Silo tree

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University of Iowa

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SILO TREE

by

Samantha Noelle Collier

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre Arts (Playwriting) in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

May 2015

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Art Borreca
This is to certify that the Master’s thesis of

Samantha Noelle Collier

has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree
in Theatre Arts (Playwriting) at the May 2015 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

Art Borreca, Thesis Supervisor

Dare Clubb

Lisa Schlesinger
To my grandmothers
The question of the wolves turns & turns.

- Simone Muench
  *Wolf Centos*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A thousand thanks to my best friends and colleagues, Sarah Cho and Ryan Oliveira, who inspire me daily with their courage, humor, and generosity. And to Micah Ariel James, Kristi Banker, Bonnie Metzgar, Alison Ruth, and all the members of the Iowa Playwrights Workshop 2012-2015. I am deeply grateful to my professors, Lisa Schlesinger, Dare Clubb, Art Borreca, Megan Gogerty, Meredith Alexander, and Sydné Mahone, for their wisdom and encouragement. Profound thanks to Nina Morrison, my closest collaborator, who gave this play life, and to the entire team of the 2015 New Play Festival production. Thank you Mom, Dad, and Amy. And thanks, always, to Tamara Vatnick.
PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Lailah guides souls through her house to the world of the dead. Lou returns after ten years to find Wiley still living in the silo. The coywolves run in the night, looking for something lost long ago. *Silo Tree* is a pause on the bridge, a collection of lives in liminal space, and a memory that rolls forward as its surface is blown backward by the wind.
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PREFACE

So. There’s this river in Iowa City, and I’ve crossed it about a thousand times. I like to stand on the bridge and watch it move, especially at night in the deep fall when the stars are sharp and the wind cool, and the ducks cluster in knots of tight, chaotic silence. I mean fifty or sixty of them down there, all shadowed and shifting. Early mornings are good too, when the fog drifts in and hides the buildings and you can stand on the bridge and look right into the nineteenth century, the trees ghostly and half-dream. The river has moods, and they change with the weather and the seasons, sometimes a muddy brown, sometimes a soft gray, reflecting the storms that push across the midwest, and moving on. It moves and moves and carries things away and never leaves. People who have lived here many years will tell you about the floods, the way the river can rise and rise and sweep through museums and classrooms and concert halls, how the whole town gathers to haul sandbags and wait. I missed the last major flood, but I’ve watched the rebuilding. The cranes and craters are a clock by which I’ve measured the months.

In the fall I like to cross the river on my borrowed bicycle, a heavy yellow contraption made of steel and crooked from my crashing. The trees gleaming upside-down and orange in the river. As summer lets go of Iowa and the nights grow long, the river turns darker, colder, its smoky depths calling to the mind. For several months one autumn, every time I walked over it I was overcome with a longing to throw something into it, something valuable: my phone or my keys, pages of my play or parts of my body. I wanted an unburdening and the river promised it. I would hold tight to my self until I was safely over the bridge. Then one morning, as I crossed the river under a white sky, a bald eagle flew past my face and cured me of this longing. It was huge, its talons clutching for purchase on the
air, its wings beating hard as it fought to climb above the wind. I marveled, watching it, a messenger announcing the approach of cold clean air, and wind, and snow. Within seconds, it was just a scrape in the sky, high above me. The turning of the year. The new page.

Something steadied in me. Time would pull me with it just like the eagle. I let go of my ribs and my knuckles and my caught breath. The river was just a river, and I was intact, and then I was across.

In the winter the river pulls the eagles up from the Mississippi, to wheel and wait and dive for fish. The surface freezes and buckles. Snow grows deep on it and is freckled with the footprints of squirrels; the barrier becomes a bridge from bank to bank. A pause. A blue-white quiet. And then one morning it’s all dark liquid again, opaque and rushing, carrying broken sheets of ice from somewhere colder. With spring come the skimming swifts and swallows, and then with summer the flooded fields and clouds of biting flies.

In the tempers of the river, I’ve seen how time can move in circles, endlessly repeating its verses. We move forward, and yet here we are again, where we were last year and the year before that. The river is the same. It holds us in time, and it releases us from time. The theater works like this too. I like long jumps in time, with a breath of years between acts. What repeats and echoes across decades? Centuries? And how can the past answer the longings of the present? I look at the river and I am myself two years ago. I cut my thumb and my grandmother’s blood runs out. The immediacy of the present and the vanishing of the past, and where are our dead except in these places where we become our past selves? When I stand on the bridge, I stand suspended.

The river runs between my home and the theater building, so when I’m on the bridge I’m traveling between the two, transitioning from teacher to student, or from collaborator to
solitary writer, moving between the shifting identities that are so fundamental to graduate school. The bridge holds a liminal space for the shifting. I can stand in the middle and be both, or neither, or something else entirely. Liminal spaces are queer, they’re hazy, they have blurred corners and overlapping edges. I like to stand on thresholds, at borders, queering boundaries with the length of my hair and the cut of my clothes. Stares and whispers, laughter and rage – these are the language of the borderlands, and I am familiar with them, and they call me deeper into the unknown. I wanted to know what it might look like to live full-time in a liminal space, so I wrote *Silo Tree*. What I found is that the usual rules don’t apply. Some things are upside-down and backwards. In the world of the play, memory can move forward, life can begin with death, and fear can be a source of great comfort.

In a poetry seminar, I learned about the hidden shipwrecks of the midwest – long-buried steamboats sunk in rivers that have since changed course and moved miles off. When the land shifts, or mud washes away in heavy rain, farmers sometimes find the steamboats in their fields with the contents perfectly preserved, time capsules from the eighteen-hundreds. In these years of jumbo jets and interstate highways, we often forget that rivers were once the arteries of the country, essential for moving people and goods long distances. The recovery of these objects is like peering into the memories of the dead. Not knowing the full history of the ground we inhabit, we walk forever on the bones and belongings of past generations. Their clothes and their food and their little treasures. And of course trauma and genocide are layered into the land. As I began to write *Silo Tree*, a play set on a kind of bridge between the worlds of the dead and the living, I was captivated by the implications of this unearthing.

Then there was the double-ness of silo trees. All over the country, they begin as windblown seeds, take root as sheltered saplings, and eventually break through the tops and
sides of the silos as fully-formed trees, busting the bricks and cement in a slow steady push for sunlight. The green life growing from the crumbling decay. The earth turning our abandoned structures into new forms. And I read about coywolves, a species born from the newly overlapping territories of wolves and coyotes, as we continue to shrink their available space. So I put them in too. Their wildness and rough hunger became the engine of the play.

I’m taking this papermaking class at the University of Iowa’s Center for the Book. I’m learning to beat fiber into pulp, to form sheets with a wooden mould and deckle, and to dry the paper so it holds a textured tooth. And I’m reading the history. And there’s this thing about the old paper mills – they were all powered by waterwheels, which were turned by rivers. And I’m realizing that the movement of the river is in my writing, too. This play was powered by the Iowa River. The clouded eddies and hidden currents, the flocks of birds, the early morning mists and midnight beckonings – these rhythms have made their way into my body and my memory, turning the substance of my days into words.

_Silo Tree_ is a play of pauses on the bridge, a river-powered love song to liminal space, and a memory that rolls forward as its surface is blown backward by the wind.
DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

*Silo Tree* received a production as part of the 2015 University of Iowa New Play Festival, on May 5th, 2015. It was directed by Nina Morrison. Alison Ruth was the dramaturg. The scenic designer was Kevin Dudley, the lighting designer was Alex Casillas, the costume designer was Hiram Orozco, and the sound designer was Bri Atwood. Lukas Brasherfons designed the violence. Samantha Paradis was the stage manager, and she was assisted by Jake Melvold. The cast was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Actor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LAILAH</td>
<td>Regina Morones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILEY</td>
<td>Valeria Avina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REED</td>
<td>Andrew Berger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOU/SILVANA</td>
<td>Katy Karas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANNIE</td>
<td>Lindsey Francisco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLIP</td>
<td>Kevin Burford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COYWOLVES</td>
<td>Damitri Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shunhua Xing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emma Genesen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF CHARACTERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LAILAH</td>
<td>Female. A guide to the world of the dead. Neither dead nor alive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REED</td>
<td>A man. Dead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOU</td>
<td>Female. Twenties, then teens. Alive, maybe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLIP</td>
<td>Lou’s grandfather. Alive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANNIE</td>
<td>A girl. Dead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SILVANA</td>
<td>Played by the actor playing Lou. Dead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THREE COYWOLVES</td>
<td>Part wolf, part coyote. Alive, but with the memory of death in their bones.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SETTING AND TIME

PLACE:

The midwest, a space of between.

A house on a river. The river was here a long time ago but now it’s gone, its course changed by several dams. Now the house is on a field. But there’s also a house on the river. It’s the same house. There is no river.

There is also a tree growing up through a silo.

TIME:

Act one: now

Act two: ten years ago

Act three: a hundred fifty years before that
SILO TREE

Preshow: The space is filled with mist, and with music: slow strings, lovely and haunting.

The audience is on the long-gone banks of a vanished river, in the very early morning.

