

THE LENGTH OF A POP SONG

by
Taylor Gruenloh

THE LENGTH OF A POP SONG

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*To AJ,
We'll always be listening for your song.*

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The Length of a Pop Song had its world premiere produced at The Marcelle Theatre in St. Louis, Missouri July 8, 2022. It was directed by Karen Pierce. Jessa Knust was Stage Manager. Lighting Designer was Kevin Bowman. Scenic Designer was Brittanie Gunn. The world premiere cast was as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------|--------|
| Rhiannon Creighton | Lex |
| Donna Parrone | Anna |
| Kelvin Urday | Oliver |

Original song used in world premiere production:

“again”

Music by Gracie Sartin and Teddy Luecke.
Lyrics by Taylor Gruenloh and Gracie Sartin.

The Length of a Pop Song received a staged reading at the Missouri University of Science and Technology on September 20, 2025. It was directed by Taylor Gruenloh with the following cast:

| | |
|-----------------------|--------|
| Josie Schnelten | Lex |
| Beth Reardon | Anna |
| Matt Minatra | Oliver |

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CAST:

Lex - Female - mid/late 20s - A young woman, hurting

Anna - Female - mid 50s - Lex's mother

Oliver - Male - mid/late 20s - A reminder to breathe, the defender of life

TIME:

2020s.

PLACE:

North County St. Louis.

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NOTES FROM PLAYWRIGHT:

The circumstances surrounding Lex's sexual assault and court case were taken from real life events. The discussion around nonconsensual videos on adult websites is still ongoing and legislature is being created to protect women like Lex. If you find this story important enough to produce, please research current laws and adult website requirements and feel free to weave those updates into Anna's final words at the end of the play.

The creative team behind the initial productions and readings of this play have all found it necessary to keep Lex talking without much delay in a new thought coming out before the previous thought has had time to land with other characters and/or audience. Lex is always running from herself.

*This play merely sees one battle
in a larger war.*

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LEX walks into her old bedroom followed by ANNA. It's very youthful in color and decor. Lex has a backpack on, which she slings off and shoves under the bed at some point.

LEX. You put everything back.

ANNA. Not everything.

LEX. I thought you'd gotten rid of all my furniture.

ANNA. No. Just in the basement.

LEX. I mean... Dad was all excited to turn this into his new writing room. I bet he didn't give it up easy.

ANNA. He was happy to have you move back in.

LEX. Yeah, right. You're a horrible liar.

ANNA. I'm not lying.

LEX. You didn't have to repaint the walls.

ANNA. We thought it would be nice. To come home to something familiar.

LEX. It's weird.

ANNA. Lex.

LEX. It's just... freaky.

ANNA. We wanted you to feel at home.

LEX. That's not the same shade of blue, ya know.

ANNA. We couldn't remember the exact color. We picked something close.

LEX. I could live in the basement.

ANNA. No. It's dark and damp down there. We got your room back in order, and I'm sorry if it feels... "freaky."

LEX. Afraid I'll sneak out? Being downstairs?

ANNA. No. You're free to go at any time.

LEX. But that's not really true, is it?

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ANNA. You can leave whenever you want.

LEX. I just won't be allowed back in.

ANNA. That's up to your father.

LEX. Well. Good thing I don't have anywhere to go. Not anymore.

ANNA. Do you want something to eat?

LEX. No.

ANNA. I'll make a sandwich.

LEX. Okay.

ANNA. Remember. You have an appointment tomorrow at eleven. I moved my lunch hour up so I can take you.

LEX. Don't.

ANNA. What?

LEX. Don't 'project manage' me right now.

ANNA. I'm just reminding you--

LEX. I'm not a to-do list. Okay? That kind of shit's gonna make me run outta here. Quickly.

ANNA. I'm sorry.

LEX. No, you're not.

ANNA. Lex.

LEX. I'm just saying. You only apologized to calm me down. The phrase "I'm sorry" is used as a hollow pacifier way too much in my world and its... Just... don't say that, unless... Okay?

ANNA. Your grandma wants to come over for dinner tomorrow night.

LEX. Fuck.

ANNA. I know.

LEX. I can't. Please, mom. No.

ANNA. She hasn't seen you in a very long time.

LEX. 'Cause I'm better at avoiding her than you and dad. She can't guilt me 'cause I won't let her. And the only reason you're gonna let her over here tomorrow is because you know she'll put her claws into me. And you'll let her, because you and dad'll get to be the innocent bystanders. You'll get the brownie points for going over and getting her, bringing her here, but won't have to suffer the inquisition. You'll sacrifice me, so when you drop her off at the old folk's home, you can say, "We know Lex is hard to talk to, but thanks for coming over and spending time with

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her. She needs you. And we love having you over for dinner. Now please reset the Catholic guilt counter so we can ignore you for another handful of months.”

ANNA. That’s not how it is at all.

LEX. It’s not?

ANNA. And it’s not an old folk’s home, it’s a retirement village.

