

RADIO ELI

By Matthew Gutschick

Matthew.gutschick@yale.edu
(336) 457-4076

Characters

ELI, *a man in his forties, an agricultural research specialist at Gilead Corp.*

LEO, *a man in his fifties, the CEO of Gilead Corp.*

JESSIE, *a woman in her thirties, a senior manager at Gilead Corp.*

OBIE, *a man in his fifties, a mercenary working for Gilead Corp.*

SOPHIE, *a woman in her fifties, runs a safehouse.*

ASHER, *a young man, son of Sophie.*

RAVENS ONE AND TWO, *homeless, painfully anonymous figures, played by the actors playing Asher and Sophie*

Place

A prosperous American city.

Time

A carnival mirror of our own.

Prologue

*The sound of something being turned on.
A great electric symphony ready to bow and blow.
The cast is standing around the playing space, facing out.*

Eli is in the center. They move around and seemingly through him as they hum:

LEO
Listen up you kings-

JESSIE
And queens-

LEO
- of wisdom.

SOPHIE
Have we got a deal for you listeners tonight.

Asher
Have we got a deal for you listeners tonight.

JESSIE
Have we got a deal for you listeners tonight.

LEO
Have we got a deal for you listeners tonight.

OBIE
By that little voice...

SOPHIE
That tiny voice...

ASHER
That negligible...

LEO
Squashable...

JESSIE
Murderous.

So, so tiny...	SOPHIE
Fucking small...	OBIE
Voice.	ALL
For the low, low price-	JESSIE
Don't touch that dial-	LEO
Of a choice.	OBIE
Coursing over the airwaves...	SOPHIE
In the space between...	ASHER
Stillness,	OBIE
Dissonance,	JESSIE
Static.	LEO
The greatest hits from	ALL
Yesterday-	OBIE
Today-	SOPHIE
And tomorrow.	ASHER

Like the wind-	OBIE
Chaff in the wind-	SOPHIE
Driven by the wind.	LEO
Keeping the music on all day and all night.	JESSIE
Just keep listening folks.	JESSIE
Like a tree...	SOPHIE
Planted by streams of water...	ASHER
Bringing-	JESSIE
You-	ALL
Fruit in its season...	OBIE
Which shall never perish...	LEO
But prosper.	SOPHIE
Flooding your bed	JESSIE
Drenching your couch...	OBIE

And let you be the judge- LEO
You queens- SOPHIE
And kings- ASHER
Of- ALL

The sound of static.

Thunder

Then darkness. Then, a human breath. Like that of an animal in danger. Eli fingers a small, round stone. Rapidly.

Eli is in a vast office, on the 23rd floor of the Gilead Corp. building. Jessie takes notes on a notepad. A radio softly plays old gospel music.

LEO

And just who are you again? I don't mean to be brisk, I just have trouble keeping track of all the people I meet

ELI

E...Eli, sir. Eli Conway.

JESSIE

Research and Development.

LEO

I see.

LEO

And what are you doing here, Eli?

ELI

I've always been a zealot for this company. It's given me everything I have-

LEO

Get to it.

ELI

It's just- I'm afraid we need to change course. We made a mistake and it's...potentially deadly.

LEO

You know this is a big day for Gilead right? That this company is having a very good day and nothing- come wind, earthquake, or fire can ruin that. You are not going to ruin-

His phone rings.

Hello-

JESSIE
We now own Clearcast.

95% of the radio stations in the
United States.

LEO

The board approved the buyout
last night...thank you.

ELI
That's...
That's wonderful.

JESSIE
Not NPR of course but...who listens to NPR?

ELI
I actually do.
That's interesting...why radio-

JESSIE
Why not broadband you mean? Because it's a perpetually renewable asset.

ELI
Air-

JESSIE
Hmm.
This is a very big days for us.

LEO
Yeah. Let's go with the corn sugar ads
and build backwards to the candidates.
Congress first...

LEO
Anonymously.

JESSIE
The value to the customer is enormous.

LEO
The value to the customer is enormous.

ELI
That's...

LEO
Wonderful! Send them up when you're finished. Two o'clock-

Jessie shoots Leo a look.

Oh wait- I've got meditation and social networking at two o'clock. Come up at three.

He hangs up the phone.

What's right now Jessie? It must be close to-

JESSIE
Football time.

LEO
Football time!

(To Eli)
Do you play?

LEO

Leo and Jessie take off their sportcoats, roll up their sleeves, and get ready to face off.

Um...do I play...Football?

ELI

No. Do you play the glockenspiel?

LEO

Um...

ELI

Grabs a football off his desk.

LEO

Of course football. The real American pastime. The great democratizer. Our country's lord and savior.

JESSIE
Shut up and throw the ball.

Leo throws it to Jessie. She unleashes a primal grunt and barrels over Eli. She hits a wall in the form of Leo and they tussle until he wrests the ball from her grasp and runs the opposite direction.

LEO
Take that.

Ah!

JESSIE

Can I- I'm here to-

ELI

Leo throws the ball at Eli. Eli turns his back, letting it hit him and drop to the ground.

ELI

Sir, I-

LEO

No football? That makes me very sad. What's your game then Eddie?

ELI

Eli.

LEO

I don't know that game.

ELI

My name...my name is Eli. Not Eddie.

LEO

Eli. Sounds like a golfer. I don't think we have time for eighteen.

ELI

I'm-

LEO

Tennis? Jessie, get the rackets.

ELI

No-

JESSIE

No.

A tension filled moment between Leo and Jessie.

JESSIE

You know what time it is Leo.

LEO

With him around? I'd be a little embarrassed-

JESSIE

On your knees.

Leo reluctantly goes to his knees. He begins a pushup drill. Jessie counts out his reps like a coach.

	JESSIE	ELI
One...two...three...		
Four...		Sir, I really need to-
Get lower! That was only four and a half.		
		Talk to you.
		LEO
Well...		
	JESSIE	
Five...		
		LEO
Talk.		
	JESSIE	
Six...get down there!		
		LEO
I'm a very...		
	JESSIE	
Seven...		
		LEO
Busy man.		
	JESSIE	
Eight...		
		ELI
I feel like...this might need your full attention.		
	JESSIE	
You can do better than that!		
		LEO
I need to focus.		

JESSIE
I'm going to start counting backwards.

LEO
Come on...

JESSIE
We'll call that ten for now.

ELI
It's the Apex line sir.

JESSIE
Eleven.

LEO
Damn...

ELI
I know...It's, this is big. It's the reason I've been trying to get to you for so long.

LEO
It's...time...

JESSIE
You're not finished.

LEO
I am...I am.

JESSIE
Fine. You have a few more minutes in your schedule then.

LEO
Then...

JESSIE
Alright.

She hands Leo a toothbrush and starts massaging his shoulders. It's toothbrush massage time. He speaks while brushing.

Should I...I mean, can I continue?

ELI

If you must.

JESSIE

LEO
Fine.

Evidence is mounting...we're putting these EDCs out there with our product...with Apex. Is there...I'm sorry if I'm just repeating what's in the report. I know you read it-

ELI

Of course.

JESSIE

Tell me again.

LEO

Well there are two parts. There's the black particulate matter that we've been fighting for decades-

ELI

And winning!

LEO

God that feels good...

To Jessie:

And the-

ELI

Who are you again? I'm sorry I can't keep it all straight.

LEO

I...I'm Eli-

ELI

Not your name. Your job.

LEO

I'm the agriculture division's R and-

ELI

Agriculture?

LEO

That's right. ELI

God I love farms. LEO

Well me too sir- ELI

All those cows. LEO

Right, I just- ELI

All those migrant workers. LEO
Jessie, memoir time.

She hands him a voice recorder and takes his toothbrush.

“When I was a migrant worker in California, before I founded my first business, before Gilead Corp. became a king of the global economy, before all the hype...Things were simpler somehow. I had peace”

I didn't know you were a- ELI

It doesn't matter. JESSIE

Makes a better story. LEO

“I long for those days sometimes.”

Sir. I- ELI

JESSIE
She hands Leo a series of documents. He begins signing them.
Time's up.

ELI

What...I-

JESSIE

I'm sorry but we have to move onto our next meeting.

ELI

No.

JESSIE

What?

ELI

I said no...I- this is too urgent.

LEO

Moving to the radio.

Oh I love this.

ELI

We're talking about a permanent disruption of the water cycle.

LEO

Turning up the radio. It's still tuned to a gospel station.

Mmmhmmm...

ELI

And testicular dysgenesis. All kinds of birth defects.

JESSIE

We're looking into it. Thank you for bringing this to our attention.

ELI

That's...no. That's not enough. We need to stop distribution immediately.

LEO

As he sways and sashays.

Mmm... sing it!

JESSIE

Maybe we'll make another appointment.

ELI
The environmental protection agency already-

LEO
Praise him sister!

JESSIE
Nobody likes a prophet of doom.

ELI
Especially when they're right. This is-

JESSIE
Come on.

ELI
I don't want your kids to suffer.

LEO
What?

ELI
Or mine.

Leo turns the radio down.

LEO
What about my kids?

ELI
We're talking about stopping the rain.
I mean...what that does to our world. How they'll...

LEO
You can't stop the rain. That's ridiculous

ELI
It's all in the report sir...we just underestimated the urgency of...we need to pull the product now and start-

LEO
Something we are doing is stopping the rain.

