

EARTH, AGAIN
Episode 5

by

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EPISODE 5

SCENE 1 - "THE ROAD"

EXT. I-90 WEST - DAY

Hooves on asphalt. Fast. Faster than they've ridden since Belle Creek. The rhythm is wrong - pushed, urgent, the horses working harder than the terrain demands. Wind from the northwest, steady and cold.

Nobody is talking.

Miles pass. The hooves. The wind. The creak of leather. Nothing else.

LIV
(quiet)
I'm fine, Calloway.

CALLOWAY
I know.

LIV
You've been riding next to me for two hours.

CALLOWAY
Nice morning for it.

A beat. Liv almost laughs. Doesn't quite get there.

LIV
You can spread out. I'm not going to fall off my horse.

CALLOWAY
(easy)
I like the company.

He doesn't move. His horse stays exactly where it is. Liv lets it go.

Ahead of them, Robert's pace hasn't changed. His horse's hooves hitting the pavement hard and even, metronomic. A man counting miles whether he means to or not.

MIRA
(calling forward)
Robert. We need to water the horses.

Nothing.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Robert.

ROBERT

(without turning)

There's a creek crossing in a few miles. We'll water there.

MIRA

The horses need it now. Listen to them.

She's right. You can hear it - the breathing is labored, the hooves less crisp. One of the pack horses stumbles slightly, catches itself.

ROBERT

Three more miles.

MIRA

Robert -

HARLAN

(from the back, dry)

I've got a horse back here drinking her own sweat. Pull over or I'm pulling over without you.

Robert's horse slows. Not all at once - the reluctance is in the animal and the rider both. But it slows. The group pulls to the shoulder.

The sound of dismounting. Saddles creaking. Water skins uncapped, water poured into a hat brim and held under a horse's muzzle. The animal drinks - deep, greedy pulls.

CALLOWAY

(to Mira, low)

He's been like this since we left.

MIRA

(low)

I know.

CALLOWAY

He'll break the horses before we make Billings.

MIRA

I'll talk to him.

CALLOWAY
He won't hear you. Not after what
happened with Liv.

A beat. The horses drinking. Keeper lapping at a puddle of
runoff along the shoulder.

MIRA
Then what?

CALLOWAY
Give him the day. Let him ride it
out. Tomorrow he'll listen.

MIRA
And if the horses are lame by
tomorrow?

CALLOWAY
I'll manage the horses. You manage
him.

She doesn't answer. The wind. The highway stretching west.

Liv is standing next to her horse. Mira walks over. Her boots
on the gravel shoulder.

MIRA
How are you feeling?

LIV
Fine.

MIRA
Liv.

LIV
I'm ok, Mira. My heart's beating. I
can feel it. I've been feeling it
all morning - I can't *stop* feeling
it.

A long beat. The wind. A hawk somewhere overhead - a thin,
falling cry.

MIRA
That must be exhausting.

LIV
(a breath)
Yeah.

MIRA
Can I check your pulse?

LIV
You checked it an hour ago.

MIRA
Humor me.

Liv holds out her wrist. Mira's fingers find the pulse point.
A pause - Mira counting silently.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Sixty-eight. Steady. Strong.

LIV
Same as last time?

MIRA
Better than last time.

LIV
Everyone's looking at me like I'm
already dead.

MIRA
Nobody's -

LIV
Dad won't turn around. Calloway
won't leave my side. You check my
pulse every hour. Harlan keeps
finding reasons to ride behind me
so he can watch my back. I'm not
stupid, Mira. I know what you're
all doing. I know what I look like
to you now.

The wind. The horses drinking.

MIRA
(careful)
What do you look like to us?

LIV
Fragile.

Mira doesn't deny it. The silence is the answer.

LIV (CONT'D)
And I get it. I do. But if you all
spend the next eight hundred miles
watching me die, I'm going to lose
my mind before my pacemaker gives
out.

A beat. Then Mira laughs. Short, surprised - the way you laugh when someone says the truest thing in the room.

MIRA
Fair enough.

LIV
I mean it.

MIRA
I know you do. And you're right.
We'll work on it.

The wind. A horse stamps. When Liv speaks again, her voice is quieter. Not sad - settled.

LIV
I'm not scared of it, Mira. I know
what my odds are.

I just don't want Dad to be alone.

That lands. Mira is quiet for a moment. Sighs.

MIRA
I'm still checking your pulse.

LIV
(almost smiling)
I know.

A beat.

Robert's voice, from up ahead. Already back on his horse.

ROBERT
Let's go.

The group mounts up. Leather creaking. The horses moving out - slower this time, Calloway's doing.

Hooves on asphalt. West.

SCENE 2 - "BILLINGS"

EXT. I-90 - LATE AFTERNOON

The wind moving differently. Channeled. Bouncing off surfaces that are closer together, taller. The open prairie sound compresses into something narrower and harder.

CALLOWAY

Billings.

The skyline isn't visible, but it's audible. Wind through broken windows in high buildings - a low, shifting moan that rises and falls, almost vocal. Glass somewhere, cracking under thermal stress, a sharp pop that echoes down a corridor of concrete. A traffic light swinging on a cable - the rhythmic creak of metal on metal, patient, purposeless.

LIV

I've never been in a city before.
Not that I remember.

HARLAN

This isn't a city anymore.

They ride in. The hooves change - asphalt gives way to concrete, then debris. Crunching. Glass, gravel, things that crumble underfoot. The horses pick their way carefully. A car door, caught in a gust, slams shut somewhere to the left. Keeper startles - a yelp, then quiet, pressing close to Harlan's horse.

MIRA

This is where I trained as a nurse.
St. Vincent's.

HARLAN

I did not know that. Should we go
check out the hospital?

A beat.

MIRA

No. Not long after the Collapse, it
burned to the ground.

ROBERT

Shit, I'm sorry, Mira.

Their hooves echo off buildings on both sides. Six sets of hooves become twelve, become twenty, the ghosts of a city throwing their sound back at them.

LIV

It's so big. How many people lived
here?

ROBERT

A hundred thousand. More, with the
surrounding area.

LIV

A hundred thousand.

They ride deeper in. The sounds accumulate - a flag, shredded, snapping on a pole. Sheet metal groaning on a rooftop. A door, somewhere inside a building, opening and closing in the draft, opening and closing, opening and closing. The metronome of abandonment.

CALLOWAY

Stay on the main road. Let's not split up.

MIRA

Is anyone here?

CALLOWAY

If they are, they're watching from inside. And they don't want to be found. That's fine. We don't want to find them.

They pass through what must be a downtown block. The wind funnels between buildings and hits them broadside - a hard gust that makes the horses sidestep. Something falls from a height - not close, but the crash carries. Metal on concrete. Nobody flinches except Keeper.

ROBERT

(scanning)

There. That building - the sign says pharmacy. The windows are broken but the door's still on its hinges.

MIRA

Pull over.

Robert and Mira dismount. The others hold the horses. The sound of boots on broken glass. The door pushed open - the groan of swollen wood.

Shelves being checked. Most of them empty - the scrape of fingers on bare wood. Drawers pulled open.

ROBERT

Cleaned out.

MIRA

Most of it. But look - check behind the counter. The things people grab first are the obvious ones.

(MORE)

MIRA (CONT'D)
Painkillers, antibiotics, anything
in a bottle with a name they
recognize. The things they leave
are the things they don't
understand.

She's behind the counter now. Drawers opening. Bottles
rattling - a few, scattered, rolling in empty drawers.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Epsom salts. A lot of it - nobody
wanted this. And here - iodine.
Half a bottle. That's worth more
than gold right now. Good
antiseptic, water purification,
thyroid support. Take it.

She keeps searching. More drawers. More nothing. Then -

MIRA (CONT'D)
Suture kit.

ROBERT
You're kidding.

MIRA
Surgical sutures. Sealed package.
Whoever cleaned this place out
didn't know what they were looking
at.

She picks it up. The crinkle of sealed packaging. She holds
it like something precious - because it is.

MIRA (CONT'D)
This could save someone's life.

ROBERT
Anything else?

MIRA
That's it. Epsom salts, iodine, and
sutures. From a pharmacy that used
to stock five thousand items.

They step back outside. Glass crunching. The door pulled shut
behind them - why, neither of them could say.

But Liv isn't with the horses. Calloway is holding her reins.

ROBERT
Where's Liv?

CALLOWAY

(calm)

Across the street. She wanted to
look at something.

ROBERT

She what?

CALLOWAY

She's fine, Robert. I can hear her
from here.

Robert is already moving. Boots on glass, crossing the
street. A door open on its hinges - he steps inside.

INT. STOREFRONT - BILLINGS - CONTINUOUS

A different sound. Enclosed. The wind muffled by walls.
Debris on the floor - Robert's boots crunch through plaster,
paper, something wooden that splinters.

Liv is in the back. Her fingers brush against something. A
large, solid surface.

Robert stands in the doorway. He doesn't say anything.
Outside, the wind through the city.

LIV

(quiet, not turning
around)

I know what it is. I've seen
drawings. I just wanted to hear it.

Robert doesn't answer.

She presses a key. A single piano note rings out in the dead
building - bright, out of tune, impossibly alive in this
place. It sustains, decays, fades into the dust.

She presses another. Lower. The hammer is sluggish - the note
comes out muted, felt-thick, like it's been waiting to speak
and has almost forgotten how.

A chord. This one holds. Clear, resonant, filling the room.

LIV (CONT'D)

Okay.

She stands. Her hand trails off the keys - a faint,
accidental chord, barely there. She walks past Robert to the
door. He watches her go. Doesn't follow immediately.

Then his boots. Following her out. Glass crunching. The street.

They mount up. The group rides on through the city. The sounds shift as they move west - the buildings thin out, the echoes lengthen, the wind opens up again.

Behind them, somewhere in the city, a dog barks. Not Keeper.

Keeper's ears prick toward the sound. A single whine. Then he faces forward again, trotting on.

EXT. I-90 WEST OF BILLINGS - DUSK

LIV

Nice to be out of the city. I
didn't like that. It was all too...
Close.

The city falls behind. The road opens. But something has changed.

The wind is wrong.

It's dropped. Not just eased - stopped. The air is still in a way that feels intentional, like the sky holding its breath. No gusts. No movement.

CALLOWAY

(low)
Listen.

They stop. The horses stamp. And in the stillness - nothing. No birds. No wind. No coyotes starting their evening calls. Just the silence of a world that's pulled everything inside.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Hear that?

HARLAN

I don't hear anything. Oh.

CALLOWAY

Exactly.

He looks west. You can hear him shift in the saddle - the leather, his coat - orienting himself toward something the others can't perceive yet.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

That sky.

ROBERT

What about it?

CALLOWAY

It's the wrong color. You can feel it - the light's gone flat. No shadows. When the wind stops and the birds go quiet and the sky looks like the inside of a tin can - that's a front moving in. A big one.

