

CHILDREN OF THE HOUSE

By Lain K.

ACT 1

Scene 1- Awake

In the center of the stage there's a bed, the foot facing the audience. There's a bedside table to the right of the bed and a chair in the back right corner. There's a chest to the left. There's a door to the right, the only door going on or out of the room.

 [Boyd Rice - Father's Day](#)

The lights are dim and blue. Dahlia stumbles in from stage left wearing a blindfold, aimlessly dragging her feet along as if she was being pulled at the temple by a string. She walks in curved lines and loose circles before bumping into the bed. She pulls the blindfold off of her face, letting it slip under the bed. She feels her face, but still cannot see. She falls forward into the bed, pulling the curtains over herself as if it were muscle memory.

 Silence

The lights brighten. Dahlia is soundly asleep in bed. Parker opens the door, walking forward into the room, his eyes to the ground. Dahlia opens her eyes and sits up in bed, stares at Parker. Parker stops, noticing her for the first time, and stands up straight, stiff as a board. The two stare at each other for a moment.

Parker: Um. Hi. *He stands awkwardly for another moment. He seems to remember himself all at once. Uh- wait right here. He quickly turns and walks out of the room, swinging the door nearly shut.*

Dahlia just looks at the door for a moment before scanning the room. She's clearly confused, and afraid. She pulls the covers tight around herself as she sits up against the backboard of the bed. After a moment has passed, Lawrence storms into the room, swinging the door wide open before shutting it tightly behind him. He's holding a large book under his arm. He pulls the chair out of the corner and sits down in it beside the bed, and starts meticulously leafing through the book. Dahlia eyes the book.

Dahlia: Where am I?

Lawrence: *Without looking up.* You're in the house. *He settles on a page, and runs his finger down to the bottom of a list on the page. He looks up to Dahlia with a smile.* Dahlia. *He shuts the book and lays it in his lap.* Welcome home.

Dahlia: Dahlia?

Lawrence: That's your name.

Dahlia looks away from Lawrence with a worried gaze and puts a hand on her forehead, seeming deep in thought.

Dahlia: It is?

Lawrence: *He rests his hand on the book.* It was picked out just for you.

Dahlia: By who?

Lawrence: Well by the housekeepers of course.

Dahlia is getting more anxious by the moment, curling up in a tighter ball.

Dahlia: *Exasperated.* Where am I?

Lawrence: I've already told you. We're in the house. *Lawrence pulls the chair closer to the bed, becoming softer.* It's perfectly safe.

Dahlia: But... where is this? *She sits up straighter in bed, pushing the sheets off. She's scanning the room once again.* How far from home am I?

Lawrence: You don't need to worry about that anymore. You have friends here. Family.

Dahlia swallows.

Dahlia: I do?

There's a knock at the door. Lawrence glances over his shoulder before standing and hesitantly opening the door, Grace pushes it open and walks straight in, stopping at the side of the bed.

Grace: It really is true! *She begins walking around to the left side of the bed.* A new child! *She puts her hands on her hips.* What's your name?

Dahlia doesn't answer.

Lawrence: It's Dahlia.

Grace: Hii Dahlia!

Lawrence: And Dahlia, this is Grace. *Gesturing to Grace.*

Dahlia looks to Grace and then back to Lawrence.

Lawrence: Oh- and I'm Lawrence.

Grace: If you ever need anything, just ask Lawrence.

Lawrence: That's right.

Maximoe pokes his head through the door

Maximoe: Can I see her? What's her name?

Lawrence: *Waving Maximoe away* Not now, we don't want to overwhelm her.

Grace: Don't be such a pest Maximoe!

Lawrence: *To Grace* Don't bother. *To Maximoe* Could you run along and get Mei?

Maximoe: *Shooting a look in at Dahlia.* Why does Mei get to see her?

Lawrence: It's for the records, tell her to bring the book along.

Maximoe: *Disgruntled.* Fine.

Maximoe walks off. Lawrence shuts the door.

Lawrence: *To Dahlia.* How are you feeling?

Dahlia: I'm not sure.

Grace: Oh- do you want a mirror?

Dahlia: Hm?

Grace begins fishing around in the chest. Lawrence watches with curiosity.

Grace: It can help to know what you look like. *A moment passes as Grace looks here and there in the chest. She pulls out a hand mirror with a large crack in it. Annoyed.* Ugh, Parker! Of course he broke his mirror. *Grace holds the mirror out to Dahlia* Here, you- *Dahlia cuts her off.*

Dahlia: *Sitting up.* This is someone else's room?

Grace: Yeah, sorry you had to be born in such a... *Looking from corner to corner, gesturing with the mirror as she speaks.* drab room like Parker's.

Dahlia: Oh, *Looking to Lawrence.* Should we be here?

Lawrence: It's no rush, I don't want to shake you out of bed so soon.

Dahlia: *Nervously* Mm. *To Grace* Um- you said-

There's a knock at the door. Lawrence opens it a crack.

Lawrence: *Flatly* Oh, Mei. Please, come in. *He opens the door. Grace sets the mirror down on top of the chest.*

Mei walks into the room with a large book similar to Lawrence's and stands stage left of Lawrence, stage right of the bed. Lawrence sits back down in the chair. Mei looks coldly at Dahlia for a moment before looking down at the book.

Mei: *To Dahlia* Your name is?

Dahlia looks at Lawrence, he just gives her a small nod. Dahlia looks back to Mei.

Dahlia: Dahlia.

Mei begins writing in the book.

Mei: Right. You look to be... *Looking at Dahlia.* a teenager. I'd guess six or seven-teen. Born in the basement, Parker's room, on the eighty-third day of the twenty-fifth year. Born, erm, *Looking up from the book.* a day after..

Lawrence gives Mei a stern look. Dahlia notices the interaction.

Mei: Right. *Continues writing.* That'll be all Dahlia.

Dahlia: *Looking to Grace, and then to Mei.* I'm sorry, you said 'born'?

Mei looks up at Dahlia but says nothing.

Lawrence: That's right.

Dahlia: Oh...

Lawrence: *Waving Mei toward the door.* Thank you Mei, that'll be all.

Mei: O- okay.

Mei gives Dahlia a long stare. She bookmarks the page and shuts the book. She awkwardly turns toward the door, giving Lawrence a look before slipping out of the room and shutting the door behind her. Neither Grace nor Lawrence acknowledge Mei's strange behavior.

The three are silent for a moment. Grace stands, wringing her hands, looking around. Lawrence is leaning back in his chair idly looking at the ceiling. Dahlia is still looking at the door Mei just shut. Lawrence lets out a sigh and looks back to Dahlia.

Lawrence: Are you ready to get up Dahlia? Would you like to rest a little longer?

Dahlia looks at Lawrence and thinks for a moment.

Dahlia: Could I please have a moment to myself?

Lawrence purses his lips, and nods, standing from his chair.

Lawrence: Of course.

Grace begins walking around the foot of the bed toward the door. She stands with her hands folded, looking at Dahlia.

Lawrence: I'll be nearby. Go up the first flight of stairs you see, I'll escort you to the mess hall whenever you're ready. Okay?

Dahlia nods.

Lawrence opens the door, letting Grace through. Lawrence turns to leave, but stops in the doorway, looking back at Dahlia.

