

Synopsis: Astrid shows up for her first day of work at the Danbury Hydroelectric Power Plant and Water Treatment facility. What follows is a descent into madness. Astrid meets the strange folks who work at the Dam. They take her on a journey that culminates in a trip all the way to oblivion.

Unsweet Perdition is a 90-minute abstract science fiction play within the genre of the “New Weird.” The play draws its influence primarily from works such as the SCP Foundation, Severance, Control, Annihilation, House of Leaves, Patriot (2015), and the X Files. It aims to elevate the character’s dreams, presence, and true motivations within each monologue driven scene.

Author Bio: Evan Spreen is a LGBTQ+ Playwright/Director based in Los Angeles. Recently, his play *Amelia?* was part of PEP Productions Best of 2020 festival in Orange County, NY and Brisk Festival LA. His one-act *Lost Oceans* was selected as Best of Festival at Know Theater’s 2022 festival in Binghamton, NY. His horror play *The Vast and Unknowable Oven* was performed at Kent School in Connecticut in 2023. In New Mexico, his play *Decision Makers* was part of the New Mexico Seven 2023 at the Fusion Theater company. *Unsweet Perdition* first premiered at the Hollywood Fringe 2025 and went on to play at MythicFest. Evan considers “weird” theater to be his particular focus. Evan is a proud member of the DGA, HWA, and SFWA.

Characters: 3M3F (Ethnicity is completely open.)
((Diverse casting is super encouraged.))

Astrid Kelvin: F (20’s) Recent graduate. New hire. Water treatment solutions. Likes 80’s synth instrumental and Japanese jazz.

Mike Broom: M (30’s) General labor. A kind man. Someone who doesn’t do drugs but is somehow stoned anyway. Likes the slow Simon and Garfunkle ballads.

Dr. Paul Morgan: M (40’s) Lead Hydrologist. Attuned to a different frequency. 20 years of service to the Dam. Likes exactly three Elton John songs.

Julia Spencer: F (30’s) Environmental Biologist. Avid Birdwatcher. No relation to facility. Enjoys fruit leather and X-files reruns. A fan of They Might Be Giants.

Erin Reynolds: F (30’s) Dam supervisor. Creases her jeans. Military background. Doesn’t listen to music often but when she does it’s probably James Taylor.

Adrian Caligos: M. (40’s) Jaded FBI agent. Wears sunglasses at night. Unhinged. Thinks he’s the main character. Listens to the B-side of ELO.

Run Time:

Approx. 90 minutes.

Setting:

Northwest Danbury Hydroelectric Power Plant and Water Treatment Facility.

4.

Scene List:

ACT ONE

Sc 1. Unsweet Perdition Dam Interior Astrid, **Mike**, Dr. Paul Sc 2. Junelings
Dam Exterior **Julia**, Erin Sc. 3. Tasteless Memories Dam Interior **Mike**, Astrid
Sc. 4. The Caligos Incident Dam Interior Erin, **Dr. Paul** Sc. 5. Malgo's
Mansion Dam Exterior Astrid, **Julia** Sc. 6. Dirtfart, CT Dam Interior **Caligos**,
Dr. Paul

ACT TWO

Sc. 1. Mamma Rambo Dam Interior **Dr. Paul**, Erin Sc. 2. Skittles and
Brutalism Dam Interior Astrid, **Julia**, Mike Sc. 3. 73rd Dimensional
Groove Dam Abyss Dr. Paul, **Erin** Sc. 4. The Ampersand Conjecture
Dam Abyss **Caligos**
Sc. 5. Puppy Breath Eulogies Dam Abyss **ALL**
Sc. 6. Cormorant Gate Dam Abyss **Astrid**, Julia

5.

ACT 1 SC 1 - UNSWEET PERDITION

LIGHTS UP on MIKE staring out at his truck.
Beat. ASTRID enters and locks her car.

ASTRID

Nice truck, by the way.

MIKE

Hey, thanks! Just finished paying it off.

I feel at peace behind the wheel. Not only does it convey me to my destination whilst proudly declaring my manhood, but that 2007 Dodge Ram 1500 out there gets me as close as I'll ever come to true enlightenment. Like I could sail over the horizon, park on a cloud, step out, and shake God's hand while the engine idles and the door goes bing bing bing bing. Does that make sense to you?

When I top out around one-twenty, my cerebellum rapidly pulsates, and my vanilla

mindscape suddenly blossoms: chocolate, strawberry, and banana. It stretches as infinite as the road before me.

I exit the 510 loop and merge onto US Interstate 95 South. I don't turn on the radio. Why would I need to? The music is all around me. The asphalt gods of the interstate howl and demand supplication. Bursting with reverence, I roll down the windows in tribute.

What that comes rushing in. Can I hear something in it? A whisper of something more? I am overcome with possibility. Something is coming. Something benevolent. Something that loves me.

Picture a bubble. A warm soap bubble. Floating innocently on the edge of the bathtub. Encapsulated within is my everso-fragile masculinity. But it's floating away, and I'm not in that bubble. Where am I? I'm still in the tub because someone has thrown a turn-of-the-century fishing net over me. "Help! Help!" I cry. "My bubble bath has become an ocean!" But no one comes to my aid. I am at the mercy of three crusty old fishermen peering down with sunken eyes full of terrible secrets and little concern for the plight of one small, powerless fish plucked from an endless bubbling ocean.

Distant thunder! My savior springs from the depths, a great Ram bearing the long and powerful tail of a sea creature. With spiral nautilus horns, he crashes into the fishing vessel, and one by one, the three ghouls sink into the murky depths below.

6.

My savior scoops me up like an infant and holds me close to his wet and shaggy goat chest. My fingers splay out, trying to feel all of him. He lowers his head to me, and I fall into those ebony rectangles, I tumble through the dead space between stars. Toward an answer.

You know?

ASTRID

Yeah?

MIKE

Tell me, friend, do you have something that brings you such contentment? Something that rushes deeply inside your consciousness and bubbles it all the way up to the fill line?

ASTRID

I'm not sure.

MIKE

Well, it is imperative that you find it. Do you like the color?

ASTRID

The color of what? Your truck?

MIKE

Yes.

ASTRID

It's orange?

MIKE

Burnt Sienna. I can almost taste it. It tastes like the tiny freedom you keep in your most secret heart place.

ASTRID

I'm Astrid.

MIKE

Mike. Nice to meet you.

ASTRID

It's my first day.

MIKE

First day!? Bet you feel like a critter come straight out of the primordial soup.

7.

ASTRID

I suppose.

MIKE

Soon these halls shall become as familiar as your own skin.

ASTRID

Okay.

MIKE

Mark this day as passage into a new state of being.

Mike exits. DR. PAUL enters quickly. He looks
Astrid up and down.

DR. PAUL

You will need the equipment. Don't follow me.

Paul exits and returns with a name tag.

DR. PAUL

Now you may follow.

He leads her across the stage.

DR. PAUL

Astrid Kelvin, Welcome to the Northwest Danbury Hydroelectric Power Plant and Water Treatment Facility. I'm Doctor Paul Morgan. Lead Hydrologist. You are currently standing on the Main floor of the Primary Re-uptake Reservoir and Hydraulic Floodgate Control Center. Look around you. This is what we do. You will be expected to do the same. I don't expect much at first. Improvement will be slow. I assume you can read?

ASTRID

Yes. I can read.

DR. PAUL

But can you properly infer the micro-fluctuations within the PH levels? Are you fluent in neo-salinity and what it means in the greater scope of the water palette?

ASTRID

... Yes. Of course.

8.

