and just runs his fucking mouth:

“Cedar Gingerflakes?” he gawks, this shit-eating smile blossoming, framed by acne scars and a patchy goatee. “You’re...? Oh, my... Nahhh...!”

The second tolk squeezes his arm.

“No,” the third tolk continues. “I didn’t mean any—” He turns back to me, chuckling now. “There was this krisp with that name who used to—”

The third tolk then yelps, grabbing at his hand, which is currently wrapped under the crushing fist of the first tolk. The first tolk tries to take as even a breath as he can and hands me back my ID.

“We’ll call the eleventh for some double-checking, Mr. Gingerflakes,” the first tolk says, fingers trembling from how tight he’s squeezing. “We apologize if anything derogatory was communicated.”

I take the ID back. So, he recognized me. He’s just not a dick.

“Come the fuc—” the third tolk tries to pry his hand free. “He’s not...! Can you let go?!”

The first tolk nods me over to a bench I can wait at. I go. Soon as I sit, I can hear the third tolk gasping in relief.

“That’s not...!” he cries, humming in distress.  
“That’s... That’s... *That’s...?*”

Fucking yes.

That’s.

GRAND RIVER  
*(screenplay)*

FADE IN:

EXT. GRAND RIVER - DAY - 2014

EMILY (7) stares down at her reflection in the Grand River. She's got frizzy, brown hair dangling all the way down to the water, half-cocooning her face.

She leans forward and dips her hair in the lake, watching the ripples make her face indecipherable.

*SPLASH!* Emily jumps, seeing heavy ripples. Looking twenty yards ahead of her, a TREE BRANCH plops up to the surface.

Emily looks up: MAYA (5) is BARELY HOLDING ONTO the pine tree hanging over the river. She squirms to get another hand on its trunk, but SLIPS and FALLS DOWN TO THE WATER.

Maya submerges. Emily is frozen.

EMILY  
(whispered)  
Maya...?!

Maya plops up to the surface,  
FLAILING.

EMILY

Maya!

Maya tries to yell, but keeps sinking under. She hugs onto the floating tree branch, but it SPINS, DUNKING HER.

EMILY

Oh, no... Oh, no...  
Maya!

Emily SPRINGS INTO THE WATER, running along the river floor. Maya is STILL UNDER THE BRANCH.

Emily stops, not able to touch the river floor anymore. She's JUST OUT OF REACH, smacking at the soaked branch bristles.

EMILY

(pushing lips  
over water)

Maya!

The branch spins up as Maya GASPS IN AIR. Maya frantically searches,

spotting Emily and kicking towards her.

Emily GRABS THE BRANCH, pulling herself up, DUNKING THEM BOTH. She kicks backward, bringing the sinking branch towards the shore.

EXT. GRAND RIVER - MOMENTS LATER

Emily and Maya lie on the shore, breathing heavily. Emily musters all her energy to push herself onto her elbows and move to Maya, hanging over her.

EMILY

Do you need Mom...?

Maya...!

Maya heaves and shakes Emily away, unable to look away from the broken tree.

EMILY

Maya, tell me if you can see my fingers.

Emily holds two fingers up to Maya's nose as Maya looks right through them.

EMILY

Maya? Hey... hey...

Maya?

Maya wheezes. Emily collapses on her arm, hugging her tight.

EMILY

Please don't let  
this happen...  
*Please. Please,*  
don't let this  
happen. *Please.*

Maya huffs incoherently, trying to speak. Emily brings herself up again, looking down at Maya.

EMILY

Maya!

MAYA

(incoherent)

I saw Him.

EMILY

Can you breathe?

Maya shakes her head, she WHEEZES. A SMILE blossoms on Maya's face as she slowly HUGS HERSELF.

MAYA

(incoherent)

I saw Him. It's a  
miracle.

EMILY

Maya, do you need  
to...? What do I...?  
Oh, G-d. Please be  
okay. Please,  
please, don't be  
now.

Maya POINTS TO THE SKY. Emily looks  
up after her finger.

CUT TO BLACK.

TEXT: *GRAND RIVER*

FADE IN:

EXT. METRO-DETROIT JEWISH ACADEMY -  
DAY - 2019

TERRA (25) sits on the hood of her  
2001 RED CHEVY MALIBU, checking her  
smartphone.

She sees a YOUNG GIRL (12) coming  
towards her, struggling with a

ROLLING BACKPACK and REGULAR BACKPACK.

Terra makes a quick peek back in the car: the glove compartment is CLOSED. Terra turns back to the Young Girl and approaches with a smile.

YOUNG GIRL

Are you Terra?

TERRA

That's me. Lemme help you with those.

YOUNG GIRL

Took ya long enough.

Terra takes the backpacks from the Young Girl, giving them a speedy inspection as she drags them to the trunk.

The Young Girl gets to the passenger seat as Terra opens the trunk, plopping in the rolling backpack.

Fast as lightning, Terra UNZIPS the rolling backpack, peeks in, and RE-

ZIPS it. Terra grabs the other backpack, puts it on top of the rolling backpack, UNZIPS, and peeks.

Without even seeing it first, Terra SWIPES A LAPTOP, throwing it in a POUCH in the side of the trunk. She grabs a \$20 BILL and pockets it. She re-zips the backpack, closing the trunk.

EXT. METRO-DETROIT JEWISH ACADEMY -  
MOMENTS LATER

The red Malibu DRIVES OFF, having been WATCHED by an older Maya (10), who waits with an older Emily (12). The LYFT LOGO glows in the back window of the Malibu.

Maya gawks to Emily, who missed the pickpocket. Emily looks to the sidewalk, morose. Maya turns to face the disappearing Malibu, coming up with something.

INT. TERRA'S CAR - LATER

Terra slows down as they reach the Huntington Woods suburb, Terra's mounted smartphone saying they're TWO MINUTES AWAY. The Young Girl is ASLEEP.

Terra sees that the Young Girl's sweating in her sleep. Terra turns the A/C up a tiny bit.

EXT. HUNTINGTON WOODS SUBURB -  
LATER

Terra pulls both backpacks out of the trunk, placing them on the road, as the Young Girl collects them.

TERRA

Need me to carry  
these in your house?

YOUNG GIRL

I can do it.

TERRA

You're paying me to  
be helpful --

however I can be  
that.

The Young Girl frowns at Terra,  
weirded out. She rolls her backpack  
up the driveway as Terra watches.

The Young Girl reaches her front  
door, struggling to open it.  
Terra's about to advance when the  
Girl successfully unlocks it. Terra  
nods and heads back to her car.

INT. TERRA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Terra sits, opening her glove  
compartment, revealing a trove of  
JEWELRY, PILL BOTTLES, WEED  
BAGGIES, and CASH.

She deposits the \$20 bill.

INT. LEVIN HOUSE - MAYA'S ROOM -  
NIGHT

Maya lies in bed, thinking. She  
looks to an OPENED ENVELOPE on her  
nightstand. It's got yellowing  
paper and "MAYA LEVIN" in browning  
cartography.

The room is covered wall-to-wall in BOOKS, all of their covers flashing a PULITZER, MAN BOOKER, NEWBERY, etc. There are MAPS of different countries from opposite corners of the world with THUMBTACKS in the old locations for the Ancient Wonders: Pyramids of Giza, Temple of Artemis, etc.

INT. LEVIN HOUSE - EMILY'S ROOM -  
SAME TIME

Emily sits in bed, looking to her open doorway. Her room is tidy to the point of uninhabitance.

The house is dead quiet as Emily stands. Just as she does so, Maya ARRIVES in her doorway. Emily quickly sits.

The two stare at one another for a moment, melancholic and exhausted. Maya goes to Emily's bed, lying down and throwing the covers over herself. Emily gets under the covers as well.

Maya looks to the wall, Emily worriedly looks to Maya, staring holes into her back.

EMILY  
I'm here still.

Maya doesn't respond, just looks at the blank wall.

INT. TERRA'S CAR - NIGHT

Terra sits, bored, as a podcast plays on her car speakers.

Terra gets a *DING!* on her smartphone. She looks, and it's a ride request from the far away Farmington Hills. She taps "DECLINE", looking to the massive houses around her, waiting.

EXT. LEVIN HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - MORNING

Emily drops her backpack and inspects the wheels of the family 2019 CADILLAC CT6. All the tires are DEFLATED. Emily looks to Maya, who stands on the edge of the

driveway, swiping through a SMARTPHONE.

Maya's on the LYFT APP. She gets a new driver for a route to the school, takes a look at him, and CANCELS. She orders another Lyft. She waits. New driver. Looks. CANCELS.

Emily grabs her backpack and goes to Maya, who squints at the smartphone, smiling: she FINALLY got TERRA WITH THE RED CHEVY MALIBU. Maya pockets the phone as Emily reaches her.

EMILY

Dad's too dense to get when you're up to something.

MAYA

He doesn't care.

EMILY

Stop fishing for indirect praise.

MAYA

He's got his own  
Lyft to work.

(re:

smartphone)

Won't be missing one  
phone for the day.

EMILY

Just for the *day*,  
yeah?

Maya smirks. Her sister's the only  
one who can follow her.

EMILY

For someone who  
thinks they're the  
messiah, you're an  
asshole.

MAYA

For someone so  
intent on me  
sleeping in the same  
room as you, you're  
a heavy sleeper.

Emily tries to respond, but sighs.

EMILY

Maya... Just tell me  
this isn't  
anything...  
y'know...  
irreversible you're  
about to do.

MAYA

If you believe that  
any act can have  
permanent  
consequences, then  
all acts do -- And I  
don't think I'm the  
*messiah*.

Maya takes Emily's hand. Emily sighs and grips back.

INT. TERRA'S CAR - MORNING

Terra arrives at the address for a "JOSHUA," seeing Maya and Emily on the driveway. Terra pumps her fist under the wheel and parks the car.

EXT. LEVIN HOUSE - DRIVEWAY -  
MOMENTS LATER

Emily and Maya watch as Terra gets out of the car.

TERRA  
(charismatic)  
Which one of you is  
Joshua?

Neither of the girls laugh. Maya walks to Terra.

MAYA  
(extending  
hand)  
Maya Levin. My  
sister and I need a  
ride to school.

Terra shakes as Emily walks past Maya and goes to the backseat door.

TERRA  
(jumping to  
Emily)  
I can help you with  
your backpack!

EMILY

I got it.

TERRA

No, really! You're  
paying me to!

EMILY

Thank you. I got it.

TERRA

Come on! It'll be  
fun! Like I'm your  
valet!

Emily pauses outside the backseat door, not smiling. Still staring at Terra, she pulls at the handle.

MAYA

(to Terra)

It's been a rough morning -- our dad's car was vandalized. Let me ask you: have you ever been convicted of a felony?

Terra frowns, looking back to Maya.

TERRA

No.

MAYA

Misdemeanor?

TERRA

No.

MAYA

It's important to  
tell me the truth:  
what's the worst  
thing you've ever  
done?

Terra stares, a little thrown off.

TERRA

All right, kid,  
let's just get in  
the car.

Maya stares Terra down. Terra  
frowns and shifts awkwardly.

Maya's face then LIGHTS UP, happy  
in her assessment.

MAYA

Perfect!

(to Emily)  
Let's go to school!

Maya goes past Terra as Terra furrows her brow.

TERRA  
I can hold your bag  
in the front seat so  
you have room.

Maya shakes her head, almost scoffing.

INT. TERRA'S CAR - LATER

Terra drives. She looks in the rearview, seeing Emily and Maya with their backpacks on their laps.

TERRA  
You two gonna need a ride back after school, too?

MAYA  
Stop right here.

Emily and Terra both frown.

TERRA  
What?

MAYA  
(holding mouth)  
I have food  
poisoning -- I'm  
going to vomit in  
your car!

TERRA  
What are you talking  
about?

Maya fakes a dry heave. Terra PULLS  
OVER.

TERRA  
Woah, just -- !

Maya manually unlocks the door as  
the car HALTS.

EXT. HUNTINGTON WOODS STREET -  
CONTINUOUS

Maya jumps into a bush, pulling out  
TWO PACKED DUFFEL BAGS.

INT. TERRA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Maya opens the back door, throwing  
both bags on top of a STUNNED

EMILY. The bags say "JORDYN'S JAMBOREE -- 3/14/15".

EMILY

Maya! You little --

(to Terra)

Ma'am, don't listen  
to her!

Maya then hops into the passenger seat.

TERRA

(surprised)

Hey, what's going  
on, friend?

MAYA

I'm feeling better -  
- keep driving but  
pull past the drop  
off line.

TERRA

I'm...

Terra sees cars behind her and pulls forward, but continues the route on her phone.

EMILY

Maya, you're not  
roping a stranger  
into your cries for  
help.

MAYA

They're not cries  
for help, they're  
part of G-d's plan.

EMILY

I'm older than you -  
- I am nearly a  
*woman* -- and I am  
telling you right  
now to --

MAYA

Not until I'm  
hoisting a chair,  
you're not.

TERRA

Is everything good?

Maya looks around the car.

MAYA  
(to Terra)

*This neighborhood at  
this time is ideal  
for a certain  
business practice,  
wouldn't you say?*

(looking ahead)  
That's the pick-up  
line. Don't get in  
it. We're changing  
course.

Maya opens the arm rest, which  
Terra quickly snaps down. Terra  
gets into the pick-up line.

TERRA  
Excuse me?

Maya opens the arm rest again,  
causing Terra to shove it down  
again. Maya opens it again, Terra  
shoves it down, now holding her arm  
down on it, gawking at Maya.

Maya then smiles and opens the  
glove compartment, revealing  
TERRA'S STOLEN STASH.

Terra's EYES GO WIDE as Maya beams.

MAYA

Do you have a  
prescription for  
these stolen pills?

EMILY

(blown away)

Oh, no...

TERRA

How did you...?

Terra slams the glove compartment shut, looking to see if any of the kids on the sidewalk noticed.

TERRA

Woah, woah, woah!  
This ride's over!  
Get out!

MAYA

I caught you  
pickpocketing from  
children and your  
first response is to  
let me go free?

TERRA  
What?!

MAYA  
I cancelled five  
Lyfts till we got  
you; but you're  
consistent in your  
prowling.

Terra pulls out of the pick-up  
line, panicking.

MAYA  
Don't do anything  
rash and be sure to  
complete the ride.

Maya undoes the top two buttons of  
her shirt, revealing that  
underneath she has TEN HAMSA  
NECKLACES, some PURE SILVER. Terra  
sees this and gawks at them.

MAYA  
I'm not here to get  
you in trouble, I'm  
here to do the  
opposite. I want to  
pay you for a ride -

- but it needs to be off the books.

Emily realizes what's going on.

EMILY

Oh, my -- You're not doing this.

MAYA

(to Terra)

We're going to Saugatuck.

EMILY

(facepalming)

Maya...

MAYA

And neither the police nor your employer will be notified about your entrepreneurship.  
Deal?

TERRA

What...?

EMILY

Maya, you're being  
an infant! I'm not  
going with you!

MAYA

(to Emily)

I'll get to you in a  
sec; the driver  
obviously needs her  
ultimatum before you  
do.

(to Terra)

A trip to Saugatuck  
averages to about  
two hundred dollars  
from Huntington  
Woods -- don't drive  
off from here before  
you complete the  
ride -- and these  
necklaces are worth  
ten times that. This  
is my dad's phone he  
gave us for the day  
so we could Lyft  
back later. My dad  
would be able to  
access this ride

history online, and therefore that we're going to Saugatuck, which means this ride cannot be on the books. I pay you with these necklaces, you take us to Saugatuck -- it's about three hours -- and neither of us ever speak about seeing each other in your red Chevy Malibu, Terra. License plate: TRB-046.