LEX. A legalized concentration camp.

ANNA. Fine. I’ll tell her no.

LEX. Thank you.

ANNA. I’ll tell her you’re not up to it.

LEX. Don’t try to guilt me, mom... *(Lex sees a small statue of Mary on the dresser and picks it up.)* You really did hit reset on this room.

ANNA. It was a gift for your first communion, and it was in a box with your other things.

LEX. Let’s go back to hiding it. *(Lex opens a drawer and stuffs the Mary statue in but sees something else...)* Oh. Wow. You bought me new underwear? And socks?

ANNA. I didn’t know what you had. Or what you were bringing with you.

LEX. No, I needed these. Thank you. Oh. Thongs.

ANNA. That’s all you were wearing when you moved out the first time.

LEX. You hated seeing them in the laundry.

ANNA. Not very practical to buy you the kind you won’t wear. And I figured...

LEX. Figured what?

ANNA. That you... that you’d be preferring the same thing, even after...

LEX. That being sexually assaulted would make me change my underwear preference?

ANNA. Like, I said, I figured not. But, if you need something else, I can go to the store later.

LEX. No. I still wear the same stuff.

ANNA. Okay. Well. I’ll be downstairs.

LEX. Can I ask you something?

ANNA. You can ask me anything.

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LEX. Like, you don't have to respond, you can just, like, acknowledge that this is a question floating around my head and you can do with it what you like. It's stuff I'm thinking about, being sober, and reading all the shit that's being thrown at me right now.

ANNA. Just ask.

LEX. Why are you such a good mom at shit like this, having underwear ready for me, always being ready to pick me up from wherever I'm at, but completely unable to see where I'm emotionally coming from, like, on anything?

ANNA. I don't not see it.

LEX. And don't get defensive.

ANNA. I'm not getting defensive.

LEX. Yes, you are. Your back got straight. Like, when dad starts making fun of you when there's company over. And I get it, I just questioned your identity, I'd be defensive, too. But we don't have to talk about this right now.

ANNA. Do you not want to talk about this right now?

LEX. I just want you to know that, like, I'm both thankful and furious at the same time. Like, the underwear thing is really nice, mom. I wanna cry because it just hit me how much you take care of me, but then I see this fake shade of blue on the walls...

ANNA. It's just paint.

LEX. It's not. But, okay. Fine.

ANNA. What do you need, Lex?

LEX. I don't know.

ANNA. Do you want me to leave you alone? (*A moment. Anna goes to leave...*)

LEX. Have you seen it? The video?

ANNA. No.

LEX. It's okay if you have. I just... I find it more, I don't know... to, like, know if... who I'm talking to has seen it. The unknowing eats me up, like... I stop listening to what people are saying, and I just wanna throw up, or something. Does that make sense?

ANNA. I haven't seen it. And I won't.

LEX. I, mean, that's what I figured. What about Dad?

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ANNA. There's no reason for us to see it.

LEX. The curiosity doesn't eat you alive?

ANNA. No.

LEX. Just to see how bad it really was?

ANNA. No, Lex.

LEX. At that support group, that the lawyer sent us to? Remember all those girls? I went on to the usual websites looking for their videos.

Found eight out of the fifteen so far.

ANNA. Why would you do that?

LEX. 'Cause I'm a monster.

ANNA. You're not a monster.

LEX. I wanted to know if they had it worse than me. Or if they didn't.

ANNA. I don't think going to those websites is healthy.

LEX. I know... Trust me... It's just... Oh, my god. Look. Out the window. You see all those birds? Damn... I forgot how all the birds would gather right here after it rains.

ANNA. The worms. They love our yard. Your father hates how many of them get on the back porch.

LEX. He hates everything.

ANNA. That's not true.

LEX. He hates me.

ANNA. Lex.

LEX. Mom. Come on. He hates all of us.

ANNA. It's sad that you think that.

LEX. No. It's just the way it is. You, like, have this different view on everyone, like you can see the good in them, you believe that underneath everyone's dark clouds and psyche there's this wholesome, almost empathetic soul, that's, somehow, just trapped inside the pain of existing. And it's sweet that you do that. I'm glad, that, like, God... and the church... could... give you that perspective, but... it's not reality. Ya, know? Dad hates me, he hates you, he hates everything around him. I don't say that looking for some sort of reassurance, or whatever. It's just an observation. A statement.

ANNA. I don't know what to say to that.

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LEX. You don't have to say anything. Or you could yell at me. Up to you.

ANNA. Those are my options? Silence or yelling?

LEX. Seems everything in-between is ineffective with me.

ANNA. Have you taken your medication?

LEX. Why?

ANNA. You seem a little scattershot.

LEX. 'Cause I'm fucking broken.

ANNA. You're not broken.

LEX. Then why the hell am I moving back in here?

ANNA. To rest. But you're not broken.

LEX. I'm polluted. Broken in the sense that no one cares because they don't actually see it. If you stay far enough away from me, you won't smell the decay of burning garbage.

