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"It will be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams."

-Acts 2:17

"What am I supposed to do outside but get rich? Work too hard but, boy, don't floss too hard and get your wig split."

-Isaiah Rashad

Characters:

Jay (he/him/his)- Late 20’s, Black, A natural charmer and unashamed flirt, Evan’s best friend, Sometimes June’s boyfriend, Store owner

Evan (he/him/his)- Late 20’s, White, Ambitious, Focused, Jay’s best friend, Store owner

Stacy (she/her/hers)- mid-30’s-mid-40’s, Black, Persuasive, Not easily rattled, Real Estate Developer

June (she/her/hers)- Late 20’s, Korean-American, Unbothered, Poetic, Sometimes Jay’s girlfriend, Artist

Walter (he/him/his)- 50’s-60’s, Black, Prophetic, Timeless, Friend of the store

Setting:

“Big Jay’s” Corner Store
Babylon, GA

Time:

The End.

Note:

A / indicates overlapping dialogue

A Note About Music

As is the case with all my plays, music was constantly swirling around me as I wrote this. For this one, I wanted to try a little experiment. As you read, you'll notice pages that contain playlists: one for Preshow and one for Intermission. These playlists, as well as all the music mentioned in the script, are the songs I hear in my dream world. I don't own or have rights to any of them. Feel free to use this music in whatever way is useful for you. Use as much or as little as feels right.

In any case, I hope you'll spend some time with all the music in some capacity. Even if it's for your own personal joy.

- J.

Preshow Playlist

untitled 01- Kendrick Lamar

K.R.I.T HERE- Big K.R.I.T

Paranoia (feat. Lili K & Nosaj Thing)- Chance the Rapper

Song 33- Noname

20 Karat Jesus- Freddie Gibbs

Black Moon Rising- Black Pumas

Posthumous Forgiveness- Tame Impala

STUCK- WESTSIDE BOOGIE

Darkseid- Isaiah Rashad

(34 minutes)

Prologue

Darkness.

In the distance, we hear galloping hooves.

A red light blinks erratically, illuminating the façade of "Big Jay's Corner Store" each time. Also illuminated is a figure, which appears closer and closer with each blink.

Is it human?

***The light becomes a huge blood moon,
bathing the space deep crimson.***

***The figure is revealed to be WALTER,
dressed in his threadbare Sunday's best.
He wears a cardboard crown
and carries a makeshift archer's bow.***

***He makes eye contact with as many of us as he can.
He looks to the sky and nods to something
or someone
unseen.
He looks back to us and speaks.***

WALTER

"Grace be unto you,
And peace,
From him which is,
And which was,
And which is to come;
And from the seven Spirits which are before his throne,
And from Jesus Christ,
Who is the faithful witness,
And the first begotten of the dead,
And the prince of the kings of the earth.
Unto him that loved us,
And washed us from our sins in his own blood,
And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father;
To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

(beat)

It's an honor to stand before you today.
As we prepare for His return,
Which was prophesied to us by our elders
And promised to us by the king Himself.
What a glorious opportunity we have been given

WALTER (cont.)

To exalt and glorify such a name as the Son of God.
To bid farewell to this life
And welcome new, eternal life in Paradise.

(beat)

I understand you may be afraid.
Change can be frightening.
Goodbyes can be frightening.
But
Please
Put your trust in me
I am your friend.
I am your brother.
I am the crowned rider atop a snow-white horse, gone forth to conquer.
There is nothing to fear.
For, my God is a God of Love.
And fear cannot exist
Where love resides.

*A beat.
Walter takes a deep breath in,
stretches his arms out wide,
and looks to the sky, in awe.*

“BEHOLD, HE COMETH WITH THE CLOUDS;
AND EVERY EYE SHALL SEE HIM,
EVEN THOSE WHO PIERCED HIM;
AND ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH
SHALL WAIL BECAUSE OF HIM.
EVEN SO, AMEN!”

A deep rumbling grows from somewhere underground.

*Walter draws back his bow
as if to pierce us with an invisible arrow.*

*The rumbling becomes cacophony.
And suddenly...
the blood moon becomes a bright morning sun.*

The front door of the store opens and JAY steps outside.

JAY

Yo, Walter!
Come on, man.
It's too early for all that yellin'.

JAY (cont.)

People still tryna sleep.

WALTER

Sorry, Little Jay.

Just tryna get people ready for the judgment.

JAY

Well, can we hold off on that until the after noon?

I'd hope God would, at least, let us sleep in on Judgement Day.

WALTER

The day and the hour are unknown.

The only thing that's certain is that/ He will return.

JAY

He will return.

Yeah, yeah, I hear you, boss.

Come on inside.

It's cold out here.

Jay calls out to an unseen crowd that has formed.

JAY

Alright ya'll!

Show's over!

***They walk through the doors
and the inside of the store is revealed
as we prepare for...***

Act 1

Scene 1

*The store shares the cozy feel
of many neighborhood corner stores and bodegas.*

*Refrigerators line most of the walls,
containing frozen food, milk, alcohol, etc.*

*At the moment,
all of the fridges are dark inside except the milk fridge,
which has the distinct glow of fluorescent light.*

*Despite its need for an upgrade,
it's a clean, well-kept space.*

*Behind the check out counter
is an unfinished, hand-painted mural.
The only thing fully painted is the title:
"A Portrait of Babylon".
The rest is simply a coat of white paint
and pencil sketches of what was meant to be a map of the city.*

*Next to the counter is an old chunky boombox.
It looks like it should be carried by Radio Raheem
in "Do the Right Thing".*

*Or hoisted high into the air by John Cusack
in "Say Anything".*

*Beside the boombox is a shelf that houses a massive, alphabetized
collection of cassette tapes.*

*Jay goes to the boombox and pops one in.
Music plays.*

*Something like "Hold On, Be Strong",
the opening track of Aquemini by Outkast.*

*He goes to one of the unlit fridges and sticks his hand in, checking the
temperature.*

JAY

Hey, do you know anything about fixing fridges?

WALTER

If it's broke, I can fix it.

JAY

My man.

You hungry?

WALTER

I could eat.

JAY

Me too.

I got some breakfast sandwiches I meal prepped for the week.
Just gotta throw them in the microwave. Sound good to you?

WALTER

Whatever you got sounds good to me.

JAY

See?

That's why I fucks with you.
You my man a hunnid grand.
I'mma run upstairs and get those started.
Gimme, like, five minutes.

WALTER

You mind if I turn on the radio, youngblood?

JAY

Come on now, Walter.
What kind of question is that?
What's mine is yours, boss man.
You know that.
Don't start getting all formal with me now!
Turn it to whatever you want.

*Jay starts to exit,
but sees something outside.*

*He goes to the front door,
opens it,
and sticks his head out.*

JAY

(to someone unseen)

Yo!

You can't park there.

Read the sign.

(inaudible response)

Look, I didn't make the law and I don't really fuck with it.
But you gotta move, bro.

The car moves.

JAY

The last thing I need is somebody getting towed and causing a scene out there.
Not today, Satan.

WALTER

Get thee behind me!

JAY

That's right!
Devil, get thee behind me!

*We hear popping and crackling from the stereo.
The music becomes distorted.*

*Jay goes over to check it out.
He takes out the cassette
and its guts spill out.*

JAY

Goddammit.
I know you got fridges covered, but what you know about tape decks?

WALTER

I'm sure I can figure it out.

JAY

My man a hunnid grand!

Jay exits up a staircase in back.

*Walter goes to the boombox,
Turns the dial,
and scans radio stations.*

*We hear short snippets of a few music stations
before landing on the local news.*

NEWS ANCHOR (VO)

Florida is still being rattled by earthquakes.
The biggest, of course, yesterday.
A 4.8 centered in Jacksonville.
The US Geological Survey says there have been five tremors since then.
One occurring early this morning.
Damage is still being assessed but, from what we can gather so far, damage is minimal,
and no residents were injured.
Even with that bit of good news, residents are still shocked by the earthquake's
occurrence.

NEWS ANCHOR (cont.)

More to come on this and other news after this...

*The front door opens
and we hear a DING! from the attached bell.
EVAN enters, wheeling in his bike
and holding a speaker blasting
"Cash Rules Everything" by Wu-Tang.*

EVAN

Walter!

My man!

How you doin' this morning?

WALTER

Blessed and highly favored.

How about you?

EVAN

Same, my friend.

Same.

How's the heart?

WALTER

Still beating.

Stronger than ever!

EVAN

Taking your meds when you're supposed to?

Walter takes a bottle of pills from his jacket and shakes it.

EVAN

That's what I like to see!

Jay upstairs?

WALTER

Yes, sir.

EVAN

Sir?

Come on, Walter.

Don't start getting formal with me now!

Evan moves to the staircase.

EVAN
JAY!
YOU PLAN ON WORKIN' TODAY?!

JAY (O/S)
FUCK YOU!

EVAN
(re: Walter)
What are you listening to?

WALTER
News.
Talking about the earthquakes.

EVAN
Shit's wild.
I didn't think they got earthquakes in Florida.

WALTER
Earthquakes can happen anywhere.

EVAN
Yeah, I mean, I know that.
But when I hear "earthquake" I think about California falling into the ocean.
That's what they taught us in school.

WALTER
Schools don't know nothing.

EVAN
Tell that to my student loan debt.

*Evan looks around the space.
Something's off.*

EVAN
Does it feel different in here to you?

WALTER
You wanna know what those earthquakes are really about?

EVAN
Pretty sure you're gonna tell me no matter what.

WALTER

His return.

It was prophesied that, in the end, there will be great earthquakes, famine, and pestilences worldwide.

EVAN

Is that right?

WALTER

Deaths all over the globe by sword and plague.

EVAN

Woah.

Swords are gonna make a comeback?

Evan goes to the boombox and begins flipping through cassettes.

WALTER

Might not wanna do that.

EVAN

Why not?

WALTER

It ate the last tape that was in there a little bit ago.

Probably don't wanna sacrifice another one until it's fixed.

EVAN

I been trying to get Jay to replace this thing for months.

He keeps saying some shit about "sentimental value".

WALTER

You not sentimental?

EVAN

Who has the time?

Jay comes downstairs with two sandwiches.

EVAN

Yo, Jay.

Walter says that, in the end, there's gonna be death by sword, famine, and plague.

JAY

Ah, shit!

Niggas bout to be using swords again?

JAY (cont.)

I gotta start practicing!
Walter, tell him about the Seven Bowls.

Walter relishes any opportunity to spread the gospel.

*He sits behind the counter
like a judge preparing to hand down a sentence.*

WALTER

In the last days, Seven Bowls will be poured onto the Earth.
First, a foul and malignant sore will afflict those people who bore the mark of the beast and worship its image.
Second, the sea will turn to blood and everything within it will die.
Third, all fresh water across the world will turn to blood.
Fourth-

EVAN

This is way too morbid first thing in the morning.
You mind if we skip to the end?

Walter's rhythm has been thrown off.

He skips to the end.

WALTER

The Seventh Bowl contains a great earthquake and heavy hailstorm.
Then comes the aftermath.

EVAN

There's more??
I thought that was the end!

JAY

It's a long ending.
Yo, Walter, tell him that bit about the frog.

WALTER

"And I saw three unclean spirits, like frogs,
come out of the mouth of the dragon,
and out of the mouth of the beast,
and out of the mouth of the false prophet."

JAY

Ain't that shit crazy??
Did you know the bible had dragons in it??

Jay hands a sandwich to Walter.

JAY

One for you.
And one for me.

WALTER

Thanks, youngblood.

EVAN

What about me?

JAY

Nigga, what about you?
You got a kitchen at *your* house, don't you?

EVAN

I got a late start!

JAY

What that got to do with me?

EVAN

Come on, man!
I know you got more upstairs.
You told me about your meal prep.

JAY

That's right.
MY meal prep.
Prepped meals for ME.
Not for the whole neighborhood.

EVAN

Please?
Pretty please??
Pretty please with a cherry on top???

Evan wraps Jay in a tight embrace.

JAY

Aight, man!
FINE!
Now get off me with your sweaty ass.

Evan lets go.

EVAN

Thanks, man!

