

EARTH, AGAIN
Episode 6

by

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SCENE 1 - "FIRST LIGHT"

EXT. TUNNEL SETTLEMENT - PREDAWN

Darkness. Boots on frozen ground. Mira, moving fast, quiet. A hand on a shoulder - shaking someone awake.

MIRA

(low)

Calloway. It's time to get out of here.

Calloway wakes clean - no grogginess, no transition. One breath asleep, the next alert. Leather creaking as he sits up.

CALLOWAY

Yeah, ok. Robert?

MIRA

Still out. Harlan's getting the horses tacked.

From the stable, the sounds of Harlan working in the dark - buckles, cinches, a horse blowing through its nose. Keeper's claws on the frozen ground, circling Harlan's legs. The soft clink of tack being handled by a man who could do it blind and probably has.

CALLOWAY

Liv?

MIRA

With her father. She'll get him up.

A beat. The wind through the settlement - and the chimes. Those glass insulators, still ringing in the dark. The sound of the place they're about to leave.

CALLOWAY

How do you want to do this?

MIRA

Quietly. Robert stays between us. Head down, mouth shut. We walk straight to the tunnel mouth and we don't stop.

CALLOWAY

And if he doesn't cooperate?

MIRA

He will. He knows what he did.

A door scrapes open - the shed where Robert slept. Liv's voice, low, steady. The voice you use on someone who's sick.

LIV
(from inside)
Dad. Wake up. We're going.

A groan. The sound of a man surfacing through a hangover - the thick, wet breathing, the shift of weight on straw. Robert coughs. Then coughs again, harder.

ROBERT
(rough)
What time -

LIV
Before dawn. Mira arranged it. Get up.

The straw shifting. Robert standing, unsteady - you can hear the wobble, his hand finding the wall. Another cough. Then stillness. The kind of stillness where someone is remembering what they said the night before.

ROBERT
(a sharp inhale)

*
*

LIV
(quiet)
Yeah.

ROBERT
Liv -

LIV
Not now. Drink this.

A waterskin uncapped. Robert drinks - long, desperate swallows. Gasps. Drinks again.

LIV (CONT'D)
Can you ride?

ROBERT
I can ride.

LIV
Then let's go.

They emerge from the shed. The cold hits - Robert sucks in a breath. The settlement is still asleep.

The group assembles by the horses. The sounds of mounting - stirrup leather, saddle creaks, the particular shuffle of riders settling in for the first time that day.

Robert's breathing. He's standing by his horse but not mounting - the silence of a man who's stalled.

MIRA

(low)

Robert. Horse. Now.

He mounts. Slow, clumsy, the brandy still in his muscles. His saddle leather protests.

Footsteps approaching on frozen ground. Unhurried. A young man's stride - lighter than the Gatekeeper's, but with the same deliberate pace.

JONAS - (he/him, 20s), the tunnel guide - all business, no warmth, the kind of calm that comes from walking through darkness every day.

JONAS

(flat, all business)

I'm your guide, Jonas. So... Five riders, six horses, one dog.

MIRA

That's right.

JONAS

Stay close. Single file once we're inside. I lead, you follow, nobody wanders. The floor is bad in places - collapsed ties, standing water up to the horses' chests in one section. I'll call it out. Listen to my voice and nothing else.

CALLOWAY

How long?

JONAS

Mile and a half. Should take about forty minutes if the horses cooperate. Longer if they don't.

LIV

You don't have a light?

JONAS

I have a torch. I'll use when I need it.

He doesn't wait for acknowledgment. His boots on the frozen ground, heading toward the tunnel mouth. The group follows - hooves on packed dirt, then the metallic ring of buried rail under the earth.

The chimes fall behind them. The settlement sounds - the goats shifting in their pen, a door creaking in the wind, a child's cough from behind a wall - fade one by one. The valley narrows. The wind funnels tighter.

Then the draft. That cold exhalation from the tunnel mouth - wet rock, standing water. The horses feel it before the riders do. One snorts. Another plants its feet and has to be urged forward.

Keeper stops. His claws scrape the ground - the sound of a dog bracing against being pulled forward. A low whine, rising.

HARLAN

(quiet)

Come on, boy. We're a team,
remember?

Keeper whines again. His paws shuffle, retreat. He drops low - you can hear his belly hit the frozen ground.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Yeah. Me neither.

Harlan dismounts - the careful, rib-guarded descent. His boots on the ground. He picks up the dog. The grunt of a man lifting sixty pounds of animal against broken ribs - a short, bitten-off sound he doesn't let become a groan. Keeper squirms, then goes rigid against him.

CALLOWAY

(low)

You can't carry him the whole way.

HARLAN

Just need to get him in.

The tunnel mouth. The sound changes - the open air compresses, narrows, and the echo starts. Hooves on dirt become hooves on wet stone, and every footfall comes back doubled, tripled. The wind stops. The chimes are gone. In their place, the drip of water - irregular, syncopated, coming from above and ahead and everywhere at once.

JONAS

Single file. Follow my voice.

They enter.

SCENE 2 - "INTO THE TUNNEL"

INT. TAFT TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Darkness. Absolute. The kind of dark where your eyes never adjust because there is nothing to adjust to.

The sound world contracts to what's immediate: hooves on wet stone, the slap of water on rock walls, breathing - horse and human and dog, all of it amplified by the tunnel into something larger, closer, more alive than it should be. Every sound has a tail, a ghost, an echo that returns a half-second later from the curved ceiling.

JONAS

(ahead, his voice carrying
strangely in the enclosed
space)

Stay center. The walls are closer
than you think.

A horse brushes something - the scrape of saddlebag on stone, then a cascade of small debris, pebbles or old mortar, clattering down and splashing into water.

LIV

(startled)

Whoa -

CALLOWAY

(close to her)

You're fine. Follow my voice.

LIV

I can't see anything. Not - I don't
mean it's dark. I mean there's
nothing. It's like being inside a
sound.

CALLOWAY

That's about right. How about some
light, Jonas?

JONAS

When it's needed.

They ride. The hooves find a new rhythm on the tunnel floor - slower, more cautious, the horses picking their footing. Somewhere ahead, Jonas's boots squelch through standing water.

ROBERT
 (quietly, just to Liv)
 You doing alright, Liv?

*
 *
 *

LIV
 (cold)
 I'm fine.

*
 *
 *

JONAS
 Water ahead. Six inches, maybe
 eight. The floor drops for about
 twenty yards then comes back up.
 Keep the horses moving - if they
 stop in it they won't want to start
 again.

The hooves hit water. The sound changes completely - no
 longer the sharp report of hoof on stone but a heavy, muffled
 slosh. The water is cold enough to make the horses gasp - a
 sound horses barely ever make, a sharp intake through flared
 nostrils. Splashing. Tack jingling. The pack horse fights its
 lead - the rope snapping taut, the animal grunting.

ROBERT
 (to his horse, barely
 above a whisper)
 Easy. Easy.

The first words he's spoken to anything other than Liv since
 last night.

They clear the water. The hooves find stone again. The
 dripping resumes - louder now, or maybe it just seems louder
 because they've been listening harder.

JONAS
 Good. Halfway.

MIRA
 Halfway?

JONAS
 Give or take. There's a vent shaft
 above us - the air changes here.
 You can feel it.

