

EARTH, AGAIN
Episode 4

by

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EPISODE 4

SCENE 1 - "CRASH AFTERMATH"

EXT. OVERPASS CAMP - MORNING

Dawn. The wind has dropped. Birds - a few, tentative, testing the quiet after the stampede. The fire rebuilt, crackling low. Mira is with Keeper - the dog panting, her hands checking the wound.

He whimpers, but licks at her face.

MIRA
(laughing)
Yes, you are a sweet boy.

This cut should be rebandaged, but we've got nothing clean left. I'll have to wash what we have and let it dry.

She pats the dog gently.

MIRA (CONT'D)
It's holding for now. Good boy.

Keeper whines softly. Harlan watches from a few feet away, sitting against the concrete wall. You can hear the tension in his breathing - short, careful, ribs dictating every move.

HARLAN
Anything I can do?

MIRA
Yes. Take care of those ribs.

HARLAN
Mira-

MIRA
I know, Harlan. Just keep him calm, and don't let him open up and bleed again.

HARLAN
Ok.

MIRA
I'll find whatever cloth I can, and get it boiled.

Calloway's voice, already distant:

CALLOWAY
(calling back)
I've got tracks heading east along
the shoulder. I'll go bring the
horses back.

MIRA
(calling back)
Alright, be careful.

CALLOWAY
(calling back)
Be gone a couple hours. Maybe more
if they scattered.

His footsteps fade down the highway. The camp settles into the sounds of aftermath - Liv sorting through scattered gear, picking things up, setting them down. Robert poking through the wreckage outside the overhang.

LIV
Found a bridle. And one of the
blankets - it's torn, but usable.

ROBERT
Good. Let's keep piling up what's
salvageable. We can put horse gear
here. Food there. Anything medical,
let's put over here on my bedroll.

Harlan shifts against the wall. A grunt. Then his hand finds something beside him in the debris - wood. He picks it up. Turns it over.

HARLAN
Hm. Well, damn.

LIV
What's that?

HARLAN
My ax handle. Was, anyway. Snapped
right at the eye. Need to carve a
new one.

He sets the broken piece down. Looks around. His hand finds a chunk of ash wood from the wreckage - part of a pack frame, maybe, or a spoke. He pulls out his knife. The click of the blade opening.

He tries to carve. The knife bites into the wood - then his breath catches. A sharp hiss through his teeth. His ribs won't let him apply the pressure.

He shifts, tries a different angle, tries bracing the wood against his knee. The knife slips. He catches it.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
(under his breath)
Come on.

He tries again. One stroke. Two. The third one locks him up - you can hear it, the involuntary stop, the breath held against the pain.

He sits there. The knife in one hand, the wood in the other. Not moving.

A long beat. The fire. The wind.

Robert's boots on the concrete. Coming back from the wreckage. He stops.

Neither of them says anything for a moment.

Robert sits down.

ROBERT
(quiet)
Can I try that?

HARLAN
(resigned)
Yeah.

A beat. Then the sound of wood and knife being handed over. Harlan gives them up without a word, but you can hear what it costs him - the exhale, controlled, like setting something down that's heavier than it looks.

ROBERT
So. What are we making?

HARLAN
You ever shaped an ax handle before?

ROBERT
I've turned a few things on a lathe.

Harlan's not impressed.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Walk me through it.

HARLAN

Start at the shoulder - that's the wide end, where the head sits. Shave it down flat on two sides first. You want it wider than you think. You can always take more off. Can't put it back.

The knife starts. Long, steady strokes. Wood shavings curling off, falling to the concrete. A good sound - rhythmic, purposeful. Something being made instead of lost.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Not so deep. Follow the grain. You cut across it, the wood'll split on you.

Robert adjusts. The strokes get smoother.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Better.

They work. Harlan talks, Robert carves. The fire crackles. Shavings pile up between them. Shoulder, throat, grip - each part named and corrected.

The sound of the knife changes as the shape narrows, shorter strokes, more careful.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Where'd you learn to use your hands? You don't hold that knife like an engineer.

ROBERT

My father built houses. Weekends I'd hand him nails and try not to get yelled at.

HARLAN

Sounds about right.

Robert carves. The shape coming together under Harlan's voice.

LIV

(approaching)

What are you two doing?

ROBERT

Making an ax handle.

LIV

You know how to do that?

ROBERT
Harlan does. I'm just the hands.

HARLAN
Now let's fit it to the head. Where
is the head?

LIV
I saw it. Hold on.

Her footsteps, out and back. A heavy metal piece set down on the concrete.

HARLAN
Cut a slot in the top - straight down the center, inch deep. That's for the wedge. Then slide the head on from the bottom. Should be tight. Too tight to push all the way.

Robert works the knife, cuts the slot, then fits the head. He taps the base against the concrete. The head seats itself - a solid, ringing sound.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
Now a wedge - thin piece, tap it into the top. Spreads the wood so the head can't come off.

Light, precise strikes - wood into wood. The wedge biting in.

Robert turns it over in his hands. The weight of it.

ROBERT
Hey, it's good!

HARLAN
It's serviceable. My grandfather would've had something to say about the finish.

ROBERT
Here you go.

Robert holds the ax out. Harlan takes it. Turns it in his hands - testing the balance, running his thumb along the throat, checking the seat of the head. The appraisal of a man who knows exactly what he's holding.

HARLAN
Yeah. That'll do.

He sets it down beside him. His hand rests on it. The fire pops. The birds, a little bolder now.

Keeper lifts his head from Mira's lap, sniffs the shavings on the ground, and sets his chin back down.

SCENE 2 - "SMOKE"

EXT. OVERPASS CAMP - LATER THAT MORNING

Hoofbeats on the highway. Distant at first, then closing. Keeper lifts his head and whines - recognizing the sound before the rest of them do.

HARLAN
That's Calloway.

The horses come in - hooves on asphalt, snorting, the jangle of loose tack. Calloway's boots hit the ground. He's breathing hard. Been walking fast.

CALLOWAY
I got six. The Bay is long gone.
Tracks went south off the highway
into a ravine - I followed them a
quarter mile but she's running
wild. I couldn't get close.

ROBERT
Six is enough. We can redistribute
the loads.

CALLOWAY
What loads?

A beat. The question lands.

LIV
Yeah, it's...not good.

MIRA
Most of the food is gone. What
wasn't crushed is ground into the
dirt. We saved maybe two days'
worth - some jerky, a bag of oats,
a handful of dried apples.

CALLOWAY
Medical?

MIRA

What Robert found last night. One roll of bandage. A knife. Some cloth strips. That's everything.

CALLOWAY

Water?

ROBERT

One full skin. The other one's split at the seam. It's useless.

Calloway is quiet for a moment. You can hear him looking around - boots turning on the concrete, surveying the wreckage in daylight.

CALLOWAY

What about the grain?

LIV

The horse feed? It's scattered. I picked out what I could, but most of it's trampled into the mud.

CALLOWAY

So two days of food. One day of water. No medical supplies to speak of. And a dog that needs stitching.

Nobody answers. The wind under the overpass. Keeper's panting. The fire, burning low.

MIRA

I boiled my t-shirt, and used that to replace Keeper's bandage. But we need to find people. There's no version of this where we make it to Billings on what we've got. That's three, maybe four days' ride and we don't have -

ROBERT

(quiet)

I know.

Mira stops. She was ready for the argument - her body was already leaning into it, the way it always does with Robert. But there's nothing to push against.

MIRA

You -

ROBERT

Mira. I can count. We need help.

A beat. The wind.

MIRA

Alright then.

CALLOWAY

There's smoke. West-southwest.
Maybe two miles. I saw it when I
was tracking the horses - a column,
not a wildfire. Chimney smoke. More
than one source.

ROBERT

Settlement.

CALLOWAY

Something. Could be a dozen people,
could be several dozen. Hard to
tell from the smoke alone.

HARLAN

(from the wall)
On I-90?

CALLOWAY

Just north of it. Looked like
buildings - couldn't make out much
through the trees, but there's a
fence line. Livestock, maybe. I
heard a rooster.

HARLAN

A rooster means they're settled.
Not passing through.

CALLOWAY

Five strangers on horseback showing
up unannounced - that's a great way
to get shot.

ROBERT

So what do you suggest?

CALLOWAY

I go ahead. On foot. Keeper stays
here - he'll just make their dogs
bark. I get close, see what we're
dealing with, come back.

MIRA

And if they see you?

CALLOWAY

Then I'm one man on foot, not five
riders. Easier to explain. Easier
to let go on my way.

A beat. Robert looks at Mira. Mira looks at Calloway.

MIRA

Go. But if anything feels wrong -

CALLOWAY

I'll be back before you know I'm
gone.

His boots on the asphalt. Walking west. The sound of him
moving away - steady, unhurried, the pace of a man who knows
how to approach a place without being heard.

The camp settles. The fire. The wind. Keeper whimpers,
watching Calloway go, then sets his chin back on Harlan's
leg.

HARLAN

Which tshirt?

MIRA

From that Suzanne Vega concert in
Atlanta.