By the banks of the river is an old, crumbling silo with a tree growing up through it. As the audience enters they might see WILEY, who is sitting in the very top branches and spray painting a mural onto the silo. It’s a face, shadowed and beautiful, but is there something grotesque about it? It’s hard to see in the dark.

And they might see REED, finding his way through the fog. He walks slowly down a long road. He’s been walking all night.

The howls of coyotes, or something bigger.

The sound of a bell.

The lights shift.
ACT ONE

1. Just before dawn.
   Spring.
   Wind and early light.

   WILEY paints.

   A coywolf runs into the field.
   It’s looking for something.
   It sniffs around. It mutters to itself under its breath.

   COYWOLF
   the sleepdying between the drowning in the night yeah gone from the world under the ground yeah inside the sky yeah winter away gone winter after a few years spring mud snowmelt summer on the wind yeah someone coming through an open field yeah boots yeah breath making clouds who is it yeah what does he remember yeah i smell him smell a river in the

   WILEY
   go away

   (The COYWOLF turns to WILEY)

   COYWOLF
   you’re tethered like a dog you are too wild to sleep in the house too soft to live in the woods yeah yeah you’re lost aren’t you lost

   WILEY
   Get out of here
   It’s almost morning

   COYWOLF
   not yet not yet the sky’s still dark yeah someone’s coming

   WILEY
   He’s not yours. Leave him alone.

   COYWOLF
   i smell his sweat i smell

   WILEY
   He’s on the road. He’s almost at her door.
and you where are you yeah do you still drown your self in the night

Leave me

a wolf in a trap will chew its own leg off yeah or a coyote will rip itself free even if it kills its own self blood in the dirt yeah a dog though a dog will just sit and whine

Go away

waiting for someone to come to come save it

Go!

i’ll chew it off for you i will i will i will

Get!

(WILEY throws a rock at the coywolf. It runs off.

In the house, LAILAH enters the kitchen, shivering, and turns on the light.

She puts a kettle on.

Around her are piles of accumulated small objects, the things people put in pockets: pens and receipts, lighters and keys, erasers and condoms and mints and ticket stubs, worry dolls and love notes, marbles and buttons and pills, tiny treasures and bits of trash and crumpled bills and many many coins.

A scarf hangs by the door. It is very very old.

She goes to the table and sits.
She has an old deck of cards.
She lays them out in a particular pattern.
She studies them.
She turns over a card.)
LAILAH

Aha.

(The kettle whistles. She gets up, pours two cups of tea, and turns to look at the door. There’s a knock. She goes to answer it. REED is at the door.)

REED

I uh

LAILAH

Yes, come in, come in

(He enters, looking around.)

REED

There’s mud on my boots

LAILAH

That’s all right. Tea?

REED

Oh um, sure, thank you

LAILAH

Did you come a long way?

REED

I can’t
I can’t remember
There was a road in the fog
a long road, through the fields, and the moon coming up

LAILAH

Have a seat

REED

Thank you

(He sits. She puts a cup of tea in front of him. He sips.)
LAILAH

How did you find the road?

REED

Oh, it was, it was, I was driving
I was driving and I lost my way
Or I lost
Anyway I got out of the car and my head felt strange
like dizzy, or
and the road was there
and I followed it
and then I saw your house

LAILAH

Yes.

REED

I thought maybe I could use your phone

Phone?

LAILAH

To call my wife? She’ll be worried.

Oh, no, I’m sorry, honey.
I don’t have one.

REED

You don’t have a phone?

LAILAH

I don’t

REED

I think
I think my car might be in pretty bad shape

LAILAH

I’m sorry to hear that.

REED

I need to call someone.
I don’t have a phone.

REED

Oh my cell phone my cell phone

(He pulls it out of his pocket. He looks at it)

Dead.
Could I – would you mind if – do you have a phone charger I could borrow?

I don’t

LAILAH

REED

How do you call people?

LAILAH

If I need to talk to people they turn up at my door

REED

Like me

LAILAH

Well, yes

(REED laughs.)

REED

I don’t know why I’m laughing. My head feels strange

LAILAH

More tea?

REED

Thank you

(She pours it.)

LAILAH

Where were you going?

REED

I wasn’t going anywhere
I was driving around
angry
We had a fight
I had to get out of there
you know, blow off steam for an hour
it makes me so mad when she talks to me like I’m stupid
you ever have anyone talk to you like that?
but it’s pathetic
when I think about it
I’m pathetic
I can’t even remember how it started
(He looks out the window.)
It’s almost morning?
I should call her I need to call her

I don’t have a phone

Yeah.
Well maybe one of your neighbors

No

All night
I must have walked for hours on that road
but your house was the first one I saw.
Where is this? What town is this?

It’s not a town.

I need to call my wife, she’ll be so worried, I need to call..

What?

What

you stopped suddenly
I um

What’s her name?

Who?

Your wife

Oh, I
Oh
oh shit
I can’t remember
no
it’ll come to me, her name is, it’s, um, wait a minute, there’s just something wrong with my head

(He reaches up to touch the back of his head. His fingers come back covered in blood.)

I uh
I
I think I’m in bad shape
I need you to call 911

Listen, honey

I need a hospital I need I need
you were driving?

yes yes I need you to

and then what happened

I uh
it was so foggy
I could hardly see
and I
oh! oh my phone
my phone buzzed
like a text
and I looked down
and I looked up and this tree came up out of nowhere
and I hit it

you hit the tree

yeah and then I got out, shook myself off, started walking
but I’m bleeding, I need a hospital, my head is kinda mushy right here

(He touches his head again.)

okay, honey
What’s your name?

Reed

Reed, I’m Lailah.
Now listen.
Just out the back door, there’s a river.
Go down to the bank of the river and you will see a rope with a bell on it. Pull the rope to ring the bell.
Then someone will come in a little boat.
Get in the boat. It will take you where you need to go.

What?
Why?

Because you’re dead
REED

What?
No, I’m not, I’m not, I just need a

LAILAH

You are.
It happens to everyone, at some point, and tonight it happened to you.

REED

But I can’t be!

LAILAH

It’s all right.
Do you have anything in your pockets? Check them.

REED

I might, I

(he pulls out a gum wrapper, a tissue, some coins.)

LAILAH

Give it to me.

REED

But I

LAILAH

You won’t need it.
(He gives it all to her. She looks through it.)

LAILAH

Give me your ring.

REED

No.

LAILAH

Let me see it.

REED

What are you

LAILAH

Let me look at it.

(He gives her his wedding ring.)
She examines it.)

Yes. This will do. Use it to pay the person in the boat.

(She hands it back to him.)

REED

But
But it’s
(He looks at it, confused.)

Is this mine?

LAILAH

Go quickly now

REED

But I need to call my
call my
there’s someone I need to call

LAILAH

you need to go before the sun comes up

REED

But I can’t! I have to go back!

(He turns toward the door he came in.)

LAILAH

Reed
Listen to me
You can’t go back the way you came.
You can’t.
You can only go down to the river now
and that’s what you need to do.
Everything will be all right. You found the road. You found my house.
Soon someone will find your body
the only thing you need to do now is get in the boat

(REED looks down at his feet.)

REED

My feet

LAILAH

Are they hurting?
Like knives of ice

Soon that will spread through your body. If you stay much longer, it will only be worse for you. Go now.

Oh god! but I

this way

(She leads him to the door.)

Just right out here and down to the river.

Listen to me! it’s important
tell her
I love her
I love her

Who?

(pause)

I don’t know

You need to go now, quick

(He exits.
LAILAH adds the gum wrapper and the tissue and the coins to a pile of other objects. She sits at the table.
The sound of a bell.
Howls in the distance.
Lights.)
2. Morning.
The field.
WILEY sleeps at the foot of the silo.

Three COYWOLVES run on.

COYWOLF 1
tails of braided fire brothers

COYWOLF 2
pelts of bitter soil brothers

COYWOLF 3
windows lash their tongues inside my ear

COYWOLF 1
we almost got that one almost got it yeah

COYWOLF 2
he found the road yeah not ours yeah never ours yeah always hers

COYWOLF 1
i’m hungry

COYWOLF 2
we’re all hungry

(they sniff around)

COYWOLF 1
the night is gone it ran off with our meat

COYWOLF 3
another hungry morning

COYWOLF 2
i smell i smell something on the wind a glint yeah from long ago

COYWOLF 3
a glint

COYWOLF 1
the glint!

(they hear something)
(they run off.
The morning breathes.
The sound of a car.
The sound of a car door.
LOU enters. She’s examining some keys. She has a suitcase.
She goes to the door of the house. She tries a key. It doesn’t work. She tries another key. It doesn’t work.)

LOU

Shit.

(Shit shit shit.

She tries one last key. It doesn’t work.)

She kicks the door.
A moment.
She tries to light a cigarette.
Lighter won’t light.
Shit.
She sits on the front step.
She thinks.)

I mean I could break the door down.
I mean it’s my fuckin...

(she laughs.
WILEY yelps. LOU sees WILEY.)

Hey

Hey!
you can’t sleep here

WILEY

ehh

LOU

Wake up

(LOU kicks WILEY.)