Harlan stops. Lowers Keeper to the ground - a careful motion,
 ribs protesting, the dog's paws scrabbling for a second on
 the wet stone before they find purchase.

Keeper stands. Trembling - you can hear it in the rapid click
 of his nails on stone. He sniffs the floor, hard, fast -
 reading the tunnel the only way he knows how. A low whine
 starts in his throat, then stops.

HARLAN
 (low, to the dog)
 There you go. Stay close, Keeper.

Keeper stays close. His claws tick on the wet stone beside Harlan's boots - a new sound in the tunnel, faster and lighter than the hooves. Unhappy, but moving.

A drip lands on someone - Liv, from the startled breath.

LIV
 Ah! Something dripped on me. God,
 that's cold.

CALLOWAY
 Snowmelt. Coming down through a
 hundred feet of rock.

LIV
 How do you know what it tastes
 like?

CALLOWAY
 You can taste it. Mineral. No dirt,
 no surface water. That drop started
 as snow on the ridge above us,
 probably three, four days ago.
 Worked its way down through cracks
 in the granite.

LIV
 You can taste it?

CALLOWAY
 (the faintest warmth)
 I opened my mouth.

A beat. Liv laughs - short, surprised, an involuntary sound that the tunnel catches and throws back at them from both directions. It sounds strange in this place. Human.

They ride. The hooves. The dripping. The breathing. Time dissolves in the dark - there is no way to know how far they've come or how far they have to go. The tunnel is the whole world.

Then - a sound ahead. Not dripping. Not hooves. A low, resonant groan, like metal under stress.

JONAS
 (steady)
 That's the old support structure.
 Steel beams. They shift when the
 temperature changes. It's nothing.

ROBERT

Nothing?

JONAS

The mountain is always moving. Just slower than us.

The groaning fades. They ride. Keeper's claws tick steadily beside Harlan's boots - the dog hasn't left his side since being set down. Harlan's breathing is labored - the ribs, the cold. But his boots keep their pace.

JONAS (CONT'D)

Collapse ahead. Hold up.

The hooves stop. The dripping fills the silence. Then a new sound - Jonas's pack shifting, something hard and hollow being drawn out.

JONAS (CONT'D)

(under his breath, fast,
almost swallowed by the
echo)

Forgive the spark.

The scrape of flint on steel. Once. Twice. On the third strike, sparks catch - a sharp orange bloom in the dark, blinding after so long with nothing.

The torch takes. Fire climbs the wrapped head and steadies, and the tunnel appears around them.

The horses react first - heads tossing, hooves shuffling back from something ahead. Liv's horse sidesteps and she grabs mane.

JONAS (CONT'D)

Stay left. Hard left. The right side drops away.

He holds the torch out over the gap. The ledge is there - solid stone against the left wall, wide enough for a horse. But only just. And the drop beside it is real now, visible, worse than what they'd imagined in the dark.

CALLOWAY

Yeah, that's deep. How far across?

JONAS

Thirty feet. One at a time.

Jonas steps onto the ledge first, torch held high.

JONAS (CONT'D)

First rider. Slow. Watch the wall,
not the drop.

Calloway. His horse doesn't want to go - it can see now, and seeing is worse than not seeing. Calloway lays a hand on its neck and squeezes with his legs. The hooves find the ledge, testing, committing. Stone grinds under the weight. He clears it.

JONAS (CONT'D)

Next.

Liv. Her horse hesitates at the edge. A hoof scrapes - loose stone tumbles into the gap. A long pause before the splash comes back.

LIV

(very quiet)

Okay.

She urges the horse forward. It goes. Hooves on solid stone.

LIV (CONT'D)

This is fine. This is all fine...

She breathes.

JONAS

Next.

Robert. His horse follows the ones ahead, hooves steady on the narrow ledge. He clears it.

JONAS (CONT'D)

You're next, Mira.

Her horse crosses steady - no hesitation, hooves sure on the ledge. She clears it and stops.

MIRA

(to Jonas, quiet)

How long has this been here?

JONAS

Since before me. It's getting wider.

MIRA

And you walk this every time.

JONAS

Helps keep people from wandering in on their own.

A beat. Mira understands - the collapse isn't just a hazard. It's a gate.

HARLAN

Coming over.

Then Harlan on foot, leading his horse, Keeper pressed against his leg. The horse sees the drop and shies - hooves scrambling, a sharp whinny that the tunnel turns into a scream. Harlan doesn't yell. His voice drops lower.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

(barely audible)

Straight on. Look at the light.

Straight. There you go.

The horse steadies. Crosses. Keeper follows - quick, low, his claws scraping stone as he slinks past the drop without looking at it.

JONAS

All clear.

He lowers the torch. Then he snuffs it against the wet wall. A hiss. The dark comes back like a door closing.

LIV

Why did you -

JONAS

No longer needed. Quarter mile.
Stay on my voice.

LIV

Jonas. When you lit the torch - you said something. Before the spark caught.

A beat. His footsteps don't slow.

JONAS

(matter-of-fact)

"Forgive the spark." You say it so the spark knows it's not welcome. That it does its job and goes.

LIV

Like a prayer?

JONAS

Like an apology. Spark's the first step to a current. And current is a trespass against the Shepherds. So you tell it - just the fire.

(MORE)

JONAS (CONT'D)

Nothing else. Just the fire and
then go out.

He keeps walking. The dark. The dripping.

The tunnel changes. The air moves differently - not the stale
circulation from the vent shaft but a current, thin and
steady, carrying something different in it.

LIV

I can smell it.

CALLOWAY

Pine.

LIV

And - wet. Like rain, but not rain.
Like the ground after rain.

The hooves quicken. The horses know. That ancient animal
intelligence that reads pressure and scent and the quality of
air - they know they're close to out. The rhythm picks up,
the splashing through shallow puddles faster, the breathing
lifting.

Then - the echo changes. Shortens. The dripping thins out and
something else leaks in from ahead: wind. Birds. Morning
birds, calling in the gray before sunrise. The tunnel is
ending. You can hear the space opening up, the ceiling
pulling away, the sounds losing their ghosts.

LIV (CONT'D)

(a breath)

I can see his ears. The horse's
ears. I can see them.

The first thing visible after a mile and a half of nothing -
the silhouette of a horse's ears against a slowly brightening
dark.

SCENE 3 - "IDAHO"

EXT. TAFT TUNNEL - WEST PORTAL - DAWN

They emerge.

The air hits them first - heavier, damper, carrying the smell
of living wood instead of frozen stone. Pine, cedar, wet
earth. A different place.

The horses stop without being asked. They stand, breathing
hard, blowing through their noses.

After the tunnel, everything sounds huge - the wind in the trees, a creek somewhere below them, the birds. Space. Open space, after a mile and a half of mountain pressing down.

MIRA

Oh, that's nice.

Keeper bolts the last ten yards - out of the tunnel and into the air, his claws going from wet stone to frozen dirt. He shakes, full-body, ears flapping, then presses his nose to the earth and inhales like he's drinking it. His tail moves. The first wag since they went in.

Harlan exhales - long, slow, the sound of a man letting go of something he's been holding for a mile and a half. Leather creaks as he leans into his horse. He doesn't say anything.

