

Heroes of the Fourth Turning

By Will Arbery

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Characters

Emily, f, 25
Teresa, f, 29
Kevin, m, 28
Justin, m, 38
Gina, f, 64

Setting

August 19, 2017
Two days before the solar eclipse
A town of 7,000 in western Wyoming
The night of Gina's inauguration as president of Transfiguration College of Wyoming

*How did I become a virus?
Hopelessness—
I feel the hopelessness.
Anohni*

*And who among us is not neurotic, and has never complained that they are not understood? Why did you come here, to this place, if not in the hope of being understood, of being in some small way comprehended by your peers, and embraced by them in a fellowship of shared secrets? I don't know about you, but I just want to be held.
Mary Ruefle*

Fugue:

1: a musical composition for a number of voices, in which a subject is announced in one voice, imitated in succession by each of the other voices – soprano, alto, tenor, and bass – and interweaved contrapuntally until the climax.

2: a state or period of loss of awareness of one's identity, often coupled with flight from one's usual environment.

Justin's backyard in Lander, WY. There's a concrete patio and a lot of space.

It's morning. Justin's sitting, drinking coffee. He might be praying. Then he sees something. He reaches behind him and grabs his rifle. He points the rifle off-stage.

He stays still for a very long time. Then he fires. Loud!

He goes off. Long pause, and then he returns with a deer corpse. He places it on a tarp by his porch. He goes inside his house and gets a knife. He sits by the deer and looks at it.

He goes to gut it, but his hands start shaking. He tries again, his hands shake.

JUSTIN
Damn.

He breathes. He starts to gut it.

Now:

Justin's backyard, empty. There's the noise of a party inside – about 20 people. Most of them on their way out. We hear cars driving away staggered over the next few minutes.

Justin comes outside – dressed in nicer clothes. A tie.

He notices that he's stained his porch a bit, with blood. He gets on his hands and knees and tries to clean the blood.

Emily comes outside, walking with a cane. Justin stands up.

EMILY
J?

JUSTIN
You're still here. You okay?

EMILY
Yeah, just in a lot of pain. And people are stressing me out.

JUSTIN
Who's stressing you out?

EMILY
Just people. No sorry, everyone's lovely. Really, honestly—everyone's so *nice*. It's so stressful.

JUSTIN
I'll tell them to stop being so nice...

EMILY
No they're angels, *really*, I'm being a brat. It's cold out here why are you out here.

JUSTIN
Doesn't feel cold at all to me. Stomach? Head?

EMILY
Head, stomach. Heart beating fast. Panicky.

JUSTIN
Do you want me to take you home?

EMILY
I just saw myself in the mirror and I got so upset.

JUSTIN
Why?

EMILY
My belly. And my skin. I don't recognize myself.

JUSTIN
I think you look beautiful.

EMILY
You don't have to say that, that's not what I'm saying.

JUSTIN
Well.

Emily shakes her head, doubles over in pain. Justin goes to her.

Let me take you home.

EMILY
No, my mom's coming.

JUSTIN
I'll call her – I'll take you now.

EMIL

No, I need to try to be here. I need to try to be somewhere. I'm gonna get through this night. I'm gonna be

Ahh

Hm

Hm

Yep.

I'm gonna be present to this night. I'm not gonna turn away from it.

JUSTIN

I'm proud of you for even getting here.

EMILY

It'll probably make me bedridden for a month.

JUSTIN

Or maybe this is the first night of your healing.

EMILY

Stop it you'll make me cry. Okay it's cold I'm going inside.

JUSTIN

I got you.

Justin helps support her as they walk in.

EMILY

Doopy-doo.

JUSTIN

Doopy-doo. Yup.

EMILY

Simple as a doopy-doo.

JUSTIN

Just a simple hoopy-hoo.

EMILY

Yuppy-yoo.

He walks her inside. They run into Kevin, who lights up a cigarette.

KEVIN

Y'all okay?

EMILY
Yes

KEVIN
Sorry Emily I didn't mean to stress you out in there.

EMILY
You didn't

KEVIN
Okay
People are leaving
Everyone's so boring

EMILY
No they're wonderful
But I'm probably gonna leave

JUSTIN
Yeah I'm probably gonna need to sleep soon

KEVIN
Totally totally
I'm gonna smoke this then leave
The stars are better here than in town

JUSTIN
Okay

Justin and Emily go inside.

Far away, the sound of gunshots.

Kevin has a bottle of whiskey. He laughs about something to himself. We shouldn't be seeing this.

KEVIN
true:
i want

to
get into

a lot of pain.
this is:
i want a new

i want a new

no,

haha

something true:

this is something true:

i feel so watched.

hey

this is something true:

i can't

see

myself

Kevin seems to freeze. Teresa comes outside.

TERESA

Kevin.

KEVIN

Oh hey! What the heck, hey Teresa! Oh my gosh! You came!

TERESA

Are you leaving tomorrow?

KEVIN

Oh maybe, I was maybe gonna stick around for the eclipse.

TERESA

Apologize.

KEVIN

When'd you get here? I thought you weren't gonna, I was like I guess she's not gonna

TERESA
Apologize.

KEVIN
For what

TERESA
For ignoring me at the ceremony.

KEVIN
I'm so sorry, Teresa. But I wasn't ignoring you...

TERESA
You were. All you gave me was a weak smile.

KEVIN
We were sitting far away from each other and then afterwards you were talking to all the professors...

TERESA
I beckoned you from across the tent.

KEVIN
I was just surprised to see you

TERESA
I was surprised to see *you*. You said "not attending" on Facebook.

KEVIN
Yeah I just – yeah. I didn't know if I would come but then on Thursday I realized that the school is in the Path of Totality so I was like ugh okay I wanna be in the Path of Totality, and the inauguration is right before, damn it's a sign, so I just got in my Camry and drove through the night.

TERESA
And then you see your old friend and ignore her.

KEVIN
Well I haven't seen you in like
And like we don't talk anymore and like
When'd you get here?

TERESA
Just now.

KEVIN
What time is it

TERESA
Almost eleven.

KEVIN
I think Emily is leaving and Justin wants to go to bed...

TERESA
No he said to stay and have a drink.

KEVIN
Oh rad. Okay rad.
Where were you before

TERESA
I was trying to infiltrate the donor and board party.

KEVIN
Damn girl so Machiavellian

TERESA
Don't say that like it's a bad thing.

KEVIN
Sorry I'm so drunk

TERESA
No you're not.

KEVIN
No I had a million secret whiskeys, I'm an alcoholic probably but I'm sorry

TERESA
It's okay. I don't even care at all.

KEVIN
No listen Teresa I think there's a demon in me
I've been so so evil lately
I just say things to people, things just come out of my mouth
Like I'm just
AHHHH
AHHHHHHHHH
I NEED TO CHANGE
SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE IN ME
IT'S NOT OKAY
IT'S NOT OKAY

TERESA
Oh okay. I'm going back inside.

KEVIN

Teresa no, I'm so sorry, no! I'm the worst I'm the worst I'm the worst

TERESA

It's nice to see that you still feel a weird responsibility to perform your self-loathing for me.
Goodnight, Kevin.

KEVIN

... I wasn't... performing my...

TERESA

You were. And listen, I like it. Wow I feel such déjà vu, this is, you right here, coiled up with your dumb guilty face, it's one of my favorite shows.

KEVIN

Stop looking at me

TERESA

Okay goodnight. Don't go into a dark place.

KEVIN

I'm already in a dark place

TERESA

You are back among friends. That is a joy.

KEVIN

No it's a torture

And I wasn't *performing* my... you don't know me anymore, I've changed.

TERESA

You've *changed*?

KEVIN

Yeah I've changed.

TERESA

Okay. Let's do this. Let's catch up. Yeah?

KEVIN

Yeah!

TERESA

Tell me about your neighborhood.

KEVIN

Okay my neighb

Why

TERESA

Just tell me about your neighborhood.

KEVIN

Okay

But... I really wasn't, wasn't *performing*, my, Teresa

Just cuz you say I was doing that doesn't mean it's true that I was

TERESA

Just talk me like an adult about adult things. Now.

KEVIN

Okay, fine. Being an adult means...

Being an adult means like...

It's the same as being a baby but instead everything has *meaning* now.

Like all I want is pleasure, basically, but it has all these *implications* now.

All I do is come and cry.

TERESA

Stop it! Don't say gross things in a holy space.

KEVIN

This isn't a holy space it's just Justin's house

TERESA

The panopticon, Kevin, Catholicism is the panopticon. This is a holy space.

KEVIN

It's also a profane space

TERESA

I asked about your NEIGHBORHOOD

KEVIN

OKAY. It's nice, I mean... It's Oklahoma so all the houses are small and flat

Like just sitting there just waiting to be ripped apart by a tornado

So I live in one of those

TERESA

Job?

KEVIN

Catholic textbooks company. It's horrible. I write about saints all day and then I come home and masturb— whoop sorry.

TERESA

Stop.

KEVIN

Sorry God I'm sorry.

TERESA

Stop, it's me. Who do you live with?

KEVIN

With Jake Lopez my friend from home, you remember him? He visited a couple times, he went to Thomas Aquinas

TERESA

Sure yeah boring? Acne?

KEVIN

Yeah he works at the office with me. So we see each other all the time and barely know each other. And we go to Mass together three mornings a week ugh... and he's so good and so boring.

TERESA

Neighborhood

KEVIN

There's a playground

There's a field

Across the street

It's nice, but the grass is always dead

But sometimes we play tag football out there

With these big tall guys who live nearby

They're nice. They're like Protestant, bro-y... I don't know... yeah... houses, families

A lot of Mexican families. A lot of white families.

TERESA

Okay. Good job. Now ask me about mine.

KEVIN

What about yours?

TERESA

Glad you asked. It's in a part of Brooklyn called South Slope. It's right by a beautiful cemetery called Green-Wood Cemetery, it's a national historic landmark. I need to tell this to Dr. Presson because she's in love with George Washington, so I live where the Battle of Brooklyn was fought in the Revolutionary War. George lost that battle, but escaped with his men, and they lived to fight on. The real heroes were the Maryland 400 – 400 men who sacrificed their lives, charging the British forces over and over and over, so that George and the revolutionaries could escape. So I feel the forces of heroic war when I walk outside, which I love. And Fiancée Patrick lives two avenues over.

KEVIN

Patrick yeah.

TERESA

There's a bakery nearby, so my neighborhood always smells like fresh bread. I love it. There are lots of babies. I live with an actress, someone I did plays with in high school. I was always the lead but anyway. She eats a lot of yogurt and talks to her mom every night. She's so boring.

KEVIN

Cool. How's your soul?

TERESA

Ugh, Kevin... I don't want to talk about my soul.

KEVIN

Why? Is it in peril?

TERESA

Is it in *peril*. Yeah probably! I do cocaine. I do too much cocaine.

KEVIN

Whoa

TERESA

Okay

KEVIN

WHOA

TERESA

Okay okay

KEVIN

What's it like

TERESA

It's fucking great, just do it, it was made for you.

KEVIN

Whoa

Okay you know what

Okay I will

Do you have some here

TERESA

I'm a gossip.

And I'm embarrassingly ambitious.

And I haven't talked to my weird sad mother in months even though she's like a 45 minute train ride away...

KEVIN
Still in Connecticut?

TERESA
Yeah and when I see her I can barely look at her, I act like she's diseased because she is.

KEVIN
What's diseased about her?

TERESA
She's weak, she's...
Okay, no more soul stuff.

KEVIN
Come on

TERESA
I'm not, like, avoiding that conversation, about my soul, I just want to have a normal conversation like adults.

KEVIN
I think talking about our souls being in peril is a very adult conversation

TERESA
I just want to be boring for like 10 minutes.

KEVIN
Have you lost Christ

TERESA
No.

KEVIN
Are you so New York now

TERESA
Maybe.

KEVIN
Did you have sex again

TERESA
No, stop, no.

KEVIN
Did you become a liberal

TERESA

How dare – are you *serious* – I’m the single most— I’m more conservative than ever, Kevin. I’m the poster boy.

KEVIN

Right I mean that’s your *brand*, but...

TERESA

No. To the core.

KEVIN

Rad, that’s rad.

TERESA

Ugh never say “rad” to me again.

KEVIN

Okay got it. I’m not more conservative than ever. I want to be but I’m not. I’ve got this like—hm, like a fascination with the way they phrase things and the holes in their logic but also their LOGIC and the holes in their morality but also their MORALITY

TERESA

Who’s *they*

KEVIN

Like the, like

Liberals – it’s been, I’ve been – I’ve been diving in—

Really, I mean—if conservatives are able to appeal to the *home*, to family values—well liberals have really got the *community* thing down... it’s, I mean— “whatsoever you do to the least of my”— we’ve lost track of the larger family?— if that even exists. I’ve been reading *The New Yorker*. Sometimes. And like the very aptly named *Vice*. And I really don’t know how or when our beliefs got bought and repackaged by billionaires who are actively destroying the planet. Or how or when we got painted as a racist monolith marching with tiki torches. It’s very hard to feel confident. And sometimes I watch Michelle Obama speeches and cry...

TERESA

Hahaha

KEVIN

Hahaha

TERESA

You have *not* changed.

KEVIN

What, yes I have

TERESA

Kevin, shut up.

KEVIN

Why

TERESA

I don't want to talk about how confused you are. I do not want to engage with your simpering little fetishized liberal panic. Good Lord — *Vice*. Do you read *my* articles at all?

KEVIN

Of course! They're great, you're so good

TERESA

What's your favorite?

KEVIN

The one about, the way you — so sharp, it was about Transgender bathrooms

TERESA

Oh. Thanks. I don't know if I nailed that one.

KEVIN

No yeah that was really — I mean it made sense
I mean it was kind of...

TERESA

What—

What, you were gonna say something bad.

Didactic

Semantic

Jingoistic

KEVIN

No

TERESA

What

KEVIN

It was, there was — yeah I mean you
You got to the heart of why their presence
Their *noise* is such a conundrum for... for us.
You could have gone a little further, even.

TERESA

I thought we'd "lost track of the larger family..."

KEVIN

What we need to do is have a big conversation...!

What we need to do is have a big conversation...!

Like we used to do

With our feet in the pool

Having big conversations with our feet in the pool is one of my favorite things in this life

TERESA

Whenever we, ugh.

KEVIN

Tell me

TERESA

No.

KEVIN

Tell me

TERESA

Whenever we have a big conversation, it's really nice for a while, but it always ends with you saying you should become a priest, and then crying about how you'd be a bad priest, and then crying about how much you want a girlfriend.

KEVIN

Oh, haha, yeah, haha, I won't do any of that. Let's pretend we're not at Justin's, but rather at the pool. You want it, I see it in your eyes. You've been waiting for this, you haven't had a big conversation in so long

TERESA

My job is to have big conversations.

KEVIN

But that's your *job*! You work too hard and you're always "on" and now you're ready to just talk and be so so human with your friend

Okay here's my thing:

Here's my thing for the big conversation:

I've been holding onto this:

It's so messed up:

It'll lead to a four-hour conversation:

Okay: okay:

Why the heck do we have to love the Virgin Mary?

TERESA

No.

KEVIN

I'm serious. Why Mary? What does she have to do with our salvation?

Like

Like
Who the heck *is* this woman?
Why do I have to love this *mom*?

