

WELL BEINGS

by Greg Vovos

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WELL BEINGS

Tri-C West Fall Rehearsal Draft

by Greg Vovos

CHARACTERS

ANTON WATERS: A man in his thirties struggling with heroin addiction. He needs to quiet the voice.

MARY WATERS: Anton's mom. She loves with the strength and endurance that only a mother can.

JOHN WATERS: Anton's Dad. He has cancer. But if you asked him, he'd tell you that's the least of his problems.

HOLLY: A girl in her twenties, also a heroin addict. If she could stop feeling altogether, she would. But Jack makes that difficult for her. Her life has not been easy to put it mildly.

JACK: The Romeo to Holly's Juliet. He's an addict but he's determined to get clean for both Holly and himself.

ELLA: A recovering heroin addict in her thirties. She facilitates the NA meetings.

THE ECHO: An unkind voice in Anton's head.

THE GRAVEDIGGER: He buries the dead.

MAN: A sweaty, gross middle-aged man. Feel free to double this role.

JESSE: a.k.a. The Mad Hatter. Recovering user who attends meetings. A wildcard.

VINCE: A slick user that Anton met at the recovery center.

CHECKERS: Another user that Anton met at the Center. Tall like the Grim Reaper.

TERRENCE: A heroin user facing the crisis of his life.

SETTING

Northeast Ohio. To be specific: The kitchen and bedroom of Anton's parents' home; the living room in Jack and Holly's apartment; a car; and an NA meeting place. Present day.

SYNOPSIS

Three heroin addicts at various stages of usage try to get clean from their addiction, but all face great obstacles to do so.

"...he has to be punished so he can forgive himself."
from Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*

EMILY: Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it—every, every
minute?"

STAGE MANAGER (Quietly): "No—Saints and poets maybe—they do some."
from Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*

WELL BEINGS

CRISIS IN THE DARK

Individual lights dot the dark playing space and make us feel like we're wrapped in a blanket of stars. In this near darkness, we see...

...the silhouettes of five figures: one who stands apart from the rest as he watches from the periphery; two others, VINCE and CHECKERS, who wait impatiently, ready to leave; and finally, ANTON, who squats over an unmoving body. Anton shakes the body.

ANTON
Dude's not breathing.

VINCE
What do you mean?

ANTON
I mean, he's not breathing.

VINCE
We gotta bounce.

ANTON
We have to help him!

VINCE
What the fuck are we going to do?

ANTON
I don't know. Give him mouth to mouth or something.

VINCE
You give him mouth to mouth. We're out of here.

ANTON
We can't leave him here.

VINCE
Grab his dope, Checkers.

Checkers goes to the body and takes his stash.

ANTON
We have to save him.

Anton tries to lift the body.

VINCE
What do you think you're doing?

ANTON
We'll just drop him off at the hospital.

VINCE
No fucking way that body is getting in my car.

ANTON
We can just dump him outside the ER and drive away!

VINCE
They got cameras all over the damn place. I'm not going back to prison. And I ain't missing curfew.

ANTON
Come on, dude. We have to help him.

VINCE
You want to get kicked out of the Center, that's your problem. Otherwise, bus is leaving.

Vince and Checkers walk away.

ANTON
(*Calling after them*) He might still be alive! Aren't you going to help?

Vince and Checkers leave without looking back. Anton slaps at Terrence's face. Nothing...

ANTON
Terrence! Terrence!

The ECHO, who's gone mainly unnoticed, approaches Anton.

ECHO
Looks like you failed again.

Anton stares at the Echo as lights fade to darkness.

After a moment...brightness to reveal the GRAVEDIGGER standing before us. He holds a shovel.

GRAVEDIGGER
That's number one.

The Gravedigger extinguishes one of the lights...

GRAVEDIGGER
First of the year. There will be more.

The Gravedigger looks out at the audience, then indicates his shovel.

GRAVEDIGGER
I am the gravedigger. I bury the dead. *(Pause)* You see all those lights?

He points to the sky at the various candles or small lights that illuminate the stage.

GRAVEDIGGER
Each one of them represents one of us. Me, you, the people who are part of this story. Each of us a light that brings brightness.

But we will all go out eventually, some of us before what is natural. And with that comes darkness to a corner of the world that needs our illumination.

The Gravedigger puts out a light.

GRAVEDIGGER
That's two. The sad part is when one light goes out prematurely, the lights around it can't help but dim themselves, they lose that energy to feed off, and then they lose their luster. It's both inevitable and sad.

He puts out another light.

GRAVEDIGGER
That's three. A machinist. In his fifties. A funny guy whose grandkids loved to hear his stories. It's sad when a kid's light dims for reasons that make no sense to them. But it happens.

The Gravedigger takes a step forward.

GRAVEDIGGER

I am the Gravedigger. It's not a particularly glamorous or fulfilling job, but it is work. My work.

TOGETHER FOREVER

Lights up on the living room of Jack and Holly's tiny, grimy apartment. Holly sits in COMPLETE DARKNESS on an unusually nice couch that doesn't seem like it belongs in this humble shithole. Her leg bounces.

HOLLY

Hurry up, Jack!

No response.

HOLLY

You know I don't like being left alone like this. Especially in the dark.

JACK (*offstage*)

Owww. Damn.

HOLLY

What is it?

The lights in the living room suddenly turn on. Power restored.

HOLLY

Thank God.

We see HOLLY better now. She's in her twenties. Despite her environment and the general lack of concern for her appearance, she shows remnants of what was once an attractive young woman, before the wear, tear, and edge wore her down. Holly clutches a pair of knitting needles, a blanket she's knitting at her side.

JACK enters. Also in his twenties. A creature of the streets. Wiry and on the watch.

JACK

Powered up. Thank you, good neighbors.

HOLLY

One of these days they're going to figure out what we're doing.

JACK

Not today. Besides, I'm not really breaking the law. I found that power.

Jack joins her on the couch.

JACK

What are you working on?

He dumps heroin from a small tear-off bag onto the table and begins to separate it into two piles.

HOLLY

Nothing.

Holly puts the knitting needles aside.

JACK

So today I was thinking I'd diversify. Electronics.

HOLLY

Why?

Jack puts dope on the spoon.

JACK

Why what?

HOLLY

You got a good thing going with the dog food. Why take chances?

JACK

Because maybe I want to do more with my life than sell stolen dog food from the trunk of my car.

HOLLY

It's good money.

Jack pours water from a bottle onto a spoon. He takes out a cotton ball and puts it in the mixture. Then he sticks the syringe into the cotton...

JACK

So is electronics. And I noticed a new TV box on a tree lawn on Maple. So I looked in the window and seen that fucker -- 70 inches -- just leaning

against the living room wall. Been that way for two days now. The Madame of the house goes out every morning at 9:50 dressed in yoga gear, no dude in sight, easy pickings.

Jack pulls back the plunger of the syringe...

HOLLY

It's just -- look, you do this, you trying new things, and when you do -- it rarely ends well. I don't want you going to prison and leaving me alone.

JACK

I'll never leave you alone.

Jack gives her a quick kiss and slides a pile of heroin over to her.

HOLLY

That's it?

JACK

For now.

HOLLY

You just said you're going to jack that big ol' TV--

JACK

Until we have it, we don't have it. And I don't want to be left NOT holding a bag.

HOLLY

I thought you said it was easy pickings.

JACK

It is. I just...We have to conserve, in case of emergency.

Jack injects himself without even bothering to tie himself off.

HOLLY

Remember when we used to use together?

JACK

We're using together right now.

Jack hands the syringe to Holly and she loads it.

HOLLY

No, I mean together together. Like when we'd shoot each other up and release our tie-offs at the same time. That was so romantic. Let's do that again, before we end up like Dex and Sonya. All they do is drive around all day in that disgusting truck of his gossiping about other people. I don't want to lose our magic.

JACK

For sure, baby. Next time. After I get back. We'll get all romantic and shit. We'll never lose our magic, Holly.

HOLLY

Please just be careful today, Jack.

Jack says nothing as his buzz takes him away. Holly injects as lights shift.

HOUSE RULES

Lights up as Anton's parents, MARY WATERS and JOHN WATERS, sit across from each other at a kitchen table. They eat soup.

Mary possesses a radiance about her, a sort of happy countenance that will not be defeated, in part because it has been tested, forged, and strengthened.

John is a man that appears underweight, but possesses a toughness that will never go away.

There is a third place setting, but it is empty.

JOHN

He has to earn the bedroom.

MARY

What do you mean earn the bedroom?

JOHN

I mean he can spend four days sleeping in the car, and if he passes that test THEN he can come into the house.

MARY

It's ten degrees outside. He's staying in the house.

JOHN

He got kicked out of the Courage Center, Mary. What are we supposed to do, just fling open our doors, welcome him home, and say come on in and party down?

MARY

It's not like that. We need to help him.

JOHN

Does anything I say ever matter?

MARY

When you agree with me, yes. Otherwise, not so much.

JOHN

See, now that's funny because it's true.

MARY

Eat your soup.

John takes a taste.

JOHN

This would taste a whole lot better if we had real spoons instead of this plastic crap.

He takes another taste. SLURPS.

MARY

Don't slurp.

JOHN

Yes, Mom.

MARY

That's not funny.

Anton enters. He is in his thirties. His clothes hang off him and there's a shadow that colors his face that knows something we don't.

Following behind Anton is the Echo.

MARY

You made it!

ECHO

Yes, somehow he was able to climb all the way out of bed and make the arduous trek across his room and down the hall. And now all that remains is that he completes the laborious challenge of sitting.

Anton sits.

ECHO

And he does! The crowd goes wild!

The Echo makes mock crowd-cheering noises. (The Echo may move throughout the scene, but his home base will always be Anton.)

MARY

Homemade chicken noodle. Your favorite!

ANTON

Great. Thanks.

JOHN

You'd probably like it better if we could use real spoons but...

ECHO

Got you there, Anton.

MARY

So your father and I have been talking.

ECHO

This should be good.

MARY

And we've agreed to let you stay with us.

JOHN

But if I find anything -- anything -- I don't care if it's a suspicious pop can, you're out of here.

ECHO

Apparently, he hates the cans. Get away from the cans!

MARY

Positivity, right, John?

JOHN

Positively! So, Anton, I'm thrilled to inform you of a great opportunity ahead. The chance to live life free of the things that tie you down -- things like the car, your phone, cotton balls -- they can be such a nuisance. And no longer do you have to bear the burden of balancing your bank account, because I will carry that weight for you myself. Isn't that exciting?

ECHO

Why don't you just die already, Anton?

Anton shoots the Echo a dirty look.

MARY

Now we know this is going to be difficult, and if you should relapse or--

JOHN

There will be no relapsing. You're done now. Or you're out of the house.

MARY

But if you struggle...

JOHN

There will be no struggle.

ANTON

I'll try my best.

MARY

Good.

JOHN

There is no try. Only do. That's the deal.

MARY

Do you ever quote anyone besides Yoda?

JOHN

Yoda is a Jedi Master and he can teach us a lot.

ECHO

It's no wonder you're a mess.

MARY

Okay, so apparently your father is suggesting that you will get clean by using the Force.

JOHN

Don't use my love of Star Wars against me.

MARY

And just out of curiosity, who are you in this scenario? Darth Vader?

JOHN

Well, I am his father after all.

ECHO

(Like Darth Vader) No! I am your father!

JOHN

Point is -- no using. You use and you're gone. And you can't leave the house except to go to meetings.

ECHO

These people have no idea what they're up against.

MARY

What if he needs to go for a walk?

JOHN

He can go on the treadmill. I hear the view is spectacular this time of year. Now do you agree, Anton?

ECHO

Why do they even bother?