See?

That's why you're my best friend.

JAY

Nah, our Daddys was best friends.

Now, I'm stuck with you.

EVAN

And one day we'll have kids and they'll be best friends.

JAY

Don't hold your breath.

Evan grabs his bike and wheels it toward the staircase.

JAY

Hol' up!

Where you takin' that?

EVAN

I'm gonna park it in your place.

JAY

The hell you are!

I just cleaned the floors last night.

EVAN

And you can clean them again tonight.

JAY

Come on, man!

EVAN

What do you want me to do?

I can't leave it outside.

Not in this fuckin' neighborhood.

JAY

Ain't nobody checkin' for your funky lil' bike.

Plus, you bein' wild racist!

Thinking niggas tryna take your shit.

EVAN

Oh, yeah?

EVAN (cont.)

What happened to your bike?

JAY

...

WALTER

It got stolen.

JAY

Aye come on, boss!

How you gon' sell me out like that??

EVAN

Don't try to chastise him for telling the truth.

Thank you, Walter.

WALTER

Any time.

JAY

Just leave it down here!

EVAN

I can't!

It throws off the whole vibe.

Customers don't wanna see my bike laying around.

JAY

What customers?

Don't nobody come in here but Walter.

EVAN

That was before.

Today's a new day!

JAY

Man, you say that every day.

EVAN

And it's always true.

Plus, today's different.

I can feel it.

***Evan starts up the stairs,
bike over his shoulder.***

EVAN

Heads up.
June's coming by this morning.

Jay is completely caught off guard.

JAY

She's coming *here*?
Today?

EVAN

Yeah, she has some shit from her Dad's store that she wanted to drop off.

JAY

Why she tell you and not me?

EVAN

I don't know, Jay.
Maybe it had something to do with what she found in your phone?
It seems like there's a direct correlation between you cheating and her not talking to you.

JAY

Texting isn't cheating!

EVAN

Whatever you say, boss.

Evan exits into Jay's apartment.

JAY

(kisses his teeth)

Man, he be working my nerves too early in the morning!
I ain't even woke up good and my blood pressure is sky high.

WALTER

Have you tried deep breaths?
Or counting to ten?

JAY

I done tried that. I did, man, but...I can never get all the way to ten.
I start off alright and it feels like maybe it's working.
By the time I get to five, all I can think about is how dumb I must look.

WALTER

It's not about how you look.
It's about how you feel.

JAY

Yeah, well, I *feel* stupid too.

Plus, I reserve deep breaths for my nightly joint.

What's the point of focusing on my breathing if I'm not gonna be high by the end of it?

WALTER

That's a question for somebody else.

Been a long time on this side of sober.

JAY

Ah shit, I didn't mean to-

WALTER

Nah, no need to apologize.

Everybody has their vices.

Don't bother me none no more.

*A comfortable silence between them.
They've known each other for a long time.
Even the awkward moments are comfortable.*

JAY

How'd you like your sandwich?

WALTER

Five stars, youngblood.

When did you start cooking?

JAY

Couple months ago.

Tryna impress June.

Show her I'm growing up and all that shit.

WALTER

Well, you impressed *me*!

You should start selling these down here.

JAY

Nah, man.

Too much work.

Plus, I gotta deal with health codes and shit.

I'm happy feeding myself and my people.

WALTER

Am I your people?

JAY

I fed you, didn't I?

Jay spots something on the counter.

JAY

Goddammit!
See that, Walter?

WALTER

See what?

JAY

Fucking grasshopper.
Been gettin' em for months now.
Health inspector would have a field day with that shit.
How are these muhfuckas still surviving in the winter?

WALTER

They can survive a lot, youngblood.
They'll be here long after we're gone.
It's probably just looking for a warm place to be.
Can't blame them for that.

JAY

When you're right, you're right, brotha.
When you're right, you're right.

Jay catches the grasshopper in his hands.

WALTER

You know locusts are a species of grasshopper.

JAY

(he already knows what Walter's gonna say)
What, you think it's a plague?
Should I expect a swarm?

WALTER

You never know.

JAY

It ain't that deep, Walter.

Jay peeks at the bug in his hands.

JAY

You know, this is what I imagine being God is like.
Lording over all.
All power in his hands.
The power to crush us at any moment.

WALTER

My God is a God of love.
He would never do that.

Jay crosses to the front doors.

JAY

I mean, I hear you.
But we were made in His image, right?
So, we're God-like.
And, sometimes, when they're really annoying, don't you just wanna get rid of them?
By any means?

He releases the grasshopper outside.

WALTER

I would have to have just cause.

JAY

You're a fair God, Walter.

WALTER

Oh, I'm just the messenger.

Ding!
The front door opens
and JUNE enters carrying a large heavy box.

JUNE

Didn't you see me walking up?!
You couldn't hold the door open?!

JAY

Oh shit!
I'm sorry, babe!
Let me help you!

JUNE

I don't need your help, Jay.
Just tell me where to put it.

JAY

You hungry?

JUNE

No, I ate already.

Where should I put this?

JAY

I got breakfast sandwiches upstairs.

All ready to go.

Just gotta throw it in the microwave.

Five minutes, tops

JUNE

Can't.

I got somewhere to be.

Now tell me where to put this before I drop it on your foot.

JAY

Just leave it on the counter.

I'll find a place later.

June sets the box on the counter.

JAY

What do we have here?

JUNE

Last of the kimchi from dad's store.

He thought it'd be better off here than just sitting at our place.

Sell it, eat it, whatever. Just don't let it go to waste.

JAY

Will do.

How's Papa Cho doing?

JUNE

He's fine.

JAY

I'm sorry to hear about the store.

Davenport Realty. Fucking parking garages and condos.

JUNE

Yeah, well.

Life goes on.

She starts to leave.

*Jay grabs her hand,
hoping to make her stay,
but she pulls away.*

JUNE

Don't be grabbing at me, Jay!
I'm not in the mood!

JAY

Sorry.
Fuck.
Sorry.
I just...I been tryna call you.

JUNE

For what?

JAY

To talk.

JUNE

What do you need to talk to me for?
Talk to Maya.

JAY

I already told you /it was nothing!
We were just texting!

JUNE

It didn't look like nothing!

JAY

Her Mom was sick/ and she needed a friend!

JUNE

What does that have to do with you?
Oh, a friend?
That's what you were being?
So, friends just send each other nudes these days?
/Is that what friends do?

JAY

She sent those to me!
I didn't even want them!

JUNE

Then why are they still in your phone?

Jay hesitates

JUNE

See?

This is why I stopped/ fucking with you!

JAY

Okay, wait!

Just give me a minute to explain.

JUNE

Fine! Explain.

JAY

...

...

...

WALTER

You should probably say something.

JAY

Yeah, thanks for the advice, boss.

JUNE

Oh, Walter!

I didn't even see you.

This idiot was blocking my view.

June pushes past Jay and gives Walter a hug.

JUNE

How are you, love?

WALTER

Can't complain, little lady.

Can't complain.

JUNE

We still on for Wednesday?

I'll pick you up in the morning for your doctor's appointment.

WALTER

(pointing to his head)

I got it in my calendar.

JUNE

Perfect.

How's everything down at the church?

WALTER

A little better everyday.

Rebuilding ain't an easy thing and we may never be able to get it how it was.

But it's starting to take shape into something new.

JUNE

That's good to hear, friend.

Evan comes downstairs with two sandwiches.

EVAN

Yo, yo!

JUNE

Friend!

Evan and June embrace.

He hands her a sandwich.

EVAN

One for you.

And one for me.

JUNE

You're the sweetest!

JAY

I thought you already ate.

EVAN

How's Papa Cho?

JUNE

He's alright.

A little aimless.

But we're getting through.

EVAN

I hear you.

It can't be easy having to start over after all that time.

This neighborhood, man...

JUNE

I know.

It's starting to look like ya'll are the last to survive.

EVAN

And survive we will.

You can bet on that.

JUNE

How much are you trying to bet?

EVAN

How much you got?

JUNE

Don't tempt me.

It's been a minute since I've bet on anything.

JAY

Yo, when we finally get some money, we bout to show up to the casino high steppin' with some J's on!

Straight cash in adidas bags.

"Lil Duffle Bag Boy" playing in the background.

Not worried about nothin'!

***Silence.
Nobody laughs.***

JAY

That was a joke.

JUNE

(to Evan)

I'll see you later, friend.

JAY

Ya'll was just talkin' about betting and I thought I'd mention the casino because-

JUNE

I got the joke, Jay.

It just wasn't funny.

This was an A and B conversation until you decided to C your way in.

JAY

Goddamn!

A nigga can't win today!

JUNE

That's your problem.
It's not about winning.
I'll talk to you later, E.
Kimchi's on the counter.
Sell it, eat it.
Just/don't let it go to waste.

EVAN

Just don't let it go to waste. I know the rules.
I would never disrespect Papa Cho like that.
Give him my best.
Mama Cho too.

JUNE

Will do.

They embrace.

June goes to WALTER.

JUNE

Bye, sweet Walter.

WALTER

I actually need to head out as well.
Gotta get down to the church and help out.

JUNE

Well, come on.
I'm going that direction.
We can catch up a little.
How's that sound?

WALTER

Fine as wine.

They start to exit.

JAY

I don't get a goodbye??

JUNE

(without stopping)
BYE!

JAY

(calling after them)

Did Evan tell you about my responsible ass meal prep??
That's called GROWTH!

They're gone.

*Jay goes to Evan,
who's stuffing his face with the sandwich.*

JAY

The fuck was that?

EVAN

The fuck was what?

JAY

You and June!
Ya'll best friends now?

EVAN

No, *you're* my best friend.

JAY

Don't look like it!
You out here huggin' and chattin'.
Giving her food from *my* kitchen!

EVAN

This shit is fucking delicious.

*Jay slaps the sandwich out of his hand
and onto the floor.*

EVAN

YO!
The fuck was that for?!

JAY

Being a bad friend.

EVAN

The sandwich ain't never hurt nobody!

JAY

You supposed to be on my side!

EVAN

What is this?
Middle school?
I'm not choosing sides, dude.
June is my friend and she's hurt.
You hurt her, Jay. You gotta own that.

JAY

Yo, I hate this!
I wasn't even tryna do nothin' with that girl.
June is my life. It just made me feel...

EVAN

Like you wanted to see ass and titty pictures?

JAY

I didn't ask for them!
She just sent them out of the blue.
What was I supposed to do??

EVAN

Delete them.

JAY

Fuck you, man.

EVAN

I love you too.

JAY

Could you at least talk me up a little bit?
Tell her I'm doing better now.
Tell her about meal prep.

EVAN

She's supposed to take you back because you finally learned how to feed yourself?

JAY

Would you just talk to her please??

EVAN

Aright, alright.
I got you.

JAY

Thank you.

(re: kimchi)

I'm gonna take two of these for myself.

You want any?

EVAN

Nah, I'm good.

I'm not a huge kimchi person.

JAY

Nigga, what??

Since when?

EVAN

Since always.

JAY

I didn't know that.

EVAN

That ain't my fault.

JAY

Wow.

I thought you was down.

But now I see you just like the rest of them.

EVAN

The rest of who?

JAY

White America.

With your weak ass taste buds.

EVAN

Don't start that shit with me, Jay.

I grew up eating Big Jay's cooking.

Just Lawry's and Frank's Red Hot, Lawry's and Frank's Red Hot, on EVERYTHING.

Can a bitch just get some black pepper and Morton Kosher Salt for once??

JAY

You not 'bout to be insulting my Daddy's cooking.

EVAN

Did I say it was bad?

No.

EVAN (cont.)

I'm just surprised it didn't lead me to an early grave.

Evan takes the rest of the kimchi over to one of the dark fridges.

Before he can open the door...

JAY

Maybe we put them over here with the milk.

EVAN

I was gonna put it in here with the rest of the food.

JAY

I just think there's more room in here with the milk.

EVAN

There's plenty of room in this one.

Evan opens the door to the dark fridge.

JAY

Look, man.

The only fridge working right now is the milk fridge.

So, we can't put them in that one.

EVAN

What??

Since when?

