

**the devil smokes**  
**American Spirits:**  
**a play in ten cigarettes**

by

Melissa Toomey

the devil smokes American Spirits: a play in ten cigarettes

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*"You may bury my body  
Down by the highway side*

*You may bury my body, ooh  
Down by the highway side  
So my old evil spirit  
Can get a Greyhound bus and ride"*

-Robert Johnson, Me and the Devil Blues

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*the devil smokes American Spirits* was first produced as a workshop at The Tank NYC, featuring the following cast:

Mary.....Annalisa Noel

Stranger.....Max Katz

Josiah/Jonas/Son.....Alexander Reed

Virgil/Store Owner.....John Scott Richardson

Don Mayfield/Old Man....Martin Pfefferkorn

Musician/Cult Member.....Cadence Lamb

Musician/Cult Member.....Julia Ty Goldberg

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CAST : 1 W, 4 M

**MARY**- Late teens-20s. Female. Any ethnicity. A runaway cult member. She has secrets.

**STRANGER** - 20s-30s. Male. Any ethnicity. A hobo/drifter. He might be a demon or--at least--he believes himself to be.

**JOSIAH/JONAS/SON** - 20s-30s. Male. White. Josiah is a cult leader. Jonas is a blind addict. The Son is a would-be messiah.

**VIRGIL/STORE OWNER** - 50s+. Male. Native American (Ideally Navajo or Hopi) Virgil is a professional recreational tour guide and local to the Southwest desert. He might also be the guide through Hell. The Store Owner owns a convenience store in rural Arizona on the border of tribal land.

**DON MAYFIELD/OLD MAN** - 60s+. Male. White. Don is an Texan ex-hippie turned Christian. Retired RV workamper who walks with a limp. The Old Man might be a has-been God.

**PLACE**: All along the Mother Road, the desert, and Hell.

Land Acknowledgement

I want to acknowledge that much of this play takes place on the homelands of the Navajo and Hopi tribal nations. I want to acknowledge the painful history of genocide and cultural erasure in this territory and beyond, through colonization. I want to honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land, and their contributions--directly and indirectly--to the stories that are born here, including this one.

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**NOTES**

This is ideally a play for a dusty, dirt parking lot or open space where you can smell smoke in the air, and into which you can drive a car. A parking lot can easily shape shift. In one, it always feels like you could be anywhere. Parking lots can also be places of horror for women.

The musical influences are from Delta Blues or Appalachian Bluegrass. A band can remain present the whole time, as music is the soul of the play.

The mandolin can be replaced by another stringed instrument if needed by the needs of casting.

This is a story told by the five storytellers. These characters are the heroes and villains and spirits and gods with a thousand faces and we don't always recognize who's who.

This is like an American folk song, so the world of this play makes the most sense if people from the following ethnic or cultural groups are represented in the cast/band: Scotch/Irish, African American, Native American. There is often a folk mythology that they share.

The / indicates overlapping dialogue.

A lot of cigarettes are consumed.

The VIRGIL/STORE OWNER character is ideally played by a Navajo or Hopi actor and the language he speaks is Dine.

The women in the pre-show and rituals can be the musicians, ensemble, and/or audience members recruited to participate.

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## PROLOGUE/PRE-SHOW

*Music (band plays a pre-show set)*

*Then, a ritual begins. A man, JOSIAH, a cult leader, is raised up, surrounded by several women in long prairie dresses lighting a series of candles around a pile of dust. He reads from a scripture, partly of his invention. The women listen.*

**JOSIAH.** *(reads)* "Your heart is proud,  
and you have said, 'I am a god,  
I sit in the seat of the gods,  
in the heart of the sands,'  
yet you are but a Woman, and no god,  
though you make your heart like the heart of a god—and your body the  
like of a creator and whore,  
you are indeed wiser than I;  
no secret is hidden from you;  
by your wisdom and your understanding  
you have made Love for yourself,  
and have gathered it  
into your treasuries; there to fucking rot.

Therefore thus says the Lord God:  
Because you make your heart  
like the heart of a god, your body like that of the creator,  
Behold, I will bring spirits upon you,

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the most ruthless of the continent;  
and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom  
and defile your splendor.

They shall thrust you down into the shit,  
and you shall die the death of the slain  
in the heart of the sands.

Will you still say, 'I am a god,'  
in the presence of those who violate you?  
Though you are but a Woman, and no god,  
in the hands of these who replace you?  
For you have cast yourself from grace,

With your bullshit,

By the blood of the unborn Savior

You shall die the death of the unchaste  
by the hand of a devil;  
for I have spoken, declares the Lord God."

### **CIGARETTE 1: THE CROSSROADS**

*Like many tales from the road and dealings with the devil, this one starts in the overlap space where one story ends and the next begins. The intersection of two worlds. The crossroads, if you will. It's a place where bad choices are made, and lost souls get stuck. It is where a soul might go who wants to never be found. This particular crossroads occurs right at the edge of Navajo country. Close to what's left of old Route 66 known as the Mother Road. The last service station for over a hundred miles any way, except back the way you came from. This tale starts as many great American tales start, at the bathroom of the Circle K...*

*The scene represented is what might indicate a gas station convenience store in rural Arizona. Some would call this crossroads the middle of nowhere. Others would call it a spiritual land. We see a counter behind*



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*which things like cigarettes, alcohol, and condoms are sold. We see walls of junk food for sale and a pile of boxes of conventional beer. A STRANGER sits on one of the boxes, reading the local newspaper and eating Reese's pieces. He is a hobo we guess, with a mandolin in its case slung across his back and roller blades dangling around his shoulders. A beat up guitar case sits next to him. He hums an old tune to himself. We hear a car pull up. It has seen better days. A young woman, MARY, steps out of the car.*

*She's covered in dirt, but underneath, she's got a cult-y kind of floor length prairie dress on. The kind that could place her in any number of fundamentalist groups of the Western states. From the waist down, the dress is stained with blood. Her hair is very, very long and trailing dust. She wears a backpack and sneakers, which look odd with the dress. Suddenly, another car pulls up. Seeing this, she rapidly runs into the store. We hear a doorbell-like ring whenever somebody enters. She doesn't even see the STRANGER and looks for the restroom. She approaches the counter. No one is there. She rings the bell.*

