

Below Zero

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Draft: 8.29.2023

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TIME

the present or a few years in the future.
winter.

PLACES

an old lodge in Northern Minnesota
the middle of The Boundary Waters
a shitty comedy club in New York City

CHARACTERS

Nellie – 25 a stand-up comedian in the beginning of her career. too much energy for her own good.

Mary Anne – 25 a professional musher. the cold weather has calloused her.

TEXT NOTES

a “ / “ indicates an interruption. The next line can begin at this point.
footnotes are meant to assist production. they should not be read aloud in a reading.

SCENE ONE

Nellie stands at a microphone.
She looks out at the audience as if they were just a small comedy club
full of other comics.

NELLIE

Hello, hello, hello.

Thank you for the pity cheers. I know what those were.

Can't slip anything by me.

It's ok. I get it, it's a rainy February day in New York.

Did anyone accidentally step in one of those lake sized puddles on your way here?

No one?

Ok, that makes one of us.

I got some reallllllly fucking weird news today. Do you guys wanna hear it?

It's about my ex-boyfriend.

Come on. I know we all love stories about ex's.

We dated in High School.

which was nearly seven years ago now.

Please don't do the math. Thank you.

He is literally a musher, like as in Mush! Mush! Balto! Like he's a dog sledder.

I'm not kidding.

It's a job that an adult man can have in Northern Minnesota. I would say that's crazy, but there are some random ass jobs grown ass men have in New York.

I once went on a date with a guy who was a Vegan Food Influencer.

And he was French!

His videos were all like "Wee wee. Tofu escargot review. It is a little slimey"

Which was endearing until he reviewed something else he ate...

Northern Minnesota.

It's practically the tundra up there where the temperature drops wayyyy below zero.

This country is wild. For many reasons. One being that

You literally are in the same country when you go from like Florida in the tropics to Minnesota where the temperature is negative 30 degrees. Which is just so fucking cold. That's when your balls legit fall off. Your nipples are just fucking icicles. And you're still in the same country!

I don't know man. It just feels like you should get a passport stamp for that.

My favorite thing about the Olympics is the way that female athletes make sure you know that they're a girl.

For example:

when the snowboarders get mega air and their little hair strands stick out of their helmets.

NELLIE (CONT.)

Or when the gymnasts do a million insane flips on the beam and they have muscles that could literallllly kill you.

and they got a cute little bow in their hair.

So cute. I love it. It's perfect. No notes.

I used to Cross Country Ski.

For sport. It was horrendous.

How many of you have skied before?

Ok, a few privileged souls. Well, imagine if all the fun things you love about skiing were just fucking sucked out of it.

You had to go up the hills, and it's a cardio activity.

fun right?

One time at "practice" for this pathetic "sport,"

I got lost during one of those below zero days. It was so cold and I was out there for like ever.

It was only 2 hours, but I thought I was going to die.

To make matters worse, instead of a hat, I had on this cute little headband that my earlobes stuck out of so that I could show off a pair of cute little earrings.

Because that's important.

The thing about frostbite is that it doesn't look cute.

Your skin turns weird colors.

And the thing about exposed skin in below zero temperatures is that it will get frostbitten

And the thing about a cute headband that your earlobes stick out of so that everyone can see your cute earrings is that you have exposed skin

And the thing about being 16 is that everything is embarrassing.

So, I'm 16 and lost in the woods. Thinking that I'm going to die at fucking cross country ski practice.

I'm crying.

I'm mentally writing my will - leaving my iPod to my dog.

My ears are turning weird colors.

When my Prince Charming on skis comes out of the woods to save me. The musher boyfriend.

This 16-year-old boy decides to warm up my ears by breathing on them.

Nellie lives in this moment for a second.

So now, I'm 16, embarrassed, cold, crying, and very turned on for the first time in my life.

I'm hopping on a plane in the morning to go to this guy's funeral.

NELLIE (CONT.)

He's not dead.

No one can prove it.

He's just missing. No one can find him.

He's probably just being a typical man and not responding to any texts.

No. This is serious. He went missing in a very scary place.

There's a terrible cold front in Northern Minnesota Right now and, blah, blah, blah.

Basically the State has decided that there's no way he could be alive and it's too dangerous to look for him.

Really wasn't planning to start attending friends funerals at 25, but here we are.

I'm really excited to be the mysterious ex-girlfriend though. I kind of want to wear one of those hats with the little veil and like smoke a cigarette out of a long holder.

I'll stand in the corner and be like "I was his first love."

Like a mysterious villain in a black and white movie.

I'll start doing it at random funerals just to mess with people.

Actually, I'll make it a business.

You can pay me to stand in the corner of your funeral – mysteriously. Everyone will be like "Who's that?" It will be fantastic.

Oops. I'm getting the warning.

Ok, I gotta wrap it up here.

What's the deal with Dog Sweaters?

Don't dogs come with a built in sweater?

It's like putting fur on top of fur.

That's very "Silence of the Dogs"

Creeps.

SCENE TWO

A Day and a Half Later.
Evergreen Lodge, Ely, Minnesota.
Late afternoon, but it's pitch-black outside.
It's cold. Scary cold.
Mary Anne wanders about the place.
Doing chores. Staying busy.

The sound of two dozen huskies barking.

Mary Anne rushes to the door. She throws it open.
The cold air rushes in. She runs out the door.
The sound of a car driving up.
The sound of tires stuck on ice.
The huskies keep howling.

Mary Anne runs back in.
She slams the door shut.
The dogs continue to howl.

MARY ANNE
It's not him.
It's not him.
You stupid bitch.
It's not him.

Mary Anne slumps down on the floor hiding.
There's a knock at the door.
Then another.
Then a whole bunch of knocks.

NELLIE
I know you're in there. I saw you!!

MARY ANNE
Go away!

NELLIE
It's freezing out here!

MARY ANNE
Evergreen Lodge is closed due to an unexpected emergency. Trips will resume next week. You can email us to get your refund or reschedule.

NELLIE
I don't need a refund.

MARY ANNE

Sorry the inconvenience, Ma'am.

NELLIE

Can I please just talk to you?!

MARY ANNE

I'm sorry ma'am. I can't help you. You need to go back into to town. / There are lodging options at an Inn in town.

NELLIE

I can't go! My car is stuck.

Mary Anne pauses for a second.

MARY ANNE

I'll grab a shovel. One second.

Mary Anne exits.

NELLIE

Wait. Don't go. I don't want to leave.

Mary Anne re-enters with a shovel and a winter coat.

As soon as Mary Anne opens the door to leave,

Nellie comes rushing in.

She's dressed in all black and there's a veiled pillbox hat on her head.

NELLIE

Oh my god. I am so cold.

MARY ANNE

Ma'am. You can't just walk in here. We are closed.

NELLIE

I know who you are and I need to talk to you.

MARY ANNE

I don't care. You need to go. Now! Here's a shovel. There's kitty litter in the shed. Dig your car out. You'll go home or go get a room in town. You hear me?

NELLIE

That's okay. It's not my car. It's Kent's car. You know Kent.

Well, he let me borrow it.

Sorta. Not actually. I sorta just took it.

MARY ANNE

Kent?

NELLIE

He's Erik's friend from high school.

MARY ANNE

I know who Kent / is.

NELLIE

It's a cool looking old lodge you got here. Love the rustic feel. So quaint. Fun. It's fun. Cute. I like it. I always say rustic / is making a comeback.

MARY ANNE

Who are you and how do you know Erik?

NELLIE

So sorry. Hello, I'm Nellie. Nellie Anderson.

You've probably never heard of me. But, maybe you have.

Um, this is like super awkward, but Erik was my first boyfriend.

Like when we were in High school. and I Just, Uh, yeah.

MARY ANNE

You're right. I've never heard of you. You need to leave.

Come on. Let's get Kent's car dug up.

NELLIE

Oh. Okay then. Well, you're Mary Anne and you're Erik's current girlfriend.

I just thought that since you weren't at the funeral that

maybe you had the same thought that I had where I was just

like

like

like

he can't be dead.

he like

always comes back

Like when he –

He just does.

And so, I wanted to know if you wanted to go search for him with me?

Mary Anne laughs.

MARY ANNE

We can't do that.

Let's get Kent's fucking car unstuck.

NELLIE

I don't want to.

MARY ANNE

Come on. We're going.

NELLIE

Ok, / but

MARY ANNE

No. / I don't know what you

NELLIE

No me! You listen!

He disappeared once in high school.

He left. In the middle of senior prom.

He and Kent and whoever went to go scavenge around a like abandoned World War 2 ammunition plant.

Erik left me with his phone and wallet and whatever else and disappeared.

His buddies left that night. He stayed.

Then, 3 days later, he walked 7 miles back to my house, still in his prom tux.

MARY ANNE

Erik wore a tux?

NELLIE

I picked it out.

MARY ANNE

....ok...

NELLIE

Ok what?

MARY ANNE

This isn't prom. This is serious. This is a missing person's case in Northern Minnesota in the worst cold front that we've had in a while.

You ever heard of hypothermia?

Frostbite?

NELLIE

Tell me that he hasn't disappeared before.