DR. PAUL

You will be required to check the PH at regulatory intervals as mandated by the State. There are several indicators of standard decimal equilibrium on the logarithmic acid concentration scale. The first can be calculated in your head or by use of a reflexive thermodynamic spectrophotometer. Volatility is measured in accordance with the conventional pro-alkaline inhibitor index, although adjustments can be made using potentiometric titration. In addition, it is your duty to note any fluctuations in the gross hydropower output ratio as a result of volumetric vapor dilution, adjusting your formulae to account for the induction loss that regularly occurs from spillway seepage -- a phenomenon commonly observed in fixed-crest dams, as well as arch-gravity dams such as this one.

ASTRID

Where does that door go?

DR. PAUL

Outside.

ASTRID

Okay.

DR. PAUL

Listen carefully, Ms. Kelvin. I have seen many come and go during my tenure as lead hydrologist of the Northwest Danbury Hydroelectric Power Plant and Water Treatment Facility. We must remind ourselves that the hydroelectric pulse is the sacred lifeblood of the Dam, and to stray from it would be most perilous. Consider the one hundred forty four trillion fluid ounces on the other side of this retention barrier. We will either hold fast or buckle under the constant pressure. There is no third option.

There will be an inspector arriving soon. As early as three hours from now. We are all subject to this inspection. I expect you to comport yourself in the same manner as the most senior among us. If you find yourself unable to function in this capacity, see me at once. When in doubt, ask yourself: Is this soluble? Am I soluble? Where am I?

Someone, please help me.

Dr. Paul exits at a clip.

ASTRID

Is this soluble? Am I soluble? Where am I? Someone, please help

me. BLACKOUT

ACT 1 SC 2 - JUNELINGS

LIGHTS UP. ERIN and JULIA stand on the edge of the dam. We hear the occasional pip of birds.

JULIA

There they are.

ERIN

Birds.

9.

JULIA

Not just any birds. Renbocker Junelings. *Sacra Stellatica*. Thought to be entirely extinct for much of the twentieth century. Rediscovered in the nineties by Ornithologist R.F. Pickering, known amongst birdfellows as “The mad birdwatcher” on one of his drug fueled treks across North America. Pickering, brimming with unbridled enthusiasm and peyote sweats; wrote the following concerning the return of the Renbocker Juneling: “Little bird. I see you. Hello?”

In a letter to his ex-wife Ruby Eleanor Pickering, he was notably more eloquent: “They were here all along, my dear. I thought they had left us. Straight through the Cormorant Gate and gone forever. Yet, here they are. Perhaps forever isn’t as long as we once believed.”

ERIN

Cormorant Gate?

JULIA

A myth. The door to an alternate dimension outside of time and space full of oceanic birds that flew through a tear in reality somewhere around the Bermuda Triangle. There are rumors that Pickering eventually found it. His correspondence with the Audubon ends abruptly.

ERIN

Sounds like he got where he was going.

JULIA

Well, that’s the prevailing theory, anyway.

ERIN

How long will you be with us, Julia?

10.

JULIA

I would very much enjoy a full month of observation. The State Wildlife Board was vague about the specifics. Can you tell me what the zoning is like here?

ERIN

Industrial class one thirteen intermediary land. Outside of the local conservation zone, I assume that's why you're asking. Thus, the birds became an internal issue, in more ways than one, as they tend to nest within the dam, particularly in spaces between the perimeter cladding, blocking ventilation systems. We initially campaigned for their immediate removal. The state gave us a waiting period, then sent a team of experts to remove and relocate them, which is when they discovered that these particular birds are what they referred to as "special."

JULIA

They are extremely special.

ERIN

And then they sent you. When can we expect a decision?

JULIA

A decision?

ERIN

Concerning the removal of the wildlife from the Dam.

JULIA

Remove the dam and leave the birds.

ERIN

I'll get right on that.

JULIA

I will observe them and let you know if there's any indication that suggests they'll leave the dam by their own means.

ERIN

That's a sit-down and wait. Got it. A reminder: Please restrict your activity to the outer dam and labeled observation platforms. You do not have the necessary permissions to enter the hydroelectric facility at this time.

JULIA

I'll do my best to stay out of the way. And I'll try to convince the Junelings to do the same. Though I doubt they will listen.

11.

ERIN

I sincerely hope they do.

Erin exits. Julia deflates.

JULIA

Oh thank god, I thought she was never gonna leave. I didn't realize I was gonna be under surveillance out here.

You guys are still awesome, though. Hey. There's so many of you. I mean, don't get excited; you're still endangered.

What brought you here? Weren't you happy enough being extinct? Why come back now?

Personally, I think you're the coolest birds this side of the archaeopteryx. No, it's true. I wouldn't say it if it wasn't.

What should we call a group of you? An exaltation of Junelings? A seclusion of Junelings? Nah, too pretentious. How about a Perposterum of Junelings? Yeah. I like that one. It's a little Dr. Seuss.

Look at that. Those flashes of color. Gliding on a downdraft, climbing back up. Blue. Yellow. Blue. It's like a subtle key change. There it is again. Into a seventh with no resolution. Angelic.

Wingspan: approximately thirteen inches. Three to four tail streamers based on sex. Yellow tips on wings and streamers. Blue velvet hood on males. Glossy with age. I bet you roost communally. That's why you're swarming these holes in the dam. No, that can't be right. That's entirely against your taxonomy. You'd have to be solitary nesters. So why are you keeping this close to the dam?

We hear the pip pip pip of a shrill alarm call.
Something has startled the birds.

JULIA

Woah. What startled you? Is there something out there? I don't see any predators. What was it?

Beat.

12.

JULIA

(low)

There's a reason you chose this place. There's something here, isn't there?

Julia squints over the edge of the dam. She's dangerously close to the edge.

JULIA

The concrete is strange. Almost like it has an aura. If I unfocus my eyes, I can almost see... A strange undulation. Like the Dam is drawing breath. (beat) No. No. No. I just got spooked. You guys got spooked, then I got spooked. It's fine. I'm fine.

Julia steps away from the edge and composes herself.

JULIA

What the fuck is wrong with this place?

BLACKOUT

ACT 1 SC 3 - TASTELESS MEMORIES

LIGHTS UP. Astrid scoops up water into her hands and attempts to "read" it. Mike enters carrying a bottle of water.

MIKE

Hey. How's it going?

ASTRID

(not looking up)

Hi.

MIKE

That bad, huh?

ASTRID

(looking up)

I can't do this. I can't read the PH.

MIKE

You're trying too hard. You can't force it.

13.

ASTRID

What?

MIKE

Here. Try some of this.

He hands her the bottle. She drinks.

MIKE

Well?

	ASTRID
Well what?	
	MIKE
What do you think?	
	ASTRID
It's water.	
	MIKE
	(Disappointed)
Oh.	
	ASTRID
What?	
	MIKE
Nothing.	
	ASTRID
No, what? What is it?	
	MIKE
You're right. It's water.	
	ASTRID
It tastes fine.	
	MIKE
Fine?	
	ASTRID
Yes!	
	MIKE
Okay.	
	ASTRID
What was I supposed to say?	
	MIKE
Nothing.	
	ASTRID
What was in it? Did you poison me?	
	MIKE

Did I poison you??

ASTRID

Sorry, I mean--

MIKE

You can't just throw the word poison around. We're in a water treatment facility. Anyhow, why would I do that to you? Do you think me so deranged?

ASTRID

No, that's not it.

MIKE

It's not poison.

ASTRID

I just don't know what kind of water it is!

MIKE

I know you don't know. I haven't told you yet.

ASTRID

Well, tell me then.

