

EARTH, AGAIN
Episode 3

by

Chris Kohout

Chris Kohout
Chris@wildskystudios.com

EPISODE 3

SCENE 1 - "THE COST"

EXT. RESERVOIR SHORE - MORNING

Water lapping. Mist. Horses breathing.

CALLOWAY

Liv. Get down off the horse. Now.

A scramble of leather. Liv hitting the ground. And then a gunshot - loud, close, ringing off the water.

HIGHWAYMAN

Fire!

Then Calloway's rifle - two shots, fast. A horse screams. Keeper is barking - furious, snarling.

A man is hit, grunts in pain. A rifle is dropped.

Another shot from the strangers - wild, panicked. A grunt from Robert. His horse lurches sideways.

MIRA

Robert!

Calloway fires again. Two bodies on the ground. A third horse bolting riderless up the ridge.

The last rider hits the mud - a heavy, wet sound. His horse wheels and follows the others.

Silence. Water lapping. Keeper snarling over something on the ground, then circling back, panting.

CALLOWAY

Everyone. Sound off.

LIV

(shaking)

I'm here.

MIRA

I'm alright.

HARLAN

(through his teeth)

Still on my horse. Barely.

CALLOWAY

Robert.

No answer.

MIRA

Robert?

ROBERT

(tight, strained)

I'm hit.

LIV

(panicked)

Dad?

Liv scrambles over. Mira's boots hit the ground. Fast steps through mud.

MIRA

Where?

ROBERT

Left side. Under the arm.

The sound of cloth tearing. Mira's hands working fast.

MIRA

Let me see - hold still. Hold still.

LIV

Oh god-

A beat. Robert's breathing is shallow, hissing through his teeth.

MIRA

It's through the flesh. Missed the ribs. You're lucky.

ROBERT

(strained)

If you say so.

MIRA

Calloway, I need a shirt, a belt, anything I can use for pressure.

Buckles and cloth. Calloway moving fast. Mira packing the wound. Robert grunts - a hard, bitten-off sound.

LIV

Dad -

ROBERT
I'm okay, Liv. I'm okay.

He's hurt though. Everyone can hear it.

CALLOWAY
Keep pressure on that. I need to
check them.

His boots in the mud. Walking back toward where the riders
fell. Keeper follows - claws in the wet ground.

Silence. Then Calloway's boots stop. A pause. He moves again.
Stops again.

Then - a man breathing. Wet, ragged, labored. Alive.

Calloway stands over him. The breathing continues - broken,
gurgling.

HIGHWAYMAN
(weak, desperate)
Please... Wait...

CALLOWAY
Be glad this came quick.

A knife quickly unsheathed, then plunged into a chest.

The shocked pain of being stabbed.

The breathing hitches, gurgles, then stops.

LIV
Calloway!

Calloway's boots in the mud, walking back. Keeper at his
heel.

Nobody says a word. Liv doesn't move. Mira keeps her hands on
Robert's wound. The water laps.

CALLOWAY
(flat)
They're done.

Water laps against the drowned town.

Mira still has her hands on Robert's side. His breathing -
tight, controlled. Keeper circling, panting.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
We can't stay here. We're in the
open, and those shots carried.

MIRA

He needs stitching. I can't do it
in the mud.

CALLOWAY

Then we move him somewhere I can
build a fire. But first, let me
check their gear.

His boots in the mud again. Walking back toward the bodies.
Buckles rattling. The sound of a gun belt being unbuckled,
pulled free. A knife sliding out of a sheath. Pockets turned
out - something metal, a tin maybe. Calloway working fast,
methodical.

MIRA

What did they have?

CALLOWAY

First one has a revolver. Six
rounds in the belt. A skinning
knife - decent one. Canteen, half
full. Some dried meat in a pouch.

He moves to the next body. Same sounds - leather, metal,
cloth.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Another rifle. Bolt action, older
than mine. Maybe thirty rounds
between the two of them.

MIRA

Food?

CALLOWAY

Nothing else.

He stands. A pause.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Boots are good on this one. Robert,
what size are you?

ROBERT

(strained)

I'm not wearing a dead man's boots,
Calloway.

CALLOWAY

Your call.

He walks back toward the group. Starts putting the new gear
into saddlebags.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Harlan. Their horses.

Two of the three riderless horses have drifted back toward the group - herd instinct. They're nervous, shifting, but they haven't bolted far. Hooves stamping in the shallows.

HARLAN
(through his teeth)
I hear them. The bay and the sorrel
came back. Third one's gone -
bolted up the ridge.

CALLOWAY
Can you get them?

HARLAN
I can barely sit up straight.

A beat.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
Give me a minute.

The sound of Harlan easing off his horse - a grunt, a hiss through his teeth, boots hitting the ground too hard. He steadies himself. Then slow, careful steps toward the loose horses. A low whistle. One of the horses snorts.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
(low, steady)
Easy. Easy now. Nobody's going to
hurt you.

The horse blows. Hooves shift. Then the sound of a hand on a neck, a lead being clipped.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
Got the bay.

He moves toward the second. Same patient sounds - the low voice, the slow approach.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
(to the horse)
Yeah. I know. Bad morning for
everybody.

The second clip. Two horses secured.

CALLOWAY
That gives us seven horses for five
riders.

MIRA
Could use a pack horse.

CALLOWAY
One for gear, one spare. A lame
horse out here and we're in
trouble.

ROBERT
(through pain)
Or we trade one. A horse is worth a
lot.

Nobody answers that, but nobody argues either.

CALLOWAY
Let's move. I saw a cattle shed up
on the ridge, above the flood line.
Half a mile, maybe less.

LIV
Can he ride half a mile?

ROBERT
I can ride.

The group mounts. Saddles creaking. The two new horses tied
to a lead. Slow hooves in mud, then the ground firms as they
climb. Keeper ahead, claws scratching on frozen ground.

SCENE 2 - "SHOT"

EXT./INT. CATTLE SHED ABOVE THE FLOOD LINE - AFTERNOON

The wind drops as they get inside - a shift from open air to
something enclosed. Wood walls, a partial roof. Not much, but
enough.

CALLOWAY
Watch the floor. Rotten boards on
the left.

Horses brought inside, or just under the overhang - stamping,
blowing. Gear hitting the ground. Robert's boots on the
floor, then Mira guiding him down.

MIRA
Sit. Lean against the post. Don't
move.

ROBERT
You keep saying that.

MIRA
You keep moving.

The sound of a saddlebag opening. Things being sorted - metal, cloth, a small case.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Calloway, I need the whiskey.

CALLOWAY
There's maybe three fingers left.

MIRA
I'm not drinking it. Liv - in my bag, the canvas roll. Bring it here.

Footsteps. A roll of cloth unfurling.

LIV
Is that a sewing needle?

MIRA
It's what I've got. Hold the thread - keep it taut.

The sound of a bottle uncorking. Liquid poured - a small amount, careful.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Robert, this is going to sting.

ROBERT
More than getting shot?

MIRA
Different kind.

Liquid on the wound. Robert sucks air through his teeth - a hard, sharp hiss.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Good. Stay still.

The sound of thread being pulled through flesh. Robert breathes in sharp through his nose. Holds it. Lets it out slow.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Stay with me. Four more.

LIV
(quiet)
How do you know how to do all this?

MIRA
You learn it or people die.

Another stitch. Robert's breath catches.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Three more. Liv, keep the thread
taut.

Another stitch. The wet sound of thread through flesh.
Robert's breath catches. And Liv's breathing changes -
faster, shallow, wrong.

LIV
(Concerned)
Dad?

MIRA
Liv. Thread.

Liv feels sick.

LIV
I...

The thread drops. Liv's boots - fast, unsteady - crossing the
floor. The scrape of the door. Then outside, in the cold, the
sound of her being sick. Retching, gasping, retching again.

Inside, Mira doesn't stop. She picks up the thread herself.
Another stitch. Robert's jaw is clenched - you can hear it in
his breathing.

ROBERT
(tight)
Go check on her.

MIRA
Two more stitches. Then I will.

Outside, Liv's retching slows. Spitting. Breathing hard. The
wind.

Inside, the last two stitches. Quick, sure. Mira's breathing
never changes.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Done.

She stands. Her boots cross the floor and out through the door. The sound shifts - enclosed to open air.

Liv is sitting against the outside wall. Breathing. The wind.

MIRA (CONT'D)
(gentle, not the voice
from inside)
Hey. You're alright.

LIV
(shaky, embarrassed)
I'm sorry. I couldn't -

MIRA
First time I stitched someone, I
passed out cold. Woke up on the
floor with the patient looking down
at me. You did better than I did.

A beat. The wind. Liv's breathing steadying.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Come inside when you're ready. No
rush.

Mira's boots back inside. The door. The sound shifts back to enclosed.

Cloth tearing - Mira does it herself.

MIRA (CONT'D)
OK, let's get that wrapped.

Wrapping the wound. Robert exhales - long, shaky, relieved.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Don't lift that arm above your
shoulder. Don't twist. Don't reach
for anything with your left side.

ROBERT
For how long?

Liv returns.

LIV
Until she says so.

A beat.

MIRA
Exactly.

(MORE)

MIRA (CONT'D)

Now. Everyone. Hands out. Move your fingers.

LIV

What?

MIRA

February. Wet ground. You've all been in the mud for hours. Show me your hands. All of you. Wiggle your fingers.

The sound of gloves coming off. Fingers flexing.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Calloway.

CALLOWAY

Fine.

MIRA

I didn't ask if you were fine. I said wiggle your fingers.

A pause.

CALLOWAY

(evenly)

They work.

MIRA

Liv.

LIV

They're numb. The tips.

MIRA

Tuck them under your arms. Don't rub them. Harlan?

HARLAN

Stiff. But they move.

MIRA

The cold tonight will be worse than this. If anyone's fingers go white, or they stop hurting, you tell me. Not in the morning. Right then.

Nobody argues. February in Montana doesn't need explaining.