No. JESSIE

Yes. ELI

That's not what the report says. JESSIE

It is. It's all in there. ELI

Get out. JESSIE

No more rain. LEO

This isn't new...we just missed it. It's already happening out there. ELI

LEO
Out there? Hmm...Let me tell you something about America , Elliott. It's limitless...
Knows no boundaries. The American system is built on the idea...the *faith* that growth is
always possible. Limited...only by our people, by our imagination and ingenuity. So how
do you expect to convince anybody that the most basic- the most renewable resource
on earth... is somehow running out?

There's a firestorm of data. ELI

And I see that as a failure of imagination. LEO

I don't want to imagine what this is going to look like...this isn't about handing our kids a
sick world. I'm saying this is going to happen now. It already is... ELI

Where's the data? LEO

In the report we sent you sir. I...this has been coming for a long time. We need to act
now. ELI

LEO

How many people do you have working down there?

ELI

Three hundred and forty-nine. I'm the fiftieth.

JESSIE

He's the only one saying anything.

ELI

I'm not...I just...the report has all of our names. The entire division signed.

JESSIE

You created Apex.

ELI

We did.

JESSIE

She looks at the report.

Hundreds of signatures on this report.

Off with their heads.

LEO

What are you talking about here? A few rivers and streams?

ELI

The birth defects are already apparent with only trace amounts in the water. It's literally unfilterable with any technology we have. The particulates...that's a different story. We may be further out on that. But we're talking about this generation. Not your children's children.

LEO

What's the time horizon on this?

ELI

Months...weeks maybe before we see a permanent...it's at a tipping point already sir.

LEO

Three hundred and fifty people...So you are telling me that a chemical you made, that a department under *your* watch put this company's good name on is now wreaking havoc?

ELI

Apex needs to be pulled right now.

LEO

The EPA?

ELI

They know it's us.

LEO

That's asinine. We're not responsible for the whole mess.

ELI

No. You're right.

LEO

...then that's what we use. Who knows what other industries are contributing...we didn't know. We're only part of the value chain. Get on it Jessie. Pre-empt this thing.

JESSIE

Got it.

LEO

Let me ask you something...

ELI

Yes.

LEO

I want to thank you for bringing this to me, uh...

ELI

Eli.

LEO

I'm just terrible with names. Good work. I just want to know something... You've never spoken up before. I've never even seen you.

ELI

I...this is too big...sir. To let go.

LEO

You certainly didn't speak up when this Apex stuff was put to the market.

ELI
We were confident that-

LEO
Then why aren't you scared?

ELI
I-

Eli drops a pebble he's been holding tightly in his hand. He quickly picks it up.

ELI
I can't let this go. I just feel...called.

LEO
And maybe it's a wrong number. Did you think of that?

ELI
Sir...

LEO
How did the EPA find out?

ELI
I...I don't know. Research.

LEO
Research can be wrong Eli. You know that right?
One misplaced zero here. A bad measurement. There are a lot of things that can go wrong. So it's unwise to go talking about something if you aren't absolutely certain you know what you are saying.

ELI
I know this without a shadow of a doubt.

LEO
But you don't know when it's going to happen.
So I'm supposed to put hundreds, maybe thousands of people out of jobs, cut off this chemical lifeline to farmers, driving up the price of food, which shoves more people under the poverty line and means that somewhere another young mother is going to put her baby to bed without dinner? Thousands...maybe millions of people need to go hungry because you want me to create a limit in a limitless world. That's what you are saying I should do...Right now.

ELI

We're right about the data. No model can predict exactly what will happen.

LEO

Uh-huh. And I think we need more than blind faith in data. We need to see it. But that's okay Eli. It's okay you don't think the way I do. My job is different...I have to watch out for the people who work here.

The market will figure this out. It knows who's to blame and who's worth saving. And Gilead is going to be just fine. Gilead is always going to be saved. Because we're the good guys Eli. We don't put people out of jobs because of a 'calling'. That's the market's job...meting out blame and innocence. And it doesn't need some junkyard dog barking at good people. Right?

ELI

Sir, I-

LEO

And there's money in the solution. There's opportunity in every problem. So I want you to go start working on the anti-Apex. The thing that's going to stop this predicted havoc.

ELI

We already are. But in the meantime we need to stop distr-

LEO

You have kids?

ELI

A daughter. Her name is Alyssa.

LEO

You are good to her?

ELI

I...she doesn't see me enough. Not lately...I'm good to her. She's a storyteller and I listen.

LEO

Go home then. See your daughter. Tell her a story. Sing her a song. Read her a story and remember how absolutely vulnerable she is. How dependent she is on you to make good decisions with her life. With your job. With your good name...have a good sleep. Then you'll understand my position on this.

ELI

Actually, my daughter's the one who told me to do this.

LEO

Then protect her. Do what's right for her and start working on the thing that will make her world better. But don't bring your zealousness into the workplace. It's histrionic. It makes people uncomfortable.

ELI

She-all of us are going to be hurt by...this isn't about me.

LEO

Eli...you don't want me telling you what's good for her, so don't tell me what's good for my family. This will get taken care of, if it's just and true. You rest easy about that. And then you're going to be a hero.

He turns up the music again.

ELI

I-

LEO

This meeting is over.

Eli turns to walk out of the room. He looks at his pebble, stops, and then continues out.

LEO

He's already talked...

Anybody who gets on our case has to be blown away. Do you understand me Jessie? This radio thing is yours. We need to be cleaner than a dog's mouth.

Keep the message ecstatic or keep it angry.

Leo starts swaying again. Jessie approaches Leo. She smacks him

JESSIE

Get the crown.

Leo pulls a king's crown out from under his desk and puts it on.

A beat.

She smacks him again.

A beat.

They grab each other and start aggressively screwing around.

The radio's sound grows but starts to buzz with a signal slowly being lost. The frequency changes across time as the voices of gospel singers mix with those of pop singers, rock stars and rap stars. Distant gunshots fuse with jazz rhythms. A muffled scream pulsates with the energy of a little Richard Wagner. News reports and ads roll in and out of audibility throughout this radio symphony:

"Three months since we've seen any rainfall..."

"Is your food supply safe..."

"And I tell you one thing Mike, if these Republicans don't figure..."

"...multiple protests squashed in Ohio this morning..."

"...another celebrity sextape. We'll tell you who after the break..."

"Gilead Corp. assumes major military responsibility..."

"Unhappy with your home? We can help..."

"...Eli Conway still on the loose, though nearly a hundred others have been..."

"...the third year without any rainfall..."

"I tell you what Mike, if these Democrats can't do anything..."

"...but things will turn around..." "This is cyclical"

"once the market recovers..." "...economists say this is no time to be sheepish..."

"Can't find any use for grandma's gold rings? We'll buy them!"

"last night's earthquake, rendering government officials useless against..."

"...food solutions for a better world"

Seeds

An ambient pulse eventually consumes the whole cacophony for an instant in time. Even that gives way to static and then to the soothing sounds of ancient jazz played on a radio. That radio is in the midst of an urban slum filled with the faded material vestiges of a modern world: monitors, plastic bags and plastic toys, broken lawn chairs, ladders, aluminum crates. This alley houses a shadowy figure. He leans against a 50-gallon drum, barely conscious. The radio is next to him.

A raven-like man stumbles into view, out of breath from an escape. He cradles a moldy loaf of bread, which he quickly sets to eating. Another similarly clad vagabond enters, searching for him.

RAVEN TWO
Finding him.

You.

RAVEN ONE

Hi.

RAVEN TWO

You ran.

RAVEN ONE

I had to protect it.

RAVEN TWO

Give it here.

Raven Two strikes Raven one.

RAVEN ONE

Ow.

He swings at Raven Two and misses.

RAVEN TWO

Stop it. Now.

Raven Two kicks Raven One. Raven One swings again and misses. The third time he strikes with the crusty bread and makes contact.

RAVEN TWO

Ow!

Raven Two grabs the loaf as Raven One starts to eat. Raven One whines and kicks Raven Two. Raven Two bops Raven One on the head.

RAVEN TWO

That's enough!

He starts stabbing at Raven One with the bread. Eventually Raven One grabs ahold of it and a tug of war ensues. Pieces of the loaf start to break off as their battle escalates. Just when it is left in a few pieces, the two forget about the bread and are truly fighting each other. It is a clumsy, stupid fight.

A helicopter is heard overhead, and its searchlight is near. The two men scatter and disappear.

The shadowy figure simply turns up the radio until the helicopter noise fades. He lethargically moves to the bread, but he is unable to eat it.

Obie enters, dressed as a civilian mercenary. His clothes are near to rags, but he has a yellow patch identifying him as an authority. Obie pulls his firearm out and points it at the man, who is turned away.

OBIE

Stop.
What are you doing here?

ELI

I am hiding.

OBIE

Identify yourself.

ELI

No.

OBIE

Excuse me.
Tell me who you are.

ELI

I'm just a hungry man.

You stole that bread?	OBIE
In a way.	ELI
Stand up.	OBIE
Why? You want some?	ELI
Get up.	OBIE
Let me just finish here-	ELI
Does it look like I'm joking?	OBIE
Does it look like <i>I'm</i> joking?	ELI
Stand up.	OBIE
Will you put the gun down if I do?	ELI
Maybe.	OBIE
<i>Eli stays where he is.</i>	
Now!	
This is just like you people.	ELI
Oh yeah?	OBIE

ELI

Reject your promise. You break down shop doors, walk into bedrooms, kitchens, put people to death by gunshot...

