

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Copyright Protection. This Play is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America; of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union, including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth; of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, and the Berne Convention; and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations.

Reservation of Rights. All rights to this Play are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights; motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video, and sound recording rights; rights to all other forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, photocopying, and information storage and retrieval systems; and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

Performance Licensing and Royalty Payments. All amateur and stock performance rights to this Play are controlled exclusively by Playscripts, Inc. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this Play without obtaining advance written permission from Playscripts, Inc. Required royalty fees are specified online at the Playscripts, Inc. website, and are subject to change without notice. Although this book may have been obtained for a licensed performance, these performance rights are not transferable. Required royalties must be paid every time the Play is performed before any audience, whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. All licensing requests and inquiries concerning amateur and stock performance rights should be addressed to Playscripts, Inc. (see opposite page).

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to Playscripts, Inc., as well; such inquiries will be communicated to the Author and the Author's Agent, as applicable.

Restriction of Alterations. There shall be no deletions, alterations, or changes of any kind made to the Play, including the changing of character gender, the cutting of dialogue, or the alteration of objectionable language, unless directly authorized by Playscripts, Inc. or otherwise allowed in the Play's "Production Notes." The title of the Play shall not be altered.

Author Credit. Any individual or group receiving permission to produce this Play is required to give credit to the Author as the sole and exclusive author of the Play. This obligation applies to the title page of every program distributed in connection with performances of the Play, and in any instance that the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing, or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and of a font size at least 50% as large as the largest letter used in the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author. The name of the Author may not be abbreviated or otherwise altered from the form in which it appears in this Play.

Publisher Attribution. All programs, advertisements, and other printed material distributed or published in connection with the production of the Play shall include the following notice:

Produced by special arrangement with Playscripts, Inc.
(www.playscripts.com)

Prohibition of Unauthorized Copying. Any unauthorized copying of this book or excerpts from this book is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Playscripts, Inc.

Statement of Non-affiliation. This Play may include references to brand names and trademarks owned by third parties, and may include references to public figures. Playscripts, Inc. is not affiliated with these public figures, or with the owners of such trademarks and brand names. Such references are included solely for parody, political comment, aesthetic purposes, or other protected purposes.

Permissions for Sound Recordings and Musical Works. This Play may contain directions calling for the performance of a portion, or all, of a musical work, or performance of a sound recording of a musical work. Playscripts, Inc. has not obtained permissions to perform such works. The Producer of this Play is advised to obtain such permissions, if required in the context of the production. The Producer is directed to the websites of the U.S. Copyright Office (<http://lcweb.loc.gov/copyright>), ASCAP (<http://www.ascap.com>), and BMI (<http://www.bmi.com>) for further information on the need to obtain permissions, and on procedures for obtaining such permissions.

The Fine Print Explained

This play is protected by United States and international copyright law. According to these laws, individuals and production groups must obtain permission for any performance of this Play, and must pay any required royalty.*

Playscripts, Inc. handles this licensing process for all stock and amateur performances of this Play worldwide. Permission must be obtained for any such performance, whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not an admission fee is charged. Playscripts, Inc. collects these required royalty payments on behalf of the Author, and the Author receives the majority of these royalty payments.

It is thus necessary to abide by the following rules, not only out of respect for international law and personal ethics, but to ensure that playwrights are rewarded for creating new and vital dramatic work.

- Do not perform this Play without obtaining prior permission from Playscripts, Inc., and without paying the required royalty.
- Do not photocopy, scan, or otherwise duplicate any part of this book.
- Do not alter the text of the play, change a character's gender, delete any dialogue, or alter any objectionable language, unless explicitly allowed by the playwright in the "Production Notes" or otherwise authorized by Playscripts, Inc.
- Provide appropriate credit to the Author and appropriate attribution to Playscripts, Inc. in all programs and promotional literature associated with any performance of this Play.

(These and other rules are presented in greater detail on the opposite page.)

Please contact Playscripts, Inc. with any questions or production requests:

Email:	info@playscripts.com	Playscripts, Inc.
Website:	http://www.playscripts.com	P.O. Box 237060
		New York, NY 10023
		USA

*Disregarding a performance license will expose you to infringement liability under U.S. Copyright law, which carries civil sanctions that include a possible award of up to \$150,000 per protected work for willful infringement. U.S. Copyright law also provides criminal sanctions.

God appears & God is Light
To those poor Souls who dwell in Night,
But does a Human Form Display
To those who Dwell in Realms of Day.

—William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence"

Cast of Characters

In order of speaking:

SETH

CELIE

KENDRA

JB

MICHAEL

ALLISON

DANIELLE

BILLY

Time

A night in 1987 and afterwards

Acknowledgements

Part I of *Language of Angels* was commissioned by the McCarter Theatre and presented in an evening of ghost plays in November 1999. Part III was conceived in collaboration with Bruce McKenzie. The piece premiered in its entirety in February 2000 at Campo Santo + Intersection in San Francisco, California. The production was directed by Delia McDougall.

LANGUAGE OF ANGELS

by Naomi Iizuka

Part I

(A breathing. The inside of a cave. The breathing grows. Voices heard in bits and pieces. Silence. A velvet darkness, dense and complete. A light.)

SETH. This is how it went.

This is what I remember.

That night we'd headed north of Lenoir, northeast end of the Keene Mountain trail, the part where it bottoms out, forest growing up there, dense growth, thickets of pine, trees growing high and wide, they block out all the light with their branches, so dark, you can't imagine how dark it gets, if you never been, if you never been, you can't know, dark even in the middle of the day, no trails, no signs of human life, no birdsong even –

Wet and old, soil and rock –

Smell of mud and rotting leaves –

Smell of something, something sweet –

(CELIE's song begins. An ancient voice. A young girl's voice. A voice that would break your heart.)

SETH. There are parts of this country out this way, pure and wild, unknown to man, no human eyes have ever seen, cave country it is, hundreds of miles of caves, stretching and twisting underground, passages and tunnels and wide open chambers, pools so deep you'd never touch the bottom –

Down in the caves, you gotta know what you're doing, gotta know what you're up against, you gotta remember, keep it in the back of your mind always, and if you do, if you know your way around, you can get from here to there and back again. Some of these boys, they know the caves pretty well, some of the caves down there, you can even see traces, paper, candles, broken glass, see the names spray painted on the wall. Party down there in one of those caves, take your girl, a case of beer, whatever, get high.

I did that once. Used to. This was, this was before.

People from these parts, everybody knows the stories, somebody gets lost down in the caves, some guy, high or drunk, wanders deeper and deeper, passes out, wakes up in that pitch black darkness, can't remember how he came to be there, where exactly he is, which way he needs to go to get out, and it's so black, it's like you can't even see your hand when it's this close to your face, dark, you can't imagine how dark it gets, and now he's getting spooked, and turned around, he can't remember how he got to where he is, which way is in and which way is out, and he starts walking faster and faster, twisting and doubling back, making a wrong turn somewhere along the line, going the wrong way, deeper and deeper into the blackness so black, nothing else like it, nothing feeling right, the way the tunnel turns, and all he knows is his heart beating, and the feel of the stone underfoot, the feel of the stone wall damp and rough against his palm, sound of water dripping, and somewhere far away, the rustling of a thousand wings, all the things you become aware of in that darkness, tiny things, and how they all feel wrong this time around, and in your heart you know, you know this isn't the way, this isn't right, and slowly you feel the panic come on, and slowly you understand just how lost you are, and what that means, and you lose all sense of which way is back and which way is forward, all sense of time, and all you feel now is your lungs and your sweat, cold sweat, and the space so narrow now like a grave, until you got no room to stand, on your hands and knees, crawling in the blackness, trying to see, trying to get back, when all of a sudden you see it –

Something up ahead –

A light, a shaft of light – Flickering, faint, a light – And now you see it glimmering, glowing, a steady glowing – There is a light – And you crawl faster and faster towards that light, towards that brightness just up ahead, just at the end of the tunnel, if you just go a little further, just a little further, you're almost there, almost, so close you can almost touch it with your hand, and then bang – You hit a wall of stone, and the light vanishes like it was never there.

