american next wave
Four contemporary plays from HighTide Festival Theatre

HighTide Festival Theatre
American Next Wave

**Perish**
Stella Fawn Ragsdale

**The Hour of Feeling**
Mona Mansour

**Bethany**
Laura Marks

**Neighbors**
Branden Jacobs-Jenkins

Methuen Drama
HighTide Festival Theatre in partnership with The Public Theater Emerging Writers Group present

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Writers

Stella Fawn Ragsdale
Mona Mansour
Laura Marks
Branden Jacobs-Jenkins

Cast

(in alphabetical order)

Emma Beattie
Ishia Bennison
Geoffrey Breton
Jack Cosgrove
Frank Fitzpatrick
Robert Gilbert
Edward Halsted
Elizabeth Healey
Louis Hilyer
Elisabeth Hopper
Phillip James
Nicole Lecky
Jonathan Livingstone
Pearl Mackie
Georgia Maguire
Stuart Martin
Lynne Miller
Marcel Miller
Miles Mitchell
Clare Perkins
Jessica Pidsley
Gemma Stone
Joseph Strouzer
Sofia Stuart
Abi Titmuss
Olivia Vinall
William Byrd Wilkins
Creative Team

Directors
Steven Atkinson, Rob Drummer, Richard Fitch, Melanie Spencer

Set Designer
Clem Garrity

Design Assistant
Holly Hooper

Lighting
Matt Prentice

Sound
Neil Sowerby

Casting
Philippa Wilkinson

American Next Wave
Four Contemporary Plays from HighTide Festival Theatre were produced in partnership with The Public Theater Emerging Writers Group, New York

All four plays received their first staged readings in the UK at the HighTide Festival, Halesworth, Suffolk, on the 5th, 6th, 12th and 13th May 2012

American Next Wave was generously supported by IdeasTap

www.hightide.org.uk
www.publictheater.org
www.ideastap.com
‘Sharp, irreverent and fresh.’ Daily Telegraph

HighTide Festival Theatre is a national theatre company and engine room for the discovery, development and production of exceptional new playwrights. Under Artistic Director Steven Atkinson, the annual HighTide Festival in Suffolk has become one of the UK’s leading theatre events, and in 2012 we are excited to premiere 18 new works. HighTide’s productions then transfer nationally and internationally in partnerships that have included: the Bush Theatre (2008 & 2009), National Theatre (2009), Old Vic Theatre (2010), Ambassador Theatre Group / West End (2011), to the Edinburgh Festival (2008, 2010 & 2011) and internationally to the Australian National Play Festival (2010).

HighTide receives, considers and produces new plays from all around the world, every play is read and the festival is an eclectic mix of theatre across several venues in Halesworth, Suffolk. Our artistic team and Literary Department are proud to develop all the work we produce and we offer bespoke development opportunities for playwrights throughout the year.

HighTide Festival Theatre is a National Portfolio Organisation of Arts Council England.

A Brief History

The Sixth HighTide Festival in 2012

Luke Barnes, Jon Barton, Ollie Birch, Mike Daisey, Joe Douglas, Vickie Donoghue, Tom Eccleshaire, Kenny Emson, Berri George, Karis Halsall, Nancy Harris, Ella Hickson, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Mona Mansour, Laura Marks, Ian McHugh, Jon McLeod, Shiona Morton Laura Poliakoff, Mahlon Prince, Stella Fawn Ragsdale, Stephanie Street, Philip Wells, Nicola Werenowska, Alexandra Wood

The sixth HighTide Festival in 2012 will premiere eighteen plays in world and European premiere productions in partnerships with emerging companies and leading theatres including: Bad Physics, curious directive, Escalator East to Edinburgh, Headlong, Halesworth Middle School, Latitude Festival, Lucy Jackson, macrobert, nabokov, The Nuffield Southampton, The Public Theater, Soho Theatre, Utter.

Ella Hickson’s Boys will transfer to The Nuffield Theatre, Southampton and Soho Theatre in a co-production with the Nuffield Theatre, Southampton and Headlong.

Luke Barnes’ Eisteddfod will transfer to the 2012 Latitude Festival.

Joe Douglas’ Educating Ronnie will transfer to the 2012 Edinburgh Festival produced in association with macrobert and Utter.

