

EARTH, AGAIN
Episode 8

by

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SCENE 1 - "THE AFTERMATH"

EXT. THE MARKETPLACE - AFTERNOON

The city after a removal. The sound is wrong. Spokane is still there - still breathing - but muffled. Suppressed. Vendors talking lower. Fewer of them calling out. The smithy hammer silent. No children's voices. No fiddle.

Footsteps on cobblestone - quick, purposeful. People moving with their heads down, not lingering.

LIV

(shaken, walking fast)

Mira, that was Colter. The guy who sold Dad the map.

MIRA

I know.

LIV

He was just sitting behind his table yesterday. He had books, and tools, and - he sold us a map. And now he's -

MIRA

I know, Liv. Keep walking.

LIV

Where are we going? The inn is the other way.

MIRA

The clinic. I have a patient who's close to delivering and I want to check on her. And Parish will be in the Hearth - I want to talk to her.

They cross the bridge. The sound of the river below, the Hearth ahead - but today even the Hearth is subdued. Doors shut. No children playing. The school silent.

Then the sound comes.

Not the full tone from before - smaller, tighter. A scanning pulse. Low and rhythmic, coming from above and to the east. Moving along the river.

LIV

(freezing)

Mira. Do you hear that?

MIRA
Keep walking. Don't stop.

LIV
It's another one!

MIRA
It's probably just a patrol. Keep
your head down and keep walking.

The pulse sweeps the bridge. People around them duck their heads, press against the railing, keep moving. Practiced. Nobody runs. You don't run.

The pulse passes over Liv.

And holds.

The tone shifts. Deepens. Narrows - the same focused beam they heard in the square an hour ago. Pointed down. Pointed at her.

LIV
(barely breathing)
Mira. It stopped.

MIRA
I know. Don't move.

LIV
I can feel it. The same thing as
before - in my chest. It's -

She gasps. Her hand goes to her sternum. The tone and something beneath it - her pacemaker, ticking, almost audible in the silence. Two rhythms, nearly aligned.

Five seconds. Ten.

People on the bridge are staring. Backing away. Giving Liv space - not kindness, fear. They saw what happened in the square. They know what a focused scan means.

BYSTANDER 1
(whispered, horrified)
It's pointing at her.

BYSTANDER 2
Get away from her -

Then the tone shifts back. Neutral. The pulse widens, sweeps on, moves west along the river. The nanny drifts over the falls and is gone.

Liv's legs buckle. She catches herself on the bridge railing - her hands on the wood, breathing hard.

MIRA
(grabbing her)
I've got you. You're fine. Can you walk?

LIV
(shaking)
Yeah. I think - yeah.

But the bridge isn't empty. People are watching. People who saw the nanny point at a stranger's daughter and hold.

BYSTANDER 3
(to someone, not quiet enough)
She was with those travelers. The ones who came in yesterday.

BYSTANDER 1
They were at Colter's stall. I saw them.

MIRA
Change of plans. Back to the inn.

They turn around. Walking fast. Liv unsteady, Mira's arm around her.

They reach the Marketplace side. Word is moving faster than they are. Heads turning. Conversations stopping as they pass. The market was already tense - the removal cracked it open, and now fear is leaking through.

AGITATOR - (he/him), a man in a doorway with a loud voice and a crowd's fear - the kind who doesn't start fires but fans them.

AGITATOR
(loud, from a doorway)
Hey. Hey! You - the girl. The nanny just scanned you. On my bridge. In my city.

MIRA
(low, to Liv)
Don't engage. Keep walking.

AGITATOR
You came in with the group from the east? Friends of Colter's?

Other voices now - not a mob yet, but the nervous energy of people looking for someone to blame.

BYSTANDER 1

They were at his stall yesterday.
Buying maps.

BYSTANDER 2

And now he's gone. And the nanny's
scanning their kid.

AGITATOR

What did you bring into this city?

MIRA

(turning, firm)

We didn't bring anything. We're
travelers. We're leaving.

AGITATOR

Leaving? After a removal? After
your girl just got scanned? You
brought something in and Colter
paid for it.

MIRA

That's not what happened.

AGITATOR

Then why did the nanny focus on
her?

Mira doesn't have an answer for that. Because the real answer
would only enflame things.

They keep walking. The crowd following - a dozen people now,
footsteps behind them, voices getting louder.

SCENE 2 - "CONFLICT AT THE INN"

EXT. THE LAST PINT - CONTINUOUS

Robert is outside the inn - he heard the tone, he heard the
commotion. Calloway beside him. Harlan in the doorway with
Keeper, who's growling low.

ROBERT

(seeing Liv)

Liv! What happened?

MIRA

(fast)

Nanny scanned her on the bridge.
People saw. Get inside.

The following crown is close now, tight. Pressing in.

AGITATOR

(pushing through the
crowd)

You're not going anywhere until you
explain -

A scuffle. He reaches for Liv's arm, grabs it.

LIV

Let me go-

The sound of a fist hitting a jaw. Hard. The crack of it. A
body staggering back - boots scraping cobblestone. Someone
falling down.

ROBERT

Don't touch her!

AGITATOR

(from the ground, stunned)

You - he hit me! You all saw that!

The crowd surges forward - angry voices, the sound of people
closing in.

A knife slides from a sheath.

CALLOWAY

That's close enough, people.

The crowd hesitates. Then -

The front door of the inn slams open. Boris bursts out. He's
not a small man. The sound of his boots on the cobblestone -
heavy, deliberate, unhurried.

BORIS

(roaring)

Blyad! Chto za huynya!

CALLOWAY

Anyone touches her again, they'll
be bleeding.

BORIS
(quiet, calm, to the
agitator)
You want to lay hands on little
girl?

I have better idea. Lay hands on
me. See what happens.

Will be good fun.

The agitator is still on the ground, looking up at Boris. The
crowd behind him has gone quiet.

BORIS (CONT'D)
No? Not so big man now?
(to the crowd)
Take your little mob and go. All of
you. You are scared - I understand.
But you do not come to my door and
frighten a child.

A beat. Nobody moves.

