

Gnawbone

By: Connor Ermir Bradshaw

THE CHARACTERS

ANGEL PETERS. In her 20s. Transfemme. Lynn's child. Dropped out of community college and moved out four years ago. Hates cops. Keeps a bat under her bed. Afraid of the dark but loves horror movies. Hates the new construction going on.

LYNN PETERS. In her 40s. Cis woman. Mother to Angel and Abel. Likes her chicken fried and her burgers rare. Has \$1,092.54 in her savings account. Resourceful. Part of the local church's altar guild. Hates the new construction going on.

ABEL PETERS. In his late teens. Identifies as a cis dude, but doesn't think of himself as a "man." Lynn's child. Studies part-time at the community college. Regularly throws out his back deadlifting. Hates the new construction going on.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHORS 1 & 2. Omniscient harbingers. Killer smiles.

THE PLACE

A trailer. An unholy and holy place. The space between shovel and dirt.

NOTES ON LANGUAGE:

A // indicates the beginning of overlapping dialogue.

A – indicates the interruption of speech, whether from the character currently speaking or from another character.

The play makes use of indents to denote beats and pauses. The further the indent, the longer the intended beat.

The play features South Midwestern accents – like what you'd hear in Southern Illinois or rural Indiana – for two of the characters: Abel and Lynn. The dialogue is written to phonetically reflect this.

*“I got severe headaches, nausea, which got worse over the next three months, accompanied by a great fatigue, sleep disturbances: insomnia; inertia, disinterest in friends and environment, in my own work. Confusion, losing things, forgetting things, dizzy-giddy feeling. Feeling of unreality, episodes of “white-outs”, not knowing where I was or what I was doing, losing things during those periods. Even losing whole hours of time. No energy. Changes in handwriting: illegible even to myself. Vision getting worse, even though nothing organically wrong; esp. left eye, feels swollen, seems to have gravel on it, extremely sensitive to light. Finding it more and more difficult to follow oral or written instructions; complete loss of three-dimensional perception and visualization...Forgetting words, even very simple descriptive ones. Unable to finish sentences, my tongue seems paralyzed...Dropping things, spilling things, stumbling over my own feet, cramps in legs at night, reflexes slowed down, can't drive car. Feels like short-circuit from head to hand...Doing madly impulsive things; very restless, irritable. **I'm just not me anymore!**”*

— Elke Blodgett, “Manganese Toxicity”

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE.

SPOTLIGHT. LYNN stands alone onstage. The only thing next to her is a bathroom sink with various makeup products and a hairdryer stacked on both sides. She's doing her makeup in the morning, facing the audience, looking into them like a mirror. She purses her lips, applies lipstick. Decides she hates that color. Wipes it off with the back of her hand. Applies another redder coat. Better. LYNN fishes for blush in her makeup bag. Finds it. Quickly stamps it into her cheeks. Forgot to put on concealer. Furiously scrubs the blush off with her thumbs. Lets out a deep agitated sigh.

SPOTLIGHT. ANGEL sits on the stage, parallel to LYNN, about two feet away. The only thing next to her is a small black bag. She's doing her morning routine, facing the audience, looking into them like a mirror. Mother and daughter perform the rest of these actions concurrently. ANGEL pulls a black lipstick from her bag and applies it. Cleans the edge with her nail. Looks good.

LYNN pulls out concealer and starts dabbing it under her eyes, around the corners of her mouth, and under her bottom lip. Fishes for another blush. Finds one and presses it into her cheeks. She tuts. It's better but not good.

ANGEL pulls an eyeliner pen from her bag and carefully draws. One eye. Then the other. It looks professionally done. She grabs a tweezer and starts deliberately, meditatively, plucking her eyebrows.

LYNN grabs an eyeliner pen from her makeup bag. She shakily draws. She lets out a breath, that sounds more like a whistle. A tea kettle starting.

ANGEL migrates the plucking from her eyebrows to her lips.

LYNN grabs her mascara and hastily rakes it over her eyelashes.

ANGEL migrates the plucking from her lips to her arms.

LYNN sprays herself with a bottle of perfume. Once. Twice. Three times.

ANGEL continues plucking her arms.

LYNN stares at herself hard, scanning for any unaccounted imperfection. She sighs.

ANGEL continues plucking.

LYNN closes her eyes, opens them. Tries to admire her handiwork.

ANGEL continues plucking.

LYNN can't admire her handiwork.

ANGEL continues plucking.

LYNN lets out a frustrated, disgusted grunt and swipes everything off the sink. The brushes, palettes and hairdryer hit the tile.

ANGEL flinches at the sound of the crash and accidentally plucks out a chunk of her skin. She lets out a breathy yelp.

LYNN feels suffocated by this bathroom. It's too small. She runs the faucet.

ANGEL investigates her wound, applying pressure. It's not bleeding too badly.

LYNN grabs a washcloth, submerges it into the water, and starts scrubbing her face.

ANGEL grabs her things and exits, with one hand covering her arm.

LYNN scrubs harder and harder. Harder. Harder.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE TWO.

We're inside a trailer. It's small, though Lynn might call it "cozy." But it's not. The home feels stripped. Gutted even. There's no dining room set – or even a kitchen table – it's just folding chairs and three tray tables leaning against a wall. Near the folding tables and chairs is a rain bucket that's about a quarter of the way full. It's positioned underneath a softball-sized hole in the roof. The only other notable pieces of furniture in the living room are the couch and the TV. The couch, a peeling leathery thing, floats in the middle of the space. A boat out at sea.

The TV, far too big for the space, sits on cinderblocks that have been stacked on top of each other. It faces the audience. A lighthouse.

LYNN's in the kitchen, leaning against the counter, drinking a cup of coffee and watching the local news on mute.

ABEL walks in.

ABEL.
Mornin'.

LYNN.
G'mornin'. Sleep okay?

ABEL.
Where's Angel?

LYNN. [*Looks toward the front door*]
Outside.
Just on 'er phone.

ABEL.
Gotcha.

ABEL looks at the TV.

ABEL.
Can you unmute it? I wanna hear this.

LYNN.
Yeah.

LYNN grabs the remote and unmutes. NEWS ANCHOR 1 is heard from the TV.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

—bean harvests hit record highs in previous years. But local farmers point out that new suburban sprawl could substantially limit harvests for years, even decades, into the future. Spokespersons from Cain Development firmly push back on these claims, noting the firm's decades-long history of sustainable commercial development and its recent efforts to electrify a portion of Indiana's power grid. For years,

the power grid has drawn from coal as its primary–

LYNN mutes the TV.

ABEL.

What the–

LYNN.

Yeh got whatcha wanted. Soybeans. Developers. Sustainable.

Now yeh want anything for breakfast? We don't got eggs but we got pancake mix. Want me to get some batter started?

ABEL.

I'm not hungry. Any coffee left?

LYNN slides a full mug over to ABEL.

LYNN.

Din't put creamer or sugar in it. S'just black.

And I used the Brita water. So it's not "tainted."

ABEL.

Thanks.

LYNN.

'Course.

Now I'm goin' to Saint Peter in a bit. There's some altar guild work that I needa do.

Denise and summa the other girls is plannin' to do a potluck too. So I'll prob'ly be there 'til...nine?

That okay?

ABEL.

Yeah, fine with me.

LYNN.

Doin' anything today?

ABEL.

Who knows?

Playin' it by ear. Couple friends and I might swing by to lift some weights.

LYNN.

Long as it's just you and there aren't any...stragglers.

LYNN looks out toward ANGEL as she says this.

ABEL.

Yeah, I know.

LYNN.

I don't needa explain. You know // what I'm gettin' at

ABEL.

Yup.

LYNN.

'Kay. Good.

So ya think you'll still have time to help move my bed and dresser before I go?

ABEL.

Uhhh//hhhh

LYNN.

We can at least try, y'know?

ABEL.

I just woke up, mom.

LYNN.

We don't gotta move 'em far. But you seen the floor. It's saggin' and I'm just worried about what'll // happen to me if

ABEL.

Okay fine fine fine. We can try to move it.

LYNN.

And it won't take long. I just can't do it myself.

ABEL.

Maybe we could get some help...[*ABEL looks offstage*]

LYNN.

Whas' that one gonna do? Sittin' out there. Talkin' on the phone. Rail thin. Prob'ly snap a bone just tryna lift a corner of the mattress. No no, we got this handled.

And if we don't, you can get summa yer friends over here tomorra and y'all can lift everything.

ABEL.

Okay.

LYNN.

Great. You finish that coffee and I'll start gettin' my things together.

Y'all din't ended up going anywhere last night, didja?

ABEL.

Nah. Keys're still in the front pocket of yer purse.

LYNN.

Just answered the next question I was gonna ask.

Same wavelength.

LYNN exits. ABEL sips his coffee, looks offstage to where ANGEL is presumably sitting outside. He unmutes the TV.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

—alling on city council members to do something about the rash of drug overdoses in recent months, highlighted by the —

LYNN returns, purse thrown over her shoulder.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

— death of 21-year-old Billy Phelps, a graduate of Brown County High School, who had recently returned to his hometown of Gnawbone.

LYNN.

Yeh finish your coffee?

ABEL tosses the rest of it back.

ABEL.

Yup.

Les' go.

*ABEL and LYNN exit. We hear them talking offstage. Meanwhile, the NEWS ANCHORS continue their exchange. This concurrent dialogue is indicated and offset by asterisks ***.*

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Brown County High School principal, Jeff O'Shaugnessy, released the following statement to the community: "The recent passing of Billy Phelps is tragic, to say the least. And in a community as tight-knit as ours, one doesn't need to look far before finding a person who was directly impacted. The entire staff of Brown County High School embraces its mission to contribute to our students' social and emotional development. This is a difficult time for everyone, but I know our students and staff will be able to lean on each other as they remember not just a former classmate, but a friend, brother, and lifelong Brown County eagle. Fly high."

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Fly high, Billy.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Turning over to related flying news, two local bird spotters have recently captured footage of a large winged creature sweeping across the night sky. This has Brown County avian enthusiasts wondering: do we have a bald eagle in our midst? Or, and I hope you don't mind my saying this, Jerry, is this perhaps Billy coming back one final time?

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Don't mind at all, Tina. You raise an interesting point. It's such an interesting point, in fact, that I'll raise your question with another: What *is* a fallen angel?

Suddenly, NEWS ANCHOR 1 & 2 turn their bodies to the camera and direct all of their lines to it. Their demeanors shift.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

We do have an Angel in our midst, don't we, Jerry?

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Indeed we do, Tina.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Why don't we ask her?

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

I would, but we're not in the habit of asking questions we know the answer to, are we?

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Perhaps I can answer your initial question with another question, Jerry. What is it they say about Gnawbone? That you don't hit rock bottom; you just get used to the feeling of falling?

The TV goes static-y. It's as though locusts are swarming the NEWS ANCHORS.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

That's right, Tina. You just get used to the feeling of falling.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Poor falling Angel.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Poor falling Angel.

The static stops and the two snap back to normal positions and demeanors.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Well here are some other animals that could be in the sky, Jerry: cats and dogs. That's right. For the first time in weeks, it looks as though central Indiana will be getting enough rain to feed a field of sunflowers.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Let's turn it over to our weather correspondent, Darrell, for the details. Darrell, you hearing any meowing or barking in the distance?

LYNN.

Now yeh see thas' where there's a good handhold. But the drawer's there so just make sure // it dun't go closin' on

ABEL.

I know how to move furniture, mom.

LYNN.

No I know, I know. I jus' don't want yer' fingers gettin' caught is all.

ABEL.

Where're you grabbin'?

LYNN.

I'm holdin' it here.

Whatta you think?

ABEL.

I think thas' a bad spot.

LYNN.

Why's that?

ABEL.

Because if I'm tryna pull, I need you to push. We can't both be pullin'.

LYNN.

I figured we'd both needa // pull to start

ABEL.

This is stupid. My friends and I should just move it.

LYNN.

Is' not stupid. You agreed to try. And if it don't work then you can try on yer own time but I just wanna see if we can // get this thing

ABEL.

Why? Why does it matter that we can move it?

LYNN.

I don't know why yer actin' so annoyed all of a sudden. You was perfectly happy to try and move it 30 seconds ago.

ABEL.

Because I thought you was gonna come in here, look at it, and realize it's too heavy for you and me to move.

LYNN.

Well you thought wrong then.

I'll carry this whole stupid dresser myself. I don't care.

A back well used is a back broken.

ABEL.

Mom.

LYNN.

You gonna move this with me or not?

ABEL.

Fine.

LYNN.

Great.

Just watch out for the floor. Remember, it's saggin' there. Ya see how it's sagging?

ABEL.

Yes, I see how it's sagging.

LYNN.

Like there's sump'n pulling it down almost.

ABEL.

Ready?

LYNN.

1...2...3!

Grunting.

ABEL.

S'tearin' up the floor, mom.

LYNN.

Well it's outta the way now at least.

What?

ABEL.

Just let me and my friends take care of it.

LYNN.

All those weights and ya can't help yer mom lift some furniture?

Vanity. Thas' what those muscles are. A vanity project.

ABEL.