Luke Barnes’ Bottleneck will premiere at the 2012 Edinburgh Festival.

Charitable Support

HighTide is a registered charity (6326484) and we are grateful to the many organisations and individuals who support our work, including Arts Council England and Suffolk County Council.

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With thanks to all our Friends of the Festival
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Introduction

We think a lot about waves at HighTide Festival Theatre, not least because the metaphor best encapsulates our energy for seeing new playwrights crash against the establishment, and the vitality in their plays sweep across our cultural landscape. This same vitality, which fills the HighTide Festival programme year after year, best captures a generation of writers with a collective enthusiasm for writing. There is a commitment to storytelling among a generation who are living through rapid change, political upheaval and the levelling, or renegotiation of democratic ideals.

Around the world, cities have been occupied, students have protested, our news outlets overwhelmed and political platforms challenged. Notions of how the collective conscience is plugged into a network of viral news, video, online social political forums, Twitter and Facebook are evolving. This planet fundamentally is smaller or perhaps, in its rapid population expansion, feels smaller as shared voices are heard, experience is offered up and the codes of online, democratic space are in conflict with the everyday reality.

Playwrights have been grouped in the past, considered alongside their peers to suggest a trend; after all there is safety in numbers and something useful in considering new work against a zeitgeist, a movement, a manifesto. As readers of new plays we of course notice those writers who feel part of the same frustration, with a shared urgency. Their plays are vital, their message bold, clear.

The festival this year is the product of reading such plays and realising we are riding the crest of a wave, where the establishment that hands down opportunities must accommodate the emerging voices and the very notion of a top-down industry is bending under strain. We feel privileged to produce the work of peers, to give soapbox to storyteller and productions to playwrights.
This wave is not restricted to HighTide, it is not focused on the UK, but it is global and if our international submissions are anything to go by we must consider a generation across land and water, and work hard to defeat censorship, bring down walls and discover the most distinct voice under the most obscure rock. This search is ongoing but most recently took us to New York, where we first encountered the plays that make up this volume and were presented at the HighTide Festival.

All four of these playwrights and all four of these plays are from the Public Theater in New York, a powerhouse and a home for exceptional voices. The Public, through their Emerging Writers’ Group, part of a wide programme of support for playwrights, champion and support, in much the same way as we do, ambitious writers and their bold stories. What all four of these plays represent is the vanguard of exceptional talent, writers who are championed in America but have yet to find a home in the UK. We are their first home and also a platform as we proudly share their stories with our audiences and an industry that will want to listen. Having met Stella, Mona, Laura and Branden we can vouch for their determined, focused enthusiasm for words, for storytelling, for pushing an audience and sharing a world that is theirs for the taking.

Each play is of course unique, but also, when seen together or read here, they paint the most contemporary portrait of America and by extension of this world we all share. Perish, claustrophobic and poetic is inspired by family lore and Appalachian roots. Stella exposes the plight of women in rural America, and in the play’s eloquent language evokes a world eroding, somehow timeless but diminishing.

The Hour of Feeling sets a newlywed couple against academic ambition and the changing map of the Middle East in 1967, while through the lens of history the play reconciles what it is to possess culture, how we mitigate love, honour and ambition when fighting against uncontrollable forces.
With Laura Marks’s play *Bethany* it is the image that resonates strongly, the image of foreclosure, empty streets, abandoned homes, suburbs lacking community. Crystal, a young saleswoman, struggles to sell one last car to Charlie, a motivational speaker – but the paranoid squatter she lives with has other plans. Soon, Crystal discovers how far she’ll have to go in order to survive.

Finally, *Neighbors* – quite simply one of the boldest new plays we have read at HighTide – is ferocious in its repositioning of an image, that of the minstrel. In its writer Branden Jacobs-Jenkins’s non-intention to shock, but rather to ‘put these ideas into constellation’, it completes our American wave of bold voices and vital stories.

What we hope we have captured here in 2012 is a bold statement of intent to champion those playwrights who have something to say and the audacity to say it. These writers through the words on the page and the productions of their plays are the future of theatre and have, through their stories here told, staked a claim on the establishment.

