Telling of the Bees

By Chandler Hubbard

Cast of Characters (*in order of appearance)*

ERIC, late teens to early twenties
EMILY, late teens to thirties
DOMINO, mid twenties to late thirties
GRACIE, early twenties to mid-thirties
EGG, fifties to sixties
BEATRICE, fifties - sixties
PARKER, thirties
NICK, thirties

Then, *Here,*
Now *There*

If there's any realism to be had, it's in act one. After that, let it flow in and out of time and space. It's always summer here.

A / represents dialogue being overlapped or cut off by another speaker or an action
Dialogue with ⁅…⁆ at the end should be left unfinished, wanting

ACT I: The River is Rising

SCENE I

A faraway droning. Low, but growing - growing closer, growing bigger.
A bridge over a roaring river. Night. Streetlights and a half moon our only illumination, save for the occasional headlights. With each passing taillight comes a small gust of air.
ERIC stands on the precipice, on our side of the guardrail. Ready to jump, just fucking jump. There's nothing but darkness below him. Somehow, that is a small comfort - a serenity that is almost joy.
Just as his foot is about to leave solid ground, EMILY emerges from the highway behind him. She approaches steadily but cautiously, never crossing over the rail. He doesn't look back at her, but he knows.

ERIC I wanna fly.
EMILY You don't got wings.
ERIC Maybe I'll grow some on the way down.
EMILY Sounds like a big leap in human evolution.
ERIC How'd you know I'd be here?
EMILY You're predictable.
ERIC You're not doing a very good job a convincing me not to jump.
EMILY I'm tryna convince you to convince yourself not to jump.
ERIC There's no coming back. Everybody'll know. If I don't jump, my mom'll be, like, "My baby boy couldn't even kill himself properly!" "If you can't take a little grief to the gut / then"
EMILY She'd say, "Thank God my baby boy didn't jump, my little prince."
ERIC She won't even call. She'll drive straight up here. She never even left the state, but this'll be the thing that'll make her up and do it, and all the way up I-95, she'll be coming up with the perfect thing to say to gut me in just one sentence. She'll have it all practiced and everything.
EMILY So, what, you tryna prove something to your mom?
ERIC Nah, this ain't about her.
EMILY Killing yourself outta spite /seems like
ERIC It's in my head, on the edges of - Some kinda droning noise tapping against my skull, far away, but getting closer. It's too much this time, Emily.
EMILY You say that every time.
ERIC I'm not predictable!
EMILY What'd your mom say, Eric?

ERIC I wanna be new. I'll be a cat. Nine lives.
EMILY You only get the one. And cats don't got wings.
ERIC Is this really the time to be correcting my metaphors?
EMILY If you jump right now, you might as well pull me down, too. I need you.
ERIC (*smiling a little)* You're being a bit melodramatic.
EMILY Says the guy on the wrong side of the guardrail. Is it working?
ERIC I do love a little drama.
EMILY Take my hand?

Eric shakes his head. He has to do this.

EMILY Nobody has to know, Eric. Especially not your mom. You're out a sight a the cars on the highway. If somebody walks by, I'll push 'em in the water so they can't tell. I haven't even called the police. I'm gonna save you myself.
ERIC My hero.
EMILY Remember what you told me the first time I pulled you back? We find ways to live. It's what we owe each other.

For the first time, he looks back at her. She's got her hand out. Reaching. Blackout.

ACT I, SCENE II
Ten years later, but the audience shouldn't know that yet. The Camden family dining room, simply adorned, without flair or fanfare. Someone clearly has cared for it, to an extent; there's only so much taste that can be accomplished without money. The room contains two anxious occupants, both of whom are employing very different tactics to suppress said anxiety: DOMINO, late thirties, the eldest Camden child, who paces; GRACIE, mid-thirties, the middle Camden child, wearing scrubs, who sits on the couch twisting several envelopes in her hand.

DOMINO It's obscene.
GRACIE You can stop sayin' that.
DOMINO There's no other word for it.
GRACIE I'm pretty sure thesauruses got options. "Inappropriate,"/ or, um
DOMINO How'm I supposed to show this to my kids?

GRACIE What about a good old-fashioned "gross"?
DOMINO Why're you makin' jokes?
GRACIE That's what I do. I'm the funny one.
DOMINO Jokin' about it's disrespectful / and, and
GRACIE That's also a good synonym.
DOMINO It's reopening an old wound.
GRACIE Shoulda expected something like this. I heard somebody say something on NPR.
DOMINO NPR, okay, fancy pants.
GRACIE I was tryna find Elvis Duran in the Morning. Oh! "Lewd". That's a good one.
DOMINO Jesus H., stop doin' the thesaurus thing!
GRACIE Just showin' I'm smarter than you.
DOMINO Shut it. Just cuz you're the "smart one" doesn't mean I can't also not be smart.
GRACIE There's two of us. If I'm the smart one, that means you're the dumb one. It's science. Or, math. (*She looks down at the envelopes in her hand.)* Mom's gonna flip when she reads this.
DOMINO Nah, she'll just internalize it every waking moment for years and years until one day she blacks out and burns the whole house down.
GRACIE Yeah, I'd call that "flipping". What'd Kelly say about it?
DOMINO I'm holdin' off on tellin' her til she brings the boys over.
EGG (*offstage)* Dammit!

They turn towards the kitchen, where a dog barks, then a loud clattering sound, followed by a screen door slamming shut. After a few moments, EGG opens the door, covered in dirt and sweat. He tracks in mud with his boots and holds a full water bottle. A Pigpen-level of dust billows behind him. He's gone.

GRACIE Mom's gonna kill you.
EGG Probably. What reason this time?
GRACIE Those boots.
EGG Aw, shit. I forgot to wipe 'em off. (*tugging at them)* Any a you seen my glasses?
GRACIE Normal or reading?
EGG Normal. Do I look like I'm readin' anything?
DOMINO (*picking up an envelope)* D'you read this?
GRACIE Find the reading glasses.

As Egg yanks at the boots, Domino and Gracie search the surrounding area. Passing by him, Gracie wrinkles her nose.

GRACIE Jesus, Dad, you reek.
EGG Can't an old man sweat a little?
DOMINO Trampin' around in the woods again?
EGG Denver needed a good run.
GRACIE Poor thing can hardly see, let alone run.
DOMINO Dad or the dog?
EGG Where's your mother? Pilates?
DOMINO That's on Tuesdays. It's Sunday, / Dad.
EGG Yeah, yeah, yeah, family / dinner, yeah

Gracie finds the reading glasses. She hands them to Egg. Domino hands him the letter. Egg has to readjust to holding the boots and the water bottle and the glasses and the letter.

EGG Oh, yeah, we got one a these, too. / Already read
DOMINO Why didn't you just say that?
EGG You bring this up with your mother?
GRACIE Nah. She's off on a rampage. Domino said the bathroom smelled like wet dog / so
DOMINO Well, it / did!
GRACIE So she's deep cleaning. Speaking a which, lemme get you a towel. And some Febreze.

She scoots down the hall and is gone.

EGG I threw our letter away.
DOMINO Shoulda burned it. Mom probably goes through the trash.
EGG I'm sure Harry and Jack are dyin' to go. They're little idiots, they'd love this sorta shit.
DOMINO Kelly'd kill me. And don't call em idiots.
EGG You call em idiots all the time.
DOMINO Yeah, cuz they're my idiots. Like how we're your idiots.
EGG Nah, all my kids are geniuses.

Gracie returns, holding a damp towel.

GRACIE You said you got a letter, too?

EGG I threw it away. I just told you.

GRACIE When?

EGG Thirty seconds ago.

GRACIE You must be confused.

EGG I just told Domino - Ah. (*pointing to his head)* The old ticker.

GRACIE You can't lose it yet. Mom needs somebody to boss around.

EGG I still got a good decade or two before the man upstairs retires.

GRACIE Homunculus.

EGG Gesundheit.

GRACIE Stick around, would you?

EGG For you, Gracie Girl? Anything.

GRACIE Anyway, I got a shift / soon.

EGG I thought you guys were stayin' for dinner.

GRACIE We did. Dinner was at seven o'clock on the dot. As usual.

EGG Well, I was down in the woods and lost track a the time.

GRACIE (*glancing at Domino)* You got lost again?

EGG Not Lost lost. Lost track a time. It got dark and I didn't have a flashlight or my glasses.

GRACIE Well. Just clean yourself up. I'll see you guys next week. (*sing-song)* Seven o'clock, on the dot, don't be late or you'll get shot. (*hurrying out)* Love you.

EGG Wanna watch something? I went out and got a DVR. It's this new device / that

DOMINO I know what a DVR is. I should probably get going, too.

EGG Come on.

DOMINO You dunno how to work the DVR anyway.

EGG I almost got it figured out. I think the remote's missing a button.

DOMINO I'm exhausted. (*He gestures vaguely towards the front door.)* I should - Maybe we can watch something next Sunday? It's my weekend with Jack and Harry.

EGG Yeah.

DOMINO See ya, Pops.

He exits. Egg is alone. He puts his reading glasses down, takes a swig of the water bottle, and begins searching. Eric enters, quiet for a moment, watching. For some reason he's wearing an ill-fitting suit.

EGG Ah. Prodigal son returns. You just missed Domino and Gracie.
ERIC We passed by. Ships in the night.
EGG Too busy for their old man.
ERIC Smells like gin in here. What's in the water bottle?
EGG Water. Hence "water bottle".
ERIC So you didn't get lost cuz you're drunk but cuz your mind's going?
EGG Old age's made you cruel.
ERIC Not as old as you. I'll never be as old as you.
EGG God Himself'll never be as old as me. Help me find my glasses?
ERIC The ones in your hand?
EGG These're readin' glasses. I look like I'm readin' something?
ERIC You got a letter in your hand so it does, actually, look like you're reading something
EGG This isn't anything. I'm lookin' for my normal glasses.
ERIC Try your back pocket?

Egg pulls out his glasses.

EGG Lucky guess.
ERIC You're predictable.
EGG I'm dependable.
ERIC Are you, though? Cuz it seems like you're losing it.
EGG (*pointing to his head)* He's still got a few years left.
ERIC Homunculus.
EGG That's what your sister says.
ERIC I know. You been down the creek? River's gonna up and rise soon.
BEATRICE (*offstage)* I swear to God - !
ERIC That's my cue.
EGG Don't go.
ERIC I'll see you around, Pops. Assuming you're still around.

Eric vanishes just as BEATRICE bursts through the kitchen door, a firestorm in human form. She holds several muddy dish towels.

BEATRICE Xavier Everett Camden, what in God's name're you thinkin'?
EGG I know, I know, it slipped my mind. I was tryna get Denver's paws / clean
BEATRICE And where'd he run off to?
EGG I think he went down the basement?
BEATRICE If I find one goddamn paw print / down there
EGG Hey. (*With that smile, the one that usually melts her anger. He approaches her.)* Hey [...]
BEATRICE Don't do it. I'm serious, Egg.
EGG Meet me halfway. I see you tryna not smile. C'mere. Oh, Beatrice [...]

He takes her in his arms and dances with her slowly. The storm looks like it might be dissipating.

BEATRICE I hate you, y'know?
EGG I know, my Sweet Honey Bee.
BEATRICE There isn't even any music.
EGG I'll hum a little. Shh. Isn't it nicer when there's no screaming? I'll mop the floor. Shh.
BEATRICE You just end up making a bigger mess. And then / I gotta
EGG I saw our son.
BEATRICE So did I. I'm told dinner was delicious, by the way. You better not be late again next week. He's bringin' the little idiots.
EGG That wasn't the son I saw [...]
BEATRICE What you going on about?
EGG Eric. He's alive.
BEATRICE (*pulling apart from him)* Not funny.
EGG Oh, Beatrice. I saw him. (*A dangerous gleam in his eyes)* Our grief brought him back.
BEATRICE You're losin' your goddamn mind. Look at me. Eric is dead. Understand? And we gotta live with that. Now clean yourself up. You look like shit.

She heads back towards the kitchen. Egg takes a sip from his water bottle.

ACT I, SCENE III

A bar, past last-call. PARKER nurses the dregs of a drink, glancing down at his phone periodically. NICK, the bartender, cleans up the counter; he looks remarkably like Eric but, somehow, just not quite him. If Eric was a scab, then Nick is a scar - literally, he's got one over his eye. Perhaps the only other difference is a less drawling accent. A beer bottle rests alone on the counter, waiting for its owner.

PARKER I don't understand.

NICK You think I do?

PARKER Plenty of guys stay here all night. Eye candy.

NICK This is different. Every Tuesday this month, this guy meanders in, chugs beer like it's water all night. Doesn't watch TV, doesn't talk to anyone. Anyone else here alone, especially an old guy, they just talk. You get to a certain age, nobody listens to you, so words just leak out, hoping someone will hear. But he's waiting for something. And he's always staring.

PARKER That's, um. I don't know what that is.