Yeah alright, mom.

LYNN.

Don't. Don't do that. I hate when yeh do that.

I dunno where yeh learned that snarkiness from but it sure din't come from me.

LYNN reenters. She grabs her purse, checks the front pocket for the keys. Looks around, trying to find something amiss, before landing on the TV, she grabs the remote and slams it down in frustration. It mutes the TV.

LYNN.

Ya can't be leavin' the TV on all the time!

ABEL reenters.

ABEL.

I don't. We // were only outta the room

LYNN.

Yeh just did! Now turn it off. I don't want the picture burnin' onto the screen.

ABEL crosses to the remote, grabs it, turns off the TV.

ABEL.

Ya only gotta worry about that with static images // on OLED displays.

LYNN.

I don't need an explanation, Abel, I just need ya to do what I'm tellin' you to do.

Now. There's a frozen pizza if yer eatin' here tonight. I don't got any money for ya // so if you wanna

ABEL.

I don't need yer money.

LYNN half-chuckles half-scoffs.

LYNN.

Yeh do, actually. But I don't have any right now so, I guess yer S-O-L regardless.

Okay. Gimme a hug before I go.

ABEL trudges over to LYNN and leans against her.

LYNN.

Thas' not a hug, thas' a lean. I want a hug.

ABEL wraps his arms around LYNN and gives her a hug.

LYNN.

Alright. Love you. I'll talk to yeh later tonight.

Lemme know if ya end up coming over.

ABEL.

Will do.

Love you, too.

LYNN exits. ANGEL enters not long after. She's wearing cargo shorts and an oversized Harley Davidson tee. It hangs off her shoulders, swallowing up her belly and hips.

ANGEL.

Hey.

ABEL.

Mornin'.

Good to see the clothes fit.

ANGEL.

Oh yeah. Like a glove.

She swishes the shirt around her like one would a dress. It'd be huge on ABEL, too.

ABEL.

I have smaller shirts.

If I'da known mom din't like yer outfits // I woulda gotten

ANGEL.

I know. This is fine.

ABEL.

Ya need a shower or anything?

I saw ya did yer makeup // so I wasn't sure

ANGEL.

Just some lipstick and eyeliner.

I can do it again.

ABEL.

I mean, you don't *have* to shower if // you don't want to

ANGEL.

No, I probably should. Wash the funeral smell of me.

ABEL.

Ah. So that's what that was. I was wondering.

ANGEL.

Yeah. Turns out "funeral smell" is just a potent mix of stale perfume and death.

Brief silence.

ABEL.

Yeah so. There's towels in my room. Dunno if mom grabbed you // any but I

ANGEL.

She didn't.

ABEL.

Yeah, I din't think she'd get to it.

They're in my closet. Top shelf. I've got soap you can use, too, if ya need it.

ANGEL.

Cool.

Thanks.

ABEL.

Yeah totally.

I can brew some more coffee if ya want. Dunno if yer still a caffeine junkie.

ANGEL.

Not a “junkie” but yeah, I could use some.

ABEL.

Cool. I’ll get that started while you shower up.

And um.

Don’t drink the water while yer in there.

ANGEL.

What?

ABEL.

I just. Mom says it’s fine but it’s been kinda weird lately. So.

Like I don’t think it’s got lead or anything. But like. Ya know. It’s backwoods tap water. Pipes are old.

Water comes out a different color if it hasn’t run in a bit.

Again, prob’ly being overly cautious. But. Wanted ya to know.

ANGEL.

Gotcha.

Thanks for the heads up. I’m gonna shower and try to avoid letting any water get in my eyes, ears, or mouth.

ABEL.

Perfect. Solid plan.

ANGEL starts to leave.

ABEL.

Oh also! Um, I don’t know what mom told you but she’s gonna be at Saint Peter mosta’ the day. Gotta clean the church robes and shit. Said there’s a frozen pizza for dinner. But it’ll basically just be the two of us today.

ANGEL.

Cool.

ABEL.

Yeah. So. If you wanna wear one of *your* outfits, ya can.

Unless you like the shirt // in which case

ANGEL.

I don’t like this shirt.

ABEL.

Okay yeah I figured.

ANGEL.

Yeah it's like...really ugly.

ABEL.

Oh it's ugly?

ANGEL.

Yeah super ugly. I'm sorry no one told you until now.

ABEL.

That's really interesting because the bitches on my dick didn't seem to think it was ugly.

ANGEL hits him with a look that's half-disgust, half-"I'm not going to bail you out with a quip; this just has to sit in the air."

ABEL.

Yeah so...yeah you can take a shower and I'll get the coffee ready.

ANGEL.

Uh-huh.

I'll make sure to put this shirt back in your room.

Ya know. Lest the bitches // lose the reason

ABEL.

Your sarcasm can't hurt me; they persecuted Jesus, too.

ANGEL.

Oh my godddd. Go make yourself useful before I have to disown you.

ABEL.

Technically, Jesus was dis//owned, too, ya know.

ANGEL.

OH MY GODDDDDDD.

ANGEL exits, laughing to herself. BLACKOUT.

SCENE THREE.

ABEL's now sitting outside by the firepit smoking a cigarette, occasionally taking swigs of his coffee. It's raining lightly, but ABEL's set up a makeshift metal awning that keeps him dry (enough). Beside him is a set of rusty dumbbells.

ABEL.

You almost done'n there?!

ANGEL.

Yeah. Coming!

ABEL.

I left your coffee on the counter!

ANGEL.

Thanks!

ANGEL emerges from the house, coffee in hand. She's wearing a long, flowy skirt with a black, plunging v-neck. She sits.

ANGEL.

I gotta ask: how long has that hole been in the living room?

ABEL.

I'm plannin' to make it a skylight.

ANGEL.

Okay.

So a couple weeks or...?

ABEL.

I dunno. Maybe a week er' two. Hardly ever rains this time a' year though, so it's like, rarely an issue. And it's a small hole so.

ANGEL.

Can't you just put a tarp over it?

ABEL.

Mom said it'd look "unseemly."

Again, s'not an issue.

ANGEL.

Long as it's not an issue.

ABEL hands ANGEL his cigarette. She accepts it.

ANGEL.

I like this little awning structure ya got here. You build it?

ABEL.

Yeah. Just had to get some corrugated metal sheets from the scrapyard and solder 'em to these poles I got from an old volleyball net.

ANGEL.

Okay, engineer.

ABEL.

Yeah right.

Y'know honestly, engineers don't even do shit most of the time. They just fuck around in CAD until their paycheck hits.

Engineers wish they could build this.

ANGEL. [*Affectionately pats the metal pole*]

Oh, I bet. Can't script this puppy in CAD.

ABEL.

Not a chance. Too original and forward thinking.

ANGEL.

Right, I figured that was why.

ABEL.

You figured correct.

ANGEL takes a deep pull from the cigarette. Exhales. The water patters rhythmically on the metal awning. Almost like musical notes.

ANGEL.

Okay bandaid rip time.

We need to talk about last night.

ABEL.

Mmmmm.

Okay.

What about it? Specifically.

ANGEL.

Guess we can start with mom having... whatever that was. Clutching at her head, moaning, crying, rocking herself. That could be a good place to start.

ABEL.

Yeah.

ANGEL.

Yeah?

ABEL.

Yeah, I dunno.

Whatta you want me to say?

ANGEL.

Anything. I mean you leapt into action. It's obviously not the first time this has happened.

ABEL.

No yeah it's like a – like a tic or sump'n I dunno.

ANGEL.

...so how often does it happen?

ABEL.

Depends. It's when she's agitated.

Which isn't often, by the way. I think she was just overwhelmed.

ANGEL.

Overwhelmed.

ABEL.

Yeah. Overwhelmed.

We were yelling.

S'the first time she's seen you in years.

Bein' reminded about the funeral prob'ly din't help any.

She was overwhelmed.

ANGEL.

Okay...

ABEL.

Can I just–

I just don't wanna turn this into sump'n it isn't. Like. She and I have a handle on it.

It sucks, like truly sucks, that you experienced it on your first day back but like. S'not a problem.

ANGEL.

Have you tried to look up symptoms // or anything? What if

ABEL.

She went to the doctor. She told me she was fine and that the doctor din't have any concerns.

ANGEL.

Yeah but she could have told you anything.

ABEL.

I guess.

But I dunno what you want me to do. I'm not gonna involuntarily commit her.

ANGEL.

Okay, I didn't say you should. I'm just asking questions that any sane person would have after watching their // mother collapse like that.

ABEL.

I know. I know. I know.

S'just not a big deal. Like.

I just.

I really don't wanna talk about this. Like at all.

It sucks. It's a total vibe killer and right now I just wanna sit under this awning and chain smoke and shoot the shit and like, eventually get the marshmallows we couldn't get yesterday, y'know?

ANGEL.

I get that. But I need you to know, really know, that mom breaking down like that, acting helpless, like a toddler // isn't a normal thing.

ABEL.

She wasn't actin' like a—

God damn it.

This is what I was talkin' about last night. *You* don't ask questions – or even talk to people – so you can understand them better. You do it to poke holes in shit. To find something wrong. Anything wrong.

Why can't this be a minor thing? Why can't mom just have some tic? Why's it gotta be // this whole conspiracy where mom's lying

ANGEL.

Because it so obviously isn't a minor thing! Mom doubled over and couldn't stop rocking, and then forced you // to like, baby her—

ABEL.

She din't force me to do anything! She was vulnerable and I knew what to do! Like. Firefighters aren't “babying” families when they rescue them from a burning house.

ANGEL.

Okay but what's the burning house in this scenario, Abel?

ABEL.

I dunno!! It was a fuckin' random metaphor I pulled outta my ass; the point was that you don't abandon family when they need you!

Pause. ANGEL flicks the cigarette away from her.

ABEL.

Can we just drop this? Please?

If it was a problem, I woulda told you.

It isn't.

Mom can be dramatic. And mean. Like really mean now. But she's not crazy. She's not dangerous.

We got a handle on it. Okay?

Silence.

ABEL.

Fuck.

Come on.

I don't wanna do this. I just wanna get to hang out with you and dick around.

This shit's heavy and I don't wanna like, only remember *this* conversation after yer gone.

Silence.

ABEL.

Here's what I had planned for today. Or what I was thinkin' about doin' while you were in the shower.

I was gonna have one of my friends drive us to the Antique Mall. I know you like those weird ass porcelain dolls with the fucked up faces. And they got a ton of 'em there.

And I know you've been reading about the real estate developments that've been happening. So I thought, we could check one of 'em out. They're, like, restricted and everything but I'm friends with one of the foremen and he said we're good to go after hours as long as we don't fuck with anything. So I thought that could be, like, cool, if you wanted a firsthand perspective on it.

And I was thinkin' we just do a Jack's pizza for dinner. Nothin' crazy. Does that sound good?

Silence.

ANGEL reaches over and grabs ABEL's hand, squeezes once. ABEL holds on.

SCENE FOUR.

It's late at night. ANGEL is sleeping on the couch, clutching a porcelain doll. We can hear the faint chirping of crickets. Maybe a yip or two from coyotes in the distance.

LYNN enters, holding a grocery bag in her right hand while balancing several full tupperware containers on her left. She turns on a kitchen light. ANGEL groans and rolls over.

ANGEL.
Mmmm?

LYNN.
Don't mind me. I'm jus' puttin' things away.

ANGEL.
M'kay.

LYNN puts the tupperware containers in the fridge, looks over at ANGEL.

LYNN.
Whas' that?

ANGEL.
Hm?

LYNN.
That.

ANGEL.
It's a doll.

LYNN.
A doll?

ANGEL.
Yeah. Abel and I...we uh, we went into town // and checked out the Antique

LYNN.
I can tell thas' where yeh went.
Jus' din't think that was sump'n you'd be into.

ANGEL.
Yeah well.

ANGEL rolls back over, shielding her eyes from the light.

LYNN.

Mind if I take a look at ‘er?

M’assumin’ it is a “her.”

ANGEL.

Can’t I show you in the morning? I’m tired.

LYNN.

I’m not askin’ for some big ol’ show n’ tell. I jus’ wanna see the dang thing.

ANGEL.

Fine. Here.

LYNN crosses and grabs the doll. She holds it out in front of her, inspecting it.

LYNN.

How much they charge yeh for it?

ANGEL.

I dunno. Abel got it for me.

LYNN.

Abel got it for yeh?

ANGEL.

Mhm.

LYNN.

Hm.

He got money for it?

ANGEL.

Guess so.

LYNN.

And yeh let ‘im pay for it?

ANGEL takes a deep breath and rolls toward her mother.

ANGEL.

Yes.

Is that a problem?

LYNN.

Don't think thas' a bit...manipulative? Gettin' him to buy ya things?

ANGEL.

It was a gift.

LYNN.

Sure. Sure.

But I wouldn't've wanted you or yer brother to buy me gifts when you was too young to pinch two pennies together.

ANGEL.

Didn't stop you from asking, though.

And Abel's got money.

But if // it's that big a deal

LYNN.

Oh come now. You don't 'spect me to fall for that, do yeh?

"Well if it's such a big fat problem to you, mama, then I *guess* I can do sump'n about it."