BORIS (CONT'D)
(kicks the prone man once)
Go. Or no trout for you. Evvvvvver.

The crowd breaks. Not all at once - the edges first, people
peeling away, then the middle, then the agitator picking
himself up and backing off. Footsteps retreating on
cobblestone. Muttering, but moving.

Boris watches them go. Then turns.

BORIS (CONT'D)
(to the group, quieter)
Inside. Now, please.

SCENE 3 - "REGROUPING"

INT. THE LAST PINT - CONTINUOUS

The door closes. The bolt slides. The street noise cuts off.

The group stands in the inn. Breathing hard. Keeper pacing,
hackles up.

BORIS
Sit. I bring cider.

ROBERT
(to Liv)
Are you hurt?

LIV
(shaking)
No. I'm - no. It scanned me, Dad.
It stopped right over me and it -

She can't finish. Robert pulls her in. His arms around her.
She lets him.

A beat. The fire. The falls, faint through the walls.

They take their seats around a table.

MIRA
(to the group, controlled)
We know what it saw. For some
reason, it moved on. Is it possible
that they make an exception for
tech keeping her alive?

ROBERT
Maybe? We've had some close calls
before, that we couldn't explain.

MIRA
Regardless, everyone on that bridge
saw the scan. Everyone in the
market saw the crowd. By tonight,
the whole city knows. And I don't
think we want to explain ourselves
to a mob.

CALLOWAY
Then we leave. Right now.

MIRA
And go where? The city's on edge,
there's an angry crowd outside, and
the nannies are still flying patrol
patterns. The whole city will be
watching if we ride out now.

CALLOWAY
Better than sitting here waiting
for that mob to come back with more
friends.

HARLAN
(quiet)
Calloway's right. But so is Mira.
(MORE)

HARLAN (CONT'D)
We can't leave now and we can't
stay long.

Boris brings over ciders. The thunk of mugs on wood.

BORIS
On the house.

ROBERT
(to Boris)
Thank you. For out there.

BORIS
(shrugging)
Is my inn. My rules. Nobody touches
guests.

SARAH
(coming over)
My Russian bear.
(to Liv)
You okay, sweetheart?

LIV
(small)
Yeah. I think so.

The group sits. Breathing. The inn around them - quieter now,
the few remaining patrons keeping their distance.

The fire low. The falls outside, constant.

CALLOWAY
We need to figure out -

A knock at the door. Not angry, not a mob. Two sharp raps.
Official.

Boris looks at the group. Goes to the door. Opens it.

PARISH
(controlled, quiet)
I need to speak with them.

BORIS
They're my guests.

PARISH
And I'm your Mayor. Open the door,
Boris.

Boris steps aside. Parish enters. She takes in the room.

PARISH (CONT'D)
I just heard what happened.

MIRA
Parish -

PARISH
I'm not here to blame you. I'm here because by morning, every person in this city will know that a nanny scanned your daughter. After what happened to Colter, that's enough. People will connect you to him whether it's true or not. And I can't protect you from that.

ROBERT
We were about to -

PARISH
You need to leave tonight. I'm opening the south gate for you - just you, just once. It'll stay closed until morning, so no one will follow you. You leave after dark, before the city wakes up and the fear turns into something I can't control.

MIRA
(quiet)
You're putting us out.

PARISH
I'm keeping you alive. There's a difference.

You're welcome back, in a few weeks. But right now, people are too jumpy.

A beat.

MIRA
I understand.

PARISH
The south gate. One hour after dark. Don't be late.

She leaves. The door closes.

Silence. The fire. Keeper whining softly.

CALLOWAY
(standing)
You heard her. We pack. Now.

The sound of movement - chairs pushing back, boots on stairs, gear being pulled from rooms. Buckles and straps. The urgency of people who've been told to run.

SCENE 4 - "QUIET DEPARTURE"

INT. THE LAST PINT - NIGHT

The group coming down the stairs for the last time. Gear on their backs, saddlebags over shoulders. The inn is nearly empty - just Boris behind the bar, Sarah wiping down a table. The fire burned low.

BORIS
Horses are ready. I tacked them myself.

ROBERT
Boris, you didn't have to -

BORIS
I wanted to. Your man Harlan showed me what they like. Salt block in the morning, easy with the cinch on the sorrel. Good horses. They deserve proper send-off.

SARAH
(pressing a bundle into Mira's hands)
Here. Bread, cheese, dried elk for the road. Don't argue.

MIRA
Sarah.

SARAH
Don't. Just take it.

A beat. The inn around them - the creak of the building, the fire popping its last.

LIV
I don't want to leave.

Nobody answers. Because nobody does.

BORIS

(quiet)

You come back someday. When things
are calm, we find space for you.

LIV

Promise?

BORIS

Boris promise is Boris promise.

HARLAN

(extending his hand)

Thank you. For everything.

BORIS

(shaking it)

Do svidaniya.

They walk out the back. The night air - cold, sharp after the
warmth of the inn. The stable. Horses shifting, already
saddled.

The creak of leather as the group mounts up. Keeper circling
Harlan's horse, ready.

SCENE 5 - "DEPARTURE"

EXT. SPOKANE - STREETS - NIGHT

The city at night. Not silent - the river, always the river.
But the streets are empty. Their hooves on cobblestone,
echoing off the buildings. No vendors. No crier. No fiddle.
Just the hollow sound of a city that's pulled its shutters
closed.

A torch flickers at an intersection - a night watchman. He
sees them, says nothing, steps back into a doorway. He knows.

They cross the main bridge. The river loud below, black and
fast. The falls ahead - the roar growing, then fading as they
turn north. The mist on their faces, then gone.

EXT. SPOKANE - SOUTH GATE - NIGHT

The south gate. A single torch, held by a guard. The gate
opens - just wide enough for horses single file.

GUARD

(flat)

Parish says safe travels.

MIRA

Tell her thank you. For everything.

The guard doesn't answer. He just holds the torch.

Calloway goes first. His horse's hooves on the bridge planking, then on dirt. Then Mira. Then Robert. Liv follows - she turns in the saddle as she passes through.

