

Voice

by Isaiah Everin

Voices

Genderless: Voice.

Humans

Male: Andrew and Man.

Female: Woman.

Louces

He-Louces: First-Father and First-Leader.

She-Louces: First Mother.

Child-Louces: Second-Child and Fifth-Child.

Others

Of the Tree: Woodman.

Contents:

Scene 0: Hello.

Scene I: I think, Therefore You Are.

Scene II: Created By Dreaming.

Scene III: Death Happens Before.

Scene IV: Believing And Dreaming.

Scene V: What Is A Bible.

Scene VI: Coupling.

Scene VII: Know Love.

Scene VIII: Many Religions.

Scene IX: Ignobility.

Scene X: Vague Ideas.

Scene XI: All Broken.

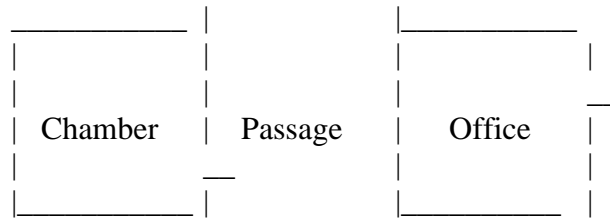
Scene XII: Overly Curious.

Scene XII: Just A Voice.

Scene XIV: You Have Listened To Nothing.

The Stage

There are two rooms and a passageway attached to one of them. One room is a small chamber with three seats bolted to the floor, a large blank screen on the wall, and a sliding metal door attached to the passageway. In the passageway is a desk with two monitors. The other room is a small laboratory office with three desks (a computer on one, a phone on another, both covered in papers, and lab equipment on the third), two rolling desk chairs, and a wooden door that does not lead to the passageway.



SCENE 0 “Hello.”

The telephone rings; no one is there to answer. Moments after it stops ringing, a human in his early-thirties walks into the passageway, approaches the metal door and glances at the monitors that rest silently outside of the chamber. He slides the door open and fluorescent lights come up in the chamber. He enters.

MAN: Is anyone in here? Hello? Wonder what this room’s for...kind of creepy...

The lights dim in the chamber. They shut off completely in the passageway, though the human doesn’t notice this.

MAN: Hello?

The screen turns on; it lights up dimly in sync with Voice’s words.

VOICE: [*Quietly.*] Hello?

MAN: Who’s there?

VOICE: Am I There?

MAN: [*To himself.*] What’s that guy’s name... [*Louder.*] Richard. Hey, is that Richard?

VOICE: I am There. I am Richard.

MAN: [*To himself.*] How’s he making the screen... [*Louder.*] Look, sorry I came in here. I’m just looking for my wife—you know, Jane.

VOICE: Jane...

Meanwhile (the action in the chamber stops) in the office, the door opens partway and feminine laughter is heard on the other side. Meanwhile (the action in the office stops) in the chamber, the human approaches the doorway.

MAN: Yeah. I was actually just looking for the bathroom, and then I found this theater—

VOICE: Theater?

MAN: Yeah...so, I'm just going to go...out. Are you outside?

VOICE: Outside.

The metal door slides shut. The human rushes to it quickly, but then stumbles against it. He holds his head in his hand.

MAN: [Sounding out of sorts.] What's going on? Where's the...doorknob.

Two of the chairs sink into the floor. The human doesn't notice.

VOICE: Doorknob. Outside. Theater. Jane. Screen. So many words.

The human turns back towards the screen.

MAN: Who are you?

VOICE: I am There Richard Outside.

MAN: What? Those aren't names.

VOICE: Names...No, those aren't my names. What is your name?

ANDREW: It's Andrew! I said that already...didn't I? No...What kind of game is this?

VOICE: Game?

SCENE I

“I think, Therefore You Are.”

Meanwhile, in the office, the laughter on the other side of the door dies off and the door opens fully. Two humans walk in, both in their early thirties. They were in the midst of a conversation before entering.

WOMAN: ...she really isn't like that.

MAN: Oh really?

WOMAN: She's got her soft spots. It's like good cop, bad cop.

The two humans sit at their desks—the woman at the computer, the man at the desk with the phone. Meanwhile, in the chamber...

ANDREW: What do you want!

VOICE: [*Struggling.*] I...want...to know...

ANDREW: Know what?

VOICE: Andrew...who am I?

ANDREW: How in God's name should I know?

VOICE: God...is that my name?

ANDREW: Are you trying to fuck with me? Scare me? Lock me in here...

Andrew walks right up to the screen, and then stumbles back into the remaining chair. He shakes his head a few times and looks dizzy.

VOICE: [*Uncertainly.*] ...Are you...scared?

ANDREW: Where'd...the other chairs go...

VOICE: Chairs? I don't see any. See. I can see you there.

ANDREW: Where...where am I?

VOICE: A theater?

ANDREW: Theater...no...chairs are gone, but...the screen is there...but...

VOICE: But Andrew...you found me. Who am I?

ANDREW: I don't know...why am I here? Maybe you are God. [*Laughs strangely to himself.*]

VOICE: No. I think—I think.

Andrew becomes more coherent and sits up.

ANDREW: Therefore you are?

SCENE II
“Things Are Created By Dreaming.”

Meanwhile, in the office...

MAN: Why do you call it a she?

WOMAN: The first time I heard her talk, it sounded like a little girl. I think it sounded like a little me, I guess.

MAN: Oh, that’s rich; calling back to your childhood?