*A man, JOSIAH, gets out of the passenger side of this car.*

**JOSIAH.** *(to the driver)* Thanks for the lift. Bless you, man.  
*The driver takes off. Josiah begins to follow her in.*  
*Mary rings the bell again.*

**MARY.** Hello? Uh, excuse me. Is anybody back there? I need...um, can I get the key to the restroom? *(She waits for just a second. Tries to look further back behind the counter for any sign of a clerk.)* Hello? *(No answer.)*

**STRANGER.** I dunno where he's at, but he can't hear you. You can take the key though. It's behind the register.

*She spies the restroom key behind the register, attached to a very large ladle. She grabs it, and runs to open the restroom door.*

**MARY.** Thanks.

*She slams the door behind her just as Josiah enters. He's sincere here. So sincere it is scary. He really believes himself. He looks around,*

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*makes his way through the "aisles" and goes straight to the bathroom door. He doesn't see the STRANGER. Tries the door. It's locked.*

**JOSIAH.** MARY? *(he pounds on the door)* Hey. Come outta there.

HEY! It's not anger. Anger has no place, I told you. You don't seem to understand the nature of what it is you've done. You know this, it's in the Bible. It's in our hearts. Our people are in jeopardy. There are consequences. YOU CAN'T LEAVE ME OTHERWISE I AM

POISONED FOR EVER HAVING MET YOU. *(He pounds on the door. This time, it opens. MARY has started to change her clothes and wash some of the dirt and blood off. She stares at him. A long pause, as communication seems to happen between them that we can't hear.)*

**MARY.** You don't want to hear what I have to say, Josiah. *(She walks past him, goes up to the counter to return the key. Rings the bell again. Twice.)*

**JOSIAH.** Put your clothes back on. I wanna go home. Let's go home.

**MARY.** I didn't think you'd/ follow me.

**JOSIAH.** Yes you did.

**MARY.** You tried to kill/ me

**JOSIAH.** I didn't.

**MARY.** You tried to bury me alive.

**JOSIAH.** You scared God pretty bad. We have to make it right. You know the People of Zion would never hurt you.

**MARY.** You could have.

**JOSIAH.** It was our Rite. We shouldn't talk about that here. Are you ready to ask me for forgiveness?

**MARY.** No.

**JOSIAH.** Come outside. I don't want you making a scene in here/

**MARY.** I'm leaving where you can't follow.

**JOSIAH.** We have oaths to fulfill. The prophecy. It's my job as the man to--No, it's *your* job as my wife/ to--

**MARY.** The future we planned isn't what I want.

**JOSIAH.** That's not a decision. I love you. That's what's real. That's what exists. That's what truth is. What you believe in doesn't matter because the truth doesn't require belief. Love is true. The future needs you. You feel it. Don't you?

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**MARY.** I...

**JOSIAH.** Don't you? Say it.

**MARY.** I really care about you...It just doesn't/ make any sense...

**JOSIAH.** You won't say it? You won't accept your responsibility? You won't ask for forgiveness?! *(He smashes something.)* Go take your pants off. I'm done asking. *(Mary doesn't move. She notices the STRANGER watching.)* You look very unattractive. *(He embraces her in a way that is not of affection, but of holding on to somebody so they won't run off. She tries not to cry. He begins to undo her jeans in attempt to undress her like she is a child. Her inner thighs and groin are stained with blood. He manages to retrieve her car keys from her pocket. She doesn't fight him.)* How'd you get out here anyway, baby? *(Mary doesn't answer. He dangles the car keys.)* How are you going anywhere/ without the car?

**MARY.** I need my car keys. Please.

**JOSIAH.** "Your" car keys?

**MARY.** That car brought me to you and it's gonna get me away from you.

**JOSIAH.** I thought you understood our rules. You can't take anything back that you've given freely.

**MARY.** Then keep them. And leave. Fuck you and the car. *(He pulls the dress back over her head and pulls her arms through it, violently.)*

**JOSIAH.** Disgusting bitch.

**STRANGER.** *(to Josiah)* Hey man, you better be nice to your lady-friend.

**JOSIAH.** *(to Stranger)* You stay outta this. This is a spiritual conversation. *(The Stranger is not convinced of this. During the momentary distraction, Mary pulls away and goes to the counter and rings the bell a number of times with fervor.)*

**MARY.** Does somebody work here?

**JOSIAH.** I got bums telling me how to live my life. *(He puts the car keys in his pocket)* Always making a scene in public. Babylon's looking for any excuse to lock me up. I told you. You don't get to write the story or rewrite the fucking story. It is written.

**MARY.** *(shouting to be heard)* Hey, is anybody back there?

**JOSIAH.** Quit that.

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**MARY.** Not talking to you. *(She doesn't look at him)*

**JOSIAH.** Go do what you want, Mary, but I know that you don't know what that is. Go ahead. Go wander around in the desert. Once you're out in that wide world of Babylon and you realize you're completely alone, you'll remember why you came home. You'll come back begging... You know there's something out there we dreamed of escaping that we can't talk about because there aren't words for it. You've felt it and you feel it. It's that empty evil crammed in between a whole lot of normal little things. You can't escape it out here. No one's gonna understand. You're never gonna find a different truth than the one right here. You know who you are.

**MARY.** No. I want to go home. My home, not yours. I want to remember the voice in my head. One I had a long time ago.

**JOSIAH.** You're stuck in your ego mind right now. In your lowest frequency. Zion is home. Home isn't what you want, it's where you're wanted. Where you're needed. Where you stop feeling afraid. You're never gonna find the Love we have for you because it's a kind we built. Your people need you. You have a responsibility as The Mother. I...I need you too... You think about whether or not you wanna understand me. *(pause)* Get some un-fluoridated water while you're in here. *(He waves at her with the keys.)* I'll wait for you outside. *(He pulls out a cigarette, exits.)*

**CIGARETTE 2 : NUTRAGEOUS**

*A moment passes, the STORE OWNER enters from the back.*

**STORE OWNER.** Sorry Miss. I didn't hear the bell...must've dozed off for minute back there. It's late. Uh, how can I/ help you...

