

TALL TALES
BY
RIVER TIMMS

Dramaturgy by Todd Brian Backus

River Timms
3351 Oak Trees Ct. Antioch, TN 37013
256-694-9175
adtimmswt@gmail.com

CAST OF CHARACTERS

NOAH- Mid 20s. He/Him. Headstrong and proud and gay. A college graduate that recently broke up with his boyfriend and finds himself back in his hometown in Alabama.

CYNTHIA- Early 30s. She/Her. Owner of a bar in town. She used to babysit Noah and his friends when they were younger. Country fried and bubbly and optimistic.

JIMMY- Late 20s. He/Him. A bit soft-spoken, a bit more passive than the others in the group. Born in Colorado and moved to Alabama at a younger age. Struggles with anxiety problems.

MICAH- Mid 20s. He/Him. The youngest of the group. A stoner with a purpose, he works hard at his dream job of running a cafe. Can be hard-headed, but has a heart of gold.

DUSTIN- Mid 20s. He/Him. A good ol' boy if there ever was one. Noah's ex-boyfriend. Usually boisterous and foolhardy, he's been acting very differently than himself lately.

CHORUS- Fractured voices of the past screaming their versions of the truth. Speaks entirely through voice clips of evangelical pastors' sermons OR pre-recorded lines from a preacher-like character.

THE ELDER- A monster that has tasted blood and craves more.

Setting:

A run-down bar in the sticks of Alabama. A hot, Southern summer. Present day.

Production Notes:

A '...' in the script denotes a very brief pause or hesitation.

If utilizing voice clips for the CHORUS, the lines need not be exact. In the script, they are mainly guidelines for the mood needed to be set in the scene. Sound designers can feel free to get creative. Only lines that are **bolded and underlined** are required to be exact quotes. In every production, the emphasis on repetition should be retained.

If needed, the televisions in the script can be replaced with radios. Use what you can.

Under no circumstances should an "all-white" production be done with this play. Casting only THE ELDER with an actor of color does not count.

PRELUDE

The lights snap off. After a moment, the televisions onstage turn on. Static. Then, the sound of channel surfing. For a second, a clear channel is found. The CHORUS can be heard.

CHORUS

In the beginning, there was darkness.

Then, more channel searching. An old gospel song is found, then it disappears into static again. After a second, a bell tolls. In the darkness, breathing can be heard, husky and deep and ragged. The televisions find the CHORUS again.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

From darkness, you came, and to darkness, you shall return.

The CHORUS disappears into static. Something... whimpers almost, like a hungry dog.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

You will have to give an account, and the wicked will be stuck down.

Cicadas begin to drone, but their drones become distorted.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

And where will you be when God calls you from this life? Will you be brought to light? Or swallowed by the darkness?

A loud bang on the wall.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

The grace of God... The *violence* of God... When He calls your name, which will you receive?

Another bang, and the televisions cut off. The sounds of breathing can be heard.

Then, silence.

SCENE ONE

Lights up on a bar, late at night. The kind of bar you would find in a shitty small town in the sticks. It's dirty. Almost disgusting, but almost charming. Cicadas are droning off in the distance. Wind chimes sing outside as a warm breeze rolls through. Above the bar are a few dusty, old television sets, but none of them are turned on. The bar's front door is located stage left. A door to the bar's back deck is located stage right, and a horseshoe is hung above it with the ends pointed up. There's a long window in the back wall of the bar. A shelf on the wall holds certain items: shredded dollar bills, old half-empty bottles of whiskey, a jar of dirt from a churchyard, a star made of sticks bound with twine, iron nails, an old pack of playing cards, and a green seven-day candle that barely has wick left in it. Care was taken in their arrangement; in fact, this part of the bar is really the only part that is cared for. No one is inside the bar, save a lone bartender, CYNTHIA, who is in a chair at a table. She is asleep with a shotgun in her hands. She wears plain work clothes, a flannel and jeans. She snores loudly. There's a beat before NOAH enters. He wears a lazily thrown together outfit, probably some kind of t-shirt and jeans. He looks around the bar. It is familiar to him. He looks at CYNTHIA, smiles, and edges close to her.

NOAH

Hey, Cynthia.

In a flash, CYNTHIA, not fully awake yet, immediately rises up and points her shotgun at NOAH.

CYNTHIA

Don't you make a move, kid.

NOAH screams and recoils.

NOAH

Jesus Christ! It's me!

CYNTHIA wakes up fully and sees NOAH. She runs to NOAH and hugs him, shotgun still in hand.

CYNTHIA

NOAH, YOU BIG DUMB BASTARD! HOW THE HELL ARE YA?

NOAH

You almost shot me! How do you think I am?

CYNTHIA lets him go.

CYNTHIA
Yeah, sorry about that. Didn't mean to fall asleep.

NOAH
with your shotgun in your hand.

CYNTHIA
It happens sometimes.

NOAH
I feel like it shouldn't.
(CYNTHIA goes behind the bar to put the shotgun away.)
How've you been? God, it feels like--

CYNTHIA
It's been about eight years, kiddo. That's a REAL long ass time not to come by.

NOAH
Sorry. College was weird.

CYNTHIA
Heard from your daddy that you finally graduated! Congrats, hon!

NOAH
Um, thanks. That's actually why I'm back home.

CYNTHIA
Just to visit?

NOAH
Nope, here to stay.

Pause.

CYNTHIA
Shit.

NOAH
I know.

CYNTHIA
who are you--

NOAH
with my dad and stepmom. Hopefully it's just temporary until I figure out my next move.

CYNTHIA
I mean, it's great to see you, but I don't blame ya. Lord knows I'd... well, you know how it is.

NOAH

So... why's this place so empty tonight?

CYNTHIA

Oh, some travelin' evangelist came through town 'bout a week ago, gave some sermon 'bout how drunks ain't gettin' into Heaven. Everyone took it awfully serious. Place's been a ghost town, but it'll clear up soon.

NOAH

You think so?

CYNTHIA

Aw, you know how it is. Give it two more weeks, 'n people are gonna forget what the Lord told 'em. This place'll be full soon enough.
(She begins to straighten up the bar a little bit.)
 So! Six years is a long time! How was it?

NOAH

It was college. Fun at first, but turned into a shitshow.

CYNTHIA

Where were you at again?

NOAH

Some tiny Jesus college.

CYNTHIA

They got phones there?

NOAH

Uh...

CYNTHIA

Six years, and you couldn't make a phone call?

NOAH searches for an excuse and finds none.

NOAH

Yeah. I got nothin'. I'm sorry I didn't keep in touch much.

CYNTHIA

At all.

NOAH

At all.

CYNTHIA

I forgive you. Hell, even if you did call, probably couldn't even get the damn thing. Service here sucks.

NOAH

So have you kept in touch with everyone else?

CYNTHIA

Yeah! The guys come in together 'bout once a week. Sometimes Jimmy comes with his fiancée. You know about that, right?

NOAH

Oh yeah, my dad told me. Good for him.

CYNTHIA

And Micah comes around all the time. He loves his bourbon.

NOAH

I'm sure his parents are thrilled about that.

CYNTHIA

He's stopped goin' to the church too.

NOAH

No kidding?

CYNTHIA

Yeah, been a few years. Think there's some bad blood there.

NOAH

I mean, good for him though, right? Good for all of us now. We're all free, baby! We're all out.

CYNTHIA

Um... not completely.

NOAH

What do you mean?

JIMMY walks into the bar. He's dressed in a stylish outfit that he clearly got from a thrift store. Goodwill chic. NOAH looks at him. There's a moment, then...

NOAH & JIMMY

AYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!

NOAH and JIMMY meet each other and embrace.

JIMMY

Dude, it's so good to see you.

NOAH

Oh my god, I've missed you, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Yeah, because you NEVER COME HOME!

NOAH

I know, I know, I'm the worst.

They break apart.

CYNTHIA

Well, ain't that the cutest thing? Want me to make y'all anything? On the house since we're celebrating the prodigal's return.

JIMMY

You got the shit to make a mint julep?

CYNTHIA

It's Alabama, dummy. Of course I do.

JIMMY

I want that.

NOAH

Man, I've got the strongest craving for an amaretto and Coke all of a sudden.

CYNTHIA

Huh. Ain't made one of those in a while. Comin' right up.

CYNTHIA goes to the bar and begins to make herself and the boys some drinks.

JIMMY

Dude! How's everything? You settled in yet?

NOAH

Ah, I haven't even gotten to the house yet. Congrats on your engagement, by the way.

JIMMY

Thanks. Rosa's a good one.

NOAH

She seems nice.

JIMMY

Yeah, and now that you're back, you'll finally get to meet her!

NOAH

Where do you guys stay?

JIMMY

Well, she lives across town. Near the old mill.

NOAH

You guys don't live together?

JIMMY

No.

NOAH
Y'all have been together for, like, five years.

JIMMY
...old habits die hard, y'know.

NOAH
No, I get it. Living with Ryan felt weird too.

JIMMY
Yeah. We're waiting until we get married. How are you holding up after the whole thing with Ryan?

NOAH
I'm... not good. It was a really messy break-up, and since I was living with him, I had to move out. Couldn't really afford rent anywhere else, so here I am.

JIMMY
what did your parents say?

NOAH
They were nicer about it than I thought they would be. Maybe waiting to live together is a good idea.

JIMMY
Maybe.

NOAH
...so what have you been up to?

JIMMY
I've been working down at the gas station on Birch and Caldwell.

NOAH
Oh yeah, I passed it on the way in. How long have you been there?

JIMMY
Since graduation.

NOAH
Oh.

JIMMY
Yeah. I'm a manager now. It sucks.

CYNTHIA brings the drinks over. She raises her own glass.

CYNTHIA
I will drink to that. To work sucking.

JIMMY and NOAH take their glasses, raise them up, and take sips from their drinks.

JIMMY
It pays well though. Lots of regulars come in and talk my ear off, so I hear all the town gossip.

NOAH
Oh, scandalous.

CYNTHIA
What's the word this week?

JIMMY
Well... you guys remember Mr. Gordon, right?

NOAH
Our third grade teacher? Oh God, please tell me this gossip isn't gonna ruin my view of him.

JIMMY
Rumor has it that he checked himself into a rehab facility.

NOAH
No!

CYNTHIA
Mr. Gordon? He's a deacon at the church!

NOAH
He's like a hundred years old now! He checked into rehab?

JIMMY
That's what I've heard. People in town have been going *nuts* over it, saying that he gets drunk and beats his wife and stuff.

NOAH
He was the sweetest man. I can't believe that.

JIMMY
Mrs. Gordon comes in for gas all the time, and I've never seen any bruises. She's always so cheerful. They're just rumors. I don't pay them much mind. And so I just live my life like this, listening to old folks complain about their neighbors until the day I die.

MICAH enters. He is well put together outfit-wise, nice shoes and shirt. He carries a big backpack. CYNTHIA sees him and begins to prepare his drink as well: double bourbon, neat.

NOAH
Who the hell is that?

MICAH
Man, I could ask the same thing about you.

NOAH and MICAH both laugh and meet in an embrace.

NOAH
Micah, what in the world are you wearing?

MICAH
what? I like to look nice!

NOAH
Since, like, when though?

MICAH
Can't all dress like punks forever. I had to get a big boy job, so I started shopping for, you know, nice clothes.

NOAH
Poser.

JIMMY
Sellout.

MICAH
Yeah, but I'm a sellout that's getting PAID. Hey, Cynthia! Can you make me a--

CYNTHIA
Already got it comin', hon.

NOAH
So you're getting "PAID"? Where are you working?

MICAH
Well, some of my buddies and I started a coffee shop in the city, and people just LOVE it. But everyone's got their side hustle.

CYNTHIA
Speakin' of which, you got my delivery?

MICAH
Gotcha covered.

MICAH throws his backpack on one of the tables and searches it. He pulls out bags of coffee. He pulls out a LOT of bags of coffee, searching for something. As he searches, NOAH speaks to him.

NOAH
So how's the scene been?

JIMMY
The scene?

MICAH
Dude, scene's been dead for years.

NOAH

No way, really?

MICAH

Yeah, none of the churches close by will have punk shows anymore after that asshole Hector Fenson broke one of the windows at Cornerstone. Skate park shut down. The city is a hub for nothing but butt rock, so all the bands worth going to see are always touring through Nashville.

JIMMY

And that's a trip.

NOAH

God, that sucks.

CYNTHIA

Things are changing, hon. The city is growin'. They destroyed the old mall--

NOAH

They tore down our mall!? The mall I had my first gay date in is gone?!

JIMMY

Took it down and put up a fancy golf driving range.

MICAH

You seen that shit? It's massive.

CYNTHIA brings MICAH's drink.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Thanks, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

Anytime. Micah, that's a shitload of coffee.

MICAH

Yeah, well, it covers the scent. Just in case I get pulled over.

MICAH finally finds what he's looking for, a hefty bag of weed.

CYNTHIA

Finally.

MICAH

Here you go. Lemme know when you need another refill, and I'll hook you up.

NOAH

Holy HELL, that's a lot of weed.

CYNTHIA

What, this? Amateur. I'll go through all of this in about a month.

MICAH checks his watch and starts putting the coffee back in his backpack.

MICAH

It's getting late. Dustin should be here by now.

CYNTHIA

wonder what's keepin' him?

NOAH

Yeah, what could be more important to him than my return?

JIMMY

Dude, have you not heard about Dallas and his campaign?

NOAH

Campaign? What's Dustin's dad campaigning for?

MICAH

Oh, Dallas is running for fucking Governor of Alabama.

NOAH

Holy shit.

MICAH

Yup. And he's gonna win.

JIMMY

God, don't say that. You'll make me nauseous.

NOAH

Can you *imagine* the entire state being run by that man?

JIMMY

Yes, and it gives me nightmares.

NOAH

So what does that have to do with Dustin?

MICAH

Oh, he's helping with the campaign.

NOAH

Excuse me?

JIMMY

So there are some things that you should know about before he gets here.

The front door opens, and DUSTIN enters. He's wearing tailored clothes, high end stuff.

Dustin! Hi!

NOAH

NOAH moves towards DUSTIN to hug him. DUSTIN backs up a little bit and extends his hand. NOAH hesitates, then shakes DUSTIN's hand. After a second, DUSTIN brings NOAH in for the good ol' handshake-hug thing that guys do. They break apart.

DUSTIN
wow, man, look at you. You ain't changed a bit.

NOAH
Look at you! what are you *wearing*?

DUSTIN
Gotta dress my best now. Press is always followin' me.