Jonas's boots on stone behind them - but not on dirt. Not on Idaho ground. He's stopped at the tunnel mouth. He hasn't crossed.

JONAS

And you are through. This trail follows the old rail grade down to the valley floor. You'll hit a logging road in about two miles - that connects to the highway. Stay on the highway and you'll reach the Coeur d'Alene river by afternoon.

MIRA

Thank you, Jonas.

A beat. When Jonas speaks again, his voice is aimed past Mira.

JONAS

The Gatekeeper wanted me to tell you something.

MIRA

What?

JONAS

"The mountain doesn't care what you believe. It just asks you to be quiet while you're inside it."

A beat. The wind. The birds. The tunnel behind them, exhaling.

JONAS (CONT'D)

Don't come back this way.

He turns and walks into the tunnel. His bootfalls on the wet stone - steady, unhurried, receding. The echo carries them for a long time. Then nothing. Just the cold air still pushing out of the tunnel mouth like breath.

Nobody speaks.

Calloway turns his horse west - hooves on dirt, then the soft crunch of pine needles. Mira follows. Liv follows. Harlan, moving stiff, mounts up with a sound he can't entirely swallow - half grunt, half held breath. Keeper trots ahead, nose to the ground, reading Idaho.

LIV
(quiet)
Dad?

A long beat.

ROBERT
(barely there)
I'm coming.

He turns his horse. The hooves find the others. They ride west - the old rail grade under them, wooden ties soft and giving, steel rails humming dully when the horses step on them.

EXT. OLD RAIL GRADE - IDAHO - MORNING

The descent. Hooves on soft wood - the old railroad ties, rotting and giving under the weight. The wind that followed them through Montana is gone. In its place: dripping. Not the tunnel's dripping - this is alive. Snowmelt running off branches, collecting in the needles, falling in fat drops onto the forest floor.

The horses move easier. The footing is soft - hooves sinking into pine duff over packed earth instead of ringing on frozen ground.

Keeper ranges ahead for the first time since the blizzard. His paws shuffling through the duff, sniffing hard and fast - a whole new library of smells. A squirrel chatters from a branch - Keeper stops. A beat. Then he trots on. Unimpressed.

CALLOWAY
(to Mira, low)
Logging road should be close.
Another mile, maybe less.

MIRA
How do you know?

CALLOWAY

The stumps. Cut stumps, not blown-down. Someone was logging this hillside. Road can't be far.

A beat. The dripping. The hooves.

MIRA

How's Harlan?

CALLOWAY

Well, he carried that dog a quarter mile in the dark and hasn't said a word about it.

MIRA

That's how you know it hurts.

They ride. The grade levels out - the echo lengthens, the dripping thins. A creek somewhere below, running fast over rocks.

Then the hooves change - soft earth to gravel, compacted, crunching under weight.

CALLOWAY

There it is. This'll take us down to the highway.

They turn onto it. The gravel crunches under the horses - a new rhythm, looser than asphalt, tighter than trail. The creek gets louder as they descend. Birds everywhere - not the solitary calls of the Montana prairie but layers of them, overlapping, filling the canopy.

LIV

Listen to that. There's so many of them.

CALLOWAY

Wetter here. More insects, more seeds. More of everything.

LIV

It smells like - I don't even know. Like the world just woke up.

CALLOWAY

Cedar. That's the big smell. And underneath it - moss, wet bark, the creek. Idaho.

LIV

And barely any snow on the ground.
That's crazy.

They ride down. The creek gets louder as they descend - wider, faster, becoming something bigger. The Coeur d'Alene river, the sound of real water moving through real country.

The gravel ends. The hooves hit asphalt - cracked, broken in places, but asphalt. A highway.

CALLOWAY

There it is. I-90. River's on our
left all the way to the lake.

They ride west. The highway is rougher than Montana's - frost heaves, cracks wide enough for the horses to step around, sections where the asphalt has buckled into gravel. But it's a road.

The trees are bigger than anything in Montana - the creak of them in the wind is deeper, slower, the sound of old wood.

MIRA

How far have we come from the
tunnel?

CALLOWAY

Five miles, maybe six. We're in the
valley now. Long way back up.

HARLAN

Keeper's happier down here. Listen
to him.

Keeper's paws on the asphalt - steady, easy, none of the reluctant clicking from the tunnel. He ranges ahead, nose working, then circles back. A dog doing his job.

They ride. Miles pass. The river beside them, the trees above them, the broken highway under the hooves. The sound world stays new - wetter, greener, alive in a way Montana wasn't.

Then - something changes in the air. A shift. The dripping from the branches picks up. Gets steadier. The drops aren't falling from snowmelt anymore. They're falling from the sky.

LIV

Is that -

A drop hits leather. Then another. Then the canopy above them begins to hiss - a soft, rising sound, millions of drops hitting millions of needles at once.

LIV (CONT'D)

Rain. It's raining.

MIRA

(quiet)

I almost forgot water can fall from
the sky, and NOT be snow.

HARLAN

This is the other side of the
mountain range. Different weather
entirely.

The rain builds. Not hard - steady, soaking, the kind that
doesn't stop. The sound is everywhere: on the canopy above,
on the leather of their coats, on the horses' backs, on the
asphalt under the hooves.

MIRA

This isn't summer rain - it's
barely above freezing. We get
soaked out here, we're in trouble.

The rustle of coats being pulled tighter. Collars turned up.
The rain drumming on leather and wool, finding the gaps,
working through.

LIV

(teeth already tight)

It's cold.

CALLOWAY

We need cover. Push on - first
thing with a roof, we stop.

They ride faster. The hooves on wet asphalt, urgent, the rain
hammering down. Liv's teeth chatter - the rapid click audible
even through the rain.

MIRA

Liv, hands under your arms. Keep
them there.

LIV

(through the shivering)

I'm okay.

MIRA

You're shaking. Do it.

Minutes on the highway. The rain doesn't let up. The horses
lower their heads, pushing through it. Keeper presses tight
against Harlan's horse, trotting in the animal's lee.

Then - from ahead. A sound that doesn't belong to the rain. Crashing. Branches breaking, feet on loose ground, breathing hard and ragged. Someone stumbling out of the tree line onto the highway.

Calloway's hand moves. The creak of the bowstring drawn back.

CALLOWAY
(sharp)
Hold.

The group halts. The rain hammering down on all of them.

A shape on the highway ahead - stumbling, catching itself, stumbling again. Falls. Hands slapping wet asphalt. Breathing. Fast, shallow, wrecked. A kid's breathing.

JOSHUA - (he/him, teens), bleeding and freezing, stumbling out of the trees onto the highway in the rain - running from something horrible.

JOSHUA
(gasping, through the
rain)
Don't shoot. Please.

CALLOWAY
What the hell?

He eases the bow down. The kid is on his hands and knees on the wet highway, rain streaming off him, gulping air. He's shaking - not just from exhaustion. From cold. Deep cold, the kind that's been in the bones for hours.

LIV
He's bleeding.

She's off her horse before anyone speaks. Boots splashing on the wet asphalt, moving to him. She kneels in the rain beside him.

LIV (CONT'D)
Hey. Hey - look at me. You're okay.

The kid looks up. Breathing still ragged. When he speaks, it comes in pieces, half-swallowed by the rain.

