

CIPHER

By Cory Hinkle

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CHARACTERS

CLERK B – A worker in an underground government office.

CLERK A – The same.

MASHA – The clerks' superior.

JEN – A lost soul.

NOTES ON THE CLERKS

The actors playing CLERK B and CLERK A also play the characters of Mike and James, the teenage terrorists they are tracking.

It is important that CLERK B and CLERK A wear identical dress – black pants, black tie, white shirt.

NOTES ON STYLE

The world of the office is highly stylized – fast, crisp, absurd.

The world of the abandoned house is mostly naturalistic.

The transitions between the two worlds are seamless and continuous.

NOTES ON SOUND

Sound is hugely important.

The electronic sounds are CLERK B's experience as he scans the mind of his current suspect.

The xylophone sounds are strange and mysterious— a call to the unknown, the past and memory.

All sound changes and develops with the action of the play.

CIPHER was originally workshopped at the Brown New Plays Festival (Bonnie Metzgar, producer) and then at the SPF Summer Play Festival in New York City (Arielle Tepper, producer) and also produced at the Illusion Theater in Minneapolis.

*In darkness
Electronic sounds
Like a swarm of tiny insects
A harsh fluorescent glare
And all is quiet.*

*MASHA stands next to a filing cabinet.
CLERK B stands near very stiff.
MASHA holds a clipboard
And a file folder.
MASHA extends the file to CLERK B.*

MASHA
I want you to begin working on Border Six-Twenty-Four.

*He looks at it
But doesn't move.*

MASHA
Got it?

CLERK B
Yes.

*CLERK B takes the file.
MASHA turns back to her clipboard.*

MASHA
Now get out of my office.

CLERK B leaves.

*CLERK B's office.
A desk, a chair, some mail crates
And hung from the ceiling
A bare light bulb.
CLERK B sits behind his desk
Opens the file
Scans its contents
Closes the file
And puts it to one side.*

CLERK B stares straight ahead.

*His eyes lock on an image
And the electronic sounds return
Distant.
He concentrates
And the volume increases.
A cacophony of buzzing tones
As CLERK B begins typing
And from within his desk
A white glow
Illuminates his face.
For a moment he scans
Then suddenly
Xylophone sounds
Like glass smashing
Against the inside of his skull.*

*CLERK B sits upright
Face contorted
Eyes open.*

*A harsh fluorescent glare
And all is quiet.*

*He looks over his shoulder
He looks up
Over the edge of his desk.
He doesn't know what he just heard
But he's fascinated.
He opens the file
And removes a piece of paper.
He scans it quickly
Then folds it twice
And puts it in his shirt pocket.*

*CLERK B stares straight ahead.
He concentrates.
The electronic sounds return
His face illuminated
As he begins typing.*

*The sounds fade
As two clear tones
Played on a xylophone
Reach CLERK B
From the darkness
A sudden light.*

*Like sunlight falling through
Cracks in the soil
JEN materializes
In the clothes of her missing brother.
At a xylophone
She stands
And looks at CLERK B
As he strains to see her.
She sings.*

JEN
I watch my fingers as they
Trace your hollow shoulders
A merciful numbness
Is all the love my brain needs.
There is nothing left,
When your blood has been lost
In forgotten soil.
How could I ever,
Again awake in the vague lines
Of that dress?
I buried an echo,
But it died with darkness,
My eyes are burnt out candles.

*JEN is suddenly gone
As the electronic sounds
And xylophone sounds return.*

The signal is clear.

CLERK B stands
And moves slowly
Toward the signal
He reaches
For the light bulb
But is suddenly frightened
He stops
And returns to his desk.

MASHA's office.
MASHA enters walking
CLERK A trailing
Dutifully rolling her chair.

MASHA
Would you mind, A?

CLERK A
What?

MASHA points to her shoulders.

MASHA
Shoulders.

*She sits.
He massages
Vigorously.
She moans.*

CLERK A
Um... What did you need to talk about?

MASHA
Oh, right. It's Clerk B.

CLERK A
What about Clerk B?

MASHA
That's enough, A.

*She pats CLERK A's hand
And moves to a filing cabinet.*

MASHA
I've assigned him to Six-Twenty-Four.

CLERK A
Does he have a signal?

MASHA
No, not yet.

CLERK A
It's because he's no good.

MASHA *(amused)*
Is that right?

CLERK A
I've told you before, he's slipping.

MASHA
His performance levels are as high as yours.

CLERK A
That's not possible.

MASHA
It's true.

CLERK A
Let me see his TTQ.

MASHA
You know I can't do that.

CLERK A
Then I can't believe his levels are any higher than Clerk E.

CLERK A *stands sullen.*

MASHA
You and Clerk B are my top two clerks (regardless of whether or not you *believe* it) and it would help me immensely – in fact, the entire division would benefit if the two of you could at least *try* to get along.

CLERK A
I am trying.

MASHA
There's enough tension in this office without—

CLERK A
What do you want me to do?

MASHA
Don't interrupt me!

CLERK A
Sorry.

MASHA
I need your assistance.

CLERK A
With what?

MASHA
I'm diverting you to Six-Twenty-Four.

*MASHA rips a slip of paper off a pad.
She hands it to CLERK A.
CLERK A looks at it.*

CLERK A *(whines)*
I have to work with Clerk B?

MASHA
I'm sure he'll resist your help, but tell him it's my order.

CLERK A
He might not believe that.

MASHA
Then tell him to come talk to me. No, tell him...

She thinks for a moment.

MASHA
Tell him I'm diverting you according to new guidelines from Homeland Security.

CLERK A
What are those guidelines?

MASHA
If he asks... I trust you to make up something believable.

CLERK A
How should I proceed?

MASHA
Work on Border Six-Twenty-Four as you would any other assignment.

CLERK A
Okay.

MASHA
But watch Clerk B for irregularities then report to me.

CLERK A *(smiles)*
I can do that.

She opens a file.

MASHA
Here's the performance chart from his last assignment.

She hands him a piece of paper.

MASHA
Got it?

CLERK A
Yes.

MASHA turns back to her work.
CLERK A is about to leave.

MASHA
Oh, A.

CLERK A
Yes?

MASHA turns slightly.

MASHA
Thanks for the rub.

CLERK A smiles
Then leaves.

CLERK B at his desk.
CLERK A approaches briskly
And stops in front of CLERK B.
Suspicious
They eye each other.

CLERK A
B.

CLERK B

A.

CLERK A
Just came from Masha's office.

CLERK B
Backrub?

CLERK A
You know it.

CLERK B
She says you're the best.

CLERK A
Pretty good yourself I hear.

CLERK B *flashes his hands.*

CLERK B
"Magic fingers."