HARLAN

How big?

CALLOWAY

I've seen this twice before in Montana. Both times, people died.

A beat. The stillness. The horses shifting, uneasy, sensing it in whatever way animals sense what's coming.

MIRA

How long?

CALLOWAY

Six hours. Maybe less. The temperature's already dropping - breathe in through your nose. Feel that? The air's got an edge it didn't have an hour ago.

A beat. They breathe. The cold bites differently now - sharper, drier, the kind that stings the inside of the nostrils.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

We need shelter. Real shelter, not an overpass. Something with walls and a roof that'll hold against sustained wind. And we need it before dark.

ROBERT

We keep riding. We make distance while we can and find shelter when we have to.

CALLOWAY

Robert. This isn't a rainstorm. A February blizzard on the Montana prairie will kill every one of us. Including her.

The last two words land like a door closing. Robert doesn't respond. The wind - what little there is - pushes against them.

ROBERT
(quieter)
Then we ride fast and we find
something fast.

CALLOWAY
That I'll agree with.

They move. Faster now, but not Robert's desperate pace from this morning - Calloway's pace. Purposeful, the horses stretching out without being punished. The hooves on asphalt, quick and urgent, heading west into whatever's coming.

SCENE 3 - "THE WALL"

EXT. I-90 WEST OF BILLINGS - NIGHT

The first flake hits leather with a tick so small it could be imagined. Then another. Then ten.

LIV
It's snowing.

CALLOWAY
Not yet. This is the front edge.
The real snow is behind it.

They ride. The flakes thicken. Not falling - driving. Horizontal. The wind hasn't hit hard yet, but the snow is already traveling sideways, pushed by something enormous that's still gathering itself in the dark.

The temperature drops. The tack stiffening. Leather that creaked now groans. Metal bits clicking against teeth as the horses mouth them nervously.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
(calling back)
Anyone see anything? Structures,
signs, anything off the road?

HARLAN
Nothing. Open country both sides.

MIRA
How far have we come from Billings?

ROBERT

Fifteen miles. Maybe eighteen.

MIRA

There has to be something.

CALLOWAY

There doesn't. This stretch of 90 runs through ranch country. Nearest town is Columbus, and that's another twenty miles.

Then the wind comes.

The first gust hits from the side - hard enough to make the horses shy, but not enough to stop them. A shove. The snow thickens. What was falling is now flying, driven sideways, ticking against leather and canvas like thrown gravel.

LIV

That came out of nowhere.

CALLOWAY

That's the front edge. Hold on to your collar - pull it up over your face.

ROBERT

(raised voice)

How far to Columbus?

CALLOWAY

(raised voice)

Too far. Keep moving. Stay tight. It's going to get thicker. Keep the horse in front of you in view.

The second gust is worse. A sustained push that doesn't let up - the horses leaning into it, their manes whipping, the tack groaning.

The snow isn't individual flakes anymore. It's a wall. A moving, white, horizontal wall that erases the road ahead and behind.

HARLAN

(raised voice)

Damn, I can't see the road!

CALLOWAY

(raised voice)

Nobody can! Close up - get the horses nose to tail!

(MORE)

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

If you can't see the rider ahead of
you, you're too far back!

The scramble of hooves bunching together. Horses jostling,
snorting, not happy about the tight formation but less happy
about the wind.

MIRA

(raised voice)

Liv, stay between us!

LIV

(raised voice)

I'm here! I'm right here!

The sound builds. What started as wind is becoming a roar -
low at first, like something rolling toward them, then
rising, filling, until it swallows the hoofbeats. Swallows
the creak of saddles. Swallows their voices.

ROBERT

(shouting)

Calloway!

CALLOWAY

(shouting, barely audible)

Stay on the road! Feel the pavement
under the hooves! If you hit grass,
you've drifted!

And then the full storm arrives. The roar becomes a howl -
sustained, full-throated, a sound that has no edges and no
end. Ice crystals driven at speed, hitting exposed skin like
sand. The horses turn their heads away from it, trying to
walk sideways. The riders lean into it, hunched, faces buried
in collars.

LIV

(shouting)

I can't see anything!

CALLOWAY

(shouting)

Don't look! Just ride! Follow my
voice!

The wind doesn't gust now - it sustains, and then it gusts on
top of that. A blast that rises in pitch - higher, tighter, a
sound like fabric tearing, except it doesn't stop. The horses
balk. One of them rears - the whinny lost in the wind, but
the scramble of hooves on asphalt carries.

MIRA
(shouting)
We have to stop!

ROBERT
(shouting)
We can't stop out here!

CALLOWAY
(shouting)
Rope! Give me the rope!

The sound of a saddlebag being torn open in the wind. Rope pulled out - the rasp of it through gloved hands. Calloway working fast, his voice cutting through the roar.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
I'm tying us together! Each horse
to the next! Liv, cinch this around
your saddle horn!

The rope being looped, pulled tight, knotted. Moving down the line. Each knot a small, desperate act of connection against a wind that wants to scatter them.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Harlan! Tie off on your pommel!
Keeper - where's Keeper?

HARLAN
(shouting)
He's here! Between my horse's legs!

Calloway mounts up again.

CALLOWAY
OK, let's move!

They move. Tied together now, a single line of horses and riders pushing into the wind. The rope between them creaks with every gust - the sound of tension holding.

The snow builds under the hooves. You can hear the change - asphalt becomes muffled, then silent. Inches of snow, then more. The horses' legs punching through a crust that hasn't had time to harden. Each step costs more than the last.

Time dissolves. There is no distance, no direction, no progress - just the wind, the rope, and the sound of animals and people fighting to stay upright and together. The cold is in everything. The air they're trying to breathe. Liv coughs - deep, wracking, the cold burning her lungs.

LIV
It's hard to breathe!

MIRA
(shouting, close to Liv)
Breathe through your collar! Cover
your mouth!

Then Calloway's voice - different. Not shouting to be heard.
Shouting because he's found something.

CALLOWAY
There! Off the right! A sign - I
think it's a building!

They turn. The rope goes taut as the line bends. Hooves off
the road now - softer ground, snow deeper. Then something
changes. The wind drops. Not gone - redirected.

They've moved behind something. A structure. The wind breaks
around it and there's a pocket of almost-quiet on the lee
side.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Here! There's a door - metal, it's
a garage or a - help me with this!

The sound of hands on frozen metal. A door, large, sliding or
rolling. Stuck. Ice in the tracks. Robert and Calloway
pulling together - the screech of metal on metal, frozen
hinges giving way.

The door opens. The sound inside is different - enclosed,
hollow, big. An echo. Concrete floor. Something dripping in
the dark.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Get inside. Horses first.
Everything inside.

One by one. The horses led through the door - hooves on
concrete, the echo sharp and strange after hours of muffled
snow. The animals are blowing hard, shaking, ice crusting
their manes and tack. Keeper's claws scrabble on the concrete
- he's inside, shaking violently, spraying melt in every
direction.

The last horse through. The door hauled shut. Metal on metal.
The wind, muffled now, howling against the outside of the
building like something that wants in.

And inside - silence. Or what passes for it. The wind is
still there, but it's become a wall of white noise, constant
and external. A backdrop instead of an assault.

The breathing of five people and six horses fills the space.
Ragged. Desperate. Alive.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
(winded)
We ok?

LIV
(chattering teeth)
Here.

ROBERT
Here.

MIRA
Here. Where's Harlan?

HARLAN
(from further back, hard
breathing)
I'm - yeah. Here. Keeper's ok too.

A beat. Everyone breathing. The wind outside, hammering the walls. Something metal on the roof, vibrating with each gust - a low, resonant hum.

LIV
(shaking)
What is this place?

CALLOWAY
Hang on, Tom cobbled together a few
torches for us. Give me a second.

Calloway strikes the flint. The scrape, the spark. A catch of dry tinder. He blows on it. The flame builds.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
There we go, that's better. County
trucks, plows, sand. Look - there's
a stack of road salt. And that's a
woodstove in the corner. Looks like
a highway maintenance depot.

ROBERT
Let's look around, see what we're
working with.

Footsteps on concrete. Calloway exploring. A cabinet opened - metal on metal. Things inside rattling.

CALLOWAY
A can of kerosene. Half full. Some
shop rags. A couple of old tarps.

HARLAN

Is that a woodstove or is that an
oil drum someone cut a hole in?

CALLOWAY

It's an oil drum someone cut a hole
in.

He checks it out.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

But it's got a chimney pipe through
the wall, and there's ash in the
bottom. It works.

ROBERT

I've got several pallets over here.
I'll start breaking these down for
firewood.

The sound of wood being broken - the crack and snap of dry
wood. Fed into the drum stove. The kerosene poured - the
liquid glug, then the whoosh of it catching. The fire roars
up, then settles. The stove begins to tick - metal expanding
with heat.

Warmth. You can hear the group moving toward it - boots on
concrete, the rustle of frozen clothing starting to soften.
Hands held out. The small groans of people letting themselves
feel how cold they actually are.

MIRA

Let me see hands. Everyone.

The check. Gloves off. Fingers flexed. The same ritual from
the cattle shed - February in Montana demands it.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Calloway.

CALLOWAY

Working fine.

MIRA

Robert.

ROBERT

Numb, but they move.

MIRA

Harlan.

HARLAN

Stiff. But I can feel them.

MIRA

Liv.

LIV

They're OK. The tips are white.

Mira takes Liv's hands. Holds them between her own.

MIRA

Let me see.... OK. Don't rub them.
Stick them in your armpits. Just
let the blood come back. It'll
hurt.

LIV

It already does.

The stove ticking. The wind outside. The horses settling -
blowing, stamping, but calmer now. Out of the wind. Out of
the assault.

ROBERT

(low)

How long does a storm like this
last?

CALLOWAY

This is a bad one. Could be six
hours. Could be three days. I've
seen both.

Robert doesn't respond. But you hear it - the shift in his
breathing. Three days. Three days of not moving. Three days
of battery draining in Liv's chest while the snow piles up
outside and the road disappears.

He walks to the far side of the space. His boots on the
concrete, away from the group. Away from the fire. Standing
alone in the dark, listening to the wind.

Nobody follows him. They know better.

The stove crackles. The wind howls. Keeper shakes himself
once more, then curls up beside Harlan on the concrete floor.

Harlan's hand finds the dog's head. Keeper whimpers.

HARLAN

(quiet)

We're alright, boy. We're alright.

SCENE 4 - "WAITING"

INT. MAINTENANCE DEPOT - NIGHT

The storm has settled into its own rhythm. The wind doesn't gust anymore - it sustains, a single held note against the metal walls, unwavering. Snow hitting the building sounds like sand being thrown by the handful. Constant. Relentless. Almost hypnotic.

