

EARTH, AGAIN
Episode 2

by

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SCENE 1 - "LEAVING"

EXT. US-212 WEST OF BELLE CREEK, MONTANA - MORNING

Hooves on asphalt. Hard, rhythmic, hollow. A sound nothing like Episode One. No soft earth, no forest floor. This is pavement. Five horses at a steady walk. The sound carries - sharp and flat, with nothing to absorb it. Alongside them, lighter and quicker - the click of a dog's claws on pavement. Keeper, trotting at Harlan's side.

Wind moves through broken things. A loose door on a rusted minivan creaks open, creaks shut, creaks open. Sheet metal flexes somewhere off the road - a slow, groaning pop.

They are riding an old highway. An exit sign swings on a single bolt - a rhythmic metal groan, over and over. Somewhere ahead, a gust catches a car door and slams it shut. The sound carries flat and far in both directions.

LIV (V.O.)

We left this morning. Five of us. I keep waiting for it to feel like something - an adventure, or a mission, or at least a decision. It doesn't. It feels like walking away from a house and not locking the door.

A horse snorts. Leather creaks. The hooves continue - that hard, exposed rhythm on the road.

LIV (V.O.)

The village sounds faded quicker than I thought they would. The blacksmith. The goats. That fiddle that never finds its tune. I kept listening for them and then they were just - gone. Replaced by wind and pavement.

A beat. The wind moves through a row of dead cars - each one whistling at a slightly different pitch.

LIV (V.O.)

We're riding on an old highway, still littered with cars, the wind moving through them like they're broken chimes.

A car door catches in a gust, slams shut. The sound rings and fades.

LIV (V.O.)
How quickly home becomes a
direction instead of a place.

The world opens up. Just the road and the riders. Five sets
of hooves on asphalt, slightly out of rhythm with each other.
No conversation.

From up ahead, Calloway calls back without turning.

CALLOWAY
Road's clear for the next mile or
so. Some pileup further on - we'll
cut around it.

Nobody responds. The hooves continue.

Liv's saddle shifts. Her canteen sloshes on her hip. She's
close to us - our point of hearing.

Behind her, further back, Harlan's horse coughs and stamps.
He murmurs something to it, too low to catch.

HARLAN
You're doing fine, girl.

Nearby, the soft pant of Keeper padding along beside the
horse, steady as a second heartbeat.

Wind gusts carry the sound of a car hood flexing somewhere
off the road - that slow metal pop of old steel settling. A
single bird calls from somewhere above them, unanswered.

LIV
How far do you think we'll make
today?

ROBERT
Twenty miles, maybe twenty-five.
Depends on the terrain once we
leave the highway.

A beat.

MIRA
Fifteen. If we're smart about it.

A silence where an acknowledgment should be. Neither responds
to the other's number.

Liv lets it go. The hooves continue.

From the back, Harlan's voice. Low, dry.

HARLAN

Going to be a long ride if those
two can't agree on how far a mile
is.

The wind picks up. It moves down the open highway unbroken -
no trees, no walls to catch it. Everything carries. Every
sound travels further than it should.

Calloway's horse picks up pace slightly. His hooves pull
further ahead, widening the gap between him and the group.

LIV

(to Robert, quieter)
Feels different out here. On the
pavement.

ROBERT

Faster ground. We'll cover more
distance on these roads than we
would on trail.

LIV

You used to drive on these?

ROBERT

Everybody did. Sixty, seventy miles
an hour. You could make Seattle in
a day and a half.

LIV

A day and a half.

ROBERT

With stops for gas and bad coffee.

A beat. The hooves ring on asphalt. The absurdity of the
comparison hangs there - a day and a half versus the weeks
ahead of them, on horses.

MIRA

There's no cover out here. Five
riders on a flat road - anyone
could see us from a mile off.

ROBERT

Not many people left to see us.

MIRA

You hope.

He doesn't answer right away.

LIV
Should we be worried about other
people?

Harlan laughs, darkly.

MIRA
That question shows how sheltered
you've been.

ROBERT
We don't know who's out here, Liv.
But we'll stay on the highway while
it's useful. Cut off when we need
cover.

LIV
When's that?

ROBERT
Good question.

The hooves continue. Steady. Exposed.

SCENE 2 - "THE REST STOP"

EXT. CREEK / COLLAPSED HOMESTEAD - MIDDAY

CALLOWAY
The freeway collapsed up ahead,
let's cut off and around here.

The sound shifts. Asphalt gives way to packed earth - the
hooves go soft, muffled. Weeds brush against the horses'
flanks. After the open highway, the trail feels close.
Contained.

Water ahead. The creek before they see it - a steady, shallow
rushing over rocks.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
(calling back)
Creek up here. Good spot to rest.

The horses smell it before they're told. Their pace quickens -
hooves splashing into shallow water, lips hitting the
surface, long pulls of drinking. But Keeper is there first -
a splash and the quick lap of a dog already drinking
downstream.

The riders dismount. Saddles creak as weight comes off. Boots hit dirt.

The group spreads out. The sounds separate.

HARLAN
(to the horse, low)
Yeah, I know. Long morning.

Further off, upstream: Calloway filling canteens from the creek. The gurgle of water pouring into metal, one after another. Caps screwing on.

CALLOWAY
(to no one in particular)
Water's for the horses. We boil ours tonight.

HARLAN
We need to keep them at a walk on that pavement. Trot on asphalt and you'll have lame horses inside a week.

MIRA
Right.

Mira stretches - a quiet groan, joints popping, the sound of someone who's been in a saddle too long and won't admit it.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Feeling a bit lame myself.

Robert is by the horses. Loosening cinches. Leather sliding through buckles.

Past all of them, further away - the rustle of something pushing through tall grass. A dog's nose, sniffing quick and low. Keeper, working ahead through the weeds. Then Liv's footsteps follow, moving off the trail after him.

LIV
Hey Keeper, whatcha finding?
(calling back)
There's a house over here. Or -
what's left of one.

Her footsteps change. Grass gives way to something harder. A board groans under her weight. Then another. The hollow sound of a porch with nothing beneath it.

ROBERT
(from the creek, calling)
Liv, be careful. Stay off the wood.

LIV

There's a whole foundation. And a chimney, still standing. And - hang on.

Dad, come here. There's something on the ground.

Robert's footsteps approach through the grass. The boards creak under him too.

ROBERT

I said stay off the - alright.

Wind through the collapsed structure. A loose piece of tin roofing lifting and settling. The low groan of a timber that's been leaning for a decade.

Liv crouches. Something small scrapes against stone as she picks it up.

LIV

It's a mug. There's writing on it.

ROBERT

What's it say?

LIV

"World's Best -" something. The rest is worn off.

A beat. The creek behind them. The wind through the ruin.

ROBERT

(quiet)

World's Best Dad, probably. Or Mom. They made about ten million of those.

LIV

Who's "they"?

ROBERT

Everyone. You could buy one at any gas station. They were everywhere. Cheap ceramic, bad coffee, some stupid slogan.

He takes it from her. The sound of him turning it in his hands.

LIV

And this one's got a logo. A gas station chain. "Sinclair." Little green dinosaur.

She pauses.

LIV (CONT'D)

A dinosaur on a gas station?

ROBERT

The fuel came from oil. Oil came from ancient organic matter. Dead dinosaurs, more or less. So - yes. We put dinosaurs on the buildings where we sold their liquefied remains to pour into our cars.

LIV

Oh. That's horrible.

ROBERT

We thought it was cute.

LIV

Someone lived here, though. This wasn't a store. This was a house.

ROBERT

Yeah.