MIKE

It's special water.

ASTRID

Okay. Why?

15.

MIKE

It's been filtered.

ASTRID

It's filtered water.

MIKE

Yes.

ASTRID

What's so special about filtered water?

MIKE

It's been filtered. And filtered. And filtered. And filtered. And filtered. And--

ASTRID

I get it.

MIKE

I ran it through the filter three hundred and forty-seven times. Then you drank it.

ASTRID

I did.

MIKE

Did it taste filtered?

ASTRID

I don't know, water doesn't really have a taste.

MIKE

(stunned)

Doesn't have a taste? Everything has a taste. A taste like a memory.

ASTRID

Huh?

Mike drinks some water.

MIKE

It tastes like the morning before my high school graduation. I celebrated prematurely the night before and woke up next to a pond clutching an empty bottle of jalapeño-flavored vodka.

ASTRID

Jalapeño?

16.

MIKE

Now, don't get me wrong. I know this water doesn't taste spicy. It tastes like the bit of the memory that comes at the end of the memory. Just hold on a minute.

I woke up that morning and had the slow, terrifying realization that I swam completely naked in a pond the night before. A decorative pond in the middle of a real upscale fancy people neighborhood. I dipped down in the scummy pond water until it tickled my nose as I watched the occasional lights of a car drift past. Oblivious to my midnight pond adventure.

That isn't the taste, though. This is all pre-taste. But we're getting closer.

Then I'm walking back to a house. My friend's friend's house. We were there because my friend really really liked the girl who lived in that house.

Anyway, sometime around midnight, I got bored and wandered listlessly into a foggy suburban limbo, swigging from a bottle of jalapeño vodka. Which I then proceeded to drop on the sidewalk as I walked back to my friend's friend's house the following morning. It shattered into a thousand glittering pieces. That's when I remembered my friend's friend's plea from the night before: "You can have the rest of the jalapeño vodka, as long as you bring back the bottle."

I returned empty-handed. I walk into her southwestern ranch-style home and confess my

terrible midnight indiscretions and the fate of the jalapeño-flavored vodka bottle. She just shrugs and says, “Oh well, that’s okay.”

And here’s where the taste is. I went to sleep in their converted garage gameroom. Stinking of pond water, I threw off my clothes and covered myself with a scratchy southwestern-style blanket.

The next thing I know I’m waking up because my friend’s friend’s friends: two girls, a bit older than me, are standing in the doorway to the kitchen. I don’t let on that I’m awake. But I can sense that the scratchy southwestern-style blanket has shifted as I slept. I don’t know how much of the scratchy southwestern-style blanket is still covering me.

They’re looking at me and whispering to each other. One of them says two words that threw a wrench in the perception I’d had of myself my entire life up to that point: “He’s cute” she says in a voice I can barely make out. Which was something I didn’t know back then. And for so many days after that, I continued not to know it.

They took in my shame and decided I was okay. More than okay, desirable-adjacent. And for one fleeting moment, I really felt like it could be true.

17.

Thinking back on that, I felt more intimate with those two girls than I’ve ever felt with anyone else. And I never even kissed either of them. Despite wanting to. That’s what it tastes like.

Astrid takes another sip of water.

ASTRID

It just tastes like water to me.

MIKE

I wonder what it will taste like after I filter it for the three hundred forty-eighth time.

ASTRID

Yeah. Be sure to let me know.

MIKE

Okay. You can keep that bottle. It’s from a whole vat that gets filtered.

ASTRID

Thanks.

MIKE

No problem.

Beat.

ASTRID

I’m not sure I know what to say now.

MIKE

Whatever you'd like, I guess.

ASTRID

I don't know if I know how to be here.

MIKE

At the Danbury Dam facility?

ASTRID

Yes.

MIKE

Well that's an easy one. You're already doing it.

18.

ASTRID

Do you know how to read PH?

MIKE

Gosh, no.

ASTRID

Crap.

MIKE

But you don't have to. You just have to feel it. Make your brain real quiet so you can listen, and taste, too.

ASTRID

What if all my memories are tasteless?

MIKE

That would be really sad.

Astrid takes another sip.

ASTRID

Nothing.

MIKE

On a scale of one to ten - how empty was your brain just then?

ASTRID

Ugh. Three.

MIKE

Gotta give me at least a seven.

Astrid takes a deep breath. Then a big sip.
Disappointment.

ASTRID

Another tasteless memory.

MIKE

You'll get there, friend.

ASTRID

Hey, where does that door go?

19.

MIKE

Outside.

Mike leads her to the door. Mike exits
elsewhere. Astrid exits through the door.

BLACKOUT

ACT 1 SC 4 - THE CALIGOS INCIDENT

LIGHTS UP. Dr. Paul is in a rolling office chair
facing upstage. Erin enters. He spins to greet
her.

ERIN

The birdwatcher says she'll be here for at least a month.

DR. PAUL

She won't last that long.

ERIN

Her frequency indicates she is amenable.

Erin walks alongside him, while he scoots along
in the chair.

DR. PAUL

There's nothing to be done for her. We have bigger problems. The stringent R index
has skyrocketed in the last three hours. Inspection is imminent. Can we begin phase
separation in forty minutes?

ERIN

I don't see how that would be possible. We're seeing a great deal of coagulation
within the SPT unit. Very little sedimentation overall. Corrosion may be an inevitable

side effect.

DR. PAUL

Can we commence induced air flotation?

ERIN

Not without risk of implosion. The distribution rods can't take it.

20.

DR. PAUL

Then, we introduce an immediate flocculant at the nucleation

barrier. ERIN

Already done. Scarcely made a difference. While tanks one through nine are diffusing as normal, tanks ten, eleven, and twelve are nearly turbid. Tank thirteen seems to be set on a repeating filtration cycle, though I'm not sure why.

DR. PAUL

How many monitors on site?

ERIN

A team of four in double shifts.

DR. PAUL

That won't nearly be enough.

ERIN

Then, I will need to be less selective with personnel.

DR. PAUL

Use the new hire. I'm sure she's acclimated by now.

ERIN

After an hour and thirty minutes? It can take weeks for someone to shift frequencies.

DR. PAUL

She'll have to get there on her feet. With inspection imminent, I don't believe we have much of a choice. But keep an eye on her. Should she begin to show signs of forward synaptic aggregation, we will have to isolate.

ERIN

And the birdwatcher? She mentioned the Cormorant Gate.

DR. PAUL

Then she must operate on a parallel frequency. Anyone who studies the migration patterns of the rare Renbocker Juneling would have to. I suppose we should have seen this coming. (beat) The Dam will decide. Do you trust in the Dam, Ms. Reynolds?

ERIN

Explicitly. But if there is a manifestation, this close to an inspection--

DR. PAUL

The last event was before your time.

21.

ERIN

I know, but if what I've heard is accurate

DR. PAUL

What have you heard?

ERIN

Only the case number... And reports of the aftermath.

DR. PAUL

Case number: Four fifty-six, thirty-two C. The Caligos incident. Adrian Caligos. A junior dam technician. Low thalamocortical sensitivity. Not considered an integration risk. Didn't know him formally. I was too busy climbing the Northwest Danbury Hydroelectric Power Plant and Water Treatment Facility ladder under Hydrologist Matthews at the time. But I do remember all the inter-departmental memoranda.

Caligos had ideas. Ideas about the dam. Ideas that didn't sit well with those above him. He kept going on and on about the hyper-agoric branch divide and the ampersand conjecture. As if no mind greater than his had ever tackled such equations.

