

SV - 2.8

FARMHOUSE, INT, DAY

The sound of a page being turned. We hear PAIGE, reading aloud.

PAIGE:

(Narrating, reading aloud)

"Upon The Birthing Of Gods. Professor Elaine Trask, revised edition.

First Instruction. Faith may be practiced in solitude.

God-birthing, however, is a communal activity. Please do not kid yourself. You will need others."

Silence.

We hear the distant cry of a cockerel.

...and HAYWARD awakes with a gasp, sitting upright in bed.

HAYWARD:

Wh-

PAIGE is sitting cheerfully before him.

PAIGE:

Good morning!

Just, ah, to pre-empt your questions.

(As a list)

You're my hostage.

We're on the second floor of a farmhouse on the western road, about a two-hour drive out of Nesh.

The bathroom is just down the hall on the left.

I don't think you have a concussion, but as I am in no way a medical professional, I'd strongly suggest you take it easy this morning and let me know if you're feeling dizzy or nauseous.

(Brightly)

I made you eggs.

HAYWARD just stares at her.

HAYWARD:

(Bewildered)

I think you may have misunderstood something fundamental about hostage-taking.

PAIGE:

(With a cheerful shrug)

Hey, it's the way it was taught to me.

Besides, sorry as I am to break it to you - you aren't going anywhere.

She tosses a newspaper down onto HAYWARD's chest.

PAIGE:

Top of the page. Read it.

HAYWARD:

(Reading aloud, with growing dread)

Shocking new revelations have emerged from the savage fire at the Kensey House last week, in the Bitter Hills of Nesh, which has now been classed as an act of political terrorism.

The Conclave have this morning confirmed the name of the key suspect in the deaths of the Kensey family.

Previously thought to be an undocumented worker from across the southern border, it has now become clear that the suspected assassin is...

...James Hayward, age unknown, Investigating Officer of the Greater Glottage Police.

(With growing panic)

The Peninsula has formally denied any knowledge of Hayward's actions, claiming that Hayward left their service in disgrace some months before, but in light of the Peninsula's escalating hostilities against the Linger Straits, this can only be interpreted as...

...can only be interpreted...

He trails off.

HAYWARD sits there in shock.

HAYWARD:

(Beginning to panic)

That's not how it really happened. They're telling it all wrong, they've interpreted it wrong-

PAIGE:

(Quietly - this reflects her own story)

Yeah, no kidding.

Listen, I-

She breaks off. We hear the door bang open as DENNIS, PAIGE's father, enters.

DENNIS:

(Cheerily)

He's not naked, is he? I come bearing coffee!

PAIGE:

(Annoyed)

Dad!

DENNIS:

He's in my guest room! I've got a right to be here, don't I?

(To HAYWARD, cheerily)

Hey, there. I'm her dad, Dennis.

Don't listen to any of the stories she tells about me, I'm not so bad.

HAYWARD:

(Bewildered)

I don't know any stories about you.

DENNIS:

(Chuckling)

Ah, sure you don't.

(Cheerily)

Tell you what, though, I never even thought my eldest daughter would come back here - let alone bring someone to stay the night.

(To PAIGE)

Who was the last one?

PAIGE:
(Just about putting up with the question)
Helena.

DENNIS:
(Remembering)
Helena. She was a riot. What went wrong?

PAIGE:
(Annoyed)
Oh, I don't know, Dad. You did steal her wristwatch. That might have had something to do with it.

DENNIS:
Ah, I never stole anything from her. You put that in her head.
Probably just down the back of a sofa somewhere.
(To HAYWARD)
So, uh, what do you do?

PAIGE:
(Drily)
He's a cop.

DENNIS:
(Pretending not to be alarmed by this)
Oh, really.

A long, awkward silence.

DENNIS:
(Quickly)
I'll leave you to it, then.

The door shuts as he retreats.

PAIGE sighs.

PAIGE:
I thought he was long gone last night when I drove out here.

Imagine my surprise when I come through the door and the
fucker's right there in his dressing gown.