*Evan sticks his hand inside.
Lukewarm.*

JAY

Just happened last night.

EVAN

I knew there was something off.

It's too quiet in here.

Why didn't you call me?

JAY

Because I knew I'd see you this morning.

Calm down.

EVAN

Calm down?

What are we supposed to do with one fridge?

EVAN (cont.)

What are we gonna do about the PERISHABLE food in the broken fridges?

JAY

We gotta throw it out.
Or we can donate some of it to the church.
It shouldn't be totally spoiled, we just can't sell it.

EVAN

Shit, man.
You know how much money that wastes?

JAY

Well, I don't know what to tell you.

EVAN

We gotta hire somebody to fix them.

JAY

With what money?
Besides, Walter says he can fix it.

EVAN

Why didn't he fix it while he was here?

JAY

It's first thing in the morning!
I wanted to, at least, feed him first.
Then June came and I got distracted.
Then Walter had to go.
Shit happens.
I'm sure he'll be back later and he can fix it then.
It's not like fixing it right now is gonna save the food.

EVAN

That's not the point, Jay!

JAY

Then what is the point??
School me.

EVAN

The point is, you gotta be on top of shit like this!
This place is on us now.
Every little thing falls on *us*.
We gotta do better.

JAY

So, now it's "we" and "us"?
A few seconds ago it was all my fault.

EVAN

They broke while *you* were here!
Not me!

JAY

Now we get the real tea.
If *you* would've been here then maybe *you* could've figured it out.
I ain't the only one who work here.

EVAN

I was in a fuckin' night class with a bunch of old people and drop outs tryna learn more
so we can make this work!
You act like I was out fuckin' around.

JAY

You might as well have been.
You don't need to take a fuckin' class to run this place.
Our Daddys didn't need a class to run it.

EVAN

Yeah, and look at us now.
No customers and no money.
Does that feel good to you?

JAY

Whatever, man.

Silence

EVAN

Look...I've been doing some thinking.
About our money problem.
I know we've been down this road before but, listen to me...
I can go down the bank/and talk to somebody.

JAY

No.

EVAN

Just hear me out!
My credit's good.
I got a degree.
No criminal record.
I can get us a loan/ just to get us back on our feet.

JAY

No.

EVAN

Why no??

JAY

We just got out from under that fuckin' bank.
I'm not going back.
We own this now.
Our Daddy's never owned it.
And the bank made sure they never forgot it.
Til the day they died.
We put them in the ground owned men.
That's not gonna be me.
I'm not doing that.
We own this now.
We paid our debt.
It's *ours*.

EVAN

You're right.
It's ours.
And because this place is ours it's our responsibility to take care of it.
What good is owning something that's just gonna fall apart?
That nobody wants to come to?
That serves no one?
Our Fathers didn't just want this place for themselves.
They wanted it for the community.
They fought hard for this place.
We can't let this go to waste.
(beat)
Jay, we gotta face it.
It was manageable before.
We ain't never been rich, but we always made it work.
But, we can't ignore what happened last year.
You put us in a tough spot and we have to-

JAY

I don't wanna talk about that again.

EVAN

Look, I'm not blaming /you.
I just-

JAY

I'm not looking for sympathy.

JAY (cont.)

Go ahead and blame me.
I made a mistake.
A big fucking mistake.
And it's up to me to fix it.
Not you.
Not the bank.
Me.
Me and me alone.

EVAN

It doesn't have to be like that.
I never asked for you to-

JAY

Can we talk about this /another time?

EVAN

Jay-

JAY

JUST...
Just give me a little more time to think about it.
Please.

EVAN

(beat)
Okay.

JAY

Okay.

Silence.

Neither of them knows how to move forward.

***Jay grabs a broom and starts to sweep the space,
while Evan goes behind the counter
and does the top of day counting of the register.***

***Jay stops sweeping,
closes his eyes,
and begins taking deep breaths.
Inhale.
Exhale.***

JAY

(barely audible)

One.

***Inhale.
Exhale.***

JAY

Two.

***Inhale.
Exhale.***

JAY

Three.

***Evan goes to the door and flips on the OPEN sign.
He stops to watch Jay.***

***Inhale.
Exhale.***

JAY

Four.

***Jay can feel eyes on him.
He opens his eyes and catches Evan staring.***

JAY

Can you not stare at me while I-

EVAN

I'm sorry!

JAY

I mean goddamn!

EVAN

I just ain't never seen you do something like that before.
I imagined you'd think it was stupid.

JAY

I do!

But I'm trying to better myself.

EVAN

I wasn't trying to throw you off.

EVAN (cont.)

I just thought it was interesting.

*Jay tries to get back into it
but he feels stupid now.*

He gives up and goes back to sweeping.

EVAN

You mad at me?

JAY

...

EVAN

Come on.

Don't be mad at me.

JAY

I'm not.

It's just...

I'm not mad.

You mad at *me*?

EVAN

No.

Never.

Come here.

Evan places his hand on the back of Jay's head.

Jay does the same.

They bring their foreheads together.

EVAN

Brothers?

JAY

Brothers.

They part.

JAY

Aight, that's enough of that.

Can I put the kimchi in the milk fridge?

EVAN

Yeah, go ahead.

***Jay grabs the box and goes to the milk fridge to unload.
Evan starts to take food out of the broken fridges.***

JAY

Did you hear what they're turning June's Dad's place into?

EVAN

No, what?

JAY

A juicery.

EVAN

Fuck's sake.

Yeah, that's what the neighborhood needs.

More green juice.

JAY

(“Paranoia” by Chance the Rapper)

“Move to the neighborhood. I bet they don't stay for good...”

JAY & EVAN

“Watch”

EVAN

“Somebody'll steal Daddy's Rollie, call it the neighborhood...”

JAY & EVAN

“Watch”

They continue their respective tasks in silence.

Jay sees something outside.

Another idiot trying to park.

JAY

Jesus Christ.

He gets up and goes to the front door.

JAY

(to the car outside)

You can't park there!

Read the sign!

(inaudible response)

Not my rules, boss!

JAY (cont.)

(inaudible response)

Nah, not even for a minute, bro!

I ain't naïve.

I let you park there, tow trucks get called, you throw a fit.

Next thing you know, I got police out front.

I don't want twelve nowhere near my shit.

Move on, my boy!

(inaudible response)

Yeah, yeah, fuck you too!

(closing the door, under his breath)

Mothafucka.

***The car moves.
Jay goes back to his activity.***

JAY

Fuck's sake.

Two new parking garages went up in the last year and people still can't get it together.

EVAN

You could've asked nicer.

JAY

That *was* nice.

(beat)

Yo, throw something on.

Like you said, it's too quiet in here.

EVAN

Hold on, I got this new speaker I wanted to show you.

It's in my bag upstairs.

JAY

Nah, just use the stereo.

We can use the aux until Walter can fix the tape deck.

EVAN

Come on, man.

Come into to the 21st Century for a second.

That old thing doesn't even sound good.

JAY

I like the way it sounds.

Reminds me of my Daddy.

It's got sentimental value.

Now, plug in.

Evan connects to the aux cord.

EVAN

Any requests?

JAY

Nah, DJ's choice.

***Evan plays a song.
Something upbeat.
Something like "Beef FloMix" by Flo Milli.
They rap along with the song.
Dancing.
Laughing.
Lights fade.***

Act 1

Scene 2

A few hours later.

Jay is alone in the store.

*Music plays from the boombox.
Something like "How's It Goin' Down" by DMX.*

*The broken fridges are now empty.
Jay is wiping down the insides.*

*Ding!
The front door opens and STACY enters.
Wearing something that says "big business".
Maybe not something as obvious as a pant suit.
But also, like, maybe totally a pant suit.
She carries an expensive leather purse.*

*She also carries the utmost confidence.
She is in complete control.
And if she's not, she'll never let you see it.*

*Jay takes a quick glance back to see who it is.
Seeing that it's only a customer, he turns back to his task.*

JAY

Yo.

STACY

Afternoon.
How are you?

JAY

Could be better.
Could always be better.
Let me know when you're ready and I'll meet you at the register.

STACY

Actually, I was hoping I could ask a question.

JAY

Bathroom's in the back.
But, between you and me, I wouldn't use it.
It doesn't quite...flush the way you want it to.
I mean, it does....it just takes a lot of work.

JAY (cont.)

And if you haven't used it before, it'll prolly make a big mess, I'll have to clean it up, it'll be a whole thing.

So, I would, politely, ask you not to.

STACY

I don't need the bathroom.

JAY

Oh.

Good.

STACY

I'm actually looking for-

JAY

Like I said, what you see is what you get.

If you're looking for chips, or candy, or something, they're over there.

I got soda in back, but it's room temp.

We just got some Kimchi in today from a local, if you're interested.

Paper products over there.

Anything you don't see, we don't have.

Stacy just stands there staring at Jay.

JAY

Looking at you, I'm gonna guess you want green juice.

Or a smoothie of some kind.

We ain't got it.

STACY

I'm not looking for green juice.

JAY

Oh.

STACY

I've already had my green juice this morning.

JAY

Good for you.

(beat)

Do you need a tour guide or something?

The place ain't that big.

STACY

I don't need a tour guide.

JAY

Cool...

So, what *do* you need?

Because trying to clean with you staring is getting to be a lot.

STACY

Is this how you talk to all your customers?

JAY

There isn't usually a lot of talking.

They grab what they need, pay, and go.

STACY

Well, I haven't gotten what I need yet.

JAY

And what is that?

STACY

I'm looking for Evan O'Malley.

JAY

Oh.

What, are you one of his night school teachers or something?

STACY

No.

JAY

Did you match with him on one of them apps?

You kinda seem like his type.

STACY

What "type" is that?

JAY

Serious.

Rigid.

A Black woman who dresses like she might vote Republican.

Like Omarosa.

STACY

(a small laugh)

I didn't meet him, or "match with him" on any app.

I'm married.

JAY

Congrats.

(beat)

Well, Evan ain't here.

He went down to the church to drop off some food.

STACY

Do you know when he'll be back?

JAY

Not sure.

Shouldn't be long.

STACY

Can I wait for him?

JAY

Are you gonna stare at me the whole time?

STACY

I'll try not to.

JAY

I guess that's all I can ask.

Jay goes back to his task.

STACY

Is there a chair somewhere for me to sit?

JAY

No.

STACY

We really need to work on your customer service.

JAY

You haven't bought or even made an attempt at buying anything.

You're not a customer quite yet.

Jay exits to the back.

***Stacy takes in the space,
smirking at how outdated everything is.***

***Suddenly, loud feedback BLASTS from the boombox,
making Stacy almost jump out of her skin.***

*She steps over to the boombox and tries to turn it off.
But nothing happens when she hits the power button.
She gives up on that and tries turning the volume button.
This works, and the feedback fades to silence.*

*Stacy begins to walk away,
but she suddenly hears the low hum of static.*

*She tries to lower the volume again,
but nothing happens.*

*A soft whisper comes through the static.
It's muffled and incomprehensible.*

Stacy leans her ear close.

*Ding!
Evan enters.
He sees Stacy and snaps into "salesman mode".*

EVAN
Good afternoon!
How are you?

STACY
(trying to recover from that weird boombox experience)
Um. I'm alright, thanks.

EVAN
Thanks for coming in today.
Unfortunately, only one of our fridges is operational.
But anything else you see is fair game.

STACY
Thanks for the information but, I'm actually not here to shop.
I'm here to speak with Evan O'Malley.

EVAN
Oh, uh...
You got him at your service.
How can I help you...

*Stacy extends her hand.
Evan takes it.*

STACY
Stacy Anderson.

STACY (cont.)

From Davenport Realty.

*A beat.
Evan knows that name
and everything that comes with it.*

STACY

If I'm not mistaken, you own Big Jay's Corner Store, yes?

EVAN

Yeah, me and my friend Jay Robinson.

(calling out)

Jay can you come here for a second?

JAY (O.S)

One sec!

He enters.

JAY

Yo!

I see you've met my new friend.

STACY

Stacy Anderson.

From Davenport Realty.

*She extends her hand.
Jay simply looks at it.
Then back to her.
He also knows that name.*

JAY

I been waiting on you.