ANNA. Promise me you won't look at those websites while you're here.

LEX. You gonna take my phone and computer away?

ANNA. If you let me.

LEX. God. I am a mental case.

ANNA. Would you stop that?

LEX. What?

ANNA. You're a monster. A mental case. A garbage fire. Just, stop it. I don't like hearing you call yourself those things.

LEX. What's wrong with self-realization?

ANNA. You shouldn't be so creative with your realizations.

LEX. Fuck. I need that on a t-shirt.

ANNA. You had a long day. I know talking about yourself... and what happened... is not the most fun thing to do.

LEX. I just don't see the point in it. I really don't.

ANNA. Someone has to stand up to those people.

LEX. It's not going to matter. Not in the end.

ANNA. I have faith. In the lawyers, those FBI agents. They seem to really want to help you.

LEX. Nobody's helping me, mom. They're just doing their job. I'm a number. A case file to the police in Georgia, a headline for the civil suit lawyers, and a revenue stream for the pornsite assholes. Cops and

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robbers. And I can barely keep track of who is who. You know those old cartoons with the guy robbing the bank, dressed in black with that thing wrapped around his eyes as a disguise? And he's holding that moneybag with the dollar sign on it? That's me. Not the valuables inside. I'm just the fucking bag.

ANNA. Court is next week. Just try to relax until then. Then we'll go down there, fight our fight. Once these trials are over, once they're all punished, you'll be able to take all this, everything you're talking about and learning, and heal. I keep reading that it's a process.

LEX. I'm finding out that I don't do well inside *any* kind of process.

ANNA. Just, try to get some rest, okay? I'll be back up with some food.

LEX. One more question. I promised myself I'd ask you this today. Do you ever think about your first daughter?

ANNA. Oh.

LEX. It's okay if you don't, ya know. I don't know why, but when I was in the hospital, I just sorta fixated on the idea. On what Grandma did.

ANNA. I think we should talk about that another time.

LEX. Okay. Fine.

ANNA. Maybe tomorrow, after the appointment, we can go to the hardware store and get another color of paint. For in here.

LEX. It's whatever.

ANNA. I want you to feel comfortable.

LEX. No such thing.

ANNA. I'm glad you agreed to come here. Be under this roof again.

LEX. I have a feeling you'll be disappointed soon enough. (*Anna examines Lex but decides to leave rather than say anything.*)

Light shift.

Lex lays on her bed, looking at the ceiling.

After a moment OLIVER climbs in through the window. He is not very graceful. Lex just watches him stumble through the process.

LEX. Bro.

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OLIVER. Can I come in?

LEX. I guess.

OLIVER. I think I pulled a muscle.

LEX. I don't know if anyone gave you the memo, but we're adults now? You can come to the front door.

OLIVER. I was surprised you were here. That you came back to your parent's house. Thought this would be fun. Like old times. Make you laugh a bit.

LEX. It's scaring me how out of breath you are.

OLIVER. Yeah. Climbing up that tree... used to be a lot easier...

LEX. You used to be a lot smaller.

OLIVER. You calling me fat?

LEX. No. I'm calling you stupid.

OLIVER. Shit. I think I'm dying. *(a moment, then a realization:)* Oh my god. I'm sorry.

LEX. For what?

OLIVER. That was dumb to say.

LEX. I can handle a joke.

OLIVER. Still.

LEX. Just-- Drop it. I'm fine. God. Stop staring at me like that.

OLIVER. I'm sorry. I just, I lost what I was gonna say.

LEX. You don't have to say anything.

OLIVER. I had a plan to get here, be silly or something, I guess, and, I don't know, take your mind off things.

LEX. Staring at me like I'm some sorta amputated dog isn't helping.

OLIVER. Fuck. I-- I'm sorry.

LEX. Just go, man.

OLIVER. No. I wanted to see you.

LEX. I'm not really into seeing people right now. Okay? I've been court ordered into seeing more people than I can handle lately. I just need everyone to stop looking at me.

OLIVER. I get it. But, umm, I got you something. *(Oliver pulls a small journal from his back pocket and hands it to Lex.)*

LEX. What is this?

OLIVER. What's it look like? It's a journal.

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LEX. For what?

OLIVER. Your songs.

LEX. It looks used.

OLIVER. I tried holding it in my hand the first time I tried to climb the tree. Got scratched up.

LEX. It has mud on it.

OLIVER. I dropped it, had to go down and get it, then climb the tree again.

LEX. You're a fucking spazz.

OLIVER. It's cool. It has prompts and stuff in it. Things to get ideas going, like every few pages. I thought you could use it to write your songs.

LEX. I don't write anymore.

OLIVER. I know. Figured this would help.

LEX. It's not that I can't write anymore, like some writer's block or something, it's that I don't wanna write anymore. Okay?

OLIVER. Whatever. That's cool. Put it on your shelf or your desk or something. It's still a pretty cover.

LEX. Another empty book staring back at me. Great.