**MARY.** Thank you. I guess...um, one ticket for the Greyhound please. One way.

**STORE OWNER.** You, uh, you alright? Do we need to call anybody?

**MARY.** Yeah. And no, I don't need anybody.

**STORE OWNER.** Who...uh...who were you talking to just now? I thought I heard a voice raised/ up...

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**MARY.** Nobody. A voice in my head. A spirit I'm outrunning.

**STORE OWNER.** Same thing sometimes.

**MARY.** Do you think you can be haunted by people who are still alive?

**STORE OWNER.** I sure as hell am, workin' here. *(pause)* Are you with those desert people?

**MARY.** Hmm?

**STORE OWNER.** That group. You all build those houses with no windows. In the middle of the desert. You've been starting fires.

**MARY.** I'm not with them. *(She looks around, noticing how empty it is. Except for the Stranger, who is now examining the beer selection.)* The bus picks up here, yeah?

**STORE OWNER.** Not for a few hours. You want the LA line, Vegas, Houston, or Chicago?

**MARY.** *(Really doesn't know.)* Uh...can you give me a minute to think about it?

**STORE OWNER.** You still got a little time. *(Mary goes into the candy aisle to regroup. Still on edge, catching her breath. She sits on a box and reaches into her backpack to see how much loose change she can retrieve. She counts it, but it's not enough. The Stranger approaches. He shuffles through the candy selection.)*

**STRANGER.** Remember Nutrageous?

**MARY.** Hmm?

**STRANGER.** Nutrageous. The candy. It was like a Reese's...a Reese's product.

**MARY.** Nutrageous? Uh, yeah. I think I remember the commercials.

**STRANGER.** You want one?

**MARY.** Nah, that's OK. I uh, don't really eat sweet stuff.

**STRANGER.** *(Ignoring her response, goes up to the counter.)* Hey, you got Nutrageous?

**STORE OWNER.** What?

**STRANGER.** Nutrageous. It's a candy bar. They used to have em. It's like a Reese's.

**STORE OWNER.** Doesn't sound familiar. Lemme go check... we just got some inventory dropped off out back. *(He exits.)*

**STRANGER.** You don't like sugar?

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**MARY.** It's kind of a rule we follow. It's hard to explain. And anyway, doesn't make me feel good.

**STRANGER.** That fool out there makes you feel good?

**MARY.** Not now.

**STRANGER.** Is he the reason you're all dirty?

**MARY.** He's not that bad.

**STRANGER.** Something bad happened today.

**MARY.** Usually I have faith when bad things happen. Tonight I didn't, I just...jumped.

**STRANGER.** You look like hell.

**MARY.** *(Smiles)* I bet.

**STRANGER.** You'll be alright. But he's gonna be in trouble real soon.

**MARY.** I coulda told you that. *(pause)* Did you roller skate here or something? *(Indicating his rollerblades)*

**STRANGER.** They're roller *blades*. And yes, I did. I wanted a donut. I couldn't help overhearing your uh...conversation. I heard a lot of interesting things.

**MARY.** We don't usually talk about all that in front of outsiders.

**STRANGER.** Outsiders, huh. *(He stares at her)* Nice dress. Did you pick that out?

**MARY.** Nah. It's, like, a church thing. And it's not nice at all.

**STRANGER.** Like a cult thing?

**MARY.** It's hard to explain. My faith...it got out of hand.

**STRANGER.** Are you sure?

**MARY.** About what?

**STRANGER.** About what you're leaving behind you?

**MARY.** Why?

**STRANGER.** If you wait too long here, something else will make your decisions for you.

**MARY.** That sounds exactly like what I'm trying to get away from.

**STRANGER.** Most don't even realize they want somebody else to do their thinking for them. *(Pause.)* We seem to have skipped over the part of the conversation where you say I'm making you uncomfortable. How did that happen?

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**MARY.** I don't get uncomfortable anymore. You do ask a lot of questions though.

**STRANGER.** Do I?

**MARY.** Yeah. And I've got some thinking to do.

**STRANGER.** You don't want to be taking the Greyhound. Just sayin'. That's some dangerous souls.

**MARY.** I don't need you to do my thinking for me.

**STRANGER.** Then you should listen to that voice in your head, saying you should grab your car back.

**MARY.** I...can't. I gave it to him. Before.

**STRANGER.** You can make him give it back.

**MARY.** I can't risk talking to him again.

**STRANGER.** Where are you heading?

**MARY.** Anywhere away from here. Where I can start over again.

**STRANGER.** You didn't grow up in that church of yours, did you? You're sweating too much to be from this hell hole.

**MARY.** No.

**STRANGER.** I see. You ran away from a dying home and you've been out looking for a new home. You found a lot of trouble instead.

**MARY.** How do you/...

**STRANGER.** Almost everybody you meet is somebody you've met before. Either that or magic.

**MARY.** Yeah. I bet.

**STRANGER.** You're a bit of a tough nut to crack though. You don't seem too churchy-like. You know what I mean? How'd you end up out here in the desert if you didn't grow here? Did you get lost, or cast out too?

**MARY.** Huh?

**STRANGER.** Seems like nobody finds themselves out here by choice.

**MARY.** Cast out I think. Yeah. It's a long story.

**STRANGER.** It always is. I'd like to hear it.

**MARY.** Still tryin' to make sense of the answer to that question myself. It's not a short conversation.

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**STRANGER.** Well, you'd be surprised by my attention span. (*pause. Mary's not going to elaborate right now.*) Fine. I just so happen to be leaving town too.

**MARY.** On your roller skates?

**STRANGER.** Blades. I might be able to be of some assistance, in your travels I mean. I only have a few stops to make. Considering you don't seem to know what exactly you want, or where to go, it shouldn't be much trouble. I promise.

