

MALHEUR

By Rachael Carnes

CHARACTERS

Sarah	Middle-aged woman, pretty, put together
A’hn	In her fifties, wiry and birdlike, A’hn is married to Joe
Joe	Ahn’s husband, rugged and handsome, like Sam Elliott. (If you can, get Sam Elliott.)
Soren	A teen, he wears goth clothing and makeup
Bob	In his fifties, married to Kassie, his clothes are too snug
Kassie	Bob’s wife, dresses like a therapist, frazzled
Jennie-Claire	Elderly, she’s a bit rumped, but with beauty parlor hair and ever-present bright lipstick and clip-on earrings
Gary	In his seventies, clean cut and friendly, grandfather to Soren, husband to Darlene
Darlene	Gary’s wife, Soren’s grandma, also older, a bit sour

SETTING

A converted brothel in the middle of nowhere, adjacent to the Malheur Wildlife Refuge, in Harney County, Oregon, a place where people converge in small groups to do one of two things: watch migratory birds, or hunt. Few people ever do both.

TIME

Dusk

The set is decorated in a kind of natty Western chic. A pair of binoculars sits on the coffee table.

The living space is anchored by a large coffee pot that sits on a warmer on a bookshelf, all day, with an assortment of ridiculous mugs — featuring kitschy expressions, like one finds in tourist shops. The bookshelf is stuffed with back issues of National Geographic, board games and jigsaw puzzles, and assorted well-loved (i.e. filthy) children’s toys.

Along the walls are various antlers, skins as well as fishing photos featuring the catch of the day. These photos are from years gone by — some are faded, sepia, others are in Kodachrome color. Most have a name, date, and the weight of the fish written right across the glass.

ACT ONE
Scene One

JOE

(Talking to him self, while fixing his telescope, which is trained on the hills across from the inn.) Before the Pacific Northwest as we know it was formed, a series of volcanic islands known as the Siletzia Island Chain sprouted up, forming the backbone of what we now think of as the Coast Range. Flash-forward 10 million years, and the Siletzia block was accreted onto the North American Plate and covered with a thick pile of —

A’HN

(Walking up on JOE, carrying fresh-dried sheets and towels.) Why you doing that?

JOE

My lens was dusty so I —

A’HN

Why you talk to yourself like that?

JOE

(Looking through the telescope.) The birth of the Cascade Volcanic Range established high grounds to the east — Oh — The kids in the school are out on recess. Wave —

A’HN

All three of ‘em? Hi, kids! *(Waving to the kids, a half-block away.)* Got the washing in before the rain — Thanks for helping!

JOE

Do you think the kids know that this area's susceptible to erosion?

A'HN

Someone coming — See that car on 205? That them. Gotta be —

JOE

That teacher probably doesn't even teach them that volcanic and sedimentary rocks washed downhill over millennia —

A'HN

Joe! (*She snaps.*) Professor! Get out of the clouds — I gotta fold laundry!

JOE

If I had a one-room schoolhouse, those young minds, I'd say, "Now set your time machine to 14,000 years ago!" —

A'HN

I going inside — Just *talk to yourself!*

JOE

14,000 years ago! The great flood! A series of floods, really — Now this lens — What? Yes! You can see it — Here. Isn't that something? A lens gives you magical powers — Let's you see the cells — or the celestial heavens. What? Where were we? A glacial mass dams a river valley in western Montana, producing a large lake —

A'HN

Professor! You don't teach there anymore.

JOE

I know — I just miss it.

A'HN

And they don't learn about that stuff now — They — long division. Negative numbers!

JOE

They'll never get out of Frenchglen with Long Division.

A'HN

Maybe they don't wanna leave — Look at 'em — Looking happy, see? Playing. Oh —

JOE

There's our guest — Wave — the guests like it when we're friendly.

A'HN

One Yelp review and you think you gotta remind me, Joe? (*To SARAH.*) Hello!

SARAH

(Walking up, wet from the rain.) Beautiful country here!

JOE

Sorry it's not better birding weather. *(Swiveling his telescope.)* Where'd you walk?

SARAH

I'm not a birder — I walked to the gate — The one to the refuge?

A'HN

I gotta take this laundry in — *(Forced.)* Please enjoy your stay.

JOE

You walked to Whorehouse Meadow —

SARAH

Excuse me?

JOE

Back when this was cattle country, entrepreneuring young females from Vale would set up wood and canvas tents in the meadow to provide services to the ropers —

A'HN

(Yelling from inside.) The women of Vale still *all whores!*

SARAH

I don't think that's their preferred terminology—

JOE

Many of the shearers were Basque American immigrants, and their sometimes-explicit carvings can still be found in the bark of aspen trees surrounding the meadow. Did you see any?

SARAH

I didn't know to look — Aspen trees? They are pretty — those are the yellow ones?

A'HN

(Yelling from inside.) They called quaking aspen! You want coffee?

JOE

She's right — *(Loudly.)* Nice botanical classification, honey! *(To SARAH.)* She remembers because she learned it on a hike, while we were exploring. That's why if I were still the teacher in the Frenchglen school — I'd tell the kids about the whoring — And the Great Missoula Flood — So they'd know about the time and place.

SARAH

You'd tell children about whoring?

JOE

All this was once underwater — Can't you see a giant ichthyosaur swimming right here? — That means fish lizard. Wouldn't you like to meet a fish lizard the size of a whale?

SARAH

Not really?

JOE

I don't know why not — It's easy to imagine we're underwater, though — Look at the hills — Like you're snorkeling and you see the reef below, but it's above water —

SARAH

What? I don't like snorkeling — I tried it once, it made me have vertigo.

JOE

I wish I could be here 50 million years ago —

A'HN

Enough about marine reptiles! These walls so thin. Joe! I'll kill myself!

JOE

The Missoula Flood!

SARAH

I think I've heard of it —

JOE

14,000 years ago is nothing! The glacier advances and retracts — Oh, bye kids! Wave —

SARAH

The kids are going in — Recess is over?

JOE

They like it when we wave. Bye, kids! (*Sound of car parking on gravel.*) Here's the new guests. Wave at them, too — They like it —

SARAH

(*Waving.*) But they don't know me?

JOE

It's just waving — It's like carving a message. Like saying, "Hello!" Just friendly. It's good for our Yelp ratings. Now smile. No — That's a Marine Reptile Smile. Be more —

SARAH

Is this better?

JOE

Yes — That’s a good Giant Beaver smile —

A’HN

(*Yelling.*) You know who friendly? The whores of Vale, Oregon!

SARAH

What?

JOE

Can you imagine — There used to be half-ton herbivores just lumbering around — But not here — This whole place was the ocean!

SARAH

You know a lot of *facts*.

A’HN

(*Folding sheets.*) Joe — Go greet the new arrivals!

SARAH

How the land forms — The animals — Giant fish.

JOE

The Great Missoula Flood was a *wild* geological event —

A’HN

You know what “wild”? Thinking it good idea to move here!

SARAH

I never knew about the flood — What is there to do this weekend?

JOE

You’ve been to the gate already. You can feed the feral cats if you want.

A’HN

In the barn! They barn cats!

JOE

(*Looking to schoolhouse.*) If I was your teacher I’d draw a huge drawing of Montana and I’d stand on a stool and I’d say, “The floods ripped a chunk of glacier from its moorings and sent an enormous river of accumulated topsoil and mineral deposit throughout” —

A’HN

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

Joe! School got a restraining order, remember?

SARAH

I should get these wet clothes off —

A’HN

Hey, National Geographic, we got company! Come inside now!

Scene Two

*GARY and DARLENE approach the front door of the inn.
We hear them offstage as SARAH enters the inn.*

GARY

(Offstage.) Well come on, mother. Let me help you with your bag.

DARLENE

(Offstage.) It’s my darn knee. This place doesn’t have a ramp?

JOE

Wave hello, Joe! Remember — They’re your *guests*. *(Looking through telescope again.)*
If we could go back in time and look at this area just a couple of centuries ago, it would look very different, before settlers began to drain and cultivate wetland areas.

A’HN

Shut up, Joe! *(Offers towel to SARAH.)* I hate how the towels are all crunchy when they air dry! Seems like it’s gonna be nice and fresh but they rough and —

SARAH

Thanks — My hair must look ridiculous —

A’HN

First guests — We got everything organized!

SARAH

Everything’s ready — the way I wanted?

A’HN

Rooms, check. Towels — See? And I got cheese. You want more help?

SARAH

I don’t think I’ll — Help with what?

A’HN

Help with the flowers — Singing — *Photocopies*. Only place to make copies at general store and she not speaking to me — Bad feud! *Bad*. She say I stealing Snapple. But I

don't even like Snapple. Like Pepsi. Anyway — All that help will costing you more.

JOE

There's a comfort to imagining this place before any of us, isn't there?

SARAH

I remember that the old owners of this place had a —

JOE

Just the land — A giant beaver loping along — Maybe some moss and lichen.

A'HN

Old owners put in stupid shit orange paper pipes and tub back-up one day with shit — real actual shit — I gonna take a bath, relax, you know?

JOE

Kids — One day we'll all be gone and the refuge can be at peace again. The land can heal — return to balance, be re-ordered, re-aligned. What? No — I don't mean we're all going to die, I just mean you shouldn't have that stupid anthropomorphizing point of view! What? No — I don't care that you're only seven — Grow up! Be accountable!

A'HN

I bake the muffins and make the beds and I finally find some me-time to recharge and SHIT come up out of the hole in the tub. So everything for your funeral cost extra.

SARAH

It's not a funeral, more of a *memorial*.

A'HN

Whatever you doing I got the cheese ready for it.

SARAH

I'd like to freshen up. Where's the bathroom?

A'HN

The bathroom right there. Claw foot tub — No shit now! All clean. I clean it.

SARAH

(Walking to bathroom with some toiletries.) The bathroom?

A'HN

(Under her breath.) Be glad you got one! And it *not have shit!*

A'HN starts banging together dusty throw pillows.

JOE

(Looking through telescope at the rain-soaked prairie.) The region’s verdant ecosystems provided a sustaining and healthful diet for the thousands of indigenous peoples who migrated in and out of this valley over millennia! Wave hello! Hello! Come in, yes —

A’HN

(Yelling outside.) Joe! She pay for a cheese platter! You gonna put it together?

JOE

Why, yes! That’s right, son. What a smart boy. Local food sources included abundant fish along riparian waterways, game — especially deer and waterfowl — tarweed seeds, acorns and hazelnuts, berries and fruits and the root of the camas flower — We learned about that on our wilderness survival expedition —

A’HN

Most people like cheese better than rocks and twigs, Joe! Fine — I get it! *(Exits.)*

DARLENE and GARY appear, with bags and umbrella.

DARLENE

That man is staring at me with his telescope, Gary — Look, what an odd man!

GARY

Just wave mother, smile and wave — Yes, hello! See? He’s pleasant enough?

JOE

(Stepping away from telescope.) Howdy, folks! Good to see you —

GARY

Oh, hello! We’re here from —

JOE

Portland —

GARY

How’d you know that?

DARLENE

It’s because we drove in from —

JOE

You drive down from Burns?

GARY

It’s funny, you’d think we would have but —

DARLENE

Someone wanted to take the scenic route!

GARY

My keester is sure feeling that gravel!

JOE

It's pumice — This area used to be underwater — And then there were volcanoes — And then a big flood! The biggest! Ripped whole glaciers from their moorings. Can you imagine the fish? *Right here.* I'll come inside — *(He walks into kitchen to help A'HN.)*

DARLENE

Where did the peculiar man go?

GARY

Volcanoes! Why — What I'd tell ya? I thought I saw pumice. Didn't I say, "This looks like pumice" when we stopped at that gas station? Well, I'll be! And giant fish! I knew I should bring my fishing pole — But I wonder — And this is important —

DARLENE

This darn umbrella.

GARY

Do you think I should fly fish or do terminal line fishing?

DARLENE

Should I just leave it here?

GARY

Pumice — Lava flown high in the sky! And breathe that fresh air!

DARLENE

(Noticing dust on the doorframe.) Well, what are you waiting for, an invitation?

SARAH enters the living area, nervous.

GARY

(On the porch.) It just seems like we should knock. Or maybe we ring this cowbell?

DARLENE

I think you just *open the door.* I've got to sit down.

GARY

Well, there's a rocking chair right here.

DARLENE

That's a decorative rocking chair, Gary. Look at it!

GARY

Looks comfortable to me. (*Knocking.*) Hello? Oh, I see someone! Hello? She's waving.

SARAH stands, A'HN breezes past her.

DARLENE

That decorative rocking chair is not for sitting on. Like this mailbox, it's a fishing creel. *It's not for mail.*

A'HN greets GARY and DARLENE at the front door.

A'HN

Welcome! Cheese? Jalapeño cheddar — It from Burns!

GARY

Hello, we're the —

A'HN

Burns 60 miles from here — They got a Safeway — But I like Costco. Nearest Costco in Nampa, Idaho — Or Bend. Either way — three hours, maybe four — depending on how many stops. We go to stock up on toilet paper and boxed wine and cheese.

DARLENE

Will you take this suitcase?

GARY and DARLENE enter, A'HN fetches suitcases.

A'HN

Joe! We have guests! They here for the funeral!

DARLENE

There's more luggage in the car. What funeral?

GARY

We can get those later, dear. Except maybe my fishing poles. Will you get my poles?

A'HN

Memorial service — You know — That why *the cheese*.

DARLENE

These people are here to do things like that, Gary.

A'HN

These people?

GARY

(Speaking loudly to A’HN) Are you a “Boat Person”? We send boat people money — Or we did — We had a boat boy of our own, we called him, oh — what did we call him?

DARLENE

Refrigerator Boy.

GARY

She’s just joking. That wasn’t his name — We were his sponsors. Dat? Phung? We had his picture on our refrigerator. Every year he’d send us a new little photo! And letter —

DARLENE

Well, he didn’t write the letter — His teachers did or something.

GARY

“Dear Miss Darlene and Mister Gary, You the best parents!”

DARLENE

We weren’t his real parents —

GARY

“I have rice thanks to you —and new flip-flops —”

DARLENE

(Loudly to A’HN.) It meant a lot to both of us to have a Boat Boy.

GARY

Why don’t we sponsor him any more?

DARLENE

He grew up! You can’t very well sponsor a *man*. Now where is Soren? Hello —

SARAH

Hi?

DARLENE

We won a contest — But there’s a funeral? Whose funeral?

A’HN

It her funeral —

DARLENE | SARAH

Excuse me? | Not really —

A’HN

She got big plans for lots of cheese from Costco!

SARAH

I did stop at the Costco in Bend on my way — chevre, Camembert, Brie —

A’HN

I not understand why you get so many soft cheeses — People wanting variety!

DARLENE

Is there some sort of reception for the contest? — Because I only brought novelty sweaters and an assortment of whimsical leggings.

GARY

I brought a collection of leisure suits — They’re back again.

SARAH

It’s really nothing. Please don’t worry —

A’HN

It not nothing! It *something*.

GARY

Grown men are wearing onesies now! I saw it in Portland Monthly.

A’HN

When you have a cheese plate, you doing something.

GARY

(*Looking towards Whorehouse Meadow.*) Soren said he wanted to try to get cell reception by walking out in the field.

SARAH

That’s Whorehouse Meadow —

DARLENE

Excuse me?

SARAH

It’s named that for the women of Vale who used to set up tents and service the —

DARLENE | GARY

I don’t want to hear about — | I said this looked like a warehouse!

GARY

When we pulled up that’s what I said! I said, “This looks like an old warehouse.”

DARLENE

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

How would you know what a whorehouse looks like?

A’HN | GARY

(Yelling.) Joe! We need more crackers on this cheese tray! | I read a lot of westerns.

DARLENE

Well, call Soren, father. We can’t wait all day! He needs his pill.

GARY

(Yelling outside.) Soren! Come on in, Son! Time for your pill!

DARLENE

Now what’s your name, dear?

A’HN | SARAH

Refrigerator Boy | I’m Sarah —

A’HN

Welcome to Historic Frenchglen Hotel!

GARY

(Shouting towards meadow.) We’re all inside. Come on! Leave the gate — It’s not time for a walk in the — Where are we?

