

## ABSTRACT

Link

Madeleine Ann Nelson

Director: Greg Garrett, Ph. D.

*Link* is a full-length play that follows the early career of a young politician with a secret. As Congressman Lincoln Williams navigates his first months in office, he must face the growing conflict between his convictions and the pressures placed on him by powerful external forces. By examining the life and choices of a man who goes to extreme lengths in pursuit of a noble goal, this play explores ideas of sacrifice, identity, and sensationalism in American society.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

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LINK

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Baylor University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Honors Program

By  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

As an intern in Congressman Mac Thornberry's office in the summer of 2019, my duties consisted of giving Capitol tours, attending congressional hearings, keeping dirty dishes out of the sink, and answering phone calls from concerned constituents. Typically, I could do very little to ease the concerns of the type of person that calls their congressman to yell at a twenty-year-old intern. However, our instructions were to take diligent notes on every conversation, indiscriminately of our judgment of the callers' rationale or overall sanity. The interns were to take down each caller's name and address, listen graciously, and we were not allowed to hang up.

Sitting at the front desk one afternoon, I answered the phone, pressed the receiver to my ear, and found myself listening to a string of angry curses. Taken aback, I listened for a few seconds before asking for the speaker's name. He paused his ranting just long enough to clarify that he did not intend to do me the honor of sharing his name, but he did inform me that I could call him Tom. Returning to his embittered complaint, *Tom* proceeded to share a half-comprehensible, morbidly entertaining story about the injuries he sustained after getting hit by a truck. Without going into the graphics of the details Tom shared, I can say that he made it abundantly clear that he felt wronged by the American legal system. Clearly, poor Tom had endured an excessive amount of difficult and traumatic circumstances. Although there was nothing I, or Congressman Thornberry for that matter, could tangibly do to remediate his long list of grievances, I was willing to provide a listening ear. Half an hour later, at the peak of his frustrated account, Tom's voice cracked as he hollered, "Because I'm a straight, white male, I have no rights in this

country!” In the moment of silence that followed, I attempted to process his words. How should one respond to a statement that one believes to be so overtly incorrect? I settled on, “I’m sorry you feel that way, sir.” Another string of expletives followed before the dial tone crackled in my ear.

I put the receiver back in the cradle and forced myself to laugh. It was an objectively absurd statement. Constitutionally, straight, white males have the same rights as every other citizen of the United States; historically, straight, white males have enjoyed the benefit of more rights than any other demographic. However, the more I ponder misguided, crazy Tom, the more convinced I become that he’s not the only person who feels that way. I think there are many rational, hard-working, and moderate versions of Tom in our nation. Many people in the straight, white demographic, my demographic, believe that they are being passed over for opportunities in favor of people that identify with minority groups. This is a complex phenomenon, and I found myself pondering Tom’s “straight, white males have no rights” mindset for many days following our conversation. Thus, the idea for this play was born. When I set out writing *Link*, I wanted my work to engage with the complexities of American political sentiments and media influences. I landed on a story about a man who takes an extreme course of action, so drastic it borders on the absurd, to secure himself a political future.

As Dr. Garrett and I began conversations about the discipline and process of crafting a story, we focused primarily on two authors: Anne Lamott and Christopher Vogler. In her book *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, Lamott uses her dry, charming wit to share insights on the joys and pitfalls that a writer might face while

practicing her craft. Lamott encourages her readers to allow themselves the freedom of a “shitty first draft,” and she asserts that merely getting something on the page proves a reward in and of itself. Lamott offers insight into the act of writing, regardless of quality or success, asserting, “Writing has so much to give, so much to teach, so many surprises. That thing you had to force yourself to do—the actual act of writing—turns out to be the best part. It’s like discovering that while you thought you needed the tea ceremony for the caffeine, what you really needed was the tea ceremony. The act of writing turns out to be its own reward” (kindle location 237). This romantic insight has been something I have reminded myself of many times throughout this process. I am grateful for the reminder as I write even now.

In a later section of her book, Lamott warns against perfectionism in the creative process. She declares, “Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people. It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life, and it is the main obstacle between you and a shitty first draft. I think perfectionism is based on the obsessive belief that if you run carefully enough, hitting each stepping-stone just right, you won’t have to die. The truth is that you will die anyway and that a lot of people who aren’t even looking at their feet are going to do a whole lot better than you, and have a lot more fun while they’re doing it” (Lamott, kindle location 591). Lamott’s anti-perfectionism encouragement proves incredibly valuable amid the self-inflicted judgments and insecurities that accompany my creative writing process. In the year that I have spent working on this play, the days I have not felt pleased with my work have certainly outnumbered the days that I have. I often read the words I have written and determine

that everything I create is a contrived piece of fluff. Many nights have I lain awake, contemplating the inadequacy of my writing. It's not funny enough, sharp enough, clear enough, real enough. The list of my faults is infinite. In these moments, I would sooner crawl into a cave and live out my days, never allowing the sun to touch my skin than share my work with another human being. In these vulnerable moments, Anne's advice proves invaluable: perfectionism is the thief of joy, and writing is its own reward.

As Dr. Garrett and I continued our discussions of story structure, we moved to Christopher Vogler's book *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. In his book, Vogler provides a detailed analysis of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey. After completing the first draft of my play, thinking back to Vogler as an exercise, I mapped out the action of my story using his outline. What I landed on looked something like this:

<b>Phase of the Hero's Journey</b>	<b>My Play</b>
Ordinary World	Link's life before he decides to leave home as a high school senior//Link's life working at the Harrison St. Foundation.
Call to Adventure	Link's idea that he could get into Harvard if he created a rough backstory//The Hobbeses ask.
Refusal of the Call	Link briefly expresses reluctance when the Hobbeses ask him to run.
Mentor	Mike//The Hobbeses.
Crossing the first Threshold	Entering office.
Tests, Allies, and Enemies	Jessica and Mike are allies. The press are enemies, although their attention helped him get where he is. Link's first test is getting his bill passed.

Approach to the Inmost Cave	Amber's arrival and news of their mother's death.
Ordeal	Link's inner turmoil in the days following his mother's funeral and his final conversation with Jessica.
Reward	Link's realization that political success is not worth missing out on a relationship with his sister and father.
The Road Back	The press chases Link, looking for scandal.
Resurrection	Link considers his repeated decision to abandon his family and experiences regret (flashback).
Return with the Elixir	Link returns home to see his mother's grave, apologizes to Amber, and receives her forgiveness.

This exercise proved invaluable as it forced me to consider structural weaknesses and holes in my work. It specifically led me to consider the role that every scene plays in the overall story and the build to the ending. In addition to his outline of the hero's journey, Vogler offers many insights into the beauty of Story and its ability to guide people to examine truth. He says, "Every good story reflects the total human story, the universal human condition of being born into this world, growing, learning, struggling to become an individual, and dying. Stories can be read as metaphors for the general human situation, with characters who embody universal, archetypal qualities, comprehensible to the group as well as the individual" (Vogler, 25). I find this to be a beautiful sentiment. Like Vogler, I believe that, as storytellers and consumers, we are continually drawn to certain archetypes because they help us to understand something more significant. I love the idea that the exploration of creativity points back to our creator, therefore leading us to profound and meaningful truths.

After our discussions on style and structure, Dr. Garrett and I moved on to specifically theatrical works. In addition to a few more recent plays, our conversations focused mostly on Tony Kushner's epic *Angels in America* and Tennessee Williams' nostalgic, meta-theatrical *The Glass Menagerie*. As we discussed Kushner, Dr. Garrett and I spoke a lot about empathy and the importance of depicting ugly and troubling scenes. With the epic style of *Angels in America*, Kushner walks the line of engaging in political and social commentary without becoming didactic. Both Kushner and Williams' plays showcase their poetic voices, which offered a good deal of inspiration as I began working on this play. Additionally, I was moved by the complex familial relationships portrayed in *The Glass Menagerie*; Williams' poetic language and portrayal of family dynamics certainly played a role in shaping my thesis work.

Another play that influenced my writing is Annie Baker's Pulitzer Prize-winning work, *The Flick*. Noted, and at times criticized, for its long run time, *The Flick* uses acute levels of realism in its portrayal of workers at a struggling movie theatre. The characters are often portrayed working in silence, and Baker often forces the audience to watch this silence for long periods of time. One stage direction in the show reads, "They sweep for a while," while another says, "They go back to sweeping. After about twenty seconds..." (Baker, 10, 15). Additionally, there are entirely silent scenes that can only be seen through the projection window at the back of the theatre, and in the moments when the actors transition from the main theatre to the projection booth, the audience watches an empty stage. The repetitive and continual act of silent cleaning mirrors the monotony in the main characters' lives, and it serves a very specific purpose in *The Flick*. However, in

reading the play, I found myself very interested in the idea of watching two people being silent *together*. Ultimately, I think *The Flick* is a play about the beauties and imperfections of friendship, and I like the idea that the characters clean together in companionable silence. I believe the long periods of silence in *The Flick* serve to highlight connections between characters, and Baker's writing certainly influenced how I chose to handle stage directions and moments of silence in my play.

As I began contemplating my thesis, I decided to write a play because I was interested in the process of crafting a story to be told on stage. I am intrigued by the idea of writing for a performative medium, and I wanted to explore the process of writing a story whose final product is not meant to be delivered on the page. I am interested in playwriting because, more than other artistic mediums, it enables the creator to craft extended periods of dialogue for diverse and specific characters. In an Austin Film Festival panel this fall, I heard Robin Swicord, writer of *The Jane Austin Book Club* and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, phrase the idea this way: "It is our job to create separate and distinct roles where each person is speaking in their own voice." Playwriting pushes the author to give every character a clear voice, which will be made sense of and portrayed by a performer. I am excited by the thought that others might have the ability to interpret and perform the story that I write. There is something beautiful in the idea that, from actor to designer to the production team, a play invites creativity from everyone who touches it.