Tell me that he hasn't wandered off on an unexpected adventure before, just to walk right back to you.

MARY ANNE

Kelly –

NELLIE

It's Nellie.

MARY ANNE

Whoever you are.

You need to leave this establishment immediately.

NELLIE

The car is stuck.

MARY ANNE

I am aware. To repeat myself. There is kitty litter in the shed.

Mary Anne exits out the front door.
Nellie sits on the ground and takes off her boots.

Mary Anne re-enters.

MARY ANNE

You need to help me.

I'm not digging your / car

NELLIE

It's / Kent's car.

MARY ANNE

Kent's car out on my / own.

NELLIE

I'm not leaving.

MARY ANNE

Don't be a fucking brat.

NELLIE

I'm not a brat.

MARY ANNE

You're the biggest brat of all the brats.

NELLIE

Shut the fuck up.

NELLIE (CONT.)

We're not digging Kent's car out.

I'm not leaving.

We're going to go look for Erik.

MARY ANNE

Fine. I'll dig the fucking car out on my own.

NELLIE

Fine.

MARY ANNE

Fine.

NELLIE

Fine.

Mary Anne exits out the front door
only to immediately reenter.

MARY ANNE

No.

I'm not digging your car out.

Dig your own fucking car out.

NELLIE

I'm not going to.

I'm staying here.

Erik is out there, and I'm not giving up on him.

MARY ANNE

I haven't given up.

NELLIE

sure.

MARY ANNE

I'm following fucking directions.

Search and Rescue called it quits.

Said they didn't believe he could still be alive.

Not in this cold front.

And I promised that I wouldn't go out anymore.

I'm following directions.

And it would suit you to do the same.

NELLIE

I can't.

He found me once.

NELLIE (CONT.)

Okay? I won't be able to live with myself. If I don't go look for him.

MARY ANNE

Bitch. I don't care.

Please go.

NELLIE

So. There is like one more little issue.

Kent said that the car won't start if it's below zero.

Like he said the car's too old.

Like especially if it's been turned off for a few minutes.

Like.

It won't start back up.

MARY ANNE

Jesus Fucking Christ.

NELLIE

And now it's been like a few minutes.

So, like... idk if it will or not.

MARY ANNE

Go try.

Right now.

Go see if it starts.

NELLIE

It won't.

Mary Anne walks towards Nellie
with her shovel.
nearly threatening her.

MARY ANNE

NOW!!

Just put the damn key in the ignition and see what happens.

NELLIE

Okay, okay, okay.

I'm going.

Nellie exits.
The dogs all howl as she walks by them.
Mary Anne anxiously watches from the window.
This is all too much to deal with.
The sound of an engine trying to flip.
It tries. It fails.

It tries again.
Still no luck.

MARY ANNE
Oh. fucking hell.

The sound of a car door slamming.
The dogs howl.
Mary Anne exits into another part of the lodge.
Nellie Reenters.

NELLIE
The car didn't start.

MARY ANNE
I fucking know.

NELLIE
It's too cold out tonight.

MARY ANNE
No shit.

NELLIE
Where are you?

Mary Anne returns with a stack of blankets.
She throws them at Nellie's feet.

MARY ANNE
You can stay here for the night.
The floor is fine.
I don't feel like cleaning up one of the guest's rooms after you.
It'll be warmer when the sun comes up.
We'll dig out Kent's stupid car.
Maybe it will fucking start.
and you can drive back down to Minneapolis.
and then hop on a plane and go back to New York City.

NELLIE
Oh -how did?

MARY ANNE
And no more talking to me.

NELLIE
But, how did you know I live in New York?

Mary Anne exits turning off the lights.

Ok, goodnight, then.

Nellie curls up in her blankets.

SCENE THREE

That night. The middle of the night.
 Nellie lies on the floor. She's dead asleep.
 Suddenly, the howl of one dog.
 Then the howls of all the dogs.

Mary Anne throws on the lights.
 She runs through the room and throws the front door open.
 She disappears into the night.

Nellie wakes up, confused.

NELLIE
 Huh?

Mary Anne wanders back into the doorway.
 She stands there. The cold air rushes in.
 Mary Anne doesn't move.
 And then, she breaks.

MARY ANNE
 The moon. Th fucking moon. It was the moon.
 The dogs were yelling at the fucking moon the way the fucking dogs do.
 How stupid am I?
 That a noise I've heard almost every night for the past three winters could just –
 Like that?
 They were howling at the moon!
 nobody was walking up the driveway.
 Of course. a deer.
 I
 I
 Oh my god. I'm so embarrassed.
 I..

Nellie goes to Mary Anne

NELLIE
 I know, I know.

MARY ANNE
 No. You don't know.

NELLIE
 Big breath. Breathe.

MARY ANNE
 No. No!

NELLIE
Can I get you anything?
Tea?
Water?
Milk?

MARY ANNE
Whiskey.

NELLIE
Damn, girl. Ok.
Um. Where?

Mary Anne points in a general direction.
Nellie finds the whiskey.

NELLIE
Here, girl.

Mary Anne takes a big swig.

NELLIE
You know that shit'll put hair on your chest.

MARY ANNE
Great. That's exactly what I need.

NELLIE
Sorry. That's just what my grandpa says.

MARY ANNE
Weird.

Mary Anne takes another swig.
She hands the bottle to Nellie.
Nellie takes a sip.
She struggles.

NELLIE
Ouch.

MARY ANNE
Sissy.

NELLIE
You really thought he came back, huh?

MARY ANNE
Huh? No.

NELLIE
You did.
I just saw you.
You saw you.

MARY ANNE
Whatever.

NELLIE
Okay, sorry.

Mary Anne takes another swig.
She passes the bottle back to Nellie.

No thank you.

MARY ANNE
Ok. Yeah. It doesn't make sense.
Erik is a fucking survivor.
He doesn't just disappear.
I mean, logically, it makes sense.
 It's been a weird year.
 Weather wise.
It had been warm.
And then cold.
And then warm.
And then really cold.
And then a little less cold.
 the ice isn't stable.
 It's dangerous out there.
 Things just don't stay as cold as they used to.
Erik needed to get out. away.
 He probably wasn't being as careful as we are when we have guests.
 We just aren't. We know we should. be.
 He went out to get away.

And we had. And had a –

 and then it got really cold.

Search and Rescue decided that there was no way he could have survived.
He was pronounced legally dead.
His parents wanted to hold a funeral.
 they're really religious.
 you know.

MARY ANNE (CONT.)

I said I would go. And give a eulogy.

I didn't.

And it all happened so fast.

He's only been gone a little more than a week.

He's lived alone in the woods for more than a week before.

But never in this cold.

Never in these conditions.

Never without telling me.

Never without...

It doesn't make sense.

He can survive anything.

I've known that since the first day I met him.

Nellie nods.

NELLIE

When did you meet him?

MARY ANNE

Working at this wilderness camp in Montana.

We've been dating six years now. Oh my god. yeah.

NELLIE

How long have you been in here all alone?

MARY ANNE

Since yesterday.

NELLIE

Oh.

MARY ANNE

Yeah. They all come back tomorrow or the next day.

Everyone is visiting friends and family while they're down in the cities for the funeral.

We resume tours on Monday.

NELLIE

That's fast.

MARY ANNE

Better to work than wallow.

NELLIE

Are *you* done searching?

MARY ANNE

I know what you're doing.
You think you're sneaky.

NELLIE

Sorry, but I don't think that you are.
come on.
You and I both know that
if you ever went missing,
that Erik would look for you for forever.
that if you are ever missing, Erik would find you.
Fuck.
Maybe it's already happened to you.
It's happened to me.
He found me.
I was left behind during ski practice.
Because I was so slow.
And he found me.
Hours later.
Lost.
Alone in the snow.
Unable to feel my ears.

MARY ANNE

It's not up to me.
It's up to Search and Rescue.
It's up to everyone else.

NELLIE

Ok. Sorry.

Mary Anne takes another drink of the whiskey.
She leaves it on the floor and leaves.

Goodnight again.

SCENE FOUR

The Next Morning.
Mary Anne throws a pile of warm clothes down on the floor.
Nellie wakes up, startled.

NELLIE
Good Morning.

MARY ANNE
Are you coming or not?

NELLIE
Huh?

MARY ANNE
On your stupid adventures so I can show you how stupid you are.

NELLIE
For real?

MARY ANNE
For real.
Coffee?

NELLIE
Cream and sugar please.
Lots of sugar, please.

MARY ANNE
Why are you just sitting there? Put those clothes on.

NELLIE
Ok, ok, ok..
how're we doing this?
The dogs?
I've never been dog sledding before.

MARY ANNE
The dogs?

NELLIE
Yeah.

MARY ANNE
Yeah, we're gonna take the dogs.

NELLIE
 Fuck yeS!
 I love Dogs! I love Dogs!

MARY ANNE
 Please calm down.

Mary Anne hands Nellie a cup of coffee.

NELLIE
 Ok
 Sorry.
I'm so excited.

MARY ANNE
 Jesus Christ.

NELLIE
 I'll shut up.
 I promise.
 I promise.
 Look at me. I'm being quiet.