Take the bread.

OBIE

I don't want any bread.

ELI

Just out killing for fun tonight then.

OBIE

Get up!

ELI

Maybe you should sit down.

OBIE

Now.

ELI

You know, take a break and rest. We can talk about your authority issues.

OBIE

Do it!

ELI

Daddy didn't listen to you, eh?

OBIE

I'm this close.

ELI

Pretend I'm him.

OBIE

Nobody will hear you die.

ELI

Or maybe daddy beat mommy and you-

OBIE

Nobody will find you.

And this is how you deal. ELI

Nobody! OBIE

Or your kid hates you. ELI

That's it. OBIE

Or *you* hate you. ELI

One. And I don't count to two. OBIE

Killed too many babies. ELI

Obie jumps on Eli, thrusting him to the ground.

You sonofabitch! OBIE

He puts the gun to Eli's head and then realizes who he is looking at.

You...

Yeah. Do it. ELI

You. OBIE

You coward. Just do it. ELI

Eli Conway... OBIE

That's right. Get me. ELI

You're still alive. OBIE

Pull it. ELI

Oh god...I... OBIE

Come on! ELI

I almost... OBIE

A beat.

Obie puts the gun on Eli's chest and gets off of him. He kneels with his head down.

What are you doing? I'm not- ELI

Please. OBIE

No. ELI

Yes. OBIE

You're supposed to- ELI

Just...just put it in your hand and pull the trigger. OBIE

No...No, no, no. You- ELI

OBIE

You can keep the gun.

Eli presses the gun against Obie's chest.

ELI

I'm a murderer, remember?

OBIE

Nobody will know you did it.

ELI

Do your job.

OBIE

I quit.

ELI

You coward. Filth...piece of shit. Come on!

OBIE

I almost shot you.

ELI

No, no, no...I deserve this. Remember.

OBIE

You don't. Get me out. Just get me out...Get me out. Get me out. Get me out. Get me out! GET ME OUT!

ELI

Grabbing him.

Shoot me! Look what I did!

OBIE

I WANT OUT!

ELI

GET ME!

OBIE

I WANT OUT!

ELI

GET ME!

Eli puts the gun in his mouth and places Obie's hand on the trigger. At this moment a spark of static interrupts the radio broadcast and a young girl's voice floats through the vacuum.

GIRL (v.o.)

I...I'm nine years old...my name is Alyssa...

Eli flies to the radio and turns it up.

GIRL (v.o.)

To someone with her:

What?...oh. My name is Alyssa... Alyssa Marie Schoenfelt.

Eli crumbles.

My missing persons are my dad and my mom...and my cat. My cat's name is Mr. Roboto. He's white and gray and really, really...cute. Mr. Roboto if you're out there... What?...oh. My mom's name is Judy Schoenfelt and my dad's-

The interruption ends in a burst of static. A radio announcer's voice comes back on:

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)

Sorry about that folks. We had a few technical difficulties here at WTQR for those of you hearing a private transmission. The problem is solved I assure you...Since we have the chance now, we might as well give you your weather report. It's currently forty degrees fahrenheit with winds out of the northeast at 5 miles per hour. Things are a little overcast here at the WTQR offices and the chance of precipitation is...just remember to take your vitamin D folks. The sun's not coming out today...We'll be right back with an hour-long block of your favorites.

Eli turns it down.

A beat.

OBIE

You looking for someone?

Eli does not respond.

OBIE

They always find them. The pirate transmissions...they always find the people behind them.

Let's just hope her parents get to her first. And Mr. Roboto.

Obie picks up the gun.

OBIE

At least her parents know she's alive...
Hopefully she's not with fighters. Anybody with a gun...

Should we...um...should we talk about that?

A long silence.

I'm...we've all been through a lot, you know? We've all been through a lot.

ELI

Why didn't you?

OBIE

I'm just a...I'm hired help. There are people who want to kill you. I...

ELI

You don't.

OBIE

No.

ELI

Okay.

OBIE

I don't.

ELI

Okay...

OBIE

You sure you don't want to talk about what just happened?

ELI

Nothing to say.

OBIE

That's not outlaw talk.

ELI

You're right.

OBIE

Then who are you listening for?

ELI

Nobody.

OBIE

I might be able to help.

ELI

No.

OBIE

I...um. Before. You said something...

ELI

We're not going to talk about it.

OBIE

I just want to know...

You survived.

ELI

Yeah.

OBIE

For a long time.

ELI

Too long...

OBIE

That's the thing. You...I know the truth. You should know that.

ELI

The truth?

About you. OBIE

You don't know anything. ELI

I guess it's why I wanted you to...
It's not all your fault. I know that. OBIE

I feel sick. ELI

You aren't the only one... OBIE

I want you to leave. ELI

Obie gets up and starts to move.

It's just that- OBIE

Oh come on! ELI

Listen man, you shouldn't blame yourself too much. OBIE

I'm gonna puke. ELI

Guilt is crippling. I know this for a fact. OBIE

Ugh... ELI

It locks its arms around you and takes away all your...anyway. It makes it hard to be
happy or...I dunno, human. OBIE

ELI
I know that one. Go.

OBIE
It just doesn't solve the problem.
Blaming you. You are just one person.

ELI
Get out of here...

OBIE
I don't blame you Eli.

ELI
You're a traitor...

OBIE
Probably. That's why...it...I don't want this badge anymore.

ELI
Go.

OBIE
I wish I could just burn it.

ELI
Shut up and leave.

OBIE
Then what will you do?

ELI
I just...it hurts and I...I can't even cry anymore...All I want to do is...

OBIE
I know.

Obie turns to leave again.

ELI
Do you have any water?

OBIE

I know a place. A widow.

ELI

Can you please take me with you?

A beat.

OBIE

The prophet of doom wants to live?

ELI

Today I do.

OBIE

Really?

ELI

Yes. Right now.

OBIE

Me too.

How long you been out here?

ELI

Months. Years maybe. Who knows...

OBIE

You cared enough to hide. That's what doesn't make sense to me...

ELI

I wasn't hiding.

OBIE

Then you should have turned yourself in a long time ago. It's one or the other. You're either hiding from your life or choosing your life.

ELI

I was searching.

OBIE

Revenge?

ELI

No.

Family.

OBIE

Same thing sometimes.

ELI

You were hiding then too if you wanted me to-

OBIE

Oh. Look who wants to talk about the main event now.

A beat.

OBIE

I...maybe I was just being honest with myself. Shedding skin.

ELI

Sounds painful.

A beat.

OBIE

You could make me a rich man Eli Conway.

ELI

I know.

OBIE

I'm Obie.

ELI

Obie, you must like bad guys.

OBIE

There's no such thing.

ELI

Just choosers and hiders apparently.

OBIE

That's all.

ELI

I kind of like that.

OBIE
You got a lot of stuff?

ELI
Nodding to the radio.
Tons. I don't know if we can carry it all.

OBIE
We don't need that. These people keep up with the news.

ELI
How awful for them.

OBIE
Let's go.
Obie takes off his badge.

ELI
No. I need this radio...
Eli picks it up and nearly collapses in the process. Obie helps him, supporting Eli's weight.

OBIE
You're really dehydrated.

ELI
I...

OBIE
You can come with me.

ELI
Thanks.

OBIE
But this place is for the living. Okay?

ELI
What do you mean?

OBIE

Where we're going...you are making a choice. Crossing a river. Putting out a fire.
Understand me?

ELI

No...

OBIE

Just don't be an asshole.

*They leave and a helicopter is heard in the distance. A few broken pirate transmissions
fuse with a journey around the radio dial: R&B, old country, death metal, folk-rock.*

"my missing person..."

"...my mother"

"my wife..."

"My name is DeAngelo Cubbins...I need to find my..."

"my..."

"my..."

"my..."

"...son Michael. He has blond hair and a scar on his right cheek..."

"friend Jacob. We were on the wrestling team together."

"...she's my missing person." "I can barely..."

"he's sick...a diabetic."

"please..."

"Donovan"

"Lisa"

"husband of thirty-five years...oh god..."

"my missing person..."

"...my missing people."

"...beloved Judy"

Wind

A woman collects sticks outside her shelter, the exterior of which is surrounded by colorful kitsch. A couple lawn chairs surround a rudimentary fire pit.

SOPHIE

Picking up a stick.

Ahhh Mr. Mattingly. We meet again.

Seeing another.

Rizzuto? Is that you?

Picking it up.

Tell me Rizzuto, do you know a good recipe for risotto?

She giggles at her own joke and searches for another.

Of course you don't. Shortstops can't cook. You're too busy sleeping with supermodels.

Like facing a cartoon nemesis:

You.

Eli and Obie enter as she bends over to pick up this stick.

OBIE

Sophie...

SOPHIE

Through her legs.

Can't you see I'm busy?

OBIE

Looks like it.

SOPHIE

I'm recruiting.

OBIE

Who'd you pick up off waivers?

SOPHIE

I'd like you to meet Don Mattingly, Casey Stengel, and Phil Rizzuto. They will be keeping me warm tonight.

OBIE

Yankees. She names them after Yankees.

SOPHIE

I'm working my way up to the Jeter years.