NICK But only on Tuesdays. Thirsty Tuesdays, / I guess.

PARKER Thirsty Thursdays.

NICK When you're thirsty enough, you can make anything work.

PARKER He's not hitting on you, right?

NICK One, everyone's always hitting on me. Two, if he's flirting, he's really bad at it.

PARKER One, calm down, trollop. Two, you know those old queens, they can't distinguish between flirting and creepiness.

NICK He's either crazy or sad. Or / both

PARKER Both, probably. Mom says hi, by the way.

NICK Hi, Sharon.

PARKER She says you should close the bar.

NICK Does that woman ever go to bed before midnight?

PARKER Rearranging furniture. She keeps reading this feng shui book before bed and then wakes up two hours later with ideas. Dangerous ideas. Like, couch-facing-the-sunrise ideas.

NICK Poor woman can't move that couch herself.

PARKER Poor woman is also convinced it's pronounced "fang shoe-y". Like, she corrected me.

NICK Tell her to go to bed.

PARKER I know, I'm doing damage control, as usual. Think grandpa passed out on the pot?

NICK If you're real quiet, you can hear him talking to himself.

PARKER Maybe he's homeless?

NICK We've had homeless guys in here before. This guy smells worse.

PARKER (*pushing his glass towards Nick)* You might as well indulge me.

NICK We're closed.

PARKER But I'm special.

NICK You're terrible, is what you are.

PARKER Oh, Linda called. She wants us to go look at a house tomorrow. Nine AM.

NICK Linda, come on!

PARKER She knows we work nights, she's / just

NICK She's a sociopath.

PARKER All realtors are, it's part of the entrance exam.

NICK Don't make excuses for her, Mr. Fix-it.

PARKER I'm not fixing things, I'm accommodating them. So the house is in, uh, Stonetree. One and a half baths, uh, one bedroom, thousand square / feet

NICK How many times have we told her / that we need

PARKER Two bedrooms, I / know, but we

NICK I don't want to waste money just to settle. Might as well just renew our lease.

PARKER We can always save up and buy a bigger one down the road. You don't get your dream house on the first try. It's cheaper this way. Less stress.

NICK We gonna put a crib in a half bath?

PARKER Maybe if it has a shed in the backyard we can shove it in there.

NICK Assuming it has a backyard. Last one was just some concrete slabs.

PARKER You're lucky we can even afford concrete.

NICK I'll ice my nips. Better tips.

PARKER Gonna take more than some frosty tits to afford the down payment.

NICK How dare you, these bad boys are top notch.

Egg stumbles in. There's a little dark wet spot on his pants. Nick takes Parker's drink.

PARKER Hello, handsome. Got a little (*motioning towards Egg's pants)* on your [...]

EGG Hm? Yeah. At my age, bound to happen.

PARKER I'm praying for a young, beautiful corpse.

EGG I don't recognize you. I thought we were alone.

PARKER I had a late shift so I swung by to see Nick after work.

NICK After work for you.

He hands Parker a half-filled drink. Egg throws back his beer, places the empty bottle on the counter.

EGG Can we talk?
PARKER I believe that's what we are doing at this very moment.
EGG In private.
NICK Well, Parker is driving me home, so he'll / be here.
EGG Who?
PARKER Me. Parker.
EGG That's a dog's name.
PARKER Woof. And you are?
EGG Egg.
PARKER Egg. Like what falls out of a chicken's ass.
EGG Precisely.
PARKER I see [...]
NICK Anyway, Parker is driving me back to our apartment /after this
EGG Oh, roommates?
PARKER Some kind of mates.
EGG Around here?
PARKER Yes, we live here. Do you not?
EGG I'm from Macon Crick.
PARKER What the hell is that?
EGG Fifty-two minutes south a here. I got this, uh, you plug into your car, GPS. It tells / you
PARKER We know what a GPS is. They don't have bars in Macon Crick?
EGG They do.
PARKER You being coy?
EGG Not particularly.
PARKER So you drive an hour away to this bar on Tuesday nights for what exactly?
EGG Tuesday nights my wife's at Pilates. The house's very quiet without her there.
PARKER I'm sorry to hear that. I had a beard once. Named Sarah.
EGG I also had a beard once. It grew outta my face. Anyways, um, Barker, d'you mind?
PARKER Uh [...]

NICK No big deal, right, Park?

PARKER Yeah, whatever. (*He and Nick exchanges glances.)* I'll be outside. Don't be too long. (*He pauses at the door before exiting.)* 9AM.

EGG I need you to come home with me.

NICK Oh, I'm, um, I'm flattered, but I'm seeing someone.

EGG What?

NICK What?

EGG Come home, Eric.

NICK Oh. Ha ha. Nick.

EGG What?

NICK My name is Nick. It's hard to hear when the music's on / sometimes

EGG It's time to come home.

NICK I think you must be confused.

EGG Why do people keep sayin' that to me?

NICK You seem a little drunk. I don't know that I can legally let you / drive away

EGG I'll walk it off. It's all back roads anyways. There's a rot in our home. It's fallin' apart. Mildewed wood, wet, green and mossy, floorboards bucklin' beneath us.

NICK Your house? I have a friend who's a contractor, if / that

EGG River's up and risin'. It'll all wash away. There's not much time left.

NICK This is some kind of practical joke? Did Lance put you up to this?

EGG Eric. You gotta / promise me

NICK My name isn't Eric. It's. Who do you think I am?

EGG You're my son!

NICK (*a sickening pause)* Don't yell at me, sir.

EGG (*grabbing Nick's wrist)* Listen to / me

NICK Okay, let go of me. / Parker!

EGG You musta been scared and you didn't know what to do. I know you wouldn't try to hurt us. But it's everyday. It creeps up in the most ordinary - Your mother, sometimes she'll wash a dish, place it on the counter clean and it'll hit her. She goes into another room so no one sees -

He breaks down into sobs just as Parker bursts in.

EGG Your poor mother. Why'd you do this to her?

NICK (*an agonizing beat)* I think you should go.

ACT I, SCENE IV

The Camden family dinner table. Beatrice at the top, Gracie and Domino on either side, all heads bowed, hands folded in front of them. There are two empty chairs.

DOMINO Father, we gather tonight to share a meal in your honor. Thank you for this family and that we may be together, even if the time's short. Forgive us taking for granted the simple joys we're afforded. Father, in your name we pray. / Amen.
GRACIE Amen.
BEATRICE Amen. Thank you, Dominic.

Vigorous chewing commences. A smile or two, a glance. No words for some time.

BEATRICE I think your father's going mad.
GRACIE Like, old-timey, prospector mad? Or just senile mad?
DOMINO Being pretty bold with the word 'mad.'
GRACIE Worse than 'obscene'?
DOMINO Shut it.
BEATRICE He's been this way for several weeks now. Maybe months. Going on long walks in the woods. Getting lost. And he's sweating more.
DOMINO It's summer [...]
BEATRICE I've lived with the man long enough to know him by smell. He's stumbling. I came home from Pilates the other night and there was a dent in the front of his car.
GRACIE Maybe he mixed up his reading glasses with his regular glasses. Again.
BEATRICE Sometimes I wake up in the night and he's locked himself in the bathroom with the light off. Muttering to himself. And what he says, these vague omens a planets tiltering, the river up and rising. Which's nonsense. Creek's almost bone dry in this heat.
DOMINO He always gets a little off when the anniversary comes around.
BEATRICE Not like this. This's all new.
GRACIE People do weird things when they get super old.
BEATRICE I'm ignoring that.
DOMINO Everybody goes a little crazy in the summertime. It's southern tradition.

BEATRICE I wish people'd stop dismissing / me all the

DOMINO Jesus H., Dad's probably just going through, like, manopause or something.

GRACIE D'you just say "manopause?"

DOMINO Yeah, I thoughta that myself. Who's the smart one now?

GRACIE Still me.

BEATRICE Stop making jokes. Something's wrong.

GRACIE Probably just the drinking.

BEATRICE What?

GRACIE He drinks. Sometimes.

BEATRICE Everybody drink sometimes.

GRACIE Yeah, but he drinks sometimes a lot. Whiskey, gin. Whatever he can get his hands on.

BEATRICE There's some beer in the fridge but that's it.

GRACIE You don't gotta refrigerate liquor. He probably hides it out in the woods. Would explain the dent in his car.

DOMINO Gracie, shut it.

GRACIE Well, if we're talking about locking Dad up in the looney bin, he needs an advocate.

BEATRICE I'm allowed to worry. (*A long, hard breath.)* Your father keeps sayin' he saw Eric.

DOMINO It's the anniversary. It's gonna be ten years / now

GRACIE I see patients who are actually losing it all the time. Dad just needs an intervention.

DOMINO Chicken's delicious, Mom.

Another lapse into silent chewing.

BEATRICE Is it so wrong to worry?

GRACIE Well, when you worry, it sounds like criticism, not like you actually care.

BEATRICE Save your backtalk for after I've left. It's what you usually do anyways.

A screen door slam and the sound of muffled footsteps stumbling. Egg bursts in, water bottle in one hand, yanking off his muddy boots with the other.

BEATRICE Thank you so much for joining us.

EGG Lost track a the time.

DOMINO Dad, would you sit down?

EGG I'm a little wired. Since we're all here, I've got some things / I'd like to

GRACIE You been drinking, Dad?

EGG I had a beer a few hours ago.

GRACIE A beer, singular?

EGG Single beer. Uno beer. What's that tone about?

GRACIE Okay, okay, um. Dad, can I see the water bottle?

Gracie takes it and gives it a good ole sniff.

EGG What? I was thirsty [...]

GRACIE Dad, this isn't water.

EGG What's wrong with you people? Eric's alive. He's in New Burnhouse, he works at this bar called Florence's, which I think is for homosexuals, but, okay, if that's / how he feels

DOMINO You're hanging out in gay bars now?

EGG I didn't know. I thought it looked homey and nice.

DOMINO Homo and nice.

GRACIE Shut it. (*to Egg)* New Burnhouse's like an hour away. How'd you even wind / up

EGG I was making a pit stop on the way back from Glendale.

GRACIE Glendale? You were there, like, two months - and New Burnhouse's nowhere near - You been using the GPS I got you?

EGG I got a little lost, so what? God led me to that bar.

DOMINO God and alcoholism, maybe.

EGG Eric was always, y'know. So he realized he's faggy and didn't know how to tell us, so he musta faked his / death or

BEATRICE That's enough.

GRACIE Dad, this isn't normal. If you're seeing things, / then

EGG It wasn't some hallucination! Other people were talkin' to him, too. He was real.

DOMINO Somebody's real. Somebody who looks like him, maybe.

EGG Why aren't you listening to reason? There weren't bodies recovered from the rubble / so

BEATRICE There's a reason for - ! Rubble doesn't leave behind bodies to - !

She stops, pats her chest, and resets. It's a ritual the family has become accustomed to. We will become accustomed to it, too.

BEATRICE I'm not entertainin' such foolishness in this house.
EGG Oh, Beatrice [...]

She stands. Egg reaches for her as she goes but she does not allow him to touch her.

EGG Guys. He's got a scar now, on his face. Maybe it's amnesia. I dunno. But he's happy.
DOMINO I think you're confused. Eric wasn't ever happy.

Egg follows her into the kitchen. Gracie and Domino sit back down but neither touches their plate.

DOMINO Jesus H.
GRACIE Dad might be goin' mad.

ACT I, SCENE V
Dr. Miller's office. Beatrice sits in a grotesquely generic chair. She is utterly uncomfortable with this but the cracks in the facade are beginning to show.

BEATRICE Sometimes you can love somebody with all you got and still - I hadn't spoken to him or his wife in, I don't know, weeks. Sometimes he wouldn't return my calls. So I didn't know he was in the towers. We all saw the news, but it was far away. And then, um, then Emily called. Eric hadn't come home. He'd put on his tie, lookin' so handsome, I imagine, and he'd left that morning for this brand new shiny job. Internship. Slavery. He worked so hard to get there. If anybody in our family was gonna up and climb out this swampy muck of a town and make something better for themselves, it was him. I love all my children, of course - of course! But my baby boy was - People say don't speak ill of the dead but Eric wouldn't want me to lie and say he wasn't a pain in the ass. Lord, he was a joy but he was a pain. I suppose that's children in a nutshell.

A pallor of something else comes over the room.

BEATRICE I, um. I have this dream sometimes. It's silly. Can't believe I'm even bringin' it up. (*She glances at Dr. Miller, looking for an out. None comes.)* I suppose it's less a dream, more a

nightmare, but. It's not a nightmare. It's what happened. The same thing every time. Like it's the world remembering and telling me about it. And he's there.

Eric, wearing a suit, covered in ash, in blood, emerges from blackness. A red light appears, slowly beginning to encapsulate him. Eric stares in horror.