'Course you don't really call me "mama" anymore so. Not sure my little example holds water.

ANGEL.

What do you want?

LYNN.

Plenty.

What do I need? Now thas' a better question.

Silence.

LYNN.

You gonna ask me what I need?

Silence.

ANGEL.

Can I have my doll back?

LYNN.

Sure.

ANGEL starts to get up.

LYNN.

No no.

LYNN crosses to ANGEL, standing over her. She pulls back ANGEL's blanket slightly. Her hand shakes, tremors. She steadies herself before placing the doll, folding the blanket on top of it.

LYNN.

There. All tucked in.

LYNN kisses her hand, places it on the doll's head.

LYNN.

Now get some shut eye.

LYNN starts to exit, stops.

LYNN.

Oh.

Not sure if this means anything to yeh, but Billy's mom was at the potluck tonight. Still in mournin' poor thing.

We prayed over her. Prayed that God end this horrible drug epidemic. And I think it brought her some peace.

Brief silence.

LYNN.

D'yeh wanna drop by her place for a visit? To express yer condolences? I know yeh went to the funeral but when it's // someone that close

ANGEL.

I already did at the wake.

LYNN.

Hm. She din't mention that.

ANGEL.

Maybe she didn't think it made sense to tell you what I was up to. Or what I said.

LYNN.

Might be onto sump'n there.

Thas' prob'ly it.

'Cause now that I think of it, nobody mentioned you at all.

ANGEL.

That's a good problem for me to have.

Night.

LYNN.

Course they just might not'a recognized it was you.

ANGEL.

Certainly possible.

LYNN.

Mmm.

Not me. I know it's you in there.

LYNN pauses then exits. After a bit, ANGEL gets up, takes a deep breath, shakes herself loose, and goes to rifle through the cupboard for a glass. Turns on the faucet.

ANGEL.

Jesus Christ...

The glass is filled with reddish water.

ANGEL.

Eugh.

ANGEL splashes the water into the sink. She goes to the fridge and grabs the Brita filter. Empty. She fills it. She sets it down on the ground, sitting next to it, watching it dilute the reddish water to a drinkable crystal clear. BLACKOUT.

THEN: later that night. ANGEL is sleeping. The remote is below her outstretched hand. The TV is playing at a low hum. Infomercials, like on QVC. But the two people in the infomercials are LOCAL NEWS ANCHORS 1 & 2.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

—ives sharpened is a pain. And for what? Paying 20 bucks just to have your knives cutting like *this*?

The TV shows a clip of a dull knife mashing into a tomato that oozes out its seeds.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Oof, that practically needs a content warning, Tina. My skin crawled a little.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Same here, Jerry. But with this nifty little tool, you can bid the skin crawls – and bruised tomatoes – goodbye.

For just \$19.99, you can get two E-Z Cutz knife sharpeners. They practically pay for themselves.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.

But wait, that's not all. Call in the next 24 hours and you can double the E-Z Cutz you get for the same price. That's right. You get *four* E-Z Cuts for the price of two! That's five dollars per E-Z Cutz – a 50 percent discount.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Well that just seems like too good a deal to pass up, Jerry. I might have to place a call myself.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.

But wait, there's more. Call in the next hour and you can double that value. That's right, you can get *eight* E-Z Cutz for \$19.99!

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

And you're not just getting quantity with this offer. You're getting quality. That's because E-Z Cutz takes the proverb – iron sharpens iron – to a literal level. E-Z Cutz are made with iron edges.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.

That means you don't need to worry about your knives dulling your sharpener. E-Z Cutz are practically indestructible.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

I sure hope there are people awake who can take advantage of this offer. You'd have to be fast asleep to not be calling right now.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.

That's right. You'd have to be fast asleep.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Fast asleep.

NEWS ANCHOR 1 & 2 turn their bodies to the camera and direct all of their lines to it. Their demeanors shift.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.

She's fast asleep, Tina.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

So she is.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.

"Iron sharpeneth iron; so one person sharpeneth the countenance of another."

This verse echoes in the background, distorting, deepening.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.
Who's "sharpened" our Angel?

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.
What happens when iron meets flesh and bone?

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.
Get too close and you might clip her wings.

The TV goes static-y. It's as though locusts are swarming the NEWS ANCHORS.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.
Poor falling Angel.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.
Poor falling Angel.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.
Poor falling Angel.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.
Poor falling Ang–

We hear someone moving offstage. The static stops and the two snap back to normal positions and demeanors.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.
E-Z Cutz makes it easy for your knives to cut anything, from tomatoes to onions.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.
From carrots to celery.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.
Heck, E-Z Cutz even gets your knives sharp enough to slice into cartilage and ligaments. But don't take my word for it. Watch Jerry use the knife he sharpened earlier to cut through some chicken wings – live on air.

A close-up of LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1 wielding a knife and cutting through the joints of chicken wings.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.
Backyard barbecues have never been easier to prep.

ABEL groggily walks into the living room.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Now all I need is the recipe to Tina's homemade barbecue sauce and I'll really be cookin'.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Only if I get invited to your cookout this time, Jerry.

The two share a canned laugh.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

That's all for us tonight. But our phones will be ready for you around the clock.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.

And in case you forgot, call in the next hour and you can receive eight E-Z Cutz knife sharpeners for just \$19.99.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Don't wait! Ya never know when you'll need to break down—

ABEL turns off the TV. He looks over at ANGEL sleeping. The doll is tucked in the crook of her elbow. ABEL gently pats his sister's head. He puts the remote on the kitchen counter before quietly heading back to his room.

SCENE FIVE.

It's the morning. ANGEL is sprawled on the couch. We can hear LYNN and ABEL offstage. She stirs after hearing the two of them.

LYNN. Jus' gotta move it, like, six inches to the left.
Yeh ready?

ABEL. Yeah.

LYNN. Alright. One, two, three!

Grunting.

ABEL. D'we got it?

LYNN. Just a lil' bit more. Lil' bit more. Aaaaaannndddd. Good stop!
Whew.

Is' on. Now we can just wheel this sucker down the hall and out through the garage.
I'll get that plywood over the steps 'fore we get there.

LYNN enters the living room and sees ANGEL sitting up.

LYNN. Nice to see yeh join the land of the livin'.

ANGEL. Need help?

LYNN. No.
Abel! Where'd ya put the plywood? By the garbage bins?

ABEL entering.

ABEL. Shhh, I don't wanna wake—
Oh you're up.

ANGEL. Yup.

ABEL. Cool cool. Hope we din't wake you.

ANGEL gestures as if to say "You did, but it doesn't matter."

ABEL. To answer yer question, yeah, s'just by the garbage bins.

LYNN exits.

ABEL. So what were yeh watchin' last night?

ANGEL. Oh. Old episodes of Spongebob.
I'm assuming you turned off the TV?

ABEL. Yeah. If mom had done it you might not'a woken up.

LYNN re-enters.

LYNN. Okay I put that plywood over the steps. Ya ready to move the dresser?

ABEL. Yeah.

LYNN and ABEL start to exit.

ANGEL. You sure I can't help?

LYNN. Mhm.

LYNN and ABEL exit. ANGEL plops back on the couch and watches.

LYNN. Easy does it.

ABEL. I push and you direct?

LYNN. Sounds good.

'Kay keep movin' in this direction aaaaaannnnndddddd stop! Don't wanna hit the doorway.

Tilt to the right a bit.

Good. Now if yeh keep pushin' like this we'll be in the clear.

A couple seconds later, ABEL and LYNN push the dresser into the living room. It stands about four feet high and is painted with a thin coat of sky blue paint that's chipping at the corners. It's the kind of wooden dresser that DIYers buy at Goodwill for \$45, refinish, and flip for \$250 with the caption "MCM dresser with original finishes – a statement piece for any room." But in this room, it just looks cheap.

LYNN. Betch'er not annoyed with me gettin' rid of all the furniture now. Practic'ly got a runway here.

ABEL. [*Somewhat sarcastically*] Totally.

LYNN. Y'know what? [*directing this to ANGEL*] You can open the door for us if yer lookin' for sump'n to do.

ANGEL gets up and exits, presumably opening an exterior door we don't see.

ABEL. Thanks!

LYNN and ABEL wheel the dresser out and exit. ANGEL returns, followed by ABEL and LYNN.

LYNN.

Easier than yeh thought?

ABEL.

Uh, maybe.

LYNN.

Why don'tcha go freshen up while I get breakfast started? Got some fresh eggs from Denise last night. Said she's got four chickens producin' every day now. Basically did her a favor takin' 'em off her hands.

ABEL. [*To ANGEL*]

You needa shower?

LYNN.

I din't tell that one to go shower. Yer the one who worked up a sweat just now.

ABEL.

Actually, I was hopin' to get a workout in – cool if I grab the car? I'll be back in like, an hour?

LYNN.

Keys're in // the left pocket of my purse.

ABEL.

Left pocket, yup. Thanks, mama!

ABEL crosses offstage.

LYNN.

No reason I can't make the eggs anyway, huh?

ABEL emerges keys in hand, hastily walks to the exit.

ABEL.

Thanks, mom! See ya!

LYNN.

Not much longer than an hour, Abel!

ABEL exits. ANGEL remains firmly planted. LYNN crosses to the fridge, pulls out the carton of eggs. Digs through the cupboard and pulls out a bowl. Grabs a fork from a nearby drawer. Cracks a few eggs into the bowl. This is all done wordlessly.

LYNN starts humming "Our God Is An Awesome God" to herself as she begins to whisk. Whisking. Whisking. Whisking. Then, almost in a singsong-y voice:

LYNN.

Yeh haven't asked me.

ANGEL.

Huh?

LYNN. [*Grinning to herself*]

Yeh still haven't asked me what I need.

Silence. LYNN resumes whisking and humming. Then:

LYNN.

I'm makin' scrambled for myself. These days I only really need one egg, but I swear, when ya scramble, it looks like two or three. Craziest thing.

Do yeh still like yer eggs sunnyside up and extra runny?

Assume so but.

ANGEL.

Yeah.

LYNN.

That's how yeh make use of yer toast. Soppin' up all the liquid.

Speakin' of, can yeh grab the bread? Should be in the fridge.

ANGEL gets up, goes to the fridge, and pulls out a bag of bread.

LYNN.

Any butter'n there?

ANGEL.

Yeah.

LYNN.

Can yeh grab it?

ANGEL.

Mhm.

ANGEL puts the butter on the counter and then goes back to the couch. LYNN continues whisking.

LYNN.

I dunno if that Kerrygold is much better than the spray butter we used'ta get. But it is the one nice thing I let myself buy at the Wal-Mart.

Whatta bout 'chu? Buy anything nice for yerself?

Silence.

LYNN.

Not drugs, I hope.

LYNN chuckles to herself a bit. Silence.

LYNN.

You may think yer not answerin' is a problem.

But is' not. Because I don't mind talkin' to myself. Is' therapeutic. Like a release almost.

Just loosenin' a valve and waitin' to see what comes outta the spout.

Y'ever feel that way?

A pause. LYNN continues whisking, resumes her humming. ANGEL remains on the couch, tightly wound into herself.

LYNN.

Been thinkin' about finally sellin' that couch.

Yeh look comfortable enough in it but. Just dun't fit this room anymore.

Got a guy out in Camp Roberts who's interested. Said he'll even cart it outta here.

Din't list it for hardly anything, but figured is' more important to get it sold quick than to wait for just a few extra bucks.

Said he could even come by today.

Haven't messaged him back yet, though.

Silence.

LYNN.

D'yeh like sleepin' on it?

If ya like sleepin' on it I won't sell it.

But yeh gotta tell me.

Yeh gotta say "Mom, I like sleepin' on that couch."

Silence.

LYNN goes back to whisking. ANGEL looks down at her phone, studying it. Like if she looks at it hard enough she won't have to look at her surroundings.

LYNN suddenly stops whisking, dropping the fork against the bowl. It clangs. She groans briefly, gripping her head. ANGEL doesn't react. LYNN groans louder, pulling her hands to her head, mashing her temples. ANGEL looks up.

ANGEL.
You okay?

LYNN. I'm...

LYNN starts gripping her head harder. Breathing heavy, almost like she's gulping for air. ANGEL stands up.

LYNN.
My head...

ANGEL.
Is this another one of your // epi—I dunno what the fuck to call it

LYNN.
Oh, my head.

ANGEL.
No, I know it's your head, I just. What can I do? What // do you want?

LYNN.
I jus' need to...

LYNN's digging her palms into her brow. She's talking quietly, almost inaudibly. ANGEL isn't really listening to her.

ANGEL.
Do you want water?

ANGEL goes to the fridge and pulls out the Brita filter.

LYNN.
I jus' need // you to...

ANGEL.
Shit!

ANGEL scours the cupboards for a cup, finds one.

LYNN.

I jus' need a...

ANGEL clumsily pours water into the cup.

ANGEL.

Water? Do you want water?

LYNN.

I'm...

ANGEL leaves the cup on the counter near LYNN before retreating back to the couch. To her phone.

ANGEL.

Fuck. [*frantically dialing her phone*]

Pick up pick up pick up!