The stove ticks. The fire inside it - low now, the first rush of heat spent, the wood settling into a steady burn. Someone feeds it. The creak of the drum's door, a stick of pallet wood shoved in, the door clanged shut.

LIV

(to Mira)

He's doing the math again.

MIRA

I know.

LIV

I can hear him. He paces, and then he stops, and then he breathes in a certain way and I know he's dividing distance by days and subtracting what we just lost.

The wind. The stove.

LIV (CONT'D)

How many days do I have?

Mira doesn't answer right away. The fire pops in the drum stove.

MIRA

What happened at the ranch - the pause. When a pacemaker battery gets low, the device drops into a backup mode. Slower rate, fewer features, less power draw. It's trying to stretch what's left. But during the switch, there's a gap. A few seconds where the device is between modes and your heart has to manage on its own. That's what you felt.

LIV

How do you know that?

MIRA

I did a cardiac rotation in nursing school.

LIV

You never told me that.

MIRA

You never had a cardiac event before.

A beat. Liv absorbs that. Something she didn't know about Mira - something Mira was holding back, not out of secrecy but out of not wanting to scare her.

LIV

So you know what's happening to me.

MIRA

I know what the device is doing. It's down-throttling. Reducing its output to extend the remaining charge. That means your heart rate will trend slower. You might feel lightheaded when you stand up quickly, or winded sooner than usual. The pauses - they might happen again. Probably will. They'll be short, and the device will restart itself. Until it can't.

LIV

(very quiet)

Until it can't.

MIRA

But that's why we're going to Seattle.

The wind. The stove. From across the room, the faint sound of Robert's boots - pacing, then stopping. Pacing, then stopping.

LIV

What do I do? When it happens. The pause.

MIRA

Get low. Sit down or lie down. Don't fight it - the device is working, even when it feels like it's stopped.

(MORE)

MIRA (CONT'D)

Your heart has its own rhythm underneath the pacemaker. It's not gone. It's just slow. The device kicks it up to where it needs to be. When the device pauses, your natural rhythm takes over for a few seconds. It'll feel like you're drowning, but you're not. You're wading.

LIV

Wading.

MIRA

Shallow water. Your head's above it. It just won't feel that way.

A long silence. The stove. Keeper shifts, sighs.

LIV

Thank you for not lying to me.

MIRA

You'd know if I was. You're too smart for that.

LIV

Dad lies to me. Not about the big things - about the small ones. He says "we're fine" and "we're making good time" and "the battery's holding." He doesn't know any of that. He just needs to say it.

MIRA

That's not lying. That's parenting.

LIV

What's the difference?

MIRA

Intent.

The fire pops. A horse stamps in the dark. The wind, unchanged.

From across the room, Harlan's voice. He hasn't been asleep.

HARLAN

We still got that elk jerky?

MIRA

We do.

HARLAN

I believe it's suppertime.

The rustling of saddlebags. Food pulled out - jerky, the corn meal from the ranch, a waterskin passed around. The sounds of people eating without enthusiasm but with necessity. Teeth on dried meat. Swallowing. The cap of the waterskin twisting open and shut.

Robert comes back to the fire. His boots on the concrete, crossing from the dark into the circle of warmth. He sits. Takes the jerky Mira holds out. Eats.

ROBERT

(after a while)

Thank you.

MIRA

For what?

ROBERT

For what you told her. I heard. I was - I was over there trying to calculate something I can't calculate, and you were over here telling her the truth. I should have been the one to do that.

MIRA

Robert -

ROBERT

No. You did the right thing. I don't know the device the way you do. I know the physics, but you know the medicine. I should have asked you weeks ago.

MIRA

You didn't want to hear what I'd say.

ROBERT

(a beat)

No. I didn't.

The fire. The wind.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Down-throttling. That's what it's doing?

MIRA

Yes.

ROBERT

So the pauses get longer. And more frequent. Until the battery drops below the threshold the device needs to restart.

MIRA

That's the trajectory. I don't know the timeline. Nobody does - it depends on the battery chemistry, the ambient temperature, how hard Liv's heart is working. Cold makes it worse. Exertion makes it worse.

ROBERT

And we're riding through a blizzard in February.

Mira doesn't answer. She doesn't need to.

The stove ticks. The wind howls.

Harlan reaches into his coat. The familiar sound - the harmonica case. The click of it opening.

He raises it to his lips.

A note. Low, warm, steady. Then another. Then a third - and they connect. Not a song, not yet. Just notes finding each other in the dark. But his breath holds. The ribs let him fill his lungs enough to sustain the sound, and what comes out isn't music - it's proof. That broken things mend. That lungs fill again. That the silence isn't permanent.

He plays. Slow, searching. A melody that might be something old or might be something he's inventing as he goes. The notes drift through the maintenance depot, mixing with the wind and the stove and the breathing of the horses. Keeper lifts his head, ears forward, listening. Then sets his chin back down.

Nobody speaks. Nobody needs to. The harmonica says what the room can't - that they're alive, and together, and the storm hasn't taken them yet.

Harlan plays until the notes thin out and his breath runs short. The ribs, still. But better. He got further than last time.

The harmonica clicks shut.

HARLAN

(quiet)
Getting there.

The stove. The wind. The dark.

SCENE 5 - "THE SECOND DAY"

INT. MAINTENANCE DEPOT - MORNING

Morning is a guess. The light hasn't changed - the depot has no windows, or the windows are buried.

CALLOWAY
(waking up)
Dawn. Or close to it. Can't tell
from in here.

The sound of the depot door being forced open. Metal grinding, then the push against resistance - snow, packed against it. Calloway puts his shoulder into it. A grunt. The door moves six inches, a foot. Cold air screams through the gap.

And then - silence. The wind has stopped.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Come look at this.

Footsteps on concrete. The group gathering at the door. The gap is narrow, but what's on the other side stops them.

Nothing. In every direction, nothing.

HARLAN
(quiet)
Where's the highway?

CALLOWAY
Under there. Somewhere.

ROBERT
I can't even tell where the fields
end and the road starts.

The silence is enormous. After twelve hours of sustained howling, the absence of wind is almost louder. Snow absorbs sound - their voices, the horses' breathing, even the stove behind them - everything is muffled, dampened, swallowed.

MIRA
How deep?

Calloway steps out. His boot punches through the crust - knee-deep.

CALLOWAY

Two feet. Maybe more in the drifts.

ROBERT

We can still ride. Horses can handle two feet.

CALLOWAY

Horses can handle two feet of even snow. This isn't even. There's drifts out there four, five feet deep and you won't see them until you're in them. And the crust might hold for the first few steps, then break. The horses will exhaust themselves in a mile.

ROBERT

Then we pick a path. Follow the fence lines.

CALLOWAY

Robert. Look at it. There are no fence lines. There's nothing. I don't even know where the road is right now.

Robert is quiet. The snow. The stillness. The total absence of the thing he needs most - a way forward.

HARLAN

(from inside)

The horses can't go out in this anyway. They need to eat. And they need water - not snow, water. Snow'll drop their core temperature.

CALLOWAY

He's right. We melt snow, let it warm, then water them. That takes time.

ROBERT

Time we don't have.

Nobody responds. The statement just hangs there, true and useless.

Then - a new sound. Distant. A crack, sharp and clean, like a rifle shot. Then another. Then a long, deep groan.

LIV

What is that?

CALLOWAY

Trees. Ice on the branches - the weight breaks them. Listen.

Another crack. Farther away. Then a crashing sound - a branch, heavy with ice, tearing free and falling through the canopy. The thump of it hitting snow.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

There's a tree line south of us. Quarter mile, maybe. That probably means a creek.

HARLAN

Water.

CALLOWAY

Water, wood, and maybe a landmark I can use to find the road. I'll go on foot.

MIRA

Alone?

CALLOWAY

I'll be alright. Keeper stays - snow's too deep for him, even without his injury.

Keeper whines. Harlan's hand finds the dog's collar, holds him.

LIV

How will you find your way back?

CALLOWAY

I'll keep the depot at my back. And I'll trench a track as I go - two feet of snow, I'll leave a ditch a blind man could follow. If the weather turns again, I'll sprint right back.

He steps out. His boots punching through the crust - crunch, crunch, crunch - growing fainter. Each step a small collapse, the snow swallowing him to the knee, then deeper in the drifts.

HARLAN

I'll get some snow melting for the horses.

ROBERT

I'll help. Leave the pot. I'll show
you a neat trick.

He goes over to his horse, pulls something out, then empties
a cloth sack.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Instead of melting the snow in a
pot, which takes forever to get
enough for horses, you just hang a
large cloth sack near the fire.
Then shovel the snow in. Catch the
water below in a pot. A lot easier.

HARLAN

Nice. I like that. Alright, I'll
look for a shovel.

LIV

(low, to Robert)

Dad.

ROBERT

Yeah.

LIV

I know you're scared. I'm scared
too. But we're going to get through
this.

Robert doesn't answer for a long time. The distant crack of
trees in the cold.

ROBERT

(rough)

I'm the one who's supposed to say
that.

LIV

Then say it back.

ROBERT

(a breath)

Yeah. We are going to get through
this.

LIV

See? You just needed a running
start.

HARLAN

Hey, I found a shovel.

ROBERT
OK. Let's get this sack filled.

He and Harlan move toward the door.

Robert stops, turns back.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Thank you, honey.

A long beat. The trees crack outside.

SCENE 6 - "A NEW PLAN"

INT. MAINTENANCE DEPOT - MORNING

From outside. Faint. Boots in snow. Getting closer. The crunch of someone following a trench already cut, moving fast.

HARLAN
(at the door)
That's him.

Keeper's ears go up. A whine, then a bark - the first sound the dog's made in hours. He knows the footsteps.

Footsteps louder now. Crunching, close. Then the door.

Calloway steps inside. He's breathing hard. Snow up to his waist in places - you can hear him brushing it off, the heavy wet sound of it falling to the concrete.

CALLOWAY
There's a creek. Running water under the ice. And the tree line follows it west. The trees are tall enough to break the drifts - the snow under the canopy is half what it is out here. Maybe less.

ROBERT
Can we ride through it?

CALLOWAY
Along the creek, yes. But that's not the main thing. The wind did us a favor.

(MORE)

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Out on the open ground - the fields, the rises, anything exposed - the wind stripped the snow down to hard-pack. Couple inches in places. Bare ground on the ridgelines. It's only in the lee sides and the hollows where it drifted deep.

ROBERT

So we can ride the exposed ground.

CALLOWAY

It'll help. The scour pattern runs east-west - same direction we're going. We stay on the windward sides, follow the ridgelines, and drop into the tree line when we need to cross a low spot. It'll be slow. We'll have to pick our way. But the horses can handle hard-pack.

MIRA

When do we go?