WILEY

whoa hey what’s the matter hey

LOU

Oh my god

(They stare at each other.)
Wiley!

hey

you’re here
you’re still here!

well yeah

well I

you smell like something
I don’t know what it is

how can you still be here

the same still but on top of it there’s a sharp
there’s a smoky

I thought I made you up
you know how kids have like imaginary friends

you were in high school

no one else remembers you

I’m real enough to bruise where you kicked me.

Sorry.

I thought you were some kid, came out here to get drunk and fell asleep.
You know when a house is empty for so long
people squat
I don’t mean you.

WILEY

I’m not squatting.

Your clothes smell different but your hair smells the same.
where did you go?

LOU

Lots of places. The desert. The city.

WILEY

what city

LOU

One where everybody looks you in the eye
and one where no one does.
Your painting is bigger. I saw it from the highway.

WILEY

What are you doing here

LOU

I’m back.

WILEY

Did something happen

LOU

What do you mean

WILEY

did something happen to you

LOU

I mean yeah

WILEY

I mean something bad. Did you
I don’t know
fall
or

LOU

No, I...
What?
I’m just.
You know. Back to the land. Grandpa’s farm. Thought I’d tear this house down and rebuild it.

WILEY

No.

LOU
All new. From scratch. My own two hands.

WILEY
No. Why

LOU
It’s an old house. Falling apart. It always had problems. Sounds in the night or strange spots of water on the floor.

WILEY
You can’t do that.

LOU
I can’t believe you’re here!
You look exactly the same.
Not me though, I’ve aged.
Look I got a tattoo.

(She lifts up her shirt.)

WILEY

nice

LOU
it’s a coywolf
remember?

WILEY

yeah

LOU
Part coyote, part wolf, little bit of dog thrown in.

what’s with you?

WILEY

I just woke up
I have something.

(LOU takes something out of her pocket)

What is that?
Oh.

The thimble. We found it, remember? In the field.

You kept it?

I brought it back. You want it?

Why would I want it? I don’t sew.

Just thought you might want it back.

It’s not mine.

So what are you doing these days

oh you know odd jobs

you’re weird you know that? I can’t believe you’re still here.

this is where I live.

the silo.

funny
I’m serious.

You should leave.

What’s wrong with you?
Maybe you should leave
I could kick you off the land.

you wouldn’t

This is my property
I could

I’m not leaving

then I’ll I guess I’ll call the cops on you

lady no one calls the cops around here

don’t call me lady

ma’am

no

sir majesty landowner

no

(pause)

It’s like no time has passed at all.
oh it passed.
my brother died.

shit

yep.
So uh.
uh.
so.
my family never sold this place.
So now it’s mine.
I can tear down the silo too if I want.

baby this is my canvas

Don’t call me baby

I’m in the middle of a painting

You can start a new one somewhere else.

You been inside yet?

No. My keys won’t work.
I guess I’m gonna have to break in.
It’s creepy - no one’s been in there in like ten years.
Except squirrels maybe. Rats.

ghosts

yeah

(She uncaps a thermos.)
coffee?

WILEY

okay

(LOU pours some coffee into the cap and hands it to WILEY.)

LOU

here.

(They share the coffee.)

I forgot how cold it gets here in the mornings
The tree is taller, too.
I could see it from the highway.
and the silo.
You can see the years in it.
You know when I went home, after that summer? I told everyone about the silo. “There’s a

tree growing right up through the middle of it! and I have a friend named Wiley who lives in
there. Wiley was raised by wolves.”

Nobody believed me.

You can imagine how I sounded.

WILEY

you can’t tear down the house

LOU

of course I can
I can do whatever I want
I can tear down the house
I can tear down the silo
I can turn the whole place into a petting zoo and fill it with goats
I can paint over your mural and plant soybeans
I can kick you off my land.

WILEY

You got it boss.

LOU

Don’t call me that.
WILEY

don’t tear it down

LOU

I might

WILEY

Lou

LOU

I want to break shit. Smash it.

WILEY

Then find something else to break.

LOU

You ever get the feeling you want to chew your own fingers off?

yes

WILEY

I’m talking blood in the mouth

LOU

I know.

WILEY

I had this picture in my mind that I would come out here and slam my hands and my body into this house until it was nothing but splinters on the ground. I would picture this all day every day. When I was sitting in traffic, or buying milk. I would imagine how my skin would echo with the stinging. My bones would ring with it for weeks.

LOU

Slam your body against something else then. Not the house. please

WILEY

What’s it to you?

LOU

You haven’t actually been here this whole time.
Have you?
Have you actually been here this whole time?
Wiley.

Just don’t.

Well
like I said
maybe I’ll rebuild it.
Put it back together again.
Yeah?

(pause)

Right.
Okay.
I need to drive into town.
Get some water and groceries.
And a cooler I guess.
Ice.
There’s no power.

And maybe a crowbar to smash a window

(LOU starts to leave, then stops.)

You need anything?

What?

From town?

can of blue paint?

A sandwich?

no

okay
(They stare at each other. Suddenly LOU hugs WILEY.)

WILEY

what are you doing

LOU

I just
I hoped
I mean I hoped
but I never thought

(WILEY says nothing and just stands waiting for the hug to end.)

Okay.

(LOU exits. WILEY watches her go.
The sound of a car door.
The sound of a car driving away.
WILEY goes to the house and knocks on the door in a specific pattern.
LAILAH comes to the door.)

LAILAH

Wiley

(WILEY enters the kitchen)

WILEY

hey we’ve got trouble Mrs. L

LAILAH

What are you doing in here

WILEY

well hello to you too

LAILAH

You’re supposed to be working
WILEY
I’m trying to tell you something important

LAILAH
Well all right, all right, let me make you some tea.

(LAILAH makes tea.

WILEY moves restlessly around the kitchen, touching everything, picking things up and putting them down again.)

Those dogs are at it again.

WILEY
They’re not dogs

LAILAH
Hounds wolves whatever
they’re vermin if you ask me

WILEY
they’re not hurting anyone

(While LAILAH’S back is turned, WILEY swipes something small and puts it in a pocket.)

LAILAH
I heard them all night
howling
singing their death songs
scaring people off the road
into the fields where the moon makes shadows
I don’t like it
and you’re supposed to be keeping them away
set traps
or poison

WILEY
no

LAILAH
Well, whatever you like then, just get rid of them.

WILEY
this is their home
LAILAH
Well it’s mine too.
All right.
Here.
Sit down.
What is it.

(LAILAH puts the tea on the table and sits.
WILEY keeps moving.)

WILEY
A woman
Okay

WILEY
Her grandfather lived in the house. She came to live with him the summer he was dying. Ten years ago. Remember?

What house
This house.
Oh.

WILEY
She’s back now. She wants to tear it down.

What.
The house!
She can’t.

WILEY
That’s what I said!

LAILAH
Wiley would you stop stealing my things and just sit down and drink your damn tea
What I didn’t I wouldn’t I would never

I wasn’t born yesterday.

sorry

Just sit.

(WILEY pulls a coin and a small wooden horse out of a pocket and puts them on the table.)

Sorry

It’s the same house, this one and that one. She can’t destroy it. What would happen to me? You have to make her leave.

How am I gonna do that?

Think of something. Scare her. So you have two jobs. The other is to get rid of those dogs.

Okay
I’ll work on it

Tonight.

yeah, tonight

That’s why I let you stay here.

why
LAILAH
So you can help me keep the wolves away. Help the souls to safely reach my door. When I found you, you were so small, just three years old

WILEY
almost dead

LAILAH
almost but not quite. Your heartbeat like a whisper at my ear. This close to death: a minute, a hair. Abandoned. At the bottom of the silo, curled up like a broken promise.

WILEY
I remember. A cold morning. You saved me.

LAILAH
I could have let you die.

WILEY
but you didn’t

LAILAH
I didn’t. I took care of you. Raised you up like my own.

So? I owe you?

WILEY
I need your help.

WILEY
When I was younger, the coywolves brought me things to eat. I ran with them. They kept me warm. Taught me to sing in the night.

LAILAH
And who taught you how to sit at a table and hold a teacup? Who taught you to speak? Who gave you clothes, and buttons to play with, and books so you would understand the world? So you could have a life?

WILEY
It’s not a life. I’m trapped here.

LAILAH
It’s the best I could do. Listen. I have been here so many years. You cannot imagine how many.
Some nights, I have read the cards and waited, and then no one came. I waited up all night while the tea got cold. If they didn’t come by daybreak, I knew they would never reach my door.
What happened to those people?
Where did they go?

WILEY
They got lost.

LAILAH
Maybe. In the fields around the road. Maybe there was no moon, and it was too dark to see. Or maybe the wolves scared them.

WILEY
They just like to sing about the night. The moonlight gets inside their blood and they can’t help it.

LAILAH
They don’t belong here.

WILEY
They were here before we were.

LAILAH
The wolves, maybe, the old ones, but not these new, these hybrid –

WILEY
They’re the children of the wolves.

LAILAH
I want them gone.

WILEY
Okay, I will! It’s just, I’ve tried to tell them to leave, but they don’t listen.

LAILAH
Tell them they can go somewhere else.

WILEY (starting to cough)
There’s nowhere else for them.