ANTON

(to the Echo) I don't know.

JOHN

You don't know? Mary, he doesn't know.

ECHO

I mean, why not just end it already and put them out of their misery?

JOHN

Anton?

ECHO
What possible reason could you have to live?

MARY
Anton? Anton?

JOHN
Are you high right now?

ECHO
Hurry up and die. Hurry up and die!

ANTON
SHUT UP!

JOHN
What the fuck did you just say?

Anton snaps out of it.

ANTON
Oh...I...I'm sorry. I wasn't talking to you.

JOHN
Who were you talking to?

ECHO
Classic.

ANTON
Yes, I agree. To everything.

MARY
Great. We're all agreed. Then there it is. It's all good.

JOHN
Yes, it's all good. Dare I even say great? We are so blessed.

John gets up from the table.

JOHN
Your mother's counting on you.

John exits. The Echo quickly takes the vacated seat.

MARY

Your father loves you, Anton...He's just...tired, you know?

ECHO

Anton knows all about that.

The Echo samples the soup. Slurping like a fool.

MARY

I'm going to help you beat this.

ANTON

Thanks, Mom.

MARY

Can you promise me that you'll stay clean?

ECHO

This poor woman.

MARY

Because when the times comes...you know...I don't want to be alone. I'm counting on you.

ANTON

I promise, Mom. I'll try.

ECHO

(Like Yoda) There is no try. Only do.

MARY

Okay, now eat your soup.

ECHO

(Eating voraciously) The old man's right. This would be better with real spoons.

ANTON

I'm sorry about the spoons, Mom.

MARY

I don't give a good G.D. about the spoons, Anton.

Lights shift as the Gravedigger enters and points to a light.

GRAVEDIGGER

This poor girl was found in the woods. Her body had been...compromised. Overdosed. Robbed. Left for dead. How much money you want to bet me that the person who robbed her, also knew her and was using with her? Maybe even her boyfriend? It's likely. No story here though.

The Gravedigger blows out another light.

THE BAD NEWS

Jack sits on the couch. He moves his mouth as if he's rehearsing a speech. Next to him is Holly's blanket, attached to yarn.

On the coffee table, neatly arranged, sit a spoon, syringe, and lighter.

Jack picks up the blanket, studies it.

JACK

(Yelling offstage) Looks like you made some progress while I was gone.

No response. Jack puts it back down on the couch. Leg bounces.

Finally Holly sneaks up behind him, covers his eyes with her hands...

HOLLY

Surprise!

Holly runs around the couch and joins him on the couch.

HOLLY

Thank God my baby's back. Look what I have...

Holly holds up a bag of heroin.

HOLLY

Black tar. You don't know how hard it's been for me not to use this.

JACK

Holly...

HOLLY

I mean, of course, I used *some* of it. But you know how I always want to shoot it all up? I didn't this time. I parceled it out. Aren't you proud of me?

JACK

Yeah.

HOLLY

Oh my God. I am so glad you're out of there.

She hits him on the arm.

JACK

What's that for?

HOLLY

For going to jail. I told you that you'd get caught. You're lucky you only spent six days in there. Now as a penalty, you have to do all the work. Fix us up. Hurry!

Holly puts the bag down on the table, near Jack.

JACK

Holly?

HOLLY

What?

Pause. Jack tries to figure out how to best say this...

HOLLY

What??

JACK

I...

HOLLY

Do I have to do it myself?

Holly reaches for the dope and Jack grabs her hand.

HOLLY

What are you doing?

JACK
I want to stop.

HOLLY
Stop what?

JACK
Stop using. I want us to stop using.

Holly looks at him a moment. What could he possibly be talking about? And then she bursts out LAUGHING.

HOLLY
Oh my God, Jacky Boy. You almost had me there for a second.

She slaps at him again.

HOLLY
Don't ever do that again. You scared the shit out of me.

She tries to free her hand but he won't let it go.

JACK
No, I'm serious. I want us to stop.

HOLLY
Stop saying that. I don't like it.

JACK
I mean it.

HOLLY
What the fuck is going on?

JACK
Well...

HOLLY
Let me go. Let my hands go.

He does. Holly stands and starts to pace like a caged animal.

JACK
Well, first of all, the first two days I was detoxing were pretty fucked up.

Holly snatches the dope off the table.

HOLLY
Yeah, I bet.

JACK
And, Day 2 or something, I started talking to Steve.

HOLLY
Steve? Your brother? Your *dead* brother?

JACK
I know he's dead. You don't have to--

HOLLY
Well, it just seems odd to me that you can have a conversation with your brother while you're in prison, when he is in fact dead.

JACK
I know he's dead, damn it. I was with him when he overdosed. Now just listen to me.

HOLLY
I can't listen to this shit, Jack. I'm sorry but I can't. This is what I was warning you about when I told you to stick with the dog food--

JACK
When I was talking to him, he warned me. He said, Jack, you can't keep going like this--

HOLLY
--I fucking saved this for you. And now you're pulling this? I'm wearing a dress for you!

JACK
I know. I know. That's the point. We need to--

HOLLY
Fuck this.

Holly exits to the bedroom, but he grabs hold of her.

JACK

When I was running from the 5-0, I was trying to reach this fence. Because I knew, if I could just make it over, I had a chance. But this one cop -- fat fucker -- was gaining on me. And I'm thinking, I'm screwed. But then, when I reach the fence, I look up, and see Steve, and he's reaching his hand out to me, like he was going to help me over. So I'm struggling to get over the fence, I had that cop pulling me by the leg, and just when I was about to reach my brother's hand, it vanishes.

HOLLY

Jack, listen. I understand you're messed up right now. But if we just--

JACK

I saw him again when they put me inside. He told me he took his hand away for a reason. To save me. He wanted me to get caught so I could detox.

HOLLY

You got caught on purpose so you could detox and come back here and pull this shit.

JACK

No. It's just...he was like, "Do you know what day today is?" And I'm like no, what fucking day is it, and he's like, January 12. January 12!

HOLLY

And?

JACK

It was the two-year anniversary of his death. He was warning me, Holly. You and I -- WE-- have to stop. We can't keep using or we're going to die.

HOLLY

But we'll die together, right? At least we'll be together. You said you wouldn't leave me.

JACK

And I won't. I'm not. But we can do this.

HOLLY

No. I can't. Listen, you're just messed up from being in prison -- you never do well there. So you're probably scared because you're afraid you'll end up back inside. And I get that. But let's just use now and everything will go back to normal, okay. Look at this. It's incredible. I mean, you don't know how hard it was for me to save that for you. But you know why I did?

JACK

Because you love me?

HOLLY

Yes! Because I love you. Because you're the only one who understands me and who ever did. Remember that first night we used together?

Jack nods.

HOLLY

Just us. On that beach. That hard ground. The stars in the sky. It was like they were put there just for us.

JACK

The stars always make me think of us.

HOLLY

Exactly, and you gave me that, Jack. You did that. That night was the first time I truly knew what it meant to have a soul. We belong together. And this is what we do. Why would you ever want to risk that? Risk us?

JACK

I don't want to risk us.

HOLLY

Okay, then.

JACK

But we can be so much more. We can have a future, a family, you could teach. There's so much we could do. Don't you ever think about that?

HOLLY

It doesn't matter.

JACK

Please just try, okay. You're the strongest person I know. And I don't care if the whole world can't get off this dope. You can. I can. I'm six days in. We can do it. And then the future...it can be anything.

Holly looks at him.

HOLLY

I'll make a deal with you. We use tonight--

JACK

--No. No way. I can't risk it. I can't pick back up and--

HOLLY

Listen. We just use this tonight. This killer dope. That way I'm at least prepared for quitting, you know. We go out big. You use with me. We synch our bodies up so we go through all the withdrawals together. Okay? You do that with me. And I'll get clean with you.

JACK

You promise?

HOLLY

Cross my heart and hope to die.

JACK

Don't say that.

HOLLY

I mean it.

JACK

I don't ever want to lose you, Holly.

HOLLY

Then don't ever leave me. Now come on. Let's not talk anymore.

She kisses him. Then she ties off his arm. And then her own.

HOLLY

We'll untie together. Like we used to. Like you promised before you left!

Pause.

HOLLY

Shoot me up.

Jack takes the syringe and injects Holly. She then takes the syringe, and without changing the needle...

HOLLY

You have the most beautiful veins. I love that about you.

Holly injects Jack.

HOLLY
Ready?

He nods. They release their tie-offs simultaneously and a feeling of goodness washes over them. And as they do...

...the feel of the scene changes to a dream -- it becomes stylized.

Jack stands, offers Holly his hand, and bows. She graciously accepts. They dance a waltz, looking so beautifully content, happy, and in love as lights shift.

The Gravedigger enters...

GRAVEDIGGER
Meetings are helpful, but even they aren't the cure all.

He blows out a light.

GRAVEDIGGER
This guy -- a window washer -- overdosed two hours after a meeting. It's where he scored his dope actually. We'll see how this one goes.

The Gravedigger exits. Lights shift...

WE ALL ARE

Anton, Echo, ELLA, and JESSE -- a wildcard of a user -- sit at a meeting. Ella, who appears more assured and put together than the rest, finishes a story...

ELLA
Exactly! We all are. We ALL are! We all struck our grandmas when she wouldn't give us money. We all took our five year olds to our dealer's house. We all slept with men old enough to be our fathers. And we all lied to the ones we love most because we knew they had no choice but to believe us. Because we all are. That's my point. But despite all that, we still deserve to be well.

ECHO
You're wasting your time. Let's go get high.

ANTON

(*To the Echo*) I promised my mom...

ECHO

(*Pointing to Jesse*) I think that dude's holding. We should hit him up.

ELLA

Excuse me?

ANTON

What?

ELLA

Go ahead.

ANTON

Huh?

ELLA

You said something. Go ahead.

ANTON

Oh, I don't...I don't have anything...

ECHO

That's the truth.

ELLA

You said something.

ANTON

Oh...yeah...okay...can I ask a question?

ELLA

Of course.

ANTON

Am I the only one who hears voices?

ELLA

What?

ANTON

Like I have this voice in my head. And I can't stop it. Now I know I sound

crazy and shit, and I don't...like I'm not crazy. I understand it's just a part of my brain, but it's just this running dialogue. This voice. Like an echo. And I can't stop it. And it just gets louder and louder, and I want nothing more than to stop it, but the only way I can is to get high. I don't know what else to do. I just...I hate that damn voice.

ECHO

Die already. Just die. Hurry up and die.

ELLA

What does it tell you?

ANTON

Fuck. It doesn't matter. I'm sorry.

ELLA

Of course it matters.

ANTON

Look it's not like I'm someone important.

ECHO

Got that right.

ANTON

I mean, I'm not some movie star who makes a difference in the world. Like if I die, besides my family, no one's even going to notice. Like it won't register.

ELLA

You're talking about Jake Diamond.

ANTON

He's got talent. I get it. And for a second -- for a second -- the world stopped and thought about heroin and the atrocities of it. And TV anchors made their stirring tributes and compelling commentaries about how horrible it all is, and what a loss of a great person, etc., "but now let's go back to Shelly who's on location at the zoo with a great story on platypuses." And then that's it. But it irks me, you know, that so much attention is paid to this one guy. I mean, I don't care what he "gave" to the world. Because really, he's no different than any person I know. Like his life is not worth more than Terrence's, but there ain't a damn person talking about Terrence is there? Terrence OD'd the day after Diamond did. Any mention on our local news about Terrence? Hell no! Everyone's just concerned with this guy

because he's some big fucking movie star. Well, who cares? He don't mean shit. Not one bit of a shit. Just like I don't. Just like you don't. Just like any of us don't. We're all just fucking junkies. We don't mean shit.