LYNN.

I think I // need...

ANGEL.

Fuck! Fuck fuck fuck.

LYNN.

Come give me // a hug.

ANGEL.

Okay, okay, I think we need to just // we just need to

LYNN.

Please hold me.

LYNN lets out a louder moan. She looks unsteady. This prompts ANGEL to walk closer to her. ANGEL holds her arms and hands like she's spotting someone lifting weights – ready to catch if anything falls, but not wanting to initiate contact. LYNN is gripping her head again, as though her hands are all that's keeping it from falling to pieces.

ANGEL.

I need to know what you need. Just tell me.

LYNN remains silent, holding her head and breathing heavy.

ANGEL starts to pace again.

ANGEL.

Goddamn it.

Just sit down, while I—I'm gonna call Abel again. He'll know what to // do, okay?

LYNN.

Please.

ANGEL.

I'm just gonna try in another part of the house. Maybe it's – maybe it's the signal.

ANGEL rapidly starts to exit toward another part of the house.

LYNN.

Please!

ANGEL.

Just a minute! Just a minute, okay?

LYNN.

My head.

ANGEL.

I know but I gotta do this!

LYNN groans.

ANGEL.

It'll only be a minute. And and and and then I'll be back! And // then I'll be back.

LYNN.

Don't go.

ANGEL.

It'll just be one *fucking* minute, please! I just // gotta call

LYNN.

Angel!

ANGEL stops in her tracks.

LYNN.

I need you to hold me.

*LYNN groans, mashing her hands into her head even harder now, massaging them deep into her eyes.
ANGEL pauses, then crosses to her mother, wrapping her arms around her.*

LYNN's moaning subsides. After a bit, ANGEL attempts to let go, but LYNN grips her tighter.

*LYNN. [Practically whispering]
Jus' hold me.*

ANGEL holds on.

And holds on.

And holds on.

We hear ANGEL's phone ringing.

SCENE SIX.

SPOTLIGHT. LYNN stands alone onstage. The bathroom sink is in front of her, with various makeup products stacked to the right. Her hairdryer is tucked neatly near her feet. She's once again doing her makeup in the morning, facing the audience, looking into them like a mirror. LYNN pulls out concealer and starts dabbing it under her eyes, around the corners of her mouth, and under her bottom lip. She blends it into her face. She's satisfied. She then grabs a lipstick (a peachy color), purses her lips, and applies it.

SPOTLIGHT. ANGEL sits on the stage, parallel to LYNN, about two feet away. The only thing next to her is her small black bag. She's once again doing her makeup in the morning, facing the audience, looking into them like a mirror. ANGEL pulls an eyeliner from her bag and draws. Shakier than the last time. She sighs after doing her first eye. She traces over it to straighten and thicken the line. Better. She does the other eye. Solid.

LYNN grabs an eyeliner pencil and draws it on her eyes. Shaky. She's satisfied once again. She pulls out some blush and presses it into her cheeks before taking a slight step back, poses slightly, and smiles.

ANGEL digs into her bag and pulls out an Estradiol vial and prepackaged syringe. She peels off the wrapping and takes out the disposable syringe.

LYNN spots a bit of lipstick on her teeth. Wipes it off before suddenly opening her mouth wider and sticking her finger into the back of her mouth, by some molars.

ANGEL sticks the syringe's needle into the vial. She confirms the dosage is right. She flicks the syringe. She inserts the needle into her thigh. She pulls it out.

LYNN's hand writhes in the back of her mouth before she procures something.

ANGEL pulls out her trusty black lipstick. She applies it before lightly tousling her hair. It looks the same as it did before.

It's a tooth. LYNN drops it into the sink.

ANGEL exits.

LYNN looks back up at the mirror, poses, smiles.

Smiles.

Smiles.

SCENE SEVEN.

ANGEL and ABEL are sitting on lawn chairs by the firepit. It's sunny. ABEL is dressed in a muscle tee and gym shorts. ANGEL has her hair pulled up into a messy bun, it's clear she wasn't satisfied with her morning routine. She's smoking a cigarette.

ANGEL.

I don't like it.

ABEL.

Yeah, ya mentioned that once or twice.

ANGEL.

I just—

Who *is* this person?

ABEL.

Mhm.

ANGEL.

You didn't see her. She was...

It wasn't like a couple nights ago.

It was like...

Or maybe it was like a couple nights ago. I dunno. I dunno what it was like.

ABEL.

Just one of 'er episodes.

ANGEL.

Maybe. How often did you say she has 'em?

ABEL.

Depends.

Been happenin' more recently.

Maybe once a week or so. Could be a little bit less'n that.

ANGEL hands the cigarette to ABEL.

ANGEL.

Does she ever have these episodes alone?

ABEL.

No way of me knowin'.

Why?

ANGEL.

You said they happen when she gets overwhelmed.
Wasn't sure if she could get overwhelmed by herself.
Or if it's other people that overwhelm her.

ABEL.

Yeah, I dunno.
She'll prob'ly be outta the bathroom soon, though. So we should stop talkin' about it. Thin walls.

ANGEL.

Okay.
New topic then.
Uh, last night I got water from the tap.

ABEL.

And was that as riveting as it sounds?

ANGEL.

Uh yeah actually because the water was fucking red and I'd never seen it that red before.
Like. The water was red, Abel.

ABEL.

Two words for ya: Brita. Filter.

ANGEL.

Yeah I used it.
Was crazy watching it go from red to clear.

ABEL.

Yeah. Better it's filtered in there than in yer body.
Would prob'ly fuck your kidneys to shit.

ANGEL.

Poetic.

ABEL.

I take community college classes from time to time. Go, Bulldogs!
Basically got a Pulitzer.

ANGEL.

Sounds like it.

ABEL hands the cigarette to ANGEL.

ANGEL.

Is school going okay though?

ABEL.

I mean we lost the computer lab to a burst pipe. Dunno whose idea it was to put all our technology in a dingy basement but.

ANGEL.

Damn.

ABEL.

And like, I dunno if you remember this, but the army has one of their training bases nearby. Like right next to the campus. So you can hear all their firing drills and shit. And then there's just, like, army shit – like literal tanks – that you can see through the barbed wire fence.

S'weird as fuck.

ANGEL.

I didn't remember that.

So is it like a breeding ground for recruiters?

ANGEL gives the cigarette to ABEL.

ABEL.

Ya'd think so.

I mean, occasionally there's some poor ROTC fucker with a clipboard but.

Seems like they've accepted the student body is whatever the opposite of cream rising to the top is.

And like, the military will *scrape* the bottom of the barrel.

But. There's always some shit left over.

That's me.

ANGEL.

Oh fuck off. You don't think that.

ABEL.

Nah, I don't.

But it sounded kinda cool.

ANGEL.

Sounded kinda overwrought.

Gimme that back. You don't get to smoke my cigarettes while trying to live out your podunk poverty fantasy.

ABEL.

If only it were a fantasy.

ABEL hands ANGEL the cigarette.

ABEL.

Maybe not so podunk anymore though.

ANGEL.

Yeah, that was crazy seeing the worksite yesterday.

ABEL.

S'just a worksite.

ANGEL.

No I know but. Seeing everything stripped back like that.

I remember when that area was just soybeans as far as the eye could see. And now? Bedrock. It's like the developers came in and gutted everything.

ANGEL.

Y'know that's what they have to do with some c-sections?

ABEL.

What?

ANGEL.

Yeah, like if it's complicated or if doctors think the baby has the umbilical cord wrapped around its neck, sometimes they have to take the parent's intestines out of the abdominal cavity. Just to get a clear look at what's going on.

ABEL.

One, I dunno what that has to do with land development. And two, I'm callin' bullshit on that.

ANGEL.

Don't have to believe me. I know what I saw.

ABEL.

What you *saw*??

ANGEL.

On Grey's.

ABEL.

Jesus Christ.

I thought—
Nah, I want that back now.

ANGEL hands ABEL the cigarette.

ABEL.
Definition of burying the lede.
Which was “While watching Grey’s Anatomy, the least medically accurate show ever, I // saw this fucked up operation.”

ANGEL.
There are surveys from real medical professionals that say, and I’m not kidding, the exact opposite of that.

ABEL.
Genuinely couldn't care less.

While ABEL and ANGEL talk, a SPOTLIGHT focuses on LYNN. The sink is in front of her. LYNN has been in the bathroom this whole time. She is now brushing her hair.

ANGEL.
Okay, last thing and then I’ll stop.
I do wonder how the body filters out all the air-borne contaminants after that. Like having your digestive system out on a table in the open. That’s not sanitary.

ABEL.
Yeah, I mean, it *is* in a sterile operating room so.
Maybe not that unsanitary.

ANGEL.
Maybe.
Still. I dunno if I could ever feel clean after that.

ABEL.
Yeah well.
Fortunately s’not a problem you and I’ll ever have.

ABEL offers the cigarette to ANGEL. She shakes her head. ABEL takes one final pull and flicks the butt into the fire pit.

ABEL.
Ready to head inside? The eggs’re still good I bet. Even though they been sittin’ out for a bit.

ANGEL.
Yeah just real quick.

So.

I'm here for another couple days. But...

LYNN brushes.

ABEL.

I know we still have to go to the library.

Sorry for not gettin' to it yet. We should be able // to get a ride tomorrow

ANGEL.

No no no, that's not why I was—

No, I was um.

I was thinking that maybe, and only if you want, you could come back with me when I leave.

LYNN brushes.

ABEL.

Oh.

ANGEL.

Not like—not like *permanently*. Or like, it could be permanent. If you want? I dunno that's like intense.

Sorry. I was // mainly thinking

ABEL.

No no I gotchu.

Yeah.

Uh, how long were yeh—how long were yeh thinkin'?

ANGEL.

Honestly I don't have a, like, hard stop date.

LYNN brushes.

ANGEL.

I was just.

When we were exploring yesterday, I kept thinking about all the cool things near me that I wanna show you.

And I know Lexington isn't, like, New York or anything. But there's a lot of cool shit there. And great people.

You could even bring a friend. If you want.

ABEL.

So like a weekend trip?

ANGEL.

Maybe.

I mean I was hopin' for longer. It's like seven hours one way. So if you leave on a Friday morning, you're
// already losing half

ABEL.

So a week?

ANGEL.

Yeah maybe.

Brief silence.

ABEL.

I dunno if that's gonna work.

LYNN brushes. Is that a smile?

ANGEL.

Oh.

ABEL.

S'just.

I got shit to do here.

ANGEL.

Right...

ABEL.

And I don't wanna leave mom to do everything on her own. And I got classes.

ANGEL.

Okay...

ABEL.

Plus with all the furniture movin'. Thas' like its own job, y'know?

ANGEL.

Sure.

LYNN brushes. Definitely a smile.

ABEL.

Yer mad.

ANGEL.
I'm not mad.

ABEL.
I dunno if I believe you.

ANGEL.
I promise I'm not mad.
Or disappointed or anything like that.

ANGEL takes a deep inhale.

ANGEL.
But I am gonna ask you something. And I need you to be honest with me, okay?

ABEL.
Okay.

ANGEL.
Do you ever feel, in your bones, in your soul, like there's something wrong with Gnawbone?

LYNN stops brushing mid-pull.

ANGEL.
And I don't mean the people. I don't mean the beliefs. I don't mean the churches. I mean Gnawbone.

ABEL opens his mouth, about to reply.

ANGEL.
When we were at the development site last night, I was lookin' at the bedrock. And it was like I said – gutted.
But with everything dug up, and us being there so late at night, it just looked like someone had carved a void into the town. And if I stepped too far forward or lost my footing, I could just fall into that void forever.
And I realized. That's how I felt living here. Like this isn't a place where people hit rock bottom. This is a place where people keep falling.

LYNN puts down her brush. It contains huge clumps of hair. She grabs the glass and raises it to her lips. Drinks.

ABEL.
Yer wrong.
There're good things here.

ANGEL.

I don't think you're understanding // what I'm saying

ABEL.

What is a town if it isn't the buildings or the people? Like.

There's no other intangible *thing*. S'just yer perception.

If you feel like Gnawbone is a place where everyone just keeps fallin' – which I don't agree with by the way – then that prob'ly means *you* feel like yer fallin'.

And yeh can't escape yourself. Movin' to a different city, a different state. It doesn't change who yeh are.

I'm not leavin' just because you did.

Silence. LYNN finishes, refills her cup from the sink, and drinks a bit more before leaving the bathroom. The SPOTLIGHT remains focused where LYNN stood – on the glass half-filled with reddish water.

ANGEL.

If you come to visit me, you'll see what I'm talking about. You'll feel it.

I promise.

Brief silence.

ABEL.

I'll think about it, okay?

ANGEL.

Okay.

ABEL.

Cool.

Cool.

ANGEL looks over at him sadly. ABEL avoids eye contact. LYNN enters and walks over to ANGEL and ABEL.

LYNN.

Alright. I haven't had much time to spend with the both of yeh, so I was thinkin' we could run to the Wal-Mart and pick out sump'n fun for tonight? Maybe like the adult versions of those frozen TV dinners yeh both liked so much? The ones with the chicken nuggets?