CALLOWAY

Dusk. The moon's nearly full - it'll be bright enough to see the snow patterns. Dark ground is bare ground. White ground is drifted. We follow the dark.

He pauses.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

And I know where we are. There's a grain elevator a mile west of here - I could see the top of it above the snow. That puts us near Park City. Bozeman's sixty miles.

ROBERT

Sixty miles.

CALLOWAY

Three days, maybe four, picking our way through this. Less if the scour holds and we can find the highway - the wind clears asphalt better than grass.

Robert exhales. It's not good. But it's a number. Something he can work with.

ROBERT

We rest through the day. Water the horses. Eat what we can. And we ride when the moon's up.

CALLOWAY

Agreed.

ROBERT

OK. We've got some flour and cornmeal. I'll make us a batch of johnnycakes. Load up on some carbs before we go out there.

CALLOWAY

Now it's a plan.

The depot settles. The stove burns. Outside, the sun finds the snow and the world blazes - silent, white, blinding. The trees crack and groan in the cold.

Inside, the group rests. Keeper curls beside Harlan. The dog's breathing deepens. He sighs, almost content.

HARLAN

(to the dog, barely
audible)

You and me both, pal.

The stove. The silence. The slow drip of meltwater from the sack.

SCENE 7 - "NIGHT RIDE"

EXT. MONTANA PRAIRIE - DUSK

CALLOWAY

Alright. Sun's going down. Time to move.

The depot door opens. The world outside is blue - the last light of day draining from a sky that's gone clear for the first time in two days.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

See that? The dark patches on the rises - that's bare ground. The wind scoured it clean. And there - the ridge running west. That's our road.

ROBERT

What about the low spots?

CALLOWAY

We drop into the tree line, follow the creek through the hollows, then climb back up to the next ridge. Dark ground is safe ground. White is deep. Stay off the white.

The horses are led out. The first horse finds the scoured ground - hard-pack under a thin skim of ice, barely an inch of snow. The hooves crunch through to frozen earth. Solid. The animal settles.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

There. That'll hold. Single file, follow my track. When I stop, you stop.

One by one. The horses find the ridgeline - thin ice on hard-pack, then bare frozen ground where the wind stripped everything to dirt. Solid footing. The animals settle into it.

HARLAN

That's better. She knows what dirt feels like.

They ride. Calloway out front, picking the route along the scoured rises.

CALLOWAY

(calling back)

Dropping down. Tree line. Stay close - it's deeper in here.

The hooves go muffled as they descend into a sheltered hollow - snow under the canopy, soft but shallow enough to push through.

The creek beside them, buried under ice but audible. Then Calloway leads them up the next rise and they're back on bare ground.

The last light fades. The sky darkens - and the moon rises.

MIRA

(quiet)

Look at that. The moon on the snow is almost daylight.

ROBERT

(quiet)

And there they are. The mountains.

LIV

That's what we have to cross?

HARLAN

(low)

Lord.

CALLOWAY

Those are the Absarokas mountains to the south. The Crazies to the north. The gap in between - that's where I-90 goes through.

ROBERT

The Crazies?

CALLOWAY

The Crazy Mountains. Supposedly named for a woman who went mad after her family was killed, and she wandered into the mountains alone.

ROBERT

Sorry I asked.

LIV

The gap between them doesn't look very big.

CALLOWAY

It's not.

They ride. The night deepens. The cold is extraordinary - the air so dry and still it hurts to breathe. Exhaled breath crystallizes and falls as ice dust.

The sounds of the night ride: Hooves on hard-pack, then bare dirt, then the muffled drop into a tree-lined hollow and the climb back out. Leather creaking in the cold - stiff, protesting. An owl, somewhere. Coyotes, distant, their calls carrying for miles across the open white.

They drop into the next hollow. The hooves go muffled - soft snow, sheltered from the wind. A creek runs through the bottom, frozen over, the snow on top making it look like flat ground.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

(ahead)

Easy. Creek bed down here. Could get wet. Single file. I'll go first. Follow my track.

Calloway's horse steps onto the ice. The hooves ring - solid, holding. He crosses.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

It's holding. Come on, one at a time. Liv.

She crosses next.

LIV

(quiet)

Okay.

The hooves ringing on ice.

CALLOWAY

Great. Mira?

MIRA

(quiet)

Coming.

She crosses.

CALLOWAY

Good job. You're up, Harlan.

He crosses. Ice cracking.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

OK, Robert, bring up the rear with the pack horse.

The pack horse is last on the lead - Robert pulls her forward.

ROBERT

Come on, girl. Your turn.

The pack horse steps onto the ice. She's the heaviest, loaded with gear. Two steps. Three.

A crack. Deep, resonant - not a branch. The sound of ice letting go.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Shit.

The ice splinters like a felled tree.

The pack horse screams. The ice opens and she drops - chest-deep in freezing water. The lead rope snaps taut - Robert lets go before it drags him in.

The current pulling at her legs. Gear shifts, a saddlebag tears loose, the water takes it. The horse thrashes - hooves scrabbling on the creek bottom, finding rocks, slipping.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

She's through the ice!

The sound of the horse fighting the water - the splashing violent, desperate, the animal grunting with each lunge. The current isn't fast but it's February-cold, and the horse knows it.

HARLAN

Hold on - hold on, I'm coming!

Harlan dismounts. He's down the bank and into the water before anyone can stop him. The gasp when it hits - knee-deep, black, cold enough to stop your heart.

CALLOWAY

Harlan, get out of there -

HARLAN

She's panicking. She'll break a leg.

His hands on the halter, in the water. Pulling, steadying. The horse's head thrashing, eyes wild.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Easy. EASY. Come on.

CALLOWAY

Cut the packs. She can't climb out with the weight. But hang on to them!

Robert's hands - bare now, gloves soaked and useless - fumbling with buckles underwater. The knife out. Straps cut.

ROBERT

OK, getting her unloaded...

Packs dropping into the current, yanked back out, tossed onto the ice.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Alright. Pull. PULL!

They haul on the halter. The horse lunges - forelegs on the ice shelf, which cracks, breaks, but finds the bank beneath.

CALLOWAY

Her forelegs are up!

Hindquarters churning in the water. One more lunge. A panicked shriek. She's up - scrambling onto the bank, streaming water, shaking so hard the tack rattles.

ROBERT

She's out!

HARLAN

Get her moving. If she freezes standing still, we lose her.

Calloway leads the horse up out of the hollow, keeping her walking. She's shaking, soaked to the barrel, but moving.

Robert is still in the creek. Waist-deep. His hands have been in that water for minutes. He climbs out - the sound of wet boots on the bank, his breathing ragged, his whole body shaking.

MIRA

Robert, give me your hands.

ROBERT

(shaking already)

I'm- I'm ok.

MIRA

You were in freezing water up to your waist. Give me your hands. Now.

She pulls his wet gloves off.

MIRA (CONT'D)

(quiet)

Oh no.

LIV

What?

MIRA

Skin's going white. Robert, your left hand. Can you feel your fingers?

A beat.

ROBERT
I can feel the thumb. And the first
two.

MIRA
The ring finger?

ROBERT
...No.

MIRA
The pinky?

ROBERT
No.

She's already working - dry cloth from her bag, wrapping his hands. But her voice has changed. The careful, level voice she uses when the news is bad.

MIRA
You'll be ok, I'll wrap these in something dry, but we need to get you warm. Calloway - how far to the next shelter?

CALLOWAY
I don't know. Could be miles.

MIRA
Then we ride fast.

They leave the hollow. The pack horse is soaked and shivering but moving - Calloway keeps her walking. They saved the horse.

They ride. Faster now - the ridgeline hard-pack under the hooves, the moon overhead.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Talk to me, Robert. Can you feel anything?

ROBERT
Just my thumb now.

MIRA
Keep them moving. Keep making a fist.

ROBERT
I'm trying.

They ride.

SCENE 8 - "FROSTBITE"

EXT. MONTANA PRAIRIE - NIGHT

They're riding hard.

MIRA

Talk to me, Robert.

ROBERT

I- I don't know, Mira. It's all
just numb.

CALLOWAY

(ahead)

There. Off the road - see the
roofline?

MIRA

Yeah, that cabin'll do.

They pile inside. The stove is rusted but intact - Harlan
feeds it sagebrush and dead wood.The crackle and tick of a fire coming to life. The group
crowds around it.Mira is looking at his left hand. The fire ticking. The other
three are quiet - the quiet of people who know what's about
to happen.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Show me. The thumb is fine. Index
and middle came back. The pinky - I
think the pinky's going to make it.
But the ring finger...

She doesn't finish. She doesn't have to.

ROBERT

(flat)

Say it.

MIRA

There's no circulation. Normally
I'd wait - give it a day, see what
comes back. But we don't have days
out here. Dead tissue rots. Rot
breeds infection.

(MORE)

MIRA (CONT'D)

And out here, without antibiotics,
infection kills.

A long beat. The fire. Robert looking at his hand. His left hand. The ring finger - the one with the wedding band. Eleanor's ring on dead flesh.

ROBERT

(quiet)

How long do I have?

MIRA

A day. Maybe two before infection
sets in.

It's better to do it now, while
you're warm and I can control it.

LIV

Do it... To cut off his finger?!

Robert doesn't answer. He stares at his hand. The fire
ticking.

ROBERT

(to Mira)

OK. Fuck. I understand. Give me a
minute.

LIV

Dad, wait a second, let's talk this
through more.

ROBERT

Simple calculus, honey. Her logic
is sound. Anything in the way of us
reaching Seattle has to go. I'll
live. Just... One minute. I need to
get this ring off first.

He walks away. His breathing - short, hissing through his
teeth. The ring won't move. The finger is swollen, the metal
tight.

Mira steps back. The fire. The wind outside.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(to himself, quiet)

Come on. Come on.

MIRA

I could try to cut it off. The
ring. There could be bolt cutters
around-

ROBERT

No.

His breathing - short, hissing through his teeth as he works the metal over the knuckle. A grunt. Then, relief.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(quiet)

OK. I- I got it.

LIV

Do you want me to take that for you?

ROBERT

No. I want to hold onto her for this.

MIRA

(steady)

Alright. Come on over here by the fire, where the light is better.

The sounds of preparation - cloth laid out, the knife, a flat piece of wood to rest his hand on.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Harlan. Do we still have that iodine?

HARLAN

Half a bottle. Maybe less.

The uncapping. The pour - careful.

MIRA

Just a little for the blade. The rest, we save for after.

Harlan, can you get me a strip of leather for him to bite on? And I need something heavy - a rock, a piece of firewood. Something I can strike hard with.

A beat. Harlan understands. He moves - the creak of him shifting, then his boots on the floor.

LIV

Oh my God.

MIRA

I wish we had something for the pain, but...

ROBERT

It's ok, Mira. Just cut straight and fast.

