THE BIG HEARTLESS

By Dale Dunn

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MAC: A recluse in his early 40's. He is wounded, driven, and intense.

JEAN: An orphaned teenager living with her grandparents. She is bright-eyed, curious, and desperate for companionship.

NED: Jean's grandfather, an ailing retired fireman in his 70's, struggling to keep his dignity in spite of increasing frailty.

TOOTIE: Jean's grandmother, a retired nurse in her early 70's, frustrated and fearful of her and her husband's advancing dependency.

CLIFF: Mac's nephew, a teenager on the run. He's a smart kid who's had toughness thrust upon him.

MONSOON: Another teenager on the run. She's a tough girl with a tenderness she tries desperately to hide.

Night. A remote hunter's cabin in the Centennial Mountains of Montana. Very spare furniture. No electricity. Various instruments for skinning animals and traps of all sizes along with fox and coyote pelts hang, thick. A fire glows in a pot-bellied stove. A cold wind worries the windows and rattles the door.

MAC transfers field notes into an old laptop. JEAN squints at a textbook. She watches Mac as he types something on the computer. He catches her staring.

MAC

It's getting late.

JEAN

It's just... I just have to... I figured out how to make people and / I need to -

MAC

Make people -

JEAN

Yeah, it's really / cool, you -

MAC

I told Tootie you could come and use my computer to get ready for your tests. That was our deal. I should never have gotten you that damn game.

JEAN

I just need to check on them. They need me. They depend on me.

MAC

So do your grandparents. Now all you can / think about -

JEAN

It's like there's this whole other dimension, living like, parallel to me. I can make a whole family. I don't know what happens to them when I turn the game off. It seems like they keep living their lives in there, but maybe not. I don't think they can take care of themselves. Are they, like, frozen or what? What do you think? Mac?

MAC

I think you're a nut.

JEAN
Takes one to know one. (*A beat.*) I just want to check on them, make sure they're okay. They could be starving to death or freezing to death. Will you just / let me -

MAC
I'm working on something right now.

Mac tries to go back to his work. Jean stares at him. He finally hands over the computer. Jean excitedly opens her game. We hear a strange meandering electronic sound-track come up, too loud. Jean turns it down and pushes various buttons. Slowly, as she becomes engrossed in the game, the images on her computer begin to bleed into the walls of the cabin: an out of focus computer-animated woman appears. She is very plain, simply dressed, smiling. She starts to babble unintelligibly. Mac looks up, peers at the screen.

MAC (cont'd)
Who's that?

JEAN
One of my people.

MAC
What kinda language is that?

JEAN
I don't know. I can't understand it.

MAC
Huh.

Mac watches as Jean changes the woman's hairstyle, adjusts her clothing. After a moment, he returns to his notes. They sit in silence as Jean fine-tunes the creation of a SIMS woman.

MAC (cont'd)
Ned and Tootie are going to be wondering where you are. Jeannie. Jean.

JEAN
(*keeping her eyes on the screen*)
Huh?

MAC
Your grand / parents.

JEAN
Oh. They're not wondering anything. They don't even know I'm gone.

MAC
What if something happened?

JEAN
Nothing ever happens.

MAC
They're getting older.

JEAN
No kidding.

MAC
One of 'em could fall.

JEAN
They can yell pretty loud. I'd, like, hear them.

MAC
Maybe. Maybe not.

JEAN
Maybe. Maybe not.

Jean pushes a few more buttons. A man appears on the screen. She begins to adjust his skin-color and body type.

MAC
Jeannie. Time to go home.

JEAN
She's about to meet the man of her dreams!

MAC
Now.

JEAN
Okay! Just let me...

Mac closes the computer. The images of the SIMS people disappear.

MAC
Get your things now. Go on.

Jean grabs her flashlight and books.

MAC (cont'd)
I've got a couple of wolves on the move. I'll be taking off for a few days.

JEAN
Again? And you'll / take the -

MAC
I'll take the computer.

JEAN
If my people die, it'll be all your fault.

MAC
People that live inside a computer game can't die.

JEAN
How do you know? They're helpless without me. They don't even know when to take a shower or go to bed! And what about their feelings? Maybe they have feelings, too, just like us, or maybe, maybe their feelings are completely different from ours. Maybe they feel things we could never imagine.

MAC
There's two very real wolves running scared out there with half of Montana out in their big trucks, looking for them. These guys would love to see 'em strung up like a coupla outlaws. I imagine those wolves are feeling things we never even dreamed of.

JEAN
It's not fair.

MAC
(*Picking up his shotgun.*)
I don't know of many things that are.

JEAN
You don't need to walk me home.

MAC
Can you see your way okay?

JEAN (OFF)
I'm not helpless. I don't need anyone looking after me.

MAC
Okay. (*After a moment)* Jean?

JEAN (OFF)
It's freezing! I thought it was supposed to be spring!

MAC
Looks like snow tomorrow! See the ring around the moon?

JEAN (OFF)
It's huge!

MAC
Good night now!

JEAN (OFF)
Good night!

A silence as Mac lingers in the dark. A wolf howls then, long and lonesome. Mac waits. The wolf howls again.

MAC
Welcome home.

SCENE TWO

Just a piece of the main living area in the cabin next door. NED, Jean's grandfather, enters, assisted by TOOTIE, Jean's grandmother. Once Ned is settled into his La-Z-Boy, surrounded by a daunting collection of prescription medicines, he picks up a pint of George Dickel Sour Mash Whiskey. Tootie settles next to him to read the local newspaper and collect articles for a large, over-stuffed scrapbook. Piles of old newspapers are stacked on the floor all around her. The fire has burned down in their pot-belly stove. The wind blows. It is very cold.

A wolf howls. They both lift up their heads to listen.

NED

You hear that?

TOOTIE

Mac says it's one of them from the Idaho pack.

NED

I sure hope he knows what he's doing, bringing those wolves back.

TOOTIE

He knows. It's his job to know.

NED

He's not careful, he'll find himself out there, howling at the moon, a lone wolf, just like that poor fella.

Ned howls like a wolf.

TOOTIE

That's good. (*A beat.*) We're not going to let that happen to Mac.

She takes her glasses off, holds her hands over her eyes.

NED

Another headache?

TOOTIE

Uh huh.

NED

We should maybe get Mac to bring you in for a check-up. Make sure it's not something serious.

TOOTIE

I don't need a doctor telling me what I already know.

NED

Jeannie! Jeannie!

TOOTIE

She isn't here, Ned.

NED

I knew that. It's awful late for her to be out.

TOOTIE

She's just over at Mac's.

NED

She's over there more and more it seems like. It's getting awful cold, isn't it? I feel like I could die of hypothermia right here.

TOOTIE

We're out of wood. Pull your blanket up. Here's something. "A Great Falls man who pleaded guilty to shaking his girlfriend's 17-month-old daughter, causing fatal brain injuries, has been sentenced to 80 years in prison. Keith Cadwell, Jr. said he shook the child out of frustration because she was crying."

NED

Maybe not the best way to stop her from crying.

TOOTIE

"His girlfriend testified that she left her daughter with Cadwell for 20 minutes while she ran an errand."

NED

That'll be the longest 20 minutes of her life.

TOOTIE

There oughta be a law. Every new parent, or anyone caring for infants, including boyfriends, should have to take a class.

NED

You could teach it.

TOOTIE

Ha.

NED

You miss it, don't you.

TOOTIE

I've got a full time nursing job right here.

NED

I'm sorry.

TOOTIE

Not your fault. It's just not what I imagined.

NED

What?

TOOTIE

This. I pictured us up here, you finally hanging up your fire helmet, me kicking off my white shoes, and both of us just puttering around in the garden....

NED

What garden?

TOOTIE

Or traveling / maybe -

NED

There's no place I'd rather be than / right -

TOOTIE

Both of us, enjoying each other's company, taking care of each other for a change, just living. And now all we're doing / is -

NED

Dying. Well, me anyways.

TOOTIE

Right behind you.

NED

That one about shaking the little girl: In?

TOOTIE

Out.

NED

Damn!

Ned coughs violently, stops suddenly and looks down at his lap.

NED (cont'd)

Not again.

TOOTIE

Oh Ned.

She gets up and goes to him, places a hand on his arm.

NED

I'm sorry.

TOOTIE

It's okay. I've cleaned up plenty of messes in my life.

NED

BUT NOT MINE.

TOOTIE

Try to be reasonable.

NED

I've been reasonable my whole life. About had it with reasonable.

TOOTIE

Let's get you up.

She struggles with the lever on the La-Z-Boy.

NED

JUST push it forward. Here. Let me do it!

Ned struggles, pitching himself backwards, nearly tipping over. Tootie jiggles the lever until it suddenly releases, nearly pitching Ned out on the floor. Ned howls.

Jean enters with a load of wood. She dumps it by the stove and hurries to help.

JEAN

Gram! Grandpa! What happened?

NED

I'm gonna cut this chair up and make a bonfire out of it.

JEAN

You alright?

TOOTIE

We're fine. Fine.

JEAN

It's freezing in here!

TOOTIE

Well!

JEAN

I'm sorry, Gram. I brought in some more wood.

TOOTIE

Help me with your Grandpa. He needs changing.

NED

Where were you? We need you here, Jeannie.

JEAN

I'm here, Grandpa.

She kisses him.

NED

You are now!

They get him up.

TOOTIE

Next time Mac goes to the store, ask him to pick us / up some -

NED

More whiskey.

TOOTIE

No, Ned. Some... oh, what are they called. Those diapers, for adults.

NED

No! No diapers. I WON'T HAVE IT!

JEAN

Okay Grandpa. Here we go.

TOOTIE

Depends!

Jean finally gets Ned and Tootie off. We hear the distant sound of a radio blasting from a car going too fast on a dirt road.

Jean, returning to stoke the fire, freezes, like a deer caught in the headlights as they sweep across the cabin and land on Mac's porch.

SCENE THREE

Mac steps back into the shadows and releases the safety on his shotgun. The approaching car engine roars, followed by a sudden silence when the car is turned off. The quiet is broken by a brief, tired argument, barely audible.

MONSOON (OFF)
I'm coming with you.

CLIFF (OFF)
Just wait a minute so / I can -

MONSOON (OFF)
No! I / want to -

CLIFF (OFF)
Wait!

A car door slams. Cliff steps up on the porch and goes to peer in the window. Mac cocks his gun.

CLIFF (cont'd)
Don't shoot.

Cliff holds up his hands and steps back.

CLIFF (cont'd)
Uncle Mac!

Mac lowers his gun and turns on his head-lamp.

MAC
Cliff? What the hell? What are you doing here? You okay?

CLIFF comes into Mac's head-lamp.. He shields his eyes to keep from being blinded. Mac turns his head, plays the light over him. Cliff's head is shaved so close it's nicked and bloody in places. He is unwashed, bedraggled, and very cold.

MAC (cont'd)
What's going on? I heard your Dad sent you off someplace.

CLIFF
Yeah.

Another car door slams.

MAC
What's that? Who's with you?

CLIFF
That's Monsoon.

MAC
Like, lotsa rain and...

CLIFF
Like a hurricane, only backwards.

MONSOON
That's a typhoon.

MONSOON comes up to the porch.

CLIFF
(*to Monsoon*)
I asked you to wait a minute.

MONSOON
Yeah, well. I'm not sitting in the car all night. It's fucking freezing.

Mac plays his light over Monsoon. He shines his lamp into her eyes. She looks right into it.

MAC
Monsoon.

Cliff puts his hand up to block the light.

CLIFF
Uncle Mac. We're freezing to death. Can we come in?

MAC
You graduate already from that place?

CLIFF
Not exactly.

MAC
So, what? Spring break?

CLIFF
Something like that.

Mac looks out at the car and whistles in appreciation.

CLIFF (cont'd)
We borrowed the car.

MAC
Uh huh. He know you're here?

CLIFF
I'll deal with Dad, okay? You won't have to get involved -

MAC
I already am.

MONSOON
I told you we shouldn't have come here.

MAC
Smart girl.

MONSOON
He thought maybe you wouldn't be here.

MAC
What were you going to do? Break in?