Feet up on the table. Chewing on a beet.

HAYWARD:
(Still completely bewildered)
He seems nice.

PAIGE:
(Drily)
Yes, he always does.
(Picking up the conversation again)
Look. I don't know why you were following me. I don't know what game of cops and robbers you thought you were playing at.

But it seems like you might have got things the wrong way around.

I haven't called the police on you. Nobody knows you're here except me and Dad, and I...I can deal with him.

Outside this place - our people are after you now. They're hunting for you.

And your people, well...it sounds like they've abandoned you.

HAYWARD stares in silence for a moment.

HAYWARD:
(Weakly)
I think I need to go for a walk.

FIELDS, EXT, DAY

We hear wind howling across a flat landscape.

The sound of feet crunching across dead earth.

PAIGE:
(Conversational)
Talk to Dad about this farm, and he'll try and tell you it was a steal. Fertile soil, good acre-age, and because it's on the cliffs, close to the polluted waters of the channel, the old owners couldn't find a buyer and they were desperate to sell.

But the honest truth is, he was tricked.

Reality doesn't stay still, when the winds blow from the south. Your people did that - they poisoned the air.

Every spring, **something** grows here, but it's a different harvest each time, and there's no guarantee it'll be edible. Flax, hemp, a sour kind of barley.

Once, we thought it was corn, but when you peeled the ears open, there was nothing but a staring, blinking eye inside each one.

We had to torch the whole field.

He spent all his money on farming equipment he doesn't know how to use, but he can't make any kind of profit from this place, because he never knows what the crop is going to be until he cuts into it.

Nothing sadder than a con-man who won't admit he's been conned.

This year, it's beets.

(With slight concern)

If he tries to feed you any beets, just say no.

HAYWARD gags.

PAIGE:

Hey - you okay?

HAYWARD falls to his knees - and retches.

HAYWARD:

Oh, fuck, oh, fuck, oh, fuck...

PAIGE:

Hey. Hey. Take it easy.

HAYWARD:

(Weakly)

I'm done, aren't I? There's no way forward from this.

They've written my final pages, they've inked the last full stop.

I'm done.

PAIGE hesitates. And then inspiration strikes her.

PAIGE:

When you were a kid, did you ever want to sit in a tractor?

FIELDS, EXT, DAY

PAIGE and HAYWARD are sitting in a tractor.

We listen to the wind blow for a moment.

HAYWARD:

How does it start?

PAIGE:

I don't think there's any petrol in it.

You could take the hand-brake off, but then we'd just roll down the hill and off the cliff.

HAYWARD:

(Grimly)

Good to know that's an option.

PAIGE:

You could blow the horn.

The tractor horn sounds.

And then again, more violently, parping over and over and over and over, then one final, long, drawn out paaaaaarp of despair.

Silence.

PAIGE:

That help?

HAYWARD stares forwards.

HAYWARD:

At times like this, you start to realise just how much of your life's been a performance.

My mother, growing up, she had this expression. You know, the side-of-the-mouth, silent worry that parents get.

PAIGE:

Sort of a 'hrrmmm.'

She makes a kind of Marge Simpson noise of passive-aggressive concern. Despite himself, HAYWARD chuckles.

HAYWARD:

Exactly!

A really visceral, silent 'hrrmmm.'

Looking at you out of the corner of her eye, never quite saying it straight, but you know what she's worried about.

She's worried that you're never going to get out of the tenements, because the only kids who get out are the ones with scholarships or qualifications or connections or opportunities, and James Hayward, he keep sitting on his ass, joking around, telling stories, and he's not going anywhere, he doesn't know anybody.

So you put on a show for her.

You tell her, "It's okay, Mom. I'm going to apply with the precinct. I'm going to become a cop."

Not something you think about, really. Just a way of shutting down that look, that worry.

But she takes the ball and runs with it, because the worry's been replaced by pride, and pride never lasts for long enough. It needs to be stoked to keep the worry away.