Terra slows the car and stares at Maya, unsure of what to do. She drives past the end of the drop-off line, PULLING OVER.

TERRA

Okay, what is going on right now?

EMILY

My sister is blackmailing you

into a ride across  
the state because  
she's reckless and  
immature.

### MAYA

The kinda blackmail  
where you stand to  
gain two thousand  
dollars. I am not  
here to tattle,  
that's simply option  
two. Option one is  
you drive us, you  
get silver  
necklaces, no one  
knows. Option two is  
you don't drive us,  
you don't get these  
necklaces, you  
receive a thorough  
investigation into  
whatever I choose to  
have lost on this  
ride; which opens  
all kinds of  
investigations based  
on contacting

previous rides in  
your history.

Terra stares, then taps "RIDE COMPLETE" on her phone, still trying to process.

TERRA

What just...? What?

EMILY

Maya, I'm not doing  
this.

Maya looks back at Emily, then to Terra.

MAYA

Stop the car for a  
moment.

TERRA

Okay, kid, what is  
going --

MAYA

Stop the car. You  
already skipped the  
drop off line  
without dropping us  
off so I can claim

you tried to kidnap  
us.

Terra throws her hands up and STOPS THE CAR, not having any other choice. Maya looks back to Emily.

EMILY

Just because you think G-d saved you from drowning one time doesn't mean you have a higher purpose that excuses your --

MAYA

This phone will be getting a call in an hour -- Dad is the primary contact in their phonebook.  
When it's called, Terra -- since she's got the deepest voice -- will either excuse one of her daughters or both of them... Emily...  
This is it. I'm

going where G-d  
wants me to. Where  
They told me to.  
You're supposed to  
be there as well.

(turning  
forward)

But I'm your sister,  
not your guardian.  
Only G-d is that.

Emily just stares, then looks at  
the duffel bags, then looks at the  
school to their right. On the  
school's front lawn, a large, DEAD  
TREE BRANCH rests -- having fallen  
recently enough to not be disposed  
of.

MAYA  
(turning back  
again)

I packed all of your  
valuables, favorite  
clothes, two books  
of poetry I've been  
asking you to read  
for a while now,  
your laptop and

charger, and I don't want you to be gone from my life.

Emily looks to Maya, sighing and shaking her head.

EMILY  
(deciding)  
Put your seatbelt back on.

Maya nods, then looks to Terra, who glares back.

The two stare at one another.

TERRA  
What just happened?  
What is going on?!  
Why do you talk that way?

MAYA  
You're going to be driving three hours West. You're going to make two thousand dollars, depending on your skills as a fence. The less

questions you ask,  
the less I will.  
That sounds great  
for our  
circumstances.

EMILY  
(tired)  
She talks that way  
because she skipped  
two grades out of  
her own volition.  
She was *supposed* to  
skip six. She thinks  
it's a personality.  
She's gauging  
necklace prices, *I'm*  
assuming, based on  
eBay --

MAYA  
Lowered a touch if I  
understand  
underground resale  
values.

EMILY  
And those necklaces  
belong to our  
mother.

MAYA  
*Step-mother.*

EMILY  
Our *mother*. I  
wouldn't agree to  
any deal with her.  
But if she made this  
plan based on you  
being --

TERRA  
Two necklaces now.

Maya smiles and removes one  
necklace, opening the glove  
compartment and plopping it in.

MAYA  
One more when we're  
out of Detroit.

EMILY  
(to Terra)  
Really? You're  
enabling this  
behavior? I don't  
want to go to Saug-  
this literally *is*  
kidnapping.

Terra taps her smartphone to go  
"OFF DUTY."

TERRA

You got necklaces  
too? No?

(nodding)

Then I've talked  
outta worse.

Emily sighs. Maya looks back at  
her.

EMILY

(to Maya)

I'm giving you a run  
for your money, I  
just need a second.

Maya grins and faces forward again.

INT. TERRA'S CAR - LATER

They're on the freeway, the sun  
higher in the sky. It seems clear  
that nobody has been doing any  
talking.

Maya and Emily's dad's smartphone  
rings, the number being a 248 area

code. Maya stares, thinks, and looks to Terra.

MAYA

We're Maya and Emily. We have fevers. The receptionist is Pat.

Maya hands the ringing phone to Terra, who answers it.

TERRA

(lower register)

Hello?

A voice speaks for a moment on the other side.

TERRA

Well, here you are calling me and here I am forgetting.

Yes, my girls both came down with such a fever -- the two of them, yes.

Thanks, Pat.

(beat;  
listening)

Yes, I know! I feel  
awful! This  
weather's for  
playing, not  
sneezing.

Maya looks back at Emily, who  
refuses to look at her.

TERRA

Oh, you never know  
with these things.  
I'd certainly expect  
them to be a couple  
days...

The other voice speaks for a bit on  
this, agreeing.

EMILY

(hushed; not  
looking)

You're not gonna get  
away with this.

TERRA

Thank you so much --  
goodbye.

Terra hangs up. Maya takes the phone.

MAYA

(to Emily)

Read your brochure.  
It's got plenty to  
think about.

EMILY

No.

A traffic jam's formed up ahead.  
Terra turns to exit.

The exit sign, interesting enough,  
has NO INFORMATION ON IT. Maya  
removes a second necklace, putting  
it in the glove compartment.

INT. TERRA'S CAR - LATER

They're on a two lane highway,  
surrounded on both sides by trees.  
There's still been a lot of  
silence. Terra looks around,  
confused by the lack of cars.

Terra looks to her smartphone on  
its dock, which shows a long blue  
line for where they need to go, but

the navigation isn't moving due to  
NO SERVICE in the corner.

Terra shifts, sighing. She keeps driving.

TERRA

So... Maya and...?

Terra looks to Emily through the rearview then looks to Maya.

MAYA

Emily.

TERRA

Riiight... You,  
uh... do a lot of  
this kinda stuff?

EMILY

No.

MAYA

Yes.

Terra nods.

TERRA

Wanna throw on  
Spotify?

EMILY

No, thank you.

MAYA

If you'd like.

TERRA

Good.

(to Emily)

I'm listening to the  
crazy one.

Terra fiddles with her phone,  
struggling to get any connection,  
while they talk:

EMILY

You're listening to  
the one with two  
grand on her. Who  
raised you? Wolves?  
Very greedy wolves?

MAYA

Don't impose.

EMILY

I am not a guest to  
my own kidnapping.

MAYA

That word's moot  
here. I asked if you  
wanted to get out of  
the car.

EMILY

Terra, ask if she's  
gonna need a return  
trip.

TERRA

Are there more  
necklaces?

EMILY

That's not the  
point.

TERRA

(to Maya)

Kinda is, man.

EMILY

If she doesn't need  
a return trip on a  
ride she doesn't  
want her parents to  
know about, you can  
assume you were the

last, documented person with a couple of *to-be-missing* children. I'll add that she didn't leave a note.

MAYA

(to Terra)

Don't sell the necklaces *right off* the bat --

EMILY

You can't sell them at all! Bury them. Deny ever having them.

Terra comprehends, pulling her hand away from the phone.

TERRA

Wait -- So you're running away-away?

MAYA

Running to.

EMILY

And didn't leave a note. She's vanishing -- conveniently, in your car.

(to Maya)

Terra's going to have to tell the cops exactly where she dropped us off -- tell them everything. You didn't think this through because, in the end, you are a child, not --

MAYA

You're a child as well, and one that got into a recognized private school because I did.

(to Terra)

*If* you get in that position, you wouldn't have to

admit to the other pickpocketing. This was simply your first time. You have no prior charges.

EMILY

You didn't get me into that school, a donation did. You're throwing a random woman under the bus just because you like bumpy rides.

MAYA

(to Terra)

You're fine.

(to Emily)

You're attempting to appeal to pathos, which doesn't --

TERRA

Oh, my -- Can you two stop talking for a second?! *What is going on?!*

EMILY

If she doesn't rat  
you out for being a  
pickpocket, then *I*  
will. *Unless* you  
drive us back.

MAYA

Same potential  
consequences as  
going forward, minus  
two grand --

EMILY

You won't sell them  
--

TERRA

Why do you -- ?! Who  
*raised* you two?

EMILY

Don't impose.

MAYA

Our stepmother is a  
rabbi and our father  
writes for the Free  
Press.

EMILY

Our *mother* is a  
retired neurologist  
and our father is a  
casual venture  
capitalist. Maya  
doesn't like her  
life so she  
exaggerates it.

MAYA

Emily doesn't like  
life, period, so she  
denies it's  
happening around  
her.

Emily is about to respond, then  
sighs and looks out the window.  
Terra's mentally KO'd.

TERRA

All right, how about  
--

(swerving)

HOLY SHIT!

Terra narrowly misses a PALE HORSE  
SITTING IN THE ROAD, the car going  
off the road and INTO A SLIGHT

DITCH. Emily LAUNCHES herself forward to try to secure Maya, but her seatbelt PULLS HER BACK.

Once the car hits its stop, the inhabitants are fine. Just a moment of off-roading. All breathe heavily for a moment.

Emily looks to Maya, whose chin quivers, terrified for her life. Terra just looks right ahead, then double-takes and looks behind them. She unbuckles and hops out of the car.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Sure enough, as Terra gets onto the car-less road, there's a horse sitting like a dog, staring at her.

It NEIGHS and gets to its feet, BOLTING INTO THE TREES.

Terra grabs her hair, unsure of what just happened.

INT. TERRA'S CAR - SAME TIME

Emily puts her hand on Maya's shoulder. Maya FLINCHES, then sees it's Emily's hand and cools down. Maya clutches her Hamsa necklaces, trying to steady her breathing.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - SAME TIME

Terra gawks, the horse now disappearing amongst the trees.

TERRA

What...? What the hell, dude...?

Terra looks back at the car, checking the damage.

She goes to the front: NOT A SCRATCH.

INT. TERRA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Terra gets in and breathes, finally looking to the girls.

TERRA  
Uh... S-uhhh... Uh,  
well, okay -- Uhh...  
Are you okay?

MAYA  
(quick)  
Yes.

TERRA  
Uh -- We -- Okay, we  
-- Holy cow, dude,  
did you -- Did you  
see that?!

Emily shakes her head.

TERRA  
No, I...! Oh, my G-  
d...

MAYA  
(voice shaking)  
Don't take His name  
in vain!

Terra's mind races as she finds her words.

TERRA

(to Maya)

Okay... first of all

-- No, first of all,

I do have a record,

so nobody's gonna be

snitching and we'll

figure that out in a

-- No, first of all,

there was a straight  
up horse in the road

-- Oh, shit, no,

first of all,

everyone okay?

The two girls are terrified. Terra  
puts the car in reverse.

TERRA

All right, cool.

Terra looks back, presses the gas,  
and the CAR DOESN'T MOVE. She  
frowns.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Emily and Terra are in front of the  
car, PUSHING, as Maya sits in the

driver's seat, REVVING. The car's pulling up mud, STUCK IN THE DITCH.

Emily and Terra release, exhausted.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - LATER

The three of them lean on the car, Terra and Maya both on their phones. Terra holds her phone high -- NO SERVICE. Terra shoves her face into her hands.

MAYA

(to both of  
them)

Okay. You're gonna stay here. I'm gonna walk till I find service -- we passed an intersection a few miles back. I can see if there are signs for anything -

EMILY

No. We're children and children are prime targets for

abduction. We're not going anywhere without Terra.

MAYA

(sighing)

Fine. Terra, you're

--

TERRA

We're not leaving this car here without anybody watching it!

MAYA

We have to.

(removing  
backpack)

You can put all your contraband in my backpack.

Terra looks to Maya, then sighs and goes to the passenger side door.

EMILY

If we walk from here, we can be hit.  
We aren't leaving.

Maya holds her smartphone to the sky.

EMILY

We're not gonna be able to get another Lyft out here.

MAYA

I know that.

EMILY

We have to find a new way back.

MAYA

We're not going back.

Terra returns with a full backpack.

EMILY

If we make it back before Dad gets home, which is in... what time is it now?

MAYA

Eleven.

EMILY

Good, so let's shoot  
for four o'clock,  
which is in five  
hours, and we drove  
less than two...

MAYA

Terra was making  
good time.

EMILY

That's plenty of  
time to figure this  
out -- we should be  
gold. We were called  
out. We go back to  
school tomorrow with  
sniffles. We forget  
this ever happened.  
No one has to know  
we did this.

TERRA

All right, so let's  
just... You're  
running away, yeah?  
What's in Saugatuck?

MAYA

G-d.

Terra nods, frowning.

TERRA

Cool...

EMILY

She thinks she's not  
kidding.

MAYA

I'm not.

TERRA

Yeah?

Maya pulls out the YELLOWED  
ENVELOPE from her pocket, waving it  
around before putting it back in  
her pocket.

MAYA

G-d invited us.

Terra throws her hands up, leaving  
this alone. As she turns away, sees  
something in the distance.

MAYA

(to Emily)

Your brochure's in  
your duffel bag.  
Unopened.

EMILY

I'm not going to  
subject myself to  
seduction.

TERRA

Folks, there's a  
car.

Maya and Emily look:

Sure enough, way in the distance,  
there's a LARGE, BLACK CAR parked  
on the side of the road.

TERRA

Was that there a  
second ago?

Neither of the girls answer, also  
confused.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - LATER

The three approach the car with their bags, Terra carrying a backpack and a duffel bag. As they get closer, they see the car's a 1991 LINCOLN TOWN CAR HEARSE.

Terra reaches the driver door and peeks in, not seeing anybody. She pulls the handle: LOCKED.

MAYA

Can you break into it?

EMILY

We're not doing that.

Terra looks around: nobody in either direction. Emily goes to the back, reading the etched company information.

EMILY

Swanson Funeral Company. Lansing, Michigan.

MAYA

Is there a body in  
the back?

EMILY

Of course there  
isn't.

MAYA

We don't know that.

EMILY

We can't take this  
back to Detroit.  
Lansing isn't too  
far from here, but  
if a hearse is all  
the way --

TERRA

We're not taking it  
back to Detroit. If  
anything, we're  
taking it somewhere  
with a phone. We'll  
figure out what the  
plan is from there.

MAYA

So you can break  
into it?

TERRA

I mean... Thing's  
gotta be like thirty  
years old...? Do you  
have a wire coat  
hanger in your bag?

Maya sets down her duffel bag and opens it, pulling a DRESS ON A HANGER out from the top. She plucks out the hanger, giving it to Terra.

Terra takes the hanger and straightens it out, keeping the hook's shape. Maya quickly folds the dress and hops to Terra, observing. Emily looks away.

Terra pauses, feeling Maya staring.

MAYA

What?

TERRA

It's just...

Terra thinks about it.

TERRA  
Come here.

Maya gets closer. Terra peels back the window's black, rubber strip, shoving the hook end between that and the window.

TERRA  
That's weather stripping. You gotta get real low. You're looking for a pin. You want that pin to go --  
(pointing towards rear)  
*That direction.*

Terra steps back, still holding the hanger. When Maya realizes she's being invited to try, her eyes light up and she rushes to take the hanger.

Maya grunts to no avail. Emily shakes her head.

TERRA  
It's gonna be lower.

Maya hits resistance and gasps.

TERRA

There you go. Don't  
lose it. It's gonna  
be pretty hard to  
get it.

Maya struggles, looking to the door lock knob for wiggles. She loses the pin and pouts.

TERRA

Try again.

Terra looks around for no cars coming as Maya tries again. She finds the pin, giving it a careful push. Just like that, the LOCK KNOB BUDGES.

TERRA

Good-good-good-good-good!  
You're on it.  
Reel it in. Nice and gentle.