LAILAH
Time to go.

WILEY
No.
LAILAH
You know the rules.

WILEY
Well you don’t have to throw me out -

LAILAH
Look at you, you’re already coughing.

WILEY (coughing)
I’m fine

LAILAH
Get out of here before your face turns blue

WILEY
love you too mom

LAILAH
Don’t call me that.

(WILEY exits the kitchen. LAILAH shuts the door.
WILEY sits on the front steps, pulls a stolen spoon out of a pocket, looks at it, waits.)
3. Late afternoon.

WILEY sits on the front steps soaking up the sun like a cat.

The sound of a car.
The sound of a car door.

LOU enters.

Here.
Blue paint.

WILEY thanks.

LOU And I brought you a sandwich.

WILEY You don’t have to feed me.
I’m not a stray dog.

LOU Here.
It’s turkey.

WILEY I’m vegetarian.

LOU What?

WILEY No dead bodies in my mouth.

LOU I never heard of a homeless vegetarian.

WILEY We exist.

Here, you take the turkey, I’ll eat it without the turkey.
(WILEY gives LOU the turkey off the sandwich. LOU puts it on her own sandwich. They eat.)

anyway I’m not homeless
This is my home.

LOU
You still sleep outside?

WILEY
of course

LOU
I could bust a window open or something
or I could spend the night in my truck
but maybe tonight I’ll just stay out here
under the stars
with you

WILEY
Oh um

LOU
remember when we did that?

WILEY
It’s probably not safe
for you
there’s wild animals
howl in the night
rattle your bones
freeze your blood

LOU
I’ll take my chances.
I haven’t slept in weeks. I think I’ve forgotten how.

WILEY
and it might rain

LOU
It’s good to be out in the open air.
I can’t wait to see the stars again.
I’ve spent so much of my life in cities
I remember the stars out here
look at that sky
oh god I could just eat that sky

I’m not afraid of wolves.

maybe you should be.

Where are you going?

My art is calling to me.

(WILEY goes to the silo and paints. LOU watches.

The sun is setting. The sky burns with it.

LOU considers the house.
She goes to the door and kicks it.
She peers in the window.
She punches the window.
Nothing happens – except that it sends an electric shock up her arm that hurts like hell.)

good bones

what?

This house has good bones.

maybe you should leave it alone

no

are you rich or something?

what
WILEY
why would you tear down a perfectly good house if you’re just going to rebuild it

LOU
I
well I
well I recently got a lot of money

WILEY
oh

LOU
No. See -

My brother was this kind of genius computer guy. He started a website and sold it. Made a bunch of money.

and then he went and jumped off a bridge.

So I
So I
So I
So I
So I

got the money
I mean a lot of money.
And I couldn’t just you know spend it on a disney cruise or like christmas cards at wal-mart.

So
So
So if I want to tear down houses for the rest of my life
then that’s what I’ll do.

I can do whatever the fuck I want.

(LOU exits.
WILEY paints.

LOU comes back with a hammer. She studies the window.)

WILEY
That’s probably not a good idea.
LOU

It’s my house.
I want to smash it.

WILEY

Broken glass all over the place

LOU

There’s gotta be a way in.

(She puts down the hammer.)

Okay give me a hand
I’m going to try to get this window open.

WILEY

It’s gonna get dark soon
you don’t want to be stumbling around in there in the dark

LOU

You can go in ahead of me.

no way

WILEY

Come on. Live a little.

LOU

It’s rusted shut.

WILEY

Let’s just try.
I bought you a sandwich.

LOU

so that makes me what?
indentured to you?

WILEY

Just give me a hand.

LOU

See that’s why I don’t accept food.
People expect things.
(But WILEY goes to help her.  
They try to lift the window.  
They can’t.)

Yeah there’s no way that’s gonna budge.  
Better just wait til you have a key.

(WILEY goes back to painting.  
LOU watches.)

LOU  
I used to help you paint. I did that blue part.

WILEY  
you did this green part

(Howls in the distance.)

LOU  
The coywolves!

WILEY  
yeah they might sneak up and eat us

LOU  
don’t say that.

WILEY  
don’t worry I’ll protect you

LOU  
what are you going to do, spray paint on them?

WILEY  
I’m just gonna talk to them  
real sweet and slow

LOU  
I remember.  
“dark earth and the taste of rain”  
“eleven ways to lick an ear”  
You never showed me the last one.  
The eleventh.

WILEY  
didn’t I?
you could show me now
WILEY

that was just a game
LOU

you forgot how to play?
WILEY

of course not
LOU

I think maybe you’re afraid of wolves.
WILEY

I’m not!
LOU

okay chill
WILEY

I just
I don’t know what you’re doing here
LOU

You can’t stay here, you know.
You can’t stay.
It’s fine for a couple days, but pretty soon it’s going to be like a construction site.
Dangerous.
You might step on a nail and get tetanus.

WILEY

Yeah.
I got it.

(Night falls.
LOU watches WILEY paint.

After a while, LOU exits.

She returns with a blanket.)
Here.

You’re not doing a very good job of making me leave.

(LOU sits next to WILEY.)

All those stars

Yep.

Don’t you get lonely? Living alone?

I’m not alone.

I mean besides the wolves and the paint and the grass.

Oh you mean like

You know

Human beings

I meet people sometimes
They come through here on their way to somewhere else

Passing through

Yeah

No one sticks
Not really

What’s the eleventh one

Oh um.
It’s like -

Show me.

It’s like
It’s like
It’s like

No, show me

It’s the last one.
It might turn you wild.

(LOU punches WILEY’S shoulder.)

Show me.

(Howls in the distance.)

They’re looking for something.

They’re hungry.

Don’t run off with them. You’ll never find your way home.

I’m gonna stay out here with you tonight.

Okay but listen.
If you wake in the night and see something strange
it’s just the dark making shapes in your eyes

LOU
You can’t scare me

WILEY
No, I mean ghosts, and floating lights, and wild

LOU
Wild what? Wolf women with fangs and streaming hair?

WILEY
This is true. Don’t wander in the night. Don’t follow the shadows.

LOU
I won’t.
I won’t!
Chill.

Show me the eleventh.

WILEY
It’s like I tear open a window in your ear and the night rushes in, a river of ice and teeth and mist, filling you with a sharp and restless hunger.

LOU
I want it.

WILEY
The hunger never leaves you. Never.

LOU
Show me.

(WILEY does.
A window opens in LOU’S ear where the night pours in.
Howls in the distance.
Lights.)
Deep night. WILEY and LOU sleep curled up at the foot of the silo. The COYWOLVES run on.

COYWOLF 2

where is it where is it i smell the glint

COYWOLF 1

the glint yeah

COYWOLF 2

long time the glint found in the summer way back there we dug it out of the field yeah with our toes yeah

COYWOLF 3

flashing silver bump yeah

COYWOLF 2

what goes bump in the night haha yeah yeah yeah

COYWOLF 1

a flicker licking curve of blue yeah

COYWOLF 3

the night alights my static fur braiding my backbone with its tongue

COYWOLF 1

i’m hungry

COYWOLF 3

shut up

COYWOLF 1

if we creep in gentle she might throw us scraps

COYWOLF 2

who

COYWOLF 1

the one in the house

COYWOLF 3

we don’t need scraps

COYWOLF 1

press a palm to my face
we are wild and free

a scratch behind the ears

you sound like a little dog

a name

you disgust me

i smell the glint i smell it yeah SHE HAS IT YEAH

who

the deep sleeping one

yeah she has it in her pocket i smell it too

it’s ours yeah

we found it yeah

let’s pull her from her dreams

chase her muddle her yeah

she’s the one who took the wild human away from us

(they circle closer to LOU.)
alone you’re alone you’re all alone come follow us

come howl with us

let the night pour into your ear and spin you

give us the metal tooth the glint and we will

we will run with you show you the wells of shadow yeah

and the swoop of the owl yeah we will we will we will we will

(LOU wakes.
She stands.

She goes to the house. She picks up the hammer.)

no no no no no

(LOU hits the window with the hammer. A huge explosion erupts from the house.

She falls.

Lights.)
Wild-animal sounds, sounds of sniffing, panting, small yelps and growls.

The COYWOLVES are circling LOU.

a soft warm belly in the mouth yeah

petals of fire in the moon

let me press my nose to this blind body
let me lick the salt from its corners

wait yeah
sisters yeah
there’s a clot of breath in its lungs

alive

how did it come here

is it alive

some strange magic is upon it

but can we eat it yeah

it’s not ours brothers
it’s hers yeah

hers hers hers
she gets all the best

she leaves us scraps of fur and splinter
COYWOLF 3
it’s hers

COYWOLF 2
just a little bite yeah a little taste of the ear yeah

COYWOLF 3
leave it

COYWOLF 2
lick the spice of its hands yeah

COYWOLF 3
leave it!

COYWOLF 1
here she comes

(LAILAH comes out of the house.
The lights shift.
WILEY still sleeps at the foot of the silo.)

LAILAH
hey!
scram!

(The COYWOLVES whine)

Go on, get away, go

(She kicks at them.)

get away from here

(She picks up a rock and throws it)

go!