OBIE

Can't find sticks that big.

SOPHIE

That some kind of steroids joke?

OBIE

Yeah.

SOPHIE

The Jeter years will burn good...a lot of hairspray on those guys.

Sophie sees Eli for the first time.

SOPHIE

You brought company, Obie.

Obie eases Eli into a chair.

OBIE

Yes. Would you bring him some water so he can have a drink?

Sophie takes a long look at Eli. She turns to go in.

ELI

And bring me...please...a piece of bread.

SOPHIE

Getting greedy are we?

ELI

I haven't...it's been a few days.

SOPHIE

I'm sorry. I don't have any bread- only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug.

ELI

Please.

SOPHIE

I'm gathering sticks to make a single meal for myself and my son, so we can eat it- eat and not die today. I'm sorry you need food.

OBIE

She's joking.

SOPHIE

Oh?

OBIE

Yes. She's joking.
You know who this is Sophie.

SOPHIE

No. I don't pay attention to the news.

OBIE

Sophie-

SOPHIE

Does it look like I'm ready to hide a man on the run?

ELI

Don't be afraid. Go in and do what you said. Just make a small cake of bread from what you have and then make something for yourself and your son. Trust me. The flour and oil won't be used up. Not until it rains again.

She laughs.

SOPHIE

I must be really lucky. I've got an unending supply of flour and oil now. Would you like to sell me some sunshine too? Maybe a solar powered car?

OBIE

Sophie-

SOPHIE

I'm doing it. But it's just because I'm happy...I've got the 1985 Yankees batting order sitting in my fireplace so it's a good day.
What's your plan Obie?

OBIE

We need to get him rested. Then we can talk-

SOPHIE

No plan. Same as usual.

OBIE

Please-

SOPHIE

I get it Obie.
I'm just going to use some of my magic flour.

She goes inside.

OBIE

An endless supply of flour and oil?

Eli pulls out a small bag of flour.

OBIE

Oh...

ELI

The oil I'll have to work on.

Eli offers the bag to Obie.

Put it in there when she isn't watching.

OBIE

You don't look so good Eli.

ELI

It feels good...this place. It smells like a campfire.

OBIE

Eli, there's something I've got to-

ELI

The light is brighter too-

Sophie re-enters with a tipling of water in a mason jar.

SOPHIE

Made from the finest purified piss.

Noticing Eli's state:

What's wrong with you? I was just joking.

ELI

Just a little tired...

SOPHIE

Oh good. Because this really isn't the finest piss.
Here you go.

Eli grabs the jar.

SOPHIE

Easy there. How long has it been?

ELI

Couple days.

SOPHIE

Little sips or you'll be sick. Just take it easy.
People are doing that, you know? Drinking their own urine. I met a lawyer who said she did it. A lawyer drinking her own piss. There's a joke in there somewhere.

OBIE

It's possible.

SOPHIE

Oh stop. That's just a boy scout's wet dream.

OBIE

Really. You just create a solar still.

SOPHIE

Oh a solar still, is that all we need? Did they give you a merit badge for inventing one?

OBIE

Saucer, some salt and cling wrap. That's all it takes.

SOPHIE

Oh? That's all it takes?

OBIE

And a little sun.

SOPHIE

And a little sun.

OBIE

There are other ways.

SOPHIE

Let's hope it never gets that bad.

OBIE

It already is...

SOPHIE

To Eli:

You're not going to throw up are you?

ELI

No...

SOPHIE

Oh he's gonna hurl. Get a bag.

Obie looks around.

ELI

I'm fine.

SOPHIE

Good, because I just mowed the lawn.

A beat.

A joke. Gosh, what has you boys so down in the dumps?

OBIE

We've had a day.

SOPHIE

I can see that.

To Eli:

You've had a bad couple years haven't you Eli Conway?

Eli looks up.

SOPHIE

The last one...

Lucky you found Harriet Tubman over there...very lucky.

Eli and Obie share a look.

OBIE

Sophie-

SOPHIE

Oh...

OBIE

I can go make the bread.

SOPHIE

He doesn't know?

ASHER(o.s)

What's brown and sticky?

SOPHIE

A stick!

Asher enters carrying magazines and a newspaper.

ASHER

Hey mama.

SOPHIE

Giving him a big hug.

My baby's home!

ASHER

I've got Home and Garden, Groovy Geek Weekly...and some softcore porn.

SOPHIE

Hmm...
Let's use Groovy Geek Weekly.

ASHER

Good choice. The porn is for me.

SOPHIE

Eww.
Boy, I raised you better than that.

ASHER

You think so.
Hey Obie.

OBIE

Asher. What's going on?

ASHER

Same old. Just trying to save the world.

OBIE

Good luck.

Obie goes in with the bag of flour.

ASHER

So Mom...I'm at the convenience store looking at the magazines and there's a sign there that says "no reading". An actual sign telling people not. To. Read. Not wanting to shake the boat, I grabbed two handfuls of candy bars, plopped them down on the counter and said "which one of these is a Butterfinger?"

SOPHIE

Unbelievable. What did the clerk do?

ASHER

I don't know. I ran away. I wasn't going to buy all those candy bars.
How are you?

SOPHIE

Fine. I found Phil Rizzuto.

ASHER

You didn't burn Babe Ruth did you?

Obie returns with a jar of water for himself.

SOPHIE

No. I'm saving him for Christmas dinner.

ASHER

Nice.

Did you think of any today?

Asher turns to the chairs and notices Eli for the first time. He freezes.

SOPHIE

Oh I thought of a good one. Let me just remember how to...oh! What do you find in a clean nose?

Asher doesn't respond.

Fingerprints!...what do you think?

ASHER

Mom...

SOPHIE

Oh, I know...

ASHER

Is this...

ELI

Hi, I'm Eli.

ASHER

What's he...

SOPHIE

Wanted a glass of water and some bread. That strange piece of humanity promises us an endless supply of flour and oil.

ELI

It's true.

Is that right?
ASHER

One favor deserves another.
ELI

It doesn't have to...that's what we call faith.
We all thought you were dead.
ASHER

I know.
ELI

We thought... if you were alive you would raise your voice.
ASHER

Be nice Asher.
SOPHIE

You should be dead.
ASHER

Asher!
SOPHIE

I mean we all thought you were...how did you make it this long?
ASHER

Hiding and running-
ELI

Without anybody knowing-
ASHER

...like a cockroach.
ELI

I-
ASHER

Asher.
SOPHIE
What did the bee say when he returned to the hive?

What?
ASHER

Honey, I'm home.
SOPHIE

That's pretty good Mom.
ASHER

Give it up boy. You've been gone all day. What did you think of?
SOPHIE

What do you call a couple lying naked waiting for an earthquake?
ASHER

What?
SOPHIE

The height of laziness.
ASHER

You're so gross.
SOPHIE

I know.
Are you cutting?
ASHER

No. Obie can do that. I have to make bread apparently.
SOPHIE

She goes in.

You know the drill, man.
ASHER

Asher hands Obie a knife and they make "notecards" with the magazine. Asher writes. He reads about the deaths from the paper.

Do you think that earthquake joke would be good for a woman who lost her husband to lung cancer?

OBIE

No. Definitely not.

ASHER

Something more innocent, eh? That's more mom's specialty...

A beat.

How about this: What color is a burp?

OBIE

What?

ASHER

Burple.

OBIE

Nah.

ASHER

Um...Where do horses live?

OBIE

Where?

ASHER

In neigh-borhoods.

OBIE

Better.

ASHER

We'll go with that for her.

He writes.

Mrs. Lydia Saunders.

ASHER

Alright. Something good for Marilyn Funk. Lost her husband to a...shit...to a bicycle accident. I wonder how many of these obits are fake. You know, like cover-ups and stuff.

OBIE

Is that a question for me?

ASHER

You're the only rent-a-cop here.

OBIE

So I am.

ASHER

Well?

OBIE

What?

ASHER

How many of them are cover ups? How many bike accidents leave holes in people's heads?

OBIE

No. They don't lie about the way these people die.

ASHER

They just make it seem natural.
What about a gunfight?

OBIE

What about it?

ASHER

What if someone resists arrest and...

OBIE

Oh if they resist arrest it's easy. Just tell the truth.

ASHER

The executions.

OBIE

Those are harder. You never would know.

ASHER

Some people just fall off the map of the world, huh?

OBIE

Don't even leave a trail.

ASHER

Any?

OBIE

Today?

ASHER

Recently. That you know of.

A beat.

OBIE

Write one to Gabriella Pulinski.

ASHER

You knew him?

OBIE

It was actually a her...A life partner.

ASHER

How?

OBIE

I don't know.

ASHER

Obie-

OBIE

I don't.

A long pause.

ASHER

What's the right joke then?

OBIE

Something nice.

ASHER

Great idea.

OBIE

Just watch the tone. This is grief we're dealing with here. Not a frat party.

Thanks Obie.

ASHER

Look, I don't know what to-

OBIE

Okay, okay every joke I know is polluted with misogyny so you're gonna have to-

ASHER

Why did the kid start a gardening service?

ELI

Why?

ASHER

He wanted to rake in some cash.

ELI

Nice.

OBIE

I can put that down.

ASHER

Is it just soldiers' widows or-

ELI

Any.

OBIE

Any widow we can find.

ASHER

And the victims of Gilead's people-

ELI

Any widow we can find. Suffering doesn't discriminate.