The city behind her. The torch. The walls. The falls, fading.

HARLAN

(low, to Keeper)

Come on, boy.

Keeper slips through the gate. His claws on dirt now, not cobblestone.

The gate closes behind them. The heavy scrape of timber on stone. The bolt sliding home. Done.

SCENE 6 - "LEAVING SPOKANE"

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - NORTH OF SPOKANE - NIGHT

The sound world changes completely. The city is gone. The walls, the crowd noise, the cobblestone - all of it replaced by wind. Open wind, across flat ground, with nothing to stop it. The creak of saddles. Hooves on cracked asphalt - I-90, stretching west into the dark. The falls are a murmur behind them.

CALLOWAY

(riding point)

I-90 is just ahead. Moon is full.

Let's put some miles behind us.

They ride. The sound of five horses moving through open country at night. Steady, rhythmic. Keeper trotting alongside, panting softly.

Nobody speaks for a long time. The hooves. The wind. The creak of leather. Miles passing in the dark.

LIV
(quiet)
I'm sorry.

A beat.

MIRA
For what?

LIV
For all of it. Spokane. The mob.
Boris having to - Parish had to
choose between us and her whole
city. And it's because of me.
Because of this thing in my chest.

ROBERT
Liv-

MIRA
That's not your fault.

LIV
I know it's not my fault. I didn't
ask for a pacemaker. I didn't ask
to be dying. But every time
something goes wrong - every time
we lose something, or someone gets
hurt, or we get thrown out of a
place that was actually good - it's
because of me. Because of what I'm
carrying.

Silence.

ROBERT
Honey-

LIV
(More frantic)
Joshua died because he rode between
me and a bear. Harlan nearly died
in a ravine. You lost your finger.
Mira left her settlement - her
whole life - to come on this ride.
Calloway hasn't slept a full night
since we left because he's always
watching. And for what? So we can
ride a thousand miles to *maybe* fix
a battery in my chest?

ROBERT
It's not a battery. It's your life.

LIV
I know what it is, Dad. I'm asking
if it's worth what it's costing
everyone else.

Nobody speaks. The hooves on asphalt. Keeper panting. The dark.

HARLAN
(quiet, after a long beat)
Liv. I had a daughter. You know
that.

LIV
Yeah.

HARLAN
If someone told me I could ride a
thousand miles to save her - if
there was even a chance - I'd still
be riding. I wouldn't stop to ask
if it was worth it. I wouldn't stop
for anything.

A beat.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
Your dad hasn't stopped. None of us
have. Because you're worth it.
Every mile. Every cost.

The wind. The horses. Keeper's claws on the road.

LIV
(barely audible)
Okay.

MIRA
(gentle)
Okay?

LIV
(steadier)
Okay.

They ride. The dark opening ahead of them, mile after mile.

SCENE 7 - "THE WHEAT SEA"

EXT. COLUMBIA PLATEAU - DAWN

The light comes. Slow, grey, then golden at the edges.

CALLOWAY
Sun's coming up.

LIV
(a breath)
Oh wow. Look at that. A sunrise
always helps.

MIRA
Is that... all grass?

HARLAN
Shoulder-high. Far as I can see.
Every direction.

ROBERT
No trees, no buildings, no fences.
Just rolling hills and grass.

LIV
All the way to the horizon.

And then the wind.

The sound arrives like a wave - a low, rolling hiss that
starts at the horizon and sweeps toward them. The grass
bends, straightens, bends again.

A ripple moving across the surface like something alive. The
hiss builds, passes over them, and continues behind.

ROBERT
(quiet)
It really does sound like the
ocean.

LIV
I wouldn't know.

Then another wave. And another.

ROBERT
Your mom and I used to sit on the
beach in Oregon and just listen.
The waves coming in, one after
another. This is - this is that
sound.

A beat. The grass. The wind. The waves rolling through it.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
She would have loved this.

Nobody speaks. The grass hisses. Another wave passes through.

CALLOWAY
Colter called it the Wheat Sea.

MIRA
The wheat's gone, though. This is
all wild grass.

CALLOWAY
A name can outlive what it names.

The horses stand, ears forward, nostrils flaring. They've never heard this. The constant hiss, the movement in every direction - it confuses them. One stamps. Another shifts sideways.

HARLAN
Easy. Easy, girl.

His hand on his horse's neck. The voice he uses - low, steady, the one that works on animals and people.

Keeper noses into the grass at the roadside. Three steps and he's gone - swallowed. The grass closes over him like water.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
Keeper! Get back here.

A rustling. Keeper's head pops up above the grass line, ears up, tongue out. He ducks back under. More rustling.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
(to the group)
He thinks it's a game.

CALLOWAY
It's not. Stay on the road. You
step off it, everything looks the
same. Easy to get lost.

ROBERT
Two hundred miles of this?

CALLOWAY
That's what the map says. A few
stops along the way, but mostly
empty.
(a beat)
Nothing in between.

MIRA

Then we'd better get moving.

They ride. The highway swallows them - cracked asphalt with grass pushing through every seam, the walls of wild grass closing in on both sides, the sky a strip of blue above, the surf sound constant and everywhere.

SCENE 8 - "THE ROAD"

EXT. COLUMBIA PLATEAU - DAY

Hours in. The surf sound has become the world - constant, layered, inescapable. The grass on both sides, the road ahead, the sky above. Nothing else.

ROBERT

(behind him)

How's the water?

MIRA

(counting)

Four skins. Five of us, five horses, one dog. If we ration, that's maybe a day and a half.

ROBERT

And the first water mark on the map?

CALLOWAY

End of tomorrow. If it's there.

MIRA

If.

They ride. The surf sound shifting as the wind changes direction - a wave rolling left to right across them now. The grass bending in unison, thousands of stalks leaning together, then springing back.

LIV

Does anyone else feel like the grass is watching us?

HARLAN

It's just wind.

LIV

I know it's wind. But it moves like
it's deciding something.

A hawk cry - distant, high, circling. The first non-human
sound besides Keeper in hours. Everyone's heads turn up.

HARLAN

Red-tail. Hunting.