HARLAN

Ah shit. Sorry, Mira.

MIRA

That's okay. Blood'll wash out.

ROBERT

When's the last time you cleaned
your rifle, Liv?

LIV

Um... Day before yesterday.

ROBERT

Doesn't matter. Dust gets in
everything. Let's clean them again.

LIV

Alright.

Liv pulls her rifle from the gear pile. Robert does the same.
They sit, working the actions open - the click of bolts, the
slide of metal on metal.

Cloth pulled through barrels. The small, methodical sounds of people keeping their hands busy while their minds are somewhere else.

They work. The quiet rhythm of it - bolt, cloth, oil, reassemble. Father and daughter, side by side, doing the one useful thing they can do while they wait.

Harlan's hand on Keeper's head. His breathing - short, careful, the ribs still dictating everything.

HARLAN
(quiet, to Keeper)
He'll be back, boy.

SCENE 3 - "THE FENCE"

EXT. OVERPASS CAMP - EARLY AFTERNOON

The fire has burned down to coals. Harlan dozes against the wall, Keeper curled against his good side.

Robert paces - short laps under the overhang, favoring his wound.

LIV
Someone's coming.

Footsteps on the highway. Measured, unhurried. Then a whistle - low, two-note. Calloway's signal.

Keeper's ears go up. His tail thumps once against the concrete.

HARLAN
(Wakes up)
Hey, go ok?

Calloway walks into camp.

CALLOWAY
Ranch compound. Half mile south of the highway, set back in a tree line along a creek. Fenced - real fencing, not scrap. They've maintained it. Main house, a barn, two or three outbuildings. Smoke from the house and the barn both.

MIRA

How many people?

CALLOWAY

I counted eight outside. Mix of men and women. A few kids running around. At least two dogs - I could hear a third somewhere behind the barn. Cattle in a pen, maybe twenty head. Chickens. The rooster I heard before.

ROBERT

Armed?

CALLOWAY

Four of the men had rifles. Not carrying them nervous - just had them.

HARLAN

What kind of shape is the place in?

CALLOWAY

Good. That's what struck me. The fence is solid. The barn roof is patched but sound. There's firewood stacked - and I mean stacked, not piled. Organized. These people aren't surviving. They're living.

A beat.

MIRA

Did they see you?

CALLOWAY

No. I stayed in the tree line. Got close enough to hear them talking. Normal talk - chores, the weather, somebody arguing about a gate hinge.

He pauses.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

There's one thing.

ROBERT

What?

CALLOWAY

I heard a woman. Not talking. Crying out in pain.

(MORE)

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

From inside the main house. The sounds were - regular. Coming and going.

MIRA

Like she was in labor?

CALLOWAY

That's what I thought.

Mira is quiet for a moment. You can hear something shift in her - the way she stands, the way she breathes. A different kind of attention.

MIRA

How long between?

CALLOWAY

The cries? I counted maybe - four, about five minutes apart. But they sounded wrong. Tired. Like she'd been at it a long time.

A beat. The wind. The fire.

ROBERT

So. What are we walking into?

CALLOWAY

A settled ranch. Good people, or close enough. They've got food, water, shelter, livestock. We've got nothing they need - except maybe the one thing they need most right now.

Everyone looks at Mira. She's already thinking. You can hear it in the silence - the calculation, not of risk, but of what she'll need.

MIRA

If that woman has been in labor since yesterday and the sounds are that far apart - she's exhausted. The baby isn't coming on its own. They might not know what to do.

A beat.

HARLAN

So we ride in and offer to save a mother and her baby. And in return, we eat.

MIRA
That's the shape of it.

HARLAN
And if we can't save her?

Nobody answers that. The wind under the overpass.

ROBERT
(sober)
If Mira can't help her, then we're
five strangers who showed up to
oversee a birth gone bad. And we'll
take the blame for it, fair or not.

Harlan sighs.

LIV
Mom would have -

She stops herself. The sentence just - ends. A quick breath,
like she caught something in her throat.

LIV (CONT'D)
(smaller)
She would have gone in. That's all.

MIRA
(gentle)
Yes, she would have.

A beat. The fire. Keeper shifts against Harlan.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Let's go. The longer we wait, the
worse it gets for her.

The sounds of breaking camp - what's left of it. Gear lifted,
strapped down. Saddles cinched. The horses stamping, ready to
move.

Keeper pulled gently to his feet, whimpering once at the
movement.

HARLAN
(to Keeper)
I know. I know. Easy.

They mount up. The creak of leather. Six horses on the
highway, heading west. Hooves on asphalt - the sound of
people riding toward something they can't ride away from.

SCENE 4 - "THE DEAL"

EXT. RANCH COMPOUND - AFTERNOON

Hooves on dirt now - off the highway, down a track through bare cottonwoods. The creek Calloway described, running somewhere to the left. Ice at the edges, water still moving in the center.

Then the fence. You hear it before anything else - a gate, heavy, wooden, swinging on iron hinges. Someone's opened it from the inside.

A dog barks. Then another. Not Keeper's bark - deeper, rougher. Keeper growls low in his throat.

HARLAN
(quiet)
Easy, boy. Easy.

A man's voice. Steady. Not raised, but carrying.

TOM - (he/him, 60s), the man who runs this ranch and the people on it - steady, careful, and not inclined to let strangers in.

TOM
That's far enough.

The horses stop. Leather creaking. The group holds.

The leader opens his mouth to speak - but behind him, from inside the main house, faint but unmistakable: a woman's cry. Strained. Exhausted. The sound of someone who's been at this a long time.

Mira is off her horse before anyone says a word. The creak of the saddle, boots hitting dirt.

TOM (CONT'D)
Hey - I said that's far enough -

MIRA
How long has she been in labor?

The leader stops. The question lands differently than he expected. Not a stranger asking for entry - a woman who already knows what she's hearing.

TOM
Who are you?

MIRA
Mira. How long?

TOM
(a beat)
Since yesterday morning.

MIRA
Do you have a healer?

TOM
We get along just fine.

MIRA
And how are you getting along right now?

A telling beat.

MIRA (CONT'D)
I've delivered babies. Difficult ones. Before the collapse and after. I can help her.

The leader studies her. You can hear him weighing it - the risk of strangers against the sound of that woman crying inside his house.

TOM
What do you want for it?

MIRA
Food. Water. Bandages if you have them. Enough to get us to Billings.

TOM
That's a lot for a stranger's word.

MIRA
I need to see her first. But I've heard what I'm hearing from that house before, and I know what it means. You're out of your depth. That's no one's fault - but the longer she goes, the worse it gets. For her and the baby.

Another cry from inside. Weaker than the last.

The leader exhales. A decision made not with confidence but with necessity.

TOM
Your people stay outside. You come
in alone.

MIRA
I'll need someone to help me. Her -
She means Liv.

MIRA (CONT'D)
My hands and hers. That's all.

TOM
(to his men)
Let them through. The woman and the
girl. The rest stay here.

The gate swings wider. Boots on packed earth. Liv follows.

ROBERT
Liv-

LIV
It's ok, Dad.

ROBERT
(low)
Be careful.

MIRA
(already walking)
We'll be fine. Take care of them.

Her boots on the path. Liv beside her, quick steps to keep
up. A screen door opens - the creak of old springs, the bang
of wood on wood.

TOM
She's back here.

Down a hallway, and into a back room.

And inside - the sound changes. Enclosed. A fire going. The
woman's breathing, ragged and shallow. A man pacing - boots
on floorboards, back and forth, back and forth. The husband.

A younger voice. The healer.

ETHAN - (he/him, 20s), the settlement's healer - young,
terrified, and doing his best to hide it.

ETHAN

(to the woman, trying to
be steady)

You're doing fine, Betsy. Just
breathe. Try to breathe with me.
In... and out. In...

His voice cracks on the second breath.

MIRA

How far apart?

The husband is on his feet instantly. A chair scraping back.
He puts himself between Mira and the bed.

JAMES - (he/him, 30s), Betsy's husband - protective, scared,
and willing to put himself between his wife and anyone.

JAMES

No. I don't know you. Get out.

MIRA

My name is Mira.

TOM

She is here to help.

JAMES

I don't care what your name is. Get
away from her.

He means it. You can hear his breathing - fast, ragged, a man
who hasn't slept in thirty hours and is running on something
past adrenaline.

MIRA

(not moving)

Your wife has been in labor since
yesterday. The contractions are
slowing down. That means the baby
has stopped descending. If that
doesn't change in the next few
hours, you're going to lose them
both.

The room is silent. Just Betsy's breathing and the fire.

JAMES

(quieter, but holding)

Ethan's handling it.

MIRA

Ethan looks like he was just born
himself.

JAMES
(firm)
He can handle it.

The healer - Ethan - makes a sound. Not a word. A breath that gives him away. The husband hears it.

ETHAN
(barely)
James...

That one word. The way it breaks. The husband - James - doesn't move, but something in his stance shifts. The fight draining out of him because the person he trusted just told him the truth without saying it.

MIRA
I was a nurse, before. Let me see her.

James steps aside. Not because he trusts her. Because he's out of choices.