ASHER

It was Asher's idea. Give them a smile so they can start...healing or...dealing. I don't really know.

OBIE

ASHER

People tell me it's glib or whatever.

ELI

For how long...I mean how long have you-

Asher and Obie look at each other.

A beat.

ASHER

Since...well, awhile. We've done this for awhile.

Alright, old age. A woman who simply died of old age. Does that even count as a death? If you make it so far they don't even know what the hell killed you.

OBIE

It's a victory of some kind.

ASHER

Yeah. A victory over science.

OBIE

There's a widower?

ASHER

Yes.

OBIE

What was her name?

ASHER

Elaine May Tomczak.

OBIE

I don't know.

ASHER

Me neither. Every old man likes sex jokes right?

OBIE

Grieving Asher. He's grieving.

ELI

Why didn't the cheetah go on vacation?

OBIE

Why?

ELI

Because he couldn't find the right vacation spot.

ASHER

Wow. You're good with the kid jokes.

ELI

Yeah. I used to be an expert.

ASHER

To Eli.

So what do you do now? When you're not hiding, I mean.

Sophie re-enters with a dark bag.

SOPHIE

It's true. How did you do that? Flour for a week!

ASHER

Really?

SOPHIE

Really.

ELI

It's just as I said.

SOPHIE

I'm going to have to start believing you more often I guess.

Handing Obie the bag.

Here.

OBIE

Thanks.

He scans the area and then runs off, leaving Eli with Sophie and Asher.

ASHER

Eli's got some good jokes too, Mom. Kid ones.

ELI

I think I'm out of them now. Those are the only two I remember.

SOPHIE

You're going to have to get creative then.

ASHER

He's stayed alive this long. He's got to be creative. Resourceful at least. He found us.

SOPHIE

Asher...

ASHER

What? Does he not know?

To Eli:

Do you not know?

ELI

I know nothing.
What?

ASHER

Where you are...what we...wow. You haven't heard of us?

ELI

What... You guys are cannibals or something? Fatten people up and eat them?

SOPHIE

Yup. And you're lunch tomorrow.

ELI

Really...what?

ASHER

No.
When are you leaving?

Asher. Obie brought him here.

SOPHIE

So...He's supposed to be the leader. I don't want him-

ASHER

Rosanna Cuddyer. Know her?

SOPHIE

Yeah...

ELI

Justin Morris.

SOPHIE

I know him...knew him.

ELI

A beat.

Miroslav Helgi.

SOPHIE

Hank Harmon. Viola Briel...Chloe Ashton.

ASHER

People I worked with...

ELI

The hunted.

SOPHIE

My department.

ELI

Research and Development. The Apex team.

ASHER

Yes that was me...what I did.

ELI

SOPHIE

There isn't a nation or kingdom on earth where they haven't looked for you all. Desert, mountain, didn't matter. I bet they even looked underwater.

ELI

I know.

SOPHIE

Your people had no place to hide forever. No chance to go home.

ASHER

No home.

SOPHIE

That's right...except here.

ELI

It does feel safe.

SOPHIE

We still have you.

ELI

Me?

SOPHIE

The hunted. The doomsday prophets. We've seen the-the...document.

SOPHIE

Obie stole it. The report.

ASHER

You were brave then-

SOPHIE

Asher.
We have your friends. The most wanted.

ELI

Where?

ASHER

Two different basements. Half a mile from here.

ELI

All of us?

SOPHIE

Fifty in each. You're one hundred and one.

ELI

There were...do you keep finding more?

ASHER

You're the last one unaccounted for.

ELI

Oh...

SOPHIE

Some might not be dead...we...this isn't very precise. We save who we can.

ELI

I...

A beat.

How?

SOPHIE

Obie.

ASHER

He's a turncoat. Obie's close to Leo Chandler. He has access to intelligence and he-

ELI

A hundred?

SOPHIE

And one. We take care of them all. Including you Eli.

ELI

Wow...

I don't have flour for that many people.

SOPHIE

Obie takes care of that. This was his idea. From the start.

ELI

That's so many people. I mean one would be...

ASHER

We've never had enough. Strangers help...generosity is infectious.

SOPHIE

The best kind of protest.

ASHER

But it's running out. There's less for everyone. In fact, I don't know if we can take on another-

ELI

You're serious about all this?

SOPHIE

Yeah...we joke about everything else.

ELI

That's incredible...I...it's just...

SOPHIE

What?

ELI

I dunno...it's just a question I have.

ASHER

I think we've told you enough for now.

SOPHIE

No-

ELI

Why?

A beat.

I mean it's an incredible act of...selflessness or kindness.

Why?

ASHER

Because faith has to be rewarded. Always.

ELI

I don't know...I just don't. This puts your lives...you. It puts you at risk.

ASHER

No actually you put us at risk now. They hunt you differently.

SOPHIE

Yours is the face. The name we recognize.

ELI

I got the hint. I didn't think they were dropping candy out of those helicopters.

SOPHIE

You must hide better than Willie Mays.
Who I WILL find out here. Sooner or later!

ASHER

So you'll probably be fine by yourself. You know, hiding.

SOPHIE

Asher.

ELI

He's right.

SOPHIE

No he's not. You just need to get better. We'll get you fixed up and then you can see your friends. They'll be happy when Obie tells them you're alive. It was a lost cause for a long time...

ELI

It was.

SOPHIE

I'm going to check on the bread.

She goes in.

A long pause.

ELI

It's a good thing you all do. I didn't mean to-

ASHER

Handing him the magazine.

You have to cut now.

How is this for a little girl who lost her mom: Why was the musician arrested?

ELI

Why?

ASHER

He got in treble.

ELI

That's alright.

ASHER

Good enough for a little girl.

ELI

Sure. I...definitely good enough for a little girl.

Eli turns on the radio, tuning it to a jazz station.

Asher puts up with this for a second and then turns it to a rap station.

A beat.

They both work, Eli cutting and Asher writing.

Eli turns the radio back to his jazz station.

Asher turns it back to his rap station.

A beat.

Asher turns up the volume.

Eli turns the radio to something even more irritating to Asher, a station that might play Lawrence Welks.

Asher turns the radio off.

ASHER

They're not that different you know.

ELI

What?

ASHER

Rap and jazz.

ELI

Yeah right.

ASHER

You should listen harder. Listen more.

ELI

Unsophisticated.

ASHER

There's improvisation. It's incredibly sophisticated.

ELI

That's not true. There's no harmony there. No...I don't know...no complex virtuosity.

ASHER

Oh what? Wordplay isn't complex? Not virtuous? Listen harder.

ELI

It's not about the words.

ASHER

Armstrong "Ain't Misbehavin" ...Duke "It Don't Mean a Thing"? Come on. These were like...rap before rap was rap.

ELI

It's just samples and words. In the box...nothing new.

ASHER

Transformed. Take something familiar to the next place. That's what the good ones are all about. Evolve it. Improve what was there before. Do it live and fearless.

ELI

Those guys perform to a tape.

ASHER

Guys and girls, by the way, and no...that's not true. They even *use* jazz artists.

ELI

Cheaper probably-

ASHER

Better than a tape. That's why. From the same world. I've seen jazz musicians. I even saw Madman Miller when I was a kid. I saw him play piano.

ELI

Madman Miller. There's an artist.

ASHER

Dude was executed. *Executed* for notes on a piano.

ELI

That's the thing. You can hear the emotion...feel the thought.

ASHER

And I saw him play with a rapper. He played backup.

ELI

On a leash probably.

ASHER

No. Not on a leash. He got solos.

A beat.

Madman, in the middle of this piano riff, he just...it was in the space between notes, who knows how long in real time, but in the space between notes he just looks at me. Makes eye contact with this expression that just says "this moment is yours"...like it's a gift and a responsibility. It was pretty heavy actually, and then he disappeared into the music. The vocalist came back in. That was the spirit of jazz, of rap...of music.

ELI

It just sounds like anger to me.

ASHER

Look around you man. People have a right to be pissed off... Let their voice be heard.

ELI

Jazz just has freedom, hope or total desperation. It's unapologetic.

ASHER

Hidden messages of protest and hope...The music working against the cynicism packed on the surface. I get it. That's rap too.

ELI

Where's the music? I just don't hear the music in it.

ASHER

Come on! They don't need a ton of notes. It's about the feeling. The protest.

ELI

They're selling you anger. One feeling. That's all. If you buy the anger...then they win. Jazz is my protest.

ASHER

How? How does that let them win?

ELI

Because anger is the brother of fear.

ASHER

You're so full of shit.

Eli turns the radio back on. He turns it to a country station.

A long silence passes between them.

ELI

You don't like me.

ASHER

No. I don't understand how you found us.

ELI

How I'm still alive?

ASHER

No. Why you're still alive. It just seems unfair.

ELI

Thanks.

ASHER

I mean, how did you just walk away?

ELI

Excuse me.

ASHER

Look, I forgive these people we...the hunted. I forgive them for creating this unimaginable...I forgive them. I forgive you.

ELI

I wasn't asking you to forgive me.

ASHER

You don't have to.
I forgive you.

ELI

Fine.

ASHER

I forgive you.

ELI

I didn't ask for it.

ASHER

I forgive you.

ELI

Stop.

ASHER

I forgive you.

ELI

I didn't-

ASHER

I forgive you.