LIV

And they had this mug and they drank coffee out of it every morning and they probably didn't think about it once.

ROBERT

No. Probably not.

She sets the mug down. The ceramic taps against stone.

LIV

That's the part I can't get my head around. Not the technology. The not thinking about it. Having so much that you stop noticing.

Robert doesn't answer. The tin roof lifts and settles. The creek runs.

From back at the water, Mira's voice. Not raised - just pitched to carry.

MIRA

Calloway. Check out the foundation.

A beat. Calloway's footsteps move through grass.

CALLOWAY

Solid stonework. Hasn't moved in twenty years.

MIRA

Hasn't needed to. That's fieldstone. Dry-stacked, no mortar. Whoever built this knew what they were doing with their hands.

A beat.

MIRA (CONT'D)

And it's still here. The wiring's gone. The plumbing's gone. That truck's sunk to its axles. But the stones are fine.

She doesn't say the rest. She doesn't need to. The thing that lasts is the thing that doesn't need a power source.

Calloway doesn't respond.

Liv and Robert walk back toward the creek. Their boots in the grass.

LIV

(quieter, just to Robert)
She's making a point, isn't she.
About the house.

ROBERT

Mira's always making a point.

LIV

Is she wrong?

ROBERT

The stones lasted. The people didn't.

That sits. The creek runs.

Mira's footsteps approach. She stops near Robert.

MIRA

Before we get back on that road - I want to see the map.

A beat.

ROBERT

You want to see the map.

MIRA

I'm riding a thousand miles with you, Robert. I'd like to know which thousand.

Robert doesn't answer right away. Then the crinkle of paper - the map unfolding. He lays it on a flat rock. Mira steps closer. Calloway drifts over. Harlan stays with the horses but he's listening.

His finger traces the paper.

ROBERT

We're here. Southeast Montana, west of Belle Creek, on US-212. The highway keeps going west from here - through Ashland, then into the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

CALLOWAY

I know that road. It runs all the way to Crow Agency.

ROBERT

That's right. And at Crow Agency we pick up Interstate 90. That's the big road - runs west across the rest of Montana. Through Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Missoula. Over the Rockies into Idaho, then across Washington to Seattle.

MIRA

All on one road.

ROBERT

One road. A thousand miles of it.

CALLOWAY

What's the terrain?

ROBERT

Open prairie for the first stretch. Then river valleys as we get past Billings. The mountains start around Bozeman - passes, timber, snow.

CALLOWAY
It's February, Robert.

ROBERT
I know what month it is.

CALLOWAY
Then you know those passes could
have ten feet of snow on them.
Unplowed for ten years.

A beat.

ROBERT
After the Rockies we cross into
Idaho - heavy forest, steep
country. Then it flattens out
through eastern Washington, and we
climb one more time over the
Cascades before we drop into the
coast.

MIRA
So the plan is to ride horses over
a mountain range. In February.

ROBERT
We'll find the low points. Or we
find a way around.

A beat. The creek fills the silence.

HARLAN
Horses don't like deep snow.

Robert doesn't answer right away.

ROBERT
We'll deal with the mountains when
we get to the mountains.

A beat. The creek fills the silence.

MIRA
And you've done this.

ROBERT
I've driven it. In a car. Fifteen
years ago.

A beat. The creek fills the silence.

MIRA

So you're navigating a thousand miles of post-collapse territory with a fifteen-year-old memory and a map.

ROBERT

The roads don't move, Mira. The mountains don't move. What's changed is what's on them - and that, we'll figure out as we go.

CALLOWAY

Crow Agency. You trying to repeat history?

LIV

What do you mean?

CALLOWAY

That's Little Bighorn. The battlefield. Where Custer rode two hundred soldiers into a camp of thousands and got every one of them killed.

A beat. The wind moves through the grass.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Five riders on a road they've never traveled, heading into land they don't know. Sounds familiar.

MIRA

Well shit, Calloway. That's encouraging.

CALLOWAY

We should try to do better.

MIRA

(smiling)

Yeah, I think we should, smartass.

ROBERT

Between us, we know the terrain. Only thing I don't know is if there are any hot zones.

CALLOWAY

There's one I know about - old nuclear plant, north of the Cheyenne reservation. Here, let me mark it on your map.

(MORE)

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
We'll pass south of it if we stay
on 212. After that, I don't know.

ROBERT
So we watch for the signs. Dead
ground, no birds, bad water.

CALLOWAY
That's about all we've got.

MIRA
How many days?

ROBERT
On horses? Best case - three weeks.
Probably longer. Depends on
terrain, weather, what we run into.

Nobody says what they're all thinking. Three weeks is what
Liv has. Best case means no margin.

MIRA
(quiet)
Then we don't waste days.

She steps back from the map. Robert folds it - carefully this
time - and puts it back in his jacket.

The group gathers itself without being told - canteens passed
around, saddles retightened, the small efficient sounds of
people preparing to move again.

CALLOWAY
Everyone topped off?

Murmurs of assent. Buckles clicking. Weight settling back
into saddles.

The hooves start again - soft now, on dirt. The creek sound
fades behind them.

SCENE 3 - "THE FORK"

EXT. US-212 - AFTERNOON

Back on asphalt. The hooves harden again - that flat,
carrying report. The rhythm settled, automatic.

LIV

My legs went numb about an hour ago.

HARLAN

That's normal.

LIV

Has anyone said a word since lunch?

Nobody answers. The hooves continue.

ROBERT

We should hit Ashland before dark if we keep this pace.

Calloway's horse slows ahead. His hooves stop.

CALLOWAY

Exit ramp up here. Decision time.

The other horses pull up behind him. Saddles creak as riders shift. The wind is steady - open prairie, nothing to break it. Keeper paces between the horses, claws ticking on the pavement, then stops near Harlan - alert, ears working the wind.

The crinkle of paper. Robert unfolds the map.

ROBERT

Alright. Staying on 212 keeps going straight west from here. Open ground, good surface. We'd make Ashland by dark, be on the reservation by tomorrow.

MIRA

And the other road?

ROBERT

County road. Follows the Powder River south, then hooks back west. Slower, rougher. But there'd be cottonwood cover along the riverside.

MIRA

Then we take the river.

ROBERT

It adds half a day, Mira. Maybe more.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

And it loops us south before it turns west - we'd be riding away from Seattle before we're riding toward it.

MIRA

Half a day is nothing if the open road gets us noticed.

ROBERT

Noticed by who? We haven't seen another person all day.

MIRA

That doesn't mean they haven't seen us.

A beat. The wind. The horses shifting their weight.

ROBERT

Every hour matters. You said it yourself - we don't waste days.

MIRA

And I meant it. But speed on a bad road is just a faster way to get into trouble.

That hangs there. The map crinkles in Robert's hands.

Neither of them raises their voice. This isn't a fight. It's two people making calm, practical arguments while the real argument - who decides - runs underneath every word.

LIV

Calloway?

A beat. Calloway hasn't spoken. The group waits.

CALLOWAY

About an hour back, I heard a probe. Northern sky. Low tone, heading east.

A silence.

ROBERT

I didn't hear anything.

CALLOWAY

I know.

Another beat.

LIV

Should we be worried about them
detecting my pacemaker?

ROBERT

They haven't yet.

MIRA

But no need to be reckless.

ROBERT

Right.

CALLOWAY

This road is flat and open for the
next twenty miles. Five riders on
an empty highway is the most
interesting thing for miles. I'd
rather not be interesting.

No one can argue that point.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

The county road follows the Powder
River. There's water, there's tree
cover, and it hooks back onto 212
before Ashland. We lose a few
hours, not a day.