And before long the whole neighbourhood seems to know that you're going to be a cop, there's a kind of respectful detachment in the way they talk to you now, and that's okay. That takes the weight off you.

So you fill in the forms, they check your teeth, and the training begins.

You don't fit in with the other cadets, you get stared at, there are jokes at first, but that's fine, there's a way forward. You pretend you're like them.

And for the first time in your life, the world opens up to you.

Things become easy, for the first time ever.

And something clicks in you, like, 'oh, **this** is how you play. Whether it's an interrogation or it's a job interview, it's all the same. You just make yourself into the person they need you to see. And maybe some day you won't even be pretending any more.'

Thirteen years pass like this.

And you're still pretending, and you don't feel any closer to the real you.

But this fake, flimsy thing, this grotesque puppet you've been letting dangle out in front of you...it has a genuine weight to it now.

You've lied. You've hurt people. You've let others get away with far too much.

It was never meant to be anything real, this part you were playing, and now it's anchored to you and you don't know how to get loose from it.

And now they've taken my part away from me.

Which should come as a relief, because I don't want to pretend to be that person any more.

But the weight - the weight stays with you.

Pause.

PAIGE:
How would you like to pretend to be someone else?

HAYWARD:
Who?

PAIGE:

A traitor to all that stands.

A pioneer.

A revolutionary.

They sit there in silence.

The wind howls around them.

HAYWARD:

(Quietly)

Yeah.

I like the sound of him.

So what do we need to do?

FARM LIVING ROOM, INT, DAY

We hear the blare of a TV, playing some kind of live sports.

SPORTS ANNOUNCER:

(Excitedly)

-and it's Lucille Valentine to Jimmie Yamaguchi!

Jimmie Yamaguchi to Graham Rowat!

He shoots. He scores!

These are The Silt Verses-

A click as PAIGE turns the TV off.

The rustle of a page being turned.

HAYWARD:

(Narrating, reading aloud)

"Second Instruction. Ensure that you have a simple and communicable concept in mind.

Once you have settled on your god's concept, immediately take the time to cross-reference said concept against an up-to-date register of licenced faiths.

Remember that international law prohibits religious plagiarism, and your national authorities are legally bound to seek out and nullify any attempted breach of copyright.

N.B. If you are defining your god as a committee, ensure everyone is on the same page from the beginning. Schisms during the planning stages benefit no-one.

The squeak of a Sharpie on a whiteboard as PAIGE leads the brainstorming session.

PAIGE:

Okay, so. A simple, communicable concept-

We hear DENNIS clearing his throat.

PAIGE:

(Coldly)

You're really just going to sit there.

DENNIS:

It's my couch. Don't worry, I'm not going to say anything. Just reading the paper is all.

PAIGE:

(Trying to speak again)

So, uh-

DENNIS:

(To HAYWARD)

You follow sports, Hayward? They have korf, don't they, on your side of the border?

PAIGE:

Dad!

She takes a breath, and tries once more to present.

PAIGE:

Which god has been directly associated with the most civilian deaths since the last war?

Our Lady of Tomorrows. A god of hope. She first became popular amongst Neshite prisoners-of-war praying to be freed from captivity at a time when there was a high risk of being sold off by their government as a sacrificial levy.

Then. Licensed. Monetised.

Now her marks are worn by oil-riggers, lumberjacks, anyone doing dangerous work for bad pay. Take on extra work, accept a risky job request - and they give you another of the Lady's badges.

(Moving to another example)

The Impassable Lith. Now one of our more popular militarised deities, utilised in defence. **But** it was originally worshipped by strikers in transport unions, almost a century ago.

My point is - there's nothing we can make that can't be turned against us.

So.

If we're going to make a god that's genuinely new, something that actually helps ordinary people, and which can last in opposition to the contemporary pantheon, we need to make sure it's airtight. It can't be taken from us.

(A little impatiently)

I'm looking for ideas.

Silence.

PAIGE:

It can be anything at this stage. No blockers.