ABEL.

Sounds fun. Ya down?

ANGEL.

Yeah.

I'm down.

LYNN.

Great. I'll be inside waitin'. But take yer time.

LYNN affectionately tousles ABEL's hair before walking off.

ANGEL.

When do you think she started eavesdropping?

ABEL shrugs, starts getting up.

ANGEL.

Can you wait with me while I smoke one more?

Brief silence. ABEL sits back down.

ABEL.

Okay.

ANGEL grabs the pack, pulls out a cigarette, lights it. She offers it to ABEL, who shakes his head. We hear the TV coming from inside. It's muffled but discernible.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.

—lopment states that the firm will proceed with its plans despite the large manganese deposits it struck. Environmentalists warn that any continued development could have adverse effects on the water quality in surrounding communities.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Though this too has been disputed by Cain Development, which released its own ecological study in response. The study, spearheaded by researchers from Columbia University, concluded that Cain Development's efforts pose "no observable or quantifiable" impact to the surrounding flora and fauna. Still, environmental activists point to...

BLACKOUT on everything but the water glass. And after a beat comes the buzzing. Like locusts. Or static.

The buzzing grows.

And grows.

And grows.

SCENE EIGHT.

It's later that night. Empty TV dinner trays are strewn across the counter. ANGEL's alone and trying to sleep. She twists and turns trying to get comfortable before she finally gets up with an exasperated sigh. She uses her phone as a flashlight, digging into her bag to grab her cigarettes and a lighter before heading outside. To ANGEL's surprise, LYNN is outside smoking.

ANGEL.
Shitfuck!
Jesus. Sorry. Scared me.

LYNN.
Ya never can quite kick a habit.
Si'down.
Want one?

ANGEL makes a move to sit down but continues to stand awkwardly.

ANGEL.
No. No, I got my own.

LYNN.
Mm. Whatta yeh favor these days?

ANGEL.
Marlboro. Reds.

LYNN.
Outgrew that Newport phase, eh?

ANGEL.
Yeah well.
Only smoked 'em because that's what was around.

LYNN.
In my purse, yeh mean.

ANGEL.
Yeah.

LYNN.
Mmm.
I'd always hoped neither of you would smoke.
But yeh got a taste for it in utero so.

Never stood a chance, really.

Silence.

LYNN.

I won't be long. You can have this area to yourself soon. Just wanna savor this last one.

Silence.

LYNN.

I used'ta live near Lexington, y'know.

Town called Wilmore. Right on the Kentucky river.

Yer Uncle Peter and I would catch crawdads with our bare hands in the summer. We had these, uh, these tin buckets we'd throw 'em in. And the crawdads'd sorta scrape the sides with their claws and climb on top of each other tryna get out.

Always made Peter sad seein' 'em strugglin' like that.

'Course that never stopped him from enjoyin' the boils we'd throw.

You'da liked Peter. Only met 'im when you was real little. Maybe two or three. And I was pregnant with Abel 'round that time so. I wasn't in the mood to entertain or nothin'.

But I coulda. In hindsight, I prob'ly shoulda.

Silence. ANGEL remains standing.

LYNN.

There's sump'n about the 2AM air that just makes yeh contemplative.

Like it's not filled with the thoughts or ambitions or judgements of everyone else. It's just open to the...the vastness of yer imagination. And the imaginations of the six other people awake in your town. Way less than usual.

Silence.

LYNN.

What about you? Whatta you think about when yeh know no one's watching? What fantasies do ya give yerself permission to live in?

ANGEL.

I don't do that.

LYNN.

You don't fantasize about things?

ANGEL.

No.

LYNN.
Bullshit.

ANGEL.
Say what you want. But I don't.

LYNN.
Everybody fantasizes.

ANGEL.
Not me.
I don't fantasize.

LYNN chuckles.

LYNN.
Sometimes I worry that I din't put enough of an effort in you.
Inta rearin' you. Helpin' yeh grow into yerself.
And maybe I din't. But, good lord, at this point, I dunno who's more at fault.
I mean yeh haven't even sat down. Yer just standin' over me as I smoke this cigarette. And I been takin' my time with it. Hopin' we could talk.
But yer not interested in talkin'. Which has me wonderin'.
What the fuck're you doin' here? Funeral's come and gone. Done explored everything you can within a five mile radius. Got yerself that doll. So whas' keepin' yeh here?
Now, I got an idea what that reason is. But. You know that reason's got ideas of his own. And they don't involve goin' to Lexington. No matter how much yeh beg. Or plead. Or pray.
Because he fantasizes. He's got fantasies. And he's got enough sense to imagine greener grass than fuckin' Lexington.
And yer still standin' there. Cursin' me in your mind, no doubt. Thinkin' I dunno what I'm talkin' about or that I'm mis-perceivin' things. But I wantchu to know something, to experience a reality you haven't ever felt before.
Yer not the only person who's wanted for more. Who's felt, deep in their soul, that they're meant for something greater. And not in the hero's journey way. Not in the Hollywood rags-to-riches bullshit way. I mean in the way where, in spite of life dealing its blows, in spite of breaking yer back day in and day out, ya lie awake at night *knowing* you have this glimmer to yeh. Knowing that yer better than yer current state. Knowing that yer not like *them*. That you have the potential to do sump'n bigger than yourself – to *be* bigger than yourself. Ya tell yerself that they're here because they're not destined for greatness. Yer here because you just haven't achieved it yet.
But that's a lie. There's no special shine to yeh. No potential that'll lift you higher. Yer like everyone else. And no amount of makeup can change that. No amount of movin' to Lexington can change that.
Yer unspectacular. Commonplace.

Silence.

LYNN.

M'all done. My lighter's here in case yeh need it.

See ya in the mornin'. Or. Later in the mornin' anyway.

LYNN exits. ANGEL has stayed standing this entire time. She moves over to the table LYNN was sitting at and lights her cigarette, letting out a shaky exhale. Thunder rolls in the distance. ANGEL flicks the rest of her cigarette and heads inside. The thunder crashing in the background starts to distort; melt. ANGEL turns on the TV. It's just a bright white screen. She attempts to change the channel. No luck. ANGEL is backlit by the TV right now; silhouetted. She tries the remote again, repeatedly clicking it. No change. The screen almost seems brighter now. She walks over to the TV, inspecting it, trying to find any physical buttons. It emits a sound. Like locusts. Buzzing. BUZZING.

B
U
Z
Z
I
N
G.

The TV suddenly turns off. The room is thrown into darkness. The thunder has subsided. ANGEL stands alone, still. A few moments later, ABEL groggily walks into the living room, jolted by ANGEL's presence.

ABEL.

Shit!

Scared me.

Don't mind me. Just.

ABEL moves past her.

ANGEL.

Did you hear that just now?

ABEL.

Hear what?

ANGEL.

The – the fucking...

Did you not hear? Why'd you come out if you didn't // hear the

ABEL.

For water.

What's goin' on?

ANGEL.

The – the.

I think the TV's messed up.

It wasn't, um, it wasn't playing normally. That's what I thought you were coming to see. To investigate.

ABEL.

Nah, I din't hear anything. Is the HDMI cable plugged in tight? 'Cuz sometimes thas' the issue I run into.

ANGEL.

That's probably it, yeah.

ABEL.

...you gonna check or...?

ANGEL.

No, I can do it in the morning. Not really trying to watch anything anymore.

ABEL.

I mean. I can check. Can you just get me some water while I do?

ANGEL.

Yeah.

ABEL investigates the TV. ANGEL fills a cup with Brita water, hands it to ABEL.

ABEL.

Thanks.

Yeah looks like the HDMI cable wasn't firmly plugged in. Sometimes it jiggles loose. S'just old. Could always replace it but they're like ten bucks and it's like, why would I pay that when I got one that works fine, y'know? And who'sta say that new one wouldn't eventually get worn down, too? Planned obsolescence. It impacts everything, practic'ly. Our refrigerators. Our phones. Our laptops–

As ABEL continues this running list, he starts exiting to his bedroom.

ABEL.

– car batteries, printers, fuckin' light bulbs.

ABEL exits fully. ANGEL stands alone. She moves to the remote, holds it, then puts it down hurriedly. She goes to the couch, tosses the blanket over herself – her entire body – and tries to sleep.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE NINE.

It's late at night. ANGEL is now asleep. LYNN enters. She half-walks, half-staggers over to where ANGEL is sleeping.

She stands over ANGEL.

And watches.

She watches for as long as you can bear it.

BLACKOUT.

LYNN is still standing over ANGEL.

ACT TWO

SCENE TEN.

SPOTLIGHT. LYNN stands alone onstage. The bathroom sink is in front of her, with various makeup products stacked to the right. Her hairdryer is tucked neatly near her feet.

SPOTLIGHT. ANGEL sits on the stage, parallel to LYNN, about two feet away. The only thing next to her is her small black bag. She's once again doing her makeup in the morning, facing the audience, looking into them like a mirror.

LYNN is once again doing her makeup in the morning, facing the audience, looking into them like a mirror. But instead of doing her makeup, LYNN just inspects her face, pushing up her cheeks, pulling up her eyelids. This intensifies. LYNN starts pulling and pushing more.

ANGEL pulls out an eyeliner pencil. But she can't do it. She's clearly distressed. Her eyes are sunken. She didn't get much sleep.

LYNN kneads and pulls and stretches.

ANGEL breathes deeply before zipping her black bag. She stares at herself, mouthes the words "What are you going to do?"

LYNN sticks her fingers in her mouth again, pulling apart her lips to get a look at her teeth. She hooks her fingers around a molar. It detaches easily.

ANGEL stares.

Clink. It bounces off the sink.

ANGEL stares.

Clink. Clink. Two more.

ANGEL stares.

LYNN breathes heavily, letting out a pitiful moan.

ANGEL stares.

LYNN pulls her hands out of her mouth and runs the tap, fills her cup, swishes the water in her mouth.

ANGEL stares.

LYNN spits. It's red.

ANGEL stares.

LYNN'S neck remains craned over the sink, her head hung low. Her hands are now clasped together.

ANGEL stares.

LYNN prays.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE ELEVEN.

LYNN is in the kitchen. More furniture has been taken away. We now see just a couch, the TV, and the cinder blocks the TV rests on.

ABEL enters.

ABEL.

Footsteps practically echo in here. Ya hollowed it out.
Everything's gone.

LYNN.

Not everything.
I kept the couch. And the TV.

ABEL.

Yeah.

LYNN.

And the floor prob'ly won't sag so much now that there's less stuff in here.

ABEL.

S'not like there was a ton here to begin with.

LYNN.

True. But that din't stop the floor from deciding to sag, did it?
Next up is patching that hole.

LYNN gestures to the hole in the roof.

LYNN.

I got some money to patch it good and right.
I was thinkin' you could watch a tutorial or sump'n. Then we could just do it.
Shouldn't take long.

ABEL.

When are we getting more furniture?

LYNN.

Soon. Once we get rid of all the old furniture we don't need.

ABEL.

But we do need it! Why replace it just to get // more?? I don't understand

LYNN.

Abel. We've had this conversation. Yer points are noted.

I'm the owner of this home. I make the rules.

Resellin' furniture is one of *my* jobs. I think I'd know whether we need the furniture.

ANGEL enters. She's wearing one of ABEL's shirts. It, too, is baggy.

ABEL.

I just don't understand the logic.

We're sellin' perfectly good furniture now so we can buy more perfectly good furniture later?

LYNN.

Fortunately, you don't gotta understand the logic. That's my job.

Yer job is to cart the shit away every once in a while.

ANGEL.

Can I borrow the car?

LYNN.

And good morning to you.

ANGEL.

Sorry. Good morning.

Can I borrow the car?

LYNN.

What for?

ANGEL.

Thought I should pay Billy's mom a visit.

LYNN.

Oh, isn't that a nice idea. Wonder who came up with it.

ANGEL.

Never said I came up with it.

ABEL.

Want company?

LYNN.

A little credit goes a // long way, ya know.

ANGEL. [*to ABEL*]

I think I gotta go on my own.

ABEL.

Oh.

Okay.

LYNN.

Keys're in the front pocket of my purse.

ANGEL.

Thanks.

ABEL.

How long do ya think you'll be there?

LYNN starts grabbing various dishes from the sink and putting them away.

ANGEL.

I dunno.

Could be a bit.

ABEL.

Wanna go to the library // after yer done?

ANGEL.

Maybe. I dunno.

I just gotta go.

ABEL.

Are you mad at me or sump'n?

ANGEL.

No.

Like I said, I just // have to go

ABEL.

That's bullshit.

LYNN.

Language!

ABEL.

S'not like you actually care, mom! You curse, too.

LYNN.

I've earned that privilege.
Comes with age.

ANGEL.

I'm not mad at you.

ABEL.

You seem mad.

ANGEL.

I'm in a rush. I'm not mad.

ABEL.

Yer such a liar I can hear it in yer voice. Just own it. Just own it and say yer pissed at me.

ANGEL.

Abel. The emotional states I'm in don't always hinge on you. In fact, they rarely do.

ABEL.

Okay, how am I s'posed to read that and not assume yer angry?