BEATRICE Everything's red. Maybe he was knocked over, cuz he's confused. He doesn't know exactly where he is. And he's wonderin' - is this hell? I wanna tell him he's safe, he's just found himself in the glowing belly a the earth, the very kiln a creation, where the molten hands a God will reshape him into something new. He won't know suffering no more. But he can't hear me. He just stares around him at this, all of it, not understanding. And then he's gone.

Eric vanishes. From her purse, a phone rings.

BEATRICE Sorry, it's - he gets all, if I don't - (*She puts the flip phone to her ear. Her demeanor shifts.)* Yeah? What's it on about? I'm at the studio. Yeah. Okay. I will. I will. I'm hangin' up the phone. (*She closes it.)* Husband. Egg. Egghead. He sees something in me I know isn't there. Man's got a one-track mind. Everything else's horse blinders. I tell him this's a weekly Pilates class. He'd laugh if I told him I was in therapy. You haven't even said anything in ten minutes and even though I'm doin' all the work you're still takin' my money. Robbery. Anyway. He's told me we - I - needed it. There was this support group for the families of the, um, "attack". All four a us went once, two hour drive, some church. Sign out front and everything, like it was some Event. Everybody weeping at nothing. I couldn't do it. Macon Crick was no better. People who'd no interest in getting to know my boy when he was alive were popping out the woodwork to organize candlelight vigils. Couldn't go to the grocery store. So many people, tryna to catch me leak a tear, beat my breast the way they think I should. I'd reach for an apple and I could feel their vulture eyes. For a while we just ordered pizza every night. But then even the delivery boys'd say, "Camden? Like, from the newspaper?" (*She pulls out a letter.)* Probably why they tried to hide this from me. "Please join us for the opening of the National September Eleventh Memorial and Museum." So tacky. Look at this lettering. An "exclusive look", "VIP". I hear they even got one a the ambulances that was destroyed on display. What do I know about burnt up ambulances? What's that got to do with my boy? A national terror. It wasn't ours. I

was watching the news and there was this dead body they pulled out, fancy pantsuit, limbs all dangling. Ash covering her eyelids. You know when you wake up in the morning, there's a little sleep left in the corner of your eyes? All I could think was that somebody oughta wipe away the sleep so she could wake up.

For a moment, as the light fades on Beatrice, a red glimmer of flame.

ACT I, SCENE VI

The bathroom of Nick and Parker's apartment. Barely big enough for one but, like most couples occupying a shared space, they've choreographed a silent, natural dance. Nick washes his face, Parker brushes his teeth.

PARKER I've been thinking.
NICK Don't hurt yourself. What're you thinking?
PARKER I've never met your parents [...]
NICK Don't you start too.
PARKER I'm not saying you're lying.
NICK It sounds like you're saying I'm lying.
PARKER That old guy - Well. I think he was sad but not crazy.
NICK Uh, he's a little crazy.
PARKER Okay, rivers rising and the dam washing everyone away was some Biblical nonsense, but people get liquored up, they predict the end of the world, it happens.
NICK I look like his dead son. That's it.
PARKER And your parents [...]
NICK Last time I saw them, I was sixteen, I left the house in the middle of the night and that's where (*pointing to his eye)* this scar came from. Want to see my birth certificate?
PARKER I didn't say that, Obama. It's just a strange coincidence, I suppose.
NICK I can call them up and be, like, "Hey, long time no talk, I know you'd rather beat me than let me live under your roof but my partner doesn't / believe"
PARKER Okay. Okay [...]
NICK For real. Stop trying to fix things that aren't broken.
PARKER Can you just let me in? For once?
NICK Here we go [...]

PARKER You're hard to read, Nick.

NICK You'd think six years of experience would make you more literate in how to / read

PARKER Don't get cute.

NICK One, I'm always cute. Two, I'm telling you exactly how I feel.

PARKER One, don't get cocky, kid. Two, I just think [...]

NICK You think I should go visit them?

PARKER Is that so crazy?

NICK When did you suddenly join his side?

PARKER When I watched him sobbing inconsolably in the passenger seat of his own car while I drove him home so he wouldn't hurt himself. I could barely keep my eyes on the road. We were basically holding hands the last twenty minutes. He was shaking so hard.

NICK He's a sad, lonely person who can't talk to his wife or kids or hold his alcohol.

PARKER Yeah. That's sad. At least go see them and show them you aren't really his son. Give him some hair, or the cotton swab in the mouth, DNA thing.

NICK That's actually not a bad idea.

PARKER See? I'm smarter than I look.

NICK That way I can be done with them and not have to go through any more of that bullshit.

PARKER You can help a sad family, who just want to believe / in some sort

NICK Why do they deserve that?

PARKER What do you mean?

NICK Clearly, he thinks his son faked his death. Why would his son do it unless he had no other choice? You don't just change your identity willy-nilly. That takes effort.

PARKER Maybe he couldn't think of any other option? I don't know. I'm not his dead son.

NICK Neither am I.

PARKER He said his son was Lost even before he was lost.

NICK "Why would you do this to your poor mother?" That's what he said to me.

PARKER Clearly he assumes his son did it to spite him. Or her.

NICK So, wouldn't his kid do anything in his power not to return to that life?

PARKER I have his phone number. When we got to that house he ran inside and got a Sharpie and wrote it on my hand. I mean, it's not there now, / but I

NICK You're being ridiculous.

PARKER Nick. If I could see my dad again - Mom's calls me at all hours of the night, just to talk. Just to hear a voice. And she's just saying things to me because she can't say them to him.

NICK The whole you didn't get to say goodbye to your dad thing / that
PARKER I'm allowed to be sad about it.
NICK At least your parents didn't throw you out.
PARKER This isn't a game in the Trauma Olympics.
NICK For all I know, my parents are dead. They don't want me to know. So I don't care.
PARKER I didn't realize you were so callous about it all.
NICK What am I supposed to do? Constantly dredge up negative memories? How are we supposed to move beyond that?
PARKER It's not so bad to hold onto the past.
NICK Yes. It is.

ACT I, SCENE VII

The sickening, droning hum of grocery store overhead lighting. Emily, fairly pregnant, wears a flowing sundress and pushes a shopping cart down the aisle. Beatrice pushes a full cart, stops to check an item on the opposite side of the aisle. She turns to move the cart out of the way. Neither really notices the other.

EMILY Oh, excuse me. (*Pausing, then staring.)* Mrs. Camden?
BEATRICE (*a momentary confusion)* Oh. Oh my word. Emily.

Emily hugs her. Beatrice is shaken by it.

EMILY Hello! You're doing, you look well.
BEATRICE Thank you. As do you, uh [...]
EMILY Pregnant. Yes.
BEATRICE I didn't even - Congratulations!
EMILY Thank you! We are very exciting. Excited. Sorry. Pregnancy brain.
BEATRICE I know all about that. It never goes away. It's just forever brain after a while. You thought about names?
EMILY Well, we aren't sure we wanna know the gender before.
BEATRICE That's very, um, modern. And not modern, I guess.
EMILY Greg wants it / all to be a
BEATRICE Greg [...]
EMILY Greg, yes, husband. Father.

BEATRICE Yes! Your mom said - I guess I'm still recoverin' from pregnancy brain. Seein' you here's very strange.
EMILY Is it? I'm always somewhere.
BEATRICE This town's so small but you can go so long without seeing somebody. You still look like that little girl down the block.
EMILY The girl next door's always the girl next door to somebody. Weird, I have this - D'you remember, when there was that big storm over summer break and that willow tree in the Leonidas Polk playground fell / right
BEATRICE Oh, yes, right onto your classroom. That was, oh my word, how long / ago?
EMILY And they had that Saturday where all the parents came and the dads dusted their toolkits off and the moms served cookies and the kids played and we got the place cleaned up. And Egg had to work and Eric was so ashamed cuz his was the only dad not there but instead you showed up with messy overalls and a hammer on your belt and worked with the dads and kicked all a their asses. Half a them ain't even know how to operate a saw or nothing.
BEATRICE And all the moms in dresses and sunglasses stood in the shade and drank lemonade while I sweated away in the sun.
EMILY My mom, at least, was jealous.
BEATRICE She shoulda been. I made cookies, too, you know. Everybody liked em best.
EMILY People get some sorta way in the heat. I feel like it's always summer here.
BEATRICE Not sure why you remembered that. Did it feel good to get that off your chest?
EMILY I didn't realize it was on my chest. Memories sometimes, uh, pop up outta nowhere.

The overhead droning of the lights grows acutely. She and Beatrice notice for a moment, then it returns to the humming of regular ole grocery store lighting.

EMILY Well, it was good to see you.

For a moment, a desperation overtakes Beatrice, an un-itched need for connection.

BEATRICE Was it? Was it good to see me? It's agonizin'. Seein' me doesn't make you sad?
EMILY It, it's a numb sad. It's two rooms down. I can't keep being sad, Mrs. Camden.
BEATRICE If you can't take a little grief to the gut and keep walkin', then you're weak. My mother useda / tell me

EMILY I forgot how unpleasant you can be. When you choose to be.
BEATRICE I been told that.
EMILY I ran into Egg last week. Had a nice little chat. He was, well, all over the place, ramblin', but that's Egg. He was sweet, as sweet as ever.
BEATRICE Is this the part where you ask how a man like that could ever fall in love with a horrible woman like me?
EMILY I don't need to. Everybody already asks that.
BEATRICE You should go.
EMILY Probably.

She turns to go and then wheels around again loudly.

EMILY I did all I could for your son.
BEATRICE Keep your voice down.
EMILY You knew. I know that you knew. How he wanted to die. How he tried. I always coaxed him down from the ledge. One time, literally.
BEATRICE Sh! Eric'd never do something so selfish.
EMILY Selfish's lookin' at somebody else's pain and thinkin' only a how it affects you. Selfish. Fuck you. No wonder. Every time he tried it, it all came back to you.
BEATRICE People're starin'.
EMILY I kept him alive. He'd be dead even if the towers hadn't fallen. That's the truth, whether you wanna say it or not. Cuz a part a you knew he was in trouble and didn't wanna give it a name. He called out from the dark and you never said nothing. Sometimes you need somebody to pull you back from the edge but at the end, that somebody has to be yourself. So, yes, I'm sad but I was sad long before your son died and so was he. But for the longest time I kept two people alive. If movin' on and fallin' in love again and startin' a life's selfish or weak or whatever you wanna call it - But I couldn't wear a widow's veil for the rest a my life. Eric wouldn't want that, Mrs. Camden.
BEATRICE You never useda call me that. Mrs. Camden.
EMILY Beatrice.
BEATRICE No, you may call me Mrs. Camden.

She takes her shopping cart, wary of those watching, and exits. Emily is left alone.

ACT I, SCENE VIII

The living room of Nick's apartment. Nick sits on the couch, playing a video game, while Parker flits about anxiously, making last minute adjustments.

PARKER This place is a wreck. I can't believe I didn't tidy it up more.
NICK You're acting like my mother.
PARKER Real mother / or
NICK Real mother. The one in Chattanooga who sat by while my dad pummeled me.
PARKER Just checking. (*re: the video game)* Would you turn that off?
NICK And do what? Sit here in silence?
PARKER You could help me clean.
NICK We don't need to impress them, Mr. Fix-it.
PARKER Rude to bring guests into a dirty house. Didn't your parents teach you manners?
NICK No, they didn't, that's why I faked my death and changed / my name
PARKER Okay, calm down, drama queen.
NICK You're calling me the / drama ?
PARKER Drama king.

He stares at Nick, who isn't paying attention.

PARKER Hey. Come back. You're doing that thing. You're far away.
NICK I'm right here. I'm not going anywhere. (*He stands, kisses Parker, and then sits back on the couch)* It'll be fine.

The doorbell rings. They both jump.

PARKER (*heading off)* I'll get it.
NICK It's fine. (*Parker is gone for a moment.)* It's fine.

Parker returns with Egg, who seems to have no shame from their last interaction.

EGG Hello.

NICK Mr. Camden. It's, um, it's good to see you.

PARKER Welcome to our wreck of a home. We're moving out as soon as we can find / a better

EGG No, it's lovely.

NICK He's doin' that thing that Southern women do where they clean for a week straight in anticipation of visitors and then act like they haven't been cleanin' for a week straight.

EGG You'd make a great wife.

PARKER (*curtsying)* Thank you. I've been trying to convince Nick of that for years now.

NICK Let's move to Canada then.

EGG Nick. I forget that what's you call yourself.

NICK The name my parents gave me. (*Pulling a photograph out of his pocket)* These parents.

EGG They got names, too?

NICK Terence and Judy.

EGG (*staring at the picture)* This one a those stock photos?

NICK I don't know, did you force your son to pose for a stock photo with two random strangers when he was fifteen?

EGG They got that, what's it called? You coulda gotten it from one a those photo shops. Y'know, one a those new stores they got where you can change what a photo looks like.

PARKER Oh, honey. I'll take you to one of those photo shops any day you'd like.

EGG I got somebody I'd like you to see. (*exiting)* Just a minute.

PARKER Thanks for that southern wife thing.

NICK I'd wife you up in a heartbeat if it was legal.