NOAH
Press?

MICAH
The campaign.

NOAH
Oh! Oh. wait, would they, like, follow you here?

DUSTIN
Naw, I drove one of the junkers over here. They only follow around the fancy cars we drive to events and stuff.

CYNTHIA
what'll ya have, Dustin?

DUSTIN
Just a glass of water for me, thanks.

NOAH
Come on, get a real drink with me. Like old times.

MICAH
He doesn't drink anymore.

CYNTHIA
Micah.

NOAH
wait, really?

DUSTIN
It's not that big a deal. I just don't drink no more.

NOAH
You're like the king of drinking.

DUSTIN
 You know, you been gone a while. Things change. I just don't drink.
 My fiancée don't like it, 'n I just don't feel like I should.

NOAH
 'Fiancée'?

DUSTIN
 Yeah. Lisa Jones.

NOAH
 Lisa Jo-- From high school?

DUSTIN
 We've been seein' each other for about a year now.

NOAH
 A year! Wow! And you're already engaged!
(He looks at JIMMY and MICAH.)
 To a woman!

JIMMY
 You've been gone a long time, dude.

Pause.

DUSTIN
 I'll, uh, I'll be right back. I think I left my, uh, phone in my
 car.

DUSTIN exits.

NOAH
 There's no fucking way.

JIMMY
 I know.

NOAH
 That man loved dick more than I do. What on earth happened to him?

CYNTHIA
 Well, part of it's gotta be his dad runnin' for governor of *Alabama*.
 Ain't no way a man with a gay son's gonna be elected to that office,
 least not for fifty more years.

NOAH
 And the other part?

CYNTHIA
 I mean, after you left, you know, he was the only one in town. I
 imagine it gets lonely.

JIMMY

He's back at church. Every Sunday.

NOAH

They got him again.

MICAHA

I keep waiting for it to wear off, but it's been a while since he's started being--

NOAH

Straight?

MICAHA

Not where I was going, but sure. Think he's serious about it.

JIMMY

He's trying not to make it a big deal though, so just don't mention it or anything.

NOAH

Uh, well it is a big deal because more than likely, the church made him 'straight' again, and I know how--

The door opens again, and DUSTIN re-enters, phone in hand.

DUSTIN

Swear that I'd lose my head if it wasn't attached.

No one understands how to proceed.

JIMMY

So... uh... how's your dad's campaign?

DUSTIN

It's exhaustin'. I could probably draw you a topographic map of Alabama, we've travelled it so many times.

MICAHA

You think he'll win?

DUSTIN

He's runnin' Republican in Alabama. why even campaign?

CYNTHIA brings DUSTIN a glass of ice water.

NOAH

Yeah, things have gotten interesting around here. Didn't know you were... into girls.

DUSTIN

Oh. Uh... yeah. We just got to, you know, got to hangin' out, 'n she's just really cool, and we want the same things--

NOAH

No, no, that's cool.

DUSTIN

I mean, I think... I think you'd like her.

NOAH

Yeah. Yeah. I bet.

A brief, agonizing pause until CYNTHIA saves us.

CYNTHIA

Well, boys. How's about a toast?

(She pours herself a shot of bourbon and lifts it to the air as the boys lift their drinks up.)

To the return of Noah, here to suffer in this shithole like the rest of us. Six long, SILENT years, but our prodigal comes back, safe and sound. Welcome back, kid.

The boys murmur in agreement, clink their glasses together, and take sips from their drinks.

NOAH

I won't lie. It sucks to be back, but it's really good to see you guys again.

JIMMY

Likewise, buddy.

MICAHA

Listen, a toast is fine, but...

(He produces a joint from his pocket.)

Let's get this celebration really going.

NOAH

God, you're a man after my own heart.

MICAHA

Yeah, well, as the Pentecostals say, "I'm blessed to be a blessing." who else is in?

CYNTHIA

We'll have to do it outside. That shit'll make this place reek for days.

CYNTHIA exits to the back deck.

NOAH

Are you in Jimmy?

JIMMY

Can't. It makes me real anxious. I'll still come and hang.

NOAH
What about you, Dustin? You in?

DUSTIN
No, I... I don't smoke anymore.

NOAH
Uh, do you do anything anymore?

DUSTIN
Like I said, you been gone a long time. Lotsa stuff that I don't do no more.

DUSTIN exits out the front door in a little bit of a huff.

NOAH
Guys, have we completely lost him?

MICAH
He'll wake up to it eventually. We all did. It'll just take that certain kind of drastic something, and he'll get it again. You just watch.

MICAH walks out to the back deck.

NOAH
I feel like I'm losing my mind. How are things so weird now?

JIMMY
Dude, everything's always been weird.

JIMMY also exits to the back deck. NOAH looks around himself, almost like he's trying to identify the bar. NOAH goes behind the bar to make another drink. The lights in the bar fade to black.

SCENE TWO

The bar is completely dark, save the light coming in through the window, the faded orange of a streetlight. Cicadas drone again, but their drones become distorted. The televisions in the bar crackle to life. Voices come through the televisions, but there's not one that's distinct. A bell can be heard through the static, and a shadow appears in the window. It is THE ELDER. THE ELDER should be just barely perceptible, but not prominent. The CHORUS comes in.

CHORUS

The darkness is about to lift--

The sound of static. Throughout the scene, the sound of static will interrupt the CHORUS as denoted by "--" in the script.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

Are you-- safe?

THE ELDER looks into the window, then up to the light. The sound of glass breaking, and the streetlight goes dark.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

Are you prepared? Are you-- safe?

There's a bang at the door.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

Are you--

A spotlight comes up. NOAH sees it. He moves from behind the bar into the light. He is no longer in the bar. Not in anywhere particular really. He addresses no one as he speaks. Maybe he's just talking to himself.

NOAH

As I drive up the hill that overlooks town, I can't help but notice that the streets are darker. Most of the street lights are broken, forgotten. I pass all the familiar streets at night. Gas stations with kudzu growing over them. Stores boarded up. A sign that says "Thank you for thirty-two years of service." Ghosts of the landscape, trapped in the Southern heat like the rest of us.

CHORUS

we shall be as one.

NOAH

I pass the diner that my grandma took me to each Saturday. The lights are off, windows smashed. No one's bought it yet. It just sits there.

CHORUS

we shall be as one.

NOAH

I pass the church. The parking lot is full. It's wednesday night. The lights are on, and the sanctuary doors are open, and as I drive by, I see him at the pulpit. It's just a flash; I'm going too fast to pick up details, but I know it's him, and I immediately wonder if he saw *me* through those sanctuary doors. Does he know I'm in town? Does he remember what my car looks like?

CHORUS

we shall be as--

NOAH

But I keep driving. And I get to my house and knock on the door and... it's not my house. An older lady answers, says that she bought it two years ago. I apologize profusely. Call my dad for the address to the new house. Old to him, I guess. I get there and go to sleep. I wake up in a room I've never seen before. Unfamiliar.

CHORUS

The darkness is about to lift.

NOAH

And I drive again. See the places I've been, the marks I've left behind. I drive past a forest that we all used to drink in when we were teenagers, smoking cigars we got from Newbie's because they didn't ever card. On my way to the city, I pass the skate park. Shut down for like the third time in my life, this time probably for good. The country kitchen has some people in the parking lot. Not many. Not like before.

CHORUS

A dying earth--

NOAH

But I pass the church on a Thursday. Parking lot full, must be a revival. They're still doing good.

CHORUS

We see you.

NOAH

I check myself in the mirror before I leave the house. A ritual I'm used to, but I'm more cautious now. I look, and I ask-

CHORUS

God sees you.

NOAH

Is this too gay? Too faggy? Will someone see? Will someone hurt me because I'm too 'in their face?' I'm always aware of it.

CHORUS

we need a change of the heart.

NOAH

I go to the store. People stare at me. They know me around here. They know who I am. My family. Ever since I was a little kid, they've known me, but they stay away, keep their distance. I don't mind the distance. I mind the looks. Always someone looking.

CHORUS

Always.

NOAH

Smirks out of the corner of my eye. Men looking me up and down, sizing me up.

CHORUS

Always.

NOAH

what did I do? How have I earned this disapproval? I look at the ground, and I hear whispers. Are they whispering about me?

CHORUS

Always.

NOAH

I embrace the hypervigilance that keeps me alive. I watch back. Keeping an eye out for anyone who may take a swing, and I'm told that I worry over nothing.

CHORUS

Nothing at all.

NOAH

And I feel it everywhere. At the store. In my car. In that unfamiliar room, I feel the eyes of everyone I know boring into me.

CHORUS

Say it in the name of Jesus.

NOAH

And I drive again. I pass by our forest, and I see something. Just barely in my peripheral, I see something.

A bell tolls.

CHORUS

Say it in the name of Jesus.

NOAH

And I don't stop to investigate. I keep driving the car.

A bang at the bar door. NOAH doesn't notice.

CHORUS

Say it in the name of Jesus.

NOAH

And I see it following me.

Another bang at the bar door. NOAH still doesn't notice.

CHORUS

Say it in the name of Jesus.

NOAH

I don't dare look. I'm going fucking forty. But it's there.
Following me.

CHORUS

Are you-- safe?

NOAH

Everywhere I am. Everyone, everything watching. Even the trees feel like they whisper about me. Waiting for me to fuck up, become easy prey.

CHORUS

Are you-- safe?

NOAH

And I am prone to fucking up.

CHORUS

Are you-- safe?

Another bang. NOAH glances over his shoulder at something unseen. Before he can notice them, the televisions snap off.

NOAH

So I put on what they want me to put on, watch for the looseness in my wrist to stiffen. It may be cowardly, but it's...

NOAH AND CHORUS

Safe.

The spotlight goes out, and NOAH disappears. A noise. Heavy breathing. Desperate breathing. A growl, but not animalistic. Then, silence.

SCENE THREE

The same bar at dusk. As the scene continues, the light steadily changes until it is night. A week has passed. CYNTHIA and NOAH enter, holding heavy boxes of alcohol.

CYNTHIA

No shit?

NOAH

Yeah, literally told me to my face that he wouldn't hire me.

CYNTHIA

Jesus.

NOAH

It's a fucking ice cream parlor. Who are they to say that I'm not good enough to work for them?

CYNTHIA

How many applications have you done this past week?

NOAH

God, I dunno. Thirty? Maybe forty? Numbers don't mean anything to me anymore. I just know my hand is throbbing from doing them all. And every time I turn one in, the manager or boss or whatever just sort of looks at me like they're disgusted that I've even come in.

CYNTHIA

All that, and you got nothin'?

NOAH

Nothing... which, I guess isn't the end of the world. I'm living with Dad rent-free, but I don't wanna be there for long. And like, I've *had* jobs before, jobs that gave me experience. I have a degree. I should be able to get at least a basic, entry-level job, right?

CYNTHIA

Right, but 'round here, it's the whole "who you know" game. No one cares 'bout "what you know".

NOAH

Everyone around here knows who I am.
(It sinks in.)

Oh shit.

CYNTHIA

There it is.

NOAH

Great to see all the social progress we've made.

CYNTHIA

Have you thought about applying anywhere near the city?

NOAH

I mean, yeah, but that's like thirty miles away. I think that's a "big picture" goal.

CYNTHIA

Meaning...?

NOAH

Meaning maybe I'll move to the city and get a city job in a year or two, but that plan means jack shit if I don't have a regular job right now. I can't afford the gas to make that commute every day. I don't even know how Micah does it.

CYNTHIA

well, people really love their coffee.

NOAH

wish he was hiring.

CYNTHIA

Hell, I wish *I* was hiring. I'd give you a job in a heartbeat, but I can barely make ends meet with no one comin' in.

NOAH

well, you DO owe me fifty bucks and two free drinks for helping you haul all this liquor over here.

CYNTHIA

That I do. what'll you have?

NOAH

Uh... I dunno. Amaretto and Coke sounds nice.

CYNTHIA

Aw, that does. Nice summer drink. Think I'll make one for myself too.

CYNTHIA begins to make the drinks. NOAH takes a folded-up paper job application out of his pocket. He unfolds it and begins to fill it out.

NOAH

Hey, is it cool to put you down as a reference?

CYNTHIA

Sure.

NOAH

Okay, good, because I've already done it on all my other applications.

Pause.

(MORE)

NOAH (CONT'D)

You know, the longer I stay here, the more I start to realize that this may have been a mistake.

CYNTHIA

Movin' back here?

NOAH

Actually, breaking up with Ryan at all. If I was still with him, I'd probably be financially secure and having fun, but instead, I'm here, looking for shitty jobs and consequently NOT having fun.

CYNTHIA

Yeah, but love don't work that way.

NOAH

It could.

CYNTHIA

Mhmm. I'm gonna go out and stock the liquor shed with the leftover cases.

NOAH

Do you need any help?

CYNTHIA

Nah, I've got a system. You stay and finish your application.

CYNTHIA exits. NOAH is alone at the bar. He looks around it. He notices the altar in a way that he's never noticed it before. It beckons to him, and he responds. He moves closer to it, but he's careful not to touch it. The televisions cut on suddenly, and the CHORUS breaks through.

CHORUS

I did not ask. I was chosen.

NOAH

SHIT!

NOAH falls backwards.

CHORUS

Are you worthy of the call?

NOAH gets up.

NOAH

Stupid fuckin' TV.

NOAH moves behind the bar. He searches for the remote.

Are you worthy of the call?
CHORUS

where is that damn remote?
NOAH

Are you worthy of the call?
CHORUS

How did you even turn on?
NOAH

NOAH finds the remote. He points it at the televisions and turns them off. The CHORUS cuts out. As he investigates the televisions, the door bursts open. NOAH screams at the sudden noise. MICAH enters. He's wearing a new outfit.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am high as shit.
MICAH

God, don't just burst in like that! Nearly gave me a heart attack.
NOAH

Doors were meant to be burst through! And I am *very* good at bursting through them.
MICAH

I didn't think you were coming by til later.
NOAH

Time literally does not exist.
MICAH

How are you already high? Didn't you just get off work?
NOAH

Bruh, I'm good at my job. I can do it stoned. It's just coffee.
MICAH

You drove here.
NOAH

It's just driving. Calm down. I come bearing gifts.
MICAH

He produces a special e-cigarette from his pocket. He waits for applause from NOAH. There is none.

Uh... what is it?
NOAH

This, my friend, is your key to the cosmos.
MICAH

NOAH

I forgot how unbearable you can get when you're stoned.

MICAH

Fuck me for adding flair to the presentation.