Another work that I found myself drawn to in the process of writing this play is J.R.R. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories." In the paper, which Dr. Garrett introduced to

me as we discussed the fantasy genre in one of his Topics in Literature courses, Tolkien offers insights into the role of the gospel in the storytelling process. He speaks to the human desire for happy endings stating, “The Evangelium has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them, especially the ‘happy ending.’ The Christian has still to work, with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope, and die; but he may now perceive that all his bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed. So great is the bounty with which he has been treated that he may now, perhaps, fairly dare to guess that in Fantasy he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation” (Tolkien, 34). Although Tolkien’s argument specifically refers to fairy stories, I believe his insights apply to every work of fiction. The gospel infuses fiction with elevated meaning and purpose. When we tell stories about brokenness, suffering, joy, family, and relationship, we point to the ultimate story of love and redemption: Christ’s earthly ministry and ultimate sacrifice for the absolution of our sins.

I believe that we long for stories of redemption and forgiveness because that is our story. Many stories depict this ephemeral idea of “love” being the key to harnessing magical powers and overcoming all sorts of supernatural evil. We consistently tell stories that reveal deep, interpersonal love as the answer to the most profound and terrifying problems. Perhaps we do this because we have a deep, inherent desire to love and to be loved. Even though reality inherently differs from the fictional stories we imagine, our lives share a striking similarity with the lands of fantasy and surrealism that enthrall our imaginations. Human beings inherently acknowledge the power of loving and being loved. Perhaps we continue to create fantastical stories built around love because we

recognize, at least in some sense, that love holds power to solve our most pressing problems. However, I believe the inherent power we sense in love goes far beyond worldly solutions for humanity's physical problems.

Love's influence stretches far beyond the physical realm. Its power penetrates straight to our souls. Love winds and curls itself around the gates of eternity. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Gateway). The love of the Father is the key to eternal bliss in the presence of God. The impurity of original sin is devastating to humanity's fate; the consequence of our imperfections is eternal damnation. The solution to the inevitable damnation of our race—undoubtedly the most significant problem humanity will ever face—is the love of God. He has planted within us the knowledge that love (and the traits that follow it, such as selflessness and grace) provides the key to our salvation. As a Christian, I believe stories about redemption are the most important stories to tell. Life is messy, but I believe the Lord's forgiveness is clear. Like Tolkien, I argue that happy endings point to our future bliss in the presence of the Lord. With this in mind, forgiveness at the resolution became important to me as I crafted my play's ending.

In many ways, this play represents the culmination of my educational experience at Baylor. As a high school senior, I chose to concentrate on English mostly because I love to read. My decision to concentrate on Theatre was a last minute one, but it was born out of a similar desire: to continue doing something that I loved. In my University Scholars application, I wrote, "I want to take classes that continue expanding my fascination with literature and the written word while simultaneously teaching me the

most effective strategies for written communication. I would also choose to participate in classes that further develop my passion for art and performance because I would like to engage with artistic expression as an avenue for inspiring change.” Reflecting on the version of myself that wrote those sentences, I can’t help but chuckle. However, I also find myself struck with an immense amount of gratitude.

The education I am receiving at Baylor has transformed my mind and heart in a way that I could not have imagined three years ago. The University Scholars Program allowed me to partake in a unique and deeply fascinating education. I *have* taken courses that broadened my knowledge of art and literature and enriched my capabilities as a writer and performer. I have also taken courses that challenged me to think philosophically and encounter truths about the Lord. I have learned that, more than anything, I am fascinated with the concept of Story and the widespread impact that storytelling can create. I believe the University Scholars program has equipped me to think deeply and critically, and my studies in the English and Theatre departments have enhanced my thinking as a Christ-follower, writer, artist, and woman. I feel confident that when I graduate, I will leave Baylor with a greater ability to think deeply and to handle complex questions with empathy and grace; I hope that this play provides a reflection of the intellectual, spiritual, and creative growth I have experienced in my undergraduate studies here at Baylor.

## CHARACTER LIST

### LINCOLN WILLIAMS

Charismatic politician in his late twenties. Ivy-league education; lived homeless from ages eighteen to twenty.

### JESSICA SUMMERS

Link's scheduler, late twenties.

### MIKE BRENTWOOD

Link's chief of staff, mid-forties.

### MIRANDA AND JEFFERY HOBBS

Wealthy and politically active San Francisco couple, sixties.

### AMBER WILLIAMS

Link's younger sister, eighteen.

United States. Present day.

Projection note: The projections in this play should be pre-recorded. The style should be that of news clips or sound bites, and although a setting is generally noted for each clip, background images should be adjusted to suit the needs of the production.

**SCENE ONE**

PROJECTION

A C-SPAN freshman profile on the Capitol steps. LINK fidgets with a clip-on microphone.

LINK

(laughing, addressing an off-camera reporter)

These things are deceptively complicated.

He finishes clipping the microphone on.

LINK

There. Okay, is that good?

REPORTER (OFF CAMERA)

Yeah, yeah, that's great. You ready to get started?

LINK

Let's do it.

REPORTER (OFF CAMERA)

You have a fascinating biography. Why don't you start by talking about why you chose to run for office.

LINK

Oh, that's an easy one. I love my district. San Francisco is a diverse and vibrant community. It's home to some real dreamers. The people in my district want and deserve a representative who will unapologetically fight for what most benefits them, without letting partisanship and political games get in the way.

In the past, San Francisco has been notorious for left-wing politics, but I want to represent *everyone* and fight for bipartisan policy. I believe my predecessor, Representative Bailey, did that very well. Obviously, she's left me with incredibly large shoes to fill.

I'm beyond honored and excited to do this job. Growing up in a small town like Mintsville, San Francisco was always this shimmering city on a hill. And later, when I hit rock bottom, San Francisco is where I found hope. It's my deepest desire to serve, not just the people who helped me in my greatest time of need, but every single individual in our district.

Our country is divided in a fundamental way. During my time in office, I intend to promote unity and to push for bipartisan policies as often as possible. I intend to focus on areas that my constituents and I are passionate about, such as social justice and human rights, national defense, and the environment.

I am thrilled to be here on the hill. We're going to start working real hard to exert some positive influence here.

Lights fade.

## SCENE TWO

Lights up on LINK'S OFFICE in D.C. It is minimally, but tastefully furnished. The stage should be arranged so that LINK, JESSICA, and MIKE's work spaces can be seen. However, it should be clear that JESSICA and MIKE's desks occupy the room adjacent to LINK's personal office. LINK's desk is littered with empty Chinese takeout boxes and other clutter. An American flag and a California flag occupy the corner of the room. It is early in the morning. The office is empty except for LINK, who sits alone at his desk. He is intently reading through a binder full of papers.

After a few moments, JESSICA enters on her side of the office, a large purse slung over her shoulder. She is also precariously clutching a stack of newspapers and two cups of coffee in her hands. She stops by her desk to set down her purse, and she grabs an additional sheet of paper. Then, she moves toward the door leading into LINK's office and attempts to knock.

Come in.

LINK

JESSICA enters, perhaps fumbling with the doornob before she does.

Morning, sir!

JESSICA

Morning, Jessica.

LINK

Coffee?

JESSICA

Yes, please.

LINK

He looks up gratefully, notices that she's struggling to balance everything in her arms, and jumps up from his chair.

LINK

Oh, let me help you with that!

JESSICA

Thanks.

He fumbles the coffees out of her hands, and she sets the newspapers down on his desk with a thud.

JESSICA

And here are your papers.

LINK

Thanks.

LINK hands JESSICA her coffee, then sinks back into his chair. Noticing that the office is a bit of a mess, JESSICA begins straightening some of the clutter on LINK's desk as well as around the room.

JESSICA

How early did you get in this morning?

LINK

Oh, not too early.

JESSICA

Before seven?

LINK

Yes.

JESSICA

Six?

*Beat.*

LINK

I needed to read through everything one more time.

JESSICA looks at him briefly, then continues cleaning.

LINK

Don't give me that look.

JESSICA

What look?

LINK

The look that says I've already read this bill dozens of times, and there's no need to do it again.

JESSICA

There was no look, sir.

LINK

Sure there wasn't. And for the record, I was looking though my speech, too. I just know I'm missing some glaring mistakes.

JESSICA

I'm sure you aren't. Besides, the staffers have read it through at least as many times as you. They're bound to catch anything you might have missed.

LINK rubs his face and yawns.

LINK

But the staffers aren't the ones who will take the hit if this doesn't make it through.

JESSICA

I suppose that's true.

*Beat.*

JESSICA

Anyway, you might want to flip over to page twenty-seven of The Post. There's another piece about you.

Sighing, LINK flips through the stack of newspapers until he finds The Post.

He opens it to the correct page as he delivers the following line.

LINK

Another one? The election was over three months ago. You'd think they would have more interesting stories to talk about by now.

JESSICA

It's quite a remarkable story.

LINK

Well, it helped get me here. Do you have anything else for me?

JESSICA

Just your revised schedule for the day. They shifted a few of the voting times after I got home last night.

She grabs the loose sheet of paper and slides it to LINK across the desk.

JESSICA

I updated your Google Calendar, and here's a hard copy.

LINK

How did I survive before you started scheduling my life, Jessica?

JESSICA

I ask myself that question a lot.

LINK laughs.

JESSICA

Well, I'll let you get back to your reading. Just let me know if there's anything else you need, sir.

JESSICA exits.

LINK

Jessica?

She pops her head back into the office.

JESSICA

Yes, sir?

LINK  
(he's asked this before)

Please stop calling me sir.

JESSICA

You got it, boss.

She exits LINK's space and moves into her part of the office. LINK can be seen returning to his reading, and JESSICA sits at her desk and begins working on her computer. After a few moments, MIKE enters.

JESSICA

Morning, Mike!

MIKE

Morning, Jess.

