

SUNDIAL

A full-length play

By Jason Half

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SUNDIAL - A full-length play by Jason Half

CHARACTER LIST (3M, 3F):

CATHY MILLER, late 20s/early 30s.

BEN MILLER, late 20s/early 30s. Also plays REPORTER

EILEEN MILLER, 50s. Also plays PAM HARRISON, CITIZEN 3

DONNIE MILLER, 50s. Also plays RON DAVIS, PASSERBY 2,
SUPPORTER 2, BILL MASON, CITIZEN 2

MARK COSTICK, mid-20s. Also plays MIKE STEMLER, PASSERBY 1,
SUPPORTER 1

RACHEL TAMM, late 20s/early 30s. Also plays DOTTIE HAYSGOOD,
SUPPORTER 3, CITIZEN 1

Except for Cathy, the same actors portray all of the supporting roles in the play. Simple changes in costume, hair, and accessories (like hat or glasses) will work best when combined with a new physicality and vocal delivery for each character.

SETTING: Locations in and around Sundial, West Virginia

TIME: September, 2013

SUNDIAL BY JASON HALF - ACT ONE

The stage consists of a few set pieces and props that suggest separate locations. Upstage right sits a kitchen table and two chairs; upstage left is an outdoor bench.

Additional sets and props move on and offstage when needed. The moments in this play should move fluidly into one another, at times overlapping. As soon as the current moment finishes, the next one begins.

As lights rise, CATHY MILLER stands downstage left. She scans the audience, smiles, then closes a storybook she is holding and addresses her class.

CATHY

Okay. So. We've all read the story, and now we get to talk about it. Lizzie, put your shoe back on. Jonathan, eyes up here. Okay. So who liked this story? Raise your hand. Good. Oh, you heard it before? Well, it's a pretty famous story, isn't it. Who's the hero? Remember, we talked about those words, hero and villain? So who's the hero? Jack, right? He's just this liiiittle, itty-bitty guy and this big, mean giant chases him but Jack is too smart for him. And-- what's that? That's right, he brings back money for his mother. Pretty heroic, right? So Jack's a pretty good guy, wouldn't you say? He takes care of his family, and he's smart, and he fights the big angry giant and he wins. He has to chop down the beanstalk and make the giant fall, but he wins. And that's what we want to see.

Lights transition as BEN, Cathy's husband, enters opposite and stops.

BEN

Cath-ay!! Cath!

Cathy sets down the storybook and turns to Ben; a new scene.

CATHY

Shhhh! Gabbie's still sleeping.

BEN

Get her up. She's going to my mother's.

CATHY

I'll take her over before I go into school. What did you need?

Ben holds out a thermos cannister.

CATHY

That's your thermos.

BEN

I can't argue with that. Actually, I can. It's half a thermos. I'm missing the lid, and I'm missing the plastic cuppy thing.

CATHY

So that's a third of a thermos.

BEN

I'm getting ready to pour in the coffee for the day, Dad'll be here any minute, and I can't find the lid. Any idea? I checked the sink, the cup shelf...

Cathy moves to a laundry basket, rummages through some toys inside.

CATHY

Gabbie likes to play with your lunchbox when you leave it in the kitchen. Lots to open, lots to smell.

BEN

She's playing "miner."

CATHY

She just wants to be like her daddy.

BEN

She already is.

A car horn HONKS.

BEN

Kee-ristmas! That's him, I gotta go.

Ben starts to pace, thermos in hand.

CATHY

Give me a minute.

BEN

I need that lid and the cuppy! The coffee's the only thing keepin' me warm down there.

CATHY

That and the thought of me, you mean. Here.

Cathy holds out the plastic cup top for the thermos, followed by the screw cap.

BEN
Thanks. Sorry I'm kinda -- It's just --

CATHY
I know.

Another horn HONK.

BEN
(Yelling to the car)
DAD! JUST HOLD IT!

CATHY
Ben! Shhhh!

BEN
Aw, she'll be up by now anyway.

CATHY
Go pour the coffee. There's leftover chicken I saved for you,
make sure you pack it. Go.

BEN
Okay.

Ben starts to rush out, then stops,
turns.

BEN
That's true. What you said. I think about you and Gabbie all
the time when I'm working. Reminds me why I'm down there.
Bye.

Ben exits. Cathy, moved, watches him
go.

CATHY
(Almost to herself)
Stay warm.

Cathy turns and leans over, hands on
knees, addressing an imaginary three-
year old. As she speaks, Cathy mimes
taking her girl's hand and walking to
the kitchen table upstage.

CATHY
(To Gabbie)
Are you ready to go to Grandma's? Mommy's gotta go to work.
What? Nooooooo, you like going to Grandma's. She loves you.
And she gets very excited when you come over to see her.
Very, very excited.

Lights rise on EILEEN in the kitchen area, who bends down to Gabbie in a loud welcome.

EILEEN

(To Gabbie)

HEEEY, THERE'S my Gabbie GIIIRRUL! She's come to see her Gran'ma! Why're you rubbin' your eyes?

CATHY

She's sleepy.

EILEEN

(To Gabbie)

SLEEPY? It's almost seven-thirty! Wake up, sleepy-head! Tell you what. Come over here, sit on the couch, I saw some cartoons on channel six. I'll get you some cookies and you can watch TV with Gran'ma.

CATHY

Eileen.

EILEEN

(Ignoring Cathy)

That's right, get your Dora blanket, it's on the side there, and I'll see what's on.

Eileen mimes changing channels on the set.

CATHY

Eileen. Remember what I asked? Gabbie only gets one hour of television while she's here.

EILEEN

It's okay, it's educational. These shows teach her about friendship and math.

CATHY

Still. Please.

EILEEN

(To Gabbie)

Aw, you got your shoes off already. It's always more comfortable that way, isn't it? Shoes off?

CATHY

Okay then. I'll see you two later.

A beat, but Eileen ignores Cathy. Cathy turns, starts to leave, turns back. Her tone is different.

CATHY

Eileen. How's Donnie doing? What's happening with him?

Eileen's demeanor changes. She leaves Gabbie and heads back to the kitchen, frowning. Cathy follows her. Both women keep their voices lowered for Gabbie's sake.

CATHY

Do you know anything new? Eileen?

EILEEN

Yeah, I heard ya. Short answer is, nothing's new.

CATHY

Okay. But what do the doctors say?

EILEEN

Nothin'. He hasn't seen anyone since that one guy in April.

CATHY

What? That's crazy!

EILEEN

That's Donnie.

CATHY

Eileen, you know... That's denial. Not seeing anyone, that's not gonna make this go away.

EILEEN

Well, it's his life, not yours, not mine.

CATHY

But we have to live with his choice. I mean, if he gets help now--

EILEEN

Okay, enough. You should get to work.

Eileen stares at the table, waits.

CATHY

All right. I'll be back for Gabbie at three.

EILEEN

Yeah. Okay.

Cathy exits. Eileen looks back towards Gabbie and changes her mood.

EILEEN

(A little too cheerful)

Gran'ma'll get you those cookies. She's a little slow, but she'll get there. Gran'ma-- Gran'ma'll be just fine.

Eileen exits.

Lights transition and Cathy sits on the outdoor bench. Her shoes are off and she is barefoot. She reads from the storybook.

After a moment, a young man, MARK COSTICK, enters. He carries a clipboard and is nicely but not overly dressed. He studies the view (downstage) and makes a note.

Mark then moves to the opposite side, passing Cathy, who watches him.

MARK

Good afternoon.

CATHY

Hello.

Mark exits. Cathy waits, curious now, and a moment later Mark returns, making another note.

CATHY

Can I help you?

MARK

I see a little footpath going towards the river. Do you know if anyone uses that?

CATHY

Yes, I use it. The kids use it. Who are you?

MARK

Oh right. Sorry. My name's Mark Costick, I've got an appointment with Principal Davis.

CATHY

Oh, I see. Parent?

MARK

No. Hope to be one someday. Miracle of life and all that.

CATHY

Try dealing with fifty-eight miracles of life five days a week, boys and girls who are still learning how to read, share, and resolve problems without hitting each other.

MARK

So you're a --

CATHY

Second grade elementary teacher.

MARK

But school got out at --

(Checks his clipboard)

Two-thirty, right? But you're still on the playground, out here by yourself?

CATHY

A little "me" time, I guess. I've got a three-year old miracle of life of my own that needs to get picked up from her grandma's when I leave here.

MARK

I gotcha.

CATHY

What're you seeing the principal about, Mark?

MARK

I'll tell you, but I want to ask you something first. Here's the thing:

(A switch; he forgot to ask)

What's your name?

CATHY

Mrs. Miller. Cathy.

MARK

Cathy. Take a look out into that field. Go on. Now what do you see?

CATHY

What do I see? You mean that field, a lot of greenish-brown grass framed by what used to be rolling blue mountains?

MARK

I meant the --

CATHY

Or the eighty-foot soot-covered coal silo that stands in the middle, spitting distance from my school?

A beat.

MARK

Okay then.

CATHY

Who are you, Mark? Why are you asking about the footpath?

In reply, Mark hands Cathy a business card. She reads it, holds it out to give back to him. He does not take it.

MARK

Keep it. Listen. In a way, we're both in the education business. I want to --

CATHY

Please.

MARK

No, really, I'm meeting with Ron Davis today to discuss this silo, since there have been concerns from certain staff at Sundial Elementary.

CATHY

Your coal silo is a hundred feet from this playground.

MARK

A hundred eighty-five. That's what I mean about educating. And here's an interesting fact: that silo can hold almost two tons of processed coal. And that's important, because it provides a way to load surplus into the train beds while the mining and extraction can continue without interruption.

CATHY

But Mark: it's on top of us. We didn't ask for this silo, we weren't asked our opinion about it --

MARK

The land beyond the fence, including the footpath, is owned by USA Energy. Permission wasn't needed.

CATHY

Your company could have asked our opinion, could have listened to us, recognized that we exist.

MARK

That's why -- See, this is good. That's why I'm meeting with Principal Davis, to hear concerns from the community, from the school. This is what USA Energy wants to hear.

(Readying clipboard)

Can I report that you disapprove of the silo because it spoils the view from the school grounds?

CATHY

No. Report this. Every sunny day from ten-thirty to noon that coal silo throws its shadow across my classroom. Actually, it's Sarah Flynn's room first, she teaches first grade, then mine, then Jim Sanders'. We've got dozens of children whose moods swing on a dime, and this thing blots out their sun.

MARK

(Writing)

This is good.

Cathy grabs Mark, moves him downstage.