What it was, what it is.

When it gets that black, in the deepest part, in the blackest part, the eyes play tricks. The mind plays tricks.

Celie? Celie girl, is that you –?

(CELIE's singing stops. Flickers of light. KENDRA is giggling. The names of people she used to know, hieroglyphics on a cave wall.)

CELIE'S VOICE. JB loves Joline – Tommy loves Danielle – Sean loves Kendra – Billy loves Allison – Seth loves Celie. 4ever and ever.

(An echo. CELIE'S VOICE echoes. Two girls laughing in the inner chamber of a cave. The laughter rings and reverberates, hangs in the air, then fades. KENDRA is alone in the silence. The darkness is electric.)

KENDRA. Hey –

(CELIE echoes.)

KENDRA. Hey –

(CELIE echoes.)

KENDRA. Celie –

(CELIE echoes.)

KENDRA. It's me –

(CELIE echoes.)

KENDRA. Kendra –

(CELIE echoes.)

KENDRA. Celie?

(CELIE echoes.)

KENDRA. Can you hear me?

(The after-image of a sound hanging in the darkness, and then the words all fade away. And all that's left is breathing.)

KENDRA. Celie?

(No echo. The breathing grows louder, more ragged, it grows so loud, it is everywhere and inside – and then it stops. Silence.)

KENDRA. That night in the cave, it was such a long time ago, I can't hardly remember.

I was playing, I remember that, throwing my voice, listening for the echo. It sounded like I was over there and over there, all over the place, like I was split up into all these girls, all these invisible girls shouting out from every which way. And I thought that was the most amazing thing –

Truth to tell, I can't recall what I saw that night, what I thought I saw. I told them so the next day, but they kept at me about what exactly happened, like I could know that, like I could know that thing –

CELIE'S VOICE. I was here. Remember me. 4 ever and ever and ever.

(The echo of CELIE's laughter. It hits against the walls and fractures into pieces. It fades away.)

KENDRA. It was dark that night, it was so dark. There was some candles we brought along, to make it all spooky like, shadow light, fire light, but once you got beyond the opening, once you got inside, there wasn't no light. Celie was talking out loud. I remember it was funny to me, what she said. I thought it was the funniest thing in the world. I forget what it was, what she was saying.

It could've been some tiny thing –

It could've been nothing at all –

After that, I don't know. I forget. I try to put this all behind me. I'm not the same person I was then. I don't even hardly know who that girl was anymore.

Celie was –

She was nice.

She was different, touched, like she got the shine, you know, like she was seeing things different, seeing things we don't see. In her room, she used to have tacked up on the wall pictures of angels, beautiful boys with muscles and all, and they're all bare chested with their big strong arms and chests—only thing different being the wings. Beautiful boys with wings. I didn't get all that when I was little, all that stuff about angels and god in heaven. I thought it was all puffy clouds and angel babies playing harps. I didn't get the other part, the secret part, like some kinda sign. The language of angels, and how light burns.

(The sound of deep, darkest space. A wind through the void. A light. A piece of skin is revealed. Tattooed wings on a shoulder blade. Brilliant-colored butterfly wings. A breathing. It grows closer.)

SETH. Celie? Celie –?

(Silence. Darkness. A match is struck. JB lights a cigarette. A flickering light in the darkness.)

JB. Folks ask, they ask me sometimes. I don't talk about it much no more. I'll tell you what, though, and this is a fact—cause I got to say it like it was—Celie was, she was a messed up girl. Her family was low. Father was a holy roller, hill people his people were, used to speak in tongues, handle serpents with his bare hands, passed on his forty-fourth year, his car flung off into oblivion on some mountain pass, died in flames on a bright Sabbath morning. Mother was never right in the head after that. Became some kind a palm reader, tarot card lady. Had a sign in front of the trailer. People come around time to time, tourists mainly, driving through on the interstate, seen the sign from the road. She'd take their hand, tell them what their life was gonna be like, if they was going to fall in love, get a new job, read the future from the lines in their hands, their life line—

CELIE'S VOICE. Don't—

(CELIE echoes.)

JB. Like you can read the future—like you can know what's gonna be. That whole family—it's a sad thing—ever since she was little, Celie'd come to school in dirty clothes, hair all wild, talking all kinds of craziness about angels and devils and god in heaven. The other thing being, too—which I don't like to say, but it's fact—that being she was wild, Celie was. She liked to be with lots of guys. She was a girl like that. She liked to get high, get drunk. She said, I'd try anything once—

CELIE'S VOICE. I'd try anything once—

(CELIE echoes.)

JB. She said that to me once.

That night, the night she disappeared, lots of us was wasted, drinking and such. We were younger then. It was a long time ago.

(A breathing. In the shadows, glimpses of CELIE – hands, fingers, hair, the side of her face, the curve of a neck, a shoulder, a tattoo. The laughter from before. CELIE turns around. Her face is a distant memory, a pixel image resurfacing from another place another time. She speaks to someone unseen.)

CELIE. What do you want?

(CELIE echoes.)

CELIE. What? *(Echo.)* What? *(Echo.)* Don't.

(CELIE echoes.)

CELIE. I said, don't.

(CELIE echoes.)

CELIE. Seth –

(CELIE's image vanishes. Static snow. The embers of JB's cigarette a light in the darkness.)

JB. That next morning, we thought maybe she'd gone off, sleeping it off somewhere. But then, later, when they saw she was missing, they called my daddy who was the sheriff at the time. My daddy and my uncle, Seth and Sean and Joline, their fathers and brothers, too, they searched the cave, as deep as we could go. They searched the forest, too. Brought in dogs.

I wish it had been different, that things had turned out different. You go over it in your head, you know, trying to understand. You never know with people like Celie what happened. It's possible, you know, they just take off. No word to anyone. Maybe something inside their heads just goes off, and they hitch a ride out of town, and they just keep going. Who knows? Maybe she's living somewhere in California, Florida, somewhere pretty and faraway, new name, new life. I like to think that's what happened. I like to keep the faith.

(CELIE's song returns. An ancient voice. A young girl's voice. A voice that would break your heart. Over the singing, the sound of breathing ragged and labored. The sound of breathing grows. The singing fractures.)

SETH. She had a tattoo, Celie did, tattoo of a butterfly, all different colors—fuchsia, blue, emerald green. She said they were angel wings. She was making her own. She got it when she was fifteen, all along the white of her shoulder blade. I remember when she got that tattoo, the little dots of blood along the edges. I touched it with my finger, and rubbed it away.