MIRA (CONT'D)
(to Ethan)
How far apart?

ETHAN
Five - maybe six minutes. They were closer this morning but they've been slowing down. I don't - I've never - I've only read about -

MIRA
You kept her alive through the night. That's a lot.

She moves into the room. Her hands - you hear her washing them, water in a basin, rubbing them together.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Betsy? My name is Mira. I'm going to help you. OK if I check you out?

The woman moans. A sound past words. Past caring who's in the room.

MIRA (CONT'D)
(to Liv)
Hold her hand. Talk to her. Keep her here.

LIV
(uncertain)
What do I say?

MIRA
Anything. Just let her hear a
voice.

She pauses.

MIRA (CONT'D)
And count for me. When a
contraction starts, you count.
Steady - one, two, three. When it
stops, you tell me how long. When
the next one starts, you tell me
how far apart. Can you do that?

LIV
Yeah. Yes, I can do that.

MIRA
Good. You're my clock.

LIV
(to Betsy)
Hey Betsy. I'm Liv. I'm right here.
You're okay. You're doing so good.

Mira's hands on the belly. Pressing gently. Feeling. A long
moment of concentration - just her breathing and Betsy's.

MIRA
The baby's head down - that's good.
But she's facing the wrong way.
Toward the belly instead of the
spine. The back of the skull is
smooth - it's supposed to slide
through. Right now you're pushing
against the widest part of the
head. That's why it's not coming.

ETHAN
Can you - can you fix that?

MIRA
I can try to turn her. Betsy, I
need you to get on your hands and
knees. Can you do that for me?

Betsy groans. Movement - the creak of the bed, Liv and Ethan
helping her shift. It takes time. Every movement costs her.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Good. Just like that. Let your
belly hang. Breathe.

A contraction hits. Betsy cries out - not loud anymore, just
a raw, worn sound. Like cloth tearing.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Breathe through it. Don't push yet.
Liv, keep talking to her.

LIV
You're okay. Just breathe. In and
out. There you go.

The contraction passes. Mira's hands working - pressing on
the belly, slow and firm, trying to guide the baby. You can
hear the effort in her breathing.

MIRA
Come on. Come on, little one.

Time passes. Another contraction. Betsy cries out, grabs
Liv's hand so hard Liv gasps.

MIRA (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Come on. Turn for me. I'm going to
press again now.

She tries again. Pressing, guiding, her breathing tight with
effort. Then - something shifts under her hands. A movement.
Small, but real.

MIRA (CONT'D)
There. There she goes.

ETHAN
(whispering)
Did it work?

MIRA
She's turning. The head's where it
should be now. The path is clear.

A beat. Relief - but only for a moment. The next one comes
weak, barely a ripple. Betsy moans but there's nothing behind
it.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Betsy, I need you to push with the
next one. Can you do that?

Nothing. Betsy's breathing is shallow. Barely there.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Betsy.

LIV

(quiet)

She's so tired, Mira.

Mira's hand on Betsy's belly, waiting. Another contraction - weaker still. Betsy doesn't even cry out. Her body is giving up.

JAMES

(low, shaking)

If she dies -

MIRA

She's not going to die.

JAMES

If she dies, you're not leaving
this room.

The room goes cold. Not a threat from anger. From terror. A man standing at the edge of the only thing he has left.

MIRA

(steady)

I hear you. Now let me work.

Mira waits. Her hand on Betsy's belly. The fire pops. Somewhere outside, a horse stamps.

A minute passes.

MIRA (CONT'D)

These hides on the walls, you must
be quite a hunter.

JAMES

I... Yeah, I got most of them.
Betsy brought down that black bear
over there.

MIRA

Nice.

(low)

Liv. How long since the last one?

LIV

(steady, but scared)

Seven minutes. And the one before
that was five.

She presses gently on the belly. Feeling for the tightening that should come and doesn't.

MIRA

The baby's in the right position now. If Betsy could push, this would be over in twenty minutes. But her body's been fighting for almost two days. The muscles are exhausted. The contractions are stopping.

ETHAN

What happens if they stop?

Mira doesn't answer right away. That silence is the answer.

MIRA

I need to restart her labor.

ETHAN

How?

MIRA

Before the collapse, we'd use Pitocin. I'd start an IV drip, and we'd be in business. Her body would do the rest. Hospitals had it by the case. We didn't even think about it.

The word "hospitals" hangs in the air. A place that doesn't exist anymore.

She scans the room. Turning, listening, the small sounds of someone searching for something she hasn't found yet.

MIRA (CONT'D)

We need...

Then she stops.

MIRA (CONT'D)

That rattlesnake skin. Hanging on the wall. Is the rattle still on it?

ETHAN

What?

MIRA

The rattle. On the tail. Is it still attached?

ETHAN

I - yes. I think so. Why?

MIRA

Get it down.

Nobody moves.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Now, Ethan.

A beat. Then Ethan's footsteps. Something being lifted off a nail - the dry scrape of cured skin against wood. He brings it to her.

Mira takes the skin. Her fingers find the rattle - you hear it, the dry buzz of segments shifting. She breaks it off. Sharp snap.

MIRA (CONT'D)

OK, good. Let me get this crushed down to powder. I'll need a cup. And clean water.

ETHAN

What are you -

MIRA

Crushed rattlesnake rattle in water. It's folk medicine. Old. Older than any of us. It can stimulate contractions.

ETHAN

That can't be real.

MIRA

Remember the Lewis and Clark expedition? A woman named Sacagawea drank this two hundred years ago in a room not so different from this one. In February, no less. The baby came.

She crushes the rattle. The sound - dry, brittle things breaking between her palms. Crumbling. She drops the powder into a cup. Water poured in. Stirred with her finger.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Betsy. I need you to drink this.

Betsy moans. She's barely conscious.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Liv, help me. Hold her head up.

Movement. Liv cradling Betsy's head. The cup against her lips. Betsy drinks - coughing, sputtering, but she drinks.

MIRA (CONT'D)

All of it. That's it. Good.

She sets the cup down. The room is silent except for Betsy's breathing. Everyone waiting.

The husband hasn't moved. His breathing, ragged. The dogs outside. A child calling somewhere in the compound. The ordinary world, continuing while this room holds its breath.

One minute. Two. The fire popping. Mira's hand on Betsy's belly, feeling, waiting.

MIRA (CONT'D)

(quiet)

Is this your first?

JAMES

Second. Our boy's four.

MIRA

That delivery go alright?

JAMES

We had an older woman then. Knew what she was doing. It went fast. Nothing like this.

MIRA

The first one's usually the hard one. Not the second. She's unlucky, that's all. She's strong, James.

JAMES

(barely holding)

I know she's strong.

MIRA

Then trust that.

A long beat. The fire. Betsy's breathing.

Then Betsy's breath catches. Not a moan - something deeper. Something involuntary. Her body seizing.

LIV

Contraction. One - two - three - four -

BETSY - (she/her, 20s), a young woman who's been in labor too long and running out of strength.

BETSY
(gasping)
Oh God -

LIV
- five - six - seven -

MIRA
There it is. That's it. Betsy, this one's going to be strong. When it comes, I need you to push. Really push.

The contraction builds. You can hear it in Betsy's voice - rising, the exhaustion burned away by something primal, the body remembering what it was trying to do.

BETSY
(screaming)

MIRA
Push! Bear down - now! Liv, hold her!

LIV
I've got her!

MIRA
Keep going - keep going - don't stop -

BETSY
(a sound beyond language)

MIRA
The head's coming. I can feel it. One more, Betsy. One more.

LIV
Another one - less than a minute -

Another contraction, almost on top of the last. Betsy screams. Mira's voice cutting through it - calm, anchored, the one steady thing in the room.

MIRA
That's it - that's it - here we go - shoulders now - easy -

And then -

A different sound. Small. Wet. The gasp of new lungs filling for the first time.

Silence.

Then the cry. Thin, furious, enormous. A sound that fills every corner of the room and pushes everything else out.

Mira laughs. A single breath of laughter, involuntary, the sound of relief so deep it has no words.

MIRA (CONT'D)

There she is. Oh, there she is.
Hello, little one.

Betsy is sobbing. The husband - a choked sound, something breaking open in his chest. His boots on the floor, moving to his wife.

JAMES

It's a girl!

BETSY

(crying)
Is she - is she okay?

MIRA

She's perfect. Ten fingers, ten toes, and she is very unhappy about being disturbed. Liv - the cloth, there on the chair.

Liv moves. Cloth handed over. The baby crying - that relentless, beautiful, terrible sound.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Ethan. Come here.

Ethan approaches.

MIRA (CONT'D)

See how I'm holding her? Support the head. Always. Now - I need to tie off the cord. Watch what I do.

ETHAN

I have her.

MIRA

James, since you're not going to kill me, I need your knife.

JAMES

Here.

The handle placed in her hand. No hesitation.

MIRA

Ethan - watch what I do. Two ties
on the cord, tight, a few inches
apart. Thread or string, whatever
you have.

She works - you hear her tying, pulling the knots firm.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Now the knife goes in the fire
first. Just for a moment.