Gradually, he became convinced that the Dam was speaking to him. Started wearing sunglasses inside. I remember that. Thought he looked like an idiot.

On the day of the manifestation. You can see him on the security camera as he boards the elevator. Bastard was smiling. Makes that stupid gesture. Finger gun. Right at the camera. With a wink for good measure. He knew what was coming. I bet he was smiling all the way down, as the water flowing through the Dam turned crimson.

Approximately fifty-six deaths a result of shifting structures. One hundred twenty more were victims of an altered gravity locus. And who knows how many sank directly into the concrete as a result of slew-calcification, later detected in particulate form within the spillway reservoir. All active staff. Either dead or missing. The luckiest of them simply boarded the work elevator and descended blindly into the depths, never to be seen again. Hydrologist Matthews himself among their number.

I keep telling myself there was something I could've done. Although it makes little sense. I was on a conference team at the time. When we returned, there was no one left. Save Caligos. Naked and screaming in the cafeteria. Covered in blood that was not his own.

In exit interviews, Caligos had regained some composure. He claimed a few disturbing

things. That part of the dam was in his head now. That he had been down there for more than three hundred years. And when asked what transpired on sub-level eighty-one, his response was, “I fucked god right in the mouth.”

22.

ERIN

What happened to him?

DR. PAUL

Need to know, and I didn't need to know. There were rumors that he had been undercover the entire time. Personally, I hope he's locked up somewhere alone with his mistake for the rest of his life.

(beat)

Everything we do is for the Dam, Ms. Reynolds. Never forget that. There have been zero manifestations under my watch, and I intend to keep it that way.

ERIN

How?

DR. PAUL

Trust in the Dam.

BLACKOUT

ACT 1 SC 5 - MALGO'S MANSION

LIGHTS UP. Julia is seated in the dam exterior, taking a break from birdwatching. She is reading a sci-fi novel. Astrid enters and approaches cautiously. Astrid still carries the bottle of memory water from Mike.

ASTRID

Hello?

JULIA

Oh, hi!

Awkward beat.

JULIA

Can I help you?

23.

ASTRID

I don't know. I walked through the door. And now I'm outside.

JULIA

I can see that.

ASTRID

Do you work here too?

JULIA

No. Well, sort of. For the moment, I do. But I'm not allowed inside. Can you do me a favor and fill up my water bottle?

ASTRID

Sure. I have some with me.

Astrid approaches and pours water from Mike's bottle into Julia's thermos.

ASTRID

What are you doing out here?

JULIA

Birdwatching.

ASTRID

Cool. Birds are cool.

JULIA

Yeah. They are.

Beat.

ASTRID

What are you reading?

JULIA

Oh, just some sci-fi. It's good so far. Maybe a little confusing.

ASTRID

Cool. Books are cool.

Beat.

24.

JULIA

Are you okay? You're practically shaking.

ASTRID

I'm just having a rough first day.

JULIA

Got it. I don't envy you. The people who work here are mega weird. No

offense. ASTRID

They are so weird. THEY ARE SO WEIRD. There's this guy I met this morning who practically had an orgasm talking about his pickup truck. I don't even think he works here. He told me that seven years ago, he just started showing up because it's where his truck decided they should go, and apparently, they just started paying him. And my boss is one hundred percent an extra-terrestrial.

JULIA

Reynolds? Erin Reynolds?

ASTRID

No. I don't think I've met her yet. Dr. Paul Morgan is my boss.

JULIA

Well there's more than one extra-terrestrial working here then. That lady was intense.

ASTRID

So is Dr. Morgan. He keeps insisting I should be able to read PH levels. Like it's a language.

Julia takes a sip of water.

JULIA

WOAH. What the fuck was that? What did you put in this?

ASTRID

Shit. You can taste it too.

JULIA

Did you drug me? What's in it?

ASTRID

It's nontoxic. I think. It's just water. Filtered water. It's been filtered over and over again.
25.

JULIA

That doesn't explain what just happened.

ASTRID

What did it taste like?

JULIA

My third-grade computer classroom.

ASTRID

Was jalapeño flavored vodka involved?

JULIA

Huh? No. I was nine. Who drinks jalapeño-flavored Vodka?

ASTRID

Never mind. What was the memory?

JULIA

Memory? Yeah. I guess it was a memory. It's hard to describe the taste. It's a clean taste. A cold taste. I haven't thought about that in years.

Julia smells the water cautiously and takes a small sip.

JULIA

It's like I'm there again. Mrs. Nesbit. She was so old that she didn't really know how to use a computer. She just had us play educational games for an hour. I remember getting lost in them. Some of them were scary. Not at first, but they became scary. That's the memory. The memory is that change.

When I was little, I really loved Halloween and spooky stuff. I was nuts about it. I wanted to be a witch. Every Halloween, I was a witch. The games I picked would reflect that. Even on a school computer, they had a few lightly spooky games. Just silly, spooky haunted house stuff. Ghosts with big dumb smiles.

But things stopped being silly spooky and turned into real dread. When I think of that classroom, the humming computers, the cold sterile smell - I know it happened there - staring at the screen of an old Macintosh.

One day, an icon appeared on the desktop. A game I'd never seen before. It was called Malgo's Mansion.

It was a haunted house full of endless doorways you would click through.

26.

Makes me anxious even thinking about it. If you opened the wrong door you would have to close it quickly, or a monster would come after you.

The hallways went on forever. Strange paintings on the walls. The sky outside unnaturally black. Someone is behind the next corner. A man with blue skin and a big smile. His name is Malgo. He knows how to abuse this reality. Knows how to hurt you with it. Making you consider your own reality as false.

He played the role of the friendly mansion caretaker. But you could see something lurking beneath that smile. Something malicious. Hateful. Abusive.

After I played that game, I became more insular. Maybe I had internalized some sort of trauma, and it triggered for the first time in that class while I was playing that game. I started showing signs of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Never diagnosed. But that's clearly what it was. I know early childhood OCD is a common thing, but to have it happen so suddenly ... Without ever having experienced it before. I thought I was possessed. I would have to turn the light switch in my bedroom on and off again until the number of times was not only an even number but also "felt right." Sometimes, the number was four. Sometimes, it was six hundred and ninety-four. I had to close doors the right number of times, or I was sure something would get in and come after me. Just like in the mansion.

My dad got really mad about it. About the slamming doors and flickering lights. Said I was wasting power, and I believed him. Even though that's not how electricity works. But I was starting to see my dad for what he really was. Hateful. Abusive. (beat) Scared?

I had a shitty childhood. I think that was the moment I realized what was going on. Not just with my dad but with everything. I became aware of my own mortality in Mrs. Nesbit's third-grade computer class. I don't think I realized how big that moment was until now. Things got really bad after that. But I guess they always had been, and I just hadn't seen it. (beat) Sorry, I just keep on talking and talking. It was just so vivid.

ASTRID

It's cool. I like the way you talk.

JULIA

What?

ASTRID

You have a nice voice.

JULIA

That's really sweet. What do you taste when you drink it?

27.

ASTRID

Nothing. It's just water to me.

JULIA

Oh.

Astrid takes a sip. She shrugs.

ASTRID

Just water.

JULIA

I don't get this place. I can't even imagine what it must be like inside. Even out here, it feels like that. Like Malgo's Mansion. Like an old computer game you have no idea

how to play. But you keep playing anyway, and it just makes you feel worse and worse. Less in tune with reality.

ASTRID

That actually makes sense.

JULIA

Oh shoot, I don't even know your name.

ASTRID

It's Astrid.

JULIA

Astrid. I like it. I'm Julia.

ASTRID

Nice to meet you, Julia. I'm sorry you had a tough childhood.