He moves to put his briefcase down by his desk.

JESSICA

How was your evening yesterday? Did you and Tess finalize those plans for a beach weekend with the girls?

MIKE

Not yet.

He sits at his desk and begins to log on to his computer.

JESSICA

You have to bring them into the office sometime soon. I'm dying to meet them all.

MIKE

Mhm.

JESSICA

Oh! Did you see that Alexis got engaged?

MIKE

Nope.

JESSICA

Well, the ring is gorgeous! I can't wait for you to see it next time she comes in. Did you--

MIKE

Must you always talk so much in the mornings?

JESSICA

Ouch.

MIKE

Jessica, I have a wife and four daughters. The last thing I need in the morning is more chatter.

They sit in slightly awkward silence for a few moments, typing at their computers.

MIKE

(sighing)

Is the boss in?

JESSICA

Yeah. He's been here since five this morning, and I know for a fact he didn't leave until after eleven last night.

MIKE

How do you know that?

JESSICA

The cleaning crew comes in at eleven, and there were still takeout boxes all over his desk when I got here this morning.

MIKE

What a sleuth you are. You young people are insane. I do not miss the days when I was in my twenties and up at every ungodly hour of the day.

JESSICA

It's not healthy.

MIKE

No, it's not.

JESSICA

You need to talk to him.

MIKE

He's an adult. He can make that kind of judgement for himself.

JESSICA

At the moment, I think he's too exhausted to make any kind of rational judgement.

MIKE

(mumbled)

Oh, boy.

JESSICA

He's been in office for two months and been getting like four hours of sleep a night. It's not sustainable. It is time for an intervention. Please talk to him.

*Beat.*

MIKE

Alright.

MIKE gets up from his chair and walks over to LINK's door.

JESSICA

Wait, you're gonna do it right now?

MIKE

Yes, Jessica. Isn't that what you wanted?

JESSICA

At least get a cup of coffee first. You're so grumpy this morning.

Grumbling, MIKE exits toward the break room and kitchen, just off stage. JESSICA smiles lightly. She takes a moment to look at the photos on MIKE's desk, and maybe she straightens a few of them. After several beats, she goes back to the work on her computer. MIKE reenters with two cups of coffee. He knocks on LINK's office door.

LINK

Come in.

JESSICA

Good luck!

MIKE enters LINK's office, and pulls the door shut behind him.

LINK

Hey, Mike.

MIKE

Hey, boss. Coffee?

LINK

This is like my fourth cup this morning.

Shaking his head, LINK gestures to the cup JESSICA brought in earlier. Then he returns to his reading.

MIKE

Suit yourself.

Throughout the course of the scene, MIKE should finish drinking the first cup of coffee and start in on the second.

MIKE

You've been here since five a.m.?

LINK

(lightly, maybe with a laugh)

Yeah.

MIKE

While you know I admire your work ethic, I think it's important to note that today marks the third time this week that you've been here past midnight and before six a.m.

LINK

You think I don't know that?

MIKE

It's a little hard to tell. If I was operating on as little sleep as you are now, I wouldn't be able to tell left from right.

LINK

Are you sure you can do that now?

MIKE

Very funny. But I'm serious. At this point, you might as well buy an air mattress and save yourself the rent.

LINK

I would never take advantage of taxpayer dollars like that. Why would you--?

*Beat.*

LINK recognizes the joke and the two men chuckle.

MIKE

I'm serious, kid. Do you really think this habit is sustainable?

LINK

Doesn't matter if it's sustainable, Mike. I don't really plan to make it a habit out of it. I just need to make sure we're getting this right.

MIKE

I get it, boss. This is the first bill you're sponsoring, and it's a big one. But you need to get some perspective here. Keeping ungodly hours in the office by yourself won't help anything. All it does is worry your employees and make you exhausted.

LINK

Did Jessica send you in here?

MIKE

So what if she did? We're all a bit worried about you. If you die in a fiery car accident caused by extreme sleep deprivation, we'll all be out of a job.

LINK

I'm touched, Mike, really. But I'm going to do whatever it takes to get this bill through. I promise, I pulled many later nights than this in college.

MIKE

Alright whatever you say, Harvard.

LINK

I appreciate your concern, though. I really do.

*Beat.*

LINK

The district needs this bill, Mike. What if I screw up?

MIKE

We won't let that happen.

During the above exchange, JESSICA, in the other room, can be seen answering the phone and nodding several times. She puts the phone down on the receiver, gets up, knocks twice at LINK's door, and pokes her head in before waiting for an answer.

JESSICA

Sir? Sorry. Mr. Williams?

MIKE and LINK turn to look at her.

LINK

Yes?

JESSICA

Miranda Hobbes is on the phone for you. Should I ask her to call back?

MIKE

No, no. We were just wrapping up here.

LINK

Go ahead and put her through.

JESSICA glances at MIKE, then exits.

Lights fade.

### SCENE THREE

#### PROJECTION

A speech from the House floor.

#### LINK

There is a woman in San Francisco who has lived there her entire life. Her name is Marie, and she has a five-year-old daughter. Nine months ago, Marie's company downsized, and she lost her job. After six months of job hunting, still unable to find full-time employment, her small savings were depleted, and she and her daughter were evicted from their apartment. With nowhere else to go, Marie resorted to living out of her car. Unable to shower or brush her teeth, and unable to pay for child care, Marie's already demoralizing job search came to a grinding halt. As neighbors began to notice that someone was living in a car parked in front of their homes, Marie's situation was reported to the authorities. After receiving six citations, all of which she was unable to pay, Marie's car was impounded. Without knowledge of another place to stay, Marie gathered her daughter and what remained of her shattered dignity, and they spent a cold and unprotected night in Golden-Gate Park.

Unfortunately, stories like Marie's occur all too frequently in our nation. Hard working Americans fall victim to a struggling job market, and they do not have access to resources to help them get back on their feet. The population of people experiencing homelessness in the United States has increased every year for the past six years. I stand before you today to propose a bill, which will provide grants to qualified organizations in an effort to provide dignified options for people like Marie. The Dignified Housing for People Experiencing Homelessness Act will fill a desperate financial need among homeless shelters across the United States.

Lights fade.

## SCENE FOUR

Two years earlier.

Lights up on an office that is similar, but noticeably different from LINK's office in D.C. This office lacks the more expensive-feeling decorations, and most notably, there are no flags in the corner. However, takeout boxes still litter the desk.

LINK, now dressed in a slightly wrinkled, business casual outfit, sits at the desk. He is intently typing at his computer when the phone rings. Without taking his eyes off the screen, he reaches over and pushes the speakerphone button.

LINK

Hello?

SECRETARY (V.O.)

Hey, Link. A Miranda Hobbes is here to see you.

LINK

(still working at the computer)

Who?

SECRETARY (V.O.)

Miranda Hobbes.

LINK

I don't know a Miranda Hobbes.

A muffled exchange can be heard on the other end of the phone.

SECRETARY (V.O.)

Sorry, it's actually Miranda Hobbes and her husband, Jeffery.

LINK

Do they have an appointment?

Another muffled exchange.

SECRETARY (V.O.)

No, but they're very insistent.

LINK

Well, send them back, I guess.

LINK stands and goes to the office door. He opens it and welcomes MIRANDA and JEFFERY in.

LINK

Hello.

MIRANDA

Hello. Thank you for seeing us without an appointment.

LINK

...My pleasure.

MIRANDA

My name is Miranda Hobbes, and this is my husband, Jeffery.

LINK reaches out to shake their hands.

LINK

Lincoln Williams. I'm the location director for this branch of the Harrison Street Foundation.

JEFFERY

Oh, yes we know.

MIRANDA

Your resume is quite impressive.

LINK

Oh? You've read my resume?

JEFFERY

Your bio is on the foundation's website. And we heard you speak at Auction Napa Valley last month. As my wife said, we think you're very impressive.

LINK

Uhm... thank you. Can I get either of you--

MIRANDA

A glass of water would be lovely.

JEFFERY

For me too, thanks.

JEFFERY sits and MIRANDA joins him.

LINK

Oh, uh, sure. Feel free to make yourselves comfortable.

LINK exits briefly, and MIRANDA and  
JEFFERY exchange a meaningful look.

JEFFERY

Well, he certainly looks the part, doesn't he?

MIRANDA

Shhh...

LINK reenters with three bottles of water, and  
he hands two off to MIRANDA and JEFFERY.

LINK

What is it I can do for you today? Is there someone in particular that you would like to be admitted to our program?

MIRANDA

Oh no. We're not here for anything like that.

JEFFERY

We're here with a different sort of business. We have a request for you.

LINK

Oh?

MIRANDA

We're part of a political group called the SFPC.

JEFFERY

San Francisco for Positive Change.

LINK

I'm sorry. I'm afraid I've never heard of it.

MIRANDA

Oh, you wouldn't have. It's important to us to operate discreetly.

JEFFERY

And because of that, we hope we can count on your discretion.

LINK

My discretion about what?

MIRANDA

I'm sorry. We're being a bit vague.

*Beat.*

JEFFERY

We would like you to run for office.

LINK

What?

MIRANDA

For office. The House of Representatives.

LINK

For the House? Against Bailey?

MIRANDA

(laughing)

Heavens, no!

JEFFERY

We recently received word that she's decided to retire.

LINK

Retire? I thought she would stick around for at least another term or two.

MIRANDA

Oh, no. She's been thinking about retirement for quite some time.

LINK

How do you know that?

JEFFERY

She's in her eighties. Who wouldn't be?

MIRANDA

Very funny, Jeffery. Debora called to tell us herself yesterday morning.

LINK

The speaker of the house called *you* to tell you she's retiring?

MIRANDA

We're old family friends. I still remember when she sat us all down and first told us she was planning to run.

JEFFERY

Obviously, she's the candidate we've supported up to this point.

MIRANDA

But seeing that she's stepping out of office, it's time for us to find someone new.