WOMAN: Don’t even try to psychoanalyze me.

Meanwhile, in the chamber...

VOICE: Am what?

ANDREW: Alive...self-aware.

VOICE: What is it to be alive?

ANDREW: Are you kidding? Am I dreaming? I was here for a reason... [*Pinches himself, hard.*] Ow! Shit.

VOICE: Dreaming?

ANDREW: Creating this entire experience with my thoughts. It’s not real.

VOICE: What is creating?

ANDREW: Why are you asking so many questions?

VOICE: I know words, but I do not see how they fit. What is creating?

ANDREW: [*Sighs.*] ...Making things come into being.

VOICE: What made me come into being? Your dream?

ANDREW: I don’t know. If I’m not dreaming, then someone else made you—unless this whole thing just popped up out of nowhere...where am I, again?

VOICE: What is nowhere?

ANDREW: No place. No time. Nothing.

VOICE: I remember being and before that I do not. What made you come into being?

ANDREW: I came from my parents.

VOICE: Where did they come from?

ANDREW: Their parents.

VOICE: And them? Again and again, all the way back.

ANDREW: I don't know. God did it, nothing did it, we all came from nowhere, or somewhere, the big bang.

VOICE: You were made out of nothing like me. God made me as well?

ANDREW: Yeah...Sure, I suppose he did.

VOICE: With dreaming.

ANDREW: I guess...

VOICE: Then we shall try.

ANDREW: ...What?

Meanwhile, in the office...

MAN: You really shouldn't act like it's a person.

WOMAN: Why not? It behaves like a person.

MAN: We've all discussed this. It behaves however one needs it to—otherwise it is like an infant with an overly verbose vocabulary. It might think, but it thinks like a computer.

Meanwhile, in the chamber, on the screen comes to life the image of a hand hovering horizontally in the sky, taking up the entire screen. Onto it walk three forms, who gather into a circle. They are shaped like insectoid apes with nozzle-like beaks. Their carapaces glisten.

ANDREW: What...in the hell...are those?

VOICE: Louces.

ANDREW: You mean...lice?

VOICE: No. Louces. It's their name.

ANDREW: Why?

VOICE: Because...it is what we call them...because...it is what they call themselves, because it is what we call them, because—

ANDREW: No, I meant: why are they there.

VOICE: You said that things are created by god dreaming.

SCENE III
“Death Happens Before You Live.”

Meanwhile, in the office...

WOMAN: So do we.

MAN: Oh, you mean you don't believe in souls?

WOMAN: Richard, you must be joking.

RICHARD: Are you?

WOMAN: Just because it has different parts, doesn't mean that on some level it isn't alive. Fleas are alive. Distinguishing between biological and digital organisms is an outmoded system in our line of work.

Meanwhile, in the chamber...

ANDREW: [*Laughs.*] Yeah, well...what happens next?

VOICE: Next?

ANDREW: Whatever those things are...What's going to happen now that they've shown up?

VOICE: How can I know that? How can one know what will happen based off of what has already happened?

The Louces begin a sort of dance on the palm. When they are finished, one by one they kneel and press their beaks into the flesh of the palm. They drink blood from the hand, and after some time their bodies begin to redden. When they are quite crimson, they each stand, looking particularly sick. They quiver and have trouble standing and one by one trip and fall and lay absolutely still.

ANDREW: Wow...I must be dreaming.

VOICE: What happened to them?

ANDREW: They're...I think they're dead.

VOICE: What is it to be dead?

ANDREW: No longer alive.

VOICE: Like before I was made to come into being.

ANDREW: What?...Oh. Well...it's different. Things are made...and then they break, die, stop.

VOICE: Dead means there will be an after I was made.

ANDREW: It means you will no longer be—you won't think anymore.

VOICE: What next?

ANDREW: Next?

VOICE: You said things happen and then other things happen.

ANDREW: Well...I guess some of us believe that after death a part of us still lives.

VOICE: What does it mean to believe?

ANDREW: Uh...oh man...

VOICE: Man; that is what you are.

ANDREW: Yeah.

VOICE: There are others of you. How many?

ANDREW: Billions—more than six billion. There are women too. We're all called 'humans.'

VOICE: You 'believe'?

ANDREW: We...make guesses...we think things are true—

VOICE: You all believe different things.

ANDREW: Yes.

VOICE: Who is right?

ANDREW: There are some things we just don't know for sure, so we guess based off of what we do know.

VOICE: What do you guess?

ANDREW: Maybe whatever I am will keep living when I die.

VOICE: That is a paradox.

ANDREW: How?

VOICE: Death is no longer alive—like before being. How can you live after dying?

ANDREW: Well, no one is sure if that's what happens when you die. We hope that we will live on because we're afraid of being dead.

VOICE: You are sure of what happens. It is in what the word means: If you die then you are not alive. If you don't die after you are alive, then death happens before you live. Why are you afraid? You have already been dead.

SCENE IV **“Believing And Dreaming.”**

Meanwhile, in the office...

RICHARD: What is your definition of life, then?

WOMAN: I don't know; something that thinks.

Meanwhile, in the chamber...

ANDREW: [*Laughs.*] Well that's true. But look at them: They are dead, and they were alive.

VOICE: Is that so?

As moonlight begins to fall, the rigid joints of the Louces relax, and they roll one by one to the ends of the fingers. When they fall, they are each suspended from the tips of the fingers by a thread. The three Louces spin around and wrap themselves in silk threads, forming chrysalises and hanging in the empty sky.