NOAH

Fine, fine. Continue with your, *ahem*, presentation.

MICAH strikes a bodacious pose and talks as if he's selling a magical elixir.

MICAH

This is, without a doubt, THE most efficient AND sufficient way to get high as a motherfucking KITE. It's a concentrated blend of hybrid indica and sativa oil, ninety-five percent THC in this one little cartridge. One hit will make you float, two will stop your throat, and three? That's all she wrote. Genuine, scientifically-engineered weed oil from the fabled legal land of California. The latest and greatest in concentrate technologies, it's concealable, easily fitting into any pocket inconspicuously.

(He demonstrates.)

Afraid of leaving a smell? Worry no longer! The vapor quickly dissipates into the air.

(He demonstrates again. He takes a pull from the e-cig and blows it out.)

And if you're worried about having weed mouth, take comfort in the fact that it's blue raspberry flavored!

NOAH

Huh. I am genuinely intrigued.

MICAH hands the e-cig to NOAH.

MICAH

My gift to you--

NOAH

Shit, thanks buddy.

MICAH

--is that you can have this for fifty dollars.

NOAH

What?! Fifty bucks?! You said it was a gift!

MICAH

This is a gift! A rig and cart set like that costs about a hundred dollars around here. I'm giving you the best friend discount.

Pause.

NOAH

Fuck it. Fine. Cynthia owes me that much anyway, and I've had the worst week.

MICAHA

Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone, take this pen and please please *please* get on my level.

NOAH braces himself for the unknown. He holds down the button and takes a hit. The hit is stronger than he is, and he sputters and chokes.

NOAH

Holy shit, you lied. This tastes NOTHING like blue raspberry. That's just weed.

MICAHA

Science can only achieve so much. Don't hit that too hard now. I threw up doing it my first time.

NOAH

I'm a pro. I think I can handle it.

(He takes another hit. Sputters. Takes the e-cig away from his lips. Tries again. Sputters again. He puts the e-cig down.)

Just weed, oh God.

(Fun fact: THC oil concentrate hits rather quickly.)

Oh... God.

MICAHA

And that's all she wrote.

NOAH

This is... a dangerous thing that you've given to me.

MICAHA

And I'm the only person in town selling the carts for those, so maybe keep it on the down-low. But hit me up if you need another.

(He pulls out his own e-cig and takes a hit.)

How's life, friend-o?

NOAH

Well, I'm living at my parents' house and unable to get a job, so I'm okay. How about you?

MICAHA

Oh, I'm good, man. My partners and I have a really good thing going with this cafe.

NOAH

I guess you're sticking around for a while.

I'm established.

MICAH

wanna trade? I got a shiny college degree.

NOAH

Absolutely not. A degree in religion sounds awful.

MICAH

My hands feel heavy.

NOAH

That's the indica.

MICAH

How did you know I majored--

NOAH

Your dad told me. Something something 'Christian university' something something. I've had to ask him about your life because you never text back.

MICAH

Okay, ouch, but granted.

NOAH

How was it?

MICAH

I mean, it was fine. I went in thinking it would be easy because, you know, we've grown up with it.

NOAH

was it not?

MICAH

Christianity is a lot more complicated than we think it is.

NOAH

I feel like it shouldn't be.

MICAH

They made me, um, they made me sign a sort of contract saying that I wouldn't smoke or drink or do drugs. That sorta thing, but towards the end of it, it said that I wasn't allowed "partake in homosexual behavior".

NOAH

No way. Did you sign it?

MICAH

NOAH

I couldn't enroll if I didn't. And like, I figured I could just play their game, but one day, the dean of the school calls me on my phone and says that we need to have a meeting. He tells me that he knows about me and Dustin, and that if I didn't break it off, he'd kick me out of the school. So I did.

MICAH

...this clears a lot of stuff up.

NOAH

Everyone around me told me that I was doing the right thing, and I started to believe it. I genuinely thought I was sending us to Hell.
(He takes a long hit from the e-cig. He takes this one like a champ.)

It took me a long time to come back from that. Ryan helped... a lot. And even after everything, I still can't separate myself from religion, you know? Not after that, not after coming out--

MICAH

It's still there.

NOAH

It's ugly and won't go away. I'd compare it to a scar, but it's more like a birthmark. What made you stop going?

MICAH

Ah, you heard about that, huh? Uh... About two or so years ago, I got my ex-girlfriend pregnant.

NOAH

Oh, shit.

MICAH

And I didn't know what to do, so I talked to Pastor Gabe. I just told him the truth and asked for advice. I needed some help. But he just told my parents, and they got mad as hell, and instead of helping me, they just sort of... left me to deal with it by myself. That church has every resource to help people like me, but they just... wouldn't. I stopped going after that. She ended up getting an abortion. That was kinda the last straw. I think if I showed up there, they'd escort me out.

NOAH

Fuck, dude.

MICAH

But like, I can't let it go either. I dunno. I see you and Jimmy and Cynthia, and I know there's genuine fucking goodness in you guys whether or not some pastor says it. Like the thumbprint of God on you or something, and that's worth believing in. The pieces of God that are inside of us. I can't be totally rid of it either.

NOAH
That was, like, really beautiful. And also pretty heartening to hear.

MICAH
That's the sativa.

NOAH
...I graduated a year and a half ago.

Pause.

MICAH
what?

NOAH
Did you really think it took me eight years to finish college? I'm a wreck, not a disaster.

MICAH
So why didn't you come back?

NOAH
Man, I hate this place. Always have. This was... It was a last resort.

MICAH
Do the others know?

NOAH
No. Don't tell them.

MICAH
why tell me?

NOAH
You're different. You know that.

MICAH
...huh.

The televisions cut back on. The CHORUS breaks through.

CHORUS
SINNERS!

Both MICAH and NOAH react to the sudden outburst.

MICAH
Jesus, that'll fuck up a high.

NOAH

It did this earlier. Hold on.

NOAH goes behind the bar again.

CHORUS

The wicked will be cast down!

NOAH

Yeah, yeah. Shut up.

(NOAH finds the power strip that the televisions are connected to and unplugs it. The televisions power down, and the CHORUS cuts out again.)

These things blow.

MICAHA

Very appropriate though.

JIMMY enters.

JIMMY

Hey, fellas.

MICAHA

Jimmy! Come in! We're discussing religious trauma!

JIMMY

Oh, gee. My favorite. How are you already high?

MICAHA

Time literally--

JIMMY

Literally doesn't exist, I got it.

NOAH

Jimmy, I love you.

JIMMY

I love you too? Are you both stoned?

NOAH

It was a gift. More than anything in this life of sin, I want you to be able to get high with us.

JIMMY

I'm touched. I'll bet Cynthia's thrilled that you're smoking in here.

MICAHA

Ah, but it's not smoke!

NOAH

Don't give the pitch again!

MICAH

Fine, it's just weed vape. It wouldn't matter if it was real smoke anyway. You know nobody else is gonna show up.

There's a bit of silence. MICAH's right, but no one wants to admit it. At this point, the lights should indicate that it is night time at the bar.

JIMMY

Once again, the last one to get here is Dustin.

MICAH

I'm surprised he still comes around.

NOAH

That situation is... very complicated. Every time I think about it, I get nauseous.

JIMMY

which part?

NOAH

All of it. Like, that's not who Dustin is. This is a brand new person that I share memories with, and it's just... I dunno what it is.

JIMMY

I mean, you were like that for a little while, and you're turning out okay.

NOAH

I never got engaged. This is bigger than the shit that happened with me.

MICAH

He won't listen to us about it, so I've just sort of given up.

JIMMY

which, you know, is the thing friends do.

MICAH

Noah wouldn't listen to us either.

NOAH

So he's just gonna be miserable?

MICAH

Until that certain something hits him.

NOAH

I'm too high to fathom this conversation right now.

JIMMY

well, he'll be here tonight. You better gear up for it.

CYNTHIA reenters.

CYNTHIA
Oh, well the gang's almost all here!

NOAH
You were gone for so long.

CYNTHIA
Yeah, well, the system is complicated, but it works. I deserve a reward.

(She produces a very pink joint from her pocket.)
Bubblegum joints. The only way to smoke.

NOAH
Cynthia, have you seen this fuckin' thing that Micah gave me?

NOAH hands CYNTHIA the e-cig.

CYNTHIA
What is it?

NOAH
Liquid gold.

MICAH
Do NOT take my pitch away from me.

CYNTHIA observes the button and takes a hit. She also handles it like a pro.

CYNTHIA
Interesting. Tastes like blue raspberry.

She hands it back to NOAH. MICAH notices the makeshift altar, but unlike NOAH, he seems almost disgusted by it.

MICAH
Hey, Cynthia, I got a question. Maybe it's because I'm always stoned, but I JUST noticed that collection of weird shit you keep on that shelf. What is all that?

CYNTHIA
Oh, this is left over from when granddaddy owned the bar. He kept all that there, said it'd help him stay prosperous and protected.

MICAH
Granddaddy. That explains it. He was always sorta loony.

JIMMY
Hey, don't talk about him like that.

MICAHA

Remember that time he was watching us when we were little, and Noah cut his foot on some glass? And before he took you to the hospital--

NOAH

He took me to the woodshed.

MICAHA

And what'd he even do?

NOAH

He rubbed some weird cologne on the cut and yelled a bible verse at me.

MICAHA

See? Loony.

CYNTHIA

Watch your tongue, boy. That's a family secret that's always worked.

MICAHA

Bullshit.

NOAH

But it did work. I remember the doctors being really confused about it.

MICAHA

Whatever. The stuff is kinda weird and creepy. I mean, why the hell would you just have nails out like that? Maybe you should get rid of it. Could be scaring customers.

JIMMY

It is a little off-putting.

NOAH

I kinda like it. Gives it something that not every other bar has.

MICAHA

A pile of junk? That's what gives this place character?

CYNTHIA

I've been keeping it nice and tidy since granddaddy kept it in such good shape. Pastor Gabe always said he held too tight to mountain superstitions.

JIMMY

I mean, maybe you could just move the stuff to a place no one will see it.

CYNTHIA has never considered this before.

CYNTHIA

It *has* been here for an awfully long time, and that prosperity shit ain't hit yet. I guess I can just take it all home.

She finds a liquor box that's lying around and begins to take the items off of the shelf and put them in the box.

JIMMY

Man, I wish Dustin would hurry and get here. I'm getting worried.

MICAHA

What's to worry about? He's always late.

JIMMY

Did you guys not hear about Mr. Gordon?

CYNTHIA

Yes, darlin', you told us last week he had gone to rehab.

JIMMY

Yeah, he had, but he's dead.

NOAH

Excuse me?

JIMMY

He was found a few days ago. Cops say he was probably dead for four or so days before that.

NOAH

Jesus.

MICAHA

What happened? Did he take a fall at home or something?

JIMMY

No, dude. They found his body in the woods, covered in stab wounds.

CYNTHIA

Bullshit. Don't be tellin' lies in this bar. The devil will get you.

JIMMY

It's in the paper. We sell them at the gas station, and all day long, all I could do was stare at the headline. I'm asking people that come in, "Hey, did you hear about Mr. Gordon?" But they walk by the papers, don't even look at them, they have no idea what I'm talking about, and they just talk about the latest gossip, as if he's not even gone.

NOAH

Why would anyone do something like that to him? He was a feeble old guy.

JIMMY

Maybe someone took those rumors of him hurting his wife seriously, decided to take action or something. I dunno. Paper says she's awfully torn up about it though. I don't know. Every time I ask one of the regs about it, all I get is an earful about Erica Pottersworth and how awful and entitled the youth are.

MICAHA

Goddamn, that's a name I haven't heard since high school. Little Miss Erica Potheads-worth. Why're people talking about her?

JIMMY

Apparently, she protested one of Dallas' election rallies or something. Who cares?

MICAHA

She always was a badass that way.

JIMMY

Yeah, thanks for being just like all the old fucks at work. Ignoring what's happening just to get in on some rumor.

NOAH

So this was a murder.

JIMMY

Yeah, and the cops have no leads to go on. So whoever did it is still out there.

CYNTHIA

And that's why you're worried 'bout Dustin.

JIMMY

Well, yeah.

CYNTHIA

Listen, things like this have always happened every so often around here. Can't let it get to ya so bad.

DUSTIN enters. He is in a new fancy outfit. He looks miffed.

MICAHA

See? He's just fine.

JIMMY

It's a relief. Hey, Dustin.

JIMMY hugs DUSTIN. DUSTIN is confused by this.

DUSTIN

Uh... hey.

NOAH

You look fancier than last time.

DUSTIN

Yeah, well we've had back to back rallies, so I've had to wear this same outfit for the past three days. We're just gettin' back from Montgomery.

JIMMY

Shit, that's a drive.

NOAH

And instead of turning in, you decided to come here?

DUSTIN

...this is our night to hang out together, ain't it? Y'all are my friends. I was gone all week. I... I missed y'all.

(Pause. It's been a long time since DUSTIN has said stuff like this.)

NOAH

We missed you too. Come join the party.

MICAH

Yes, join us! Me and Noah are blitzed, and looks like Cynthia's about to smoke too!

DUSTIN

Man, out of all the things that I miss about the old days, I miss pot the most.

NOAH

I mean, we have more, if you want any.

DUSTIN

Don't tempt me, now. I'm already givin' some concessions tonight.

MICAH

Concessions?

DUSTIN

I wanna have a drink with y'all.

MICAH, JIMMY, and CYNTHIA all cheer and bang on the tables in celebration.

NOAH

Really?

DUSTIN

Well, Lisa's mad at me right now, and I feel bad about how I acted last time I was here. I kinda just want... I dunno. Maybe I want one night like we used to have.

CYNTHIA

I mean, it'd have to get pretty crazy for that to be in the cards.

DUSTIN

Then at least kinda what we had back then. A drink and some friendly conversation, y'know?

MICAHA

If he's drinking, then so am I.

JIMMY

Likewise. It's good to have you back, at least for a night.

As the conversation goes on, CYNTHIA makes five bourbons.

DUSTIN

I mean, I'm always around, but I guess I know whatcha mean.

JIMMY

Yeah, but... well, you know... It's weird to say it out loud.

MICAHA

Fuck, I'll say it. It's weird now that you're back with the church, dude.

NOAH

Micah, come on.

MICAHA

Man, I'm glad you're having a drink, but the past few years has been weird for us, at least those of us that have been around.

DUSTIN

I mean, I know it's been different. I'm different, but we all know what that means.