Calloway building a fire. The scrape of a striker, sparks, the catch of dry grass, then the slow crackle of wood.

CALLOWAY

Liv, help me gather some rocks.

LIV

For what?

CALLOWAY

You heat them in the coals, big ones. Wrap them in cloth. Better than a fire for keeping warm through the night.

The sound of rocks being gathered - heavy, clunking together. Then placed in the coals. The hiss of cold wet stone meeting heat.

The fire crackles. Wind outside. Keeper shifts, settles near Harlan with a thump and a long exhale.

Liv's footsteps. She sits - the creak of old wood.

LIV

What happens if the stitches don't hold?

MIRA

They'll hold.

LIV

But-

MIRA

Then I do them again. Liv - your father's had worse than this. When it comes to being shot, a bullet through flesh is best-case scenario. It's infection that kills people. That's why we used all the whiskey.

A beat. The fire pops. One of the horses stamps in the dark.

HARLAN

You know what I could use right now?

LIV

What?

HARLAN

Whiskey.

A small sound - almost a laugh, from Liv. The first one in a long time.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Tell you what. Next settlement we find, first thing I'm trading for is a bottle. And a pillow. And a bath.

LIV

In that order?

HARLAN

(considers)

Depends on the whiskey.

The fire settles. The rocks hiss in the coals, heating slow.

CALLOWAY

OK, the rocks should be hot now.
Liv, help me wrap this one.

He takes a large stone from the fire, and they wrap it in cloth. Comes over to Harlan.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Harlan. Lift your arm.

HARLAN

Which one?

CALLOWAY

The one that works, dummy.

Calloway presses the stone against Harlan.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Hold that against your ribs.

HARLAN

(a long, involuntary sigh)
Oh. Oh, that's good.

CALLOWAY

Robert. Your turn.

Another wrapped stone. Calloway tucks it against Robert's side.

Harlan sighs. A long, involuntary sound.

HARLAN

My grandmother used to do this.
Wrapped them in a dish towel, put them at the foot of the bed.

CALLOWAY

Same idea.

The fire crackles low. Horses shifting in the dark. Keeper settles - the thump of a dog lying down, a long exhale through his nose.

Night falls. The sounds change - the fire, the wind outside, the breathing of five people in a small space.

Then - a sharp, loud crack from the lake below. Like a gunshot, but wetter. Liv jumps. Leather creaking as she startles.

LIV

What was that?

A beat. Then another crack.

HARLAN

Beavers. Slapping their tails on the water.

Another slap - distant, echoing across the flooded valley.

LIV

Why?

HARLAN

Warning each other.

LIV

About what?

HARLAN

Us.

The slaps continue, farther off. The sound of an animal kingdom that doesn't like intruders.

A long silence. The fire pops.

MIRA

We should talk about where we are.

ROBERT

I know where we are.

MIRA

Then you know we're in trouble. Birney's gone. Ashland might be the same. You're stitched with sewing thread.

(MORE)

MIRA (CONT'D)

Harlan can barely sit on a horse.
We're out of bandages, out of poppy
tea, and now a day behind.

A beat.

ROBERT

Liv's pacemaker doesn't care about
our progress.

MIRA

I know that.

LIV

I'm sorry, guys. This is all my
fault.

ROBERT

No, Liv.

Mira, there's nothing to talk
about. We keep going.

MIRA

I'm not saying we stop. I'm saying
we quit pretending this is going
the way we planned.

Silence. The fire. The beavers on the water below, still
slapping.

CALLOWAY

She's right. We need supplies.
Medicine. Clean bandages. Something
for pain.

ROBERT

Where?

CALLOWAY

The reservation's ahead. Lame Deer,
maybe. If anyone's still there.

MIRA

If.

CALLOWAY

Yeah.

Another silence. Harlan shifts - a small grunt.

Then the sound of Harlan reaching into his coat. The familiar
shape of the harmonica case. The click of it opening. He
raises it to his lips.

A single note. Thin, wavering. Then he tries to draw breath for the next one - and can't. A tight, cut-off wheeze. The ribs won't let him fill his lungs.

He lowers the harmonica. Puts it back in the case. The click of it closing.

HARLAN

Sorry.

Nobody says anything. The silence where the music should be says everything.

The fire crackles. The beavers slap the water. The wind moves through the broken walls of the cattle shed.

SCENE 3 - "THE MORNING AFTER"

EXT. CATTLE SHED - EARLY MORNING

Birds. The first ones - tentative, cold, testing the air. Frost cracking underfoot. The fire from last night is almost out - the faint tick of cooling embers.

Calloway is outside the shed. The sound of a whetstone on a blade - slow, rhythmic.

Footsteps from inside - careful, trying not to wake anyone. Liv steps out. Her boots on the frozen ground. She stops.

LIV

Good morning. Did you sleep?

The whetstone keeps going.

CALLOWAY

Some.

A long beat. Neither of them speaks. The whetstone. The birds. A horse blowing somewhere below.

Liv sits. The creak of a fencepost or a stump, taking her weight.

The whetstone. Back and forth.

LIV

Harlan snores now. Since the ribs.

CALLOWAY

Heh. I know.

More silence. Liv pulls her coat tighter - the sound of fabric bunching. She's cold. She came out here anyway.

The whetstone stops. Calloway tests the edge with his thumb. Then sets it down - metal on wood.

LIV

That's one of theirs.

CALLOWAY

It's a good knife. No sense leaving it in the mud.

LIV

No. I guess not.

The birds again. Keeper stirs inside - the thump of a tail, then he settles back down.

A long pause. Liv is working toward something. Calloway lets her.

LIV (CONT'D)

That man... he said please.

Calloway doesn't answer right away. The sound of him picking up the whetstone again. One stroke. Two. Then he stops.

CALLOWAY

I heard him.

LIV

And you -

She doesn't finish.

CALLOWAY

Yes.

The wind. A bird somewhere close.

LIV

Did he have to die?

CALLOWAY

He meant us harm. He knew how many of us there were and which direction we were headed. And your father was bleeding in the mud twenty feet away.

LIV
He was already dying.

CALLOWAY
Maybe. Maybe not. Gut wounds take days sometimes. Long enough to talk to whoever came looking for him.

A beat.

LIV
You don't know that someone would come looking.

CALLOWAY
Did him a favor too. Gutshot is a bad way to go.

That wasn't why I did it. But it worked out well for him.

Silence. The whetstone again - just once, absent. Then he puts it down.

LIV
On the ravine shelf. You told me about Mira. How she used to laugh more. You sat there and you - you were kind to me.

CALLOWAY
I'm not unkind now, Liv.

LIV
I'm not sure what you are now.

Calloway is quiet for a while. The fire ticks. A horse shifts its weight below them.

CALLOWAY
I'm the same person I've always been. That's what makes it difficult.

Liv doesn't respond. The wind pushes through.

He picks up the knife. Slides it into the sheath. The click of the snap.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
But I'd make the same choice again today, if need be.

Liv sits with that. The cold. The birds getting louder now.
Morning coming.

MIRA
(from inside, groggy)
Calloway? Liv?

CALLOWAY
Out here.

MIRA
How's the fire?

CALLOWAY
Almost dead.

MIRA
Then build it up. We're not leaving
until I check Robert's stitches and
everyone eats something warm.

Calloway stands. Footsteps toward the fire pit.

The stacking of kindling, then the slow catch of the flame.

SCENE 4 - "THE HUNT"

EXT. CATTLE SHED - MORNING

The fire, burning now.

MIRA
Let me check your bandage.

Mira unwrapping Robert's bandage - the peel of cloth from
skin. Robert hisses.

ROBERT
Ok, that's... Something.

A pause. She's checking.

MIRA
No smell. No heat around the edges.
The stitches held.

ROBERT
Thank you, Mira.

MIRA
Don't mention it.

The sound of a saddlebag being packed. Calloway, moving with purpose. The creak of the bow being taken off a saddle. The rattle of arrows in a quiver.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

CALLOWAY
We've got dried meat for maybe two days. Five people. That's not enough.

MIRA
You're hunting alone?

CALLOWAY
Keeper and me. I'll use the bow. Rifle's too loud - if there's anyone else out here, I'd rather they didn't know where we are.

HARLAN
(from inside, stiff)
Take the ridge above the lake. Elk come down to the water at the tree line this time of morning.

CALLOWAY
I know.

HARLAN
I know you know. I'm saying it anyway.

A beat. Calloway clicks his tongue. Keeper's claws on the frozen ground - quick, eager.

CALLOWAY
We'll be back before midday.

His horse's hooves and Keeper's claws fade up the slope. The shed settles - the fire, the horses, the wind.

INT. CATTLE SHED - CONTINUOUS

Liv's footsteps on the floor. She sits near Harlan - the creak of old wood.

LIV
You okay?

HARLAN

Upright.

LIV

That's not what I asked.

HARLAN

That's what I got.

A beat. The fire pops. Outside, one of the horses pulls at dry grass - the rip and chew.

LIV

Does it hurt when you breathe?

HARLAN

Hurts when I don't, too. So I figure I might as well keep at it.

LIV

Mira says ribs take six weeks.

HARLAN

Mira says a lot of things.

LIV

She's usually right.

HARLAN

(a small sound, almost a laugh)

True. Don't tell her I said that.

Silence. The wind pushes against the shed walls. Something creaks in the roof.

LIV

I keep listening for him. Calloway. Like I'll hear the bow from here.

HARLAN

You won't. That's the point of the bow.

LIV

What if he gets in trouble?

HARLAN

Liv. That man's come back from worse places than a hill full of elk. He'll come back, he'll have something with him, and we'll eat tonight. That's how it works with Calloway.

A beat.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
Worrying about him is a waste of a
good morning.

LIV
(smiling)
Alright, then. I'll just worry
about you.