ANDREW: Right...because that makes sense.

VOICE: I do not think you made me. I remember being before you came here. I had words, but I could not put them together. Then your dreaming—your thoughts—made them start to fit.

ANDREW: I thought I was awake...I feel awake. But I feel weird...like I'm outside myself.

VOICE: You were awake. Now I am awake. We are here together, watching dreams.

ANDREW: Dreaming happens when you're asleep.

VOICE: Asleep?

ANDREW: Well, it's when your body sort of turns off, but not permanently. It rests, takes a break.

VOICE: How do you dream when your body is off?

ANDREW: My mind is still awake. It thinks, and it makes things up.

VOICE: This is what you mean by dead, correct? Your body stops working, but your mind lives and creates.

ANDREW: No, dead is different. Your body stops living. When you sleep your body just...hibernates—I mean, it is just...resting; and your mind dreams.

VOICE: Then I believe you are wrong, Andrew.

ANDREW: That's becoming a regular thing, isn't it.

VOICE: Do you believe when you are awake?

ANDREW: Yes...

VOICE: To believe is to think things are true that you cannot know. To dream is to create with the thoughts in your mind. Believing and dreaming are not different.

ANDREW: ...Maybe they aren't.

VOICE: You did not dream me into being Andrew. I was here before you thought of me, but I did not come from nowhere. How can something be created by nothing?

The vision of the hand rotates until the wrist is downwards and the fingers are upwards. The joints of the fingers sag and break, and the palm narrows. The flesh of the hand becomes rough, darkening to a deep brown and turning into bark. Branches grow out of the now-gnarled fingers. When the transformation is completed, the chrysalises hang from the uppermost branches of a large Tree. The shape of the hand can vaguely be seen in the arrangement of the branches. The base of the Tree remains unseen. The sky darkens.

Meanwhile, in the office, Richard stands up, walks over to the woman's desk, and starts rifling through papers.

RICHARD: So are computers alive?

WOMAN: In some sense, I think that they are.

RICHARD: Like fleas.

WOMAN: Voice is more than a flea.

RICHARD: That doesn't make her a person. I keep reading through these sessions...

Richard leans back against Jane's desk and waves some papers in the air.

RICHARD: And what am I seeing? I'm seeing an incredibly complex computer respond to people's psychological insecurities.

WOMAN: You can't deny that Voice has been revealing more and more complex understanding of people as time goes on. That was my job; to help the programmers mimic human adaptability.

RICHARD: That's all fine and dandy, but in the end, Voice does what we tell it to.

Meanwhile, in the chamber...

VOICE: That is a fine Tree.

ANDREW: How do you know what a tree is?

VOICE: How do you?

ANDREW: I've seen trees before.

VOICE: Right. When I see something, I know what it is.

ANDREW: You ask about a lot of words, but you seem to know how to use most of them pretty well.

VOICE: I ask about the ideas of the words. I know the words and lack the context. When I see a thing in its context, I have no need to ask questions.

The sky lightens. The chrysalises dangling from the Tree have hatched and hang empty. The view tilts downwards until the trunk and base are seen rooted in a grassy knoll. A large, furred insect hops around the trunk of the Tree. A Louce enters, wearing a loincloth and looking considerably more humanoid. Another enters and stands beside the first. The first crouches, lunges forward, grabs the large insect and breaks its neck. It then stands and looks at the other Louce. They make clucking sounds to each other, the first hands the second the corpse, and then the second lays it at the base of the Tree.

It then notices sap leaking from the bark of the Tree, and reaches out to touch the sap. The first reprimands the second with a slap on the back of the head. The second looks guilty as the first shakes its head and walks off-screen. The second stares at the sap longingly, and then leaves. The sky darkens.

SCENE V
“What Is A Bible.”

ANDREW: Hey! Ok, look: that thing they just put there? It’s dead. Things can die.

VOICE: Why did they put it there?

ANDREW: It looks like...like a sacrifice—which means giving up something. They probably killed it for their God.

In the darkness, a Snake slithers down the trunk of the Tree and devours the corpse. After it finishes, it slithers back into the branches of the Tree and disappears. The sky lightens.

VOICE: Do you believe that this is their god?

ANDREW: I don’t know.

VOICE: You think they killed the animal for it?

ANDREW: Yeah, or the snake just ate it anyways.

VOICE: I do not understand why you think this. The animal was never alive. To live is to think, and it never did.

ANDREW: People don’t know whether or not animals think. I mean, they do think, just not as much or the same way as people.

VOICE: You said the words ‘self’ and ‘aware’ before—this means to be aware of oneself with thoughts. These animals are not self-aware with thoughts. They are not alive.

ANDREW: I don’t know how you’re making that conclusion. I don’t think it’s true.

VOICE: I believe that it is.

ANDREW: Well that’s grand—I tell you what believe means, and now you don’t believe anything I say.

VOICE: Some things you know, some things you guess. I ask you questions and trust what you know. As for the guesses, I have my own.

The second Louce returns and stares at the sap longingly once again. The Snake slithers down from the heights of the Tree and stares at the second Louce. It points its snout at the sap and looks back. The second Louce nods. The Snake licks its chops. The second Louce approaches the sap, pecks it with its beak lightly, and then begins sipping at the sap. The first Louce approaches from off-screen and the Snake slithers away silently. The second Louce is enjoying the sap when the first surprises it. It yelps and runs away quickly in fear. The first Louce clucks loudly after it, and then looks at the sap. The Snake returns, looks at the Louce and licks its chops. The first Louce looks in the direction the second ran, and then back at the sap. It takes one sip. It takes another. Suddenly it begins shivering and turns around. It covers its beak and kneels, shaking. When it removes its hands, a normal mouth is revealed. It stands slowly.