Metal against the coals. A hiss. She pulls it out.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Cut between the ties. Quick and
clean.

A small sound. Done.

MIRA (CONT'D)

There. OK, let's get her on Mom's
chest. Skin on skin contact.

She places the baby on Betsy's chest. The crying softens -
not stopping, but changing. Finding the warmth. The
heartbeat. The room breathes.

The husband is on his knees beside the bed. His hand on
Betsy's hair. He's trying to speak and can't.

LIV

(very quiet)
She's beautiful.

The baby's cry, settling. Betsy's breathing, slowing. The
fire. The wind outside.

From the compound - one of the dogs barks once, and then
silence. As if the whole place knows.

SCENE 5 - "STAY"

EXT. RANCH COMPOUND - EVENING

The screen door opens. Mira and Liv step out into the cold.

MIRA

Come on, let's get the menfolk.

The group is where they left them. Horses tied along the fence, Calloway leaning against a post, Robert standing, Harlan sitting on an upturned crate with Keeper at his feet. They've been waiting a long time.

Robert straightens when he hears the door.

ROBERT

Well?

MIRA

Baby girl. Healthy. Mom's resting.

A beat. The relief moves through the group - you hear it in the exhales, the shifting of weight, Harlan's low whistle.

HARLAN

I'll be damned.

LIV

(still buzzing)

Mira was incredible. She turned the baby with her hands. And then the contractions stopped and she used a rattlesnake rattle - crushed it up in water - and it worked. It actually worked.

CALLOWAY

A rattlesnake rattle.

LIV

Sacagawea drank the same thing. Two hundred years ago.

Calloway is quiet for a moment. Then a sound - not quite a laugh, but close.

CALLOWAY

Well, of course she did.

The compound is settling into evening. The cattle in their pen. Someone splitting wood - the rhythmic crack carrying across the yard.

Boots on the porch. The leader's voice. He's been standing in the doorway, listening.

TOM

Your friend knows what she's doing.

ROBERT

She does.

TOM

My name is Tom Garrett. That's my son in there, Betsy's husband. And my granddaughter, now.

He steps down off the porch. His boots on the packed earth, coming closer. The dogs follow him - two of them, padding along, calm now. Keeper lifts his head but doesn't growl. Something has changed.

TOM (CONT'D)

I want to thank you. All of you. You rode in here and we pointed guns at you, and your woman walked into that room anyway. I won't forget that.

A beat. He means it. You can hear the weight of what almost happened in the silence before he speaks again.

TOM (CONT'D)

We made a deal. Food, water, bandages - enough to get you to Billings. I'll honor that.

MIRA

Thank you.

TOM

But I'd like you to stay. A few days.

Robert shifts. You can hear it - the leather of his jacket, the quick breath. Time is the one thing they don't have.

ROBERT

We appreciate the offer, but we need to -

TOM

Your horses are thin. That one's favoring her left front. And the man on the crate hasn't stood up since you got here.

HARLAN

I'm fine.

TOM

You're not. I've got eyes.

A beat. The wind. The cattle.

TOM (CONT'D)

I'm not being generous. I'm being practical. Ethan - my healer - he's young. He reads every book we've got, and he works hard, but tonight he watched your woman do things he didn't know were possible. He needs to learn from her. A few days. That's all I'm asking.

The group is quiet. The real offer hanging in the air - not charity, a trade. Rest for knowledge.

MIRA

(pointed)

What do you want him to learn, from their woman?

TOM

(focusing back on her)

Whatever you'll teach him. Births. Bleeding. Fevers. The things that kill people out here because nobody knows what to do.

MIRA

That's more than a few days.

TOM

Then give him what you can.

Mira looks at Robert. You can hear the negotiation in the silence - not words, just breathing, the weight of what each of them needs.

ROBERT

(low, to Mira)

Two days.

MIRA

(low, back)

Three. Harlan can't ride like this and you know it.

ROBERT

Liv doesn't have -

LIV

Dad -

MIRA

Three days won't change that. But
riding out tomorrow on dead horses
with a man who can't sit up
straight will.

Robert exhales. Long.

ROBERT

(to the leader)

Three days.

TOM

Good.

(calling out)

Daniel - put their horses in the
south pen. Get some grain out. And
tell Ruth to set five more places.
And their dog could use a bone, I'm
sure.

A man's voice answers from across the yard. Movement - boots,
a gate opening, horses being led. The sounds of people making
room.

HARLAN

(quiet, to Keeper)

Hear that, boy?

Keeper's tail thumps against the crate.

The leader turns to go back inside, then stops.

TOM

The baby. James wants to know - is
there anything they should watch
for tonight? With Betsy.

MIRA

Bleeding. If it's more than a
trickle, wake me. And keep the baby
on her chest - skin to skin. It
keeps the temperature up.

TOM

Yes, ma'am. I'll tell him.

His boots on the porch. The door opens and closes.

The group stands in the yard. The wind has dropped.

LIV

(quiet)

Did we just get lucky?

CALLOWAY

Mira worked her magic. We were just standing near her.

Mira doesn't answer. She's already somewhere else - you can hear it, the way she's gone still. Looking at the house where a woman is holding a baby that almost didn't make it.

ROBERT

(gentle)

Hey. You did it.

MIRA

(far away)

Yeah.

A beat. The fire inside, visible through the window - the faint crackle carrying out. The horses being led to the pen, hooves on dirt, a gate latching shut.

LIV

She had me count every one.

ROBERT

What?

LIV

The contractions. Mira had me count them. How long, how far apart. The whole time.

She's quiet for a moment.

LIV (CONT'D)

I kept thinking about my heartbeat. Something's counting down and you can't make it stop.

Nobody says anything. The wind. The stars.

LIV (CONT'D)

But this was counting up. Toward something.

The baby cries inside the house. Thin, distant, alive.

SCENE 6 - "THE DINNER"

INT. RANCH HOUSE - EVENING

A door opens into a different room - bigger, open. The sound of a long table being set. Plates and cups, heavy ceramic. Chairs scraping. The fire bigger here - a main hearth, the kind you can feel across a room.

Voices. Tom's people, filling in. A woman's voice directing - Ruth, organizing the meal the way she's organized a thousand meals. Pots set down on wood. Lids lifted. A ladle hitting the side of a pot.

RUTH - (she/her, 50s), Tom's sister - runs the table and everything else, without asking permission.

RUTH

Sit anywhere. There's plenty.

The group finds seats. You hear them settling in - the unfamiliarity of chairs after weeks on the ground.

Tom at the head. His voice carries the room without effort.

TOM

We say thanks before we eat. Not to God - to the animal, the soil, the hands that did the work. You're welcome to listen or not.

A beat. The room goes still.

TOM (CONT'D)

We're grateful for this meal. For the cattle that gave it, for the hay that fed the cattle, and for the rain that grew the hay. And tonight - for the strangers who rode in and helped us when they didn't have to, and gave us little Jessica.

RUTH

Amen to that. Now eat before it gets cold.

The sounds of eating. Spoons in bowls. Bread torn. Cups filled.

HARLAN

(mouth half full)
Lord, Ruth. What is this?

RUTH

Beef stew. Nothing fancy.

HARLAN

Ma'am, I've been eating jerky and
oats for two weeks. This is the
fanciest thing I've ever put in my
mouth.

Ruth laughs. A real laugh - warm, surprised. The room
loosens.

LIV

This bread is fantastic, too.

RUTH

Sourdough. The starter's older than
you are, sweetheart. Been feeding
it since before the collapse.

LIV

You kept a sourdough starter alive
for sixteen years?

RUTH

Sure have.

The table settles into the rhythm of people eating together.
Forks and knives. Low conversations overlapping - the way a
meal sounds when there are enough people to fill a room.

TOM

So. You're heading to Billings.

ROBERT

West of Billings. Quite a bit west,
actually.

TOM

How far west?

ROBERT

Seattle.

The room shifts. Spoons pause. Someone sets down a cup.

TOM

Seattle. In February.

ROBERT

That's right.

TOM

On horseback. 800 miles.

ROBERT

That's the plan.

JAMES

(quiet, from the end of
the table)

Jesus. You know about the passes?
Look, you saved my wife and my
baby. I don't want any harm to come
to you. Bozeman's buried. Has been
since December. Lookout Pass - I
don't know anyone who's crossed it
in winter in years.

ROBERT

We know it won't be easy.

TOM

You have a talent for
understatement. It won't be
possible. That's different.

The table is quiet for a moment. The fire.

ROBERT

(steady, quiet)

We're going. Over the passes or
through them or around them. There
is no version of this where we turn
back.

A beat.

TOM

Son, I've lived in Montana my whole
life. I've seen what those passes
do in February. Ten-foot drifts.
Wind that'll knock a horse
sideways. You can't see the road,
you can't feel your hands, and if
you stop moving you die. That's not
a challenge. That's a death
sentence.

DANIEL - (he/him, 30s), one of Tom's men - quiet until the
mountains come up, then he has a story that stops the room.