SARAH

Malheur Wildlife Refuge —

A’HN

Before you leave Yelp review — it meaning “Bad Times” —

GARY

Why is there a whorehouse in a wildlife refuge? *(Yelling.)* Soren! There’s cheese from —

A’HN

Burns! It sixty miles! Go there ‘cuz of cunt General Store Lady — she think I stole!

GARY

Didn’t I always say our Refrigerator Boy was resourceful?

DARLENE

Do you think he’s in prison now? I hope not. *(To A’HN.)* I like to imagine he sells fish or something from one of those boats — The long boats — Where they — You know —

GARY

They squat. You people are so good at squatting!

DARLENE

I do like to imagine him squatting in his boat — Selling fish that he’s caught —

A’HN

I also like to imagine things, like your entrails spilling out on the floor.

SOREN

(Slinking inside, fuming.) Grandpa, we *have* to drive back to that last gas station.

DARLENE

That was 100 miles ago!

A’HN

It faster if you take I-105 to Burns —

GARY

But those back roads! Life is all about the journey. Isn’t that what I always say?
Especially for little — Dat? Tu? God — What was our Boat Boy’s name?

SOREN

You can’t say, “Boat Boy,” Grandpa! And Maddie is waiting for me to text her back!

GARY | DARLENE

Absence makes the heart grow fonder, son. | We called them “Boat People”! Aren’t you?

SOREN | A’HN

You have no idea what you’re talking about! | That’s not our preferred terminology.

DARLENE

Soren! You see? That’s his mother’s influence! The boy spends a few weeks with his mother and this is the result. What is she teaching you?

GARY

Well, now, mother, he can’t help it, child of d-i-v-o-r-c-e and all.

SOREN

I am literally right here — And everyone I know has divorced parents. Maybe my less-than pro-social behavior is due to my addiction to black tar heroine. *Or my schizophrenia.*

DARLENE

Soren! Don’t talk about that here — He’s just tired from the trip.

GARY

What do you think, Tiger? Fly fishing or terminal line? You pick!

SARAH

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

I had some luck getting a signal back by the old Round Barn —

SOREN

What kind of misery is this? “The Round Barn”? Just shoot me.

DARLENE

It’s not appropriate to joke about such things, Soren.

SOREN

When my only hope for a signal is something called a ‘round barn’ — All bets are off!

A’HN

Ah! Okay — See? We get a variety pack of Entertaining Favorites —

JOE

(Entering, with crackers.) The barn was built to provide covered space for training and exercising horses during the winter.

A’HN

No one caring, Joe! *(To SARAH.)* And no one liking jalapeño cheddar, either!

JOE

Hey, folks — Name’s Joe. This’s my wife, A’hn.

GARY

(To JOE.) Hello — Gary’s the name, from Portland — You married a Boat Person — Good for you! *(To DARLENE.)* Good for him! I always said I should do that — Haven’t I always said I should have married a Boat Person?

SOREN

Grandpa! Don’t say, “Boat Person”!

A’HN

We refugees — And Costco members!

DARLENE

We sponsored a refugee child for most of his schooling. *(Loudly at A’HN.)* We don’t know what happened to him, though —

JOE

(Looking out towards the hills.) Now keep an eye out for wild mustangs that range free on the plains near here — and the markings on the aspens that the —

A’HN

The quaking aspens!

SOREN

I don't give a shit about horses — Or trees! I have to text Maddie!

A'HN

(A little louder) Welcome to Historic Frenchglen Hotel, here in beautiful Malheur —

DARLENE

(To JOE.) We're not from Portland. We're from Gresham. *(To GARY.)* You say, "Portland" and they're going to think we're *hipsters*.

SOREN

No risk in that.

DARLENE

I never eat donuts — Not even ironically. I do Zumba!

GARY

She looks good, doesn't she, for 75?

SOREN

Grandpa! Gross!

A'HN

They gotta Costco where you live?

DARLENE

Yes, of course — With a tire center and a place to fill glasses prescriptions.

A'HN

You hear that, Joe? Tires and glasses! Wow —

SOREN

You know that prisoners make those glasses? They go blind so you can —

GARY

Prisoners do not make Costco glasses!

DARLENE

I don't know how you live out here. Gresham is seven *hours* from Frenchglen.

GARY

But we won a contest! We've never won a contest before — And smell that air!

A'HN

You all *winners*! You my Refrigerator Boys! You get flip-flops! And you get flip-flops!

JOE

Welcome to the heart of Oregon’s high desert!

A’HN

You need flip-flops in the camps — or you get hookworm.

DARLENE

Soren — it’s so good you came on this trip. You’re so pale. Isn’t he pale?

SOREN

That’s make-up, Grandma.

GARY

It’s a nice shade, son! Your grandmother is a little —

DARLENE

What?

GARY

Just a little —

DARLENE

Yes? Go on —

GARY

Maybe a little bit orange? Peach colored? And you have that ring on the edge of your face — Where you stop blending — So you just look like you’re wearing a pink mask!

SARAH

I think you look great at any age — I like Zumba, too!

DARLENE

I don’t think it’s natural for a boy like him to wear make-up but his mother doesn’t —

SOREN

I am literally right here. I can hear you!

A’HN

The Frenchglen hotel —

DARLENE

(*To JOE.*) When we pulled up — You were staring at us through a telescope —

JOE

I was merely feasting my eyes on the rainy orchestration of nature’s abundance —

DARLENE

Well it's creepy. What kind of old flea-bitten whorehouse is this? Soren, when we get back to service, I'd like you to help me send my review of this place to Google.

SOREN

Send your review to Google. "Dear Google," —

GARY

Now mother — It's not a whorehouse anymore! Look at the fish on the wall!

DARLENE

I need a Zyrtec. Do you keep animals in here?

SARAH

I might have an antihistamine in my purse.

JOE

That's the wire lettuce — the cursed buttercup, the Indian paintbrush —

A'HN

You probably allergic to nature!

GARY

That's right, Soren! Put down that phone and —

DARLENE

And wipe off that foundation! — He re-applied in the gas station! Soren, you look like —

GARY

Well he won't feel the need for make-up while we're fishing! In the morning, we'll get up before dawn, and head out on the lake — What's it called?

JOE

You can't fish in Malheur Lake —

GARY

But that's where the fish are! Soren — Just you and me. We'll catch our breakfast before the sun comes up! Fry it over a fire — Doesn't that sound fun?

SOREN

I'm a vegetarian.

DARLENE

Everyone knows fish is a vegetable, Soren.

GARY

(Showing flyer.) When we called, you told us there was fishing — “Room and board and endless coffee in the foothill of the Steens — bird-watching, fishing, trail rides” —

JOE

We can emphasize that the part about the coffee is mostly true.

A’HN

(To GARY.) I speak to you? It a contest — You win! Hooray! *(She throws confetti at GARY and DARLENE.)* But contest for free B&B — With option for memorial service. *(Loudly)* Frenchglen is “unincorporated community”!

GARY | A’HN

Memorial service? | That mean we burn our own trash — *(To SARAH.)* After we feed feral cats, you can help with that — Burn the trash.

A’HN | SARAH

Joe! Put more crackers out! | I’m a paying guest!

DARLENE | GARY

I’d like to freshen up — | Soren, wouldn’t you like to feed the feral cats?

JOE

They’re “barn cats” — They live in the barn. Some are fairly tame —

A’HN | SOREN | JOE

Why everyone need to freshen up at same time? | I’m not five years old! | Except Red.

JOE

Between about 1770 and 1840, mortality of indigenous people here exceeded 95 percent. They had no immunity to the diseases brought to this region. By the time settlers made their way across the Oregon Trail, this was already the post-apocalyptic world.

Beat.

A’HN

Now nobody wanting cheese and crackers now, Joe! And we drive to *Burns*.

DARLENE

Well, whatever — We requested two nonsmoking rooms with walk-in showers.

A’HN

Sorry, none our rooms got showers. There’s one tub down the hall from the room with the toilet. It “claw foot” — super nice, antique! And our rooms just got beds.

DARLENE

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

The toilet?

GARY

Just beds?

SOREN

Oh my god.

A'HN

That all they need back then, you know? And the whores from Vale not even have that.

GARY

Soren's mother won't take kindly to all this talk of whoring —

A'HN

This lodging house built in 1921 for cattle industry, and whores what all the ropers after.

JOE

Our B&B is open seasonally for birding *and* hunting — Though few people ever do both.

A'HN

Have shared bathroom, no TV —

SOREN

No TV?

A'HN

And no cellphone.

SOREN

(Looking at his phone, pressing buttons.) Oh my god.

JOE

Birding and hunting — Two lenses — Two ways of capturing, one distilling a moment in time, with a photo, a drawing in a journal, a song — The other, captures a life, stops a heart beating, preserves something else altogether — Not sure what.

GARY

I like catch & release — Haven't I always said I like catch & release?

DARLENE

It's easy for you, because you never catch anything.

A'HN

Frenchglen population approximately 12 — that including me and Joe and that bitch from the General Store which also the post office so you gotta go get the mail for me later —

SARAH

You want me to go get your mail?

A’HN

Lodge feature easy access to birding and hunting in the shadow of the Steens Mountains!

SOREN

Where can I hang myself?

DARLENE

Did she say ‘Shared Bathroom’?

GARY

The Steens are beautiful. Haven’t I always called them that? When I stopped to pee behind that sagebrush next to the gravel road I said, “The Steens are beautiful!”

DARLENE

He pees a lot now — It’s his —

GARY

It’s my prostate —

SARAH

There’s something special about this place — I came here when I was a child.

DARLENE

And you came back?

SARAH

Maybe we could all just look out the window at the land — The rain on the hills —

JOE

The word “Malheur” come from the French — it means misfortune, bad times.

DARLENE

Well, that’s fitting! Some contest! Rainy day — (*Sneezes.*) Dusty old inn — And a funeral for someone — we don’t even know?

GARY

But *cheese!*

A’HN

So many soft kinds — I like Stilton. Something with bite!

SARAH

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

Please — Just, if you could try to be open-minded, I —

A’HN

Coffee always on. Dinner at 6. You in Carp Room, here.

GARY

See dear, there’s a carp on the door!

DARLENE

The girl will get the rest of our things —

A’HN

I can hear you. I literally right here. (*To SOREN.*) And you in Rainbow Trout.

SOREN

This really is the best of all possible worlds.

GARY, DARLENE and SOREN exit to rooms.

Scene Three

A’HN

(*Screaming under her breath at Joe, in Vietnamese*) Thiên Chúa, những du khách ngu xuẩn! — (“God, these stupid tourists!”)

SARAH

That went well?

A’HN

Nó sẽ là một ngày cuối tuần fucking dài! — (“It’s gonna be a long fucking weekend!”)

JOE

Can I help with anything? More crackers? I could tell you about the Eocene era here?

A’HN

Muốn tôi đi lấy túi của cô ấy như tôi là lái xe kéo đi xe máy! — (“Wants me to get her bags like I’m some ping pong rickshaw driver!”) Refrigerator boy — Please! Won’t you help this child for just pennies a day!

GARY

(*From the bedroom.*) What is she talking about? I need to go to the bathroom.

DARLENE

Well, you’re just going to have to hold it.

SOREN

Oh my god, I can hear you!

JOE

Let me get the bags. Look at that sky! Still takes my breath away —

A’HN

Đây là ý tưởng ngu ngốc của bạn. "Chúng tôi sẽ di chuyển đến đất nước và mua shithole này ở giữa NOWHERE. — This was your stupid idea. We'll move to the country and buy this shithole in the middle of NOWHERE.

A’HN exits through the front door, slamming it.

JOE

Sorry about that. Sometimes things get lost in translation. I come on strong with my talk about Giant Beavers — Someone said that in a Yelp review.

SARAH

Oh, that’s okay. The inn is beautiful.

JOE

Thank you, we enjoy it. Can I offer you a cup of coffee?

SARAH

Is it decaf? I only ask because if I drink coffee this late in the day, I can’t sleep.

JOE

No, sorry, it’s regular. But we have some teas, too.

DARLENE

Now’s your chance, Gary. Coast is clear.

GARY exits bedroom, scoots to the one bathroom.

SARAH

Some tea would be lovely, thank you. How long have you lived here?

JOE

We bought the place last year. It was cheap after the — you know, the occupation. People heard “Malheur” and — Place has a long history, though, Paiute used to live here —

SARAH

You know a lot about the area —

JOE

Oh, no one cares about that anymore. No one wants to talk about sediment and —

SARAH

I like sediment — Soil — I know about it for work.

JOE

You don't look like you work with dirt.

SARAH

I'm a writer — I write about wine.

A'HN

(Walking through with bags.) They got good wine at Costco!

JOE

Let's hear some — Some soil talk —

SARAH

“With a microclimate that carries the heat of the day and an elevation that promotes cooling at night, where vines tap deep into soil that's at once volcanic and oceanic, this vineyard's site and methods are producing a new range of flavors.”

JOE

That's good. I really feel a sense of time and place!

SARAH

I'm back in Oregon on a wine beat — The upper Willamette Valley — They say it's the new Napa. Climate change and all — Drying out the state.

JOE

The new Napa! You don't say — Drying out rainy Oregon. Amazing —

A'HN

(Going to kitchen.) I like wine in a box.

JOE

But when you called, you said you'd been *here* before?

SARAH

When I was a kid. Not since then.

JOE

Can't grow grapes in Malheur. Can't grow much of anything —

SARAH

The inn still looks — Are these the same magazines?

JOE

It was what you call a “Turn Key” — We bought the whole kit&caboodle.

A’HN

Kit&caboodle!

SARAH

The front door has a lock on it now. It didn’t used to.

JOE

Yes, ma’am. We had to put that in on account of the — Let’s hear some more soil talk!

SARAH

“The result is a wine that’s well balanced between big, deep, dark fruit and vibrant, mouth-watering acidity punctuating a fine-grained tannin structure.”

JOE

See — Now that is just lovely — the way you can do that. If I still had my teaching job, I’d have you in as a guest lecturer. The kids would love you!

SARAH

Talk to them about wine and whoring?

GARY

(Walking back through, fanning.) Now maybe it was a bad idea to stop for burritos at Jerry’s home improvement center in Springfield, but we threw caution to the wind and — I would let the bathroom air out for a spell. *(Goes back to room.)*

JOE

Here’s your tea — And you were saying? The soil —

A’HN

(Yelling.) Ask her something about eyeballs!

SARAH

No — Corneas. Just corneas.

JOE

We know what you planned — You explained, don’t wear yourself out again.

A’HN

(Yelling.) You just relax! Take a *Calgon Moment!*

SARAH

Did I do something to upset your wife? She seems kind of upset with me?

A’HN

(Entering, carrying boxed wine and cups.) I cranky, sorry. I just trying to give up Pepsi — Since the feud at the General Store, and it 2PM and this Pepsi time, but no Pepsi. Shitty bathroom smell like home improvement burritos, whiny wine lady — Husband won’t shut up about the Paiute. Paiute dead! *(Yelling.)* Refrigerator Boy prolly dead, too!

GARY

(In bedroom.) She’s angrier than I imagined our Boat Boy would be —

DARLENE

(In bedroom.) Just pretend you’re sleeping.

SOREN

I am going to smother myself with my own pillow!

A’HN

Joe — Help me with the box wine’s penis —

SARAH

I think the word you’re looking for is “bladder” — Can I help?

JOE

Now that I know you’re a wine expert, I’m embarrassed to serve you boxed wine —

SARAH

I’m no expert — I’m just a writer.

A’HN

Joe! She not caring it boxed wine — She hungry for it — See? Look — Her teeth doing that clicky thing — Like her mouth taste like dimes and nickels and she want to stretch her neck and punch someone? That’s HOW I FEEL about the Pepsi! Fucking Oprah —

SARAH

How does Oprah factor in?

A’HN

She say, *(Like Oprah giving stuff away on TV.)* “Live your best life! Pepsi is cancer!”

JOE

A’hn, you promised you’d keep yourself calmer since that Yelp review —

A’HN

And I believing bitch-cunt Oprah!

DARLENE | GARY | A’HN

Gary, if you must break wind, say “Excuse me”! | Excuse me — | Fucking Yelp.