Lawrence: *To Dahlia.* I understand you're a little confused right now, but... It'll all make sense in time. Okay? We'll be waiting for you.

Lawrence walks out of the room, shutting the door behind him. Dahlia sits perfectly still for a moment, seeming almost afraid of being heard, perhaps they haven't really left. After a moment's passed, she pushes the sheets off and sits on the left edge of the bed. She gingerly picks up the cracked mirror up off the chest and holds it up in front of her face. She stares into it.

Scene 2- Induction

In the center of the stage stands a rectangular table, longer left to right than it is front to back relative to the audience. There's a door in the back of the room behind the table, facing the audience. There's a door to the left at an angle to the audience. A chair sits up against the back wall on the right side of the room.

Lucy sits along the back of the table on the right end. Parker's sitting along the front side of the table, chair pulled out, sitting at a quarter-turn angle from the audience, his chair facing stage-leftwards.

Parker is leaning back, resting his right arm over the back of his chair.

Maximoe enters the room from the left door:

Lucy: *To Maximoe* Did you get to see them? Was it a boy or a girl? Parker won't tell me anything!

Maximoe stands at the left end of the table.

Maximoe: It's a girl.

Lucy: *Celebratory* Yes!

Maximoe: And no- they're not letting me see anything! I tried to go say hi but Grace wouldn't let me in.

Lucy laughs.

Lucy: Cry to Lawrence about it.

Maximoe sticks his chin out at Lucy as she laughs.

Maximoe: Whatever.

He walks to the back door:

Maximoe: I gotta go get Mei.

He walks through the door, shutting it behind him. Lucy immediately looks bored as soon as he's out of the room. Her head resting in her hands, her eyes drift over to Parker.

Lucy: Well you're moodier than usual. What's a matter? You wanted another boy?

Parker: It's just strange, isn't it?

Lucy turns and listens intently.

Parker: About Fay.

Lucy: Fay?

Parker: Yeah. One girl disappears, another appears the next day.

Lucy does a small scoff.

Lucy: It's not that serious Parker, I'm sure she's just off sulking somewhere.

Parker suddenly looks over to Lucy, making eye contact for the first time in the conversation.

Parker: You really think so Lucy?

Lucy: Uh, yeah?

Parker: You don't think there's anything strange about it?

Lucy: Housekeepers don't seem to think so.

Parker looks away and leans back in his chair again, letting out a sigh.

Parker: Right.

A moment goes by.

Parker: It's not like children just appear every other day, I mean, it's been years.

Mei comes in through the backdoor, followed by Maximoe. Mei begins walking in a straight line to the door on the left.

Lucy: And that means it must have something to do with Fay?

Mei stops and looks over her shoulder for a moment. Maximoe settles into the chair on the backside of the table, near the left edge.

Parker: Whatever. Greater coincidences have happened, I'm sure.

Mei turns and walks through the left door, shutting it behind her.

Maximoe: What about Fay?

Lucy: Parker's just being paranoid, as usual.

Parker: Mhm.

Lucy: The important thing is, we got a new child!

Parker yawns.

Parker: She just had to show up in my room.

Lucy: Why weren't you sleeping in your own bed?

Parker: Fell asleep in the basement.

Lucy chuckles. Maximoe shakes his head.

Maximoe: I can't imagine sleeping down there, that place gives me the creeps.

Parker: Jane does it every night.

Maximoe: That girl gives me the creeps too.

Lucy: You can say that again.

The three sit in silence for a moment. Lucy and Maximoe's eyes seem passively drawn to the left door, as if waiting for Dahlia to burst in at any moment.

Lucy: I wonder what she'll be like.

Maximoe: I hope she's not too big.

Lucy: Why?

Maximoe: Ilan hardly has anyone to play with.

Lucy: How sweet of you.

Maximoe: Well, it can get pretty exhausting to be his only playmate.

Parker: Haven't been many kids around in a long time.

Mei enters the room from the left door

Lucy: What'd you see?

Mei: She's just a girl.

Maximoe: How big?

Mei: Looks about 16.

Maximoe: Dammit!

Mei begins making her way to the back door, walking slowly and aimlessly as if deeply distracted.

Lucy: Hey- Hey! Have a seat, we should all be here to greet her.

Mei looks at Lucy for a moment before hesitantly pulling a chair out and sitting along the back of the table, right-of-center just to the left of Lucy.

Parker: So we're trying to overwhelm her?

Mei: Yes, maybe it would be better if I-

Lucy: Non-sense, don't let Parker's moodiness get to you too! We gotta show, uh, wait! *To Mei* What's her name?

Mei: Dahlia.

Lucy: Dahlia... I like that! We gotta show Dahlia some hospitality!

Maximoe: Yeah, it'll be like a party!

Grace enters the room from the left door and walks to the chair on the right end of the table by Lucy, walking along the front side of the room.

Lucy: Hey- just in time for the party!

Parker: Can I have my room back yet?

Grace: Nope!

She sits in the chair, sitting cross-legged, her hands folded in her lap.

Lucy: Have some patience, why don't you?

Parker doesn't respond, he just leans back, looking off into the upper left corner of the room.

Lucy: So we're just about all here, *To Grace* where's Lawrence?

Grace: Stalking around outside Parker's room to make sure the new girl doesn't get lost.

Lucy: Cute.

Maximoe: *To Grace* Why'd you get to go see her?

Grace: I dunno. Maybe Lawrence just likes me the most.

Maximoe: Lawrence likes me!

Lucy: Apparently not enough.

Maximoe: What about Mei?

Mei: I was just recording Dahlia's arrival.

Maximoe: Hmph.

Parker: It's not a competition.

Grace: *Facetiously* Sure it is.

Lucy: If it is, Fay's winning.

Maximoe: Yeah.

Parker: Maybe at one point she was.

Grace: Have you heard from her recently?

Parker shakes his head.

Lucy: He thinks she's disappeared.

Grace: Hm.

Mei stares down at the table.

Maximoe: Crap. I had to fill in for her chores yesterday, she'd better turn up.

Grace: I'll ask Lawrence about it.

Parker: I wouldn't do that.

Lucy: Why not?

Parker: I just wouldn't.

Mei looks away. Grace looks down quietly. Lucy and Maximoe look at Parker waiting for clarification. Parker stares off into the distance. A quiet moment goes by.

Mei: Maybe not.

Parker looks over at Mei before looking away again.

Lucy: *Looking back and forth between Parker and Mei. Sarcastic.* Wow, no need to be so elucidating.

Parker is annoyed. A quiet moment goes by.

Lawrence enters the room from the left door. The room is silent. Dahlia hesitantly walks in behind him.

Lucy: Hi Dahlia!

Parker shoots Lucy a look.

Dahlia: *Recoiling* Uh. *Weakly lifting one hand to wave hello* Hi.

Lawrence: Everyone, Dahlia. *Gesturing to Dahlia.*

Lawrence begins gesturing to each person in the room.

Lawrence: Maximoe.

Maximoe: Hey.

Lawrence: Lucy.

Lucy: Hi!

Lawrence: Parker

Parker gives Dahlia a smile and a nod.

Dahlia: Oh! I saw you before. *Meekly* I was in your room.

Parker: *Matter-of-factly* Not your fault.