CLIFF
We just needed to get off the road. We need someplace to sleep / and then -

MONSOON
We should have just kept going south. Where it's warm.

ClIFF
How we gonna buy gas, food. Huh?

MAC
Woah. What's going on? You come here looking for money, you come to the wrong place.

MONSOON
That's pretty obvious.

MAC
What'd you do?

CLIFF
Nothin'.

MAC
Looks like somethin' to me. You steal that car?

CLIFF
I told you, we / borrowed it.

MAC
Don't even try to pull that shit on me.

CLIFF
What shit?

MAC
The shit you're trying to pull!

CLIFF
You have no idea.

MONSOON
Come on. Let's go.

They turn to go. A wolf howls.

MONSOON (cont'd)
What. Is. That.

MAC
Number 15.

CLIFF
Wolf Number 15.

MONSOON
What do you mean, Wolf Number 15. You keeping count?

MAC
Uh huh.

CLIFF
You released him here?

MAC
The pack he belongs to is settling into Idaho, about 20 minutes west of here. Number 15 took off on his own. I thought you might be some moron with a scope on his rifle coming in here after him.

MONSOON
Now they're following us. Come on, Cliff, let's go before they catch up.

MAC
Following you?

MONSOON
He said you'd want to hear about it. Said you cared about wolves / more than

CLIFF
We saw a couple of wolves on the highway coming into Missoula.

MAC
On the highway? You sure they were wolves?

CLIFF
Yeah. Pretty sure.

MAC
We've been tracking two of 'em out of Yellowstone. They left the park yesterday, heading north.

CLIFF (cont'd)
These two were running against the traffic. Straight at us, straight north, I guess.

MAC
Shit. Some idiot is bound to spot 'em.

MONSOON
Looked like they were running for their lives.

CLIFF/MAC

Uh huh.

Another wolf howl.

MONSOON

Creepin' me out.

Monsoon turns, slips in the door and heads straight for the stove, standing as close as she can without starting herself on fire.

MAC

Hey!

Mac and Cliff follow her in. They all stand for a moment. A brief, tense silence.

MAC (cont'd)

I don't have... I don't - You should go home, Cliff.

CLIFF

I have no home.

MAC

Of course you have a home. You should call your Dad/ and

CLIFF

No! Just let... Just let us get warm for a minute, get our bearings.

MAC

44 degrees, 35 minutes North, 111 degrees, 48 minutes West.

CLIFF

Yeah. That helps. Thanks.

MAC

I'm not set up to - I only got the one bed.

MONSOON

Oh, I can sleep anywhere.

CLIFF

Me too.

MAC

I really / don't -

MONSOON

What? You don't like people?

MAC

I like 'em fine. As long as / they're -

MONSOON

You're like that guy! He lived alone, just like this, out in the middle of nowhere. It was Montana, wasn't it? And he started mailing bombs and shit.

CLIFF

Ted Kaczynski?

MONSOON

Yeah.

CLIFF

No.

MAC

Maybe a little.

CLIFF

He's just messing with you.

Monsoon moves around the cabin, eyeing the bow and arrows, various knives, traps and skinning instruments. She runs her fingers along them, dangerously close to cutting herself.

MAC

Those / are

MONSOON

Sharp? I can tell.

She goes to the furs on the wall, runs her hand along each of them, examining the dangling feet. One of the furs falls to the ground. She picks it up, stretches it out full length. Mac takes it from her and hangs it back in its place.

MAC
You see, this is why / I don't

MONSOON
What animal is this or was this?

MAC
Fox.

MONSOON
It's so soft.

She runs her hand down the fur, slowly, sensuously.

MAC
Don't.

MONSOON
Poor, beautiful, wild, dead thing. So you're like a what? Mountain man trapper kinda deal?

CLIFF
Uncle Mac used to be in charge of Animal Damage Control for western Montana.

MONSOON
Damage to the animal?

Monsoon takes the fox pelt and drapes it over her shoulders.

CLIFF
Damage to big business.

MONSOON
Big business. Out here.

MAC
Livestock. Cattle, sheep. Big business out here.

MONSOON
Uh huh. So what animals did you control? Foxes, / coyotes

MAC
Wolves, grizzlies, mountain lions. Anything feeding on livestock.

MONSOON
And you don't do that anymore?

MAC
No.

MONSOON
Why not?

MAC
I just don't.

MONSOON
Huh. So, now what are you?

MAC
Poor.

CLIFF
Uncle Mac is in charge of the Wolf Recovery Project.

MAC
Not in charge.

MONSOON
What, like a twelve step program for wayward wolves?

CLIFF
That's good. They're trying to bring the wolf back from almost total extinction. Right, Uncle Mac?

MAC
Uh huh.

CLIFF
Bringing packs into Montana, Wyoming and Idaho, see if they can get them settled back in around here.

MONSOON
Why would you want to have more wolves around? Aren't they, like, dangerous?

MAC
You eliminate all of the top predators - wolves, bears, mountain lions - the whole system begins to fail.

Mac goes to Monsoon and removes the pelts. Monsoon hangs onto the last one by the feet and maneuvers away from him.

MAC (cont'd)
I don't have time for this shit.

Mac gets out a map of Montana, spreads it out on the table.

MAC (cont'd)
Just show me. Show me where you saw those wolves.

MONSOON
Why do you care where the wolves go?

MAC
Because no matter where they go, they're in some rancher's cross-hairs. Looks like the alphas of the pack we introduced into Yellowstone are trying to go back to where they came from.

CLIFF
Where's that?

MAC
Canada.

MONSOON
Someone should tell them there's no going back. Everything will be different. All the other wolves will look at them funny.

MAC
Yeah.

MONSOON
It's cold up there.

MAC
That's the way they like it. (*to Cliff*) So which one? Which highway were the wolves using?

CLIFF
Uhhh... We came down out of the Bitterroots...

MONSOON

(*Joining them.*) Here. 93 South.

MAC

That close to town?

MONSOON

Yeah. We were right here, by this big military cemetery. It was kinda spooky, huh? There was this mist on the road. I was expecting to see a zombie rising up outta all those white markers.

CLIFF

Ha. Me too.

MONSOON

Cliff starts reciting that / what was that?

CLIFF

“The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?”

MONSOON

Yeah. I’m just trying to keep my head on straight and he’s going all crazy poetic on me.

CLIFF

Edgar Allan Poe.

MONSOON

How do you remember that shit?

MAC

Running straight at you?

CLIFF

In the passing lane!

MONSOON

Yeah! It was just starting to get dark. Soon as I turn my lights on, I see 'em. Way out ahead. These yellow eyes. Kinda glowing.

MAC

Not dogs. Or coyotes?

MONSOON

No. Different. Not sure why.

CLIFF

Too big. Their legs were, like, really long.

MONSOON

Yeah. They keep getting closer, right in my lane. Fast. Too fast. I put my foot on the brakes, easy, so no one will hit me from behind. Wolves. Both of us said it at the same time.

CLIFF/MONSOON

Wolves.

MAC

Were they wearing collars?

CLIFF

Uhhh.

MAC

They're pretty big. You would have seen 'em. Did one of 'em look like she was carrying pups?

MONSOON

Yeah! / Maybe.

CLIFF

We couldn't see that, Uncle Mac. Everything was moving pretty fast. The sun was going down. It was getting real dark. And real cold.

MONSOON

Freezing. And the fucking heater doesn't even work.

MAC

Number Nine shouldn't be traveling like that. She should be hunkering down, building a den.

MONSOON

These two were just running, like for their lives. I just saw these eyes, picking up our headlights. Big yellow eyes. They don't look at you. They look through you. And they aren't afraid.

CLIFF
These two aren't moving out of our way, that's for sure.

MONSOON
I can't swerve or slam on my brakes. I'll smash into the cars on my right, or hit this big concrete thing on my left.

CLIFF
The divider.

MONSOON
Huh?

CLIFF
The divider. So people don't hit each other, going the wrong way.

MONSOON
Yeah. Thanks.

CLIFF
I'm thinking she's gonna clip the one on the/right -

MAC
And then what?

CLIFF
I don't / know.

MONSOON
Time, like, stops. For a second.

CLIFF
Then there's just the sound of air going past us.

MONSOON
(*Imitating the sound of a quiet wind.*)
Woooo.

MAC
And?

CLIFF
Nothing. We don't hit a thing.

MAC
Huh.

MONSOON
It was like we went right through ‘em.

CLIFF
Or they went through us.

MONSOON
Yeah. I just keep going, with the hair on the back of my neck ruffed up.

CLIFF
Mine, too.

MAC
Wolves will sometimes use highways to travel when the snow's too deep.

MONSOON
That seems a little reckless. What are they running from?

MAC
Us. They just want to be left alone so they / can

MONSOON
Be themselves.

MAC
(*Grabbing his coat*)
Yeah. I need to make a call. I’ll just - I only get bars if I stand out in the field there.

CLIFF
Who you gonna call? Uncle Mac?

MAC
My wolf team.

The door slams behind him.

MONSOON
His wolf team. Wish I had one of those. You’re sure he’s not going to call your dad? Or the cops maybe?

CLIFF
I gotta be. He may be a little weird, but, I don’t think / he’d

MONSOON
Let’s not give him too much time then.

CLIFF
We'll go, soon as we can. We gotta rest a bit. Figure out the money situation.

MONSOON
Yeah. Shit.

CLIFF
I'm beat. You?

Monsoon nods. She steps closer to the stove. She begins to shake, a desperate need rising in her. She can't get warm. Cliff stokes the fire.

A wolf howls. Monsoon looks up at the sound of the howl, shivers.

MONSOON
God. Is that the same guy?

CLIFF
Number 15? Probably.

MONSOON
Sounds so cold and lonesome. (*A beat)* I felt cold all the time, all the time I spent in there. I just couldn't get warm. You?

CLIFF
Nearly froze to death.

MONSOON
No matter how many clothes I wore. 'Specially at night. I wore my sweatpants, sweatshirt, hat, everything, even socks, to bed. I hate wearing socks in bed. Makes my feet feel really claustrophobic. It's nice to be someplace warm. I guess anyplace is better than where we been. Right? Even for a couple of hours.

Monsoon begins to cry.

MONSOON (cont'd)
Shit.

She circles around like an animal looking for a place to lie down. Cliff catches her.

CLIFF
It's okay. Don't cry.

MONSOON
Let me cry. Just let me cry for a minute.

Cliff holds her.

MONSOON (cont'd)
I'm not going back there.

CLIFF
Me neither.

MONSOON
I'd end up like Susan.

CLIFF
Jesus. I couldn't believe she jumped.

MONSOON
Made sense to me. That's the scary part. I can't go home.

CLIFF
Me neither.

MONSOON
They're going to have to shoot me. Specially after they see what I did to that guard.

CLIFF
No shit. I heard a / crack -

MONSOON
Well, seemed like you were just going to stand there -

Mac comes back in the door. Cliff moves quickly away from Monsoon.

MAC
Okay. They're tracking them, just north of where you saw them.

CLIFF
Maybe some tea. You got tea Uncle Mac?

MAC
Huh? Yeah. I got tea.

Mac goes off to gather his wares for tracking the wolves. Cliff goes to the coffee pot on the stove and moves to the kitchenette, followed by Monsoon. Cliff pours water from a jug into the pot to rinse it out and make tea.

MONSOON
He doesn't even have running water?

CLIFF
Nope.

MONSOON
Been dreaming about a long, hot shower, all to myself...

CLIFF
Yeah well, keep dreamin'.

MONSOON
Coupla hours. Tops. We're outta here.

Monsoon starts hunting through the cabinets for some tea. Even after she finds it, she continues a perusal of the kitchen's contents.

CLIFF
What are you doin'?

MONSOON
Just looking. He doesn't even have hardly any food.

Cliff allows her a sleeve of crackers, steers her back into the main living area and places the kettle on the wood stove. Mac comes in with a load of supplies.

MAC
They've picked up Number Nine's signal near the Blackfoot. If she's still got those pups, she'll be trying to den up.

MONSOON
Number Nine. That sounds so - Why do you call her by a number? Why not just give her a name?

MAC
You don't want to get too involved. Shit happens.

MONSOON

Yeah.