DENNIS:

Y-

PAIGE:

(Sharply)

That's 'no blockers' to Hayward, Dad. Not an invitation for you to start talking.

DENNIS rustles his newspaper.

DENNIS:

(Haughtily)

I was only going to say - there's a new tower god in Nesh.
Apartment block, in the canal district. It's got a great statue, wound
around the lightning rod.

The closer you live to the top, the more the god loves you, the
happier you'll be.

People pay a fortune for the penthouses on the highest floors.

If you want to make a god, you should do something like that. It's
clever.

PAIGE:

(Enraged)

No, it isn't!

HAYWARD:

(Interjecting, making a genuine effort)

The gods that always gave us the most trouble in law enforcement
were the localised ones.

God of a hill, god of a river.

They're the hardest to control, they're the hardest to understand if
you're on the outside of it.

If you want something that can't be taken from you - that can't be
repurposed or stolen - you want to be thinking local.

PAIGE:

(She's already thought of it)

But if it's a local god, it's limited. It's isolated. We won't be able to
accomplish much.

HAYWARD:

Well, um, what exactly do we want this god to accomplish? In a
word.

PAIGE thinks.

PAIGE:

Let's say there are people being sacrificed. Unfairly. Cruelly.

I want to make a god that can appear at that time, in those moments, to put a stop to that.

Something that shields, that protects, but only the powerless.

Only when they're under threat.

HAYWARD:

There's no real gods of justice, that's the thing - unless you're looking at something like the Smiling and Head-Shaking Child On The Perfectly Balanced Scales.

PAIGE:

We can't get too abstract, though. That's what the focus groups always tell us.

Get too abstract, and you lose people right away. 'Justice' can mean too many things to too many people.

HAYWARD:

(A little wearily)

Okay. So...it needs to be tangible.

Local. Universal. Incorruptible. All at the same time.

(Throwing up his hands)

I don't, uh...I mean, how did you do this in your marketing job?

PAIGE:

Well, the client would usually send in a brief. So we'd have the basis already.

(Doubt starting to creep in)

Honestly, the actual god-birthing would happen elsewhere, there was a sealed compound for that sort of thing. We just worked on the branding, the name, the associated products.

(Losing her momentum)

Ahm...

DENNIS snickers under his breath.

PAIGE:

(Losing her patience)

You sure you want to be here while we do this, Dad?

DENNIS:

(Obstinately)

Yup.

PAIGE:

(Sarcastically)

Because you're kind of aiding and abetting right now, aren't you?

You think you can afford that? Think you want to go back to jail again?

Their voices overlap as they begin to argue.

DENNIS:

I'm not going back to jail.

PAIGE:

(Overlapping)

Really? You want to take that chance-

DENNIS:

-I'm not going back to jail, because none of this talk is going anywhere.

You'll drop it. Just as soon as you realise there are genuine consequences to your actions.

PAIGE:

I'm not going to drop it-

DENNIS:

You'll drop it!

You were always impulsive. That's always been your problem.

(To HAYWARD)

Can you imagine the look on my face - I'm down at the bar, and someone nudges me and says, 'hey, Dennis, your eldest's been arrested across the border, because she quit a good job to go running off with some river-worshipping Pennie freaks. She made a fool of herself-'

PAIGE:

(Overlapping)

That's not how it happened.

That's not how it happened, Dad. That job was killing me.

DENNIS:

That job paid you well! You think the others are doing as well as you were? Your siblings, they're struggling.

I'm struggling.

And you gave up all of that stability you had on a whim, so now of course you're grasping about for something else to do-

PAIGE:

They were **bad people**.

DENNIS:

(Throwing up his hands)

And so what? You got paid by bad people. What else is there? If you can't stand it, go work for a community project, get paid less by good people, who take their money in turn from bad people. Feel relief at the distance you've built up from the way things work.

I was proud of you when you got that job.

HAYWARD:

(Quietly, unheard)

Could we-

PAIGE:

Of course you were. I was your favourite mark.

Month after month, you could siphon off exactly as much money as you were willing to guilt out of me.