(The COYWOLVES yelp and run off.
WILEY wakes.
LAILAH goes to LOU’S body.)
She checks for a pulse. She puts her ear to LOU’S mouth.

She lifts LOU’S body and starts to carry her toward the house.)

Hey!

She’s gone.

No!
Wait!

It’s too late.

No no no what happened

she tried to break a window.
The house does not want to be broken.
It just about killed her.

does she have a pulse?

Don’t interfere.

You can’t take her if she has a pulse.

There’s nothing else to do.

We have to at least try!

Let go
Wiley.
Let go.
WILEY

But she’s she’s she’s

LAILAH

She’s nothing to you.
You can go ring the bell for the boat.

WILEY

No.

LAILAH

Don’t argue.

WILEY

She’s my friend.

LAILAH

You know the rules.

WILEY

Don’t take her in there!

LAILAH

Ring the bell.

(LAILAH carries LOU into the house.

WILEY follows, hanging in the shadows just inside the door.

LAILAH sits LOU in a chair and puts the kettle on.

She holds a wet towel to LOU’S face.)

Wake up honey.
Wake up now.

LOU

mmmm

LAILAH

All right.
What’s your name.

LOU

Lou.
Tell me something you remember.

I um.
I can’t remember anything.
It’s all just a cold white fog.

All right.
Give it a minute.

Where am I?

My house.

Your house.
Wait a minute.

(LOU goes to the window and looks out.)

Please sit down.

I know this place.
I know this place.

Come away from the window.

It’s all inside out but I know it.
The walls.
The air is upside down.
It’s like a forward memory.
Why do I know this place.

cause it’s your house.

Wiley!

Wiley!
Hi.

Get out of here.

No.

You can’t be in here at night.

Well here I am.

You have maybe ten minutes before your lungs turn to ash.

You can’t have her.

Okay look this little rebellion is not going to happen.
Get out of the house.
Go ring the bell.

I’m in love with her.

You are not.

Please
Let me keep her

That’s not possible

You take all of them, every single one! I want one to keep.

Wiley.
Let her stay with me.

I can’t.

You let me stay!

I shouldn’t have.

what?

I was lonely. Only once in fifty thousand have I made that mistake. And now you’re chained at the door like a wild animal. Belonging nowhere.

(WILEY coughs)

Get out of here before your lungs burn.

You wish I’d died?

I didn’t say that

There is something very familiar about this window.

Lou honey come sit down at the table. Let me pour you some tea.

Can’t go forward Can’t go back I’m just stuck

You have me
What am I
Am I a ghost

You’re alive
You’re just trapped in a bubble of air between two worlds

Trap her too then
Do it or I’ll stay in here until I die

No

I’ll get in the boat
If she can’t stay with me then I’ll go with her

Don’t be ridiculous.

Nobody’s ever looked at me the way she does.

You’re acting like a child.

I just want to
(but WILEY is overcome with coughing and can’t finish the sentence.)

I can’t remember anything

Lou honey, come here. Your tea is ready. Drink this.

Oh. Thank you.

Am I dead?

What do you expect? You tried to break open a house of the dead.
But.

Tell me something from your life.

I remember
I was born from a dead woman.
Maybe I’ve been partway dead all my life.

(howls)

I told you to get rid of those wolves.

They’re looking for something. They’ve been talking about it. Something found a long time ago, and then lost.

(WILEY coughs.)

Wiley get out of here now.

I think I know what it is.
A thimble.

Thimble? No. It can’t be.

It was in the ground.

It’s in the river.

It’s in my pocket.

Your

(LOU takes a thimble out of her pocket.)
But
But
But how

But where did you

LOU
I took it. I’m sorry.

(LAILAH takes the thimble. She holds it. She is overcome.)

LAILAH
It’s not possible.
Is this mine?

WILEY
Is it yours?

LAILAH
It fits on my thumb. It has the same mark.
But it was gone. It landed in the river.

LOU
There was a river here?

LAILAH
A long time ago.

My grandmother gave this to me. I had it in my pocket. And then it was lost.

LOU
We found it in the field. A long time ago.

(LAILAH takes this in.
WILEY coughs)

LAILAH
Listen.
I was on a steamboat.

WILEY
what?

LAILAH
Heading upriver. This was a long time ago. I left my family to work as a chambermaid.
I was thirteen.

You

LAILAH
My thimble was lost in the river. I couldn’t go through the door.

Now I can go.

You’re leaving?

LAILAH
Now I can pay for the boat.
Oh god.
I can go.
I can go.

Don’t leave me.

I can finally go.

I’m coming too.

No.

Both of us.

LAILAH
You can’t. You have nothing for the boat.
And she has to stay and take my place.

Me?

LAILAH (to LOU)
You’re not coughing.
It must be your turn now.
You need to do it all, the tea, the cards.
WILEY
Let me come with you.

LAILAH
She’ll need your help. Keep the wolves away from the road. Help the souls find the door. Show her what to do.

LOU
How long will I be here?

LAILAH
I can’t remember. I’m so tired.

(WILEY turns away)

WILEY
Go then.

LOU
I’ll help them. I’ll get them safely to the boat. You can go.

LAILAH
Thank you. Wiley.
Bye

LOU
Bye

(WILEY says nothing.

LAILAH exits.
The sound of a bell.

LOU sees an old wallet on the table and picks it up.)

LOU
This was my grandfather’s.
I remember now.
That summer, ten years ago, the gold mornings and the smell of the fields...

(WILEY coughs.

BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT ONE.)
ACT TWO

1.

Ten years earlier.
Before dawn.
Summer.
A field.
Wind and early light. Cicadas.

Way up high at the top of the silo, WILEY tears up a leaf and lets it scatter.

WILEY holds onto the tree
leans into the tree
leans into the wind
holds onto the wind.

In the kitchen, LAILAH puts the kettle on.
She lays out the cards.
She turns over a card.

LAILAH

Oh.

(The kettle whistles. She pours two cups of tea. She turns to look at the door.
There’s a knock.
She goes to answer it.

ANNIE is there. She’s ten.)

ANNIE

Help I need help!

LAILAH

Okay honey. What’s your name.

ANNIE

Annie!

LAILAH

Come on in, Annie.
Now, what’s the trouble.
I need help!

Okay okay what do you need

there’s a kid at my school with a gun! he’s shooting people! he has a gun! we have to call the police!

oh, we can’t, I don’t have a phone

But you have to! he has a gun! he’s shooting! I just got out and started running and I just got out the door and I could hear him still shooting people and then I found this road and I ran down the road as fast as I could and then I got to your house and you have to come help, please!

Okay now just listen a moment.
Sit down.
Drink this.

I can’t there’s no time! we have to go!

Annie
Listen carefully

you don’t understand!

I do, honey. I do. Take a sip of that.

(ANNIE does, reluctantly.)

Now listen.
When you left the school, and found the road that was hours ago

It wasn’t! It was just a minute! I’m a fast runner, I am, I
No, honey. Annie. He shot you.

What

Right there, look

(ANNIE finds the gunshot wound. Her fingers come back bloody)

I need my mom

Annie

I need to find my mom

Your mom already found you You died hours ago She’s right next to your body

I’m dead?

Yes

(ANNIE stands up. She walks around the kitchen.)

Can I have some of this money?

Sure.

Is this heaven.
LAILAH
No.

ANNIE
What is it?

LAILAH
It’s my house.

ANNIE
Who are you?

LAILAH
I’m Lailah
I fell into a river a hundred fifty years ago

ANNIE
What river

LAILAH
The one outside my house.

ANNIE
Are you dead?

LAILAH
Yes.

(ANNIE starts laughing)

LAILAH
You’re not.

ANNIE
I’m going to pinch myself.

(Shes does.)

ANNIE
I’m going to open my eyes really huge.

(Shes does.)

ANNIE
I’m going to bite myself.
(She bites her arm.)

This is a deep dream.

LAILAH

Drink some more of that tea.

ANNIE

I’m going to go now.

LAILAH

No, you can’t go back that way.

(ANNIE goes to the door and tries to open it. It’s locked.)

ANNIE

Let me out.

LAILAH

No.

ANNIE

LET ME OUT!

LAILAH

I can’t.

ANNIE

OPEN THE DOOR!!!!

(LAILAH goes to the door.)

LAILAH

Stand back.

(She opens it. It’s empty night. Mist and fog. A void.)

ANNIE

No!!
No, no this isn’t real it’s not real

(LAILAH closes the door.)

LAILAH

It is real.
Come sit down.

(ANNIE does.)

Tell me something you remember.

ANNIE

I can’t. I want to get out of here.

LAILAH

Soon you’ll be able to go.

But first I need you to tell me something. A story. Something good.

ANNIE

I can’t remember anything.

LAILAH

There must be something.

ANNIE

I held a bird one time.

LAILAH

Okay

ANNIE

A sparrow

It got into our house and it was flying around like crazy

it kept slamming into the windows and the mirrors

it was all confused and scared and me and my sister didn’t know what to do

and I got a shoebox

and the next time it flew into a mirror and fell it was just lying there, stunned

and I put the shoebox upside down over it

and then I scooted my hands underneath the box

and I held it in my hands

its heart was going so so fast

and I carried it to the window

and my sister opened the window

and I let it go

and it flew away

LAILAH

thank you

now, Annie, there’s just one more thing you have to do. Do you have anything in your pockets?
(ANNIE checks her pockets.)