Dahlia: Mm.

Lawrence: ...And you've already met Mei and Grace.

Mei looks up and gives Dahlia a small smile. Grace puts a hand up and wiggles her fingers, waving hi.

Grace: Hi again!

Lawrence shuts the Left door.

Lawrence: *To Dahlia* You can sit. *Pulling out the chair on the left end of the table.*

Dahlia sits down. Lawrence swiftly crosses the room, going along the back-side of the table. In one motion he sits down in the stage-right chair against the back wall and crosses his legs. He averts his eyes.

Lucy: So, *Leaning forward* how do you feel, Dahlia?

Dahlia's looking around the room.

Dahlia: Okay.

Dahlia looks from Lucy to Lawrence, but Lawrence is looking away, his eyes to the ground.

Dahlia: I'm confused.

Maximoe: Well what are you confused about?

Parker blows air out his nose.

Maximoe: We'll get you up to speed.

Lucy: Yeah! What do you wanna know?

Dahlia pauses to think.

Dahlia: I was just born?

Grace: Mhmm.

Lawrence runs his eyes across the ground.

Dahlia: Okay. What about all of you?

Lucy: The same.

Maximoe holds up four fingers and gives Dahlia a gleeful look.

Maximoe: I was born over four years ago!

Grace gives Maximoe a haughty look and points a thumb to herself.

Grace: Six.

Lucy looks away bashfully.

Maximoe: Would you step off? Two years's like hardly anything! You're not any older than Mei, let alone Parker.

Dahlia shoots a curious look at Mei, and then at Parker.

Grace: Well I'm not the one bragging to the new girl.

Dahlia: What about Lawrence?

Everyone, even Parker, turns and looks at Dahlia.

Lucy: Eighteen years.

Lawrence: Yes.

Dahlia: Oh.

Lawrence: The housekeepers are even older.

Lucy: *To Lawrence.* A little bit longer and you'll be a housekeeper too, right?

Lawrence pauses.

Lawrence: Not for a long time.

Parker chuckles.

Parker: Some day, yeah Lawrence?

Lawrence side-eyes Parker. Mei looks down at the table.

Mei: The housekeepers are the oldest among us.

Dahlia: Everyone lives in the house?

Lawrence: Yes. The house is ours.

Dahlia: So, everyone's born here, and everyone lives here.

Grace: Mhmm.

Lucy: Right.

Dahlia: How do you get out?

Parker looks Dahlia in the eye. Mei's eyes widen. She clears her throat.

Lucy: *To Dahlia.* What do you mean?

Lucy looks around the table, looking for validation.

Lucy: There's nowhere else to go.

Parker scoots his chair a little away from the table, sitting up straight.

Parker: *Looking from Lucy to Lawrence.* What's that s'posed to mean?

Lawrence: *To Dahlia.* You wouldn't want to. This is the safest place for us.

Dahlia: Mm.

Dahlia seems a little uncomfortable, dissatisfied. Parker suddenly rises to his feet.

Parker: I've had enough. *He gives Dahlia a pointed look.* I'll be in the basement.

Parker walks across the room to the stage-left door and exits.

Grace: There he goes.

Maximoe: I was surprised he hung around so long.

Lucy: He's so annoying, right Dahlia?

Dahlia: *Flatly* Yeah.

Lucy: Anyway...

A moment passes.

Lawrence: *To Dahlia.* We'll need to find you a room.

Grace: Ooh! Can I give her a tour? What do you think, Dahlia?

Dahlia: Uh, sure.

Lawrence: Aren't you on dusting duty today?

Grace: Awww.

Lawrence: *To Dahlia.* Mei can show you around.

Mei: Sure.

Maximoe: *To Lawrence.* Speaking of chores, have you seen Fay today? *He crosses his arms.* I'm not filling in for her two days in a row.

Lawrence: Fay is- away right now. We haven't heard from her yet. She's not coming out.

Dahlia: Who?

Lucy: Fay, she's been missing since yesterday morning.

Dahlia: Missing?

Lucy: Well, people sneak off every now and then. There are stretches where we don't hear from Jane for weeks.

Maximoe: Yeah but even then we knew where Jane was. Nobody knows where Fay is.

Lawrence: It's no problem. The housekeepers are looking into it. They believe she's hiding.

Maximoe: I just don't see why I have to make up for the work she's skipping out on.

Lawrence: Tell Ilan to cover it.

Maximoe: Yes!

Maximoe stands up and heads for the back door. He pushes it open before turning around.

Maximoe: Nice meetin' ya Dahlia.

Dahlia: Oh- you too.

Maximoe exits, swinging the door shut behind him.

Mei: *To Lawrence.* You think now'd be a good time for that tour?

Lawrence stands.

Lawrence: Yes, I'll accompany you.

Grace: Aw the room's breaking up? Guess I have some dusting to do. *Suddenly, to Lucy.* Keep me company?

Lucy stands.

Lucy: Of course. You don't have the attention to **just** dust.

Grace stands and begins following Lucy through the back door. Mei steps stage-left out of the way.

Grace: Stawwp!

Lucy giggles as Grace chases her out through the door.

Lawrence: Come on Dahlia.

Dahlia stands and follows Lawrence and Mei as they walk through the back door. The door is shut.

Scene 3- Tour Guides

A door stands stage-left, angled toward the audience. A bed sits stage-right, its foot facing the audience. A bedside table stands stage-right of the bed. A swivel chair with a deep seat sits in the stage-left corner.

Lawrence opens the door, holding it open for Mei, who leads Dahlia into the room. Lawrence stands by the door.

Mei: How about this one?

Dahlia: Ooh.

Dahlia trails into the room, standing in the center and looking around.

Dahlia: It's cozy.

Lawrence: You won't find many free rooms in the west wing that are this nice. Grace and Lucy's rooms are both nearby. They can answer any questions you may have, introduce you to the other girls if you like.

Dahlia suddenly looks very tired.

Dahlia: Well that sounds... good.

Dahlia falls backwards onto the bed, lying horizontally across it.

Mei: Had enough walking, I assume?

Dahlia lets out a tired laugh.

Lawrence: It's a large house, I know. We didn't even get through most of the east wing, although it's mostly empty.

Dahlia turns herself around, laying her head on the pillow of the bed.

Dahlia: This will be my room.

Lawrence: If you say so. *To Mei.* Make sure you get that in writing.

Mei: Got it.

There's suddenly a call from the door.

???: Lawrence!! Are you in there?

Lawrence: *Shouting* What is it?

???: The bookshelf in the sitting room fell over.

Lawrence: Again? One moment.

Lawrence turns to Dahlia.

Lawrence: Will you be okay sleeping here for the night?

Dahlia looks comfortable as ever, nestled into the bed.

Dahlia: *Sleepily.* I think so.

Mei laughs.

Mei: I don't think we'll have to worry.

Lawrence: Okay, well. I'll be around.

Dahlia perks up, looking at Lawrence.

Lawrence: If you need anything and can't find me, you can go to Grace. Someone around here should know where I am. Okay?

Dahlia gives Lawrence a nod. Dahlia seems a little confused. Another call is heard.

???: C'mon Lawrence!!

Dahlia: *To Lawrence.* Ok.