The sound of a diesel truck engine is heard, then turned off, and the opening and slamming of two big truck doors.

Scene Four

SARAH

I could help with the arrangements —

A’HN

You guest! Your job “Relax”, okay?

JOE heads for his telescope.

SARAH

(To no one in particular) I forgot how pretty the colors are here — And the smell, I remember that smell!

JOE

The sagebrush is just blooming — Nice, isn’t it?

A’HN

I make cheese tray, I make wine pee — You get to greet these guests, Joe! *(She exits.)*

BOB and KASSIE walk up to the porch. JOE stares at them through his telescope, waving. BOB sees him.

A’HN

(Yelling from kitchen.) Joe! We got a bad Yelp review for that! Quit it! *(He stops.)*

BOB

Feels good to stretch my goddamn legs after a drive like that.

KASSIE

Are you sure your mother is okay in the truck?

BOB

A nap’ll do her good. There are four steps up, let me help you. One, two, three —

KASSIE

But what if she wakes up, and she doesn’t know where she is?

BOB

Don’t worry, I locked her in. Now a few more feet until the door —

KASSIE

She's not a dog. You can't just "Lock her in."

SARAH

(Greeting BOB and KASSIE at the door.) Um, hello. I'm Sarah!

KASSIE

Hi, Kassie. Are you the owner?

BOB

We're from Ontario — Oregon, not Canada. Careful, come on in, I'll hold the door. *(To SARAH.)* Her vision isn't great — She had a transplant —

KASSIE

New cornea! Just this eye — The colors here are —

SARAH

Aren't they beautiful? The greens and oranges — And yellow! Those are the aspen.

A'HN

The quaking aspen! *(She exits to kitchen.)*

BOB

All she sees is color — A little shape — I have to help her. This way —

SARAH

I remembered the colors from when I was a child — I live out of state.

BOB

Why the hell would anyone from out of State come here? *(To KASSIE.)* Let's get you to the sofa. *(To SARAH.)* This is the middle of NOWHERE.

A'HN

(Yelling from kitchen.) You got that right!

Everyone looks to A'HN, as she enters with several boxed wines and a Two-Liter Pepsi that she guzzles.

A'HN

I found this Pepsi in the feral cat barn and now I feeling better! WELCOME to the Frenchglen Hotel. This lodging house built in 1921 for cattle industry ropers looking for good time. That's why rooms so small, not much bigger than a bed — And you know what that mean! It open seasonally and offer Old West furnishings. It have shared bathroom and no cellphone.

JOE

(Entering.) What my lovely wife means to say is, “Please, welcome. When you’re here, you’re family.”

A’HN

That not what I say, Joe! That what Olive Garden say.

BOB

Well, we won this contest?

JOE

That’s right. We’ve been running lots of contests since the occupation —

BOB

Occupation? More like a Sovereign Citizen Movement! *(To KASSIE.)* You comfortable?

JOE

May we show you to your rooms?

KASSIE

It’s just, Bob’s mother’s asleep in the truck, and I wouldn’t want her to —

SARAH

Oh, I can watch for her.

A’HN

See, it just like the Olive Garden. Family. And breadsticks.

JOE

Now, Bob, this is a no carry establishment —

BOB

We’re in Eastern Oregon!

JOE

I have a safe for that firearm you’ve got on your person —

A’HN

They let you have guns in the Olive Garden in Bend —

BOB

They don’t care about the Second Amendment in Bend! Maybe LaPine —

KASSIE

Okay, well, thanks —

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

BOB

Redmond, Medford — Good, sturdy places. The kind of place *you need a truck*.

JOE

No one *needs* a truck. We love our Prius.

A’HN

Joe! They gonna Yelp that! Stop —

KASSIE

Thank you, honey — I wish I could be of more use —

A’HN

Endless breadsticks! Endless flip-flops and Pepsi!

BOB

You’re not taking my guns. And why can’t I get any cell reception?

A’HN

Endless guns! Bang bang bang! The cunt in the General Store sell ammo —

BOB

I’ve got some business deals on the line and —

SOREN

(Bursts out of his door.) Welcome to hell!

GARY AND DARLENE

Soren!

KASSIE

It smells good here — Is that sagebrush?

A’HN

Endless sagebrush!

SARAH

I called my dog sitter from the payphone in the General Store.

A’HN

That fuckface let you in? Lucky!

JOE

Yes, most days she’ll let you use it — *(To A’HN.)* If you’re not caught shoplifting. *(To BOB and KASSIE)* Now why don’t we get you folks settled?

DARLENE

(From bedroom.) I always wondered if Refrigerator Boy would turn to a life of crime.

GARY

(From bedroom.) Or be forced to sell his body! Soren — If you ever feel forced to sell your body to make money, I want you to call me, son. I will send you cash!

A’HN

Only whores around here are the women of Vale — They set up tents in Whore Meadow!

KASSIE

Excuse me?

JOE

Just don’t let the lady in the general store know you voted for Hillary.

BOB

Now why would I go and do a thing like that?

KASSIE

(To SARAH) What do the hills look like?

SARAH

Oh, who — Me?

KASSIE

I asked Bob, but he said he was too tired to describe it —

SARAH

Oh — Okay, sure. It’s soft — but unrefined — dotted with bright, brilliant color and —

JOE

(Looking out the window — Holding all the bags — Everyone waiting on him.) Nearly ten million years ago tectonic faults and regional uplifting began the formation of Steens Mountain on the south side of the Harney Basin. Eventually rising 9,700 feet above the surrounding valleys, Steens Mountain developed a vast ice field covering the upper reaches of the mountain around one million years ago. More recent glaciers carved the spectacular U-shaped gorges on the flanks of the mountain. As the glaciers slowly moved downhill, their weight and movement ground the rock below into a fine powder. This powder was captured in the numerous streams flowing from beneath the glaciers and carried down the Donner und Blitzen River and other creeks on the western flank of the mountain to be deposited on the flood plain of the Blitzen Valley. Turbulent down slope winds pushed these deposits of loess around the valley floor, eventually forming a series of low, vegetation covered dunes at the south end of the river valley.

A’HN

Earth to professor Joe! It long drive from Ontario! You gotta pee? *Get in line.* The bathroom there — *They in the salmon room!*

BOB

The bathroom?

KASSIE

The salmon room?

A’HN

It the one with the overbite.

KASSIE

Get me in closer — Maybe I can feel its overbite?

JOE

And when she’s rested — we’ll have your mother next door in the Mackinaw.

BOB

(*To KASSIE.*) Now, careful — There’s a coffee table. Watch yourself — There you go.

KASSIE

I’m such a bother.

BOB

(*To JOE.*) You can have my mother outside in the barn as far as I care.

JOE

Does she like cats?

KASSIE and BOB retire to their rooms.

A’HN

(*To SARAH.*) Okay? What you ask for — I call it “Costco Cocktail Hour” — It just like Oprah’s Favorite Thing except not as nice.

JOE

Do you have what you need?

A’HN

Joe! Dinner — We got all that pork. (*To SARAH.*) *Everyone loving pork.*

SARAH

I think I was hoping for a vegetarian option and —

A’HN

See, you *here* — you Refrigerator Boy. You get what you get. Some day you get rice, some day flip-flops. And some day — Shit come right up out of the tub! (*She exits.*)

JOE

(*Squeezing him self a long pour of boxed wine.*) Storm’s rolling in —

A’HN

(*Yelling.*) Joe! We the Olive Garden! (*He exits.*)

SOREN

(*To SARAH, who is looking out the window.*) I don’t eat meat.

A’HN

(*Yelling from kitchen.*) Pork the other white meat!

SOREN

(*Yelling back.*) But that’s still meat. From a pig!

Scene Five

SARAH

So you’re here with your grandparents?

SOREN

I’m supposed to get “fresh air.”

SARAH

How’s that going?

SOREN

We drove here the entire way with the heater on. I still wanna throw up.

SARAH

I’m sorry? Your grandparents seem nice?

SOREN

You know, my grandmother can’t not wear heels. Like, she even has slippers that are heels. Who even has those? Where do you buy them?

SARAH

I don’t know — She’s pretty. A little orange —

SOREN

They pretend to tolerate me.

SARAH

The eyeliner and everything. The safety pins? It's a lot.

SOREN

Is there anything to do here?

SARAH

Feeding feral cats.

SOREN

Weeeeeee!

SARAH

Sorry, maybe some music? Here, let's look. Okay, well, here you go: Sons of the Pioneers. That's cool, right? Kind of retro and hip?

SOREN

Kind of horrible and regressive? And what is this?

SARAH

It's an eight track.

SOREN

What kind of dark magic is an eight-track?

SARAH

Let's see if we can play it. Okay, here we go, yup, that's how they worked. My first car had one.

SOREN

How old *are* you?

SARAH

What are your grandparents doing?

GARY

(From bedroom.) We're having sex!

SOREN

Grandpa! Gross! They're sleeping — What is with old people and their sleeping?

SARAH

I don't know, they're like babies.

SOREN

My grandparents take, like, four scheduled naps and live on 300 calories a day.

DARLENE

(*Yelling.*) Don't be ageist, Soren! — Your grandfather and I enjoy a healthy sex life!

SARAH

I know, mine did, too.

GARY

(*With Cowboy accent, yelling.*) Well, hello there, you young filly. I believe I paid for a full-hour of yer company —

SOREN

Oh my God — Hurry up!

DARLENE

(*Like a Whore from Vale, OR, yelling.*) Oh, you big strong stud! I don't know if I can take all of you — You are hung like a wild stallion!

SARAH

Okay, have we got all the wires sorted? Press play!

Sons of the Pioneers' 'Cool Water' comes over the stereo as squeaking of a creaky bedframe against the wall builds.

SOREN

Oh my god, this is so bad! At least it covers them up, though —

SARAH

I kind of like this music!

SOREN

How can you like it?

SARAH

It just reminds me of something. (*Looking out the window.*) Oh, I see stirring.

SOREN

Should I go get them? Mike and Brenda?

SARAH

I think it's Bob and Kassie.

SOREN

Right — Rick and Karen.

SARAH

Bob and Kassie!

SOREN

Don and Judy will want to know!

SARAH

Yeah, go knock on their door. I don't want his mother to worry —

Scene Six

Sound of truck door opening, a splash, a mournful cry.

JENNIE-CLAIRE

(From parking lot, yelling) For those — understand what — on and — who want — and feel a need — we're asking them! A house — in! *(She cries again.)*

SARAH

(Going to the front porch.) Hello? I'm Sarah. Could I help you?

JENNIE-CLAIRE

(Walking with difficulty, in muddied clothes, she pulls SARAH in close.) There is information that is coming in by the hour —

SARAH

Whoa — You're really strong!

JENNIE-CLAIRE

About more — more instances— corruption!

SARAH

Here, let me help you. *(To SOREN.)* Go get her a towel!

SOREN goes to the bathroom for a towel as BOB enters, dressed head-to-toe in camouflage.

BOB

Mom, now I said I was coming! Here you go, right up here.

SOREN

(Yelling from the bathroom.) These towels are all crunchy!

A'HN

(Yelling from kitchen.) They air-dried!

JENNIE-CLAIRE

We want — government to — Constitution!

BOB

(Going to JENNIE-CLAIRE.) Okay, mother — I gotcha. Here I am.

JENNIE-CLAIRE

And — play by the rules!

BOB

We sure do, Mom. Now, why don't we dry you off.

SARAH

What's her name?

BOB

Jennie-Claire

SARAH

What a pretty name. Jennie-Claire, would you like some tea?

SOREN

(Returning with many towels.) Or some nice boxed wine from Costco?

JENNIE-CLAIRE

(Shaking.) What — legitimate enough — stand? When is — put yourself and other — on the line? — What are we doing?

BOB

She gets confused.

SARAH

(Beat.) I'm going to make you some tea.

GARY

(Exiting his bedroom, wearing a one-piece leisure suit.) Oh, hello there! More fishermen I see. Well, they won't be biting this time of day!

BOB

I'm not going fishing. When mother's better — I'm gonna bag a deer!

SARAH

I don't think you can do that here.

KASSIE

(Exiting her room, wearing a raincoat, with a pair of binoculars around her neck.) Bob! You cannot hunt on a wildlife preserve! *We talked about this.*

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

BOB

Mom, come sit down over here. (*To KASSIE.*) Where do you think you're —

KASSIE

I'm taking a walk.

SOREN

Can I go with you?

GARY | BOB

Fresh air will do you good! | You are not taking a walk.

BOB

She just sees colors and shapes is all —

KASSIE

I am literally right here.

JENNIE-CLAIRE

This day — 8 A. M. I took my departure from Fort Nez Perces once more for the Snake Country. I joined my party at the foot of the mountains.

BOB

She gets confused — Mother! Do you want some wine?

KASSIE

She can't have wine!

SOREN

Can I have wine?

A'HN

(*From kitchen.*) Dinner in five minutes, everybody!

KASSIE

But I was hoping to see the sandhill cranes before sunset.

BOB

You're never gonna see the sandhill cranes ever again!

GARY

Too rainy for birding today, I'm afraid —

A'HN

Dinner in five minute!

SARAH

I saw the cranes when I came here before —

GARY

Nope, today's a day for a good John Grisham novel and a nice root beer float. (*Realizing KASSIE can't see.*) Oh — Sorry — How insensitive of me. Well — They do make audio books now. You could *listen* to a John Grisham audio book —

KASSIE

I hate John Grisham.

DARLENE

She probably knows about audio books — She's blind! Not *stupid*.

KASSIE

(*Handing SARAH a book.*) Can you tell me about the cranes? Can you read about them?

SARAH

(*Reading from bird book.*) “Most live in freshwater wetlands. They are opportunistic eaters that enjoy plants, grains, mice, snakes, insects, or worms” —

SOREN

That is just gross!

DARLENE

(*Re-entering, in new outfit.*) I hope this sweater has the right blend of sober-and-upbeat e for a funeral — And I chose these leggings.

GARY

Look at my wife's legs! Those thighs — She does Zumba! Look at those Zumba thighs. I'm Gary. And this is my wife Darlene. We're over from the valley with our grandson —

DARLENE

Don't say we're “From the Valley” — They'll think we're hippies! We're from *Gresham*.

KASSIE

I would shake your hand but you'll have to bring it closer —

DARLENE

(*Sneezes.*) My allergies are acting up. (*Loudly*) There's so much dust in this place.

A'HN

(*From kitchen*) Ngủ ngốc cô gái tốt hơn đóng cửa hoặc tôi chất độc thực phẩm của cô ấy. (“Stupid bitch lady better shut up or I poison her food!”)

GARY

This is our grandson, Soren. He lives in Portland.

SOREN

Wilsonville.

GARY

It's a suburb. It seems everywhere is a suburb of somewhere these days!

DARLENE

The outskirts —

GARY

I always say we should say “Inskirts”! Haven't I always said that? Soren's parents are professors. He's named for that philosopher. What's his name, Darlene?

DARLENE

Doctor Phil?

SOREN

Kirkegarde, grandpa! *God.*

A'HN

(From kitchen.) Subjectivity is truth!

SARAH

(Loudly.) Are you feeling better, Jennie-Claire?

JENNIE-CLAIRE

I am literally right here. *(Grabbing SARAH.)* If they kill me, grab my phone.

KASSIE

Before I went blind, I read and memorized as much of that book as I could. It's comforting just to say it out loud. “Sandhill cranes are tall, gray-bodied, crimson-capped birds that breed in open wetlands, fields, and prairies” — I've never seen one. And now I never will. *(She cries.)*

BOB

It's okay — They said it might be like this for a while. Take my hand —

SARAH

(Reading from the bird book.) “The staccato call of the sandhill crane announces the beginning of spring.”

KASSIE

That's not helping! It's making it *worse.*

GARY

You know what they say — one sandhill crane is good looking to another sandhill crane — Haven't I always said that? Just today when we stopped for a Cinnabon, didn't I —

KASSIE

Over 240 pairs have nesting territories right here in Malheur Refuge —

BOB

“Territories” — Yeah, right. Birds have “territories.” Kassie, no one cares. Just — Look around.

KASSIE

I can't “look around”, Bob! I just see shapes and colors!

BOB

Trust me — No one cares! (*To group.*) She gets sad a lot — Since the transplant.