DENNIS:

(To HAYWARD)

She treats me like I'm a monster.

I paid for her college, I helped pay for her transition. I took care of all my kids. Our house was never wanting for love and laughter.

And how does she repay me-

PAIGE:

(With absolute fucking fury)

Just listen to yourself!

When have you **ever** once done a good thing for someone if you couldn't hold it over them later on?

You give so you can take. You help so you can hurt.

You've never done a **single thing** for me that you didn't make me pay for.

DENNIS:

(Now equally furious)

Liar!

PAIGE:

Do you think I can't see you watching us?

How long's it going to be before the little stories start?

(Imitating DENNIS)

'Say, daughter, I met a fella down at the local bar and he seemed to think he'd spotted your Peninsulan pal stepping out of the outhouse by the roadside. Can you lend me a few bills so I can pay him off to keep his mouth shut?'

'Say, daughter, things have gotten worse, he wants more money out of me, but I can fix it, I just need a little more-'

DENNIS:

(Interrupting her)

Why'd you come back? If I'm so bad, if I'm so rotten?

PAIGE:

(Enraged)

Because I didn't know you were here!

HAYWARD:

(Playing the peacekeeper)

Okay, I think we need to take it easy, everyone. Just take it easy-

PAIGE:

Look me in the eyes, Dad. Look at the person who knows you best.

Look me in the eyes and tell me you haven't been trying to figure out how you can turn this situation to your advantage.

Love is just a meat-hook you can catch me on.

You rot everything you touch.

Silence. DENNIS is coldly furious now.

DENNIS:

Well, guess you've got the measure of me, daughter.

It's only natural, isn't it?

Gods and people. We all need to feed on something.

(Taunting her)

You know, I can't wait to see how your new god of the common people turns out different.

Have you thought about that?

Have you considered the, um, inevitability of that moment?

Do you imagine, when the first poor struggling sod is forced down its throat, he's going to be able to be telling himself,

'Oh, this is a new faith, this is a community-driven faith of the people, how wonderful, how different, I'm so lucky?'

A god must feed, daughter. There's no blessing without sacrifice, there's no harvest without soil and seed.

(With cruelty)

I can't **wait** to see the look on your face when this great new god of yours makes you pay.

He goes, slamming the door behind him.

Silence.

PAIGE glares after him, furious.

HAYWARD:

(Sympathetically)

...wanna go sit in the tractor with me and roll it off a cliff?

PAIGE takes a breath.

PAIGE:

(Exhausted and disheartened)

I want to walk, and walk, until I can no longer see this place on the horizon.

HAYWARD:

(Getting to his feet)

Better yet. I know a place.

FIELDS, EXT, DAY

The quiet crunch of PAIGE and HAYWARD's feet on the dry earth as they walk.

PAIGE:

Think I overreacted?

HAYWARD:

(Kindly)

Nobody ever really overreacts to a parent. You're just...yelling back through the decades. Making up for lost time.

They keep walking.

PAIGE:

He's right, though, isn't he? A god must feed; a god must be fed.

How do we make something outside of that?

HAYWARD:

I don't know. Maybe we can't.

PAIGE:

So then what's the way forward?

HAYWARD:

Maybe it's about making the small changes, you know?

Find a farm, find good people. Try not to kill each other and live without harm.

A god that sits on the windowsill, and it feeds on mice or worms or something smaller yet.

PAIGE:
That doesn't satisfy. It isn't enough.

HAYWARD:
No. It never is.

They stop walking.

HAYWARD's spotted something - a half-buried concrete shrine.

He brushes the ivy away from it.

HAYWARD:
Look at this.
(Reading aloud)
'Beneath your feet lies a defensive bunker manned by the Tementry Isle First Fusiliers. They gave their lives in service of god and nation. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten.'

Looks pretty damn forgotten.

PAIGE:
Yeah, your people landed here in the last war.

There's a bunch of these up and down the coast. They just sealed up the bodies in the bunkers, used the concrete to build more shrines.