They been talking about you.

All over the neighborhood.

The barbershop, the grocery store, the bar.

"You heard about that Black lady around talking shit?

Buying people out?

Talking about change?"

(beat)

What do you need?

STACY

Well, it's not so much a matter of need.

I'm here with a bit of a proposition.

STACY (cont.)

Something I think could benefit all parties involved.
I don't know if you've noticed, but the neighborhood is changing.

JAY

We noticed, thanks.

STACY

There's a push for change happening and I want to make sure you all are a part of it.
The neighborhood is growing more and more desirable.
Which means you're going to have a lot more people moving in.
People with disposable incomes and cheaper rent than they've ever had.
My associates and I think there's real promise in this establishment.
The location, the history, two young owners.
There's an opportunity here.

JAY

We're not interested.

STACY

You haven't even heard my offer.

JAY

I don't need to.

EVAN

Jay-

JAY

Nah, E, I got it.
Look, Stacy Anderson from Davenport Realty, I know who you are.
Your name is plastered on every construction site in town.

STACY

Just got new signs.
My face is on there, too.

Jay just stares at her.

JAY

I know what you're trying to do.
And I know what you mean by "desirable".
You wanna gut the whole fucking neighborhood and build over it until it's
unrecognizable.

STACY

Mr. Robinson, please-

JAY

I don't wanna hear your reasons.
Or your excuses.
I really don't give a shit.
Whatever you're offering, we don't want it.
Keep it.
Big Jay's is doing just fine.

STACY

Evan, here, told me about your fridge situation.
We've got people-

JAY

Don't worry about that.
That's none of your concern.
Again, whatever you're offering...
We.
Don't.
Want.
It.
Now, you can talk until you're blue in the face, but the answer is gonna be the same.
This is my home.
(re: stairs)
I was raised right up there.
My Daddy died right up there.
I ain't goin' nowhere.
So, fuck off.

EVAN

Jay.

A beat.

Evan gently takes his arm and establishes eye contact.

JAY

I need to take a walk.
Can you handle this?
Tell her to leave, but...
"Nicer", I guess.

EVAN

I got it.

Jay looks back to Stacy.

JAY

Terrible to meet you Stacy Anderson from Davenport Realty.
I hope you're gone by the time I get back.
And I hope we never meet again.

Jay starts to leave.

STACY

Change is coming, Mr. Robinson.
Whether you like it or not.

JAY

(beat)

Well, tell Change he's gonna have to find me first.

Jay exits.

EVAN

I'm sorry about my friend, Ms. Anderson.
This place means a lot to him.

STACY

Call me Stacy.
And I completely understand.
Change can be an emotional thing.

EVAN

Yes.

STACY

Would *you* like to hear my offer?

EVAN

I think Jay was pretty clear where he stands.

STACY

But what about you?
Where do you stand?

EVAN

(beat)

If my partner's not onboard, then neither am I.

STACY

Hm.
I see.
Then I guess there's nothing left to discuss.

EVAN

Unfortunately not.

STACY

Well, it was nice to meet you.

EVAN

You too.

*Stacy starts to leave...
but stops just short of the door.*

STACY

You do understand the kind of access I have, right?

The kind of reach?

You understand I know all kinds of people?

Who have access to all kinds of records.

Documents.

Deeds.

Anything I want to know is within arm's reach.

You understand that, yes?

EVAN

(beat)

Yes.

STACY

Good.

Just making sure.

(beat)

Look, I'll write down the number my associates and I have agreed upon. You take a look at it.

Think it over.

And get back to me.

She retrieves a slip of paper and a pen from her purse.

She writes down a number.

A big number.

And hands it to Evan.

She watches his eyes go wide as he reads it.

She knows she has him.

STACY

Before you ask...

STACY (cont.)

No, that's not a mistake.
Those are, in fact, the correct number of zeroes.

She retrieves an envelope and sets it on the counter.

STACY

This has any other details you might need.
Think it over and get back to me.
Sooner rather than later, please.
I'll give you until the end of the week.

EVAN

The end of the week?
That's way too fast.

STACY

It's like that sometimes.
What's that saying?
"Life comes at you fast."
I'm sure you'll figure it out.

Stacy starts to leave again.

EVAN

Can I, at least have your number?
In case I have a question before then?

STACY

Just look around.
It's on every construction site in town.

She exits.

Evan stands alone staring at the slip of paper.

*Slowly, the milk fridge door opens.
Completely on its own.*

A jar of kimchi slides out and shatters on the floor.

Evan doesn't even notice.

He's too busy dreaming of what money can buy.

Blackout.

Act 1

Scene 3

Two hours later.

Evan sits at the counter reading the contents of the envelope.

Documents are scattered all over.

*He looks crazed.
His eyes are red and the size of baby planets.
He stares at the documents without blinking.
It's like he's been possessed.*

*Ding!
June enters.*

Evan doesn't look up.

JUNE
Hey friend.

Evan doesn't respond.

JUNE
Friend?

*Nothing.
She waves a hand in front of his face.*

JUNE
Evan!

*He looks up slowly.
He looks at her as if he's just woken up from a trance.
It takes him a moment to recognize her.*

EVAN
Hey.
How you doin'?

JUNE
I'm fine.
What's up with *you*?

EVAN
Nothing.
I'm fine.

JUNE

Then why'd you call me?

*Evan hesitates.
He doesn't know if he made the right decision calling her.*

June notices the glass and kimchi on the floor.

JUNE

What the fuck?
What happened?

EVAN

What?

She gestures to the mess.

EVAN

Oh shit.
I'm sorry.
It must've fallen out of the fridge.

JUNE

You didn't hear it fall?
You didn't smell it?

EVAN

I must have been distracted.

JUNE

What's going on with you?

EVAN

/Nothing.

JUNE

Don't say "nothing".
Your eyes are fucking wild.
You got glass all over the floor.
And you got paper scattered around like your cramming for Mid-Terms.
It's obvious something's up.
Now, you called and I'm here.
There's something you want to tell me.
So, tell me.

EVAN

(beat)

I'm gonna tell you something.
And I need you not to freak out.

JUNE

I won't.

EVAN

I need you to just hear me out.

JUNE

Yeah, yeah, okay.
What is it?

EVAN

Swear to me.

JUNE

What?

EVAN

Swear to me you won't freak out.

JUNE

I swear.

EVAN

(holding out his pinky)

Pinky swear.

JUNE

What the fuck is wrong with you?

EVAN

Just do it.

*June hesitantly locks pinkys.
Evan bends down and blows into his fist.
He waits for June.*

EVAN

Blow.

*She bends down and blows into her fist.
They release pinkys.*

EVAN

Stacy Anderson came by today.

*She knows that name.
Evan just stares at her.*

JUNE

You're not gonna...

(beat)

Right?

*Evan reaches into his pocket
and pulls out the slip of paper with the big number on it.
He hands it to her.*

JUNE

What did Jay say?

EVAN

I haven't shown him yet.
I wanted your opinion first.

JUNE

My opinion?

EVAN

Yes.

JUNE

Tell her to fuck off.

*Evan slumps.
He knew that would be her answer.
But he'd hoped it would be different.*

JUNE

What did you think I was gonna say?
"Yeah, go ahead!
Make a deal with the devil!"
That woman is the reason my Dad's store is gone.
My family's legacy.
Are you fucking crazy?

*Evan says nothing.
He just stares at the documents in front of him.*

JUNE

Is this about last year?
/Because we've punished him enough for that.

EVAN

No.
It's not about that.

JUNE

Then what is it about??
(beat)
He's trying.
He still has his faults, obviously.
But he's really trying.

EVAN

(blurted out without thought)
Says the woman he's cheating on.

A beat.

June is knocked off center.

*Evan, too.
He doesn't know where that came from.*

JUNE

Don't do that.
Don't attack me when I didn't do anything to you.

EVAN

I'm sorry.

JUNE

You don't know what's going on /with us.

EVAN

I know.

JUNE

You know what we tell you.

EVAN

I know.
I'm sorry.

A beat.

June looks him in the eyes and asks sincerely.

JUNE

It was just pictures, right?
They didn't...
It was just pictures?

EVAN

Just pictures.
That's all.

JUNE

You promise?

Evan gently takes her hand.

EVAN

I promise.

JUNE

How do you know?

EVAN

I know because he's not a liar.
He withholds information sometimes, sure.
No denying that.
But if you ask him a question, he answers truthfully.
You know that and I know that.
So, if he says it was just pictures, I believe him.

June nods.

*She looks down at their joined hands
and gently pulls her hand away.*

*Ding!
Jay and Walter enter.*

WALTER

Seven is the number of completion.
The seven deadly sins,
The seven bowls,
The seven sacraments.

JAY

I mean, I hear you.
I'm just sayin' five sounds better to me.
Top five dead or alive,
The Five Heartbeats,

JAY (cont.)

Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five.
That's some hard shit.
Seven is overrated.

WALTER

Overrated?
Youngblood, you don't know what you're saying.

Jay sees June and Evan.

JAY

June!
You're back.

JUNE

Yeah.

JAY

Well, shit.
That's unexpected.
Lemme get Walter set up in the back and then we can talk.

WALTER

I got it, Youngblood.

JAY

Don't you need tools?

WALTER

I got everything I need.

Walter exits to the back.

JAY

(to June)

You wanna talk upstairs or outside?

EVAN

Actually, I need to talk to you first.

JAY

It can't wait?

EVAN

I'm sorry, it can't.

JAY

Come on, man!
Can't you see I'm tryna make up with my girl?

Jay clocks the looks on each of their faces.

JAY

What's wrong?
Is somebody dead?

Silence.

JAY

Is this an intervention?
I already cut back to one joint a day!

EVAN

It's not an intervention.

JAY

Then what is it?

EVAN

We need to talk about Stacy Anderson.

JAY

We already did.
What else is there to talk about?

Evan hands him the slip of paper.

JAY

What is this supposed to mean to me?

EVAN

That's a future, Jay.
We could never think about the future before.
Now we can.

*Jay searches Evan's eyes.
Who is this person and what has he done with my friend?*

He rips the paper to shreds.

JAY

Fuck that.
Big Jay's is my future.

JAY (cont.)

Tell her she can take her money and go fuck herself.
I've made my decision.

EVAN

What about *my* decision?

JAY

What are you talking about?
My decision *is* your decision.
And your decision is mine.
If one of us isn't down then that's it.
That's how it works, remember?
(beat)
Look, I know that money is tempting.
But that's all it is.
Temptation.
There's a lot of work to do.
A lot of fighting to do.
But we're in it together.

EVAN

Jay-

JAY

I don't wanna talk about this anymore.

EVAN

WELL I DO!

Silence.

EVAN

We can't keep doing this the way we always have.
She was right.
Change is coming.
You can see it all over this fucking neighborhood.
There's no stopping it.

He goes to the counter and grabs the mess of papers.

EVAN

Just look at these.
Read what they're saying.
They're not just excited about the store, they're excited about *us*.
They want us to run it.
They want us to be the faces of the brand.

EVAN (cont.)

Do you understand the kind of opportunity this is?
It's an opportunity that only comes around once.
If we waste this...it's over.

JAY

(to June)

Are you in on this?

JUNE

Not in the least bit.

JAY

(to Evan)

This is...

This is...

I mean, what the fuck, E?

This store isn't an opportunity, nigga.

It's my home.

You don't understand that?

You used to sleep here when we were kids.

We used to stay up all night memorizing Outkast albums.

That don't mean shit to you?

Evan looks at the ground.

JAY

Look at me.

E.

Look at me!

Jay steps in close.

JAY

There is no winning with those people.

None.

They give us money and what do we give them?

It's not just the store, E.

We give them our bodies, minds, and souls.

Owned men.

That's what we'll be.

You hear me?

You understand what I'm saying?

I will never agree to that.

Ever.

Let that soak into your brain.

Get those dollar signs out of there and replace them with those words.

JAY (cont.)

This ain't you.

That woman came in here today to seduce and destroy.

She's already got you in one way.

Don't let her have the other.

Jay places his hand on the back of Evan's head.

JAY

Now.

Brothers?

Jay bows his head.

Evan hesitates.