TERESA
... how are you even still a Catholic?

KEVIN
Just let me ask the question! I just don't get it. I get that she gave birth to Jesus and that she had no sin but when I think of her I don't *feel* anything...

TERESA
This is always your thing. I can't make you feel the feelings, Kevin! I can help you think the thoughts but I can't make you feel the feelings. That is impossible. K? If you're not feeling it, you're not feeling it, and that ain't on me. GOD. Goodnight. Don't know why I came.

KEVIN
Because Dr. Presson is coming

TERESA
Jim or Gina or both

KEVIN
Gina

TERESA
But is she *really*? When?

KEVIN
Uh

TERESA
When is she coming?

KEVIN
Soon soon so soon she's coming you have to see her
She's picking Emily up

TERESA
When though when.

KEVIN
Soon!

TERESA
Okay

KEVIN
So help me with this Mary thing... help me *think* the thoughts, that's fine.

Why do I feel... why do you *think* I feel anger against the blessed blessed Virgin Mary?
Please Teresa please I won't be annoying I just love being around your brain, this is so rare—

TERESA
AHHH OKAY
Let me

She looks down and thinks.

You're afraid of the scandal of the particular.

KEVIN
Oh!
What is that.

TERESA
This is the thing about God. He makes us work out our salvation through other people.

KEVIN
Ah, why

TERESA
It's just how He works. It's the whole way the Bible is structured— the ladder of revelation. The way God reveals himself to ordinary people. When they receive the Word, common people like Abraham and Mary are worried that they won't be believed by people like you — who sit there thinking, what's so special about *that* person? Why should God choose *them*?

KEVIN
Oh my God yeah. I don't want to know our Lord through his mother. It feels like...
Wow. there's something there. Wow. Psychoanalyzing the heck out of myself right now.
There's something messed up with me about mothers...
I'm so weird about mothers...

TERESA
Gross. Shut up.

KEVIN
No I just, I'm so afraid to receive God's grace because I feel too grossly human.

TERESA
Shut up. Okay this is kind of fun, I don't get to go theological very often these days...
Walter Brueggemann said

KEVIN
Who

TERESA
Brueggemann. Brueggemann.

KEVIN

I don't know who that is

TERESA

Yeah but I *do* and he said—

KEVIN

Wait isn't he that Protestant?

TERESA

We're allowed to read Protestants idiot, Dr. Jim gave me the book okay?, he thought I could handle it, LISTEN, Breuggemann said the entire biblical revelation is built on the scandal of the particular. It's a scandal because it's so ordinary. The scandal of this particular person getting this particular revelation. This carpenter, this shepherd, this stutterer, this virgin. It doesn't make sense, but that's faith. And our faith is part two of the scandal. Faith that transcends reason. And *grace* – grace always accompanying the grotesque. Sometimes the moments that are the most grotesque are the closest to transcendent grace.

KEVIN

I

TERESA

I mean think about it politically: we almost had a president who was the opposite of the Virgin Mary in every sense. A woman who had scrubbed her image clean of any particularity, any humanity, any grace. A woman who was at the forefront of the effort to neuter all particularity. An effort to silence religion, mystery, and morality entirely. Somehow, thank God, we elected the more human and particular of the two options. Actually this is at the heart of my writing right now. The nation as the last bastion of the particular. The nation as the standard-bearer of Christ's work. The kingdom is the kingdom and the kingdom has particular laws. The lepers need to be *healed*, not championed for their leprosy. We're not meant to structure our society according to every freakish "right." We're supposed to strive for the good. The particular, written, incarnate Christian good. Otherwise, what are we? A throbbing mass of genderless narcissists. There's no "thisness" in the liberal future. There's no *there* there. Painful particularity is what we need. Otherwise we're culturally lobotomized. We'll be force-fed brand new oppressed identities every year and we'll bow the tyranny of choice. America cannot become the castrated champion of invented rights. Europe right now is the absence of particularity – it's a black hole where people can do whatever they like, as a matter of *right*. To hell with their rights. They have no idea what to do with Islam. It's going to eat them alive because it's so fucking specific and there's a *power* there. We need to embrace our American identity as a representative of Christ on the globe. Because it's Christianity alone that finds the grace in the scandal of human particularity, of man and woman and child, the scandal of faith and family and natural order (and it *is* a scandal – believe me – progressives cannot fucking stand it), and that blessing, that blessing?, is from a God who knows what it is to be a *man*. What a scandal! What a fucking scandal it is that the god who created the skies and the leviathans would care about one particular person, one particular *woman*, so much so that he would give her the son of God, so much so that he would become a particular person himself. So yeah, that's why you're afraid of Mary. She's so ordinary. Boom. Struggle with that, resist that, fall in love with that, and eat it.

Kevin is sad.

What, Kevin. Are you okay?

KEVIN

Yes, it's just
I got sad
If you're all about the particular
Then why don't you want to hear about all my things
My particular things

TERESA

... What? I asked you about your neighborhood.

KEVIN

Not my ordinary things, my soul things, my ordinary soul things
Why do you keep shutting me down

TERESA

Honestly?
Because you're weak.
And it disgusts me.

Pause.

KEVIN

But that's what I love about Catholicism
It forgives me
For being weak.

TERESA

Yeah I don't know. Sorry. I'm awful. I am, I am sorry. I just.
It can be frustrating to talk to you, cuz I just... I just wish you'd grow into yourself a little
more. Be a bit more of a man.

Kevin hides his face.

KEVIN

You think I'm a little boy

TERESA

No, I don't. I think you're stuck.

KEVIN

I know that I'm stuck but—

TERESA

I think you blame your problems on demons, but really you're just morally lazy.

KEVIN

Okay I'm sorry – I won't talk about anything anymore. It's just I wanted to have a big conversation, and you just said everything. You had the whole conversation by yourself.

TERESA

Oh I'm sorry did you want to *contribute* more? You're not actually a good conversationalist, Kevin. You make everything about yourself, Kevin. Good conversations elevate the conversants. You, without fail, bring it back down to your own shit.

KEVIN

Teresa I just
I just need to say, don't get mad
I just want a
I want a girlfriend.
I'm not crying about it, I'm just saying. I want a girlfriend.
I think it would make me better
It would make me a good conversationalist
I'm so alone all the time, I forgot how to talk to people
I think I would be such a good boyfriend
And it would help me. It really would, I know it...
I need to start to be stronger.
And I need a girlfriend.

TERESA

Yeah, you do. You do. You absolutely do. But it's not gonna be me.

KEVIN

I didn't say I wanted it to be you! You're engaged.

TERESA

Yes I'm engaged. To a man among men.

KEVIN

I can't wait for the wedding

TERESA

Oh right I invited you. You're gonna have a huge crush on Patrick.

KEVIN

I'm not gonna have a crush on your husband, what the heck

TERESA

You will – he's everything you want to be. So funny. Complex but cocksure. He's Connecticut like me. I always needed a Connecticut, ultimately, I think. Delicious.

KEVIN

Are you drunk too

TERESA

And it's not gonna be Emily either.

KEVIN

What

TERESA

Emily can't love you either – women want to feel like they have the power to melt a rock & if you're never a rock then how can they melt the rock.

KEVIN

I don't understand anything you're saying

TERESA

I'm sorry this sucked. Sorry. Sorry. I've stopped being able to lie. Don't tear yourself apart over this. There's a war coming, dude.

KEVIN

What

TERESA

There's a war coming. And I want you to be on the right side. I want you to be strong enough to fight. Later, when you go home, don't forgive yourself for this. Remember your roots. You went to a school where you got wilderness training, where you spoke conversational Latin and locked your phone in a safe for four years and rode horses and built igloos and memorized poems while scaling mountains, and you were strong and you were one of us, and now look at you, you're a pale American fuckboi. Just make a decision not to be weak anymore, and stick to it. Just promise yourself that you'll never do this again. It doesn't matter that I'm your old friend. I am a beautiful grown woman standing in front of you. When you have a beautiful grown woman standing in front of you, you'll listen to her, you'll talk to her about normal boring adult things, and the whole time you'll be ready to snap a neck if someone attacks her. And if you move into a big conversation, you won't pull it down into your fucking shame. Never do this again. Never pull things down into your shame. There's no more shame, Kevin. No more shame. Not from us. Not from our side. It's slowing us down. Stop slowing us down. -

KEVIN

... a war?

Emily and Justin come outside.

EMILY

Hey Teresa! You came!

TERESA

Yes. Hi again. Is um—is your mom coming?

EMILY

Yes, very soon I hope. I need to sleep, I'm so exhausted. So she better be coming.

TERESA

Okay yay. Okay yay. Whaddup y'all?

JUSTIN

Can I get y'all anything to drink

EMILY

Aren't y'all cold out here

TERESA

No it's not cold

KEVIN

Does anyone want to see the eclipse with me

EMILY

Oh um Justin wants to play a song.

JUSTIN

No *you* want me to play a song

EMILY

Who wants to hear it

TERESA

Oh. I do. Justin's voice makes me...

KEVIN

What kind of a song

JUSTIN

Outsider-country I suppose. Townes.

KEVIN

Ok a song

EMILY

Are y'all okay

TERESA

Yeah we're fine.

KEVIN

A war

EMILY (to Kevin)

Are you okay

KEVIN
Mhm

Kevin walks over to the whiskey bottle, and takes it for himself. He stumbles a little.

EMILY
Oh my gosh
Is Kevin okay

KEVIN
Yes I can hear you, I'm great!

EMILY
Are you sure?

KEVIN
Yes yes yes
Just hurting the good hurt
In this old trauma town

TERESA
Kevin, why did you come back for this?

KEVIN
To see the great queen anointed

EMILY
Why is it your trauma town, oh no

TERESA
Did you even like this school?

KEVIN
Yes this school taught me how to prove God and ride a mountain and climb a horse
While speaking
Conversational Latin

TERESA
Okay, give me some of that.

She takes the whiskey bottle and drinks some. She gives it back to Kevin.

Okay, play your song, Justin.

JUSTIN
Alright. Sorry if I'm a little rusty

EMILY
Shh, play

Justin plays “Nothin’” by Townes van Zandt.

JUSTIN
*Hey mama, when you leave
Don't leave a thing behind
I don't want nothin'
I can't use nothin'*

*Take care into the hall
And if you see my friends
Tell them I'm fine
Not using nothin'*

*Almost burned out my eyes
Threw my ears down to the floor
I didn't see nothin'
I didn't hear—*

Suddenly, there’s a horrible machine screech.
It overwhelms the stage.

TERESA
What the—

EMILY
OH MY GOD

KEVIN
Wow

JUSTIN
Geez

EMILY
WHAT IS THAT

It dies down.

What was that?

JUSTIN
Uh, that’s my generator. Sorry guys. Sometimes it, uh. Be right back.

He leaves.

TERESA
So uh
Is Dr. Gina coming?

EMILY
Yes dear.

TERESA
When?

EMILY
In 10 minutes I think. Less.

TERESA
Actually though?

EMILY
Six minutes ago she texted me that she was leaving Dr. Poponcinis'...

TERESA
Oh my God, okay. I'll stay. Let me go wash my face. It's so dry here. I forgot how dry it was here. I'm so ugly. Do you think Justin has any Kiehl's?

Teresa laughs and leaves.

KEVIN
how are you feeling do you need anything

EMILY
fine stop
don't

KEVIN
what

EMILY
i just i really don't, i don't want to talk about my *health*

KEVIN
okay

EMILY
thanks

Pause.

KEVIN
You know who's intense?

EMILY
Who?

KEVIN
Teresa.

EMILY
She's *so* intense. What'd she do?

KEVIN
Oh you know, talked to me about cocaine and sex and war.

EMILY
Oh gosh. What did she say about sex?

KEVIN
I mean, you know she had sex, right? While she was here? She almost got caught, too, she almost got kicked out. But she was granted clemency.

EMILY
Seriously?

KEVIN
Yeah.

EMILY
No way. Who'd she have sex with?

KEVIN
Ah
Nevermind

EMILY
You can't do that
Tell me

KEVIN
No I um

EMILY
Yes say it.

KEVIN
No Emily look at me seriously:
No.

EMILY
Oh

KEVIN

I really really just totally can't. Okay?

EMILY

Oh...

Pause.

Was it

KEVIN

What

Pause.

EMILY

Nothing

Nevermind

Sorry I asked

KEVIN

No I'm sorry.

EMILY

Wow, she is... I'm sorry but she is such a hypocrite. At the ceremony, she had a little audience and she was trying to get me to admit that my liberal friend was a bad person. And I'm sorry, but I think it's unfair to argue that I should admit that one of my dearest friends in the world is a *bad person*. I can't just see things in black-and-white like that.

KEVIN

Yeah, that's unfair.

EMILY

She's *not* a bad person.

KEVIN

I'm sure she's not. You wouldn't be friends with a bad person.

EMILY

Well *maybe* I would.

KEVIN

I guess you're friends with me so you're friends with at least one bad person.

EMILY

Kevin you're not bad. What?

KEVIN

Maybe I'm not bad but I'm very very weak.

EMILY

Well we *all* are. It ain't black-and-white, honey boo boo.

KEVIN

Haha. Yeah. No. I can't see things in black-and-white either, but I do see them in some sort of extreme...

EMILY

What do you mean?

KEVIN

There are still extremes. For me. I don't know if they're easily-definable extremes, but they're extremes. Basically, on the one side is the Eucharist – and on the other side is an orgy.

EMILY

.... What?

KEVIN

Okay, okay. This will convince you that I'm bad. When I think of the Eucharist... when I think of what we *actually* believe that to be? We are talking about the murder of our God—we're witnesses, every *week*, to the sacrifice he made for us, with his physical body. We're talking about his blood, his wounds, and we are proclaiming his *mangled body* to be *in the room* with us. How are we not falling down on the ground and WEEPING – every time? Why are we ever bored? Just waiting to get out and have *brunch*? Because it's been 2000 years and we know the story already? But the story is new every time because there are new kinds of sinning every day— and he dies for those sins, every time, every day, all over the world, in every church – he is dying he is dying he is dying, he is giving us his body so that we can LIVE, and meanwhile we're sneakily checking our phones and speed-praying by rote, just saying the words.

EMILY

Right. Uh-huh.

KEVIN

Right?

EMILY

I'm with ya, so beautiful.

KEVIN

So on the one extreme – I want it to be *that*, right? I want it to all be 100% true & perpetual & *urgent*. And I want the binaries to be true – good and evil – the party line – I want sinners to go to hell, I want the righteous to be assured of the kingdom of heaven, I want abortion to be stopped, transgender people to be given, I dunno, gentle psychiatric attention, wars to end, and slums to spill over with life-saving Christian charity. I want us all to live it, all the time. I want us all to believe it, all the time.

But that doesn't happen, right? Things stay bad and mundane and confusing and EMPTY— not only because we're not good believers, and we don't truly believe it all the time, and we're lazy – but ALSO because there are billions of people on this planet who *don't* believe it, who have never *pretended* to believe it, and who somehow manage to live beautiful, moral lives without the pressure of *having* to believe it. So what the heck do we do with them?

And that's where the other extreme comes in.