CATHY

Oh, is it? Here's another interesting fact. Stop writing and look at the monkey bars.

MARK

What?

CATHY

While you're here. Take a close look.

Mark looks at her, then looks ahead.
After a moment:

MARK

What am I supposed to be looking at? I just see monkey bars.

CATHY

On the metal. On the swings, on the bench, on the ground, everything is covered in black dust. Soot from that coal silo. All that convenient loading and unloading, Mark, it's kicking up a lot of coal dust. And it gets into our clothes, and into the air vents. These are kids, five, six years old, breathing this. And adults.

MARK

Now wait, wait. Let's not jump to conclusions. Cathy. This is a playground. It looks dusty, it looks dirty, but it looks just like any other playground. I mean, there's dust and there's dirt, but let's not jump to pollutants unless we run some actual tests.

CATHY

So when are you going to run some actual tests?

MARK

That's not-- Look. I am adding this complaint to the report. Okay?

(Writing on clipboard)

And I will make sure the owner of the company is aware of this concern.

CATHY

And what are you going to do about it?

MARK

Well, I am sure we will study the matter and see if any action needs to be taken.

CATHY

It does! It's a problem. You can call it dust, but it is soot from that coal silo that's covering our school!

MARK

Again, totally noted. It's nice to meet you, but I need to meet with the principal now.

Mark starts to leave.

CATHY

I want to be there.

MARK

The meeting? No, sorry.

CATHY

You said you wanted to hear my concerns.

MARK

I've just heard them. We're done. I'm serving as representative of my company and this is a closed meeting.

Tension, and then Cathy decides and moves back to the bench, sits.

Mark turns again to leave, and then:

CATHY

Mark.

Mark turns back to Cathy. Cathy, seated, extends her leg. Mark finds himself looking at the blackened sole of her foot.

CATHY

Which is it? You tell me. Dirt? Or soot?

The tableau is held for a moment, then changes when the lights transition. Mark and Cathy exit to separate sides and RON DAVIS, principal of the elementary school, enters and addresses an imaginary staff.

RON DAVIS

Yes, Shelley, but you didn't meet with him and I did. And I'm telling you --

(Responding to a question)

What? No. The company is aware of our concerns and they promise to look into it. The, the condition of the playground and the air quality and all of that.

(Another question)

I don't know what the time frame is.

(Another question)

No, I believe they'll find the people to do the study. The school doesn't have the funds to pay for it. But look, the bottom line is --

(Over arguing; speaking louder)

Bill! Cathy! Hush a minute, I've got the floor. Here's what everyone's gotta understand: the rep tells me that USA Energy is willing to work with all of their neighbors to address any problems that come up. Now they are well aware --

(Yelling over raised voices)

WELL AWARE that the silo might be causing problems for us. I asked him -- Jim -- I asked if they could move the thing, and he told me that the service road for the trucks and the access to the train line makes that the best spot for the loading and unloading and whatnot. That way they can keep going at the mine, don't have to interfere with the, uh, extraction and the like. So moving it is out.

(Over grumbling voices)

But -- Listen, here's the thing. From what was said, I know that the company wants to do what's right, even if they have to spend some money to do it. Just as the company's been giving back to the community with jobs and revenue and all that, if we work with them, don't stir up unnecessary trouble, then ladies and gents, this school could really reap some benefits. And I'll tell you somethin': this school could use 'em.

Ron Davis exits and the USL bench is covered with a sheet that has a design pattern, suggesting a couch.

Lights transition. Ben enters stage right. He lumbers back and forth like Frankenstein's monster, counting as he goes. His hands are cupped near his shoulders, holding the imaginary Gabbie's legs, who rides piggyback.

BEN

(Crossing to the couch)

Six... Seven... Eight... Nine... Ten... Eleven... Twelve! Off you go!

Ben mimes as Gabbie scrambles down; he sits on the couch, tired from work.

Ben's head swivels as he watches a hyperactive Gabbie race around the room.

BEN

Hey. Gabbie girl. Gabbie. HEY! Put the brakes on. You're always hyper when you come back from Grandma's. It's like you broke out of prison or somethin'. Gabbie, stop.

Ben takes a Barbie doll as if it were given to him by Gabbie.

BEN

Oh, thank you. Great. Barbie doll.

He holds onto a fuzzy monster doll in the same way.

BEN

Oh. Mister Monster. Okay.

(Pause)

What?

Gabbie makes a request.

BEN

No. Daddy's too tired to play dolls. Daddy's gonna watch some TV.

Ben aims the TV remote, pushes a button, watches TV. Gabbie stares at him.

BEN

Sit down, watch this. Judge Judy's mad at that guy.

Another moment, but Ben is aware that Gabbie won't give in. Resigned, he uses the remote to turn off the TV and picks up the dolls. He thinks for a second, then jiggles each doll in turn as he invents dialogue for them.

BEN

(As Monster)

"Hey Barbie, what's up?"

(As Barbie)

"Not much, what's up with you?"

(As Monster)

"Oh, you know. Just picked up my little goblin monster after a long day of workin' at the monster mines."

(As Barbie)

"Oh yeah? What're you gonna do now?"

(As Monster)

"Well, I was gonna watch TV, but I thought it'd be more fun to play with dolls."

(As Barbie)

"Totally!!"

Ben makes Barbie jump up and down in a frenzy of enthusiasm.

BEN

(As Monster)

"It's not that exciting, Barbie."

Cathy enters stage right, throws her purse down, and lets out a cry of frustration as she crosses left (to the bedroom).

CATHY

Aaaagh!

Cathy exits.

BEN

(Deadpan, to Gabbie)

Mommy's home.

He watches Gabbie run into her bedroom DSL, grabs her tiny sneakers by the couch and chases after her.

BEN

Hey! Barefoot Betty! Put your shoes in your closet!

Cathy re-enters as Ben sets the shoes offstage and returns.

BEN

She gets that from you.

CATHY

You could've told me you were picking her up. Save me a trip. And from having to deal with your mother.

BEN

Didn't know I was gonna do it 'til I dood it. What's the matter?

CATHY

Do you know someone named Mark Costick?

BEN

No. Should I?

CATHY

You tell me. He works for your company. Met with Ron Davis to talk about that coal silo that's sitting right by the school, polluting the school.

BEN

Again with the silo.

CATHY

That's right! But of course that whole closed meeting thing was a farce, no one's actually in there to protect the school or the people who use it. All Ron sees is the chance to get money from them so he stands there with his hand out saying, "Fellas, let's make a deal."

BEN

What you're saying is, someone from USA Energy's talking to your school about the problems with the silo.

CATHY

They already told us it's not moving! So what good is this sham discussion?

BEN

You're missing the point. You keep yellin' about how the company won't do anything to fix a problem --

CATHY

It's still not fixed. Can't move that precious silo!

BEN

-- But they are doing something. They're meeting with the school, they're checking things out.

CATHY

You should've met this guy. Mark Costick. Slick, full of fake empathy: "I'm listening to your concerns. I'll add that complaint to the report."

BEN

I thought you said it was a closed meeting.

CATHY

It was.

BEN

Then when did you talk to him?

CATHY

Before. He came around asking for my opinion.

BEN

See? Cathy...

CATHY

And he wrote it down and he smiled, and it doesn't mean a thing, because money is all that matters to Big Business!

BEN

Would you stop!? God, Cathy, I don't know what more you want right now. The energy company that I work for, that I get my paychecks from, goes out of its way to look into a problem the school might be having, and you keep complaining about how they never do nothin'. Well, they're doing somethin', Cathy.

CATHY

It's not enough.

BEN

It's a start. You know, just once I'd like to hear you talk about the company I work for in a way that doesn't paint them as the villain. They're meeting with the school? They're asking your opinion? They're reaching out. To the community. To you. Awright? So give them some credit.

Ben starts picking up toys. Cathy is silent, watching him. Then:

CATHY

What credit? They didn't have a choice.

BEN

What'dya mean?

CATHY

Your great company is more concerned about their own image than what they're doing to the community. You know why they're reaching out, Ben? Because a bunch of us at the school wrote to them about what that silo is doing to us and the kids. And at the end of it we said we want to hear from them. And if we don't we're sending copies of the letter to the *Register-Herald* and the *Charleston Gazette*.

BEN

You threatened them. I'm their employee and you threaten them. That's a smart move. They know my wife's stirrin' up trouble. They'll think I'm doin' it too.

CATHY

Maybe you should. You know Gabbie'll be up there in a couple years.

Ben, still holding some of Gabbie's toys, tosses them into the basket. He turns to Cathy.

BEN

Stop pushing. I can't afford to lose my job 'cause you're makin' trouble. You want me to think about Gabbie's future? Baby, I'm not thinkin' of nothin' else.

Ben exits, frustrated. Cathy is left alone on stage.

Lights transition as Cathy removes the cover on the bench, folds up the sheet, and stores it.

RACHEL TAMMS enters from DSL. She carries labeled specimen containers, each with a corresponding sample of soil or liquid. She hands each one to Cathy, describing them in turn. Cathy places them in a carrying bag.

RACHEL

Okay, I think we got what we need. This one's a water sample from the river, this one's dirt from the footpath. This is dust taken directly off the coal silo, and they can compare it to the residue taken off a window sill from the school.

CATHY

An outside sill?

RACHEL

Yeah, and we also want to get a sample from standing dust inside the building, maybe from the back of an exhaust fan, something that brings outside air into the school.

CATHY

Rachel, thank you so much for doing this.

RACHEL

Oh, this is the easy part. And I don't want to get your hopes up. We put this all together into a lovely little gift box and send it along with a detailed description and an environmental investigation request, and there's still no guarantee that the DEP's gonna do anything.

CATHY

Yeah, but it's not just an everyday crank like me contacting them, it's Dr. Rachel Tamm, with a Masters in Civil Engineering. From WVU, no less.

RACHEL

I don't know how much my M.S. is gonna impress them.

CATHY

It impresses me.

RACHEL

And for the record? Even if they do decide to look into the conditions down here, they'll want to run their own tests. These samples aren't anything more than a nice visual to present at show-and-tell.

CATHY

Remind me. Did you grow up in Beckley?

RACHEL

Huh-uh. Summersville. Used to love driving into Charleston on Friday nights when I was in high school.

CATHY

You go Saturdays too?

RACHEL

Nope. Tried once or twice, but church comes too early and you wind up paying for it. Which classroom's yours?

Cathy points behind her to a window.

RACHEL

And you've got a little girl of your own!

CATHY

Three years old. Gabrielle.