JOSHUA
(gasping)
Please - please don't - I'm not -
I'm not trying to -

LIV
Nobody's going to hurt you. Here.

The sound of a water skin uncapped. She holds it to him. He drinks - desperate, choking, too fast.

LIV (CONT'D)

Slow. Slow down.

ROBERT

(from his horse)

Liv, come back here.

LIV

He's hurt, Dad. And he's freezing.

MIRA

(cutting through the rain,
decisive)

We all are. We need to get off this
road. Now.

ROBERT

What's your name?

JOSHUA

(still catching his
breath)

Joshua.

She dismounts. Her hands on the kid's arm - checking, quick.
The rain driving into all of them.

MIRA

Can you stand?

JOSHUA

(teeth chattering)

I think - yeah.

MIRA

He's riding with someone. We're not
stopping here to figure this out -
we're stopping when we have a roof.

CALLOWAY

We can put him on the pack horse.
She's sound enough to carry a small
rider.

Calloway dismounts. The jingle of tack as he strips the packs
off the spare horse and distributes them across the other
animals. A cinch tightened, a strap adjusted.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

(to Joshua)

Can you mount up on your own?

JOSHUA

Yeah. Yes, Thanks.

The creak of leather as Joshua pulls himself into the saddle. The horse shifts under unfamiliar weight, then settles.

MIRA

Let's find shelter, quickly. Then we'll figure things out.

They ride.

CALLOWAY

There - off the road. Abandoned homestead.

They turn off the highway. Hooves on a gravel drive, overgrown, weeds scraping against the horses' legs. Joshua up behind Mira, barely holding on, shaking against her back. Then the creak of an old gate, hanging open. A yard. The sound of the rain changes as they get close - hitting a roof, hitting walls, the echo of a structure.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Porch is wide enough to get out of the rain. Harlan, is there a barn?

HARLAN

(already moving)

Lean-to off the back, for firewood. No door, but it's got a roof and three walls. Horses'll fit.

The horses are led around. Hooves on mud, then the hollow sound of a wooden floor - the lean-to. The animals crowd in, blowing hard, stamping, shaking water. Tack jingling as riders dismount. Keeper shakes - full-body, spraying everyone.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Damnit, Keeper.

The front door of the house. Calloway pushes it - the groan of swollen wood, then it gives.

CALLOWAY

Wood stove. Chimney pipe looks clear - I can feel the draft. And the place is furnished. Sofa, chairs. Whoever lived here just... left.

LIV

There's even a coat on a hook by
the door.

A beat. The rain. The coat, still hanging where someone put
it for the last time.

CALLOWAY

Let's get warm.

The stove door creaks open. Kindling snapped from dry wood -
a chair in the kitchen that's already half-collapsed. Flint
striking steel. The tinder catches. The crackle of flame
climbing through dry wood. The stove draws - the draft
pulling the smoke up and out, the fire ticking as the iron
heats.

MIRA

Get your wet layers off. Drape them
over the chairs, near the stove.
Joshua, sit down. Let me look at
you.

The rustle of coats being peeled off. The heavy wet slap of
wool draped over furniture. The fire building, popping, the
heat pushing back against the cold.

Joshua sits. His breathing is evening out, but his teeth are
still going. Mira kneels beside him. Her bag - the buckle,
the rummage for cloth and salve.

MIRA (CONT'D)

(working)

Where are you cut?

JOSHUA

Arm. Branch caught me when I was
running. And my side - I fell on
something.

MIRA

Hold still.

She peels back wet fabric. Joshua hisses through his teeth.

MIRA (CONT'D)

The arm's not deep. Messy, but
it'll close on its own. The side...

She presses. He sucks in a breath.

MIRA (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Bruised ribs, maybe cracked. Not
broken. You're lucky.

Robert stands. His boots cross the room - toward Liv, not the
fire.

ROBERT
(low, just to Liv)
Liv. About last night -

LIV
(not looking up, focused
on Joshua)
Not now.

ROBERT
I need to -

LIV
(quiet, firm)
I'm busy, Dad.

A beat. Robert stands there. The fire ticking. Mira glances
up at him - a look that says: not the time.

Robert steps back. Sits down somewhere. The springs creak.

MIRA
Joshua, when did you eat last?

JOSHUA
Not since - not since the attack. I
just ran.

LIV
Attack?

JOSHUA
Men. They - they attacked our camp
yesterday. Killed my dad. I ran.
Been running since.

A beat. The wind in the pines. Keeper sniffing Joshua's hand.

ROBERT
How many?

JOSHUA
Six. Maybe seven. They had horses.
I went into the trees where they
couldn't ride.

MIRA
How long ago?

JOSHUA
Yesterday. Maybe the day before. I
don't know.

ROBERT
Then you ride with us. We're
heading west to Seattle and we're
not slowing down. You keep up,
you're welcome. But we don't stop.

The condition is clear. Joshua heard it. Mira heard it. Liv
heard it.

JOSHUA
I'll keep up.

The group settles in. Springs creaking - Harlan dropping into
an easy chair with a grunt that turns into a sigh. Keeper
jumps up and curls next to him.

HARLAN
Well now. That's a chair.

Mira crosses to the kitchen. Her boots on the floorboards -
the creak of old wood, different from room to room. Cabinets
opening. Most empty. A few cans rattling - left behind by
whoever was here last.

MIRA
(from the kitchen)
Fairly picked over, but you never -
Holy shit!

CALLOWAY
You ok?

MIRA
Yeah, just...

CALLOWAY
What?

MIRA
Guys... There is coffee.

HARLAN
No way.

MIRA
(brings something back)
Look!!

CALLOWAY
Maxwell House. I'll be damned.

She shakes the container.

MIRA
It's like, quarter full too!

HARLAN
And there's a kettle here.

The fire ticks. The rain on the roof - steady, constant, a wall of sound outside. From the lean-to, the horses settling - stamping, blowing, but calmer now. Out of the wet.

The kettle on the stove. The wait. Joshua wrapped in a blanket someone found in a closet, sitting near the fire, still shaking but less. Keeper has left Harlan's chair and is nosing at Joshua's hand. Joshua lets him. His fingers find the dog's ears.

LIV
I can't remember the last time I
sat on something with cushions.

ROBERT
It was Carol Hendricks' place. The
night before we left.

LIV
That doesn't count. We sat for ten
minutes.

ROBERT
Still had cushions.

HARLAN
(from the chair)
Keeper's out. Dead asleep already.

The kettle begins to whisper. It's the most domestic sound they've heard in weeks. A stove. A sofa. Rain on a roof. A kettle.

Liv sits beside Joshua on the sofa. Close, but not too close. The springs groan under the added weight.

LIV
(quiet)
Joshua. You said men attacked your
camp. Your dad -

Joshua doesn't answer right away. His hand stops on Keeper's ears. Then starts again.

JOSHUA

He was fast. With a knife - fastest hands I ever saw. But there were too many of them.

A beat. The rain on the roof.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

(quieter)

He told me to run. That was the last thing he said.

LIV

I'm sorry.

JOSHUA

I just ran. I didn't even - I didn't look back. I just ran and I kept running and then it was dark and I was in the trees and I couldn't hear them anymore and I just...