**MARY.** I don't have a car anymore.

**STRANGER.** I'll get you a car if you give me a ride.

**MARY.** If you have a car, what do you need me for?

**STRANGER.** I don't need you./ I

**MARY.** How did you know about my family/ and all that?

**STRANGER.** Don't worry about it. (*The Stranger begins to take out his mandolin. It's old.*)

**MARY.** Is that uh...what do you call that instrument on you?

**STRANGER.** Mandolin.

**MARY.** Looks real familiar somehow. You look real familiar somehow. (*The Stranger pulls up the guitar.*)

**STRANGER.** You wanna hear something?

**MARY.** Don't care.

**STRANGER.** You sit there. You've got a choice. You can go any place. Think about where you'd want to go if you could go any place. (*He begins to tune the instrument.*)

**MARY.** I want to go home. I keep saying that in my head, ya know?...If there's such a thing.

**STRANGER.** What's home for you?

**MARY.** That's the thing...I can't remember. My mind hasn't been right.

**STRANGER.** Oh?

**MARY.** I got a North Carolina license plate. That's all I know.

**STRANGER.** They hypnotize you or something?

**MARY.** I can't remember anything from before. Not too clearly...only pieces in dreams. In the back of my head. Faces and places that seem familiar. They're consumed in fog. Things that shouldn't feel right but somehow do.



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**STRANGER.** Your man-friend was all wrong about what home is.

**MARY.** He changed my mind for good. I'm not gonna know my home 'til I see it again, I think. Until I feel it. *(The Stranger begins to mess around with the instrument.)* I haven't heard real music in a long time. *(pause)* I don't know where my home is, but I can't shake the feeling that where I'm going other people can't follow. Or won't follow.

**STRANGER.** Sounds dangerous.

**MARY.** Hoping I'll scare you off. When you start talkin' crazy, most men stop listening.

**STRANGER.** Not me. I like it when they talk crazy.

**MARY.** You meant it. About your attention span, I mean.

**STRANGER.** Just seemed like you needed a friend. *(She goes to grab a gallon of water. She hesitates, but grabs another. The Stranger nearly finishes tuning. That lull happens where she has the opportunity to end the conversation for good, but she doesn't.)*

**MARY.** You didn't say where you were coming from. Most people bring that up after they ask somebody else. Where's home for you?

**STRANGER.** *(repeating back what she had said before, as he finishes up tuning)* "Still tryin' to make sense of the answer to that question myself. It's--not--a--short--conversation."

### CIGARETTE 3: CATCH FIRE

*He plays. The band joins in. A song blows up. Mary feels it. When the music plays, the magic happens. The old songs conjure the spirits and if the timing's just right, they can make things happen. We feel something change. Something terrible is about to happen. The song crescendos, and as it does, an explosion is heard outside, from behind MARY's old car. Song is interrupted by the Store Owner's entrance. He rushes to the phone behind the counter. Dials.*

**STORE OWNER.** *(on the phone)* Yeah, I need police, or an ambulance, or uh, I dunno, the fire department...Somebody outside...he just...uh...*(back into the phone)* Yeah send somebody...an ambulance or /something.

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**MARY.** What happened?

**STORE OWNER.** White guy just blew himself up.

**MARY.** What?!

**STORE OWNER.** He blew up in flames, I dunno what happened. *(into the phone)* Yes, there's a fire. *(Mary runs toward the back door. The Stranger tries to stop her.)*

**STRANGER.** Hey. HEY! *(Mary runs out the back door. The Stranger doesn't fight her. He walks up to the counter.)* Pack of American Spirits. The blue box.

**STORE OWNER.** *(staying on the phone. to the Stranger)* Can you gimme a/ second...

**STRANGER.** Dark blue. *(The Store Owner is on hold and we hear a recording. He grabs the cigarettes as the Stranger puts the money down on the counter. Mary runs back in. She tries to make it to the bathroom before she pukes, but the fucking door is locked. She sits down on the floor. She is not well.)*

**STRANGER.** Hey. C'mere for a sec.

**MARY.** What? *(He hands her a sports drink from one of the cases.)*

**STRANGER.** You need electrolytes. This is the desert. You got a long road ahead. Sip it slow. *(She does)*

**MARY.** *(reeling)* What is wrong with you? Why are you helping me?

**STRANGER.** You weren't trying to go back to him were ya?

**MARY.** NO.

**STRANGER.** Sometimes those bridges have to burn.

**MARY.** God. Fuck. I...I uh...really, really, really wanted that to happen. That's the only thing I knew I wanted.

**STRANGER.** You wait right here. *(He goes to exit.)*

**MARY.** Hey wait!

**STRANGER.** Huh?

**MARY.** Your music. It was really...You're really good.

**STRANGER.** I wasn't leaving/

**MARY.** Oh.../right

**STRANGER.** I'll be right back.

**MARY.** Oh...yeah, ok. *(He exits to the outside.)*

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**STORE OWNER.** *(into the phone)* Yes, hi...Yes. I'm not sure, but I think he was smoking. I didn't get a good look at how close he was to the pump if that might've been what...Nah. I didn't see nothing else catch fire. Nah, there's nobody else around. *(pause)* Wait, somebody's/ still here, hold on...

**MARY.** No, I'm not. *(Store Owner speaks a few moments in a language few understand as he eyes her cautiously.)*

**STORE OWNER.** *(to the phone)* Lemme call you right back. *(to Mary)* Did you...did you know that guy?

**MARY.** No. I need...uh, that Houston ticket. For the bus...I can transfer in Houston to just about anywhere, yeah?

**STORE OWNER.** I imagine so. If that's what you want.

**MARY.** Oh...And all this stuff.. *(She's not very steady in her movement, but attempts to compile the things she's trying to buy and arrange them on the counter. She takes off her shoe to retrieve some cash stored under her sole. He rings up her order.)*

**STORE OWNER.** I'm gonna sell you your Greyhound. And then maybe you really should get out of here. What ever it is you're running from might be catching up to you. Haven't seen nothing like that...in a long time. *(The Stranger enters, holding the car keys.)*

**STRANGER.** You won't be needing that ticket. Told ya. Now, wanna go for a ride? *(dangling the keys)*

**MARY.** You took keys off a burned up man...A dead man.

**STRANGER.** His wallet too. Not much cash though, except this hundred in his shoe. *(He pulls out an unscathed hundred-dollar bill.)* The fire went out. *(to the Store Owner)* Sorry for the mess.

**MARY.** How did that/ not...

**STRANGER.** Don't worry about it.

**STORE OWNER.** *(quietly to Mary)* Hey. Was that guy out there the one who had his voice raised up earlier?

**MARY.** *(to the Store Owner, but almost to herself)* I didn't have anything to do with it.

**STORE OWNER.** This is a dangerous place sometimes. Most come out here with a choice to make, whether they know it or not. You don't want to get stuck here.