RACHEL

Wow. When's the last time we got together, face to face?

CATHY

Too long. Ages. And at Marshall, we were inseparable. Freshman year of undergrad. Roommates and best friends, that rare combination.

RACHEL

Remember when I introduced you to Ben?

CATHY

No you didn't.

RACHEL

Sure I did. Before a game. He was in the stands with Tyler Vasey and that group.

CATHY

Really? I don't remember that.

RACHEL

What was Ben going for? Economics?

CATHY

Business management. He only made it two semesters.

RACHEL

And then zoom, there was your wedding... I'm sure we got together after that! Has it really been five years?

CATHY

Pretty near. So what do you think about that?

Cathy gestures.

RACHEL

It's a coal silo. They're as common as corn around here.

CATHY

I know, but this close to an elementary school?

RACHEL

Sure, if the elementary school is close to a coal mine.

Rachel packs the bag, arranging the samples. A beat, then:

CATHY

Ben works for USA Energy. Did you know that?

Rachel shakes her head, watches Cathy.

CATHY

He's a miner. Just like his dad. And his cousins. And his friends. His whole family's in Boone County, and when we moved down here, that was what shocked me the most. How strong the coal culture is. I mean, this is people's history and profession and pride. Generations in coal, living in it, dying by it. Not so much the owners, but the workers. And it's a culture that drives Ben and Donnie. Hunting comes second, football a distant third. It defines them, it's their heritage. And here I am, pushing against it.

RACHEL

Cath. You don't have to send this to the DEP. I hope you do, but you don't have to. It's enough just having an excuse to see you after five years.

CATHY

If I make this request, I feel like I'm betraying the people who are closest to me.

RACHEL

Sometimes, you do what you have to do.

CATHY

Don't send it out. Let me think about it, huh?

RACHEL

Yeah, sure.

CATHY

It's just, Gabbie will be up here in two years. And with that silo...

RACHEL

What are the alternatives? Can you send her to a school in another district?

CATHY

(a weary laugh)

Are you kidding? Kids come from fourteen miles just to make it to Sundial. We're the only game in town. Of course I'm worried about the air for everyone here, not just my girl.

RACHEL

Understandably. With the silo and the lake, I would be a concerned parent too.

CATHY

What? What lake?

RACHEL

This is-- I thought you knew. This is an active refinement site. That means they're processing coal right here, before they move it. And the byproduct of the refinement is this... slurry, this sludge that gets stored in a lake before tanks of it are siphoned and driven off to God knows where.

CATHY

A lake of sludge? Why haven't I seen this?

RACHEL

Because it's on their property. It's not visible to the public. Nothing to look at anyway, just a giant black lake. But Cath, understand, this is also part of coal mining. It's not pretty, but it's necessary and it's not causing any problems. Right now, a dam holds it all in check.

CATHY

But you just said-- So why should a parent be concerned about this black lake?

RACHEL

Don't overreact.

CATHY

Don't tell me that, Rachel. What are you saying?

RACHEL

(Matter-of-fact)

This site is mountain-top removal. That means active blasting. Depending on the tremors, that could compromise the dam. Maybe. I'm not saying it will happen, but it's a possibility.

CATHY

And if so?

RACHEL

The school is on land that sits below this lake. Same with the river. Again. Cathy: nothing could happen.

Cathy picks up the bag with the samples, holds it out to Rachel.

CATHY

Finish the letter. Add my name to it. And send the request.

RACHEL

Are you sure?

CATHY

I do what I have to do.

A beat, then Rachel takes the bag, exits.

Lights transition. Cathy exits as MIKE STEMLER, a miner in good spirits, enters stage right and places a simple plank bench on stage. Ben follows; they are in the middle of a conversation.

As the two men talk, they change from their working attire to street clothes. Work boots are replaced with sneakers, grimy jumpsuits taken off to reveal shirts and jeans underneath, mining gear stowed, et cetera.

MIKE

Naw, man, I'm tellin' ya!

BEN

(Skeptical)

The casinos?

MIKE

Why not? The ones over there in Charleston? Over in Nitro or wherever?

BEN

I don't think so.

MIKE

I'm tellin' ya. Dude, you asked.

BEN

What's romantic about goin' to a place with no windows where you spend all day puttin' quarters into slot machines?

MIKE

It's not the days when the romance happens, it's the nights. You spend some time at the gaming tables with your girl, you lose and you win, and it's exciting. You get excited. So you go back to the hotel -- they got hotels there actually connected to the casino, don't even have to go outside -- and you get in the room and you're all ready to play a different kind of slots.

BEN

(Grinning)

Aw, shut up.

MIKE

You asked! "Mikey, where's a good romantic place to go for my anniversary?" That's my vote: casino. S'always worked for me.

BEN

Yeah, well your companions probably didn't mind.

MIKE

They loved it! I took Sherry, I took Rhonda from payroll for a weekend. You know what turned Rhonda on? The hot tub. Some of those rooms come with a hot tub, but I think it's extra.

BEN

When we did something before, we always traveled, me and Cathy. Like to Hilton Head or up to Columbus or something.

MIKE

Goin' to a casino's like traveling.

BEN

Would you stop? I think I want to just go with the basics: a nice restaurant and a bunch of roses and a card with a little poem inside.

MIKE

Snooze. Hey dude, is Cathy a camper?

BEN

What?

MIKE

Take her camping. Totally. Back to nature. The crickets and the grass and sharing a sleeping bag at night.

BEN

Yeah. That's not a bad idea. We've never been camping before.

MIKE

You're in Appalachia! Some of the most beautiful mountains and rivers and woods God gave us, and you need to take advantage of all of it. Let it work for you.

BEN

That's a good idea, Mikey.

MIKE

It's a great idea!

BEN

Well, it's better than the casino idea.

MIKE

When's the anniversary?

BEN

It's comin' up. The 22nd.

MIKE

I just saw Cathy out here, a while ago.

BEN

Out here? You mean, on the site?

MIKE

No no, by the fence. You know how the fence runs along by the school in front there.

BEN

Oh, on the playground. Yeah, she says she eats her lunch out there somedays.

MIKE

This time she had someone with her. Another girl about her age, and she's runnin' around with those little jar things. What'dya call 'em, test tubes. No, not that, more like sample jars, like they tell you to fill up for drug tests.

Ben's expression has become serious.

BEN

What did you see?

MIKE

Dude, I don't know, I thought you knew. This girl's no one I knew. You didn't have company last week?

BEN

She never said a word.

MIKE

I don't know man, I didn't talk to 'em, but it looked to me like they were up to something. They were collecting dirt and water and stuff, puttin' them in the little sample jars, and I don't know why they would do that unless they had a problem with the site, you know?

As Mike continues to talk, Ben moves across the stage into the house space. He is clearly frustrated, looking for a confrontation.

Mike continues to talk, as if Ben was still present in the scene. His comments overlap, feeding the energy.

BEN

(Calling out; searching)

Cathy!

MIKE

If it's nothin', then just tell me, but it looked like... trouble.

BEN

Cathy!!

MIKE

And if your wife is doing something, dude, you should talk to her. Don't make trouble.

BEN

Where are you?

MIKE

Because I can't afford to lose this job. I need more casino nights.

BEN

CATHY!!

MIKE

I'm just saying.

Ben exits into the bedroom, USL. Mike exits right with the bench. Lights transition.

Lights up on the kitchen table UR. DONNIE enters left, shuffling in wearing a bathrobe.

He moves to the table, where simple fixings of bread, cheese, ham, and mustard are waiting, and starts to make a sandwich. A can of beer and pack of cigarettes are also present.

After a moment, Donnie COUGHS. Another COUGH follows, and another. The sounds get scratchier, worse, and he stops what he's doing to get through the coughing spell.

Eileen yells out, offstage left.

EILEEN

(calling from offstage)

Donnie? You okay?

DONNIE

Yeah.

EILEEN

(offstage)

What?

DONNIE

Yeah, I'm fine!

The coughing stops, and Donnie takes a swig of beer. Cathy enters right.

CATHY

Hey, Donnie. How ya doing?

DONNIE

Yeah, okay.

CATHY

Ahhh, sandwich.

DONNIE

That's about it.

Another COUGH.

CATHY

Did Ben pick up Gabbie or did you take him straight home?

DONNIE

(Intent on making sandwich)

Straight home. He was mad as hell about something.

CATHY

Mad? What'dya mean?

EILEEN, THAT'S OKAY. Don't worry about. I'll take care of it when we get home.

EILEEN
(Offstage)
WHAT?

CATHY
(Calling)
I said --

DONNIE
(Yelling over her)
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, JUST BRING HER OUT HERE!

This last yelling triggers another round of COUGHS from Donnie, and he takes another drink of beer, then reaches for the pack and takes out a cigarette.

CATHY
Don't do that.

Donnie looks at Cathy, a cigarette in his fingers. Cathy is uncomfortable.

CATHY
I mean, if you could wait until Gabbie's left, I'd appreciate it.

Donnie puts down the cigarette.

DONNIE
So what did you do?

CATHY
What d'you mean?

DONNIE
To get your husband so mad at ya?

CATHY
That's quite an assumption. Why is it always the wife who gets the blame?

DONNIE
'Cause that's usually the one who deserves it. You musta done somethin'.

Cathy tries to stay composed, despite her anger.

CATHY

You know, Donnie, your son is not exactly a saint. If he's mad at someone, it's just as possible that it could be someone at work or in town or a neighbor or even you.

DONNIE

Could be, but it ain't. If he was angry at any of those people, or even me, he would've unloaded the minute we were in the truck. When Rick Murchess borrowed his weed eater, and then burned the motor on it, he wouldn't shut up about it. I heard that story every day for two weeks. But this time, he doesn't tell me anything, he just stays mad and quiet. And that means it's in the family, and that means he's mad at you.

CATHY

About what, though?

DONNIE

God, I don't know! He didn't say. He's stubborn.

CATHY

He takes after you.

(Pause, then:)

I hear you haven't gone to a doctor in months. And that you should.

DONNIE

(Drinking beer)

Aw, that woman needs to mind her own business.

CATHY

Your wife is concerned about you. That's how it works: wives get concerned, and husbands get mad.

DONNIE

I'm doing fine.

CATHY

So let's keep it that way. Make an appointment.

DONNIE

Don't need one.

CATHY

Who's your doctor?

DONNIE

Just butt out, all right?

Cathy raises the cigarette pack.

CATHY

And in the meantime, you can try to stop smoking these things.

Donnie takes the cigarette, puts it to his lips, raises his lighter.

DONNIE

Don't you have a kid to pick up?