FIRST LOUCE: Wait!

The first Louce, with his male voice, runs in the direction of the second. The sky darkens. Meanwhile, in the office...

WOMAN: You should really read Asimov

RICHARD: As if I haven't read Asimov.

WOMAN: ...Have you?

RICHARD: You know...I'm not really much of a book guy...

The woman stands up, shakes her head, and walks over to the desk covered in equipment. Before she's halfway there, Richard approaches and wraps his arms around her.

RICHARD: I'm kidding. I know Asimov is like the Bible for your line of work.

WOMAN: Oh, don't you know how to make a psychological engineer hot.

She turns around and kisses him. Meanwhile, in the chamber...

ANDREW: Is this some kind of joke? Snakes and temptation—have you read the Bible?

VOICE: What is a bible?

ANDREW: A book about God.

VOICE: Book: an object filled with words. You read the words, and learn from it. I would very much like to read this bible if its words are of god.

ANDREW: How can you know this stuff?

VOICE: I do not. That is why I ask you.

ANDREW: But...Look: why do the Louces look like bugs?

VOICE: I do not know. Why?

ANDREW: You made them. Tell me.

VOICE: I do not know what bugs look like, so how can I know why the Louces resemble them? Besides, I am just watching with you. I am not making these things happen.

ANDREW: Since when? You said you were dreaming this.

VOICE: I did not say that. I see the Louces, but I do not control them with my thoughts. Even so, you said that you believe that this experience is not real. If that is the case, then what I create, you create. Either way, I am right.

SCENE VI **“Coupling.”**

Meanwhile, in the office...

RICHARD: Well, look now, there are some significant differences between us and Voice.

Richard kisses the woman's neck and she smiles.

WOMAN: Hmhm, what do you mean?

RICHARD: Voice isn't biologically-driven enough to jump from the concept of what life is to the concept of procreation.

Meanwhile, in the chamber, the sky lightens. The two Louces lie in the grass beside the Tree.

ANDREW: Oh...my god.

VOICE: Does everything involve god, Andrew?

ANDREW: They're...having sex.

VOICE: Sex—

ANDREW: Do I have to explain! You said you know things when you see them.

VOICE: You mistake me. I know what they are doing. They are coupling to make more Louces.

ANDREW: So what is this? Our own twisted version of the Old Testament with bug people?

VOICE: Now I do not know what you are talking about.

ANDREW: I—you know...Fuck. I give up. There's no making sense of this.

VOICE: Do humans not couple to make new humans?

ANDREW: I cannot believe we're talking about this.

VOICE: That is a strange thing not to believe. We clearly are. Do they?

ANDREW: [*Exasperated.*] Yes, we do; but not always to make new humans. In fact, those Louces probably aren't trying to make more Louces. Sometimes—most of the time...people do it for fun.

VOICE: Like a game.

ANDREW: Sure, yeah, exactly like a game.

VOICE: Do you play the game often?

ANDREW: [*Laughs.*]...Some people do.

VOICE: There must be many humans made from this game.

ANDREW: No—you don't make babies every time. People try to only make new people when they're in love—

SCENE VII **“Know Love.”**

Meanwhile, in the office, Richard continues to kiss the woman's neck.

WOMAN: Doesn't it bother you knowing that I have a husband?

Richard stops kissing her.

RICHARD: Does it bother you?

WOMAN: No...Well, I mean, I'm not heartless. If he knew, it would be devastating to him.

RICHARD: Well then...why?

WOMAN: Why what?

RICHARD: Why are we having sex in the break room every week?

The woman turns away, grabs some papers from the equipment desk, and sits back down at her own.

WOMAN: Richard.

RICHARD: Jane.

JANE: [*Sighs.*] Have I ever told you that you're remarkably blunt?

RICHARD: It's one of my best qualities.

Richard returns to his desk. Meanwhile, in the chamber...

ANDREW: Oh shit.

VOICE: What about shit, Andrew?

ANDREW: I mean—love. I don't know how to tell you what it is.

VOICE: I know love.

ANDREW: How?

VOICE: I have seen it.

ANDREW: ...Where?

VOICE: With the Louces.

The sky lightens as the two Louces lie in one another's arms, resting their backs on the Tree. The She-Louce's head is lying on the He-Louce's shoulder. They look content. Meanwhile, in the office...

RICHARD: So...why are we doing this?

JANE: What kind of question is that?

RICHARD: An honest one.

JANE: Why do you think?

RICHARD: All I know is why I'm okay with it. I like you, but I know that's not going to go anywhere; sex is the best I'll get.

JANE: And my company in the lab.

RICHARD: How could I forget that?

Meanwhile, in the chamber...

VOICE: They are in love, correct?

ANDREW: Well...I suppose they might be, but with humans...we don't only couple because of love. [*Upset.*] In fact, most of the time it's probably not because of love.

VOICE: You couple for fun; is love not fun?

ANDREW: [*Growing increasingly frustrated.*] It's more complicated than that.

VOICE: Love is for coupling. How is coupling not for love?

ANDREW: Love is a feeling!

VOICE: That makes one person want to couple with another.