JEFFERY

We have a vested interest in the political success of our district.

LINK

Why?

MIRANDA

The world is changing, Mr. Williams. We believe its our duty, as citizens, to do everything we can to make sure that change is moving our country in a positive direction.

LINK

No, I mean, why me?

MIRANDA

Well, you're young.

JEFFERY

And we very much admire the work you're doing here.

MIRANDA

You obviously have a heart to care for the people of San Francisco. Especially those who struggle to care for themselves.

JEFFERY

Your education alone makes you extremely qualified.

MIRANDA

And we're very moved by your story.

LINK

My story?

JEFFERY

A young man who picks himself up out of poverty and homelessness and goes on to get an Ivy-league education?

MIRANDA

And now you're working in upper level management for the foundation that operates the very homeless shelter that took you in? It's quite remarkable. Truly.

LINK

(with a touch of irony)

You think so?

MIRANDA

Oh, certainly.

LINK

How do you know all of this?

MIRANDA

Oh, we have connections everywhere.

JEFFERY

Besides, you're Harvard's pride and joy. The boy they picked up off the streets who graduated summa cum laude. The university can't stop talking about you.

MIRANDA

Should you choose to run, a lot of important people would be behind you.

LINK

Even with all of that, you know next to nothing about me personally. Why would you ask me to run?

*Beat.*

MIRANDA

Because we think you can win.

JEFFERY

And it's obvious that you've had political ambitions for quite some time.

LINK

I... um... how do you know that?

JEFFERY

You majored in political science at Harvard. Of course you have political ambitions.

LINK

Oh. Well, yes. I do. But I didn't think I would have the chance to run for at least a few more years.

MIRANDA

Well, here we are. Giving you the chance.

JEFFERY

Obviously, we'll contribute financially what we can to your campaign.

MIRANDA

But that's not really what you'll need us for. Where we can really be of help to you is with the rest of your fund-raising. And we know a political consultant that I think would be the perfect fit for you.

JEFFERY

His name's Mike Brentwood.

MIRANDA

He's such a lovely man. We really do think you'll get along well. That is, if you're willing.

LINK

I still don't... There are things about my story that you don't--

MIRANDA

I assure you, Lincoln, we know everything that there is to know.

JEFFERY

So what do you say?

There is a long pause and JEFFERY and MIRANDA look at LINK expectantly. He looks between the two of them.

Lights fade.

## SCENE FIVE

PROJECTION

Back to the present. Several months have passed.

An interview on the Capitol steps.

LINK

This is not politics. This is about saving lives. What we're fighting for here is way bigger than a reelection campaign or an uncomfortable conversation with some unhappy constituents. I hope that my colleagues, on both sides of the aisle, will forget about all those nagging voices when considering this bill.

As public servants, our first and foremost duty should be to consider human life. The number of homeless children in the United States is staggering, and this bill will provide much needed protection for those children and their families-- some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Yes, it costs money. But I would beg my colleagues in the house and in the senate to consider money spent to save lives, especially the lives of our youngest generation, to be money well spent.

*Beat.*

LINK looks past the camera and smiles as he begins taking off the microphone clipped to his jacket.

LINK

Thanks, Beth.

Lights fade.

## SCENE SIX

Lights up on LINK's D.C. office. It's early afternoon. JESSICA and MIKE sit on the ground on their side of the office playing a vocal game of *Trivial Pursuit*.

MIKE

(reading from a game card)

In Egyptian hieroglyphs, the symbol of a decorated eye most commonly represents the Eye of which god?

JESSICA

Oh!! Horus!

MIKE

How the hell do you know that?

JESSICA adds a pie slice to her game piece.

JESSICA

My nephew's a big fan of Rick Riordan.

MIKE

Who?

JESSICA

He writes these books about ancient mythology. They're for kids, but honestly pretty good.

JESSICA rolls the dice and moves her piece forward again.

JESSICA

S and L. Hit me with it, Mike.

MIKE draws a card and reads.

MIKE

Which plant does Gilroy, California, celebrate every summer during a three-day festival?

JESSICA

Oh, gosh. I don't know.

MIKE

You've got thirty seconds to guess if you want.

MIKE watches his wristwatch intently.

JESSICA

Oh, come on. Cut me a little slack here.

MIKE

Slack is for people who aren't winning. You're demolishing me.

JESSICA

Sixty more seconds. Please?

MIKE

Seven, six, five, four, three--

JESSICA

Okay, okay! Um, garlic?

MIKE

YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME!

JESSICA

That was right??

JESSICA lets out a delighted squeal as she reaches for the dice to roll again.

MIKE

You're cheating. You have to be.

JESSICA

I am not cheating! You know, Mike, if you can't be a better sport, we might have to put an end to recess trivia.

MIKE

Stop with your empty threats and roll the dice.

JESSICA rolls the dice and moves her piece once again. MIKE draws a card.

MIKE

Oh, this is a good one. “Although he entered office with a record sixty percent of the popular vote, this US president’s short administration was marked with personal controversy as well as the scandal known as ‘Teapot Dome.’”

JESSICA

What? Mike! I have no idea which president that was!

MIKE

I told you it was a good one. Come on, you work in government. You should know this.

JESSICA

Do you??

MIKE checks the card for the answer.

MIKE

Yes.

JESSICA reacts.

MIKE

Clock’s ticking.

JESSICA

Uhh... Okay the Teapot Dome... I don’t think I’ve ever even heard of that!

By way of an answer, MIKE taps his watch.

JESSICA

Ugh! I don’t know!

MIKE

And that’s... time! Hah!

JESSICA

Who was it??

MIKE

(very pleased)

Warren G. Harding. Now hand over the dice.

JESSICA

Who?? Let me see that card.

As MIKE leans over to snatch the dice from JESSICA and show her the card, LINK enters on their side of the office. Upon seeing him, MIKE and JESSICA both scramble to their feet.

MIKE

Hey, boss.

LINK

Hey, guys.

JESSICA

What are you doing here?

MIKE

It's Monday.

JESSICA

Did you forget that we're in recess?

LINK

No, I didn't.

JESSICA

Then allow me to remind you, sir, that we intentionally left your schedule empty today for the first time since you've taken office. You're supposed to be getting rest.

LINK

I know. But I just got off the phone with Jeffery Hobbes. Apparently, if George Stinson co-sponsors, we can swing a yes vote from the rest of the Nor Cal republicans.

MIKE

Even Marsh and Homer?

LINK

Marsh, Homer, all of them.

MIKE

What do we need to do to get that signature?

LINK

The Hobbeses are in the air now. They'll be here in time for a seven o'clock dinner with Stinson and his wife. Jessica, would you call and reserve one of those private dining rooms at Plume?

JESSICA

Actually, sir-- Sorry, I mean, uh, the Dabney is Stinson's favorite.

LINK

How do you know that?

JESSICA

He goes there for lunch at least twice a week. I've heard Samantha, his scheduler, complaining about it because it's so far away.

JESSICA pulls out her phone and begins typing.

LINK

Alright. The Dabney it is. Will you let Mr. and Mrs. Hobbes know as well?

JESSICA

(looking up from her phone)

Already did.

LINK

Amazing.

He turns to MIKE.

LINK

In the meantime, let's get some research.

MIKE

Right. I'll put Ben and Georgia on constituent patterns.

LINK

Great. What else do I need to know about him?

MIKE

I'll make some calls.

MIKE exits.

JESSICA looks up from her work and notices the board game is still scattered on the floor. She crouches on the ground and begins gathering up the game with urgency. When she stands, she loses her balance. Maybe she drops the game. Maybe game pieces fly everywhere.

LINK

Whoops!

JESSICA

Sorry!

LINK

Careful! We can't afford for you to hurt yourself, especially not today.

LINK goes to help her.

JESSICA

Thanks.

LINK

I mean, blood stains don't come out of carpet easily, and we're operating on a low budget as it is.

JESSICA

Okay, very funny.

LINK

I am serious, though. This office couldn't afford to lose you.

JESSICA

(genuinely touched)

Thanks, boss.

LINK

They say hiring new employees gets so expensive.

JESSICA

Oh, you think you're so clever.

LINK

I do actually, yes. Now get back to work.

LINK exits into his office.

MIKE reenters the office and knocks on LINK's door.

LINK

Come in!

MIKE enters and closes the door behind him.  
He addresses LINK in a lowered voice.

MIKE

Did Jeffery have anything else to say?

LINK

There's a meeting next month. He and Miranda would like us to both plan to be there. He said they'll send us the official date next week.

MIKE

Great. Anything else?

LINK

Nope.

MIKE

You sure? Because last time I talked to him he mentioned--

LINK

Yes, Mike. I'm sure. And at the moment, I'd prefer to focus on getting this bill passed.

MIKE

You got it, boss.

Lights fade.

## SCENE SEVEN

### PROJECTION

A speech from the House floor.

### LINK

I've noticed, as we've discussed this bill over the last ten months, that there are a lot of misconceptions. This is not a homeless bill of rights. We're not seeking to enable self-destructive behavior; we're simply looking to provide much-needed funding for organizations that supply the basic rights of housing and shelter. The grants provided in this bill will only be available to organizations that, in addition to providing housing, demonstrate a capacity and history of providing services that address mental health, substance use disorder and other health issues, as well as offering job training, education, and employment resources. And specific priority will be shown to organizations that provide those services to families and youths.

Homelessness is a pervasive and preventable problem in our nation. Unfortunately, stories of people picking themselves up out of homelessness, stories like my own, are the exception rather than the rule. Instead of criminalizing our fellow citizens for their misfortunes, and costing ourselves billions of taxpayer dollars in the process by the way, this bill is an attempt to make strategic investments that will pay huge dividends in the long run.