His voice breaks. Not a sob - something worse. The sound of someone who's been running for a day and a half on adrenaline and has finally stopped, and now the thing he was outrunning has caught up.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

(cracking)

He's gone. He's actually gone and I just left him there.

LIV

Hey. Hey.

She puts her hand on his arm. He's shaking again - not from cold this time.

LIV (CONT'D)

You didn't leave him. He told you to go. He saved you.

JOSHUA

(barely holding it together)

It was just us. My whole life, it was just me and him. My mom died before the Collapse. I barely remember her. And now he's -

He can't finish. The fire ticks. The rain. Keeper presses harder against his leg, sensing something wrong.

LIV

(quiet, steady)

I know what that is. Losing a parent. My mom died three years ago. Pneumonia.

A beat.

LIV (CONT'D)

For the longest time I'd wake up in the morning and forget. Just for a second. And then I'd remember, and it was like losing her again. Every single morning.

JOSHUA

(a whisper)

Does it stop?

LIV

The forgetting part does. And that's almost worse. Because it means you've accepted it. And you don't want to accept it.

The fire. The rain.

JOSHUA

I don't know where to go. I don't even know where I am.

LIV

About fifteen miles from Coeur d'Alene, whatever that means.

A beat. Almost a laugh from Joshua. Almost.

JOSHUA

I've never been out of the river valley. My dad and I had a place up one of the creek drainages. Ran traps, mostly. Traded furs at a settlement two days south. That was the world. The whole world.

LIV

You were six when the Collapse happened?

JOSHUA

Five. I don't really remember before. Just... the after. Him teaching me everything.

(MORE)

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

Traps, skinning, fire, reading the water. Everything I know, he taught me.

LIV

That's a lot. He gave you that.

He doesn't answer. The fire. Keeper sighs.

Nobody speaks for a while. The particular quiet of people drying out, warming up, letting the cold drain away.

The kettle builds to a low boil.

Ceramic mugs are set out.

MIRA

Alright, here, one teaspoon each.

She measures out the coffee, careful with the ratio.

Mira pours - the sound of hot water into cups. Ceramic cups, found in the kitchen. She passes them around. The careful hand-to-hand, the wrap of cold fingers around warm ceramic. She hands one to Joshua. He takes it with both hands, holds it like it's the only warm thing left in the world.

They drink. The fire ticks. The rain drums. Keeper sighs against Joshua's leg.

HARLAN

(quiet, almost to himself)
There was a time, I would have
turned my nose up at instant
coffee.

A beat.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

That time has passed.

LIV

So this is what coffee tastes like?

ROBERT

Yes, indeed.

LIV

It's... interesting.

MIRA

(laughs)
More for us.

CALLOWAY

Can I get some half and half with this?

MIRA

Fresh out. Just got rainwater and optimism.

They drink. Nobody rushes it. The sounds of sipping, of breathing in the steam, of cups settling back into hands.

Then Robert sets his cup down. The clink of ceramic on wood. A breath - the kind you take before you say something you've been building toward.

ROBERT

I owe all of you an apology.

The fire. The rain. Nobody interrupts. Liv's hands go still on her cup. She tried to stop him from doing this privately. He's doing it the only way she'll let him - in front of everyone.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

What I said at the settlement - I can't even remember all of it. I just remember Mira's face. And the Gatekeeper's. And knowing I'd broken something that was working.

A beat.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Mira. You saved us. You walked back into that hall after I'd burned it down and you talked our way through. I don't know what you said to her and I don't deserve to know, but - thank you.

MIRA

(quiet)

You're welcome.

ROBERT

I'm very sorry. I won't behave that way again.

CALLOWAY

Oh, I bet you will.

MIRA

I appreciate that, Robert, but he's right.

(MORE)

MIRA (CONT'D)

You'll want to do it every time someone tells you the world is better without the things that would have saved Eleanor. That's not a flaw, that's grief. But out here, your grief is everyone's problem. We can't afford it.

Robert doesn't answer. The fire.

ROBERT

(after a while)

The Gatekeeper called them
Shepherds. Said they "corrected"
us.

MIRA

I know.

ROBERT

You didn't argue with her. You didn't push back. You just - let it stand. And I couldn't understand that. I still can't. How you can hear someone say "the machines that killed millions of people are guiding us" and just nod.

A long beat. The kettle simmers on the stove. The rain.

MIRA

Alright... I'm going to tell you something I've never told anyone outside the settlement. Calloway knows. Nobody else.

From the easy chair, Calloway shifts. The creak of springs. He doesn't speak.

MIRA (CONT'D)

One Eighteen.

ROBERT

Calloway said the number once. On the road. I didn't ask.

MIRA

One hundred and eighteen people.
That's how many died because of me.

The fire ticks. The rain. Liv's breathing catches - she didn't know this either. Joshua is very still, his cup in both hands, listening to something he doesn't fully understand but knows is enormous.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Soon after the Collapse, I built a medical clinic. Solar-powered. Nothing extravagant - a few panels on the roof, a battery bank, enough to run lights, equipment, and a refrigerator for vaccines and insulin. We kept antibiotics stocked, did minor surgery under real light. It was the only powered medical facility for hundreds of miles.

People came from everywhere. Families. Children. Women about to give birth. People who would have died without blood products we could keep cold.

She pauses. The stove pops.

MIRA (CONT'D)

We treated hundreds. It worked, Robert. Beautifully. I'd never worked so hard, or loved it so much. A solar panel, battery bank, some equipment, and a nurse who remembered her training. That's all it took. For a little while, people lived who would have died.

I thought I'd proven something - that we could have power, carefully, in small amounts, for the things that mattered most.

A beat. The rain on the roof.

ROBERT

(quiet)

What happened?

MIRA

The nannies found the power signature. Of course. Back then, we didn't understand them yet.

She's quiet for a moment. When she speaks again, her voice has changed - flatter, more controlled.

MIRA (CONT'D)

They came at night. Three of them. The sound - Calloway, you remember the sound.

CALLOWAY

(low)
I remember.

MIRA

Like a hum. Not mechanical - not organic. Like something very large breathing through a metal throat. Then that tone. The one that says you've been judged. The panels went first. Then the battery bank. Then the building.

A beat.

MIRA (CONT'D)

There were a hundred and twenty-four people in the clinic that night. Patients. Families sleeping in the hallway because they had nowhere else to go. Children. The nannies didn't distinguish between the technology and the people near it. The power signature was the target. Everything within the signature was the target.

LIV

(barely audible)
Oh God.

MIRA

Only six people survived. Calloway pulled four of them out. I only saved two.

The fire. The stove ticking. The rain, steady and indifferent.

MIRA (CONT'D)

One hundred and eighteen people.
Because I turned on a light.

Nobody speaks. The weight of it fills the room - heavier than the rain, heavier than the cold.

ROBERT

(after a long silence)
Mira -

MIRA

Don't. I'm not telling you this so you'll feel sorry for me.
(MORE)

MIRA (CONT'D)

I'm telling you because you asked me a question - how I can hear someone call them Shepherds and just nod. And the answer is: because I tried it your way.

I believed what you believe. I said, "We can have this. We can be careful. We can keep the power small and the lights low and they won't notice." And they noticed. And a hundred and eighteen people paid for my belief.

A long beat. The fire.