Lawrence: *To Mei.* Look after her. *To the voice outside.* Coming!

Lawrence suddenly turns and leaves, shutting the door behind him.

Mei: Uh, do you need to be 'looked after?'

Dahlia laughs a little.

Dahlia: Mm. I think I'll be alright.

Mei: *Smiling* Okay. Lawrence can be a little overbearing.

Dahlia: Heh, yeah maybe.

Mei: He just wants to make sure you'll be alright.

Dahlia: Mhm.

Mei's expression changes, becoming more serious.

Mei: I should tell you. I think he's a little anxious about the whole Fay thing right now.

Dahlia sits up in bed.

Dahlia: The missing girl?

Mei: Yeah. She and Lawrence were... they're very close.

Dahlia considers this seriously.

Dahlia: I see.

Mei: He doesn't want anything to happen to you.

Dahlia: What could happen? What happened to Fay?

Mei looks away.

Mei: I can't say. Well. I shouldn't.

Mei stands.

Mei: Just, have patience with him. He'll probably be like this for a little while.

Dahlia seems a little confused again.

Dahlia: Okay.

Mei opens the door.

Mei: Sleep well. If you don't know where to go tomorrow morning, just head to the mess hall.

Dahlia: Alright.

Mei: Goodnight.

Dahlia: Goodnight.

Mei leaves, shutting the door. Dahlia looks up at the ceiling for a moment, in reflection. A moment passes. She closes her eyes and lets out a sigh, folding her arms. The lights go out..

Scene 4- Basement

Swing and dance music is playing quietly, a muffled sound bleeding from the house down into the basement.

There's a door flatly facing the audience, far against the back wall standing stage left. In the center of the stage, there's a chaise lounge sofa facing the audience, also back against the wall. The stage is spot-lit, centering on the sofa, the stage trailing off into darkness to each side. Jane is lounging on the sofa, smoking a long, thin cigarette and reading a small book, holding it loosely from the top of the spine with a limp wrist. Parker is sitting down on the floor by the stage-left foot of the sofa.

Dahlia opens the door, entering the room. Parker looks over, surprised. He leans forward.

Parker: Oh- Dahlia!

Dahlia: Hey, you're- Paker, right?

Parker: Yeah. Today's your third day here now?

Dahlia: That's right.

Parker: How are you acclimating?

Dahlia thinks to herself, folding her arms with a closed posture.

Dahlia: It's okay. Everyone is very friendly, but...

Dahlia trails off, considering something. She shakes her head.

Parker: But?

Dahlia: *Looking back up to Parker.* I don't know.

Parker and Jane exchange a glance.

Parker: Well, what brings you here?

Dahlia stands up straight, considering this as if questioning herself for the first time.

Dahlia: Curiosity, I guess.

Jane: *Without looking up. To Parker.* You were right.

Parker only acknowledges this with a look.

Parker: *To Dahlia.* Well, I don't imagine they brought you down here when they gave you the tour. *Gesturing into the stage-left darkness.* This is the basement.

Dahlia looks around.

Dahlia: *To Jane and Parker.* Right about what?

Parker: I imagined you'd come down here.

Dahlia: Really? Why?

Parker: Cuz you ask a lot of questions.

Dahlia: Wouldn't anyone who'd just been born have a lot of questions?

Parker laughs.

Parker: You'd be surprised.

Dahlia: Hm.

Dahlia looks at Parker, as if waiting for more clarification. None is given.

Dahlia: *To Jane.* What's your name?

Jane, with gentle, languid movements, lowers her book, letting it hang from the tips of her fingers. She looks up at Dahlia.

Dahlia: *Off-kilter.* I don't think I've seen you around.

Jane takes the cigarette from her mouth, letting a big puff out into the air.

Jane: Well that's surprising.

Jane absentmindedly puts the cigarette back into her mouth before lifting the book back up to her face.

Parker: That's Jane. Jane, this is Dahlia.

Jane shoots Dahlia a look with a brief, playful smile before looking back to her book. Parker stands stage-left of the sofa, leaning on the armrest.

Dahlia: Uh huh. *Dahlia slowly moves into the spotlight. She looks around.* Are there usually more people here?

Parker: Well...

Jane's eyes lift from the book for a moment as she makes eye contact with Parker. The corner of her mouth purses as she returns to the book.

Parker: Sometimes.



Dahlia: Oh, do we- *Gesturing to Parker's spot on the floor.*

Parker: *With a small chuckle.* Yeah, you can just sit on the floor.

Dahlia: Uh... *Dahlia eyes the Sofa.*

Without saying anything, Jane shifts her position, pulling her legs in to leave room at the stage-right end of the sofa.

Dahlia: Thanks. *She falls onto the sofa.*

Jane only lets another cloud of smoke out of her mouth in response. She doesn't let her eyes drift from the book.

Jane: Fay comes around.

Parker looks over to Jane, but she's still as a statue. Dahlia notices. Parker looks back to Dahlia

Dahlia: You've seen her?

Parker: Well, not since she disappeared, but, we might have been the last ones that saw her.

Dahlia: It's part of why I came. Everyone's just gotten more and more tense over it since I got here. How long do you think she's gonna hide for?

Parker: Hiding? That's still what they're saying? Hiding where?

Dahlia: Well... that's what the housekeepers say.

Parker: I tell ya, I know this place like the back of my hand. The basement goes a lot deeper than this. *He gestures into the stage-left darkness.* I've seen all of it

Dahlia: You have?

Parker: Well, when I showed up in this house I was just a baby.

Dahlia: Wait, so you've been around for...?

Parker: 15 years.

Dahlia: And you're about the same age as me. That explains why Grace seemed to say you were older than everyone else.

Parker: Yeah, it's pretty funny huh? I had a childhood here, most people don't. This house is all I've ever had. Lawrence raised me himself, kept me close, but I started getting away from him and exploring when I got a little bit older.

Dahlia: I see.

Parker sits up straight.

Parker: I was mostly interested in the east wing at the time, I just loved picking through all the unfinished and abandoned rooms, but eventually I worked up the courage to start exploring the basement, but it went so much deeper than I'd imagined. *He gets a wistful look in his eye, smiling and looking away as if in warm recollection.* It took me months to find the bottom, and years after that to discover every single nook and cranny. Over time I grew to love it down here. It's a place with so much history, but it's all so mysterious.

Jane rolls her eyes. She's heard this before.

Parker: A lot of it is just plain unfinished, but there are so many old relics strewn about. Writings, drawings, personal items, so much of it is just- abandoned, but- abandoned by who...? *He trails off, looking stage-left, off into the distance.*

Dahlia: What does that have to do with Fay?

Jane lets her book flop to the side before leaning back and letting out a sharp laugh. Parker gets an embarrassed look on his face before looking back to Dahlia.

Parker: Sorry *Chuckling, scratching his neck*. I can get a little excited. Bottom line is: When Fay went missing, the first housekeeper-order was for me to go down here and look for her, and I found nothing new. If Fay was hiding, we'd have found her by now.

Dahlia: The housekeepers still say she's missing, so they must be looking for her, right?

The music begins fading out.

Parker: Believe whatever you want, but I wouldn't count on it if I were you.

Dahlia: What do you think happened to her?

The music has drawn to an end. Parker suddenly gets shifty, looking all around.