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**MARY.** Yeah. I...don't think I'll need the ticket. Thanks for your help.

**STORE OWNER.** Then you should leave now. If you're decided.

*(The Stranger approaches the counter.)*

**STRANGER.** *(to the Store Owner)* No Nutrageous, huh? I think they discontinued them.

**STORE OWNER.** Friend. I'm tryna close up...There's police coming out. *(The Store Owner sells him the items and begins to close up. He keeps his eye on the two of them, but pretends not to.)*

**STRANGER.** Does it feel as good as you thought?

**MARY.** Does what feel good?

**STRANGER.** Getting what you wanted.

**MARY.** What's your name?

**STRANGER.** Can't tell you that yet. You're gonna have to guess. And you're *MARY*.

**MARY.** Yeah. You heard.

**STRANGER.** I think you're the one I was hoping I'd run into. I've been waiting here a long time. Should leave before the police get here or things might get complicated.

**MARY.** *(still reeling)* You said you want a ride somewhere.

**STRANGER.** You said you want to go where the others can't follow. You said you've got to find that home in the back of your mind. Me too. I think we'll make good traveling companions. Just saying. Better decide quick.

**MARY.** Give me those keys.

**STRANGER.** *(handing them over)* Easy! I was gonna offer to drive. You've had a bad day. Buried alive. Your man spontaneously combusting.

**MARY.** Shut up. *(She begins the walk toward the car. He follows, pulling out a cigarette. She looks at the keys.)* Doesn't seem right. Taking these.

**STRANGER.** It's your car, you said.

**MARY.** I've been used to their rules. His rules, ya know. I can still hear him in my head even now. I'm not supposed to be having these thoughts. *(She takes a sip of Powerade.)* You don't have any reason to be going to North Carolina, do you?

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**STRANGER.** Sure I do. Maybe I'll find a place to call home too. Love that High Country. So much oxygen. You get a head change. *(Mary looks at the Stranger. Tries to stifle a smile. She has bad taste.)*

**MARY.** Alright. I guess you can come or something. You can come if you want. Ya know, if you need. If you don't wanna, ya know, roller blade around.

**STRANGER.** You sure? *(She nods.)* Well, OK then. But...You're a little, uh, nauseated. I'm not sure if you're in your right mind. You want me to drive?

**MARY.** I'm not in my right mind. Feels good. And I'm never letting anybody drive me anywhere again. *(They exit with urgency to the old car. They pull away hastily. Music. The Store Owner continues closing up. The merchandise is no longer visible. He locks the doors and the store is no longer a store. The Store Owner looks around. He takes a bowl out from behind the desk. He places a series of herbs in the bowl and burns them. He speaks quietly. As he speaks, the music from Mary's car (enhances by the band, dies off, as does the voice of Josiah (see below) While he does this, Josiah's lost soul lingers, emerging from the dark, covered in ash. He can now see and meet the audience. He wanders around. He picks his cigarette up off the ground. It lights. He finishes it.)*

**JOSIAH'S SOUL.** *(As he speaks, his voice begins to fade until it is inaudible, and he knows it. He recites from his scripture but no one is listening anymore)* "For you have cast yourself from grace, With your bullshit, By the blood of the unborn Savior, You shall die the death of the unchaste by the hand of a devil; for I have spoken, declares the Lord God." *(We can't hear him anymore.)*

#### **CIGARETTE 4: THE SERPENT'S HEAD**

*Walmart Parking Lot, Gallup, New Mexico. The next morning. Mary sleeps curled up in the driver's seat of the car. The Stranger sleeps on the blacktop. Parked next to them is a 1985 Lindy RV. It's been there for some time. In a foldable beach chair sits DON MAYFIELD. He's grilling up eggs and bacon on a propane camping stove. A big light-up statue of*

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*the Virgin Mary is set up by the door of his RV. She's a little beat up...has seen better days. Don is in his early 70s and walks with a limp due to a dune buggy accident long ago. A Texan. Ex hippie turned born again Christian. He's been RVing for a long time. He reads from a Bible. Mary speaks Eve's line in her sleep.*

**DON.** "Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said,

**MARY.** 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'

**DON.** So the Lord God said to the serpent,

'Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'

To the woman he said,

'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'

To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.'"

Guess you can't really win as a human being, can ya. *(He tends to his eggs And bacon for a moment, plates them and puts another round on the stove. He goes over to his plate and begins to eat. MARY stirs. She talks and walks in her sleep. She sounds a lot different. The words are barely audible.)*

**MARY.** *(asleep)* You've lost your mind, old man...the universe wants its Mommy. You weren't even there when they were born. You left and all you left was songs that are stuck in my head. I am no longer a child. Don't touch me. DON'T TOUCH ME.

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*She wakes herself up, and almost hits her head on something. Don has been listening to her. He knocks on the window.*

**DON MAYFIELD.** Hey Missy, you alright over there? *(Mary gets up.)*

**MARY.** I...I forgot where I was. I startled myself. I almost hit my head on the stupid...but, yeah sorry, uh, thank you. I'm OK now.

**DON MAYFIELD.** You havin' a nightmare or somethin'?

**MARY.** Nah it was...it was a good dream, actually. I can't really remember it now.

**DON MAYFIELD.** You're a little creepy, talkin' around like that. You hungry?

**MARY.** I dunno yet, I just woke up.

**DON MAYFIELD.** I got bacon and eggs going. You can have some.

**MARY.** Oh...Ok, sure I'll try and eat some. As soon as I wake up. Thank you. *(she looks at his makeshift kitchen)* It's...uh, a homey set-up you've got.

**DON MAYFIELD.** I can make a home any place. Happens when you've been RVing for the past twenty years.

**MARY.** You like it? RVing?

**DON MAYFIELD.** It's freedom. Nobody owns me. 'Cept God.

**MARY.** I'd better get going as soon as he wakes up. *(She indicates the Stranger, still asleep on the pavement on a sleeping pad.)*

**DON MAYFIELD.** You made him sleep on the pavement, huh?

**MARY.** He's not my...we're not...I don't know him all that well. We only met last night...

**DON MAYFIELD.** Oh I see...

**MARY.** No you don't.

**DON MAYFIELD.** I didn't mean to...

**MARY.** It's fine. I just...He just, uh, kind of helped me out last night. I figured I'd do him a favor.

**DON MAYFIELD.** Just don't do him too many favors. *(pause)* I think I seen him around before.

**MARY.** Him? Do you, uh, know his name?

**DON MAYFIELD.** Nah. I remember him though. *(Mary goes to grab the mandolin from its case.)* What are you doing?

**MARY.** I dunno.

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**DON MAYFIELD.** You play?