If we can do anything further it is simply to say these four playwrights give us the best hope in that wave crashing down and with force giving voice to a generation energised and ready to effect change. These plays, these writers are more than a step in the right direction.

STEVEN ATKINSON & ROB DRUMMER

*HighTide Festival Theatre*
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*Perish* received its first UK staged reading at the HighTide Festival, Halesworth, Suffolk, on 5 May 2012, and featured the following cast and creative team:

**Porter**  
Elisabeth Hopper

**Hazlitt**  
Georgia Maguire

**James**  
Frank Fitzpatrick

**Shannon**  
Emma Beattie

**Cove**  
Stuart Martin

**Coryden**  
Gemma Stone

**William**  
Edward Halsted

**Director**  
Rob Drummer

**Musician**  
Joseph Strouzer
**Characters**
in order of appearance

**Porter**, female, twenty-eight. Stoic, strong-spirited, Irish with Creek Indian blood, olive-skinned.

**Hazlitt**, Porter’s sister, thirty. Paler, more dreamy, seems the younger one of the two although she is the elder.

**James**, Shannon’s father, Porter and Hazlitt’s uncle, fifties. Stubborn, Irish, broad-shouldered and powerful, slow to age, a shock of black hair not yet grayed.

**Shannon**, Porter and Hazlitt’s cousin, female, thirty-six. She was both sister and mother to them at times.

**Cove**, a hunter, muscular, shows the years of hard labor and drink.

**Coryden**, childhood friend of Hazlitt’s, female, twenties. Something puck-like about her, small and greasy like a kid who has always taken care of herself with varying degrees of surprising success.

**William**, Porter and Hazlitt’s father, fifties. At least a quarter Creek Indian, smaller than James, wry, something mean about him.

**Setting**

East Tennessee. A front porch of a house surrounded by woods of a few acres. There are other houses within walking distance and probably old forgotten shacks and stills to be found within the bounds of the woods. The girls all know the woods well, having trampled them back and forth through their youth. All action takes place either on the front porch of the house or in the woods.
Scene One

PROLOGUE

East Tennessee. What was once the most beautiful place on earth. In the distance, the Smoky Mountains cradle the valley, imposing their blue breath and heavy foliage of maples, birch, hickory, chestnut and alder, trees of heaven and the devil’s walking stick, not yet bare for winter nor changed by autumn, but faded by late September’s light.

A worn but bright turquoise house with a porch sits surrounded by an oak and several tree stumps. The yard gives way to woods.

A single dead magpie hangs from the oak. **Porter** is on the porch with a suitcase. She is gaunt and dark, her crow-black hair braided. The Creek blood from generations past is revived in her. She looks older than she should. **Hazlitt**, her sister, is paler, Irish – the world never seems to sink into her. She watches **Porter**, afraid to disturb her reverie.

**Porter**  It’s not like we lived like kings or princes. It’s not like we lived on the wind, the way the wind blows there. Denel walked the foreign places as a soldier. I cleaned paint left from the boots of workers in the new houses near base in Idaho. Places I couldn’t afford to live. Maybe that was my downfall, cleaning those houses. The ones on the army base don’t belong to us. I wanted my own home. I liked the desert out west. I liked hearing the coyotes yell. The sparseness and the lightness of it on my skin. Maybe I missed the mountains of home but the way you miss a done lover. We did alright for a while. But things started slipping. The car broke. Basement flooded. We fought. Denel didn’t re-enlist. He couldn’t stay in the army anymore than I could stay married to him. He’s walking the foreign places for the last time. We got six months slack and that’s when Daddy heard about it. I lost the house. Moved to a shitty apartment because by then I couldn’t even afford a house on base anymore. Then Daddy showed up one day. Called me unfit. Said I was good for nothing. But said he’d watch Leo while I looked for work. Then I came home one afternoon and he had split with him. Maybe Leo is better off. But I would like to find him. See my son again.
They’re out there?

Shannon says he’s hiding in the woods. You said you’d move back here if I did. You promised. But you won’t.

I’m trying.

You lived a fancy life in the city and you won’t.

I haven’t. Maybe he’ll be glad to see you.

So he can beat my head into the wall. I didn’t know he was going to trick me. I wish he’d talk to me.

It’s been a long time since I saw you.