Parker: I think she left the house.

Jane sits up with a start, swinging her legs off the couch. She flips the book aside and slouches forward, looking down at Parker.

Dahlia: That's possible?

Parker glances at Jane before looking Dahlia in the eye and giving an exaggerated shrug.

Parker: *Tightly* Just a thought. You've noticed Lawrence acting strange?

Jane is actively following the conversation.

Dahlia: Strange? Well, I only met him just a few days ago, but... maybe.

Parker: I can't tell you everything, but, I'll tell you that something happened between Fay and Lawrence a few days before she disappeared, and that's no secret.

Dahlia: Then why don't I know that? And why is Lawrence still so sure that she's just hiding?

Parker: That's just the way it is. It's why I pretty much just hang around the basement.

Dahlia: *Looking away*. Right... *Looking back over*. Do you think Fay will come back?

Parker purses his lips and looks away. Jane turns and looks Dahlia in the eye.

Jane: We'll see.

Dahlia: *Looking over to Parker* Can I ask-?

Parker: *Looking back* Hm?

Dahlia: You said most people don't have a childhood here?

Parker: Mhm.

Dahlia: But, I thought everyone was born in the house?

Parker: Mmm

Parker lays down on the ground with his hands behind his head.

Parker: I don't think so.

Dahlia: Hm?

Parker: Well just think about it. *Sitting up* You were *Airquoting* 'born' just a few days ago, but you know how to walk and talk. Could a newborn do that?

Dahlia: I guess not...

Parker: *Laying back down* I sure couldn't when I showed up.

Jane is staring intently at Dahlia.

Jane: Did you remember something?

Dahlia: What do you mean?

Jane: From your life, before you got here.

Dahlia: Well... I don't know about that, but I think I remember **something.**

Jane: What is it?

Dahlia: A melody

Jane shoots Parker a look. she turns back to Dahlia with a smile.

Jane: How does it go?

Dahlia looks nervously between the two of them before closing her eyes and singing the simple 11 note melody.

Scene 5- Interrogation

A long, wide table stretches from left to right. with chairs all around. There are 3 doors in the room, to the left, right, and center. A chair sits in the back left corner of the room. Lawrence stands behind the table, centered on the stage, blocking vision of the center door. He's leaning forward with his hands planted on the table, head hung with eyes shut.

People arrive one by one. Dexter enters through the right door and sits down at the right end of the table. Lawrence opens his eyes.

Lawrence: Timely as usual, Dexter.

Dexter: Of course.

Mei follows closely behind, sitting along the back of the table to the far right near Dexter.

Lawrence: Mei.

Mei gives Lawrence a nod.

The three sit in silence for a moment. Dexter rests his head in his hand and stares off into the stage-left distance. Mei looks down at her lap.

Maximoe enters the room from the left door. and sits along the back of the table to the left edge.

Dexter: Hey.

Maximoe: Uh, hi. What's up? *To Dexter.*

Maximoe looks at Dexter expecting an answer. Dexter just stares off into space.

Lawrence: Hello Maximoe.

Maximoe: What's this meeting about anyway?

Grace and Lucy come through the right door together. They sit down in the two seats next to Lawrence just to the left of Mei.

Lawrence: Grace, Lucy.

Grace and Lucy seem unusually serious.

Grace: Hey Lawrence.

Lucy: *To Lawrence.* Thanks for the invitation.

Maximoe: Hey what's this all about? *To Grace and Lucy.*

Lawrence: Wait until everyone arrives.

Parker leads Dahlia in through the left door, leaving it open behind them.

Lawrence: Parker... Dahlia? *To Parker.* I didn't call Dahlia here.

Parker sits at the left end of the table, pulling out the furthest left chair along the front side of the table for Dahlia. Dahlia sits. Jane comes in through the left door, closing it behind her. Jane settles down in the chair in the back corner.

Parker: *To Lawrence.* She deserves to be here.

Dahlia: Huh?

Lawrence's eyes narrow.

Lawrence: Fine.

Dahlia is confused.

Grace: You got a new girlfriend Parker?

Parker gives Grace an annoyed look, his brow furrowed.

Lawrence: Now that we're all gathered, we can begin. The housekeepers insisted I hold this meeting. As I'm sure many of you have guessed, this is about Fay. I'll be direct- Have any of you seen her in the last three days?

The room is silent. Grace has a fed up look on her face, her arms crossed.

Grace: Somebody knows something they're not saying.

Maximoe looks a little confused.

Lawrence: Who saw Fay the night before she disappeared.

Maximoe: Uh- I saw her in the mess hall, I thought she went down to the basement after that though.

Lawrence turns to look at the left side of the room at Jane and Parker.

Parker: She was in the basement that night.

Lawrence: Did she say anything? Was she acting strange?

Parker shrugs and looks

Parker: Nope.

Lawrence: *To Jane.* Jane?

Jane lets out a puff of smoke.

Jane: Nothin'.

Dexter: Do you have to smoke in here?

Jane gives Dexter an annoyed look before stamping out the cigarette.

Lawrence: After that, where did she go?

Lawrence looks between Parker and Jane.

Parker: Back to her room, I assumed.

Lawrence: That's all?

Parker: That's all.

Parker looks away. Lawrence gives Parker a long stare, waiting for more. Parker is frustrated.

Parker: What, you want me to guess? If you're asking for opinions, I think Fay left the house of her own volition.

A hush goes over the room. Jane turns to look at Parker, her eyes wide. Dexter and Grace stare. Mei looks down. Maximoe and Lucy are confused. Dahlia looks back and forth observing the whole table.

Lucy: What do you mean?

Maximoe: How would she do that?

Parker folds his arms. Lawrence stares intently. Parker looks him in the eye.

Parker: What, you want another opinion? If you want to find Fay, we should all go out and look for her.

Grace: She must be somewhere in the house, right?

Parker: I've looked everywhere.

Lawrence: That's enough, Parker.

Parker taps Dahlia on the shoulder and gives her an exacerbated look as if to say: "Can you believe this?"

Lucy: Did we have to invite Parker? I mean, do we really want to entertain these theories?

Lawrence gives Lucy a stern look.

Lawrence: Lucy.

Lucy shrinks away, becoming silent. Lawrence suddenly turns to look at Mei.

Lawrence: Mei.

Mei flinches. She turns to look at Lawrence sideways.

Lawrence: Did you see anything on the top floor that night?

Mei says nothing.

Dahlia: Um.

Everyone turns to Dahlia, who's speaking for the first time.

Dahlia: Why are you asking that?

Lawrence opens his mouth to speak, but is cut off by Parker.

Parker: It's because the roof is the only way out.

Lawrence glares at Parker.

Parker: Theoretically speaking, of course.

Dexter: I didn't see anything unusual on the top floor.

Lawrence: Thank you Dexter.

Grace: What I don't get is Dahlia.

Dahlia: Hm?

Grace: Isn't it strange she appeared just one day after Fay went missing?

Lucy: Yeah!

Parker: Oh, now my theory isn't so crazy?

Lucy: Things have changed!

Maximoe: *To Lawrence.* Maybe you could ask the housekeepers about it? I mean, like, don't they plan for all the new arrivals?

Lawrence: They didn't plan for Fay to go missing, if that's what you're implying.