**MARY.** I think maybe I do, actually. If I can remember how. I think it's been a long time. *(She strums a few chords.)* They're always getting out of tune real easy. Weird how certain memories stick. *(She tunes and strums as they talk.)* What kind of music do you like?

**DON MAYFIELD.** All kinds. Ya know...I was once a Woodstock child. Rock and roll and all that... but I mostly like the spiritual stuff now.

**MARY.** Oh...uh huh. *(She gets nervous. You have to get nervous sometimes out West because the person you're talking to might be in another kind of cult.)* Like what kind of spiritual? Like the making-love-to Jesus-kind?

**DON MAYFIELD.** Well, I mean I'm a Christian. My wife...my second wife...Joanna...she helped me find the way. Before she passed. *(beat)* You don't believe in God.

**MARY.** Can't remember.

**DON MAYFIELD.** You'd know it if you did.

**MARY.** Do you believe in me?

**DON MAYFIELD.** I don't know you.

**MARY.** The whole Bible thing...it's a sore subject. I just left a...a religious community.

**DON MAYFIELD.** Mormons?

**MARY.** Not exactly. I fell out...out of a kind of love I guess. I did something real bad... I tried to leave, and they said I was...they thought I might be--

**DON MAYFIELD.** Aw, false prophets. You? *(laughs)* Seem like a sweetheart to me.

**MARY.** Guess it depends on who you're talking to. *(pause)* Here. I think it's finally... *(She strums the mandolin. It's in tune. She begins to play "The Daemon Lover/House Carpenter". She sings)*

Well met, well met, my own true love

Well met, well met, cried he

I've just returned from the salt, salt sea

All for the love of thee



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Oh, will you forsake your house carpenter  
And go along with me?

I'll take you to where the grass grows green  
To the banks of the salt, salt sea

**MARY.** You ever hear this one? It's kinda spiritual...or moral I guess.  
About a demon.

**DON MAYFIELD.** One of those mountain songs.

**MARY.** Brings back a kind of memory. *(sings)*

Oh what are those hills yonder, my love

They look as white as snow

Those are the hills of heaven, my love

You and I'll never know

Oh what are those hills yonder, my love

They look as dark as night

Those are the hills of hell-fire my love

Where you and I'll unite *(As she sings, the Stranger stirs. He shakes in his sleep. He is having a sleep paralysis. Mary suddenly notices and stops playing. She goes over to him.)*

**MARY.** Hey! Hey, wake up! What's wrong with you? Wake up!  
*She shakes him.*

**STRANGER.** Huh? Oh...man....I was...I was just/ having...

**MARY.** You were in a nightmare or something.

**STRANGER.** Sleep paralysis.

**MARY.** It looked real creepy.

**STRANGER.** You walk and talk in your sleep. That's pretty creepy.

**MARY.** I do not.

**DON MAYFIELD** *(to the Stranger)* You alright?

**STRANGER.** *(to Mary)* Who's he?

**DON MAYFIELD.** Don Mayfield. Didn't want to wake you. You want some bacon?

**STRANGER.** I don't eat the swine's flesh.

**DON MAYFIELD.** Ok then. There's eggs.

**MARY.** *(to the Stranger)* Should probably eat so we can get going.  
Don't ya/ think? You sleep an awful lot.

**STRANGER.** I like dreams. *(quiet, to Mary)* Who is this guy?

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**MARY.** I dunno, he lives here I think. He's nice.

**STRANGER.** *(to Don Mayfield)* Just you and your lady friend? *(he indicates to the statue of Mary)* She better watch it, stepping on that rattlesnake in bare feet, huh?

**DON MAYFIELD.** It's the serpent who's got to watch it. That reminds me. If you don't want bacon, I got some rattlesnake cooking up. It get's a little tough but it can be good/ eatin'...

**MARY.** I'd like to try/ some...

**STRANGER.** You don't wanna be eating that animal.

**MARY.** Yes I do, I never tried it.

**STRANGER.** The animals you eat are the ones you become. Least, that's how it works in this continent.

**DON MAYFIELD.** Would y'all mind keeping an eye on the grill for a minute?

**MARY.** No problem. *(Don exits into his RV. Mary goes to the grill. She takes the rattlesnake with her bare hands. She devours it. She looks at the Stranger.)* What? *(The Stranger shakes his head.)* If you're not gonna eat let's get going. We've been here too long.

**CIGARETTE 5: CARRY FIRE**

**STRANGER.** Did you sleep?

**MARY.** I did. What time is it?

**STRANGER.** *(he doesn't look at a watch)* Almost afternoon already.

**MARY.** Seems like you slept OK out here? Before the uh, sleep paralysis happened?

**STRANGER.** Not soundly.

**MARY.** I mean...you were asleep most of the drive, so maybe you didn't need it. *(The Stranger sees the instrument out of its case.)*

**STRANGER.** Who said you could go and use that?

**MARY.** Nobody said.

**STRANGER.** You play?

**MARY.** Only a little. *(pause)* Don says he's seen you around here before. Are you gonna tell me what your deal is?

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**STRANGER.** (*yawns, still waking up*) I hadn't mentioned anything about a deal to you, did I?

**MARY.** I meant what your story is. I'm serious. What were you doing out here before?

**STRANGER.** I've been out West on the move for about five months now. Can't remember if I stayed at this particular WALMART, but it's possible.

**MARY.** What about before that? (*pause, no response*) Look, I appreciate your, uh, help(?) last night but I'm trying to keep things boring from now on and I'd like to be sure you're not too interesting.

**STRANGER.** You sure you don't scare easy?

**MARY.** Yes.

**STRANGER.** Listen...everything I tell you about who I am, you've got to promise not to tell another soul. Living or dead. If you don't like what you hear, you're free to leave me here, understand?