Mac packs a daunting collection of tools - dart guns, pellets, ropes.

MAC

When you're recording data it's a lot easier to have a number than some dumb name someone decided to give 'em. Which one's Cinderella? Which one's King? Number Nine. Number Ten. Easy. They're the alphas of the Rose Creek Pack. Most magnificent animals I've ever seen.

MONSOON

78510.

MAC

What?

MONSOON

That's me. That's my number. At Meadow Freak. (*to Cliff*) Yours?

CLIFF

78007.

MONSOON

That's a good one. Double Oh Seven.

CLIFF

I never thought of it like that.

MONSOON

Kinda cool. If you've gotta be a number.

MAC

Meadow Freak?

CLIFF

Meadow Creek. Academy.

MONSOON

For Wayward/Youth.

MAC

Sounds/pretty nice.

MONSOON
Oh yeah. It's plush. Especially the Hobbit.

MAC
The what?

CLIFF
The Hobbit.

MAC
What the hell is The Hobbit?

MONSOON
The i-so-la-tion chamber.

MAC
What?

MONSOON
Tell him. Tell him.

CLIFF
He doesn't need to...

MONSOON
Yeah. He does. (*to Mac.*) You should maybe listen.

MAC
I'm listening.

CLIFF
It's this box they put you in when you're... when they don't want to see you or hear you, or deal with you for a while.

MAC
What do you mean, box.

MONSOON
Tell him.

CLIFF
It's kinda like a bunker, a little concrete bunker. You can't hardly stand up in there. Little tiny window with bars on it... you can't hardly see, either, it's so dark, and so fucking cold.

CLIFF (cont'd)
Concrete slab for what's supposed to be a bed, little tiny blanket, fucking freezing in there, fucking cold and hard and... Ahhhh.

He shakes his head, as if to erase it all from his mind.

MAC
How long they keep you in there?

CLIFF
Oh, it can be weeks. You come out all hunched over like a troll. That's why they call it the Hobbit.

MAC
Jesus. Your Dad - he have any idea what goes on in this place?

CLIFF
Oh I think he has a pretty good idea. He thought it would do me some good. Toughen me up a bit. You know. Get me into the big outdoors.

MAC
He could just take you camping.

CLIFF
Yeah.

MAC
God dammit.

Mac rummages around in a battered bin, pulls out an old tarp and hands it to Cliff.

MAC (cont'd)
Here. Pull the goddamn car up next to the cabin and cover it with this. I don't have many neighbors, but the ones I do have are pretty nosy. Especially Jean, the little girl next door. She's over here all the time, lookin' for something to do. She'd love to get a whiff of you two. So pull the car over on the other side there and cover the damn thing up good.

Cliff stares at Mac, then nods, briefly, relieved, thankful. Monsoon hands Cliff the car keys. He exits. After an awkward silence, we hear the GTO start up.

MONSOON
You won't regret this. I promise. How can you live without running water? Electricity? No shower? Don't you ever take a shower?

She moves up close to him, breathes in his scent.

MONSOON (cont'd)
You don't smell bad. You smell kinda like... Sunshine. No. Snow. You smell like snow.

MAC
Snow.

MONSOON
Uh huh.

MAC
You want a shower now?

MONSOON
That would be great.

MAC
I've got a spring out back and I've set up a little... It takes a while to heat up. I'll get it started... I don't know what kind of shit you're used to having to pull, but it's goin' nowhere with me. You got that?

Monsoon stares at him, then nods as tears start to fall. Mac exits.

Monsoon goes quickly to the kitchen and peruses the cabinets. After a thorough search, she finds a bottle of bourbon and swigs deeply, then turns and takes a tour of the cabin with it. She spies a small picture frame in the corner of the table. She picks it up, looks closely at it.

Cliff comes back in with a load of wood in his arms, stamping snow off his sneakers.

CLIFF
(*eyeing the bourbon*)
Where'd you get that?

MONSOON
Oh, he's got, like, these little hiding places. All around.

CLIFF
(*stacking the firewood*)
I think it's going to snow.

MONSOON
Shit. We could be halfway to Mexico by now.

CLIFF
On what. Air? We gonna drive that fucking GTO on air? You wanna start robbing banks now, too? Or maybe we should go to your father, the preacher, and ask him for some money, huh?

MONSOON
He's not a preacher! He's a bishop. In the Mormon Church, they're called bishops.

CLIFF
Whatever. I don't even know if we have enough gas to make it to Island Park.

MONSOON
Island Park. That sounds nice.

CLIFF
It isn't.

Cliff stokes the fire. Monsoon shows him the photograph.

MONSOON
Who's this? His wife and kids?

CLIFF
He doesn't have a wife and kids. That's me and my mom. And my little brother. Wade.

MONSOON
She's beautiful.

CLIFF
Yeah.

MONSOON
You look like her.

CLIFF
That's what everyone says.

MONSOON
And he's so little and cute! What is he, like, a Boy Scout?

CLIFF
Cub Scout. He never made it to the Boy Scouts.

MONSOON
I was a Brownie, for about two weeks. Too many fucking rules.

CLIFF
Yeah well, Wade loved being a scout.

MONSOON
He's got a shitload of badges! So what happened?

CLIFF
Nothing!

MONSOON
Take it easy.

Monsoon goes to him, moves in close and hands him the bottle of bourbon.

Cliff takes a quick swig, then moves to put the bottle away in the kitchen.

MONSOON (cont'd)
Hey. I'm not done with that.

CLIFF
Yeah well, let's not push it, huh? You can't just come in here and / and

MONSOON
What?

CLIFF
Stir everything up.

MONSOON
That's what I do.

CLIFF
Not here. This is like, he's like - the only thing I got left and he's ready to throw us out on our asses.

MONSOON
I'm working on him. I think he's starting to like me.

CLIFF
Don't get too excited.

MONSOON
You covered the car up good?

CLIFF
Best I could in this fucking wind.

MONSOON
My dad's gonna have every cop in Montana, Idaho and Utah looking for me.

CLIFF
He's not going to find you.

MONSOON
Oh. I don't know. He's got lots of friends. In high places. He won't stop until he finds me. You don't know my dad.

CLIFF
And you don't know me.

Cliff takes one last swig and goes to return the bottle to the kitchen. Monsoon grabs it from him and laughs.

MONSOON
I don't know why I decided to take you with me.

CLIFF
Well, if you hadn't you'd probably be out of gas, stuck, on some lonesome stretch of the road in the middle of fucking Wyoming.

MONSOON
I can take care of myself. I'd seen you around. Seemed like you were always in trouble. They were always taking you off to the Hobbit.

CLIFF
I was always pissing them off.

MONSOON
I always thought you were cool.

CLIFF
Yeah? Cool.

Cliff leans in close, like he's going to kiss her, but doesn't. When he pulls back, she pulls him to her and kisses him deeply. Finally, he comes up for air. She runs her hand over his shaved head.

MONSOON
It feels like some kind of animal.

Cliff howls like a wolf. Monsoon joins in.

MONSOON (cont'd)
That's good.

She tries to pull him in for another kiss. Cliff pulls away.

CLIFF
I'm so tired. I can't even see straight.

He digs through Mac's gear until he finds two sleeping bags. He hands one to Monsoon, and spreads his out on the floor near the fire.

MONSOON
He was going to set up a shower for me.

CLIFF
Yeah...

She stands a moment, sees that Cliff is almost asleep already, then spreads her sleeping bag out near him. She stares up at the ceiling, waiting for sleep to come.

MONSOON
Think he's got any tranqs?

CLIFF (cont'd)
Huh?

MONSOON
Tranqs, downers, sleeping pills, anything like that...

CLIFF

Uhhhh. I don't know. He might have some like animal tranquilizers, for the dart guns, you know, to bring down the wolves / but

MONSOON

That might do it.

Monsoon stares into the night. The wind howls. After a moment, Mac comes in. Monsoon plays possum as Mac spies the bottle of bourbon and the picture frame on it's side. He examines the amount of bourbon left in the bottle, then takes the bottle and the picture with him as he goes back out to turn off the shower. Monsoon opens her eyes after he leaves, staring into the night as the lights fade.

SCENE FOUR

The next morning. Jean comes in quietly and freezes when she sees Monsoon and Cliff asleep on the floor. She walks around them carefully, for a closer look. She stares at them, willing them to wake up. She tries clearing her throat, coughing. They both stay fast asleep. After a long moment, she sits down at the table. She spies Mac's computer under his notebooks. She quickly opens it up and loads her game. The image of the computer game appears on her laptop. The sound-track for SIMS, comes up, too loud. Jean turns it down and looks around to make sure Cliff and Monsoon are undisturbed. Slowly, as the game draws her in, the woman Jean was creating appears on her screen and on the walls behind her, smiling.

JEAN

(*quietly*)

Okay. Phew. You're still there! Where were we? Your eyes still aren't... You had, you have... brown eyes... bigger. Uh huh. Like that... Okay. Your name is Samantha. But everyone calls you Sam.

"Sam" stands in front of a mirror and rotates side to side, checking herself out. She makes odd little noises in SIMS language. Jean adjusts her clothes until "Sam" is dressed in a simple, 'Young Mom' style. Jean freezes her so that "Sam" stands staring out.

JEAN (cont'd)
Okay. Now... Oh no. Where did he go?

Jean pushes a few buttons. The SIMS man she created appears on the screen.

JEAN (cont'd)
OK. There you are. You are going to be... Will. You always wear jeans and a plaid shirt.

The man turns, looks in the mirror and utters approving sighs. Jean freezes him. The man and woman stare out at the audience, as if waiting for instructions. Jean stares at them. The music gets louder. Monsoon moans in her sleep. Jean turns it down.

JEAN (cont'd)
Now. You need a house!

She searches for the right button to push. The image of an empty house appears. We see it from above, like a detailed architectural plan.

JEAN (cont'd)
That's good. I like that one. Okay. You need a few things, some beds, a couch, a kitchen table, some chairs, what else? You can't afford anything else. Okay. Sam and Will, you need to get ready for work. Take a shower. Get dressed.

The couple dances around their newly furnished home.

JEAN (cont'd)
Dancing! Now? I remember you used to dance in the kitchen. Like that. But not so much kissing! Oh! What? Do I want them to make a baby? Okay! Wow. That was fast. A baby! Okay then! We'll make it a girl. And she will be... Jeannie!

The music suddenly gets louder. Monsoon stirs in her sleep. Jean hurriedly turns down the volume on the computer again. "Sam" and "Will" reappear holding a baby.

JEAN (cont'd)
(*admiring the baby*)
Awww.

Monsoon sits up, frightened, disoriented.

JEAN (cont'd)
Oh! Sorry!

Jean closes the lap-top quickly, leaving it slightly ajar. The SIMS games continues on the computer, but the images fade from the cabin walls.

JEAN (cont'd)
Hi.... I'm Jeannie. Um, Jean.

Monsoon just stares at her.

I live next door. Well, next cabin. That's as close as we get to next door out here. (*A beat. She waits for Monsoon to reply.*) You can just see the roof if you stand on tiptoes... It's kinda small, but, well, it's small.

They stare at each other.

I saw someone pull up last night and I was wondering who... Mac didn't say anything about visitors and... and then I saw his truck pull out this morning, so, I thought I'd just come see... So, I came over and I saw you both sleeping, like, so hard, like you'd never wake up and I, just...

They stare.

JEAN (cont'd)
I couldn't believe he left his computer here. He usually takes it with him any time he goes anywhere so he can charge it while he's driving. So, I just thought / while he was gone, I would -

MONSOON
Do you have an off button somewhere? What time is it?

JEAN
It's almost ten. Who are you?

Cliff groans in his sleep.

JEAN (cont'd)
Who's that?

MONSOON

Long story.

JEAN

I like stories. I just like to hear someone else talk besides me.

MONSOON

Yeah. I can see how that would be.

JEAN

Are you in trouble?

MONSOON

Why do you ask that?

JEAN

I don't know. There's a purple car out there, covered up with a tarp, and you two are here, sleeping on the floor, like someone shot you or something.

MONSOON

Don't say that.

JEAN

Sorry.

MONSOON

You don't miss much, do you?

JEAN

Nope. So what did you do?