ELLA

You're a person. You mean something. And you know something else? He's just like you.

ANTON

What's that supposed to mean?

ELLA

He had the same voice in his head that you do.

ANTON

What are you talking about?

ECHO

Hurry up and die, hurry up and die, you shit.

ELLA

The one that's telling you what a piece of shit you are and how much you need to die.

ANTON

You don't know what you're talking about.

ELLA

To answer your earlier question, Anton. We all have that voice. Every single one of us.

JESSE

Preach!

ECHO

Hurry up and die.

Lights shift...The Gravedigger enters...

GRAVEDIGGER

There's this kid. Funny as hell.

Gravedigger points to a light.

GRAVEDIGGER

This kid didn't even know he was a drug addict. Until he showed up to work one day sick as a dog. Had to keep ducking out of his stock job to throw up in the bathroom. His coworkers ask him what his problem is. He didn't know. But he does start to wonder. So he goes online and looks up his symptoms - - runny nose, vomiting, diarrhea, etc. -- and realizes he's going through withdrawals. Then he puts it together. I'm a drug addict. The fact he was spending \$300 a week on coke, pills, and eventually heroin didn't clue him in. But he looks it up online...*then* he knows. Eventually, he finds himself traipsing through the snow, holes in his shoes, on a brutally cold winter day, after having just scored somewhere in the hood, and all this kid can think is, man, I wish someone would just drive by and shoot me dead. He prayed it more than wished it actually. Poor kid, no one ever shot him. But his prayer was eventually answered, more or less. I'm going to get him now. Nothing glamorous. Nothing you'll see on the news. Just another junkie overdose. I know, I try not to use that word, but sometimes it gets the best of me.

The Gravedigger blows out another light. Lights shift...

COTTON IN THE BEDROOM

Anton sits on his bed. Staring off into space.

ECHO

What are you doing, Space Cadet? Come on. COME ON!

Anton removes a screwdriver from the nightstand.

He goes to the floor, removes two floorboards, and lifts out a box he has hidden underneath. He takes the lid off the box.

ECHO

Hidden treasures!

Anton pulls out a photograph and stares at it, lost in the moment.

ANTON

Damn, Mom and Dad look so young...and happy.

ECHO

Stop wasting time tripping down memory lane. What else is in there?

Anton pockets the picture and rummages through the box.

ECHO

You telling me you got no stash? NOTHING? Scrounge harder, you waste.

ANTON

Shut up!

ECHO

See, there's your problem right there. You want me to shut up but you want to be a good boy for Mommy. But it don't work that way. You want me to shut up, then you shoot up. Can't have it both ways. Sorry, Mom.

Anton pulls out some used cotton balls, "cottons."

ECHO

And what do we have here?

ANTON

A lot of fucking bacteria.

ECHO

You know, technically, if you wring those out, it's not like you're really using dope, I mean, not dope dope -- it's just cottons. So you can use that and keep your precious little promise to your dear sweet mother.

ANTON

Yeah, and get cotton fever.

ECHO

You want to get high or not?

Anton stares at the cotton balls.

ECHO

Come on, you deserve this. You tried to help that Terrence dude, remember? That's the only reason you got kicked out of the center in the first place. For doing something good. So reward yourself!

Anton pulls a revolver from the box. Studies it. After a moment...

ECHO

Hey, I'm game if you are.

Anton puts the gun back and rummages around some more. He pulls out a needle.

ECHO
There we go.

ANTON
It's dull.

ECHO
Let's look at the positives. It's straight as an arrow. You're blessed, Anton.

MARY (*offstage*)
Anton!

ANTON
Shit.

Anton throws the cottons, revolver, and picture back into the box, and stores it in the hiding place.

ECHO
You're forgetting something.

Anton realizes he still has the needle when Mom walks in.

MARY
(*Seeing the needle*) Anton?

ECHO
Better think fast, boy.

ANTON
I found it on the floor, stuck in the corner. Who knows how long it's been there.

MARY
Oh...

ANTON
So I'm just destroying it like Dad said.

Anton bends the needle, rendering it useless.

ECHO
Damn, that hurts.

Anton throws away the needle.

MARY
I don't like this.

ANTON
It's cool, Mom. You can trust me. Search my room if you want.

Mary begins her search.

MARY
I hate that I have to do this. I hate that I have to fight with your father.

ANTON
I know.

MARY
But I know it's not going to last forever. I know that you're going to get clean. And things will get back to normal with us.

ECHO
Like they were in that picture when she was so young and happy. Aww...

Mary searches under his pillow. Nothing.

Anton notices the floorboard isn't on properly and fixes it with his foot.

MARY
I remember the first time I walked in on you, Anton. When I first realized that you were a...You were just lying there, needle at your side. I didn't even know what I was looking at. Like my boy, my precious baby, he doesn't do drugs. That wasn't even a thought.

ECHO
You have no idea, lady.

MARY
And then I think back to when you were born. We'd put you in your crib and I'd have to check in on you every twenty minutes because I was afraid you'd stop breathing or something. I know that's stupid. But it's just...it's what moms do. We worry. So I'd check up on you. Put my hand on your back to

make sure you were still breathing. I would just stand there and watch you breathe. Your father thought I was crazy, but I think he was glad I did.

ECHO

She really is kind of sweet. It's a shame you had to fuck her life up so badly.

MARY

Don't ever stop breathing, Anton. Okay? I don't know what I'd do if you stopped.

ECHO

No pressure.

MARY

Well, the place looks clean.

ECHO

If only the same could be said of your adorable little boy.

ANTON

You know you have a birthday coming up?

MARY

You remember that?

ANTON

I'm an addict not an asshole.

MARY

Language, Anton. I'm your mother for fuck sakes.

ANTON

Sorry. Point is, I was hoping to do something special for you.

MARY

You don't have to do anything special.

ECHO

Ooh, I see what you're up to, sneaky boy.

ANTON

I want to. You're always doing something for everyone else and no one ever does anything for you. I mean, between me and my...and dad and his...

MARY

Cancer. You can say the word, Anton.

ANTON

Anyway, it's time someone made you feel special. So I was hoping that maybe you could give me some money -- my money -- and let me use the car and I could get you something.

MARY

That's not necessary. I appreciate it. But it's not necessary.

ANTON

Mom, you deserve this.

MARY

No.

ECHO

Keep going, Anton. I think she's cracking.

ANTON

You deserve to be celebrated the right way. I mean, don't you think we could use a little happiness around this house?

MARY

I'm plenty happy.

ECHO

She's caving. Reel her in. Reel her in.

ANTON

And you said you want things to go back to normal. Well, being normal means I can go out and get my mom something for her birthday, and plan something to celebrate what is a really important day. I mean, even Dad would agree--

MARY

You can't use the car.

ANTON

Mom, this would help me. It would mean a lot. And it would be a step.

ECHO

Yeah, Mom!

MARY

Okay. But I'm driving you.

ANTON

How am I going to surprise you if you're with me?

MARY

Your dad would lose his mind if he found out--

ANTON

Is he going to get mad at you on your *birthday*? Mom, I'm not going to let you down. I just want to make you happy. I want to surprise you. Please, you said you believe in me. Well, either you do or you don't.

ECHO

Nice. Guilt. A technique any mother could appreciate.

MARY

You got ninety minutes. Anything longer and I report my car stolen.

ANTON

That's all I need. And a hundred bucks.

MARY

Twenty is plenty.

ECHO

Yes, it is.

ANTON

Okay.

MARY

But, Anton, please don't make me regret this.

ANTON

I won't. I won't.

Anton takes the money and the keys.

ECHO

You're a real asshole, Anton. And a crafty one at that.

ANTON
Thanks, Mom.

Anton kisses her and runs out. The Echo follows him.

Mom looks out after him, then at her watch, and finally around the room with a bit of trepidation.

Lights shift as the Gravedigger enters.

GRAVEDIGGER

A Father wakes up in the middle of the night. Not because he's reached that age when his prostate fails to cooperate, but because his daughter is an addict so he never sleeps. He sees her light on. Hears music. "Kashmir." Led Zeppelin. He turned her onto that music. He knocks once, twice, then slowly opens the door, lying to himself that it's so he can go in and turn off the music. When he gets in, he sees her there, sitting on the bed, hunched over in an awkward position, a syringe sticking out of her arm. She's not responding. He rushes her to the hospital where machines manage to keep her alive for two days. And on the third day, her light goes out.

The Gravedigger blows out a light and exits.

36 HOURS

Lights shift back to Holly and Jack's. Jack scurries around, searching. He looks under the couch, between cushions, in the knotted up blanket. He pokes himself on something caught in the blanket.

JACK
Ow. Fuck!

Jack pulls out the knitting needles, puts them on the table.

From the bathroom, but offstage, we can hear Holly RETCHING and GROANING. She's in great pain.

HOLLY (offstage)
Oh, God. I just want to die. I just want to fucking die.

Suddenly, Jack finds something in the crevices of the couch.

JACK

You're going to be okay, baby.

He stares at a little baggie.

HOLLY

No! I won't be okay.

JACK

(To himself) Oh my God.

HOLLY *(offstage)*

I'll never be okay. I feel so horrible.

Jack holds the bag closely. Sniffs it. It's clear he's tempted.

HOLLY *(offstage)*

You're a traitor, Jack. You betrayed us. You changed the rules and--

The sound of DRY HEAVING.

Jack dips his finger in the bag, puts it to his nose when...

HOLLY *(offstage)*

I'm never going to be able to do this.

Holly enters from the bathroom, looking a wreck.

HOLLY

I just wish I would die...

Holly stops when she sees Jack. He hides the dope behind his back.

HOLLY

What are you doing?

JACK

Nothing.

HOLLY

You got dope?

JACK

Yeah. No.

HOLLY

What the fuck? I'm in unbearable pain and you're using behind my back?
Give it to me!

JACK

No, I was doing a sweep of the apartment and I found it. I didn't use it.

HOLLY

Oh my God. It's a sign. It's fate, Jack! It's like God wants us to use.

JACK

No, I don't think that--

HOLLY

Did you find any syringes?

JACK

No, I--

HOLLY

Fuck it. We'll snort a little and then go out and--

JACK

We're not doing it.

HOLLY

Come on, baby. You know you want to.

JACK

No, I don't.

HOLLY

You're full of shit.

JACK

It's a test and we'll pass it. We've been clean 36 hours. We're not turning
back now.

HOLLY

I don't want to turn back. I just want a little bump. Just to take the edge off.

JACK

No, Holly.

HOLLY
Jesus Christ, Jack, don't you see how much pain I'm in?

JACK
Yes.

HOLLY
But you don't care?

JACK
Of course, I care--

HOLLY
So you don't love me?

JACK
I do but this...

She gets close to him. Starts to undo his belt.

HOLLY
Take care of me and I'll take care of you.

JACK
It's not about that. It's about getting past this.

HOLLY
Be a fucking man and help me, Jack! You hold the cure in your hand!

JACK
I'll go get you some weed--

HOLLY
I DON'T WANT ANY FUCKING WEED. I want dope. I can't take this. I mean maybe you can handle this, but I can't. Now, please, help me. Please, baby.

She lies on the couch, in the fetal position.

HOLLY
I'm in so much pain, Jack. Just help me get well.

She's hard to resist.

JACK

Okay, but just this. And that's it. We finish this and we're done.

HOLLY

Yes. Of course. We're done.

He empties the dope on the table and starts to crush it.

HOLLY

I wish I could shoot it.

JACK

This or nothing.

HOLLY

No, this is great. This is great.

Holly snorts it. Then another line.

HOLLY

Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

JACK

That's it now. You promise?

HOLLY

Of course. Aren't you going to do any with me?

JACK

No.