KENDRA. I don't know what happened to Celie. Some folks say she ran away, just took off that night. I don't think she ran no where. Some folks, they talk about spirits. They say they hear voices, a girl singing out by Keene Mountain trail. I hear voices. I live a thousand miles away, and I hear them. When I dream. I hear them in the darkness of my sleep.

SETH. They never found her body. She disappeared. It's like she disappeared without a trace. For a long time after, I'd hear her voice in the night. I'd hear her call out my name. Sounded like she was just up ahead, just beyond the edge of where I could see.

CELIE'S VOICE. —Seth? Seth, where are you? Help me. Help me—

(CELIE screams. The sound reverberates in the darkness. And then silence.)

SETH. I didn't hear. I didn't hear a thing. That night that Celie disappeared, I was drunk, I was so drunk, I couldn't stand. I passed out. I don't remember what happened, I don't remember nothing.

KENDRA. JB loves Joline—Tommy loves Danielle—Sean loves Kendra—Billy loves Allison—Seth loves Celie 4ever and ever—

(CELIE appears for an instant. The technicolor brilliance of her wings. And then she's gone.)

KENDRA. I can still see it in my mind's eye, see the spray paint letters on the cave wall and where the paint dripped down, and thinking to myself how these names'll be here long after we're all gone, how somebody'd maybe come around sometime, shine a light up to the names, and wonder to themselves who these people were, whatever happened to them.

SETH. Joline died in her sleep before the year was out. Her heart just stopped. Nobody knew why. Tommy fell off the edge of the cliff down by Diamond Gap, broke his back in the fall. Billy killed a man

the summer of '91, got sent east to Odom, twenty-five to life. Allison died in a car crash out by Maryville, it's been five years they put her in the ground. Sean died that same year. Hunting accident up by Mount Airy. Buried him before the first snow fall. Danielle's still living. Shoots speed in a trailer out by Boone. Tried to talk to her once. She looked right through me like I was some kinda ghost.

KENDRA. Not long after, I went up north, as faraway as I could get. Got married, had kids. I guess I'm happy, happy as anyone can be.

SETH. JB and me, we stayed. JB became the sheriff, like his daddy and his daddy before him. We never did talk much after that night. We fell away.

JB. I look around, and it's a strange thing. We lived wild back then, we were crazy in the head, all of us were, did things we maybe regret, caught up with some of us in the end.

KENDRA. Sometimes I have dreams.

JB. There was a time, used to hear folks talking about a curse. Talking about hauntings and spirits. They said Celie Gaines was killed in that cave. They said her soul found no fit place to rest, wanders in that darkness still, trying to get some peace. Some folks in these parts are backward kinda folk. They hear the wind in the trees, and they think they hear a girl's voice singing. Some folks say she cursed us all. Me, I don't believe in curses or fate. I don't believe in none of that.

SETH. Sometimes I have dreams.

JB. Things happen, terrible things. You could spend your whole life wondering why one lives, and one dies. Why we sin in thought and deed. You could spend your whole life wondering why we do what we do. You could do that, and it'd make you crazy, cause there ain't no reason, none at all.

KENDRA. I heard about Seth last night. My sister called to tell me. I knew he'd had his hard times since then. I knew his life'd never been the same. And how he went into that cave where we'd all been that night, went alone, and how he disappeared. It's been near a week, searchers are still looking for him. Everybody knows those caves go back miles into the earth, a thousand ways to go, a thousand twists

and turns. Everybody knows they'll never find him, everybody knows that.

JB. They say the guilt tore him up. They say he did it. They say he killed his girl, and he hid her body deep in that cave where nobody'd ever find her. They say that. I know better.

KENDRA. Sometimes I have dreams. I remember them in bits and pieces –

JB. Celie –

KENDRA. The sound of my children's voices, sunlight on the kitchen table, my husband's sweet good-bye before he goes, the darkness of the woods at the edge of our land. I look out our window in the night, and all is darkness – our land, the woods, beyond, a field of darkness as far as the eye can see – and which is the dream, and which is the waking, I cannot know –

(KENDRA fades away. The sound of CELIE singing. SETH appears from out of the darkness. He walks towards the light.)

SETH. In the deepest part, in the blackest part, I saw a light. I followed it as far as I could go, until I could go no further. I heard her voice. I felt her skin. I felt her breath against my face like the sun. And then she reached out and held me close, held me in that darkness. She whispered to me, words that burned through, words filled me with light, heat, pure heat – if light were words – and then she took me in her arms, and I felt peace.

(SETH is illuminated. An instant of bright light, blinding bright. SETH disappears into the light. Darkness. CELIE's song stops. A soft, steady breathing.)

JB. Celie? Celie girl, is that you?

(CELIE appears. A ghost in a cave.)

CELIE. JB died in his sleep. I'm speaking now from a far distant future. He lived to be seventy-one. He married, had two girls. He was the sheriff in that small town all his life till the day he died. His days led one to the next, peaceful and unmarred.

He was well-loved, you could say, well enough. Nobody knew what he did that night so long ago, nobody even suspected. Most thought it

was Seth who killed that girl. Or if they didn't, they never said a word. Time made it fade in their mind. Even for JB, that night became a faraway thing to him, something that happened to someone else, something he could barely recall.

JB died in the morning hours on a bright, autumn day. His heart gave way without warning. He awoke as though from a dream. His younger daughter heard him say: "It burns—" And then he cried out once more, and passed away. She thought nothing of it, until later, when she was washing the body, and saw all along her father's back angry markings, fingerprints, letters, signs burned into his skin. How they got there, she did not know. Most of them she could not make out, save the words branded on his shoulder blade, clear as though burned into his flesh by a hot iron:

—Remember me 4ever and ever—

She did not understand how or why, or what the meaning of it could be. She put what she saw out of her mind, and dressed her father's body, and closed her father's eyes. Later, she watched as they lowered his coffin into the ground. She never told a soul.

(The breathing stops. CELIE lifts her hand. Fingers, palm, pure light. Across a vast distance, JB feels her touch on his back, a memory burned in flesh. Darkness. The sound of wings. End of Part I.)

Between

(Darkness. Names on the cave wall appear out of the darkness. The names flicker in and out, pieces of names, letters. Voices in the darkness. Pieces of conversation, laughter. Voices from a long time ago. Voices you can barely hear. The darkness is electric. Echoes of what came before.)

VOICES. JB loves Joline—Tommy loves Danielle—Sean loves Kendra—Billy loves Allison—Seth loves Celie. 4ever and ever.

(ALLISON's voice is heard. It surfaces from the deepest part. Still water. A ripple in the surface gives it away. A schoolgirl's lesson, a witnessing.)

ALLISON. God does not deal directly with man. It is by means of spirits that all intercourse between God and man, both in waking life and in sleep, is carried on. They are celestial beings in their essence. They go by many and diverse names. Their forms are as plentiful as the languages of man. Their garments are white, but with an unearthly whiteness I cannot describe. And they are enveloped in a light so bright that everything else seems dark. They exist in their own time. Celestial time is like a ray of light, possessed of duration but not sequence, is everywhere like light, so bright, I cannot describe it, I cannot describe what it was like —

(The names fade. The voices fade. Darkness.)

Part II

(Night. DANIELLE, ALLISON, MICHAEL are in a parking lot in town. Street light and places where the lights don't go. Shadow. Beyond the parking lot, the interstate. The cars go by. They sound like an ocean. DANIELLE's drinking Jack.)