I know it.

We’re getting old.

You look the same. Maybe a little older.

Like Mammaw when she was young. My hands look like hers too.

It’s from working outside.

Maybe. (Beat.) She’s been gone twenty-five years. I used to not know what twenty-five years was like. Now I do. When did it happen, when did we get old?

The year before last. When you lost all your values.

This isn’t the first time we’ve been broke.

I suppose it ain’t.

We’re likely to be broke again.

That’s the truth.

What do we do now?

takes off her boot and tosses it.

I don’t know. There’s things to worry about. What we will get to eat. Where we will live. Who knows if there is any future for us? Just idle wood. (Beat.) He said I’m no
daughter of his. But he pulls me back. (Beat.) You’re not really here, are you?

She takes off the other boot.

Hazlitt No. I suppose not. You’re thinking of when I saw you months ago in the desert. It was not so hot. April, maybe. I’m scraping away at the night. Sleeping on some unfamiliar mattress or couch. In a city that is a hundred mazes. I want go back to the mountains where we belong, but there’s things keeping me, things I’m looking for. I’m trying to get back to help you. Just a few more dollars and I’ll be coming to help you. I swear it.

Porter Sure.

The light falls and Hazlitt disappears.

Scene Two

THE ENCHANTED KINGDOM

The occasional laughter and whisper of children. Slowly, the world becomes lighter again and, as it does, their laughter fades into the woods and reveals Porter, wearing a blindfold in the yard and groping in the dark among the trees, playing hide-and-seek, searching for the children, alone.

A porch light comes on and James steps out of the house, a man in his fifties. He is big-boned and towering. His hair is still mostly that Irish and Cherokee black. He moves as slow as he thinks. His tall shadow falls over Porter and he carries a large switch. He watches her a moment. Every once and a while the shadow of a magpie swoons behind them.

James Porter!

Startled, Porter pushes the blindfold up.

Porter Uncle.

James I’m about to start busting some asses. Where the children?
Porter    Playin’.

James    Well, it’s time for them to go in.

Porter    It’s still light out.

James    It’s nearly dark.

Porter    I hadn’t seen my cousins in a long time.

James    I don’t care. I thought they’d be in bed when I got home. They’ve been acting like a bunch of idiots today.

Porter    I guess they take after family.

James    I reckon. Shannon lets ’em stay up all hours when they ought to be in bed. She must be down in the garden.  
(Beat.)  How long you here for?

Porter    Long enough to find my son.

James    Then what?

Porter    Don’t know.

James    Well, we’re glad to see you, we are. I remember when you was just a mean little Indian girl. Just about the meanest thing alive. But I don’t want no trouble here, Porter, while you’re staying. No men, no drinking, no fighting.

Porter    I never fight.

James    That’s right. You’re sweet as honeysuckle. I forgot.  
(Beat.)  You tell those girls I said they have to go to bed soon.

He exits into the house.

Shannon, a tall strong woman of thirty-six, comes onto the porch, dishes in her hands. She is the type of woman who by sixty will be worn out but, although we can tell she is the mother of at least four, maybe five children depending on the day, she has not yet lost her youth. Her tallness and breadth, like her father James, is almost beyond her, an embarrassment that her humility doesn’t know what to do with. When she laughs, she laughs like a child, loud and out of place, spontaneous. Likewise, when she angers, her angers is like a child’s, that burns and is forgotten. She is
mightily self-conscious of her slightly crooked teeth and so, while not so shy, she also has a habit of cowering like a child.

Shannon  You should get the girls to leave you alone.

Porter   I don’t mind it.

Shannon  Well, just tell them to go play by themselves if they start to bother you.

Porter   They ain’t seen me in a while.

Shannon  I suppose not. You haven’t found him yet?

Porter   Not yet.

Shannon  When he got here two days ago he brought Leo here to see his cousins. So he would know them. I hadn’t seen him since.

Porter   He knew I’d be hot on his trail. I ain’t got nothing. Spent what there was to get here. Left everything in Idaho. Denel, he’s still overseas.

Shannon  Must be rough.

Porter   I feel lighter at least.

Shannon  I bet.

Porter   I know what you think.

Shannon  I don’t think nothing.

Porter   Sure you do. What he tell you?