Maya grunts and tugs the wire, UNLOCKING THE CAR. She gasps in delight and OPENS THE DOOR. She looks to Terra, who grins.

TERRA

Great. And now, you  
broke into a car,  
not me.

Maya frowns as Terra nudges her aside, peeking in.

INT. HEARSE - CONTINUOUS

Terra pulls the driver sun visor down, then the passenger's.  
Nothing. She opens the glove compartment. Nothing. She opens the arm rest. Nothing. She glowers.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Maya's trying to refold the hanger. Emily's trying to peek in through the back windows.

TERRA

No keys.

MAYA

Lemme look.

Maya throws down the hanger and hops in. Emily pulls back.

EMILY

There's a casket in  
there.

MAYA (O.S.)

Let's check the  
casket!

TERRA

There's a *what*?

EMILY

Don't open it!

MAYA (O.S.)

Oh, wow, there *is*!

Maya throws open the back doors  
from the inside; she crawled over  
the partition.

INT/EXT. HEARSE - CONTINUOUS

Sure enough, there's a WEATHERED,  
BABY BLUE CASKET with a NOTE taped  
on it. Maya feels around for the  
casket's opening.

TERRA

Hey! Hold on!

EMILY  
Maya!

MAYA

The keys might be in  
here!

EMILY

We can't steal a car  
and we *definitely*  
can't open a casket!

Maya can't find the opening. She  
sees the NOTE and takes it,  
reading. Her eyes go wide.

MAYA

(looking to  
casket)

No kidding...

Maya continues reading, then looks  
to the front of the hearse. She  
leans through the partition,  
opening the sunglasses holder,  
revealing the HEARSE'S KEYS.

The three stare at the keys.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Door open, Terra STARTS THE HEARSE, the car sputtering to life. Emily and Maya stand outside the door, Maya still reading the note.

TERRA

What's the note say?

EMILY

I'm gonna have to deny that this happened later.

MAYA

Cover your ears.

Emily does so, and hums a prayer.

MAYA

(reading)

"My name is Feature Swanson. My uncle owned the funeral home. My father drove the hearses. I sat shotgun. I am in this coffin and ask that you don't bother me. It's odd

spending your life  
at funerals; feels  
odd for me to have  
one. I'd rather not.  
Instead, I'd like to  
be kept in the  
hearse forever. You  
can use it if you'd  
like. I'm not gonna  
be selfish over a  
perfectly good car.  
The keys are in the  
sunglasses holder,  
just be sure to put  
the hearse back on  
the side of the road  
when you're done,  
and it'd be kind if  
you refill the tank  
if it's under half."

Maya taps Emily's shoulder twice  
and Emily uncovers her ears. Terra  
marinates in this, looking back at  
the coffin. She looks to the fuel  
level: NEARLY EMPTY. Maya goes to  
the passenger side.

MAYA

Are you getting in  
or should we scrape  
you up later?

EMILY

There are only two  
seats up front.

MAYA

I'll go in the back.

EMILY

There's no seatbelt  
back there.

MAYA

No -- okay, I'll sit  
on your lap.

EMILY

The airbag would  
break your face.

TERRA

Oh, my Gooooodness.  
I'll go slow.

Emily fidgets. She doesn't get in.

EMILY

(to Terra)

We're just gonna go  
find service, right?  
And then back to  
Detroit?

MAYA

We're not going  
back.

EMILY

Maya, we're done  
doing this! You're  
not the one who can  
drive, so you're not  
the one who can make  
decisions!

MAYA

I *probably* could  
drive. Terra, you're  
looking to find  
spiritual  
significance, aren't  
you? You pickpocket  
to find purpose?  
Have a tangible  
impact on the world?

TERRA

Uhh... I was just  
looking at the  
necklaces.

MAYA

No, you weren't, but  
let's keep that if  
it works. Em, you  
had your ultimatum  
outside the school.  
If I have to give  
you one every hour,  
I will, but you'll  
pick the same thing  
every time.

Emily stares, then looks away from  
Maya, seeing the forest.

MAYA

I need to do this.  
You know that. Moses  
couldn't do it  
without his Aaron.

EMILY

And Abel couldn't  
get killed without  
his Cain...

The forest floor is COVERED IN DEAD BRANCHES. Emily shakes her head, wincing.

MAYA

No. G-d invited you because G-d loves the two of us together.

Maya SMILES and subconsciously HUGS HERSELF.

MAYA

It's your call if we're staying that way.

Emily stares, then looks to Terra.

EMILY

You're the one who can stop this.

MAYA

(excited)

Oh! Is she Seth?

Emily ignores Maya, looking dead into Terra's eyes.

Terra stares back, confused and idle. She looks over to Maya's backpack, then Maya. She returns to look to Emily.

TERRA

Uh-huh... Yeah, I  
really shouldn't...  
be the one to decide  
your whole thing  
with... Yeah. No.

Emily sighs disappointedly at Terra.

INT. HEARSE - MOMENTS LATER

They pull away, Maya sitting on Emily's lap and Emily covering Maya's face with her hands.

Terra struggles to roll the window down using the rusted, manual window crank.

TERRA

How good are you at  
gauging distance?  
Either of you?

MAYA

I am. I was able to

--

TERRA

When we hit a road,  
we gotta get the  
name of it, then  
gauge how far back  
my car was. I don't  
know the name of the  
road we're on now.

EMILY

Does that mean --

TERRA

We were miles from  
the last  
intersection, I  
honestly don't know  
if this tank has  
enough gas for that.  
We're gonna go ahead  
to the next  
intersection for gas  
or a phone and loop  
back to my car.

Terra looks in the rearview to see Emily's worried face looking out the window.

TERRA

Okay, so... Can we talk about where you're *going*? You're running away to find G-d?

MAYA

Yes.

EMILY

Maya got a letter from a cult.

MAYA

(to Terra)

It's not a cult and both of us got them. There's a synagogue in Saugatuck that has a direct line to G-d. They've communicated with G-d for centuries. They've invited us as pilgrims. Emily's

letter came a day  
after mine. As a  
result, she's  
refused to open it.

EMILY

Because Maya's was  
very clear that it's  
a cult, and Maya  
roped me into her  
little exodus.

MAYA

It's not an exodus.

TERRA

Kid, that's a cult.

Maya frustratedly sighs and  
procures the YELLOWED ENVELOPE from  
her pocket. We can see now there's  
no return address.

MAYA

It's dated from a  
hundred years ago.  
The brochure inside  
explains some  
details, but not all  
of them. It's in

Saugatuck, near the lake, says to follow the empty signs. The rest is mostly just info about the history of the place.

TERRA

I mean, you can pour tea on paper and make it look old like that.

MAYA

Faith is in knowing what's true, not investigating what's false.

EMILY

That's not what faith is.

MAYA

Terra, what religion are you?

EMILY

Now you're imposing.

MAYA

I told her where we  
were going. I trust  
her. She's in too  
deep.

(to Terra)

What religion are  
you?

TERRA

I don't have one.

MAYA

I would've  
predicted.

TERRA

I'm not looking.

EMILY

She's not selling.

TERRA

Yeah?

Maya shakes her head.

EMILY

Judaism isn't  
like... other ones.  
It's not survival by

conversion. It's  
survival by  
survival.

MAYA

No. It's survival by  
G-d. G-d wants Jews  
to continue on.  
That's why He has us  
surviving  
everything.

Emily scoffs and Maya smiles,  
looking to Terra.

MAYA

Emily was going to  
be Bat Mitzvah'ed in  
two months.

EMILY

*Is.*

MAYA

Saugatuck might --  
Anyways, for her Bat  
Mitzvah, she wanted  
to study the topic  
of why G-d used to  
intervene on human

atrocities, but  
didn't on the  
Holocaust --

EMILY

Why are you telling  
strangers this?

MAYA

She asked!

EMILY

She didn't.

TERRA

I mean, I really  
didn't.

MAYA

Then I apologize. *I*  
just think it's a  
ridiculous topic.

EMILY

It isn't. Hard  
questions are good  
questions. Not  
everything is a  
miracle; some things  
have no G-d in them.

MAYA

That's impossible.

TERRA

I would love to  
just... not talk  
about religion.

MAYA

You asked where we  
were going, and I'm  
linking this back to  
how this synagogue  
isn't a cult.

EMILY

It's a cult and  
they're gonna  
pedophile you.

TERRA

Wow! You two are a  
lot of fun! Let's  
listen to the radio.

Terra turns on the radio. Dead  
static. She turns it off.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - LATER

The sun is peaking in the sky as they reach an intersection: a BIG, DIRT ROAD. Terra rolls down the window and looks out.

TERRA

Okay, there's no sign for a name of the road... and it's a dirt road.

They sit, Terra biting her lip. Terra looks in the rearview to see Emily expectantly waiting on Terra's call.

TERRA

I think we gotta keep going.

EMILY

No! You said we have to turn here! We're going too far!

MAYA

Look at where the *dirt road's* leading!

Even further  
nowhere!

EMILY

There wouldn't be a road here if it were useless! It goes somewhere that warranted a whole road.

TERRA

Okay, we just can't stick around to pick. I don't know how much the longer the hearse can run on empty.

MAYA

If we turn at this one, the next one might be in a mile and might be *blossoming* with gas stations.

EMILY

We don't need gas stations! Even if

this road just goes  
to someone's house,  
that's enough to  
find a phone!

Wherever this road  
goes, it goes to  
people!

TERRA

Oh, my G-

Terra pulls forward and Emily groans.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - LATER

The car pauses at a MUCH SMALLER DIRT ROAD. This one, however, has a SIGN, reading "JEWEL RD."

INT. HEARSE - SAME TIME

Maya opens her mouth to say something.

TERRA

Let's not.

Terra drives forward before they can deliberate.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - LATER

The sun is still high as the hearse SPUTTERS. To their right, through the trees, one can now see a RIVER.

INT. HEARSE - SAME TIME

Terra fumbles to maintain control.

TERRA

(under her  
breath)

Shit.

Terra pulls the hearse over.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Terra's out of the car, Emily putting the keys back in the sunglasses holder and Maya sticking the note on the coffin.

Emily closes the front doors as Maya lugs the duffel bags and backpacks out the back, plopping a backpack on the road.

TERRA

Careful!

MAYA

I'm being careful.

Terra looks around, spotting the river. She squints, unsure.

TERRA

Okay, we're gonna walk now.

EMILY

We can't walk along a road.

TERRA

If the only car to go by in, like, an hour manages to hit one of us, I'll be ecstatic.

EMILY

No.

TERRA

Jesus. Fine! Let's just walk along the river!

EMILY  
(guttural;  
instinctive)  
*NO!*

The scream shocks Terra. Maya looks to her sister, suddenly very quiet.

MAYA  
Hey, it's okay...  
I'm walking on the  
road. I'm right  
here.

Maya quickly gives Emily a hug, then scoops up her duffel bag. Emily, still a bit shaken, grabs her backpack. Terra, concerned, plucks up the remaining backpack and duffel bag.

Emily hurries down the road after Maya. Terra looks to the river, then follows the two of them.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - LATER

Terra checks her phone: NO SERVICE, and now 12:30PM.

Emily's singing a Bat Mitzvah prayer to herself, trying to remember the words. She avoids looking towards the river. Maya, a bit ahead of the others, stops. She squints.

Emily sees Maya's stopped and looks down the road as well. She stops. Terra, looking at her phone, bumps into Emily, then frowns and looks forward:

On the lefthand side of the road is a MAN sitting at a STALL made out of plywood, a large CORNFIELD behind him. The two girls look to Terra.

TERRA  
Uh... Yeah.  
Definitely.

Terra leads the pack as the two girls follow her.

EXT. CORNFIELD - MOMENTS LATER

The three arrive at the stall, the CORNMAN (40s) is asleep, a fishing

hat covering his face from the sun.  
The stall advertises "CORN:  
25¢/EAR."

TERRA

Uh --

MAYA

Excuse me!

The Cornman wakes up, grabbing a corn ear to protect himself. He instantly CHUCKS it at the three, Terra DUCKING as it soars past her.

The Cornman looks at them, ready to throw another ear.

TERRA

Woah! Hey! We just wanted to...

The Cornman calms down a bit. Terra bewilderedly nods.

TERRA

Just wanted to know where the closest phone is. We hit a ditch pretty far back there. Do you

have a working phone  
on you?

The Cornman slows his breathing,  
shaking his head.

TERRA

Do you know the  
closest way to  
anywhere with a  
phone? Is there a  
town nearby?

The Cornman thinks, then points  
West.

TERRA

How far?

MAYA

Can you talk?

The Cornman looks between the two  
of them, unsure which to answer  
first.

MAYA

Can you talk?

After a moment, the Cornman nods.

MAYA

What's your name?

The Cornman doesn't respond, still scared.

TERRA

Look, how far is the town? Can we walk to it?

The Cornman looks West, then shakes his head, unsure.

TERRA

Seriously? Come on, man... All right. Do you live nearby?

The Cornman stares, afraid to answer.

TERRA

We just need to use a phone.

The Cornman still stares.

MAYA

I'm going to call you "Cornman."

EMILY

Maya, don't be rude.

Cornman looks to Emily, inquisitive. He hands her a corn ear, which she accepts nervously. He nods, pantomiming eating it.

Emily pulls the husk back and takes a nibble. Crunchy. Cornman nods. He looks to the others.

TERRA

Uh...

Terra pulls her wallet out, plucking a dollar and giving it to Cornman. Cornman pulls two more ears from under the stall, handing them to Terra and Maya. He pulls one for himself.

He undoes a clip on the fishing hat, revealing a clean-shaven face, his yellowed, blotchy teeth biting into the cob. He chews, looking around.

CORNMAN

Town's about ten miles West. Saranac.

Lotta uphill. If you're determined to, you can walk it in a little under four hours.

Terra sighs.

TERRA  
You don't have a phone on you? Do you have a car?

Cornman shakes his head.

TERRA  
You don't have a car?

CORNMAN  
Don't need one.  
River.

TERRA  
What about the river?

CORNMAN  
Boat.

Terra looks back at the river.

TERRA  
You have a boat?

Cornman is nervous for a second,  
then shakes his head.

MAYA  
It's okay. We can't  
steal your boat.  
Emily's afraid of  
water.

Cornman looks to Emily, who nods.  
Cornman nods himself.

CORNMAN  
Grand River.

TERRA  
Can Grand River take  
us to Saranac?

CORNMAN  
Take you all the way  
to Lake Michigan.

MAYA  
Then the river could  
take us to  
Saugatuck!

Cornman frowns, then shrugs.

EMILY

(to Maya)

You're not going on  
a boat!

MAYA

One sec --

(to Cornman;  
re: river)

You live right  
there?

Cornman goes pale, unsure of how to respond.

MAYA

Is there a cabin?  
Where do you launch  
your boat from?

EMILY

(voice  
quivering)

Maya...!

TERRA

(to Emily)

What's wrong with  
the river?

(to Cornman)  
Hey, we'll pay you  
to use your boat!

Emily's too scared to speak.  
Cornman looks to her, concerned. He  
looks back to Terra.

CORNMAN  
If you have a phone,  
you don't need a  
boat?

TERRA  
Yeah. Absolutely. We  
just gotta call  
somebody to yank us  
out of a ditch back  
there.

(to Maya)  
How far?

Maya looks to Emily, thinking.  
Terra nudges her.

MAYA  
Six miles East of  
Jewel Road. Give or  
take.

Cornman sees Emily's scared and stands. He pushes the whole stall on its back, "closing" it.

EXT. MICHIGAN FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

Cornman and Maya hold Emily's shoulders as Emily COVERS HER EYES, Terra behind them. They walk past the road, heading into the forest.