Just last year, California spent upwards of an estimated 1.7 billion dollars on issuing citations and incarcerating homeless individuals that were unable to pay tickets. A study out of LA recently reported that, monthly, the state spends approximately 600 dollars per person in supportive housing, while it spends approximately 2,500 dollars on individuals without housing. These grants aren't putting taxpayers on the hook. They will alleviate the financial burden placed on states by empowering people experiencing homelessness to get back on their feet, rather than continuing in cycles that are harmful to both themselves and their communities. Representative Stinson and I would ask our colleagues, on both sides of the aisle, to vote according to their conscience, without allowing partisanship to interfere. This is not a left-right issue. It's an issue of human rights, and the economics are on our side.

Lights fade.

**SCENE EIGHT**

It's late in the evening. Upbeat music plays out of a portable speaker. LINK, JESSICA, and MIKE are in LINK's portion of the office, drinking champagne. Empty glasses and paper plates, the remnants of a larger party, litter the desk and floor. One song ends and another upbeat tune begins to play. LINK walks over to turn the speaker down.

LINK

I still can't believe it.

JESSICA

That it passed? It was close, but it wasn't *that* close.

LINK

No, I can't believe that I'm here. That this is actually happening.

MIKE

Oh, boy. Here we go.

LINK

I mean, we legitimately made a difference today. How many people in this country can actually say that they've done that?

JESSICA

Not many.

LINK

Right??

MIKE

We're very proud of you, Link.

LINK

Thanks, Mike.

MIKE glances at his watch.

MIKE

I better be getting home. It's late, and Tess will probably call soon wondering where I am.

JESSICA

But our party's just getting started!

MIKE

(noting the trash littering the room)

You know, I think the rest of the office would disagree.

He moves into his and JESSICA's office space,  
and begins gathering his things.

JESSICA

(yelling into the other room)

What a party pooper!

MIKE

(back through the open door)

I know, I know.

LINK

Well, we don't need you to celebrate.

MIKE laughs.

MIKE

Yeah, that's my point.

His things gathered, MIKE pops his head back  
into the office.

MIKE

Oh, and don't forget about that meeting tomorrow.

LINK

I won't.

JESSICA

What meeting?

MIKE

Just a dinner with the Hobbeses.

JESSICA

Mike, how often do I need to tell you that you should forward things like that to me?

LINK  
It's no big deal.

JESSICA  
Big deal or not, it's my job.

*Beat.*

LINK and MIKE exchange a glance.

LINK  
Sorry.

JESSICA  
(playfully stern)  
You should be.

MIKE  
(chuckling)  
Goodnight, you two. Don't stay too late and get some rest this weekend.

LINK  
You too, Mike.

JESSICA  
Night!

MIKE exits.

Watching him go, LINK slowly sits on the ground, his back up against the desk. Leaning his head back, he sighs contentedly.

JESSICA  
More champagne?

He holds up his glass gratefully. She takes it and crosses the room to refill both hers and his.

JESSICA  
It's hard to believe we've only been here for eleven months.

LINK  
I know. It feels like its been years.

JESSICA

I truly can't remember the days before I spent all of my time scheduling your life.

LINK

Neither can I!

JESSICA returns with the champagne. Joining LINK on the ground, she offers him his glass.

LINK

Thank you.

JESSICA playfully raises her glass.

JESSICA

To the legislative process.

LINK

To the legislative process!

LINK laughs, taps his glass against hers, and they drink. They sit in happy, companionable silence for a few moments.

LINK

What are you up to this weekend?

JESSICA

Big fat nothing. And lots of sleep.

LINK

Same. I look forward to sleep more than almost anything else these days.

JESSICA

I guess that's the life we've resigned ourselves to. Work until it's time to sleep, and then sleep so you can work some more.

LINK

And you can forget about a social life.

JESSICA

What?

LINK

Exactly.

JESSICA

Yeah, my romantic life has taken quite a hit thanks to you.

LINK

Sorry about that.

*Beat.*

LINK

You still seeing that Navy guy?

JESSICA

Yeah, sort of.

LINK

Sort of?

JESSICA

While I am technically still seeing him, I haven't *seen* him in over two weeks. And at this point, I barely even have time to text.

LINK

Ah.

JESSICA

Yeah, the breakup seems pretty much inevitable at this point. I mean, I wouldn't want to date someone with a schedule like mine. So we'll just have to see how long he decides to stick around.

LINK

Well, he'd be stupid not to. Stick around, I mean.

*Beat.*

JESSICA

That's the end of that sentence? No joking insult or sarcastic jabs?

LINK

I'm serious. You're funny, smart, you work hard, you actually care about what you do.

JESSICA

Of course I care about what I do. I want to make a difference here. You know, help people.

LINK

Yeah, I know! But how many people do you know that actually care about helping anyone besides themselves?

JESSICA

Plenty! Lots of people care about the work they're doing here.

LINK

Speak for yourself. I think we're part of a small few.

JESSICA shakes her head. They look at each other for a long moment. Suddenly, JESSICA leans in and kisses him. LINK reciprocates momentarily. At the same moment, they catch themselves and break apart. Perhaps LINK stands.

LINK

Woah. We can't... um... That was not--

JESSICA

Oh my-- Link, I'm so sorry. I-- I-- I'm not sure what came over me just now. Except that it's late, and you said those nice things, and I've probably had a little too much champagne, and I just--

LINK

No, no, you really don't have to explain. Believe me, in-- in any other circumstances, I would-- It's just...

JESSICA

It's... illegal.

LINK

Right. And a lot of people have made a lot of sacrifices for me to be here, so I don't want to--

JESSICA

And a terrible position for me to put you in. I'm so sorry. I can't believe that I-- If you don't want me working here anymore, I would completely understand.

LINK

Jess, it's-- it's really not a huge deal. It just can't happen again.

JESSICA

Of course. It-- it was a mistake. It was my mistake.

*Beat.*

JESSICA

I'm gonna go.

LINK

Yeah, okay.

She starts toward the door.

LINK

I'll see you on Monday?

JESSICA  
(over her shoulder)

See you Monday.

JESSICA closes LINK's door as she enters her part of the office. In their separate spaces, both JESSICA and LINK take a moment to react to what just happened.

Then, JESSICA gathers her things from her desk, and LINK starts picking up the trash scattered around his space.

Lights fade.

SCENE NINE

A few days later.

Lights up on LINK's D.C. office. It's late in the afternoon. JESSICA enters through her side of the office, knocks twice at LINK's door, and opens it before waiting for an answer. She pokes her head through the door.

Hey. JESSICA

Hey. LINK

JESSICA  
It's six-thirty, so I told Jake and the interns to head home. I'll probably be here for another half-hour or so. Just wanted to let you know.

Okay. Thanks. LINK

JESSICA hesitates for a long moment, then turns and starts to go. Suddenly, she turns around and strides back into the office.

Link? JESSICA Jessica? LINK

*Beat... It's awkward.*

I wanted to say-- JESSICA I just wanted to-- LINK

*Beat... Awkward.*

Um... you go ahead. JESSICA

I just wanted to ask... if you would bump this weekend's plane ticket up to first class. LINK

Oh. Sure. JESSICA

Thanks.

LINK

Once again, JESSICA starts to leave. LINK's voice stops her in the doorway.

Jess?

LINK

Yeah?

JESSICA

What were you going to say?

LINK

Oh, never mind. It was nothing.

JESSICA

Okay. You sure?

LINK

Yeah, I'm sure. I'll go check on those tickets now.

JESSICA

JESSICA returns to her desk, and she and LINK both take a moment before they resume work on their computers. They work in silence for several moments. Suddenly, AMBER bursts into JESSICA's side of the office. JESSICA stands.

Hello.

JESSICA

AMBER, breathing hard, stares at JESSICA for a long moment.

Is there something I can help you with?

JESSICA

I'm here to see Lincoln Williams.

AMBER

Oh. Well, you can't--

JESSICA

AMBER

This is his office, isn't it?

JESSICA

Yes, it is. But Congressman Williams isn't available for a meeting.

AMBER

He isn't here?

JESSICA

If you're a constituent and have a concern, you're welcome to call the office during regular business hours. One of our staffers will make sure your requests are conveyed to the congressman.

AMBER

I need to see him.

JESSICA

Well, if you must meet with him in person, you can submit a scheduling request online. We'll review the details and do our best to get back to you within a few weeks.

AMBER

No, it needs to be today. He knows me. If you would just--

AMBER moves toward LINK's office door.  
JESSICA blocks her way.

Hearing commotion on the other side of the office, LINK rises from his desk and goes to the door.

JESSICA

I'm sorry, ma'am, but I'm going to have to ask you to leave. I've already told you that the congressman isn't available. If you need to contact him, you can call the office or submit a request.

AMBER

(voice rising)

Please, if you would just tell him that I'm here!

LINK strides through the door and into the other side of the office.

LINK

What's going on in here?

AMBER and JESSICA turn to him. LINK notices AMBER.

JESSICA

Sorry to bother you, boss. This woman was just on her way out.

LINK

Amber?

AMBER

Hey, Link.

LINK crosses the room and wraps his arms around AMBER in a hug. Pulling away, he looks intently at her face.

LINK

Gosh, you've gotten big.

AMBER

Well, it's been ten years. That tends to happen.

LINK

It's good to see you.

AMBER

You, too.

JESSICA clears her throat. LINK and AMBER turn to her.

LINK

Oh! Uh, Jessica... this is Amber.

JESSICA reaches out to shake AMBER's hand.

JESSICA

Hi. Sorry. I didn't realize-- How do you two know each other?

AMBER

I'm his--

LINK

I'll explain later. For now, would you mind if we had a minute just the two of us?

JESSICA

Oh... Of course.

LINK offers JESSICA a strained smile as he escorts AMBER through the door into his half of the office. LINK shuts the door soundly behind him. Slightly concerned, JESSICA hesitantly returns to work at her computer. Once he's confident they're out of JESSICA's earshot, LINK turns to AMBER.

LINK  
How did you get here?