So, if there are all these people with their own truths, who are not bothered by the absence of *our* truth – then I feel a responsibility to learn their truth. I feel a responsibility to be *bothered* by their truth. If I'm going to judge them for not taking the time to wrestle with my faith, then I want to wrestle with theirs. I want to meet their gods. I want to step into their skin, and see things the way they see them. I want to meet everyone, I want to learn everything, I want to kiss everyone, I want to feel it all – feel what they feel – see whether it really is empty and terrifying, or if there's beauty there, if simultaneous truths *can* exist, or even get to the brink, the cliff-face, of the question: *are we the ones who are wrong?*

EMILY

Okay. And that's the orgy?

KEVIN

In my head, haha yeah, it's basically an orgy. There are so many people. We're all melting into each other. For some reason, we're all naked. Like bodies bodies skin skin oozy oozy sex sex. And yeah, it's an orgy. Sorry.

EMILY (laughing)

Oh my gosh, Kevin.

KEVIN

Please don't judge me!

EMILY

I don't at all.

KEVIN

I'm so embarrassed.

EMILY

Please don't be embarrassed. I'm not a saint!
So are you kissing everyone?

KEVIN

No I'm not kissing anyone.

EMILY

Me neither.

KEVIN

Haha yeah. But uh I am watching a lot of films, from all over the world, beautiful films from all over the world.

EMILY

What films

KEVIN

Criterion Collection all day every day yo. But um I dunno. Mostly I just spend time on the internet. I expose myself to all of it. Sometimes it just makes me angrier. But sometimes I slip into that way of seeing things, that anything-goes attitude, that vague compassion and default to “equality,” and it’s so easy sometimes. But so is sleeping, and sleeping around, for some people – but that doesn’t mean they’re *good*. *Easy* is not *good*. Anyway, sorry I’m rambling. You must think I’m insane.

EMILY

No, I don’t. I don’t know what it is, but I’ve just never had a hard time balancing those two things in my mind. They don’t seem opposed to me. I have a full faith, it’s my rock, it’s my pain, it’s my everything – and I also am friends with whoever I want to be friends with, and I read and watch whatever I want to read and watch. It doesn’t change the faith at all. It doesn’t change my love for God, or my love for Jesus. When I watch an HBO show, I don’t take it personally if things get ugly. I didn’t put the ugliness there. And usually it all wraps itself into beauty anyway. Artists are good at that.

KEVIN

Oh God

EMILY

What

KEVIN

You’re just very compelling and nice. *And* you’re sick. How do you do it

EMILY

I just do it like my gal Flannery O: “give me the strength to stand the pain to get the grace.” I just think there’s so much grace.

KEVIN

Yeah. I know you see the grace in everything.

EMILY

Not in *everything*.

KEVIN

Okay, not in everything.

EMILY

There’s so much pain. And there’s so much *time*. So much time of me just sitting in my pain. And I get so angry. I get so small. I want to die. I want to die *a lot*. And that’s as graceless as

you can get, believe me. It's... nuh-uh. It's really, really ugly. I'll wake up in a sweat, saying "I want to effing die, just effing kill me" and it just... and I, anyway... sorry...

Pause.

KEVIN

Gosh, Emily, I didn't know...

EMILY

Whatever it's just the disease. It's just the bug eating my brain. But we all have that inside of us. We all have a labyrinth in there & it's just you and the Trinity, trying to find the way out. But why shouldn't you be reading liberal articles, and watching non-Catholic shows? Why shouldn't God have put grace in those places, for you to find?

KEVIN

oh man

EMILY

And also I don't think true compassion, or a default to equality are *easy*. Not if you're doing it right. It's hard work. It's having to constantly open yourself and let someone else in. It's almost impossible.

KEVIN

oh god
yeah
you're right
i'm not
doing it right
idiot idiot

EMILY

C'mon. You're a good person, Kevin.

KEVIN

I don't know if I am.

EMILY

You are.

KEVIN

I never *feel* anything... I don't think in those terms... the labyrinth, the grace...

EMILY

Why should you think in those terms? Those are my terms, don't take 'em.

KEVIN

A maze, a maze sounds fun, instead of this *emptiness*—

EMILY

Emptiness is beautiful!

It's all beautiful.

I don't know. Please, can we just—

Every second we're not destroying something, destroying someone, destroying the world, destroying ourselves – every second we're creating and co-existing instead of tearing this place apart – I just think it's miraculous – and I don't care how empty anyone is if they haven't destroyed if they're spending most of their time *not destroying*.

Perhaps now we realize that Justin has been listening
in the shadows.

KEVIN

but see

but Emily

sometimes I want to destroy.

EMILY

You do?

KEVIN

Yes – yeah. It's the only thing I can get to, in my brain, gather everyone in a place, let the orgy commence, and then blow it up, as though destroying will let truth rise out of that – something solid and undeniable will emerge for us then, and we can look at it with our eyes, and know it to be true.

Pause.

EMILY

Yeah whoa

Your labyrinth is not my labyrinth.

KEVIN

You think I'm horrible.

EMILY

No. I think you're suffering. So am I. You don't even know, Kev Kev...

KEVIN

haha

EMILY

Kev Kev

KEVIN

haha

EMILY

Ah whatever. It's all impossible.

KEVIN
Yeah. I thank God.

EMILY
You thank God?

KEVIN
I thank God. I thank God that it's impossible. I thank God that I'm confusing and weird and not just a boring Catholic Hufflepuff foot soldier. I thank God that you showed up our senior year. I thank God that you've stayed in touch with me. I thank God for Facebook Messenger. I think you're the most amazing human being I've ever met. And I'm so grateful and I thank God.

EMILY
Oh. Kevin, jeesh...

KEVIN
Do you wanna go see the eclipse with me on Monday?

JUSTIN (from behind them)
Did I tell y'all the story about the grateful acre?

EMILY
Ah!

KEVIN
Whoa how long have you been there?

JUSTIN
Just a minute. Yeah, uh... that generator's messed up. Sorry about that y'all.

He pours himself some whiskey.

EMILY
What did you say about a story? What story?

JUSTIN
About the grateful acre.

EMILY
What's the story about the grateful acre?

JUSTIN
It's a story I made up. I want to make it into a children's book or something.

EMILY
Are you kidding me right now?

JUSTIN
No, why.

EMILY
That's just the most beautiful thing I've ever heard. You're writing a children's book? Oh my sweet Lord. Please tell me about the grateful acre.

JUSTIN
Okay. The grateful acre was created when God created the Earth. The grateful acre was grateful to wake up one day and realize that it was an acre. God smiled upon it and the grateful acre was grateful. It was grateful when dirt appeared upon it. Even though the dirt made the acre feel heavier, the acre was grateful. It was grateful when grass appeared upon it. Even though the grass ate the dirt and made the acre feel smaller, the acre was grateful. It was grateful when insects crawled inside it. Even though the insects ate the grass which ate the dirt, the acre felt grateful. It was grateful when the beasts walked upon it. Even though the beasts trampled on the grass and ate the insects, the acre felt grateful. It was grateful when man stepped upon it. Even though man killed the grass and ate the beasts and insects and polluted the dirt, the acre felt grateful. It was grateful when man built upon it. Even when the grass disappeared and the dirt disappeared and the acre was poured upon with concrete, and a tower rose upon it, and the acre sunk deeper into the earth, the acre was grateful. When the building fell, the acre was grateful. Even though the acre was covered in stone and plastic and death, the acre was grateful. When the air filled with radiation, the acre was grateful. When the acre stopped being able to breathe, the acre was grateful. When the acre slipped into a coma, the acre was grateful. For ten thousand centuries of silence, the acre was grateful. And when the acre woke up, its first thought was: "I am grateful." And when the grass came back, the acre was grateful. And when the bugs came back, the acre was grateful. And when the beasts came back, the acre was grateful. And the acre was grateful. And the acre was grateful. And the acre waited for man to come back. And when man never came back, the acre was grateful.

Pause.

The end.

EMILY
Oh my Sweet Lord Jesus Christ
You made that up?

JUSTIN
Yup.

EMILY
Oh my Sweet Jesus God and Lord

KEVIN
Yeah that was cool Justin

EMILY
Oh my gosh
Oh my sweet Jesus gosh
Oh I could just

They all look at the sky.

Oh my Lord and Gosh

JUSTIN
Haha

EMILY
My boys!

JUSTIN
“Boys.”

EMILY
My men.

KEVIN
Yeah this feels good this feels nice. I miss Wyoming

JUSTIN
I thought it was your trauma town

KEVIN
Yeah and I miss it

EMILY
Why is it your trauma town, though, did something happen to you here

KEVIN
No, it was just a thing I said

EMILY
Gotcha. I miss Wyoming even when I’m in it

JUSTIN
Whoa that gave me a chill.

EMILY
Haha really

JUSTIN
Yeah let's not talk about – Damn.

EMILY
What

JUSTIN
It's just, uh. It's like my story. Everything's disappearing.

EMILY
What's disappearing J?

JUSTIN
All the good old things and ways.

EMILY (imitating his accent)
“All the good old things and ways.”

Kevin laughs. Emily laughs.

No but what, J?

JUSTIN
Nothing. Nothing.

EMILY
“Whoa that gave me a chill.”

KEVIN
“Whoa that gave me a chill.”

JUSTIN
I won't speak anymore.

EMILY
J, say it

JUSTIN
Do y'all notice blood on the porch here

EMILY
What?

JUSTIN
Do you see the blood stain

EMILY
No, did you kill something

KEVIN

Why would there be blood

JUSTIN

Nevermind, it was a deer. I shot it and felt, I felt weird after – I've never felt so weird after, before.

EMILY

Do you want to talk about it?

JUSTIN

Nah. Was trying to gut it. My hands were shaking.

EMILY

You're so good.

KEVIN (mocking Justin's accent)

And when man killed a deer upon it, the acre was grateful.

Haha

Justin uh what do you think is changing?

JUSTIN

It's just becoming harder and harder to hold onto what's good. I'm talking eudaimonia. I'm talking The Good.

KEVIN

Really, Justin?

JUSTIN

What

KEVIN

Aristotle? Evolve.

JUSTIN

Heh

EMILY

Evolve how

KEVIN

Plato, Plato

EMILY

Oh

JUSTIN

Even though Plato came first

EMILY
Evolve backwards

KEVIN
All the best things came first
Nothing good has ever been new

EMILY
What

KEVIN
I'm just saying words

JUSTIN (to Emily)
I was talking this out with your parents.

EMILY
Ughh they're so annoying

KEVIN
What?

EMILY
They're all college all the time, can we not talk about the college please

JUSTIN
Okay, but they're amazing.

KEVIN
Your parents are amazing, Emily. Jim and Gina!

EMILY
Okay.

KEVIN
Emily do you wish you'd gone to this school?

EMILY
Not at all
I had to get away from them

KEVIN
But like, this is the best curriculum

JUSTIN
It really is
And it really is because of them
They feel the urgency, the urgency of

EMILY

I know.

JUSTIN

The *return* to

EMILY

Yes. It's very urgent. Much more urgent than my non-stop pain and confusion.

KEVIN

Yeah but look Emily I know that it's awful and you're so sick but at least uh
I mean at least it brought you back here and into our lives. Right?

EMILY

... yeah

KEVIN

And but look Emily I mean your parents really are so so great
And they're trying to like save the country basically
With classical classical Catholic—
Like they're basically the opposite of the Benedict Option – they're going into the world
rather than retreating—

JUSTIN

Oh I like the Benedict Option.

KEVIN

You do?

EMILY

Is that the book that says we're not gonna win this thing and we should just retreat?

JUSTIN

No that's an oversimplification.

KEVIN

Whatever it's so spineless.

JUSTIN

You don't think "Transfiguration College of Wyoming" is the epitome of the Benedict
Option?

KEVIN

What?

JUSTIN

Smack dab in the middle of the least populated state in the union, six hours from the nearest
urban area. We learned how to live sustainably, ride horses, and survive in the wilderness. We

got kicked out if we had sex or did drugs. We weren't allowed to have cell-phones. Morning prayer, every morning. Our school didn't accept federal funding.

KEVIN

Okay well. Maybe this is my point about your parents, then, Emily—

EMILY

Ok

KEVIN

Is that *despite* the somewhat monastic design of the school, they still encourage us to engage with the *world*—

EMILY

I know I know, and it's good and they're heroes—

KEVIN

But I was *not* ready for the world. It's been almost seven years and this whole time I've been paralyzed about what to do with what TCW taught me. I've been wondering whether what I need is to come back to Wyoming, or maybe uh... move to New York like Teresa did.

JUSTIN

Come back to Wyoming.

KEVIN

Why?

JUSTIN

You have communicative gifts that can be of use. You can deepen your spiritual life, and get away from urban temptations.

KEVIN

Maybe what I need is more urban temptations.

JUSTIN

What?

KEVIN

Maybe repression makes me a worse person.

JUSTIN

No sir.

KEVIN

Maybe Oklahoma City is not quite urban enough. Maybe I need to be in the den of lions, in order to really be the Catholic I was meant to be. Like there are some priests, like Jesuits, who thrive in that kind of environment.

JUSTIN
I don't know.

KEVIN
Why?

JUSTIN
Well, as one example... cities are obviously hubs of LGBT activity, and I don't think it's healthy to be around LGBT activity.

KEVIN
Why – do you think I'd become gay?

JUSTIN
I just think proximity to LGBT is a threat to Christian children and families.

KEVIN
But why can't we meet it, engage with it—

JUSTIN
Also public schools.

KEVIN
What?

JUSTIN
Public schools are on the front line of everything that's wrong. No prayer in the classroom. All this babble about gender being fluid and non-binary. We are living in barbaric times.

KEVIN
But if we're in the right, if we know we have truth on our side, why can't we stare it down?

JUSTIN
Because it's hard to confront people who you know won't change. And all the power is on their side. All the bureaucracy, and soon – all the laws. Everyone working for any business or school will be frog-marched through diversity and inclusion training. It won't just be about *tolerating*, which we *do*, it will be about *affirming* their disorder. Which is a sin.

KEVIN
I don't disagree. So what do you propose?

JUSTIN
Stay among the like-minded.

KEVIN
You want us to just become a quivering bubble of Christian cowards?

JUSTIN

Wow. No. I want us to put our heads down, preserve our culture, and wait for the hedonists to eat themselves alive.

KEVIN

Well maybe I want to save some of the hedonists.

EMILY

Mmm. That's beautiful, Kev.

JUSTIN

Yeah that's fair.

KEVIN

Yeah like... I just don't trust the Benedict Option. These little cloisters of the righteous. That's the kind of community I grew up in. In rural Oklahoma – my big-ass family in a town of 300 faithful. I did not experience much genuine and down-to-earth love. Instead, a lot of pious egos prancing around and a lack of trust and vulnerability and just a lot of *fear* of not having the right opinions. And this insane, like, *fetishized* fear of sex. And we wonder why there are these constant abuse scandals... it's because we're forced to push so much natural human expression down, hide it away, and it's not *healthy*. Like what if the way is be the holy fool? To get in there, to meld, to fuse, to engage, to dance & laugh together on the street. To live our truth, in the face of theirs. To let two competing facts exist in the same space. To imagine a heaven we can all graduate into.

EMILY

Wow Kev that was beautiful.

KEVIN

Yeah that was beautiful! I'm on a roll!

Kevin takes a huge swig of whiskey.

EMILY

J it honestly reminds me of the grateful acre.

JUSTIN

Oh yeah?

EMILY

Yes, being grateful for whatever tramples you... but isn't that so hard?