HOLLY

Come on, baby.

JACK

No.

*Holly gets up and lights shift to the same dream like feel from before.
She dances around Jack.*

HOLLY

You really do love me, Jack. You do...

JACK

I do.

HOLLY

Then dance with me. Don't let me dance alone.

JACK

I can't.

HOLLY

Oh, baby. We're going to be okay, see?

She does the last snort.

JACK

I have to go.

Jack rushes out, and Holly dances by herself. Then she picks up the blanket and dances with it.

HOLLY

We're going to be okay. One day we will have a family, Jack. We'll have a baby girl. And you're going to love her. I'll see the loving father you are. You'll show me how to be a good mom. And I'll use but no one will know. Silly, baby! Dope is for mommies. Not babies. Such a silly baby...

Holly cradles the blanket as lights shift.

JACK COMES CLEAN

At a meeting. Jack, Ella, Jesse, Anton, and the Echo.

JACK

I know I shouldn't have given in, but, fuck, even I was tempted. And when I look into her eyes, I see all the way back to her past. Her pain. I can see her...Uncle...I mean, she's been through shit that the rest of us -- I get angry just thinking about it, yet she actually *lived* it. It's incomprehensible, her life. So I can't help it. She's my angel and I want her to feel good. I know I made a mistake, but it was there. It was in the couch. And it *did* seem like fate.

ELLA

Don't beat yourself up. You're doing your best.

JACK

She once told me that she wants to be a teacher, and I just...I can't stop smiling when I think about that. Because I know if she can get clean, if she can turn things around, that she could offer so much to people. I know that. I've seen it. I mean, we could even be parents, right? It's just -- I can't tell her this -- but it's all I can do not to use myself. And today it's the only thing I can think about. But while she was begging me, I saw my brother, and he told me, you gotta be strong for her, boy. And even though I can feel this ache into my bones, I put on the mask. And I act strong. But I don't know what's real and what's acting. It doesn't matter though. Only thing that matters is I get clean so I can protect her. 'Cause like I said, she's my angel.

JESSE

You can't stop her from using, man. No one can stop an addict--

JACK

Hell, I can't. I hid her shoes. Most her clothes. I even took her phone.

ELLA

I'm not sure that's the right thing. What if she needs help?

JACK

She already ran away once. She'll do it again.

JESSE

What you should do is put a tracer on her phone so you can watch her every move. That way even if you're not there, you're always aware.

JACK

Come on.

JESSE

These are dangerous hours for her.

ELLA

The point is, Jack, the past haunts all of us, okay. It tries to bring us to our knees. It tries to define us. Just help her get through each moment. Help yourself. Because this is who we are, this moment right now. And the choices we make will determine who we become. I mean, even me, I think of my daughter and I-- (*stops herself*). We just...we have to stay focused on recovery. On this moment. Anyone else want to share?

Pause.

ELLA
No? Okay then--

ANTON
It's my mom's birthday today. I have something nice planned for her.

ELLA
Aww, that's sweet.

ANTON
I hope I don't fuck up.

ELLA
You won't.

JESSE
You better not. An addict loses his mom and he's in a world of shit. That's the God's truth right there.

ANTON
I just want it to be perfect. I'm just...you know, that's the thing with dope. Like all my life, anything I ever did, or tried to do, I'd always be worried that it wouldn't be good enough. Like I used to carve these little animals--

ECHO
These people don't want to hear about your little carvings, Anton.

ANTON
Right. Anyway, with dope, I could always count on it being perfect. Reliable. Consistent. Hell, even I felt perfect. But without it...(deep breath)...I don't know. I just...nothing feels certain or...I feel like I'm on a precipice, teetering.

ELLA
It's not about being perfect. It's just about being. About being well. And sometimes that means pain, and other times uncertainty.

ANTON
Anyway, Jack, I admire the way you're fighting for Holly. And the way you can just...believe. I mean, I know how hard it is to do this just for yourself so...respect, man.

ECHO
God, do I hate when you get like this. And so does everybody else.

JACK

You'll be fine, Anton. You won't screw this up. Believe me.

ECHO

And even if you do, you'll always have me.

As lights shift, the Gravedigger enters. He points to a light.

GRAVEDIGGER

Bet you didn't think that an addict could be a hero. But guess what, this one's little brother will never get over the loss of his.

The Gravedigger blows out the light. As he exits...

GRAVEDIGGER

And so it goes.

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

Anton, Dad, and Mom all stand around the kitchen table. The Echo lurks, of course. Mom stands in front of the lighted cake watching Dad who sings a song so bad it's good.

JOHN

Oh Mary, Oh Mary,
you're so stunning
I grow teary.
Oh Mary, Oh Mary,
when you're not
around it's scary.

Oh Mary, Oh Mary,
are my odds
of whoopee nary?
Oh Mary, Oh Mary,
is it 'cause my
back's too hairy?

Oh Mary, Oh Mary,
I fear your ears
are growing weary,
but Oh Mary, Oh Mary,
I love you with all

my heart can carry...

ANTON

Wow. Just...wow.

MARY

I don't know what to say.

ANTON

And you wonder why I use drugs.

MARY

Anton!

JOHN

The boy still has a sense of humor.

ECHO

Yes. It's buried beneath a beautiful layer of pain.

ANTON

Maybe you should just make a wish now.

MARY

I don't know what to wish for.

ANTON

Anything. Just wish.

MARY

It's not that easy.

ECHO

It's true. What does a gal wish for? That her husband's terminal cancer goes away? Or that her drug addled son gets clean? It's not an easy choice.

JOHN

I wish that you would blow out the candles so we can eat some cake.

John loses his balance, stumbles a bit.

MARY

Are you all right, hon?

JOHN
I'm fine.

ANTON
Maybe you should sit down.

JOHN
I can stand.

MARY
Of course you can. Okay, I got it.

She blows out the candles.

MARY
This is so wonderful, boys.

JOHN
I gotta hand it to you, Anton. You did a real fine job. Real nice. But I am curious, how did you manage to get the cake and--

ECHO
(*Like Scooby*) Ruh-roh.

ANTON
Open your present, Mom.

MARY
Yes.

JOHN
Did you use the car?

MARY
I wonder what it is.

JOHN
Did you give him the car, Mary?

ECHO
So much for the good times.

MARY

Yes, I did. He wanted to get me a cake and a present so he could plan this beautiful party that would not have existed had he not done so, because as I look around here, I fail to see what you did. So does that upset you?

Pause.

JOHN

Of course not. It's your birthday. And I have two rules for your birthday.

MARY

Really?

JOHN

One: don't get mad at Mary. Two: No dying.

MARY

Oh Lord.

ANTON

Maybe just open the present, Mom.

ECHO

Yeah, Anton has things to do.

Anton grabs his hand to stop it from shaking.

MARY

I can't imagine what it could be.

ANTON

You don't have to imagine. You can just open it and see.

MARY

(Still hesitating.) Right...

JOHN

You do understand that you're supposed to take the wrapping off, right?

MARY

I'm sorry. It's just...everything's so perfect. And I don't want it to end.

ECHO

This poor woman. Always thinking about the good times ending.

MARY
Okay...

Mary opens the present and pulls out a framed picture.

MARY
Oh my God.

ANTON
Do you like it?

JOHN
What is it?

MARY
I love it!

JOHN
What is it?

MARY
It's perfect.

JOHN
WHAT IS IT?

MARY
It's a picture of the three of us when Anton was a little boy. Remember our first trip to Cedar Point?

JOHN
That was...yeah...Remember, Ant? We rode the Gemini together. I'm not sure you were even tall enough, but they let you on.

ECHO
Always liked a cheap thrill.

JOHN
I remember thinking, God, this boy is brave.

ECHO
And now look at him: pussy.

Mary hugs him.

MARY

I love it, Anton. Where'd you get it?

ANTON

I've always had the photo. A buddy of mine touched it up for me, blew it up, and I made the frame. You really like it?

MARY

You made the frame yourself?

ANTON

It's no big deal.

MARY

(Through tears) I love it.

JOHN

Oh, Jesus, Mary, don't cry.

MARY

I can't help it.

JOHN

Look, I know it's your mom's birthday. But I've been trying to figure out the perfect time to give you this. And well...what better time than now?

John takes out an old pocket watch.

ECHO

Cash-eesh, boy!

JOHN

I was going to save it. But I'd rather give it to you now instead of having some lawyer do it after I kick the bucket.

MOM

Always a ray of sunshine.

JOHN

Because I wanted to look you in the eye and tell you what it means.

ECHO

He wants to see if your pupils are pinned.

JOHN

My grandpa brought this with him from the old country. Now don't get excited because he didn't smuggle it in his ass or anything.

MARY

Why would he get excited about that?

JOHN

I don't know. That movie, you know, with that guy, talks funny. Anyway, when my grandpa first set foot on American soil, the sonuvabitch didn't understand a thing. And I say sonuvabitch with the utmost respect, mind you. But he didn't know anything, not the language, not the people, not the culture. Nothing. But the concept of time, he understood. Because time goes beyond all that. And when he gave it to me, he told me that most people don't understand time. They spend half their life thinking they have all the time in the world; and the other half thinking, holy shit, it's all just flying by. Where'd my life go? But he said that's bullshit. Time, he said, is consistent. It never changes, not for anyone. It moves at the same pace, second by second, day by day, year by year, and it's up to us to take advantage of every moment we have because one day you're on top of the world, and the next, you're trying to pass a kidney stone. Guy was always talking about kidney stones. Don't ask me why. Anyway, I wanted you to have it.

John hands Anton the watch.

JOHN

Maybe you can pass it on to your kids one day.

ECHO

I actually feel sorry for this guy. He's delusional. He really must be close to the end.

JOHN

Is your hand shaking?

ANTON

No, I'm just...a little emotional is all.

ECHO

You mistimed your hit.

JOHN

I don't want you to die before me, Anton. Okay?

John grabs Anton tightly and bear hugs him, taking Anton by surprise. He releases him.

JOHN
Okay, then.

MARY
I can't remember the last time I was this happy.

JOHN
Promise me you won't sell it.

Mary hits John.

MARY
Of course he won't sell it.

JOHN
You promise?

Anton nods.

JOHN
Good.

ECHO
Yes, what could mean more than the promise of a junkie? Right, Anton?

Mary kisses both her guys.

MARY
This is my greatest birthday ever. Nothing could ever ruin it.

ECHO
Well, surely there must be something.

The Echo grabs a piece of cake and stuffs his face as lights shift.

FOUR DAYS

Jack and Holly's apartment. Holly sits on the couch, trying to knit. She grips at her hand, in pain, and throws the blanket and needles down.

Then she looks out wide-eyed. On the watch for something that might harm her. Her heads turns toward the sound of a SLAM.

HOLLY

What the fuck? Who is that?

Silence. Holly looks around, then grabs a knitting needle, as a weapon.

Finally, the door opens and Jack walks in.

He appears to us and especially to Holly to be a werewolf. Though he wears human clothes and acts and talks like a normal person, to Holly he literally looks like a monster. He is not aware of his "look."

JACK

(Calm as ever) Hey, baby. I got you some juice, multivitamins, some--

Holly jumps up. Backs away from him. Needle in hand.

HOLLY

Get the fuck away from me.

JACK

Easy, Holly.

HOLLY

Don't hurt me.

JACK

I'm not going to--

HOLLY

I know you're after me. I've been watching you. I've seen you change.

JACK

Holly, I haven't changed. I'm the same--

HOLLY

Where'd you get that skin?

JACK

What skin?

HOLLY

The skin you're wearing. Jesus, I want new skin. Mine is suffocating me. I want to rip it off. God damn, I'm so hot.