ANNIE

A lifesaver.

(She pulls out a candy lifesaver and hands it to LAILAH.)

And a sparkly bracelet my sister gave me.

(She pulls out a sparkly bracelet.)

LAILAH

Okay. Take that with you.  
Go out that door and go down to the river. Pull the rope.  
A boat will come.  
Get in the boat and give the bracelet to the person in the boat.  
okay?

ANNIE

Okay.

LAILAH

Everything will be all right.  
Everything will be all right.

ANNIE

Okay.

LAILAH

Are you afraid?

ANNIE

I was before but now I’m not.  
I can tell you’re a good person.

LAILAH

Go now

ANNIE

thank you for the tea

(ANNIE exits.  
The sound of a bell.  
Lights.)
2.

Just before dawn.
The COYWOLVES run into the field.

hunger is my hunger is a
COYWOLF 1

shiver up the spine yeah
COYWOLF 2

a gnawing at the bone yeah
COYWOLF 3

yip! yip! yip! yip! yip!
COYWOLF 1

a summer shiver in the mud yeah a fever in the blood yeah
COYWOLF 3

there are legs of bone in the river in the earth yeah in the long ago down there
COYWOLF 2

i smell tails of hair yeah
COYWOLF 1

after the rain the earth is soft and slick yeah and we can dig up all its secrets
COYWOLF 3

fill the morning with our howling
COYWOLF 3

brothers there’s something here a metal tooth yeah yeah yeah a shard
COYWOLF 1

what is it what is it
COYWOLF 2

a glint yeah
COYWOLF 3

can i eat it
COYWOLF 2

it would twist your gut
COYWOLF 3
my mother said once a long ago metal tooth yeah lost in the river yeah yeah maybe could be this is it yeah

what does it smell like let’s smell it

i smell wool and leather

i smell earthworms and river weeds

i smell sorrow

this is human yeah a human tooth

if we put it in our mouths we could speak with human tongues

we could claim the land for ours

we could eat forever

all the rabbits all the deer all the squirrels

sisters with this tooth we can run in the daytime

we can bring the wild human back to us

(they howl.

WILEY runs in.)

what is it what’s that

come back to us
we found a human tooth

(WILEY takes it.)

this isn’t yours

COYWOLF 3

give it back

WILEY

it’s almost morning

COYWOLF 2

you never ran with us last night

WILEY

I have to go now, bye

(WILEY leaves with the thimble.)
Morning.

The sun is just barely up. Standing at the foot of the silo, WILEY is holding a small mirror to reflect the sun, to flash light into LOU’S window.

LOU enters.

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU
let’s just go up a minute

no way

up there you can see way across the fields
and the sun lights it all on fire

I can see the sun from here
it’s too early
I’m going back to bed

I wanted to show you something

what

look at this

(WILEY gives LOU the thimble.)

I found it. In the field where the coywolves were digging last night.

Coywolves?

Part coyote, part wolf. Little bit of dog thrown in.
I saw something shining in the earth and it was that.

Weird.

with all that rain we had, the mud washed away

I guess so

you know what I was dreaming about?
I just remembered
I was having the most incredible dream
there was a river that flowed past the house and I went down there at night and skipped stones
it was so beautiful
and then all of a sudden I was AWOKEN by a BLADE OF LIGHT that SHOT THROUGH MY WINDOW into my EYEBALL

WILEY

but look at the morning
the light
it’s so clean
I want to chew the meat of the sun til it falls apart in my mouth

LOU

you talk like a wild animal

WILEY

I can be human

(LOU hands the thimble back to WILEY)

LOU

here

WILEY

no it’s yours
it’s for you

LOU

you woke me up for this?

WILEY
don’t be cranky
you’re cute when you’re mad

LOU

you’re lucky I’m an agreeable person
I was so comfy in my bed
I should kick you off my land

WILEY

it’s not your land

LOU

it’s my grandpa’s
I’ll call the cops on you

WILEY

lady no one calls the cops around here

LOU
don’t call me lady

WILEY

ma’am

LOU

no

WILEY

sir majesty landowner

LOU

you’re weird

where are you from anyway

WILEY

here

LOU

yeah but where exactly

WILEY

This silo
I was abandoned here when I was three
and that’s the first thing I remember

LOU

no way

WILEY

Yep
cold morning
my breath making little clouds
and there was a dead mouse, frozen on the ground
I crawled inside the silo trying to get warm
and there was this tree growing in there
like a secret
and nobody knew it was there except me
and I thought
I have to tell somebody about this tree
and that's what kept my heart going
til someone found me

who

WILEY
Oh a very kind woman took me in and raised me like her own child
But now I just kind of live here.

climb up there with me

it’s so high

exactly

LOU
I’ll stay on the ground.

WILEY
you’re hopeless

LOU
yeah well you’re obnoxious

(they make out)
4. CLIP sits in the kitchen. LOU enters, trying to sneak in, but CLIP sees her.

   Where have you been?
   Out
   Out where?
   Just out
   It’s not even eight

   (LOU eats from a box of cereal.)

   Hey.
   Hey!
   Where you been?
   Out!
   You can’t just disappear!
   I couldn’t sleep!
   Something wrong with your bed?
   No
   It’s the air.
   It’s the light.
   I don’t know.
   Summer.

   You need some new shoes?
No.

Why aren’t you wearing shoes?

They’d just soak through - the grass was soaking wet

You can’t just run around barefoot

It’s fine.

You need shoes.

Grandpa! It’s fine!

you’re a young lady
you need to start acting like a young lady
(pause)
give me some of that popcorn

there’s no popcorn, grandpa

I can smell popcorn

there isn’t any

well where is the smell coming from then

I don’t know

are you hiding it from me?
your father was like this too
as a boy
always hiding his snacks from me
ungrateful
you think you know what’s best for me
well guess what
I’M OLD AND I CAN EAT POPCORN FOR BREAKFAST IF I WANT TO

LOU
Grandpa we don’t have any popcorn
I can make you an egg

CLIP
you’re a liar
you’re an ungrateful terrible child
that’s why your father sent you here for the summer
so I could knock some sense into you
keep you out of trouble
he’s had enough of your -

LOU
actually my dad sent me here because you’re sick and someone has to take care of you and he
doesn’t have time, and my brother has his computers.

(she eats her cereal.

a pause.)

CLIP
Louise. Be a doll and give me some of that popcorn.

LOU
There isn’t any

I can smell it

CLIP

that’s the tumor in your brain
it’s pressing against your temporal lobe
you’re smelling things that aren’t there.

(she eats her cereal.)

CLIP
Ungrateful.
I wish there was a phone in this house. Why don’t you have a phone?

What do you need a phone for?

To call people. So I can talk to them.

Talk to me.

That’s what I’m doing right now. Grandpa. Everybody has phones. You can’t live in this day and age and not have a phone. It’s how we’re all connected to each other.

Well quite frankly I just never saw the point of putting one in.

What if something happens when I’m not here? Like what if you fall? While I’m at the grocery store?

Then I’ll get back up.

I just really need to talk to people. I really do. I have a lot of friends back home and they really need to know what’s happening in my life. This is oppressive. This is like one of those places where they lock you up in the middle of nowhere, and even if you somehow managed to get out of the locked up part, you’d still be in the middle of nowhere.

What do you want to talk about?

My life.

What’s happening in your life?

Well right now, nothing, obviously.
Not much to talk about then.

Is this house haunted?

you mean ghosts?

it creaks in the night

it’s an old house
old houses creak in the night

sometimes doors open on their own
and down in the basement, strange spots of water appear on the floor
on the walls

the pipes leak

no
not like a leaky pipe spot
more like strange shapes and drips appear
and then disappear

and sometimes if you stand in just the right place you can hear it

water
lapping
and something like a boat
oars

you’re a very imaginative kid

well, fine,
don’t believe me if you don’t want to
I just happen to be more sensitive to the presence of spirits than certain other people I could mention
(LAILAH enters with a big bowl of popcorn.
She sits at the kitchen table.
She studies her cards.
She eats popcorn.)

I SMELL POPCORN

CLIP

help me

CLIP

what?

LOU

help me help me up
I need the bathroom

CLIP

LOU

okay okay here we go

(They exit.

LAILAH lays out a pattern of cards.
She turns one over.
She studies it.
She turns another over.
She studies it.
She eats popcorn.

LOU enters.
She makes another bowl of cereal.
She sits at the table with LAILAH, though they can’t see each other.
She eats cereal.

CLIP enters.)

CLIP

There’s a dick in the sink.
Why is there a dick in the sink.

LOU

Oh my god! Grandpa sorry sorry
In your bathroom

CLIP

oh god it’s my I’m sorry I was washing it and then I forgot

LOU

It didn’t look very realistic.

CLIP

Oh my god.

LOU

I thought you didn’t like penises

CLIP

Oh my god.

LOU

You’re not a lesbian anymore?

CLIP

Grandpa! Don’t be stupid!