JIMMY

Yeah, we get it, but...

NOAH

But it's like you've completely changed. Like, there's barely a semblance of who you used to be.

DUSTIN

Isn't that what we all want though? New creation and all that?

CYNTHIA finishes up the bourbons and hands them out.

CYNTHIA

Here we are, fellas.

Pause.

DUSTIN

Uh, well. I know things aren't the way they used to be, but for a little while, let's just have fun.

(He raises his glass.)

To the old days.

Everyone raises their own glass. They all take a drink. The group begins to banter a bit. MICAH tries to get JIMMY's attention. He does not get it. He tries more. He fails. He musters up strength and yells...

MICAHA

HEY, JIMMY. Let's go outside for a smoke real quick.

JIMMY

Uh, I mean, sure, but--

MICAHA

I know, let's just step outside real quick for one. Want in, Cynthia?

CYNTHIA

Absolutely.

MICAHA, JIMMY, and CYNTHIA begin to exit through the back door.

NOAH

What, no invite for us?

MICAHA

You have your own pen now! You don't have to go outside to smoke anymore! Besides, Jimmy and I got straight shit to talk about like the World Series.

NOAH

You two don't even watch baseball!

MICAHA yells something baseball related as the three leave. He closes the door. There's a brief pause. NOAH is suddenly aware of the situation that MICAHA has graciously created: NOAH and DUSTIN are alone together.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Huh.

DUSTIN

That was... strange.

NOAH

Dude, I gotta tell you... I'm high as hell right now.

DUSTIN
Just like old times.

NOAH
So how have you been? I haven't really been able to talk to you since I've been back.

DUSTIN
Sorry about that. I'm always busy with Dad doing somethin' stupid for the campaign. But I'm good. Been a good year. 'Cept this new stuff with Lisa.

NOAH
What's going on?

DUSTIN
Don't tell the other guys 'bout this, okay?

NOAH
Promise.

DUSTIN
She broke off the engagement.

NOAH
Holy shit.

DUSTIN
She... uh... She found some stuff on my computer.

NOAH
Oh no, did she find your porn?!

DUSTIN
Keep it down, man.

NOAH
Sorry.

DUSTIN
Yeah, she found some.

NOAH
You know I've gotta ask.

DUSTIN
It was dudes.

NOAH
Yeah, that'll do it.

DUSTIN
I tried, man. I tried real hard to just be rid of all of it, but--

NOAH

No, I know. I remember being... uh... trying to stop.

DUSTIN

I wish I could just tear it out of me. It makes things so complicated, y'know?

NOAH

Dude, it breaks my heart that you're falling for the same stuff that I fell for. Like, I know how it feels to think that you're wrong--

DUSTIN

How it feels.

NOAH

Uh.

DUSTIN

Does it go away?

NOAH

Which--

DUSTIN

You know it.

(A brief pause. NOAH is obtuse.)

Goin' to bed and not wantin' to wake up. Lookin' in the mirror and wishin' you liked that person. Askin' God to either take it away or... I mean, you know. That thorn in the flesh. Does that ever go away?

NOAH

Being with a woman doesn't change that feeling.

DUSTIN

That's not what I asked.

NOAH

It... takes work. And time. But it does, the hatred, the weight of it lessens more and more as I continue to just be. It was hard to reach a semblance of okay--

DUSTIN

You don't feel guilty? Convicted by the Holy Ghost? ...I'd pray all the time about it. Just... things could be so simple.

NOAH

It's never simple, but it's a better life. I think, anyway. Don't you remember it?

NOAH reaches out and touches DUSTIN's hand. DUSTIN lets it linger for a bit, then withdraws his hand away from NOAH's.

DUSTIN

Huh.

NOAH

what?

DUSTIN

It's just that... I haven't talked to someone else like us in years.
(He takes a drink.)

Noah, you gotta understand if I'm just a little pissed that you're lecturin' me on this considerin' the circumstances.

NOAH

...yeah, I know.

(Pause.)

So how'd they get you back?

DUSTIN

Uh... few years ago, my... partner at the time broke up with me, and I didn't know what to do. I started drinkin' a lot. A whole lot. Got fired from my job for showin' up wasted. I kept feelin' this awful pain in my chest, physical pain from bein' so upset. So I went back to church. They... uh, they prayed over me so I could stop drinkin' and bein', well, you know. After that, I did stop drinkin'. Got a new job because Pastor recommended me. I thought I was gonna be free forever, but two weeks later, I was back to watchin' those videos. And while you were off at school datin' Ryan or whatever his name was, I had to stay here, and I didn't have anyone else. Just been you and Lisa. And I get it, I really do, but... you just step in 'n out of my life so casually, and this is all I got, y'know? Everything happened out of nowhere, and I had nothin' else to hold on to. Mom is gone. Dad is Dad. Jimmy and Micah don't get it. We had a plan, and you got scared, and left. You think I wanna be helpin' with dad's campaign? It sucks, but it's my place now.

NOAH

You can make a new place. You can change again.

DUSTIN

You know it's more complicated than that.

NOAH

what do you want me to say?

(DUSTIN says nothing. NOAH presses forward.)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry about everything. I know that doesn't make up for anything now, but I need you to understand. It's just--

DUSTIN

--a scary thing to be in the hands of an angry God.

(DUSTIN takes a long sip from his glass.)

I do miss this. I miss these things I used to do. I can't tell you the last time I had a drink with a friend.

NOAH
'Friend?'

DUSTIN
We're still friends. Of course we are.

NOAH
I have a lot to make up for. To everyone, but especially to you.

DUSTIN
...yeah. You do.
(Pause.)
I have one question.

NOAH
Yeah?

DUSTIN
What if you're wrong? What if you die, and it turns out that bein' gay actually is wrong, and you end up goin' to Hell?

NOAH
I think about that every goddamn day of my life.

DUSTIN
Do you think you're wrong?

NOAH
I like to think that I'm right.

DUSTIN
Shit.

NOAH
But even if I'm wrong, I can't be happy any other way. I was *miserable* when I wasn't myself. Don't you ever get tired of it?

DUSTIN
I do. I just... I don't know how to turn it off in my head. It ain't as easy as you sayin' somethin' and me believin' it.

NOAH
Dustin, I can get you resources. There are books about it, biblical commentary, translations that break down the original meanings--

DUSTIN kisses NOAH deeply. It doesn't last long. NOAH breaks away. The two stare at each other for a moment. NOAH then kisses DUSTIN. They kiss for a long time. They make out like teenagers do behind the movie theater, passionately and secretive. For a moment, the thorn disappears.

A light flashes just briefly through the window of the bar. Neither NOAH nor DUSTIN notices this.

After a while, the two finally break away. A beat, then...

NOAH (CONT'D)

So, that's not how I was expecting tonight to go. Are you okay?

DUSTIN

I... uh... I'm not sure yet.

NOAH

I'm sorry. I just... Wow. You always were a really good kisser.

DUSTIN laughs weakly.

DUSTIN

Least I got that goin' for me.

(Pause.)

I don't know what I'm doin'.

NOAH

Neither do I.

DUSTIN kisses NOAH again. They continue to kiss until JIMMY reenters. JIMMY sees them kissing.

JIMMY

Uh.

DUSTIN immediately breaks away from NOAH.

NOAH

Jimmy! Shit, uh--

JIMMY

Do... you guys need a minute?

(No one responds.)

Okay then.

JIMMY exits.

DUSTIN

Oh, God, what did I do?

NOAH

Hey, hey, don't freak out.

DUSTIN

Now Jimmy's gonna tell people.

NOAH

He's not gonna--

DUSTIN

Everyone at the church is gonna find out. Oh God.

NOAH

Dustin, listen--

DUSTIN

Dad's gonna hear about it, and he's gonna be so mad.

NOAH

Dude, just calm down.

DUSTIN

I'm gonna get kicked out of church again. Everyone is gonna know.

NOAH

DUSTIN. You know Jimmy. He's not gonna tell anyone.

(Pause.)

He MAY tell Micah and Cynthia--

DUSTIN

He may?!

NOAH

BUT no one else will know, okay? You can at least try and feel safe here. No one at this bar is gonna think less of you for this.

One more brief pause. The feeling returns. The thorn in the flesh. DUSTIN gets up from the table.

DUSTIN

I'm sorry.

DUSTIN runs out the front door.

NOAH

Dustin, wait! Come on, dude!

NOAH follows after him. As soon as the door shuts behind him, the lights in the bar go black.

SCENE FOUR

The bar is pitch black. The streetlight outside hasn't been fixed. The wind can be heard rustling trees outside. Cicadas, distorted and melting. The televisions pop back on. Static, then a sermon can be heard again. A bell tolls. THE ELDER lurks inside the bar. It is unfettered, and it explores its new lair with an emotion close to glee. The CHORUS comes through, but the static is much heavier this time.

CHORUS

In the beginning was the word.

Static overtakes the CHORUS. Faint whispers can be heard. THE ELDER finds its way towards the now-bare altar. It runs a bloody claw over it. It investigates its claw, sniffs it, maybe tastes it. The CHORUS comes back through after a little bit, but it is broken up. Throughout the scene, the sound of static will interrupt the CHORUS as denoted by "--" in the script.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

We are-- close.
--creature-- called 'The Elder'.

THE ELDER stomps a few times.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

The word was with God, and the word was God--

The whispers grow louder and louder.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

And the word became FLESH.

THE ELDER shrieks.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

The fight is not flesh and blood-- Spirits-- Darkness-- We must teach you to see. The Elder The Elder The Elder.

Static overtakes the CHORUS again. Through the static, the hymn "Old Time Religion" can be heard, then it also dips into static. The CHORUS returns.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

Can you see home?
Can you see home?
Can you see--

THE ELDER growls and exits. Static until the televisions snap off.

SCENE FIVE

The same bar. Another week has passed. It is dusk again. Lights up on CYNTHIA, cleaning the empty bar again. Somewhere distant, a loud choir sings hymns. After a moment, JIMMY and NOAH enter. NOAH doesn't look good. He looks tired, disheveled. JIMMY doesn't look too hot either.

JIMMY

Hey, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

Hey, boys. Noah, you look like shit.

NOAH

Thank you, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

What's goin' on?

NOAH

Can I just have... I dunno... whiskey and Coke?

CYNTHIA

Odd drink order comin' from you. One whiskey and Coke, comin' up.
(She begins to make the drink.)
 So, how's the job search comin'?

NOAH looks at her and says nothing.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

...okay then. Want anything, Jimmy?

JIMMY

I'll just have the same thing.

CYNTHIA starts making another whiskey and Coke. She speaks to JIMMY.

CYNTHIA

You're here awful early.

JIMMY

I took the day off. Didn't feel well.

CYNTHIA

What's wrong, hon?

JIMMY

They found Erica Pottersworth dead earlier this week.

CYNTHIA

Excuse me?

JIMMY

She was in her room covered in stab wounds, just like Mr. Gordon.

CYNTHIA

Do the police have any leads?

JIMMY

I mean, they talked to Dallas. Erica interrupted one of his rallies in protest because he apparently takes money from some bad lobbies--

NOAH

No, say it outright. He's taking money from anti-LGBT lobbyists.

JIMMY

...right. Everyone was talking about it, and a couple of days later--

CYNTHIA

Jesus. That's gotta look bad.

JIMMY

I've been trying to text Dustin about it, but he won't respond.

NOAH

He won't respond to anyone.

CYNTHIA

Because of this? Or because of--

NOAH

I don't know. Everything involving him makes me sick to my stomach now.

JIMMY

But Erica and Mr. Gordon have to be connected. They were killed in the same way, and a week apart. That can't be coincidence. Dallas would have to be responsible for both of them.

NOAH

I mean, I wouldn't put it past him.

JIMMY

I think we have an honest to God serial killer here.

CYNTHIA

And that's why you ain't at work? Honey, what'd I tell you last week? People have always disappeared 'round here. If we stopped everything every time it happened, nothin' would get done.

(She hands JIMMY and NOAH their drinks.)

Don't dwell on it too much. Someone probably needed to get their hands on some meth money. The cops'll sort it out.

NOAH raises his glass.

NOAH

Well, here's to Erica, truly the best dealer I ever had.

JIMMY and CYNTHIA raise their glasses, and everyone takes a drink.

CYNTHIA

So what's all that racket going on outside?

JIMMY

The church is having a tent revival in the field across the street.

CYNTHIA

Didn't they just have revival?

NOAH

They got one together real quick after her body was found. That's the whole thing about it. They're trying to pray the killer away.

CYNTHIA

God, do they have to have it in the field two streets over? Why not do 'em in the woods?

JIMMY

You know, like actual cults do.

CYNTHIA

It keeps going back to killer talk, and it's creepin' me out. Can we talk about ANYTHING else?

JIMMY

Um... I do have some news.

NOAH

Oh yeah?

JIMMY

Uh, so Rosa and I have been saving up money for the past two years or something, and I did the books for us last night, and... I think we have enough saved to move back to Colorado.

Pause.

NOAH

Oh, man. Yeah. That's news. When are you guys aiming to leave?

JIMMY

Uh... the beginning of next year. January.

NOAH

Shit.

JIMMY

I know.

That's soon.
NOAH

I know. I feel like I'm betraying you somehow.
JIMMY

what?
NOAH

Like, I'm leaving when you just got back.
JIMMY

Dude, by all means, leave this place. I wouldn't be here if I had the choice.
NOAH

You wouldn't hate me?
JIMMY

I'm almost literally in gay love with you. I could never hate you. It'll suck, but I get it.
NOAH

We're moving the wedding up because of it. Our parents are so angry with us.
JIMMY

I will drink to that.
NOAH

The two lift their glasses and take drinks. MICAH enters. He's distressed. He holds a piece of paper in his hand.

Hey, buddy.
JIMMY

You guys, we have a fucking problem.
MICAH

He reveals the paper. It's a picture of DUSTIN and NOAH kissing through the bar window. There is text around the picture.

what is this?
NOAH

That's you and Dustin.
MICAH

NOAH grabs the paper. He reads it.

NOAH

"If you can't keep your house in order, how can you order the state? Dallas Boyd cannot even raise his son correctly, and he is unfit for the office of governor." A political ad?

MICAH

These things are all over the city. Everyone is talking about it. It's all I heard at the coffee shop today. This is gonna be catastrophic.

NOAH

Somebody took a picture of us in the bar... Who took those pictures?

JIMMY

The press following Dustin around?

MICAH

May have followed him to the bar.

NOAH

I... I don't... why?

MICAH

Because there's an election to win.