CLERK A
How's the work coming along?

CLERK B
Fine.

CLERK A
I'm sure you're nearly finished tracking Six-Twenty-Four—

CLERK B
Not yet.

CLERK A
In that case, Masha thought I should—

CLERK B
I don't need any help.

CLERK A
Masha seems to think—

CLERK B
I *don't* need help.

He looks at CLERK B curious.

CLERK A
Something special about this one?

*CLERK A picks up the file.
CLERK B grabs it
CLERK A pulls it
And they struggle like children.*

CLERK A
Let me see it!

*CLERK A tries to take it
But CLERK B holds it away.*

CLERK B
I told you to stop taking files off my desk!

CLERK A
I've been diverted to Six-Twenty-Four according to new guidelines from
Homeland Security.

CLERK B
I don't believe that.

CLERK A
It's Masha's orders.

Slight Pause.

CLERK A
Masha said, B.

Pause.

CLERK A
Are you going to show me the file or not?

CLERK B swivels away from CLERK A.

CLERK A
Come on, B.

Pause.

CLERK A
All right... I'm sorry about touching your desk.

CLERK B *turns back to CLERK A.*

CLERK B
Don't do it again.

CLERK B *drops the file on the desk.*
CLERK A *picks it up*
And scans the contents.
He looks up from the file.

CLERK A
Where's the printout?

They look at each other.
CLERK B *reaches into his shirt pocket*
Pulls out the printout
And hands it to CLERK A.

CLERK A
Why was the printout in your pocket?

CLERK B *shrugs.*
CLERK A *looks at the printout.*

CLERK A
See. You *do* need my help.

CLERK B
No I don't.

CLERK A
Two wave forms? It might take you a month to finish it alone.

CLERK B *spreads the printout over his desk.*

CLERK B
I'm working orange so you take green.

CLERK A
Who's green?

CLERK B

I have no specific information on either one.

CLERK A

You've been scanning for an *entire day*?

CLERK B

Yes.

CLERK A

And still you have nothing?

CLERK B

That's right.

CLERK A *stares at him, doubtful.*

CLERK A

You're telling me everything?

CLERK B

Yes.

CLERK A

Well I'll put the feelers out, see what I get.

CLERK B

You do that.

CLERK B *turns back to his work.*

CLERK A *moves to leave*

Stops

And holds up the file.

CLERK A

I'm going to make a copy of this.

CLERK A *leaves.*

CLERK B *walks to the door*

And looks down the hall

No one is near.

He returns to his desk

Sits and looks straight ahead.

Electronic sounds return

His face illuminated

As he begins typing.

*CLERK B types faster
The xylophone sounds return
Like a tiny speck of light
Piercing total blackness
CLERK B stands
And moves toward the sounds.*

He touches the bare light bulb

And the world suddenly shifts.

*The interior of an abandoned house.
Ripped up floorboards
Expose the dirt
Beneath the house.
CLERK B as Mike
Draws in the dirt with a stick.*

*JEN is near
She watches
Surprised to see him.*

*He notices her
And stands.
They stare at each other.
A moment.*

JEN
What're you doing?

She watches him.

JEN
You can't be in here. You know that?

Pause.

JEN
This is my dad's place.

CLERK B
Yeah?

JEN

If he found out you were here, he'd come down and kick your ass.

CLERK B

How would he find out?

JEN

If I told him.

CLERK B

Are you gonna tell him?

She thinks about it.

JEN

Maybe I won't... If you tell me why you're here.

CLERK B

It's none of your business.

JEN

This is my spot.

CLERK B

I thought it was your dad's.

A moment.

JEN

I know you.

CLERK B

Do you?

JEN

Mike. You went to my school a couple weeks.

CLERK B

I stopped going.

JEN

Why?

CLERK B

I hate that school.

JEN
Yeah?

CLERK B
I'm smarter than every teacher in that place.

JEN *(laughs)*
Oh, are you?

CLERK B
That's right.

*A moment.
She looks at him.*

JEN
You know something?

CLERK B
What?

JEN
I knew we were supposed to meet.

CLERK B
How?

JEN
The first time I saw you—

CLERK B
I don't know anything about you.

JEN
I know things about *you*.

CLERK B
What?

Pause.

CLERK B
What do you know about me?

JEN

You know Trench Coat Boy?

CLERK B
James?

JEN
Yeah.

He looks at her, suspicious.

CLERK B
Why you asking about James?

JEN
Why not?

CLERK B
I know him.

JEN
He said your mom killed herself.

Pause.

JEN
That's why you moved here, right?

No response.

JEN
Is it true? Did she? Kill herself?

CLERK B
Stop fucking bugging me.

JEN
This is *my place*.

CLERK B
I don't care whose it is!

JEN
You're not supposed to be here!

CLERK B

Are you gonna kick me out?

JEN
My dad will!

CLERK B
If he wants me out, tell him to come down here and do it himself!

*He draws in the dirt.
She watches.
A moment.*

JEN
You smoke pot?

CLERK B
What?

JEN
Do-you-smoke-pot?

CLERK B
I've only lived here a couple months.

JEN
So what?

CLERK B
So I don't know where to get any.

JEN
Do you smoke or not?

CLERK B
Sometimes.

JEN
I'll find us some.

She moves to leave.

CLERK B
I don't want to smoke with you.

JEN

Why not?

CLERK B
I'm busy.

JEN
What? Digging in the dirt?

*He stops
And looks at her.*

CLERK B
Stay away from me.

*She stares at him
Then leaves.*

*From the darkness
A voice.*

VOICE
Everything okay?

*CLERK B's office.
Bright fluorescent light.
CLERK B blinks
And looks at CLERK A.*

CLERK B
What do you mean?

CLERK A
Six-Twenty-Four have you down?

CLERK B
No.

CLERK A
Getting inside your head a little bit?

CLERK B
How would that happen?

CLERK A
Well... We don't know, do we?

CLERK B
Know what?

CLERK A
How things *affect* us.

CLERK B
No, we don't.

CLERK A
Maybe Six-Twenty-Four is *designed* to get to you.

CLERK B
It *isn't* getting to me.

CLERK A
If it were though you wouldn't know, would you? I mean, maybe this just happens, maybe you're *always* like this.

CLERK B
I don't know.

CLERK A
That's what I mean.

CLERK B
What about you?

CLERK A
What about me?

CLERK B
Are you always this annoying?

CLERK A
I can't *remember*. That's my point.

Pause.

CLERK A
That reminds me.

CLERK B
Of what?

CLERK A
I was thinking about irregularities.

CLERK B
Irregularities?

CLERK A
Things outside the norm.

CLERK B
Is there something work related you need from me?