HARLAN

(from the back)

And the horses could use the water.

That's practical, and everyone knows it. The wind moves
through the junction. A road sign somewhere creaks on its
post.

MIRA

(simply)

The river, then.

She doesn't push it. She waits.

ROBERT

Fine. The river.

The map folds. Not gently - the paper crunches as he forces
it back into his jacket. A small, sharp sound.

MIRA

Good.

That's all she says. No satisfaction in it. Just the word.

The horses turn. The hooves leave asphalt - first onto broken pavement, chunks of old county road crunching and shifting. Then onto dirt.

The sound narrows. Wind drops. Branches overhead filter it. Birds - more than one now, sheltered in the canopy. The open highway is gone. Everything is closer, smaller, contained.

Water moving somewhere nearby - the Powder River, threading through the trees.

The pace slows. The horses settle into it. Their breathing eases.

From the back, Harlan - quieter now that the trees absorb sound.

HARLAN
This is better.

Nobody asks what he means. The trees say it for him. Keeper's panting slows beside the horses, his claws going quiet on the soft ground.

SCENE 4 - "THE RIVER TRAIL"

EXT. POWDER RIVER COUNTY ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

The cottonwoods thicken. Branches creak and sway overhead, filtering the wind into something softer. The horses move at an easy walk - hooves on packed dirt, the occasional splash where the trail dips close to the river. Water running alongside them, steady and unhurried. Keeper ranges ahead, his paws in the shallows, sniffing at the bank.

For the first time since they left, the group isn't riding in silence.

LIV
It's so much quieter in here.

HARLAN
Not quieter. Softer. Listen.

A beat. The river. Wind through cottonwood leaves - a dry, papery rattle. A bird - then another answering it from across the water.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
Red-winged blackbird. Hear the
second one? That's the female. She
sounds different than the male.

LIV
How do you know that?

HARLAN
Grew up with them. Every irrigation
ditch in Montana had a pair.

A beat. Keeper splashes downstream, then comes trotting back,
wet to his chest.

LIV
What about that one? The high one.

HARLAN
Kingfisher. Fishing the shallows.
Hear him rattle? Means we're close
to a river bend - they like the
slow water.

He's right. The river sound shifts - wider, slower. The trail
curves with it.

MIRA
(from behind, amused)
Harlan, I think that's the most
words you've said all day.

HARLAN
Birds are better company.

MIRA
Than me? I'm wounded.

HARLAN
Than anyone.

Mira laughs - short, genuine. The first real laugh of the
trip. The sound is startling out here, in all this open
quiet.

The horses walk on. A gust funnels through the cottonwoods -
Liv pushes hair out of her face, tucks it behind her ear. It
blows back immediately.

LIV
(an annoyed sound)

MIRA
(riding up beside her)
You want me to braid your hair back
for you?

LIV
I'm fine.

Another gust. Hair in her mouth this time. She spits it out.

LIV (CONT'D)
Okay. Yeah. Please.

Mira brings her horse alongside. Her hands gather Liv's hair back - quick, practiced. The sound of hair being divided, pulled into sections.

MIRA
Hold still. Just keep riding
straight.

Mira braids while both horses walk. Fingers working fast. She's done it a thousand times.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Over... Under... Pull...

LIV
I never really learned how to do
that.

She says it like it's nothing. Mira's hands don't pause.

MIRA
I'll show you tonight. It's easy
once your hands know it. OK, let me
tie it off...

She ties it off with a strip of leather. A small tug to set it.

MIRA (CONT'D)
There.

Liv reaches back and touches it. The braid, tight and neat.

LIV
Thanks.

Mira drops back to her position. The trail narrows where the cottonwoods press close. Branches brush against saddlebags. A horse pulls at a mouthful of grass along the edge without breaking stride.

CALLOWAY

(from ahead)

Good tracks down here. Deer. Lot of them, coming to the water.

HARLAN

Elk, too. That bigger print - see how deep it sits?

CALLOWAY

I see it.

HARLAN

River is feeding everything for miles. Fine country to hunt.

MIRA

We should send a hunting party back here in the fall. Before the snow.

HARLAN

I'm in.

The trail widens again. The river runs close, the water winding around the rocks in it.

Keeper wades in up to his belly, drinks, shakes himself. The spray hits Harlan's horse, who snorts and sidesteps.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

(to the dog)

Ugh. Thanks for that.

CALLOWAY

(pulling up)

There's a flat spot up here, off the trail. Good ground, close to the water, but not too close. Trees on three sides.

ROBERT

We could push another hour.

CALLOWAY

We could. But the horses have been going since sunup, and we won't find better ground than this in the dark.

MIRA

I'm with Calloway.

ROBERT
(a beat)
Alright. We stop.

SCENE 5 - "FIRST CAMP"

EXT. RIVERSIDE CAMP - EVENING

The sounds of making camp. Saddles lifted off with a grunt, dropped onto the ground. Buckles and straps. Blankets shaken out. The hollow knock of firewood stacked on firewood.

Canvas unrolls - heavy, stiff. Tent stakes hammered into soft ground, one after another. Rope pulled taut and tied off.

CALLOWAY
Three tents. Robert and Liv, you're closest to the fire. Mira, you take the south side. Harlan and I will be nearest the trail.

MIRA
Putting yourself between us and whatever's out there?

CALLOWAY
That's the idea.

ROBERT
You're a good man, Calloway. Glad you're with us.

CALLOWAY
No worries.

The camp takes shape - canvas going up, poles lashed, stakes driven in.

Calloway works the fire - the scrape of a steel striker, once, twice. A catch. The crackle of dry tinder taking flame, then the slow build as kindling feeds it.

A large pot placed on the fire grill, then filled with water.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
OK, we'll have clean water in a while.

The horses drink at the river's edge - heavy lips on water, long pulls.

HARLAN
(to the horses, patting
their flanks)
You did good today.

Keeper barks.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
(laughing)
Yeah. You too. OK, let's look at
these hooves.

His hands work down a horse's legs - checking tendons,
lifting hooves, tapping shoes. A hoof clunks against stone.
He sets it down, moves to the next.

LIV
How are they?

HARLAN
All good. That's the thing about
horses - you take care of them at
the end of the day, they take care
of you at the start of the next.

LIV
Do you do that every night?

HARLAN
Every night. Don't matter how tired
you are. Horses first, then you.

Keeper circles the campsite - nose low, working the
perimeter. His paws pad through dry leaves, pause, continue.
Then he settles near the fire with a heavy exhale.

By the fire, the sound of water coming to a boil in a metal
pot. Calloway pours it into canteens.

CALLOWAY
Water's boiled, if anyone wants
oatmeal, or tea.

Canteens passed around. The sound of people drinking.
Settling in.

Mira sits - the groan of someone whose body is reminding her
of every mile. She unrolls something - canvas, a bedroll.

MIRA
I haven't been on a horse in six
months. My hips are making sure I
know it.

ROBERT
(by the fire)
We did maybe eighteen miles today.
With the detour.

MIRA
That's good, isn't it?

ROBERT
It's fine. If we get on 212
tomorrow and make Ashland, we'll be
where we need to be.

He doesn't say the rest - that eighteen miles is a good day
but there are dozens more like it ahead, each one a day Liv
doesn't have to spare.

The fire settles. Wood shifts, sparks snap upward.

Dinner is simple - the sounds are small. A knife cutting
dried meat. Something hard broken in half and shared.

MIRA
Harlan, pass me some of that.

HARLAN
Venison or the hardtack?

MIRA
Both. I'm past being picky.

The rustle of a canvas bag. Food passed hand to hand.