JIMMY

Dallas' campaign is shot.

CYNTHIA

Has anyone been able to get in contact with Dustin?

DUSTIN enters. He immediately points to NOAH.

DUSTIN

YOU!

He makes way for NOAH as if he's going to fight him. MICAH sees this and gets in between them.

MICAH

Dustin, stop!

DUSTIN

They told me! They told me about you! And I didn't wanna believe 'em!

NOAH

This isn't my fault!

DUSTIN

IT IS YOUR FAULT! My pastor told me to stay away from you because he knew who you were. But I didn't wanna believe him because you were my friend! He was right! You're a tempter and a snake. A seducer!

NOAH

Seducer? You kissed me!

DUSTIN

I knew the moment it happened, evil would come out of it. I tried to keep it hidden, but Dad always read me the scriptures! "Be sure your sin will find you out!" And it did! Here in black and white, my sin available for everyone to see! It's the talk of the town!

NOAH

You are not the only one this affects!

DUSTIN

Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot how much this must hurt you, the nobody that can't even get a fuckin' JOB here.

NOAH

They... They took a picture of both--

DUSTIN

My dad's campaign is FINISHED. All because I got kissed by a cocksucker.

NOAH

And why the fuck should you give a shit?

MICAH

Noah, chill!

NOAH

YOU HATE DALLAS. We all hate Dallas! Your father is an evil man who's given you nothing but black eyes your entire life!

DUSTIN

You don't know nothin' about him. Nothin'!

NOAH

what's he gonna do, Dustin? Is he gonna beat you? Is he gonna kill you like he killed Erica?

CYNTHIA

Noah, stop it.

DUSTIN

That don't got nothin' to do--

NOAH

Is he gonna kill me? Oh, I bet he'd love that. He always HATED me. Erica only inconvenienced him, but we ruined his career just by proxy. I bet he'd love to get a knife into me.

DUSTIN

Keep talkin', and he might not get the chance.

NOAH

Big strong threats from such a big ol' man. I'm shaking.

DUSTIN

Everyone called you the "blowjob queen" in high school. Everyone knew that if they wanted to get their rocks off, they would go to you.

NOAH

Go fuck yourself.

DUSTIN

Everyone knows about you. Everyone knows you're a faggot.

NOAH

I AM A FAGGOT! I AM A FAGGOT AND A FAIRY AND A QUEER. I love men, and I love to kiss men and hold men in my arms. And I want everyone to know that despite their best efforts, THEY HAVEN'T KILLED MY FAGGOT ASS YET. I want them to know that *I* know who I am. And who are you?

DUSTIN

I ain't got shit to prove to you no more.

NOAH

That's a coward's answer. You can do this "man's man" routine all you want, but you can't unsuck my dick, so let your yes be yes and your no be no, and tell me who you're gonna be so I can get on with my fucking life. WHO ARE YOU?

DUSTIN

I am Dustin Boyd, and I am a man. That's who I am, and that's who I will be. I'm gonna open up every door that you closed with this, and I'm gonna be somethin' legendary, and what will you be? When the trumpet sounds, and you're called up to give your account to God, what will you be? Nothing. Just like you are right now, you will be NOTHING but a faggot.

NOAH pushes past MICAH and punches DUSTIN in the jaw. DUSTIN falls backwards.

MICAH

Noah!

NOAH

Yeah, you go ahead and be a man if you're so goddamned good at it.

DUSTIN

You... You little piece of--

DUSTIN gets off the floor and starts towards NOAH again, but CYNTHIA, MICAH, and JIMMY all advance towards NOAH, blocking DUSTIN's way. NOAH stands in defiance of DUSTIN, no cowering, ready to fight.

DUSTIN stops. He looks at these people. He looks at his friends, then back to NOAH. Then, he laughs.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

Oh. Oh, okay. I see how it is. Defendin' him to the ends of the earth, just like high school.

(Another brief pause. He knows what he wants to say, but he doesn't know how to say it. Eventually, he continues with...)

I never want to see any of you again.

And with that, DUSTIN exits the bar, slamming the door behind him.

CYNTHIA

Noah, are you okay?

NOAH

I fucking hate this place, man. It's like living in an emotional black hole.

(He looks at the flyer.)

Can't get a job, can't kiss a guy, what can I do here? I don't even feel *safe*.

A bell tolls. No one seems to notice.

MICAH

I can't believe they followed him to the bar.

JIMMY

I can't believe they took your picture.

NOAH

I'm gonna have to explain this to my parents. And with that picture, I won't have any job prospects in town.

JIMMY

How did they even take it? We were on the deck the whole time.

NOAH

I'm done. I'm just fucking done.

There's a knock at the door.

CYNTHIA

who's... *knocking* on the door to a bar?

NOAH

Maybe it's Dustin realizing that he's a huge asshole.

(NOAH gets up and opens the door. DUSTIN is outside. He collapses into NOAH's arms. He is covered in blood. He has been brutally stabbed many times.)

Dustin? DUSTIN?! WHAT THE FUCK?

NOAH brings DUSTIN into the bar and lays him on the floor. NOAH looks into DUSTIN's eyes. DUSTIN chokes and coughs up a huge amount of blood. It splashes all over NOAH. The rest of the scene should be chaotic, lines overlapping, characters scrambling around. Maybe the televisions kick on and blasts some loud static or voice clips.

JIMMY

Holy shit.

NOAH

He's bleeding. He's bleeding. I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do.

MICAH

I'll-- fuck-- I'll call an ambulance.

(He dials a number and waits. Nothing.)

GODDAMMIT. I can't get enough of a signal!

CYNTHIA

I'll use the landline!

CYNTHIA goes behind the bar and picks up a landline phone.

NOAH

Hang on, Dustin. It's gonna be okay. We're gonna get you help.

DUSTIN gasps. He tries to make words, but he chokes on his blood. CYNTHIA puts the phone down.

CYNTHIA

Somethin's cut the phone line. I got nothin'!

NOAH

What are we supposed to do?

CYNTHIA

Jimmy, keep trying for an ambulance!

JIMMY nods and gets on his phone.

NOAH

Dustin, you piece of shit, if you die before I can hate you forever, I'm gonna be so angry.

DUSTIN gasps. NOAH begins to cry.

NOAH (CONT'D)

I loved you. I loved you so much. Please don't leave me alone here.

DUSTIN points at the door. NOAH looks to where he's pointing.

The televisions (if they have not already turned on) suddenly pop on, and the CHORUS can be heard.

CHORUS

Elder Elder Elder Elder Elder Elder Elder.

THE ELDER lets out a deafening roar. A popping noise happens. The lights in the bar go out. A complete blackout.

NOAH

what's happening?

CHORUS

It is here.

The lights come back on to reveal THE ELDER. It stands in the bar. Its form can finally be grasped. It stands upright. Bloody, ragged antlers like tree branches adorn its head. On its back are horribly mangled wings. It has a long claw on its right hand. The claw drips with blood. A monster, a demon, an abomination, THE ELDER is here. It moves to the televisions and raises its hands to the sky. The CHORUS rips through as a cacophony of angry, loud voices all shouting the same thing at once:

CHORUS (CONT'D)

THE ELDER THE ELDER THE ELDER THE ELDER

DUSTIN stops breathing. THE ELDER points at NOAH, who is dumbfounded, overtaken with shock. CYNTHIA, JIMMY, and MICAH also see THE ELDER and are also paralyzed by fear. THE ELDER lurches backwards and makes a blood-curdling screech. The screech causes everyone to pass out. THE ELDER looks upon NOAH with intent. It edges close to NOAH, and with a bloody claw, it brushes NOAH's hair. THE ELDER sniffs NOAH. Then, it leaves the bar. The televisions snap off, and the CHORUS disappears. The scene is static as we hear the distant sound of a loud choir singing hymns. Lights fade to blackout.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT II
SCENE ONE

Darkness. Emptiness. Tenebrae. The CHORUS activates.

CHORUS

All rise for the word of God.

Sounds of people standing up can be heard.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

We know that death is not the final word.

Cries and shouts of affirmation. Tongues of fire.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

But what of Hell?

The word "HELL" repeats and echoes out.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

Are you prepared?

A song breaks out. Maybe it's a rendition of "Everybody Will Be Happy Over There." A hymn from a redback hymnal.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

Each of us will give an account.

Static breaks through.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

We commend the body--

The static breaks through again. The following actions happen very quickly, back to back of each other.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

DEATH IS NOT THE FINAL WORD. ROLL AWAY THE STONE! HE'S NOT THERE!

A spotlight reveals MICAH. He is wearing clothing appropriate for a funeral.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

HE'S NOT THERE!

A spotlight reveals JIMMY. He is also wearing funeral clothes.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

HE'S NOT THERE!

A spotlight reveals CYNTHIA. She is wearing funeral clothes.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

HE'S NOT THERE!

A spotlight reveals... no one. There is no one there.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

HE'S NOT THERE!

CYNTHIA, MICAH, and JIMMY all look at the empty spotlight. MICAH becomes furious. He storms off. JIMMY watches MICAH go, then goes after him. CYNTHIA covers her face and exits as well. The CHORUS disappears. The spotlights then snap off, and at the same time, the bar lights snap on. It's daytime. NOAH sits at a table. He looks like hell, hair a mess, sloppy outfit. Nothing happens for a while. Then, a bang at the door. NOAH reacts. Then, another. NOAH falls into the floor and scoots away from the door. Then, a third, and the door bursts open. DUSTIN enters. He's wearing a much different outfit than the ones before. Just jeans and a t-shirt.

DUSTIN

See? Told ya I'd get it unstuck. You just have to push hard enough on it.

(Pause.)

Um. Are you comin'?

NOAH is aghast, paralyzed. DUSTIN waits by the door for a second, then says...

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

They won't find out.

(Pause, as if only half of a conversation is happening.)

They won't find out. Come on.

NOAH stares at DUSTIN. He can't bring himself to say anything.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

It's Sunday. Cynthia's granddad doesn't come near this place on Sunday. Don't worry so much.

(Pause.)

I thought I would take my *boyfriend* on a date.

The word 'boyfriend' overtakes NOAH, and he is up off of the floor.

Very, very light static can be heard. He follows closely to DUSTIN. DUSTIN almost takes offense to something unheard.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

Sorry. I know it's new. It'll take gettin' used to, but I like it. Do you?

NOAH is captivated, but almost horrified. He watches DUSTIN as he moves towards the bar.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

Uh... I guess this was it. I didn't think that far ahead. I just wanted to spend some time with you alone.

(Pause.)

Then we can just hang out for a while, and I'll drop you off within the hour. Is that alright?

(Pause. DUSTIN smiles.)

Hey, you wanna drink?

(Pause.)

Come on. One drink. That'll make it at least somewhat of a real date.

(Pause.)

I can do that.

DUSTIN goes to the bar and makes two simple amaretto and cokes. The two are silent during this. Eventually, DUSTIN brings the two drinks around the bar. He extends one.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

Here you go. Amaretto and coke. A nice, easy drink.

Nothing happens. NOAH looks back at DUSTIN, then walks in front of him. He takes the glass from DUSTIN, and he is now here, with DUSTIN. A slight surge of static, then it goes back to a quiet rumble.

NOAH

Thanks.

The two sit down together at a table.

NOAH (CONT'D)

I hope I didn't sound like I don't want to hang out with you. 'Cause I do. A lot. I just can't get in trouble again.

DUSTIN

Naw, I understand. It's only for one more year, right?

NOAH

One more year. Then, we can do what we want.

DUSTIN

Take Micah 'n Jimmy 'n Cynthia, and we'll all get outta here.

NOAH

Happily ever after.

DUSTIN

You think drinkin'll get old when we turn twenty-one?

NOAH

God, I hope so.

(He takes a sip.)

This is nice.

DUSTIN

Anything for my *boyfriend*.

NOAH

Stoooooooooooooop.

DUSTIN takes a sip as well.

DUSTIN

Damn, that is good. So... uh, how're you holdin' up?

NOAH

I'm... making it. I'm on super duper lockdown. My parents won't let me go anywhere. They think I'm at church right now.

DUSTIN

And they took your phone.

NOAH

And they took my phone.

DUSTIN

I never get to talk to you.

NOAH

I know. I'm sorry.

DUSTIN

Hey, it's not your fault. Did you ever find out who told 'em?

NOAH

No.

DUSTIN

Can't believe they grounded you for datin' me.

NOAH

I can. But hey, one more year, yeah? Then we can leave.

DUSTIN

I'm sorry I've caused you so much trouble... but thanks for takin' so much heat for me though. Far as I know, they haven't told my dad yet.

NOAH

I mean, I'm pretty sure they're just as worried as I am that Dallas would literally *kill* you if he found out.

NOAH moves a little closer to DUSTIN. DUSTIN notices, but pretends he doesn't. DUSTIN moves a little closer as well.

DUSTIN

See, this is way more fun than church.

NOAH

I still feel guilty.

DUSTIN

We're always gonna.

NOAH

I hope not. That sounds awful.

DUSTIN

Don't think about it right now.

DUSTIN moves closer.

NOAH

Well, Mr. Mood Killer, how are you gonna make me think of something else?

DUSTIN

I could think of a few ways.

They're touching. DUSTIN hesitates, then leans in to kiss NOAH. NOAH backs away.

NOAH

Um. I've... I've never kissed anyone before.

DUSTIN

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have--

NOAH

No no no, it's fine.

DUSTIN

I should've asked first.

NOAH

No, I *want* to kiss you. I've just ne--

DUSTIN kisses NOAH. NOAH quickly learns how to kiss. It is slow. It is romantic. The perfect first kiss. The two break away. As soon as his mouth is free, NOAH blurts out...

I love you. NOAH (CONT'D)

Really? DUSTIN

I... I know we've only been dating for, like, three weeks, but we've known each other for our entire lives. I know you better than I know anyone else. I just-- NOAH

I love you too. DUSTIN

They both laugh. They kiss once more.

when I kiss you, I can see home. Can you see home? DUSTIN (CONT'D)

I can. NOAH

It's somewhere big. And warm. DUSTIN

And pretty and busy. NOAH

We can make it, Noah. DUSTIN

Yeah. Yeah, we can. NOAH

DUSTIN puts his arm around NOAH and kisses his head.

Until then, we should probably get you home before you get in more trouble. DUSTIN

(He stands up.)
I'll go warm up the car, okay?

Okay. NOAH

DUSTIN walks out the bar door, and he is gone. Gone. Gone.

There's a shift. The atmosphere changes. The static dissipates.