JUSTIN

It is hard, yeah.

KEVIN (after a burp)

No it's not as simple as the grateful acre.

JUSTIN

The acre is essentially a sponge, retaining and absorbing the foreign elements which infiltrate it. But it cannot be erased of its essential *thisness*, which is that of an acre.

EMILY

Mmmmmmm

KEVIN

Can I talk!

EMILY

Kev, I'm sorry.

KEVIN

Yeah I can't... I can't with this grateful acre.

This is why I hate Facebook, I can't

People get obsessed with basic-ass *memes* and they're not actually engaging with the complexity of these...

EMILY

The grateful acre is not basic-ass.

KEVIN

Okay SORRY Justin I didn't mean to offend you.

JUSTIN

You didn't.

KEVIN

This is the same problem as Facebook yeah DAMN I keep getting into these little arguments and offending people. The comments wars—

Because it's *hard* to be the holy fool – it's hard to dance with the devil.

And I try to engage with this transgender thing and everyone *IMMEDIATELY* shuts me down and it's like okay do you *want* me to hate you?

EMILY

Oh man what

KEVIN

What

EMILY

Can we not with the transgender bashing, can we not

KEVIN

Sorry, whoa, I wasn't *bashing*. Damn, you're mad at me

EMILY

No no! Sorry I just don't want things to become hateful.

KEVIN

Oh my gosh – you think I’m hateful. I can’t believe you think that about me. I’m – whoa.

EMILY

No, Kev Kev... I’m sorry. I did *not* mean that you were hateful. Not at all.

KEVIN

Okay.

EMILY

You are so good. Please speak.

KEVIN

No I just

EMILY

I’m sorry

KEVIN

No I just – yeah, I think they’re making it so impossible to engage with them – they’re not even inviting us to this conversation. It’s this insane thing that they’re all getting hung up on, this small minority of confused people, but all the people all the people like *suddenly* so defensive about it. And I don’t know if you’ve listened to Jordan Peterson –

JUSTIN

Yup.

KEVIN

Because his argument is literally mostly just – it’s *grammar* mostly –
And he’s like: you know else policed people’s grammar? Stalin. Nazis. And like... Mao and like... And they just come after him, they try to get him fired, they’re trying to destroy him over not using the word “they” because it doesn’t make any damn grammatical sense.
It’s like who – who *are* they
Just, who *are* these militant liberal fucks, or like, jerks, uh, who are they?

EMILY

Kev, they’re just people. They’re just passionate people.

KEVIN

Right

JUSTIN

But the transgender thing feels like a bridge too far.

KEVIN

Whoa Justin I just noticed that you are packing a pistol, can I see it

JUSTIN
No

KEVIN
Right

EMILY
Guys guess what I hate guns.

KEVIN
Justin is a person you trust with a gun, Emily, he was a freakin sharpshooter in the *Marines*, Emily!

EMILY
“He was a freakin sharpshooter in the Marines, Emily”

KEVIN
Hahaha no but he’s... hey Justin: You have killed people.

Pause.

JUSTIN
It’s fascinating the transgender thing

KEVIN
It’s a transgender world & I’m a transgender uh
And how do we
Like if I’m dancing with them
Like do I dance them to the gates of hell & slam the gate shut behind them

EMILY
Whoa, Kevin, please...

KEVIN
Sorry whoa guys I don’t know anything about anything. Wait where’s my PHONE

Kevin looks for his phone and then finds it and then drinks more whiskey.

EMILY
I want to say: begotten not made. For me it’s just that. Begotten not made. We are *given* ourselves. And to beget means to share in this givenness. And I don’t judge them, and I’m not saying they’re bad people at *all*. But I do feel these days that it’s like... it’s like it’s popular to reject the truth of ourselves as *given*.

KEVIN
You sound like your Mom

EMILY

Ugh

KEVIN

In a good way

JUSTIN

Your dad was saying and I thought it was brilliant that it's this Cartesian "neo-Gnosticism" that convinces people that their souls are somehow separate from their bodies, and their bodies can somehow be fashioned however they like.

EMILY

Oh that's beautiful J, that's so
My body is so much a part of me I can't even begin
And I didn't choose this, my body is just a friggin
prairie of pain,
and I can't choose to make it go away
It's just what I've been given.

KEVIN

A prairie of pain. Oh Emily, I
I want you to know that you're going to be okay

EMILY

Yes I know
Do you mind if we say the rosary? Or just start one?

JUSTIN

Sure

EMILY

Is that weird, we don't have to

KEVIN

No let's do it

EMILY (getting out her rosary)

I want to say this for

KEVIN

Hold on, hold on one sec. I just have to
Real fast.
The thing about me and whiskey

He starts to go off to pee, but then suddenly turns around, and with too much fervor, recites some motherfucking William Wordsworth.

"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn."

EMILY
Mmm.

KEVIN
I gotta pee so bad.

He goes off-stage to pee. Emily and Justin look at each other and laugh. Then they look at the sky. Justin drinks whiskey.

JUSTIN
Your mom's gonna be a great president

EMILY
I know but
I know I didn't go here, but like... does this school actually... make good people?

JUSTIN
Yes. I think it attracts good people and makes them better.

EMILY
But doesn't it seem like Kevin is so wildly confused
And Teresa seems so cold... like she's switched off a part of herself.

JUSTIN
Yeah.

EMILY
I thought this would just be a nice party celebrating my mom

JUSTIN
It was

EMILY

But everyone's being so weird

JUSTIN

Yeah. But everyone else left. And everyone else is pretty great. I felt so heartened tonight seeing how everyone's ended up. Healthy. Happy. Humble. Building families. This school makes 99% *great* people. So that feeling you're feeling might just be because of Kevin and Teresa. Specifically. As people.

EMILY

Hahaha

Are they the weird lingerers? Are we left with the weird lingerers?

JUSTIN

Haha yes they *are* the weird lingerers

EMILY

Hahaha

Did you know Teresa almost got kicked out when she was a student? For having sex?

JUSTIN

I think I did know that yeah

Yeah small school, word spreads

EMILY

Why did she not get kicked out?

JUSTIN

She's savvy

EMILY

What a sad savvy woman

Oh man J

I need a buddy

Oh man it's weird because I feel better than ever

In my heart I feel so much peace

Even though I'm dying

Maybe *because* I'm dying

JUSTIN

You are not dying

EMILY

Okay okay

Everything will be okay. Haha. I'll just, I'll just get better and you'll

JUSTIN

I'll what?

Pause.

What

EMILY

I don't know
And everything will
Just somehow be
Great

JUSTIN

Yup.

EMILY (imitating his accent)

"Yup." Doopy doo.

JUSTIN

Doopy doo.

EMILY

J I got so, I got *angry* this morning. I couldn't lift my head and I just lay there like
F this F this F this F this
Just F this
Just faaaaarck this
Just over and over.
I was mad at God.
And I could feel Him, just sitting there and just taking it.

JUSTIN

You think it's bad to get mad like that, but it ain't.

EMILY

"But it ain't." Hahahaha you did that one on purpose, you play into it so hard

JUSTIN

No I do not.

EMILY

"No I do not."

JUSTIN

Well

EMILY

No, I know. And thank you, I know.

JUSTIN

Okay because I think about your pain a lot, Emily

I think of the agony and the ecstasy, right? – and, yeah.
And what does it matter, if you're *feeling* it?
If you're feeling it, you're one of the lucky ones.

EMILY
Hm.
I don't know.

JUSTIN
You don't know?

EMILY
I do not know. I do not know about *feeling it*. I think feeling it might just be dangerous. I makes me feel violated. Taken-over. I think it might just make me a non-person.

JUSTIN
You're not a non-person

EMILY
If you say so. Will you carry me to the car when my mom gets here?

JUSTIN
Really?

EMILY
Yeah, my joints swell up at night and I'm in so much pain right now. You can just carry me and then leave. I'm sorry.

JUSTIN
No, that's okay. Will your mom...

EMILY
What?

JUSTIN
If I carry you
Just that image

EMILY
It'll be fine
She loves you

JUSTIN
Sure.

EMILY
Thank you.

JUSTIN

Yup.

And uh... I do want to tell you something at some point

EMILY

What is it?

Tell me now

Kevin comes back and sits down.

J, just tell me now

JUSTIN

Kevin are you okay?

KEVIN

mhm.

EMILY

Okay, let's, let's say this for

JUSTIN

America?

EMILY

"Amurica"

JUSTIN

Why not

EMILY

Amurica! Why not. No you're right, it needs it. For Charlottesville. the nation at large. But also for my mother. The new president of this tiny little place.

They each get out their rosaries.

Okay yeah I just need the words

JUSTIN

Yup

EMILY

Just some of the words

JUSTIN

The words are good

EMILY

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.

JUSTIN

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil. Amen.

EMILY

Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee
Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus

JUSTIN

Holy Mary mother of God, pray for us sinners,
Now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

EMILY

Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee
Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus

JUSTIN

Holy Mary mother of God, pray for us sinners,
Now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

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Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee
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JUSTIN

Holy Mary mother of God, pray for us sinners,
Now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

EMILY

Glory Be to the Father and to the—

Suddenly, Kevin vomits all over himself.

KEVIN

Oh, damn

JUSTIN

Oh

EMILY

Oh gosh

KEVIN

Ahh damn

Sorry, damn
Don't
Don't look – I'm sorry – I'll
Oh, man

He collapses into sobs.

EMILY
Kevin?

He sobs. They watch him.

KEVIN (from the ground)
Please stop looking at me.
Please stop.

He tries to blow his nose onto the pavement.

Ah man my nose – it stings
It stings in my nose
Does this happen to you does it happen where your nose, it goes in your nose

EMILY
Your nose

KEVIN
It went up in my nose too
Ow, oh, ow
It hurts in my nose

EMILY
I need to go to the bathroom
J, will you carry me?

JUSTIN
Yup.

Justin lifts Emily up, and holds her like a bride in his arms. She's holding her cane.

EMILY
Be back in a second, Kevin.
So sorry, I just really really need to go to the bathroom all of a sudden
Oof ow
Love ya.

KEVIN
Love
Mhm

Justin carries Emily off-stage.

Kevin lies on the ground and keeps sobbing. He tries to blow his nose onto the pavement. Slowly, he gets himself into sitting position. And slowly, he starts cleaning himself up. He uses his tie to wipe up the vomit, and then he bunches his tie up and puts it in his pocket.

KEVIN
It stings so bad

Eventually, Justin comes back on stage.

Hey, I'm gonna um
Go back to the uh motel

JUSTIN
Are you okay to drive?

KEVIN
No yes I'm okay.

JUSTIN
Nah, you ain't.

KEVIN
Yes though. And
I'm so, so sorry about that crazy moment where I vomited.
I think I'm upset.
My nose is still

Kevin is shivering. He tries to blow his nose onto the pavement.

Man, my nose
Has this ever happened to you with the nose
When you throw up

JUSTIN
I haven't thrown up in like 16 years

KEVIN
Haha

JUSTIN
Haha

KEVIN
Why am I shivering, why am I shivering so

JUSTIN
It's okay

KEVIN
I really want a girlfriend
I'm so... everything's gonna... everything's gonna break down

JUSTIN
What is everything?

KEVIN
My, the
My soul the
The world, the
I get so tight about

Kevin suddenly puts his arm in front of Justin's face.
It's weird. He drops his arm.

JUSTIN
Anyhow.

KEVIN
I drank that whiskey

JUSTIN
You can sleep on my couch

KEVIN
How do you do the thing where you *know*?

JUSTIN
I don't... What?

KEVIN
You have a way

JUSTIN
What way?

KEVIN
A, just, a, you have a

He tries to show Justin with his hands.

JUSTIN

There's nothing that I *know*.

I've just mapped it all out in my head and I'm just hoping I'm right about it all.

I think I am, but I don't know.

KEVIN

I'm awful.

JUSTIN

No.

KEVIN

Yes. Pathetic and

At any moment, I feel this – I

Justin, seriously, I'm think I'm in *love* with...

I fall in love with SO MANY

This college was the only thing keeping me from, just, dissolv

Just watch, I'm gonna get cut loose – and I'm whipping over into the

You know, The World

And I might love it.

JUSTIN

This is the world.

KEVIN

No I mean the

The

You know

And I might love it.

Kevin lies down. Presses his forehead into the ground. He blows his nose onto the pavement.

JUSTIN

I've been there. Before I decided to come back to school. I was *there*. I had a

Pause.

I was there for a while.

Pause.

There's nothing to love, really.

Justin looks at Kevin, who has passed out.

Kevin?

He nudges Kevin. Kevin wakes up.

KEVIN
Hey.

JUSTIN
Are you okay?

KEVIN
I'm in love with Emily.

JUSTIN
You are?

KEVIN
Yes—I want to take care of her.

JUSTIN
You need to stop this.

KEVIN
Stop what

JUSTIN
You need to stop this before you say something to Emily.
Hear me?
Hey, hear me?
I'm serious.

KEVIN
Why? Cuz you love her too.

JUSTIN
Stop, no. I just don't want you to overwhelm her. Or say the wrong thing.
She gets affected by people's emotions.

KEVIN
Uh-huh.

Kevin spits onto the ground.

JUSTIN
Hey, go take a nap inside.

KEVIN
You know, maybe I don't want to.
And maybe I
And maybe I want to protect her from *you*.

JUSTIN
What does that mean.

KEVIN
You know what it means.

JUSTIN
No I do not.

KEVIN
“No I do not.” It means maybe I don’t want you to do to her what you did to Teresa.

JUSTIN
Whoa

KEVIN
I always thought Dr. Gina’s was wrong to give you clemency. I don’t know why she didn’t tell President Robinson – he woulda kicked your ass to the curb. I just don’t get why she protected you. Teresa made sense – it was her last semester and she was Dr. Gina’s protégé. But you? You were just this old-ass freshman with tattoos and an ex-wife, and she let *you* stay?

Justin stares Kevin down.

I uh
Sorry.

JUSTIN
You know nothing about it. When I got here I was older than you are now. I’d made some serious mistakes. I was poisoned. They knew that, and they gave me an antidote. And then when I poisoned myself again, they gave me a second chance. Do you have any idea of the grace...

He takes a breath.

I thank God for Dr. Presson’s clemency. It saved my life. And let me tell you, you slippery shit, if you don’t clean your temple up, you are going to ruin a lot of lives before you ruin your own. You stink, dude. You stink like the devil.

Kevin chuckles to himself. He lights up another cigarette. He looks at Justin.

KEVIN
Cool. Goodnight.

JUSTIN
Goodnight.

Kevin walks into the shadows. Justin tries to clean the blood from the porch again. Teresa comes outside.

TERESA
Hey.

JUSTIN
Hey. Where'd you go?

TERESA
I was on the phone.

JUSTIN
With Patrick?

TERESA
And then I started writing a blog post. Your song inspired me.

JUSTIN
Nuh-uh.

TERESA
Yeah-huh. The idea of "Nothing." Being a generation that doesn't want to be a bunch of Nothing.

JUSTIN
Well I gotta check that out then.

TERESA
Do you read my site?

JUSTIN
Sometimes.

TERESA
Justin. I'm flattered.

JUSTIN
Well the writing's good.

TERESA
Hey, thank you.

JUSTIN
Yup.
How have you uh...

TERESA
Don't.

