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# Silo tree

Samantha Noelle Collier  
*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

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

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MASTER'S THESIS

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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:

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Art Borreca, Thesis Supervisor

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Dare Clubb

---

Lisa Schlesinger

To my grandmothers

The question of the wolves turns & turns.

- Simone Muench  
*Wolf Centos*

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## 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 5<sup>th</sup>, 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:

LAILAH	Regina Morones
WILEY	Valeria Avina
REED	Andrew Berger
LOU/SILVANA	Katy Karas
ANNIE	Lindsey Francisco
CLIP	Kevin Burford
COYWOLVES	Damitri Taylor Shunhua Xing Emma Genesen

## LIST OF CHARACTERS

LAILAH	Female. A guide to the world of the dead. Neither dead nor alive.
WILEY	Foster-child of Lailah. Twenties, then teens. Lives in the silo. Raised by wolves. Genderqueer. Restless. Alive, sort of.
REED	A man. Dead.
LOU	Female. Twenties, then teens. Alive, maybe.
CLIP	Lou's grandfather. Alive.
ANNIE	A girl. Dead.
SILVANA	Played by the actor playing Lou. Dead.
THREE COYWOLVES	Part wolf, part coyote. Alive, but with the memory of death in their bones.

## 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.

COYWOLF

and you where are you yeah do you still drown your self in the night

WILEY

Leave me

COYWOLF

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

WILEY

Go away

COYWOLF

waiting for someone to come to come *save* it

WILEY

Go!

COYWOLF

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

WILEY

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

LAILAH

Phone?

REED

To call my wife? She'll be worried.

LAILAH

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.

LAILAH

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?

LAILAH

I don't

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

LAILAH

I don't have a phone

REED

Yeah.  
Well maybe one of your neighbors

LAILAH

No

REED

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?

LAILAH

It's not a town.

REED

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

LAILAH

What?

REED

What

LAILAH

you stopped suddenly

I um  
REED

What's her name?  
LAILAH

Who?  
REED

Your wife  
LAILAH

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  
LAILAH

I need a hospital I need I need  
REED

you were driving?  
LAILAH

yes yes I need you to  
REED

and then what happened  
LAILAH

I uh  
it was so foggy  
I could hardly see  
REED



LAILAH

Uh huh

REED

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

LAILAH

you hit the tree

REED

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.)

LAILAH

okay, honey  
What's your name?

REED

Reed

LAILAH

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.

REED

What?  
Why?

LAILAH

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?

REED

Like knives of ice

LAILAH

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

REED

Oh god! but I

LAILAH

this way

(She leads him to the door.)

Just right out here and down to the river.

REED

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

LAILAH

Who?

(pause)

REED

I don't know

LAILAH

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)

COYWOLF 3

run!

(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.

(She tries one last key. It doesn't work.)

Shit shit shit

(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!

WILEY

hey

LOU

you're here  
you're still here!

WILEY

well yeah

LOU

well I

WILEY

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

LOU

how can you still be here

WILEY

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

LOU

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

WILEY

you were in high school

LOU

no one else remembers you

WILEY

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

LOU

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

LOU

I have something.

(LOU takes something out of her pocket)

WILEY

What is that?

Oh.

LOU

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

WILEY

You kept it?

LOU

I brought it back.

You want it?

WILEY

Why would I want it? I don't sew.

LOU

Just thought you might want it back.

WILEY

It's not mine.

LOU

So what are you doing these days

WILEY

oh you know  
odd jobs

LOU

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

WILEY

this is where I live.

LOU

the silo.  
funny

I'm serious. WILEY

You should leave.

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

you wouldn't WILEY

This is my property  
I could LOU

I'm not leaving WILEY

then I'll I guess I'll call the cops on you LOU

lady no one calls the cops around here WILEY

don't call me lady LOU

ma'am WILEY

no LOU

sir majesty landowner WILEY

no LOU

(pause)

It's like no time has passed at all. WILEY

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.)

LOU

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU

WILEY

LOU

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?

WILEY  
yes

LOU  
I'm talking blood in the mouth

WILEY  
I know.

LOU  
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.

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

LOU  
What's it to you?

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

Wiley.

WILEY

Just don't.

LOU

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?

WILEY

What?

LOU

From town?

WILEY

can of blue paint?

LOU

A sandwich?

WILEY

no

LOU

okay

okay  
yeah

(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

LAILAH

Okay

WILEY

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

LAILAH

What house

WILEY

This house.