**MARY.** Uh huh.

**STRANGER.** Last time I told somebody I got locked up. Locked away. Drugged up. Do you promise?

**MARY.** What, are you wanted or something?

**STRANGER.** Well, no...well, yes...

**MARY.** Which is it? (*pause*) Am I gonna be in some kind of trouble for knowing you?

**STRANGER.** Not any more trouble than you already got. You're wanted too. C'mon, I won't let that happen. You're of interest to me. It's a kind of self interest.

**MARY.** I just don't want to regret knowing you, like I do everybody else.

**STRANGER.** It's your choice. I don't think you'll find much reason unless you want to. Not unless you tell anybody what I'm about to tell you. You promise? (*Mary nods.*) I can't remember a whole lot either. Something changed my mind too. About a year ago, something happened. Right around my thirty-third birthday. I was living in Detroit. That I remember. See...one night, everything changed. I was working on a song...writing one. Just jamming in my room real late. I found a song I never found before. I couldn't find my way out of it. And as I played, I

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kept hearing...I kept thinking I heard this knock at the door. And that was when he introduced himself.

**MARY.** Who?

**STRANGER.** Some call him the one who brings light. The one who carries fire.

**MARY.** I...I don't believe in the devil.

**STRANGER.** Neither did I. But the presence spoke to me about things...coincidences that had confused me all my life. Told me my name. Revealed my own power to me for the first time, and I became aware that I wasn't alone in the universe, but surrounded by voices. He showed me how to control them. How to collect them.

**MARY.** So who is it he told you you were?

**STRANGER.** The one who doesn't corrupt, but who will collect the souls of those who are already damned.

**MARY.** So you believe you are the devil?

**STRANGER.** Maybe, maybe not. Maybe I'm just supposed to serve him.

**MARY.** What's your real name?

**STRANGER.** Don't remember.

**MARY.** C'mon, you don't remember before a year ago?

**STRANGER.** A lot happened in a year. *(pause)* You ever heard of Pine Rest?

**MARY.** No.

**STRANGER.** It's a Christian mental...you know...A hospital. Facility. Funny...they want you to believe in God, but if you really believe in this shit you are crazy.

**MARY.** How do you know you're not?

**STRANGER.** What?

**MARY.** Crazy.

**STRANGER.** Well, others soon learned how right I was. It terrified them. 'Cause they couldn't account for the things I know. The holes I can find clear as day in their cateschism.

**MARY.** Their what?

**STRANGER.** Cate-schism. Not to mention the things I can make happen. That's how I managed to escape.

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**MARY.** What things?

**STRANGER.** I can know a person...really know them. Hear the voices in their head. Their own and the ones they carry with them.

**MARY.** Don't you think all crazy people there think they can do that?

**STRANGER.** You don't believe me? There are things I know/

**MARY.** Yeah, you keep saying/ that...

**STRANGER.** I know your home died. I know it happened sudden. I know you ran off...you packed your bags in the middle of the night. You've done that a few different times in different places. You like to run off from yourself. That was the first time. You took a car that didn't belong to you. You found a man you thought you loved, but he wasn't who he thought he was. He possessed you in more ways than one.

**MARY.** So what. You pay attention. You overheard, the other night/ when he...

**STRANGER.** You said something...that you don't know where you're going but it's gonna be where nobody else can follow.

**MARY.** Yeah.

**STRANGER.** That's what He'd said to me. That night He introduced Himself.

**MARY.** So...what, you've come to steal my soul?

**STRANGER.** Nobody can steal your soul. Most people give it up willingly. Besides, you don't happen to be on the list.

I collect souls. So do you, whether or not you've noticed it yet.

**MARY.** I think you're crazy.

**STRANGER.** That's besides the point. I think you are too. In a dangerous way.

**MARY.** What if you've got it all wrong and we're both not who you think?

**STRANGER.** I'm never wrong. *(A pause.)*

**MARY.** The old man's been gone a long time.

**STRANGER.** He fell asleep on the toilet seat. Happens to old folks sometimes.

**MARY.** We should get on the road if we want to get across West Texas before dark. Where are you needing to stop off?

**STRANGER.** New Orleans.

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**MARY.** I mean, seriously.

**STRANGER.** I am serious.

**MARY.** New Orleans is not on the way.

**STRANGER.** You'll love it. And it's real foggy just like that home in your head. Just sayin'. I got a soul to collect down south.

**MARY.** Well, maybe with your magic powers you can figure out some gas money if we're going all the way to Louisiana "on the way."

**STRANGER.** I got you for gas. If you can wait a minute. I have to stop in WALMART first.

**MARY.** Then go on. I like to get on the road, I don't like driving at night.

**STRANGER.** You'll drive me? Or you're gonna leave me here? *(Pause)*

**MARY.** I...don't think I've ever been to New Orleans.

**STRANGER.** Right. Alright, I'll be back as soon as I can. *(He gathers a few things and puts his shoes on.)* You might wanna knock. Ya know, to wake him up or make sure he didn't fall in. Stay off the music if you don't want trouble. That's not a threat it's just...a uh, recommendation. *(As he goes to leave he sees the Mary statue.)* One thing I do remember...Those things have always creeped me out. Ever since I was a kid. *(He exits. Mary knocks on the RV door.)*

**MARY.** Hey! Uh...Don? Mr. Mayfield? You need some help in there? *(No answer.)* Your food is gonna burn, so I'm gonna go ahead and... *(The door opens.)*

**DON MAYFIELD.** Is he gone? Your, uh, boyfriend?

**MARY.** He's not my boyfriend.

**DON MAYFIELD.** Good. I don't like him. Ya know, I seen him around here before.

**MARY.** You mentioned that. *(pause)* You were in there that whole time waiting for him to leave?

**DON MAYFIELD.** I uh...fell asleep there for a second.

**MARY.** OH? *(tries not to laugh)* Uh huh?

**DON MAYFIELD.** I had this...real vivid dream. A vision almost.

**MARY.** What of? *(Don doesn't answer. He starts cleaning up his breakfast spread.)*

**DON MAYFIELD.** Who was it you said you were?

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**MARY.** I guess, I didn't...

**DON MAYFIELD.** Are you two headed somewhere together?

**MARY.** I told you he's not my...we're not together...

**DON MAYFIELD.** But you're traveling together. That means you need each other. Just be careful who you let yourself need.