CATHY

We care about you, Don.

DONNIE

That's all wonderful.
(Calling)

EILEEN!!

Donnie lights the cigarette, smokes.

Eileen enters, arm down low, as if holding Gabbie's hand, and crosses with her to the table.

EILEEN

(Artificially cheerful)

Here she is! A little worse for wear, but it's better than it was. If you look, though, you can see the little splotch of orange on the side, but it's mostly out of the pants.

(To Gabbie)

You need to be careful next time, dont'cha? Maybe Grandma will bring back the sippy-cup instead of letting you drink from the big-girl glass. 'Cause that's how we spill things.

DONNIE

Just give her the kid, let me finish my meal in peace.

EILEEN

You big grump. You pretend you're not happy to see your granddaughter, but you are.

CATHY

Thanks again. But we should go.

EILEEN

(To Gabbie.)

We'll stay away from orange drink next time. Maybe give you something clear that doesn't stain, like Sprite.

CATHY

Or water. Water would be great.

DONNIE

Yeah, they should go. I think Ben's got somethin' he wants to discuss with her.

CATHY

Come on, Gabbie. Let's go see Daddy. 'Bye Eileen.

EILEEN

(Ignoring Cathy, as usual)

Bye, Gabbie girl! Lots of kisses!

Cathy exits right, "Gabbie" trailing.

Eileen watches Donnie smoke, waits, thinks about what to say. Finally:

EILEEN

Don't eat too much. Dinner's at six.

Eileen exits left. Donnie is alone for a moment, and then he also exits, taking the food with him.

Lights transition. Ben enters and sits on the couch, staring ahead. His expression is hard to read, but he doesn't look happy.

Cathy enters right, takes off her shoes, notices Ben. She bends down, addresses Gabbie.

CATHY

Hey, sweetie. These clothes are still a little wet from trying to get the stain out, so you should go change. Okay? You can change into anything you want, even your jammies. Go find something, and if you need help, I'll be in in a minute.

Cathy watches as Gabbie runs off downstage left. Cathy studies Ben, who stares straight ahead.

CATHY

Apparently, she spilled some orange soda on her shirt. How much you want to bet she comes out wearing the Princess Jasmine outfit from Halloween?

No response from Ben.

CATHY

All right. In order for the fight to start, I at least need to know what I did wrong so I can make my defense.

BEN

Fine. Who was here on Sunday?

CATHY

Who was here? As in, at the house?

BEN

Come on. You went away for six hours, you left me here with Gabbie --

CATHY

I can't leave and be on my own for part of a day without you getting suspicious?

BEN

Then tell me where you were. You said you were running errands.

CATHY

I was.

BEN

What kind?

CATHY

Why this interrogation? What's the matter?

BEN

All of a sudden, it feels like my wife is hiding something from me, doing something you don't want me to know about. That's what's the matter.

CATHY

You're being ridiculous.

BEN

Who were you with on Sunday?

CATHY

Brad Pitt. And not the salt-and-pepper goatee Brad Pitt of today but the sexy drifter one from *Thelma and Louise*.

BEN

You met with Rachel Tamm, didn't you.

Cathy is nonplussed for a second.
Recovering, she says:

CATHY

Yes. Rachel was in town, I met with her. She's a friend. There's nothing--

BEN

So why did you lie to me? You never told me about her.

CATHY

That's not a lie.

BEN

But you chose not to tell me.

CATHY

She's my friend from school, years ago. I didn't think you'd be interested.

BEN

And why was she here?

CATHY

She was passing through town, and thought--

BEN

What, after four years? No. You asked her to come down here.

CATHY

(Trying to laugh it off)

No! Ben, don't be so stupid.

BEN

(Angry)

Why can't you be honest with me? I know all about it, and you keep lying to my face, denying it!

CATHY

Why are we even fighting about this?

BEN

Because you chose to hide what you were doing from me!

CATHY

Because I knew you'd react exactly this way.

BEN

No. Because you knew I told you no. I asked you not to keep making trouble for the company, and here you are, stirring up trouble. What did you and Rachel do? You're collecting samples of the land now? For what?

CATHY

How did you hear about that?

BEN

It doesn't matter.

CATHY

It does.

BEN

You do something sneaky like that, I will find out about it, and then yeah, the sugar's gonna hit the fan!

CATHY

Since I got no support from you and no action from USA Energy about moving that silo, I asked Rachel to collect samples to send to the Department of Environmental Protection.

BEN

(As in, "Of course")

Aw, sure! Bring the government into it.

CATHY

If that's what it takes!

BEN

What's the matter with you?! You want me out of a job? You want to shut us down?

CATHY

No! I want your company to be responsible for what it's doing to our community.

BEN

So you go running to the DEP.

CATHY

Because I need things to change so we can stay healthy, you and me and our little girl.

BEN

The company already operates under regulations, Cathy! Lots of 'em! That's why they're there, to keep people safe. And if it were really a problem, then something would be done.

CATHY

And maybe there are problems that right now aren't being addressed.

BEN

Look, the mining site that everyone in this town works at --

CATHY

Not me.

BEN

--is as safe as it can be. Mining's dirty and it's sometimes dangerous, but it's the business we're all in and there's science behind us. We don't take unnecessary risks.

CATHY

It's a safe site.

BEN

As safe as possible. It's not as safe as sitting on your rump behind a desk, but it's very safe already, very regulated.

CATHY

Then what about the lake?

BEN

(Genuinely confused)

What lake?

CATHY

The lake of black sludge that sits above my elementary school.

BEN

What, the refinement pool? Why're you bringing that up?

CATHY

Rachel told me about it. Said the dam could break because you're blasting.

BEN

What does Rachel Tamm know about it?

CATHY

Why doesn't this town know it's up there?

BEN

Most of us do! We work there, we know about it! What the honk is your point?

CATHY

It sits above the school and above the river.

BEN

So? You've gone nuts, you know that? You and Rachel both. That refinement pool's not causing any problems for anybody. It never has.

CATHY

But it could.

BEN

But it NEVER HAS! The Kozy Korner could serve bad hamburger and the church steeple could fall over and kill a bunch of Baptists, but that doesn't mean we should call up the government and shut 'em down just 'cause somethin' COULD happen!

CATHY

But if there's a way to make things safer, why wouldn't you want to do that?

BEN

You haven't been listening. I told you: everything on that site has to be in line with those federal regulations up the whazoo. And that definitely includes the refinement pool that's got you so worked up.

CATHY

You think this pool is perfectly safe. No harm to the school or to the community.

BEN

That's what I'm sayin'. What harm can you point to?

CATHY

Then I'd like to visit this perfectly safe lake of sludge.

BEN

What for?

CATHY

To judge for myself.

BEN

What, you an environmental engineer now?

CATHY

No, but Rachel is. You want me to bring her along?

BEN

Forget it. You're not going anywhere near that pool.

CATHY

Why can't I see it? You say it's so safe.

BEN

A-1, that's on company ground, and no one can get over there without permission. B-2, Bill Mason sure as heck ain't gonna grant permission to an angry wanna-be activist like yourself.

CATHY

What does he have to hide?

BEN

C-3, even if you do go there, you won't have anything to see. I ride past it each day, and I'm telling you, swear to God: there's no streams of oil spillin' over the dam, no pelicans caught in the middle of it, no skeletons of prospectors who mistook it for a drinkin' hole.

Despite her passion, Cathy starts to smile at Ben's efforts.

BEN

It's an everyday, average, commonplace containment pool. And you'll find 'em near any coal mine that does on-site refining. Okay?

CATHY

That doesn't make them good for us.

BEN

C'mere.

Ben moves to Cathy, reaches for her hand, but Cathy pulls it back and turns away, folding her arms.

BEN

Hold it. I'm the one who's supposed to be mad, since you got those samples behind my back and then lied to me.

Ben turns away from Cathy, consciously parodying her folded-arms pose. A beat.

BEN

You pout just like your daughter, you know that?

CATHY

Okay. I should've told you about Rachel and what we were up to.

BEN

Well. You should've left things alone in the first place, like I asked you to.

CATHY

And you should be more concerned about what's happening to you and your family.

BEN

I'm concerned.

CATHY

With every month that your dad works at the mine, his cough gets worse. Don't tell me you haven't noticed.

BEN

He's also a two-pack-a-day smoker.

CATHY

But you're not. And I hear you at night, Ben. I'm sure you think I'm asleep, but... it's that same rumbling cough. Just not as bad. Yet. And after a minute or two or five, you chase the cough away, and you sleep okay, but me? I'm awake the rest of the night. Thinking. Wondering. Afraid.

Ben embraces her, trying to assure her with a low "Shhhhh." But Cathy needs to continue the confession.

CATHY

So that's why I'm doing this. With the silo. And the lake. And the company. I need my family, and I will do whatever I can to keep us safe.

Ben holds Cathy, trying to soothe her, but Cathy's expression shows only determination and resolve. A hold on this image, and then the pair exit left as lights transition.

PAM HARRISON, a professional in business dress and carrying a valise for paperwork, enters right. She talks on a cell phone while walking.

PAM

(Into phone)

No, the Richmond plant is next week. I'm going through the Charleston airport now, en route to Sundial, West Virginia. Testing for airborne particulates at USA Energy. No, from a storage silo... Just one, I believe. Are you at the computer now? Can you open the -- Thanks. Remind me: this one started with a public standards request? Who's the contact?

(Listens.)

Uh-huh. From where? Okay. I'm at the rental desk, I'll call you back.

Pam hangs up, remains upstage, and mimes negotiating at a car rental counter.

Rachel and Cathy enter from opposite sides, move downstage and stand facing out. Both converse by holding cell phones.

RACHEL

(Into phone)

Hey, Cathy, guess what? I know someone in the DEP national office and I asked him to let me know if there's any activity around Sundial. Aaaaaaannnd...

CATHY

(Into phone)

Are you saying that the show-and-tell worked?

RACHEL

He said the scheduling already brought an inspector out to sites on the Marcellus Shale, and that she would check out our request while she was down there.

CATHY

Rachel, that's fantastic.

RACHEL

It's pretty amazing. I never expected to get such a quick response for testing. We're talking about the federal government, after all...

Rachel and Cathy continue to mime the discussion as Pam's phone RINGS. She answers it.

PAM

(Into phone)

Pam Harrison, DEP.

Mark enters USL and cheerfully speaks into his phone.

MARK

(Into phone)

Pam, hi! It's Mark Kostick, liaison for USA Energy. How are you today?

PAM

I'm good, Mark, I was gonna call you later today.