MICHAEL. ...And then after it was all over with, afterwards, we headed out into the desert, Alpine, Julien, Yuma, down the mountain, sunset, desert far as the eye can see, east heading east, night, and I could barely keep my eyes from closing, driving all that darkness for so long, can't see but for the double line, we coulda been in deepest space, a dream of space playing along the backs of my eyes—half asleep, it all begins to look the same, shades of purple bleeding into black—but then, then, we saw it up ahead, tiny lights raining down from the sky, bright and fast, so bright, and then it's gone. It looked just like fireworks, like some kinda show, Vegas Strip, snowflakes and flowers sparkling in the sky, each one bigger brighter than the next, everybody in that car that night going ooh aah, like they'd just seen something, something beautiful —

ALLISON. Lights?

MICHAEL. Can you see it?

ALLISON. Sky full of lights —

MICHAEL. A whole big sky —

ALLISON. Falling –

MICHAEL. Raining just raining –

ALLISON. Bright and fast –

MICHAEL. Ask me how fast –

ALLISON. How fast –?

MICHAEL. Fast, so fast, cause when they fall, they fall so fast you can hardly keep up, and then, you know, then they're gone, and all that's left is sky.

DANIELLE. Where was this again?

MICHAEL. California. Heading east.

DANIELLE. Arizona?

MICHAEL. Nevada.

DANIELLE. Las Vegas.

MICHAEL. There you go. You like Las Vegas?

DANIELLE. Titties on a cowgirl, tumbling dice. Girls, girls, girls.

MICHAEL. Oh man.

DANIELLE. It's not for me.

ALLISON. You been there? To Vegas, I mean?

MICHAEL. Once or twice.

ALLISON. Win or lose?

MICHAEL. I had fun.

ALLISON. What does that mean?

DANIELLE. It means he lost.

MICHAEL. But I had a time doing it.

DANIELLE. It means he lost, but he got laid.

MICHAEL. Now how does a girl get to be so damn jaded?

DANIELLE. Ravages of time, baby.

MICHAEL. Baby, you look alright by me.

DANIELLE. Baby, I look like hell, and you know it, too.

MICHAEL. Let me see.

(Time stops. The traffic sound. It sounds like the ocean. He touches the side of her face, her jaw, soft skin over bone.)

DANIELLE. Don't.

MICHAEL. I'll tell you what, hell ain't half bad.

DANIELLE. It is what it is. Get the fuck away from me.

(Silence.)

DANIELLE. So what were you doing in Las Vegas anyway?

MICHAEL. Taking my chances.

DANIELLE. Uh huh, and how much did you lose?

MICHAEL. Oh, girl, it ain't about that.

DANIELLE. Is that so?

MICHAEL. Win, lose. You spin that wheel, you take what comes.

DANIELLE. What are you? Some kinda high roller?

MICHAEL. Do I look like some kinda high roller?

DANIELLE. I don't know.

(Silence.)

DANIELLE. I don't know what you look like.

ALLISON. I think you look like someone I know.

DANIELLE. Everybody looks like somebody. What's with the shirt?

MICHAEL. You like that?

DANIELLE. I don't know if "like" would be the word.

MICHAEL. It caught your eye. Something caught your eye.

DANIELLE. That may be.

MICHAEL. Something caught my eye, too.

DANIELLE. Oh yeah?

MICHAEL. Yeah, that's right. You smiling?

DANIELLE. I ain't smiling.

MICHAEL. Yeah, you are.

DANIELLE. Yeah, well, maybe, maybe a little. Shit.

ALLISON. What did you say your name was?

MICHAEL. Michael, sweetheart.

ALLISON. Michael. Where you from, Michael?

MICHAEL. From way faraway.

ALLISON. Is that right? How far?

MICHAEL. Oh, you know, far.

ALLISON. Passing through?

MICHAEL. I travel some, here and there. How old are you, girl?

ALLISON. Twenty-eight. Twenty-five. Twenty-one.

MICHAEL. Twenty-eight, twenty-five, twenty-one—

DANIELLE. Girl—

ALLISON. I'm just playing. Allison, I'm Allison. And that's Danielle.

MICHAEL. I already know Danielle.

DANIELLE. We just met.

MICHAEL. Did we just meet? Feels like a lifetime.

ALLISON. Did you hear that?

DANIELLE. Honey, we just met. Don't you press your luck. What you looking at?

MICHAEL. You.

DANIELLE. Oh, uh huh.

MICHAEL. There's that smile.

DANIELLE. Yeah, well.

MICHAEL. It's nice.

ALLISON. Danielle's a dancer. I mean, a real one, and she sings, we used to sing all the time, Danielle and me, we had this friend, but she took off, we do karaoke Thursday nights. Danielle can sing –

DANIELLE. No, I can't –

ALLISON. She and Celie –

DANIELLE. Allison –

ALLISON. We used to all of us, we used to sing together, we used to be in choir, Celie had a voice, too, she's the one took off, she could sing up way high, and she could hear it, when something was off, she'd stop us, and she'd be like, hold up hold up, and we'd have to start all over again, Celie and me, we'd make the harmony, you know, but Danielle, she'd sing like the main part – isn't that so, Danielle – she'd sing like the part everybody hears in their head, and we'd sing like Joni Mitchell, Judy Collins, you know, old school, why do you sing all that old school shit, is what Tommy used to say – He used to say, that stuff's so old, dead and gone, and you ain't living back then anyway, you're living now, living in the here and now, why'd you want to be stuck back there, when you got all your life ahead of you, your whole life –

DANIELLE. That's enough. Damn, girl, you talk too much. Wind you up like a goddamn wind-up doll, damn. Ain't like he even knows any of these people anyway. Ain't nothing to him, why should they be, just names is all.

(Silence.)

ALLISON. I'm sorry.

DANIELLE. What you sorry for? Ain't no cause to be sorry.

(Silence.)

ALLISON. I read somewhere, you know, when we see stars up in the sky, what we're really seeing is a memory. It's like a photograph, memory of light. Wish I had been there, in the car with you that night,

wish I had seen the shooting stars. What happened? What happened to all those people you was with?

(Time stops. The traffic sound. It sounds like the ocean. Light on BILLY.)

BILLY. Fucked in the head is what I was, and then I see the lights, and I think, what happens, what happens, if I just go, you know, mountain road yea wide, winding up and up, and I'm thinking, does this guy, is he going to follow me, is he going to have the belly to follow me far and fast as I'm going to go, cause I'm going to fly, just go right off the edge, fall free fall, no end to the falling, and I say, fuck it, and I slow down, pull over, and after, after I hear his footsteps on the earth, and then he's right there shining his light, can't see, can't see his face, can't see nothing, and he says, quiet and clear, what were you thinking, son, he called me son. And I said, I wasn't thinking, sir. I don't think, see, I'm wired is the thing, I got a fire inside, you want to see, you want to get a look inside of me, make a hole in my head, see what I'm talking about, cause I'll tell you what, I'm burning up, boy, I'm on fire, inside my head, behind my eyes, the back of my eyes, and I can hardly see through the flames.

(Light on DANIELLE. She sings a piece of an old song in a simple, unadorned voice. A soft voice.)

DANIELLE.

“What'll I do, when you, are far a way, and I am blue, what'll I do?
What'll I do with just a photograph to tell my troubles to?
What'll I do with only dreams of you that won't come true, what'll I do?”