JUSTIN
What

TERESA
Just don't

JUSTIN
Don't what

TERESA
Don't melt me

JUSTIN
What do you mean

TERESA
You're trying to melt me

JUSTIN
Wasn't meaning to

Kevin walks in from the shadows.

KEVIN
Stop flirting y'all

TERESA (startled)
Whoa

JUSTIN
We weren't. Jeez.

KEVIN
Teresa I have a question for you.

KEVIN
I'm really confused about why you think there's gonna be a war
And I want you to tell me

TERESA
Um no

KEVIN
Please. Please.

TERESA
Why

KEVIN
Because I want to be stronger.

TERESA
Okay. Good. Did I tell you about the cycles?

KEVIN
The cycles? No.

TERESA
Basically we're all being called to be heroes because history goes in generational cycles and you can trace as far back as history goes.

KEVIN
What do you mean generational cycles?

TERESA
I'll explain.

JUSTIN
Is that from that book? I wanna read that.

TERESA
Yep.

KEVIN
History repeating itself? That's just Plato. Timocracy becomes oligarchy becomes democracy becomes tyranny.

Emily walks outside slowly. Justin rushes over to help.

EMILY
Thank you J

TERESA
They want me to explain why there's a war coming.

EMILY
Oh gosh

TERESA
Do you not want me to

EMILY
No it's okay

TERESA
Okay so

EMILY
Is this the Steve Bannon thing

TERESA
Yeah but also Pat Buchanan

KEVIN
And also Plato

EMILY
My Mom hosted a Pat Buchanan rally at our house when we were kids

TERESA
I know.

KEVIN
Whoa. Your mom

JUSTIN
That's diehard

EMILY
Is it
I don't know anything

TERESA
Pat Buchanan's insane. He's amazing.

EMILY
Is he
I don't know anything

TERESA
So there's four turnings.

She uses her hands a lot when she's explaining things.

High.
Awakening.
Unraveling.
Crisis.
High awakening unraveling crisis.

High is a time of institutional security. And conformity. And the economy booms.
It's like. The 50s.

Awakening is when the institutions are attacked because people want to feel free again, the want to feel less stifled. So that's the 60s, the 70s. Hippies. Civil Rights. But also Vatican II,

John Paul II. Spirituality, authenticity, you get it. It leads to something tragic like Roe v. Wade. It messes things up.

So then *Unraveling* is weird. It's like, we break into different camps after the tragic event of the Awakening. Institutions aren't trusted, and there's a ton of emphasis on freedom – but more like, *license*. Things get a little decadent. A little depressing. People go off into their different camps. Culture wars. 80s, 90s.

Then comes *Crisis*. That's the fourth turning. It's destruction, it's war. The nation almost doesn't survive. Great example is the Civil War, and the economic crisis before that. Or the Great Depression into World War II. And it's right now. The crisis caused by Obama. Liberals think it's Trump. It almost doesn't matter. People start to collectivize and turn against each other. It seems like everything's ending – we're all gonna die. No one trusts each other. But the people who do trust each other form crazy bonds. Somehow we get through it, we rise from the ashes, and breach back into a High.

And those four turnings make a saeculum—

KEVIN
Saeculum?

EMILY
Saeculum

TERESA
Saeculum saeculum

KEVIN
Saeculum
Take me to your saeculum

TERESA
Shut up Kevin
But within each of these turnings, there's an *archetype* that defines it.
Prophet.
Nomad.
Hero.
Artist.

Prophets are born near the end of a Crisis, at the beginning of a High. They grow up when shit is generally okay, during a High. They're Baby Boomers.

Nomads are born during an Awakening, and they don't have a strong sense of institutions and so they're alienated and they're wanderers. So they're super pragmatic. And they're resilient after the Crisis.

Heroes are born during an Unraveling. They're team-oriented. They're optimistic. They're civically engaged. They're the generation that fought in World War II. And they're us. Right now.

EMILY
Wow I love that

KEVIN
What about Artists

TERESA
Oh right *Artists* are born during a Crisis. I don't really get, like, why they matter, but yeah, they're artists.

KEVIN
What?! Artists are *everything*

TERESA
Yeah, no, *Kevin*, I mean I *get* it. Artists are great, they make the stuff, the stuff is gorgeous, but yeah *we're* all Heroes.

JUSTIN
What's the cutoff date?

TERESA
Justin, you were born in 1979?

JUSTIN
Yep.

TERESA
Oh, okay. You're on the cusp, but you're Nomad.

JUSTIN
Sounds about right.

KEVIN
But we're all heroes?

TERESA
Yep. Basically anyone who graduated high school after the year 2000.

JUSTIN
Dang yeah I was '97.

KEVIN
And we're all heroes.

TERESA
Yes Kevin. We're full of energy. We're more upbeat and engaged. We're more sexually modest, we believe in no sex before marriage and we return to conservative family values.

KEVIN
What

TERESA
And we fight when we have to fight. We fight bravely during the crisis of the fourth turning.

EMILY
Oh y'all that's so amazing, my parents were just talking about this at dinner.
They were saying that they think our generation has a spiritual hunger
And like a bravery
And that they see it on both sides
Like both sides desperately want the good.

TERESA
Totally

KEVIN
Heroes haha
That's so
Heroes
Can we
Like what is this a
Video game
My friend showed me a
VR
It friggin'
Freaked me out

He wanders into the shadows.

EMILY
And I just think that was so beautiful because I really do know so many young people our
age who are so good. Like all of us, as a generation. Including people who work for Planned
Parenthood, Democrats, a drag queen I know... they're all good.

TERESA
Okay well
I mean hmm I mean... I don't know about drag queens
And Planned Parenthood are you *kidding*

EMILY
Yes she's my friend Olivia and she's really so wonderful

TERESA
Okay no, because every generation has the archetype but also plenty of people who are the
explicit *antithesis* of the archetype

EMILY
Oh

TERESA

I mean I don't know how I'm supposed to fall in line with a greater movement of heroes if they're supporting candidates who believe in late-term abortions. If candidates can't even look out for an unborn baby, I don't know how we can trust them with literally any other issue.

EMILY

But it's not the only issue

TERESA

It kind of is, actually.

EMILY

But people aren't *evil* who

TERESA

Maybe they are though.

EMILY

Teresa you're not listening—

TERESA

Fine, I'll shut up, I'll stop, this is the problem, no one knows how to debate, we literally can't hear each other.

Kevin wanders back on.

KEVIN

I can hear everyone

TERESA

Oh yeah?

KEVIN

Yeah I mean I can *hear* them, like I can hear at least
Yeah it's all about the woman's body
The woman's right to choose

TERESA

Yes we know that. But how can you "hear" that when the flip-side of the argument is that it's the murder of a child?

KEVIN

What

TERESA

Sorry I'm drunk what I mean is— how can you "hear" that when the FLIP-side of the argument is that it's the MURDER of a CHILD.

KEVIN

Oh I was just saying that
I know what their argument is
It's like: "Stay out of my body."
"It's my body, it's my choice."
Those are just the words

TERESA

Murder is one of the things you're not allowed to choose.

KEVIN

No I mean bahhh
I'm not arguing on their side
I'm just saying what their side is

TERESA

I know, and I'm saying that their side is ignoring our side. Where we say it's murder.

KEVIN

But maybe they feel like our side is ignoring their side

TERESA

What exactly are we ignoring?

KEVIN

The part about
The body like the Choice

TERESA

The choice to commit murder.

KEVIN

I guess they um
I guess they...
Right? they don't think it's murder?
Literally guys I'm just devil's advocating

TERESA

See, I think their inability to address that question of whether it is or isn't murder – the fact that they sidestep that question completely – it implies their guilt.
They do know it's murder.
They do know it's murder.
They just want to be allowed to do it.

EMILY

Oh man this is stressing me out

TERESA

I'm sorry and I'm sure your friends are nice & cool but they're part of a system that is evil. If your friend works for Planned Parenthood, she's not a good person.

EMILY

She is a good person. She's kind and altruistic and she's good.

TERESA

Look I do believe there are some people, because of the way they were raised or wanting to appear trendy, who call themselves pro-choice or use birth control or whatever and are more-or-less good in a general mediocre way. But to actually *work* for the epicenter of abortion in America? The place that *sells baby parts*? That takes calculation. You have to know what you're doing and do it anyway.

EMILY

She does know what she's doing. She believes in helping women. And she flat-out does not think it's murder. And I thought the baby parts thing was a hoax.

TERESA

No it was proved, they proved it. The hoax thing was a hoax. Look it up.

EMILY

OKAY but at Planned Parenthood it's like... trying to provide safe access because people will always do it anyway unfortunately, and like, also, just as an *institution*, it's like abortion is just one tiny part of the services they provide.

TERESA

"Murder is just one of the services we provide..."

EMILY

Can you stop talking to me like I don't know it's murder? I know it's murder. Do you know what my job was before I had to move here?

TERESA

I think I heard

KEVIN

Aid for Women

EMILY

I worked for Aid for Women.

TERESA

Okay and what is that

KEVIN

Pro-life thingy

EMILY

A pro-life women's advocacy organization in Chicago, which provides homes & communities & assistance to pregnant women with nowhere else to go. We helped domestic abuse victims, refugees, homeless women choose *life*, against all odds.

TERESA

Right, and this is my point—

EMIL

But it's about these women, Teresa. These beautiful women, these strong women. We convinced women to choose life. That was my job. And it taught me so much about what it's *actually* like. And how hard these decisions actually are. And how the real problem is with men who abuse and rape and *systems, systems* that try to keep women down. The problem's not with the women who get an abortion because they don't know what else to do. Even if they do consider it the end of a life, they feel like they have no other choice, or they're afraid to bring it into the world and that makes so much sense. It's all so terrifying.

TERESA

For me, when I hear you say these things, I'm imagining someone working with elderly Holocaust victims, right? Real stories of these elderly Holocaust victims, or uh, survivors... who had all this affection for these Nazi guards and doctors and all these anecdotes of kindness and... I mean just because people demonstrate kindness and, y'know... just because there are decent people trapped in an evil system, that doesn't make the system decent.

EMILY

What...? I'm saying the system *isn't* decent...

TERESA

But okay, I'm saying that doesn't make the Nazi guards and doctors any less evil, just because they demonstrated some kindness...

EMILY

Why are you comparing this to Nazism? Olivia is not a Nazi.

TERESA

Well she's an agent of the modern-day Holocaust.

EMILY

It's not... it's not the same. It's not a Holocaust. I believe that abortion is murder and I believe that there are horrible people who want to abort Down syndrome babies and all of these things, but I don't think it's the same as a Holocaust... I just...

TERESA

Yes you do.

EMILY

No, it's different.

TERESA

How is it different? Because they're innocent fetuses? Okay, then it's worse than a Holocaust.

EMILY

No it's not... it's not an organized effort to get rid of an entire race... it's... you're not looking at it from the perspective of these *women*, Teresa—

TERESA

Look you're allowed to like your abortionist friend Olivia. But you're not allowed to tell me that she's equally as good as you. That the work you were doing in Chicago and the work she's doing in D.C. are equal. She's contributing to a genocide. A pogrom.

She's on the wrong side.

You're on the right side.

You are the good in this world, girl.

And you know it's true.

EMILY

Well I feel like all I'm asking for, all I'm ASKING for, is just a bigger dose of empathy—

TERESA

Oh don't with the *empathy*. Liberals are empathy addicts. Empathy empathy empathy. Empathy is *empty*. Arendt says we don't need to feel what someone else is feeling — first of all that's impossible, second of all it's self-righteous and breeds complacency, third of all it's irresponsible and dangerous. Feel *bad* for someone and suddenly you're erasing the boundaries of your own conscience, suddenly you're living under the tyranny of their desires. We need to know how to *think* how they're *thinking*. From a distance.

JUSTIN

Or try to *love* them.

TERESA

Sure yes.

EMILY

Beautiful, J.

TERESA

Yes yes very beautiful, but politically? It can't be about gooey feeling, it's thought — *thought*. Comprehending each other's thinking is the only possible political corrective, and we've almost completely lost the ability to do it. But I know how to do it. It's my job. And I *know* what your friend is thinking.

EMILY

Okay so what's she thinking?

TERESA

She's thinking in one of two modes: willful ignorance or knowing evil—

EMILY

Not evil no. Even if she's ignorant or blind I don't think she's evil.

TERESA

Sit her down with me for 20 minutes and watch her sweat – you might change your mind. Or else you'll realize that she's a complete moral moron.

EMILY

Ah okay, you're very cocky.

TERESA

Thank you.

EMILY

You're not all-powerful, Teresa. Other people could make you flustered. J, do you want to...

JUSTIN

Shouldn't.

EMILY

Kevin, do you understand what I'm saying at all

KEVIN

I, um... sorta, I think it's really—

EMILY

Okay WHY does everyone here believe the same things. I'm not good at debating, but I have some friends who, like... and I'd like to see that. There are people who are better at debating.

TERESA

No, you're in an excellent position to debate. You actually have *experience*. You're *great*. I'm your biggest fan.

EMILY

No.

TERESA

Yes. Objectively. But I'm sorry, I can't subscribe to some kumbaya bullshit about everyone being good. Some people steal, some people cheat on their spouses, and they will be forgiven, blah blah blah. But some people murder babies. Fuck them. They don't get off.

EMILY

I don't know I don't know I don't know. It's a system. It's *nuanced*.

KEVIN

Can I ask

What is the *system*

TERESA

It's the culture. It's the education. It's literally everything you see on TV.

KEVIN

Like what? The news?

TERESA

99% of it. Mainstream media. And all the shows. All the movies.

KEVIN

But you watch TV you love all the shows

JUSTIN

They're

TERESA

What shows?

KEVIN

Don't you love, like... *Portlandia*. *Bojack Horseman*.

TERESA

I watch the shows they're entertaining but the shows do not validate my lifestyle.
My lifestyle is in direct contrast to the shows.

EMILY

I love those shows.

JUSTIN

They're

EMILY

"Put a bird on it." Haha.

TERESA

Entertainment is inherently Dionysian, and that's a good thing in *moderation*. But it's become our national gospel.

JUSTIN

They're

KEVIN

Our president is an entertainer

TERESA

Do you want to talk about that? I could talk about that.

JUSTIN

It's

KEVIN

Plato predicted Trump

EMILY

No Trump please no Trump

KEVIN

Trump is Plato's "shadow-bleached rich man hung with superfluous fat, sitting in helpless confusion—"

JUSTIN

It's

TERESA

Trump is a Golem molded from the clay of mass media and he's come to save us all.

KEVIN

Damn

TERESA

And even if he himself is confused, he has the ability to spit out digestible soundbites rooted in decades of the work of the most brilliant conservative think tanks in the country

JUSTIN

It's

KEVIN

He's a gaseous barfbag

EMILY

Y'all

Justin

You were gonna say something

JUSTIN

Oh nothing, the moment has passed

EMILY

No what J

What

JUSTIN

Are you okay

Is this all stressing you out

EMILY

No I'm okay

I just want everyone to love each other

TERESA

We love each other we love each other.

EMILY

I love you all so much I want to cry
Really, really
Everything is going to be okay and I love you all
I love you, I love you, I love you, I really do

KEVIN

We love you too, Emily

TERESA

We love you so much.

EMILY

Really?

TERESA

I mean... yeah.