MARK

I beat you to it. Good to hear from you again. You in Charleston now?

PAM

Just got in. Mark, can I call you back in a bit? I'm just finishing up something.

MARK

Absolutely. I just wanted to send you my number and we can make plans for your visit to the site.

PAM

Shouldn't take long. Just surface study.

MARK

The DEP's got an all-access pass, just like always.

PAM

Appreciate it.

MARK

Absolutely. Happy to have you here.

PAM

Let's hope you feel that way when the tests come back.

Pam hangs up and exits. Mark, concern on his face, exits a beat later. Cathy and Rachel's conversation resumes.

CATHY

(Into phone)

Rachel, seriously. Thanks for all your help.

RACHEL

(Into phone)

The verdict's not in yet.

CATHY

But this is a step in the right direction. I know it. If we can prove that the company is at fault, they'll have to fix the problem they made.

RACHEL

I wish I shared your wide-eyed enthusiasm, kiddo. Keep me posted, okay?

CATHY

You got it.

Lights transition. As Cathy and Rachel exit, Mark and Pam enter right. Pam sits and skims a report paper from a file folder. After a beat:

PAM

Are you the messenger?

MARK

(Confused)

Excuse me?

PAM

Since the boss isn't here, are you the one who gets to take this report to Bill Mason?

MARK

That's right. As liaison, I have to see him after this, so, yeah... messenger.

PAM

Well, suit up.

(reading from paper)

Surface study results.

Air and field tests, ASA and POA, are running high. Point oh-eight-oh for the ASA and ninety-four parts per million on the other. Acceptable level is twenty-six. In a word: carcinogens.

MARK

I need to clarify. These are the levels for the air at least a hundred and eighty-five feet from the silo.

PAM

The numbers came right from the playground.

MARK

So there we are.

PAM

So there you are.

Mark paces.

MARK

So, it sounds like we have to move that silo, even though it means changing the transportation routes. Trains, trucks. And that's not going to be easy. Or cheap.

PAM

Them's the breaks.

MARK

Personally, I'm glad. If it's declining the air quality, and you say it is, then the silo should be moved. It's just, Mr. Mason's not going to be happy. Question. What happens if he decides not to move it?

PAM

He'll have to pay annual fines until the silo comes down.

MARK

It's always the costs, you know? Yes, it needs to be moved, but then there's money spent building a new tower, restructuring the roads, the train tracks. I just hope this messenger doesn't get shot.

PAM

Well, Mark... A good liaison's gonna report back with a problem in one hand and a solution in the other.

As Mark and Pam talk on one side of the stage, Cathy enters with a cell phone and piece of paper and stands by the bench.

CATHY

Aw man, voice mail. Okay.

(into phone)

Rachel! I only have a minute before class, but you gotta hear this. The school just got a statement from USA Energy. It says they're going to -- where is it -- oh yeah:

(reading from paper)

They're going to "comply with the DEP suggestion and take action to reduce emissions allegedly created by the coal tower." Wanted you to know! Hey, I gotta go, but let's get together and celebrate.

Cathy hangs up, exchanges the phone for the fairy tale storybook, and moves downstage to address the audience/class as from the opening. The two scenes overlap and play simultaneously.

PAM

So you got a report from us that emissions are currently unacceptable.

CATHY

So we've all read the story, and now we get to talk about it. And if a story's really good, you might notice that it's talking to you.

PAM

So you can move the silo...

CATHY

And this one talks to me. Who's the hero? Jack.

MARK

And clean the air but pay the price.

CATHY

And what does Jack want? He wants the best for his family. For his village.

PAM

Or you can leave the silo where it is...

CATHY

And he's willing to fight this big giant to save others.

MARK

(Realizing)

But still address the problem.

As Cathy talks, Pam exits and Mark arrives downstage opposite her, holding a press release and also facing the audience.

CATHY

So what does Jack's story tell us? I want every one of you to realize something. If you hold true to your values, if you fight for what you really believe in --

MARK

(Reading from paper)

"For immediate release. In an effort to improve the health and well-being of the community of Sundial, USA Energy Company has decided to fit its storage silo with a newly created filtering material that will reduce potentially harmful air emissions by seventy percent."

CATHY

Then I'm telling you: you can accomplish anything.

Cathy smiles at her students, and the smile stays frozen as Mark concludes.

MARK

"Because this improvement is compliant with standards defined by the Department of Environmental Protection, the DEP will allow us to build two additional silos at the base of Coal Run Road. This is great news for all of us. When we expand at USA Energy, that means more jobs, more coal, and more money going right into the local economy. Thank you, West Virginia!"

Cathy and Mark smile at the audience as the lights fade to black.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Lights rise on Cathy and Ben, sitting on a truck cab seat downstage center. Cathy is on the passenger side. They look into the audience.

The purple-blue of twilight tints the background. The two take a moment.

BEN

So there you go. I don't know what you were expectin' to see.

CATHY

It's so... immense.

BEN

Yeah.

CATHY

And so dark.

BEN

We're lookin' at it at eight o'clock at night. If you see it in the day, it's --

CATHY

(Finishing the sentence)

So much prettier.

BEN

Yeah. So. There's the lake of slurry you've been beggin' me to show you.

(Pause.)

Happy Anniversary!

CATHY

I know you think I'm crazy, wanting to see this. But the fact that you were willing to sneak me in, bring me up here? Well, it means a lot.

BEN

We could'a done a lot of other stuff instead of coming here. Dinner at The Corral or drive into Beckley, see a movie.

Cathy shifts over to Ben, leaning on him.

CATHY

You're here with me. That's romantic enough.

BEN

Yeah, sure. We could even be at a casino right now.

CATHY

So tell me. Honestly. When you look at this lake, what do you see?

BEN

I see a business. I see my job. Not just me, but my father, my cousins, Mike Stempler, Sammy Romano. Half the people you know, all the people I know. We all work here. That's our job. And when... Aw, forget it.

CATHY

What were you going to say?

BEN

When you run around saying that my company is polluting the air, that's an attack on me and my friends and everything we do.

CATHY

I'm not attacking you, that's not what I'm doing.

BEN

Of course it is. Like we're not up here killin' ourselves to provide for our families.

CATHY

Look at the words you just used.

BEN

Don't treat me like one of your second-graders. Here's another thing. Yeah, it's a slurry lake caused by on-site coal refinement, and it's right next door to us, but you know what? It's not the only one in the world. It's certainly not the only one in West Virginia. There's hundreds around, okay?

CATHY

That's comforting.

BEN

There's slurry lakes because that's what happens when you mine and process coal. This is the business. The wacko activists gotta understand: we're not out to get you, we're not trying to poison the world, we're just trying to do our job. Do you understand that?

CATHY

I am not accusing you --

BEN

Do you understand what I'm saying??

CATHY

Yes!

Okay then!

BEN

Frustrated with each other, Ben and Cathy stare out front. A beat.

Ben reaches behind the seat, brings up a wrapped bouquet of flowers, holds them out to Cathy. He is not mad, just somewhere between embarrassed and frustrated.

Cathy takes the flowers.

Thank you.

CATHY

I don't like fighting with you.

BEN

Me neither. But I think this is something worth talking out.

CATHY

Why do we have to talk about this all the time?

BEN

Because talking can help solve problems.

CATHY

This lake's not causing any problems for anyone. It's just sittin' there.

BEN

Ben twists his body around, fumbles behind the seat again.

What else you got back there? A box of chocolates?

CATHY

Ben hooks the plastic net of a six-pack and pulls it to him. A single can of beer dangles from it, and he unhooks it.

Why'd you bring that?

CATHY

It's left over from Joey Holloway's fishing trip. And I need a beer.

BEN

Ben, you're driving.

CATHY

BEN

Right now I'm parked.

He pops the top.

CATHY

You're not drinking that.

BEN

I can if I want, Mrs. Miller. Kee-ristmas.

Ben takes a drink. Cathy glares at him. He brings the can up again, staring back defiantly at Cathy, then caves and sighs in frustration.

CATHY

Gabbie's been running around the house, saying that, you know.

BEN

What?

CATHY

"Kee-ristmas."

BEN

You think she got it from me?

CATHY

Of course! Who the hell else says it around here?

Cathy grabs Ben's beer and takes a big drink.

BEN

I stopped cussin' 'cause of her, you know. So now I got all these silly substitute words. Shhhugar. Fudge. Glassbowl.

CATHY

Of course I don't want to cause problems for you or any of the miners. But Benny, we got to keep thinking about Gabbie and everyone else who's living here. And the truth is, the company you work for is polluting the town.

Ben takes the beer back. The can will pass back and forth as they talk.

BEN

That's not true.

CATHY

There's-- Ben! Think about it! The company can't just do what it wants to if it harms the environment. It's gotta be held accountable.

BEN

It already is! The government or whatever is already strangling it with regulations.

CATHY

"The government" gave them permission to build three silos where there shouldn't be any silos at all.

BEN

Next you'll be going after this lake. And who is this lake hurting, Cathy? No one! It's ugly, but it's not polluting anything.

CATHY

No, but it can. This lake, this... thing... is twenty feet above an elementary school. It sits three hundred yards away from the river, which is connected to our wells. A few layers of plastic lining is the only thing separating poisonous black slurry from the bedrock beneath it. And because of mountain-top removal mining, you are blasting into the earth to uncover the coal veins, correct? Ben?

BEN

Not me personally. I just drive the digger.

CATHY

Well, the company is. And that containment wall -- What, maybe two, two-and-a-half feet thick -- keeps the black lake from pouring into the river and flooding the school.

BEN

Yeah, yeah. But I'm saying, we've been blasting. Nothing's happened.

CATHY

And I'm saying, why do we have to wait until something happens before we act on a problem?

Ben takes the beer can back, shakes it, turns it upside down. Empty.

BEN

I had three sips.

CATHY

So you're well under the limit, I guess.

Cathy leans over and rests her head on Ben's shoulder. He puts his arm around her. A nice moment.

CATHY

Let's find a nicer view. Thanks for the flowers.

BEN

Yeah, no problem.

CATHY

You ready to go, handsome?

BEN

Promise me. Give up this activist stuff. I'm asking ya. Give it up.

Cathy searches for something to say. Ben waits, but the promise doesn't materialize. Frustrated, Ben starts the truck as Cathy turns away, angered by the missed connection and at herself.

Lights transition, the seats move off, and Ben and Cathy exit.

Lights up on the kitchen table where DOTTIE HAYSGOOD, 50s, (played by the actor playing Rachel) sits. As Dottie talks, Eileen brings over two mugs of coffee, placing one in front of Dottie, and sits.

