

# BLACK HOLLOW

A play by  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in the Theatre Department  
of the School of the Arts

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## **CHARACTERS**

Rusty Burgess. 16. Intelligent, charismatic, but disturbed. Hyperactive and obsessive imagination. Estranged from the people around him, except for a select group of fellow outcasts, for whom he is the de facto leader.

Noah Burgess. 40's. A struggling but devoted father. His wife, Rusty's mother, was his world. After she died, Rusty became his world.

Jessie Hughes. 16. Awkward, shy, nerdy. A gamer. One of the outcasts in town. Loyal to his best friend Rusty.

Faye Roberts. 16. Punky nerd, emo/goth-leaning. Bright and creative, but contemptuous of authority and control. Can't wait to get out of this town.

Christina Parker. 40's. Fifth grade teacher. Grew up in Black Hollow, went to college in-state, and came back to be a teacher. Loves her students, loves her family, loves her town.

Howard Parker. 40's. Commutes to the city, works in an office. He cares about his family but work often takes precedence, and he struggles to achieve a balance.

Evey Parker. 16. Popular girl, masking a secret weirdness that draws her to the outcasts. Thoughtful and kind. She has a strong sense of empathy and trusts her gut.

Frank Wade. Late 50's. A military veteran. Owns the army surplus and camping supplies store and commands the town Militia. Libertarian-leaning, values self-reliance.

Sue Walton. 45. Beloved Sheriff of 15 years, and was the youngest Black Hollow elected in a century. Hard-working, caring, but tough. Cares deeply about her town, and is motivated by duty.

## **SETTING**

A small American town  
Any day now

**PRELUDE. WELCOME TO BLACK HOLLOW**

Sun rises.

TOWN

Have you ever seen the sun rise over Black Hollow?  
God stretches his arms overhead, reaches his fingertips  
across the world, and we're in the palm of his hand.  
No more shivering in the night.  
Out of the darkness and into the light.  
You should really see it sometime.  
When people think of idyllic this is what they mean.  
Untouched by the dirty hands of industry. The metal spikes of  
carnage and beady eyes that never close.  
The desert of debris, the plain of crooked teeth.  
You can keep the cities.  
They're soul death.  
We're protected.  
We're preserved.  
This is paradise.  
This is home.  
Welcome to Black Hollow.

Sirens, radio chatter. Soft. It  
fades.

You have to see it in the fall.  
The leaves are like a fireworks display.  
Bursts of color you need dictionaries to name.  
Amber, oxblood, rust-  
Saffron, ruby, auburn.  
You can see the whole thing from up here. You can see  
everything.  
There's the town center. That's where all the stores are,  
restaurants, town hall. You run into everybody there. If  
someone hasn't seen you for a day they start to get worried.  
There's the diner, the old movie theatre. That's where you go  
out with your friends, go on dates. There's one fancy  
restaurant but you save that for something extra special.  
Lotta proposals, anniversaries.  
It's the tradition. When the world changes so fast, it feels  
good to feel like some things stay the same.  
We still wave hello, we stop on our way and talk. No rush  
here.  
There's a ten minute grace period for being on time.  
From the center, smaller roads jut out and wind around in  
different directions. Woods fill the space in between.  
It's like a heart and its arteries, or the surface of a leaf,  
or an eyeball.  
(Ew.)  
On these winding roads are little houses with families in  
them, with dogs running in backyards or cats on the  
windowsills watching them.

Out through the backyards are gates to secret paths that cross through the woods. You feel like you're in another world. As kids our parents wouldn't let us out a tonight but there are big tall street lamps, the ones like from the cobblestone days that make you believe in fairies.

A chorus of alarm clocks goes off. Early birds chirp.

Everything changes.  
Nothing ever changes.  
From far enough away it's all the same. Little dots moving from box to box.

Church bells ring. They listen for a while as daylight completes its build to morning.

It's a beautiful day.  
Clear skies, barely any clouds.  
The sun is out and bright.  
Just another morning in Black Hollow.  
The kids are at school.

The school bell overtakes the church bells.

The kids are at school.

## **PART 1. THE DAY OF**

A chorus of alarm clocks.

CHRISTINA

I wake up-

SUE

I wake up-

FRANK

I wake up-

CHRISTINA

I take steps. I have a system. Things should run smoothly.

FRANK

I hop in my truck and head out to the old shed beyond the woods.

SUE

The station's chipper. I say hi to Sally at the front desk. We're the only ladies in the bunch but the place doesn't run without us.

CHRISTINA

I prepare for class. Everybody's got their rituals. Routine keeps you sane.

FRANK

Some of the boys are already there when I pull up. They're getting on their gear, warming up.

SUE

I sit down at my desk and lean back in my chair. Outside, it's a beautiful day.

FRANK

We get in formation and dive into the woods. Run a house-cleaning drill. You have to be ready for anything.

Alarm.

HOWARD

I stretch in bed. I jump in the shower.

Two alarms at once. JESSIE  
snoozes his. EVEY's continues.

EVEY

I let my alarm go for a while. Then I'm up.

HOWARD

I give Evey and Tommy a shout.

EVEY

I go into Tommy's room. He's grumbling under the covers.

The muffled sound of TV news.

HOWARD

The morning news is on. Turns to the war in the middle east. There's a ticker at the bottom with all the fallen soldier's names. Then onto local news.

JESSIE's alarm again. He rises  
this time.

JESSIE

I wake up, late as usual. I spray myself with cologne. I brush my teeth, twice. Still not white enough.

CHRISTINA

I pace. If I don't keep my mind occupied before class I start to get nervous.

HOWARD

I put on the top 40 for the kids. They're both just looking out the window.

EVEY

Tommy keeps kicking my seat. I tell him to stop. He's like "stop what?" I grab his leg and pull hard.

HOWARD

Hey cut it out!

EVEY

I let go. Tommy just curls up in a ball, says nothing the rest of the way.

HOWARD

I drop them off.

EVEY

Bye.

HOWARD

Love you buddy. Love you both.

EVEY

Tommy wait up!

FAYE rises.

FAYE

Shit! I'm going to be fucking late again. I shoot out of bed, dive in for the shortest shower of my life. I step out the door. My hair's still wet

JESSIE

Just in time. I hide around the corner, gotta slow down before I see her.

EVEY

My heart's beating a little faster.

JESSIE

Ok. Ok. I go.

EVEY

There's Jessie.

JESSIE

There's Evey.  
It's like really nice to see her.

EVEY

His cologne is really strong. But I kinda like it.

JESSIE

I sit kinda far away from her.

EVEY  
He has this goofy smile on his face.

JESSIE  
She laughs at me.

EVEY  
I punch his arm. I wrap my arms around it.

JESSIE  
She kinda shivers. I lean closer to her.

EVEY  
We sit, looking out.

JESSIE  
We talk about stuff.

EVEY  
Like, random stuff.

JESSIE  
Like how things can feel so big but you can feel so small.

EVEY  
How it's so hard to know what you want your life to be.

JESSIE  
Leaving Black Hollow.

EVEY  
Leaving Black Hollow.

JESSIE & EVEY  
And then.

CHRISTINA  
I hear this popping sound.  
Fireworks?

FAYE  
"bangnangangangang!"—

She's drowned out by the sound of  
gunfire.

CHRISTINA  
Shhh—

Loudspeaker comes on. Static and  
hesitation. Then: "Initiate  
lockdown procedure."

SUE

Call comes in. Shots fired at Maple Hill.

Lockdown siren.

FAYE

I freeze. Every window's getting covered up.

CHRISTINA

I cover up the window with black construction paper. We huddle by the books.

SUE

It's a small town, everything's close. Maple Hill's maybe a mile and a half from dispatch.

FAYE

I knock on doors—

CHRISTINA

My heart jumps in my chest.

FAYE

Please, please—

SUE

Left, right, left, another right.

CHRISTINA

I look for something to use as a weapon. I think "this is it, this is the end."

FAYE

Someone grabs me. I try to shake him off but he pins me to the lockers.

CHRISTINA

The knocking stops and all I can hear is the siren.

SUE

We set up the perimeter and wait on SWAT to arrive. We're all scared but doing our best to hide it.

CHRISTINA

The children get impatient but I just tell them it'll be a little while longer.

FAYE

It's Coach Lyman. He grabs my arm and leads me down the hall.

Lockdown siren fades away.



HOWARD

I'm at my desk and I just feel this, shift in energy in the room. People are moving around, talking, hunched over each other's screens and they're looking serious. Margaret has her hand over her mouth. Ron gives me this look of helplessness. Margaret turns her screen, and I see it: "Shooter at Maple Hill."

Alarm clock.

NOAH

How did I sleep so late? I knock on Rusty's door. No answer. Call his phone. Straight to voicemail.

HOWARD

I drive. I call Christina and Evey over and over.

NOAH

I force the door. The window's wide open. No sign of Rusty. I run out of the house and call the school. They don't pick up. I jump in my car and drive. Maybe he just left, maybe I can still catch him somewhere in the neighborhood.

HOWARD

There's a mess at the school when I get there. Shouting, crying, sirens.