MONSOON

Nothing. We're just trying to...

JEAN

Trying to what? (*Realizing*) Are you running away? It's okay. I won't tell anyone. I don't have anyone to tell. I live alone. Well, I live with my grandparents. They're kinda older, you know, well, a lot older... Is that a tattoo? Cool. So, what did you do?

MONSOON

Huh?

JEAN

What did you do? To get in trouble?

MONSOON
I... nothing. I'm not in any trouble.

JEAN
I thought you said you were.

MONSOON
Nope. I don't think I did.

JEAN
Oh, I / thought -

MONSOON
Uhhh. Sometimes I just get so tired of talking, do you?

JEAN
I guess I should shut up then.

MONSOON
Yeah. Maybe.

JEAN
So, what'd you do?

MONSOON
Nothing. I just / got -

JEAN
What?

MONSOON
Afraid. Afraid I wouldn't make it out alive.

JEAN
What? Out of where?

MONSOON
Shit.

JEAN
Okay. It's okay. (*a beat)* You slept in your clothes?

MONSOON
Huh?

JEAN
I don't like sleeping in my clothes.

MONSOON
You get used to it.

JEAN
So you do that a lot?

MONSOON
Lately. Yeah. But look. No socks.

JEAN
I don't like to sleep in my socks.

MONSOON
Me neither.

JEAN
I can, like, bring you some pajamas. If you want, / I -

MONSOON
That's okay. We're not staying. We should be outta here already. Except this guy can't even hold a few shots of bourbon.

She nudges Cliff with her foot. He moans and rolls over.

JEAN
Oh. So how come you get tired of talking? I don't think I'd ever get tired of / that.

MONSOON
Sometimes you just need a little space, you know?

JEAN
Not me. Space is all I've got.

MONSOON
Yeah? Must be nice.

JEAN
I don't know.

MONSOON
No?

JEAN
Hunh uh. Well, except for Mac. He gets mad at me sometimes for using up the batteries on his computer.

MONSOON
You don't have to go to school?

JEAN
There's nothing close enough around here. Home school. I'm supposed to be studying for the GED right now.

MONSOON
The GED! Kinda young aren't you?

JEAN
I guess. There's not much else to do, so I study a lot. They all leave me pretty much to myself.

MONSOON
That sounds good. Can I be you?

JEAN
Ha. I've never had anyone want to be me before. (*A beat.)* So? What did you do?

MONSOON
Oh, I started not to listen.

JEAN
You started not to listen to... to anyone?

MONSOON
I got tired of the noise. So I turned it off.

The SIMS music gets louder suddenly. Jean opens the computer and types.

MONSOON (cont'd)
What are you doing?

JEAN

It's this new game I got.

MONSOON (cont'd)
Yeah? SIMS? No way. I used to play this like, all night long.

JEAN (cont'd)
Lucky!

MONSOON
That's one of the reasons they... that's one of the things they're trying to cure me of.

JEAN
Cure you of?

MONSOON
My step-mother decided I was addicted. She said I couldn't tell the difference anymore, between real life and this game.

JEAN
It's like you start feeling like... their lives make more sense than yours.

MONSOON
Exactly.

JEAN
I just figured out how to make people. And now they have a little girl -

MONSOON
She looks kind of like you!

JEAN
Yeah, I / thought -

MONSOON
I used to do that, too. Make, like, clones of my family. Then, I could tell everyone what to do. And they had to listen to me. I knew the difference. I'm not stupid. I just liked the world I made up a lot better.

The images of the family reappear faintly on walls of the cabin.

MONSOON (cont'd)
You have to get that baby something to eat.

JEAN
Oh. Thanks.

MONSOON
And when was the last time she slept?

JEAN

Uh...

MONSOON

Feed her and put her to bed. See, the light above her head is like bright red? That's not good.

JEAN

But she hasn't had a bath or, I can't just/ put her to bed -

MONSOON

You can do anything you want. Quick just get her in her crib. You don't want her to die.

JEAN

They can die?

MONSOON

Oh yeah. It's awful when they die. These really creepy grim reaper zombie-type guys come and take them away.

JEAN

Yuck.

MONSOON

It's better if you don't let them die.

JEAN

Okay.

MONSOON

You've got to love them like - like family - like family is *supposed* to love you. Here. Watch. Oh. Look. They're dancing.

SCENE FIVE

Tootie and Ned's cabin. Tootie and Ned enter from the back of the cabin, dancing, light footed and young for a moment. Slowly as they reach their chairs, they sink into their age again and settle into their routine. Tootie reads from the paper. Ned sits in his chair sipping on his whiskey. He tucks it into the side of his chair, feels around, and comes up with a left-over cookie.

TOOTIE

Here's something. "A Whitefish man has drowned while fishing along the Missouri River. The body of 41-year-old Kevin Halstrom was discovered south of Cascade on Friday. Authorities believe he slipped and fell into the river. He was wearing waders, but not a life jacket."

NED

I don't know any fisherman who would be caught dead fishing in a life-jacket.

TOOTIE

Well, this one was caught dead without one. "Halstrom's raft was found tied up along the shore. One of his dogs was recovered, but a chocolate Labrador named Deuce..."

NED

Deuce? That's a good name for a Lab.

TOOTIE

"Deuce ran off when approached by emergency personnel. Anyone who locates the dog is asked to contact the Cascade County Sheriff's office."

NED

Okay. I'm guessing that's in.

TOOTIE

Nope.

NED

Why not?

TOOTIE

Put your thinking cap on, Ned!

Ned coughs. Tootie watches him.

TOOTIE (cont'd)

You should take a pill.

NED

Don't do a thing anymore, except make me goofy...

TOOTIE

And George Dickel doesn't.

NED

A little Dickel do ya!

Ned swigs deeply from the bottle. He tucks the bottle away into the cushions of his chair, digs around and comes up with his fishing cap, which he happily puts on his head.

NED (cont'd)

Now, why isn't that one about the fisherman in?

TOOTIE

Oh, you're no help at all. We haven't been fishing in years. It doesn't have anything to do with it, Ned.

NED

I wish you'd tell me what "it" is. I wish you would. Then maybe the odds would be more in my favor.

TOOTIE

The odds? The odds are against us all. From the very beginning. If you'd put that bottle of whiskey down for a minute then you might be able to help me figure it out!

NED

Figure what out?

TOOTIE

IT!

SCENE SIX

Mac's cabin. Jean stands at the window, looking back towards her cabin. Monsoon remains fixed on the game.

JEAN

I should probably get going, my grandparents, / they're -

MONSOON

Good. They're all asleep. So now, you can - You don't have like, any furniture. They need a TV and shit. A pool makes them really happy. But you've got to be careful they don't drown. Especially the kids.

JEAN

They can *drown*? I don't think they have enough money for a pool, anyway.

MONSOON
Oh man, your SIMS life is about to change.

Monsoon types.

JEAN
Wow.

MONSOON
Rosebud. They'll never have to worry about money again. Mother Lode. It's a cheat code.

JEAN
Oh! Sweet!

"Will" appears.

MONSOON
So this, Will guy, is he... like your dad?

JEAN
I don't know. He's / kind of-

MONSOON
I like them dark and brooding.

JEAN
(*pointing to Cliff*)
Like him?

MONSOON
Him? Uhhh... I guess. Hair's a little short, don't you think? They shave all the guys' heads as soon as they get there.

JEAN
Were you like, in the Army?

MONSOON
Worse than that.

JEAN
Is he your boyfriend?

MONSOON
What? No. We just met. Sorta. Do you think he's cute?

JEAN
(*nodding*)
Uh-huh. So, he's not your boyfriend.

MONSOON
(*shaking her head*)
Unnh-huh.

JEAN
Do you have a boyfriend?

MONSOON
I had one. Back home.

JEAN
Where's home?

MONSOON
I don't know.

JEAN
You don't know where home is?

Monsoon shakes her head.

JEAN (cont'd)
Well, like, how'd you get here?

MONSOON
In that purple car.

JEAN
Oh. Of course. Cool.

Jean takes over the game. She puts a knit cap on "Will".

MONSOON
That's good. Kinda the skater look. Yeah. Or watch. We could make him into a rapper dude.

They put a snap back hat on "Will". Monsoon laughs loudly. Jean tries to keep up.

JEAN
Did you have sex with him?

MONSOON
Jesus. Who?

JEAN
Your boyfriend! Back home!

MONSOON
Jared? We were... kinda close, I guess.

JEAN
What's it like?

MONSOON
Oh.

JEAN
It's okay. You don't have to tell me. But you can if you want to.

MONSOON
I'm maybe not the best one to / fill you in.

JEAN
Does it hurt?

MONSOON
Uhhh. Not if, not if - it's someone you want to be with.

JEAN
Wouldn't that be, like, of course?!

MONSOON
Of course. Yeah. If you're with someone that - the first time me and Jared were... together, my dad walked in on us.

JEAN
What?

MONSOON
Not, not while... we... we were down in the basement and... we'd both fallen / asleep after

JEAN
What'd he do? Your dad? When he walked in on you and found you / like

MONSOON
Passed out naked? He didn't say a word. He just stood there. While we got dressed. Jared had to sorta squeeze by him to get up the stairs. Then my dad just... turned around... walked up the stairs... turned out the lights... and locked the door behind him.

JEAN
Your dad locked you in the basement? In the dark? For how long?

MONSOON
I don't know. Like a whole day. Until the sleezeballs he hired came to take me away.

JEAN
What? What do you mean?

A long pause. Jean stares at Monsoon. Monsoon looks back at the computer.

MONSOON
They're dancing again.

JEAN
They like to dance.

MONSOON
That's cool.

The couple can be seen dancing slowly, faintly around the cabin. Monsoon and Jean are mesmerized.

MONSOON (cont'd)
That last day. That last day I was home... I'm down in the basement, feeling... pretty...small... pretty in-sig-ni-fi-cant, I guess. Like, I might just disappear. It's so dark. And all of a sudden, all the lights go on. I'm like blinded. And these two guys in khaki come down the stairs. And one guy, he's got a whole, like khaki suit, he comes up behind me and grabs my head and pushes it down.

JEAN
So...

MONSOON

So, I start screaming. And the other guy stuffs a bandana in my mouth. He's got like the same khaki pants. But he doesn't have the whole suit, he's just got a, like blue polo shirt with a little globe logo thing. So, the guy with the suit, he handcuffs me and tells me that it's my choice, the way I go. I'm like go? Go where?

JEAN

Where's your dad?

MONSOON

My dad? He's just standing there, on the stairs, watching. *Watching*. And then he comes up to me and hugs me. He hugs me with a bandana stuffed in my mouth. He hugs me with my hands cuffed behind my back. He hugs me. And then he tells me, he's doing this for my own good. That someday I'll thank him. Then he turns around and walks back up the stairs, real slow and calm. Like nothing.

JEAN

Shit.

MONSOON

Is there any coffee here? I need coffee. I want coffee. They don't let us have coffee.

JEAN

I can make you some.

MONSOON

(*slamming the computer closed*)

You have to pause it. You have to stop the game or they'll just keep going in there. It's not good to leave them on their own too long. They can get into all kinds of trouble.

Jean goes to the kitchenette pours water into the pot, adds coffee and goes back to set it on the wood stove.

Monsoon rifles through the cabinets.

JEAN

Are you hungry?

MONSOON

Nah. I can't eat in the morning.

JEAN

Oh. So, then what happened? In the basement? Where did those guys take you?

MONSOON
Do you know where he keeps his aspirin? Or something stronger?

JEAN
Like what?

Jean goes off to search for the aspirin. Monsoon makes a quick search of the kitchen cabinets. She becomes more agitated.

Monsoon comes upon a coffee can hiding a roll of cash.

JEAN (OFF) (cont'd)
Like what?

Monsoon looks to make sure Jean can't see her, and hurriedly pockets the roll.

MONSOON
(*covering*)
Oh, you know, good old Hydro-codo, a little Vitamin X, Valium, Vicodin...

JEAN
I think my Grandpa has some Vicodin.

MONSOON
No shit. You don't think...

JEAN
He's really sick.

MONSOON
Oh.