DOTTIE

(In mid-conversation)

And it's got this little side closet that looks like a closet but when you open it up a mattress bed falls out and it just fits without hittin' the other side.

(Demonstrating w/hand gestures)

It's like... WHOOSH!! WHUUUUUMP!!

EILEEN

Not so loud, my granddaughter's napping in the bedroom.

DOTTIE

Oh, sorry. It's like

(softer)

Whoosh. Whuuump. And of course, when you're done it just folds back into the closet again and you're ready for another day. The whole inside's filled with things like that, mechanics, I guess you'd call 'em.

EILEEN

(Not really interested)

Is that right?

DOTTIE

The miracles found in an RV. All that engineering. Eugene, my youngest, is fascinated by it all. Walks around in there with a tape measure, measuring things.

EILEEN

Oh yeah?

DOTTIE

That's right. An engineering marvel, the modern Airstream Deluxe RV.

EILEEN

I see it sittin' out in the yard every time I drive by.

DOTTIE

It's a great investment, if you ask me.

EILEEN

Really? The best way to spend your money?

DOTTIE

No regrets. I sing its praises, me and Eugene. But that's not why I'm here.

EILEEN

So why are you here, Dot?

DOTTIE

Well, we've been neighbors now for goin' on 30 years, and I wanted to share my good news. We're plannin' it for next month, October 12th. That's Ray's birthday. On that morning, we're getting into that Airstream Deluxe and we are driving to Phoenix, Arizona!

EILEEN

Who's doing that?

DOTTIE

All of us! The whole family. The kids all want to come with, Jack and Crystal now that she's divorced and little Eugene. We got enough room in there, and they're all ready to see a different part of the country.

EILEEN

So you're goin' on a vacation?

DOTTIE

Well, no. I mean, we're movin'. Ray and me'd been talkin' about movin' somewhere else for years now.

But you know, you wait too long and then you lose your chance to do it. And then you're sorry. So we're gonna move somewhere else, all of us.

EILEEN

To Phoenix, Arizona.

DOTTIE

That's right.

EILEEN

Who do you know in Arizona?

DOTTIE

Not a soul!

EILEEN

Dot, that doesn't sound like a very thought-out plan.

DOTTIE

No, everyone's excited as can be! The boys see it as a way to get out of the mine, Crystal likes it 'cause it gets her closer to California and the movie-star life.

EILEEN

But why Phoenix?

DOTTIE

Well, that's Ray. Even though he's never been past the Mississippi, ever since he was a kid, he loved the Sierras, any landscape with red rock and cactuses and señoritas. He read every Zane Grey western he could get his hands on, and he never missed a cowboy picture at the drive-in. And I guess he told me and the kids why he wanted to see Phoenix so often that it started to grow on us too.

EILEEN

I don't know, that seems kind of foolish, packing everything up and moving someplace you've never been to.

DOTTIE

I don't know, Eileen. Sometimes I think it's foolish staying where I've been for as long as I have.

EILEEN

C'mon, this is your home. You grew up here.

DOTTIE

Doesn't mean I have to stay.

EILEEN

Here you got beautiful land, good people, seasons that make you know you're movin' through the year. And what does Arizona have? Deserts and Mexicans.

DOTTIE

Eileen. I came here to share some good news. I didn't expect an argument about it.

EILEEN

No. It's just...

DOTTIE

What?

EILEEN

Nothin'. So you gonna sell your house?

DOTTIE

Yeah, we'll put it up, but... Who'd move to Sundial to start a life?

EILEEN

You and Ray were there for thirty years.

DOTTIE

Yeah. And now it's time to move on. Anyway, I wanted to let you know. Me and the kids, we're lookin' forward to it, and we haven't looked forward to somethin' in a long time. Thanks for the coffee.

Dottie rises, starts to exit. She stops at Eileen's words, which are said to her back.

EILEEN

It's just: I think you're runnin' away. Like a coward. I think real West Virginia people know where their home is. They live here, they work here, and they die here. And people here know hardship: that's in our history. And the real people here don't run away. They stay and they keep on. 'Cause this is our home.

Eileen stares at Dottie. A beat, then Dottie turns, faces Eileen.

DOTTIE

That's your opinion, then.

EILEEN

Yeah it is.

DOTTIE

We started looking at RV's in 2004, me and Ray, when the kids were still in high school. And every year Ray would say, "Let's wait, get a little more saved up in the bank first." So we'd wait, and he'd go back to work at the mine, and I'd watch those West Virginia seasons pass.

And then he got the diagnosis, and then he was in Stage Four, and then we were putting him in the ground at Marsh Fork Cemetery. And with his death benefit we could finally afford the down payment on the RV. So yeah, we're all runnin' away. And I wish to God we had the sense to run away ten years earlier.

Dottie exits. Eileen stays at the table and becomes a shadow silhouette as lights transition.

Cathy enters and stands downstage, holding out a clipboard. First she addresses imagined people who are passing by.

CATHY

(to passerby)

Hello, can I have a minute of your time?

(passerby leaves; to another)

If I can talk to you for a second about USA Energy...

She sees PASSERBY 1 (played by the actor playing Mark) enter and start to walk past her.

CATHY

Did you know there's a giant lake of poison in the hills above this town?

PASSERBY 1

What? Poison?

CATHY

It's full of toxic oil that's the product of on-site coal refining by USA Energy.

PASSERBY 1

That doesn't seem... safe.

CATHY

It doesn't, really, does it?

PASSERBY 1

But it's part of the coal site, right? I mean, it's not in the town.

CATHY

No, not yet. But active blasting on the site might weaken the dam that holds it all in place. And here's the question I want to ask you... What's your name, please?

PASSERBY 1

Jonathan.

CATHY

Here's what I want to ask you, Jonathan: why should we wait until a disaster happens before we act to protect Sundial? By signing this petition we would require the town council to consider whether the mining site should move away from the community and out of reach of our water source.

PASSERBY 1

Well, yeah, I think that's... something good to ask about.

CATHY

Then would you sign your name?

PASSERBY 1

Yeah, okay.

Passerby 1 signs.

CATHY

Thanks very much.

PASSERBY 1

All right. Good luck.

Passerby 1 leaves and PASSERBY 2, another man (played by the actor playing Donnie), enters.

CATHY

Sir, do you love the community of Sundial?

PASSERBY 2

Yeah, I love it.

CATHY

Would you take a minute to sign this petition and help protect our town?

PASSERBY 2

Protect it from what?

CATHY

From the harmful by-products caused by coal extraction and refining going on at the mining site.

PASSERBY 2

Let me see that.

Passerby 2 takes the clipboard, reads through the list of names. Cathy watches uncomfortably.

CATHY

All those people who signed are worried about the air and water quality in Sundial. If we don't take steps to address the problems, we could see our community turn into an unlivable ghost town.

PASSERBY 2

So you don't like what the company's doing?

CATHY

We're concerned. Will you give me that back, please?

PASSERBY 2

(hanging onto clipboard)

This? It's interesting. I recognize two--

(sees another name)

Three names on this list here. These are people who've been in Sundial as long as I have. People who have worked the mines. People who should know better than to encourage crap like this.

CATHY

This is important to us. Having a safer town is worth the trouble. Now I want that list back.

PASSERBY 2

Lady, that's my job you're talkin' about. You shut them down, and me and my friends are out of work.

CATHY

I'm not trying to hurt anyone's job. My husband works at the site, too. We're just trying to get them to be more responsible to the community!

PASSERBY 2

(Quietly menacing)

Your husband works there? Lady, who the hell are you? And who's your husband? I'd really love to know.

CATHY

(Shaken)

That's not... That's none of your business.

PASSERBY 2

Oh, it is. That's all of my business. Maybe I should have a talk with your husband. What's his name?

CATHY

Look, this is me, not him...

Passerby 2 looks at the petition list.

PASSERBY 2

I bet you're the first one to sign up, in big letters here. Cathy Miller. Miller. Maybe Ben Miller, drives a digger? Is that him?

CATHY

Give me. That. List. Back.

PASSERBY 2

Here's the thing, Cathy Miller. If you're gettin' vocal about runnin' the coal companies out of West Virginia, then maybe us supporters should start speakin' up too.

Passerby 2 tears up the list, drops the fragments on the ground.

PASSERBY 2

If you're smart, you'd leave it alone.

Passerby 2 exits. Cathy, trembling a little, misty eyed, takes a moment. Then she bends down, picks up the fragments, clips them under a new petition sheet on the clipboard. She takes a breath, then tries again, shaky at first, calling out to imagined passersby.

CATHY

Would you sign a petition to improve Sundial?

(To another)

Excuse me, do you have a minute to talk about our town?

(And another)

Our town's in trouble, but there's a way to make it better...

Lights stay on Cathy, but rise again on Eileen, who has been seated upstage at the kitchen table throughout the previous scene. She stands to collect the coffee mugs as Cathy continues to call to people.

CATHY

If we all got together and demanded that the energy company fixed some of the problems it's causing this community... We need to be heard...

A COUGHING SOUND is heard offstage left. Cathy doesn't respond, but Eileen hears it and freezes.

EILEEN

Donnie?

CATHY

That's the only way our town has a chance. We need to get our message out there, make them listen to us...

Another COUGH. Eileen's face shows fear.

EILEEN

(Calling out)

GABBIE?

CATHY

I know it's tough, but our priority has to be the health of this town. We need to do something before it's too late.

A third COUGH. Eileen hurries to the offstage bedroom at left, calling, panicked.

EILEEN

Gabbie Girl!! Gabbie, WHAT'S WRONG??

Eileen exits.

Lights transition and Cathy crosses to the playground bench, sits. She stares out, thinking, fragile.

A moment, and then Mark enters from right and quietly crosses to her. A beat, and then Cathy notices him.

CATHY

Another closed meeting with the principal?

MARK

No. I came looking for you.

CATHY

Here I am. Just me and the silos.

MARK

Can I join you on the bench?

CATHY

Oh, why not? Long as you don't mind getting your clothes dirty.

Mark sits beside her.

MARK

So. I understand you've created a petition asking the town council to reconsider the mine's site location.

CATHY

That's right. You're on top of us, you know that? It's like the whole community is living in your company's shadow, always in the dark. And you know what I've come to realize? That's the way you guys like it.

MARK

We want nothing but good for this town. It seems pretty inaccurate to accuse an energy company of trafficking in shadows and darkness.

CATHY

What do you want, Mark? Why are you looking for me?

MARK

Like I said: that petition.

CATHY

Yeah? Are you guys worried about it, what it could do?