FRANK

We meet up near the school and re-gear.

SUE

I see the trucks over the hill, and Frank coming down.

FRANK

The Militia stands with you. We're ready to do our part.

SUE

Go home. Or wait out here with the parents until SWAT arrives. Just get the guns out of sight.

HOWARD

Something kicks in, I think. When you're in a situation like this. It's like my body knows even the possibility of something happening to my family would kill me. No other choice but hope.

FAYE

I'm in the boy's locker room. There's a lot of us. I sit on the bench. I watch everyone. I hear whispers, like chants. It makes this crazy rhythm. It bounces off the walls. It smells like Axe and years of boy seeped into everything. There's not a lot of air. It's thick, and wet. All kinds of kids are here, and half the football team. They're curled up like a bunch of toddlers. Sweating.

But it smells different, like fear. The runningback is sobbing. The quarterback is holding him, trying to cover him, but I can tell. We listen to the whispers, and the far-off shooting.

A loud boom and crunching metal.

SUE

Move! Move!

NOAH

A bomb goes off.

HOWARD

A car just flies up in the air, disappears in a cloud of smoke.

FRANK

While the feds play sheep dog we huddle up and make a plan. Zeke volunteers right away. John goes with him.

JESSIE

We turn the corner and we're just covered in smoke.

EVEY

So thick you can't even see in front of you. And this loud banging.

SUE

SWAT finally arrives. We suit up.

FRANK

The commotion gives Zeke and John plenty of cover to move in unnoticed.

JESSIE

I hold Evey close.

EVEY

Jessie's shaking so much.

SUE

There's a thick haze and the smell of gunpowder. Low visibility. We follow the sound of the shots.

EVEY

The sounds get closer.

JESSIE

I hear footsteps. Slow, heavy.

EVEY

I sense someone come around the corner. I scream.

JESSIE

I cover her mouth and hug the wall.

EVEY

All of a sudden he lets go, and there's a man in camo on his haunches. He smiles, holds out his hand. Puts us in the closet and tells us to stay put.

JESSIE

Next thing I remember is his face as he shuts the door.

EVEY

Then gunshots.

SUE

We account for clear halls and one shooter. When we hear shots come down the hall, we snap into action. We find three men firing all over. Didn't know who was who. One of them came down the hall toward us. SWAT takes one down. The shooter takes down another. By then there isn't time to think. We fire, he ducks around the corner. Then one shot. The shooter's still sliding down the locker. There's a trail of blood from the back of his head.

JESSIE

I can't move. The door opens again. I'm sure we're dead. But there's the Sheriff with this bright light behind her.

EVEY

They throw blankets on us and walk us out. The man from before. He's on the ground, blood everywhere. I get some on my shoe.

JESSIE

We walk by this huddle, I can see this leg poking out across the floor. Somebody moves just at the right time that I can see through.

EVEY

Jessie squeezes my arm. I look.

JESSIE &amp; EVEY

Rusty?

CHRISTINA

It's hard for children to walk with their eyes closed, so I tell them to just look at the wall. We come out all in a line, holding hands like one of those paper cut-outs.

SUE

Stretchers come out. The families really start to lose it. We haven't been able to identify anyone yet. We're sorting by emergency room or, or morgue.

HOWARD sits back down, and seems to crumble. CHRISTINA sits down, as far away from him as possible.

We later identify the shooter as Rusty Burgess, a student at Maple Hill.

#### **INTERLUDE. EULOGY**

They become THE TOWN, except for CHRISTINA, HOWARD, and EVEY on one side and NOAH on the other. THE TOWN says the following in a round.

#### **TOWN**

Bruce Bell was 15. He loved languages. He thought he might be an interpreter at the UN. He wanted to travel the world. He collected old travel books.

Brandy Warner, 10. She liked to make up stories. When she couldn't write she would scribble them in her own language that no one could read. She put on plays in her room. Natural performer.

Johnny Logan was 16. He played football like it was war. He looked out for his little brother. He always helped out around the house. He was learning how to be handy so his father wouldn't have to spend so much of his time off doing repairs.

Janice Yates was 61. She worked the front office for 26 years. Students always looked forward to her smiling face in the morning, and feared her wrath when they were tardy. She had a knack for picking birthday cards. Every one of us kept ours somewhere safe.

Doris Zimmerman was 36. She had been with Maple Hill for 6 years. She taught 5th grade. Bright and cheery, but she had a sharp wit. She had a love for Oscar Wilde. She used to talk about how she went to Ireland and kissed the Blarney Stone. It brought our her gift of the gab and made her a great Debate Coach.

Janet Guzman was 14. She loved ballet but just found herself loving modern. She said it made her feel free. She kept a diary every day. She used to doodle angels on her notebook.

Susan Jackson was 47. She had been a teacher for 15 years before becoming a guidance counselor. She would get letters every week from students she helped. We've already started the scholarship in her name.

Antoinette Robbins was 11. She was a free spirit and independent. She loved playing outside and making art. Landscapes, sculptures, out of dirt and sticks and rocks. She would ask these incisive questions too. Always a sharp kid.

Todd Osborne was 12. He was obsessed with reptiles. All kinds. Snakes, iguanas, komodo dragons. If you didn't have him on another subject it's what he was talking about. Day in day out. Never got tired of saying it.

Conrad Jefferson was 58. He was Maple Hill's custodian for 10 years. He went by CJ. He used to be a competitive chess player, and the team would invite him once a month for a match. He always won.

HOWARD stands but CHRISTINA grabs his arm. HOWARD tries to bring himself to speak.

Tom-

CHRISTINA squeezes harder.

Tommy Parker.

CHRISTINA slaps him. It rings in a stunned silence. CHRISTINA exits, but there's no exit. She finds her own space on the stage. Together, they break the school setting apart, a choreographed destruction. Eventually, it clears the space for a new form.

## **PART 2. RUSTY BURGESS**

In Memoriam.

RUSTY sits dead center, facing us.

NOAH

When they came looking for something to show on the news, there weren't a lot of photos to choose from. I sent them a shot from school picture day.

RUSTY messes up his hair and poses like on school picture day.

When you're raising children it's not as simple as. They're kids. They're growing. You don't know what you'll get at the end. And every child has their issues. I'm not saying. I just, it's not like there was something I could go back to and say "If I had just." Sometimes your best isn't good enough. To be honest, I didn't see much of myself in him. His mother died when he was younger. Cancer. I had to do everything on my own after that. It was hard, just us, but we made it work. He could be difficult though. I remember when he was really young...

A red light appears under RUSTY.  
He explores it with his hand,  
like dipping a toe into a pool.

You know how a kid will put their hand on a hot stove and they get hurt. They learn. This is hot. This is pain. Rusty...he wasn't one to take his hand away. Actually gave himself third degree burns that way.

RUSTY puts his hand all the way  
in and holds it there. He  
screams, but instead of his  
voice, we hear a high-pitched  
ringing.

They kept him in the hospital for observation. Him in one room his mother in the other. When they let him move around he'd just sit next to his mother and hold her hand. At that point she was barely conscious. But he'd just sit there for hours, his good hand holding hers, his other wrapped up in gauze resting on his lap. He slept sitting up like that. When I saw that I...I don't know. Something wasn't right about it. Didn't think much of it after that. He seemed to be doing better, for a while.

\*

Darkness, crickets.

JESSIE

My family moved to Black Hollow when I was little. Rusty was my neighbor. He was the first person to talk to me here.

RUSTY comes up behind JESSIE.

RUSTY

Hey.

JESSIE

Woah!

RUSTY

Woah woah don't be scared.  
What are you doing out here?

JESSIE

I'm just...hey wait what about you?

RUSTY

I like to come out here sometimes.  
You just moved here right?

JESSIE

Uh, yeah.

RUSTY

I'm next door.

JESSIE

Oh!

RUSTY reaches his hand out.

RUSTY

Rusty.

JESSIE

Jessie.

They shake.

RUSTY

Are your parents getting a divorce?

JESSIE

Huh?

RUSTY

They're yelling a lot.

JESSIE

Yeah.

RUSTY

Do they do that a lot?

Pause.

JESSIE

Did your parents get a divorce?

RUSTY

My Mom died.

Oh.

JESSIE

Pause.

RUSTY

Hey, wanna see something?

JESSIE

What?

RUSTY

Wait here a sec.

JESSIE

Uh...

RUSTY disappears. Crickets.  
JESSIE considers going back.  
RUSTY returns, his hands clasped together.

RUSTY

Come here.  
Come on.

JESSIE comes closer. RUSTY releases his hands, revealing a firefly.

JESSIE

Woah.

RUSTY

I know where there are more. Follow me and you can catch one.

RUSTY goes off.

JESSIE

That was the start of our adventures. We'd explore our tiny nothing town, finding hidden worlds. When we were, seven or eight I think, he took me out to this lake behind my house.

A blue pool of light appears.

RUSTY walks toward the edge of the light. JESSIE joins him.

It was winter and it was freezing, and so much snow. When you're a kid it's pure magic. For a little while every year the world changes, all the rules change. You can walk on water.