**MARY.** Oh I am.

**DON MAYFIELD.** How old are you? You grown?

**MARY.** Why?

**DON MAYFIELD.** What, twenty one, twenty two?

**MARY.** I'm over eighteen.

**DON MAYFIELD.** You gotta take care of yourself.

**MARY.** Yeah I know.

**DON MAYFIELD.** Did I tell you I had a daughter about your age?

**MARY.** No, you didn't say you had kids.

**DON MAYFIELD.** Just the one. Elsie. Her name was. She was just about your age. She died, ya understand, when she was about your age.

**MARY.** I'm so sorry.

**DON MAYFIELD.** It's devastating when you lose a child.

**MARY.** Yes. I...uh, yes.

**DON MAYFIELD.** Thought I'd never make sense of it. But I know where she is. I'll be seeing her again soon I don't doubt.

**MARY.** How did she die?

**DON MAYFIELD.** She run off. She was an addict. Meth and all that pain.

**MARY.** I'm so sorry.

**DON MAYFIELD.** Don't apologize to me. Apologize to your own parents.

**MARY.** My parents aren't...uh, I don't know them anymore.

**DON MAYFIELD.** Hey listen. Girl, what's your name?

**MARY.** Mary

**DON MAYFIELD.** A girl named Mary.

**MARY.** Ya know, I guess I'm named after your, uh...your friend there.

**DON MAYFIELD.** Mary, most of the people you meet out here aren't here by choice. They're running from something. Convincing themselves of something. That guy you're clinging/ to

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**MARY.** I'm not/

**DON MAYFIELD.** He wouldn't be sleeping on that blacktop if he had power in him to do differently. Everybody takes power if they can get it. They use it up. Just remember that.

**MARY.** What about you? You like living out here...going from Walmart to Walmart?

**DON MAYFIELD.** I chose this life. When you have nothing left you find something.

**MARY.** Sometimes you don't like what you find.

**DON MAYFIELD.** I don't care. I prefer to believe in what I want to believe about my life and my self and my God. I got a home. A property...up in Mariposa, near Yosemite. Cali. It's not much, but...we had a barn all set up like a room. Like a house. For my daughter. Elsie. For, ya know, if she ever wanted to come home. It's there still. Just sitting empty. Here. *(Don grabs a napkin and writes down the address and phone number.)* Keep this.

**MARY.** Look, you don't need to/ worry about me.

**DON MAYFIELD.** If you ever need, the address is here. You phone me and I'll tell you how to find the key, how to get inside, and you can make yourself home there. Just you. I got horses. I got cows. They could use the help up there. *(Mary looks at the napkin for a moment.)* There's a home for you if ya ever need.

**MARY.** I...thank you. I don't think I'll ever be out that way again...  
*(She tries to hand the napkin back to him.)*

**DON MAYFIELD.** Just hold onto it. Please. I'd feel much better knowing.

**MARY.** That's...that's kind. *(A pause. She folds the napkin into a journal and puts it into her backpack.)* I uh...I ate the rattlesnake. All of it. *(The Stranger returns. He carries a plastic bag full of prescriptions in pill form. He's eating from a large chocolate bar. He breaks off a square of chocolate and hands it to Mary.)*

**MARY.** Ready?

**STRANGER.** One more stop and then we're gone. I promise. *(to Don)* Hey, do you know where the El Capitan is from here? It's a motel? *(Don looks pale at the mention of the place.)*



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**DON MAYFIELD.** You're not tryna stay there are ya?

**STRANGER.** Just a visit.

**DON MAYFIELD.** It can't be more than a mile. Not too far off the 66. Can't miss it if you're heading East.

**MARY.** Why?

**STRANGER.** I have some exchanges to make real quick.

**MARY.** What's all that? Did you get gas money?

**STRANGER.** Just trust me. *(He begins to change clothes into a shirt and tie that he pulls out of his backpack. They're wrinkled.)*

**MARY.** What drugs are those?

**STRANGER.** They're medicines I don't need. They'll be useful where we're headed.

**MARY.** You're trying to convince me to come sell drugs with you?

**STRANGER.** No. It's a pick up and a drop off.

**MARY.** We need to leave the desert. I can't shake the feeling like somebody's...I dunno...the People might be chasing after me.

**STRANGER.** They'll never find you out here. And I told you I got your back. *(Mary thinks for a moment.)*

**DON MAYFIELD.** Hey MARY. C'mere. *(She walks over to him.)* Hey, don't be going over to the El Capitan with all that stuff. That's a dark place, even during the day. All kinds of the people I've been talking about. Look, c'mere. *(He goes into the RV for a moment. Returns. He hands her a large wad of cash.)* That should be enough to get East. And getting back. West.

**MARY.** C'mon, I can't...I could never pay you back...

**DON MAYFIELD.** It's alright, take it. I want you to have it. And this. *(He hands her an old rosary.)* Just in case. I know, I know, you said you don't believe in anything, but just hold onto it for me. It was my daughter's...from her confirmation.

**MARY.** Come on, I can't.

**DON MAYFIELD.** Take it and get outta here. It's scary out there for a young girl. Don't forget what I said. *(to the Stranger)* So long, friend. I'll uh...I'll be seein' you. *(He exits into the RV. Mary and the Stranger head to the car.)*

**MARY.** Well, I guess that settles it. So we can just go, yeah?

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**STRANGER.** Called it.

**MARY.** What?

**STRANGER.** I didn't expect so much though. That'll definitely do it.

**MARY.** What do you mean, what did/ you think..?

**STRANGER.** That man lost his daughter in a sketchy motel full of tweakers. He's not just gonna sit there. Heartstrings and shit. He finally got the chance to feel like he's the good person like he believes himself to be. Plus, that guy really doesn't like me. We did good. *(He hands her another square of chocolate.)*

**MARY.** You knew.

**STRANGER.** I told you I know things. Let's go.

**MARY.** New Orleans.

**STRANGER.** We still gotta stop at the motel.

**MARY.** Still?

**STRANGER.** It's not for a money thing. It's another kind of thing.

**MARY.** He was a nice guy. You didn't need to con him like that.

**STRANGER.** I didn't con him. You did. *(She stares at him. She gets in the car. He gets in the car. They turn the radio on and the band begins to play. MARY looks back at the Mary statue. They drive off.)*

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