ANGEL.

I'm *getting* angry. I wasn't before. But I'm getting there.

LYNN is making no attempt to stop this fight.

ABEL.

Okay. Why?

ANGEL.

Because I'm trying to leave and you're being pedantic!

ABEL.

Thas' not why.

ANGEL.

No, I'm pretty sure that's why.

ABEL.

And there ya go. Lyin' to yourself, too.

ANGEL.

Okay. You're right. That isn't why.

I'm getting angry because I could barely sleep last night and now I have to go visit my dead friend's mom because she apparently didn't recognize me at her son's funeral! Her son who fucking over — sorry, *freaking* — overdosed. All because he stayed here and got hooked on that shit to start with.

LYNN.

He din't start that habit here. Don't go putin' that on Gnawbone!

ANGEL.

That's all that people do here. What else is there?! It's just meth and cornfields and dirt.

LYNN.

Watch it now. Remember, you asked me for a favor, not the other way around.

ANGEL.

I'm just trying to explain myself! Abel's badgering me about this and I just need to go.

ABEL.

You don't have to go.

ANGEL.

Well I kinda do.

ABEL.

Well ya kinda don't.

ANGEL.

I actually really do, Abel.

ABEL.

No, you don't! You don't have to go! Yer doin' that thing again: makin' yourself miserable. So what his mom didn't recognize you? Thas' not the point! The point was // that you could say goodbye.

ANGEL.

That actually is the point, Abel. That is the entire fucking point of going to a funeral. So you can comfort the deceased's loved ones. That is **the** fucking point. And she didn't even know I was there or who I was!

ABEL.

Do you think this would comfort her? This vibe?

ANGEL.

Fuck you.

ABEL.

No, dude, fuck you. I was bein' chill and then you came out with a bone to pick.

Like. What the fuck.

ANGEL.

Can you not make something about yourself for, like, two fucking seconds?
I just want to mourn my friend // and comfort his mom.

ABEL.

Some fuckin' friend! You barely talked to him since you left!

Silence. LYNN has stopped putting away dishes.

ANGEL.

Keys are in the front pocket?

LYNN.

Yeah.

ANGEL exits.

ABEL.

Yer not gonna defend yourself? Yer just gonna take that shit?!

ABEL strides out to follow her.

LYNN.

Abel! Let her go.

ABEL.

But she...

LYNN.

Dun't matter. Gotta let her cool off.

ABEL is clearly distressed and upset with himself for saying what he did.

ABEL.

I mean, she din't talk to him. I talked to Billy more'n she did. And you don't see me stormin' outta here.

She can't make herself the victim. He's the one who's literally dead!

And I knew him too, ya know? But I'm not sittin' here makin' myself feel bad about it. Because who does that help? Huh? Who does that help at the end of the day?

No one! Doesn't help Billy's mom. Doesn't help me. Doesn't help Billy.

S'just selfish. Grievin' over sump'n that doesn't have to do with you. It's selfish.

And now I'm upset! All because she made herself upset.

And thas' the issue. It's a trickle-down effect. It starts at the top and just coats me in the shit. It just coats me.

And now I'm angry, mom! I'm angry. I'm angry that she behaved that way. It's so fuckin' irresponsible. That's low EQ shit. Ya know? Emotional quotient? It's low. And now I gotta sit with this while she gets to ride it out. And that's unfair.

And it's what she always does, ya know? Always leavin'. Never sittin' in it. Never sittin' in it with me. Never wantin' to go over it or to understand. Just to go. Put miles between it and herself and then maybe everyone'll forget who hurt who or who was mad about what.

But I don't forget. How can you forget when yer sittin' in it, ya know? When you've been sittin' in it for years? How am I s'posed to forget it?

And how am I the bad guy for pickin' up on her wantin' to leave? Huh? How am I the bad guy for recognizin' what's about to happen? That I'm about to be forced to sit in this shit again?

Ya know? How does that make me the bad guy?

Why am I the bad guy?

LYNN.

I know.

C'mere.

ABEL goes to LYNN's outstretched arms.

LYNN.

Thas' not a hug. Thas' a lean.

ABEL.

Is it okay if I just lean this time?

LYNN.

'Course. I'll hold you.

I'll sit in it with you.

LYNN holds ABEL and smiles. The lights flicker off, then back on. Through this, LYNN holds onto ABEL tightly. After a bit, ABEL lets go.

ABEL.

Sorry.

I think it looks nice in here. More spacious.

LYNN.

Thank you.

And we'll get more furniture soon. Just gotta see what we're workin' with.

Kinda like when ya move and just get rid of anything you don't wanna box up.

I wouldn't wanna box up that furniture.

ABEL.

Fair enough.

D'ya think we'll need some drywall for the patch?

LYNN.

Might be able to get away with some plywood.

I'll let you figure that out, though. I know ya like this kinda thing.

ABEL.

Yeah.

LYNN.

Good to get it done soon, too, while it's still nice out.

And before the construction gets even closer to us. News said they'd be expandin' the development. Less than half a mile away.

ABEL.

I din't hear that.

LYNN.

Oh yeah. The gals were talkin' about it.

Denise said she was worried the stress'd mess with her hens' fertility.

But I said that shouldn't be a problem considerin' she's givin' away all her eggs.

ABEL.

You seen the jobsite then? Up close, I mean.

LYNN.

No need. I get the gist.

ABEL.

Angel was sayin', at night, that it looks like this void. In the middle of Gnawbone. Just this big field-sized void.

LYNN.

How poetic.

ABEL.

Yeah.

LYNN.

My two cents: S'not worth even thinkin' about. I'll start worryin' once my taxes go up. Until then, I'll just hope the construction ain't loud and that we get another laundromat.

'Nother laundromat would be nice. Might even be cheaper.

ABEL.
Maybe.

LYNN busies herself with finishing the dishes.

ABEL.
You don't feel different do you?

LYNN.
Whatta ya mean?

ABEL.
Like. You don't feel like Gnawbone feels different now?

LYNN.
I dunno in what way. I mean. Things change. Stan's Conveniences turned into a Citgo. But.
No. I don't feel like much has changed.

ABEL.
Even with the water?

LYNN.
Ya know, our forefathers drank from creeks lined with chemicals and bacteria. We got modern pump systems and I'm s'posed to be more worried about water than they were?
No. No, I don't think there's any difference with the water.

ABEL.
It comes out red.

LYNN.
The studies say it's fine. And I thought we were s'posed to believe science.
Or is it only the science you wanna believe in?

LYNN is teasing a bit. But ABEL still looks perturbed.

LYNN.
Abel. Do you feel any different?

ABEL.
I don't think so.

LYNN.
Hair's still on yer head. Teeth are in yer skull, last I checked. We're as good as we've ever been.

Maybe some bumps and bruises over the years, but who hasn't got those? It comes with livin' out here. S'a badge of a honor, really. Proves that yer still kickin'.

ABEL.

But yer drinkin' water from the Brita, right?

LYNN.

I drink from the Brita.

Pain in the ass to fill up all the time, but I drink from it.

ABEL.

Good.

I just wanna be careful.

LYNN.

Just don't go lettin' yourself be too careful. Soon enough, you'll be boxing yerself in. Not lettin' yerself do anything.

Life is meant to be lived.

And in the spirit of vitality, I'm gonna make the rest of that boxed mac n' cheese for breakfast. Or is it brunch now?

ABEL.

Prob'ly brunch.

LYNN.

In any case. We're gettin' cheesy.

Would ya mind getting a pot goin'?

ABEL.

Wil do.

Mother and son prepare brunch, anticipating each other's movements as needed (opening doors, closing cabinets, pouring water, etc.). They know each other and this sort of routine. Suddenly a pause:

ABEL.

Do you think I went too far? Earlier? Do you think I went too far? Because I'm worried // I may've

LYNN.

Not at all.

Not. At. All.

The two resume preparing and cooking. A faint buzzing.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE TWELVE.

It's the evening. ABEL is sitting out on the couch, watching the TV on mute. We hear water running. LYNN is in the shower. ANGEL arrives. ABEL looks up.

ABEL.
Hey.

ANGEL.
Hey.

ABEL.
Been gone awhile. Mom and I was wonderin' if you'd gotten kidnapped or sump'n.
How was it?

ANGEL.
Fine.

ABEL.
Did she recognize you?

ANGEL.
Yep.

ABEL.
That's good.

ANGEL.
Yep. Even when mom said she didn't. She saw me at the funeral. Said she liked my dress.

ABEL.
Mac n' cheese is in the fridge if yer hungry.

ANGEL.
I'm not.

ABEL.
Okay. Just.
Didn't want you to go hungry.

ANGEL grabs the remote and unmutes the TV. It's the NEWS ANCHORS.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

—night, Cain Development held a groundbreaking ceremony for the second phase of its planned industrial park. Local leaders joined company executives at the site, where they say more than fifty acres will be cleared for new warehouse space.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Supporters argue the expansion could boost the region's tax base and attract outside investment. But several community groups protested outside the event, citing concerns about increased truck traffic and the loss of farmland.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Cain Development maintains that the project will include new infrastructure improvements, including repaving sections of Route 14 and installing updated storm drainage. The company has also pledged a community fund to support nearby schools.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Construction is expected to begin this winter, with the first buildings scheduled to open by late next fall.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

For now, county officials say they'll continue to monitor environmental impact reports as the project moves—

ANGEL and ABEL had been watching this wordlessly before ANGEL turns it off.

ABEL.

What?

ANGEL.

I think you know this.

But I can't stay here much longer.

ABEL.

Okay.

ANGEL.

There's something going on. And I know how you feel.

But it doesn't make sense. What's happening here doesn't make sense.

And I don't know what it is.

But it's off.

ABEL.

Okay.

ANGEL.

And I didn't want us to end on the note from earlier.

ABEL.
Alright.

ANGEL.
I was talking with Deb, Billy's mom. And she mentioned that her water's been red, too. I brought it up cause she had a Brita attachment on her sink.

ABEL.
Those don't filter as well.

ANGEL.
Okay so you're familiar // with the different

ABEL.
The filter we have is the best one we can buy.
But sorry. Go on.

ANGEL.
Yeah, she was saying that before they started drinking from the Brita, the family had been experiencing tremors. And memory issues. That they couldn't remember what they'd eaten for breakfast and stuff like that.

ABEL.
Okay...?

ANGEL.
And it made me think of mom. Of you. And what can happen here if you aren't careful.

ABEL.
We're careful.

ANGEL.
Cain Development has been here for almost two years now. Tearing up the farmland, redirecting water and gas lines. It's possible that you two have // been exposed more than

ABEL.
Are you serious right now?
Are you trying to ultimately imply that the only reason I want to stay is because I'm poisoned? That you'd have to be poisoned // to stay here

ANGEL.
No, that's not what I'm saying.
I.

I've been feeling weird things while I'm here. And I don't know if it's the water. But I don't deal with the things I'm experiencing right now when I'm home.

ABEL.

You are home.

ANGEL.

You're being immature. You know what I mean. I mean Lexington. I mean my apartment.

ABEL.

So what's yer concern? If it's not that I'm too poisoned to know I should leave?

ANGEL.

I'm worried that your filter isn't working.

ABEL.

Oh?

ANGEL.

Because I'm worried I'm feeling the effects.

ABEL.

What kinda effects?

ANGEL.

I mean the memory thing for sure. Like I keep forgetting what day it is.

ABEL.

Okay but that can happen // to anyone

ANGEL.

Not like this. When I was driving back, I forgot where I was or where I was supposed to go. I was shaky. I, like, haven't eaten anything since I've been here. Not because I don't want to! I literally don't have an appetite.

ABEL.

But these things aren't happening to me. If they were, I could understand where yer // comin' from but

ANGEL.

Are you sure?

ABEL.

Okay well the way you said that makes me think you don't believe me.

ANGEL.

I mean...

You told me you were taking classes at the community college.

But Deb said her daughter, you know Valerie, hasn't seen you in over a year. That you just stopped showing up.

And I wouldn't have thought anything of that on its own, like, okay, maybe you just stopped enrolling.

But then I started thinking deeper and stuff wasn't adding up.

You say you go to Saint Peter to lift with friends, but there's no workout equipment there anymore. There hasn't been for months. They took it out when they redid the offices.

So where do you go?

ABEL.

And you got this from Deb?

ANGEL.

Yes but even beyond Deb, there are things. Like.

When we went into town, your "friend" at the antique store didn't recognize you. At all.

And you say you eat, but you and mom each have one egg for breakfast and then basically nothing until dinner.

None of this adds up, Abel. None of it.

And honestly, my first thought was "Fuck, he's doin' meth. He's tweaked out." But you're not. You don't have that look.

So that took me back to the water.

And I know you said you have this Brita filter, but when I got here you joked about getting water in my eyes during a shower. Like. Couldn't that affect you? The general exposure? Why would contaminated water only affect you when you drink it?

Does that make sense to you?

ABEL.

We don't even know if it's infected, though. I'm just bein' cautious.

ANGEL.

Okay but it's clearly affecting others.

ABEL.

One other family. Allegedly.

ANGEL.

Okay but are there families you know who *aren't* being affected?