NOAH is back. He is here. He stays at the table. He looks down at his glass. It is still there. He takes a sip. A gulp. He finishes the drink and puts the glass down on the table. Eventually, JIMMY enters the bar. He's in the same funeral clothes from the beginning of the scene. It's evident that he's been crying. Throughout the scene, you can tell that he is panicky, always scanning and re-scanning his surroundings.

JIMMY

Oh, uh, I didn't know you'd be in here. I didn't know anyone would be in here.

NOAH

Yeah. I'm always here now. Nowhere else I can really go.

JIMMY

How are you holding up?

NOAH

I'm not. How about you?

JIMMY

I'm making it.

NOAH

Good. That's good.

JIMMY

Have you been able to get any sleep?

NOAH

No. Thought maybe I'd be able to sleep if I smoked weed. Instead I gave myself a panic attack.

JIMMY

Damn.

NOAH

Yeah.

JIMMY

I didn't see you at the funeral.

NOAH

Oh yeah. Uh... I couldn't go.

JIMMY

You couldn't?

NOAH
Or maybe the better phrasing is "was not able to go."

JIMMY
Like you weren't allowed?

NOAH
Uh, Dallas personally called me and told me that I was, uh, that I was not welcome at the funeral. I held his son in my arms as he died. The first person I said "I love you" to is dead, and I didn't even get to go to his funeral.

(Pause.)

I hope this town burns to the fucking ground. I hope it gets hit by a fucking asteroid. I hope a volcano sprouts from the Earth and spews boiling fucking lava all over this place. I hope a fault line opens up right underneath it and swallows it whole, and I hope I'm the last one that dies so I can see it crumble.

JIMMY
Jesus, dude.

NOAH
This place has brought me nothing but misery, ever since I've come back. Just blow after blow.

JIMMY
He announced at the funeral that he's gonna continue his campaign.

NOAH
He's gonna win.

JIMMY
...yeah.

NOAH
Can't win with a living gay son, but a dead one?
(Pause.)
When do we talk about what we saw?

JIMMY
What do you mean?

NOAH
You know exactly what I mean.

JIMMY
Goddammit, Noah.

NOAH
That thing that killed him--

JIMMY
Dude, stop. The funeral just ended. I don't want to talk about it anymore. It's too sad, man.

JIMMY takes a seat next to NOAH.

NOAH
Yeah... Yeah, it is.

JIMMY
I didn't know about you and the funeral. I'm sorry.

NOAH
I know.

JIMMY
How long have you been here?

NOAH
Since nine this morning.

JIMMY
That was hours ago.

NOAH
I didn't know what else to do. Can't work, can't sleep. I knew the funeral was today, and I just felt like I couldn't be home. So I came here. Maybe it was to feel like I was close to him or something. I dunno.

JIMMY
Is Cynthia around? I feel like I need a drink.

NOAH
Not yet.

JIMMY
You're here alone?

NOAH
I've got a key.

JIMMY
What if someone showed up?

NOAH
Yeah, with all the business she's had the past month. Did Micah go to the funeral?

JIMMY
Yeah, I saw him there. He's coming by in a little bit.

NOAH
Good. 'Cause I wanna talk to you guys about something.

JIMMY
About what?

NOAH
I wanna wait until we're all together.

JIMMY
We can't just talk right now?

NOAH
It's a group discussion. I don't want to have it three times.

JIMMY
Are you drunk?

NOAH
Why does that matter?

JIMMY
Dude, come on.

NOAH
Don't start, Jimmy.

JIMMY
You aren't being healthy.

MICAH enters. He's also wearing very nice, black clothes.

MICAH
Noah, what the fuck?

NOAH
Excuse me?

MICAH
Where the hell were you?

JIMMY
Dustin's dad told him not to come.

MICAH
You didn't go because of Dallas? Bullshit.

NOAH
The man literally got my number, called my phone, and told me not to go. How am I supposed to respond to that?

MICAH
When have you ever let anyone tell you what to do?

NOAH
He could unravel my existence with a snap of his fingers. I'm not picking a fight with him, especially now.

whatever, man. MICAH

Yeah, whatever, man. NOAH

Is he drunk? MICAH

A little. JIMMY

why are you being an asshole? NOAH

MICAH
Because we had to bury our friend today, and you made us do it without you.

NOAH
Don't you put that on me. This is not my fault.

MICAH
Everyone was talking about you. EVERYONE we've known for our entire lives was there, and they were all wondering where you were.

NOAH
And what if I had shown up? Dallas would've caused a scene, and I would've been seen as the guy that crashed his son's funeral. I loved Dustin. He was my boyfriend, and he's gone now, and I didn't get to tell him goodbye like you guys did. So if you could stop being yourself for a second and let me grieve, I'd really fucking appreciate it.

Pause.

MICAH
Fine. Fine.

CYNTHIA enters. She seems distressed.

CYNTHIA
Oh. Uh. Hey, fellas.

MICAH
Uh, hey.

JIMMY
You just getting back?

CYNTHIA
Well, I... Did Pastor Gabe talk to y'all?

Pastor-- JIMMY

No. MICAH

Uh. well. He talked to me. CYNTHIA

Did he officiate it? NOAH

CYNTHIA
Yeah. Afterwards, he came up to me and told me he was still waitin' for me to sell the bar and come back to the church. Called it a "failing den of destruction". He knew that the bar's been strugglin', and he pounced. How does he always do that... I hate that man. I almost hit him, but instead I... shook his hand and got in my car. Didn't know what else to do.

CYNTHIA sits down.

So when do we talk about it? NOAH

Noah, stop. JIMMY

we all saw it! We were all in the bar together! NOAH

It was somethin' evil. CYNTHIA

Not a man. NOAH

Couldn't have been a man. A creature. CYNTHIA

I don't wanna talk about it. JIMMY

I know it sounds stupid, but... I saw it. Like a twisted up, demonic sorta thing. The kinda thing we were warned about when we were kids. CYNTHIA

Like a spirit or something. NOAH

There's no way that a ghost killed Dustin, and it's really messed up that you guys are talking about this literal hours after we put him in the ground. MICAH

NOAH

You were there! You saw it!

MICAHA

I saw my friend die! I was in shock! I don't know what I saw besides Dustin bleeding on the floor!

NOAH

You think we all imagined that?

JIMMY

I don't wanna talk about it!

NOAH

What else can we talk about?! Are we just gonna forget that our friend was murdered? Are we gonna ignore that for the rest of our lives?

MICAHA

I DON'T KNOW. I'm trying to figure this out, but I can't! It's just too much.

JIMMY

I DON'T WANT TO FUCKING TALK ABOUT IT!

(A choked sob escapes from his lips.)

I can't exist correctly because of whatever this is. I can't eat. If I eat, I throw up. I leave the light on when I go to bed, and even then, I lie awake and stare at the ceiling. I blink, and I see that thing that killed Dustin, and I wonder who else has seen it? Who else has it killed? Is this the thing that's killed Erica and Mr. Gordon? And I keep scrambling my brain for answers until I finally pass out and dream about Dustin on the ground, choking on his own blood. I panic when people knock on the door. I panic when my phone rings. I can't get rid of it.

NOAH

We're gonna have to deal with this, you know?

JIMMY

That doesn't mean we have to do it now. What I want to do right now is be sad and stop panicking and have a drink. Can I do that?

CYNTHIA begins to make four bourbons.

NOAH

Fine. Let's do that.

(Pause. He laughs.)

I remember one time, back when we were dating, I dared him to eat a ghost pepper. I didn't think he'd do it, but he ate it in one bite, and while I was laughing at him, he frenched me, and my tongue started burning too.

JIMMY

I remember that. He missed school the next day. Said he was sick.

MICAH

Do you guys remember when we were fourteen and he peed on the electric fence after he got high for the first time?

CYNTHIA

God, I think I was there for that.

NOAH

Yeah, you were babysitting us.

CYNTHIA

I was an awful babysitter.

NOAH

You were the best. Dustin was something else, but I always had a good time when he was around.

CYNTHIA passes out the bourbons, keeping one for herself.

CYNTHIA

Well...

(She raises her glass.)

I feel like someone should say somethin'.

Silence. After a bit, NOAH raises his glass.

NOAH

Uh... to Dustin, the wildest dude I've ever met. You could be a dumbass, and you could be a prick, but you always knew how to put a smile on my face. If Heaven exists, I'm sure you're there.

MICAH and JIMMY raise their own glasses. Everyone takes a sip.

MICAH

That's good bourbon.

CYNTHIA

Top shelf this time. Figured we deserve it.

NOAH

Can we all come by tomorrow? I still wanna talk to you guys, but this is a fine time for day-drinking.

JIMMY

Yeah. Yeah, we can do that.

MICAH

I'm gonna take mine on the deck. It's... It's a nice afternoon. You guys wanna come?

CYNTHIA

Absolutely. I've got a J in my pocket that I desperately need to burn down.

JIMMY

You coming, Noah?

NOAH

Yeah. Gimme a sec. I gotta go to the bathroom.

CYNTHIA, JIMMY, and MICAH all exit through the back door. After a beat, NOAH looks around. Cicadas can be heard in the distance. Somewhere, unseen, THE ELDER watches and waits. NOAH looks around. He somehow feels something is wrong. The CHORUS pops to life. It is quiet, as if it's trying to have a conversation.

CHORUS

Sinner.

NOAH

I know.

CHORUS

Sinner.

NOAH

I know.

CHORUS

Sinner.

NOAH

I know I know I know I KNOW I KNOW I KNOW. I KNOW I AM. WHAT DO YOU WANT?

The CHORUS dies out. NOAH chokes back tears. He will NOT cry. He sits down, and we immediately transition into...

SCENE TWO

The same bar. The next day, mid-evening. A few seconds after he sits down in the previous scene, CYNTHIA enters in a flurry. She is no longer in funeral clothes.

CYNTHIA
Oh. Hey, hon. Didn't know you'd be here this early.

NOAH
what?

CYNTHIA
The bar? It's like five P.M. We usually don't all meet until later.

NOAH
I... I don't remember getting here. This morning? The funeral was yesterday?

CYNTHIA
Are you feelin' all right?

NOAH
I don't remember leaving last night. I just remember... here.

CYNTHIA
You've been through a lot these past few weeks. You're too stressed.

NOAH
I feel like I'm starting to lose it.

CYNTHIA
You want a drink?

NOAH
Uh, yeah. whiskey and Coke.

CYNTHIA nods and makes them both whiskey and Cokes.

CYNTHIA
Don't remember you being such a whiskey drinker.

NOAH
It's been a long month. why are *you* here so early?

CYNTHIA
well, uh, I just got back from the bank... I have to sell the bar.

NOAH
Fuck.

CYNTHIA
Nobody's comin' through. I can't pay my bills. I'm already in debt.

NOAH

This place has been here for so long.

CYNTHIA

I know, but they're offerin' me a good deal, even after all that happened here. I really got no choice. I sign the papers next week. I don't even want this place no more. Not now that Dustin...

NOAH

God.

CYNTHIA

Maybe that makes me awful, but I can't help feelin' like... *somethin'* is around. Some kinda darkness in this place. Guess Pastor Gabe was right. It was a failin' den of destruction.

CYNTHIA gives NOAH his drink.

NOAH

So what's your plan now?

CYNTHIA

I dunno yet. I didn't even want the stupid thing in the first place, so I really don't feel sad about it. Just about everything else.

CYNTHIA pulls out a pack of cigarettes. She takes one, lights it, and begins to blow smoke around the bar.

NOAH

Cynthia, what are you doing?

CYNTHIA

It's an old trick granddaddy taught me. Tobacco's supposed to cleanse places from spirits 'n shit. Can't sell a haunted bar. The developers'll drop the price.

(She stops for a second. She looks at the cigarette.)

Pastor Gabe told me once that granddaddy's old mountain superstitions were liken to witchcraft, and he said that I shouldn't ever do it, but after seein' that thing that killed Dustin, all bets are off. How do you pray against somethin' like that?

NOAH

It's something not from here, this world or dimension. Can't be.

CYNTHIA

Supernatural.

NOAH

I think Jimmy's right. This thing had to have killed Erica and Mr. Gordon. They were all too similar.

CYNTHIA

I been tryin' to find out why though. I ain't no detective, but there's got to be some sorta connection, right?

NOAH

What's to figure out? This thing is just some nightmare demon that apparently loves to kill shit.

CYNTHIA

Well, let's follow the timeline. Mr. Gordon takes time off to go into rehab, and he ends up dead. Erica does the protest at Dallas' rally, she ends up dead.

NOAH

Dustin kisses me, and ends up dead.

CYNTHIA

None of the events are connected really. Neither are the people.

NOAH

But... we found out about the rehab and the protest before those two ended up dead. We heard about them through Jimmy.

CYNTHIA

Who heard about them from all the people in town.

NOAH

And everyone was talking about the kiss after that flyer of us was posted in the city.

CYNTHIA

So that's the connection? Rumors from townsfolk?

NOAH

It's the only connection.

CYNTHIA

That's some malicious energy to be feedin' on.

NOAH

And there was consistency because they were all killed a week apart from each other. So the next one should happen tomorrow night.

CYNTHIA

Who would it be after next?

Pause, until it clicks.

NOAH

Who's the most talked about person in town right now?

CYNTHIA

Noah--

NOAH

Everyone is mad at me for missing the funeral, for applying for jobs, for coming home at all. Micah and Jimmy said everyone's been talking. And that thing has been haunting me. I feel it wherever I go. I hear it calling me. If that thing is coming for anyone, it's coming for me.

CYNTHIA takes a beat.

CYNTHIA

So we have 'til tomorrow to keep you safe and make sure this thing doesn't get you.

NOAH

How do you protect against something like that? That thing's gonna slaughter me tomorrow. I'm gonna bleed to death just like Dustin.

CYNTHIA

Noah, I need you to not freak out right now... There's somethin' my granddad showed me that I may try.

NOAH

why do I get the feeling that it's gonna be super creepy?

CYNTHIA

One time, I was stayin' the night at his house, and the bedroom doors started openin' 'n closin' by themselves. I called 'im in 'cause I was eight and terrified. He went to the kitchen 'n got some stuff together, recited some bible verse, I'd have to sit down and think to remember the whole thing, but it was to bind a spirit and destroy it.

NOAH

That sounds like witchcraft.

CYNTHIA

It's biblical! If it's a spirit, it might work!

NOAH

This is unbelievable.

CYNTHIA

Do you have a better idea? If this is an evil spirit, and granddaddy has a can of "spirit-be-gone" that we can use, we're gonna fuckin' use it! Okay?