LIV
What is hardtack, anyway?

HARLAN
Flour, water, salt. Bake it till it
could stop a bullet. Lasts forever.

She takes a bite.

LIV
Tastes like it, too.

HARLAN
Nobody said it was good. Said it
lasts.

LIV
(chewing)
God, I need water.

She drinks.

LIV (CONT'D)

What did you have for dinner?
Before.

ROBERT

Before what?

LIV

Before all of this. When you were
at NASA. What did you eat?

ROBERT

(a beat)

Anything I wanted. There was a Thai
place near the office - pad see ew,
extra chili. Your mother used to-

He stops. The fire pops.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

We ate well. That's all.

Liv doesn't push it. The fire crackles.

MIRA

I miss coffee. The real stuff. Not
the roasted barley we pretend is
coffee.

HARLAN

Chocolate. My daughter used to hide
it around the house at Easter, and
make me go looking.

CALLOWAY

A hot shower. Long one. With the
water so hot the room fills up with
steam.

MIRA

Oh, don't.

CALLOWAY

And you just stand there. Not doing
anything. Just standing in the hot
water because you can.

MIRA

(smiling)

I said don't.

A beat. The fire. The river.

LIV

I sort of remember chocolate. Not really the taste. More like... knowing I liked it.

A beat. The fire.

LIV (CONT'D)

It's strange hearing you all talk about these things. Like you've all visited a place I can't ever get to.

The fire settles. The river runs. Crickets start up - first one, then dozens, filling the dark. The horses breathe slow and heavy nearby.

An owl calls from somewhere in the cottonwoods - low, deliberate, two notes.

HARLAN

Great horned owl. He's hunting the riverbank.

They listen. The owl calls again. Keeper lifts his head, ears forward, then settles back down.

MIRA

Pass that whiskey over, would you?

CALLOWAY

Here you go.

She takes a sip.

MIRA

Oh, that does these old bones good.

A beat.

HARLAN

Hand me that pouch?

It's handed over. He pulls something out of it. A small, hollow tap of wood against his palm. Then breath - a slow, steady exhale through the harmonica. Finding a note. Then another.

He plays. Simple. Unhurried. Something that isn't quite a song - more like the sound the river would make if it had a melody. Low notes, with air in them. The kind of playing that doesn't ask anyone to listen, but nobody can stop.

The fire crackles underneath it. The river underneath that.
The owl has gone quiet.

Nobody speaks. Mira pulls her blanket tighter - the soft
scrape of wool. Robert stares into the fire - a log shifts
under his weight as he leans forward.

Harlan plays. Keeper's tail thumps once, twice against the
ground.

The harmonica trails off. Not an ending - just a breath that
doesn't lead to the next note. Silence fills back in. The
river. The fire.

MIRA
(quiet)
Don't stop.

HARLAN
That's all I've got tonight.

MIRA
That was enough, then.

The fire burns low. The sounds simplify - breathing, shifting
blankets, the river's constant wash. One by one the group
settles. Leather and canvas and wool, adjusting, finding
positions on hard ground.

CALLOWAY
I'll take first watch. Harlan, I'll
wake you in four hours.

HARLAN
I'll be here.

The camp goes quiet. The fire ticks down. The river runs.
Keeper sighs - a long, whole-body exhale - and puts his chin
on his paws.

The night settles. Insects in the grass. The occasional pop
from the fire as the coals shift. The horses breathing
nearby, slow and deep, already sleeping.

And underneath everything, the river.

SCENE 6 - "Breaking Camp"

EXT. RIVERSIDE CAMP - EARLY MORNING

A bird. Then another. The river, still there, unchanged.

Sounds of people waking up.

Boots on cold ground. The scrape of coals being stirred - the fire brought back to life. A pot set down on the grill. Water poured in.

CALLOWAY

Sun's up. I'll get us some hot water, then let's move.

The camp comes apart in reverse. Canvas pulled down, folded. Tent stakes yanked from the ground, one by one. Rope coiled. Bedrolls tied tight.

HARLAN

(to the horses, low)

Morning. Come on, let's get you ready.

The sound of hobbles unbuckled. Horses stamping, shaking themselves awake. Blankets thrown over backs, then saddles - the heavy creak of leather, cinches pulled snug. Buckles fastened.

Keeper stretches - claws scraping the ground, a yawn - then shakes himself.

LIV

Did you sleep?

ROBERT

Some. You?

LIV

The ground's harder than I thought it would be.

ROBERT

Give it a week, you won't even notice.

LIV

Really?

ROBERT

Promise. You'll be too sleep-deprived to care.

Liv laughs.

The pot hisses on the fire. Calloway pours hot water into cups.

CALLOWAY

There you go. Coffee. Or, something like it.

The sounds of a group finishing up - last sips, bags cinched, gear lashed to saddles.

The fire kicked apart, coals hissing as dirt covers them.

MIRA

Everyone have everything?

Murmurs. Buckles. The last tent folded and strapped down.

The group mounts up. Saddles creak under weight, one after another. Keeper's claws find the trail.

The hooves start. Soft ground, easy pace. The river beside them, the cottonwoods overhead. Another morning on the trail.

SCENE 7 - "THE BIG WORLD"

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE, WEST OF POWDER RIVER - LATE MORNING

A hawk somewhere high above them. Its cry carries, thin and clean, for what feels like miles.

Liv's saddle creaks. She shifts her weight. Her breathing is easy - not tired, not tense. Just riding.

LIV

Can I say something that might sound stupid?

HARLAN

Lots of things do. Go ahead.

LIV

I didn't know the world was this big.

A beat. The wind. Hooves on packed earth.

LIV (CONT'D)

I mean - I knew. Dad told me. He'd say how far things were, how long they took to get to. Numbers. But I didn't - I didn't know what it felt like.

She adjusts her reins. Leather through fingers.

LIV (CONT'D)

Back home, the furthest I ever went
was the ridge past Doran's pasture.
I could still smell the cook fires
if the wind was right.

HARLAN

That's a small world.

LIV

I didn't think so. It felt like
that was the whole thing.

A long silence. Just the horses walking and the wind and
Keeper's claws clicking on a patch of old road surface
they're crossing.

LIV (CONT'D)

Out here, I can hear that hawk and
I don't know if it's a mile away or
five. The sky is so big it doesn't
even feel like a sky anymore. It
feels like the ground fell away and
there's nothing holding us down.

ROBERT

(from ahead)

Does that feel scary?

LIV

I know, it sounds like it should.

A beat. The hawk calls again.

LIV (CONT'D)

But it doesn't.

She's watching it. Head tilted back.

LIV (CONT'D)

Did airplanes really fly higher
than that?

ROBERT

Higher than a hawk? Yeah. Much
higher.

LIV

What was it like? Being up there?

A beat. Robert's horse walks a few strides before he answers.

ROBERT

Like you weren't part of the world
anymore. Just clouds below you and
blue above.

LIV

That sounds terrifying.

ROBERT

First time, maybe. After that,
people read magazines. Complained
about the food. Six miles up and
bored out of their minds.

A beat. The wind through the grass.

LIV

(quietly)

Six miles.

She lets it go. Looks back down at the prairie stretching out
ahead of them.

Mira's horse draws closer. The soft rhythm of her mare
alongside Liv's.

MIRA

Sounds like you're liking this
bigger world. What does it feel
like?

LIV

Hm. Like I've been listening to
someone describe music and I'm
finally hearing it.

The wind picks up. The grass bends and hisses – a long,
rolling wave of sound moving across the plain.