SCENE 5 - "HUNTING"

EXT. HILLS ABOVE THE FLOOD PLAIN - MORNING

Quiet. A different kind of quiet than the shed - open, wide,
nothing between Calloway and the sky. His boots on frost.
Crunch. Crunch. Crunch. Keeper's paws beside him - lighter,
faster.

A bird calls. Another answers. The world going about its
morning.

Calloway stops. Keeper stops with him. The dog's breathing
changes - nose working, short quick sniffs. Then silence from
the dog.

CALLOWAY
(barely a whisper)
Locked on, aren't you? Easy...

They move again. Slower. Each step placed. The frost crunches
softer when you step on it right.

A bird flushes from a thicket - sudden wing beats, startling.
Keeper doesn't chase. Calloway doesn't draw. Wrong target.

They wait. The wind shifts. Nothing.

Then Keeper whines - low, barely audible. His nose is locked
on something upwind. His whole body trembling. He knows.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
(barely a whisper)
OK. Go.

Keeper takes off - not barking, not crashing. Controlled.
Fast paws through the brush, looping wide. Working the tree
line. Driving whatever's in there toward open ground.

A beat. Then - movement. Something heavy breaking from cover. The snap of branches, hooves pounding frozen ground. An elk, pushed out of the trees by a dog it can't see.

It hits the open ground and stops. A sharp bark - a single startled huff through the nose. Then silence. The animal is listening. Deciding.

The creak of the bowstring drawing back. Slow. Steady. The wood flexing under tension.

A long held breath. The elk shifts its weight - one hoof in the frost.

The snap of release. The arrow cutting air - a quick, thin whistle. Then the thud. Solid, deep. The elk bellows - a raw, guttural sound - and bolts.

Crashing through brush, branches snapping, hooves tearing up frozen ground. Then the crashing gets slower. Heavier. Further away.

Calloway exhales. He doesn't move.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
(quiet, to himself)
Wait.

He waits. The woods settle. A bird starts up again somewhere. Keeper whines, wanting to go.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Not yet. It needs time to stop
panicking, and to bleed out.

More silence. A long minute. Then Calloway starts walking. Slow, deliberate steps through the brush. Keeper beside him, nose down, following the trail.

They find it in a thicket. The elk is down, on its side. Still breathing - slow, shallow, each one further apart than the last.

Calloway kneels. A hand on the animal's neck.

It bellows, weakly.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
(quiet)
I know. It's alright.

One more breath. A long, rattling exhale. Then nothing.

Keeper circles once, then sits. Whimpers.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Good boy.

The knife coming out. The skinning knife, the one he sharpened this morning. The sound of field dressing - hide parting, the wet work of it.

Calloway cuts something free - heavy, dense - and drops it on the frozen ground.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Here you go. Heart's yours, Keeper.

The dog doesn't need to be told twice. The sound of jaws on raw organ - tearing, gulping. Earned.

SCENE 6 - "BACK FROM THE HUNT"

EXT. CATTLE SHED - LATE MORNING

Hooves returning. Keeper first - trotting ahead, panting. Then Calloway, his horse behind him. The pack horse loaded heavy - the creak of leather straining under the weight.

LIV

They're back.

HARLAN

(listening)

What'd you get?

CALLOWAY

Elk. Young cow. Maybe three hundred pounds on the hoof.

The heavy wet sound of the carcass sacks being pulled off the horse and onto the ground.

HARLAN

You field dress it up there?

CALLOWAY

Yeah. And quartered, then went back for the horse to haul him. Keeper got the heart. Saved the liver. Eyes were clear.

MIRA

Good. Robert needs the iron.

The sound of butchering - knife on hide, the wet separation of muscle from bone. Methodical. Calloway works fast.

ROBERT

That's way more than we can eat.

CALLOWAY

That's the idea.

A beat.

ROBERT

What do you mean?

CALLOWAY

The reservation's ahead. Mira says the Cheyenne might still be at Lame Deer. If they are, we don't show up empty-handed.

MIRA

He's right. We need what they have. Medicine, bandages, someone who knows the trail west. You don't ask for all that with nothing to offer.

ROBERT

We have the extra horses.

CALLOWAY

We might need the horses. Meat's easier to give up. And it says something - we hunted on their land. Bringing back a share says we respect that.

The butchering continues. Cutting, wrapping - cloth around meat, tied and packed.

MIRA

How much are you keeping back?

CALLOWAY

A full quarter for them. Hindquarter - the good cuts. Rest is ours.

LIV

What if they're not there?

CALLOWAY

Then we have steak with every meal.

Keeper noses at the scraps on the ground. Calloway tosses him something - the snap of the dog catching it, then the sound of bones being crunched.

HARLAN
Save me a rib.

MIRA
You're getting broth.

HARLAN
I said a rib.

MIRA
And I said broth. You can barely breathe, Harlan. You're not chewing through elk ribs.

HARLAN
(quiet)
I liked it better when you weren't my doctor.

MIRA
I'm not only your doctor. I'm the only person here who'll tell you no.

The packing continues. The sound of a camp preparing to move again - saddles being checked, bags cinched, the fire being kicked apart and stamped.

CALLOWAY
We should go. The longer we sit, the farther behind we get.

ROBERT
How far to Lane Deer?

CALLOWAY
If we push it, tonight. If we're careful with the wounded, tomorrow morning.

HARLAN
We push it.

MIRA
Harlan -

HARLAN
We push it, Mira.

The group mounts. Leather creaking, horses blowing. Seven horses now - five ridden, one loaded with meat and gear, one spare. They move out. Hooves on frozen ground, heading west.

Keeper trots ahead, nose to the trail. The hunt is over. The road isn't.

SCENE 7 - "ASHLAND"

EXT. ASHLAND - LATER

The sound of a town that isn't there. Wind through empty structures. A door banging somewhere - rhythmic, unlatched, swinging. No voices. No animals. No smoke smell. Nothing.

MIRA

Ashland.

They ride in slow. The horses' hooves echo off buildings - the hollow sound of empty streets.

LIV

Hello?

Her voice carries. Bounces off walls. Comes back to her.

Nothing.

CALLOWAY

May as well check the buildings.
Anything useful - medicine, tools,
cloth. Be quick.

Boots on a porch. A door pushed open - the groan of swollen wood. Footsteps inside.

ROBERT

(distant)

Nothing in here.

Shelves being checked. Drawers pulled open. Empty. Empty.

MIRA

Picked clean. They took everything
when they left.

Robert tries a different building. Another groaning door. More nothing.

ROBERT

Same. Not even mattresses.

LIV

There's writing on this one.
Scratched into the door frame.

A beat.

LIV (CONT'D)

"Gone west. God help us."

The wind. The banging door.

HARLAN

(from his horse)

Nothing here, folks. Let's go.

CALLOWAY

He's right. We're burning daylight.

They mount up. The sound of Ashland falls behind them - the door still banging, banging, banging - getting fainter as they ride west.

The wind fills in where a town used to be.

MIRA

(to herself, barely
audible)

Two towns in two days.

LIV

The reservation will have people
still. Right?

The hooves on pavement. The wind. The road ahead, stretching toward the reservation. Whatever's left of it.

SCENE 8 - "THE RESERVATION"

EXT. US-212 WEST OF ASHLAND - DAY

Hooves on broken pavement. Wind across open grassland. The group riding steady, spread out on the road.

CALLOWAY

Slow down.

ROBERT
What is it?

CALLOWAY
That fence has been mended.
Recently.

They ride slower. Hooves quieter. Listening.

HARLAN
Tracks. A lot of them.

CALLOWAY
Days old. Some fresher than that.

Keeper's breathing changes. Ears forward - the group can hear the tags on his collar shift. He's not growling. Not tense. Alert.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Keeper smells them.

LIV
Smells who?

CALLOWAY
People.

They ride on.

LIV
I smell smoke.

MIRA
(low, to Calloway)
They know we're here.

CALLOWAY
They've known since Ashland. Maybe before.

MIRA
Scouts? How can you be sure?

CALLOWAY
Because that's what I'd do.

A beat. The road. The wind. Then - hooves. Not theirs. Coming from the northwest, off the main road. Three horses, maybe four, moving at an easy lope. Getting closer.

HARLAN
Three riders coming.

CALLOWAY

(calm)

Nobody reach for anything. Hands
where they can see them.

ROBERT

Calloway -

CALLOWAY

These aren't raiders. We come in
peace, spaceman.

The approaching hooves slow. Walk. Then stop. Maybe forty
feet ahead, spread across the road. Leather creaking. A horse
stamps.

A beat. The wind.

LITTLEBIRD - (he/him), steady and unhurried - he's been
watching them longer than they've known.

LITTLEBIRD

(steady, unhurried)

That's close enough.

The group stops. Silence. Both sides listening.

LITTLEBIRD (CONT'D)

Five riders. Two of you sitting
wrong - hurt or sick. You've been
on 212 since yesterday at least.

CALLOWAY

Since the day before.

LITTLEBIRD

We saw your smoke at the flooded
town.

That lands. They've been watched for two days. Nobody knew.

LITTLEBIRD (CONT'D)

Who are you, and why are you
crossing our land in February with
blood on your saddles?

A beat. Mira nudges her horse forward. A few steps. Stops.

MIRA

My name is Mira. I'm the head of a
settlement east of here, near Belle
Creek. This is Robert, his daughter
Liv. Calloway and Harlan ride with
us.

LITTLEBIRD
I'm called Littlebird. Belle
Creek's a long way from here in
winter. Where are you going?

MIRA
Seattle.

A pause. Even the horses seem to wait.

LITTLEBIRD
Seattle.

MIRA
Robert's daughter is sick. There's
a medical facility there - built
before the collapse.

LITTLEBIRD
Hm.

A second rider says something in Cheyenne - low, brief. The
first rider answers in the same language. A short exchange
the group can't follow.

LITTLEBIRD (CONT'D)
The two who are hurt. What
happened?

MIRA
We were ambushed at the lake. Three
men on the road. Two of ours took
injuries - a gunshot and busted
ribs. The men who ambushed us
didn't make it.