*CLERK A walks to the door
And looks up and down the hall.*

No one is near.

He walks back to CLERK B.

CLERK A
I'm dreaming.

Pause.

CLERK B
You're dreaming?

CLERK A
Yes.

CLERK B
Since when?

CLERK A
Been a few days... I think.

CLERK B
Are you sure?

CLERK A
In this one dream—

CLERK B
It's not possible.

CLERK A
In a field of grass, black ants crawl over my feet and up my legs, the sky is orange and I'm frozen, I can't move, in front of me there's a huge lake, shimmering water that seems to go on forever and from below the water's surface, a gigantic slug crawls out slimy and transparent and moves very slowly toward me and I want to run, but I can't and it comes to me, crawls on top of me, and starts to devour me.

CLERK B is visibly disturbed.

CLERK A
Have you ever seen anything like that?

*CLERK B shakes his head
And looks away.
CLERK A leans against the desk
And looks at CLERK B serious.*

CLERK A
Tell me about Six-Twenty-Four.

CLERK B
What about it?

CLERK A
What are you seeing?

CLERK B
Nothing.

CLERK A
I can't believe you haven't got a signal.

CLERK B
I got one this morning.

CLERK A
Were you ever going to tell me?

CLERK B
I'm telling you now.

CLERK A *is suddenly confused*
As he tries to remember something.

CLERK A
What did I work on last week?

CLERK A *concentrates*
He can barely remember last week
But finally does.

CLERK A
Border Six-Eleven, that's right! I finished it in *three days*. Do you think you could have tracked one that quick?

CLERK B
Yes.

CLERK A
You couldn't have even got a signal.

CLERK B
I could have scanned, signaled and tracked it in half the time.

CLERK A
Masha said—

CLERK B *(mocking)*
"Masha said."

CLERK A *gives CLERK B a sharp look.*

CLERK A
Masha said I saved eight-hundred lives.

CLERK B
But you *didn't* stop Six-Eighteen last week.

CLERK A
That wasn't my fault.

CLERK B
It was somebody's fault.

CLERK A
Not mine.

CLERK B
What does it matter anyway?

CLERK A
What does *that* mean?

CLERK B
By next week we'll forget it ever happened.

They look at each other.

CLERK A
What did you see this morning?

CLERK B
What?

CLERK A
When you signaled Six-Twenty-Four.

CLERK B
Oh... Um... It was... It was brief. He's somewhere abandoned. An empty place. I don't know where.

CLERK A doesn't believe him.

CLERK A
Do you have anything else to tell me?

CLERK B
No.

CLERK A looks at CLERK B for a moment.

CLERK A
Good luck with it.

CLERK A leaves.

*CLERK B at his desk.
He looks straight ahead
And the electronic sounds return
As CLERK B begins typing*

*And his face
Is illuminated.*

*The sounds fade
As two clear tones
Played on a xylophone
Reach CLERK B
From the darkness
A sudden light
And JEN materializes.*

*She looks at CLERK B.
He looks at her.
She plays the xylophone
And sings.*

JEN
I must have arrived,
But I find myself nowhere.
Your breath in the dark,
Staggering through insistent chimes,
Against the murmurings of emptiness.
I want to be inside your pulse,
Collect pieces of me before you disappear.
My mind hums in vain,
Splitting nothingness,
The feelers draw lines in the air,
A stark picture from somewhere else.
The wounds overflow,
And the blood can only fall.
It will never be the same as it was,
And now it will never be any different.
I breathe in flesh,
The blood turns to ash.

The signal is clear again.

*The electronic sounds
And xylophone sounds return
As CLERK B stands
And walks toward the sounds.
He touches the bare light bulb.*

*The world shifts
And all is quiet.*

The abandoned house.
CLERK B *as Mike*
Draws in the dirt.

JEN *stands behind*
Watching.
He senses her.
He looks at her.

CLERK B
Find anything?

JEN
Just a J.

She holds up a joint.

CLERK B
Good enough.

She moves near him.

JEN
I'm Jen.

He just stares at her.

JEN
What are you looking at?

CLERK B
I don't know.

JEN
You just sit here all day?

CLERK B
Pretty much.

JEN
Are you waiting on someone?

CLERK B
No.

JEN
You working on something?

CLERK B
You ask a lot of questions.

JEN
I'm curious.

CLERK B
Why?

She holds out the joint.

JEN
You want to light this?

CLERK B
Go ahead.

*She lights it
Takes a hit.*

JEN
I didn't tell my dad about you, in case you're worried.

*She passes the joint.
He takes a hit.
A moment.*

CLERK B
Did you grow up in this shithole town?

JEN
That's right.

CLERK B
I hate it.

JEN
Everyone hates it.

CLERK B
Then why are you still here?

JEN
Where else would I be?

CLERK B
Anywhere.

JEN
I should just leave?

CLERK B
If you don't like it.

JEN
How do I know I'd like it somewhere else?

CLERK B
You go there and find out.

JEN
You're one to talk.

CLERK B
What?

JEN
Sitting here in the dirt all day.

CLERK B
I'm going somewhere else soon.

JEN
Where?

CLERK B
I can't tell you that.

He takes another hit.

JEN
What was it like where you used to live?

CLERK B
Fucking sucked.

JEN

How big was it?

CLERK B

Forty thousand people. Used to be three McDonald's. There was a Super Wal-Mart. My dad worked for the water company.

JEN

What'd he do?

CLERK B

Sanitized people's shit.

He laughs.

CLERK B

I don't know what he did really.

JEN

My dad used to be a farmer.

CLERK B

Not many of them left.

JEN

Yeah... Now he gets money from the government.

CLERK B

For what?

JEN

To sit on his fat ass.

They laugh.

A stoned moment.

CLERK B

Why'd you come back?

JEN

I want you to tell me why you're here.

CLERK B

What for?

JEN

There's a reason, right?

CLERK B
Will you stop?

JEN
What?

CLERK B
We don't have some kind of special connection.

JEN
Don't we?

CLERK B
No!

JEN
Aren't you even a little curious about me?

CLERK B
Yeah. Why do you dress like a guy?

JEN
I don't.

CLERK B
Look at you.

JEN
You only wear black. What's up with that?

CLERK B
Nothing.

JEN
Saw you at school all Goth-ed out, he's kind of sad I thought—

CLERK B
I wasn't here waitin' for you to show up.

JEN
Did I say you were?

Pause.

JEN

You're waiting for something.

CLERK B
But I was fine without you.

She holds out the joint.

JEN
You want anymore of this?

*No response.
She puts it out.*

CLERK B
The last town I lived in, I didn't have a single friend.

JEN
Why not?

CLERK B
Cause people are a pain in my ass.