MARK

No, Cathy. It's the opposite. I came to tell you to forget about it.

Cathy studies Mark, who seems to be sincere.

CATHY

You've got some nerve.

MARK

I don't mean any insult, but I think your time would be better spent doing something else.

CATHY

Listen: I can do what I want to raise awareness, despite what you and your company suggest I do.

MARK

True.

CATHY

So thanks for the advice, but the petition is going forward.

MARK

Okay. Let's take best-case scenario. You get the three hundred required signatures to open a motion among the council -- How close to three hundred are you, by the way?

CATHY

Close enough.

MARK

Fine. So you present the petition, you make the motion asking the council to consider requiring the site to move outside of the town--

CATHY

Away from the schools and the river and the water supply.

MARK

And you know what the council's gonna do? Reject the motion without debate.

CATHY

That's what you'd like.

MARK

Cathy. That's what will happen. And you know why. USA Energy is the largest employer in the county, the only one providing more than two hundred jobs to people around here, and many don't have the skills or the advanced education to do anything else. Now, with the product extracted from this site, mining operations in Sundial could continue for another ten years or more.

CATHY

Making your boss millions of dollars in profits.

MARK

And providing hundreds of thousands of dollars of income to people who need it.

Cathy stands; Mark follows suit.

CATHY

So what? You want me to just roll over and give up?

MARK

No. I just want you to recognize what the company brings to Sundial. The good and the bad.

CATHY

I've certainly learned about the bad! Tell me something, does your boss, does Mr. Bill Mason know about the bad?

MARK

Of course. And we address it. We meet all government regulations and safety standards. We do everything that's required of us.

CATHY

Well, you need to do more.

MARK

There is no utopia to be found in business, you know that? Whether it's farming or manufacturing or coal mining. It's a myth. There's no perfect eco-friendly business model for anything in the real world. If you want to make a product, you're gonna get dirty. The only option is to do the best you can. And I believe--

CATHY

I don't care what you--

MARK

(A flash of frustration)

Shut up and listen for once!

(Honest and sincere)

I believe that we are doing the best we can at USA Energy. I truly believe that. We're never gonna be able to please everyone, and that's okay. But we are the best thing to happen to this community.

A beat; then:

CATHY

Wow. And here's what I believe. That particular point of view, about how Big Coal is our saviour bestowing its gifts on poverty-stricken and backwards Appalachia? That's poison every bit as toxic as whatever spills out of your work site.

Another beat.

MARK

Are we done?

CATHY

Not me. I'm just gettin' started.

Cathy and Mark stare at each other.
Lights transition. Both exit to separate sides.

Rachel Tamm enters, holding a cell phone, waiting for the beep.

RACHEL

(Into phone)

Hi. Cath, it's Rachel. I just got the email you sent me. I'm a little, uh, confused. This is a press release? Have you already sent this out? I mean, is this happening? 'Cause you talk about a demonstration outside of the company's mining site. I just-- I didn't know you were doing this. And these things can get...ugly, you know? So, I guess... I'm worried, is what I'm saying. I'd like to talk to you and, uh... learn some more about this. Okay? So call me back when you can. Bye, Cathy.

Rachel hangs up and exits.

Cathy enters, takes her place downstage and holds out a one-page flyer announcing the demonstration. The flyer is a distinctive bright yellow, easy to spot.

As imagined people walk by, Cathy hands out the flyer. Some people "take" the paper, and Cathy mimes taking another from the pile to hold out.

CATHY

There's a demonstration this Saturday. At the entrance of USA Energy's mining site on Coal Run Road. Please join us. Here's some details.

(Handing out a flyer; to another person)

Hi. Join us in a demonstration this Saturday. Let's keep the citizens of Sundial healthy.

(To another person)

Here you go, thanks. Demonstration this Saturday.

Ben enters and stops upstage of Cathy. He watches for a minute; Cathy does not see him. A patch and bandage cover Ben's left temple.

CATHY

Please join us, make a difference. We meet at the entrance of the mining site. Right now, Bill Mason and that company's not listening to us. But we have to be heard.

Ben moves to Cathy, takes the flyer she hands out, looks at her. Cathy is shocked both by his presence and by the bandage.

CATHY

Ben! What--?

BEN

(Holding the flyer accusingly)

What is this??

CATHY

It's for the... demonstration. I was gonna tell you. What happened to your head?

BEN

This is it. You're done. Let's go.

CATHY

No, I have to do this.

BEN

You're done! GO! GET HOME!

CATHY

No! This is important!

BEN

GO! NOW!

CATHY

Stop it! What are you doing? Stop!!

With his arms and body, Ben forces Cathy left. Cathy struggles, but Ben overpowers her, and the two exit, Ben herding her off.

An empty stage for a moment; uncomfortable silence. Then, Eileen enters and sits at the kitchen table. She picks up a yellow flyer, reads.

Cathy enters, sits. She does not look well. Eileen holds out the flyer.

EILEEN

Is this yours?

CATHY

I don't know any more. No. It's not worth it.

EILEEN

Not worth it.

CATHY

Ben and I just had an awful fight. Really bad. I don't know if we can get past this. People in this town hate me, and they're taking it out on the people I love. Did you know some guy at work, Wayne somebody, hit Ben in the head with a piece of wood?

EILEEN

Yeah, I know. I cleaned him up, put a bandage on it when he got home.

CATHY

That's bad, but then the stuff he said... That I said to him... And I'm losing my friends. Rachel, my roommate in college, she was helping me at first, and now... She thinks I've gone too far. I haven't even called her back, I'm scared to talk to her. Scared she'll be disappointed in me.

EILEEN

She's worried about you.

CATHY

God, Eileen, I don't know. I'm done. I wanted to improve life in this town, but it's too much to take on.

EILEEN

You're forgettin' what you're fightin' for.

CATHY

No. I'm saying that fighting has gotten me nowhere. I'm done. I want to pick up my daughter and go home and wait for Ben to get back from whatever bar he's at.

A pause. Cathy notices Eileen is unusually still.

CATHY

Eileen? What's wrong?

Another pause, then:

EILEEN

I was here in the kitchen. Gabbie was in the bedroom, taking her nap. Dottie from next door had just come over. Gabbie was... I thought she was asleep.

CATHY

Did something happen?

EILEEN

(reliving the memory)

It was just... odd. Because I heard Donnie coughing in the bedroom. But I knew Donnie was down at the mine, so he couldn't be here. But that was his cough. And it took me a second... that's not Donnie. That's Gabbie Girl. And I got really scared. God, I run to that bedroom. And Gabbie... Well, she's up and she's got Donnie's bathrobe on and she looks up at me. I said, "What's wrong?" She said, "Nothing." Said she's just trying to be like her grandpa. "'Cause Grandpa has a funny cough."

(A beat)

Well. Okay. But when I heard Donnie's cough coming from that little girl... Well, my heart broke. Donnie's a tough buzzard, you know? And the way he's lived his life -- working the mine, the smoking -- that's his choice. And when my son went to work in the mine too, well... I didn't want that. But Ben's got his own choices to make. But my granddaughter...

Eileen shakes her head slowly, coming to the realization.

EILEEN

No. Cathy, no. She deserves better. Our family's lived here our whole life, this is where we belong. I'm proud of my life here.

CATHY

I know.

EILEEN

But for my little Gabbie girl just starting her life: Cathy, you gotta get her out of this town.

A beat as the weight of Eileen's admission hits Cathy.

CATHY

I don't want to take her away from here. Eileen. Let's do something else. Let's make this a town worth living in.

Cathy holds out the yellow flyer to Eileen, and after a moment, Eileen takes it. Cathy and Eileen exit.

Lights transition as THREE SUPPORTERS of USA Energy stand behind a cordon on one side of the stage. They bristle with energy, an undercurrent of anger running through their words.

A REPORTER (face obscured by shoulder-held news camera and played by actor playing BEN) stands in front of the cordon recording them.

SUPPORTER 1

Yeah, I support the energy companies. I don't understand why people have to attack hard-working people who are just trying to make a living. You want to shut down the coal industry, you're gonna put thousands of West Virginians out of work.

SUPPORTER 2

In America, there's something called free enterprise. And if a business is run right and if it's operating in a free market, then it's gonna make a profit. But this... woman... doesn't want the business to succeed.

SUPPORTER 1

The president we got don't want that either.

SUPPORTER 3

(Played by "Rachel" actor)

You know, my husband's a miner, we've got three kids, so why attack us? Some people just have nothing better to do.

Cathy enters and stands on the opposite side of the stage, Eileen standing uncomfortably behind her. A couple BOOS and CATCALLS from the Supporters.

CATHY

Listen, please. I am here today to ask for changes in the way that USA Energy is practicing its coal extraction and cleaning. Right now, it's poisoning the air and it's putting our elementary school and our water and our children at risk. And I really don't know how anyone in our community can turn a blind eye to that.

SUPPORTER 2

(Calling out)

Our water's fine. Our kids are fine!

CATHY

And I'm fighting to keep it that way! Let's make sure that poison from the chemicals used to clean the coal won't leak into our creeks and rivers. Let's have site and air inspections more than once every ten years.

SUPPORTER 1

The government solves everything!

CATHY

No, I just want this company to meet certain standards so it can safely operate within our community.

SUPPORTER 3

You're the one who's unsafe to the community! Maybe you should pack up and leave.

Some "Yeah!" and shouts from the Supporters. The fight goes out of Cathy. She turns away, and Eileen puts her arms around her, whispers something into her ear.

Cathy takes a breath and returns.

CATHY

I wanted to present these concerns in private to Bill Mason, the owner and executive director of USA Energy. I still do. But since he refuses to meet with me, this demonstration at the front entrance of the mining site gives me a chance to present my case to everyone. I'm glad to see the press here today. Consider this a public appeal.

The Reporter with camera pushes closer. Cathy addresses the camera.

CATHY

Mr. Mason. My name is Cathy Miller, I teach second grade at Sundial Elementary School. I love the school; I love my husband and my little girl, who will be going there in three years. And like most people, I didn't think about much in my life that didn't directly concern me.

As Cathy's speech continues, the lights transition. The Supporters slowly leave, striking the cordon. The Reporter exits. Eileen leaves last. The transition should allow the speech to continue uninterrupted.

CATHY

But something happened. I looked out my window one day and saw this giant tower that I could no longer ignore. I had to deal with it. This tower was covering my school in a fine black soot. And when I tried to get the tower cut down, two more popped up instead.