She stares out over the cliffs.

PAIGE:
(With unhappy foreboding)
It's going to happen again. Everyone keeps saying it like it's a foregone conclusion.

We're going to kill each other again. I don't even understand what it's really about.

HAYWARD:
They'll have to stack graves over the graves.

Everything we've built, we've built on bodies.

I'm going to tidy this up, clear the weeds back a bit.

PAIGE stares down at the monument. Something is dawning on her.

HAYWARD:

(Snapping back the weeds)

Maybe your dad's right, we should go big. Figure out how to monetise this.

A gardener's god, that'd be something. Keep the lawns neat and tidy. The rich folks in Glottage, they'd go for something like that.

(Pitching names)

Greenfingers. The Verge-Cutter Supreme.

PAIGE:

(Faintly)

Wait. Hayward, wait.

Is that how we do it?

HAYWARD:

(Confused)

No, I don't think so.

PAIGE:

What if our god doesn't need to feed, because it's taking only what's already been offered?

A god of victims and of martyrs.

A god of...mass graves, and wronged scapegoats and voiceless sorrow.

HAYWARD:

(Not understanding)

I don't- I don't understand.

PAIGE:

Our god wouldn't come when it's called by the safe or the stable.

They'd have no way of speaking to it.

It'd come only for those who whisper to it in their final moments of terror and sorrow before the sacrificial knife descends.

Only for those who place the flowers over a tombstone in the depths of their grief, willing others to be spared the same fate.

HAYWARD begins to understand.

HAYWARD:

We'd be stealing the sacrifices right out of their mouths.

They'd try and feed their gods - and they'd end up feeding ours instead.

PAIGE:

(With growing excitement)

In every city and every village, from nation to nation, there's a corner where some weeping parent lays flowers for an innocent soul.

It's specific. Every place, every hurt, every life that's taken, carries its own weight.

But it's universal.

You said it, Hayward. Everything that's built is built on bodies.

We can use that against them.

HAYWARD:

Yes. Yes. I-

He hesitates. Frowning.

HAYWARD:

...but how has nobody thought of that before?

FARMHOUSE, INT, DAY

We hear the turn of a page.

PAIGE:

(Reading aloud)

“Third Instruction. Know your history.

Even if your chosen concept does **not** infringe upon the intellectual property of other licenced faiths, it is absolutely inevitable that someone has had exactly the same notion before you.

You’re **not** an unprecedented genius, stupid.

Search the archives for abandoned or stray faiths.

If you can find any record of why a faith was abandoned, make a note of this information for future reference, as it may impact your licencing, claim.

Also make a note of any known prayer-marks. These will be your first retraced steps towards building a shared language, a way to speak and a way to be heard.”

The sound of pages being turned.

HAYWARD:

(Excitedly finding something)

Okay, this one sounds a little like what we’re looking for.

Banned in .76 Previous.

‘May Its Spear Impale Your Father Sufficiently To Fuck Your Mother’ - whew.

A god of spite, used in the Immemorial War by dying soldiers on both sides.

(Reading aloud)

“The prayer-marks of ‘May Its Spear’ were typically erratic and ideographic, designed to be used by shaking fingers dipped in their own blood.”

PAIGE:

Bookmark it!

I’ve got one here - the Anointed Mother of Wounds.

Her followers would often break into hospital wards and-

(Reading on)

Oh. No. You know what, I can completely see why she's banned, that sounds disgusting.

Their voices fade out.

MONUMENT, EXT, DAY

A page turns.

The winds howl.

PAIGE slowly drags a piece of wood in a circle through the dirt - presumably drawing a prayer mark across the ground.

HAYWARD:

(Reading aloud)

"Fourth Instruction. Test your communication method.

Establish a connection.

You should begin this process by deciding on a conduit, or conduits; some manner of hierophant, seeker, prophet, who can relate particularly strongly to the concept at hand.

If you are not the conduit in question, share the following steps with your chosen candidate, and then retreat to a safe distance.