Emily hums the Bat Mitzvah prayer to herself. She STOPS, breathing heavily. Maya SQUEEZES her shoulder.

MAYA  
I'm here still.

Emily nods with closed eyes. They continue.

EXT. CORNMAN'S CABIN - LATER

They get to a cabin on the river, where a 1981 BOSTON WHALER SKIFF is wheeled up on a small dock. They stop Emily at the cabin so she can touch the mayfly-coated wall. She

turns away from the river and opens her eyes, her knees shaking.

Cornman sits with Emily, PULLING UP GRASS and squeezing it. Emily does the same, easing herself.

EXT. CORNMAN'S DOCK - SAME TIME

Terra follows Maya to the skiff, being CAREFUL ON THE DOCK. Maya peeks to see that Emily isn't looking, then hops in the skiff, inspecting it.

MAYA

He doesn't pad it  
when he stores it;  
you can tell because  
the tarp licked up  
the finish.

TERRA

Yeah, I figured you guys knew boats.  
Come on. Let's go back.

Maya fiddles with the motor. She seems fluent in it.

MAYA

Motor's old. But  
kept. You seem on  
edge.

TERRA

I... I don't like  
swimming.

MAYA

Because you can't?

Terra looks to see Emily and  
Cornman pulling up grass. She looks  
back to Maya.

TERRA

Can she?

MAYA

I figure she  
remembers how. A  
miracle happened  
when we were little  
kids and it scared  
her.

Maya smiles at the memory of it,  
one arm instinctually HUGGING her  
body. She then looks to Emily and  
becomes morose.

MAYA

And she'll always  
find a way to pull  
me back.

Maya pulls out her ENVELOPE,  
opening the BROCHURE. It's ancient  
as well, riddled with handwritten  
notes and drawings.

MAYA

I think she might've  
been invited as some  
kind of last test.  
And it's pretentious  
of me to assume I  
can hold her hand  
through it.

TERRA

Kid, if I had to  
give one piece of  
advice and that's it  
-- it'd probably be,  
"Don't join a cult."  
I don't know if  
there are more effed  
up ways to spend  
your childhood.

MAYA

Do you view all religious institutions as cults?

TERRA

Uhh... I view *cults* as cults. If they're telling young girls to leave home so you can directly talk to G-d, I can tell you they've got some guy named Kyle running it and he's got crabs. Just drop it. Run to something else.

MAYA

Did you have a negative experience with a religious institution?

TERRA

What? No. Never been in a cult. I'm just saying I watch TV.

You need to do that more. I don't think you're scared enough.

Maya looks to Emily, then to Terra.  
Maya walks back to shore.

EXT. CORNMAN'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Maya reaches Emily, kneeling down.  
She holds Emily's hand. She sighs,  
shaking her head.

MAYA  
(to Cornman)  
Can we use your  
phone now?

INT. CORNMAN'S CABIN - DAY

An oven clock turns to 1:00PM. It's a small cabin, but well kept.  
Deliberate sanding and staining give it a rustic touch.

Emily sits on a couch, eating a chicken salad sandwich, as Terra holds a landline and Cornman looks

through a phonebook. Cornman stops on a page, tapping it. Terra squints to see a number, then dials.

Maya plays with a KEY hanging on a nail. She looks to Emily.

Maya goes to Emily, sitting on a coffee table across from her. The two lock eyes, Emily chewing.

EMILY

(mouth full)

No.

MAYA

I understand your inability for me to go in -- it's childish but it's understandable -- why can't you go in the river?

EMILY

(mouth full)

Terra's calling a tow truck. That's the end of it.

You're not getting  
on the boat.

MAYA

I'm asking why you  
wouldn't.

Emily stares, swallowing.

EMILY

Please let's just go  
home.

MAYA

We can't...

Maya looks down. Emily stares.

EMILY

We're gonna be okay.  
We're gonna...

MAYA

No, it's... We can  
choose too.

EMILY

So let's choose to  
deal with it.

MAYA

G-d sent us these  
letters because He  
knew we wouldn't  
have a --

Emily grabs Maya's hand.

EMILY

Let's make this  
unflinchingly clear:  
G-d does not  
communicate with  
people. G-d does  
nothing. If G-d made  
everything, then so  
be it, but He  
doesn't maintain it.

MAYA

(shocked)

What do you mean  
"if"....? You said  
"if" G-d made  
everything.

EMILY

I'm...

Emily looks around, ensuring the coast if clear. Terra's talking on the phone by Cornman. Emily returns to Maya.

EMILY

You know that I pulled you out of the water that day. Not G-d. If I didn't do anything, you would've drowned.

Maya smiles at Emily's naivety, an arm subconsciously HUGGING herself.

MAYA

Em, G-d was in that water. I saw Him. G-d is there, and G-d put you there on that beach for a --

EMILY

G-d didn't put me here for the purpose of saving you. G-d did not make everything for you, so you could do

something amazing  
and world-saving and  
save Judaism -- and  
just shut up. G-d  
didn't save you, so  
I had to. From the  
very first killing:  
Cain and Abel. G-d  
did nothing to stop  
it. He didn't save  
those going into  
Birkenau. He didn't  
save our first... He  
is either a myth  
that we hold onto  
'cause we're afraid  
of the dark, or He  
is very, very, bad.  
If He is real, I  
don't trust Him.

Maya's taken aback. Emily shakes  
her head, unable to look at Maya.  
She bites her lip.

EMILY

Don't... Please  
don't try to keep  
running.

MAYA

You... You are *not*  
my guardian.

EMILY

*I'm not. Mom and Dad  
a- Mom or Da- Dad --  
We'll figure it out,  
just...*

MAYA

She's not my mom and  
neither are you. And  
I'm tired of you  
making that my  
burden.

(standing)

I'm not going in the  
water -- I'm just  
going outside --  
give me a moment,  
okay?

Maya shakes her head and storms  
off, Emily fuming.

TERRA  
(on phone;  
frustrated)

It's a tiny road. It said "Jewel Road" on the sign. Six miles East of that, just... I don't have cell service out here, man! That's all I can give you! It was an official-looking sign on it, man! Ten miles -- *sixteen* miles East of Saranac!

Emily sets down her sandwich, unable to eat.

INT. CORNMAN'S CABIN - LATER

Terra sits on a chair with a huff, pulling her hair.

TERRA  
(to Emily)  
They don't know  
where we are based

on our directions  
'cause -- guess what  
-- these random-ass  
roads -- how'd we  
get so far off the  
right way, I  
mean...? What?

Emily nods.

TERRA  
We need a new plan.  
Kid, let's just do  
the boat. That's --

CORNMAN  
Don't make her.

TERRA  
I'm not *making*  
anybody! We're not  
walking four hours  
if there's a boat!  
All those in favor  
of...

Terra looks around.

TERRA  
Maya! Get out here!

No response. Emily frowns. Cornman leans against the wall with nails in it, each holding keys. ONE NAIL'S GOT NO KEY.

TERRA

Maya!

Emily looks to the window seat: there's only ONE DUFFEL BAG AND ONE BACKPACK on it.

Without missing a beat, Emily launches herself out the door.

EXT. CORNMAN'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Emily runs onto the shore as Maya finishes wheeling down the skiff, her DUFFEL BAG AND BACKPACK on it.

EMILY

MAYA, NO!

Maya sees Emily and JUMPS on, STARTING THE MOTOR.

Terra runs outside the cabin, seeing Maya.

TERRA  
Oh, shit --  
(calling out)  
Hey! HEY!

EXT. CORNMAN'S DOCK - SAME TIME

Maya turns the bow West, then looks to Emily:

Emily's on the shore, but can't bring herself to the dock. Terra SPRINTS past Emily.

MAYA  
(quiet)  
Goodbye.

Terra reaches the dock.

TERRA  
MAYA!

Maya LAUNCHES THE SKIFF FORWARD, blazing West across the river. Terra halts as she watches Maya disappear.

EXT. CORNMAN'S CABIN - SAME TIME

Emily stares in horror from the shore.

EMILY

Maya...! Maya...!

The skiff turns around a bend, vanishing. Emily crumbles to the shore.

INT. CORNMAN'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Terra carries the deadened Emily into the cabin, Cornman hurrying to grab a blanket. Terra plops Emily onto the couch. Cornman wraps Emily as Terra paces the cabin.

TERRA

(to Cornman)

How far can it go?  
How much fuel's in  
it?

EMILY

She'll do it...

CORNMAN  
It's got fuel.

TERRA  
Come on, man!  
Just... You're  
kidding me.

EMILY  
We have to go... We  
have to go after  
her...

TERRA  
No! She just took  
eight necklaces she  
owes me! She's a  
pain in the dick!  
We're getting my  
car, I'm cutting my  
losses, and we're  
going to Detroit.  
Call somebody from  
there.

EMILY  
No!

TERRA

Then *I'm* going back  
to Detroit and if,  
hey, Cornman, if you  
wanna do what you  
can to help the...  
to...

Terra pauses, looking to the window seat. She bolts over to it, unzipping the remaining backpack.

Terra fumes, shaking her head.

TERRA

No...

Emily sees and realizes.

TERRA

No... No... Oh, my  
G-d... She took all  
my... She just...

Terra paces.

EMILY

We have to call the  
police...

TERRA

We can't call the  
police if what she  
stole is what --

EMILY

Not for your stupid  
stuff! For her!

TERRA

That "stupid stuff"  
is how I eat food!  
She just stole food!

EMILY

You taught her how  
to steal! That's why  
you shouldn't steal!

TERRA

Then feed me,  
Seymour!

Emil's eyes well up. Cornman rushes  
to comfort her.

EMILY

(through tears)

We need to call  
somebody...

CORNMAN

Oh, honey, the  
police aren't gonna  
come here anymore. I  
call them when I get  
scared too much.

Terra groans at this, shaking her  
head. She then freezes,  
comprehending what Cornman said.

TERRA

The police come  
here?

CORNMAN

Not anymore, I --

TERRA

How'd they come  
here? What'd you  
tell them?

CORNMAN

They... just came  
when I called.

TERRA

'Cause they can  
track the landline's  
location?

Terra thinks.

TERRA

Okay... Okay, can  
any other service  
track that too,  
like...?

EMILY

You have to call.

TERRA

No!

Emily gawks at this.

TERRA

Listen to me: if  
they find her, they  
find my stuff, and  
she'll give me up in  
a second. She knows  
that. She *probably*  
took my shit as a  
hostage.

EMILY

No!

TERRA

Okay, your sister blackmailed me, she broke into a car, she did whatever; she's got teardrop tattoos in her future from when she shanks everybody in psycho prison! If you mention her to them, she's going to some Juvi in Detroit. This isn't sibling rivalry when it's my shit!

EMILY

I don't care about your shit! I can't keep losing them!  
Not... her!

Terra goes from a scowl to a frown. Cornman looks between the two of them.

CORNMAN

I'll... go wave down  
a car if it comes  
by.

Cornman hurries out the cabin.  
Terra stares at Emily, then goes to  
her, sitting on a chair by the  
couch.

Emily struggles to speak.

EMILY

It...

TERRA

Hey, I really don't  
wanna know what's  
going on in your  
lives, but you gotta  
let it out so we  
figure out how to  
get my stuff and you  
get, y'know...?  
Yeah.

Emily looks to Terra, chin  
quivering.

EMILY

Our parents are  
getting... a...

Terra realizes. Emily nods.

EMILY

They told us two  
days ago. Dad's  
getting custody;  
we're not gonna  
see... That's  
another one gone.

Terra nods. She hops over to the couch. She doesn't know how to comfort Emily.

TERRA

Uh... Gotcha.  
Okay... Uh...

EMILY

Maya been crying a  
lot since. They told  
me to not let it  
affect my Bat  
Mitzvah since it's  
so soon and... then  
she got that stupid

letter and I got one  
and... Maya just...  
She said we had to  
run away and I said  
no. That I'm gonna  
be an adult soon and  
adults don't run  
from things...

Terra stares. Emily grips the  
blanket tighter. Emily rests her  
head in her lap, exhausted.

EMILY

I'm gonna be an  
adult soon and I'm  
still her keeper,  
just even more  
scared, but now  
it's... I hate  
growing up... Why  
didn't anybody tell  
me it was gonna be  
just like they said  
it was?

Terra sighs, then looks to the  
landline.

TERRA

Kid... I'm sorry,  
all right? That... I  
mean, that sucks.  
Kids freak out when  
they're freaked out.  
This is... I guess,  
kinda a bigger  
version of that.

EMILY

She can't go to  
Juvi.

TERRA

Uh... Right. She'll  
go to Juvi. So,  
can't call the cops.  
Settled.

Emily looks around the room. She wipes her eyes and goes into planning mode. She stands up and bolts to her duffel bag, opening the pockets. She finds it: the ENVELOPE FOR "EMILY LEVIN." She immediately TEARS IT OPEN.

Emily pauses. Inside's only a card, not a trifold like Maya's. She

ogles at it. It's only got one word on it:

"FOLLOW"

Terra gets up, frowning, and goes to inspect it as well. Emily looks in the envelope: there's nothing else. Terra holds the card to the light: nothing. They stare at it.

TERRA

Uh... Right.

EMILY

Maya's was way  
longer than this.  
No, no, no, hers  
had... Hers had  
information, and  
said it was near the  
lake, and said...  
uh...

TERRA

Something about  
signs...? Maya --

EMILY

Yeah, yeah, yeah --  
following "empty

signs" -- Maya said.  
Why does mine not  
have...?

The two look at it. Emily looks around the room.

EMILY

Okay. First, we gotta get internet connection, see if we can find an address for it -- No... if Maya didn't have an address with her, then she didn't find one. Uhh...

TERRA

First, we gotta get my car.

EMILY

We...

Emily looks around the room. She sees a TV. She thinks.

EMILY

TV.

(looking to  
landline)

Phone. Cable...  
Cable company. *They*  
also know your  
location. Ach --  
they wouldn't send  
somebody so soon...  
Yeah, I'm not Maya.

TERRA

No, no, no! You're  
definitely her!  
You're an *older* her!  
*Adult* her! You can  
come up with some --

CORNMAN (O.S.)

(shouting)

Hey, folks!

TERRA

Never mind, don't  
stress it.

(shouting back)

Yeah?

CORNMAN (O.S.)

Hurry up! Somebody's  
stopping!

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Emily and Terra, clutching the backpack and duffel bag, rush through the forest and to the road, where they see Cornman hanging by the side of a halted 1971 DODGE D200 PICKUP TRUCK.

Emily and Terra reach the truck, seeing the DRIVER (40s/50s) is a woman with a cowboy hat and a scowl.

TERRA

Thank you so much!  
Do you have a chain?  
Like a chain for  
towing?

The Driver inspects Terra, nodding.

TERRA

You're kidding me --  
you *do*?! Oh, my --  
Can you take us just  
six miles the other  
way? Our car's a red  
Malibu --

DRIVER  
I 'm goin' West.

TERRA  
I...  
(frowning)  
Yeah, we're just six miles back! I mean, we could even -- Do you have spare gas?

The Driver nods.

TERRA  
The hearse is even -- There's a hearse back there and it's even closer! It just needs gas and we can even tow my car ourselves if you take us just --

DRIVER  
Tell me somethin' about your eyes. Do they see me?

Terra pauses.

TERRA

Uh... yes? We don't  
have time to --

DRIVER

'Bout your nose?  
Smell the gas  
burnin'?

TERRA

I... I mean --

DRIVER

Now how 'bout the  
ears? Did they hear  
that I was goin'  
West?

Terra doesn't respond, offended.