They ride. The sun tracking overhead. Shadows shortening,
then lengthening.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

We should stop. Horses haven't had
water since Spokane.

CALLOWAY

Here's as good as anywhere.

The group dismounts - boots on dirt, stirrups swinging.
Buckles loosened, cinches eased.

HARLAN

Half a skin per horse. No more. We
don't know when we're filling up
next.

The slosh of rationed water poured into a shared bucket. The
horses drinking - long, grateful pulls. Harlan checking
hooves, running his hands down legs. Talking to them while he
works.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

(to his horse)

I know. Flat's boring. You're a
mountain horse. But we take what we
get.

Mira sits on the ground, stretches her back.

Robert has the map out. Studying it - the crinkle of paper in
the wind. He traces the route with his finger.

ROBERT

Sprague. That's the next
settlement. Four days, maybe five
at this pace.

The wind picks up. Not much - but the surf sound changes.
Louder. The grass flattening in one direction instead of
rolling.

CALLOWAY
 (looking south)
 That's not good.

MIRA
 What?

CALLOWAY
 The wind's shifting. And it's
 building.

It ramps fast. The surf sound becoming a dull roar. The grass
 no longer waving - pressed flat, all one direction, hissing.
 Gear starts flapping. A saddlebag strap snapping against
 leather.

HARLAN
 (louder)
 My hat -

The sound of it ripping off his head, tumbling away into the
 grass. Gone in a second.

LIV
 (shouting)
 This is crazy!

The horses are turning - planting their feet, swinging their
 hindquarters to the wind. Refusing to face it. One whinnies,
 high and panicked.

HARLAN
 (fighting his horse)
 They won't go forward. Not into
 this.

LIV
 (shouting over the wind)
 I can barely stand up!

CALLOWAY
 (shouting over the wind)
 We're not going anywhere. Get them
 off the road - there's a depression
 to the right. Let's get low.

The sound of dismounting in chaos - boots hitting dirt,
 horses being pulled by the reins, the wind tearing at
 everything. Keeper whining, pressed against Harlan's legs.

They scramble into a shallow depression beside the road. Not
 shelter - just lower. The wind screaming over the top of
 them.

ROBERT
(shouting)
Canvas! Get the canvas over us!

The snap and crack of canvas being unrolled in the wind - it fights them, billowing, trying to fly. Calloway and Robert wrestling it down.

CALLOWAY
Here, I got this side!

HARLAN
OK, one sec... Got it!

MIRA
I'll get some stakes in!

Stakes driven into the ground. The canvas finally over them - pinned by their bodies, whipping at the edges.

CALLOWAY
Everybody crawl under!

People scrambling on the ground, pulling in close.

ROBERT
Good! Pull that edge down. Here,
I'll take it.

Under the canvas: muffled. The wind still howling but pushed back, one layer away. Breathing. Everyone close - you can hear them all.

Keeper panting fast, pressed against Harlan. The horses outside, standing head-down, their tails whipping.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
(catching his breath)
Well, this is cozy. How long can
this last?

CALLOWAY
It's the plateau. Nothing to stop
the wind, nothing to break it up.
It's gonna blow 'til it's done.

A beat. The wind. The canvas snapping.

LIV
(quiet, under the canvas)
So we just wait?

CALLOWAY
What? You're not comfortable?

LIV

Oh, you're funny.

Time passes. The wind doesn't stop. The light changes under the canvas - afternoon dimming toward evening. The wind steady, relentless, a wall of sound.

LIV (CONT'D)

Calloway.

CALLOWAY

Yeah.

LIV

What did you do? Before.

CALLOWAY

Before the Collapse?

LIV

Yes. You know all this stuff - the tracking, the land, reading the weather. Were you always like this?

HARLAN

Since he was a baby.

A beat. The wind. Canvas flapping.

CALLOWAY

I was a guide. Wilderness guide. Out of Lame Deer - near the reservation. Hunting trips, fishing trips, some backcountry pack trips. Rich guys from Billings, Denver, sometimes further. They'd fly in, I'd take them into the mountains for a week, keep them alive, put them in front of an elk, bring 'em home.

HARLAN

Good business?

CALLOWAY

Good enough. I knew every trail in the Bighorns. Every creek, every pass, every place a horse could go and most of the places they couldn't.

LIV

Do you miss it?

CALLOWAY

(a beat)

It was a nice way to make a living. The clients were... simple. They wanted something, I gave it to them, they went home happy. Nobody was dying. Nobody was being chased. The worst thing that happened was a dentist from Denver got thrown by his horse on day three and I had to ride him out on a mule.

A small laugh from someone - Mira, maybe.

LIV

Getting paid, to go out and show people the world. That sounds amazing.

So you're basically doing the same job now.

CALLOWAY

Same job. Worse clients.

ROBERT

Hey.

MIRA

No, he's right. We're terrible clients.

CALLOWAY

The dentist from Denver never picked a fight with a prophet.

ROBERT

That was one time.

The wind. The canvas. A moment that's almost light - almost normal. Five people under a tarp, talking like people.

LIV

Harlan, what about you?

HARLAN

Guess.

LIV

Hmm. Librarian.

HARLAN

Keep going.

LIV
Yoga instructor?

HARLAN
You're not very good at this.

LIV
Underwear model.

CALLOWAY
(snorting)

HARLAN
I was a teacher, actually. High school history.

LIV
No way.

HARLAN
Yeah. I taught for twelve years. I help out in our school when I can.

MIRA
I'm still hoping you'll take over when Lisa has had enough.

The wind eases. Not all at once - in stages. The roar dropping to a howl, the howl to a moan, the moan to a steady push. The canvas stops snapping. Flattens. Goes still.

CALLOWAY
(listening)
It's dropping.

MIRA
Enough?

CALLOWAY
Enough. We can ride.

They emerge. The canvas pulled back - the sky above, grey and wide. A different sound now - a whisper instead of a hiss.

They mount up. The horses stiff, reluctant, but moving.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
We ride until dark. Make up time.

SCENE 9 - "DRY"

EXT. COLUMBIA PLATEAU - I-90 - DAY

Hooves on cracked asphalt. Wind - colder now, sharper. The surf sound thinner than before.