MIRA

I remember that feeling. First time
I left home. I was twenty and I
drove six hundred miles to a job I
didn't want, and the only part I
remember is the drive.

LIV

Because of how far it was?

MIRA

Because of how much of the world
there was that had nothing to do
with me. Towns I'd never stop in.
Rivers I'd never cross again.

(MORE)

MIRA (CONT'D)

People in windows I'd never meet.
It was - humbling. And enormous.
And I pulled over once just to
stand in it.

A beat. Keeper sniffs at something in the grass, then trots
back to the group.

LIV

That's it. That's exactly it.

HARLAN

(dry)

Enjoy it while it lasts. Another
couple hundred miles, you'll be
sick of how big it is.

LIV

(smiling)

Maybe.

A beat. The hooves. The wind. The hawk again, further away
now.

LIV (CONT'D)

But right now - this is the most
beautiful thing that's ever
happened to me. And nobody's even
doing anything. It's just - the
world. Being big.

Nobody responds. But nobody needs to. The horses walk on.

SCENE 8 - "The Ravine"

EXT. SOUTHERN TRAIL - LATE AFTERNOON

Hooves on soft ground. Branches overhead. Keeper padding
along easy.

LIV

How far since Ashland?

ROBERT

Maybe eight miles. We're making
good time on this trail.

LIV

There was nobody there.

ROBERT

No.

LIV

A whole town, and nobody.

ROBERT

Not every place came back, Liv.

A beat. The hooves continue. Nobody's talked much since they rode through it.

Keeper stops panting. His claws go still on the trail. A beat - then a low growl. Not at anything ahead. He's turned back the way they came.

HARLAN

(low)

Keeper.

The dog doesn't settle. The growl holds - quiet, steady, certain.

CALLOWAY

(pulling his horse up)

Hold up.

The other horses stop, one by one. Leather tightens. Nobody speaks. They listen.

Wind through the trees. A bird. Then, underneath it, so faint it could be nothing: a rhythm. Distant. Soft. Hooves on packed earth, a long way back.

LIV

What is that?

CALLOWAY

That's what he's hearing.
Somebody's behind us. Keeper
started growling at the last creek
crossing. I wasn't sure then. I'm
sure now.

A beat. The rhythm is there - barely. Easy to mistake for echo, for wind, for nothing.

MIRA

How far?

CALLOWAY

Was half a mile. Getting shorter.

HARLAN
(from the back, quiet)
Could be a coincidence. Same trail,
same direction.

CALLOWAY
When we stopped at the creek, they
stopped. When we started again,
they started. That's not a
coincidence.

Keeper growls again - not loud, but sustained.

ROBERT
How many?

CALLOWAY
More than two horses. I heard at
least three, maybe four. And
something else - metal. A bit or a
buckle, something loose and
jingling. Riders who aren't worried
about being heard.

That changes the air. A group that isn't trying to be quiet
is either careless or confident. Neither is good.

MIRA
We could push ahead. Open up the
gap.

CALLOWAY
Trail runs straight for the next
mile. No turns, no cover. If they
pick up pace, they'll have a
sightline on us soon. And they're
already closing, as we speak.

To prove it - the rhythm behind them is louder now. Not by
much. But enough. Closer than it was two minutes ago.

ROBERT
(to Calloway)
What else is out here?

CALLOWAY
There's a ravine pretty close to
the west. Drops down forty, fifty
feet. Rock bottom, runs south. We
take it, we're off this trail and
onto stone. No tracks, no
sightline. We come out a mile
south, cut back to the trail below
them.

HARLAN

That's rough ground for horses.
Single file, loose rock, downhill.

CALLOWAY

Yeah, not great.

A beat. Everyone waits. Behind them, the hooves - closer still, unhurried, patient.

And now, faintly, a voice. Someone calling to someone else. Words they can't make out. The sound of people who aren't hiding.

Keeper growls again. Louder this time. Harlan puts a hand on the dog.

HARLAN

(low, to Keeper)
I hear it, boy.

ROBERT

We take the ravine. Now.

MIRA

Yes. Go.

Nobody else speaks. The horses turn off the trail. Branches scrape against legs and saddlebags as they push through undergrowth. The soft ground gives way to harder terrain - roots, then rock. The ground begins to tilt.

The ravine opens beneath them. The sound changes - open sky and wind give way to close stone walls. Everything tighter, echoes sharper. Hooves on loose rock instead of packed earth.

The horses don't like it - you hear it in their breathing, the hesitation in their steps.

CALLOWAY

(ahead)
Shit, this is getting steep fast.
Dismount. Lead them by hand from here.

Boots hit rock. The creak of saddles emptying. Lead ropes pulled taut. The descent steepens - they're walking their horses down, picking every step.

Rocks skitter downslope ahead of them. A boot slips - a scrape, a caught breath, a hand grabbing at a root.

ROBERT
(tight)
Careful.

The ravine narrows. The walls press in. Every sound bounces -
hooves, breathing, stone on stone.

LIV
(low)
Dad?

ROBERT
We're fine. Just keep moving.
Carefully.

Their boots scrape forward on the rock.

The trail gets worse. The sound of water - not the river,
something smaller. A section of the path is wet, undermined.
Loose stone shifts under their feet.

CALLOWAY
(from ahead)
Washout. There's a gap here - maybe
twelve feet. Rock looks solid on
the other side. One at a time.
Bring the horses across quick.
Trust them to find their footing.

Calloway goes first. His boots scrape across - careful,
deliberate. His horse follows, hooves clattering on wet
stone, then finding solid ground.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Next. Careful, it's wet and loose
scrabble.

ROBERT
OK, easy does it...

Robert crosses - boots scraping, his horse clattering behind
him.

CALLOWAY
Good job. Liv, show us how it's
done.

LIV
It's slick. I can't tell where the
edge is.

ROBERT
(from the other side)
Stay left. There's a ledge. You'll
feel it.

Liv's boots scrape across. A slip - a gasp -

ROBERT (CONT'D)
You're alright. Keep coming.

She makes it. Her breathing steadies.

CALLOWAY
Mira. Bring yours over.

MIRA
(low, steady, to the
horse)
That's it. Easy. One more step.
Good.

Harlan's turn. He pulls the lead rope. His horse plants its
feet. Won't move.

HARLAN
Come on, now. Come on.

The horse tosses its head - the jingle of the bit, a hard
snort. Hooves stamping but not stepping forward.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
(firmer)
Not the time for being stubborn.
Let's go.

He pulls the lead. Keeper whines behind them.

The horse lurches forward - and the edge gives way.

The sound: rock breaking loose, a cascade of stone. Harlan
goes down.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
Shit!

The horse screaming - a sound that fills the ravine and
bounces off every wall. Hooves scrambling on shale that isn't
there anymore.

Harlan's voice - a shout that cuts off when he hits
something. Gear scattering - a canteen ringing off rock,
something wooden snapping.

A tumbling slide down loose stone. Maybe fifteen feet. Enough to break things. Then a hard landing.

Then quiet. Dust settling. Small stones still trickling down. A horse breathing hard - fast, panicked, wrong.

Keeper barks from the top of the washout - loud, frantic, echoing off the ravine walls.

LIV

No!

ROBERT

(noise of surprise)

MIRA

Harlan!

CALLOWAY

(already moving, boots
scrambling down rock)

I'm going down. Everybody hold on.
Mira, can you get his horse?

MIRA

I- Yeah, I will.

The sound of Calloway picking his way down the slide. Loose rock shifting under his boots. Keeper's barking shifts to a high whine.

CALLOWAY

Harlan! Harlan, talk to me.

A beat. Breathing - ragged, tight. The sound of someone trying to breathe through something that won't let him.