DRIVER

You and your kid can  
get in the truck or  
wait for somebody  
else that's goin'  
East.

Terra looks to Emily, who nods.  
Terra frustratedly sighs and opens  
the passenger door: the front seats  
are a bench.

Cornman stops Emily, leaning down to her.

CORNMAN

Good luck and be safe.

EMILY

Thank you, Mr. Cornman.

Cornman hands her a GIFT WRAPPED IN A HANDKERCHIEF. Emily takes it, feeling its weight.

CORNMAN

This'll protect you when you need it. Be very careful. It's loaded.

Cornman steps back as Emily ogles the gift. She puts it in her backpack and hops into the front. Having not heard Cornman, Terra sandwiches Emily in and shuts the door.

Emily waves to Cornman as the truck pulls away.

INT. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Emily faces forward again. The old truck is weathered inside, the seats beige leather and cracked. Between the Driver's leg and door is a LEVER-ACTION HUNTING RIFLE.

TERRA

We just need to get somewhere with service.

DRIVER

Get service 'round Saranac.

TERRA

Good to hear.

EMILY

Thank you for driving us.

DRIVER

You got manners. Clearly didn't learn'm from your sister.

TERRA

I'm... I'm clearly  
not her sister.

DRIVER

No, 'cause she's got  
manners.

The Driver slows down, causing Terra to frown more. The Driver's looking at something out the window, squinting.

The truck slows to a STOP. Emily and Terra exchange glances.

EMILY

Is everything okay?

The Driver doesn't answer, squinting into the forest, before DRIVING FORWARD again, going SLOW. She looks ahead.

DRIVER

Lookin' for somethin'.

TERRA

We're in a hurry.  
It's an emergency.

DRIVER

And you're gettin'  
me impatient.

EMILY

What are you looking  
for? If we help you  
look, will we go  
faster?

DRIVER

Sure. Lookin' for a  
horse.

TERRA

A... a horse? Hold  
on. A white one?

DRIVER

Pale's the word. You  
seen it?

TERRA

Yeah! Yeah, we saw  
the horse! Yeah, it  
was by my car! It  
was six miles back!  
If you're trying to  
-- !

DRIVER

How long ago?

TERRA

Not long! Like...!

(checking  
phone)

Less than two hours  
ago!

The Driver grimaces.

DRIVER

Too late. It'll be  
forward by now.  
Thing's hard to  
track.

TERRA

It'll be... What?  
*Really?*

DRIVER

You're keen on  
complainin' 'bout a  
good samaritan. I  
got a rifle here  
that'll even out my  
charity.

Emily looks to Terra, concerned, then returns to the Driver.

EMILY

How about this?  
We'll keep a look  
out and you can  
focus on driving.  
We'll be a help to  
you.

DRIVER

You're in a rush and  
I don't trust you to  
put that aside for  
my...

(squinting)  
My... Nah.

The Driver looks forward again.

TERRA

Ma'am... I'm sorry  
for being... rude.  
I'm sure losing your  
horse is very  
stressful.

DRIVER

Not my horse.

TERRA

Not your... Whatever  
horse you're trying  
to catch, I'm sure -

-

DRIVER

Not trying to catch  
it.

Terra struggles to not scream.

TERRA

I'll keep an eye out  
for service.

Terra pulls her phone out, trying to focus her entirety on its screen. Emily shifts in her seat, looking forward. She frowns, squinting. She looks to the Driver, who's focused on the forest. Emily looks forward again.

EMILY

Hey.

The Driver waves her away, trying to focus on the forest. Emily fidgets in her seat.

EMILY

*Hey...*

The Driver ignores her. Emily FRANTICALLY TUGS the Driver. The Driver GRIPS THE RIFLE, turning furiously to Emily.

EMILY

(pointing  
forward)

*HEY!*

The Driver looks forward and SWERVES.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The truck barely manages to STAY ON THE ROAD, having avoided the PALE HORSE sitting on the road.

INT. TRUCK - SAME TIME

The Driver gasps. She opens the door, BRINGING THE RIFLE.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The Driver steps out as the HORSE GALLOPS INTO THE TREES. The Driver FIRES AT THE HORSE.

The Driver MISSES as the HORSE ESCAPES. The Driver grunts and kicks the road. The Driver RUNS INTO THE FOREST.

INT. TRUCK - SAME TIME

Emily and Terra are flabbergasted, watching the Driver disappear into the trees. Another SHOT rings out.

DRIVER (O.S.)

(distant)

Don't you sneak up  
on me!

EMILY

What's going on?

TERRA

I don't know.

EMILY

What do we...?

Terra hops out.

EXT. MICHIGAN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Terra runs onto the road, looking for the Driver.

The Driver's in the forest, still close to the road, aiming down the sights. She crouches to steady herself.

Terra thinks, then BOLTS back to the truck, hopping into the DRIVER'S SEAT.

INT. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Terra SLAMS THE DOOR as she shifts the truck into drive. She pulls forward, then turns left, planning to execute a U-turn.

EXT. MICHIGAN FOREST - SAME TIME

The Driver hears the engine revving and looks, seeing Terra driving the truck.

She ROARS and AIMS AT THE TRUCK.

INT. TRUCK - SAME TIME

Terra STRUGGLES WITH THE GEAR SHIFT. It won't go in reverse. She kicks against the brake pedal but the lever WON'T BUDGE.

TERRA

Come on! Come on!  
Stop being old!

A SHOT rings out, NICKING the front of the truck. Terra realizes as Emily DUCKS into the passenger leg room. Terra SLAMS THE GAS -- keeping the truck on its path West -- as a SHOT SMACKS against the back of the truck bed.

TERRA

(looking back)  
Shit! Oh, shit!

Emily peeks to Terra from her cramped spot in the passenger leg room, terrified.

EMILY

You're stealing her truck?!

TERRA

Can you cut it out  
with the puritan  
shit?!

EMILY

You can't -- ! You  
can't do that!

TERRA

I had to do  
*something*! She was  
gonna --

EMILY

No! We have to go  
back!

TERRA

She's got a gun!  
(looking back)  
Jesus Christ, man!

Terra floors it even more as Emily pokes her head up, getting into the seat and frantically buckling her seatbelt.

TERRA

Hey, man! This is  
for you, right? I'm

doing this for --  
Check my phone for  
when we get service!

Emily SMACKS Terra's arm again and again.

TERRA  
OW! Stop! What are  
you -- You're gonna  
get us -- !

EMILY  
Stop stealing  
things! You're the  
reason we're here  
right now! Just  
stop!

TERRA  
All right, now  
listen to me.  
Listen. *LISSEN.*  
Okay? -- We turn  
this car around and  
either she'll shoot  
us -- she was  
shooting a horse --  
either she'll shoot  
us, or drive off

without us. Which of those helps us get your sister?

Emily doesn't answer, furious and scared.

TERRA

Right. You wanna get your little Keyser Söze home, 'cause I do too, and my way involves us actually beating her to Saugatuck.

EMILY

That woman was giving us a ride! And you stole her car! You cheated her after she -- !

TERRA

She was being an asshole about it! She didn't wanna be... charitable, she was just a... an asshole! Now, you

need to listen to  
me: playing nice and  
waiting for her to  
finish her crazy  
hunting dealeo was  
gonna cost us time  
you don't have right  
now. You need to be  
back home before I  
get a warrant. That  
lady's not gonna  
call the cops on us  
-- she shot at us...  
If you just... If  
you can just not  
smack at me when I'm  
trying to help you,  
we'll get to your  
sister. All right? I  
promise you, once we  
get your sister,  
I'll drive you back  
to Detroit.

EMILY

You just want all  
the stuff you stole.  
You're not helping  
anybody.

TERRA

Oh my G- You're a  
kid. You don't  
understand  
intentions can be  
complicated.

EMILY

You're a terrible  
person.

TERRA

I...

Terra's taken aback.

TERRA

All right. Weird  
blow. That's fine.

EMILY

It isn't fine.

Emily glares out the window. Terra  
thinks.

TERRA

Shit... I should not  
have stolen this  
truck.

EMILY

Yeah! -- You told  
her where your car  
was! If she's not  
gonna call the cops,  
she's gonna be  
waiting for you to  
drive by while she's  
heading to your car!

TERRA

Okay! All right...!  
Then...

EMILY

As soon as we get  
service, you call a  
tow truck, have them  
pull it. How much  
gas is in this one?

Terra looks down at the fuel level.

TERRA

Just about full.

EMILY

Then we shouldn't  
stop. We're taking

this to Saugatuck.

We...

Emily buries her face in her hands,  
then yanks it out.

EMILY

You'll take the fall  
if we get caught --  
I'm still  
*technically* a child  
-- but we have to  
think of...

Emily squirms at the thought.

TERRA

Calm down! All  
right? Okay, so your  
sister: she knows  
boats?

Emily winces and nods.

TERRA

It's all right!  
She's fine! We're  
gonna be in  
Saugatuck in like an  
hour. If the only  
place we can meet

her is at this cult thing, then we just gotta find it before she does and intercept her. We've got a quarter of the state left, right? She's got directions, but that river's gonna take her ages to get across a *quarter* of the state.

EMILY  
(eyes closed)  
Right.

Emily squirms again. In a panic, she looks behind them as if to anticipate the Driver. She faces forward again, holding her hand up to the window to avoid seeing Grand River.

EMILY  
No, she knows that.... There isn't enough gas in a skiff and the river

isn't wide enough  
for her to go that  
fast. She'll get  
back to land, and  
she'll get a ride.  
She'll get to  
Saugatuck. We should  
watch out for small  
planes.

TERRA  
*Planes?*

EMILY  
Small ones. Local  
airports. She might  
even get there  
before us.

Terra looks forward, shaking her  
head. Emily checks the phone,  
JUMPING.

EMILY  
Oh! Service!

TERRA  
Yeah?!

EMILY

Yeah! Says you're  
roaming!

TERRA

Yeah, yeah, yeah,  
that happens! Okay,  
let's give it a sec  
to get off roaming  
and we'll get bars.

They pass a PAVED ROAD with a sign,  
Emily and Terra grinning.

TERRA

Look at that! People  
things!

EMILY

(holding phone  
out)

Can you unlock it?

Terra puts her thumb against the  
phone, unlocking it, and Emily goes  
to the Phone App. She dials.

TERRA

Wait, are you  
calling a tow truck?

EXT. GRAND RIVER - BEACH - SAME TIME

On the river, we can see better that the sun's still high, but'll start to descend. Maya disembarks the skiff, having parked it on a small beach.

She pulls out their dad's phone. She goes to the Maps App, which takes a second to show her that she's East of Grand Rapids, a forty mile drive from Saugatuck.

She types, "Gerald R" and an AIRPORT comes up, ten miles South of her. Maya frowns.

MAYA

Missed it...

Stupid...

THE PHONE RINGS. Maya frowns, looking down: it's a 313 NUMBER. She winces, answering.

MAYA

You get that the police can track the missing phone's

records, right? You just threw Terra under the bus.

INT. TRUCK / EXT. GRAND RIVER

EMILY

Are you on land?

MAYA

I'm not telling you anything. Go back home.

TERRA

Are you -- ? Holy shit! You can call Maya! Tell her to get her dumbass back here!

EMILY

How are you getting there?

TERRA

No! Tell her to just stay still! We can find her wherever she is! Maya, can

you hear me?! You  
stay still with my  
shit, all right?!  
Where are you?!

MAYA

She really doesn't  
get it.

EMILY

She doesn't get *you*.  
People don't, and  
you pretend you like  
that. How are you  
getting there?

MAYA

I'm not telling.

EMILY

So you're still  
figuring it out?

Maya looks out at the river.

EMILY

Fine. Call me when  
you're closer to  
tell us how to find  
the place. We don't  
have to beat you,

just don't go *into*  
the synagogue  
without --

Maya hangs up. She sees an OLD MAN stepping out of a cabin and she kicks the skiff so it looks like she was coming from the other direction. She walks to him, pointing to the skiff.

INT. TRUCK - SAME TIME

Emily brings the phone down. Terra looks to her.

TERRA  
And...?!

Emily goes to the Google App, typing "towing grand rapids."

EMILY  
She's safe.

TERRA  
Is she meeting us  
anywhere?!

Emily hands the phone to Terra.

EMILY

Now it's the tow  
company.

INT. OLD MAN'S CAR - DAY

The Old Man (60s/70s) drives as Maya sits shotgun, duffel bag at her feet and backpack on her lap.

OLD MAN

When we get to  
Saugatuck, I'm  
having a talk with  
your mother. Just  
irresponsible.  
You're ten?!

MAYA

Still ten.

OLD MAN

You can't go -- You  
don't have a  
boater's license!

MAYA

I'm so sorry, sir.  
It's really all my  
fault.

The Old Man scoffs as Maya hides her grin.

INT. TRUCK - LATER

They're merging back onto the FREEWAY. Terra hangs up the phone, pulling up the Maps App on it, shaking her head.

TERRA

I mean, that was the best I could come up with. I mean...

Shoot. They're not gonna find it. How far are we from Saugatuck?

EMILY

(checking phone)

Half-hour.

Emily looks to the clock: it's 2:20PM.

EMILY

Maya's gonna play it safe and turn off

the phone by four,  
make sure Dad can't  
track it. I know  
she's gonna give us  
a heads up on where  
to find it when  
she's close. If  
she's not close by  
then...

Emily bites her lip. Terra looks over to her.

TERRA  
Yeah... Who *is* this kid?

EMILY  
Not as smart as she keeps convincing everyone she is.

TERRA  
Is she, like...?

EMILY  
(sighing)  
She's got Mom's genes... Our

biological mom was  
this... scholar.

TERRA  
Biological?

EMILY  
Our current mom's  
not our biological  
mom. Our biological  
mom died before we  
were born. Melanoma.

Terra frowns. Emily anticipated  
that reaction.

EMILY  
We don't really talk  
about -- She froze  
her eggs, Dad  
artificially  
inseminated a  
surrogate so they  
could "have kids  
together," then he  
married a woman  
named Rachel when I  
was four. That woman  
raised us, so she's  
Mom.

TERRA

Uh-huh... All right.  
And real Mom?

EMILY

*Biological.* Smart.  
Reckless. Passed  
those on to the  
second test tube.

TERRA

Uh-huh...

Terra grimaces, feeling guilty.

TERRA

I mean... All right,  
I'm sorry. That  
sucks.

EMILY

No, it doesn't. I  
had a mom growing  
up. I wouldn't want  
to have met  
biological mom: I've  
met Maya. Rachel,  
hereafter "Mom," has  
been our mom. And...  
I'm gonna live with

her... Dad likes  
Maya more.

TERRA

All right, you know  
parents don't really  
do that.

EMILY

They do and it makes  
sense. Maya's named  
after our biological  
mom. I don't know if  
she was born smart  
or got that way to  
make Dad happy.

Terra doesn't respond, sighing. She  
nods in recognition.

EMILY

You want to share  
something, just do  
it. I'm not going to  
massage your dumb  
childhood until it  
milks.

Terra grins, then nods.

TERRA

You're smart too,  
all right? And yeah.  
I had a dumb  
childhood.

A pause as Terra waits.

TERRA

Oh, you're actually  
not gonna ask  
anything.

EMILY

Yeah.

Terra nods. Emily sighs. Terra  
peeks over to Emily, who's too  
exhausted to talk.

TERRA

Answer's no. Nobody  
ever did anything  
bad in my family.

This does perk Emily's ears, who  
frowns.

EMILY

What?

Terra shrugs.

EMILY

Nobody taught you to  
steal?

TERRA

Had to figure it out  
myself.

EMILY

Why? Is anybody dead  
or divorced or  
abusive?