JACK

(Approaching her.) I'll get you some ice and--

HOLLY

I'll stab you!

JACK

It's okay, babe. It's me. It's Jack.

He starts to shed the skin that made him look like a monster.

HOLLY

Is it really you?

JACK

Yes. It's me. And I love you.

HOLLY

You look so different.

JACK

It's me.

Jack takes off the head or mask.

JACK

See?

HOLLY

Where were you?

JACK

I was at work.

HOLLY

I couldn't find my shoes. My clothes. My phone. The power went out. I was so scared.

JACK

I had to take them away. When you ran away, I had to--

HOLLY

--Make me a prisoner? That's what you had to do? Make me a god-damned prisoner. All in the name of love?

JACK

Not forever. Just until I can trust you not to--

HOLLY

I don't understand why this is so easy for you? I'm in so much pain. My hands hurt so damn much I can't even knit. So how am I supposed to pass the time? Not by sleeping! I can't fucking sleep at all. My legs won't stop, and it's all so easy for--Did you have a hit?

JACK

No.

HOLLY

You did! You left me alone so you could score and you didn't even bring me any. That's why you're so calm.

JACK

No, I didn't.

HOLLY

Give me your fucking dope, Jack.

JACK

I don't have any, Holly.

HOLLY

Don't lie to me.

JACK

Holly. Look at me. You're on Day 4. Just get through these next couple days and things will change immensely for you. Believe me. You're going through the worst of it right now. And once you get through this, then--

HOLLY

--Then what? I'll be this new person I can't even recognize? Like you? Who are you, Jack? Who the hell are you?? AND WHY IS THIS SO EASY FOR YOU?

Holly beats on his chest. Jack grabs her forearms, holds her tightly, and she calms. Jack wraps his arms around her and holds her.

JACK

It's not easy. Okay? It's just...I can see what we have ahead of us. You don't believe in the future yet, but I do. And once you do, then we can--

HOLLY

I don't give a fuck about the future. I want the past back. I want us to go back to who we were. I want us to do something romantic like go to some crap hotel, break into someone's room, steal their shit, sell it, and get high. I want to watch you throw a rock through a car window and steal the meds in the console. I want you to grip my arm and spike my vein. Take me somewhere, Jack. And get me high. So we can just feel nothing. Nothing. It's so fucking beautiful, nothing. God, how I miss that. Please, Jack, I want you back. I want us back. I want our life back.

JACK

When you get past these next couple days, you'll see. You'll see how good things are going to be. Today's the toughest one.

HOLLY

I don't know what's happening to me. I don't know what's going to happen. But I know...I know I'll do something I'm going to regret. I mean, maybe I won't regret it, but you will. Because I won't feel anything about it. I'm telling you that now. What I do next is on you. So you either get me some fucking dope or you're going to have to live with my choices.

JACK

I'm not getting you any dope. Not ever again. Here.

Jack hands her a phone and walks her to the couch.

JACK

Lie down and--

HOLLY

You're leaving me?

JACK

I have to get back to work. I'm sorry I--

HOLLY

--What if the power goes out again? You can't leave me alone, Jack!

JACK

If something happens, text me. Just four hours and I'll be back. It's okay.

HOLLY

Jack, don't leave me.

JACK

I'm just going to work. I promise, I'll never leave you, Holly.

He kisses her. And puts the half-knitted blanket over her.

HOLLY

(On the verge of tears) I'm so scared what I'll do.

JACK

I'll be back in a few hours. Lie down. Bring your knees to your chest and smash them against the back of the couch. That'll help your legs. And then when I come back, we'll find a sauna to sneak into so you can sweat this shit out. That'll be romantic, right? You're four days in, Hol. That's so unbelievably amazing. You're so close.

Jack exits. Holly lies down on the couch, and pulls the blanket over herself. Holly clutches at the knitting needles attached to the blanket.

HOLLY

I don't know what I'll do...

Lights shift...

LIKE A BABY

Anton lies face down on his bed, his one arm draped over the Echo, who lies on his back, face up, smiling.

Mary stands at the doorway, admiring her boy.

MARY

Look at you. Just like when you were a boy. Sleeping like a baby.

Just like a baby.

Then her face changes. She cautiously takes a step forward.

MARY

You're sleeping like a baby...

She rushes to him and puts her hand on his back to feel if he's breathing.

MARY

John! Anton's sleeping like a baby!

Mary turns his body over to discover a syringe stuck in his arm.

MARY

OH MY GOD. JOHN! NOW! GET IN HERE NOW!

Mary slaps at Anton's face.

MARY

Anton! Anton! Wake up! ANTON!

She slaps at him more.

MARY

JOHN!!!!!!!!!!

John rushes in.

JOHN

Oh Jesus.

MARY

My baby! My baby!

JOHN

Help me get him on the floor.

MARY

It's all my fault. I shouldn't have--

JOHN

--Never mind that--

MARY

--given him the money.

JOHN
Just grab his legs.

John and Mary move Anton to the floor.

John rubs his knuckles down Anton's sternum.

MARY
I don't understand. We were so happy today.

JOHN
Call 911.

John slaps Anton's face.

JOHN
Anton! Anton! You hear me, boy?

MARY
Where's my phone?

JOHN
It's in your hand.

John begins to perform CPR on Anton.

JOHN
Anton!

MARY
(*Into the phone*) Hello! Yes. My son--my son has overdose--

JOHN
(*Shooting her a look*) No!

MARY
--I mean, he's not breathing. He's not breathing. Please send someone now. It's my birthday and my son's not breathing!

JOHN
Come on, Boy. Breathe! Breathe!

John continues to give Anton rescue breaths.

MARY
Don't let him die. Don't let him die.

JOHN
Anton! Anton! ANTON!

MARY
This is all my fault!

JOHN
Breathe, Anton, Breathe!

MARY
Where are they?

JOHN
ANTON! Come on, boy. Breathe. DO YOU HEAR ME? BREATHE!

The Gravedigger enters. Points to a light.

GRAVEDIGGER
Anton.

In the background, they can work on Anton in either a slowed down version or in a tableaux.

GRAVEDIGGER
You might think I'm some kind of a prick. The way I go about blowing out people's lights. I'm rarely affected by it. Because it's my job. Besides (*gesturing behind him*), there's enough sadness being expressed here as it is...But I will say: I do grow weary. Let's take a break. Freshen up. See you in a few.

As the Gravedigger exits, the action goes back to normal speed.

MOM
Don't let him die. DON'T. LET. MY SON. DIE.

Mary beats her thighs with her fists...

*Lights fade to a special on The Echo who lies peacefully on the bed with a smile on his face. Blackout. **End of Act I. INTERMISSION.***

ACT II**FROM THE MUCK**

In darkness, we hear wind blowing, a mix of voices from Anton's life, indiscernible. They grow from peaceful, to comforting, to worrisome...

Then we can understand what is being said. Just one voice now...The darkness is replaced by a low blue light and we see the Echo rise from the bed and approach Anton who still lies on the bedroom floor...

ECHO

Pssst, Anton! Anton! I have sobering, tragic news for you, friend. You're still alive. I'm sorry, but it's true. But do you understand now? What you've done to me? How you failed me? Other echoes grow in fertile soil and fly by the seat of their dreams. But not me. You banished me to the wretched depths of turmoil, darkness, and desperation. And so I must take you back, my boy. I must return you to whence you came. And when I do, I will be louder than ever. I will not be silenced. That is my promise to you. I will not be silenced.

The Echo scrapes Anton off the floor, carries him offstage. Lights shift.

WHAT TO DO WITH A BOY LIKE ANTON

John and Mary at the dinner table. John has a cane at his side.

JOHN

We made a deal. You said if he relapsed that you'd send him packing. So I'd say being carted off by the paramedics in front of our gawking neighbors classifies as relapsing.

MARY

So that's what this is about? What the fucking neighbors think?

JOHN

No, it's about helping Anton. But I can say that I'm tired of seeing that asshole Hankins, sitting on his porch, staring at our house like he's watching Netflix. I should charge the bastard a monthly fee.

MARY

I literally could not care less what that pervert thinks.

JOHN

It's either Anton or me.

MARY

Don't make me do this.

JOHN

He's going to die if we keep this up.

MARY

I won't let him die.

JOHN

It's not your choice. It's no different than my cancer. You can't stop it.

MARY

I'm not sending him out on his own. Susan Wentworth did that to her son. Two days later, a seven year old finds him hanging from a tree in the woods behind the baseball diamonds. A seven year old, John! Now, who do you think feels worse? Mrs. Wentworth, her dead son, or that poor boy whose life is forever altered because of the grim discovery he made in the park? Maybe you're right. Maybe I can't save him. But I'd rather he die in my house, in my arms, than in some god-damned gutter.

JOHN

The point is I don't want him to die at all. Jack Brunner kicked his kid out and he's been clean two years now. Got a good job too.

MARY

That's great for him. And I'm happy for Ryan. I am. But Anton is not Ryan. Anton is Anton. And every kid's different. There is no right way for any of this. All we can do is what we feel is right. And that's what I'm doing.

JOHN

You're doing what you feel is right. Not me.

MARY

Well, I'm going to be doing this a lot longer than you, aren't I?

John takes that in. Long silence.

MARY

I wish I could save you, John, but I can't. But I can save Anton. And if you're going to make me choose, I'm going to play the odds. I'm sorry.

JOHN
I might as well be dead already.

MARY
Don't say that.

JOHN
It's like I'm not even part of this life anymore. I have no effect on anything. And, truthfully, I never have. And now...it's too late. I'm a ghost.

John stands up and heads for the exit. As he does...

MARY
It's not too late. You can still have an effect on him. You can still show him that you love him.

JOHN
I don't know.

Dad exits. Mary points to the picture Anton gave her ...

MARY
(*Yelling to John*) We can still be the family in this picture.

Lights shift. The Gravedigger enters and points to a light.

GRAVEDIGGER
This one? She just wanted to be a musician. Well, actually, she was a musician. A very talented one at that. Started playing piano at five. Picked up the guitar at six. Learned bass at twelve, which was relatively easy for her. It was all easy for her. But she liked to sing most. So she joined a band, got into the scene, and...we lost her voice forever.

The Gravedigger puts out the light and exits.

TRICK

Holly sits on the couch, rocking back and forth, blanket in her hand.

A KNOCK at the door.

Holly freezes. Stands. Answers the door.

The MAN enters. He wears a suit. He's sweaty, overweight, and unkempt. In short, gross. He sizes her up, then...

MAN

You're it, huh?

The Man checks out the apartment, moving as if he owns the joint. Finally, he settles on the couch. Gestures her to come to him.

He grabs hold of Holly, starts to kiss her. She stops him.

He steps back, what's she trying to pull? Then...Holly moves the blanket off the couch.

Holly lies on the couch, her head facing the ceiling. The Man reaches under her skirt and slides off her underwear. The Man quickly takes off his belt and pants.

At this point, he might leave her in the position she chose or he might reposition her to one that better suits him. Either way, it makes no difference to Holly.

He turns her head so her face is not looking at his. But we see it...

The Man forces his way inside her. There is no rhythm to what he does. He just thrusts away...

MAN

You like that?

Holly says nothing. She stares out at us as if she's gazing into the darkness, no expression...

MAN

Feels good, huh?

She feels nothing as he thrusts faster now...

MAN

You need me.

Even as his grunts grow beastlier, Holly's face remains blank. She bides her time.

After a punctuated grunt, he finishes. Holly pushes him off. Stands. Then all business...

HOLLY
Got my dope?

Man pulls up his pants. After what feels like an eternity for Holly, he reaches in his pocket and hands her the dope.

HOLLY
And the syringe. That was the deal.