Let's go. RUSTY

Are you sure? JESSIE

Whaddya chicken? RUSTY

It's not safe. JESSIE

You don't like to walk on water? RUSTY

What if it cracks? JESSIE

You watch too many movies. RUSTY

I've never seen a frozen lake. It never got this cold in California. JESSIE

Mehhh California! RUSTY

I liked California. JESSIE

Yeah cause you never saw anything different. RUSTY

It's warm there. JESSIE

Ok, let's slow down. Let's look at it for a while. RUSTY

They stare out onto the frozen lake.

It's so quiet. JESSIE

Yeah. RUSTY

Silence.

I'm cold. JESSIE

Me too. RUSTY

Are we going inside now? JESSIE

Nope. RUSTY

Rusty! JESSIE

Are you kidding? I'm not a chicken. If you're a chicken you can go cluck-clucking back home. RUSTY

Maybe I am a chicken. JESSIE

Even the chicken crossed the road. RUSTY

I'm not coming. JESSIE

Ok, but I'm going. RUSTY

But you'll get in trouble. JESSIE

Uh-huh. RUSTY

What if something bad happens? JESSIE

I guess I'll die alone then. RUSTY

Hey! JESSIE

Everybody's gotta die sometime. Unless you got somebody to pull you out. Whaddya say? RUSTY

I can't leave you alone. JESSIE

You can. Or you can be my protector. Your choice. RUSTY

JESSIE

But...

RUSTY

Let me know!

RUSTY walks into the pool of light.

JESSIE

I wanted to feel brave. We got to the dead center of the lake. That hush, and this pure white surrounding you, and you know this is the only time you ever get to stand here. In a little while all the snow will melt all the ice will melt and it'll be back to a lake and you have to wait a whole year to ever feel that way again. But the. The ice looks stronger than it really is. It cracked under me. I kind of heard Rusty shriek and then I was under and I don't really remember how long. I remember getting pulled out. And my Mom and Dad's faces.

RUSTY is curled up tight. NOAH just watches him from afar. RUSTY repeats the following, softly.

RUSTY

I don't know I don't know I don't know I don't know I don't know I don't know I don't know I don't know I don't know...

NOAH

When I found him he was just curled up in this tight little ball, tears streaming down his face. I felt guilty, I didn't know what to do for him. Everyone was concentrated on Jessie, and I wanted to be with them. Not with him. It didn't have to happen. But that was Rusty, always going too far.

Blue light dissipates.

He got a reputation. People were always a little wary, even if they weren't clear in showing it. But time went by. Things were pretty ok until high school.

\*

School bell, faintly, plays, followed by the sounds of a high school hall between classes that slowly dies through the following.

CHRISTINA

Maple Hill is a very special place. It houses every grade in one building, which encourages all the different ages to interact.

It was an idea of our founder's actually, so it goes back as far as the town does. I mean, you get a bunch of children together and try to make them learn, you're going to have a complicated experience. But it always felt like a safe, welcoming place to me.

JESSIE

It's school. So it sucks.

FAYE

There are two Maple Hills—the one on the website, and the degenerate underclass. Like, me, and Jessie. And Rusty.

JESSIE

We'd get picked on. Called names.

FAYE

Emo, hellspawn, dyke—

JESSIE

Faggot, pussy—

FAYE

This isn't as nice a place as they like to appear. There is one thing I like about it though. I have this spot, out through the woods, in the pines. There's this grove cut out perfectly and nobody knows about it. I'd run away there. After I got to know Jessie and Rusty, I decided I wanted to share it with them. So we went out there one weekend. Grabbed booze and rolled some j's and camped out. Rusty busted out this crazy story.

RUSTY stands. JESSIE drum-rolls. FAYE bangs on the ground, maybe a couple woo's and whoops. RUSTY silences the group, lights his face by flashlight.

RUSTY

Once, there was a devil who built a magic mirror. A mirror that distorted everything it reflected. When you looked into it, all the good inside you got smaller and smaller while everything ugly about you magnified. The devil carried this mirror all around the world, distorting everyone and everything. Even the most beautiful landscapes became like boiled spinach. Then he sought to take the mirror to heaven, he tried to make a fool of God. The higher he lifted the mirror, the heavier it became, and the more it shook. With heaven just within reach it plummeted to earth, shattering into a million pieces. The fall was so great that the pieces scattered all over the earth, finding their way into people's hearts and eyes. Their hearts became like ice and their eyes became just like the magic mirror, seeing only the bad and ugly in everything.

Light begins to expand again.

FAYE

Rusty was definitely dark.

RUSTY

They want to stamp us out. They hate us. You know it's true.

FAYE

They're bullies, Rusty. Just survive until we're out of this place.

RUSTY

You think this is something we can just escape? We graduate, and we go out and these are the people getting jobs with us and getting old and dying with us. And this is where it begins.

JESSIE

Where what begins?

RUSTY

The production. This school, this town. It churns out perfect model citizens to be fucking rocket fuel. It's a robot factory.

JESSIE

Robot Factory. That was one of his favorite phrases.

RUSTY

They program us. Every day. Through parenting, through education, through the media. Some of us are immune, and that threatens them.

JESSIE

The stuff they said on the news...I dunno, it wasn't like that at all.

FAYE

Freak Brigade. That's what the other kids called us, and the media ran with it. Like we were some cult.

JESSIE

We got harassed. Media hounding us after, everyone in town looking at us weird. Everybody else got this feeling of like being together, but then they were all ganging up on us like always.

FAYE

We're always on the outside.

JESSIE

Rusty was the only one who wasn't afraid.

FAYE

He was like our hero. Or I dunno, just knowing he was there, that there was someone on our side who could fight back. Someone who could scare them. A protector.

JESSIE

It felt good to listen to him. It made us feel powerful.

FAYE

Made things feel a little less impossible.

\*

NOAH

As Rusty got older, he started having some odd ideas.

RUSTY

We should have a gun.

NOAH

What's that?

RUSTY

A gun. We should have a gun.

Beat.

NOAH

Never felt the need for one.

RUSTY

We have the right.

NOAH

Well sure.

RUSTY

You don't think we should protect ourselves.

NOAH

You don't feel safe?

RUSTY

No.

NOAH

Who's coming after us?

Off RUSTY.

Something I'm missing?

RUSTY

You're lost in it.

NOAH

Oh I'm lost in it? Lost in what? Enlighten me.

RUSTY

Lost in it. Don't worry. It's too late anyway.

NOAH

You know a lot of times it feels like we're speaking different languages.

RUSTY

We should have a gun.

NOAH

I don't feel the need for one.

RUSTY

Then I'll have one.

NOAH

Not in this house.

RUSTY

Then you deserve to die.

NOAH

Excuse me?

RUSTY

You can't look after yourself, you can't look after this family. There are things going on you have no understanding of. Things are falling apart and you won't prepare, you have no one else to blame but yourself.

NOAH

Russ, I think we need to calm down.

RUSTY has a panic attack, which does not surprise NOAH.

Hey. Rusty.

NOAH approaches cautiously. He does a rehearsed gesture, an elaborated deep breath. Rusty struggles to mimic the gesture. It starts to calm him down.

RUSTY

I-I got it.

NOAH

Ok.

RUSTY exits.

The attacks got worse when he was a teenager. And he got more and more paranoid. It's poisonous, the things he was thinking.

FRANK

We did our duty that day, plain and simple.

SUE

The Militia's been around for a while. There's a streak of that in Black Hollow. We're proud of our place in American history, it's a patriotic town. Some people take it a bit far.

FRANK

A Militia is the people's army. It's how we made our country, and it's what will always let us keep our promise of a government accountable to people. The state, by definition, will overreach. Our founding fathers wanted us to be ready to take up arms in just that instance. I love this town and I want it to be safe.

SUE

They like to say they represent our town, but you wouldn't think it talking to most people here. A militia just doesn't resonate with everybody.

FRANK

When you need us, you're glad we're there. My men saved two good people that day, maybe more.

SUE

They shouldn't have done it. But they were doing what they thought was right.

Out on SUE.

FRANK

There are good people and bad people. That's the way of the world. And don't think there's some kind of truce. This isn't peaceful coexistence. The monsters are coming.

NOAH

I knew that paranoia. The same feeling I'd get at the bar with Frank getting blasted and telling me about chemtrails or the Fed. We'd get heated.

FRANK

I knew his father, Noah. Saw some promise in him once. Tried to recruit him even, but he didn't take.

NOAH

I tried to keep Rusty away from all that, but I couldn't be there all the time.



FRANK

Rusty Burgess was never in the Militia, he was never associated with the Militia. We do not endorse anything about him. That kid was disturbed, and to go around and blame law-abiding patriotic citizens well it just sickens me.

RUSTY

Frank.

FRANK hears but doesn't turn to him.

Frank!

RUSTY hands FRANK the gun. He holds it.

FRANK

How'd that feel?

RUSTY

Heavy.

FRANK

Heh. Well you've still got some growing to do. Now watch me.

FRANK kneels, aims the gun, looks through the scope.

Take a look.

RUSTY looks through the scope.