ELI

For what?

ASHER

I forgive you.

ELI

You don't even know-

ASHER

I forgive you.

ELI

Stop.

ASHER

I forgive you.

ELI

Stop!

ASHER

But I'm still angry with you.

A beat.

That means what you did isn't going to keep me from being who I want to be. Do you hear me? I forgive you Eli Conway.

ELI

Okay.

ASHER

See? That's exactly what I'm talking about.

ELI

What?

ASHER

You.

ELI

Yeah?

ASHER

It's this passive...why didn't you go down fighting? That's what I want to know. I don't understand it. The world was on the line and you got tired. Signed your name to the report and let them do whatever they wanted. Let them ignore it and...as if your name was enough.

ELI

We did more than that. We did all the research-

ASHER

A name on a piece of paper. Two seconds. That's all it takes.

ELI

It was a lot more than that.

ASHER

Okay. Okay, maybe you did more. You created Apex and then...what? You figured out it was this toxic bag of hellshit? Congratulations.

ELI

I...

ASHER

I mean congratulations on figuring it out. But what did you *do*?

ELI

More than write notes.

ASHER

The jokes? You want to bash the jokes? That's fine. I'll defend them. With. My. Life.

ELI

No, no, no Asher. It means a lot. What you do. Saying something to people...speaking to them. I'm saying it's a lot to put your name on a piece of paper. There's danger in it.

ASHER

Yeah.

ELI

Yeah. And we did that...we signed our lives away.

ASHER

Yeah well your life has limits I guess.

ELI

Yeah?

ASHER

Yes. It has limits.

ELI

Yes. I'm sorry to say that it does. It has limits. And they are ugly.

ELI

What you are doing here, with these notes...it's beautiful. I just...you didn't take their loved ones away. You can't bring them back. There are just limits...

ASHER

Life and death. Those are the only ones I can think of. And let's be honest...

ELI

There are others you'll learn about them as you-

ASHER

What? As I get older? Come on, man. What haven't I seen? The world is a desert for chrissake.

ELI

What did you want me to do?

ASHER

Fight back. Raise some Cain, man. Go down swinging, bleed if you have to but...*give* yourself to-

ELI

I did.

ASHER

You did what?

ELI

I fought back.

ASHER

How?

ELI

I went to the top. Didn't keep my mouth shut until they gave me a meeting-

ASHER

A meeting!

ELI

A meeting.

ASHER

There's one word that explains why human beings haven't reached their full potential: meetings.

ELI

Talking? You don't believe in talking? Okay. See where that gets you.

ASHER

Yeah...Look where it got you.

ELI

I went. I showed up. I did my duty.

ASHER

You went to a meeting.

ELI

I didn't shut up until they saw me. I made them listen Asher.

ASHER

Who?

ELI

Leo Chandler.

ASHER

Leo-

ELI

Chandler. I walked in there and told them this would happen. This...fire, famine, war, death...the whole thing. I didn't know how bad...how was anyone supposed to know?

ASHER

You knew.

A beat.

ELI

I wasn't certain. Absolutely certain. I didn't see it with my eyes.

ASHER

I just don't get how you all let this thing go out into the world.

ELI

It was about saving people.

ASHER

Making money.

ELI

No! ...it was about saving people. Making food cheap...available to everyone. We had good intentions. You have to assume that about people Asher. It's not good guys and bad guys.

ASHER

Then you got lazy.

ELI

What is it with the attacks? Did I do something to you?

ASHER

Yes. Yes! You went silent.

ELI

So.

ASHER

You went away.

ELI

It was better that-

ASHER

You hid. You let Leo and whoever keep you silent.

ELI

They didn't listen. They wanted the market to figure it out. To cast blame...to provide a solution. They considered this an externality.

ASHER

You bought it.

ELI

No. I didn't. I just...We knew there was a bottom...nobody knew where it was.

ASHER

You still let it go.

ELI

I live with that. I-

ASHER

It's not enough to say you tried and the world won.

ELI

Sometimes that's the truth Asher.

ASHER

No. No it' never the truth.

ELI

Sometimes-

ASHER

This is what I hate. This...it's laziness.

ELI

Laziness?

ASHER

It's fear. It's...I don't know. It's the opposite of love, whatever it is.

*Eli rushes Asher. They wrestle. Eli is in no way a good sparring partner.
When Asher is on top of Eli:*

ASHER

Are you done old man?

ELI

No.

He struggles some more, to no avail.

A long pause.

ELI

You don't know anything about me.

ASHER

I know enough.

ELI

Yeah...

ASHER

You quit.

ELI

I had a little girl....okay? That's...I...they threatened her. My livelihood. They were going to destroy me. It's a simple thing really. Instinct or...Some voice said run. Just run. And we did...we ran.

ASHER

I don't-

ELI

The whole thing is human, you know? We...you would do the same.

ASHER

No.

ELI

I did what was right for her. I was a dad...A father. A protector.

ASHER

You didn't.

ELI

What I *thought* was right.

ASHER

Protect...

ELI

Protect. Yeah.

It's defensive.

ASHER

Yeah.

ELI

Fearful.

ASHER

Yeah.

ELI

Tempting...really tempting.

ASHER

A beat.

ASHER

But it wasn't even right for her?

Eli shakes his head.

That's... I'm sorry Eli.
You saw her die?

ELI

Not exactly.

ASHER

What do you mean?

ELI

She was...we were down by the river. I had this...we were filtering water and putting it in whatever we could find. Milk jugs. Soda bottles. Beer bottles. We didn't care...it was the best we could do. Catch this filthy, parasitic water before...it was better than nothing. She was leaning over there by the water. Little blue dress blowing in the wind. There was this strong wind that day...the whole world smelled like cut grass. I knew then that it might be one of the last times...anyways, she was there, with her hair blown across her face. I was scooping water with one of her old sand pails and looked away... she just...she fell down the bank into the water.

ASHER

Drowned.

ELI

No. No we had her in swimming lessons when she was young. She just couldn't get to the side. To safety...and it...I just ran with her, putting sticks out. It's weird...I knew getting in the water would slow me down. I knew that in my...I didn't panic. I had this icy focus.

ASHER

And-

ELI

I...we came into a camp. One of the mercenary camps. We were close to it anyway and I just knew...she had a chance, if she told them she wasn't mine.

ASHER

What?

ELI

They were looking for us. Hunting us I guess...

A beat.

I told Alyssa to change her name. I shouted at her to make one up. Her favorite fairytale character... Gretel.

ASHER

Gretel? The kid must look pretty german.

ELI

I don't know if she even knew the whole story. I probably kept her from the whole cannibal witch thing, but...she would leave pebbles around the house...in the woods by our house. So I could always find her. Like in the story. That's what Hansel and Gretel do-

ASHER

So their father can find them. I know.

ELI

Yeah.

ASHER

So...

That's it. I haven't seen her. ELI

You think she's alive? ASHER

I... ELI

A beat.

I guess as a parent you always think there's a chance-

That's what you have to hold onto. ASHER

...until there's no chance. ELI

But you're looking. ASHER

I listen for her. ELI

On the radio? ASHER

On the radio. Everyday. All day. ELI

Look. I hate to tell you this but that's not enough. ASHER

A helicopter in the distance...

This is a theme with you. ELI

Seriously. She's...do you have any idea how many displaced people there are? No. It's not enough to hide Eli. ASHER

ELI

I've looked...it's just...

ASHER

Not enough.

I...if my dad were still around...when there was still a chance, I knew he was looking for us. I knew it. It's what kept me alive. And if I found him...just hiding...I...he died looking for us. I know that.

ELI

Why?

ASHER

Because that's the way it has to be for a child. Faith must be rewarded.

ELI

It's not though.

ASHER

Yes.

ELI

Sometimes you don't get what you want. That's how you learn to be human.

ASHER

Damn right man. But she needs to know you're looking. We need to know you're fighting for us. That somebody is fighting with us.

ELI

I just don't feel like I can...like I can help.

ASHER

Nobody cares about what you feel. It's what you do that matters. So you give all you got. All the time.

Asher goes to Eli, ready to embrace him. A gunshot pierces Asher's body. The sound of a helicopter grows to a paralyzing volume as Asher falls to the ground. The searchlight scans near the two men. Eli realizes this and covers Asher's body with his own, looking like a fallen man.

ELI

Lord...oh god...

The helicopter's roar gives way to the sound of a protracted ring. The world closes in on Eli. He fingers his round stone. Rapidly. The sound of a human breath. Radio static.

Oh god...

Blackout.

Condensation

Lights up outside Sophia's home. Obie stacks the lawn chairs as a news report finishes over the radio:

ANNOUNCER (v.o)

...fires from the west, so all in the area are urged to evacuate as soon as possible. Recognizing that many citizens will not find another city for days, Gilead Corp. will auction off its final supply of five-gallon water bottles. Again, that's potable water available this evening via live auction at Gilead headquarters. Authorities estimate their efforts to contain the fires will be successful and residents can return within a few days...

OBIE

Yeah right.

He shuts off the radio. Sophie enters with blankets.

No.

SOPHIE

What do you mean?

OBIE

No blankets. They're heavy. We'll have to move faster than that.

SOPHIE

What about bedding?

He looks at her.

Okay. But I'm bringing a pillow.

OBIE

You'll ditch it after an hour.

SOPHIE

Not if I need a nap.