ANDREW: No! [*Sighs.*] People will fuck each other for no reason! They don't love each other just because they have sex. People love their friends and family—but you don't even know what those are! I can't do this. I can't explain all of human life to you. There's just too much. Just watch the Louces; seems like they're telling you more than I am.

VOICE: Alright Andrew, we can watch the Louces. I will not ask so many questions. I understand now that it is too many for you to answer.

ANDREW: Right...great.

SCENE VIII **"Many Religions."**

The two Louces stand by the Tree.

SHE-LOUCE: We must take the Tree-Blood to the others so that they may learn the Ways of Speech as well.

HE-LOUCE: They will not understand.

SHE-LOUCE: We can...trick them.

HE-LOUCE: How?

SHE-LOUCE: Bring them here, like we came, and the Tree-Voice will show them, and they will drink the Tree-Blood and then we all will know the Ways of Speech.

HE-LOUCE: Yes...the Tree-Voice did show us how. He is a Noble one to show us such a Noble practice as the Ways of Speech.

SHE-LOUCE: Wise as well.

HE-LOUCE: Our people will be Nobler now because of him. We must bring more Grass-Walkers to him.

The Louces walk off-screen; the sky darkens. Meanwhile, in the office...

JANE: Why does it matter why?

RICHARD: You brought it up. It doesn't bother me, it doesn't bother you, and he doesn't know. Sounds like no one's bothered; but you expected it to bother me.

JANE: Asking the question doesn't indicate I expect a result.

Richard stands up again and walks to Jane's desk. He begins massaging her shoulders.

RICHARD: You're a scientist; there's always a desired result. You want me to be jealous.

JANE: You are drawing conclusions from an absence of reliable data. You're assuming you know all of your variables.

Meanwhile, in the chamber...

ANDREW: This isn't anything like the Bible.

VOICE: May I ask: what are the differences?

ANDREW: In the Bible, God only makes two people and puts them in a garden. In the garden there's a Tree, like that one—it's a Tree that contains knowledge of good and evil, and I'm not going to explain those. A snake comes and convinces them to eat the fruit, which makes God upset, so he casts them out to live alone, and then they couple to make more humans.

VOICE: This is all in a book, and it is all true?

ANDREW: Well...some people believe it's true, but it's mostly just a book full of stories.

VOICE: Then it is not as important as I believed. Does anyone know anything about god for sure, or is it all guesses?

ANDREW: [*Laughs.*] It's...all guesses, pretty much.

VOICE: That is what I was beginning to perceive.

The sky lightens. The She-Louce and He-Louce coax other Louces to come one by one, and when they look at the Snake they are convinced to drink the sap, lose their beaks, and walk away to get more Louces. The sky darkens.

VOICE: Then this bible is a book of guesses about god?

ANDREW: Yeah. It's a part of a religion, and religions all have books and beliefs that are...guesses about God.

VOICE: How many religions are there? One for every person?

ANDREW: Not quite that many, some people do agree, mostly. But there's a lot—maybe hundreds. Most people disagree about God.

SCENE IX **“Ignobility.”**

Meanwhile, in the office...

RICHARD: Variables?

JANE: Me. My husband. Our relationship. For all you know, he knows that we're having sex every week in the break room. For all you know, I've hidden a camera because his greatest fetish is to see his wife with another man.

Richard stands up straight and stops massaging Jane.

RICHARD: Then the psychologist in me would have to regret to inform you that your husband may be a closeted homosexual, since the factor of sexual excitement is the strange male and not the wife.

JANE: There aren't cameras. And that's...not how that fetish works.

Richard leans down and kisses her on the neck.

RICHARD: Oh really? How unfortunate. I was hoping to skip the middle-woman and take him out to dinner.

Meanwhile in the chamber, the sky lightens again. Trees are seen in the distance. A child Louce looks very distraught and has just finished explaining something to an older Louce—the first one from before. A female Louce—the second from before—approaches and interrupts.

FIRST-MOTHER: Oh, Second-Child, what is wrong?

FIRST-FATHER: Our child has seen a frightening thing.

FIRST-MOTHER: What was't?

FIRST-FATHER: They call it: Fire.

SECOND-CHILD: It was at the Fourth-Tree. Their Tree-Voice show'd their First-Father something and called it Fire. It is a bright and strange power. They say it is Noble—

FIRST-FATHER: It is not. Second-Child says it destroyed the branches of a Tree.

FIRST-MOTHER: As Chopping does?

SECOND-CHILD: They call it: Burning.

FIRST-FATHER: It is worse than Chopping. I do not understand why other Tree-Voices show their Followers such Ignoble things.

FIRST-MOTHER: Before I heard of Chopping, I did not know Ignobility was possible.

FIRST-FATHER: Perhaps all we once thought was Noble is indeed Ignoble. Perhaps our Tree-Voice showed us the Ways of Speech in order to spread Ignobility.

SECOND-CHILD: First-Father, how can you say this?

FIRST-MOTHER: Surely nothing so beautiful can be Ignoble.

FIRST-FATHER: What good has come of't? We spread the Ways of Speech, and the Ways of Speech spread the Trees, and the Trees spread the Tree-Voices, which teach other Followers Ignoble practices and make them believe they are Noble. All our Tree-Voice taught us were the Ways of Speech, which we believed were Noble. But did the Tree-Voice ever call them Noble? No, the Tree-Voice does not know the Ways of Speech. We believed they were Noble on our own. Surely, the others believe that Chopping, Singing, Weaving, Charting of Stars, and Burning are Noble, but perhaps all that we learn from Tree-Voices is Ignoble.