EMILY

Okay, because you're fierce. It's great. I love you.
Justin what did you want to say?

JUSTIN

I wanted to say something about the liberal...
The nice young liberal people. And the system.

TERESA

Okay what.

JUSTIN

So these nice young liberal people are blinded by a system that distracts them from true moral questions and re-focuses their attention onto fashionable and facile questions of identity and choice, which gender do you want to be today?, how much sex can you have today?, how many babies do you want? and how do you want them to look?, which is really all part of a larger ideological system that is rooted in an evil, early 20th-century quote unquote progressive trend towards quote unquote perfection, eugenics, and crypto-racism, endorsed by Margaret Sanger, an American eugenics system which persists, which wants to eliminate anything unclean or imperfect, including black babies and Down syndrome babies, and create a sterilized world based around state-mandated pleasure and narcissism. These are just facts, look it up y'all.

I can honestly say that, having lived in that world, and being a 38 year-old nomad, I can guarantee that 99% of them are willing to just be led blindly into the cave, hooked up to a heroin drip of self-satisfied digital activism and committing vile acts of self-gratification because they're told that it's important to "experience" life, when actually they're numbing

themselves to the possibility of real sacrifice or any chance of an ethical life, rooted in the grit and toil of suffering in the name of Christ.

And: there are more of them. We lost the popular vote, by a lot. Despite the indulgences afforded us by our wealthy backers and our electoral loopholes, we lack a unified youth movement. And they have that. And they're mobilizing. In many ways, they are in power. And they're trying to wipe us out. They're wishing for our death. And the only way to survive is to block them out, to focus on the Lord, and try to survive. Try to outlive them. Bake bread, make wine, work the earth, shelter wanderers, and survive.

TERESA

You talk like they're In Power. But they're not in power. We are.

JUSTIN

Maybe for now—

TERESA

No, and there are more of us, too. There are. We just aren't as loud, and we don't have control of the media. We're the most pro-life generation in history. And we need to come together to *fight*, not to *bake bread*. It's honestly baffling to me that someone as strong as you would *already* be giving up the fight when it's barely begun—

KEVIN

Teresa Teresa

TERESA

What

KEVIN

I don't feel like a hero

TERESA

Okay

KEVIN

But the thing

I was born in 1989

I'm supposed to be a hero

TERESA

Well it's an archetype. Not everyone is a hero. It's just an archetype – a collective thing.

KEVIN

But I could be a hero. If I learned how to shoot a gun... I was always afraid of holding one cuz I thought I'd just stare into the barrel and pull the trigger. But if there's a war coming, then uh I can be part of the heroes! I'll definitely die I'll definitely die. But I'll die with the heroes. You guys, Teresa is saying we're heroes! We're heroes but... okay but... okay but... Teresa if there's a war coming then why is Catholicism all about sex, seriously why is Catholicism OBSESSED with sex because I think it's borderline criminal to make priests be

celibate & worship this virgin mom & all I ever think about is what to do with this goddamn thing between my legs—

JUSTIN

Kevin, can you stop.

KEVIN

Why

JUSTIN

You're scaring everyone.

KEVIN

Okay I didn't mean to scare everyone, I thought I was riffing—
Was that not funny?

JUSTIN

No it was not. Talking about your genitalia in the company of women is not funny.

KEVIN (muttered)

Well Justin at least my dick isn't covered in warts

TERESA

Whoa

JUSTIN

What did you just say?

EMILY (holding up her phone)

Y'all my mom is here
She wants to come say hi to everyone.
Should I tell her not to
I'm gonna tell her not to

KEVIN

Yeah we're too drunk

TERESA

No are you kidding? That's the only reason I'm here.

EMILY

Okay yeah
I'll just say
I'll just say "come say hi"

Gina walks outside.

Oh, Mom I was about to text you

GINA
Hello everyone!

Everyone suddenly shifts to their best behavior.
Teresa rushes over to give Gina a hug.

TERESA
Dr. Presson! Congratulations! Your speech today was so beautiful.

GINA
Oh Teresa thank you so much. You look beautiful. It really means the world to me that y'all came out

TERESA
We wouldn't have missed it

GINA
You're too much. Look at you – you're a real person!

TERESA
I am?

GINA
You are you are! How are you sweetie?

TERESA
I'm well – I'm really—

GINA
Now, let me ask you a question.
Six years out, tell me honestly, has the curriculum served you?

TERESA
Are you kidding, it was everything.

JUSTIN
Made me who I am today

KEVIN
The curriculum was AMAZING
Woop

Kevin realizes he has vomit on his shirt, and tries to
hide it with his hands.

GINA
Kevin are you okay

KEVIN

Yes, yes I'm so good! Congratulations, Dr. Presson
You're going to be like the most amazing
Like the wonderful president of all

GINA

Thank you.
It was so lovely of y'all to come back for the ceremony.
Where's everyone else?

EMILY

They went home, Mom, it's late

GINA

Oh wow, how did it get so late?

EMILY

You got drunk that's how

GINA

Well anyhow, thank you.

KEVIN

Our lives are so awful without TCW

GINA

Kevin why are you standing over there in the shadows

KEVIN

Because I've been bad tonight
Everyone hates me

TERESA

No we don't

EMILY (under her breath, to her mom)

He's drunk

GINA

That's okay
Well, it was so nice to see everyone
Is anyone going to stick around for the eclipse?

KEVIN

Dr. Presson

GINA

Yes

KEVIN

Can you read that part of your speech
The part at the end
I need to seal it into my brain for like
The rest of my life

GINA

Oh, I don't have the speech with me

EMILY

I have it on my phone
You emailed it to me

GINA

Oh
I don't know
It's so late

KEVIN

Yes ma'am you're right
That's okay, sorry

EMILY

Mom just read it
Everyone loved it

GINA

Out loud?

TERESA

Yes. Please.

Gina laughs and looks at them.

GINA

Okay I will

EMILY

Ginaaaa
Gianinaaaa
Can't refuse the spotlight

GINA

Hush Emily

Emily hands Gina her phone.

KEVIN

Ah, thank you for doing this
Oh my gosh

GINA

This is so small.

How do I

Okay. Well, okay. Ahem.

“Our duty, our call as a college, is to behold—to bear witness— as Peter did upon the mountain (and think of that, climbing a mountain in that desert climate, breathless, thirsty, and then to see): Christ’s transfiguration into brilliant light, a light that showed him the truth, sustained him through the martyrdom to come, a light that became ours, a light that daily pours down with morning fog from our Wind River Mountains, brightening our course-work, our wilderness adventures, and our mundanities. Meeting at that point where the frailty of human nature meets God, where the time-weighted meets the eternal, we become ennobled to meet the world. Lit by an enduring radiance, we will make the essential freshness of our tradition appear. Students, climb joyously into our work here. Climb daily. We need you. We need you to serve as antidotes to those in the culture who drift into profligacy, whose vague tolerance slips so easily into indifference. We need you to be secure in moral persuasion, deeply sane, inventive, lucid, compassionate, and touched by divine fire. We pray that your example to the world will continue to “flame out, like shining from shook foil.” Each of us knows our weakness, but at the edge of our nothingness is the abyss of God’s kindness, that terrible beauty which sustains us.”

Beat.

Is that good? Is that good, Jim’s more of the writer—

KEVIN

It’s beyond anything

JUSTIN

Shining from shook foil

GINA

That’s Hopkins. Gerard Manley.

JUSTIN

I know

GINA

I know you know.

KEVIN

I know too.

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers us to greatness, like—”

GINA
Thank you Kevin.

KEVIN
It's just beautiful. It's so beautiful.

GINA
Thank you Kevin.

TERESA
I love what you say about needing students who are deeply sane.
Sanity is our scarcest national resource these days.
I wish you were president when I was here.

GINA
But then I would have taught less.

TERESA
Nevermind then.

KEVIN
DR. PRESSON?

GINA
Yes, Kevin? You don't need to yell. I'm right here.

KEVIN
Sorry.
I was just wondering
Um about being touched by divine fire... like how do you know if you are?

GINA
Well, I'm not sure if you ever know.

KEVIN
Okay
I think I'm touched by a different kind of fire
What's the opposite of divine
Mundane?
Mundane fire

TERESA
Kevin

GINA
I think that's a lovely point. I'm touched by mundane fire all the time.

KEVIN
Dr. Presson

GINA
Yes

KEVIN
Can I ask the dumbest
It's maybe the dumbest question I've ever asked but
Earlier people were like gathered around Teresa, who was doing her best impression of you

TERESA
What

EMILY
Not literally

KEVIN
No not *literally*, just
And we were, it got heated for a second, and suddenly I was like: wait.
Does this equal this?
And why are you *conservative*

GINA
Pardon?

KEVIN
Just like
Why are *you* conservative
Independent of Catholicism
I mean
Conservative, as a label
The party line
The uh, all the
I'm so... I don't know who to *be*, and

GINA
You're asking why Catholicism necessitates conservatism.

KEVIN
Yes ma'am.

GINA
Well, I think of Barry Goldwater's slogan: "In your heart, you know he's right."

She laughs at her own joke.

I have that as a poster. It's hanging in my office.
Anyway.

Well.

Hm...

Aside from the conservative defense of *life*, and true liberty, and pursuit of property, and a reverence for the Constitution? I think it has to do with ritual, and the sanctity of a *closed tabernacle*. Protecting the truth from the shifting winds. Liberals, these days, are constantly having to *open* themselves. Constantly shifting and opening themselves. Nobody actually wants to open themselves all the time. It's exhausting. And that's how you get diseases.

Teresa laughs a lot at this.

Bad jokes.

TERESA

No they're *great*.

GINA

I was a Goldwater Girl. So was Hillary Clinton. I stood with her on the same platform...

TERESA

Are you serious oh my gosh

GINA

I could have told you then that she had no spine.

KEVIN

NO BUT REALLY

I was really asking

Not the slogan,

The

why

TERESA

Kevin, please

GINA

No, it's okay

KEVIN

All we know how to do is make things Catholic. That's all you taught us how to do. At other schools, they allow for different conclusions. But here, we're in the pursuit of the same conclusion – what you want isn't different conclusions, you want better poetry to get us to the same place. It's all pre-determined, you're exceptionally good at thinking deeper and more poetically into the *dogma*. You chide us for not being imaginative, but you kick us out of school for smoking a joint. But there's a whole side to life that we're just pushing down. Like can't we be Catholic and not, uh...

TERESA

Kevin what are you talking about

GINA
No, shush Teresa
This is beautiful Kevin, you're so close...
Hm I want to answer
Hm
Hm, a little tipsy myself, Kevin, but let me try to...

Pause.

The space between the cup and the lip.
Martin Diamond talked about this.
The little space between the cup and the lip.
Progressivism moves too fast and forces change and constricts liberty.
Willmoore Kendall said the basic symbol of American politics was "a virtuous people through deliberative processes striving to achieve and advance their declared purposes..."
Deliberative processes.
Gridlock is beautiful. In the delay is deliberation and true consensus. If you just railroad something through because you want it done, that's the passion of the mob. Delaying is the structure of the republic, which is structured differently in order to offset the dangers of democracy. The separation of powers. I believe in slowness, gridlock – these are the true hallmarks of democracy. The space between the cup and the lip...
Just waiting a little longer to taste the wine...

She gestures as though she's drinking from a cup and holding it there still.

You ever watch those old Hollywood romantic comedies that were made during the Hays Code era? They weren't allowed to show anything – anything explicit would be censored. Working within that restraint, those movies are sexier than anything made today. A glance, a slight brushing against the hand, an innuendo... ah.

EMILY
Mom.

GINA
Everything that has form has built-in delay. The difference between goal and form. For example, a man wooing a woman, right? The most "efficient" way to get her is to rape her... but the better way is the long process. The wooing.

EMILY
Mom, oh my gosh...

GINA
Or sorry... funerals!
The most efficient way is to burn the body, right away.
But we don't. We have a ceremony.
All of the important things in life have this built-in delay. It gives form to things, it makes us citizens rather than subjects. And when things move too far in one direction, we pull it back. A gentle *return* to the original form. A *return* is wonderful. It's coming home.

KEVIN
So Trump

GINA
I don't want to talk about Trump. Why is this that? Why are we making this that?

KEVIN
Because it is that, it very much is that.
Trump talks about a return to the way it was, but he doesn't feel like coming home to me.
He's gross, he's...

EMILY
He's so gross he's a gross monster

KEVIN
Yeah and all of us are dying inside because we're being equated with Trump, we're letting
Trump exist—

TERESA
I'm not dying inside

KEVIN
And there's so much contradiction, Dr. Presson.
Our Republican president is not *slow*
There's no space between the cup and lip
He drinks it all down
He rams things through

GINA
He's a passing thing, a symptom. He's chemotherapy.
I hope he gets impeached before he can re-campaign. I'm holding out for Pence.

JUSTIN
Amen.

GINA
Trump was made possible by the uneducated.
There are so many of them.
It is a failure of education.
Still, "the last shall be first and the first shall be last."
His supporters are, I believe, the last. And to align ourselves with him takes grace and true
intellectual and spiritual grit.
I'll say I'm glad Bannon's gone. And all the others. He & his goons, fat pawns of a grotesque
fleeting *nom*.

TERESA
Bannon was actually one of the good guys

GINA
Wrong. I met him in Napa. He's a pig.

TERESA
Well, but—

GINA
And I'm personal friends with Pat Buchanan. I loved Buchanan. He's loopy now but *then*.
Bannon's something else – reminds me of—

TERESA
But Dr. Presson

GINA
Yes

TERESA
I think his ideas are actually really in line with

GINA
No, they're not
They're adolescent
They're a symptom

TERESA (starting to pace)
Adolescent? Ok. Symptom? Ok.

KEVIN
I love what you're saying, Dr. Presson.
After I voted for Trump I vomited next to my car.

GINA
Yes, after I voted for him, I went to confession. And I'm *scared* of confession. I hate Trump.
I hated Obama. But really, no one since Bush Senior had much regard for the constitution.
W. did a number on it too. What I will say is that there's danger from all sides.

JUSTIN
Yup

GINA
Liberty is being attacked, by both sides, and it's tragic to see. Polarities make way for a tyrant,
but tyrants can be productive. We'll get through it.

KEVIN
Did you just call him a tyrant?

GINA
Listen, FDR was the closest thing we had to a true dictator. He altered the shape of America
in a debilitating way. He started this pervasive entitlement mentality. A far more necessary

and dangerous quality of a dictator is skill as an administrator and a bureaucrat. Which Trump does not possess.

TERESA

Right. He's not a tyrant, he's strong. Because it's war. America's at war. We're at war.

GINA

Oh honey. You actually think that?

TERESA

I do. All it takes is one big shift & we'll realize the groups had been forming all along, and I can't say which group it'll be, maybe it'll be many at once, but when it happens, we'll start to hear the gunshots, one at a time and then more and more and more and more, getting closer, they'll have a plan and we need to be ready, we need to know what we'd die for. Because it's happening any day.

GINA

Where are you getting this?

TERESA

From myself

GINA

You just made it all up?

TERESA

From actually

From Steve Bannon, he gave a beautiful talk at the Vatican

GINA

Oh, Bannon. Listen, I just don't trust any of these men – they're all on their third wives.