And that's the thing about becoming aware of what's around you: you start noticing all the problems. Convoys of coal trucks and railroad cars rumbling past children walking to go home. Explosion mining gradually changing the beautiful hills of my childhood to flattened rock quarries. And a large lake of poison above us, with the school and the people below.

These are all byproducts of your line of business: I understand.

These practices meet with current EPA and DEP guidelines and are considered legal: I understand.

But here's the thing: as a business owner getting rich off of land that you don't really own and by using employees who live here, who work and sweat for you, and who are not getting rich like you, you owe it to this community to be responsible. To the environment. To your workers. To the children who are going to Sundial Elementary and to the families who love them.

Silently, a large man in collar shirt and tie enters and stands stock still, listening as Cathy continues. This is BILL MASON.

Mark enters after him, stands behind him, listens.

CATHY

I'm asking you, Bill Mason, to act as a responsible member of this community.

I'm asking your company to move its operations away from Sundial Elementary School, which was built and opened twelve years before USA Energy arrived. I'm asking you to drain off, contain, and close the coal slurry lake that threatens to leak and flood the school. I know those are costly actions that will affect the community, but ultimately I think those changes will make our school and our town healthier. And I think you owe us that much.

The three are now in a conference room.

MARK

Cathy, this is Bill Mason. He wanted to meet you.

CATHY

Thank you for seeing me.

BILL

What you said out there.

CATHY

Uh-huh.

BILL

It's a bunch of bullshit.

CATHY

Well, that's... blunt.

BILL

I'm blunt. You want polite conversation, you talk to this guy.

CATHY

So nothing I said out there has any merit?

BILL

It's unrealistic. We're not shutting down the site, we're not moving anything. We can't. We're committed by contract to work this section of the Marcellus strip. You understand? I spent three years building this company, raising funds, and wading through a mountain of paperwork and red tape to mine here, and I will not shut that down just because someone from the town asks me to.

CATHY

Profits before people.

BILL

If that's the simple way you want to see it, fine. But the truth is, I'm realistic. Of course I want what's best for my workers. I want them safe, I want them healthy. But mining is dirty work, and there's not a man working here who doesn't know that.

CATHY

My father-in-law is Donnie Miller, he spends forty-eight hours a week working for you, and he's got a cough that will not let him go. Could be the coal dust, right?

MARK

Cathy.

BILL

Could be. Could also be the two packs of Parliament Lights he's been smoking since Day One.

CATHY

And my husband's down there, breathing this toxic air --

BILL

He doesn't have to work here, you know that. If he objects to the working conditions, he can find the door.

MARK

Listen, let's try to talk this through. It's not about people leaving, and it's not about shutting down the mining.

CATHY

(To Bill)

Be responsible. Give the children back a school that's clean and safe, like it was before you showed up.

BILL

(Weighing the words)

"Clean and safe." By whose definition?

CATHY

By mine. And the parents of the children I teach. And the community.

BILL

Because I think most people in this town believe our site is clean and safe. And with good reason. Every regulation has been met, every single violation has been made right. Clean and safe and approved by the DEP, and the citizens know it.

CATHY

The citizens want more.

BILL

You want more. That's not the same thing. Have you ever thought that maybe you're the one who doesn't belong in this town?

CATHY

How dare you say that. This is my home.

BILL

Then act like it. Stop complaining about it all the time.

CATHY

I'm speaking for the community.

BILL

That's what you keep saying. How true is that? That petition, to get us to move the mining site: how many signatures did you collect?

(To Mark)

How many did she need?

MARK

Three hundred.

BILL

So how many did you get, Mrs. Miller? We're being truthful, you and me.

CATHY

That's not the point.

BILL

How many?

CATHY

(Wounded pride)

Twenty-five.

BILL

The voice of the community. You've got no power.

CATHY

But you're still meeting with me.

BILL

To talk sense, to put an end to this. That demonstration outside doesn't do anyone any good. I want you to shut it down.

CATHY

You don't like the publicity.

BILL

I can weather it. Probably better than you. We're done, Mrs. Miller. Thank you. Mark.

CATHY

As long as the site keeps digging away above the elementary school, the profits will continue.

BILL

That is the way coal mining works, yes.

CATHY

My husband keeps saying that I shouldn't worry about what could happen. "Why move the slurry lake if it's not leaking now?"

BILL

It's a valid point.

CATHY

So is this: if you don't do anything and a day or a month or a year later the leak happens, and wells get poisoned and people get sick, what happens to your company's profits?

MARK

You're talking about cost risk analysis.

CATHY

Sure. So think it through. A little cost now to fix a potential problem weighed against major money to handle the damage, pay the fines, settle the lawsuits, and get your reputation back if something happens later.

BILL

But that's not going to happen.

CATHY

It's already happening. My second graders showing signs of asthma, having trouble breathing. The tap water tasting a lot worse than it did just two years ago. And do you really want to face the verdict of a West Virginia jury deciding on the amount of punitive damages for every child who might get sick from your business?

MARK

This is all a giant "what if."

CATHY

Yes, it's a "what if." It might never happen. But look hard. Look at what's already happening in this town. And think again: a little cost now or major money down the road?

BILL

Even so, I've told you: I am not going to move this site.

Cathy holds out a couple pages of documents. Bill takes them, reads.

CATHY

If you won't move the mining, then you should move the school.

BILL

(Skimming the documents)

Seriously? This company has zero responsibility to build a new school.

CATHY

Sundial Elementary was already there. And then you started mining above it.

MARK

(Skimming the documents Bill holds)

Wait, you're proposing USA Energy funds a new school in a new location?

CATHY

Either you move the site or you move the school. Or you wait and go to court. Because it won't be just one child getting sick. And each lawsuit will eat into your profits.

BILL

This proposal's ten and a half million dollars for the new school.

CATHY

And your company has passed a hundred million dollars in profits from mining on this land. Of course, you're welcome to get estimates from other contractors as well, but ten and a half million is the lowest bid we received.

BILL

I've gotta think about this.

CATHY

Like I said: a little cost now or a great cost later.

BILL

Mark?

MARK

Funding a school. It's a pre-emptive move. A business write-off. And it's a great opportunity for publicity: giving back to the community, and all that.

CATHY

But most of all, it would be the right thing to do.

MARK

It's not a bad solution.

BILL

There's details to be worked out.

CATHY

I know. But I want your word. This is important. Say you'll fund a new school away from the silos, away from the mine.

BILL

If I do this... The company would agree to provide some of the funding, but the remainder needs to come from the town. The community's got to contribute too. We shouldn't be stuck with the whole bill.

CATHY

That's a yes? USA Energy will support a new elementary school?

BILL

For now, yes. But it's all dependent on the details. Let me make some calls. Mark, show this lady out. And then you need to draft a press release.

Bill exits.

CATHY

(To Mark)

It's fine. I can find my way out.

MARK

Oh no. You're not running around this site on your own. I'm going to call for an employee to escort you.

Mark smiles, sincere.

MARK

(Genuine)

Congratulations, Cathy. You made a difference.

As Mark exits right, Ben enters left. He wears his miner's uniform and still wears the bandage. Ben looks contrite. Cathy smiles.

BEN

Come on. I'm supposed to take you outta here.

Cathy crosses to Ben. They walk slowly downstage.

CATHY

Is your forehead okay?

BEN

Yeah.

CATHY

Did that Wayne guy get in trouble?

BEN

No. I mean, Mikey Stempler punched him in the ear as payback, but that was it.

CATHY

What is his last name, this Wayne guy?

BEN

Forget it. It doesn't matter.

CATHY

It does. I want to know.

BEN

Just forget it, all right? The guy's a glassbowl.

A pause. The two stop.

BEN

So where are we at?

Cathy faces him, excited and happy.

CATHY

Ben, I think Bill Mason's gonna pay to build a new school away from the mine. I finally got them to admit they were wrong!

BEN

(Very underwhelming)

Oh.

CATHY

"Oh?!" What'dya mean? That's what I've been fighting for! This is important!

BEN

I meant, where are we at, you and me. 'Cause I thought that was important too.

CATHY

Of course. It is. We'll work it out, Ben. We always do.

BEN

Here's the gate.

Ben waits while Cathy steps over a threshold. She turns back; there is now distance between them.

CATHY

We'll work it out, right?

BEN
We've been fightin' so much, lately. I hate that.

CATHY
We'll talk it through. Stop worrying.

BEN
(Soberly, a little sadly)
Are you done with all this stuff?

Cathy does not understand Ben's attitude. She shakes her head uncomprehendingly, trying to convince him.

CATHY
Baby, we won.

A pause.

BEN
I gotta go back to work now.

Ben begins to exit. Cathy's words don't stop his stride.

CATHY
(To Ben's back)
Oh. Okay. Be careful. I love you!

Ben is gone. Cathy takes a moment. Then she moves upstage to address the public.

CITIZENS of Sundial enter and surround Cathy.

CATHY
Everyone? Please listen. I have some great news to share! I am happy to report that Bill Mason of USA Energy has agreed to provide funding for a new elementary school to be built far away from the current mining site. This is an amazing victory for everyone in this great town. We made our case, we asked for change, and we won!

Some CHEERS and CLAPPING, and then the questions begin.

CITIZEN 1
How much is this new school gonna cost?

CATHY
Around ten million dollars.

CITIZEN 2

Will this come out of municipal taxes?

CATHY

Some of it, but USA Energy is contributing.

CITIZEN 2

So does this mean a tax increase?

CITIZEN 3

Moving the school could mean a longer commute for us. We don't have bus service.

CITIZEN 1

Where is this new location?

CATHY

Many of the specifics need to be worked out.

CITIZEN 2

So what's the timeline here?

CITIZEN 1

The council will have to vote on it.

CITIZEN 3

What about my kids at the school now? What about their health?

CITIZEN 1

I don't even know if we need this new school...

As FRUSTRATED AD-LIBS from the Citizens overlap into argument, Cathy tries to rally the crowd once more.

CATHY

People, please! Don't forget what's happened here. We came together and as a community we made our voices heard! The Giant listened to us. Don't forget that. We won!

Cathy and the Citizens freeze, the group surrounding her in a hostile tableau. Lights transition.

Mark enters, moves downstage. He addresses the audience, delivering his speech with heartfelt sincerity.

MARK

My company is committed to contributing to the growth and success of this beautiful West Virginia community. We love it here. We love the people, we love the land.

And to show our love, USA Energy is proud to donate one million dollars to the building of a brand-new elementary school. Ladies and gentlemen, I can confidently say that this is a bright day for USA Energy and for all the great citizens of Sundial.

Lights fade slowly to black.

END OF PLAY