TERRA

No.

EMILY

Why do you keep  
doing this?

Terra has trouble answering. Emily looks out the window.

EMILY

Take the next exit.

EXT. SAUGATUCK - DAY

The truck comes into the town.  
Saugatuck's cute, with small  
storefronts and thin streets. The

truck immediately pulls into an alley, heading into a parking lot.

Emily looks to the clock as Terra parks. It's 3:00PM.

TERRA

Near the lake and  
we're looking for  
"empty signs"?

EMILY

Yep.

TERRA

Let's find a cult.

Terra's about to pull into a spot when TERRA'S PHONE RINGS.

Emily takes it from her and answers it. She waits.

MAYA (V.O.)

(over phone)

At the northern edge  
of Oval Beach is the  
first sign. They  
lead into the woods.

EMILY

It's in the woods?!

MAYA (V.O.)

I'm... I'm right  
outside of it. I can  
see it. It's small.  
It's practically a  
cabin, but it's got  
the symbols from the  
brochure.

EMILY

Maya, please don't  
go in there!

(to Terra)

It's in the woods.

Terra turns white.

EMILY

Maya...? Maya...?!

Maya doesn't answer. Emily looks at  
the phone: she hung up.

TERRA

Oh, my G-d.

Emily furiously types into Maps.  
She looks.

EMILY

It's at the northern  
edge of Oval Beach.  
We can drive there.

Terra SPEEDS OUT OF THE LOT.

EXT. OVAL BEACH - DAY

Emily and Terra hurry from the truck, parked in a small lot by the beach. Emily's still got her backpack on. As she jogs, she feels Lake Michigan on her left, the waves pounding away. She whines under her breath.

EXT. OVAL BEACH - LATER

Emily sees something and stops jogging. Terra, a bit behind her, sees her halting and stops as well.

In front of Emily, buried in forest foliage, is a PEDESTRIAN X-ING SIGN with NO PEDESTRIAN on it. Emily looks to her right, seeing a TINY CREEK running up the forest.

Terra reaches Emily, looking into the forest as well. Terra can sense Emily's afraid.

EMILY

(squeaking)

Come on.

Emily leads the charge into the bush.

EXT. SAUGATUCK FOREST - LATER

Emily smacks at branches as Terra ducks behind her. They pass another "EMPTY SIGN" -- also PEDESTRIAN X-ING with NO PEDESTRIAN on it -- this one almost flattened along the creek. Emily subconsciously avoids stepping near the creek.

TERRA

(hushed)

Hey...! Emily, stop!

Emily doesn't. Terra has to rush forward and GRAB HER. Emily yelps as she turns back to Terra, who holds her steady.

EMILY  
(hushed too)  
What are you doing?!

TERRA  
Stop for a second!

EMILY  
We can't stop! She's  
--

TERRA  
Kid! We're literally  
running into a cult!  
We don't know how  
many they've got!

Emily pulls away from Terra.

EMILY  
We don't have time!

Emily hurries through the forest as  
Terra shakes her head.

EXT. SAUGATUCK FOREST - LATER

The sun is a bit lower as EMILY HALTS, Terra quite a few steps behind her. Emily's face is covered in TINY SCRATCHES. Emily sees

something ahead, and slowly crouches.

Terra sees Emily and HALTS. She frowns, then crouches too. Emily stays still. Terra crawls to her to see what she sees:

There's a clearing in the forest where a CABIN sits. It's over a century old: small with faded paint and surrounded by dead leaves and the same EMPTY SIGNS. It's got the STAR OF DAVID on its side along with UNKNOWN SYMBOLS.

Emily scans the area: there's nobody around.

EMILY

(still hushed)

How long ago did  
Maya call?

Terra checks her phone, spooked.

TERRA

(still hushed)

Uhh... Like, forty minutes.

Emily breathes in heavily.

EMILY

I don't see anybody.

TERRA

Okay, I'm definitely  
not saying call the  
cops, but like,  
let's just weigh  
leaving an *anonymous*  
tip --

Emily MOVES FORWARD before Terra  
can grab her.

TERRA

Emily!

EXT. SAUGATUCK FOREST - SMALL CABIN  
- CONTINUOUS

Emily crunches through the leaves  
and weaves through the empty signs.  
She keeps low, getting close to the  
cabin.

Emily reaches the cabin, putting  
her back to it. She tries to peek  
in through one of the windows, but  
it's covered in GRIME AND PINE

NEEDLES. All she can see is the cabin's dark inside.

Terra reaches the cabin as well, keeping low. Terra's practically hyperventilating.

TERRA

(still hushed)

I don't like this...

I don't like this...

Emily!

Emily turns the corner of the cabin.

Now at the front, there's an outline for a FALSE DOOR, meant to blend in with the rest of the cabin wall, but IT'S AJAR.

Emily stares at it, terrified. She sets her backpack down quietly, then reaches into the backpack.

She pulls out CORNMAN'S GIFT, still wrapped in its handkerchief. She leaves the backpack outside the cabin as she grabs the side of the door, PULLING IT OPEN. She doesn't

let any part of her body appear in the entrance.

She waits. Nothing happens. Terra peeks around the corner, seeing Emily putting her LEG in the doorway, then PULLING IT BACK. Terra winces as nothing happens.

Emily puts a HAND in the doorway, holding it there. Nothing. She WALKS FORWARD as Terra silently yelps. Emily looks in. It's too dark to see. She breathes heavily.

Emily GOES IN THE CABIN.

INT. SMALL CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The place is a mess and seems mostly abandoned. BOTTLES OF LIQUOR lie everywhere. There are a few desks but no papers on them. Once upon a time, this might've been a school.

Emily looks at both inside corners, making sure they're uninhabited, then steps in further, checking the

empty desks. She clutches Cornman's gift tight.

Terra finally pokes her head into the sight of the doorway. Emily looks around the inside of the small cabin. No people. She turns back to Terra.

EMILY

Keep watch.

Terra looks around the cabin, nodding, then hops in and pokes her head out to keep watch.

TERRA

(still keeping  
watch)

What's that in your hand?

Emily's keeping close attention to the floor, trying to find any trap doors. It seems like the more she searches, the more afraid she becomes of finding one.

Emily accidentally kicks past a bottle of Jack Daniels, its label from the eighties. She sees a few

bottles lined up on a window ledge, oldest to newest, the oldest reading "GENUINE BEAM WHISKEY" in faded letters and the newest being "JIM BEAM: 215TH BIRTHDAY EDITION (1795-2010)".

EMILY

If this place was abandoned when she got here, Maya's probably not too far away. She's probably still looking for people.

Emily arrives at the far corner, where the biggest desk is: seemingly one for a teacher. Behind it, a series of FORTY-OR-SO PLAQUES adorn the wall, all of them grimy, having been cleaned or dusted nowhere near recently.

Carved into the wall above the plaques, in beautiful typography, are the words "HALL OF PILGRIMS." Emily looks down at the plaques, reading them.

There's one reading, "ORIN BUCHMEYER -- FEBRUARY, 1939." Another nearby it is, "JANET SCHUMER -- MAY, 1950." Despite, the dates, the plaques appear to be from the same time, and clearly took very long to make, with notable craftsmanship.

Emily looks to the plaques in the bottom row. Her face goes rigid. She blinks a bit, then falls back onto the desk.

Cornman's gift HITS THE FLOOR with a ringing *CLANK*!

Terra looks back at Emily for a moment, then quickly returns to her scouting.

TERRA  
Hey! Everything  
good?

Emily just stares, unable to comprehend it. She touches it:

Emily's hand lingers, then slides down, revealing a grimy plaque reading, "MAYA LEVIN -- MAY, 2019."

It's the same as all the others,  
clearly having been made, hung, and  
neglected for decades.

TERRA

(still  
scouting)

Emily...! Emily,  
what is it?!

Emily can't answer. Terra looks around the forest, then hurries to Emily.

TERRA

Are you okay?

Emily looks to Terra, breathing heavily, then points to the plaques. Terra looks, tries to take them in, then stops.

TERRA

What?

Terra leans forward, looking at the last plaque of them all. She looks at Emily, then back to the plaque. She looks at all the other plaques, confused.

TERRA  
What is going on?

Emily looks at the last plaque, realizing it says, "TERRA HOWARD -- MAY, 2019."

Between that plaque and Maya's: "EMILY LEVIN -- MAY, 2019."

Emily, totally stunned, studies them all: the plaque to the left of Maya's is "DEANDRE LEWIS -- MAY, 2010." Every plaque with the same typography, wood, metal, and neglect.

Terra feels her plaque, scraping at it with her nail. Some hardened grime scratches off, revealing there once was a brilliant, GOLDEN shine to these.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Oh, hello.

Emily and Terra spin around to see A MAN IN THE DOORWAY. The Man holds a plastic bag of groceries, mainly Slim-Jims.

Terra jumps in front of Emily.

TERRA

Don't come any  
closer.

MAN

What are you...?

("of course")

Oh! Your plaques.

The Man enters, placing the groceries on a desk. He's in his thirties with massive bags under his eyes, wearing regular street clothes.

MAN

What day is it? Busy day.

The Man opens the plastic bag as Emily and Terra stare. The Man snaps into a Slim-Jim.

MAN

It's, what, the twenty-fifth? Sixth? Thing only says May, so I really have no idea when -- but you

guys are here!  
Great!  
Congratulations!

The Man eats his Slim-Jim, sitting on top of one of the smaller desks.

TERRA  
What is this?

MAN  
(through Slim-Jim)

You...? Didn't you guys get pamphlets? Pamphlets tell you everything you need to know!

The Man pats around his body. He finds nothing.

MAN  
What time is it?

Neither respond to him.

MAYA  
Uhh... Did I already say congrats?

EMILY

(scared)

Where is she?

MAN

It's in the -- !

Come on. Just gimme  
the pamphlet. Gimme,  
gimme.

The Man holds his hand out. Emily pauses, then cautiously crosses the room, causing Terra to flinch but not yet intervene. Emily gives the Man the CARD from her pocket.

MAN

Thank you.

(looking to  
card)

Now, what do we got  
here?

The Man takes a bite, then reads a bit, as if there was more than one word. Emily returns to Terra, .

The Man stops chewing.

MAN

Huh...

The Man looks up at the two of them, shaking his head.

MAN

Unreal...

(to Terra)

What about you?

Where's your pamphlet?

Terra doesn't respond, keeping herself close to Emily.

MAN

Really? None? So, you with her?

Terra wraps her hand around Emily's arm, pulling her closer.

TERRA

What is this place?

The Man looks up from the pamphlet and at the two of them.

MAN

You guys got any booze?

The two take a moment to comprehend.

TERRA

What?

MAN

My go-to's got pissed at me. I'm forgetful about paying. Runs in the family so I don't think it's all my fault, really.  
That's a joke. Do you have alcohol?  
I'm dying right now  
-- That isn't a joke. I keep an emergency stash in here but that's what it needs to be for: emergencies. And I know you guys have booze; I'll tell you what this place is if you --

TERRA

You tell us what is going on right now.  
Where's the girl?

(re: plaques)  
What are these?

EMILY  
Do you really talk  
to G-d?

Terra looks down at Emily, stunned  
that she'd ask that.

MAN  
We... It's  
complicated. And I'm  
not supposed to talk  
about it *exactly*,  
like we usually make  
something up, but...  
I can't exactly let  
you know why I don't  
give a shit about  
the consequences  
until you give me  
the booze and then I  
tell you...  
whatever.  
Everything. I know  
you've got booze.  
Please, can I have  
some?

TERRA  
We don't.

The Man sighs.

The Man gets up and heads to the big desk, Terra pulling Emily behind herself as the Man strolls around them.

The Man pulls a FLASK out from the desk drawer and sits in the desk's chair. He opens the flask and takes a sip. He sets down the flask, folding his arms nicely across the desk.

The Man gestures to the chairs on the other side of the desk. Emily slowly moves to them as Terra follows her, Emily keeping focused on the Man, Terra with one eye on Emily.

The Man looks between the two of them.

MAN  
So... This is not a,  
uh... synagogue,  
exactly. It's a

place of G-d. None of the religions were right. Jews, though, Jews were close. I mean, so were Muslims, and... everybody. Uhh, about the pamphlet: pamphlets just say what they gotta. So, we, uh... Well, not me. I'm not that old, so... uh...

The Man thinks.

MAN

I'm not starting at a good spot. Lemme just... So, G-d kinda tells some people, "Hey, I exist!" Don't remember their names off the top of my head. These people live in this forest and G-d lets them in on all kinds of

stuff. Y'know, all the new stuff, all the keeping up with the religious word -- always just making sure that some people were keeping a secret knowledge of the religious word. Are you keeping up with me so far?

Emily and Terra are deer in headlights.

MAN

All right, lemme try again. G-d is not fake. That's probably a big one for you guys, uhh...  
(re: plaques)

There's proof. G-d told these folks a century ago you'd be coming here right now and they made plaques, there was

room in the budget -  
- That's everybody  
who will ever be in  
this room -- after  
1927, of course.  
Good proof, yeah?  
Want anymore?

Emily and Terra just stare.

MAN  
Eh, we don't got a  
whole ton. We do got  
*some* though.

(re: plaques)  
That always gets  
people though. I  
mean, at least the  
pilgrims since I've  
been here; almost a  
decade. So... Right.  
G-d is not fake. G-d  
doesn't, uh... So,  
G-d reveals...  
*Itself*? I think  
that's the right  
pronoun... G-d  
reveals *Itself*,  
tells people It

exists and these people need to keep in tabs with G-d. Good so far? Great. In order to keep these people not dead, G-d gives them heads-ups when a storm is coming, tornadoes, making sure these people would survive. Uh... told 'em who was gonna win the World Series every year so they'd bet and that's how they bought this thing. Was gonna be a school but the town didn't finish it -- if I remember right. This piece of shit... Wasn't gambling, technically, since they knew who was gonna win. And uh...

pilgrims! Yeah. G-d predicted these pilgrims. People made these plaques and made sure they stayed, uh...

The Man looks back at the plaques, sipping the flask.

MAN

Shiny... My bad. We already talk about that? Oh! Also made your pamphlets! Basically said that those pamphlets would say the bare minimum to get you here.

(to Terra)

So, that means you came here because of her pamphlet, which is great, 'cause that probably cost them less. Uhh... So the pilgrims were just kinda people

who would get to  
meet G-d. Say hello.  
Oh! Other proof that  
I like is --

(patting  
cabinet)

-- they got formulas  
and shit to cure  
polio, 'cause that  
was a problem-o way  
back when. And G-d  
gave them the cure!  
Said, of course,  
that they couldn't  
share it with  
anyone.... Let Salk  
take that one. They  
got others here.  
Pretty sure there  
are cures here that  
still aren't in the  
medical world. Uh...  
Cool! Thanks for  
stopping by! That's  
what I'm allowed to  
tell you,  
technically.

Emily and Terra stare. Emily's too concerned to speak.

TERRA

Are you insane?

MAN

Yes. But that is unrelated.

TERRA

What are you talking about, man?

MAN

G-d. Real thing. Conversations. Knew you were gonna come here. Sent you pamphlets. Made you plaques. I'm assuming you're Emily and you're Terra. And... you're right on time! As predicted, like... a hundred years ago. Well, technically, predicted at the beginning of time. I

think. No idea how  
being G-d works.  
Sounds like a time.  
I'd probably like  
it.

TERRA  
You're tryna sell  
this bullshit?

MAN  
Wish it was  
bullshit. That'd  
probably make me not  
an alcoholic. If you  
want, we can just  
kinda pretend I  
didn't tell you any  
of that. I don't  
give a shit. You  
guys are the last  
ones.