Nellie takes a sip of her coffee.

NELLIE
 Ugh! Is there anything \ in that?

MARY ANNE
 Uffda.

NELLIE
 Oh my god. ew.

MARY ANNE
 You're fine.

NELLIE
 Ok. I'm fine. I can do it.

Nellie tries to do it.
 She cannot drink it.

MARY ANNE
 Chonga's gonna lead the team.
 I'll assemble the rest of the dogs.
 I'm gonna need you to do as I say and not ask questions.
 We're going to be on the same sled.

MARY ANNE (CONT.)

So, I'm going to need you to not be this.
Be you.

NELLIE

I can try!
Sorry. Being quiet.

Mary Anne chugs the rest of her coffee.

MARY ANNE

You ready?

NELLIE

oh.
Uh.
yeah.
Let's go!
Mush!

Mary Anne Exits.
Nellie transforms into Stand-Up Nellie.

SCENE FIVE

Nellie stands at a microphone.
She's back at the little underground bar.

NELLIE

You always want the person that your ex dates after you to suck.

You always want the sequel to not live up to the original.

You want the person that your ex dates next to be *Grease 2* not *Shrek 2*

You really want them to be a flop.

or at least be a forgettable sequel like *Balto 2*.

that's right. they made a 2nd movie that no one remembers.

What really sucks is when that next bitch is a *Princess Diaries 2*.

She's cool. There's mattress surfing. Chris Pine. Julie Andrews singing for the first time post botched vocal cord operation.

It's like, the original version holds up, but it just isn't as cool.

Like *Shrek 1* is great, but she doesn't have Puss in Boots.

I'm cool.

that's a lie.

I didn't realize how uncool I am until I watched a woman my age order a medium black coffee.

That's it.

Walked right up to the barista and without hesitation said :“Medium Black Coffee.”

I was stunned.

There was something so smooth and beautiful about the way this woman ordered a black coffee.

It was so surprising.

You see me up here.

It really shouldn't surprise anyone that my coffee order is just a cup of sugar.

I see light in the barista's eyes drain when I walk up to the counter.

Their face says it all.

They know that I'm gonna need three different types of milk and 30 pumps of vanilla

And I know that I'm making their lives a living hell.

And they look at me with fear in their eyes,

And I look at them ready to apologize for what I'm about to do.

And there's a beat where we both just know how painful this is about to be

Nellie lives in that moment.

And then I go:

“Can I have a grande Carmel macchiato in a venti cup, 1/3 whole milk, 1/3 almond milk, 1/3 soy milk, caramel wall in the cup, no caramel drizzle on top, half blended – half iced, cold foam, whipped cream but mix it in, flat lid, 1 shot extra espresso (decaf), cinnamon sprinkled on top, extra packet of raw sugar and 30 pumps of vanilla”

sorry.

Just to see how it would feel to be cool, the next time I got a coffee,
I ordered a Medium Black Coffee.

It felt powerful.

I couldn't drink it. It tasted like shit.

But, damn. I felt cool.

SCENE SIX

The middle of the woods.

It's cold as fuck.

Icey as fuck.

Everywhere is white.

Nellie and Mary Anne on one sled. Mary Anne is like visibly annoyed
Chonga¹ leads their team.

NELLIE

Oh my God, they go literally so fast!

MARY ANNE

We're gonna go around the circumference of this lake.

He would have gone around it-

Probably.

He should have been staying on land at least.

We should stay on land.

on the land.

NELLIE

Why? Crossing the lake is like way shorter.

MARY ANNE

Things don't stay as frozen as they used to.

NELLIE

ARE YOU AFRAID OF FALLING IN?

MARY ANNE

Yes, of the ice breaking.

NELLIE

Shit. Really?

MARY ANNE

Did we not talk about this?!

NELLIE

No.

...

So, like is this like the normal route you take when you're guiding?

¹ Chonga and the rest of the dogs should not be a real dog. In fact, the best course of action would be to mime all the interactions with the dogs. Let the actors act.

MARY ANNE

Yes

No

Like

Depending on the length of the trip

like how many

nights

and if they're sleeping out

or if they're sleeping back at the lodge.

it all depends

and the weather.

if it's an overnight group

Erik or I or someone else will ski out

early in the morning to get everything set up before guests come

and we'll set up camp

and get dinner made and everything so that it's all nice and ready for them

when they get there and stuff.

So sometimes when we do that we take like short cuts.

Not major ones. But still.

and so like yeah. right now

this is obviously not a short cut.

NELLIE

Where haven't you looked yet?

MARY ANNE

We looked as far as we could.

Then a chopper went out – which was a big deal because no air traffic is allowed over Voyagers National Park.

Chopper didn't see anything.

Went out with Chonga.

He couldn't smell anything.

NELLIE

Chonga?

MARY ANNE

The Lead Dog.

NELLIE

Right.

MARY ANNE

He's a good boy.

A real good dog.

A few moments of no talking.
And then,

NELLIE

There aren't like abductors out here or serial killers that will wear your skin
– are there?

MARY ANNE

Not as far as I'm aware.
The cold will kill ya before any human would.

NELLIE

People get shoved onto the train tracks like every day in New York.
Just Push and then Splat!

MARY ANNE

God. I hate cities.... and people.

NELLIE

Ya. Well. I hate titties and beagles so.

MARY ANNE

What the fuck?

NELLIE

I don't know why I said that.

MARY ANNE

Chonga. Mush!

Mary Anne and Nellie lunge forward.

NELLIE

Oh my God, Chonga!

They ride in silence for a few seconds and then:

What time is sundown?
Do we want to be back by them?

MARY ANNE

It's at 4ish.

NELLIE

Ok.
What time is it now?

MARY ANNE
Morning.

NELLIE
Cool.
I'm scared of the dark.

MARY ANNE
Should we turn around?

NELLIE
NO!

MARY ANNE
Then stop complaining.

NELLIE
Ok.
sorry.

They mosh a little further in silence.

Are there bears here?

MARY ANNE
They're hibernating.

NELLIE
what about wolves?

MARY ANNE
They're endangered.
There's very few.

NELLIE
So there's no animals that could kill us?

MARY ANNE
Probably not.

NELLIE
Is it weird? Like is it hard?
Like being here without him?
Cuz like I know that when I like was home the summer after we / broke up -

MARY ANNE
WOAH!

MAY ANNE (CONT.)

Watch the dogs.

I gotta pee.

NELLIE

In the middle of nowhere

in the middle of the cold

I hate it here.

Hehe

haha

lol

fuck.

I'm an idiot.

I'm Mary Anne

And I'm like cool and I can do things and stuff

and I say shit like

Mush, boy!

FUCK!!!!

The team comes to a sudden stop.

Mary Anne wanders away.

Nellie looks around.

She sings a nonsensical melody to herself.

Nellie looks at the dogs.

The dogs take off.

Nellie holds on for damn life.

SCENE SEVEN

A little further away in the woods.

NELLIE

Woah

Woha

woah!

The dogs finally come to a stop.

Oh my God.

Oh my God.

Oh my God.

oh my god

oh myyyyyy goddddd

what the fuck?

Holy shit.

That was terrifying.

Nellie gets off the sled and collapses into the snow.

She lies there for like 25 seconds.

Breathing heavy.

The dogs breathing. Barking.

She talks from the ground.

I did not expect you to listen to me.

People don't listen to me nearly as well as you do.

Sorry, Chonga, and friends.

Mary Anne comes sprinting in.

She breathes heavily.

MARY ANNE

I'M GOING TO MOTHER FUCKING KILL YOU!

NELLIE

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry!

I didn't know they would run like that!

MARY ANNE

yOu didn't KNOW?!

NELLIE

They just go when you say "mush"

The dogs jolt.

MARY ANNE

WOAH!

The dogs come to fast stop.

No shit, they move when they're told.

NELLIE

No one ever listens to me, ok?!
 Like they never do what I say.
 Like it surprised me when you did.
 And then it surprised me when those dogs did.
 But normally, no one ever does!
 Like
 like
 like
 like when I do stand-up -

Mary Anne charges Nellie right into the snow.

I said I'm sorry!!
 Please don't hit.

MARY ANNE
 I'm not going to hit you.

NELLIE
 You look like you might.

MARY ANNE
 I'm gonna throw you in the snow.

NELLIE
 Don't throw me in the snow!!!

MARY ANNE
 Shh.

NELLIE
 What?

MARY ANNE
 Shhh.

NELLIE
 What?

MARY ANNE
 I don't know where we are.

NELLIE
 you don't know where we are?

MARY ANNE

I do. I just

Uh.

Where. The

Wait. the like.

Go to the bottom of the lake and then keep going straight.

And then it's around at least the next one before the clearing.

But where did the trail go?

NELLIE

Have you not done this like a million times?

MARY ANNE

I have

I have

Dammit.

Just go back the way we came. Just follow our tracks backwards. Just go backwards.

NELLIE

We can't go back!

Not yet!

MARY ANNE

The fuck is that?

Mary Anne spots something.

She goes over to it.

It's a can of peanuts sticking out of the snow.

That's weird.

NELLIE

What is it?

MARY ANNE

A can of peanuts under the snow.