LAILAH

Oh.

WILEY

She's back now. She wants to tear it down.

LAILAH

What.

WILEY

The house!

LAILAH

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

WILEY  
What I didn't I wouldn't I would never

LAILAH  
I wasn't born yesterday.

WILEY  
sorry

LAILAH  
Just sit.

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

WILEY  
Sorry

LAILAH  
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.

WILEY  
How am I gonna do that?

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

WILEY  
Okay  
I'll work on it

LAILAH  
Tonight.

WILEY  
yeah, tonight

LAILAH  
That's why I let you stay here.

WILEY  
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.

WILEY

So? I owe you?

LAILAH

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.

You know the rules. LAILAH

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

Look at you, you're already coughing. LAILAH

I'm fine WILEY (coughing)

Get out of here before your face turns blue LAILAH

love you too mom WILEY

Don't call me that. LAILAH

(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.

LOU

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.

WILEY

maybe you should be.

LOU

Where are you going?

WILEY

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.)

LOU

good bones

WILEY

what?

LOU

This house has good bones.

WILEY

maybe you should leave it alone

LOU

no

WILEY

are you rich or something?

LOU

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

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.

It's my house.  
I want to smash it.

LOU

Broken glass all over the place

WILEY

There's gotta be a way in.

LOU

(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

You can go in ahead of me.

LOU

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.

WILEY

(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

LOU

that was just a game

WILEY

you forgot how to play?

LOU

of course not

WILEY

I think maybe you're afraid of wolves.

LOU

I'm not!

WILEY

okay chill

LOU

I just  
I don't know what you're doing here

WILEY

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.

LOU

Yeah.  
I got it.

WILEY

(Night falls.  
LOU watches WILEY paint.

After a while, LOU exits.

(She returns with a blanket.)

LOU

Here.

WILEY

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

(LOU sits next to WILEY.)

LOU

All those stars

WILEY

Yep.

LOU

Don't you get lonely? Living alone?

WILEY

I'm not alone.

LOU

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

WILEY

Oh you mean like

LOU

You know  
Human beings

WILEY

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

LOU

Passing through

WILEY

Yeah

LOU

No one sticks

Not really

WILEY

What's the eleventh one

LOU

Oh um.  
It's like -

WILEY

Show me.

LOU

It's like  
It's like  
It's like

WILEY

No, show me

LOU

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

WILEY

(LOU punches WILEY'S shoulder.)

Show me.

LOU

(Howls in the distance.)

They're looking for something.

WILEY

They're hungry.

LOU

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

WILEY

I'm gonna stay out here with you tonight.

LOU

Okay but listen.

WILEY

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.)



4.

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 COYWOLF 3

a scratch behind the ears COYWOLF 1

you sound like a little dog COYWOLF 3

a name COYWOLF 1

you disgust me COYWOLF 3

i smell the glint i smell it yeah SHE HAS IT YEAH COYWOLF 2

who COYWOLF 1

the deep sleeping one COYWOLF 2

yeah she has it in her pocket i smell it too COYWOLF 3

it's ours yeah COYWOLF 2

we found it yeah COYWOLF 1

let's pull her from her dreams COYWOLF 3

chase her muddle her yeah COYWOLF 2

she's the one who took the wild human away from us COYWOLF 1

(they circle closer to LOU.)

COYWOLF 2  
alone you're alone you're all alone come follow us

COYWOLF 1  
come howl with us

COYWOLF 2  
let the night pour into your ear and spin you

COYWOLF 1  
give us the metal tooth the glint and we will

COYWOLF 3  
we will run with you show you the wells of shadow yeah

COYWOLF 2  
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.)

COYWOLF 1  
no no no no no

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

She falls.

Lights.)

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

The COYWOLVES are circling LOU.

COYWOLF 2

a soft warm belly in the mouth yeah

COYWOLF 1

petals of fire in the moon

COYWOLF 2

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

COYWOLF 3

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

COYWOLF 2

alive

COYWOLF 3

how did it come here

COYWOLF 1

is it alive

COYWOLF 3

some strange magic is upon it

COYWOLF 2

but can we eat it yeah

COYWOLF 3

it's not ours brothers  
it's *hers* yeah

COYWOLF 2

hers hers hers  
she gets all the best

COYWOLF 1

she leaves us scraps of fur and splinter

it's hers  
COYWOLF 3

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

leave it  
COYWOLF 3

lick the spice of its hands yeah  
COYWOLF 2

leave it!  
COYWOLF 3

here she comes  
COYWOLF 1

(LAILAH comes out of the house.