OLIVER. Sorry. Yeah, it was a dumb idea.

LEX. Kinda.

OLIVER. You want me to leave?

LEX. I don't know.

OLIVER. You wanna talk about it?

LEX. No.

OLIVER. How's your dad?

LEX. Who cares.

OLIVER. Was he cool with you coming back here?

LEX. No.

OLIVER. Did he come visit at the hospital?

LEX. No.

OLIVER. I tried to visit.

LEX. I know.

OLIVER. I was told you wouldn't see anyone.

LEX. I wanted to be alone.

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OLIVER. Are we still friends?

LEX. Jesus christ.

OLIVER. Like, I don't know if you're just putting defenses up or if you suddenly hate me now or something.

LEX. I just don't wanna talk about it.

OLIVER. We don't have to talk about it, but it'd be nice if you'd just talk to me. About anything. I don't care.

LEX. Why? Why do I need to talk about something?

OLIVER. So, I know you're still wanting to be here. That it's us. That you still have someone you can be normal with.

LEX. I'm not normal. So there.

OLIVER. Fine. I'll leave.

LEX. Don't be a bitch.

OLIVER. I don't wanna fight.

LEX. Then just chill.

OLIVER. I don't know how. With you. Now that I'm standing here. I'm just confused and scared and whatever.

LEX. I know. It's a shitty feeling, right?

OLIVER. Yeah.

LEX. That's me times ten. So, stop worrying about you and relax.

OLIVER. How are you and your mom?

LEX. I don't know. She probably thinks I'm a whore. When she looks at me, I can see all the church logic spinning around in her head. "If Lex wouldn't have ever had sex before marriage, she'd be normal and happy and well put together."

OLIVER. You think that's true?

LEX. That I'm a whore?

OLIVER. If you didn't have the kinds of relationships you did, that if a couple of those dudes didn't exist in your life, you'd be... I don't know--

LEX. Less suicidal?

OLIVER. ...better able to handle the world.

LEX. I don't think I was made to handle the world. Regardless of the people whose orbits I got trapped in.

OLIVER. Have you talked to him?

LEX. Who?

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OLIVER. Tim.

LEX. Why would I talk to Tim?

OLIVER. I don't know, I thought something mighta happened.

LEX. Why would you think something happened?

OLIVER. Did something happen?

LEX. Who've you been talking to?

OLIVER. It's not a big deal.

LEX. No. Fucking spill, man. Who's saying what?

OLIVER. I was talking to Catherine Richardson, and she was like--

LEX. Great. President of the "Let's make Lex's life hell" club.

OLIVER. That was a long time ago.

LEX. Not that long ago.

OLIVER. She said Tim contacted a bunch of people, your old friends, and--

LEX. She's not my friend. She was never my friend.

OLIVER. Fine. People he thought were your old friends.

LEX. I was never friends with that rich twat.

OLIVER. You want me to finish the story or what? He reached out to a few people and said that you two hooked up a few weeks ago... that you were telling him that you were gonna tell people that he raped you, but that it was consensual, and you were just being crazy, and shit like that...

LEX. He said that?

OLIVER. And when I tried to get ahold of you, you were already in the hospital, so... and I couldn't see you or talk to you... I didn't know what was going on...

A moment... lights shift... the sound of an old cassette tape being rewound is heard... Lex and Oliver are somewhere in the past...

LEX. God damn, am I glad to see you.

OLIVER. I've been here for an hour. It's freezing outside. Was about to give up.

LEX. Got held back after school.

OLIVER. For what?

LEX. Artistic expression.

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OLIVER. Their words or yours?

LEX. I wrote on the mirrors of the boy's room.

OLIVER. What'd you write?

LEX. There's these three mirrors, big mirrors, in the downstairs restroom, right? And when I saw them, I was like, this is a great place to inspire the weak minds of the opposite sex.

OLIVER. Two questions.

LEX. No, I don't think you're weak minded.

OLIVER. Okay, one question. Why were you inside the boy's room when you had this idea?

LEX. Don't ask questions you don't want answers to. But I went back in today with some red lipstick and wrote "It doesn't hurt me." on the first mirror. "Do you want to feel how it feels?" on the second. And "Do you want to know that it doesn't hurt me?" on the third.

OLIVER. Did someone hurt you?

LEX. What? No. You don't get it?

OLIVER. Get what?

LEX. You don't recognize those lyrics?

OLIVER. Should I?

LEX. Fuck yes. It's from the Kate Bush song, "Deal with God." One of the best songs ever written. And when I walk out of that gross ass restroom, who sees me? Catherine Richardson. And she runs, *runs*, to the principal's office. Like, what the fuck? She narcs on me and I get yelled at, they call my folks, and my dad comes in and watches me clean it off. Stayed there the entire time. Made me wipe it off with *dry* paper towels, probably so I'd complain the whole time. Which I did. He just kept asking me, "Why do you have to damage everything around you?" He tried to force me into the car after I was done, but I made a scene in the parking lot, and he gets embarrassed in public when I act up, so he just drove off. So now I'm here.