ABEL.

My buddies would've told me if they were // experiencing other

ANGEL.

When do you see them? When is the last time you saw your friends? Because this week, I've heard you and mom talking about you having your friends help move the furniture. I haven't seen any of them. Nobody came to drive us when mom was out. I ordered us an Uber. Nobody's texting you. I would've noticed. Like. I'm not saying this to be mean but I need to know whether you're lying about meeting up with friends or if you're forgetting the last time you did.

ABEL.

I dunno what yer tryna do right now. But it's fucked up.

ANGEL.

I'm trying to understand what you and mom are experiencing.

What I'm experiencing!

Because none of this is making sense.

Even the friends you said you had at the excavation site! They barely remembered your name.

I just wasn't putting it together before. Because why would I? You had the Brita filter. You were warning me about the water. You were planning trips.

But you're different. You're meaner now. I don't remember you being this mean.

And mom's always been...*mom* but. But she hasn't been like this.

And I'm just trying to make sense of it all. I'm trying to understand what changed.

ABEL.

You wanna know what changed?

ANGEL.

Yes!

ABEL.

You haven't seen us in four years.

Four years.

It's insane that you think you could somehow tell the difference between a normal and abnormal change in a place *you haven't been in for four fucking years*.

A lot has changed.

I had to convince mom, and myself, that you weren't dead. Or dying.

We moved to a new trailer.

I enrolled and then, yes, unenrolled at a community college.

I started working out.

Mom and I started selling old furniture.

This isn't weird, Angel. It's just unfamiliar. Because you haven't been here.

ANGEL.

But isn't it possible the changes have been so gradual you just haven't noticed? The only reason Deb noticed was because her extended family came over when Billy first went missing. And they told her. They pointed out everything like I'm doing right now.

ABEL.

Okay but they're still using a shittier Brita // filter like I dunno that's s'posed to change

ANGEL.

They have one on the sink, but they also installed a full house water filtration system. The sink one is there as additional protection. Deb was telling me all about it.

ABEL.

Oh was she? Was Deb telling you all about it? About how shitty our life is and how great // her new water system

ANGEL.

Her son just died, Abel! I don't think she was bragging about her fucking water filter Jesus Christ.

Silence.

ANGEL.

I'm sorry that I left.

But you and I both know I needed to leave. If I didn't, I wouldn't be here.

And that doesn't excuse what I did to you.

But I'm here now. I'm here and I'm asking you to listen to me. To hear what I'm saying.

This isn't normal. There is something dangerous here.

I mean, even the void shit I brought up. Like. I could literally see a void. You did, too! It looked like a void had been opened up in a random field.

That's not shit you experience when you're mentally well.

ABEL.

I didn't think you were speakin' literally. Obviously.

I didn't see a literal void. I saw dug-up earth and a bedrock bottom.

Because yes, contrary to your belief, people don't just keep fallin' in Gnawbone. You can't fall through the fuckin' earth in Gnawbone, Indiana.

ANGEL.

You seriously don't see it? Any of the shit I brought up?

ABEL.

Whatta ya want me to say?

ANGEL.

I want you to say you see it.

Silence.

ANGEL.

You don't need to stay here.
I know you think you do. But you don't. You have a choice.
And it doesn't have to make her happy.

ABEL.
I don't think you realize how aggravating it is to hear you say that all the time.
I *know* I can leave. I also know what would happen.

ANGEL.
But do you know what'll happen if you stay?

ABEL.
I don't wanna talk about this anymore.
Ya made yer point.

ANGEL.
No. No, we're not done.
I wouldn't be doing my job // as your older sister if I didn't try to convince you to do what's best for you
and your future.

ABEL.
You failed your job as my sister, dude! You left me and mom and forced me to take care of everything
while you got to find yerself and lose yer accent and start over.
This conversation is done.

Silence.

ANGEL.
Just come with me. Please.

ABEL.
I knew this is how it would end.
I knew it. I knew we'd have one of these conversations.

ANGEL.
I'm sorry.

ABEL.
Yeah.

Silence.

ANGEL.
Wanna watch a rerun of Spongebob?

ABEL.

I think I gotta go to my room, actually.

ANGEL.

Okay.

ABEL.

Yeah.

I'll see you in the morning?

ANGEL nods slightly.

ABEL.

Okay.

G'night.

Don't forget to make sure the HDMI cable's plugged in all the way. And don't leave the TV on. Mom'll flip.

ABEL exits.

ANGEL.

Love you.

ANGEL is alone.

SCENE THIRTEEN.

LYNN is in the kitchen. She stands by the sink as the water runs. She's lost in thought. The couch is empty. ABEL enters.

ABEL.
Mornin'.

LYNN.
Mornin'.

ABEL.
Where's Angel?

LYNN.
Hmm?

ABEL.
Angel. Where is she?

LYNN.
Oh. Um.
She went out.

ABEL.
Out?

LYNN.
Yep.

ABEL.
Like outside? Or out somewhere else?

LYNN. [*mumbling*]
Are you her keeper now?

ABEL.
What?

LYNN.
Just makin' a joke.

ABEL.
Well I din't even hear it. So.

Is she outside?

LYNN.

“Keys’re in the front pocket.”

ABEL.

Ya feelin’ okay?

LYNN.

Oh sure. Just. Just accidentally brewed the decaf so I’m runnin’ a little slow.

ABEL.

Why don’t ya sit down? Ya look a little pale.

LYNN.

S’only because I haven’t put my face on.

ABEL.

I’ve seen you without makeup plenty of times. But right now ya look pale.
Just si’down.

LYNN.

I’m fine. Really, I’m—

ABEL gets up to guide his mother to a chair. She sits.

LYNN.

Thank you.

ABEL.

‘Course. Need water? I can—

LYNN.

You should know sump’n.

ABEL.

What?

LYNN.

Should know why she came here.

ABEL.

You mean the funeral?

LYNN.

No.

No, she came to take you away, Abie.

ABEL.

She didn't // come to, like, abduct

LYNN.

Is' not her fault.

Ya can't change who yeh are. She's just.

Well, you know how she's been.

Always demandin' more. Pushin'. Judgin'.

And I just wanted to make sure you wasn't gettin' turned around.

'Cause yer so trusting. It's yer gift. But it's also a curse.

And it's sump'n people can use to take ya off yer path.

ABEL.

I'm not goin' anywhere, mom. I just needa know where Angel is. And I need to make sure yer feelin' alright.

LYNN.

I already told'ja. Keys're in the front left pocket.

ABEL.

But did you give 'em to her?

LYNN.

Thas' what I told her earlier this mornin'.

"Keys're in the front pocket."

Left like a bat outta hell.

ABEL.

Ya couldn't have said that when I asked first? I mean, Jesus, mom.

Fuck.

Lemme call her.

ABEL calls. Waits for her to pick up when: vibrating. It's coming from under the couch.

ABEL.

What the fuck...

ABEL inspects the area, pulling out ANGEL's phone.

ABEL.

She wouldn't leave without her phone.

ABEL walks to his mother.

LYNN.

I already told'ja // that she went out

ABEL.

Why would she go into town without her phone?

LYNN.

She may've left it! Ya never leave yer phone on accident?

Now you gotta calm down.

ABEL.

I gotta calm down? Yer actin' weird and Angel is gone! What am I s'posed to—

ABEL quickly exits. LYNN gets up from her chair, steadying herself on its back. ABEL returns.

ABEL.

Car's gone.

LYNN.

Because she took it. Like I told you. I dunno where she went, but she asked for the keys and I gave 'em to her.

May've gone to see the Phelps family again.

Maybe they invited her to sump'n!

ABEL.

Doesn't make sense.

She woulda come back for it.

LYNN.

So whatta ya think happened? What do you think I'm hidin'?

'Cause that's what yer insinuatn'. That I did sump'n.

ABEL.

I'm not sayin' *you* did sump'n // I'm just sayin' it's

LYNN.

There's only three people been in this house, Abel.

C'mon. Say it.

ABEL.

She says ya din't make her feel welcome.
And maybe I haven't always made her feel welcome either. But.

Silence.

ABEL.

Ya didn't set aside towels for her. Ya din't talk to her about Billy. You just haven't been nice to her.

LYNN.

And you think if I'd set out towels and talked to her about Billy...what? That she'd be here right now?
And not in the car I lent her? That I pay for? That I don't ask her to fill up the tank for?

This is what I'm sayin', Abel.

Whenever she comes here, you start actin' different.

She's not a charitable person. She wouldn't know charity if it bit her in the ass. So of course she sees things here and starts bendin' yer ear about how it's wrong or unnatural or tainted.

LYNN stands up fully.

LYNN.

Ask her why she's so hostile to me.

She left without a trace. Din't call. Din't text. You remember. I was worried sick. Throwin' up everything
I ate. I din't know where she went.

You din't either! You had no clue!

And then, suddenly, she calls you with a new number, a new name, and a new "gender."

And thas' fine! You know I don't have a problem with it.

But she left us, Abel.

She left.

So what am I s'posed to do? I can't rely on her. I can't trust her because I know how she talks to you. And
I don't know her because she doesn't share herself with me.

What does that leave me with?

ABEL.

I dunno.

LYNN.

A stranger.

A stranger that stole from me and wants to take sump'n from me again.

All things considered, I think I've been pretty welcoming.

Cookin' you both food. Buyin' snacks. Tuckin' her into bed.

ABEL.

You tucked her into bed?

LYNN.

Her and her doll, yup.
Bet she din't tell ya that, though.
No. Course she din't.

ABEL.
Sorry.
I din't realize that's—I din't know all that was happenin'.

LYNN. [*affectionately*]
Ohhhh.

LYNN slowly walks over to ABEL, pulls him into a hug. He doesn't reciprocate. LYNN holds on.

LYNN.
I don't need an apology from you.
Like I said.
Yer trusting. And I'd rather have you trustin' everybody than nobody.
Now.

LYNN lets go.

LYNN.
D'ya want eggs? We still got some.

ABEL.
Ya think she'll be back soon?

LYNN.
M'sure she will.
Gnawbone isn't that big. Can only drive past Saint Peter so many times before ya get bored and head back.

ABEL.
Okay.

LYNN.
So...scrambled?

ABEL.
Yeah. Yeah, that sounds good.

LYNN.
Would you mind helpin' and grabbin' the milk? I'm just a little tired.

ABEL.

Oh yeah! Of course.

Actually. You sit. I'll cook.

LYNN.

Ya sure? I wasn't tryin' to get'cha to // do it yerself

ABEL.

You cook for me all the time.

I oughta return the favor, ya know?

LYNN.

That's very sweet.

ABEL starts preparing breakfast.

LYNN.

I'll turn on the news for ya. A little treat.

LYNN turns on the TV. NEWS ANCHOR 1 and NEWS ANCHOR 2 are speaking.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

—evidence following the Phelps' family decision to have an autopsy conducted on Billy Phelps, the Gnowbone native who passed away earlier this summer. // While the cause of death was initially tied to a supposed overdose, Phelps' mother insists that her son had been sober for years – and she's looking for answers from Cain Development.

LYNN.

We don't needa hear // this; it's so

ABEL.

Keep it on!

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

WRTV reached out to the mother, Deborah Phelps, for additional comment and received the following statement: "I know my son was clean. He'd been clean for a long time. He was getting his life together. This wasn't drugs. This was something else entirely. And we're going to find out what it was."

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

This investigation launched by the Phelps family fuels a claim from environmentalists that ecological factors may have played a role in Billy's untimely death.

NEWS ANCHOR 2. Cain Development reps, when asked for comment, reified the findings from their recent Columbia University research study that showed Cain's efforts presented no apparent danger to

Gnawbone inhabitants. Though this, too, has been heavily debated among environmentalists, who insist the study lacked—

LYNN turns off the TV. ABEL reacts.

LYNN.

Don't.

I don't wanna hear it. You can look up clips at the library if ya wanna watch that shit.

But I don't see a point in makin' myself miserable.

Can't change it anyhow.

Lawmakers're gonna do what they do.

Besides, we appeal to a higher power.

ABEL is shocked by the broadcast's findings.

ABEL.

Eggs're ready.

ABEL serves LYNN her breakfast.

LYNN.

Thank you. This looks wonderful.

Ya plannin' to eat any?

ABEL.

I'm not really hungry. I'll wash up once you're done.

LYNN.

Abel. She's fine.

Just went for a drive or sump'n.

If I was worried, I'da letcha know right when it happened.

Okay?

ABEL.

Mhm.

LYNN.

Ya trust me?

ABEL.

Yeah.

LYNN.

Good.

LYNN picks at her breakfast as ABEL anxiously splits his focus between his mother and the front door.

ABEL.

Maybe I could get a ride.

LYNN. [*sighing*]

To go where?

ABEL.

To look for her.

LYNN.

I thought ya said ya trusted me.

ABEL.

I do.

But that doesn't mean she can't get lost or caught in some shit.

LYNN.

Let's take a second to think this through.

I'm not sayin' yer wrong to look.

But let's just be rational.

Okay?

ABEL.

Okay.

LYNN.

Whatta ya think could've happened? Because I know there's a worse case ya got swimmin' in yer head.