GARY

That's why there's so many sandhill cranes!

BOB

Whole lotta estrogen between mom and the misses —

DARLENE

What transplant? Our Soren had a transplant —

KASSIE

He did? When?

SARAH

I saw the cranes here once — What's the thing about the young?

KASSIE

“Parents will discourage last year's colt from staying near their territory” —

GARY

You hear that, Soren — Birds in puberty!

SOREN

(*Reading old National Geographic.*) Grandpa, don't say “puberty” ever again.

KASSIE

“They turn their youngest away as they begin preparations for nesting.”

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

BOB

Okay. Everyone's heard enough.

KASSIE

No! I can't see them — But talking about them keeps them alive for me!

SARAH

I understand — I do that, too —

GARY

I always thought I should have married an ornithologist. Didn't I always say that?

DARLENE

I am literally right here.

KASSIE

“Young and unpaired birds will flock together in meadows to feed and interact.”

GARY

There's a meadow right out there for whores — Is that where the birds meet, too?

A'HN

(*Yelling.*) The birds from Vale all cunt-whore birds!

DARLENE

So, you're probably off birding all day tomorrow, right? Or — What is it if you can't —

KASSIE

I can't bird anymore, not with these eyes. But I can *listen* —

GARY

Well, I've a good mind to go with you tomorrow to listen to the beauty of nature! How 'bout you, Soren?

SOREN

I have plans to jab burning hot bamboo under my fingernails.

JENNIE-CLAIRE

We believe — federals shouldn't even be there! — And —in that — and do!

BOB

All right, mother's just going to get worse if we let her blood sugar go low —

JENNIE-CLAIRE

I have sons — and other people!

BOB

How about some of this cheese? And a cracker, mother? Kassie used to help me —

A’HN

That cheese from Burns! They gotta nice Safeway. It have a Starbucks inside.

KASSIE

Older birds — who have lost a mate — may select a new one from the congregation.

GARY

Did you hear that, dear? When you die, if I was a crane, I could get a new wife.

DARLENE

They’re not “husbands” and “wives” —

SARAH

I’m sure we’ll have dinner soon — A real cowboy-style meal! Doesn’t that sound fun?

SOREN

Seriously, I don’t eat cow, okay? Or pig, or chicken — Or anything with a face!

DARLENE

A little red meat would do you good, Soren. He’s so pale!

GARY

That’s why we’re going fishing —

BOB

What’s wrong with a face? I mean, as long is it’s prey, right? You are pale, son.

SOREN

Don’t call me “Son”!

GARY

My grandson wears lady’s foundation and is a vegetarian — At least this week!

DARLENE

It’s because he’s from the outskirts of *Portland*.

GARY

I-5 corridor — Brings all the greasy tar heroine up from Mexico so bad that people pierce things and wear make-up.

SOREN

What does that even mean?

DARLENE

Soren, when we get home I want you to help me send a note to Google about it.

SARAH

We discovered a collection of eight tracks. I think they've been here since —

KASSIE

Since losing my sight, I love music — Play something, please!

SOREN

Just no more of those pioneer dudes!

BOB

Gotta have the eyes on the two sides of the head. I mean, not a horse. (*Points to kitchen, whispers.*) Or a dog.

KASSIE

“Cranes construct their nests of cattails and tulies” —

JENNIE-CLAIRE

Now — got one killed and all I — he's sacrificed— good.

A'HN

DINNER! EVERYONE TO THE TABLE!

As A'HN and JOE enter, carrying food, everyone makes their way to the big dining table, except Kassie.

Scene Seven

KASSIE

“They group together in great numbers, filling the air with distinctive rolling cries.”

JOE

(*Entering with food.*) Mashed potatoes!

KASSIE

“Mates display to each other with exuberant dances that retain a gangly grace.”

DARLENE

She can really go on and on, can't she —

A'HN

Gravy!

SARAH

Kassie, there's an empty place next to me.

SOREN

I have to text Maddie!

JOE

(Serving food.) I'm afraid there's just no reception out here. But you're not the first to suffer for the lack of amenities. The first fur trappers to come through these parts started to eye their own horses for the kettle.

A'HN

Joe, no one interested —

JOE

It's just color commentary, you know, to help set the mood.

A'HN

What mood you setting? Group suicide? Am I Ti? You Do? Is this Heavensgate? We all gonna go have blueberry pie at Marie Callender's and then drink barbiturates and Hale Bopp our earthly vehicles after your little story?

KASSIE takes off her binoculars, and joins the group.

A'HN

You ever thinking about cult — How they go to restaurant on last day? They get the Marie Callender menus and then what — They get to choose? No! Leader say, "You all get pie! *(Like Oprah.)* You get pie! And you get pie! And then everybody put on same pants and sneakers and put purple shroud and get into bunk bed and drink barbiturates and then that it.

GARY

Sorry about the weather, there. Not much of a day for anything!

KASSIE

It would be more appropriate to say "Sorry you can't see anything!"

GARY

Salad?

JOE

Of course, the trappers nearly starved to death — ignoring the Paiute's staple. They couldn't *imagine* living on seeds.

BOB

I'd rather die than live on seeds.

A’HN

You see? History of local diet making people very sad, Joe. Be happy! Eat! You not in cult, you not in refugee camp — You got plenty of Pepsi! Everyone drink the Pepsi — This Pepsi from Vale, it special Whore Pepsi! You get some and you get some —

SOREN

(Poking at food.) Does this have dairy?

DARLENE

This water tastes metallic, Gary. Here, try it.

GARY

(Eating heartily.) Well, this is real good, A’hn.

SOREN

I can’t do gluten because of my adenoids.

DARLENE

Oh for Pete’s sake, when we were growing up, we didn’t even have adenoids.

SARAH

Soren, how about some salad?

SOREN

I only do organic.

SARAH

I’m pretty sure this is organic iceberg.

JOE

Everyone have what they need?

A’HN

More of anything?

JENNIE-CLAIRE

(Bolts upright.) Started at 7 A. M. — our tracks this day between mountains on both sides over a plain covered with wormwood. The men saw two Indians whom they secured and brought to camp. More stupid brutes I never saw, nor could we make them understand our meaning. Gave them a looking glass and their liberty. *(Goes back to eating.)*

BOB

Jesus shit, your pill — Here mother, I forgot it — Take this.

KASSIE

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

I need mine, too, Bob —

JOE

The first trappers to come to these parts were looking for beaver pelts.

BOB

Yes! Best idea I've heard today!

JOE

Well, they came here, and there were no mammals of any kind, really. Just — none. And they got stuck, and they're just so miserable, the survivors, they circle this place on all their maps and they write, "Rive de Malheur." It means "River of Bad Times" —

SOREN

Perfect! This place makes Wilsonville look good!

A'HN

Wilsonville have a Costco, Wal-Mart and a Target. They even have a — Trader Joe's!

BOB

I could use another chop!

A'HN

(*To SOREN.*) You vote for Bernie Sanders?

KASSIE | SOREN

Isn't one enough? | I can't vote yet!

JOE

'River of Bad Times' — They never meant for anyone to come here ever again.

SOREN

These were brilliant people.

A'HN

Someone forget to tell the whores of Vale and all the shepherds. — I bet the sheep glad the whores come —

JOE

And no one did come here, for twenty years! Word had gotten out, this was a bad place, a really bad place. I mean, they were boiling their belts, and all the drinking water they could find was brackish, and the men got sick, diarrhea —

A'HN

Joe! People eating! Okay to talk about fucking sheep but no one want to hear about —

JOE

If the trappers had just done what the Indians were doing, they would have been *fine*.

DARLENE

(*Lifting glass to examine it through the light*) About that water, I don't see a lot of improvement — Does this look — Oh what's that word, Soren?

SOREN

Brackish.

GARY

He's in a program for Gifted Children —

A'HN

We got a filter!

SOREN

I am literally right here —

BOB | GARY | DARLENE

So, do you fellas subscribe to some kind of New Age Men's Journals, or? | So, now, Bob, what line of work are you in? | You should be proud of your special abilities!

BOB | GARY

I'm a developer. | I enjoy golf!

GARY

A developer — Good work, eh? Hey — I always wondered — Haven't I always wondered — How do you decide what to name all the streets?

BOB

(*Grabs another chop*) Like in the developments?

GARY

Like castle themes, nature themes — Birds, mammals, trees — It's fascinating!

A'HN

Endless chops! (*She exits to kitchen.*)

DARLENE

It is not fascinating!

BOB

If I was developing this place I'd start with Sandhill Crane Lane — Then that would move into a Cul-de-Sac — Call that Whore Meadow.

JOE

You can't develop a wildlife refuge.

BOB

You wanna bet? You should clean that lens of yours a little — We're storming the gates!

JENNIE-CLAIRE

Maybe in the end we'll look at each other and say, 'What are we doing?'

SARAH

Is that Kirkegarde?

A'HN

(Yelling, from kitchen.) Joe! Little help, please!

JOE

People like you —

A'HN

The Yelp review, Joe!

GARY

Well, this sure is beautiful country. You can sure smell the sage —

KASSIE

Yes, and the juniper.

DARLENE

(To GARY.) Would you finish my meat? It's too dry.

SARAH

Maybe we could play a game.

BOB

What?

SARAH

I mean, it's raining. It's too late to do anything else.

BOB

I'm gonna bag a deer.

KASSIE

You're not going to bag a deer. You can't do that here!

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

JOE

Here on the refuge — no deer. And no development!

BOB

But I bought a new scope for this trip!

JOE

There hasn't been open season since the drought.

BOB

You just need better irrigation!

SARAH

Oregon's drying out — The new Napa!

KASSIE

Why do you have to look at the world through those crosshairs of yours?

JOE

Before I say or do something that might earn me a less than stellar rating on Yelp, why don't I go see about dessert? (*Exits to kitchen.*)

GARY

(*To SARAH.*) I'll play. What're we playing? Strip poker?

SOREN

Oh, God.

DARLENE

Gary!

JENNIE-CLAIRE

The Lord — the sheriff — take away — arms — federal agents — we the people!

SARAH

We should play a game to get to know each other.

DARLENE

And why would we want to do that?

SARAH

Well, because we're going to spend the weekend together?

JENNIE-CLAIRE

This — way beyond — agriculture.

DARLENE

See, I told you, this was going to be like that B&B. Remember that B&B?

GARY

I thought you liked B&B's?

BOB

I hate B&B's.

KASSIE

Bob, everyone hates B&B's.

DARLENE

Let's just raise our hands — Who hates B&B's? (*They all raise their hands.*) See?

GARY

It's awful — But it's *free*!

SARAH

How about that game?

BOB

I'll play, but I'm gonna have to loosen my belt.

GARY

Okay, then! Me, too. (*Loosens belt on his leisure suit, trying to be manly.*) Soren?

SOREN

How far is the nearest interstate? Can I hitchhike?

GARY

How about if we play some strip Old Maid? (*To DARLENE.*) I could go again —

SOREN

I'll walk! — Or, can you please sell me into slavery?

GARY

Now don't joke about that, Soren — Selling your body.

DARLENE

The heroine is not worth it!

SARAH

Let's move into the living area. (*She gets up, others don't follow.*) Come on, it'll be fun.

DARLENE

‘Fun’ is a stretch.

BOB

I’m fine here.

SARAH

Okay, two truths and a lie. Here’s how you play —

SOREN

Maybe if I could just borrow a gallon of gas, I could light myself on fire?

BOB

Good plan.

KASSIE

Bob! That is so rude of you. (*To SOREN.*) I’m sorry —

BOB

What? He looks like a girl! It’s obvious *he has problems*.

GARY

Now just you wait a minute — That’s our heroine-addicted grandson!

SOREN

I don’t use heroine!

DARLENE

He’s from *Wilsonville* — It’s a fast-moving suburb. His parents are d-i-v-o-r-c-e-d.

GARY

They have a Trader Joe’s there! And you know what that means.

SOREN

I can spell!

SARAH

Okay, so maybe we could start with charades?

BOB

What is wrong with you, son? No good male role models?

GARY

I love charades! Soren, you used to love charades, remember buddy?

DARLENE

Leave the boy alone.

BOB

If that's what he is.

KASSIE

Bob!

BOB

I told you, I wanted to bag a deer. I wanted it in my sights.

KASSIE

So you go after this young man, instead? What is he, Bambi?

SOREN

Just because I'm comfortable enough in my own skin it offends —

BOB

I'm not offended, son.

SOREN

Don't call me son!

KASSIE

Why can't you be content to just take a picture — Or to listen? Why do you feel the need to kill every fucking living thing on the fucking planet? And you know what I think of your developments? That they're shoddy construction! There — I said it!

GARY

Haven't I always said that housing built after the 1950's are inferior in quality? This is Oregon! Old houses are built with old growth! They have good bones — That's what I've always said!

DARLENE

No one wants to hear about lumber, Gary.

BOB

We're not allowed to cut down old growth —

JENNIE-CLAIRE

I've often wondered, are they better off as slaves, picking cotton and having a family life and doing things, or are they better off under government subsidy? They didn't get no more freedom. They got *less* freedom.

SOREN

Jesus shit! You think *I* have problems? Listen to *her*!

GARY

Okay! Let's try this game of yours, Sarah.

A'HN and JOE re-enter, carrying pie for everyone, which they distribute.

Scene Eight

SARAH

Oh, good. You're back. Thank you!

A'HN

You said the memorial need pie — This from Costco, not Marie Callender's. And we not all killing ourselves after — HAHAHA!

DARLENE

Whose memorial are we even attending?

KASSIE

I'd like to know the same thing —

SARAH

It's a fun icebreaker game! Soren, why don't you put on some more music?

JOE

Quite a collection, eh?

SOREN

Are you completely high?

DARLENE

Soren!

GARY

It's normal for users to lash out —

JENNIE-CLAIRE

We are not terrorists; we are concerned citizens and realize we have to act if we want to pass along anything to our children!

BOB

Her pill will kick in in a minute.

SARAH

Okay, so the way this one works — each person says two truths and one lie. And the goal is to figure out which statement is —

DARLENE

I'm not playing until I know whose funeral this is —

GARY

Actually the lie! Delightful!

KASSIE

I can't see! Are there visual cues? Bob?

SARAH

Right, like, "I always sing in the shower. My favorite meal is grilled cheese. I once had sex in an elevator."

DARLENE

(Beat.) Truth, truth, lie.

SARAH

Okay, so, right. That's how you play it.

GARY

I bet you have a lovely voice!

DARLENE

Will you stop flirting with her, old man?

SOREN presses play, and Sons of the Pioneers' Tumblin' Tumbleweeds' comes on the stereo, at half volume.

SOREN

My apologies.

A'HN

My turn. I not play this game before.

BOB

Mother won't understand this —

GARY

This pie is just delicious.

A'HN

I allergic to soy sauce. My favorite singer Barry Manilow. When I escape Vietnam by

boat, Thai fisherman take my money and try to rape me so I cut him right across his stupid face with a box knife.

Beat.

BOB

Truth, truth, lie.

A’HN

Nope! Truth, lie, truth! I fucking hate Barry Manilow.

SARAH

Okay, see, this is great — We’re making connections, and —

JENNIE-CLAIRE

The federal government is taking and using the land and resources, and if it is continued, it will put the people in poverty.

GARY

I’ll go next.

SARAH

Wonderful! Okay —

GARY

Just let me think for a sec —

DARLENE

People don’t have all day, Gary.

KASSIE

Take your time.

GARY

I once caught a 28-pound brown trout in Paulina Lake. And another time, I caught a kokanee measuring 36 inches!

DARLENE

That was just two lies.

BOB

Just fish stories! Some men love to tell *fish stories*.

GARY

I was being tricky — They were both catch and release!

DARLENE

It never happened! He never catches anything —

GARY

I caught you, didn't I?

KASSIE

I think it's kind of you, to let them go.

GARY

Well, not every fish is a "keeper." I always thought I should marry a Boat Person.

SOREN

Grandpa, I really don't think —

GARY

Some fish might be under legal size, or simply too big to fit in your cooler.

A'HN

I not on the market.

GARY

You may land a magnificent trophy and decide to return it to the water so that you — or some other lucky angler — will have a chance to catch that fish again!