DANIEL

There was a family tried to get
through Bozeman Pass last winter.
Made it about twelve miles in. We
found them in the spring.

The table is still. The fire popping.

ROBERT

I hear you. And I'm telling you
we're going.

TOM

Why? What's in Seattle that's worth
dying in a mountain pass?

The table is quiet. You can hear the group not looking at
each other.

ROBERT

There's a facility. Military, pre-
collapse. It has medical supplies
we need.

TOM

Medical supplies for who?

Robert doesn't answer. But Ruth - maybe she's been watching
Liv all evening.

RUTH

(quiet)

It's for the girl. Isn't it.

A long beat.

LIV

I have a pacemaker. The battery's
dying.

The room absorbs that. The sound of people understanding all
at once - the horses, the winter, the eight hundred miles.
The math of it.

TOM

Shit, I'm sorry to hear that.

Then a disturbing thought occurs to him.

TOM (CONT'D)

So that's... electrical?

A few murmurs of concern in the room.

RUTH

(slow)

You poor girl... How long do you
have?

ROBERT

Long enough. If we keep moving.

The fire. The wind outside. Then James - the man whose wife was dying an hour ago, who understands exactly what Robert is.

JAMES

(quiet)

You know... There might be one way. The old Milwaukee Road - the railroad that used to run through here. They didn't go over the mountains. They went under them. There's a tunnel at Lookout Pass, on the Montana-Idaho line. Mile and a half long, straight through the ridge.

CALLOWAY

(leaning forward)

It's still there?

JAMES

It's been there since 1909. I used to hike near it as a kid. The eastern portal's right off the highway - you'd ride past it on I-90. It's just a hole in the mountain. No gates, no nothing. I don't know what shape those rails are in now, but the roadbed's still there. Flat, level, wide enough for a train - wide enough for horses.

ROBERT

A mile and a half. In the dark.

JAMES

Pitch black. No light at all once you're past the first hundred yards. And the horses won't like it. The echo alone'll spook them.

CALLOWAY

But it goes through. Under the snow, under the passes, under all of it.

JAMES

It goes through. Comes out the other side in Idaho and you're past the worst of the divide. The Clark Fork valley takes you the rest of the way to Missoula.

TOM

Ruth, get these people seconds.
Daniel, you know that valley,
right?

The meal continues.

DANIEL

I do. You follow that west from
Missoula, it'll keep you low
through the worst of the mountains.
Stay along the river. It's how the
railroad went. Beautiful country,
too.

CALLOWAY

That's our plan, then. Valley
floors as long as we can, then the
tunnel.

DANIEL

There's people along the Clark
Fork. Some good, some not. There's
a trading post at a place called
Superior - or there was, last I
heard. Year, year and a half ago.
They might resupply you.

MIRA

How far from here?

DANIEL

Three hundred miles, give or take.
A week or two at horse pace if the
weather holds. Which it probably
won't.

HARLAN

Anything else we should know?

TOM

Open road. Long stretches of
nothing. That's good and bad -
nobody to trouble you, but nobody
to help you either. The weather
will be your biggest problem until
you hit the mountains.

The meal is winding down. Bowls emptied, pushed aside. Ruth
collects plates - the clatter of ceramic, the scrape of
chairs as people lean back.

A child's voice from the hallway - Tom's grandson, the four-
year-old.

BOY
Grandpa? Mama's asking for water.

TOM
I'll bring it. You go back to bed.

BOY
Why is the baby still crying?

TOM
That's what babies do, buddy. It means she's healthy.

Small footsteps padding back down the hall.

Tom pushes back from the table. His chair on the floorboards.

TOM (CONT'D)
There's a room off the barn - it's clean, it's warm, there's hay. You're welcome to it. Beats the ground.

MIRA
Thank you, Tom.

TOM
Ethan, first thing tomorrow. You and Mira.

ETHAN
(from the end of the table)
Yes sir.

Tom takes a pitcher of water and walks down the hall. His boots. The creak of a door opening. Then, faintly - Becky's voice, tired but alive, saying something too soft to hear. And the baby, fussing, then settling.

The group rises. Chairs pushed in. Boots on floorboards, then the door, then the cold night air.

SCENE 7 - "LONGITUDE"

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

The barn door slides open - wood on a metal track, heavy. Inside: hay, the warmth of animals, horses shifting in stalls.

HARLAN

A barn. An actual barn. With hay.

MIRA

Don't get used to it.

HARLAN

Too late.

The group settling in. Bedrolls spread on hay. Keeper turning circles before lying down with a groan.

Harlan is asleep almost immediately. You hear it - his breathing changing, dropping, the ribs finally letting go when his body goes horizontal.

Mira's breathing slows. The barn creaks. An owl somewhere outside.

Liv is awake. You can hear her - restless, turning on the hay. The rustle of someone whose mind won't shut off.

LIV

(whisper)

Dad. You awake?

ROBERT

(quiet)

Yeah.

LIV

I can't sleep. Can we go outside for a minute?

The hay shifts. Two people getting up carefully, stepping over sleeping bodies. The barn door, just wide enough to slip through. The cold hits - you hear them both inhale.

LIV (CONT'D)

God. The stars, they're everywhere.

ROBERT

Yeah.

LIV

I understand why you love them so much.

They stand there. The wind barely a whisper. Keeper's nose appears at the crack in the barn door, sniffs, retreats.

LIV (CONT'D)

You said latitude is easy, as long as you have the stars.

ROBERT

Mhm.

LIV

But you can't do that with longitude?

ROBERT

Nope. There's no star for your east-west position. No angle you can measure. The sky looks the same whether you're in London or in the middle of the Atlantic. Thousands of ships wrecked because they didn't know how far east or west they'd drifted.

LIV

How do you figure it out, then?

ROBERT

Time.

LIV

Time?

ROBERT

If you know exactly what time it is where you are, and you know exactly what time it is back home, the difference tells you how far you've traveled east or west. Because the Earth rotates fifteen degrees every hour.

LIV

That sounds simple.

ROBERT

It *sounds* simple. But you need a clock. And not just any clock - a clock that keeps perfect time on a ship that's rolling in thirty-foot swells, in salt air, in freezing cold and tropical heat. For months. Every clock they tried, the ocean broke it.

LIV

So what'd they do?

ROBERT

The British government put up a prize, back in 1700s.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Twenty thousand pounds - a fortune. The greatest scientists in England worked on it. Astronomers. Mathematicians. They all tried to solve it with the stars - incredibly complex lunar tables, measurements that took hours to calculate. Brilliant work. And none of it practical for a sailor on a wet deck in a storm.

LIV

Who won?

ROBERT

A carpenter. Man named John Harrison. No formal education. He built clocks out of wood as a kid - taught himself everything. And he spent his entire life - forty years - building a clock that could survive the sea.

LIV

Forty years?

ROBERT

Four versions. Each one better. The first one was the size of a cabinet - springs, gears, counterweights, all designed to cancel out the motion of a ship. It worked, but it was huge. So he built another. And another. Each one smaller. Each one more precise. The last one - the one that finally won - was the size of a pocket watch.

He holds up his fist in the dark.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

About this big. He called it H4. It crossed the Atlantic and lost five seconds. Five seconds, Liv. On a sixty-day voyage.

LIV

And that solved it? Longitude?

ROBERT

That solved it. A carpenter who couldn't get into any academy in England did what the greatest scientists of his age couldn't do.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Because they were looking up at the sky and he was looking down at the gears in his hands.

A long beat. The stars. The cold.

LIV

But they gave him the prize, right?

ROBERT

(a beat)

Not easily. The committee kept changing the rules. They didn't want a carpenter to win. They wanted it to be astronomy - something elegant, something academic. Harrison had to fight them for years. He was eighty before they paid him in full. His son had to petition the king.

LIV

That's awful.

ROBERT

He didn't care. I mean - he cared. But the clock worked. He knew it worked. That was enough for him.

The wind picks up slightly. A horse shifts in the barn behind them.

LIV

So every ship after that just carried a good clock.

ROBERT

Yep. And the world opened up. You can't navigate without knowing where you are. And you can't know where you are without time.

Liv is quiet for a long moment.

LIV

So time is distance.

ROBERT

In a way. Yeah. Time is distance.

Another silence. The stars. Robert's breathing, steady. Liv's, beside him.

LIV

Do you think that Mira will be able to teach Ethan what he needs to know?

ROBERT

Enough. But he'll have to keep teaching himself.

LIV

Forty years? Doing it over and over?

ROBERT

Yes.

LIV

It's not really the same though, is it. Learning to become a doctor now, without medical school, or hospitals...people will die.

ROBERT

People died back then too. Just because they didn't have the right clock.

LIV

So I guess...the thing you really need most for progress, to *build* something, is time.

A beat. The one thing Liv doesn't have.

ROBERT

Yes. The most important resource humanity's ever had is time.

On that heavy statement, we fade out.

SCENE 8 - "WHAT KILLS PEOPLE"

INT. RANCH HOUSE - MORNING

A kitchen table. Two cups set down. Water poured. A chair pulled out.

Ethan sits across from Mira. You can hear him - the nervous energy, the shifting, a pencil tapping against something. He's brought a notebook. The pages rustle.