Behind them, Walter comes out from the back and stands in front of the broken fridges.

JAY

Evan.

Please.

A tense beat.

Evan slowly places his hand on the back of Jay's head.

They bring their foreheads together.

JAY

Brothers?

EVAN

Brothers.

Walter stretches his arms wide.

Suddenly, the fridges begin a low hum and the lights within flash on brightly.

Leaving everyone in silhouette.

Blackout.

Act 1

Scene 4

A few days later.

*Darkness, except for the tiny glow of the boombox display.
Perhaps we see the ghost of Walter's silhouette nearby?*

NEWS ANCHOR (VO)

From California, to Colorado, to Utah, this is what firefighters and residents face and fear.

25 large, uncontained wildfires tearing through the West.

Some fires have been burning for two weeks now, with plenty of fuel to feed them.

Tonight, thousands are evacuating, having no idea if their homes will be there to greet them when they return.

Ding!

Lights up.

Jay and June stand outside the store.

JAY

Hey.

JUNE

Hey.

JAY

Thanks for agreeing to meet me.

JUNE

There was only so long I could ignore your calls before it started to feel cruel.

A beat.

JAY

You wanna talk upstairs or...

JUNE

I think down here is best.

We know what happens when we try to "talk" upstairs.

JAY

True.

Very true.

JUNE

So.

What do you wanna talk about?

JAY

I just uh...

I just wanted to say I'm sorry.

About that shit with Maya.

I should've told you when she sent those pictures.

I should've deleted them and I should've told you.

JUNE

Why didn't you?

JAY

Why didn't I delete them?

Or why didn't I tell you?

JUNE

Both.

JAY

I didn't tell you because I knew you'd be upset.

And, for the first time since I've known you, I was able to go quite a while without upsetting you.

And, uh, I guess I just wanted to hold onto that.

(beat)

I didn't delete the pictures because...

I, uh...

JUNE

Did you like them?

JAY

No.

I mean...

It was a naked body.

And not a bad looking body at that.

So, of course, I liked it.

But-

JUNE

So, you *did* like them?

JAY

Yes.

June looks away from him.

JAY

But it wasn't just about that.
It was...
It made feel...
Vital.
Wanted.

JUNE

I don't make you feel wanted?

JAY

That's not what I'm saying.
It's...
In the two years since my Dad died, I feel like I been drowning.
I come downstairs in the morning and look around this place...
And I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing.
It doesn't even really feel like mine.
The sign say "Big Jay's".
I ain't never gon' be able to be him.
I ain't never gon' be nothing but Little Jay.
I learned that when I...
When I took the money out of the safe and walked into that casion.
I just...
I wanted to *do* something.
Something that would make this place as big as he dreamed it could be.
All my life, I watched my Dad barely make it.
Every bill, every repair, every loan payment was a miracle.
The only reason we were able to get out from under the bank was because of his life insurance.
The man had to die to be free.
And now, somehow, I'm supposed to be responsible for this place.
His legacy.
I can hardly breathe half the time.
I ain't been sleeping...
Maya sent me those pictures and it was like I stepped out of a fog.
Just for a second.
Somebody found me...
Somebody found me *worth wanting*.
I don't even find myself worth wanting half the time.

JUNE

Why haven't you told me you were feeling like this?
I've been beside you almost every day.
Our whole lives, but especially since Big Jay died.
Why didn't you say anything?

JAY

I didn't know how.
I barely had the words until just now.

***A beat.
How do they move forward?***

JUNE

Do you remember when we snuck into the club for the first time?
We must have been fourteen or fifteen?

JAY

Yeah, I remember.
We had the worst fake IDs in existence.

JUNE

They were terrible.
But they were ours.
I remember being so excited because it was the first time we'd hung out without Evan.
Finally, it wasn't the three of us.
Just two.
We got really drunk and danced until one in the morning.
It was the first night you ever kissed me.
It was everything.
(beat)
But my favorite part was the morning after.
We woke up in your bed, all of our clothes still on.
You were trying to talk to me, but my hearing was all fucked up from loud club music.
I started freaking out, thinking I was going deaf.
You calmed me down, told me to lay down on my back and close my eyes. So, I did.
And you laid next to me and whispered little stories in my ear.
To assure me that my hearing was still there and it just needed time to heal. You remember that?

JAY

Yeah.

JUNE

In that moment, I knew.
This is a person worth wanting.
Jay you are worth wanting.
But I can't deal with secrets.
I can't deal with being lied to.
I love you.
But I love myself more than that.

Jay casts his gaze to the ground, in shame.

JUNE

We've been at this since we were children.
If we're gonna keep going...

JUNE (cont.)

And, Jay, I *want* to keep going,
You have to tell me everything.

Jay looks deep into her eyes.

JAY

Okay.

JUNE

Tell me everything.

JAY

I will.

June steps in close

JUNE

Everything?

JAY

Everything.

They kiss.

The kind of kiss that comes after a confession.

Evan enters on his bike.

They're too busy to notice.

EVAN

All made up?

JAY

/Yo!

JUNE

Hey, friend!

EVAN

Sorry to interrupt.
Jay, I gotta talk to you.

JUNE

We were just finishing up.

EVAN

I could tell.

I'm gonna take my bike upstairs.

JAY

I'll meet you inside, boss.

Evan goes inside.

JUNE

(to Evan)

Love you, friend!

EVAN

Yeah, yeah!

You too!

JAY

(to June)

Well, then.

JUNE

Well, then.

JAY

I'll see you later?

JUNE

We'll see.

They kiss.

June starts to leave.

JAY

Wait.

She turns back to him.

JUNE

What's up?

Jay goes to her, leans in, and whispers something into her ear.

She smiles and exits.

Jay watches her leave, then goes inside.

WALTER

How'd it go, Youngblood?

JAY

Oh, I'm winning today, Walter!
I'm winning today!

Evan comes downstairs.

JAY

Sorry for the show back there.

EVAN

All good man.
Look-

JAY

Where you been the last few days?
I been a one-man band for almost a week.

EVAN

I had a busy few days.

JAY

I been calling you.
Texting.
I even stopped by your place.
I was this close to calling in a wellness check.

EVAN

That's what I wanted to talk to you about. I-

Ding!
Stacy enters.

Evan and Jay freeze.

JAY

What're you doing here?

STACY

(Looking past Jay to talk to Evan)
Good afternoon, Mr. O'Malley.

JAY

Don't talk to him, talk to me.
What are you doing here?

STACY

Mr. Robinson, I assure you Mr. O'Malley has all the answers you're looking for.

A beat.

JAY

Walter, can you give us a minute?

Walter goes to Jay and places his hand over Jay's heart.

WALTER

I'll be at the church if you need me.

JAY

Thanks, boss.

WALTER

Fear cannot exist...

JAY

Where love resides.

WALTER

Remember who you are.

EVAN

(smiling)

The Lion King.

WALTER

What?

EVAN

"Remember who you are."

Mufasa says that in The Lion King.

WALTER

Hm.

I've never seen it.

He passes Stacy.

WALTER
Afternoon, ma'am.

Stacy nods.

Walter stops just short of the door.

He turns back to Stacy.

WALTER
I know you.

STACY
Everybody does.

A beat.

Walter opens the door and exits.

JAY
What's she doing here, E?

Evan opens his mouth to speak but nothing comes out.

Jay turns his attention back to Stacy.

JAY
You need to get the fuck out.

STACY
We need to work on your manners, if we're going to work together.

JAY
I'm sorry, what?
Are you fucking delusional?
Who told you we have any interest in working with you?

STACY
Mr. O'Malley-

*A sharp pain shoots through Evan's stomach.
It catches him completely unawares and he clutches the spot. He falls on
one knee.*

JAY

Yo, you alright??

EVAN

Yeah, I...

Fuck.

I don't know what that was.

Jay helps him to his feet.

STACY

Are you ready, Mr. O'Malley.

JAY

Yo, what the fuck is your problem?

Do you not love yourself?

Is that it?

Does it make you feel good to stomp around this town and take shit from hard working people?

Hard working people that, if you haven't noticed, look a lot like you.

You can't see the irony in that?

That don't keep you up at night?

All them dollar signs must've made you forget yourself.

You Black just like me, Stacy Anderson.

No amount of money can fix that.

(beat. A hard stare)

Don't you have any sense of loyalty?

STACY

(with the utmost level of calm)

Loyalty to whom?

You?

What loyalty do I owe you?

What did you do to earn it?

Be a Black man?

For that, I owe a responsibility to you?

What about your responsibility to me?

You think I don't know this neighborhood?

I grew up here.

You have no concept of what this place took from me.

I've simply come to collect a debt that's way past due.

Call me a coon, or a Tom, or whatever you need to call me to make yourself feel good.

I can take it.

I've taken way more from bigger men than you.

You say you know me.

Well, I know you too.

STACY (cont.)

I walked in here last week, a Black woman “who looks like she might vote Republican”, as you said.

And, with the way you talked to me, I might as well have been an unwanted stray dog. You didn’t even know who I was.

Where was your sense of loyalty then?

Hm?

You want me to ride for you, when you would let me bleed out in the streets without a word.

So, no, I don’t have loyalty to you.

I have loyalty to one person and one person only.

Myself.

Now, Mr. O’Malley, are you ready?

JAY

Look, I don’t know who the fuck you think you are.

But you will never have anything to do with this place.

I would rather lay down and die.

Big Jay’s is my father’s legacy.

This place is made out of my father’s blood.

*Evan finally speaks.
It’s almost a whisper.*

EVAN

Mine too.

JAY

What?

EVAN

I said “Mine too.”

You keep talking about everything your Dad did.

As if Sean O’Malley didn’t help build this place too.

As if my Dad hadn’t been here from day one.

He lead himself to his own grave trying to help your Dad keep this place alive.

Jay is caught off-guard.

JAY

I know that.

Evan, I know that.

I was just...

He can see something in Evan’s eyes that he’s never seen before.

JAY

What's going on with you?

STACY

Mr. O'Malley, I think it's time you share with the class.

EVAN

I made a deal.

JAY

What?

EVAN

That's where I've been the last few days.
Finalizing the deal.

JAY

You can't do that.
You can't make a deal without me.
It has to be a unanimous decision.

EVAN

No, it doesn't.

JAY

We're co-owners.

EVAN

Actually...
We're not.

JAY

What are you talking about?

Stacy retrieves a document from her purse and hands it to Jay.

EVAN

Sean O'Malley's name is on the deed.
My dad.
No mention of Jay Robinson Senior anywhere.

JAY

But...his will.
You said he left it to both of us.

EVAN

I lied.
 I was...
 I was never gonna tell you.
 I was gonna take it to my grave.
 We've been dreaming about running this place since we were kids.
 I let you believe we were co-owners.
 I backed off and let you handle things.
 To keep the peace.
 Your Dad's name is on the sign out front, you grew up in the apartment upstairs.
 I didn't want to take that from you.
 I didn't want to ruin the dream.
 But dreams don't...
 Dreams don't pay the bills.
 Look I...
 I love you.
 You're my brother and I love you.
 But we can't keep doing it like this.
 This is the best case scenario for us.
 We won't get another chance.
 Look at what they did to June's Dad.
 A lifetime of work, gone.
 Just like that.
 Either we get on board, or they rip us off the train.

**Jay is beside himself.
 His whole world is collapsing in slow-motion.**

JAY

Please, man.
 Don't do this.
 We can talk this out.

EVAN

I've tried talking.
 You never listen.
 You always say we'll talk about it later but we never do.
 I've taken my wants and needs and shoved them to the side.
 For you.
 I've forgiven you for every mistake you've ever made.
 Big or small.
 I've forgiven you.
 Even after...
 Even after you gambled away almost every dime we had, I forgave you.

JAY

I thought I could-

EVAN

I know what you thought you could do.

You were wrong.

You thought you could turn our little payday into a big payday.

You were wrong.

You thought you could run this place without making the smallest effort to adapt.

You were wrong.

You thought you could make this decision for the both of us without actually having to listen to what I had to say.

You were wrong.

I won't let you get this wrong.