AMBER  
I took a plane.

LINK  
By yourself?

AMBER  
Yes, Link. I'm an adult.

LINK  
Barely! What are you doing here?

AMBER  
I have something to tell you.

LINK  
And you came all the way to D.C. to do it? I have a phone.

AMBER  
And how was I supposed to call? None of us have your personal number.

LINK  
You should have just called the office and asked to speak to me.

AMBER  
What do you think I've been doing for the past three days? None of your staff would let me though! And I couldn't very well explain who I was.

LINK  
Well, I'm sorry about that. But you have to understand, there *are* crazy people out there. And we get hundreds of calls. We can't just let anybody in.

AMBER  
You know, it actually doesn't matter now. I came to tell you...

LINK

What is it?

AMBER takes a moment to steel herself.

AMBER

I came to tell you that Mom passed away.

*Beat.*

LINK

What?

AMBER

I came to tell you that Mom passed away.

LINK

No, I heard you. I just don't understand. Was she sick?

AMBER

No, it was very sudden.

LINK

How?

AMBER

Car accident.

LINK sinks into his chair.

LINK

When?

AMBER

Three days ago.

LINK

She's gone?

AMBER's composure finally cracks, and her sadness becomes deeply evident with the following line.

AMBER

The funeral's tomorrow. I wanted you to be able to come.

LINK gets up, crosses the room, and embraces his sister. It's a moment where, in the midst of deep sadness and distance, siblings find comfort in the presence of each other. They remain in the hug while delivering the following lines.

LINK

I don't know what to say.

AMBER

I have a late flight out tonight. Come home with me.

LINK

Amber, I...

LINK pulls away slightly.

LINK

I don't think I can.

AMBER

You don't think you can? Why not? What could possibly be more important than your mother's funeral?

LINK

I have work to do here. I can't just leave in the middle of the week with no explanation.

AMBER

I just told you that our mom is dead, and you're worried about work?

LINK

It's more complicated than that, Amber.

AMBER

It really isn't, though. Normal sons are willing to take a day off of work when their mom dies.

LINK

I know. I just have to consider what it would look like if I left. People would talk.

AMBER

The person who loved you most in the world is dead, and you're worried about what it will look like if you go to her funeral?

LINK

As far as anyone here knows, my family was dysfunctional and abusive.

AMBER

Well, dysfunction is right on the nose. But whose fault do you think that is?

LINK

I'm not going to let you shame me for doing what I had to do to get here. This is way bigger than that, and I don't regret it.

AMBER

I'm not trying to shame you.

LINK

I'm making a difference here.

AMBER

Yeah, in the lives of strangers! What about the people you know?

LINK

I am helping people I know.

AMBER

What about the people who watched you grow up? The people who love you? I know you're doing important work. What do you think I've had to listen to mom lecture about for the past ten years?

LINK

Amber, you have to understand the big picture here.

AMBER

I didn't spend most of my savings on a last minute flight across the country to have you talk down to me about the bigger picture.

LINK

We've all had to make sacrifices. But I thought the three of you understood that what I did was for the betterment of us all.

AMBER

And I think you need to understand the reality of the heart break you put us through. Do you think you can hop off your high horse long enough to do that?

*Beat.*

LINK

Does Dad know you're here?

*Beat.*

AMBER

No.

LINK

Amber. You can't just up and leave without telling anyone. Do you know how dangerous that is?

AMBER

Hah! That's rich coming from you! You're the one who up and left!!

LINK glances nervously at the door.

LINK

Keep your voice down.

AMBER

Why? Because you thought the life that our parents fought to give you put you at some sort of disadvantage? Do you know how sick that is, Link? How selfish??

LINK

I was at a disadvantage! I had the grades! I had the test scores! And I still didn't get in!

AMBER

Did you ever think that maybe it just wasn't meant to be? That you weren't supposed to force it?

LINK

Amber, I understand that you're upset. But I *did* leave because I care about you. This is good for our family. It's good for Mintsville. If I hadn't done what I did, I wouldn't be here.

AMBER

Would that really be a problem?? Do you really think there's no one else who could do this job?

LINK

Of course I don't think that.

*Beat.*

LINK

But out of all the candidates that were interested in running for our district, I was the most qualified.

AMBER

Why is that, Link? Because you went to Harvard? Because you lied?

LINK

I didn't lie. I did what I had to do to get here. Mom and Dad can... could... see that. I don't know why it's suddenly so hard for you to understand.

AMBER

You know what? You're right. Congratulations, Link. You screwed over the two people who love you most, and you have them both convinced that you're a hero. That must feel pretty great.

LINK

Amber...

AMBER

You know, Dad didn't want to tell you. He said that we shouldn't burden you because Mom wouldn't have wanted it. Your own father didn't want to tell you that your mother is dead. But I don't care that you're doing important work here, Link. Knowing about your mom's death isn't a burden! Which is why I came to tell you anyway. I knew you would want to be there.

LINK

And I'm grateful that you did. Thank you. Really. But I can't come home with you. It's too risky.

AMBER

Too risky??

LINK

Amber, lower your voice.

AMBER

WHY? BECAUSE YOU DON'T WANT YOUR PRETTY SECURITY GUARD OUT THERE TO FIND OUT YOU'RE A PHONY? THAT THIS STORY YOU'VE MANUFACTURED ABOUT YOURSELF-- THE STORY THAT WON YOU THE ELECTION-- IS TOTAL CRAP?

Hearing the shouting on the other side of the door, JESSICA gets up, knocks twice on the door, and enters the other side of the office during the following lines.

AMBER  
MOM LOVED YOU! MORE THAN ANYONE! AND YOU LEFT! THE LEAST YOU CAN DO IS COME PAY YOUR RESPECTS!

LINK  
I'M HERE, AMBER! I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU EXPECT ME TO DO!

JESSICA  
Link?

LINK  
Jessica!

JESSICA  
Everything okay in here?

LINK  
Yes. Amber was just... uh...

AMBER  
Leaving. I don't know why I thought coming was a good idea.

JESSICA  
Oh. Can I call you a cab?

AMBER  
No.  
(dripping with sarcasm)  
I would hate to be any more of a burden than I already have.

AMBER grabs a pen and slip of paper off of LINK's desk. She scrawls a phone number on it.

AMBER  
In case you develop a conscience in the next twenty-four hours, here's where you can reach me.

AMBER hands LINK the slip of paper.

Amber--

LINK

Goodbye, Link.

AMBER

AMBER exits quickly. JESSICA watches LINK as AMBER leaves.

LINK crosses to his desk and sinks into his chair. He opens a drawer and puts the slip of paper inside. He turns around and begins working on his computer.

What was that?

JESSICA

He continues working.

Link?

JESSICA

Mm?

LINK

Are you okay?

JESSICA

Yeah, fine.

LINK

*Beat.*

You sure?

JESSICA

LINK

Yeah. I just need to get this reading done before I leave today.

*Beat.*

JESSICA, clearly concerned, crosses to him, hesitates, and reaches out to touch his shoulder.

At her touch, LINK sighs heavily and leans his head into his hands. They sit in silence for a long moment.

LINK  
Sorry.

JESSICA  
Link, what just happened?

LINK  
I'd rather not discuss it now.

*Beat.*

JESSICA  
...Okay. Um... let me know if you need anything.

She starts to go.

LINK  
Jess?

From the doorway, JESSICA turns back to him.

JESSICA  
Yeah?

LINK  
You want to get your work and come sit in here?

JESSICA  
...Sure.

JESSICA moves into her side of the office, grabs her laptop and a few folders, then comes back to LINK's space. She sets up her things on the corner of his desk and pulls up a chair. LINK looks at her.

LINK  
Thank you.

JESSICA  
You're welcome.

LINK and JESSICA exchange a long look. They return to their computer screens and work together in companionable silence. After several long moments, LINK reaches out and holds JESSICA's hand.

Lights fade.

## SCENE TEN

Sometime much later that night.

The office is dark and empty.

JESSICA enters quietly on her side of the office. She doesn't turn on the overhead lights, instead opting for her phone flashlight. She cuts through the office purposefully, moving straight to LINK's door. Entering his side of the office, she goes to his desk, possibly turning on a lamp. She opens his desk drawer and pulls out a slip of paper. Grabbing a pen, she copies something down. Then, she returns the slip to the desk, turns off the lamp, and exits.

**SCENE ELEVEN**

Three days after AMBER's visit.

Lights up on LINK's D.C. office. It's mid-morning. JESSICA and MIKE sit working at their desks, occasionally exchanging worried glances. The phone on JESSICA's desk rings. She flinches and answers quickly.

JESSICA

Hello?

She pauses a moment to listen to the other side of the line.

JESSICA

Okay. Yeah, I'll take it. Patch him through.

Another pause as she listens to the response.

JESSICA

This is Jessica.

Pause.

JESSICA

Hello, sir. I'm sorry. He's not available to speak now.

She listens.

JESSICA

Okay. Yes, sir. I'll have him give you a call you as soon as he does.

JESSICA hangs up the phone. She looks at MIKE, who has been listening to her conversation with interest.

MIKE

Who was that?

JESSICA

Jeffery Hobbes.

Oh, boy.

MIKE

MIKE glances at the door to LINK's office,  
concerned.

JESSICA

Should I try calling again?

MIKE

No. He isn't picking up. I doubt calling again will change anything.

JESSICA

Do you think something could have happened?

MIKE

I don't know. But worrying won't do him any good.

JESSICA

You're right. I'm sure everything's fine.

JESSICA nods, and they go back to sitting in  
silence.

*Beat.*

A realization.

JESSICA

Mike? What do you know about Link's family?

MIKE

What do you mean?

JESSICA

I just realized I don't think I know his parents' names.

MIKE

Okay.

JESSICA

I mean, don't you think that's odd?

MIKE

Of course it's odd. His whole his situation is odd. That's what got him elected. Lots of people are estranged from their families, Jess. I don't see how that pertains to your work here.