MIRA

Now, for after... I can use the suture kit we found, but...

ROBERT

You want to save it.

MIRA

I don't want to sound like a heartless bitch. But yes. If one of us needs any kind of surgery, it's literally a lifesaver.

ROBERT

Agreed.

MIRA

I can cauterize the wound, and wrap your hand up, it just won't be as pretty.

ROBERT

I trust you.

Harlan comes back.

HARLAN

Found a hammer.

Sets something down. Heavy, solid. The sound made ominous by the intention.

MIRA

Liv, you don't have to be here for this.

LIV

I'm staying.

MIRA

OK, darlin.

Calloway, we'll use your blade for cauterizing. Put it in the fire now. Lay it right in the coals. I'll need it glowing hot.

CALLOWAY

(quiet)

Understood.

The sound of a knife set into the stove. The coals shifting around it.

MIRA

(to Robert)

OK, Robert, put your left hand right here, on this board. I'm going to place my knife on the joint. That will cut easier than bone. One strike, hard as I can.

Then we cauterize, sterilize, and bandage. I'll be quick.

Are you ready?

ROBERT

(Breathing hard)

Ready.

MIRA

Calloway, hold his arm.

Calloway's hands on Robert's forearm. Firm. The fire ticking.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Harlan, stand behind him, be ready.
Robert, if you need to pass out, that's ok. They'll catch you.

ROBERT

Just get it done.

MIRA

OK. Bite down on this.

The sound of leather between teeth. Robert's breathing, hard and steady through his nose.

MIRA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Robert.

The blade placed. Robert flinches, but he's held tight. Robert's breathing stops. Mira picks up the hammer.

An interminable wait as she aligns her shot.

One strike. The crack of it - sharp, clean, terrible. Robert's whole body goes rigid, the breath exploding through the leather. A sound from him that isn't a word.

Keeper whimpers, scared.

Then Mira is moving fast.

MIRA (CONT'D)

The cut is good. Calloway - your blade.

The scrape of the knife coming out of the coals. You can hear the heat - the faint tick of metal in open air.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Hold him real tight for this.

The hiss. Short, sharp - hot metal on flesh. Robert's whole body locks. A sound through the leather that nobody in that room will forget.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Good...

She sets the blade down.

MIRA (CONT'D)

The iodine, now.

She pours it over the finger stump. Robert groans, straining to move.

MIRA (CONT'D)

OK, hand me the bandage. That's it.

Robert hissing through the leather, hyperventilating. Cloth pressed down and wrapped tight. The tear of fabric, the wind around the stump, the tie. Quick, practiced.

Robert's breathing, ragged, slowing.

MIRA (CONT'D)

It's over. We're done. It's all done.

Robert breathes. He spits out the leather.

The fire. The wind outside.

Calloway steps back.

ROBERT

(rough, through pain)
...thank you.

MIRA

Don't thank me for that.

ROBERT

I'm thanking you anyway.

The fire. The wind. Keeper shifts by the stove, sighs.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(rough)

Liv. Here. Put my ring back on for me? Right hand.

The sound of Liv sliding the ring onto his finger.

LIV

Yes, of course. There...

ROBERT

(barely audible)

There. Wrong hand. Sorry, Eleanor.

LIV

(after a long silence)

Does it hurt?

ROBERT

Hell, yes.

LIV

At least it's not numb anymore, right?

Robert almost laughs. Doesn't quite get there.

MIRA

Robert, get some sleep. We'll keep moving when you're ready.

ROBERT

I- Actually, yeah. I need to pass out. Two hours, ok? No more.

MIRA

Two hours. Promise.

Nobody argues. Coats pulled tight.

Positions found on the floor, against the wall, near the stove. Keeper curls against Harlan.

The cabin settles.

SCENE 9 - "PRESSING ON"

INT. CABIN - TWO HOURS LATER

MIRA

Robert... Two hours. Time to move.

ROBERT

(groggy)

Yeah. OK.

CALLOWAY

Storm's cleared. Wind's died down.
We should move while it holds.

MIRA

Robert, how's the hand?

ROBERT

Throbbing. But I can hold the
reins.

MIRA

Left hand stays in your coat. Use
your right.

ROBERT

OK, doc.

They leave the building, saddle up and ride.

The night is clear now - no wind, no snow.

Just cold and silence and the sound of hooves on hard-pack.

LIV

The stars are different from down
here.

ROBERT

What do you mean?

LIV

On the snow. Everything's so flat
and white that the sky starts at
the ground. It's like riding
through the stars instead of under
them.

She's quiet for a moment.

LIV (CONT'D)

I can see Polaris.

ROBERT

Where?

LIV

Four and a half fists. Same as before.

ROBERT

We haven't drifted south. Good.

LIV

Forty-seven degrees. Central Montana. I know where I am.

They ride on.

MIRA

Harlan. Talk to me.

HARLAN

(slow, through cold)
What do you want me to say?

MIRA

Anything. It's been hours. I need to hear you think clearly.

HARLAN

I'm thinking clearly enough to know I can't feel my left foot.

MIRA

Dismount. Walk beside the horse. Get the blood moving.

HARLAN

(groaning as he dismounts)
Walking in this is not my idea of getting the blood moving.

MIRA

Walk. Ten minutes. Then ride.

His boots on the hard-pack. The frozen ground ringing under his heels. Keeper trots beside him - the dog's claws on the bare dirt, a different rhythm.

CALLOWAY

(up ahead)
I've got something.

ROBERT

What?

CALLOWAY

A road. Running north-south. The wind's cleared part of it.

(MORE)

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

I can see asphalt. Pretty sure this connects back to 90. We follow it north to the interchange and we're on the highway again.

They ride through the rest of the night.

Hours pass in hoofbeats and silence.

Calloway's horse drifts alongside Liv's. The two of them riding slightly apart from the others. His saddle creaks. He doesn't speak for a while.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

You've been quiet today.

A beat. The hooves on frozen ground.

LIV

Yeah...

Do you remember, on the Powder River- I said I loved how big the world is?

CALLOWAY

I remember.

LIV

I still do. But for a new reason.

A beat. The hooves.

LIV (CONT'D)

When it's this big, I get to be small. Just a girl on a horse. Not the reason you guys are getting hurt.

Not the reason my dad just lost a finger.

Calloway doesn't answer. The wind moves across the snow.

They ride on.

The first birds. One call, tentative, from somewhere in the grass.

Then another, answering. The world remembering it has a voice.

ROBERT
(quiet)
Getting lighter, behind us.

MIRA
Robert. Look up ahead.

A long beat. The horses slow on their own, as if they feel it too.

ROBERT
The mountains. They're - in the
moonlight they were just a line.
Look at them now.

HARLAN
Whole lot closer than they were
last night.

LIV
They were there the whole time,
just watching us approach.

SCENE 10 - "THE BONES"

EXT. I-90 WEST - THREE DAYS LATER - AFTERNOON

Hooves on asphalt. The snow has thinned as they've pushed west and south, following the valley floors. Still cold - February cold, the kind that lives in everything - but the blizzard is behind them. The road is visible again. The sky is open.

ROBERT
Three days since the depot. How far
have we come?

CALLOWAY
Sixty, maybe sixty-five miles.
We're past Bozeman.

ROBERT
Three days for sixty miles.

CALLOWAY
In February. After a blizzard. Take
the win, Robert.

This is Three Forks. Or near it.
(MORE)

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Where the rivers come together -
the Jefferson, the Madison, and the
Gallatin. They make the Missouri
here.

ROBERT

Lewis and Clark named them. All
three rivers. After the president
and his secretaries of state and
the treasury.

CALLOWAY

They named them after politicians.
The rivers didn't care.

The road curves. The sound of the terrain changes - they're
leaving the highway, following a trail Calloway has found.
Hooves on dirt, then frozen grass, then something else.

Crunch.

A different crunch. Not ice. Not gravel. Something dry,
hollow, snapping underfoot. The horses slow. One of them
stops - ears forward, snorting. Refusing to move.

LIV

What's she stepping on?

She dismounts. Boots on the ground. She kneels - the sound of
her hand finding something in the grass. Picking it up.
Turning it over.

LIV (CONT'D)

It's... bones.

CALLOWAY

Look around you.

A beat. The wind moves through the grass.

LIV

They're everywhere. The whole field
is - just bones...

HARLAN

This is a pishkun. A buffalo jump.
See the cliff up there? For
thousands of years, the people who
lived here drove buffalo herds off
that ledge. The animals fell, and
the people below butchered them.
Fed whole Indian nations. Year
after year, century after century.

(MORE)

HARLAN (CONT'D)

The bones piled up until they
became the ground.

Liv stands. You can hear her turning - slowly - the bones
shifting under her boots. The wind across the cliff face
makes a low, sustained note - deep, resonant, like blowing
across the mouth of a bottle.

MIRA

(quiet)

How long has this been here?

HARLAN

Thousands of years. Maybe longer.
The Blackfeet, the Crow, the Salish
- they all used jumps like this.
Long before horses, long before
guns. They'd build drive lines out
of stone cairns and brush - miles
long, funnel-shaped, narrowing
toward the cliff. Then they'd get
behind the herd and push. The lead
animals couldn't stop. The ones
behind them couldn't see. They went
over by the hundreds.

LIV

That's horrible.

HARLAN

That's survival.

The wind. The bones. The cliff face, that deep hollow note.

ROBERT

(quiet)

They didn't need any of it.
Engines, generators, power grids.
None of it.

MIRA

They needed knowledge. And
patience. And each other.

Nobody says anything. The wind moves through the bones - a
dry, rattling whisper, like the earth remembering.

She turns a bone over in her hands.

LIV

Mira. This is what you believe,
isn't it. That this is enough. That
it was always enough.

MIRA

(careful)

I think it's proof that people can
live without the things we thought
we needed.

The wind. The bones.

LIV

The buffalo came back. We saw them.
Thousands of them, on the highway.
The same animal that died here is
alive out there.

CALLOWAY

It survived everything. The jumps.
The railroads. The rifles. The near-
extinction. And now - the collapse.
Ten years without hunters and the
herds are bigger than they've been
in two centuries.

LIV

So the species that survived was
the one that didn't need anything
except grass and space.

CALLOWAY

And time.

The wind. The bones. Keeper finishes his investigation and
trots back to Harlan, sits at his feet. Done.

The group mounts up. The crunch of bones under hooves as they
ride back to the trail. The sound changes - bone to dirt to
grass to gravel - and then the road.

SCENE 11 - "THE GATE OF THE MOUNTAIN"

EXT. I-90 WEST - DAYS LATER - LATE AFTERNOON

Hooves on broken asphalt. The Clark Fork river runs alongside
them - fast water over rocks, loud enough to ride beside
without being heard.