JULIA

Growing up isn't easy. Everyone struggles in their own way.

ASTRID

Why are you out here watching birds?

JULIA

It's kinda my job. I'm a biologist. But, the reason they called me in is because I wrote a couple papers on avian cryptozoology. These birds I'm watching are a species thought to be unreal.

28.

ASTRID

So you're a bigfootscientist. A bigbird scientist.

JULIA

Both are guys in suits. But really, Cryptozoology is just the study of animals whose existence is disputed. It's not always pseudoscience.

ASTRID

So, these birds don't exist.

JULIA

That's the long and short of it. They're called Junelings.

Astrid and Julia move to the edge of the Dam.
They share the binoculars.

ASTRID

Wow. There are so many.

JULIA

I know! Aren't they incredible?

ASTRID

Yeah. The way they fly. It's almost like music.

JULIA

Couldn't have said it better myself.

ASTRID

Can I kiss you?

Beat. Beat. Beat.

JULIA

Yes.

They kiss. It's a kiss of comfort. Lovers reuniting. The sounds of the birds grow in volume.

BLACKOUT

sunglasses. He speaks to the dam.

CALIGOS

ACT 1 SC 6 - DIRTFART, CT

29.

LIGHTS UP. CALIGOS walks on wearing

I missed being inside you. Nothing compares to you. The black pyramids beneath the Denver International Airport. The reptilian tunnels under Detroit. The backrooms, the frontrooms, the siderooms. The secret library under the Vatican that houses the ancient soul conduit of Venoxis. All these inland empires as vast and unknown as the night itself. I've seen it all.

But the last thing on my list is still hidden somewhere deep inside you. I can feel it down there, waiting for me. A quiet place. Filled with starving birds. A place that shouldn't be. Holding the waters there as still as you do up here. Holding back the answer

I'll tell you a secret. I think we've got you figured out. 'Was it the meteorite samples?' Of course, it was the meteorite samples! We found a piece of you on three separate planets in the solar system, not to mention the moon. Tell me, how does that happen? That's a hell of a long way for an inanimate object.

Wanna hear what I think? Here's my leading hypothesis: you killed those planets. I know! Right!? What if you're the reason we're surrounded by nothing but empty space and desolate rocks? You wiped out the entire universe, and we're just the last one on your list.

...

Yeah, I don't believe it either. I don't think you're genocidal. I think your motives are only visible on a much smaller scale. Why else would you be out here in the middle of Dirtfart, Connecticut? Why do you bring in all these strays? There's no correlation between any of them. Fuck. It's just question after question with you, and we know absolutely nothing. Well, that ends today.

After Twenty years of begging to take another stab, they finally roll out the red carpet. Even though I spent so long trying to get over you. You cast me out. Reduced me to nothing. I wasn't even good enough to die. Wasn't good enough to be smashed to a pulp and drip out your runoff. You denied me that. YOU DENIED ME EVEN THAT.

But we get a second chance. We both know I'm not walking out of here again. And maybe I'm okay with that. Maybe I'm at peace with that.

"He who rides the tiger cannot dismount" - Kung Fu Panda said that. And he was right.
30.

It's now or never.

I'm coming down there. And we're gonna see what you're really made of. We both know it's more than polymer concrete. And when I'm at your center. I'm going to do what you couldn't. I'm going to kill you.

But soft, someone approaches. Oh, never mind. It's just this

asshole. Dr. Paul enters

DR. PAUL

Hello! I'm Doctor Paul Morgan. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Northwest Danbury Hydroelectric Power Plant and Water Treatment Facility.

CALIGOS

It's not my first time.

DR. PAUL

In that case, welcome back! We hope you find it up to the high standards you've grown to expect from us. Your formal inspection may begin whenever you are ready.

CALIGOS

Give me a complete status report.

DR. PAUL

Of course! The Northwest Danbury Hydroelectric Power Plant and Water Treatment Facility is functioning as predicted in the forecasts made sixty years ago. Zero manifestations have occurred, and we plan to keep it that way.

CALIGOS

Except for this one.

DR. PAUL

Sorry?

CALIGOS

The current manifestation.

DR. PAUL

What?

CALIGOS

It's already begun.

31.

DR. PAUL

Caligos.

CALIGOS

Agent Caligos.

DR. PAUL

You can't be here.

CALIGOS

Oh baby, it's like I never even left.

BLACKOUT
END ACT ONE

INTERMISSION

ACT 2 SC 1 - MAMMA RAMBO

LIGHTS UP. Dr. Paul sits in his roller chair,
holding an intercom.

DR. PAUL

Hello staff. Dear beloved staff. Are you working comfortably? We are currently experiencing a Class nine manifestation. The real deal. The whole mamma rambo. Readings are climbing into the triple digits. Hold onto your pants, Dammers. This is gonna be a big one.

For your safety, I have initiated a full quarantine. The National Guard is en route. Anyone leaving the facility will be considered a contamination risk and shot on sight. Woooooah! Say it isn't so director doctor Paul. Well, I am sorry to say it is indeed very so. The dam is on complete lockdown! And I've locked myself in the conference room.

So, what the hell am I going to do to help you!

Caligos! Can you hear me out there!?

I know you're down there somewhere responding to this as if I can hear you! I can't hear you!

Everything was going so well. It was just a matter of time.

Beat. Dr. Paul starts to sob.

32.

DR. PAUL

Erin. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. You're special. You're just so special. Respectfully, I love you. Like a colleague, that is. Not with romantic intentions. But somehow, that means even more. Doesn't it? I don't want to marry you and start a family. I want to run and maintain a complex hydroelectric power plant with you and only you. Doesn't that have infinitely more weight? Doesn't that mean so much more?

But now it's too late. Now we sit and wait for the walls to grow teeth and chew us all up. Maybe it's for the best. Let it rise. Let it be the world's problem. That giant Hellmouth on the horizon? Whoopsie! Big whoopsie over here!

It's all over.

This is Doctor Paul. Signing off. For the last time.

Dr. Paul lowers the intercom. Sobs slightly.
Then picks it back up with one last plea.

DR. PAUL

(beat) Caligos Please. I know I just said I was signing off for the last time but I wasn't really and now I need you to listen to me please just listen to me right now.

It knows you. It spared you once. Please find a way to reason with it. Our lives are in your hands.

Erin enters. Dr. Paul is startled.

DR. PAUL

How'd you get in here?

ERIN

The door was unlocked.

DR. PAUL

Oh.

ERIN

We have to do something.

DR. PAUL

There's nothing we can do.

33.

ERIN

If we don't stop him, he'll flood all of Northern Danbury. And not just with water.

DR. PAUL

114 trillion fluid ounces of pure extra-dimensional horror.

ERIN

We can stop it. In fact, I'd go as far as to say that it's our job description to stop it.

DR. PAUL

It's twenty years ago all over again. It's no different.

ERIN

Yes, it is. You're here this time. We're here.

DR. PAUL

You asked me what happened to Caligos. Apparently, he was promoted.

ERIN

It doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is what we do next.

Beat.

DR. PAUL

Do you think the Dam chose him? Over me?

ERIN

I'm going to try to say this as gently as possible: You need to grow the fuck up and do your damn job because I'm not going to keep standing here saying, "*You can do it, I believe in you, Dr. Paul,*" like I'm the insipid emotional support character in a kids movie about a plucky soccer team that goes all the way to nationals.