JEAN
We all know he isn't going to live much longer, but none of us talk about it.

MONSOON
Bummer.

JEAN
It's okay. He's been sick a long time. He takes a lot of pills.

MONSOON
Why do you live with your grandparents? Did your parents ship you off too?

JEAN

No... My parents... were killed.

MONSOON

Jeez. Like / someone

JEAN

No! It was an accident. A car accident - when I was like eight.

MONSOON

That's so sad.

JEAN

Yeah. It's okay. Well, it's not okay... It's just... yeah.

MONSOON

I'm sorry.

JEAN

Yeah.

MONSOON

(*A beat*) Do you think he'd miss a few?

JEAN

What?

MONSOON

Never mind. (*After a beat.*) Do you think your grandpa would miss a few of his Vicodin?

JEAN

Oh, I don't know.

Monsoon opens the computer and pushes a few buttons, staring hard at the screen, wiping away more tears as the image of the house and its inhabitants returns on the scrim and the cabin walls, more abstract and out of focus than before.

MONSOON

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked you that... I'm sorry about your parents and your grandpa and... everything. It's just... they kept me tranq-ed up in there, and after a while you get / used

JEAN

It's okay.

MONSOON

It's just - the baby needs to wake up now, don't you think? She's been sleeping for like 11 hours. I've been there. That's not so good for you. See the clock there? Time goes really fast for them.

JEAN

Oh!

"Little Jeannie" appears, rubbing her eyes.

JEAN (cont'd)

She's already walking!

"Sam" appears in the kitchen.

MONSOON

Jeez. Her mom looks... Sorta drippy, don't you think? Here.

Monsoon takes over the game. She goes through several edgy options for "Sam's" hair and clothing.

MONSOON (cont'd)

That's better.

JEAN

Yeah...

MONSOON

What's her name?

JEAN

Sam?

MONSOON

No shit. Was that your mother's name? That's my step-mother's name. Sam.

JEAN

No shit.

MONSOON
Yeah. Weird. My Sam never liked to hear anything unpleasant. I'd open my mouth to say something and she'd go (*In an exaggerated southern accent*.) "If you can't say something nice...

JEAN AND MONSOON
"Don't say nothin' at all."

Monsoon laughs loudly. Jean keeps up.

MONSOON
I really wanted to like her but, I didn't have anything nice to say. So I stopped talking to her. Completely.

Jean deletes "Sam's" name.

MONSOON (cont'd)
Yeah, maybe change her name.

JEAN
What's your name?

MONSOON
Monsoon.

JEAN
That's a good name.

MONSOON
My mom called me that. (*a beat)* My step-mother told me I had to try to learn to control my storm.

JEAN
(*Typing*). Monsoon.

MONSOON
Maybe you shouldn't name her after me.

JEAN
Why not?

MONSOON
She'll just cause you a world of trouble.

As Jean and Monsoon become more engrossed in the computer game.

The images of the computer family and their elaborate home and gardens with a pool are projected all around them now, taking over the cabin, so that Monsoon and Jean appear to be inside of the game. They manage a happy family deftly between them. Cliff is asleep in the middle of it all.

SCENE SEVEN

At the sound of Mac's truck in the driveway, Jean struggles to close the game before Mac comes in with a bag of groceries and two coats over his arm. The images fade from the cabin walls but remain on the computer screen as Jean and Monsoon try to appear casual.

MAC

Shut it down. Now. Time to go.

Mac goes to where Cliff is still sleeping and nudges him with his foot. Cliff sits bolt upright.

MAC (cont'd)

Figure the first thing you got to do is try to tone down that car. There's a case of black spray paint in the truck.

MONSOON

(*nudging Jean into action, closing the computer before the game has ended*)

We'll get it.

JEAN

But -

MAC

I picked up a few things at the Nearly New. Figured you both needed something warm.

He drapes the coats over a chair. Jean goes to them and chooses one for Monsoon.

JEAN

Come on. I want to show you around.

MAC
Jeannie. Don't be going off too far. These two need to be heading out.

JEAN
But, they just got here.

MAC
Uh huh.

Monsoon pulls Jean out the door. After they're gone, Mac turns to Cliff.

MAC (cont'd)
Congratulations. You made the front page.

He takes the front section of The Madisonian out of his pocket and hands it to Cliff.

MAC (cont'd)
Go on. Let's hear it.

CLIFF
"Missoula Police have issued an APB for two students missing since yesterday afternoon from Meadow Creek Academy near Thompson Falls. The students tied up a guard ..."

MAC
Tied up a guard.

CLIFF
Yeah.

MAC
You tied up a guard.

CLIFF
It was Dumb Donna.

MAC
Uh huh. Keep reading.

CLIFF
"And stole her car..."

MAC
I thought you said you borrowed the car.

CLIFF
Dumb Donna always wore the keys around her neck like she was going steady with the fucking car.

MAC
Uh huh. And...

CLIFF
“Hit another guard with a tire iron, shattering his jaw....” Shit.

MAC
That was you?

Cliff shakes his head.

MAC (cont’d)
You beat a guard?

CLIFF
I -

MAC
With a tire iron?

CLIFF
It was D’Wayne. He’s a fucking douche bag, Uncle Mac.

MAC
A tire iron?

CLIFF
Somehow, he always managed to pull shower duty. He’d stand there with a stick in his pants, watching all the little boys taking showers. Fuck.

Monsoon and Jean stumble in with a case of black spray paint, dump it on the table.

CLIFF (cont’d)
That’s a lot of paint.

MAC
That's a lot of car. You should head on home now, Jean. I picked up some groceries for you too. Wasn't sure what you needed. It's all on the front seat, with your grandmother's newspapers.

JEAN
Ok!

MAC
And Jeannie -

JEAN
Yeah?

MAC
We're going to keep this visit all to ourselves.

JEAN
Oh. Ok. / I

MONSOON
Come on!

Monsoon pulls Jean out the door.

MAC
Where do you think you're going?

CLIFF
It's okay, Uncle Mac. Not much to do around here.

MAC
Oh, I imagine that girl can find trouble in a box of saltines.

He picks up the newspaper, shakes his head.

MAC (cont'd)
A tire iron, Cliff? You could have killed him.

CLIFF
We weren't trying to kill him, just -

MAC
Just what?

CLIFF
Do something! Anything!

MAC
You -

CLIFF
D'Wayne let me out of the Hobbit yesterday to, you know, use the bathroom, walk a bit. So, I'm shufflin' along, all bent up, and here comes Monsoon in this fucking GTO, fish-tailing, slush flying... She slams on the brakes, pops the trunk and there it is. This big-ass tire iron. I just stood there, staring at it. I / didn't

MAC
They can bring both of you in on assault charges, attempted murder, grand theft, anything. Do you have any idea what kind of trouble you're in? You don't have a clue.

Cliff turns the paper over, looking for the rest of the story.

CLIFF
It says it's continued on B-6. The B section isn't here.

MAC
What? Shit.

Mac opens the door and yells for Jean.

MAC (cont'd)
Jean! Jeannie! Goddamn it It's with the other papers, on its way over to Tootie, now.

CLIFF
Tootie? The nurse?

MAC
She's my neighbor.

CLIFF
No shit.

MAC
Yeah, no shit. Practically lives for those newspapers.

CLIFF
She saved my life.

MAC
Yeah. She remembers you. She always asks how you're doing. She likes to keep track of the people she's saved.

CLIFF
Yeah? What do you tell her?

MAC
I say you're doing fine.

CLIFF
Uh huh.

MAC
Looks like you and your friend better get going, huh? Kin, next of kin, first place the sheriff is going to look, Cliff.

Mac picks up a can of spray paint, tosses one to Cliff and begins shaking one himself.

CLIFF
I know that. Shit.

MAC
But you came here anyway.

They work their way through the cans of paint. The paint balls rattle.

CLIFF
I didn't have anywhere else to go! You're not gonna call -

MAC
No, I'm not gonna call anyone. They can't find you here, though. I'd lose my job, Cliff.

CLIFF
I didn't mean to get you into this.

MAC
You shouldn't have come here, then.

CLIFF
I didn't know where else to go! Dad was just gonna... just leave me there. Forever. In that fucking box. I didn't know if I was going to make it out of there alive.

MAC

There might have been a few other ways to handle the situation, if you'd thought about it a little bit.

CLIFF

Yeah. There's always jumping off the roof, like one girl did last month. That's another way out.

MAC

Jesus.

CLIFF

They don't let you have any contact! With anyone! No outside contact at all! I had to take the chance, Uncle Mac. The one chance I had.

MAC

Once the law's got an idea of who you are, what you're up to, it's damn near impossible to turn that around. You're running away from your own shadow now.

CLIFF

Great.

MAC

I filled up a can of gas for you. Get you into Island Park, anyway.

CLIFF

Thank you, Uncle Mac, / I

MAC

Then we'll see about which way you should head out. I need to take off myself, try to bring in those two wolves. I've worked for years to get this / project -

CLIFF

Yeah.

MAC

I've lost a lot of time trying to get / you two -

CLIFF

I know. Go. Go take care of the wolves. You're good at that.

MAC

It's big out there. Those wolves don't have- People blame them for lots of things. Gives them an excuse to shoot them.

CLIFF
Why does everyone want to shoot them?

MAC
Wolves scare ‘em. And that kind of fear turns the unknown into something terrible. A wolf is a wild / thing.

CLIFF
And wild things, they like to roam.

MAC
We haven’t been able to pick up Number Ten’s collar signal for a good while. I just hope it doesn’t go into mortality mode.

CLIFF
Mortality / mode.

MAC
When the collared animal stops moving, after a few hours, the signal changes, fires like a son of a bitch to alert us, because everything alive moves even a little bit, all the time. The only thing that doesn’t move is something dead.

CLIFF
Maybe we should all wear collars, huh? Be a lot easier to keep track of each other -

MAC
Can’t get very far on an empty stomach.

CLIFF
Yeah.

MAC
You hungry?

CLIFF
More like starved.

Mac unloads the groceries.

MAC
I didn’t know what you would want to eat. I got some bread. Some peanut butter. That’s always good on the road. A few apples. Kinda looks like they dragged them on the highway all the way here from Washington state.

Cliff takes an apple and recites slowly, clearly.

CLIFF

"My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there are maybe two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now."

MAC

Where'd that come from?

CLIFF

That's Robert Frost. A teacher at my old high school used to make us memorize bits and pieces of things. I liked to find poems about apples. Turns out there's a lot of them.

CLIFF (cont'd)

"It's true there is knowledge in apples
and the knowledge is how to tell time by the sun,
how to keep in mind the limitless blossoming and dying
while biting down."

That's Karen Green. After a few months in that class, I started to think, well, maybe, maybe I could, you know, survive high school. Maybe I don't have to die in a car wreck or fry my brain. I could go away, go to college even. Ha.

MAC

Why not? You're a smart kid. What'd you do to end up in that place?

CLIFF

I don't know.

MAC

You must have some idea, Cliff.

CLIFF

After Mom and Wade... I kept trying to... I started partying. Sneaking out, you know... and then dad would be pissed and he and Melanie would fight. She hated me for it. She decided she was going to take over, teach me some discipline. That didn't go so well.

MAC

What do you mean? I thought you and Melanie... Didn't you two hit it off?

CLIFF

Yeah. We hit it off alright. She used to lock me in the closet on the weekends, when Dad was working on a big case. Told me I was going to stay there until I could learn some respect. Yeah. She'd let me out just before Dad got home, and then she'd be all Miss Sweetness, act like nothing happened. I tried to talk to him, to tell him what was going on, he didn't want to hear it. She thought she had it all working pretty good, until I got bigger than her. Until I got the nerve to be bigger than her. Ahhhh.

Cliff rubs his head, yells out, howling.

CLIFF (cont'd)

I'm not going back. Either place. I kept hoping you would find out I was there and somehow, like, come and get me out. I pictured you in my head, tried to, like, conjure you up.

MAC

I thought you were in some fancy-ass boarding school and it... maybe it would be good for you to get away.

CLIFF

Yeah. Far Away.

MAC

I didn't think it was my place. I didn't want to...

CLIFF

You didn't want to have anything to do with me.