BOB

(Does a slow golf clap.) Inspiring! When I develop this place — I'll name a street after you. Call it, "Gary Drive" —

GARY

Whatever your reasons for choosing live release, you want to give your fish —

DARLENE

Gary! Enough! He never knows when to stop!

JENNIE-CLAIRE

In general — we're in tune — I don't — we need — Washington, D.C.

SOREN

Do you think if I walk over the next ridge, I might get cell reception? Or do you think that a sinkhole might open and swallow me whole?

JENNIE-CLAIRE

It's our land!

JOE

You could try in the morning, but it's already getting dark.

KASSIE

(*To SOREN.*) I'd go with you.

BOB

My turn: I have an excellent impression of the Republican Party and I'm glad there's finally someone in Washington working for me. I had a big carcinoma removed from my forehead last year. And sometimes I enjoy borrowing and wearing a pair of my wife's underpants.

A'HN

(*Beat.*) Truth, lie, truth.

SOREN

As of this moment, that's, like, the *only* thing I actually like about you.

BOB

No! I don't wear her panties!

JOE

Take it easy, there, Bob. No one's judging.

BOB

I never got anything removed! Look, no scars!

GARY

Good for you, Bob! It's important to keep things spicy. Sometimes, we get pretty —

SOREN

Fuck my life!

JENNIE-CLAIRE

We will — here as long as — we have no intentions of using force — but if force is used against — we — defend ourselves.

SARAH

Kassie, why don't you have a turn?

KASSIE

I don't want to play.

SARAH

Joe?

JOE

All right then. Let me see. Okay, yes: When the tyrant dies and his rule is over, but when the martyr dies and his rule begins.

SARAH

That's not really how —

JOE

God creates out of nothing. He makes saints out of sinners.

SARAH

Maybe I should explain the rules again?

JOE

The truth is a trap: you cannot get it without it getting you; you cannot get the truth by capturing it, only by its capturing you.

A'HN

Good one, honey.

JOE

Anyone for more pie?

A'HN

After that, you all get same kind of pants and sneakers! And then we die!

SARAH

Um, thank you, but —

SOREN

But that was three truths. You didn't say a lie!

JOE

I didn't need to.

A'HN

Tonight from Frenchglen, Oregon — Inside the Cult of Refrigerator Boy!

KASSIE

It's really getting late. That was a long drive —

A'HN

Neighbors said, "They *real quiet!* Wave at all the children. Eat pie — We not expecting they kill themselves."

DARLENE

I was ready for bed hours ago.

A’HN

If we all killing ourselves, we need to decide who going first —

SOREN

Wait! It’s my turn. I want a turn!

SARAH

Super! You have the floor, Soren.

SOREN

I lost my virginity to a student teacher. I spend a lot of time thinking about the Great Barrier Reef and how it’s dying off —

KASSIE

Me, too!

SARAH

Oregon’s the new Napa —

SOREN

(Pulls open left eye with two hands.) And I have someone else’s eyeball!

DARLENE

Soren —

SOREN

(Speaking too fast, as if quoting a brochure, or the disclaimers at the end of an advertisement for medication.) If your child has recently been diagnosed as visually impaired, you, your child, and your other family members may find yourselves struggling with a multitude of new, conflicting feelings —

GARY

Now, son. Calm down!

SOREN

(Continued pressured speech.) Among them — anger, sadness, grief, frustration, embarrassment and fear.

DARLENE

He had a procedure — He gets like this!

SOREN

(Talking really fast.) This abnormal curvature of the cornea can cause blindness!

SARAH

Do you want me to put on some more music?

SOREN

Usually affecting both eyes.

DARLENE

Did you give him his medication before dinner?

GARY

I thought you did?

BOB

Shit.

KASSIE

Bob, we should go — Help me to the room —

SOREN

At first, the condition can be corrected with glasses or soft contact lenses.

A'HN

You okay? More pie, maybe?

JOE

How 'bout we look through the telescope 'til you feel better?

SOREN

As the disease progresses —

SARAH

How can I help?

JOE

Just give him a minute —

SOREN

In most cases, the cornea stabilizes —

DARLENE

He just gets like this! It's the d-i-v-

SOREN

A small number of people may develop severe scarring —

GARY

Soren! Son, now I need you to take this pill.

SOREN

For these people, a transplant may become necessary.

SOREN swallows the pill.

GARY

Better? I always say we need a schedule — Some kind of reminder system.

DARLENE

Soren, when we get to a signal, I want you to show me how to Google Calendar.

GARY

That's a good idea — His mother uses Google calendar.

DARLENE

And she's a professor — They live in Wilsonville!

SOREN

Why can't you say it — Say that I've been diagnosed with schizophrenia? You can't say it because you don't want to say it! You don't want to say it, because you're scared!

SOREN runs outside.

DARLENE

He's not schizophrenic.

GARY

No — Maybe a little up and down. You know — Teenagers.

DARLENE

He's just had a hard time since the surgery.

KASSIE

What surgery?

DARLENE

Since they did the transplant. They say that can happen.

KASSIE

That's what's happened to me —

JENNIE-CLAIRE

They are continuing to expand the refuge at the expense of the ranchers and miners.

BOB

Mother, let's get you to bed. (*He tries to help JENNIE-CLAIRE.*)

JENNIE-CLAIRE

I not only said no. I said hell no!

KASSIE

I waited so long to be next —

GARY

It's better to be 'next' than first — Isn't that right?

DARLENE

Should we go after him?

GARY

Let the boy run it off — Get some fresh air! He's got his pill now —

BOB

What's he taking?

GARY

It's like vitamins. I think she gets them at the Trader Joe's in Wilsonville.

DARLENE

We'll have to tell his mother we screwed up —

A'HN

Screwed up what?

JOE

Why don't you see to these dishes, dear?

A'HN

And why I got to *see to these dishes*?

JOE

I'll go try to help the boy. (*He follows SOREN outside.*)

A'HN

No touching!

BOB

Come on, mom. I'll take you to your room.

GARY

Can I help you, there?

BOB

Sure.

BOB, GARY and JENNIE-CLAIRE make their way to the bedrooms. A'HN is just listening.

KASSIE

When was his procedure?

DARLENE

Right after Christmas — We got a call.

KASSIE

Funny — So was mine. Big promise! But I just get shapes and colors —

DARLENE

He says he feels like it's not his.

SARAH

It's not.

DARLENE

Excuse me?

SARAH

It's not his. He's borrowing it.

DARLENE

Well, whoever he's borrowing it from sure doesn't need it anymore.

SARAH

Yes, that's true, but, it's like a pair of binoculars, right?

KASSIE

What is?

SARAH

You put them up to your eye, and you see.

DARLENE

Isn't it odd, such a small town — 12 people — Two transplants!

SARAH

You could bring a telescope to your eye — Or look down the barrel of a gun.

KASSIE

But his pills? What are his pills for?

DARLENE

My grandson is fine! He's just 17 — He's moody.

SARAH

You can hold a lens one way or the other — and you can magnify, or see forever. Isn't that funny? Like here — We're in the desert, but it used to be underwater!

DARLENE

Well, it's really getting late.

KASSIE

I can't see the desert or the water — Sometimes it fails. They say sometimes it fails!

SARAH

You're using my father's eye.

KASSIE

What?

SARAH

And, your grandson — He has one, too.

A'HN

Holy shit!

SARAH

That's why you thought you won a contest. I sent you those invitations. I wrote to the tissue donation place and I found your addresses and I found out who had my dad's eyes and I brought you here.

KASSIE

Why would you do that?

SARAH

Because I wanted to see a part of him again —

KASSIE

What a horrible thing to do!

SARAH

I thought it would help me to let go —

DARLENE

Well, we're leaving in the morning.

SARAH

But you can't!

DARLENE

Or maybe tonight! That boy is *fragile*. I mean — he's *fine*. But he doesn't need this.

SARAH

It's just — I keep seeing the scalpel.

KASSIE

The shapes and colors — The hill —

SARAH

Exactly — Do you see it, too? My dad's eye — And this place, before the occupation — the greens and yellows — The mosses and lichens — I couldn't save it.

DARLENE

What are you even talking about?

KASSIE

When we first arrived, I saw a rolling hill — Blurry edges. It's dark now.

DARLENE

You've made a huge mistake. Look at you — All pretty, put-together. What bullshit.

SARAH

I thought coming here would help —

KASSIE

And I thought the eye would help. But I still see — (*She gets up.*)

SARAH

Please don't go. Let me help you! I'm sorry, it's just —

KASSIE

(*Pulling away from SARAH.*) I can manage on my own!

SARAH

They said it was a “dignified surgical procedure.” They said he could still have an open casket, but I just got him cremated — Of course I did. Who would have come to an open-casket funeral for him? Me? Imagine me — All alone in some chapel with my dead dad.

DARLENE

Look, I'm sorry about your dad. But it's a really old club, with new members all the time.

SARAH

The gate here — I remember swinging on it when I was a kid. And that meadow — We played there — Pretended we were cranes. That's my father — That's just who he was. And I — I wanted to straighten up and pretend and get to work — Write some soil talk. "Acidity stops falling very early in the ripening curve, producing a wine with exquisite taste, color, aroma and mouth feel." And I tried — I try — But I just kept thinking about my dad's corneas, floating around in a solution. Detached from him.

KASSIE

Um, it's sad, I guess, but —

SARAH

Like a lens — Like a camera, a lighthouse, a flashbulb — His eyes —

DARLENE

Yes, that's how it happens. Just, maybe find a good therapist.

SARAH

What's it like, grafting this lens into a new person? Does it hurt? Did it hurt?

DARLENE

Or, you know, just maybe find a nice hobby.

SARAH

Are you grateful? Do you care? Do you want to know about him?

KASSIE

I was hoping to see the sandhill cranes — But life makes other plans.

SARAH

I saw the cranes. I saw them *here* — with my dad.

KASSIE

You did? When?

SARAH

I was nine. It was the last time we ever spent together.

DARLENE

But you said he just died?

SARAH

My dad's eyes were piercing blue. And cold — In the middle — They were cold.

DARLENE

When my grandson returns, tell him I've gone upstairs to pack.

KASSIE

This was a mean thing you did — A terrible thing. You should be ashamed.

SARAH

I just keep seeing the scalpel, cutting into my dad's eyes — Like the — militia walking around here — With their guns over their backs. They don't belong. They walked inside my dad's thoughts — Took him over when I was a little girl!

DARLENE

My grandson just needs a few minutes for that pill — He'll come back.

SARAH

Like the men who took this place hostage — I read about them — Their guns and trucks and their senses and the cold and the foothills of the Steens and the river and I thought about how my dad would have felt — Knowing this place he loved was overrun —

KASSIE

(Ignoring SARAH.) Your grandson will come back to the meadow. You're the nest —

SARAH

Does it stop? This feeling — It's like my arm got cut off.

DARLENE

Everyone thinks they're special. It's just grief.

KASSIE

I just don't see what you thought you had to gain?

SARAH

I'm really sorry, I didn't mean, I thought —

DARLENE

Is that a truth, or a lie?

SARAH

I watched an armed militia take over my father —

DARLENE and KASSIE enter their bedrooms.

A'HN

(Beat.) Well, that went well.

A'HN picks up the enormous coffee pot, turning off the hotplate underneath it. She turns to SARAH.

A'HN (CON'T)

When you really good, they call you Crackerjack.

A'HN exits to the kitchen, leaving Sarah alone onstage.

Scene Nine

As the characters that have retreated upstairs file towards the only bathroom, wearing various robes and pajamas, towels and toiletries in hand, they make awkward gestures and noiseless communication, waiting in line to brush their teeth, etc. A'HN comes and goes briskly, too, to clear the dinner dishes.

SOREN

(Bounding inside, holding a near-dead house sparrow in his hands.) I found this bird, right outside — look!

SARAH

Oh, poor little thing, is it okay?

SOREN

I don't know, I found it under the window.

SARAH

Well, let me take a look. Okay. May I touch it?

SOREN

It was moving, but when I picked it up it went like this.

SARAH

Maybe it's just in shock —

SOREN

What should we do?

JOE

(Entering.) Well, there you are. I was looking for ya, but you got away from me.

SOREN

I was just outside.

JOE

It's so dark tonight, couldn't see you two feet in front of me.

SARAH

He's found a little bird, Joe. It might need our help.

JOE

Oh, there's so many this time of year.

SOREN

But we should do something.

JOE

It's Spring — They haven't learned about the glass.

SOREN

Here, you hold it.

SARAH

Right — Yes.

JOE

The windows reflect the sky — Must look inviting!

SOREN

I'm gonna Google what to do.

SARAH

Um, it's just —

SOREN

Jesus Fuck why can't I get a signal here?

JOE

Now, son, I'm sorry —

SARAH

I mean, we just need a little box, right?

JOE

Hey, maybe you'd like to look out this telescope?

SARAH

You know, to keep it warm? That's what we always did. But —

SOREN

How bout one of these? Yahtzee? Boggle? (*He dumps the pieces out.*)

JOE

The rain's cleared. You can see plenty of stars tonight.

SARAH

See how its little feet are curling like that?

SOREN

But it looked at me. It was warm —

SARAH

Well, now its eyes are going milky, see? And —

SOREN

(*He sits, stroking the dead bird.*) Sometimes I feel myself going over and I know I'm going, and I don't want to —

SARAH

You barely touched your dinner — You want me to fix you a —

A'HN

(*Yelling.*) Kitchen's closed!

SOREN

I don't want to fall, but I'm slipping —

SARAH

I know it can feel that way —

SOREN

Like the weight of me is —

SARAH

Did you know they have hollow bones?

SOREN

I'm scared.

SARAH

Here's the book! I'll look it up —

JOE

Soren, the sky is putting on quite a display of stars if —

SOREN

I wanna call my mom — Can I use your phone?

SARAH

It says, “In birds, the hollow cavities in their bones —

JOE

Now — we don’t have a phone —

SARAH

Can you see your feet? Let’s look at our feet. Okay. Good! That’s good, Soren. Breathing — “The hollow cavities contain extensions of the air sacs from their lungs — giving the bird the oxygen it needs to fly quickly and without effort.”

SOREN

(Jumping up.) I’m afraid of losing what I know, what I have, not becoming what I! —

SARAH | JOE

Soren — Let’s play some music — | Easy —

SOREN perseverates on cleaning out the board game boxes, and trying to choose which one is the right size or shape for the dead sparrow, as he speaks.

JOE

(With pressured speech.) After diagnosis, first they tried me on Aripiprazole, that didn’t work. Then Clozapine, then Paliperidone. That one came close, but no cigar! Now I’m holding steady on Olanzapine. That sounds good, right? Olanzapine! Like, *Orlando* – Disneyworld! We’re all on board — Me, Mickey, my psychologist, my social worker, the psychiatric nurse, my divorced but loving parents, and my well-meaning grandparents, who think everything can be cured by fishing or a good steak — It’s a Full-Team Clinical Approach! And what red-blooded American teenage boy doesn’t want that?

SARAH

I’ll keep reading — “You might think their hollow bones are fragile, like empty eggshells, but birds can’t afford to have bones that break easily.”

SOREN

It’s making me fat, and it gives me headaches, and I get sleepy for no reason, and I can’t shit, like *ever*, and I fucking wet myself now. That happened! In school — Loss of bladder control is a side effect. For that seven-hour car ride today, I had to borrow a pair of Adult Diapers from my fucking grandpa! And I’m numb and my fingers tingle, all the time, and my mouth is dry, and I can’t remember anything, and —

SARAH

Let’s put it in the box.

SOREN

Someone is taking my thoughts —

SARAH

(Holding up a cardboard game box.) It's a nice place for it to be.

*SOREN puts the sparrow in the box, carefully.
JOE looks through the telescope lens.*

SOREN

Do you have any idea how terrifying it is to feel myself tearing apart?

SARAH

A glacier — Advancing and retreating — Unleashing a flood.

JOE

The planet Jupiter dominates the night sky this month.

SARAH

I don't know what it feels like but I've seen it before, Soren.

SOREN

I don't know what's happening to me!

SARAH

Maybe we need a tea towel or something. Here's one —

JOE

During April the giant planet is the biggest and brightest it will appear all year.