You will need: first, a variety of psychotropic smokes and commercial-grade teas (see the next chapter for a suggested list to get you started).

Second, some limited but meaningful form of sacrifice (a god must feed, and until you've established the exact ritual of sacrifice, blood and life remain the most effective general standbys).

Third. Patience. A great deal of it."

PAIGE, DENNIS and HAYWARD are standing in front of the monument.

DENNIS:

(Suddenly a little unnerved)

So wait, did I hear that right? A, uh, sacrifice.

PAIGE draws a knife.

PAIGE:

(Deadpan)

Well, why do you think I let you come out here with us, Dad?

DENNIS:

(Startled)

You wouldn't-

You're joking. Aren't you?

PAIGE chuckles at him.

PAIGE:

(Chuckling)

Limited but meaningful, was it?

We hear her gasp as she cuts her palm. We hear the blood dribbling down as she walks, spreading it across the monument.

She stops, bandaging her hand.

PAIGE:

All right, what do we start with?

HAYWARD:

The book says jimsonweed tea's a good starting point.

Hallucinations, visions. Side effects don't last beyond a couple of sleeps.

PAIGE:

Okay. We sit in a circle. We drink the tea.

And then what?

MONUMENT, EXT, NIGHT

Rainfall.

PAIGE:

(Reading aloud)

"Fifth Instruction.

Focus on your god, to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Devote mind and body to drawing it forth.

Let your mind open up new pathways through the sullen waters of reality.

Obsession is the winding road that will lead you to your god.

Again, you will need resilience-"

We hear the sound of HAYWARD retching again.

PAIGE gasping unhappily as she cuts herself again, letting it bleed-

MONUMENT, EXT, DAY

The sound of the cockerel. Another day has passed.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

"...and still more patience..."

We hear DENNIS' voice, faintly, as if carried on the wind.

DENNIS:

(Getting to his feet, trying to leave)

No! I'm done! I'm done, it's a waste of time-

PAIGE:

Dad, you're high! Don't try to stand up-

A cry of pain as DENNIS falls over.

MONUMENT, EXT, DAY

The sound of the cockerel.

HAYWARD:

(Reading aloud)

“Ninety-one percent of god-birthing efforts fall at this first hurdle. If you have access to a substantial labour force, this author advises you to make use of them and speed the process up.

Dramatically increase the psychotropic dosage, deal with any casualties as necessary, and arrive at your destination sooner.

Whatever method you choose, the crucial thing is to ensure that your chosen conduit does not lose focus.”

MONUMENT, EXT, NIGHT

Cicadas. Evening.

DENNIS, PAIGE and HAYWARD are all very high. They're singing together.

DENNIS, PAIGE and HAYWARD
(*To the tune of 'Cape Cod Girls'*)
Oh, the lawful gods won't take my calls,
Pray away, pray away-
So I'll find someone else to save my soul,
And I'll pray to the Damned Hysteriaaaa-

MONUMENT, EXT, NIGHT

The sound of a cockerel.

It's raining. We hear PAIGE once again dragging a length of wood, drawing the marks.

She drops the wood.

Falls to her knees, exhausted.

We can hear PAIGE's heavy, ragged breathing.

PAIGE:
(*Reading aloud*)
“You'll know when you've arrived. It'll feel as if a piece has fallen into place. A satisfaction so absolute that it terrifies you.

Like the world was incomplete until now.”

We feel ourselves lurching forward into...somewhere else.

MEMORIES

An unnatural ambient noise. A rumbling, from someone below us.

DENNIS, surprisingly, speaks first.

He's heartfelt. Saying the things he'd never say aloud.

DENNIS:

(Narrating, hoarsely and with feeling)

His name is Walter, although in here he goes by something else.

He tells you this in confidence, while the two of you chop potatoes in the prison kitchen, because he knows that Walter is a soft name. Tall as he is, fearsome as he is, he's desperate not to be seen as soft.

He knows how simple it is, to become a victim.