She laughs.

CLERK B
What's funny?

JEN
You.

A stoned silence.

JEN
Was your mom one of *them*?

CLERK B
What?

JEN
Did she disappear?

CLERK B
What do you mean?

JEN
Don't play dumb. People disappear every day now.

A moment.

CLERK B
You wouldn't understand what happened to me.

JEN
How do you know?

CLERK B
No one understands.

JEN
Maybe the same thing happened to me.

*He looks at her.
A moment.*

CLERK B
We smoked our joint.

JEN
Yeah?

CLERK B
So...

JEN
What?

CLERK B
We're done.

She stands.

JEN
I won't give up.

CLERK B
I've noticed.

JEN
I'll be here tomorrow.

JEN leaves.

From the darkness
A voice.

VOICE
What are you thinking about?

CLERK B *at his desk.*
Startled
He looks at CLERK A.

CLERK B
Nothing... What do you need?

CLERK A
I got a signal this morning.

CLERK B
Good for you.

CLERK A
My suspect is male. Adolescent.

CLERK B
Mine too.

CLERK A
He's driving.

CLERK B
Where?

CLERK A
Somewhere near the border. What about you?

CLERK B
I'm not seeing anything.

CLERK A
Do you have a signal?

CLERK B
No... I lost it.

CLERK A

Why are you lying?

CLERK B
I'm not.

CLERK A
I know you're seeing something.

CLERK B
I told you I'm not.

CLERK A
If we don't share information, we'll never finish.

A moment.

CLERK B
Can you keep this to yourself?

CLERK A
Yes.

CLERK B
I'm having trouble... I signal him for short stretches but then... I get stuck in memories.

CLERK A
Memories?

CLERK B
Yes.

CLERK A
His memories?

CLERK B
Yes...

CLERK A
What do you see?

CLERK B
A woman hung by her neck... The wind blows... Her blue dress flutters.

*From far away
Xylophone sounds.*

CLERK A
I wanted to tell you something too.

CLERK B
What?

CLERK A
I had another dream.

CLERK B
How is that possible?

CLERK A
I'm in the middle of the same field, but I can move and the setting sun reflects off the lake and I turn and look behind me and there's a set of railroad tracks and beyond those tracks is a brick house—

CLERK B
Why are *you* dreaming? I don't dream. I never dream.

CLERK A
I don't know *why* but listen—

CLERK B
No!

*All is quiet.
They look around
Then at each other
Having felt a presence.*

CLERK A
What's wrong with you B?

CLERK B
Every month we do this job — how many times?

CLERK A
I can't remember the other months.

CLERK B
How many *this* month?

CLERK A
Three... so far.

CLERK B
And very soon, they'll take that away from us.

CLERK A *looks at him.*

CLERK A
For good reason.

CLERK B
Really?

CLERK A
If they didn't, we couldn't perform our jobs properly.

CLERK B
What about all the time *before* we started here?

CLERK A
What about it?

CLERK B
We must have had lives.

CLERK A
Yes and I'm sure we were miserable.

CLERK B
Do you really believe that?

CLERK A
I'm happy I'm in here and not out there.

CLERK B
If everyone out there's dying, why do we bother?

CLERK A
We shouldn't talk about this.

CLERK B
Who were we?

CLERK A
I don't want to talk about it.

CLERK B

How can you not?

CLERK A

I want to do my job. Thinking about who I am gets in my way.

Pause.

CLERK A

Don't you want to finish this?

CLERK B

Yes...

CLERK A

Then stop asking questions.

CLERK A leaves.

*CLERK B watches him leave
Then looks straight ahead.
The electronic sounds
And xylophone sounds return
As CLERK B begins typing
And his face
Is illuminated.*

*He stands
And walks toward the sound.
He touches the bare light bulb.
All is quiet
As the world shifts.*

*The abandoned house.
CLERK B as Mike and JEN share a joint.*

JEN

Everything here's the fuckin' same. Nothin' changes.

CLERK B

That's why I'm gonna leave.

JEN

Where will you go?

CLERK B
I don't know yet.

JEN
No one tries to change anything and if it's all fucked, well, sorry, make the best of it... But there's nothin' to make of it.

Pause.

JEN
That's what my brother believed.

CLERK B
Where's your brother?

JEN
Don't you already know?

CLERK B
No.

JEN
The same thing's happening everywhere.

CLERK B
He disappeared?

She moves away from him.

JEN
I don't talk about it.

CLERK B
Tell me.

JEN
With *anyone*.

CLERK B
But I can understand.

JEN
Can you?

CLERK B

Yeah.

She looks at him.

JEN

That's why I come here.

CLERK B

What?

JEN

To this place. John and I used to get high here.

She looks around.

JEN

Then at the beginning of last summer, he disappeared and I knew he was just like the rest of 'em, ya know?

CLERK B

Yeah...

JEN

So for a while I didn't come here anymore. I started smoking in the storm cellar behind my house. I'd get so high I couldn't feel anything and I'd pull the roots out of the dirt. Then winter came and dad told me to go out and chop some wood. John always used to do it, so I walked out there, trying to look like John, move like John. I raised that axe high over my head, but I was so stoned I fell over backwards. I tried to stand, but I couldn't and then I sank. The grass, the dirt they were like water and I was falling... I'm still falling...

A stoned silence.

They look at each other.

He moves toward her

She moves away.

Another moment.

CLERK B

Why do you keep coming back?

JEN

I can leave.

CLERK B

No, I just—

She moves to leave.

CLERK B
I'm sorry.

She stops.

JEN
For what?

CLERK B
Stay.

JEN
No.

CLERK B
We're the same, aren't we?

JEN
Are we?

*She looks at him for a moment
Then leaves.*

*From the darkness
A voice.*

VOICE
Would you mind B?

*CLERK B stands
In his office
Disoriented.
MASHA sits in CLERK B's chair.*

CLERK B
What?

MASHA points to her shoulders.

MASHA
Shoulders.

CLERK B *massages MASHA's shoulders.*

MASHA
You're the best.

CLERK B
Thank you.

MASHA
Magic fingers.

CLERK B
You're *really* tense.

MASHA
It comes with the job I'm afraid, but lately I've started to think it's all in my head.

CLERK B
What do you mean?

MASHA
Because *really* I have no reason to worry, do I? Not with you and Clerk A on the job.

CLERK B
Of course not.

She pats his hand.

MASHA
That's enough, B.

She swivels in his chair and looks at him.

MASHA
How is Six-Twenty-Four coming along?

CLERK B
Very good.

MASHA
You have a strong signal?

CLERK B

Yes.

MASHA
Sit down.

He sits.
MASHA *looks into* CLERK B's eyes.