LIV

The grass is getting shorter out here.

CALLOWAY

Drier country. We're getting into the middle of the plateau.

Mira shakes a water skin. The hollow slosh - mostly air.

MIRA

How far to a water source?

ROBERT

(checking the map, the crinkle of paper)
Should be close.

CALLOWAY

There's a dip ahead. Quarter mile.

They ride toward it. The road descending slightly - the asphalt tilting, the grass falling away to reveal a low basin. A creek bed.

HARLAN

I can smell it. The horses can too.

The horses quicken - ears forward, pulling at the reins. They know water. The sound of hooves on the downslope, faster now.

They reach the basin. Dismount. Boots on frozen ground.

Silence. No trickling. No splash. Nothing.

The tap of his knuckle on ice - thick, dull. Not the thin crack of a puddle. Deep ice over a shallow bed.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

(kneeling)
Frozen. Solid.

CALLOWAY

Can we break through?

HARLAN

Maybe. But I don't know what's underneath. Could be water. Could be mud.

ROBERT

We have to try. Let's grab those rocks.

The sound of work. A rock lifted - the scrape of it off the ground. Slammed down on the ice. A crack, but not through. Again. Again. Calloway with a second rock. The percussion of it - two men hammering at frozen ground.

A crack. A deeper one. Water - or something - underneath.

HARLAN

We're through. Hand me the bucket.

The scrape of a bucket pushed through broken ice. The sound of water. The bucket coming up half full.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

(tasting it)

It's water. Barely. Silty as hell and tastes like mud, but it's water.

MIRA

How much?

HARLAN

Not much. A few inches under the ice. Enough for the horses if we're patient. Not enough to fill the skins.

The horses crowd the hole. Harlan holds them back - one at a time. The sound of a horse drinking from a shallow pool, lips on muddy water. Grateful, desperate sounds.

CALLOWAY

Next water mark on the map?

ROBERT

(looking)

Two days. Maybe a day and a half if we push.

CALLOWAY

And if that one's frozen too?

Robert doesn't answer.

MIRA

We ration. Starting now. Horses get priority - without them we're walking, and walking means we're dead. We each get a quarter skin per day. That's it.

LIV

Not a lot.

MIRA

No, and the cold'll trick you. You don't feel thirsty but your body's losing moisture every time you breathe. You'll feel fine until you don't, and by then you're in trouble. So drink your quarter, spread it through the day, and don't skip it because you think you're not thirsty.

ROBERT

She's right. Nobody plays tough with the water.

Keeper is at the ice hole, lapping at the muddy water. His tongue scraping the shallow pool. Harlan lets him drink.

HARLAN

(to Keeper, quiet)
Get what you can, boy.

MIRA

Here, pour that through this cloth.

They fill what they can - a skin and a half of silty water, strained through cloth.

LIV

How's it look?

Mira holds it up to the light. Cloudy. Brown.

LIV (CONT'D)

Ugh.

MIRA

I wouldn't drink this if I had a choice.

CALLOWAY

You don't. Let's move on.

They mount up. The creek bed behind them - a broken hole in the ice, muddy water already going still.

The road ahead. The grass shorter now, the wind cutting across without resistance. The sky flat and grey.

LIV
(riding, after a while)
I keep licking my lips.

HARLAN
Stop. Makes it worse. Breathe
through your nose when you can.

They ride. The water skins lighter. The horses slower.

ROBERT
(to Calloway, low)
If the next one's dry -

CALLOWAY
Then we push through to Sprague
without stopping. The settlement
has a small lake. It's on the map.

ROBERT
That's three days from here.

CALLOWAY
Then we'd better not waste any.

The surf sound - what's left of it. The shorter grass
whispers instead of hisses.

SCENE 10 - "THE SECOND MARK"

EXT. COLUMBIA PLATEAU - I-90 - DAY

A horse stumbles - hooves scraping asphalt, catching itself.

HARLAN
Whoa, easy. Easy.

LIV
She's been tripping all morning.

HARLAN
She's thirsty. They all are. You
can hear it in their pace.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

(low)
Easy, girl. Easy.

LIV

(dry-throated)
How much further?

CALLOWAY

Should be right around this bend.
There's an overpass ahead - Colter
marked the water just past it.

The sound of riding under a concrete overpass - the echo suddenly close, the hooves louder, amplified. Then out the other side.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

There. Left side. See the cattails?

They dismount. Boots on frozen ground. The horses pulling toward the smell - they know.

HARLAN

(kneeling)
Stock pond. Bigger than the last
one.

LIV

Is it frozen?

HARLAN

Frozen over, but it's bigger. More
surface area - might be deeper in
the middle.

He walks out onto the ice. The creak of it under his boots. Careful steps. Testing. Then a crack - his boot punching through.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Whoa -

The splash of a boot in shallow water. Harlan steadying himself.

MIRA

You okay?

HARLAN

Fine. Ice is thinner here in the
middle. There's water underneath -
maybe four, five inches of it.

LIV

That's enough, right?

HARLAN

(scooping, tasting)

It's... well, it's wet. Alkali.
Tastes like someone dissolved a
battery in it.

MIRA

How bad?

HARLAN

Horses won't like it. People
shouldn't drink it without boiling.
And even then -

He tastes. He spits.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

- it's not going to taste any
better.

ROBERT

Must be a lot of volcanic minerals
in the soil.

MIRA

Alkali water will make you sick.
Diarrhea, cramps. Which means
dehydration - the opposite of what
we need.

ROBERT

So it's useless?

MIRA

Not useless. We can water the
horses - they can handle alkali
better than we can. But it's not a
resupply. It's a delay.

CALLOWAY

How far to Sprague?

ROBERT

(checking the map)

Day and a half. Maybe two.

CALLOWAY

On what we've got?

Mira shakes the water skins, one after another. The sound
tells the story - empty, empty, a slosh.

MIRA

We're down to maybe one quarter
skin of clean water. We already
gave the muddy stuff to the horses.
This is what we've got.

(a beat)

We need Sprague. There's no margin
left.