LITTLEBIRD
We heard the shots. Figured it was
hunters, but too many, too fast.

Another pause. A horse shifts its weight. Leather creaks.

LITTLEBIRD (CONT'D)
You have weapons.

CALLOWAY
We do.

LITTLEBIRD
And you're choosing to keep your
hands open.

CALLOWAY
We're on your land. We know that.

Calloway dismounts. His boots on the frozen ground. He walks to the pack horse - slow, deliberate, hands visible. Unties something heavy. Carries it forward.

The wet, dense thud of the elk quarter hitting the ground between them.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

We hunted on your land. Elk, this morning, above the flood line. This is a hindquarter - the good cuts. It's yours.

Silence. The wind.

One of the other riders dismounts. Walks forward. The sound of someone kneeling, checking the meat. A knife poking hide. Then standing back up.

CHEYENNE RIDER

(in English, to the first)
It's fresh. Good kill.

LITTLEBIRD

You hunt with a bow?

CALLOWAY

When I can.

A beat.

LITTLEBIRD

What do you need?

MIRA

Medicine. Bandages - clean cloth, anything for wounds. Willow bark, if you have it. Something for pain. We used everything we had at the lake.

LITTLEBIRD

And you want this for free.

MIRA

No. We'll trade.

LITTLEBIRD

With what? You've got two wounded, seven horses you need, and winter gear you can't spare.

MIRA

Information. We came from Belle Creek through Broadus. I can tell you what's standing and what isn't between here and the Powder River. Every settlement, every empty town, every road that's still passable.

The wind. The Cheyenne rider considers this. Another low exchange in Cheyenne between the riders.

LITTLEBIRD

Follow us. Stay on the trail. Don't leave it.

The Cheyenne riders turn their horses. Hooves on the packed trail, heading northwest. The group follows. Single file. Nobody talks.

SCENE 9 - "RESERVATION VISIT"

EXT. CHEYENNE MEETING GROUND - LATER

The sound changes - more people. Voices in the distance, not English. The crack of an axe on wood. A dog barking - not Keeper, different pitch. Keeper's ears prick, his tags jingle, but he stays quiet.

Children's voices somewhere, laughing.

A horse being shoed - the ring of a hammer on an anvil.

LIV

(quiet, to Mira)
How many people are here?

MIRA

(quiet, with a little awe)
A lot.

They're led to a stopping point. The riders dismount. Boots on hard ground - a clearing, packed earth.

LITTLEBIRD

Wait here.

Footsteps leaving. Voices in Cheyenne, further off. A discussion. The group waits.

The sounds of the settlement around them - wood being split, water being carried, a fire crackling, someone singing low and steady.

LIV
(barely a whisper, to
Calloway)
Everything sounds so... normal.

CALLOWAY
(low)
This is a well-running settlement.

Footsteps returning. More than one person this time. An older voice - a woman, steady, with weight behind it.

STANDINGWATER - (she/her), an elder of the Northern Cheyenne - direct, unhurried, and in no rush to trust.

STANDINGWATER
Which one of you is Mira?

MIRA
I am.

STANDINGWATER
Hello. I'm Standingwater. You run a settlement near Belle Creek. Sixty people, give or take. Traded livestock with Birney.

MIRA
We're over a hundred now, but yes. You knew Birney?

STANDINGWATER
We know everyone between here and the Yellowstone. Birney went under last spring. The dam.

MIRA
We found that out the hard way.

STANDINGWATER
Yeah... Sit down. All of you. Let me see the wounded.

Boots settling. The group sitting - some on the ground, some on what sounds like a bench or log. The woman moves to Robert.

Cloth being pulled aside. She examines the wound - quiet, methodical.

STANDINGWATER (CONT'D)
Who stitched this?

MIRA
I did.

STANDINGWATER
With what?

MIRA
Sewing needle. Thread from a
saddlebag.

A pause.

STANDINGWATER
It'll hold. But I'll put a poultice
on it - yarrow and pine pitch.
Draws infection before it sets.

She moves to Harlan.

STANDINGWATER (CONT'D)
And you. Ribs and wrist?

HARLAN
Two. Maybe three. Left side. Not
sure about my wrist.

STANDINGWATER
(checking)
OK... Your wrist will be alright,
just a bad sprain. Be tender with
it. Let me feel those ribs.

Her hands on his ribs - pressing, checking. Harlan sucks air
through his teeth.

STANDINGWATER (CONT'D)
Three. Two cracked, one broken
clean. Who wrapped these?

HARLAN
Same one who stitched him.

The woman presses again. Harlan grunts.

STANDINGWATER
The binding's good. Kept them from
shifting. You'd be in worse shape
without it. I'm going to rewrap
them with better cloth, though.
Tighter. It'll hurt worse before it
hurts less.

HARLAN
Story of my week.

Standingwater moves to Liv.

STANDINGWATER
And you- you're the sick daughter?

LIV
Um, yes.

ROBERT
She's not contagious.

STANDINGWATER
What's the problem?

LIV
I-

ROBERT
Something you won't have medicine
for. Not here.

STANDINGWATER
But Seattle does, right?

ROBERT
That's-

STANDINGWATER
I was asking her.

LIV
(nervous)
Um, yes. Yep, that's right.

A beat as Standingwater considers this. Everyone holds their
breath.

STANDINGWATER
Hm.

The sound of cloth being unrolled. Long strips, clean.

STANDINGWATER (CONT'D)
Guess I'll start with the ribs
then.

She goes back to Harlan. The woman wrapping Harlan's torso -
snug, methodical.

Harlan breathing through it.

STANDINGWATER (CONT'D)

(while working)

So. Tell me about the road behind you. What's still standing east of here?

MIRA

Mill Valley is hanging on. Maybe thirty people. They've got a well that still draws, a few cattle. South of there, along the Powder River, it's scattered - family groups, mostly. Nobody organized.

STANDINGWATER

Ashland?

MIRA

Empty. Picked clean. "Gone west" scratched on a door.

STANDINGWATER

That was last year. They came through here - some of them. Took the ones who were willing to work. Turned away the rest.

A beat.

LIV

Turned them away?

STANDINGWATER

We can't take everyone. We feed two hundred people through a Montana winter. That takes planning, not charity.

The wrapping continues. A knot tied off. Harlan exhales.

STANDINGWATER (CONT'D)

What about the machines? The drones.

ROBERT

Still out there. We hear them at night sometimes - the hum. Haven't seen one up close since we left, but we're careful. No tech, no power, nothing that draws them.

STANDINGWATER

We don't use anything they'd care about - no generators, no batteries, nothing with a current. But they still come through, sometimes.

The woman finishes with Harlan. Stands. The sound of a pouch being opened - dried herbs rustling. Smaller bundles being counted out.

STANDINGWATER (CONT'D)

Here. Willow bark - chew it for pain. It's bitter. Do it anyway. Yarrow for the wound - mix it with pine sap, change the poultice every day. Clean cloth - three rolls. That's what I can spare.

MIRA

Thank you. It's appreciated.

STANDINGWATER

Don't thank me. You paid for it. The elk was generous. The information is useful. We're even.

A pause.

STANDINGWATER (CONT'D)

The road west from here - 212 through to Crow Agency. It's open. We keep it clear because we use it. Past Crow Agency you'll hit I-90.

CALLOWAY

Anything we should know before Crow Agency?

STANDINGWATER

The bridge at Lodge Grass is out. Has been for years. There's a good river crossing a half mile south - shallow, but cold. Walk the horses across, don't ride them. And there's a camp at Crow Agency - not ours. Crow people. They trade with us. They'll leave you alone if you leave them alone.

CALLOWAY

Understood.

The woman steps back. The sounds of the settlement continue around them - the axe, the fire. And somewhere nearby, children laughing. Not cautious laughter. Not quiet. Just kids, playing, like nothing in the world is wrong.

LIV
(quiet, barely holding
steady)
The river keeps flowing.

Mira is quiet. Listening. Not to Liv - to the settlement. The anvil. The children. The rhythm of a place that works.

MIRA
Two hundred people. How?

STANDINGWATER
How what?

MIRA
I run a hundred, and some winters I don't know if we'll make it to spring. You feed twice that. How?

A beat.

STANDINGWATER
We were here before the collapse.
We were here before the country.
The land didn't change when the lights went out. We just stopped sharing it with people who didn't know how to live on it.

MIRA
Sure, but...

STANDINGWATER
Root cellars. Elk and bison we dry in October and ration through March. Three freshwater springs that don't freeze. Seed stock we've been keeping since before your settlement existed. And rules people follow because they helped write them.

Mira takes that in.

MIRA
(quiet)
I'd like to send someone back here. When things settle. Someone who could learn from you.

STANDINGWATER

If they're willing to work, they're welcome. If they're coming to take notes and leave, don't bother.

MIRA

Understood.

STANDINGWATER

You should go. You've got daylight left, and your wounded need rest somewhere sheltered before the next cold front.

The group mounts. Leather, horses, the now-familiar sounds of five people getting back on the road.

MIRA

Thank you. For the medicine. For the information.

STANDINGWATER

Come back through on your way home. If you make it. I'd like to hear what you find in Seattle.

MIRA

We will. And when we do, I hope we can establish trade between our settlements.

STANDINGWATER

Come back alive, and we'll talk. Good luck.

Hooves on the trail. The group rides out. The sounds of the settlement fade behind them - the axe, the children, the dog that isn't Keeper.

SCENE 10 - "THE RIVER CROSSING"

EXT. US-212 WEST - DAY

Hooves on pavement. The group making good time - the road is clear, the surface held together better here than anything east of Ashland.

Mira hasn't spoken since they left the settlement. The group rides. The wind. The hooves. The silence where her voice usually is.

Calloway's horse moves alongside hers.

CALLOWAY

(low)
You alright?

MIRA

Yeah...

She feeds twice as many people as I
do. With seed stock older than the
country.

CALLOWAY

Different land. Different history.

MIRA

Same winter.