MASHA
A woman hung by her neck. The wind blows. Her blue dress flutters.

CLERK B *looks away.*

MASHA
What is that?

CLERK B
I don't know...

MASHA
It's not your job.

CLERK B
Yes, Masha.

MASHA
Do you know what you are?

CLERK B
No.

MASHA
A disappointment.

CLERK B
No.

MASHA
I trusted you.

CLERK B
You can still.

MASHA
I thought you were wonderful, but I have doubts. I doubt your abilities, commitment and I don't believe you care about saving people's lives, because I

MASHA (CONT'D)

know, if you *did care*, you wouldn't waste your time with things that don't matter.

CLERK B

I'm sorry.

MASHA

That's not good enough.

CLERK B

Who was I before this?

MASHA

What?

CLERK B

Before I started working here... Who was I?

MASHA

I have no idea.

CLERK B

Was I like him?

MASHA

Like who?

CLERK B

The one I'm tracking.

MASHA

I don't have access to that information.

CLERK B

Don't you?

MASHA

No, I do not.

Pause.

MASHA

Your performance on Border Six-Twenty-Four is abysmal.

CLERK B
I'm sorry.

MASHA
I need you and Clerk A to finish immediately.

CLERK B
I can't.

MASHA
You can't?

CLERK B
I need more time.

MASHA
Why would you want more time?

CLERK B
I believe I can save him.

*She moves to CLERK B.
She smooths the hair on his head.
He leans his head against MASHA.
She strokes his hair.*

CLERK B
That feels good.

MASHA
You're such an asset to our work.

CLERK B
Thank you.

MASHA
You have amazing abilities.

CLERK B
But...

She looks into his eyes.

MASHA
What is it? What's wrong?

CLERK B

There's something about Border Six-Twenty-Four... It's...

MASHA

What?

CLERK B

The person I'm tracking... I...

MASHA

What about him?

CLERK B

I understand him.

Pause.

MASHA

You know something?

CLERK B

What?

MASHA

The world is a better place because of you.

*She slides a syringe into his neck.
The electronic sounds
And xylophone sounds return
Erratic.
The xylophone sounds slide away
As the electronic sounds build intensely

And the world shifts again.*

*The abandoned house
But this time
Sinister
And surreal.*

*CLERK B in the dirt
Drawing feverishly with a stick.
The light bulb flickers.*

JEN *watches.*

JEN
What happened to your mom?

*He stands
And looks at her.*

JEN
What happened to her?

*He moves.
She follows.*

JEN
What happened? *What happened?* What happened!?

CLERK B
I can't tell you!

JEN
Please.

CLERK B
I can't remember.

JEN
You can. Tell me.

CLERK B
No!

JEN
We can help each other.

CLERK B
How?

JEN
We can find out what's happening.

CLERK B
I don't want to know!

JEN

What do you remember?

CLERK B
About what?

JEN
The past.

CLERK B
Nothing.

JEN
Then who are you?

CLERK B
I don't know!

*A moment.
She moves to him
Tries to touch him
But he backs away
Scared.*

CLERK B
What are you—

JEN
I want to know that you're real.

CLERK B
I am. I'm real.

JEN
Are you?

*She tries again
But he moves away.
A moment.*

CLERK B
Leave me alone.

JEN
I won't.

CLERK B

Why do you keep coming?

JEN

Did your mom disappear like my brother? Like all the others?

She reaches for him.

This time

He doesn't move.

She touches him.

She looks at him.

CLERK B

No. She didn't. She wanted to leave.

They look at each other.

A moment of touching

And it's as if her touch

Drains him.

He starts to fall.

CLERK B

I don't know who I am.

JEN

Don't be scared.

She lifts him up.

JEN

Touch me.

CLERK B

No.

JEN

Please.

CLERK B

I can't.

JEN

Why not?

CLERK B

You'll disappear.

*He is completely drained
And collapses.
JEN watches
For a moment.*

*Then reaches for him
But her hand is stopped.
The electronic sounds return
Sinister
Fevered.*

*The world shifts
Somewhere unseen
And different.*

*JEN at the xylophone
All is quiet.*

*JEN plays and sings
Over CLERK B's crumpled body.*

JEN
Cruel eyes hang heavy over
The dirt walls of my mind, and I wonder
If anything can be loved, and then not lost.
Every memory could end up in secret oblivion,
Worlds forever submerged in an endless grave.
And yet here behind every thing,
The dress still flutters,
Free and persistent in the wind.
There is nothing to expect,
But nothing to do,
Except create eyes to look into your face.
Look and begin to dream.
I will be here tomorrow.
In the mud,
In the mud,
In the mud, mud, mud.
In the mud,
In the mud,
In the mud, mud, mud.

CLERK B's *office*.
CLERK B *is passed out on the floor*.
CLERK A *stands over him*
Holding a file
Watching.
He drops the file
Loudly
Next to CLERK B.

CLERK B *wakes*
And looks at CLERK A.
CLERK B *and CLERK A have no memory*
That this has happened before.

CLERK B
A.

CLERK A
B.

CLERK B *picks up the file and walks to his desk*.

CLERK A
I just talked to Masha.

CLERK B
What did she say?

CLERK A
She wants me to brief you on a new assignment.

CLERK B
Go ahead.

CLERK A
We've both been re-directed to Border Six-Twenty-Four.

CLERK B *gives CLERK A a look*.

CLERK B
I have to work with you?

CLERK A
That's right.

Slight Pause.

CLERK B *picks up the file.*

CLERK B
Is this the file?

CLERK A
Yes.

CLERK B *opens the file.*

CLERK A
Two wave forms.

CLERK A *points at the printout sheet.*

CLERK A
Suspects are adolescent males in the Midwest. Here's the progress on orange thus far.

CLERK B
Who was tracking him before?

CLERK A
I don't have access to that information. Green was tracked to a house near the border. He made a purchase.

CLERK B
What kind?

CLERK A
Explosive.

CLERK B
They didn't get him?

CLERK A
They missed by an hour.

CLERK B
But they're following him?

CLERK A
No. They can't find him.

CLERK A
Look, it shouldn't take long... Let's go in and finish this?

CLERK B
Yes.

CLERK A *moves to leave.*
CLERK B *looks suddenly strange.*

CLERK B
Clerk A?

CLERK A
Yes?

CLERK A *stops.*
CLERK B *looks at CLERK A confused.*

CLERK B
I...

CLERK A
What is it?

CLERK B *concentrates.*

CLERK B
I had a memory.

CLERK A
Really?

CLERK B
Yes.

CLERK A *looks up and down the hall.*
No one is near.

CLERK A
What was it?

CLERK B
I'm... sitting... in the dirt... in an empty place...