They water the horses. The sound of reluctant drinking - a
horse nosing the water, pulling back, nosing it again. One
drinks. Another follows.

HARLAN

(coaxing)

I know. It's bad. But it's what we
got.

Keeper approaches the edge of the ice, sniffs, turns away.
Goes back to Harlan and sits.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Yeah. I don't blame you.

They mount up. The stock pond behind them - a grey circle of
bad water in a dead landscape.

LIV

(riding)

One and a half days to Sprague.

CALLOWAY

One and a half days.

LIV

And they have a lake.

CALLOWAY

That's what the map says.

LIV

What if the map's wrong?

CALLOWAY

Colter's been right about
everything else.

A beat. The wind. The hooves.

LIV

Yeah. He has.

SCENE 11 - "SPRAGUE"

EXT. COLUMBIA PLATEAU - I-90 - DAY

CALLOWAY
(from the front)
Smoke ahead. Several chimneys.

LIV
(dry, cracked)
Please tell me that's Sprague.

CALLOWAY
It is.

ROBERT
And the lake?

CALLOWAY
I can smell it. The horses can too -
listen.

The horses quickening. Heads up, ears forward, pulling at the reins. They smell the water before anyone can see it. Hooves faster on the asphalt - the rhythm changing from plod to purpose.

MIRA
How far?

CALLOWAY
Half a mile. There's a fence line.
Livestock - goats. And there's
someone on the road ahead. Armed.

A figure on the road. Boots walking to them on asphalt.

MIRA
Everyone look friendly.

OREN - (he/him, 20s), a young sentry with a rifle and an uncertain voice - armed because someone told him to be, not because he wants to.

OREN
(Chambering a round)
(A young voice, uncertain)
That's far enough. Where are you
coming from?

CALLOWAY
East. Spokane. We've been on the
plateau for four days.

OREN

Four days on the Wheat Sea. You look it. I'm Oren. Our leader, Slater, is down at Vantage trading for steel. I'm in charge until he's back, so... I'm making the call here.

ROBERT

I'm Robert. We're armed - bow, two rifles, knives. I'm telling you that upfront so there's no surprises. We've got no quarrel with anyone here. We just need water. Our horses are about done and so are we.

A beat. You can hear Oren shift. The rifle settling in his grip. He's deciding.

OREN

How do I know you're not -

ROBERT

You don't. But look at us, Oren. We've got a sixteen-year-old girl, a man with cracked ribs, and horses that haven't had a proper drink in two days. We're not raiders. We're just tired and dehydrated.

A beat. Oren wasn't expecting that.

OREN

(the toughness cracking)
No, I - yeah. I can see that. The lake's that way. But no trouble, alright? Slater will have my head if something goes wrong while he's away.

ROBERT

Understood. You're the boss.

OREN

Follow me, then. I'll take you to the shore.

SCENE 12 - "THE LAKE"

EXT. SPRAGUE LAKE - DAY

The sound arrives before they see it. Not the hiss of grass - something fuller, softer. Water lapping against a shore. Actual water, open and moving. Wind across a lake surface.

HARLAN
(exhaling)
Oh, thank god.

LIV
It's huge.

OREN
A mile long. Fed by springs - never freezes all the way, even in February. The edges ice up but the middle stays open.

They dismount. The horses lunge toward the water - pulling hard, hooves splashing into the shallows.

HARLAN
(sharp)
Hold them! Don't let them drink free - they'll gorge and colic.

The sound of people grabbing reins, pulling back. Horses fighting, desperate, whinnying.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
One at a time. Let them drink for a ten-count, then pull them off. Rest, then another ten-count. We do this slow or we could lose a horse.

They break up the edge ice. The sound of controlled drinking - a horse's muzzle in the water, the deep pull, then Harlan's voice counting.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
...eight, nine, ten. Pull her back.

The horse protesting, being led away. The next one stepping in.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
I know, girl. I know. You'll get more. Just not all at once.

Keeper is already in the water. Splashing, drinking, his whole body in the shallows. The sound of a happy dog - the first truly happy sound in days.

LIV
(kneeling at the shore)
Is it safe?

MIRA
(cupping water, tasting)
It's clean. Spring-fed. No alkali.

LIV
(drinking)
Oh my god.

ROBERT
(drinking)
Damn, that's good.

MIRA
Same advice for us. Your stomachs
have been empty - too much too fast
and you'll cramp.

Nobody listens. The sound of people drinking - desperate,
grateful, animal. Then Mira's right - someone coughs. A
stomach protesting.

MIRA (CONT'D)
I told you. Small sips. I'll grab
the water skins.

They fill the water skins. All of them - the sound of leather
skins being submerged, the gurgle of air escaping, the weight
of them full again. Heavy. Beautiful.

HARLAN
(filling a bucket for the
horses)
I could kiss this lake!

SCENE 13 - "OREN"

EXT. SPRAGUE - LAKESHORE - AFTERNOON

Oren has relaxed. He's walking them along the lakeshore,
pointing things out - the pride of a kid showing off his
town.

OREN
That's the smokehouse. We do perch
mostly, but bass when we can get
them. The goat pen's over there -

The bleat of goats. The clatter of hooves on a wood fence.

OREN (CONT'D)

Thirty-two goats. Milk, cheese, some meat. Slater built the pen himself - he's better with his hands than he is with people.

LIV

How many people live here?

OREN

Twenty-eight. Thirty-three when Slater's crew is here. Used to be more, but some families headed east to Spokane a few years back.

The sound of someone splitting firewood nearby - the crack of the axe, the thud of halves hitting ground.

LIV

What do you do here? I mean, what's your job?

OREN

Uh... everything? I fish, I mend the nets, I fix the fence when the goats knock it over - which is every week. I'm supposed to be learning to smith, but mostly I just hold things while Dale hammers.

LIV

How old are you?

OREN

Nineteen.

LIV

You're only a couple years older than me.

OREN

(a beat, surprised)

Yeah? You look... I mean, you all look like you've been through some shit.

LIV

(laughing)

We have.

OREN

How about you? What's your job,
back where you're from?

LIV

Oh, me? Um...