Dahlia: Then it's just a coincidence?

Lawrence: We won't know what it is as long as things are being hidden.

Lawrence looks around the table.

Lawrence: Well, we're clearly not getting anywhere with this. I expect one of you to come forward in the next few days. The housekeepers are considering drastic measures. I don't want this to get any worse. If you find something out, report to me immediately. Mei, I'd like to speak with you privately.

Mei looks at Lawrence for a moment.

Mei: Ok.

Mei stands slowly. Lawrence turns and opens the back door, holding it open as Mei walks through.

Lawrence: The rest of you are dismissed.

Lawrence turns and leaves, shutting the door behind him.

Maximoe breathes a sigh of relief. Parker pushes his chair away from the table and leans back.

Maximoe: That was scary.

Parker: I don't believe this.

Dexter stands and begins pacing around the room. Lucy is still staring across the table at Parker.

Lucy: I know you know something Parker.

Parker puts his hands behind his head.

Parker: Me? I don't know anything. I'm just a paranoid conspiracy theorist.

Grace shakes her head.

Grace: I just don't know what to think.

Lucy: *To Jane.* Nothing to say?

Jane shrugs. Maximoe looks back and forth across the table.

Maximoe: What kind of 'drastic measures' do you guys think Lawrence is talking about?

Nobody has an answer to this.

Grace: I don't want to find out.

Dexter: *To himself.* What is Lawrence's interest in Mei?

Dahlia: I don't know her as well as all of you, but she's seemed really nervous since I got here.

This makes Parker think. His head tilts to the side.

Grace: She's always been shy.

Dexter: Yes, but not like this. Dahlia's right.

Dahlia: *To Dexter.* I'm sorry, who are you?

Dexter: Dexter, I'm usually on the top floor. I work with Mei. I wish we could have met under better circumstances.

Dexter reaches across the table and offers Dahlia a handshake which she hesitantly accepts.

Dahlia: Nice to meet you.

Maximoe: I'm real glad I'm not Mei right now, Lawrence must really be putting the squeeze on her.

Grace: I don't know if I've ever seen him like this.

Lucy: This is how he gets over Fay.

Maximoe puts his head in his hands.

Maximoe: If only she were here right now. Fay would be able to figure out where Fay is.

Lucy: I always thought she was sort of an airhead.

Maximoe: Maybe, but she's real clever.

Jane: Her mind is always somewhere else. Always dreaming of what might happen next.

Parker closes his eyes.

Parker: I hope this was part of your plan, Fay.

A moment passes.

Dexter: That night, I thought I heard someone go into the farm.

Parker opens his eyes.

Parker: The farm...

Dexter: Only Lawrence and the housekeepers have farm keys. It wasn't the usual time Lawrence goes to harvest. I have a feeling Mei knows something about this.

Grace: If anyone could get special keys out of Lawrence, it'd be Fay.

Lucy: What are you implying?

Grace puts her head in her hands.

Grace: I dunno...

A moment passes.

Parker: Okay.

Parker stands.

Parker: I've heard enough.

Parker turns and opens the left door, exiting the room.

Parker: See y'all around.

Dahlia stands and walks out after him.

Dahlia: Parker...!

Grace: Seems like Dahlia's made a friend.

Jane: Well.

Jane stands and stretches her hands to the ceiling.

Lucy: *To Jane.* See you in a week.

Jane smiles.

Jane: Uh huh.

Jane turns and walks out the door.

Jane: *Jokingly.* You could always visit me.

Jane shuts the door behind her.

A moment passes. Dexter stands, looking at the door.

Maximoe: I've got a bad feeling...

Scene 6- Chasing Ghosts

A door stands stage-left. A large armchair sits stage-right, facing stage-left, slightly angled toward the audience. A chaise lounge sits in the middle of the room, running along the back wall. Lawrence is pacing back and forth between the door and the armchair with slow, deliberate steps. At each end of his path he stops in place, staring out across the floor before shifting his weight back in the other direction.

There's a knock on the door. Lawrence stops, and turns to face the door.

Lawrence: Come in.

Dahlia opens the door and walks into the room.

Lawrence: Dahlia.

Dahlia: Do you have a moment?

Lawrence takes a step backward and falls into the armchair.

Lawrence: Come sit down.

Dahlia closes the door behind her and sits down on the lounge chair, her body facing the audience. Lawrence folds one leg over and leans back.

Lawrence: I've been meaning to check in with you, Dahlia. It's been four, nearly five days you've been with us. How have you been?

Dahlia: It isn't so bad... Everyone's been very nice.

Lawrence: That's good to hear. You've been finding everything alright? Have everything you need?

Dahlia: Yeah. Grace has been very helpful.

Lawrence: Good. I knew I could count on Grace. She did the same for Lucy.

Dahlia: Really?

Lawrence nods.

Lawrence: Lucy was only born two years ago.

Dahlia: I didn't know that.

:Lawrence: She still depends on Grace, more than she admits. I'm glad that Grace is there for you too.

Dahlia nods.

Dahlia: Yeah.

A moment passes as their eyes trail away from each other.

Lawrence: You've been spending time in the basement?

Dahlia: Hm?

Lawrence: Parker brought you along yesterday. I haven't been seeing you around the first floor as much the last few days.

Dahlia: Oh, yeah.

Lawrence: How's that?

Dahlia: Fine.

Lawrence: *Smiling.* Parker's behaved himself, I hope.

Dahlia: They've been friendly, Parker and Jane.

Lawrence says nothing.

Dahlia: I've been remembering things.

Lawrence: What sorts of things?

Dahlia shakes her head.

Dahlia: I'm not sure. Blurry things. Faces, names. Melodies. A lot of melodies.

Lawrence: Yes. It's not unusual for children to have these sorts of visions.

Lawrence tilts his face.

Lawrence: Is this something Jane told you about?

Dahlia looks up at Lawrence.

Dahlia: Yeah, why?

Lawrence: She's always been wrapped up in her dreams, for as long as I can remember.

Dahlia: Dreams?

Lawrence thinks for a moment.

Lawrence: Before a child is born, it dreams. It's said to be the first thing that happens when a child comes into existence. The visions you're shown, the ones you create, they're the roots of your identity, the sort of person you'll be when you're born.

Dahlia slouches forward, laying her arms across her lap.

Dahlia: They don't feel like dreams.

Lawrence: The dreams before birth are always the most vivid. It's a sentimental thing.

Dahlia: It feels like a life I once lived.

Lawrence pauses. He stares intently at Dahlia.

Lawrence: I understand. It can be a difficult thing to let go of.

Dahlia: Let go of?

Lawrence: Yes. You can't chase those images forever. *Lawrence looks away in recollection.* You can try. For a time, it was all I thought about. I used to think it held some essence in it. Some kind of truth.

Lawrence looks over at Dahlia.

Lawrence: As if pinning them down would tell me some truth of myself.

Dahlia: Why didn't it?

Lawrence: I only went around in circles, trying to dig out some definition of why I was alive, what I was meant for. But I realized, who we are is something that changes all the time. All I had achieved was putting myself in a box.

Lawrence looks at Dahlia, waiting for her response. Dahlia has none.

Lawrence: You are defined by what you do next. What you're doing now. That's what's real.