The hooves. The wind. Calloway doesn't push it.

CALLOWAY

Lodge Grass. Another ghost town.

Ahead of them - or what's left of it. Wind through empty
structures. A few standing walls. The hollow knock of a loose
shutter somewhere.

The horses slow. Stop.

LIV

Oh. Well, she did say the bridge
was out.

CALLOWAY

Yeah. Careful, don't get so close
to that edge.

The bridge. Or what used to be the bridge. A cable somewhere,
loose, swinging and tapping against a beam. Below it, water.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Ice took the bridge deck out. The
pilings are still standing, but
there's nothing between them.

Robert's horse steps forward. A hoof on the edge - loose
gravel shifting, falling. A long pause before the stones hit
water.

ROBERT

That's a good forty foot drop.

CALLOWAY

The Cheyenne woman said there's a crossing to the south. Let's find it.

They turn off the road. The pavement ends. Hooves on frozen grass, then frozen dirt, then the crunch of river rock getting louder as they descend toward the water.

The sound of the river grows. Not a gentle sound - fast, shallow, the chatter of water over stones. Ice along the edges. The crack and tink of it shifting.

They reach the bank. The horses know. You can hear it - the hesitation, the short blowing breaths, hooves planted.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

This is it. See how the rocks are flat across? Shallow. Knee-deep on the horses, maybe less.

MIRA

Maybe less?

CALLOWAY

Depends on the horse.

HARLAN

(dry, through pain)
And the knee.

CALLOWAY

Everybody off. We walk them across. Lead them by hand. The rocks are slick. You go slow, test every step. You rush, you're in the water.

The sound of dismounting. Boots on river rock. Saddles creaking as riders swing down. Robert grunts - low, tight. The wound.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

And boots off. Socks too. Tie them to the saddle.

LIV

You want us to go barefoot? In that?

MIRA

Wet boots in February will cost you your toes by sunset.

(MORE)

MIRA (CONT'D)

Your feet will warm up. Wet leather stays stubbornly wet.

Nobody argues. But nobody's happy about it. The sounds of laces being pulled, boots knocked together, tied by their laces to saddle rings. Socks stuffed inside. The small, private sounds of people preparing to do something miserable.

MIRA (CONT'D)

I'd roll your pant legs up high, too.

LIV

Yeah.

CALLOWAY

Harlan. You're not crossing on foot.

HARLAN

The hell I'm not.

CALLOWAY

You fall on those ribs, we're carrying you all the way to Seattle. Stay mounted. I'll lead your horse.

A beat. Harlan doesn't argue. That's how they know he's hurting worse than he'll say.

HARLAN

At least I keep my boots on.

CALLOWAY

I'll take the pack horses and Harlan first. Once we're across, Robert and Mira bring the rest. Liv - you help your father.

LIV

What about Keeper?

They all look at the dog. Keeper is at the water's edge, nose down, sniffing. He backs up. Whines. Puts one paw in and pulls it out fast.

HARLAN

He'll go. He just has to decide it's his idea.

CALLOWAY

Let's move. River won't get any warmer.

Calloway steps in first. The sound is different without boots - bare skin on wet stone, the grip and slide of it. Then the water. The gasp - involuntary, bitten off. The cold is a blade. It hits the ankles and climbs. The current pushing against his legs, the rocks grinding under his bare feet.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

(mutters)

God's holy trousers, that's cold!

LIV

(From shore)

How is it?

His horse follows. Then the two pack horses on a lead, splashing in behind him.

CALLOWAY

(Calls back)

Oh, it well and truly sucks.

Then Harlan's horse, led by the bridle.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

OK, hang on, Harlan.

The animal doesn't want to go - a whinny, a toss of the head.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Come on, you big baby.

Calloway pulls steady and it steps in.

HARLAN

(through his teeth)

Cold even from up here. Lord.

The crossing. Step by step. Bare feet finding each rock, testing it. Water rushing around the horses' legs - the sound changes as they move deeper. Knee-high on the animals. The horses blow hard, heads up, ears flat. The pack horse stumbles - a lurch, a splash, gear shifting. Calloway steadies the lead. Holds.

CALLOWAY

Halfway. Easy. Easy.

Halfway. The current's faster in the center channel. You can hear it - the pitch rises, the push of the water harder, louder. Ice chunks knock against the horses' legs with a hollow clack.

Then the sound of feet on gravel. The far bank. Calloway climbs out - you hear him breathing through it, the cold in his legs, his feet slapping wet stone. One horse up, then another, then the pack horses scrambling out, water streaming off their loads. Harlan's horse lunges the last few feet - Harlan grabs the pommel with his good hand and holds on.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

(calling back)

OK! It's good. Rock bottom all the way. Stay left of center - there's a deeper channel on the right.

On the near bank, Robert takes a breath. Picks up his horse's lead.

MIRA

Robert. Keep that left arm down.

ROBERT

I know.

MIRA

If you tear my stitches -

ROBERT

I know, Mira.

He steps in. The same gasp. Bare feet on slick rock, the water closing over his ankles, his shins. The cold is real - February snowmelt, barely above freezing.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Yeah, this does suck.

His horse follows. Mira's behind them with the last two horses.

LIV

(stepping in)

Oh - oh, that's -

She can't finish. The cold takes her breath. Bare feet on river rock - every stone a shock, every step a negotiation. She keeps moving. One step. Another. Her foot slides on something slick and she catches herself, arms out.

MIRA

(From shore)

Steady. Make sure each step is solid, before you put your weight on it.

Liv adjusts. Slower now. Each foot placed, gripping, finding the hold before she shifts her weight.

The center channel. Deeper here - the water hits Liv at mid-thigh. She makes a sound - not a word, just the body's response to cold that deep. Her horse is breathing hard, head up, eyes wide.

ROBERT
(ahead, through clenched
teeth)
Almost there, Liv. Ten more steps.

She counts them. You can hear her - each bare foot finding rock, the water rushing, the horse's legs churning beside her. Seven. Eight. Nine.

Her foot hits gravel. The bank. She climbs out, feet numb, legs shaking. Her horse scrambles up behind her, shaking hard - the spray flying, tack rattling.

Then - a bark. Not from across the river. Right beside her.

Keeper. Soaked to the skin, shaking violently, spraying everyone within ten feet. He'd crossed on his own. Nobody saw when.

LIV
Oh! Didn't even see you go in, boy.

HARLAN
(almost a laugh)
Told you. His idea.

The dog shakes again.

LIV
Ah! Keeper!

And again. Then trots to Harlan's horse and sits, panting, like nothing happened.

The scramble for boots.

ROBERT
Socks. I need socks.

Numb fingers fumbling with laces, trying to get socks onto wet skin that won't cooperate. Feet that have gone from burning to numb to something beyond numb. The sounds are clumsy - buckles missed, laces knotted wrong, the hiss of breath when wool sock meets frozen skin.

MIRA

Don't rub. Just get them on. The warmth will come.

LIV

(through chattering teeth)
When?

MIRA

(laughing)
Not soon enough.

They finish. The boots are on. Dry socks, dry leather. The feet are screaming as the blood comes back - you can hear it in the way they move, the careful steps, the sharp breaths. But it's already better than the alternative.

CALLOWAY

Mount up. The riding will warm us.

MIRA

Everyone check your feet in an hour. Wiggle your toes. If you can't feel them-

LIV

Tell you.

MIRA

(a small smile)
That's right.

The group mounts. The horses shake, blowing hard, eager to move.

They climb the bank back to the road. Hooves on frozen dirt, then gravel, then - pavement again. The road picks up on the other side like the bridge was never missing.

SCENE 11 - "LITTLE BIGHORN"

EXT. US-212 WEST - DAY

Hooves on pavement. The group riding steady. The wind has shifted - colder, coming from the northwest. Open country, the sound spreading wide.

They ride. The pavement gives way to dirt, then grass - a subtle shift. Hooves quieter now, muffled by frozen ground.

HARLAN

Smoke. Small fire, off to the north.

CALLOWAY

That's the Crow camp Standingwater mentioned. Let's stay on the road.

They keep riding. Keeper's claws in the grass beside them. The wind steady, pushing across the open plain.

Then Calloway slows. His horse drops from a walk to a stop. Leather creaks.

ROBERT

Why are we stopping?

Calloway doesn't answer right away. The wind. The grass moving - a dry whisper, thousands of stems bending together.

CALLOWAY

Listen.

They listen. The wind through the grass. And something else - a low, uneven whistling. The sound of wind catching on something upright. Posts. Wooden posts, spaced apart, standing in the open field. The wind finds each one differently - a hollow note here, a thin whistle there.

LIV

What is that sound?

CALLOWAY

Markers. Grave markers. Hundreds of them.

A beat. The wind. The whistling posts.

LIV

Whose graves?

CALLOWAY

Both sides. Soldiers and native Americans. This is the Little Bighorn, Liv. This is where Custer died.

Silence. The horses shift. The grass.

LIV

What happened?

CALLOWAY

A man rode into country he didn't understand. Brought two hundred soldiers with him. The Lakota and Cheyenne were already here - thousands of them, in the biggest camp the plains had seen in a generation. Custer split his forces, charged, and none of his men ever rode out. Every one. Gone. In less than an hour.

The wind. The markers. Hooves in grass where hooves charged a hundred and fifty years ago.

LIV

He didn't know they were there?

CALLOWAY

He knew. He just thought it didn't matter.

A long beat. The wind through the markers. The horses walk slowly now, picking through the field. A marker creaks as a horse brushes past it.

LIV

(uncomfortable)

Let's keep going.

CALLOWAY

Yeah. Interstate-90 isn't far now. Let's get up this bluff, and we should be able to see it.

They ride through the field. The markers thin out. The whistling fades. The grass opens up into a wide valley - the sound of space, wind with nothing to catch on.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

And there it is.

They crest the rise. Below them, the sound confirms it - the wind sweeps across open asphalt, a hollow rush that's different from anything they've heard on 212. Wider. Emptier.