MIRA
Put that away.

ETHAN
I want to write it down so I don't -

MIRA
You won't remember what you write
down. You'll remember what you do.
Put it away.

A beat. The notebook closes. The pencil set down.

MIRA (CONT'D)
What killed the last person you
lost?

ETHAN
(not expecting that)
I - there was a man who cut his leg
on a piece of equipment - a plow
blade - and it got infected.

MIRA
How long between the cut and when
he died?

ETHAN
Nine days. Maybe ten?

MIRA
What color was the skin around the
wound when you last looked at it?

ETHAN
(thinking back)
Um...red. Dark red. And there were
these lines, running up his leg.

MIRA
Red lines running away from the
wound toward the heart. That's
blood poisoning. Sepsis. By the
time you see the lines, you're
losing.

ETHAN
I know.
(then, quieter)
I know that *now*.

MIRA
So what do you do before the lines
show up?

Ethan is quiet.

MIRA (CONT'D)

This is not a test. I'm asking because I want to know what you know. So I know where to start.

ETHAN

Uh, you clean the wound. You boil water, get a clean cloth and keep it covered. Change the dressing regularly.

MIRA

Good. What else?

ETHAN

I... that's all the books said.

MIRA

The books are right. But they leave out the hard part. The patient won't let you.

ETHAN

What do you mean?

MIRA

Cleaning a wound hurts. Cleaning it properly - the way it needs to be cleaned to prevent infection - is some of the worst pain a person can feel. They'll scream. They'll fight you. They'll beg you to stop. And if you stop, they die. Not today. Nine days from now. From the thing you were too kind to finish.

The fire. The wind outside. Becky's voice, faint, from the back room - talking softly to the baby.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Give me your hand.

ETHAN

Why?

MIRA

Give me your hand.

He does. She takes it. Turns it over.

MIRA (CONT'D)

You have good hands. Steady. That matters. Now - feel here. The inside of the wrist. Find the pulse.

A moment. His fingers searching.

ETHAN

I got it.

MIRA

Count it. Don't tell me the number - just count. Get used to how it feels. Fast, slow, steady, uneven. A pulse tells you more than a patient's words. People lie about how they feel. The pulse doesn't.

A beat. Ethan counting silently.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Normal resting is sixty to a hundred beats a minute. Anything over a hundred and the body's fighting something - pain, fever, blood loss, infection. Anything under fifty and the heart's giving out. You don't need a watch. You need a rhythm. Count against your own breathing. You'll get close enough.

ETHAN

What if I can't find it?

MIRA

At the wrist? Try the neck. Side of the throat, just below the jaw. Stronger there. If you can't find it at the neck -

She stops.

ETHAN

What?

MIRA

Then you don't have much time. And you do what you can.

The fire. Cups on the table. Outside, the sound of Harlan's voice - low, talking to Keeper. The ordinary morning of a place that keeps going.

MIRA (CONT'D)

I'm going to teach you three things this morning. The things that kill people most out here. Bleeding, infection, and a baby that won't come. You already survived the third one - we'll go back over that so you know what to do next time without me.

ETHAN

You think there'll be a next time?

MIRA

How many women of childbearing age are on this ranch?

ETHAN

(counting)

Four. Five, if you count -

MIRA

There'll be a next time.

A beat.

ETHAN

Can I at least take notes on the birth part?

Mira almost laughs. Not quite - but close.

MIRA

Yeah. You can take notes on the birth part.

The pencil picked up again. The notebook opening. Pages turning to a blank one.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Alright. Bleeding first. Show me what you've got for bandages. Everything.

A chair scrapes. Ethan's footsteps. A cabinet opened - wood on wood, the rattle of supplies being gathered. Things set down on the table, one at a time. Not many things.

MIRA (CONT'D)

That's it?

ETHAN

That's it.

MIRA

And next time it happens - the cut,
the infection, the red lines -
you'll have this. What's in that
cabinet. That's what you'll have.

Ethan is quiet. The fire. The wind outside.

MIRA (CONT'D)

So let's make sure you know exactly
what to do with it.

She picks up one of the cloth strips. Turns it over.

MIRA (CONT'D)

You boil these before you use them.

ETHAN

I know that.

MIRA

Good. Now - what do you do when you
run out of clean cloth and the
water you've got isn't safe to boil
in?

Ethan doesn't answer.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Honey.

ETHAN

Honey?

MIRA

Raw honey. Straight from the comb.
You pack it into a wound and it
fights infection better than
anything in that cabinet. The sugar
pulls moisture out of the tissue -
bacteria can't grow in it. It seals
the wound, keeps it clean, and you
can reapply it every day with your
bare hands. The Egyptians used it.
Every field hospital in the Civil
War used it. It's not penicillin,
but it can work.

ETHAN

We have bees. Three hives of them.

MIRA

Then you have medicine and you
didn't know it.

She sets the cloth strip down.

MIRA (CONT'D)

What else? Pine resin. The sap - the thick, sticky kind that bleeds out when the bark is cut. You warm it until it's soft, spread it over a cloth, and lay it on the wound. It's a natural antiseptic. It pulls out infection, keeps air out, and it sticks - you don't need to tie it in place. The whole forest is a supply cabinet, Ethan. You just have to know what you're looking at.

Ethan is still. Taking it in. Then - the pencil. The notebook. Writing fast.

Mira doesn't stop him this time.

From outside - the sound of horses in the pen. Robert's voice, talking to Calloway, too far away to make out words. Liv laughing at something.

The compound waking up around them while Mira and Ethan sit at a kitchen table and try to outrun the next death.

SCENE 9 - "THREE DAYS"

EXT. RANCH COMPOUND - DAY

An audio montage. The three days at the ranch, compressed. Sounds overlapping, bleeding into each other, time passing the way it does when the body finally stops running.

DAY ONE:

Harlan. Still against the barn wall. The careful breathing - short, measured, ribs setting the limits. Keeper beside him, the dog's head on his thigh.

Ruth's voice, close.

RUTH

Drink this. All of it.

HARLAN

What is it?

RUTH

Bone broth. Best thing for busted ribs. My husband cracked three falling off a horse and I kept him on this for a week.

HARLAN

Yes ma'am.

RUTH

Drink.

He drinks. Long, slow. The cup set down.

RUTH (CONT'D)

There's more where that came from. And stop calling me ma'am. I'm not that old.

HARLAN

Yes ma'am.

A beat. Ruth laughs despite herself. Keeper's tail on the barn floor.

The horses in the south pen. Grain being poured into a trough - the dry rattle of it, then the sound of horses eating. Really eating. Muzzles deep in the feed, the wet grinding of teeth on grain. A sound like relief.

Calloway at the fence. You hear him - the creak of the rail under his weight, his breathing slow, watching the horses.

DANIEL

(approaching)

That sorrel mare. She yours?

CALLOWAY

She's the group's. But I ride her.

DANIEL

She's got a stone bruise on the left front. That's why she's favoring it. I've got a poultice - pine tar and tallow. Give it two days and she'll be sound.

CALLOWAY

I'd appreciate that.

The sound of Daniel working - a tin opened, the thick smell of tar, hands on a horse's hoof. The mare stamps once, then settles.

DAY TWO:

Morning. The compound waking up. A rooster. The dogs. An axe splitting wood.

Mira and Ethan at the kitchen table again. Closer this time - their voices lower, more intent. Mira talking him through something with her hands.

MIRA

Feel here. Right below the ribcage.
Push in and up - firm, not gentle.
If someone's choking and they can't
cough, this is what saves them.

A thump. Ethan practicing on himself.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Harder.

Another thump.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Good.

The baby's cry from inside the house, thin and distant. Then Betsy's voice, singing something - low, tuneless, the sound of someone too tired to carry a melody but doing it anyway.

The singing settles the baby. As the crying fades, we transition outside, we hear the last cry from the baby from Liv's position.

LIV

(quiet)

Hey, little one. Counting up.

Boots on packed earth. Slow, careful. Keeper's claws beside them.

LIV (CONT'D)

(calling from across the
yard)

Harlan! You're up!

HARLAN

Don't make a fuss. Just stretching
my legs.

LIV

How are the ribs?

HARLAN

I can breathe without thinking
about it. That's something.

The porch. Two chairs creak - Robert and Tom, settling in.

TOM

How old were you when the lights
went out?

ROBERT

Thirty-one. I was working from our
home in South Dakota - remote
contract with NASA. I was on a call
with my team when every screen in
the house went dark.

TOM

And your wife?

ROBERT

She was here, in Montana. Eleanor.
She'd taken Liv to visit her
brother in Great Falls, and when it
happened, she got them out. Took me
a week to find them.

A beat. The wind.

TOM

What happened to her?

ROBERT

Pneumonia. Seven years ago. Her
brother didn't make it either. He
was at a clinic that got hit early
on. One of the first.

The silence that follows isn't empty. It's full - the way a
room is full after someone says something that explains
everything.

TOM

My wife was Suzanne. Raiders. I
wasn't here when it happened.

Two men on a porch. The wind. The cattle.