TERRA  
You want money.

MAN  
Nope. I don't want  
jack shit but this:

The Man lifts and sets down the flask.

MAN

I'm just kinda the one who has to sit here and know these things. Gets passed along. I was one of those pilgrims. Not gonna tell you which one though. My age is my own business. Always believed in that philosophy.

Emily and Terra stare.

TERRA

What is going on?  
(re: plaques)  
How did you...? How  
is that...?

MAN

Sorry, lady... Only one explanation. And it sucks: G-d.  
Those've been there for a century. Not

allowed to tell you  
what happened next.

EMILY

What... happened  
next?

Terra frowns at Emily.

MAN

Can't. Sworn secret  
that only one person  
is supposed to know  
and carry it on to  
the next generation.

Man points to himself. Emily  
pauses, then takes the flask from  
the table. The Man nods, *there you  
go.*

MAN

(phoning it in)

Oh, no! I have to  
tell you now!  
Because I'm addicted  
to -- !

(legit)  
No, but exactly...  
Now, please put it  
back.

Emily doesn't.

MAN  
I'm gonna tell you,  
put it back.

EMILY  
What happened next?

TERRA  
(to Emily)  
What are you doing?  
You don't... Do you  
believe any of this?

Emily looks at Terra, then to the  
plaques.

MAN  
I know! You can't  
come up with another  
solution! I've been  
here for a while --  
I mean, I'm not here  
for the months when  
there aren't gonna

be pilgrims -- but  
I've been here with  
that knowledge and I  
cannot come up with  
a reason for these.  
Sure enough. May.  
2010. I come here  
the first day.  
Nobody. Next day.  
Nobody. I think it  
was the third day of  
May -- I remember  
'cause it was  
awesome -- it's  
usually like the  
twenty-sixth day --  
DeAndre Lewis. Tell  
him about G-d.  
Congratulate him for  
being a pilgrim. He  
loses his shit.

EMILY

Did you tell him...  
the... thing you  
can't tell people?

MAN

I did not.

TERRA  
(to Emily)  
Stop listening to  
this...

EMILY  
(to Terra)  
I have to hear it  
before Maya does.  
(to Man)  
What's the thing you  
can't tell people?

MAN  
I mean, on that --  
First, can I get the  
flask back?

EMILY  
No.

MAN  
Will I get it back  
after -- ? Ah, of  
course I will. All  
right. Time for the  
thing! Weight off my  
chest! Big ol'  
secret!

The Man shifts in the chair, then addresses the two of them.

MAN

G-d... is... dead.

The Man looks at the two of them, waiting for a reaction. Terra has a more surfaced one, *not* expecting that.

TERRA

What?

MAN

G-d is dead.

The two of them don't respond for a moment, neither able to comprehend.

EMILY

Okay... You mean...  
Nietzsche? Time  
Magazine? You're  
saying religion no  
longer serves the --

MAN

Nope, but you're a  
*smart* cookie, but  
nope. Like... G-d

got sick and died.  
1927.

Terra is now roped in.

TERRA  
What?

MAN

G-d existed. We talked to G-d. Sometime in the 1100s maybe, before we were talking to It, G-d got sick. Probably why It started talking to us, figuring the end was on its way and couldn't disappear without saving face. G-d got sicker. In 1927, G-d died. Don't look for significance in the year. There is literally none. All pilgrims since have been trying to understand the

significance of the date, and there is absolutely none.

Emily and Terra stare, Terra frowning.

TERRA

What?

MAN

Old age, we think...  
So... obviously, we stopped being able to talk to G-d... It just happens.

Everything dies. And you guys...

(re: plaques)  
... are the last to make the pilgrimage... You wanna see the grave?

Emily and Terra are too thrown off to respond.

EXT. SAUGATUCK FOREST - SMALL CABIN  
- DAY

The three of them stand outside, looking down at the ground. The Man nods. Emily frowns. Terra is stunned.

A false patch of grass has been removed, revealing a flat TOMBSTONE, reading, "Here lies G-d. The beginning - 1927."

MAN

Obviously "Here lies" doesn't make any sense. This thing itself doesn't make any sense. I'm pretty sure some idiot had it made in the '60s. Blew the last of the budget. G-d only told 'em who won the World Series up to, like, the mid-'40s or something. Tigers winning.

The three of them keep staring down at the grave.

MAN

Oh. Obviously, uh....  
You can't tell anybody about what you learned here today. Uh.... For probably some pretty obvious reasons.  
The, uh.... G-d, I forget what the people were called! The people G-d talked to. They swore to never let anybody ever know outside themselves - - ourselves -- but made sure the truth was passed on to only one person and that person had to be a pilgrim. That was me -- before today. I made sure the pilgrims visiting under my

watch didn't see  
this dumbass thing.  
And now that there  
are no more pilgrims  
to tell, it's up to  
you three to figure  
out if the secret's  
carried on, who to  
tell since G-d  
didn't pick any more  
people after you, et  
cetera. Hey, can one  
of you -- ?

EMILY  
(looking up)  
Wait -- what?

MAN  
Can one of of you  
stick around and  
take my place?  
Somebody is supposed  
to guard this thing  
so nobody after you  
"last predicted  
pilgrims" wanders in  
and learns about --

EMILY

You said "up to you  
*three.*"

MAN

Uh... You two and  
your sister.

Terra looks up from the grave.

EMILY

So... Wait, you were  
here before? Did she  
already hear all of  
this?

MAN

Yeah. She, uh... She  
seemed super devout  
so I figured she'd  
take my place so I  
told her about G-d  
being dead and all,  
and she did not take  
it well. Actually  
had a breakdown and  
ran off in... some  
direction. I went to  
buy more drinks  
after that but my

go-to's still mad at  
-- Hey, either of  
you gonna take my  
place?

The two stare at him. The Man sighs and nods, looking down at the grave and sipping the flask.

MAN

Well, shoot... I was  
a bit of a sucker  
when I said yes to  
it.

The Man chugs the rest of the flask and shakes like a dog. The Man stumbles back to the small cabin. Terra looks down at the grave as Emily looks after the Man.

Neither of them speak.

Terra takes a breath to speak, then doesn't. She joins Emily in looking down at the grave:

"Here lies G-d. The beginning – 1927."

Terra shakes her head and takes a breath to speak. She doesn't. She frowns and takes another. She doesn't speak.

The two keep staring down at the grave.

Emily takes a breath to speak.

EMILY

We have to find her.

Terra looks up at her, thinking.

TERRA

What's that smell?

Emily stares at her. Terra looks down at the grave. She sniffs. Terra's head perks up. She looks to the small cabin.

TERRA

Oh --

Terra BOLTS over to the small cabin as Emily looks as well:

SMOKE IS POURING OUT of the small cabin.

EMILY

Oh...

Terra PULLS THE MAN OUT THE CABIN,  
the Man clutching a half-full  
bottle of whiskey, pouring some ALL  
OVER HIMSELF.

MAN

(slurring)

It was an emergency!

Emily runs past them and into the cabin.

INT. SMALL CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The FIRE IS COVERING THE FRONT OF THE ROOM, lapping up a splashing of whiskey. It's at the desks now as Emily searches the room, trying to find something to put it out.

MAN (O.S.)

(from outside)

There's another  
bottle in one of the  
desks! The left-  
handed one!

Emily rushes to a left-handed desk, lifting it and pulling out a BOTTLE OF BOURBON. She opens the bottle, looks at the fire, realizes the counterintuitive nature, and sets it down.

She grabs CORNMAN'S GIFT off the floor and runs out.

EXT. SAUGATUCK FOREST - SMALL CABIN  
- MOMENTS LATER

Emily reaches Terra, who's sitting and catching her breath, THE MAN GONE.

TERRA  
(looking  
towards water)  
I... I don't know.  
He was slurring but  
he said he was  
gonna...

Emily looks around the forest, standing next to Terra and pocketing Cornman's gift.

EMILY

We gotta find Maya.

The two pause for a moment, Terra  
still breathing.

TERRA

*Shit, dude...*

Emily nods. Terra looks down at the  
ground.

TERRA

*Shit, dude... Is  
that...?*

(re:

cabin/plaques)

What do we...? Do we  
think...?

Emily doesn't answer, looking  
around.

EMILY

Where would Maya  
go...?

TERRA

Can we take a second  
to think about what  
just happened?!

EMILY

Maya... Maya would  
probably take a  
second to think.  
Then she'd...?

Emily looks around the forest,  
thinking.

EMILY

She hasn't called?

Terra throws Emily her phone,  
shell-shocked. Emily looks at it:  
it's 3:50PM, with no notifications.  
Emily holds the phone to Terra, who  
unfocusingly puts her thumb against  
it.

Emily goes to the Phone App and  
redials, holding it to her ear. She  
waits.

EMILY

It's dialing. She  
hasn't turned the  
phone off. Why...  
Why hasn't she  
turned the phone  
off?

Terra gets up, RUNNING TO THE CABIN.

EMILY

Terra?

(standing)

Terra!

Emily hurries after her.

INT. SMALL CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

The cabin's filled with SMOKE, but the fire hasn't moved much; taking its time to burn wood after centuries of rain.

Terra's at the entrance, coughing from the smoke and unable to go in. She lowers herself. Emily reaches her, but she's still trying to hear the phone.

TERRA

We need to... grab  
the stuff from the  
cabinets or...!

Let's get the  
plaques! We can take  
them to somebody and

they'll tell us if  
they were made,  
like, an... How  
would they know  
*me*...?!

(looking to  
Emily)

How'd they know *me*?!

Terra looks back into the cabin.  
She readies a charge, but Emily  
HOLDS HER BACK.

EMILY

Stop!

TERRA

What do you mean,  
*stop*?! There could  
be proof there that  
G-d exists -- I have  
to -- !

Terra MOVES IN and Emily tugs her  
back.

EMILY

NO!

TERRA

Let go!

Terra THROWS EMILY DOWN. Emily lands in the dead leaves, phone falling out her hands, as Terra readies to run in.

Terra can't do it. She holds the edges of the doorway, as if throw herself in. She stares at the fire through the smoke.

TERRA  
(biting lip)  
Shit, dude.

Emily gets back up, grabbing Terra again.

EMILY  
NO!

Terra's READY TO THROW Emily again, then sees Emily's pleading eyes. Terra stops. She doesn't know what to do.

The roof to the cabin FINALLY COLLAPSES IN. Terra sees this and quickly PULLS EMILY away from the cabin.

EXT. SAUGATUCK FOREST - SMALL CABIN  
- CONTINUOUS

They run away from the cabin as it continues burning, smoke RUSHING OUT the massive hole in the top. Terra stares at it as Emily coughs.

Terra looks to Emily, guilt slowly blossoming.

TERRA  
I just...

Emily looks to the cabin, then hurries over to it.

TERRA  
Hey! HEY!

Emily scoops the PHONE from the leaves in front of the cabin. She listens. She quickly hangs up. She heads to Terra, keeping them on track as best as she can.

EMILY  
Voicemail. She  
didn't pick up.

Terra gawks at Emily, half blown away by Emily's focus and half

mortified that Terra actually threw Emily to the ground.

Emily hands Terra her phone and Terra hazily takes it.

EMILY

She'd take time to think... She'd take a lot of time to think. Then... Then she'd... What conclusion would she come to?

Terra just gawks, unable to do anything else.

EMILY

She'd... She'd...

A tree over the cabin GROANS. A branch BREAKS OFF IT, smacking into the cabin and shooting up embers.

Emily sees this and recognizes the one thing she hasn't looked at yet. Her face goes numb. She can't speak.

She finally turns to THE WATER.

EMILY

No...

She stares at it, then has to turn her head away.

EMILY

No.

Terra sees this, not following.

TERRA

Emily...?

Emily's chin quivers, then she SPRINTS TOWARDS THE LAKE.

TERRA

Emily!

Terra gets up as Emily disappears into the trees.

EXT. SAUGATUCK FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

Emily's CHARGING THROUGH, branches SLICING HER CHEEKS. She doesn't even notice she's whimpering, going as fast as she can without thinking twice anymore.

Terra hurries through, but doesn't have the animalistic drive that puts Emily so far ahead of her.

TERRA  
EMILY!

EXT. OVAL BEACH - LATER

At the parking lot, the Man sits on a concrete wheel stop. He drops an EMPTY BOTTLE into the sand. He looks at the horizon.

Emily arrives at the beach, UNABLE TO BREATHE and her NOSE BLOODY. Her clothes are TORN UP. She looks around the shore. No Maya on the shore. She finally sees it:

At the edge of the water are Maya's BACKPACK and DUFFEL BAG.

Emily sees SPLASHING in the FAR, FAR DISTANCE.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

MAYA SWIMS BREASTSTROKE, only looking to the horizon. She pauses,

floating on her back, looking to the sky.

MAYA  
(huffing)  
Please... Please...

EXT. OVAL BEACH - SAME TIME

Emily sees this and WAILS.

EMILY  
NO!

Emily almost has a moment to think before she BURSTS DOWN THE BEACH, feet hitting the water.

Emily nearly SCREAMS as the water gets to her KNEES, but she's got no air left.

Terra REACHES THE BEACH, seeing Emily running in.

TERRA  
(breathless)  
Oh, no, no, no --

Terra LIMPS over to the water, but stops herself.

TERRA

No, no, no... No...

Terra looks around the beach,  
trying to find anyone.

TERRA

(words not  
coming out)

He-... Help!

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

Emily's now up to her NECK.

EMILY

(no air to  
yell)

Maya!

Tears nearly blind her as she  
BEGINS SWIMMING.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

Maya swims, but has to STOP TO  
BREATHE AGAIN.

She floats, looking back up at the  
sky, HEAVING.

MAYA  
(barely coming  
out)

Prove to me  
You're...? Show me  
Your... Show me...

A wave goes OVER MAYA'S FACE. Maya resurfaces and GAGS OUT WATER, COUGHING.

She's barely able to tread water.

EXT. OVAL BEACH - SAME TIME

Terra reaches the parking lot,  
seeing the Man.

TERRA  
(still no  
breath)  
He-... Help...!

The Man doesn't react, eyelids drooping.

Terra doesn't know what to do. Then she REALIZES. Terra pulls out her phone, unlocking it. She goes to the Phone App and DIALS 9-1-1. She stares at the screen, panting.

She looks to the water.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

Emily's BARELY ABLE TO SWIM, head under the water for longer and longer spans of time. She's beginning to LOSE CONSCIOUSNESS, her eyes closing for a moment before she JOLTS them open again. She looks forward.

She can no longer see splashing far ahead of her.

EXT. OVAL BEACH - SAME TIME

Terra stares at the phone, then PRESSES THE GREEN "DIAL." She puts the phone to her ear, worriedly shaking her head.

North of her, a FISHERMAN is loading a SKIFF into the lake.

911 OPERATOR (V.O.)  
(over phone)  
9-1-1, what's your emergency?

TERRA  
(still catching  
breath)

I'm on... Oval  
Beach... and...

Terra SEES THE FISHERMAN.

TERRA  
Oh!

Terra RUNS TO THE FISHERMAN,  
LIMPING, completely ignoring the  
phone in her hand.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

Maya floats with her eyes closed,  
another wave skimming OVER HER  
FACE. She breathes in after it. Her  
eyes barely open.

The sky above her is covered in  
clouds.

Maya SINKS UNDER THE WATER.

EXT. OVAL BEACH - MOMENTS LATER

Terra reaches the Fisherman,  
spewing out an incoherent sputter  
of words. The Fisherman frowns.

Terra points to the water.

TERRA  
(barely finding  
air)

There are... There  
are girls... They're  
in the water...

Terra shows the man the phone,  
where 9-1-1 IS DISPLAYED.