What the hell?

NELLIE

remember when I asked about serial killers?

MARY ANNE

Other people use these woods.

Evergreen isn't the only lodge out here.

But there aren't many others.

NELLIE

What about ghosts? Do you have those out here?

NELLIE (CONT.)

we don't see any footprints or ski tracks
or anything in the snow.

we just see the peanuts.

It sounds other worldly.

I think this place is haunted.

MARY ANNE

Oh. Boy.

Mary Anne keeps looking around the area.
She sees a strip of land where the snow is more melted.

She walks over to it.

NELLIE

Whatcha looking at?

Mary Anne gestures at the melted snow around her.

What about it?

MARY ANNE

Do you see how it's more
like the snow is melted here?

The grass is sticking through.

It's weird.

NELLIE

Oh my god. We're totally being haunted.

MARY ANNE

Will you shut up?

There are many good reasons for the snow to be melted.

Like, um.

There could be a cave underground. Caves don't get as cold as the outside so sometimes the
snow melts.

But, I've never heard of a cave here.

NELLIE

Oh.

Maybe the sun hit it just right? Can that melt the snow?

MARY ANNE

Maybe someone camped here. Or. There could

Mary Anne hands Nellie the peanuts.

NELLIE

???

MARY ANNE

I think I see some tracks the other side – over there – look?

NELLIE

Should we?

Mary Anne hops onto the sled.

MARY ANNE

Come on!

Nellie hops on.

Mush, Chonga!

Nellie, Mary Anne, Chonga, and the rest of the dogs mush the fuck on.

SCENE EIGHT

Nellie at a microphone.
This time, a disruptive member of the audience
talks to someone in the backrow.²

NELLIE

Good Evening.

It's ok. I can wait for you to be quiet.

Nellie waits for a few seconds.

Come on.

Don't make me treat you all like fourth graders and pull out the silent fox.

I'll do it.

Really. I will.

Nellie slowly raises her hand above her head.
Her two middle fingers touch her thumb,
her pointer and pinkie fingers stand up.
Nellie holds up the silent fox.

Good.

Very good. Thank you for quieting down.

Thank you for listening.

I do get ignored a lot. So this is nothing new. It's fine. It's not. But whatever.

It's actually the reason I started doing stand-up in the first place.

To make you all sit there and just listen to me talk about whatever I want!

That and when people tell me I'm funny, it makes me feel good.

and when I feel good, I feel sexy.

so please listen to me and laugh at me so that I can feel sexy!

thank you so much for your participation.

I wish I could give out grades for participation.

Or at least leave comments like on your report cards.

"Pleasure to have in class." That was me. Anyone else?

We know the back row came home with "talks too much in class". Losers.

All those "pleasure to have in class" kids are doing great now.

Like me. Clearly. I'm up here.

I'm doing fine. I am.

I don't have a 401k like "the rest of pleasure to have in class" kids do,

but I'm here making all of you listen to me.

² Audience plants would be fun. But they are not necessary.

NELLIE (CONT.)

Turns out dogs listen to me.

Granted humans train dogs to listen to them.

And they learn voice commands through positive reinforcement.

but the questions still stands.

can I give treats to people who listen to me?

like a Starburst for every time you listen.

God. I just know that if I did that,

the “pleasure to have in class” kids would have a mouthful of cavities so fast.

You nerds. I love you.

“talks too much in class” kids... you’re not getting any fucking Starbursts.

sucks to suck. Bitch.

SCENE NINE

Back in the woods.
Nellie and Mary Anne mush onwards.

NELLIE
Where are we going?

MARY ANNE
I actually don't know. I don't recognize this.

NELLIE
You WHAT?

MARY ANNE
Well, excuse me if snow covered trees all begin to look alike.
We're following his – the – tracks.

NELLIE
Sorry.

MARY ANNE
Erik knows every inch of these woods.
He'd been coming up to Evergreen since he was a kid.
He started working here in high school even.

NELLIE
I remember.

MARY ANNE
And I didn't start till about two years ago.

NELLIE
Oh, for real?

MARY ANNE
No, actually, this is my third season.
Yeah.
It is.

NELLIE
How you even get into mushing?

MARY ANNE
Needed something to do with my winters.
In college, I used to spend winter break with my grandpa.
He was getting sick. Old.

And the winters started to get to him.
 They never did before, but, oh you know.
 So, I spent my first three winter breaks with my Grandpa.
 But he died summer before my senior year
 So I started working at Evergreen that winter.
 Doing prep for trips.
 Clean up.
 Etcetera. Did some training.
 By the end of the next season, I started guiding.
 So, this is my second season of guiding.

NELLIE
 Sorry about your grandpa.

MARY ANNE
 Grandparents die.

NELLIE
 My grandpa is dead too.

MARY ANNE
 Okay.

NELLIE
 Did Erik remind you of your grandpa?

MARY ANNE
 Ew. No.

NELLIE
 I mean, he's got grandpa-vibes. He reminds me of my grandpa.

MARY ANNE
 Dude. That's so creepy.

NELLIE
 That's not creepy.

MARY ANNE
 Yes. It. Is.

NELLE
 He's got an old-man smell and he can ramble. Boom. Grandpa vibes.

MARY ANNE
 What kind of grand-daddy issues do you have?

NELLIE

You're the one who just told me alllll about your Grandpa while we were in the middle of talking about Erik.

MARY ANNE

...

Fine.

He does have slight Grandpa-Vibes.

NELLIE

Is that usually your type? Like Grandpas?

MARY ANNE

Huh? Uh. I don't know.

NELLIE

Oh.

MARY ANNE

I mean. It's like. In this line of work. Like seasonal work. It's like either Grandpa Vibes or like Youth Pastor vibes.

NELLIE

Ugh.

MARY ANNE

Yeah. Slim pickins.

But I've never dated much. So. Doesn't matter.

NELLIE

Oh. For real?

MARY ANNE

just Erik.

NELLIE

Are you happy doing this?

Like, do you want to do this the rest of your life?

MARY ANNE

I want to be in the outdoors as much as possible.
and preferably not around a ton of people.

NELLIE

Did you have like interest in dog sledding before Grandpa Erik?

MARY ANNE

Nah, just cross-country skiing.

Snow shoeing.

Winter camping.

You know. Just other winter stuff.

But Erik loved it.

NELLIE

Do you still see tracks? I don't.

MARY ANNE

WOAH!

Shit shit

shit

I don't see tracks.

NELLIE

Before we get going again, did you bring any snacks?

MARY ANNE

Seriously?

NELLIE

I'm starving.

MARY ANNE

You're fine.

NELLIE

Dammit.

Where's that peanut can?

Mary Anne stops the dogs.
She gets off the sled and investigates

Mary Anne continues to investigate

In desperation for snacks,
Nellie opens the can of peanuts.
To her surprise, there are no peanuts.
Just an old crumbling piece of paper.

Uh...

Do you know what any of this means?

MARY ANNE
Give me that!

Nellie hands the piece of paper over to Mary Anne.

It's in French!
What the fuck is this?

NELLIE
I don't know.
I'm asking you!
I found it in the peanut can.

MARY ANNE
Dammit.

NELLIE
Do you know any French?

MARY ANNE
No, I took Spanish like everyone else!

NELLIE
Let me try!
I spent a week in Paris while studying abroad in / London.

Mary Anne shoves the note in Nellie's face.

MARY ANNE
What does it say?

NELLIE
Ok, ok, ok. One second.
Something about North star.
Something about a secret.
Three cups of coffee.
Hot body.
Something, something.
The beginning and the end.
something else.
And

MARY ANNE
This is useless.

Mary Anne takes the note back.

NELLIE
Well, Erik doesn't know French, so it's not like it's him anyways.

MARY ANNE

Erik knows more French than you.

NELLIE

Bull fucking shit.

MARY ANNE

No, he can hold a fucking conversation in French.

NELLIE

Literally since when?

MARY ANNE

Since we started taking on a lot of French speaking clients.
They come here from Quebec and they tip better if you speak French.

NELLIE

Dammit.

Erik speaks French?

MARY ANNE

Yeah?

NELLIE

No. It's just

Like

Fuck. Really?

I always like

I like to think that

I'm like way like

more sophisticated than him.

I'm a classy bitch.

MARY ANNE

are you know?

NELLIE

I am.

I have an

apartment in New York City.

(with roommates but whatever)

I have an honors degree in English.

MARY ANNE

And you do shitty stand-up comedy in little bars.

NELLIE
What the fuck?

MARY ANNE
I saw you.
Your posts on Instagram.
I searched for you

once.

NELLIE
You did?
Oh my god.
Were you like threatened?

MARY ANNE
I was relieved.

NELLIE
Why did you stalk me?

MARY ANNE
Doesn't matter.

NELLIE
Do you think I'm funny?

MARY ANNE
No.

NELLIE
Fuck you.

MARY ANNE
Sorry I just don't.

NELLIE
You're lying.
I'm funny.

MARY ANNE
Shhh!! I'm trying to decipher this.

NELLIE
What's the clue, Nancy Drew?

MARY ANNE

This is legible, so it can't be his handwriting.

NELLIE

True.