Dahlia: But the dreams feel just as real. As real as all of this.

Lawrence: They're real to you. And I mean that, but....

A moment passes.

Lawrence: The housekeepers brought us here for a reason. For us to be here for one another. To live, and leave each other better than we were. *Lawrence turns away.* Fixating on the questions we can't answer won't help anyone.

Lawrence turns and looks Dahlia in the eye, waiting for a response. He slouches forward in his chair, and lets his head fall.

Lawrence: Just don't get lost chasing ghosts. Okay?

Dahlia: Okay.

A moment passes. Lawrence and Dahlia both seem sullen and withdrawn.

Dahlia: I wanted to ask you...

Lawrence looks up.

Dahlia: What's gonna happen if we don't find Fay?

Lawrence shifts in his seat.

Lawrence: The housekeepers have been pressuring me for answers. They want me to interrogate everyone individually. Split everyone up from each other so nobody can keep their stories straight. They have so little trust in us. It's always been that way.

Dahlia: I thought they wanted us to help each other.

Lawrence: They do. But people are keeping secrets. That isn't helpful.

Dahlia: What can I do to help?

Lawrence: Is there anything you know?

Lawrence pauses.

Lawrence: Anything Parker told you?

Dahlia's lips part. She turns away from Lawrence slowly.

Dahlia: No...

Lawrence stares at her.

Lawrence: Okay. Just let me know if you find anything out.

Dahlia nods.

Dahlia: Ok.

A moment passes. Lawrence checks his watch.

Lawrence: Is that all?

Dahlia: Yeah

Lawrence stands.

Lawrence: I apologize, but, I have somewhere to be. The housekeepers would like to meet with me.

Lawrence heads for the door. He opens the door and turns to Dahlia

Lawrence: You may use this room even when I'm not around. If you ever need anything, don't hesitate to come, okay?

Dahlia nods.

Dahlia: Yeah!

Lawrence: I'll see you around.

Lawrence shuts the door. Dahlia takes a deep breath.

Dahlia sits, looking at the door for a moment waiting for the footsteps to die away, before letting her eyes drop. She sits with her hands folded in her lap, looking at her feet.

Scene 7- Alliance

A door stands to the right. All the way across the room to the left side against the back wall sits a rectangular desk, long side facing the audience. It's stacked with binders and papers. A bookshelf makes an L shape with the desk, boxing in the left side of the room. Mei sits in a swivel chair, leaning over the desk, her head in her hands. A coat is draped over the chair.

There's a knock at the door. Mei sits up straight, swiveling in her chair to face the door.

Mei: Yes?

Dahlia enters. Mei's posture relaxes, she slumps back in her chair.

Mei: Oh, Dahlia. What can I do for you?

Dahlia: Is now a good time to talk?

Mei: Um, sure.

Dahlia shuts the door behind her. She looks around the room.

Dahlia: Is there anywhere I can sit?

Mei: Sorry, this is my study. I'm the only one here most of the time.

Dahlia: Okay.

Dahlia walks a short distance into the room and sits down on the floor. Mei is surprised by this.

Mei: Oh.

Mei hesitantly steps out of her chair and walks across the room to sit down across from Dahlia.

Mei: What can I do for you?

Dahlia: You know something about Fay, right?

Mei looks taken aback.

Mei: Did Lawrence put you up to this?

Dahlia: No.

Mei listens.

Dahlia: What did you tell Lawrence?

Mei shakes her head.

Mei: I didn't tell him anything.

Dahlia: But, you know something.

Mei pauses.

Mei: I don't understand. What's your interest in any of this?

Dahlia: I've been talking with Parker. He knows something too.

Mei: Okay? What does he know?

Dahlia: He won't say.

Mei is confused. She lets a nervous "heh" slip out of her mouth.

Mei: Stubborn as ever. That doesn't surprise me.

Dahlia: But Dexter said something after Lawrence took you out of the room yesterday. He said that he overheard something happen in the farm.

Mei says nothing.

Dahlia: Where is the farm?

Mei considers whether or not to keep talking.

Mei: There's a flight of stairs which goes up to the attic, although it's a little hard to find. It's near my bedroom. The farm is part of the way up the staircase, but the door is locked shut. Only Lawrence has a key.

Mei pauses. She shakes her head and laughs nervously.

Mei: I don't know why I'm telling you any of this.

Dahlia: Yesterday, Parker mentioned that the roof was the only way out of the house. When I was talking with him later, he guessed that the farm would be the best shot. He's never been inside but he figured that, for plants to grow, the farm would either need to be on the roof of the house, or have a glass ceiling.

Mei just stares.

Mei: What do you get out of this?

Dahlia's brown furrows.

Dahlia: What do I get out of this? I don't know what's going on! Everyone's keeping secrets. There's so much I don't understand. I don't think Dexter even told Lawrence what he remembered. You and Parker know things you're not saying. The housekeepers are only gonna escalate from here. Lawrence told me that the meeting yesterday was just the start.

Mei says nothing.

Dahlia: So if there's something you can't tell Lawrence, can you tell me? Can you tell Parker?

Mei stands and turns, taking three steps from Dahlia. Dahlia sits on the floor, looking at Mei's back. Mei stares at the bookshelf, her arms crossed. She thinks for a moment.

Mei: It isn't fair that you would show up in the middle of all this, Dahlia. From the moment I heard there was a new child, I knew there would be trouble. I didn't know what the consequences of my actions would be, but I never imagined this.

Mei turns to face Dahlia.

Mei: But you're right. Parker deserves to know what happened. I really should have told him by now.

Dahlia stands.

Dahlia: I'll take you to him.

Mei: Now?

Dahlia nods. Mei looks away.

Mei: I should have known it would come to this.

Dahlia: Whatever happened, you can't change it now.

Mei looks up at Dahlia.

Dahlia: All we can do is try and keep this from getting worse.

Mei: Okay.

Mei pulls the coat off of the chair and slips it on.

Mei: Let's go.

Dahlia holds the door open, and looks at Mei. Mei walks through, Dahlia shuts the door behind them.

Scene 8- Truth, At Last

Basement.

Parker is slouched forward on the stage-right side of the couch, his legs crossed and his arms folded. Jane is sitting on the floor; her legs stretched out, leaning against the stage-left side of the couch. She's resting her eyes.

Dahlia opens the door. Parker glances over.

Parker: Ay.

Mei walks in behind Dahlia. Parker double-takes.

Parker: Mei?

Jane peaks around the front side of the couch to see.

Mei: Parker.

Dahlia walks across the room and sits down stage-left of Jane, who's now leaning against the front of the couch. Mei walks to the front of the room, facing all three of them from stage-right, her back to the audience.

Mei: *To Parker.* I need to talk to you. In private.

Parker looks Mei in the eye.

Parker: Anything you can tell me, you can tell both of them.

Dahlia looks up at Parker.

Dahlia: Parker...!

Mei: It's about Fay.

Parker: I know.

Mei pauses.

Jane: I think you oughta come sit down.

Mei slowly walks to the stage-right side of the couch, sitting down. Parker lowers himself from the couch, forming a semi-circle on the floor with the others.

Mei: Do you all promise to keep this between us?

Dahlia nods without a second thought.

Dahlia: Mm.