MIRA (CONT'D)

The Gatekeeper isn't wrong, Robert. She's not right, either - it's not peace, and they're not Shepherds. But the fear she built that settlement on? The rule that says don't touch the wire, don't turn on the light, don't give them a reason to come? That rule keeps her people alive. I know, because the opposite killed mine.

ROBERT

(quiet, shaken)

So when you came on this trip -

MIRA

I came because Liv is dying and I wasn't going to let that happen without trying. But I also came because I need to see what's in Seattle when you do. Because if it's what I think it is - then someone needs to be in that room who understands that risk.

ROBERT

I understand the risk.

MIRA

(a challenge)

Then someone who *cares* about the risk.

The fire. The rain. The stove ticking. A long silence.

Mira looks at Liv. When she speaks again, her voice is different - not controlled. Open.

MIRA (CONT'D)

Your uncle was one of the one
eighteen, Liv. Eleanor had brought
him in three days before. Broken
leg - a fall, nothing that should
have killed anyone. He was sleeping
in a cot by the east wall when the
nannies came through.

LIV

(quiet)

Mom never told me how he died.

MIRA

Your mother pulled me out of that
building. I was going back in. She
wouldn't let me. That's how we
became... whatever we were-allies.

(then, softer, afraid to
claim it)

Friends.

(beat)

She saved my life, and I couldn't
save her brother. That math doesn't
balance, Liv. It never will.

*
*
*
*

The fire. The rain on the roof. Nobody moves.

ROBERT

(after a long silence)

I didn't know.

MIRA

No one does. Outside the
settlement, One Eighteen is just a
number Calloway says when he wants
me to stop talking.

CALLOWAY

(from the chair, quiet)

Works every time.

A beat. Then Mira laughs - short, raw, the kind of laugh that
lives next door to something worse.

The fire. The rain on the roof. The kettle, simmering. The
house around them - someone else's home, someone else's life,
holding them together for an afternoon.

Robert stands. His boots on the floorboards. He crosses to the stove, picks up the kettle, and pours hot water into Mira's cup. The sound of it - careful, deliberate. A small thing. The only thing he has.

ROBERT
(very quiet)
Thank you for telling me.

Mira takes the cup. The warmth of it in her hands.

MIRA
When we get to Seattle, and you see what's there, and every part of you wants to turn it on - you look at me first. That's what I'm asking. Not permission. Just a breath. One breath before you reach for the switch.

The fire ticks. The rain eases - the drumming on the roof softening, the hiss in the canopy thinning.

The storm passing.

CALLOWAY
(standing, boots on the floor)
Rain's letting up.

MIRA
How are the coats?

Calloway checks - the sound of hands on wool, testing.

CALLOWAY
Damp. Not soaked. Good enough if we keep moving.

ROBERT
Let's just... finish our coffee first.

The group sits, sipping. The fire crackling.

The rain drumming on the roof.

MIRA
How far to Coeur d'Alene?

CALLOWAY
Fifteen miles, maybe. We can make it before dark if the rain holds off.

ROBERT

Good. Five more minutes. I'll check around, see if we missed anything useful.

He stands, and walks into the bedroom.

HARLAN

Well, hello there...

He gets up, crosses the room. He picks the guitar up. Turns it over in his hands - the creak of old wood.

He returns and sits back down. Tests the strings, tuning them - plucking single notes, twisting the pegs, plucking again.

Background texture while the room settles.

Robert comes back into the room.

ROBERT

Liv. Found something for you.

He sets something in her hand. The click of brass.

LIV

What is it?

ROBERT

Open it.

The case clicks open. She taps the glass. A needle swings, ticks, settles.

LIV

A compass?

ROBERT

Brass case, surveyor's grade. Glass is cracked but the needle's good.

LIV

It works?

ROBERT

Points north. That's all it needs to do.

Behind them, Harlan finds something. The tuning stops and a melody starts - open, simple, the kind of thing that sounds like it's always been there. Not a performance. Just a man, a guitar, and a fire.

LIV
 (over the music, quiet)
 Thank you.

She turns it over in her hands, examining it, before clicking it closed again. *

ROBERT
 It's a great find. And now it's yours.

LIV
 (pleased)
 Oh yeah, that's a keeper.

The guitar stops. Not a last note fading out - a hand on the strings, killing the sound dead. Silence, except the fire and the rain.

Liv looks up. Everyone has gone still.

Harlan is staring at the guitar in his lap, his hand flat across the strings.

LIV (CONT'D)
 What? What did I -

HARLAN
 (flat, quiet)
 Nothing. You didn't say anything.

He sets the guitar down. Stands. His boots cross the room - the floorboards creaking under him. The front door opens, the rain louder for a moment, then it closes behind him. Keeper is up and following - claws on wood, then gone.

Nobody speaks. The fire ticks. The rain.

MIRA
 (very quiet)
 Leave him be.

LIV
 What did I say?

Mira doesn't answer.

CALLOWAY
 Come on, let's get moving.

The group stirs. Coats pulled on - still heavy with damp, the wet wool smell of them.

They move outside to the horses.

Saddles lifted back onto horses. Buckles and cinches. Keeper stretches - the groan and yawn of a dog getting up.

They mount up. Joshua on the pack horse - Calloway stripped the packs and distributed them while the others were inside. The horse shifts under unfamiliar weight, then settles. Joshua sits easy, comfortable in the saddle. A kid who grew up riding.

Hooves down the gravel drive, then the highway. The rain has thinned to a mist - the drops scattered and light. The river loud beside them.

SCENE 4 - "ON THE ROAD"

EXT. I-90 - NORTHERN IDAHO - AFTERNOON

Hooves on wet asphalt. The group riding steady. The mist hanging in the trees, the river running beside them.

Joshua rides near the back. His head turns - the creak of leather as he twists in the saddle, scanning the tree line. Scanning again.

LIV

(riding up beside him)
You keep looking behind us.

JOSHUA

Habit. The men who hit our camp - they use this road. Or they used to.

LIV

You think they'd follow you this far?

JOSHUA

(a beat)
Maybe? They work the river valleys mostly. East of here. They don't go past the big ridge - too exposed, not enough cover.

CALLOWAY

(from ahead, he's been listening)
How far to the ridge?

JOSHUA
Half a day, maybe. Once you're past
it, they won't follow.

CALLOWAY
(to Mira)
We'll push through.

They ride. The terrain changing - the valley widening, the
trees thinning in places where old clear-cuts are growing
back. Joshua keeps turning in his saddle. Can't help it.

LIV
(low, just to Joshua)
You're safe with us. Calloway
doesn't miss.

JOSHUA
With a bow?

LIV
With anything.

A beat. Joshua's saddle creaks as he stops twisting to look
behind them. Not fully relaxed - but trying.

Liv rides up beside Robert. The creak of saddles, the horses
matching pace.

LIV (CONT'D)
Dad.

ROBERT
Yeah.

LIV
I upset Harlan somehow.

ROBERT
It's ok honey. Let it be.

They ride in silence for a good bit.

LIV
There's more death out here than I
expected.

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

ROBERT
More than there used to be. People
get desperate when the rules
change.

LIV
Have you killed people?

A long beat. The trail. The pines.

ROBERT
Yes.

LIV
How many?