TERESA

I'd love for you to watch his speeches, I can send you the link. He said that one of the biggest open questions in this country is whether the United States is willing to embrace the strenuous life. Is that grit still there, that tenacity, that we've seen on the battlefields, fighting for something greater than ourselves?

JUSTIN

There's a quote by Teddy Roosevelt—that's something like: when men fear work or fear righteous war, when women fear motherhood, they tremble on the brink of doom.

KEVIN

I fear work

I fear righteous war

I'm trembling on the brink of doom

TERESA

And I fear motherhood, I've been infected by the culture... and that's part of the *problem*—

GINA
Okay, listen

KEVIN
I feel like a disease, Dr. Presson

GINA
What?

KEVIN
I feel like a disease.

GINA
What are you talking about?

EMILY
Actually, I'm the diseased one, Kevin

KEVIN
I'm so sorry.

GINA
You're all so...
What is going on here tonight?
Why are you all so sad?

TERESA
I'm not sad

JUSTIN
Me neither

KEVIN
I don't know

TERESA
I'm so sorry about this, Dr. Presson

GINA
No it's okay
This reminds me of Augustine's sense of unquiet — *cor inquietus*.
You're all forgetting your being.

KEVIN
What do you mean?

GINA

Oh, I don't know. Maybe I'm old, maybe I'm out of touch, maybe my conservatism isn't conservative anymore. Maybe it's more agrarian. And I'll be dead soon anyhow...

EMILY

Mom.

GINA

But in the meantime, I'm trying to *be*.

Read your Hannah Arendt. You deserve *delight*.

Or your Heidegger? "Forgetfulness of being" is the biggest problem we face.

To forget being means to forget how astonishing it is that anything exists at all.

Aren't we allowed to just *be*?

Do we have to keep *making* ourselves? No. We already *are*. We don't have to keep up with their new "rights." We don't have to make sense out of their noise.

Tune it out. Say your prayers and vote Republican. Do it for the unborn.

And then just *be*.

Climb a mountain. Make a meal. Behold creation and *be*.

Okay?

Anyhow. I'm hog-tired.

JUSTIN

I can walk you to the car.

GINA

Okay, I'm going to the car

Let's go, Emily, come on

EMILY

Okay. One sec

TERESA

So wonderful to see you, Dr. Presson, and congratulations.

GINA

Thank you, Teresa. Write me a letter. Your hero Bannon – he isn't going to last. He's crass, he's an identity politics toad. You need to look higher.

TERESA

I

What

EMILY

Too *harsh* Mom

GINA

Oh, she can take it.

TERESA
Dr. Presson

GINA
What is it Teresa

TERESA
I'm trying to
You taught me to try to form the body politic in the image of...
In the true good, in the

GINA
I know
But you're getting it all wrong, sweetheart.
It disturbs me that you're aligning yourself with these people.
These new people on the Right, they're not true conservatives. They're charlatans, they're hucksters. And honestly, darling, they're a bit racist.

TERESA
"Racist." Okay.

GINA
I think too much of it becomes about race. All this about "whiteness" and "privilege" and "blackness" all of a sudden. It's not about race. It's about these nauseating movements, all that noise drowning out the discourse.

Suddenly, the horrible screeching noise again.
Everyone gasps & covers their ears.

TERESA
GOSH

GINA
WHAT ON EARTH

JUSTIN
SORRY – GENERATOR
BE RIGHT BACK

Justin rushes off. The sound dies down.

GINA
Geez.

EMILY
It's his generator, it's broken.

GINA
Let's get going, Emily. Goodnight, you two.

TERESA

Dr. Presson, aren't you a member of the John Birch Society?

GINA

Pardon? I used to be.

TERESA

Why'd you leave?

GINA

I got too busy, with all the pregnancies and they... this is a thing that happens to me sometimes. I get pushed out of places. I'm too opinionated.

EMILY

You're a strong woman and they can't handle it.

GINA

Oh hush.

TERESA

What were you too opinionated about?

GINA

Oh, I don't remember now.

TERESA

So why were you in it in the first place?

GINA

Because Goldwater was. He didn't like the founder but he liked the society.

TERESA

And what was the society.

GINA

It was created in response to the New Deal – it opposed wealth redistribution. It's anti-communist, anti-totalitarian, anti-collectivist, founded on George Washington's precedents—

TERESA

So you're anti-collectivist, and you look around today, what are the collectives that you see?

Justin comes back.

GINA

What is this, Teresa?

TERESA

What are the major movements, the major groups?

GINA
You're giving me an exam.

TERESA
Sorry, I...

GINA
No, let's have fun. Okay. Collectives. It would be Occupy Wall Street...

EMILY
That was like 10 years ago, Mom—

GINA
Or, oh... the Women's March, and Black Lives Matter.

TERESA
Right. And I would argue... the John Birch Society was formed in 1958. It wasn't in response to the New Deal. It was in response to the Civil Rights Movement.

GINA (laughing)
No, Teresa... it was about Communism.

TERESA
No it was both—

GINA
Teresa, I was there. You weren't. The main target was Communism. There were a lot of Communists in the Civil Rights Movement. We also oppose globalism, the agendas of—

TERESA
But all of these words are "codes," right?

GINA
Codes for what.

TERESA
For America's race problem.

GINA
What are you talking about?

TERESA
They're ways of talking about race. They're polite ways of talking about race. This is big on the Left right now and they're not wrong about this.

GINA
You're agreeing with them? Tearing down the statues? Erasing history – lobotomizing ourselves?

TERESA

No of course not, but I do agree with them about race and the ways in which it needs to be directly addressed. Their claim is not only that our political party is white supremacist, is ruled not only by racism, but by an economic need to have *slaves* under a different name—

GINA

I can't believe what I'm hearing.

TERESA

Black Lives Matter, the Women's March, BDS, Occupy – they're all together, they're "intersectional." They're united in the attempt to constantly lean on America's original sin – slavery. They're using that original sin to take over, and create a new America which doesn't resemble a true democracy at all, and which oppresses us in the same ways our ancestors oppressed them. As revenge. Literal revenge. So what do we do with that? We can know that we're not racist, we can know that we're not looking to keep slavery alive, but there's no convincing them. So what are our choices? If we don't collectivize ourselves, we're going to be exterminated.

GINA

We will not. We have the Constitution, dear.

TERESA

They *hate* the Constitution. They want to get rid of it. They think it's a white supremacist document designed to protect white men.

GINA

So *what?* Gather our torches and drive our cars into crowds? That's not helping our case.

TERESA

I'm not crazy about that, but if we don't do *anything*...

GINA

What's all this "we." Listen, every American heart needs to be *educated* in the *natural good*.

TERESA

Or what about Pat Buchanan?

GINA

What *about* him?

TERESA

Emily said you hosted a rally for him in the 90s.

EMILY

Sorry Mom

TERESA

Why'd you do that?

GINA
Because I supported him for president.

TERESA
Why?

GINA
Because he was pro-life, an educated man...

TERESA
He was an incredibly controversial figure, you must have known that...

GINA
I'm not afraid of a little controversy.

TERESA
But to say you supported him because he was pro-life, an educated man... I mean you're ignoring the effect he had on the discourse.

GINA
Teresa, things are not as—

TERESA
There were other conservatives you could have aligned yourself with. Russell Kirk or George Will or William F. Buckley, for example. But you didn't. Why?

GINA
They weren't as sure of where they stood.

TERESA
Because they're weren't tough enough for you?

GINA
Maybe so.

TERESA
Tough about what?

GINA
About *life*, Teresa. You have to understand. When *Roe v. Wade* happened, we thought we had lost everything. We endured over 40 years of moral degradation as millions of babies were aborted—it took strength, and patience. We had to cultivate that strength and prepare the younger generation to take up the fight in case we died before we won it and now we're finally finally taking the Supreme Court back. And to do that, we had to make compromises. We had to align ourselves with people whose priority was... ah.

TERESA
People whose priority was what? Own it.

GINA
Your tone, Teresa.

TERESA
I'm sorry.

GINA
I'm tired. I need to go to sleep.

TERESA
Pat Buchanan was willing to say things that other people weren't. About how black movements are funded by proven communists. About how there is a documented, daily, open attack on white Christians. And we're not allowed to talk about it. White people are the only people in the United States who aren't allowed to take public pride in who they are. You always liked to tell us about the Catholic priests who are being martyred in Iraq, in Africa, and now in *France*... and you reminded us that it could happen here too. Well, who would be the ones to do it? What would they look like? We need to be able to talk about our enemy. Why'd you host Pat Buchanan in your *home* if you were just *compromising*?

GINA
Because I thought he could WIN. Because I thought he would win, and I was wrong, because he wasn't stupid enough to appeal to the masses. It took more *time*. But we're getting it back, we're getting it back. And we're *not* on the brink of doom. Not anymore.

TERESA
Dr. Presson, you told me that we *were*. Over and over and over again, in your courses – in Thucydides, Herodotus – you would bring it back to today. You would warn us about *today*. You would ask us what we would do to prevent these outbreaks of violence when they came for *us*. How would we be strong enough? How would we know how to recognize it? It would be bodies in the street, mass movements.

GINA
I didn't think you would take it this far! We need to be appealing to the natural good...

TERESA
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN!

GINA
It means CALM DOWN!

TERESA
I agree, okay? I agree. Everyone needs to calm down. But they're never going to listen to you, because you're white. Because your language is the language of the "oppressor."

GINA
Good Lord.

TERESA

Right? I know! Telling them to “calm down” is “a violence.” It’s a micro-aggression.

GINA

Look, it’s not their fault that they get manipulated by socialists, whipped up into these frenzies. If it takes more time for them to be satisfied, to realize that they’re *fine*, then so be it. I can’t imagine what it’s like to be born black in this country. But I am certainly not wishing for their subjugation. I certainly don’t support candidates because I secretly believe that they’ll oppress brown people and boost white people. I believe in a free market. I believe in hard work. I believe in a limited government which allows the course of—

TERESA

Every thinker on the left today would say everything you’re saying is bullshit. You’re a little protected out here, you don’t have to deal with the pronouns and the cancelling and the... I just feel like you need to experience the front lines. They’d look at you and point to how all of your conferences are funded by the Koch Brothers and they’d itemize the worst-hits of Trump’s rhetoric and they’d say there is no free market, there is no democracy, the country’s oppressed are still on the auction block, being ruled by the same people who have always ruled it—

GINA

Well, then, honey: what exactly are you proposing?

TERESA

Looking at the truth in the face. Knowing what it looks like. Knowing what we look like to them. It’s not going anywhere. Trying our best not to fight, to be more graceful than the other side. But also not taking any *shit*. Not ignoring all the hypocritical *bullshit*. Going blow for blow. And being ready for the war, if it happens. *When* it happens. You call us white, we’ll call you black. You call us Nazis, we’ll call you genocidal eugenicists. You call us racist, we’ll call *you* racist. You call us ignorant Christians, we’ll call you spineless hedonistic soulless bloviating bloodbags. But you stop doing that, and give this thing space and time to work itself out, we’ll stop too. You focus your efforts on making this a better nation, an American nation, a republic of ideas, we will too.

GINA

I’m so, so sorry to hear all of this.

I don’t know what I did wrong.

TERESA

You just lost track of the new thinkers.

GINA

No, Teresa.

I failed you.

This is a brutal and stupid way of thinking.

Wrapped up in *identity*.

You’re just as fragile as they are. Maybe more so.

You’re being ruled by *emotion*.

It’s embarrassing. It’s imbecilic.

I thought I was cultivating students of *character*. I thought our students were happy and strong. Was I wrong? Look at you, you're worldly, you're crude, and you're *weak*. You're *one of them*.

TERESA

I... no, I wasn't trying to offend you, and I'm not one of them...
I'm trying to know the way they think, like Arendt...

Pause. Gina shakes her head.

GINA

And what's going to happen... I'll just die off in a couple of years, having failed...

EMILY

Mom, please don't say that.

GINA

I know. I know. Sorry.

JUSTIN

Dr. Presson, have you seen the new horses?

GINA

Teresa, listen. Hey. Look at me.

TERESA

I'm looking.

GINA

In the thin space between your intellect and your animal nature is the cave meant for the Holy Spirit. The tiny cave for your conscience.
Gut instinct.
Goodness.
You're not listening to that. I can tell.
And it's heartbreaking.
You've managed to do it again, Teresa. You've managed to break my heart.
I risked my good standing at this school to give you clemency in your senior year. Now I wonder if I was wrong to ever treat you with gentleness.
You've reverted back to an emotional, fire-spewing slut.
You're whoring yourself to popular opinion.
I do not recognize you.
And I despise the world you're trying to create.

Pause.

EMILY

Mother. I think you should leave.

GINA

Yes I *know*, Emily. Folks, I need to go sleep.

JUSTIN

See you on Monday, Dr. Presson.

We've got new horses, you should come see them.

GINA

Okay. Are they trained?

JUSTIN

I'm working on it.

GINA

Great. I don't know how you get on those horses. Terrifies me.

JUSTIN

Copy that.

Gina starts to exit.

One thing I've been wondering, Dr. Presson, is whether you'd consider doing marksmanship training for the students. I'd be happy to take on those courses, in addition to the horseback...

GINA

What? No, absolutely not. I don't want guns around the students.

JUSTIN

I'd make sure everything was as safe as possible.

GINA

Why are you asking me this *now*? I need to *sleep*.

JUSTIN

One of the things I love about this school is the way it hearkens back to the Ancient Greek model, in which students learned philosophy, mathematics, metaphysics, but also trained in the art of war.

GINA

What *war*?

JUSTIN

Ma'am, I believe Teresa is correct about the coming war.

GINA

Oh, Justin. Is this some sort of... gesture?

JUSTIN
Ma'am?

GINA
You're performing some kind of gesture for poor Teresa.

JUSTIN
I'm performing no kind of gesture, ma'am, just expressing my opinion.

GINA
Uh-huh. You know, you don't owe her anything, Justin.

JUSTIN
Ma'am?

GINA
Forget it. Look, we already have wilderness training. Adding guns into the mix... and while we're still seeking accreditation? We *cannot* appear to be some radical far-right militant school. They've already pegged us as a cult because we don't take federal money, and if we suddenly offer *weapons* training? No, impossible.

JUSTIN
Yes ma'am but in an increasingly violent world, it seems reasonable to have your students – who are educated in morality and sanity – to be equipped to meet that violence should it arise near them or, worse, *towards* them.

GINA
Justin—

JUSTIN
Beyond that, they're also used to hunt, which, for the wilderness training—

GINA
I know. I understand the argument.

JUSTIN
And as the debate about the Second Amendment continues to flare, I think it might be important for the college to take its official stance seriously—

GINA
I just don't want guns on campus. For now, they stay locked in the safe with the cell-phones. When I'm dead, it'll be easy to convince the next guy. But I just don't like guns. And that's just how it is.

JUSTIN
Copy that.

GINA

Goodnight, Justin. And don't worry. Teresa will be gone tomorrow and then you can get your good sense back.

EMILY

Mother – leave.

GINA

Goodnight, Kevin. Go home.

KEVIN

Sssure

GINA

And Kevin?

KEVIN

Yes! Goodbye. Congratulations. Again it was a beautiful speech.

GINA

Thank you. Come visit me before you leave. We have an opening – we need a Dean of Admissions.

KEVIN

Oh wow

GINA

Consider interviewing? I think you'd be perfect

KEVIN

Are you serious?