MARY ANNE

unless...

It's two different -
look.

it turns to scribbles

here at the end.

and...

English?

Here:

By foot or by ski, the treasure will come to thee

Follow the Star to the North.

Keep the secret close.

Three nights journey, in the deepest part of winter.

Keep the coffee hot to keep the body warm.

From where the winter never sticks

Through the golden snow

Across the lake of nourishment

Down the sparkling stream

abandon the star and

The beginning will become the end again.

The truth is in the journey.

NELLIE

No?

Yes?

MARY ANNE

ERIK!. Fucking. HAGEN!!

I'm going to fucking kill you!!!

NELLIE

What?

WHAT?

This makes sense to you?

MARY ANNE

Not one bit.

Ok.

A little bit?

NELLIE
What does it mean?

MARY ANNE
It means he fucking.

NELLIE
What? What?

MARY ANNE
I think it's ripped from some old journals
from some French Fur traders
From like
like
like
17fuckingSomething.
A treasure.

...

He was.

NELLIE
Slow down!
What fur traders?

MARY ANNE
Do you know nothing about Minnesota history?

NELLIE
Does anyone?

MARY ANNE
There was a time in France where felt top hats were really fashionable
and the way that you made them was with beaver pelts
so French dudes
came over to the states. And they traveled into Northern Minnesota
through the Hudson and then Lake Superior and what have you.
And they trapped beavers.
or they traded with the Ojibwe tribe to get beavers.
and they shipped them back to France
for lots of money.
and got rich.
and fucked up the ecosystem.

NELLIE
That's from this?

MARY ANNE

I don't know, probably.
 the like historical society like dropped off some books from researchers
 for us to like sort through.
 Because
 I don't know. They don't have many volunteers.

NELLIE

so.
 what do we do?
 Do we follow the North Star for three days?

MARY ANNE

Well, Erik went by foot.
 I think we can do it in one.
 But it needs to be night fall.
 To follow the North Star.

We're going back to the lodge.
 We're going to load up.
 We're going back out at nightfall.
 to follow the North Star.

Oh my god.
 if this is supposed to be a three-day journey...

NELLIE

He might be out there.

MARY ANNE

Three days out. Three days back.

NELLIE

He's only been gone what? A week?

MARY ANNE

Just a little more than a week now.
 He's out there.
 This proves it.
 I.
 I can feel it.

Nellie watches Mary Anne as Mary Anne rereads the note.
 Mary Anne rereads it approximately 3 times before moving on.

SCENE TEN

Nellie at her little comedy club with her little mic.

NELLIE

So. I've given up on dating.
I woke up one day and realized that
the scariest thing in the world
is dating men in New York City.

I'm ready to skip to the later stages of my life.
When it comes to love, at least.
I'm not ready for my joints to hurt worse than they already do.

I guess I'm just ready to skip to my "On Golden Pond" days.
I want to sit on my rocker on my front porch talking to the loons Luuuuuloolu.
while my grumpy old husband complains about how nobody knows how to fish anymore.
Luuuuuloolu.
Luuuuuloolu

If you haven't seen the movie, you have homework tonight.

I actually don't like fish.
Or the woods.

Let me rethink this.
I want to retire with a rich Frenchman in the South of France.
We'll spend our days reading books and talking about wine.

I should work on my French.
So, it sounds like I have homework too.

SCENE ELEVEN

Complete Darkness.
4:30pm in the afternoon.

Nellie, Mary Anne, and the dogs.
The sled is loaded up a bit heavier now.
Back at the patch of melted snow.
A blanket of stars above them.
There's so little light pollution up here, that this
night sky is one of the prettiest that you've ever seen.
Mary Anne is at a new level of intensity.
Nellie is at a new level of cold.
Which, to be fair, it is cold out.
approximately, 2 degrees below 0, Fahrenheit.
It's about to get much colder, however.

Mary Anne wears a headlamp.
She turns it off to look at the sky.

MARY ANNE
Back to where we started.
The place where the winter never sticks.
Hello, The North Star

You could nearly say it twinkles in response.³

Lead us to Erik.

NELLIE
Are you talking to a star?

MARY ANNE
Are you ready to make this journey?

NELLIE
I'm cold.

MARY ANNE
It's only going to get colder.

NELLIE
I'm tired.

³ this can be as cheesy or as subtle as you want it to be. It's a simply a nudge of confidence for Mary Anne.

MARY ANNE
We packed plenty of coffee.

NELLIE
I'm still afraid of the dark.

MARY ANNE
Stop whining.
MUSH!

They're off.
The air gets colder.
The wind begins to whip.
Flakes of cold snow.
Mary Anne follows the star with precision.
Nellie begins to doubt.

NELLIE
What do you think the secret is?

MARY ANNE
What secret?

NELLIE
in the note.
It says, "Keep the secret close."

MARY ANNE
Where does it say that?

NELLIE
"Follow the Star to the North.
Keep the Secret Close."

MARY ANNE
Oh.
I don't know.

NELLIE
Do you think it's important?

MARY ANNE
I don't know.

NELLIE
Ok.
I'm cold.

MARY ANNE
Heard ya the first time.
Only going to get colder.

NELLIE
Are the dogs ok?

MARY ANNE
They love it.

NELLIE
Chonga?

MARY ANNE
What about him?

NELLIE
He's Erik's favorite?

MARY ANNE
Erik is his favorite.
they've been buddies since Chonga was a puppy.

NELLIE
Does Erik like,
does he like dogs?

MARY ANNE
Have you ever heard of a Musher who doesn't like dogs?

NELLIE
I don't know.
I've heard of two mushers.
Total.
You.
and Erik.

MARY ANNE
He loves dogs.
A musher who doesn't like dogs.
That'd be like a cowboy who hates horses.
idiot.

NELLIE
Ok, listen.
He did not love my family's shih tzu

MARY ANNE

That's cuz that's barely a dog.

NELLIE

Well, excuse me.

...

he would act like he didn't like the dog
and talk about how dumb she was.

but then.

like

Erik would swing by and take her for a walk.
and nobody asked him to.

he just used to do it.

I think they really bonded.

And that dog did not like many people.

It was weird.

Erik was over all the time though.

Just to hang out.

not even with me.

I remember one time I didn't even know he was at our house.

He just came out of my dad's
tool shed. He was building something.

always building something.

And always using our printer.

Our printer and my dad's tools.

Designing shit.

Building shit.

shit.

stuff.

all the time.

Making real things.

And all I was doing was

homework.

writing stupid essays.

Essays that are long gone.

But the things that he made?

Those still exist.

I still have all the stupid little trinkets he made me.

MARY ANNE

That's nice.

NELLIE

Did he make you things?

MARY ANNE

A few times.

NELLIE

Like what?

MARY ANNE

he built me a bike.

from scratch.

Like he collected parts.

in secret for a full year. and then he gave me a bike.

I rode it all throughout college.

NELLIE

He made me a bracelet.

out of copper wire that he stole from
that old World War Two ammunition plant.

I still wear it from time to time.

And he made me a wooden box.

For my pens.

I used to have a lot of cool pens.

I still do.

And he made me a little wooden box for them.

To collect them in.

MARY ANNE

A leather-bound journal.

He made me a leather-bound journal.

I don't really journal much.

But, I use it.

For writing down birds I've seen.

NELLIE⁴

he whittled me a little bird whistle.

MARY ANNE

a comb whittled out of pine.

NELLIE

a leather coin purse that now holds tampons.

⁴ As the women talk about these items, it nearly becomes a competition.

MARY ANNE

a ceramic soap dish shaped like an oak leaf.

NELLIE

a ball of rubber bands.

to use as a stress ball.

MARY ANNE

a chest made from a street sign he stole.

NELLIE

a sun catcher made out of pressed flowers.

MARY ANNE

a toilet paper holder

NELLIE

a sweater. a wool sweater.

for our family's Shih Tzu.

MARY ANNE

a bookshelf made of refurbished wood from my grandpa's barn.

NELLIE

a ring made from an old coin.

it fits my finger just perfect.

i never take it off.

Mary Anne is silent.

Nellie waits for Mary Anne to say something.

Finally, Mary Anne responds.

MARY ANNE

ok.

NELLIE

but I mostly just never take it off

so that like um

guys at bars don't hit on me.

like, ya know?

MARY ANNE

no.

they pass some yellow snow.

and then like a lot of it.

NELLIE
you don't think that's the golden snow, do you?

MARY ANNE
WOAH!

They come to a stop.
Mary Anne gets off the sled to investigate.
Nellie follows.

MARY ANNE
deer shit.

NELLIE
Cool.

Mary Anne shines her headlamp all around.

MARY ANNE
a big ass meadow.

suddenly, a loud "crunch"

NELLIE
Awwwahhhhh!!
I'm scared of the dark.

MARY ANNE
Shhh!

NELLIE
What the fuck is that??

MARY ANNE
SHHhhh!!

Too late, the dogs begin to bark and howl.

NELLIE
oh my god! a moose!
We're going to fucking die.

MARY ANNE
Don't go near it!
Stay here! They can charge!

NELLIE
and a moose baby!

MARY ANNE
Chonga, shhh!