LOU

Well explain it to me then

CLIP

Oh my god. I’m going to die. I am literally going to die.

LOU

You like girls, or you like penises. That’s-

CLIP

No, no. You don’t understand. GENDER. BODIES. QUEER FUCKERY OF BODY PARTS. Oh my god. I cannot have this conversation with you. I have reached the limit of my ability with words and now I have run out. I am done. That’s it. I’m running away. I’ll wait by the side of the road for someone to pick me up and take me somewhere anywhere and when they ask me why I’m leaving I’ll say my grandpa found my SEX TOY OH MY GODDDDDD I’m gonna die.

CLIP

Well it’s not as if I’ve never had sex

LOU

Please stop right now
We’re not going to talk about this
Ever. Again.

(he sits at the table.)

no one tells me anything

CLIP

that’s supposed to be MY BATHROOM! haven’t you heard of PRIVACY?

LOU

I was looking for the Q-tips
there’s a buzzing in my ear
I think a fly got stuck in there

CLIP

there’s no fly in your ear grandpa, it’s just your brain playing tricks on you

LOU

Who’s that?

CLIP

Who?

LOU

Sitting right there.

CLIP

Where?

LOU

Right there.

CLIP (pointing at LAILAH)

Grandpa.
There’s nobody here.

LOU

Oh, I.
I thought I saw someone.
Just something in my eye.

CLIP

You want something to eat? An egg?
CLIP
Why don’t you give me a piece of that orange. I’m thirsty.

LOU
If you’re thirsty you should drink some water.

CLIP
I don’t like water. It tastes like bleach.
Give me a piece of that orange.

LOU
I found something this morning.

CLIP
Oh yeah?

LOU
In the field, where the mud washed away in that big storm we had?

(She shows him.)

CLIP
It’s a thimble.

LOU
Is it yours?

CLIP
Nope
you know
the river used to run through here

LOU
what river

CLIP
before they put in those dams up north.
the river went right through here
steamboats ran up and down it in my grandfather’s time
he grew up over on the other side of the river
when he was a little boy he used to swim in it
go fishing
watch the boats.

LOU
is that true?
I never know if what you say is true

CLIP
It’s true, the river flowed right through where our field is now. You know a few years back my brother Junior went out in his field – he lived over there in Missouri - and there was a big old smokestack sticking up outta the mud. So he called up some people to come take a look at it, and they dug up a whole steamboat and put it in a museum. They said the boat must’ve hit something in the river and sank all those years ago, and the silt on the river bottom was so fine that the ship just slipped right down and was buried in the mud. Everything was perfectly preserved: calico buttons and fruit preserves and bolts of fabric. All the people must’ve got out in time because they didn’t find any bodies. He had no idea there used to be a river right there where his field was. There’s boats like that all over this country, under the ground.

LOU
Are you saying there could be DEAD BODIES in our FIELD?

CLIP
Well I’m not saying there are, and I’m not saying there aren’t.

LOU
That’s disgusting. Cool.

(CLIP studies the thimble.)

Maybe this is really really old.

CLIP
Louise, it’s not too late for you to find a boyfriend.

LOU
Grandpa!
UGH
Forget it.

(she exits. CLIP eats the orange. LAILAH looks at her cards.)

Lights.)
Night.

The silo.

WILEY is spray painting a mural onto it.

Two COYWOLVES enter, sniffing around.

COYWOLF 2
the finest meat yeah the warmest curl yeah the place by the ribs where the animal heat

I can’t.

COYWOLF 3
all of this we promise yeah yeah

I can’t.

COYWOLF 2
you stink of humans yeah invisible like a drowned star all your smells erased
come run with us yeah yeah
the trees are gleaming in the moonlight

yip! yip! yip!

COYWOLF 2 & 3

I’m busy

COYWOLF 3
you think you’re human but you’re not
what are you doing
what are you doing
what are you

WILEY

I’m making a painting.
It’s called art.
You wouldn’t understand.

COYWOLF 3
i understand betrayal
I haven’t betrayed you

when we were pups you shared your squirrels with us and the soft wet bellies of fawns

I have someone else now

a human yeah yeah you put your mouth on her? yeah you give her your squirrels

it’s different

come run in the night come run with us flash your eyes in the dark

I don’t do that anymore

the earth so cool and sweet on your toes the night so rich with wings and breathing

I have better things

better better

what is better yeah yeah what could be

there’s a howling in your blood you won’t forget a tooth of fire in your breath

i can hear it sleeping hiss i can hear the
someone’s coming
run!
The COYWOLVES run off. LOU enters.
Oh that looks cool thanks
what’s it gonna be
a big face a woman’s face that you can see all the way from the highway so people driving by will see it and think WOW HUMANITY
cool can I help
(WILEY gives her a can of spray paint)
(WILEY)
do that part blue and then I’m gonna put some green in there
okay
(they paint the moon shines the coywolves howl)
what’s that

coywolves

no way

It’s true
they live around here

you talk like you know their language

don’t worry

dangerous

I’ll protect you

what are you gonna do, spray paint at them?

no I’m just gonna talk to them
real sweet and slow
want me to show you?

um

dark earth and the taste of rain
smell of hot fur
and a wild hunger in the blood
red flowers crushed like the tongue of a star
smoke curling sharp on the air
and your breath burning its edges
I do
I was raised by wolves

LOU
I thought you said a woman
found you

WILEY
she kept me alive
but they – the wolves
they taught me the important things
how to run in the night
how to sleep in the snow and still be breathing at sunrise
eleven ways to lick an ear

eleven

LOU
yes
some are simple
others are more complicated
let me show you

WILEY
I uh

LOU
the first one is just saying hello

(WILEY licks LOU’S ear.)

Straightforward, see?

LOU
yeah

WILEY
the second is more of a playful challenge.

(WILEY licks LOU’S ear.)

the third one holds the threat of a bite
(WILEY licks LOU’S ear.)

WILEY
you know how wolves let you know if they’re dangerous?

LOU
how

WILEY
like this

(WILEY licks LOU’S ear)

EW hey!

WILEY
it’s true

LOU
you are the weirdest person I ever met

WILEY
I know
you like it

LOU
I have weird things too

WILEY
like what

LOU
like I was born from a dead woman. They cut me out of my mother and that was my first breath. I was as gray as river water, but my lip was bleeding where I’d bitten it, so they knew I wasn’t dead. I was born with teeth.

WILEY
yeah that’s pretty weird

LOU
told you
what are the others?
other what

the other ways to lick an ear?

I'll show you.

No. Tell me.

It’s hard to describe. 
To put human words to it
It’s always an approximation.

Try.

The fifth is like a pool of ink spilling down your throat. 
The sixth is like a needle stitching its teeth into your skin. 
The seventh is like a hot black flower opening into the helix of your ear. 
The eighth is

I’ve got one.

You do? What is it?

I’ll show you.

(LOU kisses WILEY’S ear.)

Oh. 
Yeah wolves don’t do that one.

It’s human.

Okay my turn.
The eighth...

(they lick each other’s ears.

the moon shines
the coywolves howl)

In the house, CLIP enters the kitchen. He’s looking for something.

He can’t find it.)

CLIP

Lou?

Lou?

(He sits at the table.

The coywolves howl.)

LOU

That thing you found in the field? My grandpa thinks it’s from a boat. He said it -

WILEY

shhh

(WILEY listens.)

Lou

you should go

LOU

what? why?

WILEY

go

go back to the house

LOU

but

WILEY

go!

(LOU runs.

The kitchen.)
CLIP sits slumped at the kitchen table.
LOU enters.)

LOU
Grandpa?
(She goes to him.)

Grandpa?

CLIP
I heard something
A voice
I came to see what it was

LOU
A voice?
What did it say?
Was it a ghost?
I told you this house is haunted!

CLIP
And I heard coyotes

LOU
Oh, me too
those aren’t ghosts though
they’re real

CLIP
you sure about that?

LOU
they’re coywolves
my friend Wiley told me about them
what else have you heard

CLIP
I hear a buzzing in my left ear

(LAILAH enters.
She sits at the table
She lays her cards out.
She studies them)

CLIP
Louise
Yeah Grandpa

get me a pain pill

yeah, what’s wrong

I have a a pain in my
my my my my my my my
muuuhhhhhhhhh
muhhhhhhh
MUHHHHHH
MUHHHHHHHHHHH

Grandpa? Grandpa? Oh god

(LAILAH turns over a card.)

Ah.

(LAILAH goes to the stove and puts the kettle on.)

Grandpa
Grandpa can you hear me

MUUUUUUHHHHHHHH

GRANDPA!
oh god oh god oh god oh god

Muuuuuuuhhhhhhh
LOU

can you hear me?
can you hear me?
grandpa
grandpa

(he is unresponsive)

what do I do what do I do what do I do

(LAILAH looks at her cards.
The kettle whistles

LAILAH takes it off the stove.))

LOU
grandpa can you hear me? oh no oh no oh no

(CLIP sees LAILAH.
LAILAH makes two cups of tea.
She smiles at him.
He smiles at her.

He gets up out of his chair, but only LAILAH can see him moving.
LOU keeps looking at his “body” in the chair.)