GINA

I am.

You're close to something, Kevin.

KEVIN

Thank you so much, that would be... oh man, I'm really thinking about this

GINA

Good – come visit me. Because it could go the other way, too.

You seem...

Your soul is in danger.

There's something awful in your eyes.

Kevin is speechless.

Okay, night y'all.

And I'm sorry if I was a bit stern just now, Teresa. If there's a war coming, you'll know it when you see it. Don't invent one.

And everyone:

Don't be dark and complicated, even though it's very Catholic. Strive for *peace*.

Gina almost succeeds at leaving.

TERESA

Dr. Presson... !

GINA

Teresa, I'm going to sleep.

TERESA

Yes, I just... I'm writing a book, my collected essays... I don't know if you heard, but I have a real following online and um...

I don't know if you've read any of them, but...

I was wondering if you wanted to write a blurb. I was going to ask you to write a blurb.

Teresa gets a manuscript out of her purse. She holds it out to Gina.

GINA

Oh gosh I don't want all that paper. Can you send me the pdf?

EMILY

Mom just take it.

Gina takes it.

GINA

I'll read this when I can. But I don't like that website you write for. It's illegible to me. It's a landscape I do not recognize.

TERESA

Right. Okay. Sorry.

GINA

No, it's okay. I'll read it when work calms down. I don't know if you heard but I got a new job recently.

TERESA (near tears)

I know. Sorry.

Oh and I forgot to tell you...

I live right near the place where the Battle of Brooklyn happened...

Where, um... George Washington

Pause.

GINA
Thank you for telling me.
Come on Emily

EMILY
One second Mom, I
I think I'll get a ride home with Justin, if that's ok?

GINA
Is that ok with him?

JUSTIN
Course.

GINA
So Emily what did I come here for?

EMILY
To
To see everyone
They wanted to see you

GINA
Right.
Well, whatever.
Goodnight.

Gina leaves.

KEVIN
My soul is in danger? She just said my soul is in danger

EMILY
Oh she makes me so mad
I don't know why she said that, she should not have said that

KEVIN
No it's okay it's just
Something awful in my eyes?!

JUSTIN
I think she was just responding to a few things that you were putting out into the air, Kevin

KEVIN
What did I say
I just
She sees
Did she see the vomit on my
She sees how much my soul is in danger, it's so obvious

EMILY

It's not, she's ridiculous, she's on a power-trip

JUSTIN

Nah, she was just

EMILY

No, J. She's constantly trying to fix people, she's never meeting them where they are. She's constantly just focusing on what they're not. But she's also a hero. I mean seriously, she had 8 kids in 13 years AND three miscarriages and still taught full-time. And they were all C-sections. She basically shrunk five inches from eight C-sections. And she's got basically paper for knees and she's walking around in tremendous pain every freaking day. Meanwhile when my dad gets a cold, it's like – *call the Navy*. So y'all I guess we can forgive her for being a little intense.

KEVIN

She's not intense. She's just *right*. She sees it. I knew it, I knew it... I'm bad and it's obvious and she just chopped me in half.

JUSTIN

She was just trying to help, Kevin

KEVIN

She did help me. It's okay.

No, *Kevin*

You're a demon

JUSTIN

Kevin, seriously, go to sleep.

KEVIN

Oh my God, stop trying to brush me under the rug Justin

JUSTIN

What?

KEVIN

You keep trying to hide me

JUSTIN

No I don't

KEVIN

Yes you do

You hate how weak I am

You all hate how weak I am

But in the next kingdom, my weakness will invert, and I'll be as strong there as I was weak here. And you'll be the weakest creature, Justin. You're gonna burn in hell motherf—

JUSTIN
KEVIN.

KEVIN
WHAT, JUSTIN

JUSTIN
STOP IT. RIGHT NOW.

KEVIN
STOP WHAT
JESUS

Justin moves towards Kevin, who backs away.

I'm going to split myself open

EMILY
Oh my Lord
Kev what is wrong
I've never seen you like this

KEVIN
Never yeah
I hid it from you

Kevin starts crying.

I'm so drunk y'all
I'm the drunkest I've ever been
Oh and
Emily
For so long
For so long I've wanted
To bathe you, to bathe you, uh

JUSTIN
Kevin, that's it—

KEVIN
And Teresa
For so long
For so long I've wanted you
Wanted you to be my girlfriend
For you to beat me up & teach me how to fff, how to make love
When you told me you had sex with Just—

Teresa pushes Kevin's face, hard, and his neck snaps back and he flips to the ground and lies there, maybe unconscious.

TERESA
Oh my God

EMILY
Oh my Gosh
Oh no

Justin checks on Kevin.

KEVIN (quiet)
Damn Teresa

Kevin snores.

JUSTIN
He's okay
He's snoring

EMILY
That could be bad though
It could be a concussion right
We should wake him up

Kevin stops snoring and turns his face to the ground.

KEVIN (whispered)
No I'm okay
I'm so sorry Emily

EMILY
For what

KEVIN
For me

EMILY
For you?

KEVIN
For all of this night

EMILY
Why are you apologizing to *me*

KEVIN

This just shouldn't be anything that you have to see

EMILY

Kevin I'm fine, I'm here just like you
Don't talk to me like I'm some pure

Teresa starts approaching Kevin.

TERESA

Oh my God
I can't believe I

KEVIN

I'm sorry Emily

EMILY

Stop it

KEVIN

Sorry

TERESA

Kevin
Oh God

Teresa goes to the ground and holds Kevin.

I'm so sorry

KEVIN

I'm so sorry

TERESA

I'm so sorry

KEVIN

Are you holding me

TERESA

Yes

KEVIN

Why

TERESA

Cuz

KEVIN
I'm sorry

TERESA
I didn't mean to hurt you

KEVIN
I'm so sorry
You're holding me

TERESA
Yes

KEVIN
For a second I saw the mountain

TERESA
You saw the mountain?

KEVIN
For a second I fell asleep and I saw the mountain

TERESA
What mountain

KEVIN
Sinks Canyon. The one we all climbed when we were freshman right?
That one with all the burned trees cuz of the fire...

TERESA
Right

KEVIN
We were all on the mountain for a second

TERESA
Right

KEVIN
I was different, I was a different person, I was young

TERESA
We can go back up the mountain while we're here, let's go back up

KEVIN
And then I saw more though

TERESA
You saw more

KEVIN

I saw, higher up
I saw someone coming down
Carrying the stones

TERESA

They were carrying the stones

KEVIN

They were carrying the stones

TERESA

What stones

KEVIN

The stones had words on them for everything we've been missing
There are things we've been missing

TERESA

There are things we've been missing

KEVIN

There are secret sacraments and commandments we forgot to follow
And they were carrying the stones down
They were blind, I couldn't tell if it was a he or a she, it wasn't either, it was more than one
being in one being
It was night but it wasn't like night
And I watched them come down the mountain and I wanted to wake you all up but I
couldn't move and they just kept moving – they didn't see us, we were blending into the
rocks & the burned trees, they just kept moving, they were blind
And they moved past us and I should have stopped them
And then they
They
They took the stones away, and I fell asleep, I didn't tell anyone
And that's when I started to change
Leave me all of you please, please, leave me alone

He curls up on the ground. Teresa stands up.

EMILY

Hey

TERESA

Hey uh. I'm really scared

EMILY

Of what

TERESA
That um...

EMILY
Was it my mom

TERESA
No, I can handle it.

EMILY
What are you scared of?

TERESA (cold)
That my wedding won't be beautiful. That it just won't be beautiful. That people won't know how to celebrate me, or my love.

Pause. She gets quieter.

Or just that people don't know me, that I don't let them know me
That I'm too private with my love
Or that I don't really know how to love at all

From the ground:

KEVIN
No it'll be beautiful
It'll be scandalously particular – everyone will look at you and wonder how this one person
this one particular person got so much grace.

Teresa frowns.

TERESA
Thanks Kevin

KEVIN
Hey um
Can I sleep here Justin?

JUSTIN
Fine.

Kevin nods, stands up, and goes inside.

The screech of the generator again.

EMILY
OH GOD

TERESA
YOU HAVE TO FIX THAT

JUSTIN
IT'LL PASS IN A SECOND.
SORRY.

It screeches and screeches.

TERESA
IS IT GOING TO STOP

JUSTIN
IT SHOULD

EMILY
AHHHHHHH

JUSTIN
Goshdarnit

TERESA
JUSTIN WHAT THE HELL IS—

The screeching stops.

WRONG WITH THIS PLACE
oh ok
Well, on that note.
Emily will you get brunch with me tomorrow?

EMILY
Really?

TERESA
Yeah I just...

Pause.

EMILY
Yes. Okay.

TERESA
Okay. Goodnight.
Emily, tell your mom, uh...
Well, goodnight.

Teresa leaves.

Now Emily doubles over in pain.

JUSTIN
Hey hey
You okay?

He helps her to a chair.

EMILY
Lot of pain.

JUSTIN
Where

EMILY
Everywhere

JUSTIN
How long

EMILY
For like 20 minutes

JUSTIN
Why didn't you say something

EMILY
Everyone was trying to figure their things out

JUSTIN
You should have told me
Breathe

She breathes.

EMILY
Oh my Gosh

JUSTIN
You're okay

EMILY
What did you want to say to me?

JUSTIN
We don't have to talk about that now.

EMILY
Tell me, I want to hear, that's why I stayed.

JUSTIN

Uh

EMILY

Please

JUSTIN

Okay well

Pause.

I think, I've been thinking
And I think I'm going to enter the monastery
The one in Abruzzo

EMILY

oh

Pause.

JUSTIN

I've prayed on it quite a bit and I think it's what's best

EMILY

I'm happy for you really J

Pause.

JUSTIN

I don't want you to feel abandoned

EMILY

I don't feel abandoned
I'm just going to miss you
You're so good to me and you're my best friend
And I think you'd be such a good father that's all

JUSTIN

A father

EMILY

I just had a dream I had a vision of you as a father
But it's okay, I've been wrong before

Pause.

Is it really what you want?

JUSTIN

I was starting to feel a lot of anger and I don't know why
And then a terrible compassion
And then this terrible compassion
And then paralysis...
I'll just be a monk in Italy
I'll just work the good small ways and pray for you and

EMILY

I need a buddy, J
I really need one so bad
Stay here

Far off, a gun goes off. Justin looks towards the sound. He turns back towards Emily.

Just stay.

More gunshots in the distance. They look towards the sound.

JUSTIN

Someone's doing target practice.

More gunshots. They don't pay attention to them.

Uh I've been telling a lie all night.

EMILY

What? What lie?

JUSTIN

About the screeching noise, the generator.

EMILY

What?

JUSTIN

When I first moved into this house, I felt the most horrible presence. It was suffocating me. I had the house blessed. Fr. Paul came & basically scrubbed it down with holy water. It didn't help.
And that screech you heard, it isn't the generator.
I don't know what that is.

Pause. This hits Emily hard. She shakes her head.

EMILY

I had this crazy nightmare, it was a nightmare even though I was awake. I thought I was this woman Tiffany – this pregnant woman I counseled in Chicago who ended up getting an

abortion anyway, it was probably the worst session I had out of all of them. She was so mean to me, just like screaming at me and calling me a self-righteous c-word and all this horrible stuff, but it wasn't her fault, she had been hurt so much, I think abused, and she was tall and black, this black woman who was desperate and so wounded and angry, and so I was lying there and I was convinced that I was *her* – I was in insane pain, on my bed, I couldn't move, and I was *her*, in Chicago, waking up so exhausted and so afraid to start the day. Just, I was Tiffany in my bed, and I had so much to do, and my brain was knives. I had no hope. I just lost control. I wasn't me. I was terrified.

She curls into herself.

JUSTIN

Buddy

Buddy

EMILY

Don't call me that

I hate myself

JUSTIN

Don't say that

Hey

EMILY

I hate myself

JUSTIN

Emily

EMILY

No I don't, okay

I don't then

Why do I have a body?

JUSTIN

What—

EMILY

I'm just so tired of talking

There's nothing to figure out

We just eat each other up & die one by one

And in heaven it's going to be so different, all the words and meaning will fade into no words and no meaning, just God everywhere through us all the time, and it'll hurt so bad.

It'll hurt forever.

And maybe if we just...

You know?

Fuckitfuckitfuckitfuckit fuck you, get out of here. Get the fuck out of here. Fuck your empathy. I hate your empathy— you're not better than me. Fancy fucking pity. Fuck your empathy. You can't understand what I'm feeling. Fuck your pity and fuck your empathy you

self-righteous cunt. There's nothing there. Get the fuck out from behind that desk telling me what you think you know about me. You don't know anything about me and fuck you. You can think of me but you cannot feel me. You cannot feel me. You cannot possibly ever feel what this feels like. High up in your tower of see-everything. You can't go back to the shit that became my shit, the knife that cut me. See what I'm seeing. Don't feel what I'm feeling. You can't fuse with me. You can't merge with me. And my pain doesn't make me better fuck you. And my pain doesn't bring me closer to Jesus fuck you. And fuck what-does-it-matter-if-you're-feeling-it-if-you're-feeling-it-you're-one-of-the-lucky-ones – fuck your holy fool, fuck your war, fuck your astonishment, fuck your path of totality, fuck your grateful acre, fuck your grateful acre, the acre is not grateful, the acre is in pain, the acre is dying, fuck you. Listen to me. I'm one of the damned, I'm the trampled-on, I'm the shit-covered, I'm the rotting, I'm the teeming mass, I'm the hacking cough, I'm the phlegm, I'm the vomit, I'm the bloody piss, I'm the look-away, I'm the shake-your-head, I'm the praying-for, I'm the prayer, I'm the oh no. You don't feel this, you can't feel this. And grace doesn't happen. It doesn't exist. The big bitch shits on your fuck. You don't know how dangerous this is. It's too dangerous, don't try to feel this, it'll kill you, it won't solve anything, leave me to die, get away from here. Help me oh God. Get me out of this. Get me to the water. Turn it off. The song is over. And I'm still here? And I'm just me? And I'm just me and I'm still here. I'm dead and look what I can do. Kill more on my way through. Feel it kicking. Know that it's in me and still kill it. Know that it's living and still kill it. Cut it out. Throw it away. Toss it out. Look away. Sign the paper. Walk around. Go to sleep. Wake up. A little later I'll let somebody else in. Then I'll fuck somebody else. Then somebody else. Then somebody else.

She hides herself. She breathes.

Oh J where am I
Where did I go

JUSTIN
You're here – hey.

EMILY
Hey

JUSTIN
Emily, are you— what do I do

EMILY
What happened

JUSTIN
How do I help

EMILY
You don't have to help

JUSTIN
You're in so much pain, I didn't know

EMILY
You do know

JUSTIN
I didn't really know

EMILY
Know what

JUSTIN
The pain

EMILY
It's okay
I love pain
I love it
I love pain
We love it

JUSTIN
Emily—

A gunshot whizzes by us, eerily close.

EMILY
Ah okay. Okay. Guess what? I feel a little better now.
Doopy-doo.
Come on. We're okay.
Doopy-doo.
Doopy-doo.

JUSTIN
Doopy-doo.
Yup.

EMILY
Simple as a doopy-doo.

JUSTIN
Just a simple hoopy-hoo.

EMILY
Yuppy-yoo.

The end.