ROBERT
That's not something a girl needs
to know about her father.

They ride. Liv doesn't push it. But she doesn't move her horse away either. They stay side by side for a while, the question sitting between them like the stones on the trail - solid, unmovable, part of the landscape now.

SCENE 5 - "CHURCH SONGS"

EXT. CAMPSITE - CLEARING IN THE PINES - NIGHT

The fire, low and careful. The pop and tick of dry wood. Horses picketed nearby - the stamp and blow of animals settling. Keeper curled by Harlan's feet.

Joshua eats. The sound of someone who hasn't eaten properly in days trying not to eat too fast. A spoon scraping a bowl. The last of the broth.

HARLAN
There's more if you want it.

JOSHUA
(mouth full)
I'm okay.

HARLAN
Son, I've been hungry, before. Have more.

The ladle in the pot. Another pour. Joshua eats. Slower this time.

Liv sits by the fire. Calloway is whittling a stick down to a point.

LIV
(low)
Calloway.

CALLOWAY

Hm.

LIV

Back at the house. When I said -
when the guitar stopped. What was
that?

A beat. The fire pops. Calloway doesn't answer right away.

CALLOWAY

(quiet)

He had a daughter.

The scraping stops.

LIV

What?

CALLOWAY

Harlan. He had a daughter. Before.

The fire. An owl. Liv doesn't move.

LIV

(barely audible)

What was her name?

CALLOWAY

Don't know that he ever said.

A beat.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

But she had this thing she used to
say. When she found something she
liked - a rock, a feather,
whatever. She'd hold it up and say -

He stops. Lets Liv get there on her own.

LIV

(understanding)

"That's a keeper."

CALLOWAY

Yeah.

The fire. The crickets. Somewhere behind them, Harlan's low
voice to the dog. Still too quiet to hear.

LIV

And the dog -

CALLOWAY

The dog came after. Found Harlan on
the road, or Harlan found him.
Doesn't matter which. He called him
Keeper the first day and never
explained why.

A long silence.

LIV

What happened to her?

CALLOWAY

(after a beat)

What happened to a lot of people's
kids.

He picks the stick back up. The scraping resumes - steady,
rhythmic, giving her space to sit with it.

LIV

I feel like such an asshole.

The quiet grows oppressive.

CALLOWAY

(A bit louder, to Harlan)

Wish we had that guitar.

Harlan reaches into his coat. The harmonica case - the click
of it opening. He raises it to his lips and plays. Low, slow,
something without a name. The melody winding through the
firelight.

Joshua stops eating. Listens. His spoon still in his hand,
forgotten.

The harmonica. The fire. The horses breathing. A moment that
almost feels safe.

Harlan finishes. The harmonica clicks shut.

JOSHUA

(quiet)

My dad used to sing.

HARLAN

What'd he sing?

JOSHUA

Old stuff. Church songs, mostly. He
wasn't religious, he just liked how
they sounded.

HARLAN

Best reason to sing anything.

The fire. The adults settling into sleep - the shift of blankets, the breathing changing.

Liv and Joshua, sitting near the fire. The particular quiet of two people who aren't ready to sleep yet.

LIV

Can I ask you something?

JOSHUA

Yeah.

LIV

What's that scar? On your hand.

JOSHUA

Skinning knife. Slipped when I was twelve. My dad stitched it up with fishing line.

A beat.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

What about yours? On your chest.

LIV

It's from a surgery. Before the Collapse. There's a machine in my chest. It keeps my heart beating.

JOSHUA

(a beat)

A machine?

LIV

A pacemaker. It's small. Battery-powered.

A long pause. The fire ticking.

JOSHUA

And it still works?

LIV

For now.

Joshua is quiet, turning that over. A machine in someone's chest. Something from the old world, still ticking inside a living person. He's never encountered anything like it.

JOSHUA
Is that why you're going to
Seattle?

LIV
Yeah.

JOSHUA
(quiet)
I hope they can fix it.

LIV
Thanks. Me too.

The fire burns low. The coals ticking. Keeper sighs.
Somewhere out in the dark, an owl - a single, falling note.

Joshua is quiet for a long time. Then:

JOSHUA
What am I supposed to do?

LIV
What do you mean?

JOSHUA
After. When you get to where you're
going. You all have a place you're
headed. I don't have... I don't
have anywhere. I can't go back to
the cabin - the raiders know where
it is. The settlement's two days
south, and they barely tolerated us
when we had furs to trade. I don't
have anything to trade anymore.

A beat. The fire.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
(quieter)
My dad had this whole plan. Trap
through the winter, save the best
pelts, trade for seed in the
spring. Start a garden. Maybe find
a group that needed a good trapper.
He was always planning the next
thing. And I just... I don't know
how to do that part. I know how to
set a snare and skin a marten. I
don't know how to figure out where
to go.

LIV
You're fifteen.

JOSHUA
That's old enough out here.

LIV
No, it isn't. It's not old enough
anywhere.

The fire. A long silence. Liv makes a decision - you can hear it in the way she shifts, the way her breathing changes. The slight lean forward.

LIV (CONT'D)
Come with us.

JOSHUA
What?

LIV
To Seattle. Come with us. You know
this land, you know how to trap.
You're not dead weight, Joshua.
Come with us.

JOSHUA
You can't just - your dad, and Mira
-

LIV
They'll be fine with it. And if
they're not, I'll make them fine
with it.

A beat.

JOSHUA
(careful)
Why?

LIV
Because you lost your dad yesterday
and you're fifteen and it's
February and you're alone.

Joshua doesn't answer. The fire ticking. Keeper shifts in his sleep.

JOSHUA
(after a long time)
Okay.

LIV
Okay?

JOSHUA

Yeah. Okay.

The fire. The wind in the pines. They settle into quiet. Two teenagers, sharing a fire in a world that doesn't have many teenagers left.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

You should be careful through here,
by the way. Creek beds especially.

LIV

Why?

JOSHUA

Bears. Grizzlies. They're thick in
the valleys this time of year -
waking up early, hungry. My dad and
I always stayed high when we could.

LIV

What do you do if you see one?

JOSHUA

Make noise. Back away slow. Don't
run.

He says it like directions to the nearest creek - practical,
not urgent. The bears are a fact of the landscape, not a
fear. Not like the raiders. Not like the thing that actually
scares him.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

It's the raiders you worry about
out here, though. Bears are just
bears.

LIV

Sure. Just bears.

The fire. The wind in the pines. They settle into quiet.

SCENE 6 - "BLOOD IN THE WATER"

EXT. CREEK CROSSING - MORNING

Dawn. The group packing up - the routine sounds of camp
breaking. Saddles lifted, cinches tightened. Keeper
stretching, yawning.

Someone is already kicking dirt over the fire, stamping out
the embers. Fast, efficient. Doesn't have to be asked.

HARLAN

Look at that. Kid knows his way
around a campfire.

CALLOWAY

He does.

JOSHUA

Water skins are full, too. There's
a spring about fifty yards east.

CALLOWAY

(a beat)

When did you do that?

JOSHUA

Before you were up.

CALLOWAY

(impressed)

Alright, then.

MIRA

(to Robert, low)

Robert, how's the hand?

ROBERT

Stiff. Throbs with my heartbeat.
It'll loosen up.