PARKER I reject your gender stereotypes. I'm butch as hell.

NICK Queen.

PARKER Put your money where your mouth is and buy me a ring, you whore.

NICK We can barely afford your tastes as is.

Egg returns, escorting Emily.

PARKER Who's she?

EGG This's Emily Camden. Emily, this is Nick.

EMILY (*staring)* Nick.

NICK Yes. My name.

PARKER The one his parents gave him. Boy or girl?

EMILY What?

PARKER Pregnant, right? Sorry, I'm nervous, I shouldn't have asked a stranger / if she's

EMILY Oh. Yes. Um. We're waiting to find out.

PARKER A good dramatic reveal.

EMILY Can I get a moment?

PARKER Oh, the bathroom is down the / hall

EMILY No, not that. I just got questions.

EGG I'm sure you do.

EMILY Oh, wow. (*She takes a deep breath.)* Wow, I. I'm having some real trouble here.

EGG Barker, let's go for a walk. Give em some privacy.

PARKER Did this lady really just barge in and ask me to leave my own home? Outrageous.

EGG Come along, pooch. (*He leads Parker towards the door.)* We'll let you be.

Egg and Parker are gone. Emily is staring.

EMILY You look so much like him. Hair's different. Maybe the nose.

NICK Scar.

EMILY Well, you coulda gotten a scar during the, um [...]

NICK National tragedy. I'm also three years older than he is, or, would, would've been.

EMILY Holy shit! This's insane. Egg showed up outta nowhere and told me you're still alive and I assumed he had finally lost it like we always joked, but [...]

NICK Who are you anyway? A sister?

EMILY Emily. Not Camden, uh, anymore. Emily Ryan. Egg gets a little confused sometimes. I'm. Um. (*She opens her purse, produces a photograph.)* That's our wedding day. Eric and my, our.

NICK He was handsome. And you were, well, are, beautiful. You both look very happy.

EMILY We weren't. We were in love, sure. But that don't always make you happy.

NICK No, for some people, I guess it doesn't.

EMILY That man's your, um [...]

NICK My Parker. Yes.

EMILY He's handsome. I never met one.

NICK A homosexual?

EMILY Yeah, one a y'all. I lived in New York, big gay city, right? I'd see some, time to time. I walked past a gay bar once. I thought I'd go in and get a laugh but there was a giant drag queen in the doorway so I ran right past her. And home, well, not much diversity in Macon Crick.
NICK I bet Macon Crick has its fair shares of closet queens.
EMILY I dunno what that means.
NICK People who run from their truth.
EMILY I wish I could run sometimes.
NICK Would that make you happy?
EMILY No.
NICK Would Eric have?
EMILY Eric was sad. But he was kinder than he was sad.
NICK Look. I know a thing or two about pain. Maybe not yours. But certainly my own.
EMILY What's that line? Like, "all sad families're the same" or something. Anna Karen-Nina-Something? I just read the Cliffs Notes for the essay.
NICK Nobody's sad is the same.
EMILY No. But I'm not sad anymore. Well. I'm sad the adjective. Not sad the verb. Still. It's so strange. Being in front a [...]
NICK Just me.
EMILY Are you happy?
NICK I am.
EMILY Okay. Can I hug you? Or that'd be weird?
NICK It would be weird.
EMILY Y'know. Even if. Whoever you are. You gotta know how loved you are.
NICK What?
EMILY Parker, or us, or whoever. We wouldn't be doing it if - You're so loved.

Nick hugs her briefly, then he breaks it. They stare at one another, only to be interrupted by Parker bursting in, followed by Egg. Nick sits down, facing away from them.

PARKER Okay, are you guys done?
EMILY Yes, yeah, we're done. I'm feeling a little queasy. Baby's doing a dance. I think it's time to go. (*exiting, to Egg)* It's not him.
PARKER Wait. (*He pulls out a ziplock baggie of hair.)* Take it.

EGG What's this?
PARKER Proof.

Egg stares at him and exits. Parker turns around.

PARKER Nick. Nick. (*He sits down.)* Will you say something?

Nick says nothing. He just turns, kisses Parker, and then clings to him tightly. Parker holds him.

ACT I, SCENE IX
The Camden living room. Beatrice vacuuming. Egg walks in. She doesn't see him.

EGG Beatrice.

She can't hear him.

EGG Bee. Hey. (*Still no response. Egg unplugs the vacuum.)* Bea/trice
BEATRICE What? Oh [...]
EGG (*showing the ziplock baggie)* Look what I got. Our son's.
BEATRICE You gonna do one a those DNA tests?
EGG If that'll make you come to your senses.
BEATRICE Oh, yeah, yeah. I'm the one not in my right mind.
EGG You're testy. (*He slides into full charm mode.)* Come here, my Sweet Honey Bee.
BEATRICE Knock it off.
EGG I've got my eye / on you
BEATRICE When were you gonna tell me about the memorial?
EGG Oh, Beatrice [...]
BEATRICE Yes?
EGG Oh. I thought you were gonna cut me off.
BEATRICE No, I'd rather watch you squirm around tryna make up some excuse.
EGG We thought it'd upset you.
BEATRICE I wouldna been upset if you'd just told me. It's like you people dunno me at all.
EGG Oh, Beatrice [...]

BEATRICE Yes?

EGG Again. I thought you were gonna cut me off.

BEATRICE Christ, what would you even say to console me? Plug the vacuum back in.

EGG Well, you never once tried to console me.

BEATRICE Why would I? You seem to be sitting pretty in your fantasy land.

EGG Not fantasy. Eric's been coming to me, visions, so I'd be prepared to see him alive.

BEATRICE And your ramblings about the end a days, what's that preparing you for? How's the world gonna go, prophet, fire or water?

EGG Not rambling, my mind's finally open. When the river up and rises, you'll see / the full

BEATRICE You gotta see a neurologist. Dominic and Grace agree with me.

EGG How long you known about the memorial?

BEATRICE Don't change the subject.

EGG This's what you do, Honey Bee. You hold onto things, but you pretend it's all fine and dandy until everything comes / crashing

BEATRICE Suddenly you losin' your mind's my fault?

EGG The river's risin' and soon the whole dam bursts. That's not my brain, that's science.

BEATRICE There's no river, there's no dam. There's just you and me, and now there's this.

She throws the invitation at him. It's paper, so it floats to the ground lazily.

EGG We were protectin' you.

BEATRICE I'm not weak.

EGG What does it matter? It's up in New York. You never even crossed the state line.

BEATRICE I'll go for Eric. I couldn't do anything for him when he was alive, / but now that

EGG He didn't die that day.

BEATRICE Shut up!

EGG See? Burstin' a the dam. Please, let's calm down.

BEATRICE Tellin' somebody to calm down makes em wanna not calm down at all!

EGG Is't wrong to want a miracle?

BEATRICE No [...]

EGG Well, then, it's wrong a you to deny me believin' in one.

BEATRICE Fine. You want me to meet him? Schedule an appointment with a neurologist and then bring that boy here. I'll know if it's him. You didn't know Eric like I did.

EGG Oh, of course, you knew our son better than I did. Of course, your sadness's / more than
BEATRICE Gracie and Domino take after you, but Eric was mine. Eric was mine.
EGG (*heading to the kitchen)* I'll bring him.
BEATRICE Have another beer, sweetheart, maybe it'll make you more lucid!

She goes to turn on the vacuum, but it's still unplugged. She kicks it over.

ACT I, SCENE X
Dr. Miller's office. Beatrice is all over the place, never quite tethered.

BEATRICE It was never easy. It just felt like something that had to be done. Have the sex to make the baby. Endure the pregnancy to birth the baby. Birth the baby to raise the child. And then suddenly I was no longer Woman. I was Mother, I was Wife. So Woman never came back. I feel like I've had a mild hangover for the past forty years, except there wasn't any fun buzz to justify it. I'm geometric. Hard lines and angles. That don't make for a good Mother, Wife. It can make for a good Woman, in bits and pieces. I was never soft. I'm at peace with that. It's other people who aren't at peace. I can't change my nature. Speakin' a changin' things, you choose that painting? It's hideous. Why'd you hang that in your office? A fuckin' duck on a fuckin' pond. Is it supposed to be calmin'? I'm gettin' angry just thinkin' about you tryna to calm me down with that goddamn duck. (*She stops, pats her chest, and resets.)* I know. I know. I'm off subject again. You get to a certain age, the mind, she rambles. Homunculus.

Out of the darkness, Eric emerges, covered in ash. He stares around him, the light a flickering red.

BEATRICE What's worse? That he died in the fire? Or, something else?

The light fades from red to grey - Eric is outside the towers, looking up in horror.

BEATRICE That he looked around at the end of the world, he took it all in and in that moment, saw death as opportunity? In my nightmares, he's reaching for me. But maybe I can't see the world clear anymore - what if he was runnin' from me? Forcin' him to return'd be cruelty. If God gave him that that choice, and that's what he - ? Then who am I to - ?

Eric makes a decision. Slowly, he backs into the darkness, away from the fiery light. Beatrice, however, is trapped on the edge of a tumultuous abyss. A drop of water falls from the sky, landing in her palm.

BEATRICE River is risin' [...]

A droning nose. Quiet, for now. The darkness takes Beatrice, as well. End Act I.

ACT II: The Dam is Bursting

SCENE I

The lights find Beatrice, in a semi-fugue state. A droning noise, far away but getting closer. There is an unreality unfolding. Embrace it.

More than a decade ago, but also today. Beatrice at the head of the dining room table. Lights reveal Egg, Emily, Eric, Gracie and Domino around her. Emily sports a modest engagement ring and no baby bump. Perhaps someone's haircut is different, someone else has fewer wrinkles and more laughter lines, or perhaps everyone looks exactly the same. For now, the mood is upbeat, loving, not entirely sober.

GRACIE So this baby's pokin' its big old head in and out like a goddamn whack-a-mole, for twenty-two hours. Mother's screamin' her face off the entire time - Bless her, some women aren't made to be mothers - this lady's just shriekin', epidural this, tellin' the doctors to grab the baby when it pokes its head out again, cuz she's been poopin' / everywhere

BEATRICE Grace. Not at the dinner table.

EMILY It's cool. Gross but cool. I actually thought about going into nursing, too. Too much blood, though.

GRACIE There's not always blood. Sometimes it's other bodily fluids leakin' / out

BEATRICE So, Emily, tell us all about how Eric proposed.

ERIC Don't say anything. It's so embarrassing.

BEATRICE I wanna hear all / about it.

ERIC You don't need any more ammo to make fun a me.

BEATRICE I don't make / fun a

ERIC Can we change the subject? Seriously.

BEATRICE Alright. Didn't mean to embarrass our baby boy.

GRACIE Speakin' of baby boys, so that mother was screamin' / for an epidural

BEATRICE I put a lot of work into dinner. No more of that.

EMILY You should tell my mom. She loves all the baby stuff.
EGG Bet she's houndin' you already about having your own.
EMILY She literally asked if that's why he proposed.
DOMINO Well, is it?
EMILY No!
DOMINO Makes sense. Aincha bit young to be / getting married?
EGG Your mother and I were that young when we / got married.
DOMINO Yeah, exactly why they shouldn't.
GRACIE Also, have we seen this cheap ring Eric / settled on
ERIC Hey. I spent good money on that cheap piece a crap.
EMILY And I love it.
ERIC Good, cuz there's no return policy.
EGG (*standing)* I suppose now's as good a time as any to propose a toast to the happy couple.
ERIC Dad, please, come / on.
EGG Now, when I met your mother, she was a fiercely independent woman. Eyes blazin'. Impossible to tame her. She was like a wild horse: you had to be gentle to get near her, but once she was yours, she was yours for life. Just throw a saddle on / her and you've
GRACIE Great, a horse metaphor to describe our mother.
EGG Much like a wild horse buckin' its new rider, she fought me for ages. I chased her up and down every street in town. I knew I'd tire her out eventually, though.

This story is souring Beatrice's expression. Everyone watches the light fade from her eyes.

EGG Always some new excuse: she'd never crossed the state line or she was gonna get a job or she wasn't ready or she didn't know if she even wanted / to get
BEATRICE Egg, that's enough [...]
EGG But once I finally wore her down, made her come to her senses, / she never
BEATRICE Sit down. We don't need another one a your long-winded speeches.
ERIC Thank you, Mom.
EGG I barely said anything.
BEATRICE Good. This day's about them. Not whatever nonsense you were about to say.
EGG I, um. Never mind.

He sits back down. A droning tension has fallen over the room. Beatrice realizes she has ruined things. As usual.

BEATRICE Grace, why don't you tell us more about that baby? Whack-a-mole?

The lights go down on everyone but Beatrice. The droning noise threatens to overwhelm her, until she finds herself seated in Dr. Miller's office in the present.

BEATRICE When you're too old, too tired to overthink it all, you realize there's nobody else to blame. You're the source a your own unhappiness. You always have been. And not just your own unhappiness, but you've made it in other people too. And your children - Dr. Miller, d'you know what it's like to realize that the world'd be a happier place without - ?

She stops, pats her chest, and resets. The lights return to the Camden dining room, but in the past again - ten years ago, the day after Eric's funeral. Beatrice seems slightly confused to find herself back here, but there's almost a comfort in that droning now. Domino and Gracie flock around her.

DOMINO Mom, put the sponge down.
BEATRICE Don't tell me what to do. I'm a grown / woman.
DOMINO When's the last time you slept?
GRACIE You're still wearin' the clothes you had on at his funeral.
BEATRICE A joke. Half those people never knew Eric! Not even a body / to bury
DOMINO Mom, settle. Nobody's around.
BEATRICE People keep showin' up at the door with a tear in their eye and a story in their heart and a casserole in their hands - fourteen! - how the hell am I gon fit fourteen goddamn casseroles in the fridge - and then I gotta clean every container and remember who / had which
GRACIE It's okay to cry, Mom.
BEATRICE That's what you'd like to see, huh? A slobbering mess? Beatrice Camden on full display for the world to pity! That's not who I am.
GRACIE It doesn't gotta be this way.
BEATRICE This's the only way I know how to be!

And now she finds herself back in Dr. Miller's office, blinking from the whiplash.

BEATRICE I know what you say, I got trouble connecting, communicating with people. I try. Just feels like everybody else's on the other side a this wooden bridge above a frothin' river. It's swayin' in heavy winds, can't cross. I gotta scream, but they can't hear me. Maybe they don't wanna. I'm so tired a screamin', Dr. Miller. My brain's this cage a hornets, buzzin', feedin', fuckin', multiplyin'. A tumor a hornets. They're small things, but every day there's a new one, chippin' away at the brain until they're tap tap tapping against my skull. And that tappin' turns into a vision: me, walking out the backdoor, down the creek, wading through muck and blood, never once turn around. There's a loose floorboard in the bathroom. Old mason jar tucked underneath. Do the laundry, shake the pennies out a pockets. Cash back at the grocery store. Thoughts. Buy a bus ticket. Hop on a train. Go until the gas runs out or the rails end. Every day's a choice to stay. But it's gotta be a choice. I think I need to stop forcin' my children to come to Sunday night dinners. If they wanna visit me they can choose that. But I don't want my voice to be a little hornet tap tap tappin' in their skulls [...]

And suddenly Beatrice is seated at the head of the table. Gracie and Domino sit for dinner. It's the present. They're staring at her.

DOMINO What about Sunday night dinners?
GRACIE You okay?

Beatrice nods vaguely.

GRACIE Don't you start zoning out, too. I swear Dad's here only half the time.
DOMINO Harry too. We gotta get him tested for ADD or ADHD but Kelly / never has time
GRACIE ADHD. It's one disorder. They changed it. Look it up.
DOMINO I think I know a little bit more about parentin' than you do.
GRACIE You put a baby inside a woman. That don't make you an expert on parentin'.
DOMINO Twice! I put a baby in a woman two times!
BEATRICE I'm in therapy. Her name's Dr. Abigail Miller. She's a lovely, fat woman with awful taste but she was the cheapest I could find. She's recommended I see a psychiatrist for prescriptions. I recommended she see an interior decorator. She says our family has too many

secrets. Your father doesn't know. But once that boy comes tomorrow, it's all gonna come spillin' out. Dam's croakin', ready to up and rupture. I can't hold back the river anymore.
GRACIE (*after a pause)* So. You're usin' Dad's river thing now. You feelin' okay?

Though Gracie and Domino don't seem able to see, droplets of water are beginning to fall on Beatrice's face from above.

ACT II, SCENE II

Later the same night of Act II, Scene I, in a way. The back porch of the Camden home at night. Cicadas in bloom. Egg sits, beer in hand. A faraway droning noise. Beatrice enters from the kitchen, holding a quilt. Egg stares at her, confused.

BEATRICE Summer nights can be coldest of all. Takes you by surprise.
EGG I'm not surprised by much anymore.
BEATRICE When you got a back channel to the heavens, I imagine you wouldn't be.
EGG Back in the day, God spoke to his buddies. Maybe he's speakin' to me, too.
BEATRICE Back in the day, God also smote his buddies. (*She glances down at his beer.)* Kids think you got a problem. Well, multiple problems. But one that's fixable.
EGG Alcoholism's a young man's burden. This might as well be water.
BEATRICE Creek's all dried up. I went down this morning. Not sure why. Maybe to spite you.
EGG Better spite than smite.
BEATRICE I think I'm turnin' into you. Back and forth. Real and not real. Comin' loose. Synapses in the noggin firing so hard they've melted, goo jellifyin' and leakin' down my spine.
EGG Gives me an idea for Halloween. Where'd you learn a fancy word like "synapses" anyway?
BEATRICE I read.
EGG You were always too smart for me.
BEATRICE No. I wasn't smart. Just stubborn.

Somewhere else, in time and place. Emily enters holding several boxes, that cheap wedding ring on her's finger. Beatrice rises to join her.

EMILY Thanks for your help. Mom didn't wanna go through it all. I guess she thought when I didn't get into any schools that I'd be sticking around, but now that Eric and I're looking for

apartments in New York, she figured she'll put me to work. Gotta figure out which a this stuff's worth keeping and what's just old crap.

BEATRICE Not one for nostalgia, huh?

EMILY I do hope I find one thing up here.

BEATRICE Oh, is it that, oh, what was her name?

EMILY Maddie. Big rosy crocheted cheeks, blonde blonde hair, like spaghetti.

BEATRICE She smelled like creek water.

EMILY I took her everywhere.

BEATRICE I remember one time you almost tore her arm off in the car door and your mom didn't know how to fix her so you up and ran right over here and made me perform "surgery."

EMILY I was a good mother to Maddie. But a stern one. She had to work hard. Can't all be fun, no ma'am. Good things come to those who wait. All she had to do was be patient. All the sad'd squeeze outta her like a sponge and then she could finally just be, uh, happy.

BEATRICE And then you just left her up here?

EMILY She's got a cardboard box apartment with nice Barbie friends and a Troll doll whose hair I cut off.

Beatrice grabs Emily's hand, the one with the ring on it.

BEATRICE You sure you wanna go through with it?

EMILY What? Of course I do. You officiated our wedding when I was, like, six, remember? Maddie was Maid of Honor. Domino was the flower girl.

BEATRICE And Grace has never forgiven you for that.

EMILY Domino looked better in the dress.

BEATRICE Emily. Don't settle now. My mother, she - You're young, you can do / anything

EMILY Thank you for your concern, Beatrice. But this's what I've been waiting for my whole life. Besides, I look killer in white.

Emily vanishes. Beatrice returns to the present.

BEATRICE Did we mess up? Somewhere along the line?

EGG I think everybody messes up. Would you rather beat yourself up for your flaws?

BEATRICE Maybe. Yes. (*pulling something out of her pocket)* So. I guess we should talk.

EGG I thought I was being sneaky.
BEATRICE You picked up the mail for once. Immediately suspicious.
EGG Haven't read em.
BEATRICE Me neither. Just rereadin' the envelope over and over. Funny who it's addressed to. Doesn't say Xavier Camden.
EGG Test results are for you. I don't need em.
BEATRICE It's cruel, Egg. When'd you get so cruel?
EGG I could ask you the same thing.
BEATRICE No. I was always like this. Even at sixteen. I'd shoot daggers at you every time you sauntered past my locker. You were never cruel. Did I do this to you?
EGG It takes a long time to wear a body down.
BEATRICE But it was me who did it.
EGG Don't be so self-centered, Honey Bee. We're old. Time does most a the wearin'.

Somewhere else, in time and place. Parker is driving Egg's truck back after their first meeting. Egg is gone, gone, gone. He's batting at a droning noise like it's gnats around his head.

PARKER What even is this "river's rising" thing? You watch that global warming documentary too many times?
EGG You think I don't know it's nonsense? I'm terrified. D'you know what it's like to be held hostage by your own goddamn mind?
PARKER I mean, the drinking seems to / be a
EGG It's my fault. I thought I could - it's all come unglued. Earth's crackin' apart. Fire startin' to spew.
PARKER Wait, is it water or is it fire?
EGG End a the world doesn't need to be consistent. You must think I'm crazy. But I'm a fixer.
PARKER I'm a fixer. You're a - I don't know what you are.
EGG This is - this is the only thing left. It wasn't her fault that he - I wasn't there for my boy. A boy needs - that's why he - absent father, that's how y'all become gay.
PARKER Um. So, that's not really how - Moving on. Maybe your wife can get you help?
EGG She's who I gotta help. It don't have to be this way anymore. I'm gon fix it. We can do it all right this time. I can do it right this time.

Parker vanishes. Egg returns to the present.

BEATRICE You're a good man, Egg. You deserved somebody better.
EGG Hey. Come back. You got that Eric look in your eyes. Far away.
BEATRICE It's a Beatrice look. He got it from me.
EGG But he perfected it.
BEATRICE D'you remember that time when he got stung? That whole hive a bees? I'm tryna remember, it was - some sorta outdoor thing.
EGG I don't remember.
BEATRICE You weren't there, as usual, but after - he slept so long, all night, next day. I don't think I slept. Just stood outside his bedroom. I didn't think he'd die from a sting but children've died from less. And at some point I figured he wasn't sleepin', he was just closin' his eyes whenever I looked in. What a way to find out your own son doesn't love you like you thought, huh? I wanted so much for him to need me.
EGG He did.
BEATRICE What would you say to him? If it's him.
EGG I'd say, "Hey kid. Long time no see." Make it seem like he was just on a fun little vacation, but that he's home now. What about you?
BEATRICE I'd tell him, no matter what the test result says, my son's dead. If that paper says he's a different person, then Eric died. If it says he's ours, then it doesn't matter. Our son'd still be dead. Cuz the Eric I knew'd never've done this to - *(She stops, pats her chest, and resets.)* I feel as though he's right here. Fingertip to fingertip.
EGG You're right about one thing. You're turnin' into me.
BEATRICE I'm cold. I'm gonna go vacuum.
EGG The house's fine.
BEATRICE I don't want that boy thinkin' we're just a family a idiots who / can't be bothered
EGG Nothing wrong with that. We are a family a idiots.
BEATRICE He's coming tomorrow. A deal's a deal.
EGG I made an appointment with the neurologist for November. Earliest they could do. It's gonna cost a pretty penny just to sit in the room.
BEATRICE We'll know. (*She places the DNA results next to him.)* Good news or bad. We'll know.

Beatrice heads back into the house. Egg stares down at the creek. That faraway droning noise. Water begins to lap at his feet.

ACT II, SCENE III

Today - sort of. In many ways, simultaneous to Act II, Scene II. Gracie's apartment. Cramped, uncleaned, claustrophobic in its messiness but ever expanding in memory. Beatrice would probably faint if she ever walked in to find it in this state. Gracie and Domino nearing blackout drunk, clutching alcohol for dear life. Gracie balances a landline phone between her ear and shoulder.

DOMINO Pepperoni.
GRACIE I'm on hold. (*studying his face)* Don't you throw up, I cleaned, like, two weeks ago.
DOMINO This's clean?
GRACIE Eighteen hour shifts, I don't got time to (*into the phone)* - Hi, yes, it's no problem, um, yes, it's large (*to Domino)* - shit, what kind / d'you say?
DOMINO (*rallying)* Pepperoni!
GRACIE(*into phone)* Pepperoni! Yes. (*to Domino)* What kinda pizza?
DOMINO Pepperoni!
GRACIE No, the crust
DOMINO Yes, we gotta get crust.
GRACIE (*into phone)* Yes, we'd like crust. Um. 4242 Copperhead Creek Drive, Apartment 5C. No, thank you! (*She puts the phone down.)* He sounded cute. Need more gin. (*She nearly trips over herself. She looks back, as if to assign blame to the mess.)* D'you ever invite Mom over to your place?
DOMINO She'd harangue me for not deep cleanin' the rugs after my weekends with the idiots.
GRACIE "Harangue". Good word. Don't even know what it means. Proud a you.
DOMINO I'm proud a me, too. I got myself a Word a the Day calendar. "Harangue."
GRACIE (*singing)* "Harangue."
DOMINO (*joining)* "Harangue." Is my hand shakin' or my eyeballs?
GRACIE Maybe it's the earth. River's a-risin', dam's a-croakin'. D'you ever feel like past-present-future's blurry? Seams of reality poppin' like buttons. Mom's right, it's all spillin' out.
DOMINO D'you tell em pepperoni?
GRACIE I hope so. Scale a one to ten, how messed up's tomorrow gonna be?
DOMINO Optimistically, ten outta ten.
GRACIE I'm bettin' Mom up and has a heart attack as soon as this Nick guy walks in the door.

As becomes custom throughout this scene, things fluctuate between past and present rapidly. A shift: Teenage Eric appears from the past and lands in Gracie's apartment, wobbling, beer in hand. Gracie and Domino, now in their twenties, aren't even vaguely tipsy.