Shannon  Your father told us that when he went up there, your place was a wreck and you were so drunk you couldn’t even stand up.

Porter   That’s a lie.

Shannon  I just been prayin’ about it.

Porter   I looked all day. I’ve walked those woods to death and back looking for them.
Shannon  He knows these coves like the back of his hands. Even if you hunted him down, he’s likely to hurt you.

Porter  Well.

Shannon  I know. (Beat.) I was planning on cooking a late dinner. Brown beans, fried squash, corn bread, pickled okra. I been cooking for hours already. Nothing fancy, but if you want to eat –

Porter notices the dead bird hanging

Porter  What’s that bird doing there?

Shannon  A warning. The magpies was in my garden this summer. (Beat.) My girls are big, ain’t they?

Porter  Yeah. Pearl was just a baby last time I saw them.

Shannon  I know I should get them in bed earlier but they won’t go, stubborn as poke, sweet as lambsquarter. Sophia. May. Rose. Prudence. And Pearl. My children, they won’t never sleep. Sometimes I sit on the porch all night and wait for them to go to sleep.

Porter listens, but her attention always drifts away toward the woods.

Porter  All night?

Shannon  Sure. When the stars have set their store for the night, when I have worshed the steel pot and made coffee I sit out here and watch the mountains.

Porter  Your girls wanted to play hide and seek.

Shannon  I figured.

Porter  It took me so long to find ’em. Running between the silver birches. Pale though.

Shannon  I know they’re pale. White as ghosts. Or paper. I used to keep them in on account of the yard being full of copperheads. And they sleep late. They sleep deep into summer and don’t wake till the moonflowers bloom. I try to
feed them good. All they want to eat is sugar cookies. But their lives are untroubled –

**Porter**  Maybe you ought to let them out more. The girls.

**Shannon**  I can’t keep ’em in. Daddy hates for them to be out late, but I don’t see no harm in it.

**Porter**  They seem like cautious children. When I came here, they all hid at first. I saw Sophia peeking out from behind a tree. She threw an apple at me. *(Beat.)* You’d tell me if you knew where my boy was, wouldn’t you?

**Porter**  stares at Shannon for a moment.

**Shannon**  I would.

*The shadow of a bird flies low.* Shannon grabs her gun and shoots.

**Porter**  Holy shit! You trying to kill us?

**Shannon**  I want them out of the greens.

**Porter**  Put that thing away.

**Shannon**  Fine. *(Beat.)* I keep the garden myself. Daddy got down there one day to try to pull the rocks out for me. It was all he could do to get up off his knees so old was he. I do all the hoeing and weeding and watering. I stake the tomatoes and pole beans. And then I do all the canning too. I look the greens and wash and boil ’em for the winter. I fix the roof, I built that fence there. Hailed out chessey drawers all by myself. I tell you what. I can do it all. Have to. Now night has surely come. Now the wind moves through the maples and alder. There the dragonfly is, when you can see him, with evening dew on his wings. I know how you feel, commed here after making a life. Wondering what was the past. In the day I walk Knoxville, past the old JFG coffee factory, past the railroad tracks, boarded-up buildings, looking for work, wondering what will come.

**Porter**  There isn’t any future for us but there’s going to be one for Leo. I even went and saw this guy today. To try to get a loan.
Shannon  Hard to believe.

Porter  Everybody’s a whore these days, ain’t they? You sleep with men and keep having babies so you can keep your WIC vouchers. Selling pies. Your legs are probably still slick with the juice of the last one. You want me to get you the dish towel?

Shannon  Shut up, Porter. You ain’t getting me riled today.

Porter  It doesn’t even bother you.

Shannon  My body is temporary. It’s my spirit God wants.

Porter  What do I care? I used to pay the boys to go down on me when I was twelve, but now I’d let them pay me if it’d bring my son back. I’m meaner than any one of them. I see the lines and lines. I remember them from when we was kids. Miserable children. Miserable men.

Shannon  My body might be of the world but my spirit is pure.

*She gets to looking at the birds again as they swoop. She shoots.*

Porter  grabs the gun away from her.

Porter  Knock it off.

Shannon  When did you ever care about a bird?

Porter  Just leave it alone. Something about it.