MICHAEL. That's a sad song.

DANIELLE. It's sad.

MICHAEL. How long have you been sad, girl?

DANIELLE. Forever and a day.

MICHAEL. Don't be, don't be sad.

(MICHAEL touches DANIELLE's face. Time stops. Traffic sound. The sound of an ocean. Enter BILLY. And the world goes back to how it was.)

ALLISON. Billy. Baby –

BILLY. You just get off work?

ALLISON. Uh huh, sweetheart, look at you, look at you –

BILLY. What you up to?

ALLISON. Nothing much. I made good tips tonight –

BILLY. Oh yeah?

ALLISON. Everybody's feeling flush, whole place packed from nine on, packed, everybody's out and about, and JB, he had his birthday – can you believe that shit – people I ain't even seen since I don't even know when, JB was the same as ever.

BILLY. He's a fuck.

ALLISON. Yeah he is.

BILLY. Acts like he's better than everybody. Walk in the room, acts like he don't even see you.

DANIELLE. What do you care?

BILLY. I don't.

ALLISON. Danielle came around the end of my shift with her friend here.

BILLY. What?

DANIELLE. Nothing.

BILLY. What?

DANIELLE. I said nothing.

BILLY. (*Grabbing the whisky:*) What you got there?

DANIELLE. Fuck you.

BILLY. Ain't anybody ever tell you share and share alike. (*To MICHAEL:*) Who the hell are you?

ALLISON. Michael, this is Michael. Danielle's friend.

BILLY. Oh yeah?

DANIELLE. He says he knows you.

BILLY. Is that right?

DANIELLE. Says you go way back.

BILLY. Is that what he says? We go back, huh? How far back do we go?

MICHAEL. We go back.

BILLY. How far would that be?

MICHAEL. Far.

(Silence.)

BILLY. I don't know you, boy. I never seen you before in my life.

(Silence.)

ALLISON. He kinda looks like Tommy.

MICHAEL. Who?

DANIELLE. Nobody.

ALLISON. In the eyes, something in the eyes.

BILLY. Maybe you got me mixed up with somebody else. Cause, see, I don't know nobody named Michael. Your friend, he got me all mixed up with some other guy, Danielle. Your friend's a little mixed up, ain't you, boy? You thought you knew me, but you don't. You just fucked up is all.

MICHAEL. I maybe was mistaken.

BILLY. I would say you were.

(Silence.)

BILLY. So how's it going with you, Danielle?

DANIELLE. It's going.

BILLY. Uh huh.

ALLISON. Billy, baby. I'm tired, baby, it's late.

BILLY. Long night, huh?

ALLISON. Yeah.

BILLY. Maybe you should get on home. Get some sleep.

ALLISON. What about you, baby? Why don't you come on home with me?

BILLY. I'll be there in a little while. You go on. Me and Danielle here, we haven't seen each other in what—? How long has it been, Danielle?

DANIELLE. I don't know. I ain't keeping track.

BILLY. You and JB, seems you ain't got much time for your old friends.

DANIELLE. I got bills to pay, I got a job, you know.

BILLY. Listen to all that high and mighty—

DANIELLE. Oh yeah, that's me—

BILLY. Like I got something that's catching, can't even be nice. Like I'm less than you—

DANIELLE. You can think whatever you want—

BILLY. You and JB, cut from the same goddamn cloth—

DANIELLE. I ain't nothing like JB. You get that straight in your head.

ALLISON. Billy, baby—

BILLY. It ain't nothing. I'm just talking. So what you been up to, Danielle?

DANIELLE. Like I said, I got a job.

BILLY. Oh yeah, that's right.

DANIELLE. I got a job. I work. I ain't got no girlfriend to sponge off of.

ALLISON. Danielle.

BILLY. Fuck you.

DANIELLE. You got a filthy mouth, Billy, always have.

ALLISON. Billy—

BILLY. Baby, it ain't nothing. You go on home. I'll be there in a while.

(Silence. ALLISON exits. Silence.)

BILLY. Your friend here, he's a quiet one, ain't he?

MICHAEL. Ain't got nothing to say.

BILLY. Is that right? Just listening, huh?

MICHAEL. That's right.

(Silence.)

BILLY. What you looking at?

DANIELLE. Nothing.

(Silence.)

BILLY. Nice shirt. I like that. So who is this, guy, Danielle? New boyfriend?

DANIELLE. That's it. Let's go.

BILLY. Go? Girl, what you talking about? Party's just begun.

DANIELLE. Get out of my way.

BILLY. Don't tell me what to do, girl.

DANIELLE. Honey, I ain't Allison. Now get the fuck out of my way.

BILLY. Oh, it's like that, huh?

DANIELLE. Don't push me, boy.

BILLY. Oh, and it's like you going to do something, is that it?

MICHAEL. Easy now. It's alright. He don't mean no harm.

BILLY. That's right. You got that right. Listen to your friend, Danielle. I just want to have a drink. What's wrong with that? *(Silence.)* What?

MICHAEL. It's alright. It's alright.

(Silence.)

BILLY. You know what your problem is, Danielle? You ain't friendly, ain't never been.

DANIELLE. Friendly?

BILLY. Everybody always said. Joline, Kendra, Seth—

DANIELLE. Joline's dead, Kendra might as well be, and Seth's a goddamn drunk.

BILLY. Sean, too. He always said, Danielle, that girl, she's cold. Pretty enough, if you like that type, but cold through and through.

DANIELLE. I don't care what that fool has to say. All he knows how to do is kill.

BILLY. Likes to hunt is all. Always thought Tommy and Sean, birds of a feather, you know what I'm saying.

DANIELLE. Tommy wasn't nothing like Sean.

BILLY. Kindred souls. These are our friends she's talking about.

DANIELLE. Celie was my friend. Allison's my friend.

BILLY. Like I said, these are our friends she's talking about.

DANIELLE. Your friends maybe.

BILLY. Mine and Tommy's.

DANIELLE. Don't you talk to me about Tommy.

BILLY. Oh? And why's that?

DANIELLE. Because you don't know.

BILLY. Is that right?

DANIELLE. You don't know what Tommy thought. You don't know the half of it.

BILLY. Girl, me and Tommy, he was my best friend.

DANIELLE. Friend? Honey, that weren't friendship. That'd be pity. Tommy felt sorry for you. You was somebody Tommy used to know. He felt sorry for you.

BILLY. What do you know?

DANIELLE. Only what he told me.

BILLY. What he told you, what he told you. Listen to us. Here's your new friend standing right here, and he don't even know any of these people. I bet he doesn't even know who Tommy was. Did Danielle, did she ever tell you about Tommy?

DANIELLE. Don't—

BILLY. It's a sad, sad song, but what can I say? Life's full of sadness, ain't it? Tommy, he and Danielle, they used to be a thing, see, they were going to get married, move on, you know, head down to Fayetteville, Danielle's got people down around those parts—

DANIELLE. Fuck you—

BILLY. I ain't finished yet. Danielle was going to go back to school, see, become a nurse—ain't that right, Danielle—shakes her ass for a living, but now she's going to go be a goddamn nurse, and Tommy, she had Tommy all set to work at the goddamn Nissan plant, making cars for slanteyes, good money, it's all about plans—

DANIELLE. You go to hell.