See that critter?

RUSTY

Yeah, a rabbit.

FRANK

Uh.

RUSTY moves away. FRANK looks through the scope again. He finds the rabbit, follows it a bit with his rifle. Fires. The shot rings, echoes, dies. FRANK and RUSTY go to the fallen animal. RUSTY moves very close.

Hey now.

RUSTY stops his advance, but kneels down to get a closer look. FRANK watches him.

The other kids don't treat you so well, huh?  
 I've seen 'em, around town.  
 They don't like having me around much either.  
 But you know...maybe it's not everything to be liked.  
 Maybe there are more important things.  
 Maybe we're a part of them.  
 Rusty?

RUSTY  
 (Not looking away from the  
 carcass.)

I think you're right.

\*

JESSIE  
 After school Rusty and I would spend our time getting lost on  
 the internet. First it started with videos of like stunts  
 gone wrong.

RUSTY  
 "Dude eats a Mentos and diet coke, watch his stomach  
 explode!"

JESSIE  
 Shit like that. Then we found this site that was all these  
 photos of crime scenes and accidents, close-ups on the  
 body...

RUSTY  
 "Man has head crushed like roadkill!" "See what a brown  
 recluse spider does to a woman's elbow!"

JESSIE  
 Then we found stuff from the war, cell phone footage from  
 riots and war zones. Stuff they don't show you on the news.  
 Like, the army's using these drone things. It's like a remote  
 controlled plane, and it sees through a camera and some guy  
 in like New Mexico is controlling it on his desktop. It was  
 insane, this like completely other world from our basement in  
 Black Hollow in America. We had this portal that could take  
 us anywhere.

Screen light goes off on RUSTY.

Around this time our adventures turned into missions. We'd  
 plan these strikes—pick a house, plan our route, train. We'd,  
 like, do graffiti, tp houses, steal signs. It started off  
 with stupid stuff like that. He called them "disruptions."

\*

CHRISTINA  
 Evey has such a big heart.

HOWARD

Evey is the kindest person I know.

FAYE

Yeah, Evey's fine I guess. She's pretty cool. Only prep we'd talk to, who'd talk to us. She just like showed up one day while we were hanging out back. I guess I saw something interesting about her.

JESSIE

I like Evey a lot.

FAYE

Jessie was smitten, of course.

JESSIE

She's just so nice. Like, impossibly nice.

HOWARD

Sometimes I wonder if she's too good for this world.

CHRISTINA

I think she has the potential to give too much.

HOWARD

I couldn't understand her fascination with those kids. I saw big things for her. But it's so easy for someone to get derailed.

CHRISTINA

But she's so strong.

EVEY

I've always felt kinda different. Everyone else is always like "...okay." I hate that. When I don't understand something, that's when I get interested. Growing up, there was always this one kid in the class who everybody decided to pick on. It didn't make me feel good, to do that to people. So I just talked to them. I wanted them to know there was somebody on their side. I started to get to know people, and, actually, started to like them more than the people who were supposed to be my friends. I learned all this stuff I had no idea about. Everybody thought I was giving them charity. They don't really get it. It's good to be good. That's what I always thought and I always will.

FAYE

It was fun to have a convert. It took me a while to get used to how damn genuine she was. I got to show her all my favorite stuff and she'd just sit there leaned over with these big ol' deer eyes. Always asking questions.

JESSIE  
Rusty never trusted her.

RUSTY waits on stage, looking  
into a flame. FAYE, JESSIE, and  
EVEY enter together.

FAYE  
Rusty! You're here already.

RUSTY  
You're late. I started the fire.

JESSIE  
Thanks!

RUSTY  
Where have you been?

FAYE  
We picked Evey up on the way. Well, you got the fire going.  
Let's get started.

RUSTY  
No.

FAYE  
No?

RUSTY  
Yeah, no. Let's not.

FAYE  
The fuck?

RUSTY scoffs.

The fuck is your problem Rusty?

RUSTY  
Why is she here?

FAYE  
Uh. She's our friend?

RUSTY  
I don't know why you'd bring her here.

FAYE  
Because this is my place and I want her to be here.

RUSTY  
Well I'm the only one who knows how to start a fire.

As he violently kicks the fire out.

So fuck fuck fuck fuck you!

It's almost pitch black now.

FAYE

Oh that's great asshole!

FAYE turns on a flashlight.

JESSIE

Rusty, you gotta calm down ok?

RUSTY

You did this! You fucking did this. Now it's all fucked up.

JESSIE

Everything's fine Rusty. Everything's good. Just...

RUSTY

Don't fucking tell me!

EVEY

Hey, Rusty...

RUSTY paces.

FAYE

Evey, stay back ok?

EVEY

I didn't mean to make you upset.

FAYE

Evey just stay back stay out it.

EVEY

I know my friends treat you badly, I just want you to know I'm here because I want to be—

RUSTY

Shut up!

JESSIE

Don't talk to her like that!

FAYE

Hey!

RUSTY charges at JESSIE and JESSIE shoves RUSTY, sending him backward.

JESSIE

Just stop just stop just fucking STOP RUSTY!

JESSIE stumbles back, catching himself, startled by what came out of him.

What is wrong with you?

FAYE

Can we just, like, breathe for a second. Please.

RUSTY

I'm going home.

RUSTY heads for the exit.

JESSIE

Rusty, I'm sorr-

FAYE

Don't you dare, Jessie.

(calling out to RUSTY)

What are you so afraid of Rusty?

RUSTY exits.

EVEY

I'd never felt something like that. I got sick when I came home.

CHRISTINA

I walked by the bathroom heard Evey, it sounded like she was crying.

EVEY

Mom?

CHRISTINA

Honey?

HOWARD

I heard about everything when I got home. She wasn't going anywhere near those kids again.

EVEY

I told Faye and Jessie-

FAYE

Your mom? Are you kidding me?

JESSIE

I didn't know what to do. Rusty was my friend but now he just screwed everything up.

FAYE

Yeah, great, Evey, get him expelled or whatever.

HOWARD

The next day we went over to talk to the father.

NOAH

They told me he attacked their daughter—

CHRISTINA

I can imagine, if I were a parent, it would be hard to hear—

NOAH

It blind-sighted me. At the time...I couldn't believe it. Or I wouldn't.

CHRISTINA

He slammed the door in our face.

HOWARD

Maybe that whole family has a screw loose.

CHRISTINA

Maybe I would have done the same.

NOAH

But then...something just hit me. When he went to school I searched his room. I didn't find anything. I keep asking myself why I never looked sooner.

JESSIE

I hadn't talked to Rusty for days, but then Faye wasn't talking to me and I couldn't get a hold of Evey. So when he called me...I picked up. I could hear how excited he was: he wanted to do a raid. A special one.

RUSTY and JESSIE change onstage  
into all-blacks, including gloves  
and hats.

We wrapped up in all black, sat in the dark until our eyes adjusted.

RUSTY

Got the bag?

JESSIE

Rusty went first. We snuck down the stairs, watching for creaks in the floorboards.

RUSTY puts his finger over his  
lips, a silent "Shhhhh." They  
wait, looking around them.

We got to the door. He turned the knob slow, really slow—made my skin crawl. I couldn't breathe I was so afraid to make a sound. The click came, and we were out. That's step 1. Rusty's halfway into the woods by the time I turn around.

RUSTY gets low, starts performing commando moves.

He stayed low, quiet—you couldn't hear his feet, even in the dark. It was funny cause right then and I swear I saw him at 8, rolling around, barking orders, dodging imaginary snipers. Looking back I don't know what was serious and what was a game. Or if there ever was any difference.

RUSTY rolls and crouches, as if hiding behind a tree. He signals JESSIE over, gives him a flashlight.

We went into the woods.

RUSTY and JESSIE give each other a nod, and as they flip their lights on, all goes dark but the flashlights in their hands.

We could only see a few feet in front of us but we knew these woods. Rusty was hauling ass, I almost lost him a few times, but we met up at the hollow tree. All paths cross it.

RUSTY holds his hand out. JESSIE gives him the bag. RUSTY digs through and pulls out a flask and takes a swig. He hands it to JESSIE, who does the same. They take turns until the last drop is finished, by RUSTY. He turns the flask over and gives it a few shakes.

RUSTY

To the bottom of everything.

They pack the bag and JESSIE takes it again.

JESSIE

That was step 2. To the house.

Some light comes up as they leave the woods.

But it wasn't how we planned. The route must have changed, but I wasn't paying attention. We were at Evey's house.



RUSTY

You coming or what?

JESSIE

I was so mad at him for lying. I didn't want to do anything to hurt Evey. I shouldn't have, I know that now, but....I...

JESSIE takes RUSTY's hand. Other members of the town place two chairs next to each other, making EVEY'S CAR.

RUSTY

What the fuck are you doing?

JESSIE

What the fuck am *I* doing?

RUSTY

Get over here.

JESSIE

Rusty-

RUSTY

Come on!

JESSIE joins RUSTY on the ground.

JESSIE

I held the bag, kept watch. Just heard clinking and pulling.