Shannon  asserts herself with a nervous confidence.

Shannon  This is my house. I’ll do what I want. Well, if you don’t like it you can leave.

Specially if you keep talking like that, that raunchy ass talk a yours.

Porter  You owe me anyhow. I could stick up for myself but Hazlitt was too pathetic and weak.
She sees the row of little girls’ shoes lined up.

You don’t leave them alone with Uncle, do you?

**Shannon**  He’s fine. Just a little senile. He’d never harm them.

**Porter**  Do you?

**Shannon**  I watch my children.

**Porter**  Stupid.

**Shannon**  I’m telling you I watch them.

*She sees the bird and shoots again.*  **James**  comes out of the house.

**James**  What’s going on out here?

**Shannon**  Nothing.

**James**  Crows.

**Porter**  Children.

**James**  More like it. I can’t hardly get around in the kitchen, the mess you made in there.

**Shannon**  I’ll clean it up.

**James**  Don’t even make your money back with those pies.

**Porter**  Won’t you git off her back?

**James**  Aw, hush, Porter. You always walk around here like you own the place. Seems like you’d come back here with a little humility, losing everything. When I was your age I had me a job.

**Porter**  What do you want me to do, shit myself a job?

**James**  That’s what a real American would do. Hard to believe.

**Shannon**  Don’t mind him. He just is in a bad mood ’cause he keeps wrecking the truck at work. His vision ain’t good.
James (jokingly) My vision is just fine. Won’t you come over here and tell me how my fist is doing?

Shannon Okay.

James I’m the only one I guess who works.


James At least I have a job. Twenty-five years working as a security guard. No thanks or kiss my ass.

Shannon Won’t you go and make yourself useful?

James A little humility. The both of you. I came out here to tell you that maybe I’d give Porter a hand in the morning.

Porter Morning’s too late. Got to find my son tonight.

James Not going to be able to find anybody when you can’t find the fist in the front of your hands. He could be anywhere in those woods.

Porter That may be, but I can’t sleep till I find him.

James If I find out any of these folks ain’t been telling the truth, not saying where your daddy is, I’ll be fierce to deal with. A person like that wouldn’t have no decent quality. I’ve always thought William doesn’t have a lick of sense except a selfish one.

Porter sees the bird again.

Porter Hush. There it is. Maybe you hurt it.

Shannon I aimed to kill it.

Porter It doesn’t look like a magpie. It looks like it has orange feathers or something. Maybe it’s a hawk.

Shannon Well, whatever it is.

Porter It never bothered anybody. Look how bright it is.

*She starts toward the bird.*
James Watch now.

Porter Now it’s going into the woods.

Shannon What about your son?

Porter I just want to make sure he’s not hurt. Look at him.

James Particular looking.

Shannon I’d be careful.

Porter It’ll just take a minute. I’m tired of things getting pushed around.

Shannon Sophia been seeing the work lanterns of the railroad at night.

Porter So.

Shannon They ain’t worked on the rails in years. The lights float through her room. Last time she talked about seeing them, someone died. The lanterns move through their room up the hill to the graveyard.

Porter You’re full a’ shit. Anyway, I have to see what it is. I’ll be back.

Shannon Suit yourself.

Porter exits into the woods, searching for the bird.

James You know I’d be real upset if someone was keeping things from her.

Shannon I ain’t. I told you.

James You know God is a watchin you, Shannon. He surely is.

Meanwhile, Cove, who we only see in the shadows, carrying a hunter’s bow on his back, hangs a lantern in a far tree, while wandering the woods unseen, then fades back into the rising tides of night.
Scene Three

THE DARK NIGHT AND THE THRESHOLD

Porter enters, searching for the beastly bird.

She walks into the woods and a graveyard filled with modest, sometimes wooden tombstones and petrified statues. Children’s clothes hang on the nearby trees. Near the graveyard is a boat on the edge of a pond, which is unseen. The bowers hang low while, above, the silver moon, bright as a high beam, echoes Porter in her companionless hunt, which has grown from a slow to a burning fever, the world an ephemeral hue.

She senses she is being watched but cannot decipher the direction. The shadow grows at times mountain-high immortal and at other times sloughs little and mean.

From the trees, a voice is heard.