You're an adult, for god's sake, and the lead Hydrologist of a colossal Dam and hydroelectric power facility comprised of thirty-two individual turbines capable of generating a typical output yield of approximately twenty-four thousand megawatts of oscillating interflux power. Do you honestly think your deep-seated feelings of inadequacy have any bearing at all on your present obligation to everyone who depends on you for instruction and relies on your leadership to get things done?

DR. PAUL

No?

34.

ERIN

What's our problem? Caligosis our problem. He's headed to the core. We know that

much, and we're already seeing the ramifications up here. Don't tell me you can't see them. The patterns forming on the back of your eyelids.

DR. PAUL

Yes.

ERIN

The feeling something is squirming beneath your fingernails.

DR. PAUL

Yesss.

ERIN

The overwhelming sensation that you left the oven on six years ago and the house is burning down all around you in retrospect.

DR. PAUL

Yes! Yes! A thousand times, YES!

ERIN

So what are we going to do about it?

DR. PAUL

We go down. Dear god, we go down. Past sub-level eighty-one. To the core.

ERIN

I'm right behind you, Director Doctor Paul.

Beat.

DR. PAUL

Did you hear what I said about you? On the intercom?

ERIN

I did.

DR. PAUL

And?

ERIN

I'm flattered.

Beat. Dr. Paul smiles. Then he grabs the intercom and addresses the Dam once more.

35.

DR. PAUL

Attention Dammers. Disregard everything I said earlier. I wasn't seeing this clearly. I've been a fool. Ms. Reynolds here has sounded the war horn. We're not gonna let Caligos take over our show. Assemble all personnel to staging area twelve. Tell Satan to make some room, we're on our way down. We're gonna save the goddamn Dam.

Dr. Paul lowers intercom and looks to Erin.

DR. PAUL

How was that?

ERIN

Brilliant. Let's go.

BLACKOUT

ACT 2 SC 2 - SKITTLES AND BRUTALISM

LIGHTS UP. Astrid leads Julia on stage holding her hand.

JULIA

I'm not sure I should be in here.

ASTRID

Safer in here than out there.

JULIA

Are you sure? This feels wrong.

ASTRID

I don't know what a manifestation is supposed to feel like. I don't even know what one is. No one's told me. I just got here. But maybe you're right, It does feel like *something* is happening.

JULIA

I think I've had bad dreams about this place. Dreams I can barely remember. I'm in a place like this. A massive parking garage. I'm searching for a swimming pool. Or maybe I've just come from a swimming pool. I'm awkward in a one-piece swimsuit. I can smell chlorine.

(beat) Astrid? Where are we? Are we still on earth?

36.

ASTRID

I don't know. I haven't seen any swimming pools.

Julia looks to the ceiling.

JULIA

Oh, shit. Look. One of my birds. How did he get in? There's a few more over there. Wait. That's it. Isn't it? They aren't flocking to the Dam. They're coming out of it.

Just give me a minute. This is a lot.

ASTRID

It's okay. I'm here.

Mike enters with a backpack.

MIKE

Hey. Did you hear the big voice? We're going down.

JULIA

Is this the truck guy?

ASTRID

Yeah. This is Mike.

MIKE

Who's your friend?

ASTRID

Julia.

MIKE

An outside person.

JULIA

Yes?

MIKE

You brought an outside person inside.

ASTRID

Is that okay?

MIKE

I don't know. We're going down.

37.

ASTRID

Are you sure it's safe down there?

MIKE

No.

JULIA

Is there a swimming pool?

MIKE

Never seen one. Doesn't mean there's not one, though.

ASTRID

How many people are coming?

MIKE

Just us. Pretty much everybody ignored the quarantine and left.

JULIA

Lucky them.

MIKE

Let's go. I already pushed the elevator button.

Mike exits. Julia and Astrid start to follow but stop.

JULIA

Are you sure we should do this?

ASTRID

No. But ... wherever the birds are coming from -- that can't be a bad place, can it?

JULIA

Unless they're fleeing from it.

ASTRID

If we don't go now, we'll never know.

Astrid holds out a hand to Julia. Beat. Julia takes it. They exit.

BLACKOUT

38.

ACT 2 SC 3 - 73RD DIMENSIONAL GROOVE

Erin and Dr. Paul walk across a dim stage. They both hold flashlights.

ERIN

How deep do you think it goes?

DR. PAUL

This is as far as they excavated the shaft for the elevator.

ERIN

What would you call this? Sub-level eighty-one continuous?

DR. PAUL

Sub-level X.

ERIN

Really?

DR. PAUL

I'm in charge. I get to name it.

ERIN

We should consider setting up a camp. There's nothing here. It's just empty space. I don't know what I expected but I guess I expected *something*.

DR. PAUL

Some say Sub-level X exists deep within the seventy-third-dimensional groove. The planar geometry gets funkier the deeper you get. It's a conceptual space. The floor seems to be made out of some kind of resistant polymer. The temperature is pleasant enough. And if you kept going that way, I'd wager you'd be walking for the rest of your natural born life.

ERIN

What does Caligos think he's going to find down here?

DR. PAUL

Ascension? Godhood? A pat on the back? Let's face it. Whoever's pulling the strings wanted this to happen. And Caligos is the only one who could actually pull it off.

ERIN

And once we find him?

39.

DR. PAUL

Shoot the bastard. I mean, you'll shoot him, and I'll sit over here and offer affirmations and gentle words of encouragement. No. I don't know. I'm just really frustrated with him right now.

ERIN

I don't have a gun.

DR. PAUL

What? Why not?

ERIN

We work for the Connecticut Regional Water Service. Why would I have a gun?

DR. PAUL

Shit.

ERIN

An understatement.

DR. PAUL

Do you think the Dam blames us?

ERIN

I think we've both been under its influence for longer than we realize.

But the truth is I've been here before. In the shadow of something inanimate, uncaring, and lethal. Something that shaped the person I am today.

I was Navy. Flight deck crew on an Aircraft Carrier. USS Woodrow Wilson. The world's deadliest ballet. Every day was constant stress. Even the slightest mistake could be your last.

I saw it happen. Greg Howard. Ten years on the job. Got just the slightest bit complacent. Training exercise in the Atlantic. Launching F-18's off the waist catapults. Greg lifted his torso up a fraction of a second too early on launch, to start prepping for the next one. And that was it. The Missile stanchion of an F-18 went straight through his head.

The plane rocketed off the deck at one hundred sixty miles per hour. His body spun and fell. No one moved. Until we had to. We had to ignore his body lying there and do our job to safely catch the other planes coming back in. Our footsteps painting the deck red. When the F-18 was back on approach, we saw his green safety helmet stuck up there. And we all knew his head was still in it.

40.

I don't think I've ever heard a silence like the one in the mess hall that night. 5,000 people. Completely silent. I'm sitting there trying to lose myself in my meatloaf when suddenly I have this insignificant, irrational, intrusive little thought: The USS Wilson had a bad day. Caught a bad mood. Somehow, we hadn't been good boys and girls. And it was taking it out on us. Making us watch an F-18 do circles with a severed head stuck under its wing and demanding we sit in silence and think about exactly what we each did to deserve that etched in our memory for the rest of our lives.

I know it was just nerves. It was just a ship. It was just a place where we lived and worked. But now ... I'm starting to doubt that. Because I feel the same dread now that I felt for months after that incident on the flight deck. "Don't piss it off, or it'll take your head."

We're powerless in the face of the Dam. All of us. It could take us at any moment and I doubt we'd even feel it. But in those last few seconds, I bet we'd both know exactly why we deserve it. Even if we don't truly deserve it at all.

Because there's one thought that keeps repeating over and over in my head and I can't get rid of it no matter how hard I try and I swear I'm trying but it's there with every breath and it just keeps getting louder and louder and louder.