ABEL.

This is stupid.

LYNN.

Is' not stupid!

I'm tryin' to make sure we're thinkin' rational.

What is the worst case?

ABEL starts to get emotional.

ABEL.

I dunno.

LYNN.

No.

You know.

Say it.

Say it, Abel.

ABEL.

I'm.

I dunno I just.

I just get this feeling like she's in trouble.

LYNN.

What kinda trouble?

ABEL.

It's stupid.

LYNN.

Say it.

ABEL.

It's stupid.

LYNN.

Say it, Abel.

ABEL.

I feel like she left. That she's gone.

LYNN.

Why d'ya think that?

ABEL.

I dunno. I just got this bad feeling. Real bad.

LYNN.

But, honey. Thas' just anxiety.

Thas' what it does. It twists you up and makes you think there's sump'n comin'.

But there never is.

ABEL.

It can't *never* be real. Like. Like people sense things, mom.

LYNN.

But yer not sensin'.

Yer speculation'. Yer fixatin'. And now yer brain, and all the neurotransmitters in it, is locked in on this theory.

That she's gone. That she's disappeared.

ABEL.

Okay maybe not that. But // she could be

LYNN.

You said gone, and we're gonna focus on that. Okay?

You think she's "gone."

ABEL.

I'm worried.

LYNN.

Right.

So. How do ya think it happened?

ABEL.

What?

LYNN.

How do you think she got gone? What kinda gone? Car crash? Or she just got lost on the interstate? What do you see?

ABEL.

I dunno.

I just got this feelin' that she's gone.

LYNN.

Where'd she go?

ABEL.

I don't know! That's the problem!

I dunno know where she went!

ABEL uses this anger to fuel his next actions.

ABEL.

I'm goin' to look for her. I'll walk there if I gotta.

LYNN.

Abel!

ABEL.

No! I gotta go. You can stay here; I don't expect you to come with, but I gotta // see where she

LYNN.

You can't leave me here, Abel.

Please.

I'm not.

I'm not doin' as well as I'd like to think I am.

And I'm worried. What happens if I get another one of my...seizures or or or episodes or whatever you wanna call 'em?

I'm alone.

ABEL.

You'll be okay. Yer fine. Ya got some food; I poured you a glass of water. I'll keep my phone on me. And I won't be far.

You can handle this; I know it.

LYNN.

But what if this one is bad?

ABEL.

But you said yer doctor din't have any real concerns. That you were fine.

LYNN.

I din't say he wasn't concerned!

I just said he said I was stable.

Coma patients can be stable.

ABEL.

Don't do this.

LYNN.

I'm just sittin' here! Yer the one who's doin sump'n – gettin' up and gettin' ready to leave.

ABEL.

Whatta ya want me to do?!

LYNN.

Finish walkin' through this worst case with me.

If we walk through it, and yer still convinced the worst case is the most realistic one, then we can go.

I'll join.

But ya can't let yer nerves get the best of you. Thas' how ya lose yer grip.

ABEL.

I don't understand why I can't go.
Why can't I just go?

LYNN starts massaging her temples. She grimaces through the rest of her lines.

LYNN.

Fine. Go then.

ABEL.

...I don't get it.

LYNN.

Ya feel like I'm keepin' ya here.

ABEL.

That's--yeah! Yer literally what's keepin' // me here!

LYNN.

Thas' not what I mean.

This is what I was tryna tell you.

Oh my god, you don't even realize how much she's convinced you.

Yer worried, not because *you* think anything bad would happen, but because *she* does.

She has infected yer mind, Abel. She's convinced you that yer hometown, the place you grew up and still spend all your time, is a dangerous place.

This isn't even *your* anxiety, It's hers.

And now yer gonna leave because she's persuaded you of sump'n you know in yer bones isn't real.

Silence. LYNN struggles with her lines occasionally here, taking staggered breaths.

LYNN.

Walk through the scenario with me.

I promise if ya still feel the same way, we can go look.

Just please don't leave me here.

ABEL.

I have to go.

I'll have my phone on me. We can call one of the altar guild ladies to come over.

Lights start to dim before a full blackout.

ABEL.

How does that sound?

Is that okay?

Then yer not bein' left alone. Right? Then you got company?
Does that sound good?
Mom?
Does that sound good?
Mom.
Mom!
Don't.
C'mon. Yer gonna do the silent treatment? Really?
I won't be gone long! I just gotta see her! I gotta make sure she's okay!
Don'tcha understand? I gotta see where she is!
Please.
Please understand why I gotta do this.

BLACKOUT.

ABEL.
Goddamn it.
I'll call one of 'em. Okay?
Which one? Which one do ya like the most?
Denise, right? 'Cause she's been given' us the eggs?
Okay, I'm callin' Denise. I'm callin' her. And if she doesn't pick up, I'll go down the list.
You won't be alone for more'n ten minutes.
Okay?
Mom? Does that work?
Mom.
Mom!

Goddamn it!

Something smacks the counter. A fist maybe?

LYNN. [*comforting*]
Shh shh shhh.
S'okay, Abie.
It's gonna be okay.
This is the right place for you to be.

SCENE FOURTEEN.

We've gone back in time. ANGEL and ABEL are together.

ANGEL.

Wanna watch a rerun of Spongebob?

ABEL.

I think I gotta go to my room, actually.

ANGEL.

Okay.

ABEL.

Yeah.

I'll see you in the morning?

ANGEL nods slightly.

ABEL.

Okay.

G'night.

Don't forget to make sure the HDMI cable's plugged in all the way.

ABEL exits.

ANGEL.

Love you.

ANGEL is alone.

After a bit, she grabs the remote, clicking on the TV. The backdrop for the NEWS ANCHORS is present, but they're missing. Suddenly, NEWS ANCHOR 2 walks into frame.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

To the viewers at home, we here at WRTV appreciate your patience as we navigated some technical difficulties. But we're back now with our regularly scheduled programming.

NEWS ANCHOR 1 walks into frame, as well.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Thanks, Tina. Turning back to Gnawbone-specific news now, Cain Development officials confirmed today that crews struck bedrock earlier than anticipated at their newest site. The company says excavation is "ahead of schedule" and poses no threat to surrounding communities.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

But not everyone agrees. Environmental groups filed complaints with the county this week, citing unsafe blasting practices and concerns about groundwater contamination. Some nearby residents reported cracks forming in their foundations — hearing low vibrations late at night and even reporting localized power outages.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Reps from Cain Development have dismissed those claims, referring to them as “rumors” and “isolated coincidences.” Still, officials advise motorists to avoid the junction near County Road 6, where heavy trucks continue hauling debris out of the site.

Both NEWS ANCHORS turn to the camera. Their smiles hold, but their cadence shifts.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Debris. Rubble. Broken things pulled from the earth.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

What’s left when you dig past soil, past stone?

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

A hollow. A cavern.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

A void.

The broadcast feed flickers; the hum of static begins beneath their words. ANGEL moves to grab the remote. The NEWS ANCHORS glance at this flicker of movement from her. ANGEL doesn’t register that she’s being watched. How could she?

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Residents say echoes don’t even return from it.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Should we step to the edge? See if our voice comes back?

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

See if anything comes back.

The buzzing grows, like locust wings. Their voices blend with distortion, a double-tracking chorus.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Now wouldn’t that be a fun segment? If we could get Dale to approve some field reporting?

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

You know, Jerry, I've been saying we need to check it out for ourselves.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

I swear, it's practically calling to me, Tina!

Is it calling to anyone who's watching? You have to wonder.

ANGEL turns off the TV. The room is thrown into darkness. She scrolls on her phone, turning on a guided meditation. She relaxes, closing her eyes, trying to focus on the breathing exercises.

MEDITATION VOICE.

Take a moment to find your seat.

Let your body be heavy, grounded, supported by the floor beneath you.

Inhale slowly through your nose...

Exhale gently through your mouth.

Notice the breath.

Notice the space around you.

Everything you need is here.

The TV turns on. The light is low, almost completely indiscernible. There's no noise. ANGEL is undisturbed.

MEDITATION VOICE.

Now, imagine roots growing down from your spine, down through the floor, into the earth.

The ground holds you. The ground steadies you.

Let yourself sink a little deeper.

A faint buzz under the recording, easily dismissed.

MEDITATION VOICE.

You may hear sounds.

You may notice vibrations.

Let them pass through you, like wind, like locust wings.

Every sound is welcome.

Every sound belongs.

Notice the hollow space behind your eyes.

Notice the hollow beneath your ribs.

Notice how the hollows inside you feel, how they stretch with your breath.

Buzzing swells; the voice is still calm.

MEDITATION VOICE.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Step closer.

Feel the pull at your feet, like standing at the edge.
You are safe. You are steady.

The meditation voice now blends with faint distortion, like two voices layered. The light grows, catching ANGEL's attention. She opens her eyes. The meditation continues to play.

MEDITATION VOICE.
There is no fear in falling.
Only release.
Inhale: falling. //
Exhale: falling.

ANGEL.
What the fuck?

MEDITATION VOICE.
The earth // is waiting.
The hollowness is waiting.

ANGEL.
What the fuck?!

ANGEL chucks her phone away from her. It slides under the couch. The buzzing persists. The TV continues to brighten. ANGEL goes to the TV, unplugging the HDMI cable. No change. The TV gets brighter. ANGEL has to shield her eyes. The room is now brimming with light. The buzzing is almost deafening now. ANGEL cradles herself, plugging her ears.

Suddenly, everything stops. The buzzing. The light. The room is thrown back into total darkness. ANGEL catches her breath. Then, from the black screen of the TV:

NEWS ANCHOR 1.
Angel. It's time for you to go home.

ANGEL jolts back. She's so scared she can't even scream. Air is the only thing that escapes.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.
It's not your fault.
But it is your time.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.
It's your time, Angel.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.
You know what you have to do.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

You know what you have to do.
And you know what's coming.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

You know what's coming.

Silence.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Go now.

ANGEL slowly gets up.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Get the car keys.

ANGEL.

I don't...

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Ask your mother. She knows where they are.

ANGEL.

What do I say?

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

You'll know what to say.

Go on.

The voices are encouraging, sweet. The only real reassurance that ANGEL has gotten from adults since she's been here.

ANGEL.

I can go home?

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Yes. You've done such a good job.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

We're very proud of you.

ANGEL slowly exits toward the bedrooms. The NEWS ANCHORS hold their positions. ANGEL returns quickly with the keys.

ANGEL.

What am I supposed to do?

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

You know what you're supposed to do.

You've known all night.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Procrastination is the enemy of action.

Don't wait too long, Angel.

ANGEL.

I'm scared.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Don't be scared. This is how you knew it would end.

You get to leave.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

It's your turn to leave, Angel.

ANGEL stalls.

ANGEL.

What about Abel?

Have you spoken to Abel? Does he know to leave?

Hello?

Does Abel know he can leave?

Does he know he can come with me?

Silence.

ANGEL.

Say something if he knows.

NEWS ANCHOR 1 & 2.

He knows.

ANGEL pauses, then hurriedly gathers her things: her clothes, her makeup bag, her backpack. She then grabs her doll and tucks it under her arm. She starts to leave before glancing back at the TV. Black. She exits.

After a beat, the TV turns back on. The NEWS ANCHORS are on screen.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Do we want to run through version A and then cruise into Version B?

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Let's do it.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Okay.

The NEWS ANCHORS ready themselves before presenting:

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Good evening. Authorities confirmed today that the body of a young woman was recovered at the Cain Development site just outside Gnawbone.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Crews working overnight reported spotting the form at first light, lodged against the wall of exposed bedrock. Rescue workers say the fall was fatal.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

The county coroner has identified the victim as Angel Peters. Officials believe the Gnawbone native may have wandered onto the site late last night before losing her footing.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Family members declined to comment, but neighbors have begun leaving flowers and candles at the edge of the pit. "It don't make sense," one woman told us. "She was just here. She was just at the party."

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Cain Development has released a statement offering condolences, while insisting the site is secure. A spokesperson wrote, quote, "This was a tragic accident, but no further danger exists to the community."

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

The county sheriff has urged residents to avoid the excavation, warning that unstable ground remains a hazard.

A pause. The screen flickers. Their smiles never falter — they simply reset.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Good evening. Authorities confirmed today that search efforts are just getting underway for a young woman reported missing near the Cain Development site in Gnawbone, Indiana.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Sheriff's deputies say they have begun canvassing the excavation and surrounding woods, but add that it is still early in the investigation. Volunteers are expected to join the search over the weekend.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Officials have not ruled out other possibilities. The woman may have left the area voluntarily, and a car believed to be connected to her is also unaccounted for.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

Family members describe her as stubborn but kind. They are urging anyone who may have seen her vehicle on local roads to come forward.

NEWS ANCHOR 2.

Cain Development has pledged to assist with the search and says it is cooperating fully with investigators.

NEWS ANCHOR 1.

At this time, authorities stress there is no evidence of foul play.

Both NEWS ANCHORS pause, nodding calmly. The buzz hums faintly under their words.

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR 2.

For now, she has not returned home.

They smile. The TV turns off. BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY