Only One

A full-length play

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SETTING

The In-Between.

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Note: It is not important to make all the actors playing ARCHER TURNER look the same. I strongly encourage diverse casting. Fill each part with the person who best fits the essence of that role. I would also recommend casting adults to play the young Archer's.

6-YEAR-OLD ARCHER TURNER - Kind, friendly, and a bit oblivious. Loves to play games.

15-YEAR-OLD ARCHER TURNER - Withdrawn. Really does not want to be here.

23-YEAR-OLD ARCHER TURNER - Freaked out. Not coping very well.

42-YEAR-OLD ARCHER TURNER - Unhealthy both physically and emotionally.

46-YEAR-OLD ARCHER TURNER - Very fit. Calm. Balanced.

75-YEAR-OLD ARCHER TURNER - Bit of a superiority complex. Good with kids.

LULU - A fluffy dog. Enjoys her job very much. A puppet.

DOUBLE/2ND PUPPETEER - someone who can double as the other characters, including Lulu.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

On Production - There are many ways that the mystical world of The In-Between can be brought to life. I have ideas in mind for how everything could be staged, but I encourage each design team to discover the ways in which *they're* inspired to create this world and the characters.

Overlapping Dialogue - A forward-slash - "/" - indicates that the rest of the line is to be spoken over by the following line. The line should be read in its entirety, in order to convey the sense of people speaking over each other - and failing to listen.

CONTENT WARNING

This piece tackles difficult subjects, including suicide, physical abuse, emotional abuse, death of a child, and drug addiction. While the intent is for the show to give people (some) hope in tackling their own demons - and the ones passed down by their parents - I understand if these subjects make anyone reading uncomfortable. Take care and stay safe.

SUMMARY

ARCHER TURNER dies, then wakes up...next to several other Archer Turner's. Is this Heaven? Is this Hell? Is there a way of deciding which Archer is truly "the best?" Well, they better figure it out - because only one Archer will win the right to an afterlife.

"I'm fighting myself every day to get better."
-Vitor Belfort

ACT ONE

In the dark, a cacophonous argument. Five voices yelling at once. Some words cut through the din:

23
-who are you?!-

42
-the fuck?!-

15
-w-what is this?-

46
-where is she?-

6
M-Mom?! Mom, where are you?!

Lights rise on a strange sight. In a fluid, shifting, *living* space, five versions of ARCHER TURNER yell at each other, confused and scared. These are a 6-YEAR-OLD Archer; a 15-YEAR-OLD Archer; a 23-YEAR-OLD Archer; a 42-YEAR-OLD, overweight, unhealthy Archer; and a 46-YEAR-OLD, fit Archer.

A sixth Archer - this one 75 YEARS OLD - stands to the side and watches in stunned silence. *Note: the Archer's will be referred to just by their ages.*

More words cut through the chaos:

23
-the fuck am I?!-

42
-some sick joke?!-

15
-I-I don't understand-

6
-bad! That's bad-

46
-where's Maggie?

As the cacophony continues, 75 realizes something.

75
...No. No, this can't be real.

During the below, a TINY, FLUFFY DOG appears upstage, almost as if she grew out of the space itself. This is LULU.

75
A dream. That's all this is. A dream.

75 closes his eyes and pinches himself - *hard* - as the other Archer's keep yelling.

23
-not funny, Mike!-

6
-Dad will be mad-

75 opens his eyes.

75

...Crap.

Lulu moves toward the chaos. 6 is the first to notice her.

46

I don't know what this is, but if any /of you get in my-

6

Lulu? Lulu!

6 crosses to Lulu. 46 freezes as he really looks at 6 for the first time.

46

...Oh, my God. Y-You're-

6

(to all)

Hey! Hey, look! It's my dog, Lulu!

6, instantly feeling more secure, hugs Lulu. All the other Archer's turn to look.

15

Lulu?

46

L-Lulu?

6

Sit, Lulu. Sit.

Lulu sits.

6

Good girl!

42

That's not...

23

Whoa.

46

That's not possible. I haven't seen Lulu in-

75

Sixty years.

46

Thirty years.

6

I can't be that far from home if Lulu's here. She must've come to find me. Good girl, such a good girl. She really is the best dog.

23
(mumbles)
Man, she's a *dead* dog.

6
She can do all sorts of tricks. Like - stay, Lulu, stay.

Lulu stays.

6
Roll over.

Lulu rolls over.

6
Play dead.

Lulu just stands there.

6
Lulu, play dead.

Lulu continues to stand there.

6
Okay, you don't have to play dead if you don't wanna. Speak, Lulu, speak.

And Lulu does just that:

LULU
It's not that I didn't want to "play dead." The joke was that since we're all in The In-Between, I already *am* dead, at least to a human's perspective, so I don't need to "play" anything. I can see now that the joke would have worked better with context.

Beat.

23
Nope.

23
No way.

15
Oh, Jesus, no.

42
The fuck?!

46
What the-?

75
Oh, Christ.

23 curls into a fetal position on the ground.

6
Whoooa. Good girl!

LULU
Thanks, kid.

6
Why didn't you tell me you could speak, Lulu?

LULU
Because I'm not really Lulu. I always take a form that I know a particular set of V's will respond to positively. I find it makes the whole experience more digestible. I understand that discovering that the multiverse exists and the only thing you and your V's have in common is that you're dead can be a little...ruff.

(beat)
Get it? "Ruff." It's a dog joke. Seriously, nobody got that?

6
Uhhhh-

46
I think we're distracted by that earlier bit. What was that about being dead?

LULU
You're-

75
I knew it. *Christ*, the moment I saw all of you, I knew it. But I didn't want to believe it.

42
Believe what?

75
I was only supposed to take a nap. I promised Maggie that /I was-

42
Maggie?

75
-just going to take a nap. That I would hold on. Hold on for her.
How could I be so *weak*?

42
You better start making sense real soon, old man-

75
Don't you get it? I'm dead. I died in that hospital. And now I'm here. Faced with reflections of myself from different times in my life.

(re: 6)
When I was a child.

(re: 15)
A teenager.

(re: 23)
In my twenties.

(to 46)

Middle-aged.

(to 42)

And...well, to be honest, I don't remember ever being that fat.

42

Okay, fuck you.

6

Bad! That's a bad word. Dad will be mad.

75

And he's not very nice when he's mad, is he?

6 shakes his head, scared.

75

(to Lulu, re: the Archer's)

But why? Why force me to look at all these mistakes?

42

Hey.

46

That's a bit rude.

75

(a dawning fear, to Lulu)

Wait. Is this...is this-

75

Hell?

15

Hell?

Without waiting for Lulu to respond:

75

Oh *God*, it is, isn't it?

75

But that doesn't make any sense!

15

But that doesn't make any sense.

75

I repented! I went to Church.

42

I never went to-

46

I never went to-

75

I didn't start going until I was seventy. But still, I went. I did everything I could to atone for my sins. How is this possible?

(beat, to Lulu)

Well? Don't you have anything to say for yourself?

LULU

Oh, I get to speak now? That's nice.

You are, in fact, *not* in Hell.

75 breathes a sigh of relief.

LULU
But you are dead. And so are the other Archer Turner's. You are /all-

75
Well, obviously. I'm dead, and therefore, by definition, any reflection of me is-

A *low, unhappy rumble* is heard - and felt.

42 6
Hey, hey! Whoa!

46
What is that?!

LULU
Oh, it does that sometimes.
As I was saying. You are *all* dead. Because you are all Archer Turner's, from different Earth's within the multiverse.

42 75
Multi-what? Multi-what?

LULU 15
Multiverse. Multiverse?

15
Like from the comics?

LULU
Comics. Centuries of science. Take your pick.

75
Can someone *please* explain what a multiverse is?

15
It's just, it's this thing, this idea that there are all these universes out there. And each one has an Earth and its own version of...
(realizing)
...you.

LULU
Close. Though not-

6 starts to scratch Lulu's butt.

LULU
What are you doing?

6
Scritchy-scratches. They're your favorite, Lulu.

LULU
As I explained, I am not really-
Oh. Oh, wow. Never mind, kid, you keep doing what you're doing.

As 6 keeps scratching her:

LULU
Not every universe has an Earth, let alone a V of every person.

46
I'm sorry - "V?"

LULU
Variant. Like how you are each a variant of Archer Turner. But there isn't a V of Archer Turner in every universe, or even most of them. Barely a paw-full, really. There are way too many variables for you to come into existence every time. For example, there are all those times your mom did that thing your dad really liked which caused him to ejaculate twenty seconds earlier, making a completely different baby /that-

15
Ah, gross.

42
I'm gonna be sick.

75
Hey! Not in front of the kid.

LULU
Right. *So* sorry.

6
(to 15)
What's "ejonculate?"

15
It's a, uh, type of soup.

6
Oh.

LULU
And yet, even with all of those variables in play, several V's of Archer Turner still came into existence. All with their own lives. And deaths. And now, the six of you are here.

46
But how are we all here at the same time? We're each a different age, which means we died at different times, right?

LULU
Humans and their linear time. Adorable!
Aaaaanyway. You're all here to decide which V should move on.

75

But didn't I already move on?

LULU

No. Right now, you're in The In-Between. You stay here until you walk through that door-

Lulu gestures, pointer-dog style. Out of the ether, a door appears.

LULU

-which eventually leads to The Other Side. But *only one* of you will get to walk through that door. The rest of you will cease to exist. Understood?

Beat.

42

What the fuck are you talking about?!

6 flinches.

6

Bad! That's a bad /word!

LULU

Hey. Hey, kid.

Lulu gets on her back, presenting her belly.

LULU

Can you do that scritchy-scratch thing again?

During the below, 6 scratches Lulu's belly, which calms him down.

LULU

So. A lot of humans talk about Heaven. Something similar *actually* exists, called The Other Side. Not Heaven, per se, but that sort of idea.

(to 6, re: scratches)

Yes, ohhhh, yes, right there.

(to all)

And the good news is, everyone gets in! But only one V of everyone. The best V. Same goes for you, Archer's. And sure, I could tell you which V *I* think is the best-

(re: 6)

-though you can probably guess-

(then)

-but that's not how this works. You have to tell *me w*hich V should move on. Which V is, without question, truly your <u>best self.</u>

(to 6)

Alright, alright, that's all I can take. And may I just say - you are an artist with those hands.

(to all Archer's)

Now. Who will it be?

Beat.

6

Oh - “ruff!” - I get it!

6 laughs while making a “ruff” noise.

LULU

I love this kid!

46

So. You want us to decide which one of us should get to go to the, um, The Other Side. And, by doing so, condemn the rest of us to Hell?

LULU

No. Nothing so dramatic. You will merely be erased from existence.

42

Oh, that’s all?

LULU

Yes.

42

Uh-huh. I dunno about the rest of you, but I don’t see why we gotta listen to some zombie-dog back from the grave.

LULU

Please keep in mind, I’m not really Lulu.

42

I really don’t care. What I do care about is that you’re all of nine pounds of fluff. And there’s six of us, weighing in at a combined total of - a lot. So if we all wanna go through that door, I don’t think there’s much you can do to stop us.

46

But if this is what we’re supposed to do-

42

If you really are another me, then “supposed to” never got you very far.

42 walks to the door. Lulu watches. He touches the doorknob - and gets thrown back like he was hit by a huge, electric shock.

42

Ah!

15

Oh, God.

6

Whoa!

46

W-What just happened?

LULU

To continue with the dog theme we have going, you've heard of a shock-collar. Well, when you touch the door without permission, it's a similar sensation, but with the intensity of an electric chair.
Good thing he's already dead!

23

That's it, man, that's it!

23 jumps to his feet.

23

I've had some *bad* highs, yeah? Some seriously fucked-up trips, /like, like, like, like-

6

Bad, that's /really bad-

15

(to 6)

Hey, hey, hey.

During the below, 15 puts 6's hands on his ears, so 6 can't hear 23.

23

-like one time, I thought I was tar. No shape, just a big puddle of tar. But I could still move. Like wind was pushing me. Except I was my own wind. And I'd push myself into people. When they were sleeping. Or drunk. Or watching TV. I'd slosh in through their pores and nose and mouth and that tiny little space under the nails. Just fill them the fuck up. And, and infect them. 'Til they couldn't move. Couldn't breathe. Couldn't *be*. And, fuck, I don't even know why I did it! Part of my brain was like, "shit, this isn't cool." But another part was like, "Man, I'm tar! I don't even have a brain!" So I never stopped. Fucking never.

Beat as 23 pictures this horror.

75

(quietly)

Was I really this stupid?

23 shakes his head, trying to clear it.

23

That was a bad trip. But this? Man, I warned Mike that shit looked sketch.

46

Mike? You mean Mikey Vasquez?

23

Wh-? I haven't spoken to Vasquez since high school. He-

(suddenly)

No! I am not having this convo! Cuz there's no one here to convo *with!*

(a decision)

I'm, I'm gonna find Mike. And get us to a hospital. A hospital.

23, in a daze, wanders to one side of the stage.

23

...hospital...h-hospital...

46

(to Lulu)

He's not going to get very far, is he?

23

...Hospital...

23 exits the stage-

-and re-enters on the *other* side, not aware he was teleported to a different spot.

23

...Hospital...

LULU

He is not.

During the below, 23 keeps crossing the stage, exiting, and reappearing on the opposite side, while occasionally muttering "hospital."

15 gestures to 6 to tell him it's okay to take his hands off his ears.

15

If you hear any other bad words, know that they can't hurt you. Cuz Dad's not here and can't get mad. Not right now.

6

Does, does that mean I can say a bad word?

15

Uh, yeah, I guess.

(beat)

You gonna say one or not?

6

Not now. I'm gonna save it for later.

15

...Okay.

Beat.

75

Fine. If no one else will say it, I'll state the obvious. The one who should move on to The Other Side is me.

46

And how did you come to that conclusion?

During the below, 42 works his way back to his feet.

75

I'm the oldest, so I know more than the rest of you - and have more friends and family that will want to see me again. How do you think my daughter will /feel-

42

Wh-?

75

-if she gets to The Other Side and finds her dad is some drug addict?

23

(muttering)

Hospital.

75

Or worse - a child that she has to take care of?
Besides, I made a promise to Maggie.

42

(quietly)

No-

75

That I would never leave her side. Even as I laid in my own filth in that miserable hospital bed, I swore that I wouldn't let her go. That I was only going to take a nap, but I'd wake to Maggie's gentle smile /in-

42

(a bit louder)

Stop.

75

-no time.

46

So - we got her back? We got Maggie back?

75

What do you /mean?

42
(pissed, *very* loud)
Enough!

Everyone looks at 42, who is seething. Lulu wags her tail.

42
(to 75)
Keep your mouth shut, old man, or I'll close it for you.
(to 46 and 75)
Both of you.

75
Excuse me?

46
Excuse me?

42
I've been a true son of a bitch - and so have all of you, I bet. But to pretend like Maggie and my child aren't dead in the ground, is...

42 trails off, too upset to finish the sentence.

6, a bit nervous, tugs at 15's shirt.

6
Who's Maggie?

15
I dunno, I...
Just - ask someone else, okay?

15 wraps his arms around himself and walks away from 6.

During the below, 6, not sure where else to turn, watches 23 stumble-walk.

75
(to 42)
What in God's name are you talking about? Maggie isn't-

42
I held her. As she coughed up blood. It was running down her chin, over the spot where I'd kiss her every morning before getting out of bed. I wanted her to take my hand, to hold it and know that it was gonna be okay, that help was coming, but she wouldn't let go of her stomach. She was trying to say something but couldn't with all that blood filling her throat. But I know what she was trying to say. "My girl. My baby girl."

Silence.

46
How?

42

A car crash. After Adam Thorsen's Tenth Annual Christmas Party. I wanted to drive, but I'd had a few drinks, so Maggie insisted. It was dark. There was black ice...

(to 75)

S-So. Don't try to tell me that Maggie and my unborn child are-

75

Betty. Her name is Betty.

42

Whose?

75

My daughter.

46

My daughter.

75

Who *is* alive. Just like her mother.

42

I told you, /don't-

75

Just because you don't want to hear it doesn't stop it from being true, you overgrown child. And the truth is Betty was the most energetic little girl I've ever met. Impulsive. Unpredictable. A bit overwhelming, but brimming with a joy that could only be described as infectious. And that joy never went away. Faded occasionally. But it always came back. Always.

Beat.

42

I need to meet her.

75

What?

46

What?

42

I need to meet Betty. And see Maggie. I need to see that she's happy again.
It should be me. I should be the one to move on.

75

Absolutely not. Maggie should spend eternity on The Other Side with the man who took care of her and Betty. Not the one who had her drive so he could get wasted.

42 looks like he's been slapped.

42

That's not what /happened-

75

I know how it feels to drink the world away. To disappear into a darkness of my own making. Dad sure as shoot showed me how. But I fought it, eventually. You didn't. I did.

42

/But-

46

But what if Maggie doesn't want to be with you on The Other Side?

Beat.

75 42

What? What?

46

You said she was with you when you died, so clearly we got her back, but what if that was just because she felt like we were her only option? On The Other Side, she might try to get away again. To find someone better.

75

Who could possibly be better?

46

Lulu, is Frank Sinatra on The Other Side?

LULU

Literally everyone is on The Other Side.

75

But that means Hitler's on The Other Side.

42

Is Hitler really on The Other Side?

LULU

Literally everyone is on The Other Side. But it's likely a baby V of Hitler. That's usually what happens with the dictators. All the adult V's find each other insufferable with their endless speeches and agree that the baby is the only option that isn't wholly irritating.

75

But you don't know for sure?

LULU

No. I've never been to The Other Side.

15

What? But doesn't that suck?

Beat.

46

Well?

LULU

I just shrugged, but I feel like that didn't translate in this fluffy, little body. *So* sorry.
I like this job very much, so I don't mind.

46
But that also means you can't know which V of Maggie will be there, can you?

LULU
No. Everyone gets the same choice as you.

46
(to 42 and 75)
So what if it's a Maggie who doesn't love us anymore? Or never loved us? Or never even met us?

A slight beat.

75
No. No, I don't believe it. She'll get to send her best self along - how could it not be the one who was by my side to the very end?

42
How about the one who wants to finally meet her child?

46
Speaking of children. Can we just ignore...*him?*

46 gestures to 6, who by this point is mimicking 23's stumble-walking.

42
What about him?

46
He's just a kid.
(re: 15)
So is he.

15
I'm fifteen.

46
I'm making your case, you really want to fight me on it?

15
I don't...
Whatever.

15 steps away from the group.

6 turns to 75.

6
Can I have some mac and cheese?

75 kneels next to 6 (he's quite good with kids).

75

I'm not sure, kiddo. Lemme check.

(to Lulu)

Can he have some mac and cheese?

LULU

Not here. There should be some on The Other Side.

6

I wanna go there!

42

So there's the kid's argument for why he should move on.

(sarcastic)

Tough to argue with "mac and cheese."

46

Is this all a joke to you?

42

Of course not, /I-

75

Okay, okay, look. Betty's got kids of her own now.

46 and 42 both soften.

46

She does?

42

Really?

46

What are their names?

42

What are their names?

75

Clementine and Alvin.

15

(under his breath)

Those names *suck.*

42

(a rare smile)

I'm a granddad. Holy shit, I'm a granddad.

75

Yes - and no. That's my point. I was all of you, but I'm also a lot more. I'd give my life for Alvin and Clementine, no questions asked.

(re: 6 and 15, some regret)
But not them. Because they won't be gone while I'm still around.
(to 15)
Everything you know, I know. So you'll still exist within me.

15
Uh, that doesn't sound as appealing as you think. And also - would I? We don't know if any of us are really the same, do we?

46
What do you mean?

15
Like, maybe you were like me when you were a kid, but maybe you weren't. And I know we can't be *exactly* the same. So-

75
You can't know that.

46
Let him finish.

15
...So you're not, like, carrying me around inside you. Or whatever.

6 tugs on 15's shirt.

6
Is it almost done?

15
Is what almost done?

6
The mac and cheese.

15
There isn't /any-

75
They had to run to the store to pick it up, so it's gonna take a while. Okay, kiddo?

6
Okay.

46 steps forward, brainstorming.

46
Alright, let's...
Lulu. Does the voting have to be unanimous?

LULU

I'm afraid so.

46

Then let's do this. An initial vote, just to see where everyone stands. It won't be unanimous, so nothing's official. Sound good?

75

I suppose.

42

Fine.

15

Whatever.

46

(to 6)

Kid, you want to play a voting game?

6

My mom said voting's for...

Beat.

46

What?

6

I don't wanna use my swear word yet.

46

I respect that. In this game, you can vote for yourself.

6

Oh! I pick me!

46

That's one vote for the kid.

42

He doesn't even know what he's voting for.

46

You wanna explain it to him?

(beat, to 75)

How do you vote?

A slight beat at 75 looks at 6 with some guilt. But then:

75

I'm not going to feel bad about voting for myself.

46

Then don't.
I'll vote for the kid.

(to 42)

You?

42

Me. I vote for me.

46

Shocking.

(to 15)

You?

15

Do I have to vote?

46

You really want to let the chips fall on something this important?

15 shrugs, uncomfortable.

46

(to Lulu)

Does he have to vote?

LULU

I'm afraid so. Abstaining won't get any of you anywhere.

A slight beat.

15

Will the V that goes through gain all the other V's memories? Or will he just, like, know what he lived through?

LULU

The latter. Plus, whatever you decide to tell each other in The In-Between.

15

(to 6)

Hey. You love your mom?

6

Uh, *yeah.* She's my mom. Not like she's a dad or anything.

15
(to all, re: 6)
Okay. Okay, yeah, I vote for the kid, too.

6
(not really getting it)
I'm winning!

46
So that just leaves...

They turn to see 23 disappear from one side of the stage and reappear on the other again.

23
...Hospital...

46 steps in front of him.

46
Hey, bud. Listen-

23
Oh, hey, hey, man, can you point me to the nearest hospital?

46
No. No, I can't. Because whatever your friend, Mike, gave you - I'm sorry to tell you, but it killed you.

Beat.

23 bends over and begins to retch.

46
Jesus! Are you okay?
(to Lulu)
Is he okay?

6 mimics the retching noises.

LULU
Yes. You can't get sick here, so there's no reason he should be doing that.

23
(between retches)
This always - makes me - throw up - if I wanna - get - some shit - out of - my system.

42
Well, stop. It's fucking disgusting.

6 stops making the noise as 23 sits on the ground, upset.

23

Fuck, man. Fuck. I *warned* Mike-

(realizing)

Oh, no. Mike! I hope he's okay.

42

If he took the same shit you did, I wouldn't count on it.

23

Don't say that, man. He's got a kid.

75

Then he really shouldn't have been taking-
What were you taking?

23

What are you, a cop?

75

...Are you *actually* asking if I'm a cop? A cop who looks like an older version of you and is, let's not forget, also dead?

Beat.

23

You gonna answer the question or not?

75

No, I'm not a cop!

23

Got the temper of one. Fuck.
Sugar. Some brown sugar.

15

For, like, baking?

23

Nah, dumbass. Like smack. Heroin.

15 wraps his arms back around himself.

75

You were taking-?
You idiot! Why would you-

23

Back off, old man, you don't know what I've been through.

75

I do! I literally do!

46

Let's just - take a breath. Center ourselves. No harmony can be found without balance. Alright?

23

Uhhh...

46

Now. Only one of us can go through that door to Heaven.

LULU

It's not actually-

46

Essentially Heaven. So. Who should it be?

23

Isn't that obvious? Me.

75

You?! Out of all of us, it should be the brain-damaged drug addict?

23

Man, the fuck's your problem with me?

75

I can't even look at you.

23

Why?

75

Because you're a waste of Goddamn space!

Lulu wags her tail.

23

(to 75)

Dude, fuck you! You're not exactly Kris fucking Kringle.

During the below, 23 and 75 stare each other down, almost like cowboys standing off.

6

(to 15, anxious)

W-Why are they yelling?

15

(to 6)

Just-
Go to a corner, press your back against the wall, and hum your favorite song.

6

L-Like my game, “Not Here?”

15

Oh. Right. Yeah, go play “Not Here.”

During the below, 6 crosses to a corner, sits down and hums to himself.

75 studies 23.

75

How old are you?

23

Twenty-three. So /what?

75

At twenty-three, I was already working at the warehouse, seventy hours a week, living on a couch, barely sleeping - and not just because of the nightmares - all so I could send some money home to our mother. So I could give her the stability that our sweat-stain of a father never could. Were you? Were you doing *anything* to help her?

23

We’re not exactly talking right now, so no, I can’t say I am.

15 comes forward, suddenly interested.

15

You’re not? Why?

23

Twenty-fucking-questions up in here. Cuz she said it, like, broke her heart to see me like this. That broke her heart, but hearing Dad’s belt come down on my back for years was hunky-fucking-dory?
Whatever. Just drop it. Both of you.

15 steps away from the group again.

46

Alright. Let’s just go over the votes. We have three for the kid, one for-

(re: 23)

-the, um, addict, one for-

(re: 42)

-the angry one, and one for-

(to 75)

-the old one.

75

Gee, thanks.

46

What do you want me to say, “Three for Archer, one for Archer, one for Archer, and oh yeah, one for Archer?”

75

You could have just as easily referred to me as “the silver fox.”

46

(to Lulu)

Fifty percent of the votes are for the kid. But you said it’s not possible to round up, right?

75

Wait.

42

Hey!

LULU

It is not. *So* sorry.

46

Then it looks like we’re going to be here for a long time.

Beat as they all try to think of what to do next, some more frustrated than others.

6 tugs on 15’s shirt.

6

Will you play with me?

15

Uh, no, thanks.

6

Why not?

15

I don’t like games.

6

You like “Not Here.”

15

I wouldn’t say I like it. But okay, I play one game.

6

That’s it?

15

That’s it.

6

That's really sad.

15

You're not wrong.

6

Do you know the game "Hide the Heart?"

15

No.

Awkward beat. It's clear 6 wants 15 to prompt him. Finally:

15

What's "Hide the Heart?"

6

(quickly)

My mom plays it with me, it's when she hides her heart somewhere in the room and I gotta find it before she dies.

During the below, 6 crosses extra-close to 15, to share a secret.

75

(to 46 and 42)

That's a bit intense. Do you remember that game?

23

I do, yeah.

42

No. Mostly we sang. Quietly, so Dad couldn't hear. But every night.

75

Same. Even after she got sick, at the hospital we'd still-

75

Sing for hours.

42

Sing for hours.

23

Wait. Mom gets sick?

Neither 42 nor 75 want to revisit that memory.

6

(to 15)

Psst. You wanna know a secret Mom told me? About how to find the heart before she dies?

15

Um, okay.

The other Archer's can't help but listen in.

6

She always hides it-

6

Inside me.

23

Inside me.

Beat.

15

No. No, I don't wanna play that.

15 moves away from 6.

42

(to himself)

"Before she dies..."

(to all)

Hey. I got an idea.

(re: 15)

Like he said, we're all different, right?

46

Right.

75

Well...

6

My mom says no one's as different as they think.

42

Not relevant right now, kid.

(to all)

But the problem is we don't know what those differences are. And without knowing what sets us apart, we can't tell who's really the best. So - let's figure it out.

75

You mean go moment by moment through our lives and compare notes? I barely remember being fifteen, let alone six.

42

There's one event we know for damn sure was different for each of us.

23

What?

42

How we died.

46

How we died.

23
Oh. Oh, shit. So, we just go down the line and say how we kicked it?

42
And what you were doing the moments *before* you died.
Okay, who wants /to-

15
Can we, can we talk about something else?

46
What did you have in mind?

15 shrugs, uncomfortable.

42
(sarcastic)
Super helpful, thank you.

46
(to 15, re: 42)
Then I think he's right - at the very least it's a good place to start.

Lulu laughs. Everyone looks at her.

LULU
I'm sorry, was that not meant to be funny? Referring to the moments you died as a "good place to start?"

A slight beat.

42
Anyway, let's-

15
I'm serious. I don't want to talk about *that.*
And I don't wanna hear about, like, all the *other* ways I could have died. I don't wanna do that.
I'm not gonna do that.

42
For fuck's sake, you little brat, all you've done so far is pout in a corner and say "no" to shit. I've had ulcers that contributed more than you.

75
There's no need /to-

15
You know what? You're an asshole.

42
(sarcastic)
Perceptive, wow.

15
Maybe your kid was better off never knowing you.

42 goes quiet.

75
Okay, /that's-

15
Cuz I bet you'd be as bad as Dad.

A very tense beat.

Suddenly, 42 LUNGES at 15.

42
Don't you dare-

46, 23, and 75 hold 42 back.

42
Don't you dare say that!

23
Whoa, whoa, hey!

15 backs into a corner, covering his face with his hands.

42
I'll rip out your fucking tongue!

15
Don't you fucking touch me!

Seeing this, 6 gets very tense, his hands instinctively clutching at his back.

6
(quietly)
No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no...

6 continues mumbling "no" and begins to rock back and forth during the below.

46
(to 42)
Calm down, man, calm down. The kid doesn't know what he's saying.

42
He knows exactly what he's saying!

15
I know exactly what I'm saying!

75
If you lay a finger on him, you will hate yourself.

42

Too late! Besides, you heard Lulu, no one can die here.

LULU

That is correct. Plus, from what I hear, people beat themselves up all the time.

46

Not literally, Lulu!

75

He's not the one you're angry at. Not really.

42

Oh, I *really* am.

46

Listen to me. I am giving you *one last chance* to take a deep breath and center yourself.

42 isn't letting up.

46

Alright, then.

(to 23 and 75)

You two back up.

23

But-

75

But-

46

Now.

23 and 75 back off.

Thinking he has an opening, 42 lunges at 15 again.

42

Finally.

But 46 hits 42 with an impressive *krav maga* grappling move, locking 42 in place.

42

What the hell?!

46 pulls on 42, adding more pressure to the hold.

42

Ah, fuck!

Lulu wags her tail.

46

I should have warned you, I am trained in krav maga. Apparently you did not pick up the same hobby.

42

Let go of me!

46

I will. Once you promise not to hurt the kid.

42

Come on, it's not a big deal in here - like squeezing a stress-ball!

46 pulls harder. 42 groans in pain.

46

Are *you* feeling like a stress-ball?

42

Arrrrgh...
Fuck, fuck, fine! I'll leave him alone!

46 lets go of 42.

75 stares at 42 with deep disappointment.

15 lets himself slide down the wall.

15

(shaking with adrenaline)

Fuck. Oh, fuck.

23

(to 46)

Shit, man, that was cool. I wanna learn krav maga.

46

It changed my life. Unfortunately, it might be a little late for it to change yours.

42 starts to get up, sees 75 staring at him.

42

Don't look at me like that.

75 just keeps staring.

46 crosses to 15, offers his hand.

46

He's not going to touch you. I promise.

15 takes 46's hand, who helps him to his feet.

15

Th-Thanks.

46 nods, then turns to the group.

46

Alright. Let's-

15

Wait.

15 gestures to the still very tense 6, breathing heavily and twisted in a knot with tension.

6

(still mumbling)

No, no, no, no, no, no...

The other Archer's react, knowing that feeling too well.

23

Ah, shit.

75

Ah, kiddo.

42 looks away, ashamed.

46

Alright, alright, just give him some space. Room to breathe.
That's the most important thing, kid. Just breathe through it.

6

(mumbling)

No, no, no, no, no, no, no...

15 crosses to 6. Doesn't touch him, but sits by his side. 15 begins to hum the same song 6 was humming earlier.

6 is still tense.

75 joins 15 in humming.

Then 23.

Then 46.

Even 42, in a corner on his own.

Finally, 6 joins in. As he does, the tension leaves his body.

15

Better?

6

Y-Yeah.

75 and 15 help 6 back to his feet.

Beat.

46

Well...I suppose we should get back to it, then.

Everyone looks at him.

46

Talking through our - you know - deaths.

15

But I already said, I don't want-

46

I don't know what happened to you. And I'm sorry to put you through that memory. I truly am. You can go last, alright?

Beat.

The other Archer's watch as 15, unhappy, goes and sits in the corner.

6 crosses to him.

6

You okay?

15

Not really.

6

Oh. Can I help?

15

Not really.

6

Oh. Can I play "Not Here" with you?

15

I'm not gonna stop you.

6

Do you *want* me to?

Beat.

15

Yeah.

6 sits next to 15, hums very quietly.

42

(to all, still embarrassed)

Okay. So.

(to 23)

We already know what got you killed. Something quite likely to get you killed. So, no offense, but not the most tragic story.

75

Agreed.

42

So, /then-

23

Man, you two - you're made for each other, you know that?

75

We *are* each other-

23

Both judging me so fast. Least I found something. Something that gave me...something.

75

A poet, this one.

23

Hope. That I wouldn't be a Goddamn whipping-post anymore. That I wouldn't wake up in howling pain every time I rolled onto my back.
First time Mike offered me some brown sugar was at Rachel Tipton's graduation party.

42

I was at that party. But I didn't-

23

He saw me sitting in the corner drawing and was like, "Damn, dude, that's pretty fucking dope." And I was like, "Oh, it's just this, like, dream-world I made up, where everything's super soft so nothing can ever hurt you. I call it-

23

-Softland."

15

Softland.

75

(quietly, jogging a memory)

"Softland?"

23

And he was like, "Dude, how'd you like to *live* in Softland?"
How the *fuck* could I say no to that?

75

Look. Does life work out the way you want it to? Of course not. My hands grew so raw at the warehouse that holding a pencil felt like Hell. But you let your dreams fade. You don't throw away everyone who matters for /a quick escape-

23

That's bullshit, man, I-

46

(cutting them both off)

Alright, alright. I am sure we are all going to have *feelings* about the choices we each made. And voting will be a great time to express those feelings. But for now, let's keep it light and pleasant as we discuss how we died. Deal?

Everyone grumbles in agreement.

46

Good. Who's next?

42

I am.
I was stabbed.

23

Whoa, really?

42

Outside a bar. I was just standing there, looking at the stars, when out of nowhere, some prick decided he had a problem with me. Didn't like my face or something. He stuck me between the ribs. Even after I was on the ground bleeding out, he got me a few more times. I had to watch as he tore my body apart. Like chopped meat.

23

Dude, that sucks.

42

It was fucking tragic. Not how anyone deserves to go, especially on the heels of losing their wife and unborn child.

Beat as everyone processes this.

42

Okay. Next to go should be-

75

Hold on. This man stabbed you without warning?

42

Awful, right?

75

Unprovoked?

42

Essentially.

75

You didn't say or do *anything* to provoke him?

42

Why would you even ask that?

75

Because I've known you less than an hour and been ready to stab you three times.

23

That's a good point.

42

A good-?! I was *stabbed*! There's no good reason to be stabbed!

46

Of course not. But given what we're trying to accomplish here, I agree that context is important. It says a lot about the sort of person you were when you passed.

Beat.

42

He was smoking.

46

Smoking?

75

Smoking?

42

The guy. Smoking in front of his wife.

75

So?

42

His *pregnant* wife.

I snapped. Went over, grabbed the cigarette outta his mouth and said some things that I...can't really remember, I was so angry. Just to get him to stop smoking that close to her. Or smoking at all. I stormed off. That's when he came after me.

But that doesn't give him the right to fucking stab me!

46

No. No, it doesn't.
And thank you. For sharing that. I'm sure we all appreciate your honesty.

75, realizing something, turns to Lulu.

75

Excuse me, Lulu. Is there any way to confirm whether any of us are lying?

LULU

Well-

42

Come on, I just told you the truth.

75

Once we called you out on it. But even now, we only have your word on what happened. And what if you're not the only one who's lied?
(to Lulu)
Can you confirm or deny what any of us say about ourselves?

LULU

I can't disclose any information that might impact voting. *So* sorry.

75

But what if we cast our votes based on lies?

LULU

Then you better find a compelling way to make each other tell the truth!
Though to be fair, from what I hear, humans lie to themselves all the time.

46

Well, this is going to make things more complicated. I don't want to make any decisions without knowing for sure they're based on facts.

75

Oh, for God's sake. I know it's a *fact* that I'm telling the truth and the one who should move on, so it looks to me like the conversation's over.

46

No. No, I think we just need to swear on something.

6

But I don't wanna use my swear word yet.

46

Not that kind of swear, kid.
(to all)
We have to swear that we're telling the truth on something that mattered to all of us.

42

Then obviously it should be-

42

Maggie.

75

Maggie.

46

Maggie only mattered to us three.

(to 23)

You haven't met her yet, right?

23

Is she the one who threw up on Mike's cat?
No, wait, that was me.

46

So. It needs to be something from when we were young. And for me, at least, the thing I'd always swear on was /Mom.

42

Mom.

75

Mom.

23

...Mom, yeah.

This catches 6's attention.

6

Mom?! You've seen Mom?

6 looks around the space.

46

Oh, um, well-

6

Where is she? Is she here?

46

She-

15

She's not here.

6

(increasingly worried)

But I need to see her! Dad's gonna be really, really mad when he wakes up and sees I'm not home, so I have to talk to her first.

(calling out)

Mom? Mom, where are you? Mom? Mom?!

15 tenses every time 6 says "Mom," eventually walking away.

The other Archer's (minus 15) look at each other, not sure what to do. Finally, 75 jumps in.

6
Mom, can you hear me?! Mom?! /Mom, please, I-

75
Hey, hey, hey, it's okay, kiddo. It's okay. She knows where you are.

6
R-Really?

75
We're keeping her updated on how you're doing.
(to other Archer's)
Isn't that right?

46
That's right.

75
And she said as long as you're happy, then she's happy. So - are you happy?

6
(re: 42)
Uh...he's scaring me a little.

75
Oh, you mean cuz he got all loud? He didn't mean it, he was just teasing.
(to 42)
Weren't you?

42 sees the stare 75's giving him and wilts.

42
Yeah. Yeah, I was just teasing, kid. Sorry if I scared you.

6
It's okay.

23
Hey. Mo-
Your mom wanted us to tell you something.

6
She did?

23
That you still got something of hers.

6

What?

23

Her heart. She wants you to promise to keep it safe.

6

I promise.

6, calmer, holds his hand over his heart as he goes and sits next to 15 again.

46

So. Is that alright with everyone? We're all swearing on Mom?

42

Yeah.

75

Yes.

23

Okay, yeah.

46

(to 15)

Well?

Beat.

15

Why not?

42

Good. Then who wants to go next - with the dying thing?

As 75 goes to speak:

42

We get that you spent your final moments holding onto Maggie and aren't willing to let go, even in death. Anything else?

A slight beat.

75

No, that sums it up.

42

Then next should be-

46

Me.
Along with krav maga, I practice - practiced? - tai chi, explosive dynamic strength training, ashtanga yoga, and interval running. “A healthy heart is the key to a healthy soul,” as they say.

42

Who’s /“they?”

46

But this last morning, I was just starting my run when I...I woke up here.
I must have had a heart attack.

42

So much for “a healthy heart.” Makes me glad I didn’t exercise.

46

How old are you?

42

Forty-two.

46

I lasted four more years than you.

42 goes to retort, but then decides to play nice.

42

Moving on.

(re: 15)

Since he gets to go last, that means next is...

They all look at 6, none of them inclined to ask a 6-year-old how he died.

After a moment, 75 crosses to 6.

75

Hello, again.

6

Hi.

75

Mind if I sit here?

6

(to 15)

Do you mind?

15 shrugs. 6 follows suit by shrugging at 75.

75

Okay, then.

75 sits next to 6.

75

May I call you Archie?

6

Sure.

75

Good. Now-

6

What's your name?

75

Hm? Oh, you can call me Lee.

6

Hey, that's my middle-name.

75

Well, that is quite the coincidence!
Now, Archie, what's the last thing you remember before arriving here?

6

What do you mean?

75

You woke up here after taking a nice, comfy nap, right?

6

I guess. I do like naps.

75

Me, too. Maybe a little *too* much. So, what's the last thing you remember before taking that nap?
You said you were home?

6

In the living-room. With Dad. He was asleep on the couch.

42

(quietly, to 46)

Probably passed-out.

6

Mom was in the bedroom. The door was locked again. We got Chinese food for dinner, but I was full and booooored. I wanted to watch TV, but Dad gets really, *really* mad if he wakes up and sees I changed the channel. Lulu was sleeping, too. So I played "Ghost."

75

Oh, I love playing games with my grandkids. How do you play "Ghost?"

6

Easy! You take anything white and cover your head with it so people can't see you. Like a ghost.

75

That does sound like fun.
Okay, so, you had, what, a sheet over your head, and-

6

No, not a sheet. The Chinese food bag.

Beat.

75

The, um, plastic bag?

6

I guess.

75

That's...well, that's, um...

6

What?

This was clearly harder for 75 to hear than he was expecting. 46 comes over to help.

46

That was a lot of fun, I bet.

6

I guess.

15 looks at 6.

15

Jesus, Archie...

6

What? What's wrong?

15

I...I...
I *really* wanna play a game with you.

6

Really?!

15

Yeah.

6

What do you wanna play?!

15

Hmmmm, well, that's a tough-

(suddenly)

Tag! You're "it!"

15 tags 6 and quickly dashes away.

6

(laughs)

Hey!

15 and 6 run around upstage, playing tag, as the other Archer's talk downstage.

75

Jesus Christ. His poor mother. *Our* poor mother. To think she'll come out and find him like that. If that ever happened to Alvin or Clementine...

42

All because our raging prick of a dad passed out drunk again.

23

You think there's a universe where she murders him? Like poisons one of his shitty-ass beers or something?

42

Let's fucking hope.

6 sneaks up behind 23 and...

6

Tag! You're "it!"

23

Hey! But I wasn't even-

(stops)

No. You know what? I *am* "it," baby! Which means I'm gonna tag-

23 spins around, tags 46.

23

-the shit outta you!

46

Come now, you really should have given me a fair-

46 lunges forward and tags 42.

46

Tag! Got you!

As the other Archer's run away from 42, he just stands there.

42

Hold on, hold on.

(very loud)

I said, wait!

Everyone stops, looks at 42.

42

Did I say I was playing?

46

Oh, come on, the kid just wants to have some fun.

42

Did I say I was playing?

6 looks a little nervous again.

As 46 crosses to 42:

46

(quietly)

Can't we give him this one moment of-

42 suddenly tags 46.

42

Tag! Tricked you, hahahaha!

42 gleefully runs away from 46 as 6 laughs.

46 turns, looks at 75, and slowly crosses to him.

75

(playing it up)

Oooh, pleeeease. You can't tag me, I'm just a poor, ooooold man.

46

You know me. Would I do something like that?

Beat.

75

Heck yeah, you would.

46

Heck yeah, I would.

46 tags 75. Rather than being upset, 75 quickly joins in and chases the other Archer's.

The game - a joyful release of tension - goes on for a bit, with several different Archer's tagged "it" at some point.

Lulu watches the whole thing...and doesn't look particularly pleased. After some time, she walks into a position that causes 23, not noticing her, to trip and fall.

23

Ow, fuck!

6

Lulu! Are you okay?

Lulu's fur is barely ruffled.

LULU

I think so.

(to 23)

I must have stepped right into your path. *So* sorry.

23

Nah, not your fault.

As he rubs his ankle:

23

Damn, Lulu, you're hard as a fucking rock.

LULU

Thank you.

(to all)

So. Where were we?

6

He was "it," so-

LULU

Before that. In telling each other how you...

Lulu makes a dying noise.

6, finding it funny and not really getting it, imitates the sound.

42

Oh. Oh, right.

(to 6)

Thanks for the game, kid.

23

Yeah.

15

Thanks.

75

Thank you, kiddo.

46

Thank you.

6 happily lies on the ground, content.

42

Okay, who's next?

42 spots 15.

42

Oh, yeah.

75 clears his throat. 42 looks at 75, then back at 15.

42

I don't wanna be a dick about it, but you're the only one left. What happened?

15, uncomfortable, doesn't say anything.

42

You heard all of ours. It can't be any worse.

75

Certainly not worse than...

75 gestures to 6.

15

I just...
I'm not gonna say it. I'm not. And if that means I'm not gonna get your votes, fine, whatever, I wasn't voting for me, anyway.

A slight beat.

75

Alright, we won't force you.

42

But-

75

We won't.

Beat.

Finally, 42 nods.

42

Another vote, then?

23

Man, how about this - has anyone *changed* their vote?

No response.

6

Does that mean I'm still winning?

75

It means our little story time got us exactly nowhere.

42

Hey, at least it was an idea. I don't see anyone else offering up brilliant suggestions.
(to 46)
You. You got an idea?
(to 23)
How about you?
(to Lulu, sarcastic)
Hey, how about you, Lulu? You got any brilliant ideas?

LULU

I do.

42

You do?

46

You do?

LULU

Mm-hm.
I find it best to start by seeing if all the V's can come to a quick consensus as to who should move on, but in this case, I believe we should institute elimination rounds.

Lulu wags her tail.

46

Elimination rounds?

42

Elimination rounds?

23

Whoa, elimination?

LULU

Yep!
That way, rather than having to agree on which V should move on, you just have to agree on which V should definitely *not* move on. And since it's pretty much impossible to get a V to outright say, "yes, eliminate me," the V being eliminated doesn't actually have to agree to it - just all the other V's!
So. Who are you eliminating first?

23 42

Uhhh- Wait.

46

Hold on. To - to be clear. Now we have to agree on one V to *not* move on, and they'll - what? - disappear? Just, just be gone?

LULU

More or less.

23

Shiiit, man, I dunno that I'm cool with that much, like, responsibility.

Mumbles of agreement from the other Arthur's.

LULU

V's, V's, trust me, it's actually less pressure this way. You're only eliminating one V at a time, instead of five - which is what *would* have happened if you came to an agreement on who should move on.
Oh! And as a helpful tip, I would focus the initial elimination rounds on the V's that don't have *any* votes in their favor.

She points at 46 and 15.

LULU

If they didn't even vote for themselves, they're essentially asking to be eliminated.

46

/But-

LULU

Though I will say that it's generally best not to start with eliminating-
(re: 15)
-a child. Better to build up to that. It makes the whole process a bit easier to swallow.

46

No, hey, hold on. When we voted, I was trying to get the kid to The Other Side. But if I'm gone, he loses a vote. So that goes against what I-

The sound of the low *rumble* fills the space.

All the Archer's react - catch their balance, etc.

LULU
So sorry, but I really am going to need that first elimination. In fact, I'll need one every ten minutes - or I'm inclined to a grow a tad impatient.

42
What?! What happened to "silly humans and their linear time?"

LULU
Hm?

42
Earlier you laughed at the idea of linear time, but suddenly you need us to move this shit along?

46
That's a fair point.

23
That's a good point!

23
We should get all the time we need!

46
A decision like this takes deliberation.

LULU
V's. I work hard to make this a pleasant experience.
But the truth is, tough decisions must be made. And above all else, I am here to facilitate them. I would *like* to facilitate them as gently as possible. But if you leave me with no choice...

42 takes a step toward Lulu.

42
Are - are you *threatening* us?

Beat.

42 falls to the ground in severe pain - because he just got electrocuted again.

42
Aghghghgh, fuck!

LULU
Not "threatening," no.

42
Fuck, fuck, fuck!

46
Did-? Hold on, did you just electrocute him again?

23
What the fuck?!

6 tugs at 15's shirt, anxious.

6
(to 15, re: 42)
W-What just happened?!

15
(overwhelmed)
Uh, /um-

75
Why would you do that, Lulu?! He was nowhere near the door!

Beat as Lulu just stands there.

75
Well?!

LULU
I just shrugged again. Could you still not tell? *So* sorry.

6 keeps tugging at 15's shirt, getting increasingly anxious as everyone freaks out.

6
Hey! What's going on? Hey! Hey! /What-

15
Just - Jesus, just go play "Not Here," okay?

6 nods, quickly goes to his corner and begins to play "Not Here."

LULU
(awfully peppy)
Now! How about that vote?

42, struggling to get back to his feet, moves as far away from Lulu as possible. He comes to a decision.

42
Okay, okay! Let's vote. And I - I *strongly* suggest we all take Lulu's advice.

46
What do you mean, "take Lulu's-"

As 46 looks around, he notices the Archer's are having trouble making eye-contact with him.

46
"...advice..."
(realizing)
Wait.

23
It's not, like, personal.

46
I understand. But let's all just take a breath /and-

42
No. No waiting. No breaths. I vote to eliminate-

46 15
Stop! Me.

15 steps forward.

15
Eliminate me.

A confused beat.

75
Don't be ridiculous.

15
You need to eliminate someone.

75
But not you.

15
You're gonna have to eliminate me eventually. Why not now?

75
Because! You're a child.

15
That doesn't change-

75
Yes. It does.

15 turns away from 75 to the other Archer's.

15
I want you to eliminate me. Okay? I *want* you to.

15 looks at 6.

15
Archie, cover your ears.

6 nods and covers his ears.

15

(pouring out of him)

I don't want to be on The Other Side, or anywhere. I just want to - to stop. Stop thinking, stop remembering, stop dreaming.

I had a nightmare. Mom was at the door. Reaching out to me. Yelling that we were running out of time. I was slowing us down cuz I needed to pack all my plushies. I mean, I haven't liked plushies in *years*, but for some reason, I needed to take all these little guys with me. But I couldn't find my backpack. So I took off my belt and tied it around the plushies. To keep them all in a bundle. Finally, I ran to the front door. To Mom. But when she saw me, she screamed. Like she was looking into the mouth of Hell. And she ran out the door. Into a blinding light. I tried to follow, but the light was so bright, it burned. I stumbled back into the house and fell. And looked at the ceiling. But. It wasn't a ceiling. It was - a reflection. As if the ceiling was a giant mirror, reflecting the whole house. The recliner covered in beer stains. The decades-old couch. And me. Except I didn't look like me. Not really. I looked like him. Like Dad. And then I tried to scream, too. But I couldn't. Cuz the belt had wrapped itself around my neck. I was suffocating on cheap leather and moldy plushies.

Then I woke up. And found out that the only thing worse than dreaming was being awake. Cuz Mom...she, um...

My heart was in her, too, you know? As much as hers was in me. And if you all still love her, then I definitely want to be the one eliminated. Cuz it must've been me, right? It must've been my fault.

75

What /was?

15

I want to be punished. I *need* to be punished. For me and that memory to just - *rot.*

That's why I took Dad's belt. The one I'd felt on my skin a thousand times. And went to the closet. I made sure the bar was strong enough that it wouldn't break. Cuz I needed it to be the end.

And it was. It was.

This knocks the wind out of 75.

75

Oh, Jesus, kid.

15

...Until it wasn't. Until I woke up here. With every thought. Every memory. Every broken dream. Eliminate me. Please.

A long silence.

75

Well, crap. In that case, I vote to eliminate...

75 steps forward.

75

Me.

23

Whoa, what?

15

Wait, what?

42

The fuck is happening?

75

I got seventy-five years. And, God, I wasted a lot of it. I lost so much time with Betty. She took off as soon as she turned eighteen. She stayed in touch with Maggie, but wouldn't let me see Alvin and Clementine until I started going to Church.

(re: 15 and 6)

They look a lot like the two of you. Which I suppose means they look a lot like me.

(to 46)

You asked me if I got Maggie back. I never had to. Because she never left.
I screwed up a lot, but I still got more than most. I had Maggie. I had my time. I had my chance. I should be the one eliminated.

15

But-

75

You were right. We are not the same. I had dark thoughts in my life, but I never came close to... My time's up. But not yours.

(re: 6)

And not his.

23

Hey, what about me?

75 looks at 23.

Beat.

75 turns to Lulu.

75

Being eliminated from existence - is it quick?

LULU

Yes.

75

And painless?

LULU

It's quick.

75

Better than nothing, I suppose.

75 raises his hand, looks at the other Archer's.

75
We know how I'm voting. Who's next?

42 starts to raise his hand - then hesitates.

42
(to 75, re: 15)
Was - was he right? Were we just as bad as Dad?

A slight beat.

75
I had a lot of rage, years and years of it. For him. But also for me. And it got worse every time I lost control. But I tried to fight it. Which is more than can be said for that bastard.

42 takes this in, then nods. He raises his hand.

42
I vote to eliminate the silver fox.

A slight smile from 75.

46 raises his hand.

46
I vote for him, too.

As does 23.

23
I mean, shit, yeah, okay. Him.

75 looks at 15.

Finally, 15 raises his hand.

15
(quietly)
I vote for him.

Everyone looks at 6.

75 gestures for 6 to remove his hands from his ears, which he does.

75
Archie, I need you to do me a favor. Vote for me.

6
Why?

75

It's not important.

6

But I voted for me. I'm winning.

75

Yeah, but that was before and - different. This is...

75 hesitates, not sure how to put it.

46

Hey, kid. You want to play another game?

6

Yeah!

46

Okay, this one's called "who can raise their hand the fastest?"

6

Oh! Oh!

6 shoots his hand up into the air. All the Archer's are raising their hands.

46

Well, Lulu, you got your vote.

LULU
(hesitates, re: 6)

Technically, he should be aware that he's eliminating someone.

46
(quietly)

Come on, you're the one who wanted an elimination so quickly. And the kid is raising his hand, just like the rest of us.

Beat as Lulu studies 46.

LULU

Fine. I'll allow it.

75

Then it's unanimous. I'm the first to be-

Suddenly, a DEAFENING EXPLOSION OF SOUND as - WHOOSH! - Lulu flies through the air and CHOMPS DOWN on the top of 75's head. There's a loud CRUNCHING sound as Lulu breaks through 75's skull. It is *vicious*.

23
Jesus fucking Christ!

15
Oh, my God!

46
Jesus Christ.

42
Oh fuck, oh *fuck!*

6
Ahhhhhhh!

75's body goes limp, but he stays vertical. At the same time, a MILLION SOUNDS from 75's life fill the space. Only bits of dialogue can be understood. The bits we do understand are:

CLEMENTINE & ALVIN (V.O.)
Grandpa!

75 (V.O.)
Hey there, kiddos!

ADULT BETTY (V.O.)
It's good to see you, Dad.

75 (V.O.)
(weak, scared)
M-Maggie?

OLDER MAGGIE (V.O.)
Shh, it's alright, love. Shh, shhh. I'm here. I'm right here.

After Lulu feasts on 75's head for a while, she jumps off and lands lightly on the ground. At the same time, all the sounds fade away.

75 hangs there, suspended in the air for a second, then falls to the ground - *very* dead.

Lulu stretches. Maybe she whistles a little song to herself. She takes 75's shirt-collar in her mouth and drags the body offstage.

All the remaining Archer's watch, frozen with fear, as Lulu and the body exit from one side of the stage-

-but *only Lulu* re-appears on the other side.

LULU
So. Everyone ready for Round Two?

Lulu wags her tail.

The remaining Archer's stand there in absolute fucking horror.

Blackout.

End of Act One.

ACT TWO

We pick up right where we left off: all the remaining Archer's frozen in horror as Lulu waits for an answer to her question.

A long beat.

LULU

Well?

23

No, Lulu, we're not ready for Round fucking Two!

15

(quietly)

Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God...

During the below, 15 keeps muttering "Oh my God." All the Archer's - except 46 - freak out.

6

(sobbing)

W-...What was that?!

42

I'm gonna be sick. Oh fuck, I'm gonna be sick.

LULU

Please remember, you can't actually get sick here.

42

No, but you can rip our heads open like cans of Goddamn tuna fish!

LULU

That is correct.

23

Jesus fuck, Lulu, why would you do that?!

LULU

It's my job.

23

Then your job-

23

-fucking sucks!

42

Fucking fucks!

LULU

I understand that you're a bit upset.

23

No! *No.* I'm a "bit upset" when I realize I'm out of pancake batter. Right now, I'm FLIPPING THE FUCK OUT!

6 tugs at 15. 15 stops muttering.

6

W-W-What happened to Lee?

15

Don't - Jesus Christ, don't ask me that.

15, overwhelmed, goes into a corner to play "Not Here." 6 follows. They both hum, but more falteringly than before.

23

You're - you know what you are, Lulu? You're a - a bad dog!

42

A bad dog! Such a bad fucking dog!

23

A bad, bad, bad, bad dog!

The *low rumble* starts back up.

LULU

So, two things.
One: I am still not actually Lulu. Two: you're being a little rude.

23

Oh, am I, Lulu? Am I?

LULU

Yes.

23

Uh-huh. Then let me just say-

46

/Don't.

23

-that you're a motherfucking bitch!

A loud WOOMP is heard as all five Archer's DROP to the ground, like the air itself just got much, *much* heavier. 6 and 15 drop where they were playing "Not Here."

Lulu is unaffected.

The Archer's all react at once, struggling to move but barely managing a crawl.

42
I-I-I'm being crushed! Oh, fuck, I'm being crushed!

23
Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit!

15
No, no, no, no.

6
Ahhhhh!

46
Stay calm! E-Everyone, just stay calm!

They scream and shout, in full panic mode.

Lulu's voice comes from everywhere at once:

LULU
Silence.

The Archer's all shut up, terrified.

During the below, Lulu does some crazy shit to show off her power *(I envision this adorable, dangerous, little puppet walking on the walls, but hey, you do you).*

LULU
I know that you are not fond of my methods, but I began working this post well before any of you existed - and I am really quite good at it. I take pride in it.
So, before we continue, I would like you all to promise to be civil...to me. You can say whatever you'd like to each other.
Will you promise me that?

46
Yes, Lulu.

23
Y-Yeah.

42
Yeah. Yeah.

15
O-Okay.

Lulu looks at 6, the only one not to promise. Her voice goes back to normal.

LULU
Will you promise me, too, kid?

6
W-What did you do? To Lee?

LULU
Only what I said I would. I erased him from existence.
(to all)
I don't know what you were expecting - that I'd clap my paws and he'd disappear in a puff of smoke? Eliminating a V is messy. I have to remove their memories. Their hopes. Their joys. Extract it all. And not just the fun stuff. I have to take out the fears. The regrets. The lies buried so deep that they forgot they were lies at all. But I know what they are - I can taste them. And let me tell you, they can be quite hard to swallow. But that's what I do, I swallow them. Until the V is empty. Perfect.

Lulu looks at 15.

LULU
Honestly, I think more V's should look forward to it.
(to 6)
So, you see, there's no reason to cry for the old V. Because there is no old V! Not anymore. There's only you.
(to other Archer's)
And you and you and you and you and...
(to 6)
So, can you pretty, pretty please promise to do what I say and be a good boy?

46
Just say "yes," Archie.

6
Yes.

LULU
Oh, good.

WOOP!

All the Archer's can move freely again - though it takes them a moment to get their bearings.

Lulu takes a steps toward them-

LULU
Now, to keep things moving-

-and they all back away, terrified. 15 wraps his arms around 6.

LULU
V's, V's, relax. I'm not some rabid dog. I'll only eliminate the next V when the rest of you give the go-ahead.
Get it? "Go-ahead." Because when you say "*go*," I rip open *a head.*

The Archer's look ready to throw up.

23 42

Christ, Lulu. For fuck's sake.

LULU

Upon reflection, I can see why that joke may have hit a little too close to home. *So* sorry.

(beat)

I'm sensing that you're still a bit tense, so I'm going to let you listen to something. Between the entire multi-verse and the whole In-Between, this is the most beautiful sound I've ever encountered.

Silence.

LULU

Wasn't that nice?

42

Wasn't *what* nice?

LULU

The sound I just shared with you.

23

I didn't hear anything.

(quickly)

Sorry.

LULU

I will let you listen once more, but that's it. Understood?

23, 42 and 46 nod.

Silence again, but this time the Archer's miiiight hear the faintest sound of a leaf rustling.

23

(whispers)

Okay, yeah, I think I hear something.

42

(whispers)

What is that?

LULU

A caterpillar walking on a leaf.

The sound plays for a moment longer.

LULU

I hope you enjoyed that as much as I did.

Round Two! Who's next to be eliminated?

6

(to 15)

Am, am I gonna be-

(trying to say “eliminated”)

-emiminated?

15

No. Hey - *no*. Come on, you wanna play “Not Here” again-?

6

No! “Not Here” doesn’t work. Cuz of my mean, mean dog. I hate her.

15

That’s okay, you don’t have to play anything. Cuz, cuz I’m gonna keep you safe.

15 positions himself between Lulu and 6. He wraps 6’s hand around part of his shirt.

15

Just keep holding onto my shirt and you’ll be safe. As long as you don’t let go of my shirt, nothing can hurt you. Okay?

6 nods and holds onto 15’s shirt - tight.

46

Since it can’t hurt to ask...does anyone *volunteer* to be eliminated?

(beat)

I had a feeling. Then next question-

23

Hey. Who’s the oldest?

46

Why?

42

How is that relevant?

23

That was the thing with the old guy - he had the most time, so he, like, already had his chance. Shouldn’t that still be true?

42

That - okay, that, right there - is ageism, and I don’t appreciate it.

23

You don’t appreciate it cuz you’re older.

42

At least I lived long enough to get older, you little shit!

23

Okay, fine - how about we eliminate the one with the *worst fucking attitude*?

42 looks around, aware that everyone's watching him. He takes a deep breath, trying to calm himself. It works - a little.

42

Having had your time isn't just about age. There are lots of ways to squander your chance. For example, by being an *addict.*

23

Hey!

46

He does have a /point-

23

I'm twenty-three! Everyone fucks around at twenty-three.

42

Not me.

46

Me, neither.

42

The old guy didn't.

23

But you could've. Lulu, we were all born exactly same, yeah?

LULU

That is correct.

23

Okay. So, this want - no, you know what? I'll say it - this *need* I got, it's just as much a part of you. Asleep, maybe. But waiting to be woken up. So just cuz it happened to not wake up yet, that doesn't make you better than me.
With that first hit, my body was *new.* Untouched. If none of you ever tried smack, then you haven't even *met* your bodies. Not once.

15

Sometimes I would take a handful of ibuprofen, to feel numb for a little while. Was it like that?

23

Hey, I did that, too. But nah, not really.

46

(to 23, re: 42)

No offense, but I feel like you're actually proving his point. We were born the same, had the same DNA, and yet you're the only one who went down that path.

23

So?

(re: 15)

He’s the only one who offed himself.

(re: 42)

He’s the only one who got his wife and kid killed.

(to 46)

And you’re...the only one who got in crazy-good shape. Fuck! Is that really the only thing different about you?

46

Well-

42

No, it’s not. You asked the old guy about getting Maggie back. I...yeah, I lost her, but she never would have left me. What did you do?

Beat.

46

What do you think? I strayed.

42

Bull.

46

It’s the truth.

42

You had Maggie, why would you ever-

46

I know. I know I did. But...
I couldn’t stop hearing his voice. Dad’s voice in my head. Telling me how worthless I am. How I never fail to find new ways to disappoint people. How everyone is worse off for knowing me.

42

What does that have to do with Maggie?

46

I was scared. That any day, she’d wake up and see everything that Dad saw in me. That she’d walk out the front door and take Betty with her, leaving me with nothing. Whenever I looked into her eyes, I knew I was being ridiculous. That she was mine and I was hers. But the moment she left the room, his voice came back. It always came back.
So I, I decided to keep a piece of myself hidden from her. Protected. That way, if she did leave, she couldn’t take everything. And I gave it to someone else. It didn’t matter who. Just so long as it wasn’t Maggie.
When Maggie found out...
She always had this light in her eyes.

46

A glow.

42

A glow.

46

It didn't go out. Not completely. But there are some things that kill a person, just a little...
I did everything I could to win her back. And to get his voice out of my head. I sharpened my body and mind until I knew no one could ever hurt me again.

Beat.

42

No. No, I don't believe it.

46

It happened.

42

With you, maybe. But that couldn't have happened with me. Something in your, your very *core* must be broken to do that to Maggie.

46

At least I worked to fix my mistakes. I didn't just wallow.

42

What does that mean?

46

You know what it means.

42

My wife and child *died*.

46

And that is horrible. Truly. If I ever saw Maggie like that - honestly, I'm surprised you didn't end it all.

(re: 15)

Like him. But you didn't. You didn't keep going, either. You just - stopped. Were you going to grief counseling?

42

I can grieve however I want.

46

Did you do anything to atone for your mistakes?

42

It wasn't my fault.

46

But that's the thing.
I was at that party.

42 goes still.

42

...What?

23

What party?

46

Adam Thorsen's Tenth Annual Christmas Party. In his new place, at the end of that giant cul-de-sac. But I didn't drink. I'd been sober for three years. So when Maggie and I left, she didn't drive. I did.

42

W-Wait-

46

And we didn't hit any black ice.

42

That's not-

46

Maggie lived. My child lived. All because I made a different choice.

This hits 42 like a gut-punch.

46

Can you honestly say that night wasn't your fault, now that you know you had the power to keep everyone safe?

Silence.

23

Shiiiit. When you put it like that-

42

Now fucking listen!

15 and 6 jump back, nervous.

42 paces, trying to keep his temper under control.

42

Do you, do you really think I didn't spend every remaining second of my life thinking of everything I could have done to keep her safe? I would have given *anything* to be the one who died that night.
And hey - you're right. I stopped. I stopped cuz moving on would have been an insult.

23

Then why didn't you - ya know?

23 gestures to 15.

42

I wanted to punish myself. Not just for that night, but for every night I was short with Maggie. Every time I came home stressed and made her tip-toe around me.

I *needed* to make myself suffer for each moment of Maggie's life I stole from her.

(beat)

But...but that's all different now. Everything's changed. Because I thought that night had been the end of Maggie.

23

Uh, it was, wasn't it?

42

Forever, I mean. But Maggie still exists on The Other Side. *My child exists.*

46

Well. Not your child.

42

What?

46

I mean, yes, biologically, Betty's your child. But whichever version of her makes it to The Other Side, it's not going to be the one you raised.

42

What do you /mean?

46

Because your Betty never made it that far.

42 tenses.

42

That doesn't change anything.

46

Doesn't it? Any Betty that makes it to The Other Side will have had a father who loved her. Took care of her. At least long enough for her to be born.

42 is quiet, but practically shakes with rage.

46

Do you really want to explain to her why you never met while you were alive?

23

Damn, that's a good point.

And then - the dam bursts. It is a level of rage we have not seen from 42 up until now.

42

I had three fucking drinks at a party cuz my wife said she was gonna drive and wanted me to have a good fucking time! How the fuck do you look at that and go, "that motherfucker got what he fucking deserved?!"

Lulu's tail wags.

46

That's not what I'm saying.

42

Fuck you it's not! You piece of Goddamn shit, you try to live with the pain that was tearing away at my motherfucking guts. None of you assholes would last a fucking day. Not a fucking day!

15 wraps his arms around the terrified 6.

Beat.

42 breathes heavily, still shaking.

46

You have so much pain inside you. The rest of us, sure, we have our damage. A lot of depression. At least I know I do.

23

Yeah.

46

But your rage...that must be torture. Even on The Other Side, to carry that with you forever? That sounds like Hell.

Glances are shared between 46, 23 and 15.

46

We can't let you hold onto that pain any longer.

42 looks around, realizing what's about to happen.

42

Stop.

46 raises his hand.

46

(re: 42)

I vote for him to be eliminated.

42

No!

23, looking at the floor, raises his hand.

23

Fuck, yeah, me, too.

42

You *asshole*-

46

Kid?

42 turns to 15 and 6. Adrenaline pulsing through him, he looks *intense*. He crosses toward them.

42

Don't. Don't you dare-

15, scared, backs away as he continues to shield 6. He quickly raises his hand.

15

Him! Him!

15 turns around to 6.

15

Quick, raise your-

42 runs over and puts his hand over 15's mouth, almost strangling him.

42

Shut up!

6 tries to pull 15 away from 42 - with no success.

42

Please, just shut up!

6

Stop! Leave him alone!

46

Archie, raise your hand! You want to protect your friend, raise your hand!

6 raises his hand.

That *EXPLOSION* of sound again. 42 lets go of 15, just in time to see Lulu lunge at him.

42

Shit!

42 dives. Lulu misses. 42 scrambles.

42

Don't do this, Lulu.

LULU

I'm afraid I must do as the votes command. *So* sorry.

Lulu pounces on 42.

15

This way, Archie, look this way.

Lulu goes for 42's head, but he punches her, practically breaking his hand in the process-

42

Ah! Fuck!

-but at least giving him a moment's reprieve.

It becomes an all-out grudge-match between 42 and Lulu. It's brutal, the most intense brawl between a grown man and nine-pound dog that the world has ever seen. It's obvious Lulu's enjoying it, like a game of cat-and-mouse.

46 and 23 watch as if they're witnessing a slow-motion car-crash, but 15 and 6 turn away.

Finally, Lulu gets 42 by the head-

42
(terrified)

P-Please-

-and chomps down.

As before, a MILLION SOUNDS pour into the room - but different than the ones from 75's elimination. Again, we hear snippets:

MAGGIE (V.O.)
(hesitant)

...Another long day?

42 (V.O.)
(an edge)

I don't wanna talk about it.

Maggie sighs - which transitions to the sound of her coughing up blood.

E.M.T. (V.O.)

Sir, please, we need you to let go of the body.

42 (V.O.)
(a desperate cry of pain)

Don't you fucking touch her!

Eventually, the sounds disappear as Lulu jumps off 42's head. He slumps to the ground, dead.

The Archer's look away as Lulu drags 42's body offstage by the shirt-collar. Lulu re-appears on the opposite side - without the body.

LULU

Everyone ready for Round-

6

No!

15

God, Lulu just give it a minute. Please?

Lulu looks at 6.

LULU

I will allow a short break.

6, still clinging to 15's shirt, looks up at him.

6

I didn't know his name. What was his name?

15

It...It doesn't matter.

Beat.

23

(to Lulu)

Hey.

LULU

Yes?

23

Is there a God?

LULU

That's a complicated question.

23

Okay, but can you, like, have a crack at it?

LULU

From what I understand, there is an entity that, to humans, would fit the definition of a god. That entity is powerful. Brilliant. And not a big fan of second drafts.

23

What does that mean?

LULU

It has big ideas. And is very happy to pour them out. But leaves it to the rest of us to go back and make the necessary edits.

23

Are...are you calling me a rough draft?

LULU

You said it, not me.

23 quietly stews.

46 crosses to 15 and 6.

46

How you doing, Archie?

6

Scared.

15

Me, too.

46

Me, three.

6 looks at 46.

6

You're a grown-up. Grown-ups don't get scared.

46 kneels down next to 6 (he can be quite good with kids, too).

46

That's the secret they don't tell you when you're a kid - grown-ups are actually scared all the time.

6

Really?

46

Mm-hm.

6

Even my mom?

46

Yep.

15

Yeah.

46

And your dad.

6

No. He's too angry to be scared.

46

If someone's really angry, that means they're so scared that they want everyone around them to be even more scared than they are. Like your dad.

A slight beat.

6

I wish my dad wasn't so scared.

46

Me, too.

15

Me, three.

Beat.

46

Archie, you want to thumb-wrestle?

6

Okay.

As 46 and six thumb-wrestle-

46

(to 15)

Hey, kid, come here.

-46 whispers in 15's ear, unheard.

23 sees this. He shakes his head and turns back to Lulu.

23

(to Lulu)

Hey. You. What do you look like?

LULU

A dog.

23
Fuck that. What's your true form when you're not, like, on the job? Who are you, really?

LULU
I'm always working, so I look like whatever I believe will best serve the current group of V's.

23
But what do I call you?

LULU
Lulu.

23
No. No, no, no. I fucking loved that dog. My first real friend. And you don't hold a day-old shit up to her.
So. What do I call you?

Beat.

LULU
Round Three.

46 lets 6 win the thumb-wrestling match.

46
Ah, ah, you got me! Boy, you are strong.

15
Super strong.

6
(pleased)
I'm not *that* strong.

46 moves toward 23.

46
Alright. Just to see where everyone stands, should we take a quick vote?

23
Man, I'm not an idiot. You two wanna get the kid to The Other Side, so you already agreed to vote me out next.
Now, am I right or a shriveled-up donkey-dick?

46
Well, you're not a, uh, donkey-dick.

23 scoffs.

46

So...Are you ready?

Beat.

23

No, I'm not fucking ready!
Ready to get erased like I never even existed? Like all the pain and terror were for nothing? Like I'm nothing? I don't deserve to just be forgotten. Nobody does. *Fuck.*

An awkward beat.

Finally:

46

Well. I'm sorry to say it, but I vote for-

15

Wait. Wait.
Before we do - *that*.

(to 23)

How about you tell Archie something? Something, um, special?

6 46

Huh? What?

23

Whaddaya mean, "special?"

15

You don't wanna be forgotten, right?

23

Right.

15

(re: himself and 46)

Okay, well, we agreed to eliminate ourselves, too, so the only one of us who'll be around to remember you is Archie. So - why not give him a reason to remember you?

23

Like what?

15

Like something that feels special to you.
A memory. Your happiest memory.

23

...You really think that'll make him remember me?

15

I mean, I hope so.

A *low rumble.*

LULU
If you all know who you are voting for, then I must insist you get on with it.

15
Please, Lulu. We know what's gonna happen. Can't we let him do this one, last thing?

LULU
I'm afraid-

15
If you let him do this, Archie will give you scritchy-scratches.

6
No, I won't! I'm never touching my dog again.

15
Fine, *I'll* give you scritchy-scratches.

A slight beat.

LULU
Keep it quick.

Lulu presents her belly. 15 starts giving her scritchy-scratches.

15
Okay, so - favorite memory?

23
Fuck yeah! It's-

15
Not involving drugs.

23
Shit.

(a long beat)

Oh! I got one. I was-

15
Tell Archie.

23
Oh. /Uh-

6
Tell me what?

23 kneels down near 6 (he is not so good with kids).

23
I wanted to tell you a memory. It's like a, a story. From my past-

6
I know what a memory is.

23
O-Oh. Okay.
(awkward beat)
It's a quick one.

6
Is it funny?

23
No.

6
Oh.

23
I mean, it's kinda funny. And has a happy ending.

6
Okay.

23
Cool, cool.
So, I was walking on a beach. Breathing in that sweet ocean smell.

6
When I'm in the water, I pretend my parents are a dolphin and jellyfish cuz I'd be happy all the time but could also shock anyone mean that got too close to me. I'd be called a-

6
-dollyfish.

23
Dollyfish!

23
Yeah, yeah! "Dollyfish." Man, I forgot about that...
So, uh, I was on this beach. And I was trying to convince myself that a nuclear holocaust had just happened, and that the only things left on Earth were me, the sand beneath my feet, and this big ol' bowl of salt water in front of me. Cuz then everything remaining on this planet would be soft. Just - soft.
And right then - no joke - I stepped on a *sharp* seashell. It got stuck deep in my foot.

6 gasps.

23
Like, I lifted my leg, and the thing just dangled. I pulled it out and fu-
(holds back from swearing)
-*frick*, the blood poured.

6

Ew.

46

I'm not sure this story is appropriate for children.

23

No, no, it wasn't bad. Cuz it didn't hurt. Not compared to the pain I felt most days, anyway.
So I sat. Sat and watched the blood hit the sand. Turned it red. Made me think of that colored play-dough I got as a kid.

6

Play-dough tastes gross.

23

I know, right?!
I dunno how long I was sitting there, but at some point, I heard sniffing. You know, like-

He makes an exaggerated sniffing noise. 6 giggles and mimics the noise.

23

So, I looked to my side and saw this dog. This big, black-and-brown mutt, not a foot from my, uh, *foot*. He had all this drool pooling on his lips, and I was like, "Oh shi-

(doesn't swear)

"-*shoot*, this dog thinks I'm dinner." But I couldn't run. So I just closed my eyes. And prepared for the worst. I heard this big boy get even closer to my foot. I felt him put his nose right up *in* my cut and...lick it. He licked up my blood. No biting or anything. Just - licking. He was having the time of his life! And man, I'd never brought anyone joy except when I shared some brown sugar.

6

Mom says sugar's bad for me.

23

Yeah, she's, uh...not a fan, that's for sure.
Anyway, for me to know my blood - this random, crazy magical thing keeping me alive even when I *really* didn't want it to - to know it was bringing joy to this other living thing? It made me so freaking happy to be alive.

(beat)

That's, uh, that's my memory.

6

What happened to the dog? The one giving you kisses?

23

I dunno.

6

Oh.

23

But I like to think it went for a swim. That it's still out there, just, you know, doing the doggy-paddle.

23 mimes doing the doggy-paddle. This makes 6 giggle. He does the motion, too.

23

So...did you like it? My memory?

6

The dog was cool.

23

Ha. Yeah.

23 stands, looks at Lulu.

23

Unlike you, you razor-toothed tumble-weed, that was a dog that could be presented with human flesh and *not* chomp into it like a double cheeseburger.

15 crosses to 23.

15

I really liked your memory.

23

I dunno, feels like the kid's more likely to remember the dog.

15

No, really, it was kind of amazing, actually. To hear what's it like to still be me, but in another world. To know that things could have been different. That they *were* different. It was...yeah, amazing. Thank you.

This strikes a chord with 23.

LULU

Wasn't that nice. Now, if everyone would place their votes-

23

H-Hold on.

(to 15)

What about yours?

15

My what?

23

Your happiest memory. I wanna hear it.

15

Why?

46

Why?

23

What you said, man! To live in another world? I want that. I want that a *lot*.

The *low rumble.*

LULU

That was not the agreement.

46

Yeah, the memories are supposed to be for the kid.

23

Why should he be the only one?

(to 15)

Come on, dude, I'm about to be turned into one of those doggy-dinners made with, like, all-natural ingredients. Gimme something good on my way out. Yeah?

15

But I don't have a happy memory.

23

'Course you do.

15

No, I don't. I-I mean, I did. Have one. But it's not happy anymore. Not since I found out the truth.

23

But that's-

LULU

Enough. We agreed that-

23

Oh my Goooooood, will you shut up, you fluffy little Nazi?!

Lulu stares at 23.

The *low rumble* returns - but quickly transforms into a very loud *CRACKING* sound that fills the space. It is the sound of a belt being cracked against someone's back.

All the Archer's react, knowing that sound far too well. 6 covers his back with his hands again, as does 15.

6

No! No, no, no!

15

Oh, God, no.

46

Oh, Jesus Christ.

23

Oh, fuck. Fuck, no.

The *CRACK* again.

The Archer's curl further into themselves, press their backs up against the walls, etc. With each crack, they get triggered again and again.

LULU

I have been very patient.

CRACK.

LULU

But my patience is running out.

CRACK.

LULU

So sorry.

CRACK.

LULU

Test my patience much longer, and I'm afraid it won't just be the *sound* of a belt.

CRACK.

6

Make it stop! Please!

LULU

Vote.

CRACK.

46

Alright, alright! I vote /for-

23

No, no, no!

(to 15, very quickly)

Come on, man, that happy memory might've been ruined for you, but it sounds like it was fucking awesome at some point. And we don't know what fucked it up, so give us what was great about it. Let it be fucking awesome again.

CRACK.

46

We don't have time for this!

15

I...

15 hesitates, looking from 23 to 46.

CRACK.

CRACK.

CRACK!

15 makes a decision - and turns to 23.

The *CRACKS* continue during the below.

15

(very quickly)

New Year's Day, Mom came into my room super early, when Dad was still asleep, and whispered that she had a surprise for me and made me promise to keep it secret and then told me that when school finished that year, we were gonna leave Dad, that we'd leave him behind and never see him, never even talk to him again, cuz Mom said that no matter what, she was making a promise to herself and, and, and to me, that this was gonna be the year we both got away from him, finally got away from him, and in that moment she handed me the greatest gift ever cuz it gave me so many dreams.

CRACK.

Everyone flinches - except 23, who's picturing 15's memory with every ounce of energy he has.

23

Holy shit. *Holy shit!* That sounds fucking amazing!

CRACK.

23

Imagine - me and Mom on the road. Going who the fuck knows where, just as long as it's away from him.

23 kneels down and closes his eyes, living in the joy.

CRACK.

23

Mom smiling at me. Smiling at *me.*

23, eyes still closed, basks in this image.

CRACK.

46 raises his hand, looks at 15.

23

And no tears.

CRACK.

15 raises his hand. During the below, 15 gestures to 6, telling him to raise his hand.

23

No tears except the happy kind.

CRACK.

6 raises his hand.

23
(eyes still closed)

I love that, man. I love-

The *EXPLOSION* of sound as Lulu leaps up and tears 23's head open. All the sounds from his life pour into the room, including:

MIKE (V.O.)

Holy shit, dude, this is amazing.

23 (V.O.)
(pleased)

It's just a sketch.

MIKE (V.O.)

Can I keep it? I'll trade ya.

The sound of a pencil sketching in a notebook transitions to the sound of someone flicking a needle.

MIKE (V.O.)

What do you mean, "we're out?"

23 (V.O.)

The fuck do you think I mean?!

The sounds stop as Lulu jumps off of 23. He slumps to the ground, dead. She drags the body offstage and reappears on the other side.

LULU

I was afraid of that.

46

What?

LULU

He tasted terrible.

15

Jesus, Lulu! He's gone. Can't you show a little respect?

LULU

Like the respect he showed me when he called me a fluffy little Nazi?

(beat)

Round Four.

46 notices how tense 6 is.

46

How are you doing, Archie? Did that scare you?

6 nods, still clutching 15.

46

Me, too.

15

Me, three.

(to 6)

But hey, I got some good news. We're gonna raise our hands again-

6

No.

15

-no, it's okay, cuz this time, it's gonna give you the power to go through that door. And you'll never, *ever* have to come back here again.

6

Really?

15

Really.

6

O-Okay, let's go!

6 tries to move to the door while still gripping onto 15's shirt - but 15 doesn't move.

15

I, uh, can't go with you.

6

What?

15

You're gonna have to be very, very brave and go through on your own.

6

Where are you going?

15

Nowhere. I'm staying right here.

6

Why?

15

Cuz it's, it's the right thing to do.

6

I don't understand.

15

I know. And I'm sorry. But this is for the best. I promise.

6

B-But...if you're staying here...then I should stay here.

15

No. No, you shouldn't.

6

But *why?*

15

It doesn't matter why, you just gotta trust me.

6

I did! When you said I'd be safe as long as I hold onto your shirt. So I'm not letting go. Not ever.

15

What if, what if I let you take my shirt *with* you?

6 thinks...then:

6

No.

15

Archie-

6

You gotta come, too.

15

I can't! And I would. I can't believe I'm saying this, but I actually would. But I can't.

6
(getting upset)
I don’t understand, I don’t understand, I-I don’t...

Overwhelmed, 6 clings to himself (and 15’s shirt).

46 crosses to the other side of 15 and speaks quietly.

46
Kid. Look, I don’t want to think it, let alone say it, but I’m pretty sure Archie won’t go through that door while you’re still here.

15
But we agreed we’d vote him through once it was the three of us.

46
Listen to me.
He won’t go - *while you’re still here.*

Beat.

15
You mean...

46
If we eliminate you first, he won’t want to stay. He’ll be begging to leave by any means necessary.

15 hesitates.

46
I swear I’ll get him to The Other Side, but I can’t do that until you’re gone. I’m sorry, kid. I really am.

15
...Lee wanted me to keep fighting.

46
Lee didn’t want you to just give up. And neither do I. But sacrificing yourself so Archie can move on? That’s a fight worth losing.

Beat.

15
I wanna say goodbye first.

46
Of course.

15 kneels next to 6.

15

You know, I, I always wanted a brother.

6

You did?

15

Yeah.

6

Me, too.

15

I had a feeling.
Archie. I know that nothing makes sense right now. That you're scared. And to be honest, it's gonna get even scarier in a second.

6

What?! /Why?!

15

But - *but* I need you to promise me, that when everything seems too scary, *you will go through that door.*

6

I /don't-

15

Cuz once you do, this will all be over. It will *finally* be over. There will be peace and fun and, and *mac and cheese* once you go through that door.
Isn't that right, Lulu?

(beat)

Lulu?

LULU

Hm?

15

There will be peace and fun and mac and cheese once he goes through that door.

LULU

That door?

15

Yes.

LULU

No.

15

What?

46

What do you mean, “no?”

LULU

I mean that going through that door gets you closer to The Other Side, but it’s not like The Other Side is just on the *other side* of that door. Understood?

15

Uh, then what *is* on the other side of that door?

LULU

Another section of The In-Between, very similar to this one.

46

And what happens there?

LULU

Something very similar to what happens here.

A slight beat.

46

Will you please expand on that?

LULU

Sure!
If you’re the V of Archer Turner who walks through that door, you’ll have *only won* your first bracket. *All* the winning V’s from their respective first brackets will move onto a second bracket and once again face off against other V’s in groups of six, to see who moves on to a *third* bracket. And so on and so forth until there’s only one V remaining.

Beat.

15

No. No, no, *no.* We were all the V’s of Archer Turner - us six.

LULU

Do you really think that out of the whole multiverse, you were the only Archer Turner’s to come into existence?

46

How would we know?! You’re the one who said there were only six of us!

15

And that this door - *this door* - leads to The Other Side.

LULU

So, two things.
One: I never said there were only six V’s. I said you were the only six *here.* Which is true. Two: I specifically said that this door *eventually* leads to The Other Side. Which is also true.

15 falls into a sitting position. He stares at Lulu.

Beat.

46

Lulu. I *really* don't want to ask, but how many V's of Archer Turner are there?

LULU

Eight-billion, five-hundred-thirty-nine-million, two-hundred-sixteen-thousand, three-hundred-and-thirty-six.

46 reels.

46

Whoever goes through that door will have to do this *billions* of times?

LULU

No, that seems a tad excessive. Since only one in six from each group moves on to the next bracket, the final, winning V will have competed in thirteen brackets.
Besides, that last bracket is only the final four, rather than six, so that's not so bad.

15

And, and you were just gonna let us vote Archie through without *any* idea of what we were sending him into?

(beat)

Answer me!

LULU

Oh, I just shrugged again. *So* sorry.
Yes. If you hadn't asked.

15, in a sudden burst of rage, jumps back to his feet.

15

We shouldn't have to fucking ask!

6

(startled)

W-Why are you angry?

15

I'm not angry! I'm *scared.* I'm really, really scared.

(to Lulu)

You should've told us all of this right at the beginning.

LULU

Humans are fragile. If I tell them right away that they're competing against billions, they feel completely overwhelmed. Wholly insignificant. And don't get me wrong - they are. But no decisions get made that way.
However. When they're one of six in a room, that's a goal humans can see.

They will fight as hard as they can to win. And once humans start fighting, they'll just keep doing it, no matter how distant the goal becomes.

6 tugs at 15's shirt.

6

Can we go now?

15

(in a daze)

H-Huh?
Go where?

6

Through the door.
You promised we could leave.

15

No, I promised *you* could leave and go to-

(realizing)

...to...

15 looks at the door, then back at 6.

Beat.

46 crosses close to 15 and speaks quietly.

46

Kid-

15

No.

46

You don't know what I'm going to say.

15

Yeah, I do. We're not eliminating him.

46

You've seen what he's like. How little he understands, even now, about what's going on. Do you really think he can handle twelve more rounds of this?

15

We gotta give him the chance. It's better than eliminating him.

46

Is it? You, more than anyone, should understand that sometimes it's better to just-

15

Don't. Don't use that against me.

46

...You're right. I'm sorry.

15 kneels down next to 6.

15

Archie. Hey, Archie, I need to tell you something.
When you go through that door, it's, uh, it's gonna be bad. Like it was in here.

6

What?! But you promised-

15

I know, I-I know, but things changed.

6

Why?

15

It doesn't matter. What matters is that you keep going. No matter what. Cuz if you do, I *know* you'll find someone who will take care of you, just like I did.

6

I want *you* to take care of me.

15

I can't.

6

Yes, you can! Just come with me.

6 tries to pull 15 to the door. 15 resists.

15

No! It's gotta be you. Only you.

6 is so confused he could cry.

6

W-W-Why are you doing this?

15

Cuz it's the only way.

6

Did I do something wrong?

15

No, Archie-

6

Are you mad at me?

15

Never.

6

Then why-?

15

Stop asking me that! Please.

Beat.

Extremely confused, 6 grows angry. He pushes 15 - but doesn't let go of his shirt.

6

You can't make me! You can't! You're being mean and stupid and scaring me and I hate it, I hate it, I hate it, but you can't make me go away so I won't! I - I *fucking* won't.

6 defiantly sits on the ground - while still holding 15's shirt.

An uncomfortable beat.

46

(meant to be supportive)

At least you finally got to use your swear word.

6

Fuck you.

15 looks at 6, mortified.

46 puts a hand on 15's shoulder.

46

Kid. We have to.

15

I'm not voting. I'm not. No one can be eliminated if Archie and I don't vote. So, so I guess that's it. We're all just stuck here.

(to Lulu)

Fuck whatever you want.

The sound of the *rumble*, soft.

LULU

Would you like to guess how this will go?

15

Yeah. Yeah, sure, why not? You're probably gonna try to pressure me into voting by sending some electric volts through my veins. And then go back to that cute trick where you make my body so heavy that it should break all my bones.

And, Hell, maybe you'll even mix it up and turn my skin inside-out or something, I dunno. And whatever, I don't care. I've been hurt my entire Goddamn life, but for the first time, there's a good reason.

LULU
That was a good guess. Except for one detail.

15
What?

LULU
I won't be doing any of that to *you*.

Lulu looks at 6. The implication is clear.

15
...No.

LULU
Then vote. I do not care who you vote for. But you must vote.

46
We cannot send him through. It would be torture. And then he'd *still* get eliminated.
If you care about him, you'll let him go.

An excruciatingly long, difficult beat.

Finally, 15 raises his hand. It's the most painful thing he's ever done. 46 does the same.

Beat.

LULU
Let's go for a walk, Archie.

6
B-But-

LULU
(re: 15)
He can come, too.

15
A walk? Why?

LULU
You'll prefer it. Believe me.

A slight beat.

15

Come on, Archie.

6

Where are we going?

15

It's a, uh, surprise.

6

I'm not letting go of your shirt.

15

That's...

15 looks at Lulu.

LULU

That's fine.

6

Oh. Okay.

Lulu walks toward the side of the stage. 6 goes to follow - but 15 stands there, too scared to move.

6

What's wrong?

15 doesn't answer, but instead, hums, giving himself the courage to do what he must. 6 joins in. Together, they follow Lulu offstage.

A moment later, 15 appears on the opposite side of the stage - without 6. We no longer hear 6 humming. 15 looks down, realizes 6 isn't there. He shirt is still scrunched-up where 6 had been holding it. 15 stops humming.

Then - an *EXPLOSION* of sound made up of moments from 6's life (we do *not* hear Lulu chomping):

DAD (V.O.)

Goddammit, I was watching that.

The sound of a bottle smashing on the ground.

6 (V.O.)

Is it there?

MOM (V.O.)
Guess again.

6 (V.O.)
Uh...Oh! There!

MOM (V.O.)
Yay, you found it!

6 and MOM both laugh - until the sounds fade away.

Lulu appears on the opposite side of the stage.

15 sinks to the ground, fucking shattered.

46
You could have been eliminating us like that the whole time?

LULU
It's not the most effective way to erase a V, but in this case, I found it...preferable.
(a long beat)
Round Five.

46 looks at 15.

46
So. Just the two of us.

15, still in shock, doesn't acknowledge 46.

46
It's not fair to ask anyone to face the Hell that waits behind that door. Especially a kid.

15
...That doesn't make me okay with what we did.

46
Of course not. But I'm not just talking about Archie.

Beat.

15
I'm so...so...
Tired.
Of the fighting.
The fear.
The loss. The fucking loss.
When I pulled that belt around my neck, I told myself I wanted the pain to end. To just stop. But really? I wanted to create *more* pain. To punish Mom. To make her pay for...
(a slight beat)
How could I do that? How the fuck could I do that?

46

You were suffering. You're *still* suffering. Every crack of the belt. What we did to Archie. Whatever happened between you and Mom. That's all inside you. And will keep living inside you, wherever you are. There's no shame in wanting that to go away.

46 stands, offers 15 his hand.

46

It's your choice, but...what do you say we make it go away?

Beat.

15 takes 46's hand and stands.

46

Lulu. I vote to eliminate him.

46 raises his hand.

Beat.

LULU
(to 15)

Well?

15

I...
I vote to eliminate...
Him.

15 raises his hand and looks at 46.

46

Sorry?

LULU

That is a tie. With only two V's left, I'm afraid I will need a unanimous vote. *So* sorry.

46

What's going on, kid?

15

You're right. All that awful shit is inside me.
But so is the memory of Archie. And Lee. And the twenty-three-year-old V talking about his day at the beach. I'm holding onto all these memories and...and I'm not ready to let them go. Not yet. I want to be the one who moves on.

46

I just, I don't want to see you get hurt anymore.

15
(with regret)
You won't.

A slight beat.

46
You're *sure* this is what you want?

15
I am, yeah.

46
...Well, shit.

15
I know I'm asking a *lot.* So if you wanna take a minute to just, like, breathe, or whatever-

46
I don't need a minute.

15
Oh, okay.

46
Because I'm not gonna do that.

Beat.

15
What do you mean?

46
Just what I said. I am not going to do that.

15
I'm really confused.

46
I get that.

15
Cuz you said - you said that I could choose-

46
I did say that, yeah. Because I wanted you to believe you were in control. That for once in your life, you were the master of your own fate. And if you had sacrificed yourself for Archie, you could have even gone out convinced your loss actually meant something.

15
"Convinced?"

46

Archie was just a kid. And it is tragic that he died so young. It truly is. But that by no means makes him the best of us.

15

You - you were gonna eliminate Archie as soon as I was gone?

46

I told you, he'd want to leave by any means necessary.
Then Lulu dropped that bomb about the additional brackets, and I'll admit, that was *irritating*.
But it doesn't change how this ends. It will all be over - as soon as you vote to eliminate yourself.

15

We were supposed to be on the same side.

46

No one's on the same side. If anyone should know that by now, it's us.

Beat.

15

No. No, I won't let you win.

In one fluid motion, 46 hits 15, dropping him to the ground. 15 curls into a ball, terrified. 46 is completely calm.

46

Why are you dragging this out? I am giving you exactly what you wanted from the very beginning. Can't you see that?

Lulu wags her tail.

46 kneels down next to 15 and shakes him.

46

Are you listening to me?

15

S-stop. Please.

46

You know how to make this stop.

15

I - I won't.

46 hits 15 again. 15 covers his face with his hands.

15

No! No, no, no, no, no, no, no...

15 mumbles as he rocks back and forth.

46

Pathetic. Just pathetic. You moan and whine and cry about how awful the world is, but don't do a single thing to take control of your circumstances. No wonder Mom left.

Beat as 15 processes what 46 said. He looks up.

15

Wh-...What did you just say?

46

I said. No wonder. Mom left. No wonder Mom took off and left Dad with full custody, despite that beautiful bullshit she fed us on New Year's Day.

Silence.

15

How do you know about that?

46

You really think you're the only Archer whose mom left him? Whose mom realized that the only way to truly get away from Dad was to let him have you? Whose mom managed to escape that Hell by, for the first time in her life, putting herself first?
You think, in a sea of faces exactly the same as yours, that your tragic backstory makes you special? Newsflash: we *all* have tragic backstories! The only difference is some of us learn from them. And some of us give up.
So, come on, do what you do best and give up, one more time.

Beat as 15 studies 46.

15

W-What was it like? After Mom left?

46

What do you think? Dad was left with only one punching-bag and he sure as shit put it to use. Still. I survived.

15

How?

46

By never flinching when he unclipped his belt. By never letting him see me cry. By never letting that bastard break me. I was better than him and he knew it. By the end, he knew it.

46 towers over 15.

46

Now. Are you ready for another vote?

15

...It's not gonna be any different.

46 punches 15 again. 15 holds himself, in agony.

15

Fuck!

46

The only one's who making you hurt right now is you. I hope you know that.

15

(breathing through the pain)

You...you talk about how you're better than Dad. But you know what? I-I think, I think you're as much of an abusive *fuck* as he ever was.

46 kicks 15, knocking the wind out of him.

46

Dad was a child throwing a temper tantrum because he was convinced the world owed him something. I didn't whine or scream or beg. I *took*. I took control of my body, my temper, and then took what I wanted, by any means necessary. And now, I am taking them back. I am taking Maggie and Betty back - and you will *not* stand in my way.

15

"Taking them-?"

(realizing)

Maggie. Maggie left you and took Betty with her. What, when you cheated on her? Good! No dad at all would be a Hell of a lot better than you. Your heart attack was the best thing that ever happened to them.

46 hits 15 again.

46

You don't know a thing about me, kid. I never cheated on Maggie. And I didn't have a heart attack.

15

Jesus Christ, more fucking lies?

46

Of course I lied. You open yourself up to someone and it's not a risk that you might get hurt. It's an inevitability. If I told you and the other V's what really happened, you would have gotten rid of me without even trying to understand.

15

You don't know that.

46

I do. When you look at me, all you see is Dad. You are *blinded* by your fear for that man.
I don't take joy in what I've done to you. Not like him. Not like the look he'd get in his eyes.

15 really looks at 46.

15

You're lying again.

Silence.

46 hits 15 - really fucking hard. 15 tries to crawl away, but 46 flips him onto his back. 46 gets on top of 15 and punches the shit out of him.

Lulu wags her tail.

46 doesn't stop until he's winded. 15 is motionless, eyes closed, as 46 catches his breath.

46

There's no reason for this. No good reason for you to put yourself through this.

Suddenly, 15's eyes fly open - and he kicks 46 right in the balls. 46's knees buckle. He falls onto all fours. In severe pain, 15 works his way back to his feet.

15

Yeah. Yeah, there is. A few good reasons, actually.
Stopping you. That's one.

15 punches the downed 46.

15

Holding onto the V's *worth* remembering. That's two.

15 runs at 46 - and kicks him straight in the face. 46 goes down *hard.*

During the below, 15 backs up and readies himself for another kick.

15

But most of all, it's worth it for the chance to find out who really is the best Archer Turner. And, fuck! It might not even be *me!* But I'm damn sure it isn't you.

15 goes to kick 46 again - but 46, expecting it, flips 15, sending them both to the ground. They lie there, drained.

Slowly, they start to rise again. And that's when the fight really begins - *not like a cool action movie. But abuse. Awful, gut-wrenching abuse.*

15 puts up a good fight, but 46 is much stronger. 46 sends 15 tumbling across the room.

46

Aren't you sick of this? Of being reminded how small you are? How little control you have? Just raise your hand and you never have to remember anything ever again.

15

(an idea, under his breath)

...Raise your...

15 gets a second wind. He dodges around 46, but with a very specific objective: getting 46 close to a wall or hard surface, and Lulu between the two of them.

46

What are you doing, kid? There's nowhere to run.

46 and Lulu are both where 15 wants them.

15

Hey, Lulu.

LULU

Yes?

15

Stay.

15 runs straight at Lulu - and leaps off her back to launch himself into the air, right at 46.

15 SCREAMS in rage.

46 catches the jumping 15 by the throat. He spins 15 around, pinning 15 up against the wall. 15's legs dangle. 46's arm is stretched up high above his head as he continues to choke 15. Rather than trying to free himself from 46's grip, 15 raises his hand high up in the air. Barely able to breathe, 15 rasps out:

15

H-Him. Eliminate. Him!

46 drops 15 back onto the ground.

46

That won't do you any good, kid. I-

Lulu LUNGES straight at 46, who dodges out of the way.

46

Hey! What do you think you're doing?

LULU
A decision has been made regarding which V to eliminate. I am eliminating that V.

Lulu approaches 46 during the below.

46
What are you talking about? I didn't vote for this!

LULU
You had your hand raised as the other V voted to eliminate you.

46
So?! That shouldn't count!

LULU
I would like to draw your attention to the fact that you are the V who pushed to have hand-raising count as voting.

46
For the kid! Just the kid!

LULU
I'm afraid you did not specify that at the time.

46
I am now!

LULU
The votes have already been tallied. *So* sorry.

Lulu lunges at him. 46 dodges again.

46
But that's not what I meant. You know that's not what I meant!

Beat.

LULU
Would you like to guess what I just did?

46
...You fucking shrugged.

Lulu leaps again, but 46 continues to use his krav maga and martial arts training to evade her.

Eventually, 15 shoulder-tackles the back of 46's knees - dropping 46 onto his stomach. 15 jumps onto 46's back-

46
No! No, no, no-

-as Lulu chomps down on 46's head.

We hear the *EXPLOSION* of sound from 46's life, including:

BETTY (V.O.)
(a temper tantrum)
I hate you I hate you I-

BETTY (V.O.)
-hate you I hate you I hate you I hate you I hate you I hate you I-

46 (V.O.)
Betty, calm down. Betty, I need you to calm down. *Betty!*

46's calm persona snaps - as he SLAPS Betty.

MAGGIE (V.O.)
Archer!

Betty bursts into tears.

MAGGIE (V.O.)
Get away from her!

46 (V.O.)
Maggie, wait-

MAGGIE (V.O.)
Come here, Betty, come here.

Sound transitions to a car door slamming shut. Betty's crying is muffled because she's inside the car. 46 pulls at the car door, but it's locked.

46 (V.O.)
Let's talk about this. Don't leave, Maggie. Come on, don't leave.

The car's engine revs. 46 SMACKS his hand on the car's roof.

46 (V.O.)
Open this door! Open this door right-

The tires SQUEAL as 46 runs after the car.

46 (V.O.)
Turn around! Turn around right fucking now! You can't do this! You can't take my daughter from me! You-

The car drives further and further away.

46 (V.O.)
...You...You can't...

Suddenly, we hear the sound of HONKING from a *different* vehicle as it gets closer and closer. It grows painfully loud-

46 (V.O.)

What the-?

-then silence as 46's body drops, dead.

Lulu pulls 46's lifeless body offstage - and reappears on the other side without him. She looks at 15, who is utterly spent.

LULU

You have won your first bracket and may now go through that door to begin your second. Congratulations.

15

What. The Fuck. Was that?

LULU

The final elimination of your first bracket.

15

That memory. He - he hurt Betty? That's why Maggie left him?

LULU

I'm afraid I can't tell you that.

15

He's gone! It can't impact your stupid voting anymore.

LULU

If you would please go through that door-

15

Shove that door up your fluffy, little ass, Lulu! I'm not going anywhere until you tell me what the fuck I just heard. And you can't use Archie to scare me this time.

Beat.

LULU

He hit Betty. Maggie caught him. She drove off with Betty. He ran after them into the road. A truck coming from the opposite direction hit him at seventy miles per hour.
Now, if you would be *so* kind as to go /through-

15

You - you knew. The whole time we were voting, you knew what he did.

LULU

That is correct.

15
And the V's in the other brackets, you know what they've done, too?

LULU
Correct.

15
Then tell me.

LULU
That I cannot do.

15
Can't or won't?

Beat.

LULU
I just-

15
Yeah, I know.
How...how the fuck does this happen? How does life go so wrong that you grow into something even *worse* than your worst nightmare?

Beat.

15 looks at the door, but doesn't move.

15
The Other Side. It's really worth all this?

LULU
I've never been. But I've heard lots of theories, all very positive.

15
But the people who've been to The Other Side, they *confirmed* that it's worth it?

LULU
I've never spoken to anyone who's been to The Other Side.

15
You...what?

LULU
Once someone goes to The Other Side, they never come back.

15
But that's...that's...
What about God?

LULU
Oh, I've heard lots of theories about God, too.

15 stares at Lulu in utter fucking disbelief.

15
One more question. What is the point of all this?

LULU
To determine which V-

15
Of having us beat the shit out of each other! Lie to each other. Destroy each other. Why put us through that? Just for your sick fucking enjoyment?

LULU
I won't deny that I find it quite amusing. But that's only because the stakes are so low.

15
How in the holy fuck are these low stakes?!

LULU
Most of the time when humans fight, it's everything around them that suffers. But in The In-Between, humans can tear each other apart without anything getting caught in the crossfire. It's proven to be an elegant solution to humanity's biggest problem.

15
What's that?

LULU
("duh")
Itself.

Beat.

15, extremely frustrated, crosses toward the door - but stops a foot away from it.

15
You're wrong, Lulu. Our lives are not low stakes. They matter. Cuz...cuz humans have hope. *I* have hope. I shouldn't, I really shouldn't. But I do. And that means something. That *has* to mean something.

15 turns away from Lulu. He looks at the door. He puts his hand on it. It doesn't shock him.
He takes a deep breath....opens the door...

...and walks through.

It closes behind him.

Beat.

Lulu wags her tail.

Fade to black.

End of Play.