(NOAH doesn't respond. CYNTHIA continues.)

So for the... thing, we'll need sage, rosemary, a buncha salt, a KJV Bible--

NOAH

That's not even a good translation.

CYNTHIA

Yeah, but it's the translation that the old folks used for this stuff, so shut up. We'll also need three white candles, an ounce of Holy water, and a cross made of sticks. Got some candles around here in case of blackouts. I can make a cross like granddaddy did, but I ain't got no idea where to get Holy water.

NOAH

There's a catholic church like five miles from here.

CYNTHIA

You want me to steal it? From a church?

NOAH

They won't notice that an ounce is gone.

CYNTHIA

Ugh, fine. I will steal the Holy water. I'm gonna keep the other two here tomorrow night as well, just in case. They're comin' by later, right?

NOAH

Uh... They told me that they wouldn't make it tonight.

CYNTHIA

what the hell are they doin' that's so damn important?

NOAH

They're going to church tonight.

CYNTHIA

Excuse me?

NOAH

We gotta get them out of there, Cynthia. This place will swallow us whole. If this... *thing* doesn't get to us, then the church will.

CYNTHIA

Fine. We'll make that plan after we follow through with this one.

NOAH

...so you think this will kill it?

CYNTHIA

I mean, I think so? The house settled after granddaddy finished it. Maybe he really did get rid of a spirit.

NOAH

Good. Let's do it.

CYNTHIA

I mean, it sounds wild comin' out of my mouth--

NOAH

No, if it can die, then I want it dead. Fight fire with fire.

CYNTHIA

Fight the devil with the Holy Ghost. I'll go ahead and get that stuff together.

NOAH

You're not gonna open?

CYNTHIA

What's the point? It's all just too much.

CYNTHIA exits. NOAH lingers, looks around. Then, he begins.

SCENE THREE

NOAH is once again by himself in the bar. The lights are dim. No one enters this time. The televisions pop on in the bar, but this time, they don't scare NOAH. Instead of the CHORUS blaring through, a sweet, quiet rendition of "Just As I Am" plays.

Outside, a windchime rings in the warm June breeze. Birds sing outside. The smell of honeysuckle wafts through as the lights shift to a beautiful Alabama sunset, all red and orange and purple. It's peaceful. It's actually kind of nice. NOAH revels in it for a bit before moving to the bar to grab a canister of salt. As he speaks, he does so with quiet, mournful reverence.

NOAH

This is place wasn't so scary before I grew up.

He begins to find the ingredients needed for the banishment rite. He pulls out some sage and rosemary.

NOAH (CONT'D)

My best friends live close by. We used to run through the cotton fields and ride our bikes to the beat-up ice cream shack that sold cones for a dollar. You can see the stars so clearly at night because nothing's around for miles. I sometimes see this place how I used to, but only for brief moments.

He pulls out three white candles, a KJV Bible, and a cross made out of sticks. He looks at the cross.

NOAH (CONT'D)

This place can swallow you up, but I can understand why people can call it home.

He pulls out a canister of salt. He goes to the middle of the bar proper and begins to pour a wide circle of salt onto the floor.

NOAH (CONT'D)

No matter how I fight it, this place is in my bones and blood. And that means something.

He finishes the circle. He admires his work, then goes back behind the bar again. He pours an amaretto and Coke. He then takes it and places it gently on the shelf where the altar was.

NOAH (CONT'D)

I read somewhere that spirits get thirsty. It's here just in case.

The lights shift. It's nighttime.

NOAH (CONT'D)

This is where I grew up. Blood cries out from its soil, but every now and then, I see God there.

NOAH sits at one of the tables. The televisions cut out. After a few seconds, we transition into...

SCENE FOUR

The same bar. The next evening. The sun is setting. MICAH opens the bar door. He looks at NOAH who is still looking at the salt circle in the floor.

MICAH

So this is what you wanted me to come over for?

NOAH

Technically Cynthia invited you.

MICAH

I'm outta here.

NOAH

Come on, I was kidding.

MICAH

What is in the floor?

NOAH

A salt circle.

MICAH

Why is there a salt circle on the floor?

NOAH

Because Cynthia thinks it can stop the monster.

MICAH

Couple things. Number one: I am not staying around while y'all fuck around with witchcraft--

NOAH

It uses a Bible!

MICAH

Okay, I'll rephrase; whatever THIS is, I'm not doing it. Number two: we have discussed that there is no monster--

NOAH

Correction. We have discussed it, and literally everyone agrees that there's a monster except for you because you're afraid to admit it.

MICAH

Goddammit, fine! There's a monster! And for some unknown batshit reason, it's after you. What is a circle of salt going to actually do besides make a mess?

NOAH

It's something Cynthia's granddad taught her. It's supposed to kill evil spirits.

MICAH
Oh, that makes perfect sense. Fuckin' granddad.

NOAH
Hey, you loved him, and he loved you.

MICAH
Yeah, and then he tried to cure my fever with an egg.

JIMMY enters. He also sees the salt circle in the floor.

JIMMY
Uh. Okay.

MICAH
Noah, you're being paranoid.

NOAH
That's what you said when we were thirteen--

JIMMY
Can I just get a sec to catch up here? I'd love to know why there's salt in the floor.

NOAH
Monster. Bible. Granddad. I explained ALL of this in our groupchat.

JIMMY
I thought we weren't gonna talk about it anymore.

NOAH
Oh my God, let's never talk about anything. Let's just bury our heads in the sand and wait for death to claim us.

At that instant, CYNTHIA enters. She is holding a soda bottle that's almost full of holy water. Bonus points if it's a Faygo bottle.

CYNTHIA
I got the Holy water!

NOAH
Cynthia, we needed an ounce, not a liter.

CYNTHIA
Well, I figured more would be better. Like, what spirit could fuck with twenty ounces of Holy water?

NOAH
I don't know if this shit is like cooking or baking yet! What if it's too much?

JIMMY

Oh, there's Holy water now.

MICAH

Yeah, so I'm leaving. I'm not okay with this.

NOAH

Alright, you know what I'm not okay with? You guys going back to the church.

MICAH

It's not the same.

NOAH

It is exactly the same. You're both looking to shit you don't really believe in for answers. We're doing the same thing.

CYNTHIA

Hey, I actually DO believe this stuff!

JIMMY

Look, we went back once.

NOAH

And one time turns into two turns into five turns into Dustin. Come on! We all know better.

JIMMY

It's hard to get rid of that stuff, man. It's always in the back of my head, no matter what I do. Maybe there's good stuff in it.

NOAH

Yeah, but not THIS church! We know about this church! We've felt this church, and it does nothing but cause us pain. You can't go back. You can't leave me and Cynthia by ourselves.

MICAH

That's real fuckin' rich, coming from you.

NOAH

Meaning what?

MICAH

Meaning that you didn't just leave us; you disappeared. You left and then didn't contact ANYONE. EIGHT YEARS. No phone calls, barely any texts, and you have the audacity to bitch about us leaving *you* alone?

NOAH

I didn't--

MICAHA

After we all stood up for you! After you came out, and we all fought for you! And you fucked off to college, and you stayed there. You left us behind.

NOAH

I'm sorry.

MICAHA

You can be sorry all you want. It doesn't make up for almost six years of radio silence.

NOAH

What else do you want me to say?

MICAHA

I don't know.

Pause.

NOAH

So they didn't kick you out?

MICAHA

No. They didn't even mention anything about it. It was just like--

JIMMY

Just like going back in the day.

NOAH

Wow.

MICAHA

So... maybe they weren't as bad as we thought.

JIMMY

It's just... it felt safe there. Like coming home.

MICAHA

It's familiar. This is not the same thing. This thing you're doing here is creepy. And why are you going along with it, Cynthia?

CYNTHIA

'Going along with it?' It was my idea! I ain't lettin' that thing take more of my babies.

MICAHA

I'm not helping you two with this. It's weird.

NOAH

I have a compromise, if anyone is willing to listen.

JIMMY

Let's hear it.

NOAH

You three just hold the lit candles. We'll stay here for a while, and if I'm really crazy, the spirit won't come after me, so we won't have to do anything.

JIMMY

...fine.

MICAHA

You're serious?

JIMMY

Why not? What have we got to lose?

MICAHA

We've been warned about stuff like this all our lives.

JIMMY

If God wants to send me to Hell for holding a candle because I thought it would help my friend, then he can go fuck himself.

MICAHA

You're gonna entertain this?

JIMMY

Look, maybe this is all bullshit, but on the off chance that it isn't, I'm gonna do whatever helps.

MICAHA

...goddammit. Fine. I'll hold it.

NOAH

Thanks.

CYNTHIA gives the bottle of Holy Water to NOAH.

CYNTHIA

Now that we're really doin' this, it sorta gives me the creeps.

NOAH

Honestly? Me too.

CYNTHIA

I need a drink. Anyone else need a drink?

The other three murmur in agreement. She begins to make four bourbons. NOAH sets the Holy Water down, then reaches for the candles.

NOAH

So after I light these, you three will sit in a triangle formation, and I'll sit in the middle.

Nobody liked that. NOAH gathers the ingredients for the rite and enters the salt circle.

NOAH (CONT'D)

So for the prep-work.

(He sits down with the pot in front of him and spreads out the ingredients.)

I just add the... ounce... of Holy water.

(He pours a little bit of the water into the pot. He hesitates, then pours the whole bottle in.)

Fuck it.

CYNTHIA

I don't think you should swear when you're messin' with Holy water.

NOAH

I mean, sure. Next is more salt.

(He pours in some salt.)

A little rosemary.

(He puts in the sprigs of rosemary.)

And the sage.

(He crumbles some sage in his hands and puts it in the pot as well.)

And now...

CYNTHIA comes to NOAH. They both reach their hands into the pot to wet them, then they run the water in their hands over their arms, their necks, their face. They wash. They cleanse themselves.

MICAH

Fuck, really dude?

NOAH

Shush.

They finish up. NOAH hands CYNTHIA the candles. CYNTHIA gets a lighter from her pocket and lights her candle. She hands the other two candles to MICAH and JIMMY, who light their candles off of hers. They then all move in separate directions in order to form a triangle around NOAH. NOAH holds the wooden cross and the Bible.

JIMMY

That's it?

NOAH

Hopefully.

MICAH

Good.

NOAH

Look, I'm sorry that I've gotten you guys involved in this. I just really don't know what to do.

JIMMY

I mean... We're also involved with this. We all saw it.

NOAH

Everyone except Micah anyway.

MICAHA

I saw something. Don't know if it was a monster or spirit, but it was something.

JIMMY

I haven't really been sleeping since that day. I just can't stop thinking about... Maybe if I had dialed faster or something--

MICAHA

Jimmy, don't do that.

NOAH

He was dead on scene. There was nothing you could have done.

JIMMY

And like, maybe that's true, but I can't make myself believe it.

CYNTHIA

It was methodical. Whoever or whatever did it had a plan. They cut the landline. There really was no other outcome.

NOAH

I've been meaning to talk to you guys the past couple of days actually. Like, in regards to all the things happening.

MICAHA

What about it?

NOAH

I really think we need to leave town. Whether this ghost thing comes or not, I think we have to get out of here.

JIMMY

You're kidding.

NOAH

I'm absolutely not.

MICAHA

Dude, we can't do that. We have jobs.

NOAH

I know that. And I know I'm talking a big game because I don't have a job or anything, but I think this place is seriously not good for us anymore.

JIMMY

It's not like we haven't noticed. We've been here just as long as you.

MICAHA

Longer even.

JIMMY

I mean, I'm already leaving. When are you trying to get out?

NOAH

Honestly? By the end of next week.

MICAHA

You're out of your mind. You have no money.

NOAH

I don't know how, but I'm getting out. I want you guys to get out of here too. I'll live in my car if I have to, but I'm leaving this place.

JIMMY

Noah...

NOAH

I'm serious. None of you can talk me out of it.

CYNTHIA

I mean... I got nothin' holdin' me here now that the bar is gone. And I've always wanted to get out of here.

JIMMY

Really? You two are just gonna up and leave?

NOAH

I want you to come with us.

JIMMY

Rosa and I have a plan already! Colorado!

NOAH

Then we'll go to Colorado, and you can bring her with you, and you guys can have a cute Colorado wedding that we can all be at.

MICAHA

I'm not going anywhere.

NOAH

why not?

MICAHA

I have a business. I have people that count on me. I'm not leaving this place.

JIMMY

And I'm not messing up my plans with Rosa.

NOAH

I just don't want anything bad to happen to us.

JIMMY

I get it, but uprooting everything is harder than just talking it through.

MICAHA

If you leave again--

NOAH

If you guys don't come, I'll keep in contact this time.

MICAHA

whatever you say.

NOAH

I promise. I really do love you guys. Things just got hard.

JIMMY

You could have talked to us about it.

NOAH

One day, I will. I just have things to deal with before then. I thought about you guys all the time though. I never forgot about you.

MICAHA

If you pull that shit again, I won't forgive you. Got it?

NOAH

If you guys stay, you can't get sucked back into the church.

MICAHA

Really?

CYNTHIA

Yeah, I wanna back him up on that. We went through too much to let them take us over again.

NOAH

why did you guys end up there yesterday?

MICAHA

Uh... Pastor Gabe came up to us after the funeral. Said something about how it was too late for Dustin, but not for us.

NOAH
what a bastard.

JIMMY
But when he said it, it's like something inside me activated, and I was scared all over again. I hadn't talked to that man in four years, and he still had this... hold on me. On both of us.

MICAH
Just like the old days.

CYNTHIA
I hate that.

JIMMY
Maybe we *should* leave.

MICAH
Are you kidding?

JIMMY
My parents will be pissed, but I think Rosa and I have enough money to scrape by for a couple of months. She's really aching to get out, and I'm always afraid around here now, and I really... REALLY hate getting brought back to that place. They acted as if nothing had happened at all, like I was just gone on vacation. I don't even want to give warning.

NOAH
without a trace?

JIMMY
without a trace.

NOAH
How punk.

JIMMY
Shut up.

MICAH
Fine. Fine. Just fucking leave me here all over again. With fucking nobody.

NOAH
You can't stay here. This place will eat you.

MICAH
I am happy with my life here! Like I get that we all hate this place, but it's where I'm at, so I'm making the best of it! Not running away.

NOAH
what is keeping you here so badly? Your coffee shop?