ERIC I gotta get outta that bitch's house.
GRACIE Okay, Mama's boy. Got one beer in him and he's Mister Confident.
ERIC She's a bitch when I'm sober, too!
DOMINO Bet you wouldn't say that to her face.
ERIC I'm smart enough to know better.
GRACIE The only smart you are is aleck.
ERIC Huh?
GRACIE Too dumb to even know what a smart aleck is.

Eric rises to go.

GRACIE Whoa whoa whoa. Where're you going?
ERIC Home. To tell her / to her face
DOMINO If Mom found out we gave you beer she'd probably up and have a heart / attack

A shift: The present.

GRACIE Heart attack's the perfect way to spite us.
DOMINO A dramatic exit. She'll be all, like, (*fake-dying)* "This's the final straw."
GRACIE (*fake-dying)* "You won't catch me leakin' one single tear over this!"

A shift: Teenage Eric returns.

DOMINO Not like baby boy over here.
ERIC I don't cry!
DOMINO Our bedrooms share a wall, I can hear you late at night.
ERIC It isn't cryin', / I'm just
GRACIE If that noise isn't crying, well, then you're definitely masturbating wrong.

ERIC I'm just sad [...]
DOMINO Grow a pair. Everybody's sad sometimes.
ERIC No, I think that's just who I am. Sad.
DOMINO Someone get baby boy to a therapist.
ERIC Mom says therapy's for the weak. If you can't take a little grief to the gut, / then
DOMINO Tell her everybody got a therapist. I got a therapist. My therapist got a therapist.
ERIC Do the meds do weird things to your personality?
GRACIE Only if you got a personality.
ERIC What's that supposed to mean?
GRACIE Moping around and masturbating all the time ain't a personality.
ERIC I came here for help, not for you to make fun of me!

A shift: The present.

GRACIE Mom up and goin' on this journey a self-discovery? "I'm in therapy"? Fucked up. Eric shoulda been the one to see a shrink.
DOMINO She's too far gone anyway. Therapy won't help.

The doorbell rings. Gracie goes to get it.

DOMINO That was fast. Did I blackout? Or did you?

As Gracie returns with a pizza box, a shift: Teenage Eric returns.

ERIC I'm gonna get this scholarship and then go somewhere better and never come back.
DOMINO Okay, one, Camden's don't get scholarships.
ERIC I'm different. I'm / smart.
DOMINO Two, you ain't that smart.
ERIC I work hard.
DOMINO Three, that'd break Mom's heart.
ERIC She doesn't got one to break.
DOMINO Hey, bitches still got hearts.

GRACIE Leaving won't make you happy. The sad's up in your brain. You just take it with you. Eventually you're gonna just wind up back here.
ERIC Emily and me're different.
GRACIE That's what I thought. That's what Domino thought. And we're still here eating pizza with you.

A shift: The present. Gracie reaches for the pizza box.

GRACIE I can't believe this awful place hasn't gone outta business.
DOMINO No, don't eat yet. Gotta say prayer.
GRACIE Like hell we do. "Good God, thanks."
DOMINO My hand's shakin'.
GRACIE Nah, the earth's crackin' apart! Dad was right! End a time!
DOMINO The deluge a-comin'!
GRACIE Word a the Day!
DOMINO No, I just know that word cuz I'm not the stupid one!
GRACIE Then who's the stupid one, Eric?

This gives them pause.

GRACIE D'you remember when we were kids and you had that little league game and Eric didn't wanna watch so he hung out by himself and he was wearin' velcro sandals and some bees had made a nest in the ground and all the bees up and got stuck in the velcro so they kept stingin' and he / was wailin'
DOMINO And! There was that lady out for a smoke and she heard him and she took her pack a cigarettes and broke one in half and put the tar on his feet cuz apparently that works?
GRACIE And the whole way home, Mom was like, "A brand new pack, wasted. Those're expensive." Even though it was that other lady's cigarettes! Like, / she didn't
DOMINO And she didn't even know the lady! And the lady never even asked for money! And Eric - He kept on huggin' me the whole car ride home. Couldn't get him offa me. He useda cling to me all the time. I never understood why. Like a baby realizin' for the first time that if you drop em, well, plop, bye bye.

A shift: Teenage Eric looks up as Beatrice storms into Gracie's apartment.

BEATRICE Eric Xavier Camden, are you tryna give me a heart attack?
ERIC Would it get me out a listenin' to you? Burn.
BEATRICE (*rounding on Gracie and Domino)* And you! What in God's name're / you thinking
ERIC I'm sixteen. It's not like it's my first time, Dad sneaks me beers every / once in a while
BEATRICE He does what?
GRACIE Ah, shit.
BEATRICE I'm calling your father.
ERIC Stop raggin' on him. You're always raggin' on him. Or me. Or anyone. Just to rag. (*Under his breath.)* Bitch.
DOMINO Jesus H.
BEATRICE I'd expect this kinda nonsense from Grace and Dominic. But not from you.
ERIC Yeah, well, I'm not Gracie and Domino. I'm different.

A shift: The present. That faraway droning noise - we can barely hear it, but we know it's coming.

GRACIE If it had been you or me in the towers. Or drownin' or something. D'y'think Mom'd give two shits the way she did about Eric dying?
DOMINO Nah. You and me's peas in a pod. Buy one, get one free. One of us got gone, they still got the other. Now if we both of us got blown to bits - then they'd be in trouble.
GRACIE Take a lot to kill both of us.
DOMINO Maybe we should both take the same car to see Eric tomorrow so we'll double our chances a gettin' killed in a wreck.
GRACIE Is that how math works? Doesn't matter. It's not gonna be Eric.
DOMINO It could be.
GRACIE Who cares? (*suddenly serious)* You never even liked him.
DOMINO Of course I liked him! I was his Best Man! I was his goddamn flower girl!
GRACIE So how come you never helped him? All you ever did was make him feel bad about feeling sad. You're our big brother.
DOMINO I - I thought he'd grow out of it, like we did.

GRACIE When did we ever grow out of it? We're still stuck back there, with him. I'm still in this goddamn apartment ten years later and it's, like, you and I are closin' in on forty, but we might as well still be twenty, waiting on him to walk through that front door, lookin' for help.

They stare at the front door. But Eric is long gone. Instead, there comes a low droning, low, low, low, but growing, growing, growing.

DOMINO I like you better when you're makin' stupid jokes.
GRACIE Well, maybe I'm tired of bein' the funny one all the time!
DOMINO If you gotta keep sayin' you're the funny one, maybe you aren't the funny one! (*He covers his mouth, looking queasy.)* Water?
GRACIE (*rising)* I'll get you some.
DOMINO You're right. I shoulda done something to make him - something. I dunno.
GRACIE Nah, you couldna done nothing. I was his big sister and I didn't - It doesn't matter. His brain's not the thing that killed him.
DOMINO Assuming something killed him.
GRACIE This guy tomorrow - It's not gonna be him.
DOMINO How d'you know?
GRACIE I dunno. Maybe I just don't want it to be him.
DOMINO Why not?
GRACIE I like to imagine he died a hero. I mean, it was probably instantaneous, probably never knew what happened, but. I got this image a some person out there in the world, who owes their life to this, this kid. They'll tell their children, "There was this kid with a crookedsad smile and faraway eyes and I'll never know who he was, but he saved my life". Our baby brother, wonderin' what the point of his life was, and - and that was the point. To help someone else. But who knows. A Schroedinger's Eric. I think Mom prefers him that way. Dead and a martyr. I think it might be the only thing keepin' her alive. Other than spite.
DOMINO It's all bullshit. Eric shoulda killed himself and saved us all this towers nonsense. All my buddies who thought this country was crap all turned into die hard boners-for-America overnight, cryin' at the national anthem, boohoo-USA. My boys do the Pledge of Allegiance at the dinner table now. I can't even listen to country music anymore cuz it's all Never Forget but it's never the right thing to never forget. That day was supposed to be this great unifier but it split our stupid family up.

GRACIE We're not that stupid.
DOMINO So. Maybe we can go back to bein' like every other family and Eric didn't have to die in there. Maybe it's a miracle.
GRACIE We're not special. Miracles don't happen to people like us. We just live with the muck and the grime and move on.
DOMINO Nothing wrong with wantin' to believe.
GRACIE Don't make me put you in a home, too.
DOMINO You're all I got, Gracie.
GRACIE Don't say that.
DOMINO Who d'we got but each other? Eric's gone. Pop's, well. Mom was never really here.
GRACIE What about the boys?
DOMINO Half a my Harry and Jack weekends are spent with Mom and Pop. And even when the boys're here, they're far away. Or maybe I'm far away. There's always gonna be some part a me that they won't get to see. You know, Eric died before they were born. So to them he's just some pictures on the walls that their mean grandma's got up. So I gotta be a guy who useda have a brother at the same time I'm a dad of kids who don't have an uncle.
GRACIE Yeah. I guess you don't got anyone.
DOMINO Well, who d'you got?
GRACIE That's not nice.
DOMINO It's just us. It's always been us against the world.
GRACIE Well, fuck.
DOMINO It's not so bad. Is it?

Gracie and Domino stare at one another, then take a sip simultaneously. The river reaches their waists.

ACT II, SCENE IV

A park bench. In many ways, it is simultaneous to Act II, Scene II and III. Muggy, thick air, simmering with grasshopper tunes. Parker sits anxiously on one side, Eric on the other, with pregnant Emily literally caught between past and present. On Parker's side, it is night. On Eric's, a blistering summer day.

PARKER It's a, uh, nice park. It's a lovely little town. Kind of swampy, but [...]
EMILY Is what it is. I dunno why you called me up.
PARKER I needed to talk to someone / about this.

EMILY Talk to Egg.
PARKER The man has a one-track mind.
EMILY What's left of his mind. Talk to Nick.
PARKER He's a brick wall. As usual.
EMILY (*suddenly interested)* He always been like that?
PARKER When we first met, he was a lot. He was always On, for everyone. I think he needed me. I'm a fixer, yeah, but I'm willing to meet people on their level, let them fix themselves. Uncomplicated. No chip on my shoulder. I'm usually pretty good at simplifying things.
EMILY Well, maybe you oughta stop treating people like they gotta be simplified.
PARKER You're right. It's me. I'm the one who told Nick to reach out to them. Stupid. Maybe I'm not a fixer, maybe I'm just a busybody? Ugh. I can't go to their house tomorrow.
EMILY They're normal people. "Normal". Compliment her chicken. She works real hard on it.
PARKER I don't understand hating your own mother. My mom's my best friend.
EMILY Beatrice is a lot. A bad mother, maybe. But not a bad person.

There is a shift, and pregnant Emily turns to join Eric, ten years ago.

ERIC No, she is a bad person.
EMILY (*cradling her belly)* Your negative feelings're gonna affect the baby.
ERIC The baby's the size of a Fig Newton.
EMILY Sh, sh, sh. My brain juices go directly down there.
ERIC Baby's gonna be messed up anyways. With us as parents, and them as /grandparents
EMILY My mom'll make up for your mom. Everybody got a mean grandmother.
ERIC We're genetically fucked. Gracie and Domino're both on meds now / for their
EMILY Okay, here's a perfect example. They're taking meds. Why can't you?

Eric is here, but he's gone now. For a moment, he seems to hear a droning noise - far away, but getting closer. Emily doesn't seem to notice the noise.

EMILY Hey. Walls're going up. I'm looking for a door.
ERIC (*standing)* I need a breather.

As Eric exits, the present day returns. Emily turns back - Parker is sitting down next to her.

EMILY Mrs. Camden useda beg Eric to take the train back here every weekend after we moved. We useda come to this park to get away from her.
PARKER She's a little controlling, I'm gathering.
EMILY I don't blame her. Everybody she ever loved wanted to get away from her.
PARKER So why did you keep coming back?
EMILY Eric liked being cared for. And after he died, his parents needed me. I needed - Pregnant widows / don't have
PARKER (*stunned)* Eric had a kid?
EMILY No. He didn't.

From a winter's past, Beatrice wraps a blanket around Emily, who ascends to mania in the night air.

BEATRICE You're shivering. Please come inside.

A droning noise - far away, but getting closer. Emily is the one to hear it this time.

BEATRICE Look me in the eyes. You're strong. You're so strong.
EMILY I wanna die.
BEATRICE I know y'do.
EMILY Can you hear that? That buzzing?
BEATRICE What're you gon on about?
EMILY I need to get outta this town. Every day, I wake up and I can't force myself outta bed. His bed. Why're you making me stay in his fucking bed / when
BEATRICE We'll put you in Grace's old room.
EMILY You're tryna destroy me.
BEATRICE I know your hurt. I know how it coils around inside you, how it pops out on your skin and in your hair and inside your mouth, how you can't even for a second lose sight a what you lost cuz your entire body's / inside out
EMILY Don't pull that shit with me. "I know your hurt." Bullshit.
BEATRICE I know.
EMILY Bullshit!
EGG (*offstage)* Beatrice?