OLIVER. Wow.

LEX. I hate her, though. Why couldn't she mind her own business. She's always in my shit.

OLIVER. Isn't that song called "Running Up That Hill"?

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LEX. Oh my god, you're a fucking bitch, man. You want your patriarchy card laminated for you?

OLIVER. What did I do?

LEX. That song was originally called "Deal With God." But the record company and the radio ass hats were all like, "they won't play it in Italy and Ireland if it has God in the title" and she was forced to change it, 'cause of course she was. It's about changing genders, to let guys know what it's like to be a girl for a little while, and instead of making it a 'deal with the devil' it's a deal with God because she has the fucking right.

OLIVER. Okay, okay.

LEX. I, mean, get right or get fucked. Sorry. My dad just pisses me off, ya know? I haven't been high in a couple days and I'm on edge.

OLIVER. That sucks though. Making her change the name of her own song.

LEX. They almost didn't let her release it at all. They wanted the lead single of the album to be the song Cloudbusting. Which is about some German scientist who wanted to use orgasm energy to control the weather, or some shit.

OLIVER. Orgasms to control the weather?

LEX. Yeah. Cloudbusting. Get it?

OLIVER. I don't pay attention to lyrics much, I guess.

LEX. And that's what makes you part of the general public.

OLIVER. You're not as witty as you think you are.

LEX. Why would you say that?

OLIVER. To prove that the judgment train goes both ways.

LEX. I am witty though.

OLIVER. Yeah, you are.

LEX. Fuck. I hate how fast it got cold around here. I don't think I'll ever write anything as good as Kate Bush.

OLIVER. That's not true.

LEX. I hate everything I've been writing lately. It's like I don't know what makes a good pop song. Like a *good* pop song. Something that's easily swallowed by the masses, easy words, but, like, *big* meaning.

Kate Bush, man. "Do you wanna know that it doesn't hurt me."

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OLIVER. I think a good song is about looking forward to something. Like, something that reminds people they aren't alone. Something to get lost in.

Lights shift back...

LEX. You know the counselors in the psych ward? They'll fucking tell you anything to get you to settle down. They'll act like your best friend to get you to be calm, just to keep your thoughts in your head... just to get you out of there... Like, you're default crazy, ya know? You can't argue anything with them, because you've been labeled as having no decent set of faculties, you have no ability to be self-aware, because wanting to hurt yourself is inherently bad and crazy. That's the foundation of the entire system. So, it's all of them shushing you, and, like, artificially putting "those thoughts" away... They don't have the time or energy to actually hear you out. If you have a reasonable rationale for hating this world, you just get more pills thrown down your throat... Because it would be fucking anarchy if they actually listened to you, ya know? 'Cause they have absolutely no defense against what this world creates... they can't compete with the Tims of the world, because the Tims of the world are giving me actual reasons to hate everything around me... what if my brain chemistry is just fine? What if my problems aren't internal? What if I'm that fucking tired? I'm supposed to stay alive for you? I'm supposed to stay alive for my mom? How exhausting is that? *(beat)* Yeah. I got drunk and called Tim to come get me. I was blacked out for sure, like, every other woman would call it rape. *(beat)* I woke up on my front porch. Did he tell that part of the story? He didn't know I wasn't living with my parents anymore. So, he dumped me off here, didn't even ring the doorbell. My dad found me the next morning, bruises all over my neck. They kept asking me what happened, but I was either silent or throwing up, I wouldn't say anything.

OLIVER. Why is this dude not in jail, Lex?

LEX. I knew if I asked... that he'd choke me... And I must've asked...

OLIVER. Seriously?

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LEX. When I get depressed I start drinking, and using... and when I'm wasted I get horny, and, I don't know, it all gets tangled up together... it's messy, I'm messy... and, my parents are just yelling at me, asking "What were you thinking?", "What did you do?", "What's wrong with you?" And I finally just looked at them and said, "I wanted to die." *(beat)* And it was off to the hospital. *(beat)* I guess Tim must be scared now. Fuck him.

OLIVER. I don't know what to say to that.

LEX. You don't have to say anything. That's the thing people need to learn. There's nothing to say to that. No handful of sentences can put any of that shit into a different perspective. And to answer your next question, no I don't want or need anything. And to answer the question after that, no I don't want you to do anything. And to answer the question after that, I'm fine.

OLIVER. Did you tell anyone else about Tim?

LEX. No.

OLIVER. Why?

LEX. Apparently, my parents can force me *into* the hospital. The counselors can force me to *stay* at the hospital. So, I don't know, I get some sorta satisfaction by proving they can't *force* me to talk. *(beat)* Kinda reminds me of confession. At St. Francis.

OLIVER. Those priests hated you.

LEX. Hearing them on the other side of that wall twist and sigh, knowing that they were being fucked with, but didn't have the balls to call me out.