She's thinking.

OREN

(Smiling)

You don't know what your job is?

LIV

I mean, I help my Dad with
everything. But... I guess I don't
have a job. Like, something I could
get good at. Be known for.

OREN

But you'd like to?

LIV

Yeah. I think I would.

She's thinking about that possibility.

OREN

Hang on, let me go get Abby.

He walks away.

They sit on the shore. The horses grazing on lake grass
behind them. Keeper lying flat on his side, wet, exhausted,
content. His tail thumps once when Harlan sits beside him.

The sound of the lake - water lapping, wind across the
surface, the soft knock of ice chunks against the shore.

ROBERT

(unfolding the map)

The Columbia river's another two,
three days west of here. Colter
marked the crossing at Vantage.

CALLOWAY

We should get info about that
crossing.

ROBERT

Yeah, I will.

LIV

(lying back on the ground,
sighing)

Can we just stay here for ten
minutes without planning the next
disaster?

HARLAN

(quiet)

She's right. Ten minutes.

The lake. The wind. Keeper snoring in the sun.

Robert folds the map. Puts it away. Sits. Listens to the
water.

Oren returns with a woman. Boots on gravel.

OREN

This is my girlfriend, Abby.

ABBY - (she/her, 20s), Oren's girlfriend - warm, practical,
and arriving with smoked fish before anyone thinks to ask.

ABBY

You folks hungry? I brought some
smoked perch.

ROBERT

That's very kind. We can pay.

The clink of payment. She hands over the bundle.

They sit nearby.

ABBY

Oren said you came from Spokane.
How is it?

CALLOWAY

Doing well. Two thousand people.
Walls, a market, a school. Woman
named Parish runs it.

ABBY

Parish. We've heard the name.
Traders come through a few times a
year. Last one said it was growing.

ROBERT

It is. Good people. I can recommend
the food at The Last Pint.

ABBY
(Laughing)
Good to know.

OREN
So you're aiming to cross the
Columbia river?

ROBERT
That's the plan. What can you tell
us?

OREN
The bridge is a hundred feet above
the water, but it's in crap
condition.

The ferry at Vantage is your best
bet. Old man named Polk runs it -
him and his sons. Cable barge, hand-
cranked, pulls you across on a
steel line. It works. He's been
running it since year three.

CALLOWAY
What does he charge?

Abby laughs.

ABBY
Whatever the voices tell him to.

OREN
Abby... Depends on his mood. Coin.
Bullets maybe. Though one time, he
just wanted something purple.

Five riders - that's two trips.
He'll want something for each
crossing.

CALLOWAY
What's the river like this time of
year?

OREN
High. Cold. Fast. Winter runoff
keeps it strong this time of year.

Polk may be batshit crazy, but he
won't cross if the wind's up - the
barge rides too low and the cable
dips. You'll want to get there on a
calm day.

ROBERT

How far?

OREN

Two days west. You'll see the
canyon before you see the river.
You won't miss it - the ground just
drops away, six hundred feet.

They eat. Smoked fish, bread. The sound of people eating real
food beside clean water. Keeper gets scraps. The horses
graze.

A small group of men is approaching. Their leader calls out.

SLATER

Oren!

OREN

Ah, shit.

It's Slater. They're back early.

ROBERT

Is that a problem?

OREN

Um. No. It's fine.

Oren gets up to greet them. They are unloading bundles.

OREN (CONT'D)

Slater! How was the trip?

SLATER

Well, Thomas was an idiot and broke
his arm, but otherwise we did well.
You brought in some guests.

ROBERT

Hi, I'm Robert. Oren let us water
our horses, and buy some of your
perch. But we're ready to head on
to Seattle.

Slater looks the group over.

SLATER

I'm not crazy about him letting you
in.

MIRA

Well-

SLATER
But you look alright.

And the group relaxes.

SLATER (CONT'D)
Guys, let's get this stuff
unloaded, ok? And we'll need to
pack up everything we agreed to for
the next shipment.

OREN
So we have an agreement with
Perrin?

SLATER
Yeah. We'll send them perch and
goat meat, they'll send us tanned
hides, carrots, potatoes, and
onions.

OREN
Nice! Abby's been wanting to make
Shepherd's pie.

SLATER
She'll be in business then.

ROBERT
We should get out of your way.
Everyone set?

HARLAN
Our water's topped off. We can get
moving.

They pack up as the afternoon fades. Water skins full. Horses
watered and rested. Saddles back on. The sound of cinches
being tightened, buckles fastened.

OREN
(as they mount up)
Stay on the highway. When you hit
the canyon rim, there's a
switchback road down to the river.
That's where Polk is.

CALLOWAY
Thank you, Oren.

OREN
Safe travels. Come back through if
you're ever heading back east.

They ride west. The lake falling behind them - the lapping fading, replaced by grass and wind again. But the water skins are heavy. The horses are steady. And the Cascades are closer.

LIV

(riding)

I liked them. We should stop here
on the way back.

ROBERT

I'd like that. World's getting
smaller every day. Might as well
know our neighbors.

Liv is smiling, looking at him.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

What?

LIV

Nothing. Just not something I
expected you to say.

He thinks on that for a moment.

ROBERT

This journey of ours. I can see
that it's been good for you.

LIV

And maybe you've been holding on to
me a little too tightly?

He smiles, knows she's right.

ROBERT

Now that's just crazy talk.

The highway ahead. The grass. The mountains on the horizon,
closer now. Two days to the river.

SCENE 14 - "THE RIM"

EXT. COLUMBIA PLATEAU - I-90 - DAY

Two days west of Sprague. The grass has been thinning for
hours - shorter, sparser, giving way to rock and dry scrub.
The surf sound fading. The wind still there but different -
sharper, carrying something hollow in it.

LIV

The grass is almost gone. I can see
the horizon again.

CALLOWAY

(slowing)

Everyone stop.

The horses halt. The creak of saddles. Wind.

LIV

What? What is it?

CALLOWAY

Look ahead. The road just... ends.

ROBERT

It doesn't end. The ground drops
away.

They dismount. Boots on rock. Walking forward, careful.