TOM (CONT'D)

Ruth stepped in. She's my sister.
She held this place together when I
couldn't get out of bed.

ROBERT
Sounds like she still is.

TOM
(a quiet laugh)
Don't tell her that. Eh, she
already knows.

ROBERT
Well, Tom? Shall we get drunk?

TOM
I do believe we should.

Glasses are set out, and whiskey poured.

ROBERT
Gone, but not forgotten.

They clink glasses.

DAY THREE:

The sound of the compound has changed. Or maybe the group has changed inside it. The rhythms are familiar now - the rooster at dawn, Ruth's voice calling people to the table, the dogs circling the yard, the cattle mooing at feeding time.

Harlan at the woodpile. The axe in his hands again.

HARLAN
Alright, let's see how this goes.

A long breath. Then a swing - not full force, but real. The crack of wood splitting. A grunt - the ribs protesting.

He waits. Breathes. Swings again. The wood splits clean.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
(quiet, to himself)
That'll do.

Keeper barks once. Approval or excitement - hard to tell with him.

Mira and Ethan. Last session. The kitchen table for the final time.

MIRA
So. A breech birth. The baby's feet
are coming first. What do you do?

ETHAN

Don't pull. Support the body as it comes. Keep the head - the head is last, and that's the dangerous part. I tilt the body up, toward the mother's belly, and that helps the head clear.

MIRA

And if the head doesn't clear?

ETHAN

I have sixty seconds. I put two fingers in and find the baby's mouth. Create an airway. And I don't panic, because she'll feel it if I panic.

A beat.

MIRA

You're going to be fine, Ethan.

ETHAN

(not sure)

Yeah?

MIRA

You listen. You're not afraid to say you don't know. And you stayed with Betsy through the night when you had no idea what you were doing. That's more than most people can manage.

The pencil on the table. The notebook - full now, pages covered.

ETHAN

I don't know how to thank you.

MIRA

Keep people alive. That's how.

The fire low. The ranch kitchen. The end of a day. Water being poured into a basin. The clink of tin cups on wood. Somewhere in the other room, the baby fusses and settles.

Liv sits near the stove. The sound of a comb dragging through hair -- catching, pulling, catching again. A sharp intake of breath.

LIV

Come on. Come on, come -- ow.

She yanks the comb free. A few strands come with it.

LIV (CONT'D)

My hair is basically one giant knot
at this point.

She tries again. The comb hits a snarl and stops dead.

ROBERT

(from across the room)
Just cut it.

LIV

I'm not cutting my hair, Dad.

ROBERT

Liv, you've been fighting that comb
for twenty minutes.

LIV

I'm aware.

A beat. Robert sets something down - a cup, a plate - and
crosses the room. His boots on the floorboards.

ROBERT

Here. Give me the comb.

LIV

You're not touching my hair.

ROBERT

I used to brush your hair every
morning. Before school.

LIV

I was six.

ROBERT

I remember how to do it.

LIV

Dad. You cut your own hair with a
hunting knife.

ROBERT

And it looks fine.

LIV

It does not look fine.

Harlan snorts from somewhere by the fire. He doesn't say a
word, but the snort says everything.

ROBERT
Give me the comb, Liv.

A beat. She hands it over. The sound of Robert settling onto the bench behind her. He pulls the comb through. It catches immediately.

LIV
Ow --

ROBERT
Hold still.

LIV
You're pulling from the top. You have to start at the bottom and work up.

ROBERT
That's what I'm doing.

LIV
That is not what you're doing.

He tries again. Gets about two inches before the comb locks in a snarl. He pulls harder. Liv yelps.

ROBERT
Sorry. Sorry.
(quiet)
Your mother was better at this.

The words land and sit there. Not heavy - just true. The fire pops.

Robert tries once more. The comb moves half an inch and stops. He exhales through his nose - the engineer confronting a problem that doesn't respond to force or logic.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
I think we have to cut it.

LIV
(Resigned)
I know.

Neither of them moves.

ROBERT
I can do it. It won't be-

LIV
You'll make it worse.

ROBERT

Probably.

He pulls the comb free. Gently, this time.

LIV

Can you get Mira?

A beat. Just long enough to hear.

ROBERT

Yeah. Sure.

His boots on the floor, crossing to the door. He opens it. Cold air. His footsteps on the porch, heading out.

Liv alone for a moment. She runs her hand through what she can reach. The snarls, the matted sections near her neck. The fire ticking in the stove.

The door opens. Two sets of footsteps now - Mira's lighter, quicker.

MIRA

Robert said you want a haircut.

LIV

Want? No. Need? Probably.

Mira sits down behind Liv. Close. The bench creaks.

MIRA

Let me see.

Her hands in Liv's hair. Fingers working through it, finding the knots, mapping the damage. Unhurried. Not pulling -- just feeling.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Oh, honey.

LIV

I know.

MIRA

When's the last time you got a comb through this?

LIV

Maybe before the ravine.

Mira's fingers keep working. She finds a section near the left side that's beyond saving -- felted solid, like wool.

MIRA

This part has to come off. Back here, too. The rest I can save if you let me work through it.

LIV

How short?

MIRA

To about here.

She touches the back of Liv's shoulders.

LIV

(a small breath)

OK.

MIRA

It'll grow.

A beat.

LIV

Okay.

A small sound -- metal on metal. Scissors, opening and closing once. Mira testing them.

MIRA

Ruth loaned me her sewing scissors.
Hold still. Chin up.

Liv lifts her chin. Mira gathers a section and pulls it taut. The scissors cut. A soft, fibrous sound - hair parting from hair.

Silence for a moment. Then another cut. And another. Slow, deliberate. Mira turning Liv's head gently with one hand, cutting with the other.

LIV

My mom used to do this.

She says it the way you say something you've been holding in for a while.

LIV (CONT'D)

She had these silver scissors. They came in a little leather case. She'd sit me on the bathroom counter and I'd watch in the mirror while she cut.

MIRA
How old were you?

LIV
Five. Six. This was before.

Another cut. Hair falling.

LIV (CONT'D)
She used to hum while she did it. I
don't remember the song. Just that
she hummed.

Mira doesn't respond right away. Her hands keep working -- a
knot loosened with her fingers, hair smoothed flat, another
cut.

MIRA
Turn this way a little.

Liv turns. Mira cuts along the line she's established. Even,
patient.

LIV
I don't remember enough of her.
That's the thing. I know she
hummed. I know she smelled like
something - lavender, maybe, or
soap, I don't even know what kind.
I know she did this. But I can't
hear her voice in my head anymore.
I try and I get Dad's voice telling
me what she sounded like.

Mira's hands pause. Just for a second. Then they resume.

MIRA
My mother had hands like sandpaper.
She worked tobacco -- the curing
barns, east of Raleigh. You could
hear her hands on anything she
touched. Fabric, skin, a glass of
water. This dry sound, like paper.

LIV
Do you remember her voice?

MIRA
Her laugh. She laughed big. Too big
for rooms. People would stare and
she didn't care.

A cut. Hair falling.

MIRA (CONT'D)

I remember less than I think I do.
The memories I go back to the most -
I've worn them smooth. Like a river
stone. I can't tell anymore what's
the memory and what's the
remembering.

LIV

Yeah.

MIRA

But the body remembers things the
mind doesn't. Muscle memory. I can
feel exactly how her hand sat on my
shoulder. Right here.

She touches Liv's shoulder. Lets her hand stay there for a
moment.

Then she goes back to cutting.

LIV

Sometimes I watch you do things -
the way you check a wound, or the
way you hold the baby's head, or
just the way you walk into a room
and everyone looks at you - and I
think, that's what it's like.
Having a mother who knows what
she's doing.

A beat. Mira's hands stop.

The fire ticks.

MIRA

(careful, gentle)
I'm not your mother, Liv.

LIV

I know that.

A moment. Mira picks up the comb again.

MIRA

But I'm here. And your hair is a
disaster. So let's start with that.

Liv laughs. A real one - short, surprised.

Mira keeps working. The comb moving easier now. Long strokes
from root to tip. The sound of it is hypnotic - steady,
rhythmic, like brushing a horse.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Tilt your head forward.

Liv tilts. Mira trims the back, evening it out. Little cuts now - shaping, not removing.

LIV
How does it look?

MIRA
Like a girl who's been riding a horse across Montana for three weeks and then someone with a paring knife tried to fix it.

LIV
So... good?

MIRA
(warmth underneath it)
It looks good, Liv.

She runs the comb through one last time. Top to bottom, no resistance. The sound of it going clean through.

MIRA (CONT'D)
There.

LIV
Thank you, Mira.

A pause.

MIRA
Anytime.

Mira stands. The bench creaks.

Evening. The barn.

ROBERT
Alright. We'll be leaving soon.
Let's go through what we've got.
Call it out.

Liv looks through their gear.

LIV
Jerky - a lot of it. Some salt pork. Smoked venison. A small bag of corn meal. A bag of grain, and two of flour. Some dried peas and beans. Two full waterskins.

MIRA

Bandages, clean cloth, and a jar of honey.