It's meant to be a gesture of trust. You understand that; it's something fragile, something meaningful.

And yet you make him pay for it, four days later. You don't mean to. His name is just currency, like anything else in here. In your place, he might have done the same.

It's an opportunity to make others laugh, to be the one who makes people laugh, to tell them that the great muscled brute is named, of all things...Walter.

He doesn't talk to you after that. Over-sensitive, you tell yourself.

Months later, you get word that they're building a new extension to the south of the prison compound.

There'll need to be sacrifices, buried beneath the concrete - that's only natural.

You survive, as you always have, as the canniest and wealthiest in this place always do - and you make damn certain that when the lots are drawn, your well-rewarded friend amongst the wardens has taken your name out.

It comes as a shock when they call Walter's name instead.

As he's beaten, tazed, dragged from the canteen, his eyes bulging, screaming his pleas to whatever god he worshipped before he ended up in this place - the prisoners rise to their feet in scoffing relief and they use his name as a missile, as they toss their figgie puddings after him.

"Goodbye, Walter. So long, Walter! Build it well, Walter."

Like he was foolish, like he'd made a fatal misstep, to have given away even that small part of his true self.

You don't see him again, but you walk the cracked concrete of the new compound in the months to come, and it takes an effort - to forget, to stop remembering, that Walter is down there under your feet.

PAIGE picks up the narration.

PAIGE:
Her name is Gwyneth.

To you, she's Mom.

She dies out of sight. Stepping off the pavement, at a busy intersection. Nobody seems to quite want to say that she made a mistake, but nobody is blamed for it either.

He doesn't take you back to the grave after the funeral, because he's busy and stressed enough as it is, but one morning you're in the heart of Nesh, holding his hand at a red light and he looks up with a strange expression and says,

"Oh. This was the place where it happened."

And so in the years to come, this place becomes her grave to you, it becomes the memory of her.

She loved white crocus flowers.

And every year, you buy a bouquet of gorgeous white crocus down on the concrete at the busy intersection, propping them up against the lights so they don't get trodden on or disturbed.

Feet trample over them all the same. People kick. Often her grave finds its way into the road.

And whatever's left rots down into the concrete.

HAYWARD:

(Remembering)

They all have names, the children who go missing from the estate. You don't remember exactly what they were.

But your kickball game, a tournament of champions floodlit by the tenement windows all around, keeps on getting smaller.

You pass to one of your fellow players, the short boy with dark hair and big round glasses, and one night he's no longer there.

The ball goes stray, trailing to a halt on the other side of the courtyard.

You run to fetch it.

Your kickball game keeps getting smaller, and nobody is talking about it.

There's a girl with braided hair who watches every evening from the outskirts, and is always too shy or too sullen to come and join the game, and then one night she's gone as well.

Your kickball game keeps getting smaller, and there are nights when nobody shows up at all - and you wait for as long as you can stand before dashing home in a desperate frantic as if something terrible is chasing you down the long concrete stairwells.

Your mother says she doesn't want you staying out after dark any more.

She buys a television, to distract you and keep you entertained during the evenings.

And soon new people move into the apartments that have been abandoned, and you forget about the children who went missing, and you get used to your new routine.

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

And the words will rise upon your lips-

ALL:

My god, let this not be in vain-

PAIGE:

(Narrating)

The marks will flow from your fingers, readily conjured, in the dirt and in the wet grass-

Because you're not giving birth to anything.

You're re-discovering something that was already dormant in the world. Already buried in you, beneath flesh and pumping organs, in the aching bones of you.

And as the three of you drool and mutter in the dirt before the cracked soldiers' monument, your eyes are white and wide and trembling with tears.

Your god is rising in your throats and in your lungs as you croak maddened hosannas, together.

A bright new colour you can finally see.

An old song you've always known, even if you kept on forgetting it.

And the white crocus splits the trembling concrete like lightning splits the sky...

...as something new...

...as something new begins.

We hear the cracking of concrete, a rising rumble from below...

...and something like a rising breath.

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END OF EPISODE.