*Suddenly,
eardrum shattering feedback BLASTS from the old boombox.
Everyone covers their ears and Jay runs to try and stop it.
He tries the power button.
Nothing.
He tries the volume knob.
Nothing.*

EVAN

TURN IT OFF!

JAY

I'M TRYING!

*Jay rips the plug out of the wall and the feedback ends.
A beat as the three of them catch their breath from the shock.
Jay levels a gaze at Evan.*

JAY

If you do this, we're done.

Do you understand?

I will never speak to you again.

You fucking traitor.

I will never speak to you again.

Do you hear me?

If you do this...there's no going back.

It's over.

We're done.

Silence.

JAY

Plea-

"5"

Blackout.

End of Act I.

Intermission Playlist

Crown- Kendrick Lamar

Johnny P's Caddy- Benny the Butcher & J. Cole

Fire in the Hole- Earl Sweatshirt

Infared- Pusha T

(15 minutes)

Act 2

Scene 1

Six months later.

Darkness.

*The red light blinks erratically,
illuminating the façade of the store once again.*

*In the distance,
we hear the galloping of hooves and the neighing of a horse.*

The blood moon returns, bathing everything in red.

Jay stands in front of the store smoking a joint.

*Music crashes into the space.
Something like "1985" by Freddie Gibbs and The Alchemist.*

*The inside of the store is revealed.
Completely renovated, new, and "modernized".
There are no longer shelves, or aisles, or fridges.
Only kiosks, vending machines, and self-checkout stations.*

*The counter remains untouched.
As well as the staircase in back.*

The lights blink into a warm yellow sun.

*There's a huge empty space where the boombox used to be.
In its place is a small, bluetooth keypad.
The music isolates to the newly installed surround sound speakers.*

*Jay enters.
The front door is now an automatic door that opens in silence.
He wears some sort of uniform.
A tucked in polo and khakis.
Or something equally "professional".*

*He looks around at the almost unrecognizable space
and goes behind the counter.
He sits, leans back, and closes his eyes.
He takes a deep breath.*

*Inhale.
Exhale.*

JAY
One.

Inhale.
Exhale.

JAY
Two.

Inhale.
Exhale.

JAY
Three.

Inhale.
Exhale.

The front door slides open.
Evan enters.

He wears a button down and khakis.

Jay's flow has been ruined.

Evan looks around the space.
Making sure everything looks good.

EVAN
Is my tablet back there?

Jay reaches under the counter.

Evan extends his hand.
Jay retrieves the tablet,
looks at Evan's outstretched hand,
sets the tablet on the counter,
and leans back with his eyes closed once more.

Evan picks up the tablet and consults a "to do" list.

The music is distracting him.
He goes to the keypad and shuts it off.

JAY
Yo, what the fuck?

EVAN

I need to concentrate.

JAY

That was helping me concentrate.

EVAN

Sitting back there with your eyes closed?

Yeah, you looked very focused.

JAY

I'm the one that woke up at six in the morning to get everything cleaned up. Had to sweep and dust from all the shit the renovators left laying around. Fast foods cups and shit everywhere.

I woke up and did that.

Where were you?

EVAN

I was in a meeting with Stacy taking care of real business.

JAY

So, the shit that happens in the actual store ain't real business no more?

EVAN

Look, I just walked in the door.

Can we not, right now?

Silence.

Evan consults his tablet.

EVAN

How's the back room looking?

JAY

Fine.

EVAN

Fine?

JAY

Yeah, fine.

EVAN

Is it clean?

EVAN

Is it organized?

JAY

Pretty much.

EVAN

Pretty much?

JAY

Nigga, stop repeating everything I say and making it a question.

EVAN

When do you plan on finishing back there?

JAY

Once my break is over.

EVAN

How long will that be?

JAY

Until the impulse to strangle you dies down.

EVAN

Stacy's gonna be here soon.

JAY

So?

EVAN

She's gonna want to look back there.

JAY

Why?

Out here is clean.

The part customers will be looking at is clean.

Why does she care about what the back looks like?

EVAN

Because this is her property.

And she wants to make sure we're taking care of it.

Every inch.

Look, Jay, we open next week.

If we can just keep Stacy happy until then, we'll be in the clear.

The better we are on the front end, the less we have to worry about surprise check ins.

We just gotta earn her trust.

EVAN (cont.)

After that, we're golden.

JAY

We gotta earn her trust, but she ain't gotta earn ours?

EVAN

She bought it.

Suddenly, Evan winces in pain and grabs his stomach.

JAY

Yo, you alright?

EVAN

Yeah, yeah.

I'm good.

Let's finish up in the back.

I'll help you.

JAY

You sure?

EVAN

Yeah, I'm just...

Sore.

JAY

Prolly from sitting in all those meeting room chairs for hours on end.

Let's get you some *real* work to do.

Something physical.

They exit out back.

Silence.

The keypad lights up.

Static spills in from all around.

Stacy enters.

She's on the phone.

STACY

Sir, things are moving along as fast as they can.

(chatter on the other end)

STACY (cont.)

Yes, sir, I understand that but-

*We watch her being chewed out in complete silence,
save for the static.*

This lasts as long as it needs to.

STACY

Yes sir.

Will do.

She hangs up.

*She tries to stay strong but her face crumples
and she buries it in her hands.*

Walter enters.

Stacy straightens up and wipes tears from her eyes.

WALTER

Sorry if I scared you.

STACY

You didn't.

WALTER

Okay.

STACY

What do you want?

WALTER

I'm just looking for Jay.

I come by and share a meal with him most days.

But they've been busy for a while now.

Just checking in.

STACY

There's a lot to do.

Grand re-opening next week.

WALTER

I heard.

Congratulations.

STACY

Thanks.

*She sends a text.
Then starts reading emails on her phone.*

*Walter takes in the new space.
He notices a familiar sight.*

WALTER

You kept the mural.

STACY

What?

WALTER

The portrait of Babylon.
Jay's Father made it.

STACY

Oh.

Yeah.

I proposed we get rid of it.
But the higher ups liked it.
So...there it is.

WALTER

Ya'll gonna hire somebody to finish it?

STACY

Maybe.

We'll see.

WALTER

Big Jay started painting it just before he passed.
Seems to me like he knew his time was coming.
Wanted to immortalize the place he loved the most.
But, in the end, he had less time than he thought.

STACY

We all do.

WALTER

(beat)

Yeah.

It sure seems that way, doesn't it?

Silence.

Stacy is working hard to radiate "leave me alone" energy.

WALTER

I remember where I know you from.

STACY

(not looking up)

Oh yeah?

WALTER

Yeah.

You're Leti's daughter.

Silence.

Stacy tenses but stays glued to her phone.

WALTER

(gently)

We all knew that boy wasn't right.

From the time he was little, we knew he was gonna be trouble.

But, I guess, we never thought...

We never thought he was capable of something like that.

So, when you decided to say something...

Nobody knew what to do.

If you had said it was some white boy from out of town, we would have had an answer for that.

But, one of our own?

(beat)

Everybody seemed so surprised when you and your Mama left.

We all pretended like we couldn't think of a single reason for you to go.

But I knew.

How could you live with people who refused to believe you?

How could you stand to look us in the face?

How could you survive seeing that boy every day?

We knew why you left.

But it was easier to pretend not to know.

(beat)

I wish...

I wish we'd all done better by you.

***Stacy finally makes eye contact with him.
Her eyes turned icy.***

STACY

I wish you had too.

Jay and Evan enter from the back.

EVAN

Stacy!

Sorry we weren't here to greet you.

We were just finishing up some last minute organizing.

STACY

No worries.

I had company.

JAY

Walter.

Brotha, I'm so sorry I've been MIA.

Things have been...

WALTER

I understand.

I'm just happy I'm seeing you now.

JAY

You hungry?

I can run upstairs and grab you something.

Jay starts to head upstairs.

STACY

Before you do that, I have a small piece of business to discuss.

JAY

Yeah, yeah.

Just give me a minute.

STACY

(firmer than usual)

I don't have that kind of time, Mr. Robinson.

Business first.

Charity later.

JAY

Yo, what the fuck?

EVAN

Jay.

EVAN (cont.)

Relax.

Do you have time, Walter?

Shouldn't take long.

WALTER

I'm nothing but time.

Walter walks behind the counter and sits.

EVAN

So, what is it, Stacy?

STACY

Two things.

First: We're very much on track for next week's opening.

And that's thanks to both of you and your hard work.

So, thank you.

EVAN

Happy to do it, Stacy.

Right, Jay?

Jay glares at Stacy in silence.

STACY

Second: My associates and I have been in conversation regarding the store's name.

EVAN

Big Jay's?

STACY

We feel the name to be too niche.

It runs the risk of isolating the new customer base.

We're thinking of changing it to something a little more neutral.

JAY

Neutral?

STACY

Yes.

We were actually thinking of changing it to something like "O'Malley's".

JAY

"O'Malley's" is neutral?

STACY

Perhaps that was the wrong choice of words.
Maybe more relatable is what we mean.

JAY

Relatable to who?

STACY

Everyone.
But especially to the people we're hoping will become frequent shoppers.

JAY

And who are they?

STACY

Hm.
I see you have questions, Mr. Robinson.

JAY

You better fuckin' believe I do.

WALTER

Youngblood-

JAY

One second, Walter.

WALTER

I'm gonna let you take care of your business.
I'll come back later.

JAY

No, just...just wait, alright?
I got you.

WALTER

Brotha, I-

JAY

JUST GIVE ME A SECOND, WALTER!
AIGHT, FUCK!
JUST GIVE ME A SECOND!

Silence.
Walter looks at Jay, in pain.

WALTER

Okay, Youngblood.
I'm just gonna wait out front.

He goes.

EVAN

Jay-

JAY

Nah, E.
Nah.
I've given you a lot.
I won't give you my name.
You can't take it from me.

STACY

I would say we've given you a lot as well.
I mean, you still live here.
We didn't have to do that.

JAY

You want me to thank you for not making me homeless?
Yeah, fuck you.

STACY

You have to admit we've done more than that, Mr. Robinson.
We pay you, don't we?
Your pockets are deeper than they were before.
Your wallets fatter.
Doesn't that feel good?
I mean, be careful.
Don't want you wasting it all on the slots again.

JAY

(a beat)

What the fuck did you just say?

STACY

Or was it blackjack?
It was surprisingly hard to get the specifics.

*Jay lunges toward her.
Evan holds him back.*

JAY

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THE /FUCK YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT!

EVAN

JAY, PLEASE!

STACY

Don't I though?

JAY

FUCK YOU!

EVAN

JAY!

JAY!

Look at me!

Calm down for a second.

We're gonna figure it out.

Jay backs away.

STACY

What do you think, Mr. O'Malley?

EVAN

I...

I, uh...

JAY

Please, don't do this.

Evan, please.

I can't...

I can't live if you take that from me.

Take everything else.

But leave me my name.

EVAN

...

...

...

JAY

What do you want me to do?

Beg?

Please, don't do this to me.

EVAN

Okay.

(beat)

Okay.

I'm sorry, Stacy.

But I can't let you change the name.

There's too much history in it.

We'll do anything else you want.

But the name stays.

STACY

(with a small laugh)

I apologize if I gave the wrong impression.

This wasn't really a question.

Or something we're looking for feedback on.

My associates and I have already decided.

A new sign will be up by the end of the week.

Now, if that's a deal breaker for either of you, you're free to leave.

Silence.

***Evan looks to Jay.
Jay looks to the ground.***

STACY

Fantastic.

Mr. O'Malley, would you give me a walk-through of the storage room?

I'd like to hear your organization strategy.

EVAN

Of course, Ms. Anderson.

STACY

Call me Stacy, remember?

Don't get formal with me now.

They exit out back, leaving Jay alone.

He walks to the front door and opens it.

JAY

Walter?

He's gone.

Jay stands in the doorway.

"5"

***He takes a deep, deep breath...
and lets out a full body scream.***

Blackout.

Act 2

Scene 2

That night.

Evan enters from the back holding his tablet.

He checks off the last thing on his list.

He goes behind the counter and places the tablet underneath.

He turns off all the lights and starts to exit.

Suddenly the key pad lights up.

Static.

Evan goes to it and tries to turn it off.