BILLY. Always full of plans, ain't you, Danielle. You been jumped up since you was a girl. Tommy was the only one'd ever deal with you, but then Tommy goes and gets fucked up one night, cause Tommy, I'll tell you what about Tommy, God love him, but he ain't none too bright, never thought one day to the next. He'd do anything, you get him fucked up enough, stupid fuck, falls off the goddamn mountain up by Diamond Gap, and that ain't in no plan, is it, Danielle? Ain't that how it went, Danielle?

DANIELLE. What do you know about anything?

BILLY. You were there, girl.

DANIELLE. So were you.

BILLY. That's true. I was. I liked Tommy. He was my friend. You all were my friends. Even you, Danielle, even you. And I guess maybe that means something to me, may not mean shit to you, but it means something to me. What do you want with my friends, boy? What kinda bullshit story are you feeding my friends?

(BILLY pulls out a gun and fires. The light explodes so bright. The edges of the photograph get so white. Everything bleaches away over

time. Time stops. The traffic sound. It sounds like the ocean. Light on DANIELLE, MICHAEL, and BILLY. The edge of a mountain. A moment in time that came before. BILLY's in the middle of a story.)

BILLY. ...And then he was like, he said he knew me, and I was like: Man, I ain't never even seen you before in my life. Guy's staying at the goddamn Motel 6, guy's got fucking Florida plates, and he was like: Man, I'm your cousin. And I was like: No you ain't my goddamn cousin. You staying at the Motel 6, fool. And you don't even look like me. What do you take me for, fool? Cause this fool, see, he must think everybody lives in these mountains, we all goddamn inbreds, kissing cousins—I fucking hate that kind of bullshit—Don't you be laughing at me, Tommy, this is a serious fucking story I'm telling you—So then I'm like—if you don't shut up and give me your goddamn wallet right now, I'm going to put a bullet right through that fat Florida ass of yours, I swear I will—

MICHAEL. Shit—

BILLY. *(Pulling out a gun:)* Cause I ain't talking to talk—

MICHAEL. Shit—Look at that—

BILLY. Check it out—I'm goddamn Dirty Harry—

MICHAEL. Oh man—

BILLY. Make my day, right, make my day—What do you think, Tommy, huh? What do you think?

MICHAEL. I think if I was that guy, I'd be giving you my wallet, I'd be giving you my car, I'd be giving you whatever the hell you wanted.

BILLY. That's right, you would. *(Pulling out a wad of cash:)* Hold up, hold up, here, check this out.

MICHAEL. Well, look at that.

BILLY. See that, Danielle. That's called quick cash.

MICHAEL. Girl? What are you looking at?

DANIELLE. Tommy?

BILLY. You want some money, Tommy? Yeah? Well, you going to have to go get it.

(BILLY throws the money over the edge. The bills fly out into the night sky. They flutter in the air. Paper and wind. Stars in the sky. MICHAEL goes to the edge.)

MICHAEL. Oh man.

DANIELLE. Tommy – no, wait –

MICHAEL. It's all gone.

BILLY. Easy come. Easy go.

DANIELLE. Tommy, baby –

MICHAEL. It's alright. I'm alright. *(Silence.)* Look at that. Look at that sky. Girl, I can fly. I can, watch me. I can fly straight up and over those hills, over the valleys, and the trees. The trees don't even look like trees from where I'm looking. Step off the edge, and just, just hang there, high above the forest, high above the rock, safe in the soft arms of the sky, moon on my back, moonlight shining right through my skin, moonlight through the whites of my eyes.

BILLY. Poetry, Tommy, you're a goddamn poet.

MICHAEL. Hell yeah I am.

BILLY. Well, what do you know.

MICHAEL. Billy, man, there's a lot you don't know, a whole goddamn universe you don't know.

BILLY. Is that right? What do I not know, Tommy? What kinda shit do I not know? Oh, that's right, I forgot. You got it all figured out. You and Danielle, you got plans, you got all these plans.

DANIELLE. It's nothing, he didn't mean nothing. Look at me. Baby, please look at me.

(MICHAEL draws near. MICHAEL and DANIELLE are so close. Silence. They touch. They hold each other.)

BILLY. Oh now, I don't need to be seeing that.

DANIELLE. Tommy –?

MICHAEL. What is it, baby? It's me, girl. What's wrong with you?

DANIELLE. Tommy, listen to me. I need for you to listen to me. I need for you to tell me—

What did I say? You were right here. I remember that. And I just stood by watching, and I keep trying to remember, and I can't, I can't remember what I said, what I coulda said—

MICHAEL. Ssh. It's alright.

BILLY. Tommy? Tommy, what the fuck? I'm talking to you.

DANIELLE. Baby—

BILLY. Hey. I said, I'm talking to you. What are you doing, boy? What are you trying to be?—Careful. You get too close to the edge, you might hurt yourself.

DANIELLE. Tommy, baby, we gotta get outta here. We gotta go.

MICHAEL. I know it, Danni, Fayetteville.

BILLY. Fayetteville. Fuck that.

DANIELLE. No, baby, I mean now, there ain't no time, there ain't no time for that.

BILLY. Time, girl, there is all the time in the world.

MICHAEL. Eternity.

BILLY. That's right.

DANIELLE. Baby—

BILLY. It goes and it goes and it keeps going. It's a fact. Ask him. Ain't I right, boy?

MICHAEL. Hell yeah you are. Look at that sky.

BILLY. What are you? High? What are you talking about, sky, the sky, the stars in the sky? Careful—

DANIELLE. Tommy, don't—

MICHAEL. It's alright. I'm right here. Look at how far back it goes, look at those stars, millions of miles away, so far you can barely see.

(Time stops. The traffic sound. It sounds like an ocean.)

MICHAEL. This girl I knew once told me, the stars in the sky, they're like a memory, a memory of light.

BILLY. Tommy didn't say nothing like that. That's not how it went.

MICHAEL. How did it go?

BILLY. Ain't nothing to you how it went. Fuck you.

MICHAEL. You remember how it was that night?

BILLY. What is this? What the fuck is this?

DANIELLE. I try to remember, I try to go back —

BILLY. Tommy was my friend. She knows that.

DANIELLE. In my mind, I go over it, every second of it —

BILLY. He was just some guy, you know, some guy she met at a bar.

DANIELLE. Looked just like Tommy. I saw him from across the room, and it was like I was seeing him —

BILLY. What does he know —? What the fuck does he know —?

DANIELLE. And I try, but I can't, I can't put it all together. All the pieces, I can't make them go, but I know them, I know them all by heart, like the words to a song —

BILLY. What I said, what I did, what I did or didn't do. Like he knows me, acting like he knows what I think —

DANIELLE. His eyes, I remember his eyes —

BILLY. Talking shit, like he knows me —

DANIELLE. And how he looked at me. Baby —

BILLY. Like he knew, the way he looked at me —

DANIELLE. The way your eyes, when I looked into your eyes.

BILLY. Like he could see straight inside of me.

DANIELLE. What did I say?

BILLY. What do I remember? Fuck you. Like you know any of us, like you were there that night. You weren't there. You don't know. He was so fucked up, Tommy was. Couldn't walk, couldn't hardly see, talking about the stars and the sky, talking about the moonlight. He said he could fly. And I said, oh yeah? Let's see. I dare you, boy. I dare you to. And he said, watch me, and he stepped out over the edge and he fell, he fell so far and so fast, he didn't even make a sound. What was he thinking? What the fuck was he thinking?