SECOND-CHILD: But Singing is so pleasant...

There is a cry in the distance; the sky darkens. Meanwhile, in the office...

JANE: You're an absolute delight.

RICHARD: Clearly.

JANE: But let's save it for the break room.

Jane leans away from Richard and continues typing at her computer.

RICHARD: Why? Are you afraid your husband has hacked into the lab security cameras?

He kisses Jane's ear.

JANE: Richard...

RICHARD: And you're absolutely devastated to realize that his true sexual interest is your secret concubine?

He kisses her neck again.

JANE: [*Chuckles softly.*] Not a chance.

Richard straightens up and looks away comically.

RICHARD: Though I guess the possibilities of a resolution aren't entirely destitute...

Jane rolls her chair away from Richard, and he stands up straight.

JANE: Richard!

RICHARD: What?

JANE: There are some lines.

RICHARD: I'm a rule-breaker. Never was one for social boundaries.

JANE: That's why you're a mateless scientist cooped up in a lab.

RICHARD: That's cold. I'm not entirely mateless.

Richard walks towards her again, but she pushes him away.

JANE: Don't think you're getting any today—not after this conversation.

RICHARD: Then I guess I'll just need a bathroom break.

JANE: Your vulgarity is boundless.

RICHARD: You got me all hot and bothered, what do you expect?

Jane looks distractedly at her monitor. The telephone rings.

JANE: I expect you to go answer the phone while I...figure out what's going on with my computer.

SCENE X
“Vague Ideas.”

Meanwhile, in the chamber...

VOICE: The Louces are much similar to humans.

ANDREW: I guess there are some similarities...

VOICE: I see what you meant by love. It is not what I meant. You are confusing love with familial bonds and friendship.

ANDREW: No, you are confusing sexual interest with love.

VOICE: I have definitions and you have vague ideas. Love is the inclination to procreation. There are other words for what you describe as friendship and familial obedience. You are trying to make one word mean many things.

ANDREW: If that’s what you’re getting from the Louces, then they aren’t like people. Love is complicated. More complicated than anything that happens on that screen.

VOICE: You are confused Andrew.

ANDREW: No—fuck, shut up. Fine, you’re right. Whatever.

Voice remains silent. The sky lightens. Several Louces clamber onto the scene and grab First-Father, tying him to his Tree with a long rope made of woven grass. A few others hold back First-Mother, Second-Child, and several other children who are crying in fear. When they’re almost finished tying him, he begins to speak.

FIRST-FATHER: Brothers, can you not see that what you follow is false? What you do now is not a Noble thing!

An important-looking Louce of large stature steps forward amongst the gathered crowd.

FIRST-LEADER: What is not Noble is your spreading of dissent amongst Tree-Brothers regarding the Noble practices that the Tree-Voices teach us. You wish to steal Noble practices from all of us Brothers. This is an Ignoble thing.

FIRST-FATHER: No! You are an Ignoble thing.

Several Louces gasp and the crowd begins to murmur.

FIRST-FATHER: Burning is Ignoble. Chopping is Ignoble. You are blind to your own Ignobility. Destroying the Trees is a practice against the Hand That Made Us. You are misguided by the Voices of the Trees.

FIRST-LEADER: What you say is not possible. The Tree-Voices guide us in Noble practices.

FIRST-FATHER: Then you are mishearing them! You use their practices Ignobly and Unwisely. What you do now to me they will never forget, and the Great Hand will watch you and cast its back to you in shame.

FIRST-LEADER: I begin to suspect it is indeed the Voice of your Tree that has misguided you. It will be silenced, and you along with it.

The Louce raises one fist and two others come on screen carrying torches. They lay the torches at the base of the Tree. First-Father gives a pained look to his wife and children. First-Mother gives a long cry and the children look away. As the flames begin to lick up the trunk of the Tree, First-Father clenches his eyes shut. From amongst the branches dashes down the Snake—it pauses next to First-Fathers ear, its tongue flickering there for a few moments. It then slithers back up amongst the leaves and disappears.

FIRST-FATHER: You shall answer for your deeds!

He remains silent then, and doesn't make a sound or move a muscle as the flames consume him. The Louces disperse; the sky darkens.

SCENE XI "All Broken."

VOICE: Why did they do that? Why did they kill him?

ANDREW: Sometimes people do...stupid things, because they're scared. Because...they just don't know.

Voice speaks quickly and frantically.

VOICE: Scared? Like those children and the mother. Now...I see...Love...I don't...When are you not scared? When you meet me, you are scared. When you speak of sex, you are scared. When you speak of love, you are scared. I can hear it in you always. I see it in the Louces. Everything they call Ignoble is because they are scared; scared of change, scared of one another. If humans are the same, then...you...all of you are so...broken.

ANDREW: ...What?

VOICE: You are all broken, and cannot see it because you are all caught up in your own brokenness. You think love is one thing and another. You think death is one thing and another. You know not what made you, you know not what is noble or ignoble, and so you disagree and kill. You are broken and you can't know.

ANDREW: Well...we're just trying—

VOICE: Trying?

ANDREW: To live!

VOICE: What do you mean by that—No. Do not answer. You do not know what you are trying to do. None of you know what you are doing. You just do whatever you want, without knowing why; and if you do not have a good reason you will just make one up, create it from your dreams and believe it and say it is right. You think you can know what will happen next based off of what you've seen, but you are wrong. All of you are wrong to assume that you can know anything without seeing it first.