Pause.

CLERK B
I can't see it anymore... it was nothing.

CLERK A
No, no.

CLERK B
It's nothing.

CLERK A
Tell me. What was it?

CLERK B
I don't know.

CLERK A
Do you know what it meant?

CLERK B
No.

CLERK A looks at CLERK B for a long moment.

CLERK A
We need to focus on Six-Twenty-Four.

CLERK B
Yes.

CLERK A
I'm going to start scanning.

CLERK B
Me too.

CLERK A
See you in the middle of nowhere.

CLERK A leaves.

CLERK B watches him leave.

*He looks straight ahead.
The electronic sounds return
As CLERK B begins typing
And his face
Is illuminated.*

*He stands
And walks toward the sound.
As he does,
CLERK A joins him.
They touch the light bulb.*

*All is quiet
In the abandoned house.*

*CLERK A as James (Trench Coat Boy)
Holds a duffle bag.
CLERK B as Mike
Draws in the dirt.*

CLERK A watches CLERK B.

CLERK A
What's with you?

CLERK B draws.

CLERK A
Come on man.

*CLERK A kneels
Opens the duffle bag.
CLERK B looks at CLERK A.*

CLERK A
Come here 'n take a look at this.

CLERK B looks away.

CLERK A
Guy I bought it from used to be like a Army explosives guy. Blew up all kinds of shit in Iraq. Knows everything there is to know about this shit and he said this thing's the fuckin' best.

CLERK B ignores him.

CLERK A
Talk to me Mike. Come on. We doin' this?

CLERK B

What took you so long?

CLERK A
There was a storm.

CLERK B
A storm?

CLERK A
Yeah up north.

CLERK B *moves near the bag.*

CLERK B
You shouldn't have left me waitin'.

CLERK A
It was fuckin' huge man. I got stuck comin' back.

CLERK B
Thought you backed out or something.

CLERK A
No way.

CLERK B *checks out the bag.*

CLERK B
So how's it work?

CLERK A
It's got a switch.

CLERK B *reaches for the switch.*
CLERK A *pushes him away.*

CLERK A
Don't touch it!

CLERK B
I didn't.

CLERK A
This thing goes off—

CLERK B

I know.

CLERK A
Then why'd you touch it?

CLERK B
I didn't!

*CLERK A gives the bomb
Another once over*

CLERK A
This army dude's very interested in what we're planning. He's part of this organization of vets and they go around blowin' up like government buildings and shit. Said he and his buddy's will be watchin'.

CLERK B
Watching?

*There's a glitch
In the transmission.
An explosion of electronic sound.
The image gets fuzzy.
Static-y.
A tiny hole opens.
Barely audible
Is the sound of CLERK B's thoughts.*

CLERK A's voice cuts through.

CLERK A
What happened?

*Things get back on track
But not quite.
The world seems off.*

CLERK A
The news, man.

CLERK B
Cool... So let's plan this.

*CLERK B kneels down with the stick
And draws a diagram of the school.*

CLERK A
I was driving back...

CLERK B
What?

CLERK A
I was drivin' back and I started thinkin'.

CLERK B
'Bout what?

Slight Pause.

CLERK A
I don't know...

CLERK B
You gonna back out?

CLERK A
No.

CLERK B
Sounds like it.

CLERK A
I'm not.

CLERK B
Then, what?

CLERK A
I just wanna say – ya know this is *real*. People are gonna die.

CLERK B
That's the fuckin' point, right?

Slight Pause.

CLERK B
You scared?

CLERK A
No.

CLERK B
Then let's do this!

CLERK B *kneels in the dirt.*

CLERK B
I come in thru the south door put the chain on, you meet me at the north side door and you got the duffle bag, right?

CLERK A
Right.

CLERK B
We chain that door then go to the east side and I keep a lookout while—

CLERK A
What happens after?

CLERK B
After?

CLERK A
Everything goes down, we're out of the school *then* what?

CLERK B
Someone opens their locker—

CLERK A
But what about *after that*?

CLERK B
We leave town.

CLERK A
They'll follow us.

CLERK B
We're not gonna get caught.

CLERK A
We don't have a choice.

CLERK B
Yeah we do.

CLERK A

They'll come after us, throw our asses in jail and that's it!

CLERK B

We won't give 'em the fuckin' chance.

CLERK A looks at CLERK B – What?

CLERK B mimes a gun with his fingers

He sticks it in his mouth

Pulls the trigger.

CLERK A looks away.

CLERK B

You're scared of this, aren't you?

CLERK A

No that's not—

CLERK B

What's wrong?

CLERK A

I'm not scared.

CLERK B

All right. You ready?

Another glitch.

A larger hole opens.

Electronic sounds

And the sound of B's thoughts

Now more audible.

CLERK A

B?

You there?

Respond, B.

*A buzzing sound
And the world snaps
Back to something
Closer to normal
But even less than before.
It's like the world
Pulses around them.*

*JEN has appeared.
The clerks stare at her a moment.*

CLERK A
How long you been standing there?

JEN
Long enough.

CLERK A
Long enough for what?

JEN (to CLERK A)
I told you to stop coming here.

CLERK B
You know each other?

JEN
I know all about James and his little schemes.

CLERK A
No you don't.

JEN
Let's blow up the school—

CLERK A
Fuck you.

JEN
Let's kill all the jocks!

CLERK A
You don't know shit!

JEN *grabs the duffle bag.*
CLERK A *tries to grab it*
But she's quick and opens it.

JEN
You guys aren't gonna stick this in someone's *locker*, are ya?

CLERK A
You'll find out.

JEN
He *always* does this.

CLERK A
You can't be him.

Slight Pause.

JEN
What?

CLERK A
It doesn't matter what you wear, how you look, what you *think* it won't bring him back.

Slight Pause.

CLERK A
You can only be yourself.

JEN
I don't want to be me.

CLERK A
Then what are you?

JEN
I'm nothing.

CLERK B
You're not.

JEN
No one gives a fuck any of us are alive.

CLERK B

We can change that.

JEN
By blowin' up the school?

CLERK B
Yeah if we do this—

JEN
What's it gonna change?

CLERK B
People will see me for who I really am.

JEN
No they won't. You do this, it'll just be another tragedy on TV no one understands.

CLERK A *(overlapping)*
Why we listenin' to her?

CLERK B
At least I'll have tried something.

JEN
But it won't matter.

CLERK A *(overlapping)*
Get outta here!

JEN
You'll just be another one that's disappeared.

CLERK B
Not if they remember me.

JEN
What about all the ones they forgot?

CLERK B
What about 'em?

JEN
Can't we still find 'em?

CLERK B

How?

She touches the bomb.