The Fisherman frowns then looks out  
to the water: there are no  
splashes, and the waves are  
covering wherever the girls' heads  
would be.

FISHERMAN  
Is somebody out  
there?

Terra nods, buckling over. She uses  
her hand to display short height,  
then realizes and points down the

beach, where the backpack and duffel bag are.

FISHERMAN  
Is a kid out there?!

Terra nods, holding up two fingers. The Fisherman PULLS THE MOTOR and hops into the skiff.

FISHERMAN  
Where are they?! I  
don't see them!

Terra still wheezes as she looks out.

She can't see them either.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

The trees, Terra, and the Fisherman, are completely indecipherable from how far out Emily is now. She looks around, her chin unable to lift itself over the water.

Maya's nowhere to be found.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - UNDERWATER -  
SAME TIME

Maya's face is less and less illuminated as she SINKS. Bubbles flow out of her nose in a burst, then another, shorter burst, then an even shorter burst.

Maya closes her eyes, curling her body together.

She's nearly in complete darkness when EMILY GRABS HER.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - MOMENTS LATER

The two reach the surface, BOTH GASPING FOR AIR. Emily treads water for the two of them, holding Maya over herself.

Maya's half conscious, eyes closed, as her weight forces Emily to SINK UNDER FOR A MOMENT, before Emily kicks herself back up. Emily tries to spit the water out of her mouth.

EMILY

(no air)

Maya, you... kick...

Maya, you gotta  
kick...

Maya's curled, barely conscious,  
unable to open her eyes.

MAYA

He's gone...

EMILY

Maya... Maya,  
*kick...*

MAYA

He's gone... He's  
not there...

EMILY

I'm... I'm still  
here... *I'm* still  
here...

Emily whimpers, struggling to keep  
her face over the waves.

EXT. OVAL BEACH - SAME TIME

Terra and the Fisherman are still looking for the girls.

FISHERMAN

Okay, I'm... I'm gonna head out and try to look for them! You stay here and wait for the cops!

The Fisherman PULLS FORWARD, bringing the skiff out.

Terra collapses onto the beach as she grabs her leg, trying to catch her breath. She watches as the Fisherman gets smaller and smaller.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

Another wave passes over the two of them, this one covering Maya's face as well. Emily gets to the surface again.

EMILY STOPS KICKING.

The two float for a moment, both with eyes closed.

EMILY

M-... Ma-...

They float, a wave coming OVER THEIR FACES. Both emerge from it, Emily taking a numb breath after. MAYA DOESN'T.

Next to them, CORNMAN'S GIFT plops up the surface, the handkerchief wrapping now a bit undone.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

The Fisherman's moving fast, looking out for the girls:

Through the waves, he CAN'T SEE ANY HEADS.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

Emily's eye peeks open, seeing Cornman's gift. The last corner of the handkerchief falls off, revealing AN OPAQUE ZIPLOC BAG, the air keeping the gift on the surface.

Emily keeps one arm wrapped around Maya, using the other to reach for the bag. As she does, the arm FALTERS. Emily's eyelids droop. She GRABS THE BAG, pulling it in.

Emily puts the bag on Maya's head, unzipping it. The contents are dry. Emily pulls it out, resting it on the bag.

It's a FLARE GUN.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

The Fisherman slows the boat to a halt, looking around. He still can't see anyone.

EXT. OVAL BEACH - SAME TIME

Terra lies on the beach, breathing, she looks up at the sky.

911 OPERATOR (V.O.)

(barely  
audible)

Ma'am...? Ma'am, I  
have you at Parking

Lot B on Oval Beach

--

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

Emily tries to point the flare gun up, but SHE CAN'T, her arm too weak. She looks up at the sky, her finger SLIPPING around the flare gun.

*REV!* Emily hears the Fisherman's skiff, breathing new life into her. SHE KICKS, holding Maya up, her eyelids fluttering.

Emily holds her arm up, pointing the gun to the sky.

The sky above her is covered in clouds.

Emily stares at it.

SHE SHOOTS AT IT.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

The Fisherman hears the FLARE SHOOT UP, lighting a BRILLIANT RED against the clouded sky.

The Fisherman follows it down to the water and TURNS THE SKIFF towards it.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SAME TIME

Emily kicks the two of them over another wave as the sound of the ENGINE gets LOUDER AND LOUDER.

EMILY

Stay here... Stay  
here... You're still  
here...

Emily can't see as the SKIFF comes into view, the Fisherman SEEING THEM and slowing down.

Emily BLACKS OUT.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. OVAL BEACH - LATER

Emily VOMITS WATER, a PARAMEDIC backing off of her. Terra covers her mouth in relief. Emily GASPS IN AIR.

They're on the beach, an AMBULANCE by them, parked on the sand. The sky's orange through the now spreading clouds. The Fisherman talks to a POLICEMAN as Emily begins to recognize her surroundings and push herself up.

PARAMEDIC

Woah, woah, woah,  
take it easy.

Emily gasps as she looks around hazily.

EMILY

(no air)

Where...? Where...?

PARAMEDIC

Come on. Keep down.  
You're safe on a  
beach.

EMILY

Where...?

Emily looks around as Terra kneels by her.

EMILY

Where...?

TERRA

She's okay.

The Paramedic wraps Emily in a towel, who tries to refuse it, looking to Terra.

TERRA

She's okay! She's lying down in the ambulance. She's just lying down.

Emily looks back to the ambulance, letting the towel wrap around her. The Paramedic heads back to the ambulance as Emily breathes.

TERRA

Oh, my G-d -- you're okay.

Emily looks to Terra, then immediately tries to stand. As Terra tries to stop her, Emily COLLAPSES from weakness.

TERRA

Hey! Hey, you're all  
good!

Emily shakes her head, pushing herself up again. She winces as she gets to her feet, Terra unsure if she should stop her.

Sand falls off Emily's soaking clothes as she pulls the towel around herself and stumbles to the ambulance.

INT. AMBULANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Emily arrives, where Maya lies on the stretcher, looking up at the ceiling. Maya turns her head slightly to acknowledge Emily as Emily leans against the back of the ambulance.

EMILY

Are you breathing?

Maya doesn't answer. Emily sighs in relief.

EMILY

Okay.

Emily leans her torso over the edge, flailing a bit to tumble into the ambulance. She squirms to face up, lying on the ambulance floor, feet hanging over the edge.

EXT. OVAL BEACH - SAME TIME

Terra stands, watching the girls from a distance, not noticing the POLICEMAN APPROACHING.

POLICEMAN

Ma 'am?

Terra turns as the Policeman reaches her.

POLICEMAN

Whose kids are these?

Terra thinks for a moment, then nods.

TERRA

They're my sisters.  
What's up?

The Policeman frowns, gauging their lack of resemblance.

TERRA  
Well, *step-sisters*.  
But, y'know, same  
whoop.

The Policeman frowns even more,  
then confusedly nods.

POLICEMAN  
All... right... So  
can we drop you off  
anywhere?

TERRA  
I drove.

The Policeman nods.

TERRA  
You guys got here  
fast.

POLICEMAN  
Yeah, there was a  
fire not too far  
from here. In the  
forest.

TERRA  
Yeah?

POLICEMAN

Yeah. Hard to get  
water there. Had to  
just contain it.  
Crazy fire.  
Everything's just  
ash.

The Policeman steps away as Terra  
nods.

INT. AMBULANCE - SAME TIME

Maya still lies on the stretcher as  
Emily lies on the floor, both  
looking up at the ceiling.

MAYA

I...

Emily looks in Maya's direction.

MAYA

I'm sorry.

Emily doesn't respond, smiling.

INT. TRUCK - LATER

Emily sits in the middle of the  
beige leather truck bench as the

Paramedic helps Maya into the passenger, Maya wincing. Terra gets ready to get into the driver's seat when...

POLICEMAN (O.S.)

Hey!

Terra sees the Policeman hurrying after them holding the BACKPACK and DUFFEL BAG. Terra's face goes still.

TERRA

Oh, shit...

The Policeman arrives at the truck, frowning.

POLICEMAN

(to Terra)

Are these yours?

EMILY

They're mine!

Terra and the Policeman look to Emily as the Paramedic closes the passenger door, Maya wincing in pain.

EMILY

You can throw them  
in the bed!

The Policeman looks to Emily,  
shaking the backpack.

POLICEMAN

It's pretty heavy.

EMILY

Yeah. I do a lotta  
learning --  
(a la Terra)  
-- bud.

The Policeman frowns, then shrugs,  
tossing the bags in the bed. He  
waves goodbye to the three of them,  
then heads to his cruiser in the  
other end of the lot.

Terra gets in, closing the door.

INT. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

None of them say anything. They  
just sit for a moment. Terra  
fidgets with the rusted gear shift.  
Maya takes a breath.

MAYA

There's sand in my  
ass.

Emily agrees. Terra nods and starts the car.

EXT. TOW COMPANY LOT - EVENING

The sun's getting low as Emily and Maya lean against TERRA'S MALIBU. They've changed into dry clothes from the duffel bag.

Terra walks out of the office door, shaking her head.

TERRA

*Towing and storage fee.*

Terra unlocks the Malibu as Emily opens the backseat door. Maya pauses, then opens the other backseat door.

INT. TERRA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Terra closes her door and they sit in silence again, taking a breath. She runs her hands over the gear

shift and a SMILE creeps out of her.

Terra looks out the window, seeing the TRUCK.

Terra thinks about it, then pulls out her phone. She dials, then holds it to her ear.

TERRA

Hi. Somebody stole my truck. I live somewhere around ten miles East of Saranac maybe. The truck's, uh... No, right, I don't know where the truck is. Best of luck. It's a Ram, but like, old and shitty. My name's whatever. I have a hat and I'm an asshole.

Terra hangs up and starts the Malibu. Emily smiles.

Terra goes to the Maps App.

INT. TERRA'S CAR - EVENING

They're on the freeway, Emily sleeping against the window. Maya looks out her window at the violet sky. There isn't a single cloud in it. The sky's just empty.

Morose, Maya looks away. She looks to Emily, sleeping. Maya stares at her.

Maya pulls her backpack from under her feet, opening it. Piece by piece, she reaches to put Terra's contraband on the front seat.

Terra looks to the passenger seat, seeing Maya has also placed ALL TEN HAMSA NECKLACES on the front seat.

TERRA

(quiet)

These were your mom's, yeah?

Terra looks in the rearview as Maya nods.

Terra fishes through the necklaces, plucking out...

TERRA  
(to herself)  
One, two, three,  
four, five...

She pulls the five up, then holds them back for Maya to take.

MAYA  
(quiet as well)  
I don't want them.

TERRA  
Emily might.

Maya stares at them, then takes them, putting them back in her backpack and zipping it up.

Terra takes a breath to say something, but can't bring herself to. She keeps quiet. Maya looks out the window again.

EXT. LEVIN HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Terra pulls the duffel bags out of the trunk. Emily checks their dad's phone: it's 9:00PM.

TERRA

You sure you can  
carry these?

Emily nods, taking both of them.  
Her limp arms FALL DOWN as she  
grunts. Maya watches, then takes  
one of the bags. Both of them are  
exceedingly weak right now.

TERRA

All right... Uh...  
If you ever need a  
ride, I'm... There's  
an app. I'm on it.

The three of them stand there,  
nobody moving.

Terra nods, then makes the first  
move: she pats them both on their  
heads.

TERRA

See ya, buds.

Terra heads back to the driver's  
seat, starting the car. She drives  
off. Emily and Maya watch her go.

EXT. LEVIN HOUSE - DRIVEWAY -  
MOMENTS LATER

Emily and Maya reach the top of the driveway when Maya stops. Emily goes to the side door to type a code into the door handle when she sees Maya and pauses.

Maya stares at the door, unable to move.

Emily doesn't say anything.

MAYA  
I...

Maya's chin quivers, but she holds it back.

MAYA  
You guys saw it too,  
right? The plaques?

Emily nods.

EMILY  
There's an  
explanation for --

MAYA

No, there isn't... I  
spent an hour  
just... just  
thinking of every  
possible explanation  
for something so  
simple... And I  
thought proof of G-d  
was gonna be more...  
exciting. But that  
was it. There's no  
other explanation...

Emily pauses.

EMILY

There's probably an  
explanation.

MAYA

(voice  
cracking)

Emily!

Maya's eyes well up.

MAYA

I... I don't think I  
can go back in

there... I don't  
think I can do  
this... I don't know  
how to do this  
without... If I  
don't have...

Emily sets down her duffel bag,  
then crosses over to Maya.

MAYA

Why is everything  
happening at  
once...? I...

(taking a  
breath)

I don't wanna go...  
I can't lose... I  
can't lose  
everything...

Emily stares, then hugs Maya.

EMILY

You're not losing  
everything. Dad's  
getting sole  
custody. I'm not  
going anywhere.

MAYA

Don't...

(breaking down)

Don't let them take  
her away...!

Emily squeezes Maya as Maya sobs  
into Emily's arm.

MAYA

I know I pretend  
that I don't like  
her but I do! I do  
so much...! It's  
because of me...  
This is because of  
me. All of this --  
All of --

EMILY

No, it isn't... Not  
everything is  
because of you.

Emily thinks, holding onto Maya.

EMILY

You're ten. You're  
small. You really  
can't do a lot...

(cracking a  
smile)

I think you'll feel  
different when  
you're becoming a  
woman.

Maya stares up.

EMILY

It's gonna suck...  
but I'm still here.

Maya looks up, unsure. Emily knows  
she has to say more.

EMILY

Y'know... I'm sorry  
you lost G-d today.  
I know They meant a  
lot to you... But I  
was thinking of,  
y'know, if G-d died  
in 1927, then Hitler  
rose to power right  
after that, and  
maybe G-d would've  
done something if  
They were still  
alive. But then, I

thought... about...  
probably not. But I  
don't know... I  
don't think it  
matters if G-d can  
change things. *If* G-  
d made us, if G-d  
was real once, then  
G-d made us loving.

Emily holds Maya tight.

EMILY

I don't... When I  
always saw you  
talking about G-d  
and being Jewish,  
you were just  
bursting with  
love... I don't know  
if G-d exists,  
but... I know G-d's  
good.

Maya looks at her, trying to take  
it in. Emily releases and steps  
back, going to punch the code into  
the door handle.

Maya pauses, then grabs her duffel bag off the driveway. She doesn't smile, but one arm subconsciously HUGS HERSELF.

INT. LEVIN HOUSE - EMILY'S ROOM -  
LATER

Emily sets her duffel bag and backpack on her bed.

DAD (O.S.)

Hey! What have you two been up to?

EMILY

Soccer. Maya's got your phone.

DAD (O.S.)

Gotcha.

Emily looks around the bare room. Now that we've got a look at it, we can see all that's in it is her bed and a desk. The desk has a printout of a TORAH PORTION on it.

Emily goes and sits at the desk, exhausted. She looks down at the Hebrew, then smiles and kisses it.

She reads it in her head, humming along.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - EARLY MORNING

The Man from the small cabin swims in a calm lake, clearly exhausted and soon to drown. The fog is so thick he can't see in front of himself.

Up ahead, a RED BLUR OF LIGHT FLASHES BY. The Man is surprised by it. He keeps swimming. Another red blur of light. The Man keeps swimming, then pauses. He stretches vertical and his feet touch the bottom.

EXT. FREEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The Man walks to shore, exhausted. He walks over a railing as another car zooms by. The Man looks up and sees a freeway sign showing an exit in the direction of SOUTH TOWARDS MILWAUKEE. The Man confusingly

looks back at the water, then to the sign again.

The Man shakes his head, then walks back towards the water.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END