Coryden Who goes there?

Porter Hello?

Coryden I said who goes there?

Porter Nobody. Who the hell are you?

Coryden I’m the shepherd of Wear’s Valley.

Porter There ain’t no shepherds. Who are you really?

Coryden It’s none of your business.

Porter Where are you?

Coryden slips closer.

Coryden Move again if you want to die.

Porter I don’t care, living or dying, it’s the same to me.

Coryden comes out of the shadow. She is a girl dressed as a boy, her curls tucked up under her hat fall in wisps around her face, her stature is small and greasy and bright.

Coryden Well, you ought to care whether you live or die.
Porter  I can’t see you.

She tries to go by.

Coryden  Watch it.

Porter  Get out of my way.

Coryden  You try to hop this paw and I’ll slam you back so hard your head’ll spin.

Porter  I’ve walked these woods almost my whole life.

Coryden  I don’t let anyone pass.

Porter  Who are you? If you don’t get out of my way I’ll shove my fist down your throat.

Coryden  Porter Kidd, is that you?

Porter  Who wants to know?

Coryden  It’s Coryden. I didn’t get a good look at you at first but now I recognize your mean streak.

Porter  Coryden?

Coryden  That’s right.

Porter  Wipe your face. You look like you been suckin’ a cow. What are you doing out here?

Coryden  I protect these woods. What are you doing out here?

Porter  I followed a bird.

Coryden  What kind of bird was it?

Porter  I don’t know. I don’t see it now.

Coryden  What are you doing looking for a bird if you can’t find your son?

Porter  How do you know about that?

Coryden  I heard it. In the wind.

Porter  I don’t know. It was silly, I guess.
Coryden  It’s quiet out here. Mostly just me and the stag. How is your sister?
Porter   We ain’t talked in a while.
Coryden  Me and her were close.
Porter   I should get going. I have to find my son.
Coryden  Wait. Have you ever hear a strange sound in the woods at night? Drifting up from the trees? Like glass?
Porter   No.
Coryden  Wait. Listen. Do you hear anything?
Porter   I don’t hear anything.
Coryden  *puts her ear to the earth.*
Coryden  Do you believe in spirits?
Porter   No.
Coryden  You did when you were little. And your mammaw did.
Porter   So.
Coryden  Hazlitt heard them. Always heard things like that. We heard them once together. They came up from the earth. When your father had run her off into the woods, I used to come lay with her till morning. She used to read to me. Some old poems and things. And books on agriculture. And grammar. That’s when we did.
Porter   She used to read a lot.
Coryden  It started so quietly at first you could barely hear it. But it came up through the earth and went up into the sky. Chilled me cold. Quiet at first but then deafening, the most beautiful sound you ever heard. It gets lonesome here. I go home to my brothers and sister with their mouths open from morning to night. I keep trying to find it. I don’t know why angels would come up from the ground unless they were earthly angels. I get the feeling that they are not invincible,
but still hallow. Not even pure. The only thing I think is pure is the stag.

**Porter**  Aren’t there lots of deer in the woods?

**Coryden**  Not now. He used to have a mate but she was shot last year. Now he just roams the woods looking for her. He’s the last. His heart is just a muscle, he loves what he loves. I protect him. You don’t know what to say. That’s alright. But there’s a mystery to things, Hazlitt knew that. Hazlitt is a seeker.

**Porter**  I have to find my son.

**Coryden**  I could tell you where to look. I seen your father’s truck. If you will help me.

**Porter**  You saw his truck?

**Coryden**  Not far from here.

*She pulls a book up from the earth.*

This is one of the books, papers, she used to hide.

**Porter**  What do you mean, used to hide?

**Coryden**  She was made of a gentler rye. You were too. Your father was suspicious of her books. We heard it when she was reading to me.

**Porter**  takes the book.

**Coryden**  I remember when you were just a little girl. Everybody thought you were mean, but you weren’t mean. You were lovely and you didn’t even know it. You was the wildest and most stubborn-minded girl anybody had ever met.

**Porter**  I should go back. It was crazy of me to come out here.

**Coryden**  Will you read a few lines for me? I saw your father’s truck. I’ll show the way, if you’ll help me.

**Porter**  Just tell me.