The dog barks turn to little whines.

MARY ANNE
I've never seen a moose out here before!
They're so rare these days.
Not much habitat.
They need wide spaces to roam.

NELLIE
I've never seen a moose at all.
they're so BIG!

MARY ANNE
Shh!
Let them pass through.

Mary Anne and Nellie sit and watch the moose pass.

NELLIE
if this is the golden snow,
What if this old note is just a like nature walk?
Like "here's where you can see deer and moose."
Like what if?

MARY ANNE
Yeah, I don't know. It's just a lot of animal piss.
So it's probably a good place to hunt.
If you're traveling through. On foot in like 1722 or whenever.

NELLIE
is this a good time for coffee?

MARY ANNE
Now?

NELLIE
Yeah. The note said to keep the coffee hot to keep the body warm.

MARY ANNE

We are like barely into this journey.

NELLIE

and I'm cold and tired.

need I remind you that I slept on a floor last night!?

MARY ANNE

Fine.

One cup of coffee.

Fast.

Nellie pours cups of coffee out of thermos.

NELLIE

Cheers!

They sip their coffee.

Oh. God!

There's nothing in that! Ick.

MARY ANNE

I like my coffee plain. Black.

NELLIE

Why are you so cool?

Mary Anne and Nellie sit on the cold ground.

MARY ANNE

I don't like that you wear a ring Erik made you.

NELLIE

Oh shit.

Seriously?

Sorry.

MARY ANNE

It makes me feel weird.

NELLIE

It's nothing like serious.

I just like it.

MARY ANNE

It's weird.

NELLIE

No it's not.

Want to see?

Nellie takes her hand out of her mitten.

MARY ANNE

Take it off!

NELLIE

no!

It literally doesn't mean anything.

MARY ANNE

It does to me.

NELLIE

It's just an old like nickel that he like made into a ring.

MARY ANNE

And that you wear on your fucking ring finger like a psycho!

NELLIE

I'm not a psycho!

MARY ANNE

I could leave you in these woods right now.

Watch and see if you could survive.

NELLIE

That would literally be manslaughter.

I have like literally so few survival skills.

MARY ANNE

Just take it off.

NELLIE

Ok. I'll put it in my pocket.

I just like it ok?

I swear I'm not like coming for your man.

I just.

MARY ANNE

you just pretend to be like fucking married to him.

NELLIE

No, I don't.

MARY ANNE

You're the one who said that you wear it so that guys don't hit on you at bars.
You pretend to be married to him.

NELLIE

Nah uh. I pretend to be engaged.
See?
It's on my right hand.

MARY ANNE

That's no better!

NELLIE

What does it matter?

MARY ANNE

It matters because you still fucking love / him.

NELLIE

I do / not.

MARY ANNE

Then why are you here?

NELLIE

...

MARY ANNE

Just give me the / fucking ring!

NELLIE

I won't.
and I don't love him.

MARY ANNE

Stop fucking lying!

NELLIE

I just miss the way that loving him feels.
I miss that. / so much.
I'm sorry.

MARY ANNE

fuck off.

Mary Anne chugs the rest of her coffee as Nellie rambles.

NELLIE

I love that he's happy with you.
 that he's taken care of
 not like
 that.
 but like
 he's a sad little loner boy.

and
 so it's just good.
 for him and probably you.
 he's not a loner boy.
 he's just – I don't know.
 different?
 no one in school understood him.
 like no one understood me.
 everyone from our high school. Just.
 they all wanted the same basic things, but we –
 we were different.
 and like. I miss having someone who gets me like that.

It was never going to work out for us.
 either.
 like we were 18 and stupid
 and I had known that I would live in New York at some point in my life.
 I had known that ever since I saw Mary Kate and Ashley's *New York Minute*.

 when
 he suggested we get married
 and move to Alaska,
 that's when I finally
 decided on which college I wanted to go to
 because up until that point
 I knew I wanted to get out of Minnesota
 but I didn't know if that was because there
 were too many people here or too few
 and
 and
 and
 the idea of marrying my high school sweetheart?
 that made me realize the answer was
 too few
 and / and

MARY ANNE

and now you still wear the fucking ring?!

NELLIE
Ok. I'll take it off!!

Nellie tries to take the ring off.

It's stuck!

MARY ANNE
give me your hand.

NELLIE
Don't yank my finger off!

Mary Anne breathes on Nellie's hand.

Oh, that's kinda hot.

MARY ANNE
I am literally going to murder you.

NELLIE
You didn't get just a little bit turned on?

Mary Anne slides the ring off and tosses it.
Deep into the dark woods.

NELLIE
I HATE YOU!
FUCK YOU!
FUCK YOU TO FUCKING HELL
YOU BROTHER FUCKING BITCH!!!

Mary Anne gets on the sled.

MARY ANNE
Get on or you're getting left.

NELLIE
no!
You just fucking –

MARY ANNE
Mush!!

The sled starts to jolt forward.

NELLIE
FINE

MARY ANNE
Woah!

The sled stops.
Nellie gets on.
The sled lunges forward.

SCENE TWELVE

Nellie is back at her mic in her little bar.

NELLIE

I'm so fucking mad! I'm mad mad mad mad mad.
all the time.

But nobody likes a mad woman.
so no one likes me.

Hence why I lost a precious fucking ring in the woods.
"my precious"

I don't need a fucking ring. Look what it did to that guy in that cave in that movie.

I don't need anything.

I don't need a man.

I don't need Mary Anne.

Nellie. stay on track.

A desk appears out of nowhere.
Or maybe just a notebook and a pen.
Nellie starts up her bit.

I lose everything.

Women's pockets were designed by men to
make them either buy purses or depend on men
and their GiaNT pockets.

don't do. Big Feminist Rage.
everyone does feminist rage.

She writes things down as she goes.

Actually I lose so much shit because I just have too much shit.
because I'm hoarder. I'm not.
funny. ok.

I lose so much because I hold onto so much shit.
because I love stupid pointless impractical shit.
HA!

I am so impractically impractical.
I love unnecessary shit.
Why do you think I'm pursuing a career in comedy?

That one didn't work.

Nellie crosses it out.

Okay.
 Impracticality.
 What's impractical? What's funny?
 Dog Sweaters.
 That's funny.

Dog sweaters. There's a better punchline in there somewhere.
 hmmm.

Pens.
 Yes.
 Pens are necessary. Practical.

Nellie stands up.
 She starts to do the bit.

Pens are a practical thing to give people.
 Everybody needs pens.
 That's why they give you pens at the dentist.

Nellie, what? Pens at the dentist.
 What's funny about pens at the dentist?

Nellie sings that one verse from "Riptide":

I'm afraid of dentists and the dark.
 Nellie. Don't sing! FOCUS.

Nellie starts her bit again.

I. have. pens. I have a collection of pens that are pretty.
 They're too pretty to be used.
 They're my looking at pens.

Nellie goes back to writing it down.

Okay. There's something here.
 Pens, dentist, pretty pens for looking at – pretty teeth for looking at.
 The better to eat you with my dear!
 Okay, pens, dentists, pretty pens for looking at, little red riding hood got lost in the woods.

stupid
 stupid
 stupid
 stupid

dog sweaters and dentists and pens and Lord of the Rings.
 why dentists?
 Pens at the gynecologist.
 now that's funny.

Nellie tries a bit again.

my great grandparents were "pioneers" who didn't have anything that wasn't necessary and now I collect pens for looking at.

That's funny.

Nellie goes back to the drawing board.

No it's not.

Nellie.

Okay, let's try this.

Nellie tries again.

I am chronically impractical. nooo.....

Nellie goes back to her notebook.

Let's dig deep.
 What is it about impracticality?
 It's uhhh.
 uhhhh.
 hope?
 ew.

Nellie tries the bit again.

But my most impractical quality is that I am chronically hopeful.
 Part of the reason I stopped dating was that I got too hopeful.

I get too imaginative about how magical the first date will be.
 Snow falling. Dancing under a Christmas tree. Kissing in Central Park.
 And then it's like "ding!" "You up?"
 and I'm like "sure. come over"

Nellie writes that down.

GoD! NOTHING IS WORKING!
 I JUST WANT MY ringgggg back!

SCENE THIRTEEN

Back in Northern Minnesota
The sled comes to the edge of a lake.

MARY ANNE

The tracks go across the lake.
I don't know if we should cross it or not.

NELLIE

You know that's littering, right?
Like throwing my ring into like the woods
or whatever.
that was littering.

MARY ANNE

shut up.
I'm trying to make a decision here.

NELLIE

no / but like -

MARY ANNE

we're going to do it.

NELLIE

You're a jackass.
You're a nasty litterer of rings into woods.

MARY ANNE

we're going to cross the lake.

NELLIE

I thought you said that the weather has been too unstable all year.

MARY ANNE

it has been.

NELLIE

so what changed?

MARY ANNE

the tracks go that way.
and
if we fall in, I don't doubt the dogs will get out.
and I think I can get out.
But you?

NELLIE
are you fucking serious??

MARY ANNE
Mush!

They mush on!

NELLIE
I swear to god
if you kill me just because I wore a fucking ring.