(Silence. The sound of the wind. The vastness of the night sky.)

BILLY. I didn't mean nothing. I didn't mean him no harm.

DANIELLE. It was so quick, it happened so quick, you were right here, you were so close, so close I could touch you, and then you were gone, and everything stopped, and nothing was the same, and I can't remember, I can't remember if I said what I wanted to say. I go back in my mind and I try to think. I try to remember, but I can't.

MICHAEL. Oh, girl, now why'd you want to be stuck back there, when you got all your life ahead of you, why'd you want to do that?

DANIELLE. Tommy –

MICHAEL. Ssh –

DANIELLE. Because we had no time, and I don't understand that. Because we were going to have us a life, all that future laid out for us like sky, and now I can't even remember some tiny piece of the past. It's like you're going away from me, it's like you're fading away.

MICHAEL. Ssh –

DANIELLE. What did I say? Did I remember? Did I tell you what was in my heart? Did I tell you all the secrets of my heart? Tell me, quick, tell me so I don't forget. I don't want to forget.

(MICHAEL touches the side of her face. A breathing. He comes close. He whispers in her ear. A language like no other. A moment suspended in time, outside of time. If word were light.)

BILLY. Tommy –?

DANIELLE. Baby –

BILLY. I used to know you.

DANIELLE. Tommy –

BILLY. I used to know who you were. Now I don't know anything anymore –

(The gleam of the gun. BILLY shoots. The sound is so loud. The light is so bright. MICHAEL falls back into the darkness, into the night sky. The sound of a car speeding away. The sound of a highway. The cars go by. They sound like an ocean. The sound of a car radio switching stations. Light on ALLISON in a car. The driver is unseen. Light on her face.)

ALLISON. They caught Billy heading back over Mount Airy, driving so fast they thought, this boy must be crazy, this boy wants to end it here and now, cause he's going to die the way he's going, ain't no way he's going to live to tell the tale. But he did. And he told them all everything, too, just how it happened. He was no one we knew. Just some guy we met that night. It made no sense. I wonder sometimes what happens in the seconds before a thing comes to pass, what happens between people, the look in their eyes, and how time stops, like you can see everything frozen and still, laid out before you like photos of people you loved once, a long time ago. I wonder what happens in a human heart, all the things I didn't know, won't ever know. Billy never told me why. I asked before he went away, but he never said. And I never saw him after. Did I tell you that I loved him? Because I did, yeah I did. Broke my heart what happened, but it's all over now. That's just how it goes. Oh—wow—look. Look at that. It's so beautiful. Quick, quick, make a wish.

(ALLISON closes her eyes. An explosion. The light explodes so bright. The edges of the photograph get so white. Everything bleaches away. Time stops. The traffic sound. It sounds like the ocean. ALLISON disappears. Darkness. Light on DANIELLE. She is alone.)

DANIELLE.

“What'll I do, when you, are far a way, and I am blue, what'll I do?
What'll I do with just a photograph to tell my troubles to?
What'll I do with only dreams of you that won't come true, what'll I do?”

(Darkness. End of Part II.)

Between

(Darkness. Names on the cave wall appear out of the darkness. The names are shot through with light. Voices in the darkness. Pieces of conversation, laughter. The darkness is electric. SETH's voice is heard beneath everything, a continuous loop, a river of words.)

SETH. Joline died in her sleep before the year was out. Her heart just stopped. Nobody knew why. Tommy fell off the edge of the cliff down by Diamond Gap, broke his back in the fall. Billy killed a man the summer of '91, got sent east to Odom, twenty-five to life. Allison died in a car crash out by Maryville, it's been five years they put her in the ground. Sean died that same year. Hunting accident up by Mount Airy. Buried him before the first snow fall. Danielle's still living. Shoots speed in a trailer out by Boone. Tried to talk to her once. She looked right through me like I was some kinda ghost.

(A mother and daughter in the vast night. Two VOICES. A tiny window of light.)

VOICE 1. Momma, do you wonder, do you ever wonder if angels have wings, like in all the pictures, so they can fly?

VOICE 2. I don't know, I guess they do.

VOICE 1. How high do you think they fly? Do they fly to heaven?

VOICE 2. All the way to heaven and back. Heaven and back, feather and bone.

VOICE 1. Do you think it hurts?

VOICE 2. Does what hurt, baby?

VOICE 1. When the wings push through the skin? Do they bleed? Do angels bleed?

VOICE 2. I don't know, baby, I don't know.

(The names fade. The voices fade. Darkness.)

Part III

(Darkness. The sound of rain. This comes later, much later. Light up on DANIELLE and JB. The end of the road. DANIELLE's place. Night. JB is looking out the window into the darkness. DANIELLE is behind him, at a distance, watching.)

JB. Is that how it went?

DANIELLE. You know, to tell the truth, I forget.

JB. How can that be?

DANIELLE. My memory, you know, it's all messed up. Nothing sticks no more. It all flies away.

JB. Birds in a field –

DANIELLE. You know what I'm saying –

JB. You look at that field –

DANIELLE. Uh huh –

JB. And you don't see nothing but dead grass. As far as you can see, dry and still, so still so quiet, and then bang, the birds come up all at once, the sound of wings, and they fill the sky –

DANIELLE. And you're thinking to yourself, how is it, how is it there could there be so many birds hiding there, where you can't see, all the things that you can't see. How could that be?

JB. I don't know, Danielle. You tell me.

(Silence. JB turns around. DANIELLE smiles, a long slow smile that turns into something like a laugh.)

JB. Where's that coming from?

DANIELLE. You crack me up.

JB. Is that right?

DANIELLE. Uh huh.

JB. Why's that?

DANIELLE. Oh hell, I don't know. No reason. Just because. *(Silence.)*
What?

JB. Nothing.

DANIELLE. Now don't you lie, JB, cause I can see right through. I got old. Baby, you did, too.

JB. Yeah, I did.

DANIELLE. I'm looking just like my momma, and my momma was ugly.

JB. Yeah, she was.

DANIELLE. You remember.

JB. Bad teeth.

DANIELLE. Bad everything. That woman was falling apart at the seams, and I am, too. What goes around, you know what I'm saying. Look at you, JB, you got a little belly going on there.

JB. Yeah, I do. I used to be skinny, remember?

DANIELLE. Mm hm, skinny and mean, meanest bastard I knew. There weren't one nice thing I coulda said about you, not a one.

JB. Is that right? What about now?

(Silence. Rain.)

DANIELLE. We all used to be something, I guess, something else. It don't pay to hold on too tight, I find. What you come to say to me, JB? You got something to say?

(Banging on the door. DANIELLE makes no move to answer. The rain beats down. The sound grows louder, and then stops.)

JB. Rain.

DANIELLE. Mmhm.

JB. Listen to that.

DANIELLE. It's coming down.

JB. Hasn't rained like that in ages. Last time, I recall, was the day Sean passed. Hard rain, sheets and sheets, falling into the day into the night, falling like there'd be never an end to the falling. Ain't you going to offer me something to drink?

DANIELLE. What you want, JB?

JB. Something strong.

DANIELLE. I got some black tea.

JB. I was thinking something stronger.

DANIELLE. I don't drink no more, honey. I thought you knew. It's practically a miracle, ain't it? Next time you're out this way, I'm going to be walking on water, you watch.

JB. Is that so?