OBIE

You'll be slow.

SOPHIE

Well then you can just have the pleasure of being right.

OBIE

Or leave you behind.

SOPHIE

Yup. But I'll have my pillow.

A beat.

I've heard them for years you know. The flames. I heard them coming when nobody else did. That fire... those pops and hisses like an orchestra warming up. It's here now, ready to clean the world away.

OBIE

Look Sophie...I'm going to work tonight.

SOPHIE

Any way you can get one of those jugs-

OBIE

That's what I'm thinking. They're heavy, those five-gallons. I might be awhile. I will meet you in Rodgers Canyon. There's a-

SOPHIE

An abandoned Exxon station. I know.

OBIE

The others will be a mile out of town making camp.

SOPHIE

Everyone got out?

OBIE

Sophie.

SOPHIE

Yes.

He offers his service gun.

No.

OBIE

Please.

SOPHIE

No...
It'll slow me down.

OBIE

Funny.

SOPHIE

You'll need it more than I will. I'm a trained ninja. Did you forget that?

OBIE

I thought those were yoga classes.

SOPHIE

I just can't find my throwing stars in the house.

OBIE

Sophie.

SOPHIE

Obie.

OBIE

You okay?

SOPHIE

Shaking her head "no".

Yeah.

A beat.

OBIE

It's going to be alright. I promise. I'm going to make it right.

SOPHIE

You can't Obie.

A beat. She almost cries.

OBIE

Bring the pillow.

Pillow it is!

SOPHIE

Knives?

OBIE

And knives.

SOPHIE

You have a pot and a pan?

OBIE

In the bag.

SOPHIE

Good.

OBIE

Not even plates?

SOPHIE
She nods.

Tools only. We'll eat with our hands.
Please take the gun.

OBIE

Absolutely not.

SOPHIE

Look, Sophie...I'm not...this badge is getting dumped in a ditch. Tonight.

OBIE

You're an outlaw after tonight.

SOPHIE

No. We've always been outlaws. Now they're going to know about it.

OBIE

Hell...I've been an outlaw since I burned the '68 Yankees bullpen to make a cake. This is nothing new.

OBIE

I'm...these people are going to have to...I want your life to be easier from now on. No more giving food to a hundred people. No more.

SOPHIE

Kind of everyman for himself.

OBIE

It's what's needed.

SOPHIE

But that's not what I want Obie.

Eli enters with a mason jar of oil and a full bag of flour.

ELI

Turn your eyes away Obie.

OBIE

Contraband.

SOPHIE

I don't know if we can bring all that. My arms are full since Obie's making me bring a pillow.

ELI

Take it.

OBIE

You bring the flour and oil. They're yours.

ELI

No.

SOPHIE

Really.

ASHER (o.s.)

What's brown and sticky?

SOPHIE

A stick. Here...

ASHER

No. There will be so many people they won't notice-

OBIE

Him?

ASHER

You're right.

ELI

I'm not going.

SOPHIE

You can't wait Eli...this will be a tinderbox.

ELI

I'm not talking about waiting

ASHER

So...

SOPHIE

No.

ASHER

You have to go. Everything's going to burn.

OBIE

Asher and Sophie. You go ahead.

ASHER

We're not leaving Eli behind.

OBIE

I'll make sure he gets to camp.
We're just going to have a word.

A beat. Asher and Sophie collect their things and eye their residence.

ASHER

I can't believe I'm sad to see it go.

SOPHIE

It served us well. Really kept the rain out.

Ha. ASHER

Let's go. SOPHIE

That thing is going to feel like the Hilton by comparison. ASHER

We'll find something better. Or make something better. OBIE

Please. Go.

They start to exit.

Your pillow.

I'll do without. SOPHIE

See you tonight. ASHER

They leave.

The boy...Asher, he... OBIE

Very lucky. ELI

Yes. Lucky he had you. OBIE

They were looking for me. ELI

You don't know that. What we do here is dangerous. He's part of that. OBIE

They would find you first. ELI

I don't know about that. OBIE

Kill you first if that was the case. ELI

Maybe. OBIE
Either way, this isn't about you. There are a hundred people who tried to do the right thing and they were punished for it.

I know that. ELI

Be there for them, if not for the boy. OBIE

Asher's smart Obie. Wiser than I'll ever be. ELI

I know. OBIE

He's a leader. ELI

You need to be one first. OBIE

You're a leader. ELI

It's fragile. OBIE

I know. ELI

No matter the cost. Letting yourself burn is a stupid way to die. It serves no purpose. OBIE

But a gun does? ELI

OBIE

I didn't...look, that was a bad day. Ok?
That's all it was.

ELI

Why did you want to-

OBIE

Die? That's normal sometimes isn't it? To die. To pay the cost of living...my debt.
I wanted to settle up.

ELI

You were giving up then?

OBIE

I...

ELI

Surrendering.

OBIE

No. I was paying a debt. Trying to...you know what I do for a living. You've seen us.
Keeping order in this broken...it's a joke, what I'm paid to protect.

ELI

Order.

OBIE

At the beginning, you know, it wasn't so bad...

ELI

Power usually isn't.

A long silence.

OBIE

I was on break and went down to check on the river. The water level...see it for myself.
If what they said was true.

I saw this short man sitting under a giant willow tree. In its shade...when there was such
a thing. Fishing. He was fishing and I knew that was illegal so I said
something...something that would let him save face and leave...just let him know I was
there. I just called out to him: "Sir"...and then he- he ran. Now nothing admits guilt like
running. I didn't care about the fish. They'd all be dead soon. He was a bigger target

because he ran. I watched enough television to know that. The guilty ones run. So I chased him...through the hills and into downtown. It was...he was fast. Each step I just felt hotter...angrier I mean. For whatever he did. Angry about him running...not following the rules. Making me run...

He made a wrong turn into this dead end alley. Tripped on some garbage and hit his head on the pavement. I got close and he crawled to the wall, into a corner, and just screamed at me. He...I started to get scared. Nobody had ever unloaded on me....made a noise like that around me. There...it wasn't language. Just rage. Like an animal. Unpredictable...cold. I had my weapon drawn but my hands were shaking so bad he could see them. My fear. And he reached a hand into his pocket...and I'm just shaking. I couldn't...if he got a shot off I'd...it was him or me and I shot.

I didn't miss.

ELI

That's terrible.

OBIE

Yeah. He didn't even have a gun.

ELI

Knife?

OBIE

An I.D. He was pulling out his I.D.

A beat.

That's how I found Sophie and Asher.

ELI

They're...

OBIE

Yeah.

ELI

And they know?

OBIE

Nods.

Sometimes forgiveness is greater than guilt.
It just wasn't on the day you and I met.

ELI

When you and I met I was...that was surrender for me. I was done. Tired...dead already in a way I guess...

OBIE

So I'll be damned if I let you try again.

ELI

No. This is different.

OBIE

Damn right it's different. This time I'm going to hide the gun.

ELI

I want you to tell Gilead...tell Leo and all of them that I am here.

OBIE

Excuse me.

ELI

Go tell Leo 'Eli is here.'

OBIE

And then what?

ELI

I am going to present myself to them.

OBIE

What?

ELI

I will present myself.

OBIE

You'll present yourself to them? Like a bridegroom? Like a sales pitch?

ELI

I'll be a few minutes behind you. Take the credit for capturing me.

OBIE

Won't do any good. They'll kill you.

ELI

The killing ends tonight.

OBIE

When they kill you?

ELI

Yeah. And people will revolt.

OBIE

That won't happen Eli. It's not even...this is a useless conversation. There's an Exxon station.

ELI

I'm going to them either way Obie.

A beat.

OBIE

After you it'll be someone else. They'll put your dead body up on every screen and the world will celebrate for maybe half a day. Then their focus will be on someone else. Some...refugee that killed a cop. Some politician with an actual idea. Maybe an entire people...a whole country or a whole faith. Then what have you done?

ELI

You're wrong. People don't buy it.

OBIE

And the other hundred?

ELI

What about them?

OBIE

Has it escaped you that there isn't a stone on this earth unturned? Whenever someone said they hadn't seen you, promises had to be made, documents signed...and now you tell me to just say you are here. They're not stupid Eli. They'll ask questions, and what are my answers? Why did I suddenly find you?

ELI

Police work. You turned me. I want to give myself up.

OBIE

Did you hear what I do in my free time Eli? While the world has been murdering you troublers, I hid a hundred of you and supplied them with food and fucking *water*! And now you want me to go to Leo and suddenly say 'Eli is here'. The killing won't stop with you. Not even close. I'm next.

ELI

This is bigger than you and me Obie.

OBIE

Eli is here?! You want me to just tell them that?

ELI

I'm going either way.

OBIE

Walk.

ELI

You can't make me do this Obie.

OBIE

Walk!

ELI

No.

OBIE

Then I'll chain you to a pipe and come back for you.

ELI

This is what I want Obie.

OBIE

It solves nothing.

ELI

You just don't understand.

OBIE

This only creates problems.

ELI

For them. Believe me.

A beat.

Obie.

OBIE

What?

ELI

It's time for the people to get what they deserve. Let me make this right.

OBIE

You need to show them your fight. Your resistance.

ELI

By running away again?

OBIE

Yes.

ELI

I'm tired of running.

OBIE

Are you tired of living too? Because that's your fight right there. Keep breathing. It will piss them off.