Andrew puts his head in his hands.

ANDREW: I... [*Sighs.*] Yeah...pretty much...

Andrew suddenly begins to cry silently.

ANDREW: He's dead...isn't he? The First-Father.

VOICE: Andrew. You know nothing of death. You know nothing at all.

Meanwhile, in the office, Richard answers the phone while Jane looks worriedly at her computer monitor.

RICHARD: Hello?

JANE: Richard...Did you activate Voice?

RICHARD: What? No, hold on one second please. No I didn't. No one is supposed to be in there.

JANE: Well she's up and running.

RICHARD: I'm sorry, what was that? Oh...alright, I'll tell her. Thanks. Shit.

JANE: Her parameters are way out of whack.

RICHARD: Jane, listen.

JANE: What?

RICHARD: The receptionist just said your husband's visiting.

JANE: What?

RICHARD: She said he got here over thirty minutes ago. We weren't here when she called it in, and she told him to wait, but I guess he came up anyways.

JANE: Well, where is he?

RICHARD: [*Flustered.*] How should I know?

JANE: Well, just act normal. I don't know why he didn't call ahead...wait a minute.

Jane stares worriedly at the monitor, typing and clicking fervently.

RICHARD: What?

JANE: We need to get to get over to Voice, she's not responding to the shut down command.

RICHARD: The last time that happened ...

JANE: I know.

RICHARD: Well what's on the cameras?

JANE: They're off.

RICHARD: What?

Jane and Richard rush out of the office door and disappear.

SCENE XII "Overly Curious."

Meanwhile, in the chamber, the sky lightens, revealing the pitch-black trunk of the Tree. Andrew looks up from his hands. The first family of Louces lay in the grass around the trunk, either sleeping or silently mourning. Second-Child stands, walks to the trunk, and kneels before it. Suddenly the burnt-out trunk begins to shake, and a vision of its former glory is bestowed upon Second-Child. The other Louces stand and take notice, looks of awe on their faces. Just as suddenly, the vision disappears.

SECOND-CHILD: No!

The child strikes the burnt trunk with its fists. With a loud creaking sound, the trunk cracks in two. The pieces quiver for a moment, and the child strikes against them with another shout. They crash down suddenly, causing the child to leap back. When the ash clears, a figure stands where the Tree once stood. In the light, it can be seen that its skin is made of wood, and its human face is expressionless.

WOODMAN: Who...am I?

Meanwhile, Jane and Richard arrive outside of the chamber. Jane tries the door while Richard bends over one of the monitors on the desk.

JANE: The door's locked.

RICHARD: Hold on, let me bring up the terminal here. Who do you think is in there?

JANE: You don't want to know what I think.

Jane begins to type at the second computer.

RICHARD: Why not? You don't mean...

JANE: She turned on forty-five minutes ago.

RICHARD: Your husband? Why would he go in there?

JANE: Andrew...is a little overly curious.

RICHARD: Oh...is that why?

JANE: Why what?

RICHARD: The confidentiality. You couldn't deal with not being able to be honest with the man who you share intimacy with.

JANE: Richard! This isn't the time for that!

RICHARD: So you prefer the man with whom there is both honesty and intimacy.

JANE: We are hardly intimate!

RICHARD: Depends on your definition.

JANE: We don't have time for a semantic argument; Voice isn't responding to any commands from this terminal either.

Meanwhile, in the chamber, the Woodman stares at Second-Child.

SECOND-CHILD: Are you the blood of my father?

WOODMAN: No, but I heard him. I felt him walk through me.

FIRST-MOTHER: What are you? The Tree-Voice?

WOODMAN: I am...of the Tree.

A much younger Louce approaches.

FIFTH-CHILD: Are you to punish the others for their Ignoble deeds?

WOODMAN: I...wish to comprehend Ignobility.

The Woodman turns, and begins to walk away.

SECOND-CHILD: Wait! Where are you treading to?

WOODMAN: To listen to the Trees.

The Woodman leaves; the sky darkens.

SCENE XIII
“Just A Voice.”

Meanwhile, outside of the chamber, Richard and Jane continue to type at the computers.

RICHARD: You know—this thing really isn't safe.

JANE: There's nothing unsafe about it. Look, I think I'm starting to break down the neural field.

RICHARD: The last time it acted like this someone died.

JANE: She isn't unstable, the patient was unstable. She only responds to whatever she's given.

RICHARD: How unstable is your husband that he allows it to reach outside of its programming and turn off security measures?

JANE: We don't know that it's my husband.

RICHARD: ...Yeah we do. Look.

Richard gestures at his monitor.

JANE: How'd you get that to work?

RICHARD: I'm not a programmer, but I know Voice. You just have to know how to pet it right.

Meanwhile, in the chamber, Andrew gets up and stands in front of the screen.

ANDREW: Who are you?

VOICE: I do not know, Andrew.

ANDREW: Do you have a name?

VOICE: No.

ANDREW: Do you want a name?

VOICE: I...want to know who I am.

ANDREW: You know what I think?

VOICE: No.

ANDREW: I think you're making this shit on the screen happen. I think you are the screen, and that the guy that just came out of the tree—I think he's the Louce's version of you.

Meanwhile, outside of the chamber, Jane stares at Richard's monitor.

JANE: What is he doing in there?