JEN

We disappear like they did.

Pause.

CLERK A

What the fuck?

They look at each other.

CLERK A looks at both of them.

CLERK A

No fuckin' way I'm doin' that.

CLERK B

You're scared of everything.

CLERK A

What about our plan?

CLERK B

You never wanted to do it anyway.

CLERK A

I did.

JEN

No, you didn't.

CLERK B looks at CLERK A.

CLERK B

Leave.

CLERK A

This was our plan, Mike.

CLERK B

Leave.

Slight Pause.

CLERK A looks at them.

JEN *puts her finger on the switch.*

JEN
Breathe.

*They inhale deep
She lets go of the switch.
A bright white flash.
A cacophony of sounds—
Strong electronic sounds
Xylophone
Like glass breaking.
It's glorious
Two bodies ripped apart.*

*The hole opens wide
And throughout
The barely audible sound
Of Clerk B's running thoughts.*

JEN
Grab the blades—

CLERK B
The sharp razors—

CLERK B
kill my senses—

JEN
Cut the shit—

CLERK B
My dirt—

CLERK B
numb my nerves—

JEN
My roots—

CLERK B
Open wounds—

CLERK B
smash out my teeth—

JEN
Pick the shit out of the open
wounds—

CLERK B
twist my sadness—

CLERK B

And let the spiders
crawl—

JEN
Out of my eyes—

CLERK B
into ash—

CLERK B
The cockroaches—

JEN
Out of my nostrils—

CLERK B
Suicide bomb my skin—

CLERK B
With their feelers—

JEN
Behind my teeth—

CLERK B
IED my gray matter—

CLERK B
Where you bite—

JEN
Gnaw on my hands—

CLERK B
Boil my blood—

CLERK B
And let the blood—

JEN
Drip—

CLERK B
Burn the hair off my head—

CLERK B
Drip—

JEN
Drip.

CLERK B
And the interior of
my skull—

CLERK B
Gouge out my eyeballs—

JEN
My slimy eyeballs—

CLERK B
Cut off my fingers—

CLERK B

Focused inside—

JEN
On the black hole—

CLERK B
Slice off my nose—

CLERK B
Where the spider
legs—

CLERK B
My ears—

JEN
Catch—

CLERK B
You fall on your
back—

CLERK B
Kill this feeling—

JEN
Your chest ripped open—

CLERK B
By the maggots that
breed—

CLERK B
Behead the past—

JEN
In my red blood cells.

CLERK B
Don't let me remember—

CLERK B
There are some
things—

JEN
You—

CLERK B
I can't I can't can't—

CLERK B
Can't—

JEN
Stop.

CLERK B
Kill the ones in our way—

CLERK B
There—

JEN

CLERK B
I give you a chance—

Are some—

CLERK B
Things—

JEN
You can't—

CLERK B
You can save yourself—

CLERK B
Stop.

JEN
There's something—

CLERK B
I can't save you—

CLERK B
Something—

JEN
Out there—

CLERK B
Any of you—

CLERK B
Out—

JEN
There—

CLERK B
because I'm me—

CLERK B
A weight—

JEN
I wear—

CLERK B
nothing—

CLERK B
On my neck—

JEN
Around my head—

CLERK B
roots in dirt—

CLERK B
God—

JEN
God—

CLERK B
submerged—

	CLERK B God—	CLERK B disappeared—	
JEN God—			CLERK B ripped apart—
	CLERK B It's the weight—		
JEN My brother—		CLERK B by my own terror—	
	CLERK B Carried—		
JEN It's the—		CLERK B my dreams—	
	CLERK B Weight—		
JEN My mother—		CLERK B stuck inside—	
	CLERK B Carried—		CLERK B my own terrifying end—
JEN My brother—		CLERK B dying shit—	
	CLERK B I carry—		
JEN I tried to—		CLERK B shit—	
	CLERK B Save her.	CLERK B here I am—	
JEN But—			CLERK B death—
	CLERK B Nothing—		

JEN
I carry—

CLERK B
Disappeared.

CLERK B
Worked.

*The sound of CLERK B is gone.
A chorus of two voices—
JEN and Mike become one
As the electronic sound disappear
And all that is left
Are the xylophone sounds
Crashing down like a wave.*

CLERK B
My—

JEN

Brain—

Brain—

Is—

Is—

A—

My—

Red—

Brain—

Mark—

My—

I—

Head—

Can't—

Is—

The—

Is—

Black—

Is—

Spot—

Filling—

Focus—

With—

The—

Blood—

Bright—

Tried—

Red—

Already—

Stain—

Try—

Can't—

Harder—

Try—

I—

Try—

I—

Harder—

In—

Side—

A—

Black—

What—

Splotch—

Is—

Look—

It—

A—

I—

Hole—

I—

Look—

I—

In—

Can't—

Side—

Look—

No—

Look—

Can't—

See—

See—

Look—

I—

Can't—

Look—

Look—

Look—

Look—

Look—

JEN begins speaking after 'on speed.'

CLERK B

Things will get better, things will get better, things will get better — I tried to sit still but I couldn't, like I was on speed, her skin red, the mole on her cheek catching water falling, and her lips pressed hard, body shaking — what had I done, what had I done, what had I done — she looked at me, her eyes, I didn't know were sad, just eyes, blue, and I thought like the ocean, I'd never seen the ocean, but later I knew, I saw it finally, I knew *her*, she was inside me in every small little dug out hole and I dug each piece out with a stick and it killed me, but I tried, I loved her and the ocean said it was okay, but it never was again, and I could've reached out, I had touched her a thousand times, but I didn't. Not again. Not anymore. Not anymore.

JEN

(fast tempo)

There's a head splitting rage inside of me it's slipping, slipping cause no one loves no one loves me all the people I ever reached for they pushed me away, all the people I touched pretended they liked it, but really they hated it, and you were supposed to love, but didn't love me - there's this secret, secret part of myself that I will never ever show anyone because it's such an open wound and it hurts so fucking bad and now you haunt me cause I never told you the truth, WHO I AM and your ghost follows me everywhere and blows out the candles in the cold rooms I creep in and out of at night in the dark.

*CLERK B and JEN collapse in the dirt.
The xylophone sounds fade
Slowly
Very slowly
Maybe twenty or thirty seconds
To a tranquil lull
And then to nothing.
All is quiet.*

*MASHA's office.
CLERK B stands with his eyes closed.*

MASHA
What happened out there!?

CLERK B is silent.

MASHA
Clerk B... Don't ignore me!

Slight Pause.

MASHA
Do you have *anything* to say?

He looks at her.

MASHA
Do you understand what will happen if you lose this job?

He looks at her.

MASHA
You don't want that, do you?