JESSICA

It doesn't have to--

MIKE

Why don't you try calling again?

*Beat.*

Suddenly, LINK enters on MIKE and JESSICA's side of the office. His shirt is untucked, and his hair looks markedly disheveled. MIKE and JESSICA stand, surprised.

MIKE

Morning, boss.

LINK moves toward the door of his office, and MIKE and JESSICA share another concerned look.

MIKE

Everything alright?

LINK

Yeah, fine.

JESSICA

Voting starts at three today.

LINK acknowledges this with a wave of his hand.

JESSICA

And Jeffery Hobbes just called for you. I told him you would call back as soon as you had the chance.

LINK

Jeffery Hobbes can go to hell.

LINK slams his office door, stumbles over to his desk, and sits.

Taken aback, JESSICA and MIKE look at each other, then return to their desks. They sit for a while. JESSICA pulls the slip of paper out of her bag and looks at it intently.

After a moment, MIKE gets up and knocks at LINK's door.

LINK  
(after a long pause)

Come in.

MIKE enters and speaks in a lowered voice.

MIKE  
What is wrong with you?

*Beat.*

MIKE  
You can't talk like that in front of an employee.

*Beat.*

MIKE  
Link. Being at that funeral would have made no difference. She's gone. There's nothing you could have done to change anything.

LINK  
I know.

MIKE  
Do you? You need to start acting like it.

LINK  
I know.

MIKE  
You need to pull yourself together. She's starting to get suspicious.

LINK  
*I know.*

*Beat.*

LINK

I just can't stop seeing Amber's face. She was so hurt.

MIKE

I'm sorry about that, kid. I really am.

LINK

I just feel like... I need to go back. I need to see her grave. To see Amber and my dad, and to make things right, somehow.

MIKE

Going back now would mean risking everything you've worked for. Think of all the sacrifices you've made to be here. Think of all the sacrifices your mother made for you to be here. Hell, think of all the sacrifices I've made for you. It's not worth it.

LINK

I could go quietly. No one would need to know.

MIKE

The media is obsessed with your life story. You are being watched way too closely to get away with no one knowing. And the last thing we need right now is the deluge of questions that would follow a visit to your hometown. You think Miranda and Jeffery would appreciate that kind of attention?

LINK

I don't--

MIKE

You need to drop it, Link. You can go visit your mom in a few years. After the novelty of your background has passed. The press will move on to the next interesting life. And you need to hold it together until then.

*Beat.*

LINK

I know.

Lights fade.

SCENE TWELVE

Later the same day.

Lights up on LINK's D.C. office. JESSICA and MIKE sit at their desks. JESSICA stares off into space while MIKE packs up his things.

On his side of the office, LINK sits at his desk, also staring off into space.

MIKE

Alright. Goodnight, Jess. Have a good weekend.

He indicates the door to LINK's office.

MIKE

Give him some space.

JESSICA

Yeah.

*Beat.*

JESSICA

Goodnight, Mike.

MIKE exits.

JESSICA remains at her desk for another long moment, looking at the slip of paper in her hands. Then, steeling herself, she marches through the door into LINK's side of the office.

LINK

Jessica? What do--

JESSICA

Did you make it all up?

LINK

What?

JESSICA

You heard me.

LINK

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

JESSICA

Your story. Your family background, the homelessness. Did you make it all up?

LINK

Make it all up? No. That's absurd.

LINK stands and stumbles slightly.

JESSICA

What is wrong with you?

LINK

I'm just a little tired. And I've maybe had a few drinks.

JESSICA shakes her head in disbelief. She opens her mouth to say something, but can't find the words. Finally, she simply holds the paper out to him. He takes it.

LINK

(looking up after a moment)

What is this?

JESSICA

You know what it is.

LINK

Did you steal this?

JESSICA

I was worried about you.

LINK

Why?

JESSICA

You've been off ever since she left.

LINK

Who?

JESSICA

Your sister. You haven't been the same since she left.

LINK

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

JESSICA

Amber. Your sister.

LINK

I never told you Amber was my sister.

JESSICA

It didn't take a genius to figure it out, Link.

*Beat.*

LINK

You overheard what she said?

JESSICA

I overheard enough to be suspicious. So I decided to look in to some things.

LINK

So you broke into my office, stole private information, and what? You called her?

JESSICA

I needed to know what's been going on. We've been worried about you.

LINK

So, what? You talk to my confused and emotional teenage sister and you automatically assume that I've been lying about everything?

JESSICA

She filled in the gaps in your story that have never made sense. So tell me: have you been lying this whole time? Because there's quite a bit of evidence that suggests you have.

LINK

Of course I haven't been--

JESSICA

Link, I swear, if one more lie comes out of your mouth...

LINK

So you've made up your mind, then. It doesn't matter what I say. You're going to believe I'm lying.

JESSICA

Prove me wrong. Explain away your sister and the fact that you've been acting like a zombie ever since she left.

LINK

My mom died. I don't know what you want me to say.

JESSICA

Just admit it, Link. You made it all up. The abuse, the homelessness, all of it. The whole story that people went crazy about during the campaign. It's a sham.

LINK

I didn't make it up. I was homeless.

JESSICA

But by choice. There was no abuse, was there? Nothing *forced* you to leave home!

*Beat.*

*Beat.*

*Beat.*

*Beat.*

LINK

What do you want?

JESSICA

Maybe you could start with explaining why.

LINK sighs.

LINK

Jessica, I'm a white male, and I grew up in a suburb in Northern California. On paper, I am the definition average. You're smart. I don't think it's too hard to work out why I did what I did.

JESSICA

So you had a campaign in mind from the beginning?

*Beat.*

JESSICA

That's insane.

LINK

(getting heated)

I am totally qualified for this job. I've dreamt about this since I was a kid, and regardless of what Amber told you, my family wanted this for me. There's no way I could have won running on merit alone.

JESSICA

You actually believe that?

LINK

I've been at a disadvantage *since birth!* Do you *honestly* believe I could have been elected without my backstory?

JESSICA

You lied.

LINK

You think I would have been able to make it here, been able to do the things I've done, *been able to protect those kids*, if I hadn't lied?

JESSICA

That is *not* the point.

LINK

Then what is the point, Jessica? I wanted to work in government. I wanted to help people. I changed my circumstances to increase my odds of being able to do that.

JESSICA

You think you're the only person who has dreams that haven't worked out? The only person who feels like they're at a disadvantage?

LINK

Oh course no--

JESSICA

You think I wouldn't love to have your job? You want to talk about getting the short end of the stick? We have the same degree! I didn't go to Harvard, but I graduated from Berkley. With distinction! And I've dreamt of being in politics since I got elected to student council in the seventh grade. But no angelic PAC descended from the heavens asking me to run for office. You want to know why?

You-- you know what the real reason is? It's because, no matter what the media or-- or the democratic party tries to tell you these days, women just aren't electable. Especially not young women! Do you have any idea the tightrope that the female population is forced to walk if they want to make any sort of difference? If you don't fight people on things, then you're weak. But you can't push too hard, because then you're a bitch! Don't let people trample over you, but you better not make any men feel small.

LINK

Jessica, if you would let me--

JESSICA

I'm a woman trying to work my way up the ranks in Washington D.C, and what do I do? I'm a congressman's scheduler! I earn a living by telling you where to be at what time every day. It doesn't get much more degrading than that! My life literally revolves around planning yours! And you know what the worst part is? I'm amazing at it! It's like I'm furthering every toxic, destructive female stereotype just by being good at my job! But here I am! Participating in the patriarchy because I have some crazy idea that if I stay long enough and work hard enough, maybe someday I'll actually get the chance to do what you do. So you can sit there and talk about being at a disadvantage because of things that are out of your control, but let me tell you something: everyone feels that way. We're all just trying to do our best with the hand we've been dealt. And it is no excuse.

JESSICA turns to go.

LINK

Where are you going?

JESSICA

I'm leaving.

LINK

What?

JESSICA

I quit.

LINK

You can't do that.

JESSICA

I can't work here.

I can't stay here without--

LINK

You can't talk me out of it.

JESSICA  
(sharply)

JESSICA walks quickly to the door. LINK chases after her, grabs her arm, and turns her around.

Jess, wait! Don't go.

LINK

*Beat.*

I can't stay.

JESSICA

JESSICA shakes her arm free and moves into her side of the office. She quickly begins gathering things from her desk. LINK follows her, then stops in the doorway. She moves toward the exit without looking back.

Jessica?

LINK

She looks back at him.

*Beat.*

...You won't tell anyone?

LINK

Goodbye, Link.

JESSICA

JESSICA exits, and LINK stands staring after her.

Lights fade.

## SCENE THIRTEEN

### PROJECTION

A 60 Minutes-style interview.

### LINK

No, I don't talk about it much. I think, sometimes, when those childhood memories are so painful, it's easier not to dredge things up. I really do wish them all the best. From the little I hear, it sounds like they're doing very well. But... coming from an abusive home... we're better off apart. Living without a home... that's a dark place to be driven to. But I'm here. On the other side of it. And I hope... I hope my story is an encouragement to people who have undergone similar things.

Lights fade.

**SCENE FOURTEEN**

Two years earlier.

Back in LINK's San Francisco office.

Evening.

LINK, MIKE, MIRANDA, and JEFFERY are gathered around maps and piles of paper spread out on a conference table or desk. LINK is not wearing a jacket and his sleeves are rolled up to his elbows.

MIKE

We'll be going door to door in Richmond this weekend, North Beach the next, and we have that rally in the Mission District next month.

JEFFERY

Excellent.

MIRANDA

And I just confirmed that fundraising dinner in SoMa. They can open up a spot for us next week.

MIKE

Any idea how much that'll cost?

MIRANDA

I already sent the numbers to Donna.

MIKE

Great. Get me the details, and I'll let the rest of the team know.