MARY ANNE
It's weird.
ok?

NELLIE
did he tell you about it?

MARY ANNE
He told me that he-almost gotten married right outta high school.
He told me about that.
About you.

NELLIE
He did? What did he say?

MARY ANNE
That you're fucking annoying.

NELLIE
No he didn't!

A loud groan from the ice beneath them

NELLIE
HOLY SHIT!
THE FUCKING ICE!!!!

MARY ANNE
It does that sometimes.

Then a cracking sound.

NELLIE
and that?
does it just do that sometimes??

Mary Anne looks behind them.

A long singular crack forms in the ice.

MARY ANNE
not necessarily!
don't look back.

Nellie looks back.

NELLIE
You are literally trying to kill me!!!

MARY ANNE
Mush! MUSH!
Faster! Faster!!

The sled lunges forward.
they race.
faster than
the ice
cracks
but barely
barely
making it to the
other side of the lake
as the ice splits into two
the sled comes to a stop.

MARY ANNE
Woah.
Good boys.

NELLIE
Oh my god.
Oh my god. We made it!

Mary Anne praises the team of dogs.

MARY ANNE
Thank god.
Such good doggos! Good boys.

NELLIE
Were you scared? because
you were like
cool as a cucumber
and I was like
"this bitch is actually trying to kill me"

MARY ANNE
I'm not trying to kill you.
I'll get back at you, though.
I'll find a way.

MARY ANNE (CONT.)
Who's a good boy? Huh?

NELLIE
That's comforting.

Mary Anne produces a jet boil⁵ from the sled.
She fills with snow.

Whatcha doing?

MARY ANNE
gonna try and get the dogs to drink some water.

NELLIE
Oh.
do they need to eat?

MARY ANNE
Yeah.
that too.
I'll feed them now.

NELLIE
I'm hungry.

MARY ANNE
That's nice.

NELLIE
thanks.

Nellies looks back at the crack in the lake.

Oh my god!
Mary Anne! Look!
Look at all the fish!
I know that fish have to go like somewhere in the winter
but
I just never thought
about how they all must still be in the lake!!
Do you see them??

MARY ANNE
Have you never heard of ice fishing?

NELLIE
Oh.

⁵ A jet boil is a type of light weight camping stove that produces boiling water very quickly. For the purpose of theatrics, the jet boil need not function.

yeah.
LOL
Duh.

NELLIE
But like look at them!

MARY ANNE
I'm looking.

Mary Anne finds a slab of frozen meat
from the sled. She puts it in a big ass dog bowl.⁶
The dogs all begin to whine in excitement.

Can you let the dogs off? Just undo the top one on each of them.

NELLIE
Who let the dogs out?
Who, who who?
Me. I did.

MARY ANNE
Uffda.

Nellie begins to undo the dogs one by one.

NELLIE
do you think that this is the Lake of Nourishment?
from the note?
because of the fish?

MARY ANNE
The Lake of Nourishment?

NELLIE
Like because like people used to eat the fish.

MARY ANNE
People do still eat the fish.

NELLIE
Oh.
Yeah.
Do you?

⁶ This need not be meat. And the thawing of it need not be seen. The dogs are not even real.

MARY ANNE
Me?
No. I'm vegan.

NELLIE
Shut up!
For real??
Even like while dating Erik? cuz he eats like everything!

MARY ANNE
He's vegan too.
We started it to save money one summer because meat is expensive.
And it sorta stuck.

Mary Anne pours the now boiling snow over the meat.

NELLIE
Erik a vegan?
That's crazy.

MARY ANNE
Yeah, well.
It's not that crazy.
He gives a giant fuck about a lot of things, so what he eats and how it effects the world around him.
That's important to him.

NELLIE
Huh.

Nellie undoes the last dog.

MARY ANNE
Come on boys!
Come eat!

The sound of dogs slurping up the mushy food.

NELLIE
Are they all boys?

MARY ANNE
Nope.
I just like saying
"Come on Boys"

NELLIE
What's that smell?

MARY ANNE
It's the dog's food.

NELLIE
ew

MARY ANNE
Yeah. It stinks.

NELLIE
I really do think this is the Lake of Nourishment. I'm gonna say it is.

MARY ANNE
Suit yourself.

NELLIE
I can't believe that Erik is vegan.

MARY ANNE
People change.

NELLIE
What else is different about him?

MARY ANNE
I don't know.

NELLIE
I'm getting sick of talking about him.

MARY ANNE
That's a little harsh.
Considering that
like
he's missing
and everything.

NELLIE
I know.
But
I want to talk about something else.
like there has to be something else that you and I have in common.

MARY ANNE
or we could just not talk at all.

NELLIE
No thank you.

MARY ANNE
No, I think we should try that.

NELLIE
Fine.

A few moments of silence.
Mary Anne preps two cups of coffee.

MARY ANNE
Coffee?

NELLIE
Sugar?

Mary Anne shakes her head and hands Nellie the cup of black coffee.
Nellie and Mary Anne sit quietly and sip their coffee.
Nellie winces her way through every sip.
while the dogs continue to slurp.
when the slurping stops, they all start to howl
at the moon. a full moon.
Nellie watches her breath in the cold air.
Mary Anne watches the steam from her coffee.

NELLIE
Stars.

MARY ANNE
Lots of them.

They both sit there.
Shivering.
Looking up.
around.
Wondering.

The stars and the moon above seem to almost dance.
Not quite.
but
it's that sickening feeling that you get when you
can see the vastness of the universe.

Another howl from a dog.

And then,

finally,
Mary Anne gets up.

NELLIE
If he's still alive,
he's looking at the same sky that we are.

MARY ANNE
I thought we weren't going to talk about him
anymore.
I thought maybe
we weren't going to talk at all anymore.

NELLIE
Ok.

One more moment of the women.
the coffee. the stars. the silence.

MARY ANNE
Help me harness the dogs again.

Nellie goes to help Mary Anne.
The stars shine brighter.
The moon feels bigger.
The North Star glimmers more than before.
It all gets bright.
too bright.
and then darker.

SCENE FOURTEEN

Back on the sled.
And deeper into the woods.
Mary Anne and Nellie on the sled.

NELLIE

What do you think Kent is doing without his car?

MARY ANNE

Jesus Christ, Nellie.

I can't believe you did that.

Kent's so annoying.

NELLIE

Tell me about it.

People like Kent are the reason I can't stay in Minnesota.

They don't get it.

They only see like one track to life

and it's so annoying.

It's like:

- get an engineering degree
- get a practical engineering job
- make good money but not too much
- take up Bouldering and Cross-Country skiing as hobbies
- buy a house
- find someone to marry
- have your wedding reception at a brewery
- start a family
- buy a cabin
- eventually retire, sell your house and move into your cabin.
- die.

and like I get it.

but like. then like. someone like you or me comes along

and we're like "Nah Bro"

and they are like :

"Cannot Compute

I am a silly robot brain. beep boop"

MARY ANNE

I just feel lucky that my parents get it.

I know that Erik's try to get it, but mine really do.

NELLIE

That's good.

I blocked my mom on Instagram because she would

and ask me to like explain the jokes I posted.

and I got annoyed so I blocked her.

MARY ANNE

I don't have an Instagram.

NELLIE

I thought you said that you stalked me.

MARY ANNE

I did. On Erik's phone.

NELLIE

Oh.

...

I think we're starting to get along.

That's fun. Don't you think?

MARY ANNE

What did you say?

NELLIE

That we're getting along, and I like it.

MARY ANNE

What?

NELLIE

We're getting along, and it's fun.

MARY ANNE

Huh?

NELLIE

Never mind.

MARY ANNE

what's next on the note?

NELLIE

"Down the Sparkling Stream"

MARY ANNE

Down the Sparkling Stream.

NELLIE

The fact that some of these things have like remained the same is crazy.

Don't you think?

MARY ANNE

Yeah. It's crazy.

I mean there's a lot of people that have cabins up here.
but that took a while.

It was fur traders and the Native Americans for a long time.

But the fur trade eventually fucked over the Ojibwe.

Just like eating all their food

and then getting them to like

kill beavers and stuff and trade the furs

with the French

and then like

they didn't have enough

and then of course like

colonizing them and kicking them off their land

and stuff

like this is a national park now

but

yeah.

NELLIE

Cool.

...

The Sparkling Stream.

sounds like something made up in a Disney Movie.

Mary Anne chuckles

Did I just hear you laugh?

Do you think I'm funny??!

MARY ANNE

You noticed something very niche.

That's not funny.

NELLIE

Fine.

I'm observant.

MARY ANNE

Ok.

NELLIE

And amusing?

MARY ANNE
Sometimes.

NELLIE
Thank you.
See, we are getting along.

MARY ANNE
Shhh.

NELLIE
No. I like it.

MARY ANNE
Shhh!!

NELLIE
No! It's nice.

MARY ANNE
Shhhhhh!
I think I hear water!
Rushing water?

NELLIE
I don't hear anything.

The go a little further.
The sound of rushing water.

MARY ANNE
Woahhh.

They all come to a halt.
The sound of the water gets louder.

NELLIE
Now I hear it.