MAC

No, I just... I had my own shit to deal with. I was...

CLIFF

You were what?

MAC

You don't need to know about it.

CLIFF

But I want to. I want to know, Uncle Mac.

MAC
I was still working with Animal Control -

CLIFF
Yeah. I knew that. You were like gone all the time.

MAC
I'd come into a town and people would know something was dead and I was going to be doing some more killing. I'd go into a bar, smelling like coyote bait, or worse. And folks, would kinda sidle away, just, ease on down the line. Even your dad, my own big brother. It got so, I couldn't get the smell of death out of my nose. Couldn't get the smell off me. I'd scrub my hands, scrape my nails... Pretty soon, I had become something not even I could stand to be around.

CLIFF
I always thought you were cool. Kinda scary, but cool. That time I spent with you, that one summer, that was like the best. Tracking the animals, sleeping outside, learning about the stars... I kept thinking, while I was in that fucking GTO with Monsoon, that if we could just get here, everything will be all right.

MAC
Yeah, well, you're a long ways from all right.

CLIFF
I know. Shit. Maybe we'll go to Mexico -

MAC
Canada's closer.

CLIFF
Who knows, huh? I might not be able to come back.

MAC
Oh, you'll get things straightened out / and then -

CLIFF
Straightened out? How? It's all fucked up.

MAC
You'll make it. Somehow you will. As long as you part ways with your little girlfriend...

CLIFF
I feel like I'm being buried alive. (*A beat.*) Their bodies are still there, with all those Cub Scouts, buried under all that rock. They didn't have a chance.

MAC
They probably never even woke up.

CLIFF
How do you know?

MAC
I don't. That's what I tell myself, anyway. Your Mom and Wade... they were very special to me, too.

CLIFF
You just fucking disappeared off the face of the earth.

MAC
I thought maybe you and your dad could...

CLIFF
Could what?

MAC
I don't know... heal.

CLIFF
Heal? He just stopped talking to me. Left me alone. He'd work late and then go out to the bar, every single night. And then, pretty soon, he started bringing Melanie home. And that was that. There was no fucking healing. There was only silence. Silence full of... blame.

MAC
He can't have blamed you. It was an "Act of God."

CLIFF
God? What kind of God brings a whole mountainside down on a bunch of Cub Scouts? I stopped believing in that God a long time ago.

MAC
Yeah. Me too. (*A beat.*) What happened / exactly -

CLIFF
What happened? They were buried under a million pounds of rock / and

MAC
Yeah. I know that part. How did you / end up -

CLIFF
Alive?

MAC

You and Murphy.

CLIFF

Yeah. Me and Dad. And Mom and Wade. There we are, sitting around the campfire, all together at the Cub Scout Jamboree, singing songs and roasting marshmallows... and Wade, well, he was little, he wanted to go to sleep, but he was afraid to be in the tent by himself, so Mom, of course, Mom, always Mom, she... Jesus. I have the bright idea to sneak off for a smoke. And Dad comes after me. He starts giving me hell and the next thing we know, the whole world is shaking like, everything is fucking going nuts. I'd never felt an earthquake before. I didn't know what the fuck was going on. Then there's, like, this huge roar and... Me and Dad? We're blown up the other side of the canyon. When we come to, we realize Mom and Wade are down there, under a million tons of rocks and shit. And then, here comes the water. The fucking Madison is damned up with all that rock and the whole canyon starts filling up with water. Freezing cold water. If we had just gone into the tent with them, we would have all been buried alive. All of us. Together.

MAC

So, really, you saved his life. You saved both of your lives.

CLIFF

Yeah. Hallelujah. I'm a fucking hero.

MAC

It's not your fault, Cliff. We can't plan everything out. Sometimes.. Some people's lives, they seem to go easy, don't they? In a straight line, floatin' down a river with the breeze at their backs. Others, like mine, like yours, well, not such a straight line. There's no explaining it or trying to figure it out. It's nothing personal. It. Just. Is. It's big. It's big and it's... I don't know what I'm talking about.

CLIFF

I wish it had been me instead. Me under all that rock. Me with my head / crushed, me...

MAC

Stop. Cliff, you gotta stop.

Mac goes to Cliff, tries to hold him. Cliff starts to fold into him, then pushes Mac away.

CLIFF

It's too late.

MAC

Cliff -

CLIFF

You never gave a shit about me, did you? Not really. If you had you would have been there for me. You would have stuck around.

MAC

I couldn't stay Cliff, I couldn't watch your dad, out at the bar every night. It almost killed me to think of your mom and Wade down there and him acting / like

CLIFF

Like nothing.

MAC

Yeah. Like nothing.

CLIFF

It would have been nice to have you around.

MAC

You look just like her.

CLIFF

Yeah. That's what everyone says. They also say Wade looks just like you. What difference does it make? They're both dead. You're not my kin. You're not even my next of kin. Not anymore.

MAC

I don't have to be anything to you if you don't want.

Mac backs up and begins stuffing his lunch things into his bag. He stops, then goes to the kitchen cabinet and takes out the coffee can where he keeps his money. He looks inside, then slams it down angrily on the counter.

CLIFF

What?

Mac shows him the empty coffee can.

CLIFF (cont'd)

What?

MAC

Where is it?

CLIFF

What?

MAC

The goddamn money.

CLIFF

What money?

MAC

The money that was in this can.

CLIFF

I don't know.

MAC

You don't know.

CLIFF

No. I don't know! I didn't take any fucking money.

MAC

No? What about your girlfriend, Little Miss Rainstorm?

CLIFF

Shit. / I don't

Mac throws the coffee can across the room.

MAC

You don't know.

CLIFF

No. I don't. But I don't think / Monsoon -

MAC

You don't know her. You don't know anything about her.

CLIFF

I know her better than anyone else I've ever known. I know she saved my fucking life.

MAC

And turned you into a lowlife, just like her. Someone who only looks out for herself. You're in way over your head. I was going to offer to help you out, but, looks like you're all set. Where is she, anyway? Sure she hasn't taken off without you?

CLIFF
Monsoon / wouldn't

MAC
Paint the car.

CLIFF
Yep.

MAC
Take that food I got with you.

CLIFF
Uh huh.

MAC
Call your dad.

CLIFF
No way.

MAC
Then I will.

CLIFF
No. Please. Uncle / Mac -

MAC
Oh, it's Uncle Mac again now?

CLIFF
Please. I just need some time.

MAC
Looks to me like that's one thing you don't have. You should maybe let your dad know what you were up against. He could sue that place for abuse.

CLIFF
He'd never do that.

MAC
Might be a good start. He's pretty good at winning.

CLIFF
He'd have to admit he was wrong.

MAC
Yeah well, we all have to do that sooner or later.

Mac lifts his bags onto his shoulders. A loud, insistent beeping noise comes from within one of the bags. Mac retrieves the tracking device, looks at it a moment, then goes to the door. He turns, looks back at Cliff.

MAC (cont'd)
I want both of you out of here before I get back. Tonight. You understand?

Mac exits. Cliff holds on for a moment, then violently knocks a chair over. The mortality mode signal lingers, and fades.

SCENE EIGHT

Ned and Tootie's cabin. Tootie sits in her chair, scouring the newspaper with a magnifying glass. Ned is next to her, staring into space, occasionally swigging from his whiskey bottle.

TOOTIE
Here's something. "Wolves raid sheep herd. A landowner has been issued a shoot-on-sight permit in light of losing 20 lambs to wolf predation. Bill Toppe, said "telling his grandchildren about the loss of their animals was tough because the younger children see them as pets."

NED
Remember when we tried to raise that orphaned lamb that Mac gave Jeannie and it got into the mint? Bloated up like a balloon. Had to pop him with an ice-pick!

TOOTIE
That was bad. Jeannie couldn't stop crying.

NED
Changed my mind real quick about raising sheep.

TOOTIE
"Animal Control investigated the incident and determined two wolves were in the area and may have been responsible..."

NED
You got two wolves hunting together like that, there's not much going to stop them.

Ned picks up his shotgun and pretends to take aim at a running wolf.

NED (cont'd)

Kapow!

TOOTIE

Oh Ned, put that thing away before you hurt someone.

NED

It's not even loaded, Tootie.

TOOTIE

Still.

NED

Worth a fortune to that rancher if he can prove it was wolves. Ahh, but they had themselves a mighty fine feast, huh? That's 10 lambs a piece!

TOOTIE

Are you hungry Ned?

NED

I don't know.

TOOTIE

I can fix you something.

NED

Can't taste a thing anymore. Those lambs will probably be the last thing the two wolves have to eat, if those ranchers get a hold of 'em. What do they call that? That last meal? The one where you get to choose whatever you want. Anything at all? You could order Pot Roast or... Lobster Thermidor... and a banana split, and they'd have to bring it to you. What do they call that, Tootie?

TOOTIE

What?

NED

That last meal! On death row!

TOOTIE

The last meal.

SCENE NINE

Monsoon and Jean stand together in a gulch, looking down at a dead bear.

MONSOON

Is it a Grizzly?

JEAN

I don't know. Could be a young Black Bear.

MONSOON

But he's not black.

JEAN

Black Bears come in lots of colors.

MONSOON

Hence the name.

JEAN

The young ones can be cinnamon like that. Grizzlies too, though. Hard to tell, without the head.

MONSOON

Where's his head? What do you think killed him? What kills bears? Wolves?

JEAN

I don't know. There's been a wolf around here lately. Have you heard him?

MONSOON

Number 15.

JEAN

Yeah! Kinda creepy, huh? I don't think they mess with each other, though. Unless they're like, fighting over territory or something. Sometimes a papa bear will kill its own cub.

MONSOON

No. Why?

JEAN

He gets hungry.

MONSOON

Shit.

JEAN

Could have been trappers, out for a trophy.

MONSOON

What, someone wants a dead baby bear's head on his wall?

JEAN

And look, someone cut off his paws. Could have been someone found him dead already and just collected parts of him they wanted.

MONSOON

So sad. Why would they cut off his paws?

JEAN

Bear claw necklace anyone?

MONSOON

(*looking farther away*)

What's that?

JEAN

The rib cage. Something has definitely been feeding on him. Maybe it was Number 15. (*A beat.*) I better go.

MONSOON

Yeah. Me too.

JEAN

Just wait, will you? I just have to check on my grandparents, feed them and stuff. I can try to... get you those... pills. If you want.

MONSOON

Oh, that's a want that never goes away...

SCENE TEN

Ned and Tootie's cabin. Ned sits. Tootie scours the newspapers with her magnifying glass.

NED

Anything yet?

TOOTIE

No, Ned.

NED

You got me sittin' here on pins and needles.

TOOTIE

I'm doing the best I can.

NED

I've about had it with this business.

TOOTIE

What business?

NED

THIS! ALL OF THIS!

He picks up his shotgun and sweeps all of her newspapers and his medications off of the side table.

TOOTIE

Ned! Stop it! Stop it this minute!

Tootie struggles to clean up.

TOOTIE (cont'd)

I won't do it to her, Ned. It ain't pretty, what's happening to you, what's gonna happen to me.

NED

How do you know what's going to happen to you.

TOOTIE

She started with the headaches, just like mine, and pretty soon, I didn't recognize her. My own mother. She was angry and she was mean and I hated her for it. I hated her for getting sick and then I hated her for being mean and then I hated her even more for dying. Jeannie loves us. I won't do it to her, Ned. I WON'T! DO YOU HEAR ME?

Jean enters, stomping snow from her boots, a load of wood in her arms, along with the groceries and the newspapers.

JEAN

What's going on?

TOOTIE

We're just.... We're just a little tired, sweetie.

NED

SICK AND TIRED!

JEAN

Okay! Grandpa! Do you need a pill?

NED

NO! I DON'T NEED A PILL!

JEAN

Yes you do!

TOOTIE

That's enough, Ned.

NED

I DON'T WANT A PILL!

TOOTIE

There's no need to shout.

NED

WHO'S SHOUTING?

JEAN

You are Grandpa!

NED

I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE! You been gone an awful long time.

JEAN

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to - You okay, Gram?

NED

No! She's not. She needs to go to the doctor.

TOOTIE

NO! NO MORE DOCTORS. I'm fine, honey. Just a little headache.