RUSTY sits in the driver's chair and mimes working on the ignition.

It was an old car with no alarm. He waved me over to the other side and unlocked my door.

JESSIE hurriedly sits in the passenger's seat. He keeps looking around.

Shit shit shit.

RUSTY

Is something happening?

JESSIE

Not yet.

RUSTY

Keep quiet until you see something all right? I need to concentrate. Take a breath or something.

JESSIE  
What are we doing Rusty?

RUSTY  
Shhhh.

RUSTY pulls two imaginary wires  
together. The ignition starts up.

That's it.

JESSIE  
Shit shit shit-

RUSTY  
What did I say?

JESSIE  
A light went on in Evey's house.  
We have to go.

RUSTY  
Not done with the steering wheel.

JESSIE  
Rusty we gotta go!

RUSTY  
We need to steer the damn car all right?

JESSIE  
Shit shit shit-

RUSTY  
Just give me a goddamn sec-yes!

The engine revs and they're off.

JESSIE  
The roads are hilly and winding around here. You go the right  
speed and it's like you're on a roller coaster. We were past  
the right speed now.  
Rusty.  
We weren't slowing down.  
Rusty!

The car speeds up.

Rusty you gotta slow down.  
Rusty!  
That look on his face.  
Rusty!  
Rusty! Rusty stop the fucking car!

Screech, then a rumble as the car comes to a gradual stop.

I don't think he heard anything I said. I think he just decided that was the time. We came to a stop. Like it was nothing.

Police sirens, flashing lights.  
JESSIE collapses onto the ground outside of the car.

RUSTY

That was something, huh?

\*

SUE

You know we're not perfect. Like any place we have our share of crime, but it's always small, and you can always put a face to it. Petty, I guess you'd call it. Petty and spiteful. Never evil. You have vandalism, theft, public intoxication—people do tend to settle things in the bar here, over a few or too many drinks. Nothing you can't work out somehow, pay damage, shake on it. But I look back on this night and I'm thinking this is something else. You know, serial vandalism, tactical strikes. It's more than petty—it's mean. It's destructive. Does something to a town. I remember a time when people didn't need to lock their doors. Now you don't know who's your enemy. And once you're at that point, you start to wonder who's your friend. So it's something more than a little property damage here and there. Every cut scabs over and you think "I won't put myself there again," "I don't want to risk it." And you look around and you keep an eye on threats, you take precautions. You can feel the difference in a place. A little more tense, a little more distrustful. You don't want to let things go down that road too long.

Interrogation room.

Look at me.  
Jessie.

JESSIE

I didn't want to do it.

SUE

So why didn't you stop?

JESSIE

I couldn't.

SUE

Why?

JESSIE

I don't know.

RUSTY

Jessie wanted to do it too.

SUE

He wanted to.

RUSTY

I was grounded. He kept calling me, talking about Evey Evey Evey Parker.

SUE

He didn't mention Evey Parker.

RUSTY

He's embarrassed about it.

SUE

He did seem nervous.

RUSTY

It was stupid, I get it. I thought I was doing him a favor.

SUE

What about the other times?

Beat.

We're not as thick as you might think. You boys have been busy. Unless you have some rivals running around out there with spray paint and toilet paper. How did you feel those other times?

RUSTY

I don't know.

SUE

This is unacceptable.

RUSTY

I understand that now.

SUE

You understand that now.

RUSTY

Yeah.

SUE

I'm not so sure about that.

RUSTY

No I do. I really do.

Pause.

SUE

Rusty. I know you've been through...

RUSTY

Stop.

SUE

This is not the way to do it. You hear me?

RUSTY

It was wrong. I'm sorry, ma'am. I won't do it again. Please let me go home now.

\*

FAYE

The night before it happened—

JESSIE

The night before it happened—

EVEY

The night before it happened—

SUE

The night before it happened—

HOWARD

The night before it happened—

FRANK

The night before it happened—

FAYE

I bring a handle of whiskey over to Rusty's house. He sneaks me in. We talk about...how much we hate everything.

EVEY

I turn out the lights, hide under the covers, and call Jessie.

JESSIE

I talk to Evey for an hour and a half.

FAYE

I say that I think everyone in this town deserves to die. That makes him laugh.

SUE

I climb the stairs to my room. I take off my uniform and climb in bed. I turn the TV on.

FAYE

Halfway into the bottle he tells me to get out, that he's tired and needs to go to bed. I fight him on it but...I had a weird feeling...I...I went home.

SUE

I let myself get sleepy as I watch sitcom reruns and read a random magazine I picked up that day. Last night it was Cigar Aficionado. Tonight, it's Interior Design.

CHRISTINA

I hang a picture Tommy did in school on the fridge. It's a knight and a dragon, fighting in the clouds.

FRANK

I have my last drink at the bar and take a nice long walk home. I don't think about much of anything at all.

NOAH

I say goodnight to Rusty, who's in front of the TV. I give him a countdown. I'm exhausted so I go upstairs and crash.

HOWARD

I kiss Christina goodnight and go upstairs. I say goodnight to Tommy

CHRISTINA

I give Tommy a kiss goodnight.

EVEY

I hear my parents coming.

HOWARD

I knock on Evey's door.

EVEY

Shhh.

JESSIE

Ok.

HOWARD

No response. Guess she's gone to bed.

CHRISTINA

I see the light in Evey's room is off so I go straight to bed.

HOWARD

I fall into the bed and stay there. I hear Christina laugh.

CHRISTINA  
I turn him over and kiss his cheeks.

HOWARD  
We roll around, laughing.

CHRISTINA  
I look into his eyes.

HOWARD  
I look into her eyes.

FAYE  
I climb up to my roof and smoke a joint.

NOAH  
I look out the window. I see stars and hear the crickets.

FRANK  
No cars out on this path so all you hear are the woods.

FAYE  
The woods are like an orchestra tuning.

JESSIE  
Goodnight

EVEY  
Goodnight

CHRISTINA & HOWARD  
Goodnight.

FRANK  
Goodnight.

NOAH  
Goodnight.

FAYE  
Goodnight.

All sit, but RUSTY, who talks to  
us.

RUSTY  
Once upon a time, there was a devil who built a magic mirror that distorted everything it reflected. When you looked into it, all the good in you got smaller while everything ugly about you magnified. The devil carried this mirror all around the world. Even the most beautiful landscapes became like boiled spinach. Then he sought to take the mirror to heaven, tried to make a fool of God. But what happens to you when you try to make a fool of God?

The higher he lifted the mirror, the more it shook, and it plummeted to earth, shattering into a million pieces. The fall was so great that the pieces scattered all over the earth, finding their way into people's hearts and eyes. Their hearts became like ice and their eyes became just like the magic mirror, seeing only the bad and ugly in everything. The world was thrown into chaos. Everyone cried out in pain. They could not bare the newly-made space inside them. They were cruel to each other. There was misery, there was war. Parents would have children with glass shards inside them. And their children and their children's children, every generation more scarred than the last. Until we find ourselves in a little town in a magic land of the imagination called America. Every day the scarred people made a play about happiness with each other, then went home and practiced their lines. All of them pretending and burying their darkness, their longing, filling their holes that only ever emptied. Then one day, an angel came down, someone with no holes or shards. He was a pleasant, caring angel. He didn't need to act. He was. At first everyone was touched by his energy. It seemed to fill the space they never could. But soon enough, they grew to despise him. He reminded them that they were miserable, that they would never be like him. They called a secret town meeting and hatched a plot to kill the angel—but they decided it would be better to draw things out. So instead, they tormented him. They mocked him, they beat him. They coughed up their bloody shards of glass and made him swallow them. And he became ugly like them. Uglier even. He crawled to the other end of the earth, to the coldest part of the world, leaving a trail of blue blood behind him. He broke a glacier down with his anger and built a castle, with a tower so tall he could look down at everyone in this little town, and everyone in every little town full of broken people. And he decided there was no point for them to go on. These people were tainted, defective. So he carried their children away, cracked the sky, and plunged them into everlasting winter.

RUSTY exits.

#### **INTERLUDE. FUTURE/NO FUTURE**

The characters have become the TOWN again except for HOWARD, who stares into a television and CHRISTINA, on the opposite end of the stage, stares out into an abyss.



## TOWN

I hate that this will be the one thing you'll remember about us.  
 Now we're the talk of the nation.  
 The battle rages on.  
 Round and round and round and round.  
 Deeper and deeper down.  
 We are adapting.  
 Slowly.  
 It takes time.  
 Constant effort.  
 Constant effort.  
 It means living in between time.  
 Past  
 Present  
 Future—  
 No future.  
 It will get better.  
 (That's bullshit.)  
 (Watch your language.)  
 It takes time.  
 (It takes time?)  
 (There is no time.)  
 There is no time.

## CHRISTINA

I can't take one more goddamn memorial.

She exits.

Dry your eyes  
 The sun will rise in the morning  
 No more shivering in the night  
 Out of the darkness and into the light.