MIRA

Let me see it before we ride.

She checks - the unwrap, the look. Quick, routine. Robert
flexes what's left.

ROBERT

Going to be a while before I get
used to the sight.

MIRA

I know. But you're still here,
that's what matters.

She wraps it back up.

LIV

You slept like three hours.

JOSHUA

I slept fine.

LIV

You were up before Calloway.
Nobody's up before Calloway.

JOSHUA

(a small smile in his
voice)

I'm a light sleeper.

LIV

You're a no sleeper.

The group finishes packing. Cinches tightened, saddlebags secured.

They ride down toward a creek - you can hear it before they reach it. Fast water over rocks, swollen with snowmelt. Not deep, but wide. The horses will have to pick through it single file.

CALLOWAY

Take it easy through here. The
rocks are slick. Let the horses
find their footing.

They enter the creek. Hooves on wet stone - the careful, deliberate steps of horses testing the bottom. Water rushing around their legs. Keeper splashing through, lighter on his feet.

The group strings out. Calloway first, then Mira, then Robert. Liv next, Joshua riding beside her.

Harlan in the rear, Keeper beside him.

Halfway across. The water loud, the horses steady.

Then Keeper stops. Dead still in the current. A growl - low, rising, the kind that starts in the chest.

HARLAN

(sharp)

Keeper? What's the matter, boy?

Keeper barks, frantically.

The brush on the far bank explodes.

The bear comes out fast - a blur of brown, a sound like a tree falling. No warning growl, no bluff charge. It's in the water before anyone can turn.

Horses scream. The sound of a horse panicking in a creek - hooves slipping on rock, water crashing, the animal lunging sideways. Mira's horse rears - the fear of it, the saddle creaking.

CALLOWAY
MOVE! Get to the bank!

Confusion. Water. Screaming horses. Keeper barking - sharp, furious, continuous. The bear in the creek, the sound of its breathing heavy and wet, grunting.

Liv's horse rears back, tossing her - hooves hammering the creek bed, water flying.

Liv hits the water hard. The splash, the gasp, the scramble of hands on wet rock.

She's on her knees in the creek.

ROBERT
LIV! MOVE!

The bear turning toward her now - the heavy breathing, grunting, closer. The sound of something enormous shifting its weight in the water.

Calloway draws his bow.

CALLOWAY
Liv! Move! I don't have the shot!

It bellows.

Liv screams.

The bear closer. The water. Her breathing - quick, terrified.

JOSHUA
LIV!

Joshua kicks his horse forward - hooves hammering the creek bed, water flying.

LIV
JOSHUA, NO!

Joshua drives between Liv and the bear, shouting, trying to turn it.

CALLOWAY
Kid, get back! GET BACK!

The bear turns. A terrifying roar.

A slashing sound. Fast and heavy and brutal. Joshua's horse screams. The splash of something falling - a body hitting water. Joshua's breathing - hitched, labored, desperate.

The snap of Calloway's bowstring. The thud of an arrow hitting flesh. The bear doesn't stop - a roar, louder, angrier.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
SHOOT! Somebody shoot!

A rifle crack - the echo off the creek walls. Then another.

Another bowshot into flesh.

The bear roaring. A third rifle shot. A fourth.

The bear breaks off. Crashing back through the brush, heavy and fast, the sound of branches snapping, then fading. Gone. Not dead - gone.

The creek. The water running. Horses blowing, stamping, still panicked.

Then -

LIV
Joshua? JOSHUA!

She's splashing through the creek. Falling, getting up, splashing.

He's in the water. The sound of Liv reaching him - her hands on his coat, pulling him up. The water running past them both.

LIV (CONT'D)
No no no no no - Mira!

Mira is there. Fast. The splash of her boots, her knees hitting the creek bed.

MIRA
Here, pull him to the shore.

They drag Joshua out of the water. He cries out.

Mira's hands working - checking, pressing, the sounds quick and practiced.

Joshua's breathing - shallow, wrong, gurgling.

A beat. The creek. Keeper whining from the bank.

MIRA (CONT'D)

(quiet)

Liv.

LIV

Fix him. Do something. You can fix this.

MIRA

Liv - I couldn't fix this in a hospital. I'm sorry, honey.

LIV

He just rushed in there. He was -

MIRA

(steady, the voice she
uses when there's nothing
left)

I know.

The creek. Joshua's breathing - shallow, wrong, slowing. Liv holding him.

His breathing catches. A long pause. Then nothing.

The creek keeps running. A bird calls from somewhere upstream. Keeper whines.

LIV

(barely a whisper)

Joshua. No.

Nobody speaks. The water and the wind and the morning, carrying on without him.

The group on the bank. Wet. Silent. The horses standing head-down, still shaken.

CALLOWAY

(low, to Mira)

That bear isn't gone. It'll circle back. We need to move.

Mira looks at Liv. Liv is kneeling beside Joshua on the creek bank. Her hand on his chest.

MIRA

Liv. We have to go.

LIV

We can't just leave him here.

CALLOWAY

We can't stay. That bear is still close. Keeper knows it - listen to him.

Keeper is pacing, nose up, whining. Hackles raised. Calloway's right.

ROBERT

(to Calloway)

How long do we have?

CALLOWAY

Not long enough to dig a proper grave.

A beat. Robert kneels at the creek edge.

ROBERT

Here, these creek stones. We can at least cover him up.

CALLOWAY

A cairn. OK, that works. But quickly.

Starts picking up stones. Heavy, flat creek stones, still wet. He doesn't say anything. Just starts stacking them.

Calloway joins him. Then Harlan, favoring his ribs. Then Mira. The sound of stones lifted from water, carried, placed. The rough cairn taking shape over Joshua's body. It's fast. It's not enough. Everyone knows it.

Liv places the last stone. Her hand stays on it for a moment.

LIV

He was fifteen. He survived raiders killing his only family. And now he's dead, because he put himself between me and a bear.

Nobody answers. The creek. The wind. Keeper still pacing.

ROBERT

(gently)

Liv. We have to go now.

LIV

Thank you, Joshua.

She stands. The group mounts up. The sounds of wet leather, buckles, horses turning toward the trail.

They ride out. Fast. The hooves on the far bank, climbing away from the creek.

Miles. The trail climbing through pines. The group strung out, quiet. The only sounds are hooves, wind, and Keeper's paws on the packed earth.

LIV (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

We made it to Idaho. I keep waiting for that to feel like something - a border, a milestone, proof we're getting closer. But the mountains don't care what state you're in, and neither does the rain.

Mira told us about the clinic. A hundred and eighteen people, dead because she wanted to help. She's been carrying that number the way Dad carries Mom's ring - close, heavy, never set down. I didn't understand her before. I thought she was stubborn. But she's not. She's terrified of being right.

And Harlan - every time he says that word, he's saying her name. Every time he calls his dog, he's calling his daughter. He's been carrying her this whole time, in the only word he has left.

Everyone out here is carrying someone they couldn't save. Dad carries Mom. Mira carries a hundred and eighteen strangers. Harlan carries a girl who loved feathers and rocks.

And now I'm carrying Joshua. A boy who shared a fire with us and told me about his dad's church songs. Who was going to come with us to Seattle. And now he's under creek stones, because he was braver than any of us.