SOREN

I wanna go home. I wanna talk to my mom.

*SOREN paces around, holding the box in one hand, his
phone in the other, trying to get a signal.*

SARAH

What would you say to your mom, Soren?

SOREN

Who are you, my fucking psychiatrist?

SARAH

It's normal — It's okay. How 'bout some soil talk?

SOREN

What the fuck?

JOE

The Great Missoula Flood, actually a series of more than 70 floods, was a wild geological event that ripped a chunk of glacier from its moorings and sent an enormous river of accumulated topsoil and mineral deposit throughout the Columbia Plateau and —

SARAH

In the morning, you'll see there are plenty more sparrows where that one came from —

SOREN

I don't care about the bird —

JOE

That's right, they're invasive.

SOREN

No, I don't care about this one, or any —

SOREN throws the box across the room.

JOE

Now look, I've got Jupiter all lined up for you.

SOREN

I don't give a shit about Jupiter, okay?

SARAH

Soren — We're trying to help you.

JOE

These days, instead of invasive, some people use the word 'accidental'.

SOREN

I'm *accidental!*

SARAH

Now, that's not true. I'm actually not a counselor and —

JOE

The Ancients believed Jupiter presided over the heavens and the light.

SARAH

(Handing SOREN the box.) Here, do you want to take our friend upstairs?

SOREN

Why would I want it now? Look at it! It's *dead!*

JOE

To the Romans, Jupiter was responsible for protection of the laws of the State.

SARAH

I thought maybe it would be helpful —

JOE

Did you know there's an invasive species in Oregon called the Mystery Snail?

SARAH

To have some closure — You need closure!

SOREN

It's a fucking bird.

JOE

Armed anti-federalists took over this refuge for 41 days — Our whole country needs closure! That was it — That was the writing on the wall, that was the message carved by the whores in the trees for those sheepfuckers — When those armed fucking Federalists got away with it — That's when I knew this Country was *fucked*.

SARAH

But we're here to help Soren —

A'HN

(From the kitchen.) Joe! I need your help with something!

JOE

"We're here" because we thought we could make a difference — Preserve a little nature, a simpler way of life. You think the militia cared about eradicating the Mystery Snails?

BOB has been listening in, above.

BOB

Just to be clear, this refuge was in better shape after the patriots showed up here.

JOE

I'm sure you know that the bounds of my proprietary service preclude me from stating my honest opinion on that score.

BOB

Another goddamn reason to hate B&B's! Soren — Son, your grandmother is worried.

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

SARAH

Let's talk about it in the morning.

BOB

Let's not. Just tell the boy.

SOREN

Tell me what?

JOE

How can you condone the desecration of culturally significant Native American sites?

BOB

How can *you* condone the mass surveillance in this country?

JOE

Did your mother forget to hug you as a baby?

BOB

Do you ever get laid?

A'HN

(From offstage) Joe! thời gian để ngủ! ("Joe! Time for bed!")

SARAH

Please! Could this just wait 'til morning?

SOREN

Could what wait?

Bedroom doors crack open, with all characters — Except JENNIE-CLAIRE — who's sleeping like a baby, listening. BOB commands attention.

BOB

All right! Her dad died, and you've got one of his eyeballs, and my poor wife's got the other one, and for some godforsaken reason, she thought'd be a good idea to bring us altogether for a memorial for *her* father, who none of us have even met. Does that bring us all up to speed? Does that about sum it up?

SARAH

I just wanted, I don't really have any family, and —

BOB

Well, Kum-Fucking-Baya!

SARAH

I'll thank you not to swear at me.

BOB

You don't have the right to fuck with us.

JOE

You don't get to talk about rights.

SOREN

Well, my brain's gone all cloudy once tonight —

DARLENE

Soren, sweetheart, just leave it.

GARY

Soren — Come on, Tiger.

KASSIE

Bob! Come to bed.

SARAH

I know, I'm sorry, I know what you're going through, I —

JOE

Your pack of “patriots” damaged this beautiful place! They — they stole, they mined — They dug a pit and used it as an open latrine, when they had a working toilet right inside! How stupid do you have to be to do that?

BOB

(Beat.) Well, it's clear that the Native Americans should be working with the militia.

JOE

God, you're such an asshole!

KASSIE

Don't call my husband names!

A'HN appears in the doorway, wearing her robe and slippers, brushing her teeth.

JOE

You can be incompetent or you can be an asshole. You cannot be both!

A'HN

Nó không đáng, Joe. Họ sẽ đi vào ngày mai. Quên đi! (It's not worth it, Joe. They'll be gone tomorrow. Forget it!)

DARLENE

Gary, get up, will you? Come help me get the boy!

GARY

Oh, now, mother, I was just falling asleep.

BOB

No one hates the Red Man more than the Federal government!

SARAH

My dad was crazy! Schizophrenic! It's not something I ever talk about, but there it is. He wasn't charmingly eccentric — he was, he became, absolutely mad. He lost touch with reality, he lit away from this world, and never came back. In the beginning, well, that was the scary part, because it was full bore. He didn't have anything in his system to quell the demons, to quiet the monsters. He was so afraid. And he was *so angry*.

DARLENE

Don't listen to her, Soren. You're not a monster —

SARAH

I'd lie in my bed at night, and listen to him screaming, fighting what was happening. He had so much rage. Can you imagine, standing on that precipice, knowing you're about to go over, knowing your mind is crumbling inside itself, that your hold on — this — is slipping? Knowing that you're on this glacier that's just going to cleave —

JOE

The ice is all breaking and cracking — Global warming, not that he cares!

BOB

I do not recall seeing a sign out front saying, "Drum Circle This Way."

SARAH

How terrifying that must have been for him. (*To SOREN.*) That's why I know what you're going through. I watched him go through it, too.

JOE

Ulysses S Grant set aside the Malheur Indian Reservation for the Paiute, but immediately, settlers pushed them off the lakeshores —

A'HN

This a mess. We need Bounty —

BOB

It says in this old National Geographic I was perusing whilst taking a huge shit, “Ranchers considered the streams and pastures along trails highly valuable!”

SARAH

Recently diagnosed? What are you, 17?

SOREN

Yeah?

JOE

But that was an area where the tribe collected seeds, which they gathered as food —

BOB

All this wild game, and they were eating *seeds*?

JOE

This is the high desert! Few mammals you moron! And I drive a Prius!

BOB

Exactly!

KASSIE

Bob, why don't you just go to bed?

A'HN

Bounty the quicker-picker-upper!

DARLENE

Honestly, Soren. We are leaving in the morning.

SARAH

By the time he was your age, my dad was already hearing voices. Do you hear voices?

SOREN

No?

SARAH

When my dad died, everyone in his family seemed relieved.

Three conversations follow, taken nearly at a race — the effect should show that no one's really listening to Sarah, or cares — until Sarah's monologue that closes Act One.

SOREN

That's a horrible thing to say.

SARAH

I don't mean you.

JOE

Your patriots paved new roads! They tore down fences!

BOB

They were just making improvements.

DARLENE

(To A'HN) I am going to need clean sheets on this bed. The one's on there are so musty!

A'HN

One more word, I'll put a scorpion in your bed!

GARY

Mother, please!

KASSIE

I'd like to get up early to look for nesting pairs. *(To GARY, in his bedroom.)* Would you like to join me? We could go listen for them together.

SARAH

This is the last place I ever went with my dad — *(She looks out the window into the darkness, becomes hushed.)* To see those cranes. He wanted to see them migrating.

KASSIE

(Cheerfully) Migration is the seasonal movement, often north and south along a flyway, between breeding and wintering grounds.

SARAH

(Whispering to herself.) I was nine years old.

KASSIE

“It carries high costs in predation and mortality — including from hunting!”

DARLENE

Oh, will you give it a rest? Even *she* doesn't want a biology lecture —

JOE

(Pretending to lecture.) You know, kids, come to mention it, it's funny — several of the planets in our solar system have seasons, similar to Earth's, but Jupiter does not!

A’HN

Nobody mention it, Joe. Jesus shit.

SARAH

(*Getting attention, somehow*) After his break — The Great Flood — Comes the drought, the occupation. My dad doesn’t know me — not even my name. He lives in hospitals, on the street, in group homes, when he’s lucky, with locks on every door. Gates — Armed militia kept quiet by giant drugs. He can’t come or go.

BOB

We’re all in limbo, aren’t we?

SARAH

He never writes, never calls. He never says he loves me. I grow up, graduate High School, graduate college, live my life, work, travel, you know. And I see him, bring him birthday presents once a year, Christmas, you know. The beginning his eyes were piercing blue — in the middle — They were cold. At the end — They were milky — Like that bird. The forgetting. He let go. (*To SOREN.*) That will happen to you —

DARLENE

Leave him out of it.

SOREN

I am fine.

A’HN

You on your own — Moral support cost extra.

SARAH

But he has it *so good!* Now it’s cool to be different. It’s special! But when my dad disappeared one day, I was told to keep it a secret — that it was just too embarrassing. I was ten. And now? As an adult? He pours — he *poured* — me a cup of coffee and asks every single time if I’ve seen the hummingbird feeder outside the kitchen window. But he asks me with just his hands, and his milky eyes, because he can’t talk anymore, he can’t remember. Every day that goes by, I’m so glad he’s in care, that he has food, shelter, that he’s not on the sidewalk, like so many other Americans. And when he dies, I thought it would be a relief. I thought he’d finally be free. I knew he was sick, that it was the end, but I just couldn’t get myself to the hospital, I couldn’t walk through all those nurses and orderlies. I couldn’t face them. They were like this gate I couldn’t go through. What kind of daughter am I? You’re supposed to be there at the bedside, holding the person’s hand, right? Like in the movies? Well, I couldn’t do it. And when I hear the news that he’s dead, I go to bed — and I feel like someone’s cutting into me — Cleaving me in two. I’m lying in bed feeling like the moon and the stars are shredding all the space between me and him, burning it down, bringing him close — like he’s there, lighting on my body like a little bird, kissing me, saying goodbye, saying he loves me, at the same time he’s leaving me forever. And in the days and weeks after that, I walk around, with this

bleeding stump where my personal narrative used to be — My soil story — About the geography and history and people and I think, well, fuck. The idea that I had my dad — and then I didn't — was a lie I told myself. It was a lie I tricked myself into believing. Because even when I was a baby, he was already so —

Sarah looks at SOREN. The group freezes. Beat.

SARAH

Crazy.

SOREN

I wanna go home.

SARAH

You know my dad had a PhD from Harvard? He did! I'd get calls every once in a while — from his old classmates, and I'd have to tell them he wasn't going to make the reunion because he was too busy with electroshock therapy that week. They'd always sound so sad — There'd be this pause. "I'm sorry to hear that about your dad." No one knows what to say except, "I'm sorry."

JOE

I'm sorry about your dad.

DARLENE

Soren, honey. Go upstairs.

SARAH

Well, I'm the next of kin. So the day after my dad dies, the next morning, I had to sign away his eyes. Imagine: Despair, and now add to that you're talking to someone named Kevin or Elliot or Joel or whoever on the phone — your lungs are full of ice — and you're consenting to an organization harvesting your father's tissue. You're agreeing to terms and conditions and it all seems smooth and — you're just floating. And I keep thinking about that. I keep thinking about my dad's eyes. They were sparkling blue. And when we came here when I was nine, he danced with me — pretending to be those cranes. Here we are, way out in the prairie, standing around in the rain, not seeing birds. And so my dad says, "Let's just be them." And we spend the whole day, as a Daddy Bird and his Baby Bird. It was the last time we spent together, when he wasn't lost on the street, or behind a locked door.

Everyone has assembled to listen by now, some in bathrobes, etc. All the characters eye each other warily, looking around to see who, if anyone, might respond.

Beat.

A’HN

The most painful state of being is remembering the future, particularly one you’ll never have.

Beat.

SARAH

And now — and *now* — I keep thinking about that scalpel, cutting into my dad’s eyes, and I keep thinking about someone wearing rubber gloves, taking those eyes out of their sockets and away with them — and someone else sewing them into other people. It’s a “Dignified Process” — they said. It But I see my dad with these empty sockets where his eyes used to be.

Beat.

JOE

It was an occupation —

GARY

What you did was an act of generosity — Catch and release!

DARLENE

Jesus, Gary.

KASSIE

Every bird has its last migration.

SARAH

I got a letter, saying “thank you.” They told me thanks, on behalf of the recipients. (One good eye each for two people who couldn't see.) And I wonder, what does tomorrow look like for you?

The lights fade as Sons of the Pioneers’ ‘Whoopie-Ti-Yi-Yo’ is heard.

ACT TWO
Scene One

Lights up on a bright, sunny morning.

The stage manager or backstage crew – somebody - brews coffee, and cooks a rasher of bacon on a hot plate in the wings, so the theater is filled with those aromas. The scene opens with Sons of the Pioneers’ “Way Out There” – an upbeat yodeling cowboy ditty. As the music plays, A’HN and JOE are busy setting out a buffet style Cowboy breakfast on the dining table, as well as organizing a collection of brown bag lunches for birding or hunting. The massive enamel coffee pot is put on its hot plate roost. Characters begin to emerge from their bedrooms and jockey over the one bathroom, as the scene plays out below. As the music fades:

JOE

Which one of these bags has the vegetarian sandwich for the boy?

A’HN

I don’t know — This one?

JOE

They didn’t have any gluten free bread at the general store.

A’HN

Why everybody all of a sudden thinking flour going to kill them?

SARAH, wearing all black, enters from her bedroom, carrying a basket chock-full of cards, candles, floral arrangements, etc.

SARAH

I hope I remembered everything. I’ve got black armbands, condolence cards, casserole recipes — Wait, oh my god, I forgot!

A’HN

What the hell is she talking about?

JOE

Where do you want the fruit salad?

A’HN

Ồ đó, bởi yogurt và granola, Joe! Tại sao tôi phải tự làm mọi thứ? (Right there, by the yogurt and granola, Joe! Why do I have to do everything myself?)

SARAH

(Bringing a funerary urn out of her bedroom.) I can’t believe I almost forgot this!

Sarah pauses to negotiate carrying the urn, and the basket of supplies, at the same time. As she does, Darlene’s door opens, and glaring at Sarah, she puts her suitcases in the hallway briskly.

SARAH

Oh, good morning! Lovely day!

Darlene shuts the bedroom door.

JOE

Do you think we made enough muffins?

A’HN

Two kinds! Blueberry and chocolate chip!

SARAH

Sorry, I should have asked before —

A’HN

What? You ovo-lacto intolerant today? Take your food allergy and shove it up your butt!

SARAH

No, no, I’d just like a little room on the dining table, for this.

SARAH puts the basket down, and starts to push A’HN’s carefully arranged buffet out of the way, displacing bowls, plates, etc., so she can put her father’s urn down in the middle of it.

A’HN

(Gritting her teeth) What a beautiful tribute — Your father, yes?

SARAH continues to displace A’HN’s buffet.

SARAH

Oh, do you like it? I had trouble choosing —

A'HN

(Annoyed) It nice — Brushed nickel?

SARAH

Do you think I could just put this fruit salad over here?

A'HN

(Smiling) Joe, I will break her arm!

KASSIE and GARY approach the front porch, wearing binoculars, and outdoor gear, chatting.

GARY

Well, gosh darn it if you haven't inspired me!

KASSIE

There's a lot to look forward to in the spring —

GARY

Why, to think I could learn to identify birds by their calls!

SARAH

Where do you think I should put out the supplies for the memorial? Here?

A'HN

What memorial?

SARAH

For my dad? When I made the arrangements, I —

GARY

There sure was a hullabaloo of birdsong today, wasn't there? One heckuva hullabaloo!

DARLENE enters the hallway and is heading towards the stairs when she sees GARY and KASSIE, lingering on the front porch.

KASSIE

Most birds have a wide repertoire of songs and calls —

DARLENE heads down the stairs, fuming as GARY carefully takes the binoculars off of KASSIE's neck for her.

KASSIE (CON'T)

But there's an important distinction to be made between the two.

Darlene stomps down the stairs angrily.

GARY

(Dreamy) So how can you tell a song from a call?

SARAH

This looks ready for the memorial — You know, like a funeral — but with no body.