It doesn't work.

EVAN

Come on.

He pokes at keypad, mashing his fingers into the touchscreen.

It goes black for a moment.

Evan starts to walk away.

It lights up again.

Static.

EVAN

The fuck?

The static continues.

We begin to hear whispers breaking through the static.

Evan looks around, listening intently.

The door slides open.

June enters.

The keypad goes black and the static dissipates.

JUNE

What the fuck, Evan?!

What are you trying to do?

EVAN

What?

JUNE

How could you let them change the name?

EVAN

How did you-

JUNE

Jay called me.

EVAN

Fuck's sake.

JUNE

What?

Did you think he wouldn't?

EVAN

I told him to just hold off on saying anything until I could work something out.

I'll figure it out.

I just need time.

JUNE

He was distraught, E.

On the phone.

I've never heard him sound like that in my life.

Inconsolable.

Because of you.

EVAN

It wasn't my choice.

JUNE

Maybe not this one.

But this all started because of a choice *you* made.

Nobody else got a say.

You made sure we knew that.

So, yeah, maybe you didn't have a choice in this particular matter.

But, make no mistake, *your* choices got us here!

***A sharp pain pulses through Evan's ribs.
He clutches them and falls to one knee.***

JUNE

Whoa.

JUNE (cont.)

You alright?

EVAN

I'm fine!

I just...I hurt all over.

I'm tired.

I'm stressed the fuck out.

But, please, yell at me some more.

I'm sure that'll fix everything.

JUNE

I just wanna understand what's going on.

You're killing him.

Slowly, but surely.

This person who, six months ago, was your best friend in the world.

Why are you doing this to him?

EVAN

I'm not doing anything to him!

I'm doing this for him!

Do you know how hard I had to work to get them to include him in the contract?

You think they wanted him?

They called him an "unnecessary risk".

A liability.

But I fought for him.

To help him.

He was never going to change.

He was gonna let this place rot away because of his pride.

No plan.

No vision.

Just principles.

I couldn't let him fuck this up.

He thought he could do whatever he wanted because his Father's name was on the sign out front.

But he's gotta understand that's not enough.

It takes more than that to be a leader.

JUNE

Is that what you think you are?

A leader?

And congratulations, Big Jay's name won't be on the sign anymore.

So, I guess, mission accomplished.

Right?

You sure taught him a lesson.

Took his family's name from him and replaced it with yours.

How noble.

JUNE (cont.)

(beat)

Why didn't you just tell him the truth about your Dad's will?

From the start.

Why didn't you just tell him?

EVAN

I didn't want to hurt him.

JUNE

Yeah, sure.

But still.

As the owner, you could've changed things around and given Jay joint ownership.

That was within your power to do.

Right?

So, Jay would've been hurt by what your Dad did.

Sure.

But you could have fixed it.

Why didn't you?

Silence.

EVAN

It's not that simple.

JUNE

Isn't it?

EVAN

...

...

...

JUNE

Fucking coward.

EVAN

What do you remember about my Dad?

JUNE

What?

EVAN

What do you remember about my Dad?

First thing that pops into your head.

JUNE

Evan-

EVAN

Please.

Just answer the question.

JUNE

I...

I remember he was always around.

He was quiet.

I remember...

She can't think of anything else.

EVAN

Not much, right?

That's okay.

It's not your fault.

He liked to fade into the background.

He let Big Jay be the people person.

Truth be told, my Dad didn't like people all that much.

He didn't spend a lot of time trying to be nice.

To anyone.

Not to me.

Not to my mom, God rest her soul.

Especially toward the end.

Every year he got older, he got meaner.

Like clockwork.

The only people he showed an ounce of affection to were Jay and his Dad.

Big Jay and Little Jay.

He loved those two people in a way I could only wish for.

Why?

He grew up with Big Jay.

A giant even as a child.

A pillar of the community from the age of thirteen.

Everybody liked him.

Plus, he beat up all the kids who called my Dad "Leprechaun" in middle school.

They called him all kinds of shit.

Mick, Coal Cracker, Paddy.

But he hated Leprechaun the most.

JUNE

Is there a point to this story?

EVAN

I'm getting to it.

(beat)

Big Jay stood up for my Dad when no one else would.

So, he forever loved him for that.

And Little Jay was just an extension of Big Jay.

So, he forever loved him for that.

And, by the time he died, I'd given up all hope of some grand show of love.

So, when I read his will...

and I saw that he'd left this place to me...

this person who'd never given me anything in my whole life...

(beat)

I couldn't share it.

With anyone.

It was mine and mine alone.

A secret between me and a ghost.

And I intended to keep it.

JUNE

I can empathize with you.

Trust me.

You don't have a monopoly on cold fathers.

But if you think any of that serves as a good excuse for what you've done, you're sadly mistaken.

EVAN

He shouldn't have told you.

JUNE

I'm his girlfriend.

EVAN

Yeah, for now.

You're only a wandering eye and a few poorly hidden texts away from disaster.

JUNE

Fuck you!

EVAN

You could do better, June.

JUNE

Better like who?

You?

EVAN

...
...
...

JUNE

Wow.

You have really been shedding your skin lately.

Leaving no trace or sign of dignity behind.

Jay's upstairs right now.

Does that mean nothing to you?

(beat)

Look me in the eyes.

Right now.

I want you to hear and understand me clearly.

I would not so much as spit in your direction.

You snake in the grass, slimy FUCK!

*Suddenly, music creeps into the space.
Not from the keypad and surround sound this time.
But from Jay's apartment upstairs.
Something like "Lilac Wine" by Nina Simone.*

Jay appears at the top of the stairs holding a bottle of tequila.

JAY

AYO!!!!

Ya'll havin' a party without me?!

He starts to stumble down the stairs.

JAY

You know you can't have a party without ya boy!

*He stumbles on the last step.
June steadies him*

JUNE

Careful!

You okay?

JAY

I'm golden.

GOLDEN!

He eyes Evan.

JAY

There he is!
The overseer!
The head honcho!
BIG MEECH!
How's the view from inside Stacy Anderson's asshole?

EVAN

Dark and rainy.
But it's warm, so I can't complain too much.

JAY

(laughing)
That was good.
You're getting quick on your feet.
You *almost* know how to hang.
Much better than you used to be.
I remember back in the day when niggas used to roast the soul outta you. But we worked on it.
We practiced, and practiced, and practiced.
We made your mouth and tongue a weapon.
And you got good.
Not as good as me.
But good enough.
Because of me.

EVAN

They were my words.

JAY

Yeah, but it was my mind.
Practiced insults that I created for you.
Downloaded from my mind to your mouth.
So that you could survive.

EVAN

And survive I did.

JAY

Yes.
You did.
Until that one day.
Remember?
Me, you, Darius, and his crew.
All behind the alley flaming each other like our lives depended on it.
You were holding your own beautifully until Darius called you...
Shit what was it?

EVAN

You remember.

JAY

Yeah, but I wanna hear you say it.

Beat.

***Evan sneaks an embarrassed glance at June.
Then back to Jay.***

EVAN

He called me "Leprechaun".

JAY

LEPRECHAUN!

Right!

Not the most original.

But effective.

'Cos you turned beet fuckin' red.

And he knew he had you.

If I recall correctly, he went so far as to call you a "White trash, Lucky Charms, Taste the rainbow, Silly rabbit Trix are for kids looking motherfucker"

(he laughs. Hard)

His whole crew laughed like they were seeing Chappelle at the Garden.

And you cried.

Boo-hoo baby tears all down the front of your shit.

And what did I do?

EVAN

I don't remember.

JAY

Yes, you do.

SAY IT!

What did I do?

EVAN

(beat)

You hit him.

JAY

I put his face in the dirt and turned his jaw into crushed ice.

For you.

I fought off his boys by myself for as long as I could.

For you.

And eventually I let those boys jump me for what felt like hours.

JAY (cont.)

For you.

And partway through that beating, I looked up, and you were running away.

You apologized later.

And I said "It's all good".

Because I knew you weren't a fighter.

You never were.

And I would never try to make you into something that you're not.

(beat)

So, really, I should've known this would happen.

I should've known I would spend my whole life taking punches while you run.

Silence.

Jay starts to walk away.

EVAN

You wanna talk about running?

Where were you when Big Jay was sick?

Everybody knew something was wrong.

We could all see it in the way his hands would shake.

How tired he always was.

Everybody could see it except you.

You refused to acknowledge it and then had the nerve to act surprised when he died.

Kept telling everybody how unexpected it all was.

In whose world is that true?

The truth is, you didn't pay attention.

Because you didn't want to.

Because you were too scared.

Every time it's time to step up and be an adult, you're nowhere to be found.

Whether it's paperwork, logistics, or literal death.

You're too scared to face it.

You run.

I may not be a fighter but I know how to survive.

How to step up.

Can you say the same?

The room is deadly still.

JAY

When your time comes

And you have to answer for what you've done...

What will you say?

Evan holds his gaze, unflinching.

EVAN

That there was a push for change happening and I wanted to be a part of it.

Silence.

Jay turns to June.

JAY

(like a child needing his mother)

Will you help me upstairs?

JUNE

Of course.

*She puts his arm over her shoulder
and they start upstairs*

JAY

You're so beautiful.

I love you, June.

I love you so much.

JUNE

I know.

I love you too.

JAY

I'm so sorry for everything.

JUNE

I know.

I know.

They're gone.

Evan is left alone.

*The sharp pain returns, but worse.
He clutches the same spot on his ribs.*

*As the pain subsides,
he takes off his shirt and looks down at himself.
His torso and back are covered with puffy red sores.
He touches one and it knocks the wind out of him.*

*He stumbles to the counter
and takes a long swig from the bottle.*

*He coughs.
And coughs, and coughs, and coughs.
Until, finally, he coughs something up onto the ground.*

He looks at it in utter confusion.

It's a frog.

He can't take his eyes off it.

The keypad lights up.

Static.

Blackout.

Act 2

Scene 3

The next morning.

*Jay emerges from his apartment,
nursing an impossible hangover.*

*He's carrying hangover essentials:
a wet hand towel, a bottle of water, and a portable fan.*

*He begins to gingerly descend the staircase,
stopping to clutch the railing every so often to steady himself and avoid
puking everywhere.*

*He finally reaches the bottom of the stairs
and looks around the space.
It's even less his than it was before.
He sits on the stairs, exhausted.
He takes a swig of water,
puts the towel over his head,
clicks on the portable fan,
and lets out a long sigh.
He sits in silence for a long moment.*

Walter enters.

Jay's too tired to look up to see who it is.

Walter watches him for a moment.

WALTER

Long night, Youngblood?

JAY

(looking up, gently)
Hey, boss.

WALTER

How you feeling?

JAY

How do I look?

WALTER

Like hell.

JAY

Yeah, that sounds right to me.

They share a laugh.

JAY

Walter, man, I'm sorry about yesterday.

WALTER

No need to apologize.

JAY

I shouldn't have-

WALTER

Youngblood-

JAY

No, Walter, you deserve an apology.

I shouldn't have yelled at you.

You been too kind to me for too long for me to be talking to you like that. These last few months have just been...

(a beat)

Doesn't matter.

I will never talk to you like that again.

Ever.

I promise you that.

WALTER

(softly)

Okay.

Jay stands to be eye level with Walter.

JAY

You forgive me?

WALTER

(extending his hand)

I forgave you before you even did it.

JAY

(taking his hand)

Good.

Good.

Thank you.

They breathe each other in for a moment.

JAY

If you don't mind, I gotta sit down.
Standing ain't really the move this morning.

WALTER

All good, Youngblood.

Jay sits.

WALTER

You got work today?

JAY

No, thank God.
Evan's been having us go nonstop.
But he texted this morning saying we should take a day off.
For the first time in a long time, I agree with him.
June's out grabbing coffee.
Gonna try to make the most of this day.

WALTER

You two gonna be able to work this thing out?

JAY

Me and June are all good.

WALTER

I'm talking about you and Evan.

JAY

(a beat)

I don't know, man.
I don't know.
We done had some fights in our day.
We done been damn near falling out.
But it ain't never been like this.
I just don't know if I'll ever be able to look at him the same.