EMILY I don't want him to see me.
BEATRICE We need to get inside. It's too cold out here.
EMILY You can't hear it?
BEATRICE Emily, look at me.
EMILY Why? I see nothing but hate in your eyes.
BEATRICE I don't hate you.
EGG (*offstage*) Emily? / Beatrice?
EMILY So why d'you look at me like that?
BEATRICE I don't hate you. I just hate. I am so filled with [...]
EMILY Well, I'm not filled with anything. I'm empty. Except for that buzzing noise in my head and (*Emily holds her belly)* this, this -
BEATRICE It's all we got left a Eric.
EMILY It's not Eric. It won't be him. I want it outta me.
EGG (*offstage)* Bee?
EMILY I wish it'd die and then I'd die and it could all just go away. And don't pretend like you care. You just want some replacement for - I can't be what you want from - Leave me alone.

Beatrice stares at her, then takes the blanket from Emily. As she turns towards the sound of Egg's voice, she pauses, staring down at the blanket. There is blood, fresh, wet, gleaming in the icy air. Beatrice turns to Emily, who is holding her legs closed.

BEATRICE Emily. (*calling off)* Egg! Egg!
EMILY I just wanna die.

Beatrice reaches for her as the droning crescendos - then stops abruptly. Emily returns to the present.

EMILY But I didn't. I got a second chance. Everybody doesn't get that.
PARKER Thank you for trusting me with that. I'm sure it wasn't easy to tell - My mom told me at like two AM one night about this thing in (*a vaguely Slavic accent*) "back in old country", where, uh, they had this superstition about bees being, like, gatekeepers for the afterlife, so you'd have to treat bees with a certain dignity and, like, if you set up a beehive near your house or if they made their own hive, they're family, so you have to tell them everything about your life, good and bad but mostly the bad, cuz apparently bees like hearing all the tea, / if some

EMILY Heh. Honey. For the tea.

PARKER Hm?

EMILY Honey bees, like - or is "tea" a gay thing?

PARKER Gay thing. Anyways, if something happens and you don't go tell them the right way, the hive would rot from the inside out. So, like, it's a metaphor, or, like, a fable, telling you to grieve in the right way.

EMILY There's a right way you're supposeda grieve?

PARKER Judging from all you people, there's definitely a wrong way. When my dad died, my mom and I just did the normal -? Or maybe the normal thing isn't normal at all.

EMILY I read the bees are going extinct.

PARKER Bleak.

EMILY In some dark way, um, it was good that everything happened the way it did. It took me a long time to be okay with that. I mighta ended up like Beatrice. Or, like, Egg, maybe. Eric was close to up and taking me with him. Now I get to live the life I always wanted. I get to be happy and loved and not alone. This's who I wanna be. Happy endings're really beginnings.

PARKER (*glancing at her belly)* Rainbow baby.

EMILY Another gay thing?

PARKER It's a baby you have after one, uh, is lost. Rainbow after the storm, light from the darkness, blah blah. Just a cheesy colloquialism.

EMILY That's not cheesy. Thank you. And you should tell the Camdens that bee story.

PARKER You think?

EMILY We all gotta find ways to live. It's what we owe to each other.

But even as she says it, the river has reached their necks.

ACT II, SCENE V

The Camden dining room, the next night. The dam has been built, but will it hold? Beatrice enters. She hasn't slept. She places rolls on the table, then wipes her hands. She stares at the chairs for a moment, then adjusts one in particular. For a moment, she is quiet here, alone in her home, as perfect as she could make it. She almost smiles. Then, a dog barks far off and she jumps. Her expression sours again.

BEATRICE Hurry up! They'll be here any minute.

Beatrice heads for the stairs. Domino and Gracie, both a little worse for wear, enter from the kitchen as she goes. Domino places plates and glasses while Gracie distractedly sets napkins and silverware.

DOMINO Jesus H., I'm sweatin'. I think I'm gonna be sick.
GRACIE Hey. (*reassuringly)* It's not gonna be him.
DOMINO You're doin' the silverware wrong. You're - (*putting down his pile and resetting Gracie's plates)* Never mind. I'll do it myself.
GRACIE (*blocking him)* Dom. Calm down.
DOMINO Me calm down? You calm up! How're you not freaking out?
GRACIE I'm massively hungover and everybody else around here's crackin' so I'm gonna be the one straight man.
DOMINO Good one. Cuz. You know. The gay thing.
GRACIE The gay thing?
DOMINO I've never met one.
GRACIE Well, if he's actually our brother, then, yes, you have. Or bi. Or whatever.
DOMINO Is it cool to call em 'faggots' yet? Like, don't they call themselves that?
GRACIE I think that's something they can say to one another. It's, like, a man calling a woman a 'bitch' and two women calling each other that.
DOMINO Are men not allowed to call women 'bitch' anymore?
GRACIE How about this: you set the table, I'll do the talkin'.

A dog barks, then the sound of a screen door crashing shut, and Egg bursts in, muddy and sweating.

DOMINO Dad, you were supposed to be getting dressed.
EGG I had to clear my head. Creek's risin'.
GRACIE It hasn't rained in months.
DOMINO Are you kiddin' me? Mom's gonna have a heart attack. Dad, I need you to stay.
EGG Man can't leave his own home when he chooses?
DOMINO Stay. Like, your brain. You gotta keep it together. You're the only reason anybody in this family's as well-adjusted as we are.
GRACIE Yeah, we're all real well-adjusted.

The doorbell rings and Gracie shrieks.

EGG (*exiting)* I'll get it. (*offstage)* Welcome!
DOMINO Gracie, I want it to be him [...]
GRACIE I know. Just be yourself. If you start actin' different, you might scare / him off.
DOMINO I am being myself!
GRACIE Calm down.

Egg reenters, beckoning Nick and Parker in. Gracie shrieks again.

PARKER (*anxiously)* Hi! (*Toning it down.)* Hello.
DOMINO (*after a long silence)* Hello.
EGG This's Nick. Well. Introduce yourselves.
DOMINO Domino.
GRACIE Gracie. Grace.
EGG Where's Denver?
PARKER Colorado.
EGG (*heading off in search)* No, the dog.
NICK Um. So. This is my, uh, Parker.
PARKER Boyfriend. Don't beat us up.
DOMINO Why'd ya look at me when you said that?
PARKER Bad joke. Sorry.
GRACIE Dinner's, um, ready. Mom's upstairs getting ready. Getting herself ready, not dinner.
DOMINO Dinner's ready.
GRACIE I said that.

Parker glances over at Nick, but the walls are up.

PARKER So. You guys grew up all the way out here in the middle of nowhere, huh?
DOMINO It's somewhere. Technically. We just got a Wal-Mart, though.
GRACIE Well. It's twenty minutes away.
PARKER The long dirt driveway is very, uh, rustic. And I like all the knotty pine. Retro chic.
DOMINO Knotty pine?
PARKER Yeah, the walls, that's what it's called.

DOMINO Oh. I thought you meant some gay thing, like, (*acting it out)* "naughty".

GRACIE Absolute dumbassery.

PARKER We've been touring lots of houses recently and it's a fairly common feature, that's the only reason I know.

GRACIE You guys looking for a new place or something?

PARKER Hopefully we're gonna buy a nice house, settle down. (*looking at Nick)* Anything to add? (*Nothing.)* Cool. So. That old fireplace work? The ones we've seen have all been decorative.

DOMINO It works but, y'know, fire is hot and it's hot. Unless, d'you want it hotter?

GRACIE We must seem like a bunch a idiot hicks.

PARKER No! No, no, no. No [...]

DOMINO My friend, Dub, his house's on wheels.

PARKER Are you trying to convince me you aren't hicks?

DOMINO Just saying. We're trash but we're not Trash. Dub's place gets up and washed away every time it floods.

PARKER Does Macon Crick have a river? I didn't see one as we drove in.

GRACIE Creek out back's the closest you're gonna get.

DOMINO We're all creekheads around here.

PARKER "Creek / heads" ?

DOMINO Like "crackheads," but with creeks. Some people around here're crackheads, too, but it's mostly meth.

GRACIE Domino. Anyway, no, there's no river here.

PARKER When we first met Egg, he was saying something about a dam and river, I /didn't

GRACIE He's been predicting the end a the world. One day it's water, gonna wash us all away, one day it's fire, cleansing the earth. (*Domino's attention is on Nick.)* Stop staring.

DOMINO Sorry. You look great, bro.

Gracie elbows him.

DOMINO Dude. Working out?

NICK When I can.

DOMINO Sweet. Sweet. What sorta protein you use?

GRACIE Dumbass.

DOMINO No, I'm not, I'm being myself.

GRACIE Yeah, a dumbass.

DOMINO Sorry. We're being weird. Ahhh! It's the heat.

PARKER Yeah, the air is practically green down here

DOMINO August in Macon Crick's like wading through Satan's taint.

PARKER Is everyone here so poetic?

NICK Parker's an only child. He doesn't get sibling dynamics.

PARKER No, I'm pretty sure this is not common / sibling

NICK I'm going to sit.

GRACIE Okay! Good idea. We'll all sit.

No one does. Nick sits.

GRACIE Jesus.

NICK What?

GRACIE That's Domino's spot. He always sits there.

NICK Should I move?

GRACIE No, I just. Well, I thought you might [...]

NICK You thought I would sit in Eric's chair?

GRACIE Yes.

NICK Would you like me to?

GRACIE No. Jesus, no.

NICK Okay. I'll just sit here. Where I'm sitting.

GRACIE Domino, you didn't put out the rest a the silverware. (*moving to correct that)* Idiot.

Beatrice comes down the stairs, wearing all black. It would almost be comical if her expression weren't so deadly. No one notices her.

PARKER That's not very nice. (*to Domino)* I'm sure you did your / best

GRACIE I'm just giving him a hard time. It's a thing we do. Sibling thing.

PARKER He's nervous. Be nice to him.

BEATRICE Good evening.

Gracie shrieks again. Everyone turns to look at Beatrice.

BEATRICE Welcome to my home. I'm Beatrice Camden.
PARKER It's a lovely home. Very clean.
BEATRICE I know. I spend a lotta time working on it.
PARKER I can tell. I love the pictures on the walls. (*No response.)* You all look very happy. (*No response.)* Especially, um, this one, where you and Egg are just kids. So in love.
BEATRICE What a quaint perspective.
PARKER I, uh, hear you rule this house with an iron thumb.
BEATRICE I do believe the phrase's "iron fist."
PARKER I, oh my god, I'm so stupid [...]
BEATRICE Temporary dumbassery, I'm sure. In this house it's contagious.
PARKER Sorry, I completely forgot to introduce myself. My name / is Parker
BEATRICE (*turning from him)* You must be Nick. Xavier was right. You do favor our son. The nose's a little different.
NICK Yes.

Egg re-enters.

EGG I couldn't find the damn dog. Something must've scared him off.
BEATRICE (*coldly)* I'll bring the rest of the food out.
GRACIE I'll help you.
DOMINO Me, um, also me.
GRACIE (*following Beatrice into the kitchen, with Domino)* Idiot.
PARKER The whole run away and change your identity thing is beginning to make sense. Does your wife, um, always dress like a queen at a state funeral?
EGG I imagine she feels a little dramatic tonight.
PARKER That's a lot'l dramatic.
EGG I dunno what's going through her mind half the time.
PARKER (*glancing at Nick)* That sounds familiar.
EGG Smells like she made chicken. Be sure to compliment it.
PARKER Yeah, Emily told me.
NICK Wait, when did you see Emily?
PARKER I needed someone to calm my nerves and you've had your walls up for days now.

NICK Of all the people you could talk to / about this
PARKER She was once part of the family.
EGG I was going to invite her but Beatrice threatened to set me on fire. I'm fairly certain she was joking but you can never tell.
PARKER So, this is going well!

Egg pulls a large envelope out of his jacket and places it on the table.

PARKER That's the results? What does it say?
EGG Haven't read em. Untampered. Wanted everybody t'know it's not me pullin' any strings.

Beatrice, Gracie and Domino reenter, carrying several dishes. Everyone sits.

BEATRICE Dominic, if you'd like to lead us in prayer.

Egg, Gracie and Domino bow their heads. Parker looks around and follows suit. Nick and Beatrice catch each other's eyes. Neither moves their head.

DOMINO Father, we gather tonight, here, all of us, um, sharin', um, sharing this lovely meal in your honor. We praise you for the nourishment you give us. Thank you for this family and, um, bringing us all here tonight. It's. It's great. It's just great. And may we appreciate what we got. We don't do that enough. And we, uh, we should. Father, in your name we pray. Amen.
PARKER (*too enthusiastically again)* Amen!
BEATRICE Thank you, Dominic.
PARKER It was lovely. My parents didn't really go to church so we never prayed before meals.
BEATRICE We don't attend church anymore.
PARKER So you just pray for fun?
BEATRICE You don't gotta sit in a pew to fear the wrath a God.
PARKER (*glancing at Nick, "Where the hell are we?")* Oh [...]