DANIELLE. Yeah, it is.

(Silence. JB tries to read her eyes. He smiles.)

JB. Girl—

DANIELLE. Yeah, well. It's just one of those things. Like to see things clearly this time around, I guess.

(JB arches back. Sharp pain. A burning across the expanse of his back.)

DANIELLE. What's wrong, baby?

JB. I ache. My back aches, my shoulder, too.

(The pain diminishes.)

JB. You know, I was just—

DANIELLE. Uh huh—

JB. I was just passing through—

DANIELLE. A social call.

JB. That's right. I'm saying, what I'm saying is, I can't stay, I can't stay long.

DANIELLE. Who said anything about staying? Sit down, baby. It ain't like it's going to kill you.

(JB sits. DANIELLE stands behind him. She lays hands on him. Silence. Rain.)

DANIELLE. You like that?

JB. That feels nice.

(Silence.)

DANIELLE. I was going to be a nurse once. Can you believe it? A goddamn nurse.

JB. Help the needy.

DANIELLE. Something. That was a long time ago. (Silence.) You got something on your mind, JB?

JB. Nothing much.

DANIELLE. You got, what, two girls?

JB. Mm.

DANIELLE. I bet they're big by now.

JB. Almost grown.

DANIELLE. I bet they're pretty.

JB. Pretty and smart, never a moment's grief. Everything their Daddy ain't. When's the last time you saw my girls, Danielle?

DANIELLE. I don't know. The younger one, she was baby, I guess.

JB. They're real quiet, you know what I'm saying, old souls. Take after my wife, I think.

DANIELLE. Only met your wife that one time.

JB. Is that right?

DANIELLE. It's been years.

(Silence. Rain.)

JB. You ever think about things, Danielle?

DANIELLE. What kind of things, baby?

JB. You ever think about all the people we used to know?

DANIELLE. I knew a lot of people, baby. You talking about anyone in particular?

JB. You ever think about Joline?

DANIELLE. Joline?

JB. You ever think about her?

DANIELLE. Honey, Joline's been dead for years.

JB. I know.

DANIELLE. Joline. Jesus. I liked her. First time I ever got drunk was with Joline. Pepsi and Jack. I was so sick. I got sick on my shoes, new shoes, too. I was so pissed off. Joline was laughing so hard, I thought she was going to bust a gut.

JB. Oh man—

DANIELLE. That girl could drink —

JB. I know it. Girl was a live wire, Joline was, she was. Got mad at me once, we was fighting, girl threw a toaster right at my face. Got me good, too. Split my lip.

DANIELLE. Was she drunk?

JB. Just mad is all.

DANIELLE. What'd you do?

JB. Oh, I don't know, something.

DANIELLE. Girl had a temper.

JB. Yeah, she did.

DANIELLE. Kept you in line.

JB. Yeah, she did.

DANIELLE. I liked Joline.

(Silence. Rain.)

JB. Yeah. I did, too. She died so young. I think about that sometimes. Out of the blue. Who woulda known? My daughter's age, you know, Joline, she was my daughter's age when she died. She never got old is

the thing, she just stopped where she was, never knowing what was or what woulda been, she never knew, how could she.

(Silence. JB reaches for DANIELLE's hand, finds it, holds it. She lets him. He holds too long, holds too tight. Slowly he pulls up her sleeve, touches her arm, the scars on her arm. She lets him.)

DANIELLE. History, baby, ancient history.

JB. How long has it been, Danielle?

DANIELLE. Going on eternity.

JB. Looks like it hurts still.

DANIELLE. Dead skin is all. I don't feel a thing.

JB. I remember when you lived out in that trailer out by Boone, after Billy and Allison, after all of that. I thought you was next. Like the walking dead, you was, out there. You surprise me, Danielle.

DANIELLE. *(Pulling away:)* I ain't got time to think about what was.

JB. Sometimes it's like I got all the time in the world. *(Silence.)* You talk to Billy ever? Well, why would you, I guess. What am I thinking? *(Silence.)* Seth came by, I hear, before he disappeared. What did he want?

DANIELLE. I don't recall.

JB. Or maybe you don't want to say.

DANIELLE. Honey, I was in a haze for years, you get what I'm saying? He coulda told me I won the goddamn lotto, and I wouldn't have known the difference. I don't remember a word he said.

JB. Maybe he told you a story, some wild story about something or other.

DANIELLE. Could be.

JB. He was full of wild stories, Seth was, shooting off his mouth about this one and that.

DANIELLE. Who can say?

JB. I feel bad for Seth. Falling down drunk half the time, killing himself slow, finishing the job. He was a weak man, Seth was. I pity him.

DANIELLE. I wouldn't know about that. We was never close.

JB. Not like you and Celie. You and Celie, Allison, too, you girls was close.

DANIELLE. You know what it is, baby, when you're like fifteen, sixteen. It's like, friends for life, friends forever, no matter what. But it ain't like that, it never is like that. People fall away, JB. Ain't like I'm telling you something you don't already know.

(Silence. Rain.)

JB. You ever think about that night? The one when Celie, when she disappeared.

DANIELLE. No. I don't. I truly don't.

JB. You believe in God, Danielle, you know, the afterlife and such?

DANIELLE. Don't tell me you came out all this way to talk to me about God, JB.

JB. Is that so strange?

DANIELLE. It ain't what I expect, coming from you.

JB. People change, Danielle.

(Silence. Rain.)

JB. Smoke?

DANIELLE. Not for me, no.

(JB lights up. Smokes. Silence.)

JB. I got my own girls now. I guess it gets me thinking. I think about Celie sometimes, now and again. Everybody's gone now. Except you and me, Danielle. You and me, girl. Been back that way ever?

DANIELLE. No.

JB. Some folks up around the trail head, they say they hear a girl singing.

DANIELLE. Folks'll say all kinds of things.

JB. Ain't that the truth. (*Silence.*) You know, I went back when Seth disappeared. Place was just like it was that night, not a single stone out of place, that smell, you know, of mud, and something else, something sweet. I think his conscience got the better of him in the end. I think that's why he went back to the cave.

DANIELLE. It's a hard thing to know what's in a man's heart, to tell the lies from the truth. Some folks lie so well, you'd never even know it. Saw things, said he saw things.

JB. Seth?

DANIELLE. That's who we're talking about, ain't it?

(In the distance, a sound. The rain beats down.)

JB. Thunder.

DANIELLE. Baby, that's a shotgun blast. Surprises me you don't hear the difference.

JB. Little early for hunting season, ain't it?

DANIELLE. Some of the boys go out before it's time. You know that as well as I do. I bet you did yourself when you was young.

JB. I never did. Sean used to.

DANIELLE. I know.

JB. Course you do. You was there. Why would I tell you what you already know?

DANIELLE. Liked the quiet of the forest. Sean said he could hear the deer, if he was still enough, hear their footfall on the leaves. Even before he saw one, felt the creature like a breathing.

JB. I saw his body.

DANIELLE. Did you?

JB. I was the one got the call. Went up there. Up on Mount Airy, middle of nowhere. Rain like this. Why would a man go out on a day like this? I remember thinking that. I remember how his body was. Shot once he was, straight through the heart.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

In order to protect our associated authors against copyright infringement, we cannot currently present full electronic scripts.

To purchase books with the full text, and to apply for performance rights, click ORDER or go back to:

www.playscripts.com