The lights shift.

WILEY still sleeps at the foot of the silo.)

hey!  
scram!  
LAILAH

(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.)

WILEY

Hey!

LAILAH

She's gone.

WILEY

No!  
Wait!

LAILAH

It's too late.

WILEY

No no no what happened

LAILAH

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

WILEY

does she have a pulse?

LAILAH

Don't interfere.

WILEY

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

LAILAH

There's nothing else to do.

WILEY

We have to at least try!

LAILAH

Let go  
Wiley.  
Let go.

But she's she's she's

WILEY

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

LAILAH

No.

WILEY

Don't argue.

LAILAH

She's my friend.

WILEY

You know the rules.

LAILAH

Don't take her in there!

WILEY

Ring the bell.

LAILAH

(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.

mmmm

LOU

All right.  
What's your name.

LAILAH

Lou.

LOU

Tell me something you remember.

LAILAH

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

LOU

All right.  
Give it a minute.

LAILAH

Where am I?

LOU

My house.

LAILAH

Your house.  
Wait a minute.

LOU

(LOU goes to the window and looks out.)

Please sit down.

LAILAH

I know this place.  
I know this place.

LOU

Come away from the window.

LAILAH

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.

LOU

cause it's your house.

WILEY

Wiley!

LAILAH



Hi. WILEY

Get out of here. LAILAH

No. WILEY

You can't be in here at night. LAILAH

Well here I am. WILEY (starting to cough)

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

You can't have her. WILEY

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

I'm in love with her. WILEY

You are not. LAILAH

Please  
Let me keep her WILEY

That's not possible LAILAH

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

Wiley. LAILAH

Let her stay with me. WILEY

I can't. LAILAH

You let me stay! WILEY

I shouldn't have. LAILAH

what? WILEY

I was lonely. LAILAH  
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? WILEY

I didn't say that LAILAH

There is something very familiar about this window. LOU

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

Can't go forward WILEY  
Can't go back  
I'm just stuck

You have me LAILAH

WILEY

What am I  
Am I a ghost

LAILAH

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

WILEY

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

LAILAH

No

WILEY

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

LAILAH

Don't be ridiculous.

WILEY

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

LAILAH

You're acting like a child.

WILEY

I just want to

(but WILEY is overcome with coughing and can't finish the sentence.)

LOU

I can't remember anything

LAILAH

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

LOU

Oh. Thank you.

Am I dead?

LAILAH

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

But. LOU

Tell me something from your life. LAILAH

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

(howls)

LAILAH (to WILEY)  
I told you to get rid of those wolves.

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

(WILEY coughs.)

LAILAH  
Wiley get out of here now.

WILEY  
I think I know what it is.  
A thimble.

LAILAH  
Thimble? No. It can't be.

WILEY  
It was in the ground.

LAILAH  
It's in the river.

LOU  
It's in my pocket.

LAILAH  
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.

WILEY

You

LAILAH

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

Now I can go.

WILEY

You're leaving?

LAILAH

Now I can pay for the boat.

Oh god.

I can go.

I can go.

WILEY

Don't leave me.

LAILAH

I can finally go.

WILEY

I'm coming too.

LAILAH

No.

WILEY

Both of us.

LAILAH

You can't. You have nothing for the boat.

And she has to stay and take my place.

LOU

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.

ANNIE

I need help!

LAILAH

Okay okay what do you need

ANNIE

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

LAILAH

oh, we can't, I don't have a phone

ANNIE

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!

LAILAH

Okay now just listen a moment.

Sit down.

Drink this.

ANNIE

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

LAILAH

Annie

Listen carefully

ANNIE

you don't understand!

LAILAH

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

ANNIE

It wasn't! It was just a minute! I'm a fast runner, I am, I

No, honey.  
Annie.  
He shot you.

LAILAH

What

ANNIE

Right there, look

LAILAH

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

I need my mom

ANNIE

Annie

LAILAH

I need to find my mom

ANNIE

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

LAILAH

I'm dead?

ANNIE

Yes

LAILAH

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

Can I have some of this money?

ANNIE

Sure.

LAILAH

Is this heaven.

ANNIE

No. LAILAH

What is it? ANNIE

It's my house. LAILAH

Who are you? ANNIE

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

What river ANNIE

The one outside my house. LAILAH

Are you dead? ANNIE

Yes. LAILAH

(ANNIE starts laughing)

I think I'm dreaming. ANNIE

You're not. LAILAH

I'm going to pinch myself. ANNIE

(She does.)