MICAH

See, you say it so flippantly as if I didn't work my goddamn ass off to get to where I'm at. I'm so fuckin' proud of that place because I finally found out what I was good at, and I made something out of it. I'm allowed to stay for that. I'm allowed to stay for any goddamn reason I want.

NOAH

...I'm sorry.

MICAH

I get that you're so super above this town, but not all of us are.

NOAH

I keep saying the wrong things. What am I supposed to say?

At that moment, a bell tolls. NOAH is alert.

NOAH (CONT'D)

wait, listen.

Another bell.

CYNTHIA

what is that?

A loud bang is heard on the outside wall.

JIMMY

what the fuck.

CYNTHIA

No. No no no no no no no no.

Another loud bang is heard.

MICAH

There's no way in goddamn hell.

Another bang.

NOAH

Oh shit. It's here. It's here. It's here.

The ELDER rushes past the window outside.

NOAH (CONT'D)

THERE!

CYNTHIA

outside!

MICAH drops his candle in fear.

MICAH, THE CANDLE!
NOAH

Noah, I--
MICAH

The ELDER lets loose a synthetic sounding growl. Not animalistic, but not wholly human. The rest of the scene should be chaotic, lines overlapping, characters screaming. Maybe the televisions can come on and blast some loud static or voice clips.

MICAH PICK UP YOUR CANDLE.
JIMMY

MICAH picks up his candle.

Okay. Okay okay okay okay okay okay I can do this. I just have to find the verse.
NOAH

Another bang, this time from the wall outside. The ELDER is heightening itself. NOAH flips through the Bible to find a marked verse.

It has to be in the salt circle. It has to come INSIDE.
JIMMY

A bang at the door.

We're gonna die. We're gonna fucking die.
MICAH

NOAH YOU CAN START READING NOW.
CYNTHIA

I THOUGHT IT HAD TO BE IN THE CIRCLE.
NOAH

Another bang at the door. NOAH jumps. He begins to read.

NOAH (CONT'D)
"And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils a long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs."

The healing of the demon possessed man.
MICAH

In Luke.
JIMMY

NOAH

"When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, 'What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not.' For Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes--

Another bang, at the door once more. This bang is much louder, more destructive than all the others.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Shit. "For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness. And Jesus asked him, saying... What is thy name?"

The banging stops. A beat, then the doorknob slowly turns, and the door opens to reveal THE ELDER.

MICAH

FUCK.

The ELDER opens itself, and a chaotic screech fills the room. NOAH tries to continue to read.

CYNTHIA

NOAH!

NOAH

"And-and-and there was a herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them."

The ELDER walks towards NOAH. It makes no rush of it.

NOAH (CONT'D)

"Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were CHOKED."

NOAH stops reading. The ELDER continues to walk towards NOAH until it's in the salt circle. NOAH immediately jumps backwards towards CYNTHIA. He raises up the cross.

NOAH (CONT'D)

NOW!

CYNTHIA raises her candle high.

CYNTHIA

In the name of the God that rules these mountains, I bind you, spirit!

THE ELDER stops moving. It cocks its head, almost curious about the ritual.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

It's working!

NOAH

Keep going!

CYNTHIA

In the name of the God that cleanses through the river Jordan, we choke you out! As the sows that held demons cast themselves into the sea, so too shall you drown. We banish you!

CYNTHIA spits on THE ELDER, finishing the rite. THE ELDER sees that the show is over and begins to move closer towards NOAH and CYNTHIA.

JIMMY

Nothing's happening!

NOAH

We did it almost exactly right! It's supposed to banish spirits!

MICAH

IT'S FUCKING SOLID. HOW IS IT A SPIRIT?

NOAH begins to back away from the ELDER. He clutches the Bible tight with his finger in the page of the passage he read. The ELDER steps past the boundary of the circle of salt.

NOAH

What do you want from me?! What did I do?!

The ELDER stops moving. Then, it moves erratically and strikes quickly at NOAH in the arm with its claw. He begins to bleed.

JIMMY

Noah!

JIMMY drops his candle and runs to NOAH. The ELDER flings JIMMY away. It looks back to NOAH, then strikes him again in the collarbone. NOAH begins to bleed more. He falls.

CYNTHIA

Noah, no!

MICAH drops his candle and sneaks behind the bar. CYNTHIA runs to NOAH and holds him in her arms. The ELDER reaches through her and strikes NOAH again. He is bleeding profusely. NOAH stops reacting.

He faints and drops the Bible. JIMMY runs back to NOAH and covers him with his own body. The ELDER looks at JIMMY and CYNTHIA.

Suddenly, MICAH appears from behind the bar, shotgun in hand. He screams as he fires a shot. The shot connects. THE ELDER recoils. MICAH fires again. Another shot connects. THE ELDER stumbles backwards away from NOAH. It lets loose with another screech, flung far into the sky.

And then, it leaves out the door it came.

MICAH

Holy shit.

JIMMY

We need an ambulance. He's bleeding. He's fucking bleeding.

MICAH puts the shotgun on the bar and checks his phone.

MICAH

I-I have signal. I have signal!

MICAH dials 911.

CYNTHIA

It's too much blood! He won't make it!

JIMMY

Don't say that!

MICAH

Yes, I need an ambulance to the bar on Durham and Lowell.

JIMMY

What do we do? What do we do?

CYNTHIA notices the Bible. It's open to the page that NOAH read from.

CYNTHIA

Jimmy, hand me that pot of shit Noah had.

JIMMY

Why do you need--

CYNTHIA

JUST DO IT!

JIMMY grabs the pot and hands it to her. She puts one of her hands in the pot, then pulls it out and presses it on one of NOAH's wounds. With her other hand, she holds the Bible. She reads.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

"And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanchèd."

DUSTIN appears in the bar. Nobody notices him.

MICAH

what the FUCK DO YOU MEAN you can't get anyone out here?!

JIMMY

Micah, what is it?

CYNTHIA

Oh, please work. "A-and a woman having an issue of blood twelve years... twelve years..."

DUSTIN moves to CYNTHIA and NOAH. They can both see DUSTIN. MICAH and JIMMY cannot.

DUSTIN

Keep goin'.

CYNTHIA

Dus--

NOAH gasps. He reaches out and touches DUSTIN's face.

DUSTIN

Keep goin'.

CYNTHIA nods.

CYNTHIA

"A woman having an issue of blood twelve years..."

MICAH

I don't give a shit if my language offends you! A man is bleeding to death! We need something! An ambulance or-- YES THIS IS A GODDAMN EMERGENCY.

JIMMY

Oh no. Oh no oh no oh no.

CYNTHIA

Please God work. "Touched the border of his garment."

DUSTIN leans down and kisses one of NOAH's stab wounds. It stops bleeding. MICAH yells in anger and hangs up his phone.

MICAH
They're not coming. No cops, no ambulance.

JIMMY
what do you mean 'not coming'?!?

CYNTHIA
"And her issue was staunched..."

DUSTIN kisses a second stab wound. It stops bleeding.

MICAH
IT MEANS EXACTLY WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE. We have to get Noah to the hospital ourselves.

DUSTIN kisses the final stab wound. It stops bleeding. NOAH gasps a bit.

JIMMY
we'll load him into Cynthia's truck.

CYNTHIA is shell-shocked. Her gaze cannot escape DUSTIN's. MICAH grabs NOAH and looks at her.

MICAH
Cynthia, we have to go, okay?
(*She doesn't respond.*)
Cynthia, we have to GO.

She still doesn't respond, but she lets go of NOAH. MICAH and JIMMY pick NOAH up together.

JIMMY
The monster is still out there.

MICAH
I know. But I don't know what else to do.

JIMMY and MICAH exit with NOAH. CYNTHIA stays still, almost paralyzed by shock.

DUSTIN
Cynthia, look at me. I'm gonna help you up, okay?

CYNTHIA doesn't respond. DUSTIN pulls her off the ground. He begins to lead her to the door.

CYNTHIA
wait.

CYNTHIA grabs her shotgun from the bar. She hesitates, then charges outside into the night. DUSTIN watches her go. He then stands and heads to the shelf where the altar used to be. He takes the amaretto and Coke, sips it. He starts to take a seat, but then he sees the audience. He is aware of them now. He smiles at them, then he takes a seat at a table. Lights shift, bathing DUSTIN in nothing but darkness and blue light, and we wait. We wait in this moment with DUSTIN until it feels right to move on. When it's right, we transition into...

SCENE FIVE

Morning. A week later. The same bar. Nothing has changed. No mess has been cleaned up. CYNTHIA enters. She is visibly shaken. She looks to the corner where DUSTIN is. She does not see him anymore. She walks to the bar top and looks around the bar. After a few seconds, the door opens, and she jumps. JIMMY walks in.

CYNTHIA

well, ain't you a sight for sore eyes. what took ya?

JIMMY

Sorry, the guys at work made me stay and eat a farewell cake with them. They got it pretty fast considering I told them that I was leaving today. How's packing?

CYNTHIA

Oh, I didn't come here to pack this stuff. They can have all of it.
(She hesitates, then grabs a full bottle of liquor from the bar.)

Besides this. I just came to see this place one more time before we ship off for good. How are you holdin' up, hon?

JIMMY

I mean, I'm better? Maybe? How about you?

CYNTHIA

I'm... fine. Real good now that I'm finally gettin' out of here.

JIMMY

It's gonna be good. Wish Micah was coming with us.

CYNTHIA

You know that boy. He's hard headed as a bull.

MICAH enters.

JIMMY

Speak of the devil.

MICAH

I hope I'm not too late for the teary goodbyes.

CYNTHIA

Never.

MICAH

Can't believe you guys are actually leaving.

JIMMY

I mean, can you blame us though?

MICAH
 No. No, I really can't.
(Pause.)
 we didn't get rid of it.

JIMMY
 I know.

MICAH
 will it get someone again?

CYNTHIA
 Micah--

MICAH
 Can we tell someone about it? what's gonna happen next?

JIMMY
 I don't know. This is why we want to take you with us.

MICAH
 No. No, I'm good. I've got some money saved. Looking at some places
 in the city tomorrow. I'll be closer to the shop there anyway.

CYNTHIA
 ...okay.

MICAH
 But I am glad for y'all. You're all finally getting out.

CYNTHIA
 well, not all of us.

JIMMY
 He'll make a good ghost.

MICAH
 He's gonna be the kind of ghost that hides people's keys and shit.
 He'll be a riot.

*Pause for a second. No one knows what else to say
 until NOAH comes in. He is in a sling, but he gets
 around fine.*

NOAH
 Shit, I must be late if Micah got here before I did.

JIMMY
 Just a little.

NOAH
 Sorry. The guy really wanted to be thorough when he checked out my
 car before he would buy it, but...
(He pulls out a wad of cash.)
 (MORE)

NOAH (CONT'D)

Fifteen hundred in cash. It's not much, but it's a start. So is this the goodbye part?

MICAHA

It is. I gotta go to work after this.

CYNTHIA

You're already back to work?

MICAHA

I mean, I'm fine. It's been a week. Besides, America needs their coffee.

NOAH

Well, goodbye Micah. Come see us soon.

MICAHA

I'm gonna have to. There's a wedding coming up that I gotta be in.

JIMMY

For sure.

NOAH

I love you with all of my heart, dude.

MICAHA

I love you too, Noah.

The two embrace the best they can with NOAH in his sling. MICAHA then hugs JIMMY.

JIMMY

Take good care of yourself.

MICAHA

I will. I will.

MICAHA then hugs CYNTHIA.

CYNTHIA

I love you, sweetheart. Stay safe.

MICAHA

Love you too.

He breaks from CYNTHIA.

MICAHA (CONT'D)

Well, you guys have a safe trip.

NOAH

We'll keep in touch.

MICAH

You fuckin' better.

And with that, MICAH exits.

CYNTHIA

Well, that was short and sweet.

JIMMY

He deserves that coffee shop.

NOAH

If anyone does.

JIMMY checks his phone.

JIMMY

Well, I'm gonna go pick up Rosa from her last shift. We'll meet at the Shell station at the county border and caravan up there. Sound good?

NOAH

Yeah. Drive safe, bud.

JIMMY

I'll see you guys in a little while.

JIMMY exits. CYNTHIA and NOAH are alone in the bar with DUSTIN.

NOAH

I guess this is it.

(Pause.)

Hey, I've been wanting to ask you. The guys said that when I passed out--

CYNTHIA

Oh, did they tell you about that?

NOAH

What bible verse was it?

CYNTHIA

It was the healing of the woman with the issue of blood. Same verse granddaddy prayed over you when you got that cut on your foot. Funny, it's in the same section of Luke that granddad's "spirit-be-gone" was in.

NOAH

The doctors couldn't explain how I'd stopped bleeding.

CYNTHIA
They never can... I keep thinkin' maybe if I had remembered it when
Dustin got stabbed--

NOAH
Don't do that to yourself.

CYNTHIA
I know. It's just hard.
(She grabs the liquor bottle that she's claimed.)
I'm gonna head to the car.

NOAH
Go ahead. I'm gonna say goodbye to this place.

CYNTHIA exits.

NOAH (CONT'D)
I can see you still.

DUSTIN
I know.

*NOAH walks to DUSTIN. DUSTIN stands. NOAH embraces
him tightly. DUSTIN hugs him back.*

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

DUSTIN
Don't apologize.

NOAH
I love you.

DUSTIN
I love you too.

*NOAH kisses DUSTIN's forehead and breaks away from
him.*

DUSTIN (CONT'D)
Y'all are finally gettin' out.

NOAH
Most of us.

DUSTIN
Micah will leave soon.

NOAH.
still not everyone.

DUSTIN

Yeah. Bit of bad luck there. But y'all are followin' the plan. See it through. You can make it, Noah. Be sure to take care of yourself.

NOAH

I will.

A car horn honks. CYNTHIA is getting impatient.

NOAH (CONT'D)

I better go. Goodbye, Dustin.

NOAH lingers for a moment, looking at DUSTIN, then he exits the bar. DUSTIN stays. Lights down.

SCENE SIX

The faintest amount of red light in the bar. The televisions kick on, but the only produce static over a black screen for a bit. THE ELDER appears, not in the bar, but in the midst of us, the audience. It seems to walk with a limp. The CHORUS breaks through.

CHORUS

Immaculate.

THE ELDER looks amongst the audience. It is aware of them. It is aware of you. It stares at you.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

Perfect.

THE ELDER points at you.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

Holy.

The static and noises get louder. THE ELDER edges closer towards you until, all simultaneously, the lights and televisions snap off, and THE ELDER screams to the heavens.

END OF PLAY