WALTER

Might never be able to.
But it ain't never too late to make something new.

JAY

(a beat, taking Walter in)

I hear you, boss.

They sit in silence, taking in the space.

JAY

What do you think my Dad would say about all this?

WALTER

Who knows?

Ain't not use in trying to imagine what the dead would say or do.

How they might react to this world we find ourselves in.

Ain't on them no more,

It's on us.

Life is for the living.

JAY

Yeah.

I just wish the shit didn't have to be so hard.

WALTER

You and me both, Son.

You and me both.

Jay smiles and looks deep into Walter.

JAY

Ain't nobody called me "Son" in a long time.

WALTER

Me either.

JAY

I fucked this up, Walter.

He ain't have much to leave behind besides this place.

And I couldn't even take care of that.

WALTER

You're doing your best.

JAY

Am I?

WALTER

You are.

I know it and you know it.

(beat)

Ya know, when the church got torn down all them years ago I thought it was the end of the world.

I couldn't imagine who I would be without it.

I even thought about saying "fuck it" and going back to using.

WALTER (cont.)

I was miserable then, but at least I knew my place in the world.
 But God saw fit for me to have good people in my life.
 Good people who reminded me that the only motion is forward motion. Ain't no going back.
 So, I moved forward.
 And the world kept spinning, and the sun kept rising and falling, and God kept showing his face in everything around me.
 And here I am today.
 Alive.

JAY

At least they're rebuilding the church now.
 That's gotta feel good.

WALTER

It does.
 Of course, it does.
 But if I've learned anything in my life, it's that pretty much anything could be taken from you at any moment.
 There's no such thing as permanence on this Earth.
 It all comes and goes.
 We could finish rebuilding one day and the city could find some reason to tear us down again the next.
 In this life, you try the best you can to hold on to the things that mean something to you.
 But none of it is really yours at the end of the day.
 The only things we own are our hearts, minds, and souls.
 Those are the things worth holding on to.
 Worth living for.
 Hell, worth dying for.
 (beat)
 You remember that.
 In these next few days and beyond.
 You will have a great many things taken from you before all's said and done.
 But can't nobody take this.

He points to Jay's head.

WALTER

And can't nobody take this.

He places a hand on Jay's heart.

WALTER

You understand what I'm telling you?

JAY

Yes, sir.

WALTER

I love you, Son.

JAY

I love you too, Son.

*Jay buries his head in Walter's chest.
Walter wraps him in a warm embrace.*

They cling to each other for a long time.

Two lost sons, found in one another.

Blackout.

Act 2

Scene 4

A few days later.

Grand re-opening.

Fresh morning sun illuminates the store.

Jay and Evan clean and decorate.

Stacy watches.

**They wipe down counters,
sweep the floor,
hang ribbons,
blow up balloons, etc.**

**The "Big Jay's Corner Store" sign is removed and a new,
shinier one is erected.**

"O'MALLEY'S".

**The three of them gather in anticipation
in the middle of the store.**

Stacy hands them party hats and noisemakers.

The front doors swing open.

They stand waiting for the masses.

The whole day goes by.

And then...another day.

And another.

Day after day passes them by.

Weeks.

Months.

Seasons change.

Summer becomes Fall.

Fall becomes Winter.

Every day, without fail, they return and wait.

An endless cycle of hoping.

Lights shift for...

Act 2

Scene 5

*Stacy, Evan, and Jay haven't moved an inch.
They watch the entrance, praying that someone...
anyone comes inside.*

We sit in uncomfortable silence until...

Jay blows his noisemaker.

EVAN

Could you please?

JAY

Sorry.

A beat

EVAN

What do we do now, Stacy?

JAY

Well, it seems to me that the party's over, friends.

EVAN

I wasn't asking you.
I was asking Stacy.

JAY

And there lies the problem.

EVAN

Are we really gonna do this again?

JAY

I'm not doing anything.
I'm just talking.

EVAN

That's new.
You've been moping around here in silence for the last six months.
Every time I asked your opinion about how to get people in here.
You'd just grunt like a fucking caveman.

JAY

What you askin' my opinion for?
You made it clear you don't care.

EVAN

For fuck's sake.
You're being a child.

JAY

Am I?

EVAN

Yes.
You don't get your way so you just fucking pout.
You don't even try.

JAY

I been here every day, aint I?
Cleaning up when you ask me to.
Reorganizing when you ask me to.
Waking up at four in the morning to make sure O'Malley's is ready.
What the fuck else do you want from me?

EVAN

Effort, Jay!
I want effort!
I want you to pretend for two seconds that you actually give a fuck.

JAY

I did give a fuck.
I *did*.
You took away the shit I gave a fuck about and you turned it into this.

EVAN

Whatever, man.

JAY

Don't whatever me.
I'm talking to you.

EVAN

How about you go back to shutting the fuck up and being complacent.

JAY

Yo, say that shit again to my face.

EVAN

I been in your face the whole time.
Ain't nobody scared of you, Jay.

JAY

Well, you should be scared, nigga.
Life don't mean shit to a nigga that ain't got shit.
You should be terrified.

EVAN

Then show me why.

JAY

Aight, nigga, bet.

Jay steps in close.

STACY

(the first time we've heard her raise her voice)

STOP!

A beat.

The boys separate.

Silence.

STACY

Jay, will you do me a favor and grab me a glass of water?
Please?

A beat.

The first time we've heard her say please.

JAY

Whatever.
I need a smoke anyway.

He exits out back.

EVAN

What do we do?

STACY

It sounds to me like Mr. Robinson is right.

(removing her party hat)

We gave it our best shot.

Did the best we could.

Gave it old college try.

And the people have spoken.

STACY (cont.)

Best thing to do is to pack it up and move on.

EVAN

Pack it up?

No, there must be another option.

Maybe we reassemble the marketing team and rebrand.

Or conduct a research study for the target demographic.

See what people are craving from a neighborhood store.

STACY

I mean...we could.

It's not a *bad* idea.

I'm proud of you for suggesting it.

You've learned a lot over these last few months.

But, in the interest of full transparency, that's a little more work than we're willing to do.

We know what the people want.

And, the truth is, they already have it.

The Whole Foods just went up a month ago.

And it was an absolute success.

We thought "O'Malley's" would succeed for it's nostalgic appeal.

We were wrong.

The people have spoken.

EVAN

Well, then, what's gonna happen to this place?

STACY

...

...

...

EVAN

Stacy.

What's gonna happen?

STACY

Corner stores are dying.

Been dying for a long time now.

But you know what will never die?

What people will always have need for?

Especially with an ever growing population?

Parking garages.

Evan is decimated.

STACY

People will always need somewhere to park.
And, at a certain point, they'll pay anything.
As long as they don't have to circle the block one more time.

EVAN

How can you just give up on it like that?
After all the time spent.
After all the MONEY spent.

STACY

Don't be naïve, Mr. O'Malley.
The money spent here was merely a drop in the bucket.
You know that.

Evan gets in her face.

EVAN

You can't do this!
I won't let you!

STACY

How do you plan to stop me?

EVAN

...
...
...

STACY

I'm not one of your little friends, Mr. O'Malley.
I'm going to ask you nicely to back away from me.
If I have to ask you again...
Well, I'll let that be a surprise.

*Evan backs away.
He takes a seat on the stairs.*

STACY

This life, Mr. O'Malley, is not about the cards you're dealt.
It's about what you choose to do with them.
You're young.
The chances of you still making something out of yourself are high.
Think of this moment as practice.
Believe it or not, with enough practice you can still win with a bad hand.
You got close this time.
You got really close.

STACY (cont.)

But you and I both know you've had a chain dragging behind you this whole time.
Weighing you down.
Making you slow.
Believe me, I know all about that.
And, listen, I understand.
It's not too late for you, Evan.
But you need to make a decision *now*.
A decision to take care of *you*.
None of us know how much time we have.
It could all be over just like that.
So, while there's still time, I encourage you, more than anything, to say "Fuck.
Everybody."
And win.
That's the American Imperative.
Forsake all others and wi-

She meant to say "win", but what comes out is a dry heave.

*She coughs.
And coughs.
And coughs.*

Until, finally, she coughs something up on to the floor.

A frog.

She stares at it in disbelief.

She makes eye contact with Evan.

EVAN

The false prophet.

We hear Jay offstage.

JAY (O/S)

WHAT THE FUCK?!

EVAN

Jay!
What is it??
You alright??

Jay enters holding a glass.

It is filled to the brim with blood.

His hand and forearm are covered.

Evan runs over and starts to feel Jay's wrist for cuts.

EVAN

WHAT DID YOU DO??

WHAT THE FUCK DID YOU DO??

JAY

(shaken)

I didn't do anything.

It...

It came from the sink.

EVAN

Come on, man.

Evan walks Jay behind the counter and sits him down.

EVAN

I'll grab you a towel.

He exits to the back.

Stacy stares at Jay in shock.

The keypad lights up.

The news plays.

NEWS ANCHOR (VO)

Ladies and gentleman...

I...

I'm at a loss for words.

We've just received word that the Atlantic Ocean has been...

Overtaken by a dark red hue.

Witnesses nearby have reported the taste of copper in the air.

I...

We hear the News Anchor's quiet sobs

NEWS ANCHOR (VO)

I'm sorry, ladies and gentleman.

I just...I don't understand.

(More sobs)

Christina, Mommy loves you so much.

You're my whole world and you always will be.

Tony...

I'm sorry for everything.

(A shaky exhale)

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, On Earth as it is in-

The lights cut out.

The only light remaining comes from the setting sun.

Evan enters with a towel.

EVAN

Jesus Christ!

The fuck is going on??

Evan hands Jay the towel.

June enters.

Her clothes are torn and dirty.

Her eyes are vacant and red with tears.

Something's happening out there and she's been in the middle of it.

She stands frozen for a moment, getting her bearings.

She locks eyes with Jay.

JAY

Hey baby.

JUNE

Hey love.

EVAN

June, you alright?

JUNE

(re: Jay's bloody everything)

What happened?

JAY

The sink.

*She reaches for Jay's hand.
He takes it.*

JAY
Did you see the news?

JUNE
Yeah.

JAY
We gotta go find Walter.

June cries softly.

JAY
It's okay.
We'll find him.
It's all gonna be okay.

She looks back to him.

JUNE
Walter's dead, Jay.
He's gone.
They found him at the old church.
His heart...

EVAN
Oh my God.

Silence.

Jay gets up without a word and exits upstairs.

EVAN
June...

JUNE
Don't.

Jay returns with a bat.

He starts smashing everything in sight.

The vending machines, the self-checkout kiosks, everything.

Evan tries to stop him.

June and Stacy can only watch.

EVAN
YO, JAY!
STOP MAN!
STOP!

Jay throws Evan to the ground.

*He tosses the bat aside,
climbs on top of Evan,
and beats him until he's almost unconscious.*

*He picks up the bat,
returns to Evan,
and raises it high above his head.*

*Just as he's about to bring it down on Evan,
the ground beneath them begins to shake.*

Jay and June fall to the ground.

They all lay face down with their hands over their heads.

The sign out front crashes to the ground.

The shaking stops and a blood moon hangs in the sky.

We hear hooves galloping.

It starts far away and gets closer and closer.

*The four of them look toward the entrance.
In shock.*

In terror.

In awe.

They see a horse, white as snow.

*Sitting atop the horse is Walter,
his tattered cardboard crown now pure gold.*

Silence.

June slowly pulls Jay in close to her.

*Jay slowly pulls Evan in close to him.
They hold on to each other for dear life.*

EVAN
I thought I could-

JAY
Shhhh.

Jay takes a deep breath.

Inhale.

Exhale.

JAY
One.

*Inhale.
Exhale.*

JAY
Two.

June joins him.

*Inhale.
Exhale.*

JUNE & JAY
Three.

Evan joins.

*Inhale.
Exhale.*

JUNE & JAY & EVAN
Four.

*Stacy stands.
She and Walter eye each other from opposite sides.
Walter takes a deep breath in to speak.*

"5"

And then...

Blackout.

END OF PLAY

One last song from the dark:

Jupiter- Spillage Village, Mereba & JID