A’HN

(Pointing to the urn.) Oh, we got a body. And fruit salad! Fruit salad and a body.

KASSIE

(Moving in closer.) The difference isn’t always obvious, but songs are usually more complex and carry a clear pattern.

GARY

Tell me more —

KASSIE

One classic example is the melody of the song sparrow.

JOE

I think most of our crew’s planning to go out to see the cranes today —

A’HN

No one want to stay for memorial — They afraid to tell you!

SARAH

But they can’t do that; I need them to help me!

Darlene opens the door wide as Kassie and Gary are closing in.

DARLENE

Well, good morning! Have you both enjoyed yourselves?

Gary enters, with Kassie following.

GARY

Oh, we had a wonderful time! Just terrific. Kassie here took me out into the refuge — Now, we didn’t see any cranes, but oh, so many other creatures. It was just —

DARLENE AND A’HN

(Simultaneously) Food is getting cold. / Thực phẩm đang trở nên lạnh.

DARLENE

Well now that you've bid a welcome to all God's creatures, could you please wake your grandson? It's time for his pill.

SARAH

I thought we could write condolence cards, and maybe sing some songs — and I brought recipes for casseroles. For me — We're gonna all grieve!

A'HN

Okay?

SARAH

Isn't that what people do — when someone dies?

DARLENE

Well, we're leaving. Gary! Go get the boy!

SARAH

But you can't leave —

JOE

You all might at least want to have a little breakfast before you —

A'HN

Two kind of muffins! Two!

SOREN comes out of his bedroom, rumped.

GARY

Good morning, sleepyhead!

SOREN

God, what is that smell? Bacon? You know how sad that makes me, right?

JOE

Son, I appreciate your neuro-differences, but I just can't wrap my brain around that.

A'HN

Why can't more people in the world comprehend the idea of meta-cognition?

JOE

I just —

A'HN

Jesus, Joe, he doesn't eat meat!

Scene Two

Bob enters, carrying the limp, bloody carcass of a sandhill crane.

BOB

Well, I got a real trophy for ya. *(He thrusts crane in towards KASSIE. She feels it.)*

KASSIE

Bob! What did you do?

BOB

I saw ‘em everywhere — whole families, nesting, just like you said.

KASSIE

But why did you?

SOREN

I’m gonna be sick!

GARY

You ol’ son-of-a-gun, where’d you find ‘em?

JOE

Those birds are protected!

GARY

We were out looking all morning!

KASSIE

I can’t believe you —

A’HN

You want me to do something?

JOE

Call the sheriff.

BOB

Now, come on! No need for that. There are plenty more where this one came from!

SARAH

It’s — dripping.

A’HN

Get that thing off my floor!

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

Get it out of here!

SOREN

We have to leave.

KASSIE

Are those muffins?

BOB

Blueberry and —

A’HN

I’ll get your mother up.

GARY

I like it here. Bacon?

BOB

(Furious) Hickory smoked!

A’HN

No! — It’s the sagebrush that smells so fresh! Started the day *hunting*, too!

BOB

You will pay for what you’ve done.

JOE

Bob picks up the head of the crane, pretending the bird is saying the next line, like a puppet.

I don’t understand why you had any trouble finding us!

BOB

(Exploding) President Teddy Roosevelt established the Malheur Lake Reservation to protect waterfowl and water bird breeding grounds in eastern Oregon!

JOE

No one care, Joe!

A’HN

Jennie-Claire! Rise and shine!

GARY

She’s not up yet?

BOB

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

A’HN

If I living in your family, I stay unconscious as much as I can.

JOE

Prior to establishing the Malheur reservation, hunters — who shot large numbers of waterfowl for their meat —

BOB

Wait a sec — You can eat this thing?

Bob thrusts the bird in Soren’s face.

SOREN

Oh, God! That’s horrible! Get it away from me!

BOB

Look at its little yellow teeth!

DARLENE

Leave my grandson alone!

GARY

Really, now, Bob —

JOE

Those hunters destroyed entire bird colonies — in pursuit, in pursuit of feathers —

SOREN

Okay, okay — Just get it out of my face!

A’HN

I don’t know why you so upset. We got a real live body in that thermos!

SARAH

It’s called an ‘urn’.

SOREN

Oh my god, gross!

Beat.

SOREN (CON’T)

Can I look inside it?

GARY

I can’t get your mother up — Sorry —

BOB

Here, friend. You take it.

BOB hands the limp crane to a stunned GARY.

BOB

How is this any different than killing a chicken? Do you eat chicken? I love chicken. Baked chicken. Fried chicken. But I might try some fried crane!

GARY

(Examining the dead bird's wound.) Well, I know I'm no hunter, but it sure seems like this wasn't a fair fight.

JOE

They killed them for *fashion*! Every fashionable dandy needed a crane feather in his cap! Are you a dandy, Bob? Is that it? Or do you have to kill innocent creatures to compensate for something?

SARAH

So, I know this morning's off to a rocky start and all —

SOREN

I mean, I've never seen ashes before —

DARLENE

That's enough, Soren!

SARAH

He's probably just naturally curious, but —

JOE

Malheur supports over 250 breeding pairs!

BOB

249 now —

KASSIE

You can't come back from this.

JOE

I can't get reception. I'm gonna go use the landline at the store.

A'HN

That bitch pretty clear: "Phone for Republicans only."

JOE

She's just gonna have to make an exception!

GARY

Tell her you voted red 'Down the Ticket'. That's what I always do when pollsters call!

KASSIE

Your attitude is *exactly* why we lost the election!

Beat.

BOB

The flock flickers past overhead, cants, circles once more, then descends all at once. Eight cranes dive straight toward the decoys I set out. The birds are deceptively agile, given their size, and I quickly realize that dropping one won't be simple.

KASSIE

You're a monster.

BOB

The cranes are just 15 feet above the ground. At last, when the birds are right over the decoys, I spring from the blind, and my shotgun blast jolts the flock backward. But instead of rushing a shot, as I tend to, I pause a beat and take stock of what's unfolding: A bird in front has managed to evade, so I shoulder my 12-gauge. The crane is high now and gaining speed; I lift the barrel far above it and fire. The bird hits the ground with a thud.

Bob knocks on his mother's door.

BOB (CON'T)

(To Kassie) You said they can always find another mate.

SARAH

Well, we prepared some activities for the day — there are cards to write, and later we can bake some casseroles, and sing and —

A'HN

Who's 'We'?

DARLENE

None of that is happening, dear.

SARAH

But, I —

DARLENE

But I might have a muffin.

A’HN

Two kinds! Blueberry and chocolate chip!

GARY

Really? Two kinds?

GARY eyes the buffet, but can’t figure out how to get to it, with a dead bird carcass in his hands. BOB enters his mother’s bedroom.

KASSIE

(To GARY.) How can you even *think* about eating?

SOREN

Yeah, grandpa! Look at that thing! It’s disgusting.

KASSIE

It’s beautiful. It *was* beautiful!

SOREN picks up the urn, putting his hand on the lid.

SOREN

What do you think it looks like?

SARAH

I haven’t opened it.

SOREN

How can you not? Aren’t you the least bit interested? Is it, like, campfire ash? Is that all we are – just carbon? Just someplace to snuff out a marshmallow when it’s on fire?

GARY

Well, now that’s the worst, isn’t it? (*He looks around*) Just walking that razor’s edge between a toasted marshmallow, and one that’s burning like —

DARLENE

That’s right, Gary. That is the worst. Nothing in the world is more difficult than that.

SARAH

I guess I could have opened it — I just never saw the right moment.

SOREN

This seems like as good a moment as any — let’s open up the thermos!

A’HN

It called an ‘urn’.

SARAH

But I’m not really ready to see the —

SOREN

The ashes?

SARAH

They’re called ‘cremains’.

SOREN

But you brought them here! You must have wanted to share!

SOREN pauses, looking at his grandmother, she slowly shakes her head ‘No’. His grandfather has picked up a fishing magazine and is reading it intently.

SARAH

It’s more — decorative! I mean, I thought I could just bring my dad here and could all help me to grieve — Since my family —

DARLENE

Where *is* your family?

SOREN

Genie, come out and grant us three wishes!

SOREN lifts the lid, excitedly, and looks in the urn.

DARLENE

No one cares about your dad, honey.

BOB re-emerges from his mother’s bedroom, pale.

BOB

Mom’s dead.

KASSIE

What? She can’t be!

BOB

Tell that to her.

SOREN puts the lid back on the urn, and sets it down on the table like a hot potato.

A’HN

Tell the sheriff it’s a two-fer!

SARAH

Bob, I’m so sorry!

KASSIE

Are you sure she’s *dead* dead?

GARY

Now mother, an outdoorsman just *knows* these things.

A’HN

Tell her you change your mind — Vote Republican down the ticket!

GARY

That’s what I always say! Don’t I always say that? We’re from *Gresham*.

JOE

Do you need me to stay here with you?

SOREN

Gah! A dead woman was in the bedroom next to mine? That is so gross!

A’HN

I once spend a night in Saigon, hiding under a corpse, okay? Get a grip!

JOE

Honey, why don’t you —

A’HN

What? Have a Coke and a smile?

SARAH

Is there anything we can do for you?

DARLENE

Gary, collect the boy’s things. We are leaving. You’ve done *plenty*.

SOREN

I’m not even dressed yet!

DARLENE

Where is your retainer?

SOREN

I need my pill!

DARLENE

We cannot leave without that retainer — Or I'll never hear the end of it from your mother.

SARAH

I think I saw it on the sink in the bathroom?

KASSIE

But she seemed fine last night! I mean —

SOREN

I can't have my pill on an empty stomach!

A'HN

(Yelling and pointing) I make two kind of muffins!

SOREN

Are they vegan?

GARY

Now, Bob, can I help you with your mother?

BOB

She's pretty much past helping.

DARLENE

Jesus, Gary! What are you going to do? Stuff her and mount her on the wall?

JOE

Why don't I stay here, and you go call the sheriff?

A'HN

Stop telling me what to do!

JOE

I didn't mean, I just —

A'HN

You think this bad? You think — Oh, boo hoo, my dad die, and I got to give his eyes to someone else. So sad! And you? Your mom die in the night? Okay, fresh sheets, pillow,

die in her sleep? And she too out of it to know she out of it? That sound pretty good to me!

SARAH

I really don't think you can compare our painful experiences.

A'HN

No, sorry. Going to compare for just a minute!

SARAH

I don't feel —

A'HN

I make two kind of muffins — blueberry and chocolate chip. One even *gluten free*. What gluten? Why it bad? And why people who so scared of it also think they special?

SARAH

I don't think I'm special —

BOB

So is somebody gonna call this in, or what?

A'HN

What the hardest way to die, you think?

Beat.

GARY

Eaten by a bear!

A'HN

Okay, that not good. What else?

SOREN

My friends skidded on the ice —

A'HN

(Growls like a tiger) Rowwwr! Cars like the saber toothed tiger of today. What else?

KASSIE

I knew a man who ran a garden hose from his exhaust pipe —

A'HN

Okay?

KASSIE

I just thought it was sad that his last moments on earth were in a Ford Festiva.

A’HN

Now we getting to the meat.

SOREN

I’m a vegetarian!

SARAH

When my dad died, no one sent me a card, or brought me flowers or —

A’HN

Who give a shit?

JOE

That’s enough —

SARAH

And if anyone did say anything, it was always, “Your relationship was complicated.”

A’HN

What if everything in the world is a misunderstanding?

GARY

Um, I hate to ask, but I’m wondering if someone else might hold our friend here?

A’HN takes the crane, cradling it in her arms like a baby.

A’HN

She need to see how her life been so easy.

BOB

Again, I reiterate. My mother?

DARLENE

Take some muffins for the road, and let’s give the boy his pill!

SOREN

If I eat white flour, my mom says I start humming — I don’t want to start humming!

GARY

Soren, now, run upstairs and get dressed — your grandmother’s ready to leave.

DARLENE

I was ready to leave yesterday.

GARY

And son, I saved one pair of, you know —

Gary points to his own underwear region

GARY (CON'T)

— for the car ride home.

SOREN

Jesus fucking Christ, Grandpa!

A'HN

(To SARAH.) You lose your footing for a moment — that's all. You recover. You *fine*.

SARAH

But I didn't have anyone! I had to go all by myself to get the ashes! I get to this weird little funeral home and it smells like disinfectant and there are urns and plaques everywhere and a low-talking office person makes me sign papers and I'm bracing myself — and then she hands me this box, in a little bag with handles — I knew they'd hand me this box with my dad in it. But then she says, in that stupid low tone, I mean, where do they teach them to talk like that? She looks at me and she says, "Here are his personal effects."

A'HN

Face the facts of being what you are.

SARAH

I see this plastic bag, weighted down with my dad's only possessions on earth, and I go numb. My arms go limp.

A'HN

So you sad because they handed you a bag of your dad's stuff? His clothes? What you think, they cremate him in his Dockers for Men?

SARAH

I don't expect you to understand — Any of you! But I spent my childhood trying to make sense of someone who dropped in and out of reality, whenever, wherever. In and out of the micro, and the macro — From the subatomic to the edge of the cosmos, so fast and so furiously, it'd make your head spin.

A'HN

Last time I see my dad, he taken for re-education at the camps! Not a lot of closure there!

SARAH

My dad was the smartest person I ever knew. From the cellular to the celestial in a blink!

DARLENE

When they gave you the bag of his stuff — Did you open it?

SARAH

I just wanted someone to pour milk on my cereal, you know? I just wanted someone to help me learn to ride a bike. I didn't care about the cosmos! Or history, or neurotransmission or how to build a stereo from odd parts or whatever manic wave we were riding on that day! I just wanted someone to practice my times tables with me. Someone to be a —

GARY

She does make a point. I mean, seven times nine? That can't even be a real thing.

DARLENE

The bag. What was in the bag?

BOB

My mother?!

JOE

Sorry, yes —

KASSIE

I wonder what the widowed crane will do now?

GARY

Would you like some tea?

SOREN

I wanna go home.

SARAH

The last night my dad spent at home, he tore the kitchen cabinets off their hinges, one by one. He hurled himself against the wall, over and over, until his head started bleeding. He knew what was happening to him.

DARLENE

We're going to need to see those personal effects.

SARAH

I'd tried to keep up, but it was like looking through a microscope one minute, and a telescope the next. I never knew which one I'd get.

DARLENE

The bag?

SARAH

I'd come home from school, and I'd listen at the door, so I could try to guess who I'd find on the other side. Some days I just didn't go in.

Sarah pulls the plastic bag of personal effects out of the basket, and puts it on the table.

SARAH (CON'T)

I never realized until he died, that I never really had him. Not for a moment. I thought I did, but it was a story I told myself. A lie I made up, to make sense of what happened. I was born into whitewater, in a river of bad times — him holding me, rushing, trying to keep me above the surface, while he was going under. When I learned to swim, I tried as hard as I could to keep him afloat, but I couldn't do it. I let him sink. When he died, he was all alone.

Scene Three

This scene breaks from the realism of the previous ones, leaping from the distant past (1828), the proximal past (1962), the recent past (1978), to the present imagined — and the present real.

DARLENE

What do you want to do?

GARY

I don't know — TV?

A'HN

Sorry, we don't have TV.

DARLENE

Well, your parents said we were supposed to entertain you. "Get you out of Wilsonville."

GARY

Fresh air! Fishing —

A'HN

Do you still want to play funeral? She looking unresolved. You unresolved?

JOE

I'm gonna go outside and smoke first —

Malheur – Rachael Carnes

A’HN

You smoke?

JOE

River of Bad Times.

JENNIE-CLAIRE exits her bedroom in a tasteful nightgown, her hair down and face clean, she moves about, allover the stage, for the remainder of the scene, unnoticed.

JOE

‘Rive de Malheur’ – River of Bad Times — Now kids, Peter Skene Ogden, Captain of the 1828 Hudson Bay Company Snake Expedition — was the one who circled this place on the first navigational maps — Left a diary — I have a copy of it somewhere.

A’HN

Then why we coming here?!

JOE

Here it is —

JENNIE-CLAIRE

This day at 8 A. M. I took my departure from Fort Nez Perces once more for the Snake Country —

SARAH

Dear Diary, we left home today — My mom and me. We’re staying in a motel —

JENNIE-CLAIRE

I joined my party at the foot of the mountains.