OLIVER. I remember you walking back into class, saying you confessed to Father Abbott that you coveted your neighbor's wife.

LEX. I had no idea what that meant.

OLIVER. You were a maniac. That was for sure.

LEX. No. Just naive. I used to think fucking with them, ya know, any old dude, was somehow getting power over them, but... it didn't do anything at all.

OLIVER. You know I'm always here for you.

LEX. You're gonna have to come to terms with the fact that at some point, that's not gonna matter. And there's nothing you can do about it.

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Anna walks in. Subtle light shift.

ANNA. See. That wasn't so bad.

LEX. For you.

ANNA. What did you think of the doctor?

LEX. Same as all the other ones.

ANNA. I thought she was nice.

LEX. She was tired. I felt bad for her.

ANNA. Can't be an easy job.

LEX. There's no such thing as an easy job when your job is talking to other people.

ANNA. I took the rest of the afternoon off.

LEX. Why?

ANNA. To be here. With you.

LEX. Afraid I can't handle talking about my feelings for an hour and then be left by myself?

ANNA. I just want you to know I'm here in case you don't want to be by yourself.

LEX. You read that somewhere.

ANNA. What if I did?

LEX. What's dad doing?

ANNA. Cleaning before getting dinner ready.

LEX. What's for dinner?

ANNA. Lasagna.

LEX. Oh, fuck you, mom.

ANNA. We're gonna get through it together. I'll do most of the talking with grandma. If she's asking you too many questions, I'll change the subject.

LEX. Promise?

ANNA. Yes. Now. Do you want to go to the store tomorrow? Get anything you're missing? I'm worried about your rest, and an extra pillow might help you sleep better.

LEX. Alright... you do have an obscene talent for switching subjects.

ANNA. I work in an engineering plant with all men.

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LEX. God, that reminds me. I have so many questions for you. Like... if this sounds mean, I'm sorry...

ANNA. Just say it.

LEX. I never saw you as, like, a woman. Someone that could have a history... with this kinda shit... Does that make sense?

ANNA. You see me as a mom.

LEX. More like a middle school principal. But, like, an effective one.

ANNA. I'll take what I can get.

LEX. Have any of the men that you work with ever, like, crossed the line?

ANNA. No. When I started there it became apparent, very quickly, they would only listen if they thought of me as their mother.

LEX. Some guys wanna do their mom. Like, really wanna do their mom.

ANNA. Lex. I might not be capable of having the conversations you're wanting to have.

LEX. Because you're normal.

ANNA. No. I think it's an age thing.

LEX. Guys your age have said some pretty crazy things to me. Some women, too.

ANNA. I've probably led too conservative of a life to have a back and forth here. Have you tried reaching out to any of your old friends? I mean, ones that are still around here?

LEX. Still around, right. No... I'm in that weird space, where, like... it was cool to be a slut in your twenties, but they're still the girls who called me a slut in high school... and no one really tries to bridge that gap. I'm too far gone. This is too much for you.

ANNA. No. It's good to hear what's going on in your head.

LEX. You're asking yourself, "Where did I go wrong?"

ANNA. I've never asked that.

LEX. Because you know the answer?

ANNA. Because I don't believe I failed you.

LEX. Interesting. You're not, like, gonna talk about Jesus right now, are you?

ANNA. No. I know better than to do that.

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LEX. Right. Ya know, all that shit I said to you? Back when I left? About you being the reason I don't believe in God...

ANNA. It's fine.

LEX. It's not... it... it's always, kinda, haunted me, for, like, throwing that in your face.

ANNA. You meant it. And I understand.

LEX. I wanted to hurt you. In the moment.

ANNA. It was a tough time. For all of us.

LEX. I had just found out about what grandma did to you. I was so mad at you, ya know? Maybe mad for you, I don't know.

ANNA. Grandma didn't do anything to me.

LEX. She made you give up your kid.

ANNA. It's complicated.

LEX. It's not, though.

ANNA. I'm sorry you found out about that. I, actually, do think, we'd all be better off if children didn't have to learn about the mistakes their family made in the past.

LEX. Literally, the slogan of the Catholic church.

ANNA. You really want to talk about this right now.

LEX. I do.

ANNA. But you can't bring it up when Grandma gets here.

LEX. I just need to know how it feels to give up part of you, surviving that, all these years later.

ANNA. It's not like that.

LEX. Tell me how it is, then.

ANNA. I was too young to handle a responsibility like that. And there was a couple who couldn't have their own. It worked out.

LEX. Did you have a choice?

ANNA. I don't know who told you about all this.

LEX. Aunt Shelly. She got drunk at a thing. Said it was a shame we never got to know my sister. And, I was like, "What?" And she said Grandma made you go to Connecticut and stay with family, give the baby up, and not tell anyone. That it would be an embarrassment to have their sixteen-year-old at home with a kid. Said you fought and cried.

ANNA. It was a different time.

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LEX. The tag lines of rationalization: “It worked out.” “It was a different time.” “It was God’s plan.”