The horses are tired. You can hear it in the uneven rhythm of
their steps, the way the pack horse keeps falling half a beat
behind. Keeper's claws click slower on the pavement.

CALLOWAY

Another mile, maybe two. The tunnel should be just past that ridge.

ROBERT

Should be?

CALLOWAY

I've never been inside it. But I know where it is. Mile and a half straight through the mountain, comes out in Idaho. The old Milwaukee Road punched it through a hundred years ago.

ROBERT

The Milwaukee Road was electrified.

LIV

What do you mean, electrified?

ROBERT

Electric trains, Liv. Not steam. Not diesel. Electric.

LIV

In 1915?

ROBERT

(and there it is - that shift in his voice, lighter, younger, the version of Robert that used to teach)

People think old means primitive. It doesn't. The Milwaukee Road strung a hundred miles of copper wire over these mountains - from the plains of Montana to the coast of Washington.

Substations every thirty miles converting power for the locomotives. The trains ran clean and quiet through these passes. No coal smoke. No soot. Just current in a wire and steel on a rail.

A beat. The horses' hooves. The river. The weight of the comparison just sitting there.

LIV

So a hundred years ago, trains were running on electricity through these exact mountains. And now we're -

ROBERT

Riding horses through them. Yes.

CALLOWAY

That's the plan, anyway.

Mira says nothing. The river. The hooves.

MIRA

How's the hand feeling?

ROBERT

Down to a dull roar.

They round a bend. Calloway pulls up. His horse stops. Then the others, one by one - the sound of the group compressing, hooves shuffling to a halt.

CALLOWAY

Whoa.

Keeper whines. His nose is up, working the air.

HARLAN

(low)

Smoke. More than one fire. And livestock - goats, maybe. That's a settlement.

LIV

There's a wall across the road. I can hear something - sounds like glass?

ROBERT

Those are insulators. Ceramic caps they used to mount on the power lines to keep the current from grounding out. Someone's hung them from the old poles like decorations.

A gust of wind. The insulators clink and ring - a clear, cold, almost pretty sound. Dozens of them, strung at different heights, making a kind of music out of dead electrical hardware.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(quiet)

They hung them like wind chimes.

MIRA

And built right across the road.
That gatehouse blocks the tunnel
mouth.

CALLOWAY

Makes sense. Only passage through
the mountains for fifty miles in
either direction. If you control
that, you control everything moving
east-west through here.

A dog barks from behind the wall - deep, territorial.
Keeper's ears go forward. He growls, low in his chest. Harlan
puts a hand on him.

HARLAN

Easy.

A scrape of wood on wood above them - someone climbing a
ladder on the far side of the wall. Then boots on timber,
heavy, deliberate.

A second set follows.

CALLOWAY

(low)

Two on the wall. Watching us.

A beat. The boots stop. The wind. The chimes.

ROBERT

(to Mira, quiet)

Let me.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(calling up)

Afternoon. We're looking to pass
through the tunnel.

A beat. The figures on the wall confer - low voices,
inaudible.

GATEKEEPER - (she/her), the woman who decides who enters the
Taft Tunnel - leader of an anti-tech religion.

GATEKEEPER

(calling down)

Where from?

ROBERT

Billings. Before that, further east.

GATEKEEPER

What are you carrying?

ROBERT

Horses. Gear. Nothing dangerous.

That word lands differently here. You can hear it - a subtle shift in the air. The other figure on the wall straightens.

GATEKEEPER

Ride up to the gate. Slow. Keep the dog close.

They walk forward. Hooves on asphalt, then dirt, then the packed ground in front of the gate.

The gate opens. Two people pull it inward - the heavy scrape of timber on frozen ground. Goats bleating. A hammer on metal somewhere. Children's voices - then quiet, fast, as the riders come through. The sudden hush of a place that's noticed strangers.

The insulator chimes are everywhere inside the walls. Different pitches, different heights - a whole architecture of them, ringing in the wind. And underneath that sound, something else: the creak of old steel. The catenary poles, still standing, groaning when the gusts hit them.

CALLOWAY

(low, to Mira)

They've built the whole settlement out of the old railroad. Ties, rail, sheet metal - all of it salvage.

LIV

What's that smell? Like - rust, and something sharper.

ROBERT

Creosote. Railroad ties were soaked in it. It never goes away.

They ride deeper in. The chimes thicken - more of them, layered, overlapping. Liv's horse brushes against something - a heavy clang of metal on metal.

LIV

Whoa - sorry, I hit something.

CALLOWAY

(quiet)

Don't touch it. They've got things mounted on every pole - old transformer casings, coils of wire, insulators laid out in rows. All of it arranged. Deliberate.

LIV

Are they... shrines?

Boots on frozen ground behind them. The GATEKEEPER has come down from the wall - her stride easy, unhurried.

GATEKEEPER

You can water the horses at the trough. There's a place to tie up past the smithy.

MIRA

Thank you. We've been riding a long time.

GATEKEEPER

I can see that. You're the first to come through from the east since November.

CALLOWAY

We need to use the tunnel.

GATEKEEPER

Everyone who comes here needs to use the tunnel.

She leads them forward. The sounds of the settlement fall behind - the goats, the smithy, the voices. It gets quieter. The chimes thin out. The wind funnels tighter between the valley walls and picks up, pushing against them cold and steady.

Then - a draft. Not wind. Something deeper, colder, rising from below and ahead. Air that smells like wet rock and standing water. The horses feel it. One snorts. Another plants its feet and has to be urged forward.

LIV

I can feel it. The tunnel. It's like the mountain is breathing.

GATEKEEPER

It does that. Winter air pushes through from the Idaho side. A mile and a half of cold stone exhaling.

Their hooves hit something metallic - a buried rail, ringing dully under the dirt. Then another.

CALLOWAY

We're on the old tracks.

GATEKEEPER

(stopping)

Before you go further. Can you read?

LIV

Yes.

GATEKEEPER

Read what's above the tunnel entrance.

LIV

"What we sent through the wire, we sent through ourselves."

A beat.

LIV (CONT'D)

What does that mean?

GATEKEEPER

It means electricity wasn't just in the machines. It was in us. The wanting. The reaching. The belief that we could push power through a mountain and call it progress. Those machines are gone. The question is whether the sickness that built them is gone too.

Robert's saddle creaks. He shifts his weight.

ROBERT

Well-

MIRA

That's a way of seeing it.

GATEKEEPER

It's the only way of seeing it that kept us alive.

She stops at a row of posts. Gestures.

GATEKEEPER (CONT'D)

Tie up here. Rest. We'll talk about passage in the morning.

ROBERT

We were hoping to go through tonight.

GATEKEEPER

Nobody goes through alone. The tunnel's not safe in the dark - the floor's collapsed in places, there's standing water, the footing's bad for horses. We send people through at first light with a guide. That's how it works.

HARLAN

How much?

GATEKEEPER

We'll discuss it.

She turns to go. Robert hasn't dismounted. He's still looking at the painted words above the tunnel. At the catenary poles. At the shrines.

ROBERT

Those poles out there. You know what they are?

The gatekeeper stops. Turns back.

GATEKEEPER

I know exactly what they are.

ROBERT

They carried electric current. A hundred miles of it. Ran locomotives that hauled freight and passengers through these mountains for decades.

GATEKEEPER

Yes...

ROBERT

That infrastructure - those poles, this tunnel, the substations you probably pulled apart for building material - that was one of the most ambitious engineering achievements in American history.

GATEKEEPER

So you say.

ROBERT
And you turned them into -

MIRA
(sharp, quiet)
Robert.

A beat. The settlement sounds - goats, a hammer on metal somewhere, a child's voice quickly hushed. The cold air pushing out of the tunnel mouth.

ROBERT
(controlled)
Into what? Altars?

GATEKEEPER
(steady)
Into reminders. That's what the poles are - the old bones of a thing that tried to go through a mountain and thought it could keep going forever. It couldn't. Nothing that needs a wire can. We keep them standing so our children know what the wanting looked like. So they can see how big it was, and how completely it failed.

ROBERT
It didn't fail. It was stolen from us.

GATEKEEPER
By what?

ROBERT
You know by what.

GATEKEEPER
Say it.

ROBERT
Something came, and it decided we couldn't have electricity anymore. That's not failure. That's suppression.

GATEKEEPER
Something came. Something bigger than us, smarter than us, and the first thing it did was take the current out of the wire. You don't find that instructive?

ROBERT
I find it criminal.

GATEKEEPER
A man standing in a place that was
built, used, and abandoned in less
than a hundred years - calling the
thing that outlasted it criminal.

The wind through the chimes. That clear, cold ringing.

A beat. Then - a sound behind them. Footsteps. More than one
person. The settlement has been listening.

GATEKEEPER (CONT'D)
We get people like you. Not often.
But we get them. They come through
here with that look - staring at
the poles like something was stolen
from them personally. Like the wire
was theirs.

(closer, quieter)
I'm going to ask you a question,
and I need you to answer it
honestly. Because my people are
listening, and they know what the
wanting sounds like.

Are you carrying anything electric?

A long beat.

Liv starts to speak-

MIRA
(steady)
No. We're not.

The gatekeeper holds the silence. Keeper whines softly.

GATEKEEPER
Morning. First light. We'll talk
terms then, after we've had a meal
together.

Her boots on the frozen ground, walking away. The settlement
settling into evening around them - fires being stoked, a
door closing, the goats shuffling in their pen.

Calloway dismounts. Starts untacking his horse. Mira does the
same. Harlan lowers himself down carefully, ribs dictating
every movement, and Keeper drops to the ground beside him.

Robert sits on his horse. Still looking at the tunnel.

LIV
(quiet)
Dad. Come down.

ROBERT
That tunnel was electrified, Liv.
The whole line was. They ran trains
through this mountain at sixty
miles an hour, clean and fast and
quiet. And now we're going to walk
horses through it by torchlight
because these people think the wire
was a disease.

LIV
I know.

ROBERT
They're living in the ruins of the
thing they're afraid of. Building
houses out of the railroad that
proved them wrong.

LIV
What else are they supposed to do?
(then)
Get off the horse, Dad.

A long beat. The wind. The glass chimes. The dark mouth of
the tunnel, exhaling cold air like a held breath.

Robert dismounts. The creak of leather. His boots on the
ground.

He stands there, holding his horse's reins, staring into the
dark.

SCENE 12 - "THE TABLE"

INT. SETTLEMENT HALL - NIGHT

A large space - the echo says timber walls, high ceiling. A
fire somewhere central, crackling. Benches scraping the floor
as people settle. Voices - not the group's. Thirty, forty
people, talking low, the sound of a community eating
together. Bowls set down. A ladle in a pot. Children
somewhere at the far end.

GATEKEEPER
Elk stew. Bread's from this
morning. Eat.

Bowls placed in front of them. The sound of eating - hungry eating, the kind you can't fake. Spoons scraping. Bread torn.