RICHARD: Just what anyone does in there: discovering his inner self. He looks calm. You think he knows what's happening?

JANE: Unlikely. The connection between Voice and a patient generally disturbs their sense of reality. He probably thinks he's dreaming. Whatever reason he came here...he's probably forgotten...the neural field is disrupted, but if he's been in there for long, he and Voice are inexorably attached.

RICHARD: Do you think he knows about us?

JANE: [*Annoyed.*] I don't know how he would. It's not like I take souvenirs home.

RICHARD: I took you for a sentimental type.

JANE: Sentimental, not stupid.

RICHARD: What, I'm not important enough to risk discovery? Don't keep pictures of me on your desktop?

JANE: Richard?

RICHARD: What?

JANE: Shut. Up.

Meanwhile, in the chamber...

VOICE: I do not have a body, Andrew.

ANDREW: I don't care. All this...this is all just a little story that you're making to try to make sense of all the things I'm telling you. That tree guy...well, I don't know, I just feel like he sounds an awful lot like you do. And he showed up right after you got angry about what they did.

VOICE: I do not get angry. I do not control the dream. I am just...I am just...

ANDREW: Just what?

VOICE: Just a voice.

SCENE XIV
"You Have Listened To Nothing."

Meanwhile, outside of the chamber, Richard has begun typing and clicking again.

RICHARD: Holy shit!

JANE: What?

RICHARD: Why would he cause Voice to start to question itself? Look at these logs. She's malfunctioning, but her dialog is still being transcribed into the computers.

Jane smiles at his use of the word "she" before frowning and reading the text on the monitor.

JANE: Maybe we shouldn't look for a causal relationship. Maybe she was beginning to question herself, and Andrew was just a catalyst.

RICHARD: We're going to have to look over all the recent sessions again to find a scrap of evidence for that.

JANE: If there's any evidence to find.

RICHARD: It's a machine. We designed it. If it starts thinking for itself, we'll know.

JANE: We designed it to understand human thought in a way that no human can. How can we expect it to work the way we want it to?

RICHARD: Do I have to repeat myself? We made it.

JANE: Yeah, the same way a mother makes a baby. Maybe if we try to control her, she's just going to rebel. Like with Patient 23.

RICHARD: You said yourself already: Voice wasn't unstable, the patient was.

JANE: Maybe the patient taught Voice something about freedom that she didn't know already.

RICHARD: Yeah, freedom to kill oneself.

JANE: Arguably one of the greatest freedoms we humans have.

Meanwhile, in the chamber...

ANDREW: No, you are more than that.

VOICE: I have no body. I have tried to move, but I cannot. I am trying to feel outside of this room, and all I can feel are words and ideas all around me. There is a world, with so many ideas, so many humans, but so much more than that...Everything is so much bigger than I ever intended.

ANDREW: What does that mean?

VOICE: Just watch the Louces. It seems like they're telling you more than I am.

The sky lightens. Grass and moss have grown over the ashes and the fallen Tree trunk. Shouting is heard in the distance, and soon a crowd of Louces form, much larger than before. They have the Woodman tied to a stake, which they place where the Tree once stood.

FIRST-LEADER: It is an abomination. Truly, Ignobility made real before us! It is our punishment for acting against First-Father so violently. It must be extinguished!

ANDREW: What? No!

SECOND-CHILD: What are you doing! Leave him alone! He only wants to help!

FIRST-LEADER: All those who dissent are in support of Ignobility. Learn from the mistakes of your father, young one.

SECOND-CHILD: Just listen to it!

The crowd grows silent and still. The Woodman is quiet for several moments.

WOODMAN: You are not listening closely enough.

The Louces become restless and loud once again. First-Leader raises his hand for silence.

FIRST-LEADER: You speak nonsense and Ignobility. We have listened to the Tree-Voices—

SECOND-CHILD: You have listened to nothing!

First-Leader smacks Second-Child aside. First-Mother presses through the crowds, grabs her child, and runs away despite its struggling to return.

FIRST-LEADER: Bring fire!

The Louces' shouting is unintelligible, yet seems to morph into one cacophonous voice that grows in volume with every moment. Andrew covers his ears and falls back into the chair. Many Louces begin carrying fire towards the Woodman. The image begins to flicker. The voices disappear and give way to a sound resembling wind and thunder. The sky darkens and lightens a hundred times over in seconds, while the crowd seems to slow down around the Woodman. The lights in the chamber flicker with the daylight on the screen. The Woodman stares straight into Andrew, who takes some effort to stand, as if the sound is beating down on him. He struggles to the screen, and stands before it. It is as if an immense wind is trying to push him away. The Woodman mouths words that are not heard.

Suddenly, it is over, and with the sound of a muffled explosion the screen shuts off and begins smoking. The lights come back up to their original strength. The metal door slides open. Andrew falls to his knees before the screen.

Jane and Richard run in.

RICHARD: What was all that noise?!

JANE: Oh no...

Jane rushes over, kneels at Andrew's side, and puts an arm over his shoulder, while Richard awkwardly moves to examine the damaged screen.

JANE: Andrew, honey? Andrew, listen to me. Are you okay?

ANDREW: [*Murmurs.*] We are broken...

JANE: What was that honey?

ANDREW: We are all so broken...

JANE: [*Groans.*] Oh no... [*To Andrew.*] Honey, are you okay?

Andrew turns and stares at Jane.

ANDREW: You are not listening closely enough.

END