LOU

what do I do
what do I do
what do I do

CLIP (to LAILAH)

Hello

LAILAH

would you like some tea

CLIP

thank you

LAILAH

What’s your name

CLIP

Clip
Hi Clip, I’m Lailah.

This tea is nice.

I’m glad you like it.

what do I do

I want some of that popcorn.

what do I do

Of course! Help yourself.

(CLIP eats some popcorn)

what do I do

Clip tell me something from your life

I uh
when I was a boy
my brothers and I, we used to
in the summer
we’d go out in the fields or in the woods
and stay out there for days
build fires
trap small animals
steal corn and apples from the neighbor’s farm
but then after my father lost his job
my parents had to send us away, each of us
I went to work on a farm
my two brothers went to a different farm
and my brother Billy
he got sick with a fever
he died there
I never saw him again

LAILAH

thank you

okay Clip
it’s time for you to go now
listen
you have anything in your pockets?

(CLIP checks his pockets)

CLIP

a coupon for those vanilla sandwich cookies
the little screw that came out of my glasses – I’ve been meaning to fix that
my wallet

(he opens his wallet)
some bills
a picture of my granddaughter

LAILAH

Okay.
Take the picture.
Leave everything else here.

Now you’re going to go out that door
and down to the river
ring the bell and a little boat will come
give the picture to the person in the boat.

CLIP

Well all right, but where is the boat going

you’ll see

LAILAH

CLIP

do I have a choice

Not really

LAILAH

CLIP

Have you ever been in the boat
No.
There was a time once, a long time ago, when I could have, but I missed my chance.

CLIP

What’s a long time?

LAILAH

a hundred fifty years.

CLIP

Maybe you will have another chance.

LAILAH

You need to go now.
Watch your step on the stairs.

CLIP

Bye

(he exits

LOU still stares at the chair he was sitting in.

The sound of a bell.

Lights.)
6. LOU runs out of the house and into the field. She finds WILEY.

LOU
They’re making me go home. I have to go away. Come with me.

WILEY
I can’t. If I cross the road I’ll die.

LOU
I’ll come back then

WILEY
when

LOU
soon

WILEY
when?

(LOU runs off

END OF ACT TWO.)
ACT THREE

A hundred fifty years earlier.

Deep mist and fog.
A riverbank.
The river flows through the field.

The WOLVES run on.
They are the great great great great great great
great great great great grandparents of the
COYWOLVES.
They’re sharper and wilder and hungrier.
They sniff around
they chew the sky
they gnaw at the moon
they tear open windows in each other’s ears
they dance joyful and lick the shadows and bite
and yelp and lope along the road and whine and
fuck and snarl and howl
and then run off.

A girl comes through the mists. It’s LAILAH.

She goes to the door of the house.

She knocks on the door.

In the kitchen, SILVANA takes a kettle off the stove. She pours two cups of tea.

She goes to the door and opens it.

LAILAH

Good evening.

SILVANA

Yes, come in.

LAILAH

Please, might I sleep here til sunrise?

SILVANA

What’s your name?

LAILAH

Lailah.
SILVANA
Would you like some tea?

LAILAH
Yes please.

SILVANA
There you are.

LAILAH
What a lovely house.

(Howls in the distance)

Wolves.

SILVANA
They’re hungry. They have so little to eat. It makes them desperate.

LAILAH
I saw one on the road. It was wounded. It was bleeding. It followed me. As if it wanted something. It bared its teeth. I walked faster and then when I looked again it was gone.

SILVANA
Are you frightened?

LAILAH
I’m not frightened of anything.

SILVANA
Perhaps you should be.
How did you come here?

LAILAH
I am employed on board a steamboat. All day I wash the delicate whites of the wealthy. My hands are scrubbed raw – look.

SILVANA
How did you find the road?

LAILAH
Some time after midnight I went out to look at the moon. Usually the captain will not travel at night, but tonight the moon was so bright, and he wanted to make up for lost time. We hit a snag last week and lost two days.
There’s a gentleman on board – a Mr. Singleton – he likes to catch me alone and run his hands under my dress. All week he’s been losing money at cards and tonight he was in a foul temper. I went into the stateroom to collect the linens, and he shouted at me to bring him something to eat. There’s nothing, of course, not until breakfast – the cook would kill me for asking – so I went out on the deck, where the passengers were restless and shoving at each other to make room. There’s a pair of brothers with the cholera and everyone’s afraid of it spreading. I found a place behind a stack of crates where no one would see me, and I looked down into the water.

It looked like ink in the dark.

I am so lonely, you understand.

I looked into the water, and I thought: I cannot stay on this boat and I cannot go home.

And then before I could change my mind I was in the water, and I was sinking. The current pulled me under and I sank down to the bottom of the river. Everything upside down. The mud at the bottom was so fine and soft, like silk.

My mouth filled up with river water.

And then I came back to myself. I started kicking. I thanked God that my brothers taught me to swim when I was a girl. When I get home I will tell them how they saved my life! I swam to the bank and heard the howling of the wolves. I climbed out and found the road and it brought me to your door.

Please, if I may pass the night here, I’ll leave at dawn. I’ll find employment somewhere else.

SILVANA

No.

LAILAH

I cannot live on a boat. I miss my mother and sister.

SILVANA

Lailah. You perished in the river.

LAILAH

Perished?

SILVANA

Drink some more of that tea.

(LAILAH sips at it.)

Do you have anything in your pocket?
(LAILAH checks her pocket.)

LAILAH
A thimble. It’s my grandmother’s.

SILVANA
That will do.

It’s almost morning - soon it will be time for me to go.

Listen. You will wait here until the next person comes. That person will wait for the next person, and it goes on like that. There must always be someone here to explain.

LAILAH
Explain what?

SILVANA
Listen. When it’s your turn, you go out that door and pull the rope to ring the bell. Someone will come for you in a rowboat and take you where you need to go.

I will not get on another boat.

LAILAH
You must. That’s how it works.

SILVANA
No. Why?

LAILAH
You died tonight.

SILVANA
What?

LAILAH
You did.

SILVANA
But I swam.

LAILAH
No. Your body is buried in the fine silt at the bottom of the river.

Are you dead?
SILVANA
Yes, of course. Now I can go. Next it will be your turn.

LAILAH
I’m not going. I have to see my sister again.

SILVANA
Everyone needs something to pay for the boat. Do you understand? Something from their life. I will pay with this calico button. It fell off my little baby’s coat, and I was going to sew it back on. But I never got the chance.

It’s almost dawn and I must go. Your thimble will pay your fare -

(LAILAH stands suddenly. She goes to the door.)

LAILAH
Then I’ll get rid of it.

SILVANA
What are you doing?

(LAILAH runs out the door)

Come back!

(LAILAH runs out into the night and throws the thimble as far as she can into the river.

A desperate moment. A wild wind.

The WOLVES move at the edges, in the shadows.

SILVANA catches up with her and pulls her back into the house.)

LAILAH
Leave me alone!

SILVANA
Are you a madwoman!

LAILAH
I’m not going!

SILVANA
What have you done!
The wolves are out there!

(a pause
they regard each other.
SILVANA gives LAILAH the cup of tea.)

Here.

(LAILAH throws the cup, and it shatters.)

I’m not dead.

You are.

I’m not!

Oh this is difficult.
Lailah.

You’re lying to me! You’re the devil or or -

Child.
Sit down.

No.

What you have done is.
It’s not supposed to happen.
You cannot get in the boat now, because you have nothing to pay for the journey.

I’ll go home. I’m not dead.

Didn’t you notice when you went out of the house?
The wolves creeping in? Without your thimble you have no protection from them. If you leave the house they’ll get you. They’ll trick you into the fields and eat you.
LAILAH
That’s just a story.

SILVANA
It’s a true one. They have lived here a long time, and they’re hungry. It was a hard winter. Don’t leave the house. You must stay here.

LAILAH
What?
No.
For how long?

SILVANA
I don’t know. The person before me said nothing about this. Without your thimble you cannot get in the boat.

LAILAH
But I have these! I’ll use these!

(She pulls out a deck of cards.)

SILVANA
What’s that?

LAILAH
The cards. Mr. Singleton’s cards.

SILVANA
How did you get them?

LAILAH
I took them! When he wasn’t looking! He’ll never know where they went! I’ll pay for the boat with these.

SILVANA
No, no, Lailah. You cannot pay with something stolen.

LAILAH
But

SILVANA
No.

LAILAH
I won’t tell. The person in the rowboat will never know.
Oh, they’ll know.
It’s time for me to go.

But what will happen to me?

I don’t know.

There’s a pain in my feet like knives of ice.

You’ll get used to it. The tea will help. Don’t try to look for your thimble – you would lose your self long before you ever found it.

I might be here forever.

Perhaps one day someone will find it for you.

I’m afraid.

Yes. This is only the beginning.

(SILVANA takes a scarf from her shoulders and hangs it by the door. This is the same scarf that has been there for the whole play.)

SILVANA exits.
The sound of a bell.
LAILAH sits alone at the table.

A WOLF creeps in. It’s starving. It’s wounded and bleeding. It stands in the doorway.

LAILAH and the WOLF look at each other.

BLACKOUT.
END OF PLAY.)