HARLAN
(low, to Mira)
This is good.

MIRA
Don't talk with your mouth full.

HARLAN
Yes ma'am.

Keeper is under the table - the click of his claws on the floor, a soft whine. Someone from the settlement sets a bowl down for him. The dog eats.

LIV
(quiet)
Thank you. For the food.

GATEKEEPER
You're guests. Guests eat.

A beat. The hall sounds. Then - the glug of liquid poured into cups.

HARLAN
(appreciative)
Well now.

GATEKEEPER
Plum brandy. We've got an orchard south of the wall. The fruit makes better alcohol than it does food.

Cups lifted. The burn of the first sip - Liv coughs. Harlan laughs, short and dry.

HARLAN
Sip it slow, girl.

LIV
(hoarse)
Thanks for the warning.

The meal settles in. The fire. The hall. People talking around them - fragments of conversation. For a few minutes, it almost feels normal.

SETTLEMENT VOICE 1
- and I told him, if the goat gets out again, I'm not chasing it. I'm eating it.

Laughter from her table.

A man, farther away, arguing good-naturedly.

SETTLEMENT VOICE 2
It was three elk. Three.

Closer. A woman, quieter, talking to a child:

SETTLEMENT VOICE 3
Sit down. Eat your bread. No – sit down.

A man across the hall, telling a story:

SETTLEMENT VOICE 5
– so the whole roof comes off. Just
– gone. Wind took it clean. And
Martin's standing there holding a
hammer like he's gonna nail it back
on.

Laughter. Someone claps at a table.

A woman at the next table is talking to a younger man. Her voice carries – warm, certain, the tone of someone repeating something she's said a hundred times.

SETTLEMENT VOICE 1
– and my mother used to tell us
about the lights. Whole valleys lit
up at night. You could see towns
from fifty miles away, just from
the glow. Can you imagine? All that
waste, all that energy, just
bleeding into the sky.

SETTLEMENT VOICE 2
Hard to picture.

SETTLEMENT VOICE 1
That's the point. It should be hard
to picture. The Shepherds gave us
the dark back. The stars. The
quiet. My children have never seen
a light that wasn't fire, and
they're better for it.

Robert's cup hits the table. The sharp sound of him draining it. Then the pour – refilling it himself this time, the brandy glugging heavy.

MIRA
(low, just to Robert)
Robert, go easy on that stuff.

Robert doesn't answer. He drinks. Sets it down. Pours again.

LIV
(quiet, to Mira)
He's listening to them.

MIRA
(barely audible)
I know.

GATEKEEPER
What is it that's bringing you
through the mountains this time of
year?

MIRA
We're headed to Seattle.

GATEKEEPER
That doesn't really answer my
question.

A beat as Mira considers what to say. Liv jumps in--she understands enough of what's going on to not say too much.

LIV
I'm- I'm sick. There might be
medicine there.

GATEKEEPER
What is it you need? We might have
it, or know folk closer who do.

MIRA
You get a lot of travelers through
here?

Another beat. The gatekeeper decides to let it go.

GATEKEEPER
Enough to keep us in what we need.

LIV
Guess you're sort of using the
tunnel the same way it's always
been used then.

It comes out before Liv can think better of it--the off-hand comment of a girl who has been taught to be curious about the world.

GATEKEEPER

How do you mean?

MIRA

I think she-

LIV

Oh, just that- well, trains used to run supplies and people through here, right? And that's what you're doing too. Just not at sixty miles an hour.

Liv realizes she may have offended and recalibrates.

LIV (CONT'D)

I just mean...it's amazing, isn't it? How much you can do with the right people and some horses, right?

Everyone relaxes. The Gatekeeper relaxes and smiles.

GATEKEEPER

That's right. We've returned to the way things ought to be.

ROBERT

(scoffs)

SETTLEMENT VOICE 1

You disagree. That's alright.

But you still eat our food, don't you?

A beat. The fire. The table goes quiet.

Robert reaches into his coat. The sound the audience already knows - coins. Then metal on wood. He drops them on the table. Deliberate.

ROBERT

There.

The room changes. Everyone heard it. Everyone understands it. He just turned dinner into a transaction.

MIRA

(to the hosts, quickly)
He didn't mean that.

ROBERT

Yes I did.

A man from the settlement - older, confident - leans in from the next table. His voice carries.

SETTLEMENT VOICE 5

So. Billings. What's it like now?

CALLOWAY

Empty. Picked clean, mostly. Some buildings still standing.

SETTLEMENT VOICE 5

We send scavenging parties there in summer. Useful hardware, if you know where to look. Metal, mostly. Glass.

ROBERT

(flat)

But not wire.

A beat. The hall quiets slightly. Not all at once - a ripple, conversations dropping off.

SETTLEMENT VOICE 5

No. Not wire.

ROBERT

What happened to the wire?

GATEKEEPER

We buried it.

ROBERT

You buried it.

GATEKEEPER

A hundred miles of copper, aluminum, and steel. The catenary wire, the feeder cables, the substation coils. Everything the railroad strung up, we took down. Cut it, coiled it, and buried it. Three summers' worth of work.

HARLAN

(quiet)

Three summers...

ROBERT

Where?

GATEKEEPER

In the mountain. Old mining shafts,
a mile from the tunnel. Sealed them
after.

ROBERT

(a laugh - not a good
laugh)

You buried a hundred miles of
copper wire in a mine shaft.

GATEKEEPER

We returned it to the earth.

ROBERT

You could have - do you have any
idea what that copper is worth?
What you could build with it?

GATEKEEPER

We know exactly what it's worth.
That's why we buried it.

Robert's cup. Another drink. The hall is quiet now - the kind
of quiet where everyone is listening and pretending not to.

MIRA

(low, warning)

Robert. Not here.

ROBERT

Not here. Not at the bones. Not at
the settlement. Not anywhere, ever,
because every place we go, the
answer is the same - don't touch
it, don't want it, don't remember
it.

GATEKEEPER

The Correction took the current out
of the wire for a reason.

ROBERT

The Correction.

GATEKEEPER

That's what we call it. What
happened. The Shepherds came, and
they corrected us.

ROBERT

(laughing coldly)

And you call them Shepherds.

GATEKEEPER

They guide. They don't destroy
unless we force them to. Ten years,
and anyone who accepted the
Correction is still alive. The ones
who fought it aren't.

ROBERT

The ones who fought it were
murdered.

GATEKEEPER

You think the Shepherds just break
machines. They don't. Sometimes,
they take the people too. The ones
who won't stop.

ROBERT

What are you talking about?

GATEKEEPER

A man named Dale. First winter
here. He was an electrician before
the Correction - couldn't let it
go. Found a car battery in one of
the wrecks on the highway. Just
enough for a lamp. His daughter was
afraid of the dark.

A beat. The fire.

GATEKEEPER (CONT'D)

We heard the Shepherds that night.
Saw the light through his windows -
bright, white, not fire. I was
thirty yards away. I could feel it
in my teeth. The house was
untouched, but Dale and his
daughter were just gone.

ROBERT

(flat)
Bullshit.

GATEKEEPER

The ones who fought it couldn't let
go. And letting go was all that was
ever asked of us.

Robert sets his cup down. Hard. The thud of wood on wood.
Pours again - the brandy bottle scraping the table as he
drags it toward him. The pour is sloppy now. You can hear it
miss the cup, hit the table.

LIV

Dad-

ROBERT

I'm fine.

He's not fine. The next drink is loud - a full swallow, the cup set down wet.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Letting go. A hundred miles of copper wire. And you cut it down and buried it in a hole because some machines told you to be afraid.

GATEKEEPER

(steady)

Nobody told us to be afraid. We chose it. Fear is what keeps the Shepherds away. Fear is what keeps our children alive. If that looks like worship to you, you're not paying attention.

ROBERT

Oh, I clearly see your ignorance. And it looks exactly like worship. You wrapped the poles. You hung the insulators like - like icons. You painted scripture above the tunnel. You built a whole religion out of not touching a goddamn light switch.

His words are starting to slide. Not slurred - loosened. The consonants softer, the pauses in the wrong places.

GATEKEEPER

We built a community that has survived ten winters. What did you build?

Robert doesn't answer. The cup again.

GATEKEEPER (CONT'D)

You came here, missing a finger, carrying a girl who's sick with something you can't fix. Seven hundred miles from wherever you think the answer is, and you don't have a thing to show for all that wanting. So tell me - what exactly did holding on get you?

A long beat. Robert breathes. When he speaks, the anger is still there, but something underneath it has cracked open. The brandy didn't cause it - just unlocked the door.

ROBERT

You want to know what your
Shepherds cost me?

MIRA

(low, urgent)

Robert. Don't.

ROBERT

My wife died of pneumonia.

The hall goes still. A different kind of still.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Pneumonia. Do you - do you
understand what that means? A
course of antibiotics. A week on an
IV drip. A hospital with
electricity and a doctor who could
run a blood panel. That's what
would have saved her. That's what
she needed. Not willow bark. Not -
not prayer. Not fear.

Amoxicillin and a warm room.

His voice is breaking now. Not loud. Worse - the sound of a
man saying something he's been carrying for three years.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

She drowned in her own lungs. In
our house. In our bed. While I held
her hand and couldn't do a single
thing because everything that could
have saved her was used up, or
buried, or broken, or forbidden by
your Shepherds.

Silence. Absolute. The fire ticking. Someone's breath
catching - one of the settlement women, maybe. A child
pressing closer to a parent.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(quieter - the bottom of
it)

She was thirty-nine years old. It
took four days. Liv heard all of
it.

Nobody speaks. The cup. One more drink. His hand shaking - you can hear the brandy trembling in the cup. He sets it down.

Then the anger comes back. Not hot anymore - cold, and worse for it.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

So yes. I'm holding on. Because letting go means my wife died for nothing. It means my daughter dies next. And you fucking people - you sit here in your graveyard and you call that peace. You disgust me.

He stands. The bench scrapes back harshly, falls over. The hall is dead silent.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

You have your faith. Fine. Wrap your poles. Sing to your Shepherds. Bury every wire you find.

But I have a theory. A hypothesis. Something out there, past your tunnel, past your mountain - something that might prove every one of you wrong. And we are going through that tunnel tomorrow morning.

A beat.

The gatekeeper's chair scrapes back. She stands. When she speaks, her voice has changed - the patience is gone.

GATEKEEPER

No. You're not.

ROBERT

Excuse me?

GATEKEEPER

The tunnel is ours. We decide who passes and when. And a man who stands in my hall, drinks my brandy, and tells my people their dead died for nothing - that man does not get to walk through our mountain.

A murmur through the hall. Agreement. Someone says something low - "that's right."

ROBERT

You can't -

GATEKEEPER

I can. I have thirty people in this room and you have four. One of them is a child, and you can't walk a straight line to the door. So sit down, or leave.