JEAN

Grandma, I can ask Mac to take you in.

TOOTIE

I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE! THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH ME! I'M FINE!

NED

Now you're the one that's shouting.

JEAN

Both of you need to calm down. Are you hungry?

NED

Yes.

TOOTIE

No! (*She turns to the newspaper.*) Where's the front section? Aggh. I hate it when he loses part of the paper. You'd think Mac could keep a little bitty newspaper like this intact. I don't think that's too much to ask, do you?

NED

Nice of him to bring even that to you, huh Tootie?

TOOTIE

Uh huh. It is. Awful nice. (*After a moment.)* Here's something. "A worker at the Spring Creek coal mine drove his truck through a berm at about 7:30 pm Monday, killing himself and his passenger, a co-worker."

JEAN

What's a berm?

As Jean straightens up, she looks over Tootie's shoulder at the newspaper. Tootie angles it away.

NED

An embankment. To keep in the mine waste. Toxic.

TOOTIE

"Federal mine safety officials were on the scene to determine whether it was an accident or some sort of suicide pact. No other details were immediately available."

JEAN

That's horrible.

TOOTIE

That's life.

JEAN

No, it isn't. Everything you read to us and everything you put in this scrapbook is about someone dying!

TOOTIE

No one's interested in happy stories.

JEAN

I am!

NED

Me too!

TOOTIE

Well, it's not what sells newspapers. Death! Dismemberment! Double suicides! Mass casualties! That's what makes the front page.

JEAN

What's this?

TOOTIE

I don't know. It says it's continued from the front page, which is not here.

JEAN

Can I just see it?

TOOTIE

What is so interesting all of a sudden?

JEAN

I thought I recognized someone's name.

NED

Who? What's this about?

JEAN

I / just

TOOTIE

Just. Let. Me. Read!

JEAN/NED

Okay.

TOOTIE

Thank you. “Continued from page A-1,” which is not here. “Police are looking for 16 year-old Abigail Smith, a.k.a Monsoon / and”

JEAN

Monsoon!

TOOTIE

That’s what it says.

NED

Monsoon? That’s a girl’s name?

TOOTIE

Something she probably made up for herself. More dramatic, than... Abigail.

NED

We’re lucky you’re the sensible type, Jeannie.

TOOTIE

...”and her assumed accomplice, Cliff Newman.”

NED

Newman? Cliff Newman? Wasn’t that Mac’s nephew, the boy from the quake?

TOOTIE

Uh huh. Couldn’t be him, though, Mac told me he’s off at some fancy boarding school. Back east somewhere, I would imagine.

JEAN

Can I / just -

NED

She don’t like anyone touching her paper, Jean.

JEAN

I know.

NED

She’s like a mama bear with her cub. You’re likely to get slashed.

JEAN

Keep reading then, Gram!

TOOTIE

Okay! Keep your pants on! "Police say the young man has a history of violence, having been sent to the Meadow Creek Academy for repeatedly tying up his step-mother and locking her in a closet."

NED

What kind of school is this?

TOOTIE

"The school, part of a multi-million dollar business..."

Ned whistles in appreciation. Tootie glares at him.

TOOTIE (cont'd)

..."of 'tough-love' programs is under investigation after student Susan Webb, 15, jumped to her death from the roof of the dormitory last month in an apparent attempt to escape."

NED

Jesus Lord.

TOOTIE

"A spokesman attributed the growth of these tough-love programs to the breakdown of the family, saying, 'When the family is not functioning, society suffers'."

NED

That's true!

He coughs. Tootie waits a moment, then continues.

TOOTIE

"Newman is considered to be armed and dangerous..."

Tootie cuts out the article for her scrapbook.

NED

Wait a minute. That's in? What's that got to do with it?

TOOTIE

NOTHING NED! IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT!

NED

I give up!

JEAN

OK! OK! Have you eaten anything?

TOOTIE

Yes!

JEAN

What did you eat?

TOOTIE

I don't remem.... We had some... toast.

NED

Toast? That's right. I'd forgotten about the toast.

Tootie lights a cigarette. Jean takes it from her and stubs it out.

JEAN

We ran out of bread two days ago. How did you make toast?

Tootie avoids her eyes. Ned chortles until he coughs violently.

TOOTIE

I wish you'd take a pill.

Jean goes to his side table, chooses a vial of Vicodin and holds a pill out to Ned, with a glass of water. He waves off the pill.

JEAN

You need to take a pill, Grandpa.

NED

I. Am. Through. With. Them. Pills! YOU HEAR ME? DOES ANYONE HEAR ME?

JEAN

I do, Grandpa!

Jean pockets the vial of Vicodin.

TOOTIE
I think half of Clark County did too.

NED
(*Calming himself*) Just some water. Please. Jeannie...

JEAN
I'll make you something to eat.

Jean hands him the water and goes off for some food.

TOOTIE
We can't, Ned.

NED
She's already lost so much,Tootie / her -

TOOTIE
I'm not going to do that to her. And neither are you. She'll be okay. Better even. This way, she'll / be -

NED
Free.

TOOTIE
Uh huh.

Jean brings in a plate of crackers and cheese.

JEAN
Gram? You okay? I'm going to /go over to -

TOOTIE
You know honey, at the bank, we have a safety deposit / box.

JEAN
I know, Gram.

TOOTIE
There's some money in there, and my engagement / ring.

NED
That old thing? I got it at Woolworths!

TOOTIE
Oh Ned. Your parents' wedding / rings,

NED
And a coupla savings bonds. Worth about a nickel maybe.

TOOTIE
They're worth more than that. (*to Jean*) There's enough to take care of you, should something, ever happen to us.

JEAN
Nothing's going to happen to you, Gram.

TOOTIE
Listen to me, Jeannie! You don't know what's going to happen in life! THINGS HAPPEN! If something should happen / to us.

JEAN
Nothing is going to happen to you!

NED
Jeannie, listen to your grandmother.

TOOTIE
If something should happen to us, sweetie, we've taken care of you. We've talked to Mac.

JEAN
Do we need to talk about this right now?

TOOTIE
Now would be good.

JEAN
You need to eat.

TOOTIE
Just so you know, Jeannie. We love you. More than life itself.

JEAN
I love you too, Gram.

NED
And what about me?

JEAN

And you too, Grandpa.

NED

Good. We got that settled.

Tootie picks up another cigarette.

NED (cont'd)

What would we do without you?

JEAN

I don't know.

TOOTIE

(*finding the lighter*)

And what would you do without us?

JEAN

(*taking away the cigarette and lighter*)

I might be able to breathe.

TOOTIE

(*Sighing)* Get him a napkin, will you, Jeannie? That La-Z-Boy has gotta be - He's been practically living in the thing, sleeping, eating, day in, day out, stuffing all kinds of things down the cracks. I found half a sandwich down there the other / day.

NED

I was saving it for / later.

TOOTIE

He keeps this up, we'll have all the mice in the county moving in, taking over the whole place.

JEAN

Not if you burn the whole place down first.

NED

That'd be a pretty sight. There's enough ammunition in this cabin to blow us all sky high.

Tootie looks up from the paper, staring at Ned in wonder.

TOOTIE
As simple as that.

Ned looks her in the eye and nods.

NED
Simple as that.

JEAN
Simple as that!

Jean fluffs a napkin over Ned's chest.

JEAN (cont'd)
Don't make a mess.

NED
We won't!

She rushes to the door.

NED (cont'd)
Wait a minute, Jeannie/ I -

TOOTIE
She'll be fine, Ned. Let her go.

NED
(*quietly*)
I wanted a kiss.

JEAN
I'll be back.

NED
Love you!

TOOTIE
Love you!

JEAN (OFF)
Love you too!

SCENE ELEVEN

Jean returns to the gulch where Monsoon paces with cold.

MONSOON
I thought you'd forgotten about me.

JEAN
I'm sorry. My grandparents, they're... they need a lot of attention.

MONSOON
Yeah. Everybody does.

JEAN
I got you these.

She holds out the vial of Vicodin.

MONSOON
Yes! Total score!

Monsoon takes out three pills, chews and dry-swallows two, and holds one out to Jean.

JEAN
What do they do to you?

MONSOON
They just take the edge off. (*Jean hesitates.*) Go for it. One Vicodin isn't going to kill you.

Jean swallows the pill. She chokes on it.

MONSOON (cont'd)
I don't think.

SCENE TWELVE

Ned looks down at his plate.

NED
This is a far cry from Lobster Thermidor.

TOOTIE

Leave it, Ned. I need your help.

NED

Right this minute?

TOOTIE

Right this minute.

She takes his plate away, and hands him some newspapers. They wad up the papers and stuff them into the cracks of Ned's chair.

NED

Get some shells, Tootie.

She empties boxes of shells into his lap. He stuffs them deep into the chair. She grabs his whiskey and pours it in a circle around the chair. He grabs the bottle away and takes a deep swig, before handing it back to her. She swigs deeply. They stare at each other.

Tootie looks through Ned's medications.

TOOTIE

I thought you had a whole bottle of Vicodin.

NED

I can't keep that stuff straight anymore.

She takes up a bottle of pills, examines the label, and hands it to him.

TOOTIE

These'll do.

NED

I said no / more

TOOTIE

It'll take the edge off, Ned. Make you sleepy.

NED

What about you?

She looks through the remaining pills and choses a bottle for herself. She empties it into her hand and stares back at Ned.

TOOTIE
These'll do. If you chew 'em up they work faster. Go ahead.

They chew the pills and wash them down with more whiskey.

NED
Come on, then. Get up on my lap like old times.

Tootie settles onto his lap with her scrapbook. She begins to sing 'Taps'.

TOOTIE
(*singing, quietly, at first*)
Day is done. Gone the sun. From the hills,

NED
From the lake,

TOOTIE (cont'd)
From the skies.

TOOTIE/NED
All is well, Safely rest,

TOOTIE
God / is

NED
Wait a minute. Get up! Get off of me! We've got to call the boys.

TOOTIE
What boys?

NED
The boys at the station! A fire like this could take out all the cabins and half the wildlife refuge before they even get their boots on.

Ned pushes Tootie off his lap, and struggles to get up out of the chair. They sway a bit from the effects of age, whiskey and powerful narcotics, and help each other off.

TOOTIE
Steady there.

NED
Woah.

TOOTIE
Yeah.

NED
Hoo-eeh!

SCENE THIRTEEN

The gulch. Monsoon and Jean huddle together in the cold, staring out at the coming storm.

MONSOON
Ahhhh. I'm starting to feel it. You?

JEAN
I... I'm not sure. Everything seems kind of... Smooth.

MONSOON
Yeah. That's it. You okay?

She pulls Jean to her feet.

JEAN
Huh? Oh yeah. I'm fiiiiine. (*Staring at the bear.*) There's something about seeing... something... that wild / So

MONSOON
Dead.

JEAN
It's / like

MONSOON
Gooey.

JEAN
Yeah. Look at how it's turning black / and

MONSOON
Gooey.

JEAN
It's like it's / just

MONSOON
Disappearing.

JEAN (cont'd)
Like it was / never

MONSOON
Here.

JEAN
It's -

MONSOON/JEAN
Terrifying.

JEAN
It's like / So

MONSOON/JEAN
Final.

JEAN
Where was the mama bear? There was no one to save him.

MONSOON
No one can save you from it.

Jean spies something farther off.

JEAN
Here's like, one of his paws!

She picks up the bear paw, holds it in her hand for Monsoon to examine.

JEAN (cont'd)
Must be a young Grizzly. Their claws are much bigger than a Black Bear. Look, the claws just come right out!

She extracts the claws.

MONSOON
Don't take his claws!

JEAN
Why not?

MONSOON
What if he, like, needs his claws?

JEAN
Needs them?

MONSOON
Yeah, like where he's going. Where he is. What if he needs them?

JEAN
If he needs them where he is now, he's in big trouble. He doesn't have his paws or his head even. Hard to be a bear without them.

MONSOON
Shit.

JEAN
Maybe spirit bears don't need them.

MONSOON
Every bear needs his claws. Let's not take them. Just in case. We should, like, give him a ceremony or something.