HARLAN

(strained, through his
teeth)

I'm here.

CALLOWAY

Where are you hurt?

HARLAN

(a sharp inhale - pain)

Ribs.

LIV

(from up above)

Is he okay?

CALLOWAY

Don't move yet. What about your
legs?

A beat. The sound of Harlan shifting on rock. A groan he
tries to swallow.

HARLAN

Legs are alright. My horse?

CALLOWAY

(calling up)

Mira - how's his horse.

MIRA

(from above)

He's standing. Favoring the right
front but he's standing.

HARLAN

(exhaling)

Okay. Okay.

Keeper has found a way down - scrambling, claws on rock. He's
at Harlan now - the whining close, nose pushing against him.
Harlan's hand finds the dog.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

(to Keeper, quiet)

I know. I'm alright.

He isn't. Everyone can hear it in his breathing.

CALLOWAY

Alright, everybody come down,
carefully.

Everyone starts to make their way down.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

You ok to stand?

HARLAN

(groans)

Peachy.

MIRA

(From above)

Hell no! Don't you dare move,
Harlan. I'll be right there.

CALLOWAY

Guess you get to goldbrick a little
longer.

Harlan laughs and a groan slips out before he can catch it.

Mira comes up to him, kneels down.

MIRA

Don't move. Let me look.

HARLAN

I'm fine, Mira.

MIRA

Yeah, you look real healthy. Hold still.

The sound of Mira's hands working - fingers pressing along his ribs, firm and practiced. She's done this before. Harlan hisses through his teeth.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Breathe in. Deep as you can.

He tries. Gets halfway and stops - a sharp, bitten-off sound.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Again.

You can hear it in his breathing - short, careful, each one costing him.

HARLAN

That's as deep as it goes.

MIRA

Two ribs, maybe three. Left side.

LIV

Is he going to be alright?

MIRA

He's lucky his ribs didn't puncture anything.

HARLAN

Doesn't feel lucky.

MIRA

Give me your wrist.

HARLAN

It's just -

MIRA

Give it to me.

A beat. Then Harlan exhaling through his teeth as Mira takes his wrist. She turns it, slowly. He makes a sound he doesn't want to make.

MIRA (CONT'D)
That's either broken or the worst
sprain I've ever seen. Either way,
you're not using this hand for a
while. I'll wrap it.

The sound of cloth tearing - a long strip, ripped from something.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Liv, you know how to stabilize a
broken bone?

LIV
Um...no.

MIRA
Come here. You're going to learn.

Liv comes and crouches next to Mira.

MIRA (CONT'D)
You got to make sure it's tight as
can go without cutting off the
circulation.

Mira starts wrapping the wrist. Around and around, pulling snug. Harlan breathes through it.

CALLOWAY
(close, holding Harlan
steady)
Easy. Almost done.

MIRA
I need something rigid for this.
Liv, hand me that stick right there
- yes, that one.

The snap of a thin branch. Mira splints the wrist against it, wraps it tight.

MIRA (CONT'D)
We use that as a splint and-

One final knot, pulled hard.

MIRA (CONT'D)
There you go.

HARLAN
(exhaling)

LIV
(comforting)
You're done.

HARLAN
Alright.

MIRA
Not yet. We've got to do the ribs.
This is going to hurt.

She wraps his torso - the sound of cloth pulled tight around his chest, binding the broken ribs. Harlan breathes in shallow, controlled sips.

Keeper whines beside him, nose pressing against his leg.

HARLAN
(to Keeper, strained)
Quit it. I'm alright.

MIRA
You're not alright. But you'll live.

She ties off the binding. Steps back. A beat.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Shit, that's a nasty gash too. Let me get a clean bandage on that.

Liv springs into action.

LIV
I can do that.

CALLOWAY
Can you ride?

HARLAN
(through his teeth)
I can ride.

Liv wraps his bleeding arm with the bandage.

MIRA
You can sit on a horse. That's not the same thing.

That hangs there. The water trickles. The horse with the bad front leg shifts its weight - a hoof scraping rock.

Mira turns. Her footsteps move toward Robert, who hasn't spoken. He's been standing apart, above them on the slope.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Robert.

A beat.

ROBERT

I know.

MIRA

He can't take rough trail. Not at pace. Every bad stretch of ground just got twice as slow.

Robert doesn't answer right away. The ravine is quiet - just water, just breathing, just the sound of a group waiting for someone to say what happens next.

ROBERT

We camp here. Move at first light.

MIRA

Agreed.

CALLOWAY

I'll find a flat spot further down.
Get him off this rock.

Calloway's boots move away down the ravine floor. The others start the slow work of settling in - gear pulled from saddles, bedrolls unstrapped. Everything quieter than last night. Everything heavier.

Harlan tries to stand. The sound of it - hands on rock, a grunt, Calloway's boots coming back fast.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

I said I'd find a spot. Stay down.

HARLAN

I can walk, Calloway.

CALLOWAY

Then walk slow.

Harlan's boots, careful on the rock. Each step measured. Keeper at his side, claws ticking on stone, matching the pace exactly.

The group settles on a flat shelf of rock near the stream. Saddles dropped.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
I assume no fire tonight?

MIRA
Right. We're taking no chances,
especially with a man down.

CALLOWAY
Yeah.

MIRA
Break out some of Lisa's hard
candy. If we don't get anything hot
tonight, let's at least have
something sweet.

CALLOWAY
Thanks, mom.

She laughs shortly.

MIRA
And no tents. If we get visitors in
the night, we all need to be ready.
Bedrolls only.

Food is unwrapped.

They eat in near-silence. Chewing. A canteen passed.

Harlan's breathing - shallow, careful - is the loudest sound
in the camp. Keeper pressed against his side, not moving.

SCENE 8 - "COLD AND DARK"

EXT. RAVINE CAMP - NIGHT

The ravine at night. No fire - just the stream, close and
constant, and the sound of the rock walls holding everything
in. No crickets down here. No wind. Just stone and breathing.

Harlan is propped against a rock. His breathing is slower
than before - shallow but steadier.

MIRA
How's the poppy tea?

HARLAN

(groggy)

Making me stupid. That's probably
the point.

MIRA

That's the point. Let it work.
Sleep if you can.

(then)

You too, Liv.

Liv settles into her bedroll.

LIV

I'll try.

Keeper is beside them. A slow thump of tail on rock, then
nothing. All of them drifting off.

Calloway's boots on rock - standing, moving.

CALLOWAY

I'll be up on that shelf tonight.
Better sightline on the ravine.
Anyone comes down from the trail,
I'll hear them first.

MIRA

Take a blanket at least.

CALLOWAY

A bedroll, candy, and a blanket?
I've had worse dates.

MIRA

(Laughing)

Wiseass.

His boots scrape up the slope. A few loose stones. Then he's
above them - still, quiet, listening to the dark.

Mira and Robert sit near each other. The first time they've
been still and facing each other since the market. No fire
between them, just the sound of the stream and the dark.

For a while, nobody speaks. A canteen uncaps. Someone drinks.
The cap screws back on.

Then Mira. Not loud. Not angry. The voice of someone who's
been putting pieces together all day and just finished.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Robert. I want to ask you something, and I want a real answer.

A beat.

ROBERT

Alright.

MIRA

A thousand miles. In February. On horses. With your daughter's heart failing.

She lets that sit.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Nobody does that for a hospital, Robert. Not even a good one. Not even the best one that ever existed. There'd have to be something closer. Somebody, somewhere between here and Seattle, who could crack a chest and replace a pacemaker.

ROBERT

There isn't.