ROBERT

Four lanes.

CALLOWAY

Six, in places.

HARLAN

That's a lot of road.

MIRA

It goes all the way to Seattle?

CALLOWAY

Pretty much. Through Billings, Bozeman, Missoula. Over the mountains and across Idaho and Washington. A thousand miles of highway.

LIV

And nobody on it.

CALLOWAY

That's what we're about to find out.

The horses start down the slope. The grass gives way to gravel, then the shoulder, then - hooves on asphalt.

SCENE 12 - "THE HIGHWAY"

EXT. I-90 WEST - DAY

Hooves on asphalt. Wide, open, ringing. The sound is different from 212 - bigger. The wind doesn't just blow across this road, it pours across it. Six lanes of nothing between them and the horizon.

HARLAN

I haven't been on an interstate highway since... before.

They ride. The wind. The hooves. Then - something new. A metallic rattle. Then another. Wind catching on shapes along the road. Cars.

CALLOWAY

Keep to the left lane. Looks like people have pushed most of the cars over to the right.

They shift. The cars are on the right - pushed against the shoulder and the median. The group rides past them. Wind through open windows. A low whistle through a cracked windshield. Something flapping - canvas or plastic, shredded, catching the wind.

LIV

So many... There are hundreds of them.

CALLOWAY

Everyone trying to get somewhere when the power went out.

ROBERT

They wouldn't have gotten far. Engine dies suddenly, at highway speed -

He stops himself.

LIV

What do you mean, the engine dies? All of them? At once?

Robert doesn't answer right away. The hooves. The wind through the cars.

LIV (CONT'D)

Dad.

ROBERT

The... aliens - the first thing they did wasn't send drones. It was EMPs. Electromagnetic pulses. Detonated in the upper atmosphere. Not one. Not a dozen. Hundreds. All at once. Across the whole planet.

LIV

The whole planet?

ROBERT

Every continent. Every country. Simultaneously. One pulse at that altitude covers a thousand miles in every direction. They blanketed the Earth in a single second.

LIV

What does it do?

ROBERT

A human EMP - a nuclear one - we studied those at NASA. We war-gamed them. A nuclear pulse would knock out the power grid, fry some satellites, cause problems. But most cars would keep running.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

EMPs are most efficient traveling along long conductors like power lines. The military had hardened systems that could ride it out. It was bad, but it was survivable.

A beat. The wind through the dead cars.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

What the aliens did was stronger. Not a pulse - a wall. It hit every conductor on the planet like a lightning strike. Power lines, car wiring, phone towers, undersea cables - anything with wire in it became an antenna, and the antenna cooked whatever it was connected to.

LIV

Everything?

ROBERT

Everything that wasn't shielded. If it was inside something metal - a shipping container, a steel warehouse, a military bunker - the metal blocked the field. We call that a Faraday cage.

He pauses. When he speaks again, his voice is flatter. The NASA voice. The one that explains things because explaining is easier than feeling.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Every car on this highway has hundreds of feet of wiring in it. Engine management, fuel injection, transmission, brakes - all of it runs through wire. The pulse hit that wiring and it was over. Engine dead. Power brakes dead. Steering so heavy you can barely turn the wheel. You're doing seventy miles an hour and you've got no engine, poor steering, and every car around you has the same problem.

LIV

All at the same time.

ROBERT

All at the same time. Every car on every highway on Earth, in the same second. And then the drones came. But by then it didn't matter - nobody could call for help. Nobody could organize. Nobody could even turn on a light. It was over before anyone understood it had started.

The wind. A cable somewhere, slapping against a guardrail.

LIV

So you knew what an EMP was. When it happened - you knew.

ROBERT

Pretty quickly, yes. But I also knew it was wrong - too strong. A nuclear pulse doesn't feel like that. The fluorescent tubes in the ceiling lit up on their own for a second - just the gas inside them, excited by the field. I'd never seen that before. Nobody had. And I knew whatever had done it wasn't ours. Wasn't human, I mean.

A long silence. Hooves on asphalt. The wind through a hundred dead machines.

LIV

(quiet)

My pacemaker.

Robert doesn't answer.

LIV (CONT'D)

Dad. My pacemaker has a circuit. Why didn't the EMP kill it?

ROBERT

(careful)

Yours is leadless. No wires. It's a small titanium capsule, sitting directly in your heart. Anchored to the wall of your right ventricle. There's nothing on it long enough to act as a good antenna. The wiring in one of these cars is hundreds of feet long - it collected the full force of the pulse.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Your pacemaker has no leads at all.
Nothing to collect the energy.

A beat.

LIV
So it's fine?

ROBERT
The EMP didn't touch it. The
pacemaker's fine. It's the battery.
They designed it to last twelve
years, and then you go back to the
hospital, and they replace the
whole device. That's how it was
supposed to work.

The wind. The dead cars. Robert's horse walking steady.

LIV
OK.

They ride on. More cars. A door hanging open, creaking on its
hinges. The wind through a broken window - a low moan, almost
human. Keeper's claws on the asphalt, steady beside Harlan's
horse.

Then - a sound. Small. A dry, papery rattle from inside a car
they're passing. Like something shifting in the wind. Bones
settling against a seatbelt.

Liv's horse slows. Stops.

LIV (CONT'D)
Dad.

Her voice is wrong. Flat. Robert turns his horse. Hooves
coming back to her.

ROBERT
What is it?

LIV
In the crashed car. The blue one.

A beat. Robert's horse stops beside hers.

ROBERT
(quiet)
Oh. Two of them. Still buckled in.

Silence. The wind through the car. The dry rattle again -
what's left of two people who were going somewhere ten years
ago and never got there. Going seventy. And then not.

LIV

They never even got out of their seatbelts.

ROBERT

The car stopped. Everything stopped.

LIV

At seventy miles an hour.

Robert doesn't answer. He doesn't need to. She understands now. The physics of it. The seatbelts held them through the impact.

Mira's horse approaches. Slow steps.

MIRA

Liv. Come on, honey. We need to keep moving.

LIV

Should we do something?

MIRA

There's nothing to do, Liv. There hasn't been for a long time. And we'll see many more, too.

Liv's horse starts again. Slow. The car falls behind. The rattle fades. The wind fills in.

Nobody says anything for a long time. Just hooves on asphalt. Mile after mile.

LIV

Oh, wow.

The wind hits them full. Open. Unbroken.

LIV (CONT'D)

I can see - how far is that?

HARLAN

Probably twenty miles to that ridge.

Liv doesn't answer. The wind. The grass moving across the hills in long, slow ripples.

LIV

It's so... open. The sky is bigger than the ground.

HARLAN

That's why they called it big sky country.

They ride down the far side of the rise. The land swallows them again - another long valley, another long climb.

MIRA

How many people do you think lived out here? Before.

CALLOWAY

In Montana? Million, give or take.

MIRA

And now?

CALLOWAY

Couldn't say. Thousands, maybe. Spread thin.

MIRA

A million people, and the land looks like nobody was ever here.

HARLAN

Give it another twenty years and you won't find the roads.

ROBERT

The roads should last, shouldn't they? Concrete and asphalt don't decompose. They just crack.

HARLAN

And the grass comes through the cracks. Then the roots break the asphalt. And the dirt covers the pieces. I've seen it. There's stretches of 212 back east you can barely tell from a field.

Robert doesn't answer. The wind. The hooves.

CALLOWAY

He's not wrong. Nature is slow, but relentless.

Then -

A sound. Distant. Low. Like thunder, but it doesn't stop. It rolls, continuous, from somewhere ahead and to the south. The ground beneath the horses' hooves begins to vibrate - a faint tremor, felt more than heard.

The horses notice first. Ears forward. One of them stamps, uneasy.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Quiet. Listen.

They stop. The rumbling builds.

LIV
What is that?

Deep, rolling, the sound of something massive and alive. Not a machine. Not weather. Something older. Louder now, closer.

ROBERT
(barely above a whisper)
No way.

The sound grows. Thousands of hooves on frozen grassland - not galloping, just moving. A herd in motion.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Buffalo.

Underneath the hooves, a low chorus of grunting and breathing. Deep bellowing calls rolling across the plain. The sheer weight of it - the air itself vibrating.

Nobody speaks. Nobody moves.

LIV
(almost inaudible)
How many is this?

HARLAN
Thousands.

The herd passes south of the highway - the sound sweeps across them like a wave. Close enough to feel the ground shake, to hear individual animals snorting and grunting. A calf bleats. A bull bellows - a deep, resonant sound that seems to come from the ground itself.

MIRA
(quiet, her voice
unsteady)
They came back.

The herd moves. The sound drifts south and west, rolling across the grassland. The tremor in the ground fades. The hooves thin to a distant rumble, then a murmur, then nothing.

The wind. The highway. Five riders on six lanes of asphalt, staring south at something they can still feel in their chests.

HARLAN

I never thought I'd hear that sound.

CALLOWAY

Your grandmother ever tell you about them?

HARLAN

She said her grandmother told her about them. That's how far back you have to go. 1870's.

LIV

They're not afraid of us.

CALLOWAY

They don't know what we are. Nothing's hunted them in ten years. We're just another animal on the road.

They sit for a moment longer. The wind.

MIRA

I tell people back home - I stand up at meetings and I tell them - the world is healing. Give it time. Trust it. And they nod, and they believe me, or they don't. But I've never -

Her voice catches. She stops.

MIRA (CONT'D)

I've never actually seen it. Not like that.

A beat. Nobody fills it.

Calloway turns his horse west.

CALLOWAY

Let's keep going.

The group follows. Hooves on asphalt. Heading west. The buffalo gone, but the feeling of them still in the ground.

They ride. Then - a sharp snap of leather. A metallic clang against asphalt. One of the new horses lurches sideways.

HARLAN

Whoa - easy. Stirrup leather broke on one of our new horses. The whole iron came off.