They nibble at food, no one really hungry, save Egg, who scarfs it down. A silent dance has begun.

DOMINO The chicken's delicious, Mom.

GRACIE Does this look like the time for smalltalk?
DOMINO Well, the silence's weird and / I don't
GRACIE It's only weird cuz you gone and made it weird [...]

A silence.

DOMINO Bullies go into two careers when they're older - boy bullies become cops, girl bullies become nurses. Statistically-speaking. I read it in an article.
GRACIE When'd you learn how to read?
DOMINO I want our guests t'know that I read. Articles.
GRACIE Tweets aren't articles. Also, I wasn't a bully in high school, just an all around menace.
DOMINO I didn't say you were a bully, it was just something I read. Cuz I read.
GRACIE Your attempts at smalltalk leave much / to the imagination
DOMINO It's better than hearin' my own teeth chewing!
PARKER Domino's right, the chicken is very good.
GRACIE Don't say that, butterin' her up / isn't gonna
PARKER Green beans too, Beatrice. I'm pretty sure I've only ever had them from the can.
BEATRICE I'd prefer it if you called me, Mrs. Camden, please.
GRACIE Okay, Mom, can you be pleasant for once in your life?
BEATRICE I said, "please."
A silence.

EGG The silence's weird [...]
DOMINO Told you so.
GRACIE Would you stop actin' like a goddamn child?
PARKER Who had the audacity to name you Grace?
BEATRICE I did.
GRACIE I see why Dad called you sassy.
PARKER He did what?

A silence.

PARKER Um, there's this old superstition "back in old country" / that

BEATRICE Egg, why'n't you give me the test results? Grace's right. Idle chitchat ain't doing anybody any favors. Nerves're making us say things we might regret. Hand it over.
EGG (*doing so)* Alright. But don't blame me if everybody suddenly loses their appetite.

Everyone stares in anticipation as Beatrice, ice in her eyes, takes the envelope and slices it open with her knife. Beatrice studies the results, her expression unreadable.

EGG She broke the seal, not me. Everybody saw, / right?
DOMINO Dad! Shut your yapper, please.
PARKER What does it say?

A long, tense moment. Everyone glances from Beatrice to Nick. Beatrice stares at him for a moment, then back down at the document.

BEATRICE He's /not our son
NICK I'm Eric!
EGG (*to Beatrice)* I couldn't / hear you over the
DOMINO Jesus H.
PARKER (*to Nick)* What did / you say?
GRACIE What the / fuck
EGG It must be a mistake. Some clerical, / there's always a
PARKER (*to Nick)* Why did you say that?
NICK I thought [...]
PARKER You thought what?
NICK (*to Beatrice)* Your family deserves to be happy.
BEATRICE That wouldn't make us happy. We want our son back.
NICK I could be. It could be a little fucked up family of our own creation.
BEATRICE You're somebody's son. But you aren't ours.
EGG (*reaching)* Let me see that.
BEATRICE (*snapping the document away from him)* No.
EGG Let's take another (*glancing at Parker, expression changing)* - You gave me the wrong hair.
PARKER What?
EGG You musta. That was someone else's hair, it musta been.

GRACIE Dad, you're makin' a fool / a yourself.
EGG Or somebody else's. That's the only way. (*Everyone is staring. Egg is alone.)* Why's no one listenin' to reason? (*rounding on Parker)* You're tryna keep / him from
PARKER (*rising defensively)* Keep him - ? From what? From this family?
EGG That's why you agreed to this! You gave me somebody else's DNA sample. You're selfish, you're greedy and selfish, you want him all to yourself!
PARKER What the fuck is wrong with you? This entire family is - do you not see how you treat each other? This isn't normal! It's, it's obscene. If I were your son, I'd want out, too.

Parker exits.

DOMINO Jesus H.
EGG Let's do another test. Do it right / this time

He reaches for Nick, who darts out of his way.

BEATRICE You done enough. I indulged your little - It's gotta end, it's - (*She stops, pats her chest, and resets).* I know you hoped for so long, that there could be some small miracle, but [...]

She falters. The dam is about to burst.
GRACIE Mom. You don't gotta hold it in.

And so she weeps, perhaps for the first time in years. The rest of them dissolve away into darkness as she lets it all out. She is finally laid bare - this should last as long as it needs. Eventually the tears fade into laughter. Egg staggers in, water bottle in his hand. It's a few hours later.

EGG (*offering)* You want some?
BEATRICE (*taking a swig.)* Oh, my God. (*taking another swig, almost joyfully)* That tastes awful.
EGG You get used to it. When you have to, you have to.
BEATRICE Everybody go home?
EGG You scared 'em off. I started cleaning the kitchen.
BEATRICE (*rising)* I'll clean up your attempt to clean up.
EGG I wish I'd been right.

BEATRICE I know you do. *(Another swig.)* I'm in therapy.
EGG Good. You need it.
BEATRICE Dunno if it's helping. But I'm trying. I had to do something or else I [...]
EGG You coulda talked to me.
BEATRICE You know I couldn't. (*Another swig.)* Why d'you stay? Everybody else goes. Not you. Day in, day out, you got a choice. And you stay.
EGG I don't got anywhere else to go.
BEATRICE Yeah. (*She takes another swig, then hands it back to him.)* Me neither.

He watches as she stands and begins clearing the rest of the table. She exits into the kitchen. For a moment, quiet; a slight movement behind him, like a hand on his shoulder.

EGG Eric?

But this time, we do not see Eric, or Nick, or whoever it is that Egg sees. Just Egg, an old man, alone.

EGG Quite the spectacle, huh? Don't got many of those dinners anymore. And the chicken was delicious. You sticking around this time? Good.

He takes another sip, inhales, and slowly smiles. This is enough.
EGG Good [...]

ACT II, SCENE VI
The park bench. A few weeks later. Nick and Parker sit, not quite together.

PARKER I don't want to be here when she is.
NICK Honestly, me neither.
PARKER This'll be good for you.
NICK It mostly feels like some sort of cosmic joke.
PARKER Is it being played on you or me?
NICK Everyone, maybe.
PARKER I don't want to end up like them.
NICK We won't. We're different.

PARKER The night we first met, you told me that you just wanted to have fun, that you weren't looking for anything real. You didn't want anything to tie you down.
NICK You changed my mind.
PARKER Did the tether become an anchor?
NICK More like a balloon.
PARKER Because I'm full of hot air?
NICK No, because you've helped me be free.
PARKER That's really gay. I'm glad you decided not to float away.
NICK Yeah, you get too high, you pop.
PARKER Like champagne. Speaking of which, I'd like to get very, very drunk, very, very soon and be drunk until I'm very, very ready to not be drunk anymore.
NICK Me too.
PARKER I'm gonna wait in the car. You need anything?
NICK I don't think so. Hey. I love you, dummy.
PARKER I love you, too.
NICK I'm not going anywhere. I'm far away but I'm here.
PARKER We'll be okay, right?
NICK We are.

Beatrice approaches. Parker ducks out.

BEATRICE Hello. Thank you for taking my call.
NICK Sure [...]
BEATRICE Dr. Miller said it'd be good for me.
NICK Sneaking out while you were in the fetal position wasn't a great parting of the ways.
BEATRICE I cracked. That's not how I am.
NICK Parker had a few tears to shed that night, too. There's a lot about me he doesn't know but he tries to know. And that is something. It seems so simple, just trying. But it's enough. I, uh, I'm not great at the whole "expressing my emotions in a healthy manner" thing.
BEATRICE I burned the test results. We had a cold snap one night and we lit the fireplace and when Egg was takin' the dog out I set it aflame. Strangely nice. So much for healthy emotions.
NICK Closure comes in weird ways.
BEATRICE I dunno that it was closure. I dunno that closure's a thing.

NICK We owe it to each other to find ways to live.
BEATRICE Very wise a you.
NICK My upbringing. My parents were wise people. Bad parents, wise people.
BEATRICE I'm sorry they failed you. Not everybody's meant to be a parent. They can try all they wanna but it's not who they are. Sometimes it's hard enough just being a person.

Nick nods vaguely.

BEATRICE I bought a bus ticket. To go see the Memorial. I thought I was sure but I'm not anymore. I never been outta the state, actually.
NICK It'll be a nice vacation, maybe?
BEATRICE Grief isn't meant to be shared. Sometimes you just gotta swallow it and force yourself to get past alone. I dunno if - It was a one-way ticket. Maybe I'll stay on the bus. See how far away it takes me. Get off at the last stop and not turn around.
NICK You seem like the kind of person who'll know what to do when you get there.
BEATRICE I never been certain a anything in my life. Even when I was walkin' down the aisle, I told myself, if I land on my left foot, I'll stay at the altar, if I land on my right, I'm gonna keep walking.
NICK But you stayed.
BEATRICE I musta landed on my left, I guess.

Beatrice rubs her forehead, headache brewing. A faraway droning.

NICK You know, they say fire is cleansing. Egg, he mentioned the end of the world, fire, water, but, uh, our ancestors used to do these, like, controlled burns. So they got to choose what burned before nature did its thing and destroyed everything.
BEATRICE Hm. So I should burn my house down?
NICK Something like that. I dunno. It just popped into my head.
BEATRICE Most sensible people keep thoughts a arson to themselves.
NICK Yeah. So, what's this thing Dr. Miller wants you to try?
BEATRICE It's silly. It's called roleplaying.
NICK Oh, I know all about roleplaying. Parker is, um. Never mind.
BEATRICE It's an effort to, uh, "adjust perspectives". (*She pauses, unsure.)* Sorry.

NICK You don't have to be self-conscious. I'm a stranger. You're never gonna see me again. Um. If I were in Eric's shoes, I'd guess he needed someone to tell him that he wasn't alone. Or at least that he wasn't alone in the way he felt alone. He probably just wanted to stop hurting.
BEATRICE I deserve to hurt.
NICK It's not selfish to look for happiness.

Beatrice stands into darkness. Silence. The ghosts of the past abound. Immortalized debris, artifacts of lamentation, death preserved for eternity. The only sounds are the stark clippings of a crowd of feet and a feminine voice played on the loudspeaker above, simultaneously monotone and cloying. Beatrice walks through it all, the voice fading in and out as she moves. This is a cavernous, empty place, and she is suddenly very, very small.

VOICE The stories they tell echo on in eternity. What can we learn from them? Not an easy question, and not an easy answer. Welcome to the National September Eleventh Memorial and Museum. Please watch your step as you approach the exhibit. The relics are real. A testament. A memory. Time immemorial. Time in memorial.

Beatrice pauses at one of the objects on display. There is nothing of Eric here. The drone. Nick joins her, still on the bench. He was here but now he isn't. Beatrice, too, is there, and she is here.

NICK Let's do it. Go ahead.
BEATRICE So, uh, roleplaying. I figured you'd get why it's supposeda help. You got a fractured relationship with your parents. I got one with my, well, everybody.
VOICE What do we-the-living owe the dead?
BEATRICE Sometimes I'd be myself, sometimes Dr. Miller'd be me and I'd be one a my children or my husband, or my own mother, and we'd just talk to each other.
NICK (*taking her hands in his)* I forgive you.
VOICE It is said that the dead die twice: once when we die and once more, long after, when the last person who loved us thinks of us for the final time. After that, we are gone.
BEATRICE What did you say?
VOICE Who is tethered to whom? In the churning kiln of creation, in the belly of the earth where the flame is without end, who do we see? Perhaps, more importantly, who sees us?
NICK I said, I forgive you.

The voice eats at her, like a storm of gnats around her head. Or, perhaps, a tumor of hornets. She tries another station of the exhibit. The droning follows, warping the voice.

BEATRICE You're supposed to establish who you are before you start.
NICK Do you forgive me? It's not that hard. You say it. Slowly it starts becoming real. Simple.
BEATRICE Things're never simple.

As the voice goes on, Nick begins to vanish into the darkness.

VOICE Will we succumb to the flame? Or will we ascend from the embers, a smoking phoenix whose wings spark against a blue sky?

Nick appears again out of the gloom, unseen to her, surrounded by fire. Or perhaps he is Eric. Or perhaps he is merely who Beatrice wants him to be, needs him to be. He brings with him the droning sound, louder with each step of his approach. She is on the edge, darkness beyond the precipice.

NICK Try. It takes time. It's never fully true. But you owe it to yourself.
VOICE It is only human to envision ourselves soaring, refusing to dignify death by giving it a name. But to rise, must we first fall?
BEATRICE But who're we in this situation?
NICK Whoever we want to be.

Smoke. Droning. The apparition, standing directly behind Beatrice, reaches out to her. A hand in the darkness, ever reaching. She does not see. She cannot see. She cannot stay. She cannot go.

VOICE To fly, must we first burn?
BEATRICE (*deciding)* I forgive you.

end.