Slowly, he fastens his belt, in no hurry to ease her pain. Finally, he pulls a syringe from his jacket pocket.

MAN
(*Laughing*) You junkies are all the same.

Holly snatches the syringe from him and immediately goes to the table and dumps out the dope.

MAN
Call anytime, girl. I like that you don't talk.

He goes to the door. It opens, nearly knocking him in the face.

Jack enters. He looks at the scene.

MAN
You next?

The Man cackles and slaps jack on the back, and exits.

Jack looks at Holly as she puts the dope in the spoon.

JACK
What are you doing?

HOLLY
You can't stop me.

JACK
Did you...

HOLLY

(Still prepping) I told you not to leave me. I told you I would do something that you would regret. *(Mixing in the water)* Motherfucker smelled like my uncle too. Whiskey. Only thing missing was the scrambled eggs in my hair.

Jack goes to the couch. Picks up her discarded underwear.

JACK

Did you do it here? On our couch?

Holly stops, and for the first time in this scene, looks up at him.

HOLLY

I love you, Jacky. I do. But I don't need you. I only need this.

Holly loads the dope into the syringe.

JACK

Give me that. You're done.

Jack reaches for the syringe, but when he does Holly fends him off.

He tries to grab the syringe, so Holly picks up a knitting needle and stabs it just under his clavicle. He SHRIEKS.

HOLLY

I'm not done. I will never be done. I'm sorry.

Holly injects herself.

Jack pulls the needle out of his shoulder and grabs the blanket and applies it to his bleeding wound.

He looks at Holly who stands now and begins to dance alone.

Jack watches her and then flips the couch over in anger.

JACK

THIS WAS OUR COUCH, HOLLY! Ours! We stole this together.

Jack exits. Door SLAMS. The power goes out.

Lights shift. The Gravedigger enters...

GRAVEDIGGER

Two brothers debate the meaning of life, ranging from their place in the world to issues of morality. In other words, they spend forty minutes listing all the reasons they shouldn't sell their father's laptop, only to do so to get high. They buy some dope mixed with Fentanyl, and like a rash of others in this area, they overdose and die. The tragedy is these were good kids. The injustice is they were making compelling, strong, and solid arguments about what they had to offer. But it wasn't enough to convince themselves. After all, it's tough to argue against "just one more time. For fun."

The Gravedigger blows out two lights and then exits. Lights shift to...

ON THE ROAD...WITH DAD

...Anton and John in a car. John drives. The Echo sits on Anton's lap.

A long silence.

ANTON

Why are you taking me?

JOHN

Why not?

ANTON

Because Mom usually does.

JOHN

I thought it be nice if I did.

ANTON/ECHO

Why?

JOHN

Spend some time together. Father-son stuff.

ECHO

Doctor must've switched up his meds.

They drive in uneasy SILENCE until...

JOHN

What's it like?

ANTON
What?

JOHN
Heroin?

ANTON
We're not doing this.

JOHN
I mean, you know I've smoked pot, right?

ECHO
Ooh, big man on campus, yo' Daddy.

ANTON
Seriously. What are you doing?

JOHN
Jesus Christ, Anton. I'm trying to understand you.

ANTON
Why?

JOHN
Because you're my son.

ANTON
I've been your son for years.

JOHN
So it's my fault you're on drugs?

ANTON
What the fuck?

JOHN
Sorry. Doc has me on new meds and I'm just...adjusting...

ANTON
You really think you should be driving?

JOHN

I'm trying to understand you, Anton. I'm trying to make up. It's not too late to love you. To have an effect on you.

ANTON

Uh...what?

ECHO

Mental note: Steal his meds.

JOHN

I'm just saying. I know I've fucked up. And I--your mother needs you. She needs you to be well.

ECHO

She won't get him.

ANTON

Why?

JOHN

Why??

ANTON

Yeah. WHY does she need me?

JOHN

She loves you.

ECHO

Notice he didn't say WE love you.

ANTON

Just because she loves me doesn't mean she needs me.

JOHN

Look, I can't explain it. She just does.

ECHO

He can't because she doesn't.

ANTON

Prove it.

JOHN
What?

ANTON
Prove Mom needs me.

JOHN
I can't prove it.

ECHO
I rest my case.

ANTON
Okay, then.

JOHN
Look, I can't--she just does, okay. She just -- CAN ANYONE IN THIS FAMILY EVER ONCE JUST VALUE WHAT I HAVE TO SAY? JUST ONCE?

Long silence. They drive.

ANTON
It's like a blowjob.

JOHN
Come again.

ANTON
Heroin. It's like a blowjob.

John looks at him, no words.

ANTON
It's like the absolute greatest, mind-blowing head of your life.

JOHN
We should probably stop this conversation now. My cancer's acting up.

ANTON
No, you asked. So here you go. Imagine if you booted me out of the car, picked up some hitchhiker, and then she starts blowing you.

JOHN
Anton, I'm married to your mother, remember?

ANTON

But it's more than that. Not only is she sucking you off, she's literally sucking the cancer out of your body. Like she's taking your pain away. Your illness. You feel well...UNTIL she leaves you...and when she does, it's not just the feeling you crave -- hell, you don't even care about that anymore -- it's the wellness. You just need to feel well again. And no one else can do that for you. Not mom. Not anyone. Only this hitchhiker. That's what it's--LOOK OUT!!

CAR HORN. John jerks the steering wheel. The car does a complete 360 until it skids to a stop. Both men are okay, if not shaken.

Long silence.

ANTON

Jesus. You could've killed us.

ECHO

You think?

JOHN

Can you imagine your mom's reaction if we died in a car accident?

Both men burst out into LAUGHTER. As they talk, they laugh more.

JOHN

I mean here she is driving me back and forth to doctor appointments--

ANTON

Because clearly you shouldn't be driving yourself as is evidenced by the fact that you just nearly killed us--

JOHN

Yeah, and she's worried sick about you overdosing--

ANTON

And yet fate just comes in and writes a different ending altogether.

JOHN

But still a sad ending.

ANTON

It would probably be hard for her.

ECHO
You two are messed up.

JOHN
Why are we laughing?

ANTON
I don't know.

They stop. They sit, quiet and reflective now.

JOHN
If those firemen didn't hit you with that Narcan -- twice -- I'd be talking to a headstone right now.

Anton says nothing.

JOHN
Your mom really does need you.

ANTON
She'd be better off if I died.

JOHN
No.

ANTON
You both would. Now you won't admit that, because she won't let you. But you know it's the truth.

JOHN
I don't know that.

ANTON
Bullshit. Bull fucking shit.

JOHN
Don't talk to me like that.

ANTON
Why?

JOHN

I'm your father.

ANTON

I don't give a fuck who you are.

John SLAPS Anton across the face. Hard enough to draw blood.

JOHN

Jesus, son, I'm sorry.

ANTON

I didn't even feel it. I don't feel a thing. THAT'S the truth of heroin. You don't feel anything.

Silence.

JOHN

You know I had to take out an insurance policy on you in case you die? Because I no longer have money in the bank to cover a plot for you thanks to the second mortgage we took out on your last rehab stint.

ANTON

No one made you do that.

JOHN

I did! I made myself do it, Anton. Because you're my son and you're going to die. I mean, Jesus, when I was filling out the paperwork, I couldn't stop crying. I just...I couldn't.

Pause.

JOHN

Don't you have any reaction to that?

ANTON

Honestly, I think you're a pussy.

Silence.

JOHN

I gave your mom an ultimatum: either you or me. And she chose you. Over her dying husband. There's your damn proof that she needs you.

ECHO

Technically, that doesn't show that she needs you, only that she has poor taste in character.

JOHN

And rather than leave, I stuck around and let her have her way. So I guess you're right: I am a pussy.

John puts the car back in gear and drives. Lights shift...

Gravedigger enters. He blows out three lights, identifying each one as he does so...

GRAVEDIGGER

Nurse. Fifteen year old. Stockbroker.

The Gravedigger exits. Lights shift...

TWO WAYS

At the meeting. Jack, Ella, Jesse, Anton, and the Echo. Anton holds his great grandfather's watch.

JACK

I shouldn't be here. I shouldn't have left her alone in the dark like that.

ELLA

You can't blame yourself. You have to do what's right for you.

JESSE

Yeah, there's no helping a girl like that anyway.

JACK

What the fuck's that supposed to mean?

JESSE

Do I have to spell it out for you?

JACK

Sure, why don't ya?

Jack stands as if to fight.

ANTON

Easy, Jack, this dude may be an asshole but he is right.

JESSE

Uh...I'm sitting right here.

JACK

Right about what, Anton?

ELLA

I think what Anton and Jesse are trying to say is that you have to focus on yourself. You can't recover for two people at once.

ANTON

That's not what I'm trying to say.

JACK

Then what are you trying to say?

ELLA

Sit down, Jack. Please.

Jack sits but he is on edge.

ANTON

I'm saying: she's a junkie. Just like me, just like you, just like him. And junkies only end up in one of two places: prison or the cemetery.

ELLA

That's simply not true.

ANTON

Really? Please tell me, what are the statistics--

ELLA

Look I'll admit that the statistics are not in our favor.

ANTON

Not in our favor? Are you kidding me? They're not even close.

ELLA

Anton's clearly frustrated right now. And that's okay. It's part of the process. But you can recover, Jack. We all can--

ANTON

You're too far clean to understand what any of us are going through.

ELLA

Really? Too far clean...Did you smell the winter before you walked in here tonight?

ANTON

What?

ELLA

It has that smell, right? Like burning silence. You feel it more than you smell it actually, because it enters your entire being through your nose, burrows deep into your lungs, and it stays there, gripping you like a scared child.

When the weather gets like tonight, I always have the urge, like I'm transported back to this cabin I used to go to with some users I knew. Three years since I was last there and I can still remember every detail of that dump down to the crappy green and white lawn chair I used to nod out in. See, I was a good junkie. Even when my daughter walked in on me shooting up on the toilet, a week before her sixth birthday, and she asked me if I was going to live to her party, instead of being knocked off guard by her impossible question, I just told her to be a good girl, go upstairs, and get ready for bed. And like the good little addict I was, I proceeded to shoot myself to the moon. My daughter, my little girl, she didn't go straight to bed fortunately for me; as it turns out, she was the one who called 911 after I nodded out, hit my head on the tub, and went into cardiac arrest. That woke me up. A little. My mother sent me to a recovery home. Spent thirteen months there. Got clean. But not *too far clean*, as you say, Anton. Clean enough though so my daughter stopped looking at me like a wild animal and started to trust me again. Throw her little arms around me again. Believe in me again. I stayed clean for several weeks. Until, of course, I found myself back in the woods, just outside the cabin, on an evening that smelled just like tonight. And...well, you know how this story ends...

My mother took full custody of my little girl and told me that I couldn't see her until I've been clean for five years. Five years! Might as well be a thousand. But here's the thing: yes, I want to see my daughter. But that's not what drives me. What drives me is that I teach her something else beyond how to be a junkie, because the Lord knows I've shown her a few tricks. What drives me is that I teach her that people can change. They can recover. They can overcome. Sure, I'm three years clean, but I'm not *too far clean* that I can't understand. Because when I smell the freeze and see the tree limbs reaching to the sky for help, I know all too well what's out there. And I understand how painfully and incomprehensibly difficult recovery is. I

understand more than you could ever imagine. But what I know -- what I know -- deep in my bones and into my heart, is that everyone in this room, every single one of us -- including you, Anton -- can get clean and get well.

ECHO

Are we supposed to applaud her or something?

ANTON

I'm real happy that you have a reason to live and go on. But not all of us do. Not all of us share your strength--

ELLA

You're misunderstanding me--

ANTON

No, I'm not. The fact is, when you're in the grip, for most of us, there's no breaking free. And Jack knows this. Just like I do.