DR. PAUL

Say it.

ERIN

I think we might belong down here.

BLACKOUT

ACT 2 SC 4 - THE AMPERSAND CONJECTURE

LIGHTS UP on Caligos center. He's shambling through sub-level X. He is visibly disheveled and manic.

CALIGOS

Gotta pull it together. Breathe. (beat) WHERE ARE YOU?

We hear a few birds fly by.

41.

CALIGOS

How long have I been down here? Longer this time. Yesssss. Forever is longer than just a little while.

Part the waters. Let me in. Don't do this to me, baby. It was just a fight. Just a stupid fight. I said I was sorry. We'll get through this. I'll be better this time. I didn't mean to yell. YOU JUST DON'T LISTEN.

Okay. No. You're right. No, I'm not yelling. That wasn't yelling. Do you wanna hear me yell? No. That's not a threat. I'm not threatening you. I just think that-- No. Of course not. No. I don't want to see other people. I only want to see you. I'm opening my third eye for you, baby. Perceive me. Perceive me all the way down to my RNA strands. String them around your little finger. Now pull.

Caligos spasms.

CALIGOS

Assessment. Omnipotent entity. Class two-fourteen. Contact has failed. Won't talk to me. Took the kids to Mom's house. Containment procedure. Court-appointed visitation. Restraining order. Ambient energy seeping through my body. Radioactive piss. Attending physician ordering 50cc's of ibuprofen.

Looks like we took one hell of a wrong turn past the world of fuckin' make-believe, let me tell you.

Just be quiet and listen to the birds. Yeah. That's right. Great idea. Just. Listen. Pip pip pip pip pip. The birds know where to go.

Birds fly by again.

CALIGOS

I didn't know what you were back then. And now ... I still don't.

I want to see the colors one more time. The secret colors. The ones they don't make crayons for. Will you show them to me?

I've seen your sister. Yeah. The one they keep in Cheyenne Mountain. The one NORAD was a great big cover for. I've seen her. Her colors aren't as bright as yours. You know what they did to her? She's a goddamn supercomputer. They plugged her in. LIKE A TOASTER.

They've got her calculating how many licks it takes to get to the center of a Tootsie Roll Pop.

42.

But you. You're the problem child. The infinity symbol you look at too closely, and you realize it's just a sleepy ampersand. Or the number eight taking a power nap. There is no solution.

I remember standing on this precipice. Last time, I was down here for thirty minutes, and in truth, it was an eternity. Am I in that same eternity? Does it ever end?

It's happening all over again.

Am I worthy now?

Will I ever be?

Birds fly by once more.

CALIGOS

You set me up. You measured this out already.

You knew we'd end up here. Because you can see it all happening at

once. We always end up here. Right where we began.

And I only know that I only know completely jack shit.

I wanted to talk to you. I really, really wanted to.

But it seems like you're always on the saxophone.

Caligos collapses.

BLACKOUT

ACT 2 SC 5 - PUPPY BREATH EULOGIES

LIGHTS UP. Erin and Dr. Paul have set up camp on sublevel X. They huddle around a camping lantern and glowsticks.

43.

ERIN

Sometimes, I think I can almost see people out there.

DR. PAUL

Maybe one of them is Caligos. Or Hydrologist Matthews. Maybe I'm out there too. Some version of me.

ERIN

I think you were right. We might not be able to fix this.

DR. PAUL

I think it's supposed to happen this way. At the very least, we tried.

Beat.

ERIN

Dr. Paul?

DR. PAUL

Yes?

ERIN

Respectfully, I love you. And I don't mean romantically. I mean, I'm happy it was you. I'm happy you were the one who was inexplicably drawn into this incomprehensible, otherworldly death trap with me. That means more, right? That means more than sex. Or babies. Or whatever. That means I'm glad I get to die with you. My last thoughts will be with you. And I'd rather it be you than anyone else.

Paul takes her hand, they share a moment.

DR. PAUL

I miss my chair.

Mike, Astrid, and Julia enter. Erin stands.

ERIN

Who's there?

MIKE

We're cool! We're cool! Don't shoot!

ERIN

I don't have a gun.

44.

MIKE

Okay.

ASTRID

Sorry. You guys left before us and we had to wait for the elevator to come all the way back up.

Mike begins to unpack. His bag is full of only water bottles. Julia and Astrid sit with Dr. Paul and Erin in a semi-circle.

ERIN

This is a restricted area.

JULIA

I think we're a little past that.

DR. PAUL

Ms. Kelvin. Ms. Spencer. And who are you?

MIKE

Mike Broom.

DR. PAUL

Mike Broom. Alright. Well. Thank you for coming to witness the end of the Northwest Danbury Hydroelectric Power and Water Treatment facility. May she rest in peace.

ASTRID

There's nothing here. It's just nothing.

MIKE

Sometimes nothing is a something.

Mike hands a water bottle to Dr. Paul and joins the semi-circle.

DR. PAUL

Thanks?

MIKE

Three forty-eight.

Dr. Paul takes a sip.

45.

DR. PAUL

Tastes like Apricots. Breakfast with my grandparents. July 5th. A diner outside of Richmond, Virginia. The floors are sticky. I order blueberry pancakes and a coffee. The waitress screws up and brings me someone else's order. I eat it anyway. What are they gonna do? Stop me? It's a bowl of oatmeal and a slice of Apricot pie. The pie is the most delicious thing I've ever tasted.

That's when I noticed it for the first time. Looking across the table. A twitch. Almost imperceptible. In the corner of my grandfather's eye.

He had a stroke three days later. Survived, but couldn't speak anymore. A short circuit in his left hemisphere. He died a year later.

I would read to him every week. He was royal in his hospital gown. A wispy crown above his head. I read him all of Tolkien. Even the Silmarillion. I couldn't tell if he enjoyed it. Maybe it was more for me than it was for him. Couldn't say a word either way.

But sometimes, he would open his mouth and stare at me as if he did have something to say.

Something he'd just remembered.

Dr. Paul passes the bottle to Erin. She sips.

ERIN

Tastes like puppy breath. I'm not even kidding. Kind of weird to drink it, though. It tastes like Melissa's puppies.

Melissa. Shit. I loved that dog. Yellow lab.

Her puppies would all snuggle up with her in the laundry room in front of the dryer. And follow her around the house when she got sick of nursing them.

Big clumsy puppy feet. Padding around the house.

I would wake up so excited I could almost cry when I remembered they were down the hall, curled up in a blanket with the dryer softly thumping through cycles behind them.

Waiting for their eyes to open. Waiting for them to see the world. Waiting for them to see me.

I don't remember what we named the puppies. We gave them away.

My father parked his car in the mall parking lot with a cardboard sign that said “Free to a good home.” I tried to stop him. I asked him why our home wasn’t good enough. He said “That’s not what it means.” and walked out the door.

It felt like he was giving away something that was a part of me.

And then, twenty years later, I’m having a complete emotional breakdown because I can’t figure out why I’m crying every time I run the dryer.

I guess that’s why.

Erin passes the water bottle to Astrid. She takes it reluctantly. She sips and then shakes her head sadly. Astrid passes the bottle to Julia. Julia sips.

JULIA

Tastes like a papercut. Last year. A small bookstore in Sarasota. Looking for a book on hummingbirds that’s out of print. I found it between a book on prehistoric crustaceans and one on Peruvian ecology.

When I opened it, I looked down in surprise at the thin red line appearing on my index finger. Cut deep. My initial thought was infection. In this forgotten dusty back section of an old bookstore in Florida. But what could it have infected me with? Dust particles?