I'm going to open my eyes really huge.

(She does.)

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 3

after the rain the earth is soft and slick yeah and we can dig up all its secrets  
COYWOLF 1

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



COYWOLF 1

my mother said once a long ago metal tooth yeah lost in the river yeah yeah maybe could be this is it yeah

COYWOLF 2

what does it smell like let's smell it

i smell wool and leather

COYWOLF 3

i smell earthworms and river weeds

COYWOLF 1

i smell sorrow

COYWOLF 2

this is human yeah a human tooth

COYWOLF 3

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

COYWOLF 1

we could claim the land for ours

COYWOLF 3

we could eat forever

COYWOLF 2

all the rabbits all the deer all the squirrels

COYWOLF 1

sisters with this tooth we can run in the daytime

COYWOLF 3

we can bring the wild human back to us

(they howl.

WILEY runs in.)

WILEY

what is it what's that

COYWOLF 2

come back to us

COYWOLF 1

we found a human tooth

(WILEY takes it.)

WILEY

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.)

3.

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.

LOU

Wiley!

WILEY

hey

LOU

What are you doing? It's six a.m.!

WILEY

I want to watch the sunrise with you

LOU

I'm gonna kill you  
shining that light into my room  
I thought the world was ending

WILEY

climb up in the silo with me

LOU

I'm going back to bed

WILEY

Lou. You're on summer vacation.  
live a little

LOU

Yeah well I was up half the night getting things for my grandpa  
Water  
Pills

WILEY

that bad huh

LOU

he's not doing so great

let's just go up a minute

WILEY

no way

LOU

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

WILEY

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

LOU

I wanted to show you something

WILEY

what

LOU

look at this

WILEY

(WILEY gives LOU the thimble.)

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

Coywolves?

LOU

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

WILEY

Weird.

LOU

with all that rain we had, the mud washed away

WILEY

I guess so

LOU

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

LOU

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

LOU

it's so high

WILEY

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? CLIP

Out LOU

Out where? CLIP

Just out LOU

It's not even eight CLIP

(LOU eats from a box of cereal.)

Hey.  
Hey!  
Where you been?

Out! LOU

You can't just disappear! CLIP

I couldn't sleep! LOU

Something wrong with your bed? CLIP

No LOU  
It's the air.  
It's the light.  
I don't know.  
Summer.

You need some new shoes? CLIP



No. LOU

Why aren't you wearing shoes? CLIP

They'd just soak through- the grass was soaking wet LOU

You can't just run around barefoot CLIP

It's fine. LOU

You need shoes. CLIP

Grandpa! It's fine! LOU

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

there's no popcorn, grandpa LOU

I can smell popcorn CLIP

there isn't any LOU

well where is the smell coming from then CLIP

I don't know LOU

are you hiding it from me?  
your father was like this too CLIP

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

CLIP

I can smell it

LOU

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.

LOU

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

CLIP

What do you need a phone for?

LOU

To call people.  
So I can talk to them.

CLIP

Talk to me.

LOU

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.

CLIP

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

LOU

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

CLIP

Then I'll get back up.

LOU

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.

CLIP

What do you want to talk about?

LOU

My life.

CLIP

What's happening in your life?

LOU

Well right now, nothing, obviously.

Not much to talk about then. CLIP

Is this house haunted? LOU

you mean ghosts? CLIP

it creaks in the night LOU

it's an old house  
old houses creak in the night CLIP

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

the pipes leak CLIP

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

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 CLIP

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 LOU



CLIP

In your bathroom

LOU

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

CLIP

It didn't look very realistic.

LOU

Oh my god.

CLIP

I thought you didn't like penises

LOU

Oh my god.

CLIP

You're not a lesbian anymore?

LOU

Grandpa! Don't be stupid!

CLIP

Well explain it to me then

LOU

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

CLIP

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

LOU

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 GODDDDD 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.)

CLIP

no one tells me anything

LOU

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

CLIP

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

LOU

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

CLIP

Who's that?

LOU

Who?

CLIP

Sitting right there.

LOU

Where?

CLIP (pointing at LAILAH)

Right there.

LOU

Grandpa.  
There's nobody here.

CLIP

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

LOU

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.

(LOU studies the thimble.)

Maybe this is really really old.