**PART 3. THE CROSSES ON MAPLE HILL**

*Maple Hill.*

Two weeks since the shooting at Maple Hill. Wooden crosses line the back of the stage. RUSTY, facing away from us, watching the sun rise, now on the opposite side from Part I. He turns and stares at us, maybe a bit too long. Footsteps. RUSTY moves to the center cross. NOAH enters. SUE behind him. A moment passes.

I'm sorry, I can't. NOAH

Give it some time. SUE

They shouldn't have made one for him. NOAH

Pause.

It was enough to get it from everyone in town. They let the whole country have their say.

Glad that's died down. You can get a table at Molly's now. SUE

Pause.

Hey don't shut down again. I couldn't get a word out of you the whole way here.

Sorry it's- NOAH

It's really all right. I'm...giving you a hard time. Guess you're having a hard enough time as it is. Just haven't seen you out. SUE

It's been too much. NOAH

Yeah. Things are still raw. SUE

That's for sure. NOAH

That smell. NOAH sniffs the air.

Oh. Ah. Some of the kids get pissed and come out here and well... SUE

Oh. NOAH

Pause.

I really thought this would be a good thing. SUE

NOAH  
I wish he had never been born.

Pause.

God had to take away my wife. I wish he had just left me all alone.

SUE  
You took good care of him.

NOAH  
I should have thrown him in that lake. I wanted to, then.

SUE puts her hand on NOAH's back.  
They are quiet for a while.

Time to go. We should go.

NOAH takes one last look, then  
turns to SUE.

Thank you.

NOAH exits. SUE looks at the  
cross, and RUSTY, and exits.

\*

*Elsewhere on Maple Hill.*

FAYE and EVEY enter.

FAYE  
Thank you, thank you so much for coming.

EVEY  
It's nothing.

FAYE  
It's not nothing, Evey.

EVEY  
I'm happy to be here.

FAYE  
Happy?

EVEY  
You know what I mean.

FAYE  
I'm sorry, I'm being a dick.

Yeah. EVEY

Thank you. FAYE  
Just tell me.

Ok. It doesn't bother me. EVEY

Everybody's out of their fucking minds, more out of their  
fucking minds than usual. You're the only person I can talk  
to. I don't usually ask people for...but you were the first  
one that I thought of- FAYE

I'm here, I'm glad you did. EVEY

I'm going crazy Evey. FAYE

You're not. Just keep yourself going as best you can. EVEY

What if I don't want to keep going? FAYE

Faye. EVEY

I'm serious. What's the fucking point of anything? Our friend  
just shot up our fucking school. Now everybody's a saint no  
matter how much of an evil fucking prick they were when they  
were alive. The world sucked, and I didn't think it could  
possibly get worse, and then this happened, and now it sucks  
even more. Just a fake world full of ignorant selfish tools  
who are just going to get rich, fuck the planet, fuck  
everybody else. Fuck them, fuck us. We're all so purely,  
royally fucked!  
I hate everything so fucking much. FAYE

Everything? EVEY

FAYE holds EVEY tight. FAYE  
buries her face in EVEY's  
shoulder. `

I'm sorry Evey I'm so so sorry. FAYE

Stop, Faye.

EVEY

I should be the one coming to the rescue.

FAYE

I'm ok.

EVEY

Are you? How are you ok?

FAYE

Tell me what happened.

EVEY

FAYE pulls her sleeves down further over her hands. EVEY holds her arm.

Can I see?

FAYE shakes. EVEY lays her hand on FAYE's back. FAYE breathes a deep sigh. It's palpable, how much her body relaxes.

Yer shakin' like a leaf!

FAYE laughs despite herself.

I can't believe you.

FAYE

What?

EVEY

You don't seem real sometimes.

FAYE

EVEY checks if she is real.

I feel real.

EVEY

Everybody else is falling apart and you're like running around doing good works.

FAYE

I don't know Faye. It's just the way I am. Everybody's different.

EVEY

I didn't even...and I'm a fucking mess.

FAYE



Evey? FAYE

EVEY's phone rings.

I'm not going anywhere. EVEY

She notices the phone.

I gotta go now though.

Ok. FAYE

Are you ok? EVEY

I'll see you soon. Promise. FAYE smiles, shrugs.

Yeah. FAYE

EVEY leaves. RUSTY holds EVEY, kisses her scars. He pulls her with him into the darkness. FAYE breaks away and exits.

\*

*Somewhere in town*

Phone rings and rings and rings. JESSIE enters. The line picks up. It's Evey's voice, but a recording—her voicemail.

EVEY (VOICEMAIL)  
 Hiiiiii! You've reached Evey Parker. Sorry I can't come to the phone right now, please leave a message and I'll get back to you aye-sap!

The beep.

JESSIE  
 Hey. Jessie. I'm trying not to be annoying. Well. I'm being annoying. I'm mad that I'm being annoying. I don't know what else to do. I need to see you. I know your Dad needs you but I need you too. I miss you a lot and I don't know why you won't talk to me. If you could tell me why you're not talking to me then at least I would know what I did. I didn't mean to whatever it is. And I'm really really really...sorry.

He opens his mouth as if to say something else, but then he gives up and hangs up.

Phone rings. CHRISTINA lets it ring for a long time. Finally, she answers, but soundlessly.

EVEY

...Mom?  
Mom?

CHRISTINA

I love you Evey.

CHRISTINA hangs up.

EVEY

Mom! Mom!

Out on CHRISTINA. EVEY looks at her phone. Out on EVEY.

\*

*Frank's property.*

We hear the sound of a skeet shoot. The machine launches, a pause as the skeet soars, and then a loud gunshot, that rings and echoes, and dies. Lights up on FRANK, facing the horizon, holding a gun, which he is lowering as he brings a whiskey bottle to his lips. He takes a long swig. He pours two very quick swigs out. RUSTY walks up next to him. FRANK puts the bottle down and lights a cigarette. FRANK hands RUSTY the gun. RUSTY aims.

FRANK

Stance is off.

RUSTY adjusts.

That's it.

FRANK takes another swig. RUSTY fires. It echoes, and dies.

You're a natural.



RUSTY points the gun at FRANK.  
Points it at his head. Clicks.  
It's empty. FRANK laughs. His  
laughing turns to helpless sobs.  
RUSTY lowers the gun.

\*

*Parker Residence*

HOWARD, in PJ's, sits transfixed  
by an unseen television. We hear  
the muffled sound of the  
television news. He mouths along  
to headlines.

HOWARD

Shooting. Milwaukee. 2 dead. 3 injured.

Doorbell rings.

Bombing. Afghanistan. 8 dead. 4 injured.

Doorbell.

Plane crash. Indonesia. 243 dead.

Doorbell.

EVEY (O.S.)

Dad! Is that the doorbell?

HOWARD

Landslide. Peru. 42 dead.

HOWARD continues mouthing.

EVEY (O.S.)

Dad?

The doorbell rings, and HOWARD  
tries to drown it out with a loud  
siren like wail. He keeps making  
it over the next doorbell. EVEY  
enters.

Dad!

HOWARD

Shooting. San Antonio. 4 dead.

Doorbell.

Come on. Can you just work with me—

HOWARD grabs EVEY's arm and pulls her back.

Hey. We talked about that.

HOWARD lets go. EVEY goes to the door.

I don't want any visitors.

HOWARD

Mr. Parker? Evey?

JESSIE (O.S.)

EVEY opens the door.

I don't want him in here!

HOWARD

Don't worry about him. Come in.

EVEY

(to JESSIE)

What did I say?

HOWARD

I want him here.

EVEY

What does it take for a parent to get some respect?

HOWARD

What about me?

EVEY

Is it better if I—

JESSIE

No. I want you to stay.

EVEY

Evey.

HOWARD

I've done everything the way you wanted now I'm having Jessie over. Ok?

EVEY

(to JESSIE.)

Come inside!

Mr. Parker— JESSIE

Jessie, don't. EVEY

I'm sorry for— JESSIE

For what? For what? HOWARD

Pause.

Evey I just feel like I'm causing problems— JESSIE

Stay! EVEY

She's swallows her rage.

Let's go.

Ok, yeah. JESSIE

EVEY pulls JESSIE out by the hand, leaving HOWARD alone. He returns to the television.

\*

*Evey's backyard.*

EVEY and JESSIE enter.

I... EVEY

I just wanna see you. JESSIE

Jessie— EVEY

Do you not wanna see me? JESSIE

Of course I want to see you. EVEY

JESSIE

Then what's going on?

Pause.

Please like me again.

EVEY

I don't know what I'm doing.

JESSIE

Me neither. All I know is that I want to be with you. I'm happy when I'm around you, Evey.

JESSIE kisses EVEY. EVEY catches RUSTY in her line of sight and breaks away.

Wait you're running again.

EVEY

No, it's. I-

JESSIE

You know what if you don't like me you can just say it you don't have to be nice to me.

EVEY

Jessie come on.

JESSIE

It's ok, you know, I'm used to it.

EVEY

I'm doing my best.

JESSIE

I feel like an idiot for freaking out so much but it's weird, right? It's weird that you're not returning my calls.

EVEY

You're calling a lot.

Beat.

Hey-

JESSIE

I didn't mean to be so-

EVEY

Jessie, please understand, I have so much going on right now.