But that tunnel is closed to you.

The hall shifts. The scrape of benches. People getting to their feet - not all of them, but enough. The sound of a room choosing sides without a word being spoken.

Robert's breathing. The brandy and the rage and the room closing in on him.

His voice drops. Not louder - quieter. The kind of quiet that's worse.

ROBERT

(very low)

If any of you zealots even try to stop us from reaching Seattle, I will find your copper graveyard, and I will bury you in it.

The crowd erupts.

MIRA

Robert! Jesus Christ, that's it.

She leaps up, and manhandles him out of the room.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Let's go.

ROBERT

(yelling, as he's dragged outside)

Then you can rot with the wires!

Silence. Total. The fire. A child breathing. Keeper's tags, shifting under the table.

The gatekeeper hasn't moved. Her breathing steady.

GATEKEEPER

(very quiet)

Take your people outside. Now.

CALLOWAY
We're going.

The door - cold air rushing in, the wind, the chimes. Mira hauling Robert by the arm. His boots stumbling on the threshold. The door banging shut behind them.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - CONTINUOUS

The cold hits them. Robert coughs - a hard, brandy-soaked cough. The chimes ringing in the wind.

CALLOWAY
(low, to Harlan)
Let's get the horses ready.

HARLAN
Yeah. Quietly.

Calloway and Harlan move off. Boots on frozen ground, tack jingling. Keeper's claws following Harlan.

Mira is still gripping Robert's arm. She steers him - you can hear the shuffle of his boots, the unsteadiness - toward a structure.

A door opens, scraping on dirt. A small space - the echo tightens. A stable, or a storage shed. Straw underfoot.

MIRA
In here. Sit down.

ROBERT
I don't need to -

MIRA
Sit. Down.

A thud. Robert dropping onto something - a bench, a bale. His breathing heavy in the small space.

MIRA (CONT'D)
(furious, barely
controlled)
You threatened to kill them. In
front of their children. In front
of your daughter.

ROBERT
(slurred)
They deserved -

MIRA

What? What did they deserve,
Robert? These people fed us. They
gave us brandy. They were going to
guide us through the tunnel in the
morning. And your response is to
threaten them?

Robert doesn't answer. His breathing. The straw shifting
under him.

MIRA (CONT'D)

What is it about these people? What
did they do that's so much worse
than everyone else we've met?

A beat.

ROBERT

(thick, fighting the
brandy)
You know what.

MIRA

I don't. Tell me. Because from
where I'm standing, they're not
that different from my settlement.
No electricity. Community rules.
Making it work without machines.

ROBERT

(a bitter laugh)
Your settlement isn't like this.

MIRA

It's closer than you think.

ROBERT

No. No! You - you made the best of
what you had. You and your people,
you - you adapted. You didn't have
a choice, and you built something
anyway. I respect that. I've always
respected that.

A beat.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

But these people? They don't just
accept it. They celebrate it. They
thank the machines that did this to
us.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

They wrap the poles in - in
ribbons, and they hang the pieces
up like trophies, and they teach
their children that the darkness is
a gift.

His voice cracks.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Eleanor would have been fine. Do
you understand that? Some
antibiotics. A week in bed. And
she'd still be here.

The straw. The wind outside, muffled by the walls.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(barely audible)
She'd still be here.

He's done. You can hear it - the fight going out of him. The
brandy pulling him down. His breathing slowing. A long,
ragged exhale.

MIRA

I know.
(softer)
I know, Robert.

She doesn't say anything else. The wind. The chimes, faint
through the walls.

He slumps down into the hay. His breathing steadying,
thickening toward sleep.

The door opens. Soft footsteps on straw. Lighter than Mira's.

LIV

(quiet)
I can stay with him.

MIRA

Liv -

LIV

I've got it. You've got more
important things to do.

A beat. Mira's hand on Liv's shoulder - the sound of contact,
brief.

MIRA

He didn't mean it. What he said in
there. The threat.

LIV
Yeah. He did. But he'd never
actually-

MIRA
I know.

LIV
Please fix it, Mira. If anyone can,
it's you.

Mira sighs.

MIRA
I'll try.

Mira's boots on the straw. The door opening, closing. Gone.

Liv settles next to Robert. The straw shifting. His breathing
- deep now, heavy, almost asleep. She puts her hand on his
arm.

LIV
(barely a whisper)
It's okay, Dad. I'm here.

ROBERT
(half-gone, mumbling)
...Eleanor?

A beat.

LIV
No. It's Liv.

ROBERT
(almost asleep)
...that's good. That's good.

His breathing deepens. Sleep takes him. Liv sits in the dark,
listening to her father breathe, the chimes outside, the cold
pressing through the walls.

SCENE 13 - "THE FIX"

EXT. SETTLEMENT - NIGHT

Mira's boots on the frozen ground. Fast, purposeful. The
chimes.

Angry voices from inside the hall - the settlement still awake, still talking about what just happened.

CALLOWAY
(stepping out of the dark)
Horses are ready. We can go now if -

MIRA
Not yet.

CALLOWAY
Mira, after what he just -

MIRA
I know what he said. And tomorrow morning, when he's sober, he's going to need a tunnel to walk through, not a burned bridge behind him. Running in the dark gets someone killed.

A beat. The wind.

CALLOWAY
So what's the plan?

MIRA
I'll talk to her.

CALLOWAY
She just threw us out.

MIRA
She threw Robert out. She told me to take my people outside. That's different.

HARLAN
(from the horses, low)
She's right. The woman spoke to Mira at the end, not to Robert. She knows who the grown-up is.

CALLOWAY
And if she says no?

MIRA
Then we go through the tunnel in the dark and you were right all along. But I'm asking first.

A beat.

CALLOWAY

What do you need from us?

MIRA

Stay here. Keep the horses ready.
And for god's sake, keep Robert in
that shed until morning.

HARLAN

What if he wakes up?

MIRA

Liv's with him. She's the only one
he listens to anyway.

Mira walks toward the hall. Her boots on the frozen ground -
steady, unhurried. The sound of a woman who's talked her way
into harder rooms than this.

She reaches the door. Knocks. Not loud. Three knocks, evenly
spaced. Deliberate.

The door opens. The warmth and sound of the hall spilling out
- but quieter now, the children gone to bed. Fewer voices.

SETTLEMENT VOICE 2

She doesn't want to -

MIRA

I know. Please tell her Mira is
asking. Not Robert. Mira.

Footsteps inside. A murmured conversation. Then the
gatekeeper's boots, approaching the door.

GATEKEEPER

You've got some nerve.

MIRA

So I've been told.

GATEKEEPER

Your man threatened my people.

MIRA

He's not my man. He's a father
whose daughter is dying and whose
wife died in his arms because there
wasn't a bottle of antibiotics
within a hundred miles. He drank
too much of your brandy, and he
said unforgivable things. I'm not
here to excuse that.

A beat. The wind through the door.

GATEKEEPER

Then what are you here for?

MIRA

Passage. In the morning. With a guide, the way you do it.

GATEKEEPER

After what he did? You don't have nerve, you have brain damage.

MIRA

What he said was about his wife. It just came out aimed at you.

I think you can see that.

The gatekeeper is quiet. The hall behind her. The chimes outside.

GATEKEEPER

The girl. The one he said was sick. What's wrong with her?

MIRA

Her heart. It's failing. There's a facility near Seattle that might be able to help her. That's why we're on this road in February. That's why a man who should know better just made the worst speech of his life in your dining hall.

A long beat. The fire inside, ticking.

GATEKEEPER

Seven hundred miles for a maybe.

MIRA

Because it's the only option left.

GATEKEEPER

And him? Is he going to be a problem on my mountain?

MIRA

He's passed out. You heard him - pneumonia, no medicine, nothing he could do. He hasn't forgiven the world for that, and he shouldn't have to. But he took it out on your people, and that was wrong.

(MORE)

MIRA (CONT'D)

He'll be silent in the morning.
I'll make sure of it.

The gatekeeper is quiet. The fire. The wind through the door.

GATEKEEPER

I run a settlement of thirty-four people. I've buried six of them myself. Fever, infection, a fall from the wall. I know what it sounds like when a man is talking about his dead and not the room he's standing in.

A beat.

GATEKEEPER (CONT'D)

That doesn't make what he said acceptable.

MIRA

No. It does not.

Silence. The chimes. The gatekeeper exhales - a long, slow breath. A decision being made.

GATEKEEPER

He doesn't talk to my people. He stays out of sight until you're through. I don't want my children seeing the man who threatened to bury their parents.

MIRA

Understood.

GATEKEEPER

And when you get to Seattle - whatever you find there - you keep it on that side of the mountains. I don't want to know what it is. I don't want it coming back through my tunnel.

MIRA

Fair.

GATEKEEPER

That's not a promise I hear.

MIRA

I don't know what we'll find in Seattle. I don't know if it'll help her.

(MORE)

MIRA (CONT'D)

I can't make a promise about a thing I haven't seen yet. But I can tell you I didn't leave my own settlement because I want to start the old world back up. I left because a girl is dying and her father needed our help.

The gatekeeper is quiet for a long moment.

GATEKEEPER

First light. I'll send Jonas to guide you through. Don't make me regret this.

MIRA

Thank you.

GATEKEEPER

Don't thank me. Just get through the mountain and don't come back this way.

The door closes. The warmth cut off. Mira standing in the cold, the chimes, the dark.

She exhales. The breath she's been holding since she knocked.

Her boots on the frozen ground, walking back. Calloway steps out of the shadow.

CALLOWAY

Well?

MIRA

First light. They'll guide us through.

CALLOWAY

How?

MIRA

I told her the truth.

A beat.

CALLOWAY

Which truth?

MIRA

Robert's. Eleanor's. Liv's.

Calloway is quiet for a moment.

CALLOWAY

And she said yes.

MIRA

She said don't come back.

The chimes. The wind. The tunnel mouth ahead of them in the dark, breathing cold.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Let's be up before dawn. I want to be ready before Robert opens his eyes.

Her boots on the straw. A door opening, closing. Quiet.

The settlement sleeps. The chimes ring.

The tunnel waits.

LIV (V.O.)

We made it to the tunnel. The one Calloway said would take us under the mountain and into Idaho.

Dad told a room full of strangers about Mom. About the pneumonia. About holding her hand while she - while it happened. He's never told me any of that. It took a bottle of plum brandy and a room full of people he hated to break it out of him. Then he threatened to kill them.

Mira fixed it. I don't know how. That's what Mira does, though. She walks into rooms where everything is broken and she finds the one person who can still be reasoned with, and she reasons with them.

Dad will be ashamed in the morning. He should be.

He called me Eleanor. He thought I was someone he'd already buried. I almost didn't correct him.

END OF EPISODE 5