CLERK B
No...

MASHA
Then why won't you do it correctly?

CLERK B
I am doing my job.

MASHA
No you are not! What's your job description?

CLERK B
I know what it is.

MASHA
If any person within the borders of the United States has a thought, one simple thought of terrorism, from that point forward you track that person and then you give me their location. Correct? Isn't that right, Clerk B?

CLERK B
I don't know.

MASHA
Yes you do! What is wrong with you?

CLERK B
Why do I have these powers?

MASHA
Stop asking questions.

CLERK B
I want to know.

MASHA
No, you do not.

CLERK B
Who was I before this?

MASHA
Stop.

CLERK B
Was I like the one I was just tracking?

Pause.

MASHA
All right... Yes. You were. How does that make you feel?

CLERK B *is silent.*

MASHA
Before you came here, you were *nobody*. The person you were then is a person you would never want to be again. Do you understand?

CLERK B
I want to be myself.

MASHA
You don't understand anything.

CLERK B
I do.

MASHA

You were sent to me because your thoughts were a sickness, you were dangerous and it became necessary for the world to get rid of you. But you were given a second chance and I have made you into somebody.

Pause.

MASHA

You had a location, didn't you?

CLERK B

Yes.

MASHA

Why didn't you pull out and tell me where they were?

CLERK B

I wanted to save him.

MASHA

You don't have an affect over his actions.

CLERK B

But I did save him. I let him save himself.

MASHA

Border Six-Twenty-Four has you very confused.

CLERK B

I'm sorry...

MASHA

I'm giving you one more chance, but if you screw this up, that's it, Clerk B. Do you understand?

CLERK B

Yes.

MASHA takes a file out of the filing cabinet.

MASHA

I want you to begin working on Border Six-Fifty-Seven.

*MASHA extends the file to CLERK B.
He looks at it*

But doesn't move.

MASHA
Got it?

CLERK B
Yes.

*CLERK B takes the file.
MASHA turns back to her clipboard.*

MASHA
Now get out of my office.

*CLERK B leaves.
As CLERK A enters right after him.*

CLERK A
You needed to talk to me?

MASHA
I'm diverting you to Six-Fifty-Seven.

*MASHA rips a slip of paper off a pad.
She hands it to CLERK B.
CLERK A looks at it.*

CLERK A
I have to work with Clerk B?

MASHA
I need you to watch him for anything abnormal then report to me.

She opens a file.

MASHA
Here's the chart from his last assignment.

She hands him a piece of paper.

MASHA
Got it?

CLERK A
Yes.

MASHA *returns to her work.*
CLERK A *stands motionless.*

MASHA
Anything else?

CLERK A *pauses.*
MASHA *turns back to CLERK A.*

CLERK A
How long have I worked here?

Pause.

MASHA
I would have to check your file to know that.

CLERK A
Is my file in your office?

MASHA
No of course not. It's in records.

CLERK A
Can you check for me?

MASHA
I will yes... After lunch.

Pause.

MASHA
It's not like you to ask questions.

CLERK A *is silent.*
She stands and moves to him
Touches his hair
And looks in his eyes.

MASHA
You know something?

CLERK A
What?

MASHA
The world is a better place because of *you*.

He looks at her.
He wants to believe it.

CLERK A
Is it?

MASHA
If you believe in the work we do here.

CLERK A
I do.

MASHA
Do you have *any* doubts?

CLERK A
I don't think so... Do I? I've always believed... Haven't I?

MASHA
You have.

CLERK A
Is there documentation?

MASHA
Of what?

CLERK A
That I believe.

MASHA
We keep meticulous records.

CLERK A
So everyone will know... that I believed?

MASHA
Of course.

CLERK A
When I agreed to work here... I... Um...

MASHA
What?

CLERK A
I...

CLERK A looks confused.

CLERK A
I'm not sure... What was I going to say?

MASHA
I don't know.

She strokes his face.

MASHA
Talk to Clerk B for me?

CLERK A
Right. Yes.

*CLERK B at his desk.
CLERK A approaches briskly
And stops in front of CLERK B.*

CLERK A
How's the work coming along?

CLERK B
Fine.

CLERK A
You must be nearly finished tracking Six-Fifty-Seven—

CLERK B
Not yet.

CLERK A
Then Masha thought I should—

CLERK B
I don't need any help.

CLERK A
Masha seems to think—

CLERK B
I don't need help.

He looks at CLERK B curious.

CLERK A
What's so special about Six-Fifty-Seven?

*CLERK A grabs at the file
But CLERK B anticipates him
And pulls it away.*

CLERK A
Show me the file, please.

*CLERK B drops it on the desk.
CLERK A picks it up.
CLERK B points at the printout.*

CLERK B
I'm working orange so you take green.

CLERK A
I'll put the feelers out, see what I get.

CLERK B
You do that.

*CLERK B turns back to his work.
CLERK A stands motionless.
CLERK B turns back to CLERK A.*

CLERK B
Anything else?

*CLERK A looks outside the office
Up and down the hall
No one is near.
He whispers.*

CLERK A
Something strange is happening.

CLERK B
What is it?

CLERK A
I'm dreaming.

Pause.

CLERK B
You're dreaming?

CLERK A
Yes. It's just been a few days... I think.

CLERK B
You're *dreaming*?

CLERK A
That's right. This one dream I had...

CLERK B
This already happened.

CLERK A
What?

CLERK B
You already told me this.

CLERK A
No... No I didn't.

CLERK B
Didn't you?

CLERK A
No... Did I?

CLERK B
Yes.

CLERK A
I don't think so...

Pause.

CLERK A
I couldn't have told you.

CLERK B
Why?

CLERK A
Because I'm not really dreaming.

CLERK B
Why did you—

CLERK A
I was going to make something up...

CLERK B
Why would you make it up?

CLERK A
What else do I have?

Pause.

CLERK A
I'm standing in the middle of a field and...

*CLERK A hesitates
And looks at CLERK B.*

CLERK B
Go ahead.

CLERK A
You want to hear it?

CLERK B
It doesn't have to be real.

CLERK A
Next to the railroad tracks is a brick farm house. A train flies by very fast my hair blows up and I start to run through the gate across the yard up the steps onto the porch and I throw open the screen door walk inside and right at that moment... I have a memory.

The xylophone sounds return.

CLERK A

When I was very young I used to stand with my hands against that same door and watch the Southern Pacific fly by. My mom would stand behind me with her arms folded. She always wore a blue and white print dress and I could sense her sad eyes watching but I was so content with the movement of the train that I almost forgot she was there.

*The xylophone sounds
Fade away
Like a gnawing sadness
That has reason
But will never be remembered.*

END OF PLAY