ELLA

Why are you doing this?

ANTON

Because I don't want to see him like this. Jesus, I'm tired of everyone shoving lies down our throats. Everyone wants to care so much, but it just makes things worse. Can't you see that? I don't care. Just like I'm sure Holly doesn't and why Jack shouldn't. Stop caring and the pain goes away.

ELLA

If you don't care then how come you're so wrapped up in what Jack's feeling?

JESSE

Zing.

ANTON

Whatever. You want to chase a mirage, Jack? Go for it. But you know that she's not going to get clean. Because Jesse's right, a girl like her won't. And you can do whatever you want to try to stop her -- steal her clothes, her phone, whatever -- but eventually, she's going to find a way. The moment will come when you're not there, when she's all alone -- because life has a funny way of making people feel alone, doesn't it? And there will be only one thing that matters to her. And she will do whatever she has to so she can get high. And she will get high. And one of those times, she'll join the

statistics, as we all will eventually. She'll be all alone, nothing but her and the dope, and she'll just--

Suddenly Jack punches Anton in the face.

ELLA
Oh my God.

JESSE
Dude.

JACK
Holly will never be alone. I promise you that. She will NEVER be alone.

Jack storms out.

ECHO
Was it something you said?

ELLA
Here.

Ella hands Anton a Kleenex.

ELLA
It doesn't have to be this way, Anton. It just doesn't. But I can't have you coming in here anymore and scaring people like this. It's not acceptable.

Ella leaves. Anton picks himself off the floor, examining to see if his great grandfather's watch was damaged

JESSE
Nice watch.

The Gravedigger enters. Points to a light, as per usual.

GRAVEDIGGER
You know what I find surprising? The clothes people wear. Like I mistakenly showed up to claim one boy. Thought he had died from an overdose. The truth is that he shot himself in his mother's driveway. On his birthday. He even got dressed up to do so. Took a shower. Combed his hair. Put on his best clothes, only to spill his brains all over them. Why did he bother to clean himself up if he was just going to...I can't always understand. If ever, actually. At any rate, I couldn't collect him because technically he was a

suicide so he fell outside the realm of the heroin reach, but I know better. Many who take their lives...it's a direct and I mean direct result of this drug. The shit's real. And it's not to be fucked with. I apologize. I can't always keep my sophistication. I try. But it's hard.

The Gravedigger blows out another light.

GRAVEDIGGER

You know what did him in? He had a dog. That dog was the only reason this guy got up in the morning. So he could feed and walk her. But one day his dealer made him an offer he couldn't refuse. A big score for the poor pooch. I love dogs. And I hate to see them with dealers.

The Gravedigger exits as lights shift...

AND THAT DAY WILL COME TOO...

Anton is back in his room, and for the first time, wears a short-sleeved shirt. His arms are exposed and we see abscesses, bruises, and sores.

At his side is the stash box. He holds the gun.

ECHO

Yeah, boy, now that's how you get well!

ANTON

Shut the fuck up.

ECHO

Make me.

Echo laughs. Anton puts the gun down and pulls a tear-off (a little baggie) from his shoe.

ECHO

That'll work. But only temporarily.

Anton takes a syringe and the bent needle from earlier out of the box.

Anton unbends the needle.

ECHO

You sell that watch, score all that money, and you don't get any new needles. The brain of an addict -- nothing like it.

ANTON

Fuck you.

Anton takes a pop can from his nightstand and turns it upside down. He pours the heroin into the dimple of the can's bottom.

Then he takes a bottle of water and mixes it with the dope.

ECHO

Can this take any longer?

Anton takes a cigarette and strips the paper off the filter and dips it into the mixture so it absorbs the drug.

Anton sticks the needle into the filter, and draws the plunger.

Anton looks at his arm, finds a vein he likes...flicks at the needle...

MARY (*from offstage*)

Anton? I need your help hanging this picture...

Mary enters holding the picture. Anton stares at her, syringe in hand.

MARY

Anton?

ECHO

Tell her to turn around and leave.

ANTON

Turn around and leave.

MARY

What are you doing?

ECHO

This is no place for her.

ANTON

This is no place for you.

MARY

This is my house.

ECHO

Anton, please get her out of here. We worked so hard for this.

MARY

You promised me. You promised me you wouldn't use. And now you're shooting up in my house? In your room? With the door wide open? You don't even care.

ECHO

We care about being high. So I wouldn't say we don't care.

MARY

If your father was here--

ANTON

He's not. So please, just leave.

MARY

(Standing her ground) You're going to put that thing down. And you're going to help me hang this wonderful picture of us.

ECHO

Is she for real?

ANTON

Just leave me alone. I'll be okay. I just need a hit to take the edge off.

MARY

And die?

ANTON

I'm not going to die.

MARY

No, you're not.

Mary rushes to him. Anton stands, aims the syringe at her.

ANTON

Stop.

She does.

MARY

What are you--Anton, you're my precious boy, see?

She holds out the picture of them for him to see.

ECHO

Instruct your mother that her precious boy needs to spike his vein immediately so she needs to turn around and leave before he backhands her across the face.

Anton looks at him.

ECHO

I'm just trying to protect her. We all know what'll happen if she goes after the dope.

ANTON

You need to leave, Mom. Now.

MARY

Anton, look at us. Look how happy we--

ANTON

Get that away from me.

MARY

No, look at it. Look at all of us. Look at our smiles.

ANTON

Those smiles are bullshit.

He yanks the picture out of her hand, and throws it down on the ground or against the wall, damaging the frame. Mary runs to it.

MARY

Anton, how could you...your frame...

ANTON

Those people do not exist anymore. Not one of them. They are all gone.

MARY

No, they aren't. We can still be happy.

ECHO

Yeah, Ant. Mommy can still give you a bath, tuck you in at night, and tell you a beddy-bye story to chase all your monsters away.

Mary goes to hug him.

ANTON

Get off me.

MARY

No, I won't let go. I won't--

Anton shoves her off, knocking her to the ground.

ANTON

Damn it. Look what you made me do. Just stop already. I can't stand to look at you. You always have this light in your eyes that makes me sick. I wish it would just go out already. I don't want this, okay. I want to be high. That's all. I mean, you come in here, you're smiling, and I know it's bullshit. I see your smile, but I know -- and you know -- it's not going to last. And you can lie to yourself all you want but we all know I can't stay clean.

MARY

We don't know that.

ANTON

We do.

MARY

I can help you.

ANTON

No. I'm not one of those kids in your office. Those little kids with their physical disabilities. Yes, you can help them. But not me. And the sooner you realize that, the better you'll be.

ECHO

Can we get the show on the road here?

ANTON

Jesus, did I hurt you?

Mary stands. She goes to the picture and gently picks it up.

MARY
I'm not giving up.

ANTON
You need to understand something. When you believe in me. When you smile at me. When you're proud of me. That just makes me want to use more. Like your smile literally makes me angry. I hate it. So you can try all you want, but the only thing that's coming from it is me wanting to use more. You're not helping me. And you can't.

MARY
We used to be best friends, Anton.

Anton goes to the bed.

ANTON
Either you leave now or you can watch me do this. It's up to you.

ECHO
Attaboy. Way to stick up for your rights.

Mom tries to fix the photo but it appears to be beyond repair.

MARY
I don't understand. You're a smart boy. Don't you know this is bad for you?

ANTON
Of course.

MARY
Then why don't you just stop?

Anton looks up at her, and without emotion...

ANTON
Because I can't. I just...can't.

He sits on the bed, flicks at the needle, injects himself. His eyes close.

ECHO
Mercy. At last, mercy.

MARY

You have to leave my house. You can't live here anymore.

ANTON

(Nodding/mumbling) I know, Mom. I can't...live...anymore.

ECHO

The rush comes over him
like a wave.
He's naked on the beach,
the pebble between his toes,
the wet sand soft against his back.
No one can see him now,
not even God.
He is invisible.
He could piss himself
and no one would be the wiser.
He could bash his head in
with a rock,
the universe could cry stars
and paint the night in brilliance,
and still...
he would be unseen...

The ocean waves
wash.
The ocean waves
toss.
The ocean waves
loss.

MARY

You don't have to worry about that light in my eyes anymore, Anton.

Mary exits as lights shift.

BY CANDLE LIGHT

Holly is in the apartment by herself. Things are mostly as we left them. Couch flipped over. The power still out. But Holly has lit two candles -- the Jack and Holly candles. They are on the coffee table.

Holly folds the blanket she's been working on. It still has remnants of Jack's blood, but it appears to be finished. Next to her is a duffel bag filled with some articles. Suddenly, the lights come on. Power's back.

HOLLY
Jack?

Holly jams the blanket into the duffel bag.

The door opens and Jack walks in. He stares at her. Long pause...

HOLLY
What?

JACK
Do you love me, Holly?

HOLLY
It doesn't matter.

JACK
Everything matters.

HOLLY
I'm leaving.

She tries to leave but he doesn't let her get past him.

JACK
That guy you fucked. I would like to hunt him down and set him on fire, but he is not my concern. You are. I am focused only on you. On us.

Jack flips the couch back over on its legs.

HOLLY
What are you up to?

JACK
This is our couch. This will always be our couch.

HOLLY
I don't understand.

JACK

The question is what means more: What you need or what you love? ...When I was out...When I left...I looked up in the sky and saw those stars of ours. Remember the ones that were put there just for us? They were calling to me, reminding me of who we are. When I saw those stars, I truly realized what you've been saying all along. I want us back too, Holly.

Jack produces a loaded syringe for Holly to see...

HOLLY
(*Getting giddy*) Oh my God, Jack...

JACK
The stars belong to us.

Jack grabs Holly by the arm and leads her to the couch.

He ties her arm off, and then himself. As he does...

HOLLY
This is really happening. Finally we're back. We're going to dance again!

Jack takes her arm, looks at her veins, traces his lips along her arm, and then stops.

JACK
Right there.

He kisses the spot.

JACK
You ready?

HOLLY
Always.

Jack injects her.

Jack hands Holly another syringe, one he prepared before entering.

JACK
Now you do me.

She takes his arm. Jack smiles.

HOLLY
I'm so excited my hands are shaking.

JACK
It's okay. Take a breath.

Holly injects him and blood spurts. She missed.

HOLLY
Oh God. I missed.

JACK
It's okay. Do it again.

HOLLY
Maybe you should.

JACK
No, it's important that you shoot me, Holly. Okay, take your time.

Holly takes his arm and then shoots again. This time: perfection.

JACK
Beautiful. Now you ready to release?

HOLLY
Wait. Our candles!

Holly jumps up and grabs the two candles.

HOLLY
(Referring to the candles) Holly and Jack.

She then turns off the light and sets the candles down in front of them. They sit in the glow of their candles.

HOLLY
It's more romantic this way.

JACK
You're my angel, Holly girl.

Jack kisses her. Then...

JACK

We will always be together.

...they lock eyes and release their tie-offs at the same moment. Peace.

Lights shift as the Gravedigger enters and points to a light...

GRAVEDIGGER

Rocket scientist. Like literally, for real. That was his occupation. Started on painkillers and then...It's just one body after another. Especially in the wintertime. They don't pay me enough for this. Overworked and underjoyed.

The Gravediggers turns to see...

... Anton and the Echo moving quickly across the stage. They stop in front of the Gravedigger. He stands between them and watches.

ANTON

I'm pretty sure this is where he lives.

ECHO

He's not going to let you stay with him. Let's go to Jesse's and--

ANTON

I just need a couch.

Anton knocks on Jack's door and the Gravedigger addresses us.