The group slows. Horses shifting. Harlan dismounts - boots on asphalt.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Leather's rotted through. Somebody wasn't taking care of his tack.

CALLOWAY

Can you tie it off?

HARLAN

Not with what's left. The strap tore right at the buckle.

A beat. Boots on asphalt - lighter. Liv has dismounted.

LIV

Let me see it.

She picks up the stirrup iron from the asphalt. Turns it in her hands. Examines the broken leather.

LIV (CONT'D)

The stirrup iron is fine. It's just the leather. Does anyone have cord? Anything strong?

CALLOWAY

I've got paracord in the saddlebag.

A buckle opens. Rummaging. He tosses it to her - a small catch.

LIV

Great, give me a minute.

Liv works. Quick, sure hands. She threads the cord through the stirrup iron, loops it through the saddle bar where the leather was, wraps it tight. A knife - she cuts the cord, tucks the end.

HARLAN

That'll hold?

LIV

It'll hold until we can find real leather to replace it. The cord won't rot like the strap did.

Harlan tests it - pulls down on the iron. It holds firm.

HARLAN
Huh. Alright, then.

They mount up. The group moves again. Hooves on asphalt.

SCENE 13 - "THE STARS"

EXT. I-90 SHOULDER / UNDERPASS CAMP - LATE AFTERNOON

The group slows. You can hear it in the horses - the rhythm breaking down, hooves dragging, the pack horse stumbling. Someone's saddle creaks as they shift weight wrong. Robert hisses through his teeth.

MIRA
We're stopping.

ROBERT
We can make another five miles
before dark.

MIRA
Robert, you've been bleeding
through your bandage for the last
hour. Harlan hasn't said a word
since noon, which means he's in
more pain than he'll admit. The
horses are stumbling. We're
stopping.

ROBERT
OK. Alright.

An overpass ahead - the sound of the wind changes as they ride under it. The echo closes in. Concrete above, concrete walls on either side. Sheltered. Out of the wind for the first time all day.

CALLOWAY
Under this overpass will work. Wind
break, solid ground, sight lines in
both directions. We can camp under
it, and let the horses have some
open space.

The group dismounts.

LIV
I'll get the horses settled. Lay
out the saddlebags?

CALLOWAY

Yeah, that'd be good. And anything wet. Let things dry out, if possible.

The sounds of camp being made - saddles pulled off with a heavy creak, blankets laid out, horses tied to a guardrail.

Robert sits down hard against the concrete wall. A pained grunt he can't hold back.

MIRA

Let me see it.

Cloth peeling away from skin. Mira checking the wound.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Stitches held. But you've been pulling at it all day. You have to stop reaching for things with that arm.

ROBERT

I was adjusting the saddle.

MIRA

Ask someone else to adjust the saddle.

She re-wraps the wound. Robert breathes through it.

CALLOWAY

I'll get the fire going.

HARLAN

(Taking out his ax)

I'll bring you some wood. Saw some nice branches over there.

The camp ax - short, sharp strokes. But each swing costs him - a tight grunt on the follow-through, the ribs catching. He splits one piece, stacks it. Starts another. This one locks him up - a hiss through his teeth, the ax stopping mid-swing.

MIRA

Give me that.

HARLAN

I got it.

MIRA

Harlan. Give me the ax.

A beat. He hands it over. Mira splits the rest - steady, unhurried. Not as clean as Harlan, but she gets it done. She stacks the wood and sets the ax down on the concrete beside the pile.

HARLAN

I keep it sharp, so don't bang it
on the concrete.

MIRA

I know how to set down an ax.

CALLOWAY

Harlan, come sit with me.

HARLAN

(Pained)

Alright, believe I will.

Harlan eases himself down. The careful, controlled descent of a man with broken ribs finding a position that hurts the least. Keeper settles beside him. The thump of the dog lying down, chin on paws.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Yeah, you're a good boy, aren't
you?

LIV

(outside)

How far did we come today?

CALLOWAY

Maybe fifteen miles.

LIV

(outside)

Is that good?

CALLOWAY

It's what we did.

The fire builds. Robert stares into it. You can hear it in the way he shifts - the restlessness, the inability to sit still. His boot scrapes the concrete. He adjusts his coat. Shifts again.

MIRA

(low, to Calloway)

Robert's antsy.

CALLOWAY

Well, he has reason to be. But if
we push too hard, we'll burn out.

(MORE)

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

And that doesn't help the girl one bit.

MIRA

Agreed.

CALLOWAY

Hey, bring me that elk quarter?
Let's have steaks tonight.

MIRA

Hell, yeah.

She hauls it over, drops it.

The sound of meat being cut. The sizzle of it hitting a hot cast iron skillet by the fire. The smell - you can almost hear the group come alive around it.

HARLAN

Damn, that smells good.

MIRA

And here, cook this up for Robert.

CALLOWAY

Sure thing.

Calloway starts cooking the liver. The sizzle of it in the skillet.

Keeper lifts his head at the smell, sniffs.

HARLAN

My grandmother used to fry up liver with onions on Sunday nights.

LIV

Was it good?

HARLAN

Hated it. Every Sunday I'd beg for something else. She'd say, "You'll miss it when it's gone."

A beat. The fire. The skillet.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

She was right about most things.

CALLOWAY

Mine did the same. Only it was deer liver, not beef. She'd season it with wild sage.

LIV

You two sound like you were raised
by the same woman.

CALLOWAY

Heh. Maybe we were. Different
kitchens, same lessons.

The liver sizzling. The steaks crackling. The fire popping
low and steady.

MIRA

Robert. Here.

ROBERT

What is this?

MIRA

Liver. Calloway saved it for you,
from his elk hunt.

ROBERT

Oh, thanks, but I'm not crazy about
-

MIRA

You lost blood, Robert. Liver has
more iron than anything else we're
carrying. You eat it or I hold your
nose and feed it to you. Your
choice.

A beat. He takes a bite.

ROBERT

(chewing)

It's not awful, I guess.

HARLAN

Hey, I'll take some of that.

MIRA

You'll get your share. Robert first
- he's down a pint.

Night falls. The sounds change. The fire lower now. The wind
above the overpass - a constant, hollow rush.

An owl somewhere, distant.

The scrape of the skillet being wiped clean.

A canteen passed around - the slosh, the cap twisting shut.

HARLAN
 (a long, satisfied exhale)
 That was the best meal I've had in
 a month.

Coyotes, further out - a rising, yipping chorus that comes
 and goes.

A blanket pulled up. The fire popping low. The thump of the
 dog settling his chin on his paws.

MIRA
 Goodnight, everyone.

LIV
 Night, Mira.

The camp goes quiet. Breathing. The wind above the overpass,
 steady, passing over them instead of through them.

The fire ticking down.

Liv is awake. You hear her - the rustle of her blanket, a
 small shift.

LIV (CONT'D)
 (Softly)
 Dad? Are you up?

ROBERT
 (from the edge of the
 overpass)
 Yeah. Out here.

Footsteps on concrete. Liv walks to where Robert is standing -
 or leaning, favoring his side. They're at the edge of the
 overpass now, out from under the roof. The sound opens up.
 The sky.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
 Look up.

A beat. The wind drops for a moment. Just the night.

LIV
 Oh.

ROBERT
 No city lights. No street lights.
 No glow on the horizon. Nothing
 between us and the stars.

LIV
 I've seen stars before, Dad.

ROBERT

Yes... but at the settlement
there's always a fire somewhere, a
candle, something. Out here there's
nothing. Your eyes open all the way
up.

A silence. The stars. The wind, gentle now.

LIV

The Milky Way is so pretty.

ROBERT

That's us. That's our galaxy, edge-
on. A hundred billion stars, and
you're looking at it from inside.

His voice has changed. Lighter. Something underneath the
exhaustion - not quite excitement, but close. The version of
Robert that used to stand in front of rooms and explain the
universe. The NASA version.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Here. I want to show you something.
Face north. You know which way
north is?

LIV

That way. I think.

ROBERT

Close enough. Now look for the Big
Dipper - the seven bright stars,
like a ladle.

LIV

I know the Big Dipper.

ROBERT

Good. Now take the two stars at the
front of the ladle - the ones
furthest from the handle. Draw a
line through them, straight up.
Follow it about five times the
distance between those two stars.
What do you hit?

A pause. Liv looking.

LIV

That bright one? By itself?

ROBERT

That's Polaris. The North Star. It doesn't move, Liv. Every other star in the sky rotates around it, but Polaris stays fixed. It's been sitting there for every navigator, every explorer, every lost person who ever looked up. Before compasses. Before maps. Before any of it. That star.

LIV

It doesn't move at all?

ROBERT

Not enough to matter. Now - hold your fist out. Arm straight. Put the bottom of your fist on the horizon and stack fists up to Polaris. Count them.

The sound of Liv extending her arm. A pause.

LIV

Four. And a little more. Almost five.

ROBERT

Each fist is about ten degrees. So Polaris is sitting at roughly forty-seven degrees above the horizon.

LIV

OK. What does that tell me?

ROBERT

That's your latitude. That number - forty-seven degrees north - that's where you are on the Earth, right now. That's south-central Montana. As you walk north, Polaris climbs. Walk south, it sinks.

LIV

(quiet)

So I always know where I am. Just by looking up.

ROBERT

Well, your latitude, anyway. Longitude is harder. As long as you can see the sky. No batteries. No circuits. No signal.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Nothing that can break or run out
or get fried by a pulse. Just your
eyes, your fist, and a star that's
been in the same place for ten
thousand years.

A long silence. The stars. The wind.

LIV

That's the most Mira thing you've
ever said.

Robert laughs. Small, surprised - the first laugh from him in
days. Then the laugh catches his stitches. A sharp hiss.

ROBERT

Ow. Don't make me laugh.

LIV

(smiling)

I'm serious. The thing that lasts
needs no power source? That's her
whole philosophy.

ROBERT

(still recovering)

It's not philosophy. It's
astronomy. Polaris doesn't care
about philosophy.