HARLAN

Rope. About fifty feet. And Tom threw in some char cloth and a few torches.

ROBERT

That's more than we started with.

Calloway comes in from the pen. The barn door sliding shut behind him.

CALLOWAY

The mare's leg is sound. Whatever Daniel put on that hoof, it worked. She's walking even on all four.

MIRA

Robert, your wound is looking much better. Harlan? Those ribs?

HARLAN

I'm on the mend. I can ride. For real, this time.

ROBERT

We can leave at first light, then. Agreed?

The group murmurs in agreement.

MIRA

Alright, let's get one more good sleep.

The barn settles. Hay rustling. Keeper turning his circles. The familiar sounds of the group bedding down - but different now. Fed. Rested. Something closer to whole.

Harlan's harmonica. Low, slow, almost under his breath. Not a song - just notes. Finding each other in the dark. The sound drifts through the barn and out through the cracks in the walls, into the cold where nobody hears it but the horses and the stars.

He plays until the breathing around him goes steady. Then he stops.

The harmonica clicks shut. Keeper sighs.

Silence. The last night with a roof.

SCENE 10 - "THE GATE"

EXT. RANCH COMPOUND - DAWN

A rooster crows. Then another, answering from across the yard. Morning - early, the air still sharp with cold. The compound waking up around them for the last time.

The sounds of departure. Saddles being cinched - the creak and pull of leather straps. Saddlebags lifted and secured, heavier than they've been since before the stampede.

Horses stamping, blowing, fed and rested and eager to move. Gear checked. Canteens filled - the slosh of water, caps twisted tight.

TOM

(calling from the barn)
Calloway - there's another bag of
oats by the door. Take it. Your
horses'll need it more than mine
will.

CALLOWAY

Thank you, Tom.

The bag hauled up, tied to the pack horse. The final sounds of a camp being broken - except this time they're leaving something good behind, not wreckage.

Ruth is on the porch. You hear her - the creak of the boards, a cup of something hot set down on the railing.

RUTH

There's biscuits in that sack. Eat
them today - they won't keep.

MIRA

Ruth. Thank you. For everything.

RUTH

You earned it. Every bit.

The group mounts up. One by one - the creak of saddles, boots finding stirrups, horses shifting under the weight. They walk toward the gate.

Betsy is standing there. The baby in her arms, wrapped tight. James beside her, one hand on his wife's shoulder.

MIRA

Betsy.

BETSY

(to Mira)

I don't know what to say.

MIRA

You don't have to say anything.

BETSY

She won't let me put her down. She sleeps on my chest, and if I move her, she screams until I pick her back up.

MIRA

(smiling)

Smart girl. She knows where the good stuff is.

Betsy laughs. The baby makes a sound - that small, wet newborn noise that isn't a cry. Just presence.

BETSY

Do you want to hold her? Before you go?

Mira looks at the baby. A beat. Something crosses her face that the listener hears in her breathing - a catch, a held moment.

MIRA

Give her to Liv.

LIV

Me?

MIRA

You were there. She heard your voice before she heard anyone's.

Betsy holds the baby out. Liv dismounts - the creak of leather, boots on the ground. She takes the baby. Careful, uncertain, both arms.

LIV

Oh. She's so light.

The baby shifts against Liv's chest. A small sound. Finding warmth.

LIV (CONT'D)
(barely above a whisper)
Hi. Hey. Remember me? I'm the one
who counted.

The baby makes a noise. Liv laughs - short, real, surprised
by how much it moves her.

LIV (CONT'D)
You came in screaming and you
haven't really stopped, have you?
That's ok. Scream all you want.
You've got -

She stops.

Her breathing changes. Not a gasp - a halt. Like the air was
pulled out of her mid-word. A small, confused sound.

ROBERT
Liv?

Her arms tighten on the baby. Not a choice - reflex. Her body
is doing something her mind hasn't caught up to yet.

The world shifts. The sounds of the compound - the rooster,
the dogs, Betsy's voice - start to pull away. Not fading.
Receding. Like being dragged underwater while everyone else
stays on the shore.

LIV
(distant, strange)
I...

Her knees buckle. Not all at once - a sag, a step sideways to
catch herself that doesn't land right. Mira is off her horse
before Liv's second knee touches the ground.

MIRA
Take the baby. Take her NOW.

Betsy snatches the baby from Liv's arms.

Mira's hands are on Liv's shoulders, lowering her to the
ground.

MIRA (CONT'D)
I've got you, Liv. Down we go.

Robert is there - boots hitting dirt, running, the wound
forgotten.

ROBERT
Liv! Liv, talk to me.

Liv's hand goes to her chest, pressing flat. Her breathing is wrong - shallow, fluttering, searching for something that isn't there. Her mouth opens. Nothing comes out.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Liv!

LIV

(a single word, slurred,
fading)

Dad -

Then she's gone. Not dead - but gone. Her eyes unfocused, her body slack against Mira's hands. The weight of a person who isn't steering anymore.

One.

Robert's hand on her face. Mira's fingers on her neck, pressing for a pulse. The compound sounds - the rooster, the dogs, the baby starting to cry - all of it continuing as if nothing is wrong.

Two.

MIRA

(low, controlled, to
Robert)

I don't have a pulse.

Three.

Robert makes a sound. Not a word. Something from below language - the sound of a man watching the thing he's crossed a thousand miles to prevent.

Four.

Then it kicks back.

Not gently. A jolt - Liv's whole body seizes, her back arching off the ground. A gasp torn out of her, raw and involuntary, like a drowning person breaking the surface. Her hands claw at the dirt, at Mira's arm, at anything.

She's breathing. Ragged, desperate, greedy for air. Her eyes wide, wild, seeing everything too bright and too loud.

MIRA (CONT'D)

(steady, hands on Liv's
face)

Liv. You're back with us now.
Breathe. Slow. Breathe with me.
In... and out. In...

Liv tries. Her breathing hitches, catches, then finds Mira's rhythm. Rough, but following.

LIV
(gasping, terrified)
It stopped - my heart - there was
nothing, Mira, I could feel it -
nothing -

MIRA
I know. It's back now. Feel it? Put
your hand here - feel that? That's
your heart. It's beating.

LIV
(hand on her own chest,
pressing hard)
I couldn't talk. I tried to talk
and I couldn't -

MIRA
That's over. You're here. Stay with
my voice.

Liv's breathing slows. Ragged, but slowing. Her hand on her chest, eyes wide. Robert is on his knees beside her, and his hand is shaking - you can hear it in the way he touches her shoulder, the unsteadiness.

ROBERT
(wrecked, trying to hold
it together)
You're okay. You're okay,
sweetheart.

LIV
(small)
How long?

ROBERT
A few seconds.

LIV
It felt longer.

Nobody speaks. The baby is crying in Betsy's arms. The dogs are barking somewhere. The compound is full of sound, but the five of them are in a pocket of silence that nothing can reach.

MIRA
(to Robert, low)
Help me get her up.

They lift her. Slowly. Mira on one side, Robert on the other. Liv's legs are unsteady - you hear it in her steps, the way she leans.

RUTH
(from the porch, urgent)
Bring her inside. She can rest -

ROBERT
NO.

It comes out harder than he means it. The compound goes quiet.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
(to Ruth, gentler)
Thank you. But no.

He turns to Liv. When he speaks, his voice has a quality it hasn't had before - not the NASA voice, not the father voice. Something underneath both. The voice of a man who just watched the reason for everything almost end in a farmyard.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Liv. Can you ride?

LIV
(beat)
Yeah. I can.

ROBERT
Then we ride. Right now.

Mira opens her mouth. Closes it. For once, she doesn't argue. She heard what Liv's chest just told them. The math changed.

They help Liv onto her horse. The creak of the saddle. Her hands finding the reins. Her breathing - steadier now, but the steadiness is effortful. Chosen.

Calloway pulls up beside her. Says nothing. But his horse falls into step with hers - close enough that if she lists sideways, he's there.

CALLOWAY
I'll ride here close, for a bit.

LIV
Thank you. That sounds good.

Harlan is already on the road. He clicks his tongue. Keeper trots ahead.

The gate swings shut behind them. Betsy is standing there with the baby, watching them go. The baby has stopped crying.

Hooves on dirt. Then gravel. Then the road.

LIV (V.O.)

My heart stopped this morning. Four seconds, maybe five. Dad counted. I couldn't - I tried, but nothing worked. Not my voice, not my hands, not the counting Mira taught me. The only thing still moving was the fear.

It came back. The pacemaker found its rhythm, or made one, or remembered. I don't know how it works anymore. I don't think Dad does either, and that scares me as much as the stopping did.

We left the ranch today. The baby was three days old. I held her and she was so warm and so light and she didn't know anything about the world yet, and I thought - this is what it's supposed to feel like. A heartbeat against your chest. Steady. Sure.

Mine isn't sure anymore.

Dad didn't say a word for the first ten miles. He just rode, and I could hear him thinking - the way he breathes when the math is bad and he's looking for a number that fixes it.

There isn't one. We both know that now.

We ride west.

END OF EPISODE 4