ANNA. I don’t need you to be angry on my behalf, Lex.

LEX. I’m angry on behalf of everybody. If I can’t be angry about it, and if I can’t subscribe to the idea of being subservient to it, ya know, the writing off of the crimes, then I have no use being here. Because the only thing left is learning to live as a victim and I’m tired of that shit, too.

Light shift fast. The sound of the old cassette tape being rewound is heard again.

Lex shoots up from her bed and gets into Anna’s face.

LEX. You are the biggest bitch that has ever walked the face of the earth.

ANNA. I’m trying to protect your reputation.

LEX. From what? Being happy?

ANNA. People talk, Lex. This is about your future.

LEX. My future?

ANNA. Fun comes with a price.

LEX. Can you even, for one second, think that I might *actually* like this guy. And we can have a relationship that lasts?

ANNA. When you have sex with someone while still in high school, relationships *don’t* last. He got what he wanted, and he’ll leave now.

LEX. So. I’m just an embarrassing piece of ass to you.

ANNA. Boys are embarrassed to be with girls who’ve already had sex.

LEX. Thanks, mom. I appreciate you telling me I’m damaged goods.

ANNA. It’s my job to get you through this world.

LEX. And I’d trust you with that if you had any idea of how this world really works.

ANNA. Fine. Don’t listen to me. You never do anyway.

LEX. Why the fuck would I? You don’t see me at all. You don’t have any sense of why I do the things I do. My desires, my needs, my wants.

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You don't know why I crave the things I do, you never will, and you have no interest in finding out.

ANNA. You're in high school. The only thing you need to do is graduate and not get pregnant before that. You want people thinking you're a whore?

LEX. I'm sorry I want to be touched. I'm sorry I'm not like you. I don't want to live a life where my husband refuses to fuck me.

ANNA. That's enough.

LEX. Yeah... it is...

Lights shift back slowly. Lex is back on her bed.

ANNA. You've had so much happen to you... It would be sad if you took the things that happened to me and let them effect you.

LEX. What can I say? I'm the family's sin eater.

OLIVER. That's a bit dramatic.

LEX. Stay out of this.

OLIVER. Can I remind you of something.

LEX. No.

OLIVER. It is possible to be both traumatized and accountable to the feelings of others.

LEX. Shut the fuck up.

ANNA. Do you think you would've had a better childhood if you had an older sister?

LEX. That's not what I'm getting at.

ANNA. What are you getting at?

LEX. I was awake the night that woman came over. The one who told you about dad sleeping with all those women, around town. The lady who was married to one of his friends. I was awake and could hear your conversation outside, after she came to the door.

ANNA. Lex.

LEX. Like, I don't know... I don't know why that moment is on repeat in my head, like, all the time... people fuck around, I get that... It's more normal to fuck around than it is to be faithful, *I know*... and it's nothing, and it's your business, I guess... but... just the fact you stayed here,

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stayed with him... it's, just, always been... confusing to me. Like, why couldn't you leave? Why did you stay here and spend years just letting him walk all over you? All his huffing and puffing every time you talk... His constant eye rolling with *everything* you do... Like, it shouldn't bug me like it does... your life, right? But it eats me alive. Because he did the same thing to me. And I couldn't leave fast enough. And. *Fuck*. I could tell you were trying to make God happy by staying. Proving you could endure.

ANNA. He was so good with you, when you were younger. He was great with you. You don't remember loving him?

LEX. Sure. But then I became old enough to see him for the actual human being he is, at his core. And he knew it. He could sense I saw through him, and he stopped liking me. Just like that. Because when men find out that you can truly see them, they're done with you. And you're fucking stupid if you stick around. But you're not stupid, so why did you stay?

ANNA. I don't think I have an answer that will satisfy you.

LEX. You don't need to satisfy me.

ANNA. Apparently, I do.

LEX. I just wanted you to know, like, that I heard all that, and, how I felt about it, before...

ANNA. Before what?

LEX. Before whatever.

ANNA. Lex?

LEX. Before I leave again. Before we leave for the trial in a few days. It's, just, important for me that you know that.

ANNA. I'm sorry you felt the need to run out of here. I hope you don't think we wanted you gone.

LEX. He did.

ANNA. That's not true.

LEX. Yes, it is. And don't be like grandma. Where you just go into denial until you start believing the lies you say out loud. There's a difference between a positive outlook and rewriting history.

ANNA. I'm not rewriting history.

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LEX. By saying he didn't want me gone, out of this house, is completely ignoring the bad stuff, trying to trick me into thinking he might, actually, not hate me. My mind is so fucking broken right now, playing with my memories is, like, telling me I don't know who I am, and that's most fucked thing you can do to someone. I know everything that's happened to me.

ANNA. I wasn't trying to say you don't know yourself. I'm sorry.