They both get off the sled.
They walk towards the sound.

Do you think it's the Sparkling Stream?

MARY ANNE
I don't like that the water isn't fully frozen.

They stand at the top of a halfway frozen waterfall
The kind where there are huge masses of ice formations

and yet
 water runs underneath them.
 It's frightening.⁷

Mary Anne's headlamp hits it just right.

NELLIE
 It's sparkling.

MARY ANNE
 What's after this?
 In the note?
 What comes next?

NELLIE
 "Abandon the star and the beginning will become the end again."

MARY ANNE
 Turn around
 After this, we turn around and go home.
 So he's either here.
 Or he's nowhere.

NELLIE
 I'm not going to lie,
 I'm, like a little like nervous
 to just like go down this like secret not-so-frozen waterfall
 that like
 a like uh.
 old dude who used to hunt beavers wrote about
 and then
 our friend
 never came back from.
 We've only seen tracks going in one direction.

MARY ANNE
 I need to know now.
 We've already made it this far.

NELLIE
 don't die.

MARY ANNE
 Are you not coming with me?

⁷ In production, we need not see it. The actors can see it. The audience can hear it. That is enough for me.

NELLIE

That shit looks scary as shit.
I'll sit here and drink coffee.

MARY ANNE

Fine.
I'm going.

Mary Anne goes.

NELLIE

How is it that I'm being the reasonable one?
Huh, Chonga?
I hate the dark. It's so scary.
Do you like pets?

Nellie reaches her hand out for Chonga to sniff.
Then she pets him.

Yes. you do like pets.
Good boy.
Who's a good boy?
God. Your breath.
Smells atrocious.

Chonga and Nellie look in the direction Mary Anne left.

SCENE FIFTEEN

Mary Anne walks along the waterfall alone.
Just Mary Anne and her headlamp.

MARY ANNE

I've come this far.

Why wouldn't I just go look?

look down

this sparkling stream

that's more like a river

if not a brook.

If not here,

where?

If not now,

when?

wait to find your body when the snow melts?

She begins to descend the side of the waterfall.

what if

you ran away from

me?

and the

the

what if it was

because I wasn't ready

I'm sorry I didn't speak at your funeral.

Mary Anne slips.

She falls.

Scream

Crack.

Splash.

She's fully submerged.

SCENE SIXTEEN

Mary Anne's imagination.
 In her mind she's standing at the pulpit of a Church.
 She's in all black under her snow gear.
 But instead of a wool hat on her head, it's Nellie's veiled pill box hat.
 She speaks to the audience as though they're at the funeral.

MARY ANNE

Well, this is weird.

I haven't been inside a church in a long time.

Don't you think this is weird??

Like

being here? at a church because Erik disappeared?

God. If I'm being completely honest, I feel like this is all my fault.

Erik and I have always gotten along perfectly.
 always.

we both only like a handful of people, and we both happen to like each other.

I love him.

I really do, but we could go a full day without talking to each other
 and would know exactly how the other was doing.
 and what they were up to.

the day he went missing, we didn't. for the first time.

It was the night before we both had a day off.
 so we were both. cranky. tired.

I was checking in on our list of things.

things that needed to get done

before the end of the season.

because our goal.

our goal is to do what we do.

in Antarctica.

our goal.

is to go big.

and I was working on an application to one of the like the research facilities down there. and the
 way the living situation works there is that singles get a bunk,
 but married couples can have their own dorm.

it's a little ass backwards.

but it makes sense.

because

like

people live down there for long periods

of time, if you're there with your person, you need your space.

and I mention that. and that it was on the application.

and he said "so let's get married".

and I said "is that a proposal?"

and he said "do you need one?"

do I need a proposal? I would like one.

and I think that he thought that that meant that I didn't want to marry him. but that wasn't the case at all. I just don't feel ready. I'm twenty-five. which isn't too old or too young. he said that he had planned on marrying me for a while now. he had already told his dad that he wanted to get married soon.

he just thought
he thought i was on the same page.
because we don't talk about things like this.

and so I said. "I don't know."

I didn't know.

It's not that I don't want to spend the rest of my life with him
it's that I don't know where the rest of my life will lead
and so. how am I to know?
how?

and

and

and

I said. I think I said that I wasn't sure. Or ready. Or or or.

but why didn't he tell me any of this?

why did he just expect me to know without telling me?

and for the first time ever, I wanted to scream at him.

I wanted to get mad at him.

I love him so much.

I would love to be here.

standing here in white saying "I do" with him

but you don't just spring that on to people.

and then he said that this was how his last relationship ended.

his relationship with Nellie.

he said. it ended because he made her a ring out of an old nickel.

and he asked her to marry him and move to Alaska.

Can you believe that this wasn't his first time trying this shit?
 that for that bitch he made a ring and thought it out.
 but for me?

he was just like "why not? let's do it."

and maybe if it had been like my idea, I would have been down. Down to run to city hall. and
 just get married. I don't know. But I wanted it to be a special circumstance. a special experience.
 So much of what we do is not like that.

and I wanted that.

and I finally told him that.
 and I told him that I wanted a ring
 and a real proposal
 and a real wedding.
 and and and

he had never thought about that before.

and he felt. bad. so bad.
 and I was mad. so mad.

and I went to bed early.
 and he went outside to play with Chonga.
 Chonga always calms him down.

and then he never came back.

Chonga came back. But Erik did not.

and and I'm so scared that he's never coming back.
 I'm so scared of what everything is going to be without him.
 who am I going to be without him?

I have no fucking clue.
 talk about what's coming next.

We've planned everything together.
 what do you do when everything you've ever planned disappears into the woods?

I hope that was enough of a eulogy for you fuckers.

Muffled sound overwhelms.
 a distorted voice cries out "MARY ANNE!"
 The voice gets louder and clearer.
 It's Nellie.
 The strap to a dog harness appears.
 Mary Anne grabs it.
 She's pulled off, swiftly.

SCENE SEVENTEEN

Mary Anne sits shaking around a crackling fire.
 Her wet clothes on hang off the sled.
 Nellie wraps Mary Anne in a blanket.
 Mary Anne sips a hot cup of coffee.

NELLIE

I had a feeling you were gonna fall in.
 I was talking to Chonga about it.
 and then there was a scream.
 and I was like “Dammit!”
 and Chonga was like
 “you were right”

but hey.

Look. I saved your life!
 anyways.

How’s the coffee? Still warm?
 Maybe that’s why the note said to keep the coffee warm
 because like people fall in there.

Oh! Did I mention?
 While I was like gathering wood for this incredible fire.
 Don’t you think this fire is incredible?

I saw a beaver dam. Like while I was looking for wood.
 I bet that’s the secret.
 that the like trappers and what have you had.
 that this was a secret place to trap beavers!
 seems legit to me.

I just want to say.
 I think we should be friends.
 I know we don’t have a lot in common,
 but
 I don’t know.
 If you come to New York sometime, I would love to take you to all my favorite bookstores.
 You’ll love it! I think at least.

Can I have a sip of that?

Mary Anne hands Nellie the coffee.

NELLIE (CONT.)

Eck. Ew.

MARY ANNE

It's whiskey.

NELLIE

Nice.

MARY ANNE

I think I know why he wanted to find a treasure.

I think it's all my fault.

NELLIE

Impossible.

MARY ANNE

He wanted to marry me.

And I told him I wanted to do it right.

I think.

Maybe he was hoping to find something.

to uh to help him afford a ring.

that was stupid of me.

I just shoulda done it.

I don't need diamonds or gold.

NELLIE

Hey, hey.

that's not stupid.

That's just expecting the bare minimum.

MARY ANNE

But that's not how we live.

NELLIE

so? you deserve it.

you deserve a fucking ring.

MARY ANNE

He's supposed to be here.

He's supposed to be right here.

I miss him.

Nellie hugs Mary Anne
Mary Anne shivers. Her teeth clattering.
They both sit there in the silence.
in the cold.

NELLIE

I think we should get you back and into some dry clothes.
Get you inside.
Maybe even to a hospital.
You know when I had frostbite on my ears they told me
I coulda died of hypothermia.

MARY ANNE

I know about hypothermia.
I'm fine.

Bright colorful light.
And then another.
Pretty Soon it fills the entire sky.⁸

NELLIE

Oh MY GOD! The Northern Lights!

MARY ANNE

aurora borealis.

NELLIE

holy shit.

MARY ANNE

i think it's time to go home.

NELLIE

You ready?

MARY ANNE

the sky?
i think it's Erik.
he's telling us to go home.
he's here.
he's sorry.

NELLIE

I've never seen them before.
But Erik talked about them all the time.

MARY ANNE

I've only seen them with him.

and now.

⁸ This should be the most fun and most insane lighting cue of all time. Blow their minds.

MARY ANNE (CONT.)
can you help me onto the sled?
I can barely move.

NELLIE
Oh, yeah.
obviously, here.

Nellie helps Mary Anne onto the sled.

MARY ANNE
tell them what to do, Nellie.

NELLIE
MUSH!

The sled lunges forward.
The women fly through the dark forest now covered in colorful lights.
They mush until the lights become darkness.
They fly all the way home.

END PLAY