MIRA

Maybe not. But you didn't even look. You didn't ask around, didn't send word to other settlements. You went straight to the map. Seattle. A thousand miles. Like nothing else would do.

The stream runs. Robert doesn't answer.

MIRA (CONT'D)

So I started thinking. What's in Seattle that can't be found anywhere else? What are you not telling me?

The stream. Harlan's breathing, slow and medicated. Keeper sighs in his sleep.

MIRA (CONT'D)

You worked at NASA. They don't build hospitals. So I'm going to ask you once, and I want a real answer. What is this place?

Robert doesn't answer right away.

MIRA (CONT'D)
I would have heard of a hospital
that good, even this far away. Is
it hidden? Underground?

ROBERT
Yes.

MIRA
How deep?

ROBERT
A hundred and thirty feet.

She thinks.

MIRA
Does it still have power?

ROBERT
Yes.

MIRA
What kind?

A beat.

ROBERT
(quiet)
Nuclear.

MIRA
A nuclear reactor. A hundred and
thirty feet down. Built by NASA.

Robert doesn't answer.

MIRA (CONT'D)
That's not a medical facility,
Robert. What are you not telling
me?

A long beat. When Robert speaks, the deflection is gone. The
careful phrasing is gone. Just a tired man in the dark.

ROBERT
It's called the Ark.

MIRA
The Ark. Biblical references do not
make me feel better.

ROBERT

Self-sustaining survival platform.
Seventy feet long. Its own power,
its own air, its own water.
Hydroponics, science lab, full
medical bay. It was designed to
keep a crew alive indefinitely,
independent of anything on the
surface.

MIRA

A crew.

ROBERT

Eight people. Deep space
exploration - the idea was to send
crews out for years at a time,
completely self-sufficient. They
built two prototypes. One launched
before the nannies hit. The second
one never made it off the ground.
It's still in that facility.

The stream runs. A stone shifts somewhere in the dark.

MIRA

You told me it was a medical
facility.

ROBERT

It has a medical facility.

MIRA

It has a medical facility the way a
warship has a kitchen.

That sits. Robert doesn't defend himself. The stream fills
the silence.

ROBERT

The auto-doc is real. Automated
surgical system - the most advanced
ever built. It can replace Liv's
pacemaker. That part is true. All
of it is true.

MIRA

You just left out the rest.

ROBERT

Yes.

MIRA

Why?

ROBERT
Because if I told you what it
really was, you would never have
let us leave.

A beat. A long one. Harlan shifts against the rock - a small groan, muffled by sleep. Keeper adjusts beside him.

MIRA
You're right. I wouldn't have.

The stream. The dark. Two people sitting with a truth that just changed the shape of everything.

EXT. RAVINE CAMP - LATE NIGHT

The ravine. The stream below, constant. Above the rim, wind moves across open ground - a low, steady sound that doesn't reach down here.

Boots on rock. Light, careful - climbing the slope to the shelf above camp.

LIV
(sounds of effort)

CALLOWAY
(low)
Watch the last step. It's loose.

A scuff. A small scatter of gravel. Then she's up.

LIV
I can't sleep.

CALLOWAY
That makes two of us.

She settles beside him. Leather creaks as he shifts the rifle across his knees.

A long quiet. The ravine sounds at night - water over rock, wind above the rim, something small moving through scrub along the stream. Keeper lifts his head below - a soft huff - then puts it back down.

Then - above the rim. A rock shifts. Something moving through brush. The rifle comes up - a creak of leather and metal.

They listen.

Nothing. The brush settles. Wind.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

(low)

Deer. Moving along the ridge.

LIV

How can you tell from down here?

CALLOWAY

Too light for a person. Too heavy
for a coyote. And Keeper didn't
stand up.

A beat. He lowers the rifle. They settle.

The stream. The wind.

LIV

How long have you been with Mira?

CALLOWAY

Since before the Collapse.

LIV

Long time. Was she always like
this?

CALLOWAY

Like she already knows the answer
before anyone asks the question?

Liv laughs.

LIV

Exactly.

CALLOWAY

No. She wasn't always like that.

The stream below. Keeper sighs in his sleep.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

First couple weeks, she was the one
pushing to build. Wanted power.
Wanted a medical clinic. Hauled
solar panels twenty miles on a
flatbed and wired them up herself.

LIV

Mira did that?

CALLOWAY

She was hopeful. That's the word.

A beat. The stream runs below them.

LIV
What changed?

A long silence. Calloway shifts on the rock.

CALLOWAY
One eighteen.

LIV
What's one eighteen?

Nothing. The wind crosses the rim.

LIV (CONT'D)
Calloway.

CALLOWAY
That's hers to tell. Not mine.

A long silence. Harlan shifts against the rock - a small groan, muffled by sleep.

LIV
Sounds like she was always in charge though.

A beat.

CALLOWAY
She used to ask people what they thought. Now she tells them.

The wind above the rim. The stream below.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
What about you?

LIV
What about me?

CALLOWAY
Your mother. Robert doesn't talk about her.

A beat. Liv takes a moment.

LIV
She died when I was nine.
Pneumonia. Three days, start to finish.

CALLOWAY

Damn. I'm sorry.

LIV

Dad doesn't talk about her. Like...
if he doesn't say her name, I won't
have to carry it.

CALLOWAY

Does that work?

LIV

No.

The stream. A long quiet.

LIV (CONT'D)

She used to sing when the power
went out. I don't remember the
songs anymore. Just that she sang.

CALLOWAY

That's how it works. You keep the
feeling. The details go.

They sit with that. The wind moves across the rim. Below,
Keeper breathes slow and steady.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Get some sleep.

LIV

I'm alright.

CALLOWAY

Wasn't a suggestion.

A beat. Liv doesn't move right away. The stream runs. The
last of the fire ticks and settles below them.

Then her boots on rock - careful, picking her way back down
to camp.

Calloway alone on the shelf. The rifle across his knees.
Listening to the dark.

EXT. RAVINE FLOOR - NIGHT

MIRA

So, this Ark. Is it still
operational?

ROBERT

It's been running since before the nannies came. The reactor, the AI, all of it. Ten years, underground, fully autonomous.

MIRA

Ten years.

ROBERT

The shielding's held. A hundred and thirty feet of rock and military-grade insulation. The nannies have never detected it.

MIRA

That you know of.

Robert doesn't answer.

MIRA (CONT'D)

So it's been sitting there, alive, for ten years. And you want to walk in the front door.

ROBERT

I want to save my daughter.

MIRA

Of course. But you have no evidence this thing is still functional, right?

Robert doesn't answer. The stream runs. Somewhere above them, Calloway's boots shift on rock - still listening.

ROBERT

No.

MIRA

You're not just riding toward a machine, Robert. You're riding toward a decision that could affect every settlement between here and the coast.

ROBERT

I know.

MIRA

Do you?

ROBERT

Why do you think I didn't tell you?

That lands. Mira doesn't speak. The stream runs. A long time. Long enough that Robert shifts on the rock, uncomfortable with the silence.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Mira.

Nothing.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Say something.

MIRA

I'm trying to decide if I take Calloway and Harlan and ride home in the morning.

A beat. That's real. She means it.

ROBERT

You'd leave Liv?

MIRA

You lied about what we're riding into.

ROBERT

You would have made the wrong choice.

MIRA

The wrong one? You mean the safe one.

ROBERT

I mean the one where my daughter dies.

The stream. Keeper shifts beside Harlan. A stone settles somewhere in the dark.

Neither of them speaks for a long time.

MIRA

If I go home, you ride into that facility alone. No one to check you. No one to say stop. You turn everything on, because why wouldn't you - she's dying, and the machine is right there.