But it still felt like there was something amongst those old books that I didn’t want in my body. Like I’d picked something up off the floor in an antique store and promptly stuck it in my mouth without even checking to see what it was. I looked at the culprit. Page 29. Sure enough, the top corner of the page was stained crimson. So thin you could barely even tell it was there. Why would it even matter? Unless something really did get inside of me.

Do you think it’s still there? Not a real thing. Some kind of literary tumor. Like a bad idea. Just one bad thought. That turns into more. And eventually, it takes over entirely and shuts down my liver and kidneys. My brain goes dark. And all I can think of is the hummingbird on page 29.

In my next life, can I just be a little hummingbird? I know I don’t get to pick, but what if I ask really nicely?

Please.

Little Bird. I see you. Hello?

Julia passes the bottle to Mike. Mike sips.

MIKE

Tastes like a Thursday. The bar isn't crowded. She's caught me staring a few times already. She's impossibly gorgeous in a way that says I was a Psychology major until I changed it to Performing Arts. The setting sun lights up a smoky halo behind her as she leans over and says, "Is that your truck out front?"

She lets me into her life. I do my best not to track muddy footprints all over it. I tell her I love her. I mean it.

And she never loses that Thursday taste. That smoky bar-room sunset halo. Even when we fight, she still has that glow. When she cries she's got it. When she packs her bags and leaves, it's still there.

She leaves me on a Friday afternoon. Fridays are okay but never as good as Thursdays and that particular Friday sucked really bad. I called her a year later. Tried to get some closure. Asked her if she ever loved me at all and she said "No. We weren't together long enough for me to love you" and then I tell her, "I loved you on Thursday and every single day after that one." And she pauses and I know she doesn't know what I mean, because sometimes I don't even know what I mean. Then she says she has to go because she has a Yoga class. So I hang up, but in my head sometimes I think I'm still having that conversation that never got finished.

It hurts from time to time.

But I think I've come to realize that I gave her that power. Through my own power of passive perception.

The Thursdays were always mine. And never hers. She's got her own days. Thursday was part of me all along.

Caligos has slinked in and joined the circle during the above monologues. He sits in the circle with them. No one reacts to his presence. Mike passes the bottle to him. Caligos sips.

CALIGOS

Tastes like television static.
In the room down the hall.

"THE END" is written across the screen as if by an invisible hand.

48.

The credits roll.

The VHS clicks, whirs, and goes silent.
The day has turned to night.

My parents aren't home yet.
The house seems so very still.

And there it is. Lighting up my face with a low monochrome pulse. Oz was just a dream, and now all Dorothy has is Kansas.

Can you think of a worse fate?
Having to go back to black and white?

I don't want to live in that world.
I'll take the dream even if it becomes a nightmare.

Because when I close my eyes, I can see so much more than when they're open. So, which channel do I choose?

Because if I leave the static on,
everything will drown in white noise.

The loudest kind of silence.

Let it wash me away.

Caligos stands. He hears a few notes on a saxophone. He follows it off.

Beat.

Mike stands. He hears a phone ring. He walks off in a different direction.

Beat.

Dr. Paul stands. He hears the beeping of a heart monitor. He walks off in a different direction.

Beat.

49.

Erin stands. She hears the sound of puppy feet on a tile floor. She walks off in a different direction.

Beat.

Julia stands. She hears the sound of a computer booting up. She begins to follow the sound off. Astrid stops her and pulls her back to center.

BLACKOUT

ACT 2 SC 6 - CORMORANT GATE

LIGHTS UP. Astrid and Julia sit on the edge of the stage. We hear the pip pip pip of Junelings in the background.

JULIA

I wish I had met you back then, instead of now. Don't get me wrong. I love now. I'm a huge proponent of now. But holy shit, where have you been?

ASTRID

I think we've always been here. Some part of us at least.

JULIA

You're cute when you make absolutely zero sense.

ASTRID

ME? Make zero sense? Me!?

Julia laughs.

JULIA

So, I guess we made it.

ASTRID

This is it?

JULIA

This is it. The Cormorant Gate.

Beat.

50.

JULIA

Well, go ahead.

ASTRID

Go ahead what?

JULIA

Take a sip. It's your turn.

ASTRID

A sip? Of pool water?

JULIA

It's more than a swimming pool. Let's see how deep it goes.

Astrid leans down, cups her hands, and takes a

sip.

ASTRID

It tastes like water.

No, I mean it really tastes like water. Pristine and clear. Sometimes nothing is a something.

I'm twelve years old, standing in the kitchen of the house I grew up in. The morning sun is casting beams of light, lazy particles drift through them. I can see the shadow of a tree branch gently bobbing on the wall across from the window above the sink. I can feel my bare feet on the kitchen tile. I'm using the water dispenser on the fridge, and it's got this deep hum when it's working that I can feel in my bones. My mom's calling me, but I'm

so thirsty, and water has never tasted this good. But that isn't the taste. This is all pre taste.

I place my empty glass on the counter and walk into the living room. I see my mother. But for just one second, one brief moment in time, a veil was lifted. I could see past the curtain. Past my own perception. Outside of the woman I learned to see, I saw for what she really was: some strange kind of mammal who, against astronomical odds, gave birth to me.

Temporary, but also permanent.

Sad, but also happy.

Improbable, but also exactly according to plan.

That flash of clarity.

I don't even remember what she had to say.

51.

I'm going to imagine it was something nice. For once I'm going to take her at her intention. What she was going to say was not only nice, okay? But it was warm and calm and knowing, and I felt so close to her, and I never want to leave her, sitting on the living room couch on a crisp October morning, but it's so far away. It's so far away. And I'll never get back there no matter how hard I try.

Is this the taste? Is this the memory? Is this what it's supposed to feel like? Because oh my god, it hurts. It hurts so much.

Why do we never figure out the things that really matter until it's too late?

Is it just a quirk of the universe?

"You thought you knew. You really thought you knew. But you don't. You won't know until it's all ashes around you."

...

But now I've got the taste. And I know I'll never lose it again.

I can see it was everywhere. Every second of my life. Every single day. Every day my heart's been beating in my chest. Every day I've had a drink of water. Every day I've seen the color green at least once. Every day I was on a planet hurtling through space.

Every day I've been a part of this impossible symphony that I can't even hear. And someday I won't be. And there's nothing wrong with that.

I can see every sunset I've ever had. Every one I ever will have. Orange making way for purple. Then black. Then stars.

I can see it all happening at once.

And I like what I see.

BLACKOUT

END PLAY

52.

53.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

DAM PLAYLIST

(Just songs I attributed to each scene during the writing process. They are not intended for use in the play. But could be used as house music or something.)

ACT ONE

Sc 1. Unsweet Perdition - Let's Get This Over With - They Might Be Giants
Sc 2. Junelings - Parade - Rone
Sc. 3. Tasteless Memories - Barrier Reef - Old 97's
Sc. 4. The Caligos Incident - Nakt - Rone
Sc. 5. Malgo's Mansion - We Were Kids - Carter Vail
Sc. 6. Dirtfart, CT - Pentagram - Cake

ACT TWO

Sc. 1. Mamma Rambo - When the Lights Come On - They Might Be Giants
Sc. 2. Skittles and Brutalism - Slow West Vultures - Mountain Goats
Sc. 3 73rd Dimensional Groove - Labyrinth - Miracle Musical
Sc. 4 Ampersand Conjecture - You Part the Waters - Cake
Sc. 5 Puppy Breath Eulogies - End Times Daily - Papercuts
Sc. 6 Cormorant Gate - The Trip - Still Corners