LEX. *Stop saying you're sorry. (beat)* I don't know... It's just... Okay, like, this is a random thought, but, I swear, it's connected somehow in my head... There was this other girl at the, umm... the house where I was living, in Atlanta... and she said something one night, when we were high and talking about our moms, and I had said something about getting one of those DNA tests? The ones that tell you about your ancestry? But she said something I'll never not think about... like, a kind of ancestry test that shows the lineage of people who hurt you... because who gives a fuck about family you've never met or heard of, the people that hurt you make you who you are, right? And you could just go to this nicely formatted poster map thing and say, "Yup. I cried at work today because of this guy right here. And the nightmare I had the other night was this asshole over here. The scale went up three pounds this week because of this bitch." It'd be tangible, ya know? It would be a better representation of who you really are than any other report or scan or whatever the fuck we use to measure anything about ourselves right now. It's sad, yeah, I know, but in the moment... we couldn't stop laughing about it. It was hysterical to us, for some reason, like, we were competing with each other on who could laugh the most about the bad shit that's happened... And then some guy came over to, like, have sex with her, or whatever... and I just sat there, alone, and thought about it... ...it felt like forever... just creating my 'pain ancestry', in my head, which isn't hard, it's all there already, but every-time I do something fucked up, or something I hate, or whatever, I can assign the action to someone on that map... And. I just wanna know why you chose to stay. Here. With him.

ANNA. Do you give yourself the credit when you do something good? Or do you give that to the people who hurt you, too?

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LEX. Mom. I'm here because I don't do anything, anymore, that I don't hate myself for later... There are no good thoughts. So...

ANNA. Are you going to tell me I'm on the list of people who hurt you?

LEX. Do you think you're one of them?

ANNA. Yes.

Light shift. The sound of the old cassette tape being rewound is heard again.

Lex sits on the floor with her back to the bed.

LEX. I didn't know who else to call...

ANNA. I'm glad you did.

LEX. Are you missing work?

ANNA. That doesn't matter.

LEX. They say if the, umm... the cleaning lady hadn't found me...

ANNA. You need to come home.

LEX. Did dad come with you?

ANNA. No. He thought it would be better if it was just me.

LEX. I guess that's probably true.

ANNA. The doctor said you had a lot of bruises, over your body. That are days old.

LEX. Yeah.

ANNA. Do we need to talk to the police?

LEX. It's just stuff from work.

ANNA. What are you doing for money? You haven't called in a while...

LEX. Factory work... Hence all the bruises...

ANNA. Is that the truth?

LEX. Well. I did things in a building that looked like an old factory... and I got paid... so, yeah, that's the truth.

ANNA. Are you going to try this again?

LEX. Factory work or offing myself?

ANNA. Lex.

LEX. I don't know...

ANNA. You need help.

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LEX. Obviously.

ANNA. Tell me what to do.

LEX. It's not like that, mom. If I had answers, even for other people, I wouldn't be here...

ANNA. Do you have any friends here? That you want me to call?

LEX. Friends... When was the last time you remember me having friends?

ANNA. I haven't seen you in so long, Lex. I don't know.

LEX. I don't attract friends. There's people with common interests coming in and out, a lot... but... not many friends... Do you have friends?

ANNA. You think you'll come home?

LEX. No.

ANNA. I think it would be the best thing for you.

LEX. I don't.

ANNA. Lex.

LEX. I need to tell you something. Fuck. There's a video... of me on the internet...

ANNA. We know about those.

LEX. Right. No. There's a certain... new video... I was, umm, drugged and unconscious, and...

ANNA. You were raped?

LEX. I, mean... yeah, I guess, but...

ANNA. We're calling the police.

LEX. Mom. That won't help anything. Trust me.

ANNA. How could this happen? Again.

LEX. I hang out with shitty people.

ANNA. You'd rather be part of this world than be at home? With us? We were *that* bad to you? You need to go out and have sex on camera and get assaulted? That's an easier way to live than what we can provide?

LEX. This isn't about you.

ANNA. Obviously, it is, if this lifestyle you got going is a better choice than being near me.

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LEX. Fine. I don't know what I'm doing. I'm an idiot and I'm lost. I'm only good for being used. What a shitty daughter to be stuck with. It's hard to see why you even fucking bother.

ANNA. I bother because I don't want to see you die.

LEX. Why?

ANNA. Why what?

LEX. Why do you care if I live or die?

ANNA. Because you're my daughter.

LEX. What does that even mean? Can you give me one reason that's not rooted in some sort of intangible universal obligation? Huh?

ANNA. I'm not good with words, Lex. You know that, but... I won't let you trip me up into giving you some kind of permission to die.

LEX. Well, good thing I don't need your permission.

ANNA. Don't do that. Don't threaten me with something like this.

LEX. I want to be left alone.

ANNA. The doctors said I still have the power to send you somewhere to get help.

LEX. Don't. I swear to God. Don't. Not again.

ANNA. Come home.

LEX. No.

ANNA. Then I have no choice.

LEX. Mom.

ANNA. I won't let you destroy yourself any further.

LEX. You think you're helping, but you're not.

ANNA. We'll see.

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