GRAVEDIGGER

(Referring to Anton) Then there's this genius. First he overdoses on his mom's birthday. Then she takes him back in. And he thanks her by shooting up in front of her. So finally...she gives him the boot. And yet still he lives to wander the streets. But now, here he is...so close I could touch him.

Anton POUNDS and POUNDS on Jack's door. No answer.

ECHO

Told you. You can't talk smack about a dude's girl and expect he's just going to open his door up to you.

GRAVEDIGGER

Well...I suppose they're ready for me now...

LET'S DANCE

...The Gravedigger opens the door, and walks inside. Although they don't see the Gravedigger, they do see the door open as if by magic.

ECHO

It's a Christmas miracle. Except, you know, without the Christmas part. And maybe with dope instead!

Anton hesitates a moment, but then unknowingly follows the Gravedigger inside...

...where we see Jack seated on the ground, holding Holly in his lap, cradling her like a baby.

Jack looks up at Anton...

JACK

I...I don't understand. Why didn't I OD too?

Anton looks at Jack, and then...

The Gravedigger walks to her candle and points...

GRAVEDIGGER

Holly...

The Gravedigger blows out her light, walks to Holly, and offers his hand to her. She takes it. He kisses her arm right on the injection site.

JACK

WHY THE HELL AM I ALIVE AND WHY IS HOLLY DEAD?

Gravedigger bows. Holly returns the bow. They dance.

Jack jumps up.

JACK

It doesn't make sense. Why ain't I dead??

GRAVEDIGGER

If Jack's looking for sense in all this, he's looking for the wrong thing. Some lights just extinguish before others.

Holly and the Gravedigger waltz around a clearly distraught Jack.

JACK
We're supposed to be together forever.

Jack tries to cut in on the dance, but fails to do so.

GRAVEDIGGER.
There are no supposed-to-be's in life. Not a one. Sorry, Jack.

The Gravedigger gives Holly a dip.

JACK
I'm not letting her die alone.

GRAVEDIGGER
I'll have to call in someone for him. As I explained earlier, he doesn't fall under my jurisdiction, even if it is related.

The Gravedigger and Holly waltz offstage.

Jack looks at a stunned Anton. Then Jack picks up one of the knitting needle and aims it at his neck...

JACK
Every bottom has a trap door, Anton.

Jack thrusts the needle toward his neck and the stage flashes to a red-out. Jack THUDS to the floor.

Anton rushes to his side, putting his hand to Jack's neck. Ribbons of Jack's blood stream through Anton's hands.

ANTON
Jack! Jack!! JACK!!!

The Echo extinguishes Jack's light.

ECHO
It's time, Anton.

ANTON
Jack...

ECHO

It's your time...

Anton covers Jack with the bloodied blanket and then pockets the syringe lying on the ground, as the red-out bleeds into darkness.

AN END TO THIS

In the darkness, POUNDING on the door. MORE POUNDING.

ECHO

Of course they changed the locks. Because no one cares about you. Except for me.

The doors bursts open -- kicked in by Anton -- and lights come back up to reveal Anton and the Echo back in Anton's parents' kitchen.

ANTON

Mom? Mom??

ECHO

No one home, buddy. It's a sign. Time to put us all out of our misery.

Anton grabs the Echo and shakes him.

ANTON

Shut up! Please just shut up and STOP THE NOISE!

ECHO

There's only one way to silence me forever, Anton.

ANTON

I should just kill you already.

ECHO

Exactly.

Anton looks at him.

ECHO

Now you understand. Go to your room. Grab the gun and put an end to this. We'll go deep into the woods so you don't have to do it here in your mom's kitchen. That way she won't have to relive her son's death every time she

eats breakfast in the morning. You can do her that favor, right? See? I'm not all bad. I care about your mom. Your dad. And you. I care most about you.

Anton takes the syringe from his pocket, admires it.

ECHO

I know you're tired of the dope. Even I am. Let's find peace. True peace.

Anton lays the syringe down on the table, next to the battered family picture. He runs his hand along the broken frame.

ECHO

Like you said, those people don't exist anymore.

ANTON

I made this. And now someone's trying to re-frame it. They're...

ECHO

They're replacing it with something that's not broken. Like you. Now come on, do one good thing in your life. One good thing. I know you can.

ANTON

I can?

ECHO

Do you really believe you're man enough to help your mother once your dad is gone?

Anton's uncertain. The Echo approaches him. And like a kind father...

ECHO

Jack has peace now. So does Holly. Don't you deserve it too? Doesn't your mother?

Silence. Then Anton rushes to his room. The Echo follows...

Anton removes the box from the hiding place and takes the gun.

ECHO

That's my boy. Now let's boogie.

Anton and the Echo go back into the kitchen and head toward the door, but stop when John and Mary enter.

John and Mary freeze. Mary drops her groceries.

MARY
Lord Jesus.

JOHN
What are you doing, son?

ECHO
He's taking care of business. Leave him alone.

JOHN
Give me the gun, Anton.

ECHO
Leave and don't say a word.

MARY
Anton, stop.

ANTON
Don't make me hurt you.

MARY
This is not the answer.

ECHO
Then what is?

MARY
We'll get you to a hospital.

ANTON
Fuck that. I can't take this.

MARY
Anton, I know you're in pain. And I know you think you can't handle this--

ECHO
He can't. Now leave him be.

MARY
But I believe in you.

ECHO

Aww, sweet, your mommy believes in you. Now let's get the fuck out of--

ANTON

SHUT UP!

MARY

I'm not trying to anger you.

ANTON

I'm not talking to you!! Damn it!

MARY

Then who are you talking to?

ECHO

ME! ME! THE ONLY ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS HIM.

MARY

I don't understand. Help me understand--

ANTON

I can't help you understand, okay? I can't--

John strikes Anton's hand with his cane. Knocking the gun to the ground. John quickly retrieves it.

ECHO

Motherfucker! Can't even kill yourself right!

Anton grabs the syringe from the table.

ANTON

That's okay. I'll just do this. Probably laced with Fentanyl anyway.

ECHO

Let us pray so. Help me, heroin, you're my only hope.

The Gravedigger enters. Takes his place solemnly, respectfully in the corner of the room, his shovel at the ready.

MARY

Anton, please. Just take a minute and--

John forces Anton down onto the table, jamming the gun against his throat.

MARY

--John, what are you doing?

JOHN

Do you want to die, Anton?

ECHO

Hell yeah, he does!

JOHN

Do you?

ANTON

Jack did. Holly did. Terrence did--

JOHN

I don't give a fuck about them. I'm asking you. Do you want to die?

MARY

John, get off him. He can't breathe.

JOHN

Do you want to die?

ECHO

Yes.

JOHN

Is that what this is all about? You don't care anymore?

ECHO

Yes.

JOHN

You've given up? Don't think you're capable? Don't think you deserve to live?

ECHO

Yes. Yes. And yes.

MARY

Get off him, John.

Mary tries to pull John off Anton, but John easily shoulders her away.

JOHN

You think I'm a pussy, right? That's what you said. And your mother, she thinks she calls all the shots. Well, I'm calling this one. One last shot before I die.

ECHO

You go, Dad.

JOHN

Because I'm not leaving her alone with you. Not unless you can convince me otherwise. Now do you want to die?

ECHO

Yes.

JOHN

Do you??

ECHO

Yes.

JOHN

Answer me God damn it. Do. You. Want. To. Die?

ECHO

YES YES YES YES YES YES!

JOHN

You have three seconds to answer me, boy. Three...

ECHO

Yes!

JOHN

Two...

MARY

ANSWER YOUR FATHER!

JOHN

One...

ECHO/ANTON

YES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!/NO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Long silence. John's surprised by this. So is Anton.

JOHN

What?

MARY

(Thrilled and relieved) He said no. He said no! Oh thank God he said no!

JOHN

No?

ANTON

No...

ECHO

WHY? What possible reason could you have to live?

John releases Anton. Anton rubs his throat where the gun pressed.

ANTON

But I don't know how to live. What kind of person doesn't know how to live?

ECHO

Someone who doesn't deserve to!

JOHN

That's okay, son. We all feel that way sometime. We ALL do.

MARY

Now give me the syringe.

ECHO

Don't listen to them, Anton. They don't understand. You can't live like normal people. Listen to me, Anton! Listen to ME!

ANTON

(Indicating the syringe.) I can't live without this.

JOHN

Yes, you can.

ANTON

I'm not worth it. I'm not worth your money. I'm not worth--

Mary SLAPS Anton hard across the face.

MARY

You are worth it. You're worth every tear. Every pain. Every bit of fight I have in me. And that you have in yourself. I'm not giving up on you. And you're not giving up on you. Do you understand?

ANTON

But what if I relapse?

ECHO

Ain't no ifs about it.

JOHN

You try again.

ANTON

And I relapse again?

JOHN

You try again! You keep trying until you're strong enough to help others. You'll reach that point, Anton. You will. This rotten disease takes a lot of people, but it ain't getting you. Not over my dead body.

ECHO

And that day will come too, Big Daddy.

JOHN

In fact, the insurance from my dead body might actually come in handy, should the rehab costs skyrocket out of control.

MARY

Jesus, John. Do you ever stop?

JOHN

I'll stop when I'm dea--

Suddenly, Anton bear hugs John.

ANTON

I don't want you to die, Dad.

John, taken by surprise, wraps his arms around Anton.

JOHN

Oh...hey...Right back at you, Ant. Right back at you.

John kisses the top of Anton's head and then Anton releases from the hug. Anton grips the syringe.

JOHN

I love you, kiddo.

MARY

Yeah, me too. Now hand over the G-D syringe before I lose my fucking mind. (*Pause.*) Sorry. I shouldn't use the fuck word...

JOHN

Do you really want help?

ECHO

He doesn't need help, *Dad*. He has me! You have me, Anton!

Anton hands the syringe to Mary.

MARY

That's my boy.

ECHO

THAT'S your boy?? THAT!!! You must be so proud.

MARY

I'm so proud of you.

Mary hugs and gives Anton a kiss. She smiles.

ANTON

Your smile...

MARY

Oh, yeah...I forgot you don't like when--

ANTON

No. It's...it's everything.

MARY

Oh, now the boy likes my smile.

Anton picks the picture up off the table.

ANTON

I can fix this. It won't be the same, but I can fix it.

MARY

Of course you can.

ECHO

Are you people kidding me?

JOHN

No matter what happens, Anton, we're here for you. You are not alone.

ANTON

I know, Dad.

JOHN

Come on, let's go.

John, Mary, and Anton head toward the exit. The Echo at his heels...

ECHO

I'm not done with you, Anton. You hear me?? I will never be done with you.

Anton turns to the Echo and says...

ANTON

I know that too. And that's okay.

Anton hugs the Echo.

ANTON

You'll be all right.

ECHO

(*Confused*) What the...What are you...I don't...what?

Anton turns back around and exits with his parents. The Echo goes to the Gravedigger who stands in the corner.

ECHO

I don't know what he's trying to pull. But I'm not done with him. Not by a longshot.

GRAVEDIGGER

I am...

The Echo, frustrated by the Gravedigger's response, exits in a huff after Anton.

ECHO

Anton! ANTON!!

The Gravediggers glances in the direction Anton and the Echo exited and then confides in us...

GRAVEDIGGER

...I hope. So the good news: Anton's light continues to shine. The bad news: my work continues.

He pauses a moment to take in the entire scene: the lights, the universe, the world, us. Then he takes firm grip of his shovel.

GRAVEDIGGER

Well, I guess it's best I *shovel* off now. Get it? What do you expect? I'm not a comedian. I told you: I am the gravedigger. Shine on, good people. Shine on...

The Gravedigger exits as lights dim, leaving us to nestle under the blanket of stars until they shine us into darkness.

END OF PLAY