CLIP

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

LOU

Grandpa!  
UGHHHHHHHHH  
Forget it.

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

Lights.)

5.

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

WILEY

I can't.

COYWOLF 3

all of this we promise yeah yeah

WILEY

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

COYWOLF 2 & 3

yip! yip! yip!

WILEY

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

WILEY

I haven't betrayed you

COYWOLF 2

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

WILEY

I have someone else now

COYWOLF 3

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

WILEY

it's different

COYWOLF 3

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

WILEY

I don't do that anymore

COYWOLF 2

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

WILEY

I have better things

COYWOLF 3

better better

COYWOLF 2

what is better yeah yeah what could be

COYWOLF 3

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

COYWOLF 2

run!

COYWOLF 3

The COYWOLVES run off.  
LOU enters.

Oh that looks cool

LOU

thanks

WILEY

what's it gonna be

LOU

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

WILEY

cool  
can I help

LOU

(WILEY gives her a can of spray paint)

do that part  
blue  
and then I'm gonna put some green in there

WILEY

okay

LOU

(they paint  
the moon shines  
the coywolves howl)

what's that

WILEY

coywolves

LOU

no way

WILEY

It's true  
they live around here

LOU

they're creepy

WILEY

don't worry

LOU

dangerous

WILEY

I'll protect you

LOU

what are you gonna do, spray paint at them?

WILEY

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

LOU

um

WILEY

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

LOU

you talk like you know their language

I do  
I was raised by wolves

WILEY

I thought you said a woman  
found you

LOU

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

WILEY

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

(WILEY licks LOU'S ear.)

Straightforward, see?

yeah

LOU

the second is more of a playful challenge.

WILEY

(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)

LOU  
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  
WILEY

the other ways to lick an ear?  
LOU

I'll show you.  
WILEY

No. Tell me.  
LOU

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

Try.  
LOU

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  
WILEY

I've got one.  
LOU

You do? What is it?  
WILEY

I'll show you.  
LOU

(LOU kisses WILEY'S ear.)

Oh.  
Yeah wolves don't do that one.  
WILEY

It's human.  
LOU

Okay my turn.  
WILEY



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

LOU

get me a pain pill

CLIP

yeah, what's wrong

LOU

I have a a pain in my  
my my my my my my my  
muuuuhhhhhhhh  
muhhhhhh  
MUHHHHH  
MUHHHHHHHHH

CLIP

Grandpa? Grandpa? Oh god

LOU

(LAILAH turns over a card.)

Ah.

LAILAH

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

MUUUUHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH  
MUHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH  
MAAAHHHHHHHHH

CLIP

Grandpa  
Grandpa can you hear me

LOU

MUUUUUHHHHH

CLIP

GRANDPA!  
oh god oh god oh god oh god

LOU

Muuuuuhhhhhh

CLIP

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. LAILAH

This tea is nice. CLIP

I'm glad you like it. LAILAH

what do I do LOU

I want some of that popcorn. CLIP

what do I do LOU

Of course! Help yourself. LAILAH

(CLIP eats some popcorn)

what do I do LOU

Clip tell me something from your life LAILAH

CLIP

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

LAILAH

you'll see

CLIP

do I have a choice

LAILAH

Not really

CLIP

Have you ever been in the boat

LAILAH

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 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.

Would you like some tea? SILVANA

Yes please. LAILAH

There you are. SILVANA

What a lovely house. LAILAH

(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.

Are you frightened? SILVANA

I'm not frightened of anything. LAILAH

Perhaps you should be. SILVANA  
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.

How did you find the road? SILVANA

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.

LAILAH

I will not get on another boat.

SILVANA

You must. That's how it works.

LAILAH

No. Why?

SILVANA

You died tonight.

LAILAH

What?

SILVANA

You did.

LAILAH

But I swam.

SILVANA

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

LAILAH

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.)

LAILAH

I'm not dead.

SILVANA

You are.

LAILAH

I'm not!

SILVANA

Oh this is difficult.  
Lailah.

LAILAH

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

SILVANA

Child.  
Sit down.

LAILAH

No.

SILVANA

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.

LAILAH

I'll go home. I'm not dead.

SILVANA

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.

SILVANA

Oh, they'll know.

It's time for me to go.

LAILAH

But what will happen to me?

SILVANA

I don't know.

LAILAH

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

SILVANA

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.

LAILAH

I might be here forever.

SILVANA

Perhaps one day someone will find it for you.

LAILAH

I'm afraid.

SILVANA

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.)