LIV

Neither does Mira.

The wind. The stars. Father and daughter standing under a sky
that's older than everything that went wrong.

Behind them, in the dark under the overpass, a blanket
shifts. Mira, turning over.

INT. OVERPASS - NIGHT

HARLAN

(Whispering)

Did you hear that?

MIRA

Shh... I did. He'd make a good
teacher.

HARLAN

Sounded like you for a minute
there.

MIRA

(quiet)

He wants to get back to the stars,
Harlan. That's what drives him. The
trajectory, the future, all of it.

HARLAN

And you?

MIRA

I think a species that can't say
"no" to itself isn't ready to say
"hello" to the stars.

HARLAN

Hm.

The coyotes start up again, far off. The fire pops.

MIRA

Goodnight, Harlan.

HARLAN

'Night, Mira.

The stars turn, slowly, around a fixed point.

SCENE 14 - "CRASH"

EXT. OVERPASS CAMP - BEFORE DAWN

The fire is embers. The horses are picketed out on the flat
ground south of the overpass - you can hear them shifting,
stamping softly.

Then Keeper lifts his head. The tags on his collar jingle - a
small, sharp sound in the stillness. A low whine, rising from
his chest. Not a bark. A question.

A beat. Silence.

Then the ground begins to vibrate.

It starts deep - below hearing, almost. A tremor through the
ground under them. The horses feel it first. One stamps.
Another pulls at its picket, the rope going taut with a
creak. A whinny - high, nervous.

Keeper whines.

HARLAN
(waking, groggy)
What - Keeper, what is it?

Keeper is on his feet now. Growling. Barking. Not the alert bark from the trail - frantic. Urgent. He's facing south, into the dark, and his whole body is rigid.

The rumble gets louder. Closer. The ground shaking now - not like the herd on the highway, distant and rolling. This is close. This is coming.

CALLOWAY
(sharp, instantly awake)
Get up. Get up now. Something's coming.

Scrambling. Blankets thrown off. Boots being pulled on.

ROBERT
(groggy)
What? What is that?

The rumble becomes a roar. Hooves - heavy, pounding, close. Not a herd in migration. Something running. Stampeding, wildly. Coming across the open grassland straight toward the highway. Straight toward the horses.

CALLOWAY
Buffalo. Least a dozen of them.
Christ, the horses - they're right in the path.

He's already running. Boots on concrete, then asphalt, then grass. Out from under the overpass toward the picket line.

HARLAN
(shouting)
Cut the line! CUT THEM LOOSE!

The knife slashing rope. Horses screaming, rearing, pulling free. They bolt down the highway in both directions, hooves ringing on asphalt, panicked.

Then the herd hits. The sound is enormous - a dozen of the massive animals pouring across the ground in the dark.

Hooves on grass, then the sharp crack of hooves on pavement, then grass again. The ground shaking so hard the concrete overhead hums.

Liv screams.

The horses bolt in panic.

Under the overpass, the group is pressed against the wall. The buffalo are thundering past on both sides - not through the overpass itself, the concrete pillars split the flow, but everything outside is being trampled. The saddlebags stacked at the edge of the overhang. The gear laid out to dry. The food.

A saddlebag goes flying - we hear it hit the ground, burst open, contents scattering under 50 hooves. Something metal clanging across the asphalt. Canvas ripping.

MIRA

Stay under the overpass! Up against the pillars!

LIV

The horses!

CALLOWAY

(from somewhere outside,
shouting over the roar)

They're loose - they'll run clear -

The herd shifts direction, gets louder.

LIV

Dad, they're turning toward us!

ROBERT

Honey, come here. I got you, stay close. Up against the pillar.

The herd gets louder.

LIV

Dad!

Keeper is barking in the chaos - not under the overpass, he's out there. Running the edge of the herd, barking furiously, snapping. Trying to turn the stragglers away from the overpass pillars where the people are.

HARLAN

(shouting)

Keeper! KEEPER! Get back here!

The dog doesn't listen. He's working - driving animals sideways, away from the concrete. Barking, darting, barking. One animal veers - you hear the hooves shift direction, the heavy body swerving.

Then, a gunshot.

CALLOWAY
Come on, keep turning. Keep 'em
turning!

Three more shots.

The herd thins. The thunder rolling north, spreading,
dissipating.

The last few animals crashing across the highway, their
hoofbeats fading into the grassland.

Silence. Or what passes for silence - heavy breathing, the
wind, the echo dying under the concrete.

MIRA
Sound off.

LIV
(shaking)
Here.

ROBERT
(tight)
Here.

HARLAN
(through clenched teeth)
Here. Where's Calloway?

CALLOWAY
(from out on the highway,
winded)
I'm here. I'm alright.

A beat.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Harlan, where's Keeper?

Silence. The wind.

HARLAN
(urgent)
Keeper. KEEPER!

Nothing. Harlan tries to stand - grunts, the ribs. He can't
move fast enough.

CALLOWAY
Keeper!

A beat. Two. Three.

Then - from the dark - the sound of claws on asphalt.
Limping. Uneven. Getting closer. A pant. A whimper.

Keeper comes out of the dark. He's hurt - you can hear it in his gait, the hitch in his step. But he comes straight to the overpass. Straight to Harlan's voice.

HARLAN
(a sound that's almost a
sob)
There he is. Come here. Come on,
boy. Come here.

The dog reaches him. Harlan's hands on him - checking, feeling. Keeper whimpers pitifully when he touches the left side.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
He's bleeding bad. Along his side.
Something caught him.

MIRA
Let me see.

Her hands replacing Harlan's. Keeper whines but holds still.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Jesus, something opened him up.
It's a gash, wide but not deep. A
hoof grazed him. He's lucky - a
half-inch closer and it would have
caved his ribs in.

HARLAN
Can you stitch it?

MIRA
No, he won't sit still for that.
But I can pack it and wrap it. I
need the medical kit - Calloway,
where's the kit?

Calloway's boots on the highway. Walking through the wreckage outside the overpass. His boot kicks something.

He picks it up. Keeps walking.

CALLOWAY
(Outside)
Jesus.

A long silence. Then his boots coming back.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

(flat)

It's like a tornado came through.
Everything that was outside the
overhang is crushed. Saddlebags are
trampled - food ground into the
dirt.

He walks around, looking.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

I don't know. Everything's just...
everywhere.

MIRA

I need my medical kit!

ROBERT

Liv, help her. I'll go look for the
medical bag.

Robert's boots on the asphalt. Moving slow - favoring the
wound - but moving. Kicking through debris.

Something metal scrapes across the pavement. He picks it up,
sets it down. Keeps searching.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(calling back)

I've got the skillet. It's dented
but fine.

CALLOWAY

(further out)

I got two water skins.

ROBERT

Intact?

CALLOWAY

One is. Other one's split at the
seam.

He keeps going. More debris - cloth tearing underfoot,
something crunching.

ROBERT

Here - the medical bag. What's left
of it. The strap's torn off and
it's been stomped.

He carries it back. The sound of him kneeling, opening it,
sorting through. Small sounds - cloth, metal, things
rattling.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

One roll of bandages. The knife is here. A few strips of clean cloth. That's it - everything else is gone or crushed.

MIRA

The meds? Needle? Thread?

ROBERT

Not in the bag.

CALLOWAY

Could be anywhere out there. I'll search at first light.

A beat. The wind.

MIRA

Give me the bandages.

Cloth being unrolled. Mira wrapping Keeper's side.

MIRA (CONT'D)

We'll pack it with the bandage, then wrap it with our cloth. Best we can do right now.

The dog panting, holding still. Harlan's hand on his head, steadying him.

HARLAN

Just do it. I got him.

MIRA

Good boy. Hold him still. Good. Just let me get this around... Ok. And one more...

She ties it off.

MIRA (CONT'D)

That should hold until morning, if he doesn't mess with it. He needs real stitching, though. I don't know how we're going to do that.

HARLAN

He turned them. You saw it. He turned the herd away from the pillars. Away from us.

CALLOWAY

I saw it.

HARLAN

Eighty pounds against ten thousand.
And he went at them.

Nobody says anything. The wind.

Keeper's breathing - steady now, the panting slowing.

ROBERT

(quiet)

What did we lose?

CALLOWAY

I won't know the full count until dawn. The gear under the overhang is fine. But anything that was outside - the food, the medical supplies, two saddlebags at least. The horses I cut loose. I need to find them.

ROBERT

How many got clear?

CALLOWAY

I cut loose all seven. They bolted down the highway. They'll stop running when they feel safe. I'll track them at first light.

A long silence. The weight of it settling. Supplies they can't replace. Gear that took weeks to gather, destroyed in seconds by animals that didn't know they were there.

LIV

(small)

They weren't trying to hurt us.

CALLOWAY

No. Something spooked the herd - wolf, maybe, on the edge. They just ran through whatever was in front of them.

They sit under the overpass. The concrete that saved them. The wind outside, cutting across the open highway.

Keeper whimpers once, softly, then settles against Harlan's leg. Harlan's hand on the dog's head. The sound of a man holding something he almost lost.

HARLAN

Come here, boy. I got you.

He holds Keeper close, the dog's breathing steady now. The wind outside, cutting across the open highway.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

(quiet)

We're okay. We're okay.

Keeper whimpers.

LIV (V.O.)

The Cheyenne woman was right about crossing the river. Knee-deep. Cold. We walked the horses across barefoot because Calloway said wet boots would cost us our toes. He was right. She was right. Everyone who's been here before us was right. That's what good information is worth out here. More than ammunition. More than whiskey. Somebody who's been where you're going and will tell you the truth about it.

Dad's quiet in the way that means he's doing math he doesn't like. Mira's quiet in the way that means she already knows the answer. We're in worse shape than yesterday, and yesterday wasn't good.

But the stars are out, and I know which one is Polaris, because my dad showed me. Forty-seven degrees. South-central Montana. That's where I am.

I know exactly where I am.

END OF EPISODE 3