ROBERT

Yes.

MIRA

And if the nannies come, and find a nuclear reactor, they don't just come for you. They come for every settlement within a hundred miles. Hell, maybe they track you back to our home.

Robert doesn't answer. He doesn't need to. They both know it.

MIRA (CONT'D)

If you were someone else, I'd solve this with a bullet.

But I can't kill you and Liv. Just don't have that in me. So no... I can't leave.

That sits. The stream runs.

ROBERT

(quiet)

I understand.

MIRA

When we get there, I'm in the room. Every decision about what gets turned on and what stays off - I'm there. That's not a negotiation.

ROBERT

Alright.

MIRA

I'll have my gun in my hand. And if I think you're putting people at risk - my people, anyone's people - I will shut it down. I don't care what it costs.

ROBERT

Even if it costs Liv.

A long beat.

MIRA

Fuck you. Don't make me answer that.

The stream runs. The dark holds them. Above, Calloway's boots shift once on the shelf - still there, still listening. Beside Harlan, Keeper breathes slow and steady.

SCENE 9 - "UNWELCOME COMPANY"

EXT. RAVINE - EARLY MORNING

A bird somewhere above the rim. Then another. The first sounds that aren't stone and water.

Below, camp sounds. A bedroll being rolled. Straps cinching tight. Buckles, leather - Calloway packing, methodical, already done with sleep.

CALLOWAY

Sun's up. We should move.

Harlan groans. A sharp intake of breath - ribs.

MIRA

Easy. Let me help you -

HARLAN

I got it.

He doesn't. Another groan. The sound of someone trying to stand using a rock wall for leverage.

CALLOWAY

(close, steady)

Arm over my shoulder.

A beat. Then effort - two men, one carrying most of the other's weight. Boots shuffling on rock. A horse shifts, snorts.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Left foot in the stirrup. I've got you.

Leather creaks. A grunt. The saddle takes his weight. Harlan breathes through his teeth, settling.

Keeper's claws on rock - up, moving, ready to go.

They ride. Hooves in the narrow ravine, echoing off the walls. The stream alongside them. Keeper's claws clicking on wet rock ahead.

Single file. The ravine is too narrow for anything else - hooves landing carefully, one horse after another, the echo layering each step.

MIRA

How far does this go?

CALLOWAY

Hard to say. Ravine bends west up ahead. Could open up after that, could go for miles.

LIV

How are you doing, Harlan?

HARLAN

(tight)

Upright. That's all I got right now.

They ride. The stream braids around rocks beside them. Keeper splashes through a shallow crossing, shakes off.

ROBERT

What about the riders from yesterday?

CALLOWAY

They didn't follow us down. But if they know the country, they know where this ravine comes out.

ROBERT

So they could be waiting.

CALLOWAY

Could be. Depends on how much they wanted what we've got.

LIV

But we don't have that much.

CALLOWAY

A lot of folks have even less.

A beat. Hooves on rock. The stream running beside them.

MIRA

Then we don't stop when we come out. We keep moving.

They ride. The walls narrow, then widen slightly. The echo changes - less sharp, more hollow. Water drips somewhere in the rock above them.

MIRA (CONT'D)

We need to find supplies. The poppy tea's almost gone, and I used the last of the clean bandages last night.

ROBERT

There's a town at the mouth of this basin. Birney. It's on the map. Real town.

MIRA

Birney... We traded with Birney a few years back. They had a working settlement - forty, fifty people. A woman named Deb ran the med clinic.

ROBERT

You know the town?

MIRA

Not really. We had a caravan come through from there last year. But they were doing okay. Settled right along the river, below the dam.

HARLAN

(strained)

How much further?

CALLOWAY

Walls are getting lower. We're close.

MIRA

Harlan, hang on. They have a working clinic, in an old hospital, no less. We'll get you sorted.

HARLAN

I'll settle for a floor that isn't rock.

Then - gradually - the echo drops away. The walls fall back. Wind arrives. The sound opens in every direction. Sky above them, space, distance.

Hooves on softer ground. Wind across open country. Keeper ranges ahead - paws in dirt, circling back.

LIV

We're out.

CALLOWAY

Basin opens up to the north. Town should be right around that bend.

The horses pick up the pace. Tack jingling. Keeper trotting.

Then - water. Not the stream behind them. Something bigger. A lapping sound, rhythmic, against something hollow. A metallic creak.

The horses slow. Stop.

LIV

Wait, I...

ROBERT

This is wrong. This should be the valley. Birney should be here, not a... lake.

LIV

Where's the town?

CALLOWAY

(Sighs)

Here. It's under the water.

Water laps. Something wooden groans in the mist. A slow creak.

MIRA

It's just... gone?

CALLOWAY

Oh, it's there, just underwater. Look, see the steeple out there - church. Power poles. A few rooflines just above the surface. Bigger building to the south - flat roof. Could be the hospital.

Nobody speaks.

MIRA

(quiet)

That's Birney.

CALLOWAY

This was a valley. The dam must have given out, upstream.

Water laps against a rooftop. A hollow, patient sound.

ROBERT

The route follows the eastern shore. We stay high and pick up the road to Ashland.

CALLOWAY

Robert. The road's half underwater.

A beat. Water. Mist.

ROBERT

There has to be a way around.
North, above the waterline -

CALLOWAY

Can't see where it ends. Could be a
mile. Could be ten.

MIRA

And the mud flats between here and
the water?

CALLOWAY

Swallow a horse to the chest if you
step wrong.

Nobody speaks. Water laps. The mist holds everything close
and shapeless.

The rustle of paper. Robert's map, unfolding. A long silence.

Then the paper folds again. Slow. Deliberate. Tucks into his
jacket with a whisper of cloth.

MIRA

Robert?

ROBERT

We go north. Stay above the
waterline until we find solid
ground. Pick up the road on the
other side.

Nobody moves. The water laps.

Then - behind them. The way they came. Hooves on rock. More
than one horse. Moving steady, unhurried.

Keeper growls. Low, from the chest.

CALLOWAY

(quiet)
Don't turn around.

LIV

(whisper)
Who is that?

The hooves get closer. Three horses, maybe four. Tack
jingling. A voice - low, male, too far to make out words.
Then another voice answering.

MIRA

(low)

The riders from the ravine.

CALLOWAY

They didn't follow us down. They
went around.

The hooves stop. Not far.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

They waited for us.

A rifle cocks.

HIGHWAYMAN - (he/him), a man with a rifle and the kind of
dangerous calm that comes from having done this before.

HIGHWAYMAN

That's a nice string of horses.

Nobody answers. Keeper growls, low and steady.

HIGHWAYMAN (CONT'D)

Five riders. Long way from anywhere
in February. What are you carrying?

MIRA

We're not looking for trouble.
We're passing through.

HIGHWAYMAN

Through what? The lake?

A second voice laughs. A third horse shifts.

HIGHWAYMAN (CONT'D)

Here's what's going to happen.
You're going to drop the rifles and
the packs, and then you're going to
ride out of here. Nobody needs to
die.

CALLOWAY

Stealing provisions, this time of
year? You're still killing. Just
doing it slower.

HIGHWAYMAN

We got people to feed too. Drop
your gear. Ride on.

CALLOWAY
(calm, flat)
That's not going to happen.

HIGHWAYMAN
Friend, you've got water behind you
and three guns in front of you.
Think about it. Or the dying will
come quick.

A long beat. Keeper's growl rises.

CALLOWAY
Liv. Get down off the horse. Now.

He cocks his rifle.

Silence.

END OF EPISODE