SARAH

Did you hear that cougars are extinct in the Eastern United States now?

GARY

It’s so bright today. (*To DARLENE.*) Will you put sunscreen on my face?

SARAH

My mom used to give me money for a snow cone at the pool.

DARLENE

We are not staying. Soren — Get your retainer!

BOB

My mother appears to be the *only* one staying.

KASSIE

She's your mother and you don't even seem *sad*.

BOB

How do you know how I'm feeling? I have feelings!

SARAH

We'd be at the pool, my babysitter and me, and I'd ask, "Can I go get my snow cone?"

A'HN

What in the plastic bag?

JENNIE-CLAIRE

At sunrise, horses assembled — two found missing. As we have a long days march and hard roads, I gave orders to start.

JOE

Can you imagine how hard it must have been — The journey?

KASSIE

I'm sorry — I just really think I need a little protein. Muffins are simple carbs —

A'HN

You know who need protein? Refrigerator boy!

JENNIE-CLAIRE

Our horses soon found —

JOE

Don't worry, kids — They found the horses!

JENNIE-CLAIRE

At sunset all safe — with the exception of 24 pounds of peas lost by a horse taking fright.

SARAH

Am I a bad person?

JENNIE-CLAIRE

Hunters also start in pursuit of game, but return without success.

SARAH

There's no Hallmark Card for this — You know?

GARY

Mother, I'll go get my suitcase.

DARLENE

I already packed for you.

SARAH

I can't remember the sound of my dad's voice — But people used to *listen* to him —

JOE

So you see, class — A nebula is an interstellar cloud of dust, hydrogen, helium and other ionized gases — What? Yes, this is my daughter Sarah. No school for her today — She's visiting. Wave hello, Sarah! That's right. She's my assistant.

A'HN

Where's the bag? The one with your dad's things.

SARAH is half in and half out — she's aware of reality, and flooded by memory.

SARAH

(*Imagining her childhood bedroom*) “So what do you want me to read you?”

*Lighting returns to the distant past.
The sound of raptors in the sky.*

JENNIE-CLAIRE

2 P.M. Our horses fatigued. Wild horses are unfit for a long journey.

JOE

Next slide, Sarah.

SARAH

Like this, dad?

A slide of a nebula envelops the whole stage.

JOE

Contrary to fictional depictions where starships hide in nebulae as thick as cloudbanks, in reality a nebula is barely visible to the human eye!

The sound of crickets. The nebula remains.

JENNIE-CLAIRE

Did not reach unfortunate Malheur River till 4 P. M. —

SARAH

Dad, can I help you grade papers? What are you reading?

JENNIE-CLAIRE

At this point, a Snake Indian was to assist as guide, but so far no sign.

JOE

What were we reading?

SARAH

Black Stallion. I'm at the part where he's training his horse.

JOE

Can you imagine being all alone like that boy on that big island?

SARAH

He's not alone —

JENNIE-CLAIRE

Started at daybreak. Advanced six miles. Reached a long lake.

SARAH

Dad — I can't understand what you're saying.

JOE

Shut up, Sarah! Go away!

JENNIE-CLAIRE

Not suspecting the water was salt we advanced —

SARAH

I'm sorry, daddy.

JENNIE-CLAIRE

When discovering it — we were obliged to retrace our steps.

Abruptly, lighting shifts back to present real.

GARY

I've heard that domesticated parrots are so smart, they can learn language! I mean, they're not just mimicking, you know? They actually understand what they're saying.

DARLENE

Is that so?

GARY

Yes, it's true! There was a parrot that I read about, and its family gave it a piece of chocolate cake on its birthday, and the parrot tasted it and said, "Yummy bread!"

KASSIE

Yummy bread! Why, what a clever bird.

JOE

(Speaking faster and faster) Nebulae are often star-forming regions, where gas, dust, and other materials "clump" together, attracting further matter — eventually becoming stars.

JENNIE-CLAIRE

(Loudly, fast) Started at 7 A. M. — our tracks this day between mountains — The men saw two Indians whom they secured and brought to camp. More stupid brutes I never saw, nor could we make them understand our meaning. Gave them a looking glass and their liberty. In less than 10 minutes they were far from us.

The present real.

DARLENE

What is the matter, dear? Gary — What is wrong with her? She's just staring into space!

GARY

Well, it is very restful here. Sarah, you alright?

KASSIE

Maybe she's meditating.

DARLENE

With her eyes open?

SARAH

My dad does the voices. "Maybe we should read a different book." No — this one's good. Just try.

SOREN

You can't just keep dissolving stuff in water forever. Eventually, the water becomes saturated; it hits a point where any more of the stuff can't dissolve.

JENNIE-CLAIRE

A cold night. Reached a bend of the river and camped. Indians are most numerous, their subsistence grass, roots and wild fowl. Birds fly in all directions. We are the first whites they have seen — and they think we have come with no good intentions.

A'HN approaches SARAH.

A'HN

It's time.

A'HN holds the dead crane in one hand, and hands SARAH the bag with the other. It's a hospital bag, labeled

'PATIENT PROPERTY' — Sarah opens the plastic bag of personal effects, and takes them out slowly, one by one: The bag contains a pair of pants, a shirt, a pair of slippers, two Christmas cards, that Sarah pauses to read, a half-opened gift-wrapped box containing new bed sheets, and a small, inexpensive Christmas stocking.

SARAH

These are all my dad's things. All he had in the world.

JENNIE-CLAIRE

Had a cold night. Half our trappers absent. Six Indians paid us a visit and traded three beaver. On asking what they had done with the other skins, they pointed to their shoes. Miserable looking wretches, with scarcely any covering, the greater part without bows and arrows without any defense.

SOREN

Saturated water surrounds the tablet, preventing anymore dissolving until the cloud is swept away into your bloodstream.

JENNIE-CLAIRE

Trappers started at dawn of day. I wish it was in my power to follow them but the sick man cannot stir.

SARAH

(To no one) Since I was ten years old, I have felt like I failed him —

BOB

(Putting his gun on a table in front of SARAH.) The conquest of space deserves the best of all mankind — and its opportunity for peaceful cooperation may never come again.

SARAH

Where the rivers meet —

JENNIE-CLAIRE

Cold severe. Sick man no better. If the weather would moderate I would make an attempt to move. Horses starving. Provisions low.

GARY

There was another parrot, in England, I think — He disappeared for four years, and one day — the family had left the kitchen window open — and in he flew! Right back to his cage. But when he returned, he was fluent in Spanish!

JENNIE-CLAIRE

The river fast bound with ice. Provisions very low. Not a track of an animal to be seen.

BOB

We choose to go to the moon! We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard!

JOE

This whole desert was underwater — All ocean! Giant fish. Isn't that comforting?

SARAH

Anyone like me — we're in a canoe river system — On water — In it — No land.

A'HN stops SARAH in her tracks, and gestures for SARAH to open the plastic bag wide. A'HN gently slides the dead crane into the bag, pausing to carefully fold its legs inside. Then she snaps each plastic snap shut, crying softly to herself, and hands the bag to JOES. She faces away.

JENNIE-CLAIRE

We are wretched reduced to skin and bone — having been three days without food. One of our horses fell down so weak and reduced he could rise no more. I had him killed and the meat gave to those most in want.

KASSIE

(To Gary, like a parrot) Hola!

GARY

(To Kassie, like a parrot) Hola!

SOREN

Saturated water within a network of spongy holes migrates to the edge of the pill, ensuring that the same amount of the drug is released throughout the day.

JENNIE-CLAIRE

One of the trappers left in charge of the sick man arrived with his horse fatigued, and informed me that our sick man died eight days after we left, suffering most severely. A young man only 29.

SARAH

My dad was only 29, when we came here. It was the last —

JOE

Ignoring the name, Rive de Malheur — river of bad times — a group of 100 pioneers made the 2,000-mile journey to Oregon — passing right through here. You can still see the wagon ruts on the prairie. The next year, the number of emigrants skyrocketed to 1,000.

BOB

The Pioneer Orbiter was inserted into an elliptical orbit around Venus in December 1978 — to characterize the atmosphere and surface of the planet.

JOE AND BOB

(Simultaneously) It was the last great thing we ever did.

JOE and BOB look at each other, quizzically, and begin to pull props down and pick things up to exit — BOB to his bedroom.

SARAH

1978 — The last moment we were a family — The last phone call, letter — The last time my dad was *my* dad.

JOE

The only one who can forgive is — You.

JOE exits towards the kitchen.

DARLENE

Come along, Soren. We're leaving. Gary?

GARY nods his goodbye to KASSIE. SOREN goes to the table to take a last look in the urn, finds it missing. GARY, DARLENE and SOREN each help clear the space.

SOREN

Grandma, the car's out front!

DARLENE

No, we're going this way, dear.

DARLENE, GARY and SOREN exit through their bedroom doors as the dialogue continues.

SARAH

When I came here with my dad I was nine. It was the last time he was —

SARAH picks up her dad's shirt and smells it. A'HN turns back to face her.

A'HN

Life can only be understood backwards.

A'HN gathers up props from the tables and walls.

SARAH

Is that why it's so hard to walk?

KASSIE

When the weather is good and the winds favorable a migrating crane flies like a glider, on fixed wings —

SARAH

My dad had mother-of-pearl buttons on his shirts. They felt shiny and cool to the touch. I liked the way they snapped together in my fingers. I'd sit in his lap and snap and unsnap the buttons on his cuffs. I can't remember his voice —

A'HN

I can't remember my dad, either.

A'HN exits through the kitchen.

SARAH

Stop — I'm sorry — I wanted to thank you. Hello?

KASSIE looks skyward through her binoculars.

KASSIE

You think they fly in a straight line, but they don't. Cranes spiral upwards, drop down, and begin spiraling upward again —

SARAH

He had piercing blue eyes. Was his voice soft? Or harsh — I can't remember!

KASSIE

(Taking off binoculars.) We become good at imagining — Seeing someplace the way it was, drafting a memory from a future we never had. Read me another part of the story —

SARAH

(Picking up KASSIE's bird book, flipping it open.) "This spiraling and gliding, carried out when the crane encounters suitable thermal updrafts, is energy-efficient and allows the cranes to fly nonstop for great distances."

KASSIE

They keep moving — Turning — Falling. That's all you can do. Just let yourself —

SARAH

I am sorry for what —

KASSIE

It's not your fault. Just wait — Wait for that updraft — It's coming.

SARAH

What if it doesn't? What if I stay here forever?

KASSIE

Here's gone — This was a place you visited — all this was underwater! Giant fish!

SARAH

I can't stop seeing him lying there —

KASSIE

Then close your eyes — Or open them wider.

KASSIE sets her binoculars on the coffee table. She removes props, pictures, items from the room and exits through her bedroom, SARAH is left alone onstage.

She looks at the gun onstage, and the binoculars.

Beat.

SARAH puts the binocular strap around her neck.

SARAH

I didn't know that when someone dies, the ashes we leave behind are indistinguishable — in size, weight and feel — from the crushed sand and rock that make up the riverbank itself. It's a comforting reality that at our deepest, we are made from simple materials, the kind we've all held in our hands. I guess I knew this — theoretically — but I had to see it with my own eyes, to feel it, to finally understand. As I walk the river, this place we used to come together, I nestle scoops of memory into little pockets under rocks, I cast plumes of ash into the eddying water, and into still pools, occupied by tiny fish, whose presence is temporarily revealed when the brown sand at the bottom of their habitat is made — momentarily — a rosy ivory. Water rushes in, blends past, present, future. I find joy in this last act of nurturance, releasing my father back to the elements, back to the realm of the cellular and the celestial. But as the last grains are dispersed, and I'm standing ankle-deep in cold water, folding the plastic bag that the cremains had been kept in, I'm overcome. I wish so much that my dad could have held onto this life, when as a child, I needed him so. I wish he could have seen me grow up. I wish he could have been free from the pain and suffering that he always knew. Between the earth and sky, the spine of the mountains, laid down millions of years ago — I remember his spark, his zest for new adventures, his creativity and love of nature. When we'd go camping, he'd patiently catch and release minnows in a bucket, for hours. Or he'd delight with me in leaving one raisin after another on a stump, for some lucky chipmunk. My dad was smart. I never knew much about what he was thinking or working on — But his wheels turned fast. And he

was likable, engaging. People say I can talk to anyone. That's what they say! And when I was tiny, my dad built me a pegboard 'bridge' - like Mr. Sulu used on "Star Trek" - made from buttons, knobs, switches and toggles from the local hardware store. This thing was huge — the size of a door — and I loved to play with it, endlessly voyaging to new galaxies, with my imagination. My dad had Big Ideas. His personal motto may have been "Safety Third," but life was never dull. (The highlight was probably taking a death-defying nighttime run, together on a cheap plastic sled, on Mt. Hood's downhill Glade trail, from Timberline Lodge to Government Camp, about SIX MILES, when I was eight years old. No helmet, angry ski patrol guys shaking their fists as we whizzed by them and into the dark, snowy abyss. My dad used his feet to steer.) My dad had terrors that he faced, from the time I was a baby. I'm glad that he can be free from all that now. And I'm grateful that he was afforded sustenance and shelter, when he was unable to care for himself. I'm 45, and my father moved into institutionalized care when I was 10 years old. I'm thankful — my dad didn't die alone on the street, like so many souls. When he died, my dad was free from pain, in a hospital bed, looked after. He'd let go long ago — When I was ten, I saw him cling to this world — self aware that he was falling into madness. I cannot imagine how terrifying that must have been for him. Fortunately, he got support, and his voices and visions were quelled, or at least tempered. But he would never again live alone, or with a family. Over time, I believe he found simple grace. As a visitor to his limited world, I was continually struck that despite his seemingly strange environment, with its locked doors and security procedures, my dad was vulnerably present, even content. I came to appreciate the aromas of home-cooked meals, and the rhythm of care taking. Over time, I began to let go of the shame and stigma, the anger and guilt, of having a family member with a profound mental illness, and eventually learned to give myself an allowance of acceptance — and gratitude. In the last years of his life, barely able to speak, my dad gestured wordlessly, offering me coffee, then asking if I took cream. He'd always pull out my chair for me. He'd point out the window, noting the hummingbird feeder, or he'd quietly wave at another resident, or a caseworker he liked. He'd reach a hand out, like he wanted me to meet the people who he depended on. I've been letting go of my dad since I was a little girl. After I was 10 years old, my dad never once said he loved me. He just couldn't. He never wrote me a letter, or called. Did torrential storms in his brain — and the drugs used to counter them — scrub away the altruistic structures on which parenting is built? Though his neurology, the firing network of electrical impulses, couldn't amass and organize to care for me as my father would have wanted, I know in my bones that I was loved by him. Now my father is at peace. He's returned to the shells and the stars. I hope that wherever my father travels to next on the journey, that he experiences pure freedom. I hope he soars. He leaves a bright legacy, in me. I'm enough. I am his and he is mine. And nature rises up. The day unfolds.

We live.

SARAH looks through the binoculars.

Black out.

Sons of the Pioneers' 'Chant of the Wanderer' is heard:

(The rippling rills the cataract spills the whippoorwill thrills)
Take a look at the sky where the whippoorwill thrills
And the mountains so high where the cataract spills
Take a look at the falls and the rippling rills
Hear the wanderlust call of the whispering hills
(The rippling rills the cataract spills the whippoorwill thrills)
Ooh ooh (the rippling rills the cataract spills the whippoorwill thrills)

Let me live on the range where the tumbleweeds grow
Let the silver sands change where the prairie winds blow
Let the wanderer sing where the wanderers go
Let the melody ring for he's happy I know
(The wanderers go the prairie winds blow the tumbleweeds grow)
Ooh ooh (the wanderers go the prairie winds blow the tumbleweeds grow)

Let me follow the trail where the buffalo roam
Let a silver cloud sail where the settin' sun shone
Let the lobo wolf wail in a broken heart tone
Let it storm let it gale still the prairie's my home
(A broken heart tone the settin' sun shone the buffalo roam)
Ooh ooh (a broken heart tone the settin' sun shone the buffalo roam)

The prairie's my home