JESSIE  
I don't know what to do Evey.

EVEY  
I just need you to be here.

JESSIE  
Be...here.

EVEY  
Just...be my friend and be-

JESSIE  
Just be your friend.

EVEY  
...yeah, Jessie. If that's not too horrible.

JESSIE  
Please, tell me what I did.

EVEY  
Jessie, I'm still here. I just...I need...time...and space...

JESSIE  
Just forget it, ok. It's fine. I'm just disgusting and stupid  
and-

EVEY  
Jessie!

JESSIE  
Forget it.

JESSIE exits, leaving EVEY and  
RUSTY. A moment.

\*

*The Bar*

NOAH enters, sits, watches. SUE  
enters and, seeing NOAH,  
approaches.

SUE  
Noah?

NOAH  
Hiya Sue.

SUE  
You're out!

I'm out.

NOAH

I uh, I've had a day, I just need to sit and skulk on my own for a while.

SUE

Oh that was my plan.

NOAH

SUE sits in another part of the bar. RUSTY mirrors her. She stares him down.

SUE

Why do I only see you?

FRANK enters and sits next to NOAH.

NOAH

Frank.

FRANK

Where were you?

NOAH

What?

FRANK

Where were you?

NOAH stands.

NOAH

Ok Frank.

FRANK blocks him.

I just want to go home.

FRANK grabs NOAH.

FRANK

You were supposed to be a father. You were supposed to guide him.

NOAH

What about you, Frank? Are you supposed to guide him too?

They tussle. It gets ugly. SUE comes down.

SUE  
You fellas fighting over me?

NOAH lands a punch.

NOAH  
You know nothing about being a father!

FRANK puts his hand on his  
holster.

SUE  
HEY!

SUE holds NOAH back. FRANK takes  
his hand off his weapon.

FRANK  
Sheriff.

SUE  
Noah. You all right to get yourself home?

NOAH  
Yes Ma'am.

SUE  
I think you should go ahead and do that.

NOAH  
Right away Sheriff. Thank you Sheriff.

NOAH skedaddles.

SUE  
I think you've had enough for tonight.

FRANK  
Don't fucking touch me.

SUE  
All right, all right.

FRANK  
You always gotta butt in.

SUE  
Well that's what you pay me for.

SUE takes the gun out of FRANK's  
holster.

FRANK  
Hey!

SUE  
It's staying with me tonight.

FRANK  
It's not the gun's fault.

SUE  
Thought it might be a good idea to give you two some distance.

FRANK  
She gets antsy when I'm away.

SUE  
We're all heartbroken.  
You need to leave the justice to us, Frank.

FRANK  
Justice.

SUE  
Isn't that what you want?  
Frank?

FRANK starts to leave.  
You got it all out now. You're leaving it here.

FRANK stops.  
You're gonna leave it.

FRANK  
Yeah.

SUE  
Say it.

FRANK  
I'll leave it.  
I'll leave it.

Pause.

SUE  
Goodnight, Frank.

FRANK exits. SUE watches him for a moment.

Wait. Frank.  
Let me walk you home.

SUE exits.



\*

*The Pines.*

FAYE and JESSIE enter.

FAYE

Surprised you called me. It's been a little while.

JESSIE

Yeah. I've been...

FAYE

Yeah.

Look. I...

I'm sorry for being a fucking asshole.

JESSIE

Don't be.

Don't be sorry about anything.

I'm tired of being sorry.

FAYE

Me too.

Pause.

JESSIE

I don't understand her.

FAYE

Me neither.

JESSIE

Have you seen her?

FAYE

Once. Only once.

JESSIE

Guess she's trying to get to everyone on the list.

FAYE

She's doing the best she can.

JESSIE

I knew I was being crazy but I. I just felt so bad and I needed her and she. I got so scared. That she just didn't like me anymore. That I didn't matter anymore. And if that can just happen-

FAYE

Don't let anyone make you think you don't matter. You hear me?

Everybody is just figuring it out. We're winging it. Running around like chickens with their heads cut off trying to make every minute count for something. And every one of them does it in a different way. And sometimes those ways are strange, or they hurt ourselves or other, chickens, and so we just have to be there, whoever can, for whoever they can.

Beat.

I dunno, maybe that was stup—

JESSIE

I haven't been a good friend, Faye.  
I just disappeared.

FAYE

It's ok. It's really ok.

JESSIE

Can we be friends again?

Beat.

FAYE

Of course you idiot.

\*

*Somewhere on Maple Hill/Sue's  
backyard(?)*

SUE enters. She lets out a sigh.  
She sits, and looks at the stars.  
RUSTY enters. Sits with her. They  
look at each other. SUE looks  
back up.

SUE

We are so very small.

RUSTY looks at her, then up at  
the stars.

\*

*Burgess residence.*

NOAH enters. Doorbell. NOAH  
cautiously checks the door. EVEY  
pokes her head in.

EVEY

Mr. Burgess?

Evelyn!

NOAH

They look at each other awkwardly  
for a moment.

Are you all right? Is something the matter?

EVEY

Can I...can I come in?

NOAH

Y-yeah. Yes, of course. I'm sorry. Please.

EVEY steps in. NOAH and EVEY  
stand looking at each other, a  
feeling like gravity pressing on  
them. RUSTY sits, watching  
cartoons.

NOAH

Cup of tea?

EVEY

Uh. Yeah, sure.

NOAH

Make yourself at...sit wherever you like, feel comfortable.

NOAH goes off stage as EVEY looks  
around. She sits close to RUSTY  
and watches him. After a moment  
NOAH enters. EVEY gets up  
instinctively.

EVEY

Mr. Burgess?

NOAH

I'm sorry.

EVEY

No. I just thought maybe you'd like to sit down.

NOAH sits.

NOAH

I've forgotten how to be around people.

EVEY

Me too. Everybody, I think.

NOAH

I've been drinking a lot of tea. I'm becoming more knowledgeable about it.

EVEY

Oh. That's cool.

NOAH

It used to be just hot water to me, with the smell of flowers. But now I really know what I drink.

EVEY

Oh?

NOAH

You wouldn't believe what you can find on the internet. There are all kinds of teas. All kinds. And you can't find everything on Amazon. Some of this stuff is very rare. Grown by farmers out in the middle of nowhere. There are whole communities on the web, trading teas and sharing tips for growing and steeping.

EVEY

Wow I didn't know there was so much to it. My Mom just get teabags at the supermarket.

NOAH

It's become an obsession. I'm thinking of starting a garden, so keeping in mind ones I really want to grow. This one we're drinking right now is a Silver Tip, a very rare white tea. It can be tough to cultivate, the leaf needs to be picked before it matures, and...uh...

Pause.

I'm trying to figure out how to ask how you are.

EVEY

You can ask.

NOAH

It's probably the only question you get nowadays.

EVEY

You probably understand.

NOAH

Maybe.

EVEY

My Dad won't leave the house. My Mom won't come back home. And I don't have a brother anymore. Whatever that is, that's what I am. I don't think it's fine, but I'm still here, so. What about you?

NOAH  
Still here.

Pause.

EVEY  
I think...maybe you're the only person in the world who feels worse than I do.

Pause, then NOAH cracks up.

I'm so sorry.

NOAH  
I'll take this over rocks at my window or graffiti on my door.

EVEY  
That sounds really horrible.

NOAH  
Well, that's the way it is.

EVEY  
Mr. Burgess...

NOAH  
Yes?

EVEY  
Your home is really nice.

NOAH  
Oh.  
Thank you.

EVEY  
I thought...

NOAH  
What?

EVEY  
I thought maybe I would understand better.

NOAH  
I don't understand anything at all.

They watch RUSTY together for a while.

EVEY  
Was he just bad?

NOAH  
 I don't know.  
 What does that make me?

EVEY  
 Very sad, it looks like.

Pause.

NOAH  
 I didn't love him.

EVEY  
 No, that's not true.

NOAH  
 Yes it is, I know it in my heart.

EVEY  
 Hate is like poison Mr. Burgess.

NOAH  
 It's not hatred. I feel...detached. From him. From this town,  
 from the world. My muscles are detached from my bones, my  
 organs are floating in the air. It's like I'm not here  
 anymore. I don't belong here anymore.

EVEY hugs NOAH.

EVEY  
 You're here. See?

NOAH hugs back. They hold each  
 other for a while.

I have to go home.

NOAH  
 Ok.

EVEY  
 Thanks, Mr. Burgess.

\*

*The Parker Residence.*

HOWARD watches the news.

EVEY  
 Dad?  
 Dad?  
 I'm sorry I didn't call you. I didn't want to worry you.  
 Did you eat anything?

Is this just...what you...  
 You have to talk to me if you want me to make you something.

HOWARD

I don't want to eat.

EVEY blocks HOWARD's view of the  
 TV.

EVEY

I can't take this anymore.

HOWARD

Don't you dare.