Parker gives Dahlia an annoyed look.

Parker: I can't promise anything until I know what it is you're hiding.

Mei looks away. She looks hurt by this.

Mei: Okay.

Jane leans back, resting her elbows on the seat couch behind her.

Jane: You don't have to worry about me saying anything.

Parker looks between Jane and Dahlia. He gives Mei a stern look.

Parker: So, what do you know?

Mei takes a deep breath.

Mei: *To Jane.* Do you have one of those sticks you could spare?

Jane unbuttons her shirt pocket, and hands Mei the cigarette.

Mei: Thanks.

Mei puts it to her lips as Jane fishes the lighter out of her pants pocket. Jane holds the flame up, lighting it for Mei. She takes a drag, followed by a short coughing fit.

Mei: Been a long time since I smoked one of these things.

Parker is starting to look impatient. Dahlia just watches.

Mei: That night, before the morning Fay disappeared, I helped her escape.

Parker has no reaction, his eyes as sharp as ever. Jane attempts to hide her shock, her face tightening and her lips parting. Dahlia makes no such attempt.

Mei: Of course Fay was able to get copies of all the house keys from Lawrence. The only place she didn't have access to was the housekeepers' room. *To Parker:* Dahlia told me about your theory. You're right. The farm has a glass ceiling, although it's a very high one.

Mei gets a wistful look in her eye.

Mei: I forgot what the sky looked like...

Parker: Yes.

Parker gets a self-satisfied look on his face.

Parker: I knew there was a world outside.

Mei: Yes...

Mei clears her throat.

Mei: Fay was convinced that I would be the only one able to hear her escaping through the farm. The top floor is sparsely populated, and the farm is right above my room. A few days after she went cold on Lawrence, she came to me and told me her plan. She asked for my help.

Parker's eyes widen.

Mei: She took a real gamble. I could have gone straight to Lawrence right then and there, but when she told me she had a plan to escape, I couldn't bring myself to stop her. We'd never known whether or not it was even possible to escape. I thought to myself, 'Who am I to stop history from being made?'

Mei looks nervously at the others for validation.

Parker: I would have thought the same.

Mei looks down.

Mei: I did have reservations. I told Fay that the housekeepers' room was even closer to the farm than mine, but she didn't care. When she told me she didn't care, suddenly I didn't care either. I wasn't thinking about whether or not I could be caught any more. I just wanted to know what was possible.

Parker: Heh.

Parker leans back.

Parker: Fay has a way of doing that.

Jane smiles. Mei smiles in turn.

Mei: Yeah...

Mei's face gets serious again.

Mei: There's part of it I still can't reconcile.

Dahlia: Hm?

Mei: How easy it was. It was simple. She'd asked me to find the tallest step ladder I could. I'd been keeping it under the bed. She came and knocked on my door that night. She brought a brick and a rope she fashioned out of some old clothes. I took the ladder and a lantern, we walked up the stairs, and she unlocked the door to the farm. It's a cylindrical room which juts up out of the roof of the house.

Mei shows the shape of the room with her hands, cupping them in a cylindrical shape.

Mei: We could only see by the glow of the lantern. I set up the step ladder. She climbed to the top, up into the darkness, and was barely able to touch her fingers to the glass. She'd brought the brick in case she needed to shatter the window, but the panels were loose. They weren't screwed in, they just sat in the grooves of the crossbars.

Mei takes another drag of the cigarette, coughing a single time. She shakes her head and laughs.

Mei: All she needed to do was push them out... *Mei speaks slowly, talking with her hands.* ...And slide them over the top. She had to stand on her tiptoes and strain just to reach them. Those moments were long.

She takes another drag.

Mei: It felt like fifteen minutes went by. The entire time, I just looked up at her and held the ladder like both of our lives depended on it not moving a single inch. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. *Mei gestures to the room.* So long believing that these walls were impenetrable barriers, and those panels just popped out. The sky was right there. It was a mild night. I could see clouds.

Mei pauses for a moment. She looks at the floor as if recounting to herself.

Mei: She threw the rope up over the crossbar between the two panels she'd dislodged and held both ends in her hand. *Mei holds her hand up to the side.* She finally looked back down at me. She offered to take me with her. I shook my head. That was the closest thing I got to a goodbye. She crawled up the rope, and pulled herself up onto the roof like it was nothing.

Mei shakes her head.

Mei: Like it was absolutely nothing. I couldn't see anything through the glass. All I saw clearly was her hand pulling the rope over the bar as she let it fall to the ground. I watched one glass panel slide back into place, and then the other. It felt fake, as if that ceiling would never really be solid again. Then it was quiet. I heard a thump as Fay landed on the roof which I was sure the housekeepers would hear.

Mei takes a long puff of the cigarette, inhaling and exhaling slowly.

Mei: But nobody came. That was it. I stood there in the farm for a very long time. That was it.

Parker, Jane, and Dahlia all look at Mei waiting for more, but when it's clear she's done, they each look at the floor. The room's quiet for a long time.

Jane: Shit.

Jane pulls another cigarette out of her shirt pocket, lighting it for herself. Slowly, a wide smile forms on Parker's face. Dahlia just watches the other two to see how they're reacting.

Parker: So Fay really did make it out.

Parker is beaming, looking at the ceiling.

Dahlia: What does this mean?

Dahlia wasn't sure who the question was directed to. Nobody answers for a moment.

Mei: I don't know.

Another moment passes and Mei bursts out laughing.

Dahlia: What? What is it?

Mei: I forgot, the strangest part of all. I didn't even know **why** she wanted to leave! I never even thought to ask her! She never acted like there was any question about it.

Parker's face gets serious.

Mei: *Reflective.* It took so little for me to go against everything.

Jane: That's Fay.

Mei: Hell.

Mei takes another puff.

Mei: I still don't know why for sure, and yet, it doesn't feel like much of a mystery.

Dahlia: She sounds like an extraordinary person...

Parker: I know why.

Everyone turns to look at Parker.

Parker: I know what happened between Fay and Lawrence. What made her go all cold.

They all just wait.

Parker: Before I tell you this, I want to be clear that I'm not sure whether or not it's true. Although, I suspect that is.

Parker looks around at the others. He leans forward, making eye contact with the others as he speaks.

Parker: The night Fay escaped, she came to me in the evening. I was nearly asleep. She opened the door to my room without knocking and walked in without saying a word or turning on any lights. I didn't know who it was until I sat up and turned on the lamp by my bed and saw her. She was in a state, shell-shock or something. She had these wiiide, emotionless eyes, as if she knew a thousand things she'd never tell. It freaked the hell out of me. But it was glee. She seemed excited, or aroused, but she stood perfectly still. She didn't say much.

Mei: What was it?

Parker speaks slowly, choosing his words carefully.

Parker: She told me that Lawrence told her that the housekeepers aren't real.

Nobody knows what to say. Mei lets out a massive puff of smoke.

Mei: That explains... a lot.

Jane looks consternated.

Jane: It's worse than you told me.

A long silence goes by.

Dahlia: What does this mean?

Parker: I don't know.

Another long silence.

Dahlia: What are we gonna do?

Dahlia looks between the others. No one has anything to say.

Mei: I'm sorry, Dahlia.

The curtains close.

End of Act 1.