Monsoon takes the claws and arranges them around the bear.

MONSOON (cont'd)
This is the way it is. This is it. You're here. You're full of everything, full of life, and then... You're not. And all you've been and were going to be... doesn't matter. This is how small something as wild and... strong...and fearless as a bear is.

Cliff appears in the gulch.

CLIFF
There you are! Jesus. I've been looking all / over

MONSOON
Look.

CLIFF
Oh wow. What is it? A baby bear?

MONSOON
Baby Grizzly. We were trying to, like, give him a little funeral, but... Maybe you can, you know, say something?

CLIFF
We don't have time for this / shit.

MONSOON
Please.

CLIFF
I / don't

MONSOON
Yes you do.

CLIFF
Monsoon, we gotta get out of here.

MONSOON
I am not going anywhere until we give this poor guy a place to rest.

Cliff stares at her, then stares at the bear. He stands very still, then recites regally.

CLIFF
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

MONSOON
Far away.

A light snow begins to fall. Monsoon looks up and lets the flakes fall on her face. Jean follows suit.

JEAN

Snow!

Monsoon catches snowflakes on her tongue, Jean does too.

CLIFF

Percy Shelley.

MONSOON

What?

CLIFF

The guy who wrote that.

MONSOON

Oh. That doesn't even sound like a real name.

CLIFF

It's a sonnet.

MONSOON

Okay, Mr. Honors English. So what does it mean?

CLIFF

It's about how... insignificant we all are, you know, in the big picture.

MONSOON

Great. Thanks. I really need to hear that.

Monsoon begins to cry silently. This time, she lets the tears fall.

CLIFF

Come on. We've gotta get out of here.

MONSOON

We're good. We're good right here.

JEAN

Yeah.

MONSOON

Thanks.

CLIFF

No, we're like, in the newspapers, on the wanted list, and shit. They're going to be coming after us, like any minute.

MONSOON

What's in your hair?

CLIFF

What?

MONSOON

Your hair.

CLIFF

(*feeling his hair*)

I've been painting the car. Fucking nightmare. Come on! We gotta go!

MONSOON

I don't want to go anywhere.

JEAN

Me neither.

MONSOON

I'd kinda like to dig a hole. Dig myself a little hole and curl up / inside and

CLIFF

Monsoon.

MONSOON

Disappear.

JEAN

Yeah.

CLIFF

Jesus. Are you high?

Monsoon puts her head back and howls. Jean follows suit and begins making an angel in the snow.

CLIFF (cont'd)
Cut it out. Uncle Mac's pissed as hell.

MONSOON
So?

CLIFF
Did you steal his fucking money?!

MONSOON
He doesn't need it. What's he going to spend it on?

CLIFF
Shit.

MONSOON
He doesn't want to have anything to do with you anyways.

CLIFF
Not anymore. Thanks to you.

MONSOON
He never did.

CLIFF
You don't know that.

MONSOON
You don't know anything.

CLIFF
I know we're in a shitload of trouble and if we don't get / going

JEAN
I don't want you to leave. You can stay here with me!

Jean stands up, gestures wildly and stumbles back.

CLIFF
What's with her?

MONSOON
Oh, we uh, she scored some Vicodin from her grandpa / and

CLIFF
Jesus, Monsoon, she's a kid, she's been, like, isolated out here. Probably hasn't ever had anything like that.

MONSOON
One Vicodin won't hurt her.

CLIFF
We don't have time for this shit.

MONSOON
Here. Take a chill pill. Or two. If you chew 'em up, they work faster.

She hands Cliff two Vicodin. He stares at them, then throws hard into the trees.

MONSOON (cont'd)
Hey!

She starts to go after them. He catches her, holds her back.

CLIFF
They've probably sent someone out this way to look for us already.

MONSOON
I'd like to see 'em catch us now!

She begins to howl again, fiercely.

JEAN
(*interrupting*)
It was in the paper.

MONSOON
Huh?

JEAN
They said in the newspaper that Cliff tied up his step-mother, or somebody, and locked her in a closet. My grandma read it out loud.

CLIFF
Did they say she locked me in the fucking closet every other weekend for, like, six months? Did they say that? No? Did they say my dad hired some goons to come and take me away in the middle of the night? In fucking handcuffs?

JEAN
No. Unless it was on page one.

CLIFF
Of course they didn't say that. They never tell the whole story.

MONSOON
Were they wearing khaki?

CLIFF
Huh? Who?

MONSOON
The guys that came to get you!

CLIFF
I didn't notice what they were wearing, Monsoon.

MONSOON
My guys had these like whole / khaki -

JEAN
They said you're armed and dangerous.

CLIFF
Oh my god.

MONSOON
None of us have a fucking chance.

The snow falls even heavier now.

A loud roar. They all turn to the sound.

JEAN
What was that?

CLIFF
Something just / blew up.

JEAN
Look! There's a fire. It's, it's our cabin!

MONSOON
What?

JEAN
It's burning!

There is another explosion and a roar of fire, big and loud, its yellow and red flickering light reflects off of the teens' faces.

MONSOON
What's happening?

Cliff and Monsoon hold Jean back when she tries to run towards the cabin. Round after round of ammunition explodes.

CLIFF
Jesus.

MONSOON
It's like a war.

Jean tries to run.

CLIFF
You can't. / You'll

A propane tank blows.

JEAN
Gram! Grandpa!

CLIFF
You have to stay here!

JEAN
I've got to help them! We've got to get them out of there!

MONSOON
It's too late!

CLIFF
You two stay here. Monsoon. Hang on to her.

Cliff runs towards the fire. The sound of sirens, far off at first, but getting closer fast.

MONSOON
Shit. Shit. Shit. We gotta get out of here. Cliff! Cliff! Shit!

Jean starts to run for the cabin again. Monsoon holds her back. Jean struggles against her.

MONSOON (cont'd)
I have to go, I can't let them find me here.

Monsoon starts off, then turns back.

MONSOON (cont'd)
Don't trust 'em, Jean.

JEAN
What? Who?

MONSOON
Anyone in khaki.

Monsoon runs to the car. Jean watches her go, then turns towards the burning cabin. Another explosion, more ammunition firing in the heat. The fire roars. A conflagration. Jean runs towards the fire.

The fire burns, then fades, leaving a desolated and charred landscape. Ashes mingle with the snowfall.

SCENE FOURTEEN

Mac's cabin, two days later. The sound of Mac's truck pulling up. We hear the car doors slam, one after the other. Jean enters and stands alone, stunned at the emptiness. She spies the computer, which still sits on Mac's table. She opens it, and resolutely becomes engrossed in the game again.

Mac can be heard on his cellphone, standing in the field, answering numerous questions with one-word answers. After a time, he comes in and stands just inside the door, staring at Jean.

Jean refuses to look up at him.

MAC
Murphy's with Cliff at the hospital now. He wanted to know what the hell happened. (*He waits for a response*.) I told him what I could.

Jean remains fixed on the game.

MAC (cont'd)
Sounds like he'll be okay. Some pretty nasty burns but...

Music from the SIMS game suddenly gets louder.

MAC (cont'd)
What are you doin'?

Mac goes up behind Jean and looks over her shoulder, watches her manipulate the game for a long moment.

MAC (cont'd)
I don't know if now is the right time to... Jean?

Her focus and increasing desperation unnerves him.

MAC (cont'd)
Who's that?

JEAN
My family.

MAC
What happened to the other one?

JEAN
They all died.

MAC
So they can die.

JEAN

Yeah, they can die!

MAC

Jeannie. Jean. Stop for a minute. We need to talk.

JEAN

I just have to.... just... I have to make a new family. A family that...loves each other. A family that takes care of each / other

MAC

Jeannie. Stop.

JEAN

They can starve, or drown, or get electrocuted. They can even die of hysteria. They can laugh themselves to death.

MAC

(*closing the computer, taking it away*)

What? That's - We're going to shut it down. Now.

JEAN

(*holding on*)

I have to take care of them!

MAC

No you don't. You need to take care of yourself.

JEAN

I don't know how!

MAC

You need to talk to me. Tell me what happened.

JEAN

I don't know what happened!

MAC

Just, start somewhere.

JEAN

I don't know where to start.

MAC
Where were you, when the fire started?

JEAN
We were just... we were all just hanging out. I don't know!

MAC
I should have been here.

JEAN
But you weren't.

MAC
It's going to be / okay.

JEAN
I shouldn't have left them alone.

MAC
You took good care of Ned and Tootie.

JEAN
It was like... Do you think they knew?

She cries out, a sharp howl, lonely, afraid.

MAC
Oh Jeannie. I'm so sorry.

JEAN
When the firemen got there, they got Cliff out, and then they told me Grandpa had called to tell them there was *going* to be a fire.

MAC
He wouldn't have wanted a fire like that to get out of control. No telling what / could have -

JEAN
No. He wouldn't have wanted that.

MAC
They loved you, Jean.

JEAN
They left me all alone!

MAC
I know. It might not seem like it / now, but -

JEAN
They didn't care!

MAC
You're all they cared about in the world. Tootie had me promise that if anything happened to her and Ned / that I would -

JEAN
She told me. Like a million times.

MAC
I told her I might not be your first choice.

JEAN
I don't have any other choice.

MAC
That's exactly what she said. I was thinking. Jean? I was thinking, maybe, after the funeral and everything, I should, close this place up, head into town. Get you into a real school, where you can make some friends, be with real people.

JEAN
You'd hate that.

MAC
I could stand it. For a little while.

JEAN
(*after a beat*) I'm sorry Cliff got hurt.

MAC
I am too. They said when he opened the door, the whole place must have gone up like a bomb. He's lucky. He got a chestful of birdshot, but... he'll be okay.

JEAN
He should have gone with Monsoon. Together / maybe -

MAC
That's not the kind of person he is.

JEAN
One minute she was holding on to me and the next minute she was... gone. She heard the sirens and, she just took off.

(MORE)

JEAN (cont'd)

She's heading down the road, and here comes the firemen and then the sheriff and I'm thinking, 'This is it, it's over. They're going to put her in handcuffs and take her away, or shoot her!' They're headed like straight for each other, but somehow, Monsoon, she, she just plays it cool. And they all, like, drift by each other. (*imitating a quiet wind*) Wooooo. The sheriff keeps coming down the road with his lights spinning, and Monsoon she just keeps going, right by him, in that car, it's so black, it's, like almost invisible. She went right through them. (*A beat*.) Where do you think she went?

MAC

Well, I had about $500 stashed away in my trusty coffee can. I figure, it's enough to at least get her to Canada.

JEAN

She doesn't like the cold.

MAC

No. If she headed south, maybe she'll have better luck than Number Nine and Number Ten.

JEAN

Monsoon.

MAC

Yeah. (*Unnerved by the hurt in her voice, changing the subject.*) We found them.

JEAN

Where were they?

MAC

Number Nine had built a den, up on the side of a gulch, as far up as she could to get away from people.

JEAN

And Number Ten?

Mac takes out a dirty, bloodied wolf pelt, lays it on the table.

MAC

A couple of drunk assholes shot him, skinned him, badly, took his head and his tail, and threw his tracking collar into a culvert. The signal from the collar went into mortality mode, firing like a son of a bitch. That's how we found him.

JEAN

So beautiful. Why did they kill him?

MAC

Why not? They saw a wolf, so they shot him. They're on the front page of all the newspapers. They're calling themselves the Wolf Reduction Program.

JEAN

What will happen to Number Nine?

MAC

She's a survivor. We managed to tranq her and then find her pups. She hid them pretty well, up near a rocky outcrop. When we took her, the pups hunkered down into the cracks in the rocks. Took us a while to find all eight of 'em.

JEAN

Eight!

MAC

Eight. A male from the Crystal Creek pack, Number Twelve, he's already sniffing around. He'll probably move in as soon as he can, help her raise all those pups. Hopefully they'll stay and make lots of new pups. And then we might all have a chance, when we get everything headed back to the way it's supposed to be.

JEAN

How is that? How is it supposed to be? Sometimes it just seems so... hard.

MAC

Well, it is. It's hard. There's no way around it. We just have to try to -

JEAN

Take care of each other.

MAC

Best we can.

END OF PLAY