EVEY turns the TV off. HOWARD  
 stands, furious. EVEY flinches.  
 Doorbell. EVEY goes, leaving  
 HOWARD alone. HOWARD goes to the  
 TV to turn it on and gets caught  
 by his reflection. He stares.  
 EVEY enters with CHRISTINA. She  
 drops her suitcase. HOWARD turns.  
 CHRISTINA tries and fails to  
 speak.

EVEY

Mom's home.

CHRISTINA croaks, but still no  
 words.

CHRISTINA

How are you?

HOWARD

Whereto now?

CHRISTINA

I'm back.

Pause.

I needed...  
 I wasn't able to...  
 I'm better.

HOWARD, turns the TV on. EVEY  
 rushes to him, trying to stop  
 him, but she can't throw him off  
 as he resets.

What are you doing? Howard?

(to EVEY)  
 What is he doing?

EVEY  
 Dad. Dad. Let go. Please. It's ok.

HOWARD shakes his head. EVEY hugs him. He struggles at first, but he relents.

CHRISTINA  
 (answering her own question)  
 What's happened to you Howard?

CHRISTINA goes to HOWARD and EVEY but stays some distance away.  
 I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

#### **INTERLUDE. TRAGIC RESPONSE**

THE TOWN enters.

THE TOWN  
 It was an art installation.  
 (An art installation?)  
 One night those crosses just disappeared  
 Every single one of them.  
 Up and vanished, just like that.  
 (What about all the things people left?)  
 Left in boxes, dropped off at the police station.  
 We found out on the news.  
 He was "responding" to what happened here.  
 Apparently, he'd been doing this all over the country.  
 "Responding" to everybody's tragedies  
 Putting up crosses for the dead, and taking them away.  
 (It's despicable. Playing with people's emotions to make a point.)  
 (I bet he feels really good about himself. He did his part.)  
 (I don't know.)  
 (What?)  
 (I never thought they were really brought there by God or anything.)  
 (It just felt like someone out there saw us.)  
 (It felt like an honor, a gift.)  
 (A gift?)  
 (It's insensitive. It wasn't his place.)  
 (This is still an open wound.)  
 (It's ours.)  
 (It's all of ours.)



We hear clips of local news,  
carrying us through 10 months.

**PART 4. TO THE FUTURE**

*Sue's place*

FRANK and SUE sit together.

FRANK

It's a nice place you got here.

SUE

Everything's from my folks. Wouldn't even know where to start  
if I had to decorate.

FRANK

Yeah I remember your Pop.

SUE

Still can't get the cigarette smell out of this place.  
It always made me mad. He went to war and came back only  
to...

FRANK

You think a man who's gone through that's gonna let you tell  
him he can't have a smoke?

Pause. Doorbell. SUE opens the  
door. It's HOWARD and CHRISTINA.

SUE

Hello! Welcome.

She hugs them at the door.

Come in, come in.

HOWARD

Shoes?

SUE

Oh I don't care. Let's keep 'em on!

CHRISTINA

That's right! We have business to take care of this evening.  
But there are snacks right?

SUE

You come to my house, you're leaving with your belly full.

NOAH enters.

CHRISTINA  
 Noah.

NOAH  
 Hi, Christina.

SUE  
 I...you both knew...

CHRISTINA  
 Of course, we did, just. It's been...I've been...

SUE  
 Understood. I hope you both feel all right.

HOWARD  
 We'll be...

CHRISTINA  
 Yes. Yes.

SUE  
 (joking of course)  
 Well have some shrimp or something you're making me nervous.

HOWARD and CHRISTINA laugh,  
 releasing some tension.

CHRISTINA  
 Frank.

FRANK  
 Mrs. Parker.

HOWARD  
 How...are you?

FRANK  
 Doing all right, thank you.  
 I was at a meeting tonight.

HOWARD  
 Oh.

CHRISTINA  
 That's wonderful, Frank. That's...really wonderful.

FRANK  
 Thanks.

HOWARD  
 Oh well I'm sure you're feeling healthier than ever.

FRANK

Yeah. After I dried out a bit.

FRANK chuckles, the rest take a little time to realize they can laugh too.

SUE

Let's all have a seat and get this started shall we?

CHRISTINA

Thank you Sue, for hosting.

SUE

My pleasure. Happy to have you all.

CHRISTINA

So, I think...  
It's coming up on the one year—  
I'm not used to talking in front of people.

HOWARD

Says the teacher of the year—

Laughter.

CHRISTINA

You're not my students!  
So, I thought we should do something on the day. Something special. Howard and I have been talking about an idea and I thought we could use it to start the conversation. We thought it could be good to build something for the town, like a memorial.

HOWARD

We thought we could commission an artist to design and build it—

NOAH

An artist, like the cross guy?

CHRISTINA

Well. Ah.

NOAH

I just—

HOWARD

We know those were...complicated. But, I think we can agree that for some, maybe a lot of people, having something to commemorate, no, that's not the word...having something to remember, it was like...it was like a place you could put it, compartmentalize, without forgetting.

I'm not talking about a statue in the town square, but...a place for us in town to go and remember, but without thinking about death. If that makes sense.

NOAH

No, that...I understand that.

HOWARD

Well after all that mess this artist guy went into seclusion for a while, or no one really heard from him. We started to forget about it. Then out of the blue, we get a letter. He apologizes, has this idea, practically begging us to do it. He wants to design a memorial for us. At first we were going to tell him to fuck off-

CHRISTINA

Howard...

FRANK

Fuck 'im.

Chuckles.

HOWARD

We heard him out. We got him to agree to allow public input this time and he really wants to take it seriously. Said that what happened really, "inspired" him. I don't know if he's doing it for the publicity or what but if he wants to make something good for us...

CHRISTINA

We thought we'd share it with you all. And, if you'd like to be involved...

Beat.

NOAH

I like the idea.

SUE

Yea.

CHRISTINA

Frank?

FRANK

Yeah, sure.

CHRISTINA

All right then. We'll meet again to discuss specifics. This is good.

Beat.

Uh. NOAH

Yes? CHRISTINA

Well...Frank? NOAH

There was something I wanted to talk to you all about if you don't mind. FRANK

Uh...sure, Frank. HOWARD

He looks at SUE, who smiles back.

So ah...since we retired the Militia, I've been trying to ah...find a way to contribute. And...I thought, well, I have a lot of skills that I can pass on. FRANK

Oh, um. CHRISTINA

It's really appreciated Frank, I just don't know if we want anything with... HOWARD

It's not about guns or anything like that. Hear us out. NOAH

This is something they came up with together. SUE

Ah...all right. HOWARD

Go ahead. SUE

We're blessed here, all this beauty surrounding us. And today, you know you got all these new machines and that's all well and good, but...you lose connection to nature. When you have that, foster that, it teaches you self-reliance, builds character. And those kinds of skills are important for people to learn. FRANK

We're thinking about starting a camp. NOAH

CHRISTINA

A...camp?

NOAH

Like a program. I got in touch with this PhD who studies this kind of thing and we would do wilderness training, Frank will be in charge of that, and we'd make a curriculum with experts to develop social skills, community-building, stuff like that. It could be a nice place to go.

HOWARD

Huh.

CHRISTINA

That sounds very nice.

Beat.

SUE

Ah—

FRANK

We want your help.

CHRISTINA

Oh. What did you have in mind?

NOAH

Would you be willing to partner with us and, maybe spread the word at the anniversary ceremony?

HOWARD

Um. Well. We'd have to. Christina?

CHRISTINA

I think that's a wonderful idea.

NOAH

Are you sure?

CHRISTINA

I think it will be a very good thing.

\*

*The Pines*

FAYE, EVEY, and JESSIE enter.  
They build a fire together.

FAYE

All right so/ I think you gotta...

EVEY

Here, I have the perfect/wood for...

JESSIE

Yeah stack them like...give them/ some air...

EVEY

So like...

JESSIE

Yeah.

A fire alights. They admire the  
glow together. We hear the  
crackle. They look at each other.  
JESSIE and EVEY look at FAYE.

FAYE

Ok gather round.

They huddle together.

This flame represents the fire in all of us  
That binds every one of us  
The undeniable truth of nature  
That nothing is created or destroyed  
That nothing is gone forever  
And often—  
Not long at all.  
This flame is the beginning  
The Origin  
—The Primal Everything.  
In it we see  
The Past  
The Present  
The Future  
Tonight, we offer our wildest dreams.

Beat.

JESSIE

I really liked that Faye.

EVEY

It's really beautiful.

FAYE

Oh. Uh. Thanks.  
Who wants to...uh...?

JESSIE

I want a world where we can be who we want to be. As long as  
it doesn't hurt anybody.

Beat.

EVEY

I want a world where people are kind to each other.

FAYE

I want a world where we can look whatever way we want.

JESSIE

I want a world where, um...

EVEY

Where we don't have to be afraid of each other.

FAYE

Where we can love whoever we want!

JESSIE

I want a world where there's no more war.

FAYE

I want a world where we take care of each other.

EVEY

Where nobody has to feel alone.

They hear wolves howling in the distance. They stop, and laugh. Then, they howl back. Rusty, very far away, watches as the lights go out, leaving only the stars and the howling and laughter. Then, darkness.

End of play.