ELI

Not anymore. Not for a long time...That hasn't been enough for quite awhile.

OBIE

Just tell me something.

ELI

Yes.

OBIE

Why?

Eli slowly embraces Obie. Obie is at first uncomfortable with this.

ELI

You ever feel pulled? Sort of yanked. Like cold water was just poured on your whole body and you are awake for a while, maybe only a little while...as if the rest of your life was a dream. I feel that. I feel that like I haven't felt it in a long time. It's this still voice that tells says "try and ignore me...but I will always be here in stillness, in silence, in small places of peace." And it's been a long time since I heard that voice.

OBIE

I don't know what that means.

ELI

It means somebody's faith is being rewarded.

The sound of ambulances and emergency sirens builds. The crackling of fire consumes both.

Transport

Leo's office.

Lights up on Leo, who is turned away from Jessie and Obie. A massive crowd murmurs in the not-too-great distance. Classical music plays on the radio.

LEO

"...we see from the histories of empires
none will last forever
and all are brought down finally
not by others
but by themselves,
from the actions that they take
that they believe are right or good

It will preserve itself first from extinction
and, then from lethal damage or great harm
and next from hurt and ill-treatment
and, so by degrees,
an empire will reason itself to a need to be immune even
from insult
responding, finally,
to the anxieties and nightmares
that arise from within,
and so: striking out
at the phantasms of its own dreams."

He almost collapses under the weight of his 'performance'. He goes to his desk, which has a tray of cookies laid on top of it.

Whew...I don't know what happened there. I was just really feeling it.

JESSIE

That was awful.

LEO

What?

JESSIE

I can't even give you line notes that was so pitiful. You missed "an empire cannot refuse to defend itself from absolute devastation"...no more than the belief that something

could be done..." It would also be nice to have the first paragraph of the speech whenever it's convenient for you.

LEO

I was just feeling it. When you're really into it, the text doesn't matter.

JESSIE

Yeah well to a director or oh, I don't know, a PLAYWRIGHT, the text might matter. Just a little bit.

OBIE

Was that Shakespeare? *Richard III*?

LEO

Agamemnon. I don't know who wrote it. Doesn't matter who wrote it if I don't get the part. My name's on the theater and I still might not get the part. That's how good these people are at their jobs.

JESSIE

A community theater.

OBIE

A community theater? I'm surprised people have time for that with-

LEO

I live in a very nice community.

JESSIE

They drive Volvos there.

OBIE

Are Volvos nice?

Eli enters.

LEO

Eli Conway.

ELI

You have the time now, don't you?

LEO

Is that really you, the troubler of the land?

ELI

I haven't made trouble for you. For anybody. You and your people have.

JESSIE

Watch it.

LEO

My people? I'm a public servant Eli.

JESSIE

A servant.

LEO

To the will of others. The ones with insatiable demands only we can meet. Are those the people you speak of Eli? The ones who are starving and angry because of something you did?

Have a cookie.

ELI

I did nothing wrong and you know that.

LEO

No cookie? They're delicious. I'm telling you.

JESSIE

I made them.

LEO

What are you doing here Eli?

ELI

I have been hiding from you for too long. You broke a promise to the people. Because you wanted someone else to take responsibility. I spoke up once and I'm still here. And I want to speak again.

LEO

Eli, I don't remember you being so...what's the word?

JESSIE

Pallid.

LEO

No...assured.

ELI

I finally decided to act. Maybe that's what you sense.

LEO

And how is that working out for you? Bet you're exercising more. What with the running and all.

ELI

I lived this long.

LEO

I know. It's kind of disturbing isn't it? We found so many of you. I just don't know how you lived this long. Please have a cookie.

JESSIE

I made them.

ELI

Some people still have their hearts intact. That's how I survived. I'm here to help them.

LEO

Help Eli? That's great. Tell me how.

JESSIE

And have a cookie.

LEO

Please tell me how you can help us. You helped ruin the world, after all. I know that. Everyone knows it. And then you had the audacity to run away.

Leo starts clipping his fingernails.

They want your head. So how can you help them?

ELI

It's not that simple.

LEO

Isn't it?

ELI

There aren't good guys and bad guys.

LEO

I think the blame is pretty well directed.

ELI

Because it benefits you.

LEO

I didn't decide you were an enemy of the people. But I also didn't make Apex. The market spoke, my friend.

ELI

But the people didn't.

LEO

I don't follow.

ELI

This story you fed-

LEO

I never messed with editorial. They have their own point of view. I just set the business goals.

ELI

I didn't start this problem more than you or anyone else.

LEO

You are the only person who believes that Eli.

ELI

Not true.

LEO

Oh?

To Obie.

How about you Obie? What do you think? After spending years of your life hunting this man down, hearing people's stories, seeing their suffering...I mean we give the Wright Brothers credit for the airplane. Hitler for the Third Reich. Walt Disney for...Pixar.

ELI

Let's test it then.

LEO

What's that?

ELI

Let's see what the market has to say. About a solution.

LEO

For this draught problem? The market hasn't solved it yet Eli. I have to give that one to you. But we are set to provide thousands of people with the opportunity to drink clean water. We're going to do our part. Being good citizens.

JESSIE

But there aren't enough cookies for everyone.

ELI

What's it worth?

LEO

The cookies?

ELI

No.

LEO

The water?

JESSIE

One thousand dollars a bottle.

LEO

That's what we're hoping to get. It's actually not much, but in absolute terms-

ELI

One thousand dollars for what? I don't know how long a person can live off of five gallons. A week maybe...of life?

JESSIE

Actually if you ration-

ELI

So what's the worth of a human being? Of a whole life...hundreds of weeks. Thousands of weeks.

JESSIE

We would never be so cynical-

ELI

Do the analysis then. I'm here. I'm sure you spent thousands of dollars hunting me.

LEO

More than that.

ELI

And I'm you made a pretty penny off of me too.

LEO

We were just delivering a service to the people.

ELI

Then deliver me to them.

LEO

Oh they'll know you were captured. Rest easy about that.

ELI

No. You think blood is more valuable than water. That's the story you told everyday since I disappeared. Auction it off.

LEO

Yours.

ELI

Let the bull be burned.

JESSIE

Genius.

OBIE

No-

LEO

Oh. Obie wants to do it himself.

JESSIE

Just brilliant.

OBIE

Eli-

JESSIE
We should have done this with all of them.

LEO
Jessie-

JESSIE
All those prophets of doom.

LEO
That's enough.

JESSIE
God, he's a better businessman-

LEO
Take it easy.

ELI
How long will you waver? Answer this hideous thing you worship Leo.

LEO
I-

ELI
And finally feed it.

LEO
...why?

ELI
Because the people need to decide what they believe. What to follow.

LEO
I admire you Eli.

ELI
Thanks.

LEO
No really. It's brave. Stupid. But brave.

ELI

Let them choose for themselves.

LEO

The cost of a life...I'm curious how high you'll go. Just listen to them...

ELI

I am.

LEO

The space between those voices, and the sirens...it's like music.

JESSIE

Let's go.

The orchestral music crescendoes and transcends the radio. Fire approaching.

*The beginnings of the auction are heard. Water sells for hundreds, thousands of dollars.
The crowd is resentful of this.*

To Wash it White

Eli stands presented to the masses, with Leo at his side, Leo who speaks through a microphone which broadcasts his voice. Jessie and Obie stand vigilantly. The crowd is restless. It is angry. It is terrified.

As Leo's voice echoes throughout this terrifying void, Asher and Sophie hear him as they journey. Eventually they stop to listen.

LEO

Good people. We have some fantastic news to share with you. As some of you may know, today our brave soldiers captured the greatest threat to our security. And now we want to return him to you for justice.

The greatest troubler of our time, Eli Conway, is yours tonight.

This...this man who unleashed the greatest catastrophe the world has ever known. The enemy of freedom everywhere, has emerged from his cave. He is yours tonight...before you leave this city...one of you can buy the right to his life. To his death. For the expense of a bullet you give the gift of life...to your country.

Do I hear a million?

A wind. The crowd grows quieter. Thunder in the distance.

A long silence.

Eight hundred thousand...seven hundred...six. Six hundred thousand. Do I hear five hundred thousand?

The fires. The crowd grows quieter.

ELI

Shout louder. Surely they can't hear you. Perhaps they are just busy in thought. Maybe they are asleep and you have to awaken them.

LEO

A hundred...a hundred thousand! Do I hear a hundred thousand for the right to save your people from this enemy? From this killer! A hundred thousand to be a hero!

A breathless silence.

LEO

Think...think about your years without water or sun. A...the pain of your loss. Ten thousand! Ten thousand dollars for the right to...

Thunder. Eli fingers his stone.

This...I don't understand you...Come on people! He tried to kill us all!

A thousand dollars!

Thunder.

A long, drawn out silence.

I'll do it for a thousand...

OBIE

Stepping in front of Eli, seizing Leo.

No you won't.

Eli slowly takes the microphone and turns to the crowd.

ELI

Go. Eat and drink.

The sound of rain. Cheers start to rise out of the crowd.

Eli faces them for a second and then starts to depart.

Static.

ALYSSA (v.o.)

Soft and still:

My name is Alyssa...what?

A silence.

Alyssa Conway. My missing person is my dad....Eli.

You.

Static.

Blackout.

End of Play.