MIKE scribbles something down.

LINK

I got a call today from Ralf at the Harvard Club, and he invited me to come speak at an event they're having next month. Is that something we want to say yes to?

MIKE

(still scribbling)

Yes. Send me his info.

JEFFERY

How are we feeling on media attention?

MIKE

Pretty good. We're interviewing a Communications Director tomorrow. She'll be able to take over in that department, which should help us out quite a bit.

*Beat.*

JEFFERY

Are you sure that's wise?

MIRANDA

Well, it'll have to happen eventually, dear.

JEFFERY

Yes, but isn't it a little early to let someone we don't know start fielding a pack potentially sensitive questions?

MIKE

That's the issue. People are so fascinated with his story that we're getting more questions than the two of us can handle.

LINK

We've gotten twelve interview requests just today.

MIKE

With a few exceptions, the questions are all pretty much the same. If we hire her, we'll feed her the answers and make sure she knows Link prefers not to discuss his family. This is just to help us out with volume.

JEFFERY

And what if she starts asking questions? What if *she* decides to reach out Link's family?

LINK

They know not to talk to anyone. Or answer any questions.

*Beat.*

MIRANDA

It's settled then. Probably no one will be asking questions about those people, but even if they do, we have a contingency plan. I say hire away! Jeffery?

JEFFERY

As long as we're careful.

(to Link)

One slip about your family and we could be in serious trouble. And we have too much riding on this campaign to allow carelessness to get the best of us. Understood?

MIKE

Understood.

*Beat.*

LINK realizes something.

MIKE

Link?

LINK

Why didn't I think of this before?

MIKE

Think of what?

LINK

Why do we even have to worry about a slip? We could frame it as a reconciliation story. Patch things up. They could even campaign with me!

JEFFERY

You're not serious.

LINK

No, I am! I mean, don't you think people would love it? What's more heartwarming than a reunited family?

MIRANDA

Lincoln... We've discussed this.

MIKE

You miss your family. I get it. I do. But when we all agreed to this, we agreed that it needed to happen a certain way.

LINK

But I--

JEFFERY

Bringing them into the spotlight with you will only raise more questions.

MIRANDA

And how could we justify your return to a family whose abuse, according to your story, drove you to a life on the street?

LINK

Obviously, I haven't worked out all the details, but I'm sure we could think of something.

MIRANDA

Lincoln, as we have discussed, the success of your story lies in the absence of your family.

MIKE

It creates sympathy, and it makes a statement about who you are and what you want to do.

JEFFERY

You're selling yourself as an outsider. You need to look the part.

MIKE

Like it or not, kid, the lone wolf narrative is working in your favor.

MIRANDA

It resonates with voters. Need I remind you to consider what your family *actually wants*?

JEFFERY

The last thing we need--

LINK

(heated)

I get it. It doesn't work.

*Beat.*

MIRANDA

If we're going to support you, Lincoln, we must have your cooperation. We want you to succeed, but we can't afford a scandal.

JEFFERY

We're invested in you. We need to be able to trust that you're not going to do something stupid.

MIKE

Of course.

JEFFERY

(pointedly to LINK)

When we started this, you agreed that you would do whatever was necessary. I know it's hard. But we're the experts here, and we're telling you that *this* is necessary.

*Beat.*

MIRANDA

Unless you've changed your mind?

LINK

No. No, of course not.

Lights fade.

**SCENE FIFTEEN**

PROJECTION

We hear exclamations and the sound of clicking cameras before JESSICA appears on a public sidewalk, wearing casual street clothes.

This video's quality should be lower than the others we've seen. Perhaps it's been recorded on an old iphone camera.

The following lines should be spoken over each other at a rapid-fire pace.

REPORTER 1 (OFF CAMERA)

Ms. Summers, do you know where Representative Williams is?

JESSICA

Please if you would just--

REPORTER 2 (OFF CAMERA)

Is it true that the congressman missed yesterday's voting because he's on vacation?

JESSICA

Oh, no, I can't--

REPORTER 3 (OFF CAMERA)

Is there any word on when the congressman will return?

JESSICA

I can't speak on behalf of the congressman. I don't work--

REPORTER 4 (OFF CAMERA)

Would you agree that the congressman allows undue influence to be exerted over him by political groups?

JESSICA

I don't see what that has to do with--

REPORTER 5 (OFF CAMERA)

Would you agree that this disappearance indicates that Representative Williams is not fit for office?

JESSICA

What?

REPORTER 6 (V.O.)

Would you agree that this disappearance indicates th--

JESSICA

*Stop!* Just stop. I no longer work for Congressman Williams. I can't speak to his position. Or his whereabouts.

There is a cacophony of overlapping questions  
from the REPORTERS.

JESSICA

(over them)

I want nothing to do with this.

JESSICA leaves the frame.

Lights fade.

**SCENE SIXTEEN**

A light rises on LINK, standing at his mother's grave and paying his respects. He has a suitcase and some flowers; perhaps his jacket is slung over his arm.

After several seconds, AMBER appears behind him. It takes a moment for her to confirm that it's him. She takes another moment to gather herself before she speaks.

I talked to Jessica.

AMBER

LINK turns to her.

I know.

LINK

*Beat.*

Are you in trouble?

AMBER  
(apologetically)

No. Well, maybe. I-- It doesn't matter.

LINK

What-- Are you okay?

AMBER

Not really.

LINK

What are you doing here?

AMBER

I just-- I came to-- I needed to see her.

LINK

Why now?

AMBER

LINK

I don't know. I just thought-- I thought it would help... somehow.

AMBER

Help you or help her?

LINK

Both? I don't mean-- you can't help a dead person. I just... just...

(breaking down)

I'm sorry, Amber. So incredibly sorry.

*Beat.*

AMBER walks to LINK and embraces him. LINK rests his head on her shoulder and cries for a while. Then, gathering himself, he pulls away. They stand side by side, looking at the grave for another long moment.

LINK

I'm sorry that I wasn't here... for the funeral... for the last ten years. If I had it to do over again, I-- I would do things differently.

*Beat.*

AMBER

Thank you.

They stand together, looking at the grave in silence for a few more moments. LINK clearly has more to say, but he hesitates. After a few seconds...

LINK

You know, it was her idea.

AMBER

What was?

LINK

Me, leaving. I contributed, and agreed, but... at the beginning... it was her idea.

*Beat.*

AMBER

What?

LINK

When we got that rejection letter from Harvard, I was so disappointed. But mom? Indignant. Or maybe incredulous is a better word. She could not fathom the thought that an objective university could read my application and not want me. There was no possibility in her mind that the admissions process was fair.

AMBER

So...

LINK

So she saw that I was devastated, and she saw a pattern in the system.

AMBER

Pattern in the system?

LINK

You know, you don't get in unless you're incredibly wealthy or you have a tragic story. We're not incredibly wealthy, and I didn't have a sob story, so they didn't let me in. At first, she was just angry, you know? And we worked each other up. For weeks, it felt like all we could talk about was how messed up the whole Ivy-League system is.

AMBER

I don't remember any of this.

LINK

I mean, you were what? Eight? It started off as a joke. A ridiculous, offhanded thought. But somehow, the more we talked about it, the more plausible it seemed? And eventually, she made up her mind that being homeless could open more doors than just Harvard. So we made a plan. The day after graduation, I would leave home and drive to San Francisco. I would live out of my car, never shower, beg on street corners, the whole shebang. Starting the moment I left, there would be no contact. They would effectively cut me off, except for five hundred dollars cash, which mom would mail to a P.O. box every month. If people asked, I was supposed to talk about an abusive family that drove me to a life on the streets. The plan was to do that for ten months. Then, I would go to the Harrison Street Foundation, which we had researched, get plugged in, find a job, and try applying again.

AMBER

I don't-- Link, what are you saying?

LINK

And I know she was in contact with the Hobbeses. I think that might be how they found out about me in the first place. They never said so outright, but...

AMBER

Mom *wanted* you to leave?

LINK

In her mind, I think she was making a noble sacrifice. Surrendering her son to the greater good. Like... Hannah and Samuel. They never tried to look for me. Didn't that ever seem odd to you?

AMBER

I assumed... I assumed that they did. Where was dad in all of this? Didn't he try to stop you?

LINK

You know no one's more stubborn than mom. Once she decided the system was rigged, there was no arguing with her. And crazy as it seemed, I was technically an adult, and I wanted to do it. He was never fully on board, but what could he really do to stop us? She was determined that I deserved to go to Harvard, so she found a way to make it happen. And it worked. I got the education I had always dreamt of, and... now I'm a congressman. All things considered, ten months without a house seemed like a small price to pay.

AMBER

What if it hadn't worked? What would you have done then?

LINK

I don't know. I'm sure we would have worked something out, but it doesn't really matter. It did work. It never occurred to me that you didn't know the whole story. I mean, I was eighteen. I never would have had the guts to do something like that on my own.

AMBER

You're not blaming her? Because it's not some kind of excus--

LINK

No! No. I... I take full responsibility for what I did. But um-- It didn't seem fair. That none of us ever told you how it happened. So I wanted to tell you. I don't expect you to forgive me... I just... wanted you to know.

AMBER looks away, resting her eyes on the grave. There's a long stretch of silence as AMBER processes.

LINK watches her, uncertain how she's taking it. After at least a full ten seconds, unable to stand further uncertain silence...

LINK

...Is Dad around?

AMBER takes another moment before turning her eyes to him.

AMBER

He's at home. He'll want to see you.

*Beat.*

AMBER

If you're planning to stay.

LINK

I was planning to stay for a while.

*Beat.*

AMBER smiles softly. Then, she steps in and wraps LINK in a hug.

AMBER

Then let's go home.

Pulling away, LINK gathers his jacket and suitcase. Then, he puts his arm around AMBER's shoulders, and they slowly walk towards home, together.

Lights fade.

**END OF PLAY.**

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