LIV

(a breath)

Oh.

ROBERT

Careful.

The Columbia Gorge. The sound hits before the sight registers
- wind funneling up from six hundred feet below, a rush of
air pouring over the rim. And underneath it, far down, the
river. Not a trickle, not a creek - a roar. Deep, constant,
massive.

CALLOWAY

That's the Columbia Gorge. Six
hundred feet down.

LIV

It's... breathtaking.

ROBERT

Quarter mile across. And the canyon
- look at those walls. Layer after
layer of basalt. Lava flows. The
river just cut through it like it
had all the time in the world.

MIRA

It did.

A hawk cry - echoing off the canyon walls, bouncing back and
forth, multiplying. Keeper's ears up, tracking the sound.

CALLOWAY

Town of Vantage is on the other side of the river. Oren said there's a switchback road down.

HARLAN

(looking over the edge)
That's... a long way down.

CALLOWAY

It is. We take it slow. Let's just follow the road down. Cars drove this, so we'll be ok. Let the horses set their own pace.

They ride along the rim. The wind constant - funneling up from the canyon, cold, carrying the sound of the river. To their left, open plateau. To their right, the drop. Six hundred feet of layered basalt, the river carving through the bottom.

LIV

(riding)
Dad. How old is this canyon?

ROBERT

(a beat)
The rock is maybe sixty, seventy million years old. The river cut through it over the last few million.

LIV

And it's still here. All this time. That's kind of comforting. But looking down there... makes me a little dizzy.

ROBERT

Yeah, me too. Just look up at the horizon. It'll help.

They find the switchback road - a narrow cut in the cliff face, carved by road crews long before the collapse. Cracked asphalt turning to gravel, then bare rock.

The river getting louder with every switchback. The wind in the canyon walls.

HARLAN

(to his horse)
Easy. I know. One step at a time.

They descend. The canyon closing around them - the sky narrowing to a strip above, the walls rising, the sound compressing. The river growing from a distant roar to a presence.

SCENE 15 - "POLK"

EXT. COLUMBIA RIVER - DAY

The bottom. The river up close - not the distant roar from the rim, but a heavy, muscular current right in front of them. Water moving fast, cold, opaque with silt. You can feel the weight of it in the sound - the deep churn, the slap against rock.

CALLOWAY
There's the old bridge.

ROBERT
(quiet)
Big damn bridge. I drove across that once. Sixty miles an hour with the radio on.

CALLOWAY
Down on the bank. There's the ferry.

And on the bank: a shack. Timber and corrugated metal, smoke from a pipe chimney. A dog - not Keeper - barking from a chain. Keeper growls low.

HARLAN
Can you imagine living out here, in a little shack like that?

ROBERT
(to the group)
Remember what Oren said. He's... eccentric.

MIRA
He said batshit crazy.

ROBERT
Well... Yeah.

They ride toward the shack. The dog barking louder - but not aggressively.

The door of the shack opens. Boots on rock. A man emerges - unhurried, deliberate. The sound of him: heavy coat, something metal clinking on his belt, a walking stick tapping the ground.

POLK - (he/him, 60s), the man who runs the Columbia river barge - weathered, amused, and maintains a loose grasp on reality.

POLK
(calling out, a rough
voice - weathered,
amused)
Well, well. Travelers.

ROBERT
Hello. Are you Polk?

POLK
Most days I'm nobody. But when
someone needs to cross, I'm Polk.

He walks closer. The walking stick. The dog still barking.

POLK (CONT'D)
(to the dog)
Shut up, Lewis.

The dog shuts up.

ROBERT
Five riders. Six horses.

He circles them. You can hear the walking stick tapping, the boots on gravel, the slow assessment of a man who's in no hurry because he doesn't have to be. He's the only way across.

He stops at one of the horses. A long look.

POLK
That sorrel's the smartest. She'll
be fine. But this bay - he's going
to be a problem. I can tell by his
ears.

HARLAN
His ears are fine.

POLK
(already moving on)
Spokane?

CALLOWAY
That's right.

POLK
Everybody comes from Spokane these days. What's on the other side that you need so bad?

ROBERT
Family.

POLK
(a beat)
Family. Alright. The ferry takes three horses at a time - four if they're calm, which yours aren't. That's two crossings. You want across, you pay. One payment per crossing.

ROBERT
What do you charge?

POLK
(amused)
What do I charge. I like this one, Lewis. He thinks it's a store.

He taps his walking stick on the ground.

POLK (CONT'D)
I've got the river, I've got Lewis, I've got everything I need.

ROBERT
Then what do you want?

POLK
Hm. Something interesting. The pleasant surprise. That moment where things shift and look upside down. Doesn't everyone?

A beat. The river. The cable humming in the wind.

ROBERT
I'm not sure I know-

POLK
First crossing: I want a secret. From one of you. Your worst one. The thing you've never told anyone.
(MORE)

POLK (CONT'D)

I don't care if it's true - I care
if it costs you something to say
it.

LIV

(low, to Mira)
He's joking, right?

MIRA

(low)
I don't think he is.

ROBERT

And the second crossing?

POLK

I'll tell you when we get there.
One at a time. That's how I like
it.

He grins. You can hear it in his voice.

POLK (CONT'D)

So. Who wants to set down a burden?
Illuminate me!

Silence. The river churning. Lewis panting on his chain. The
cable humming.

Nobody speaks. Robert looks at Mira. Mira looks at Calloway.
Harlan looks at the ground.

ROBERT

Um...

A long beat.

CALLOWAY

(quiet)
I'll do it.

Everyone turns.

MIRA

You will?

POLK

Good, good. A mountain man secret.

CALLOWAY

(to Polk)
Not here though. Just to you.

A long beat. The river. Polk studying him.

POLK
 (quiet)
 Alright.

Calloway dismounts. They walk away from the group. Down toward the water. Boots on wet rock. The river louder, covering their voices.

The group watches. Nobody speaks.

From a distance - Calloway's voice, low, inaudible under the river. Just the rhythm of it. A few sentences. Then silence. Another sentence. And another.

Then Polk's voice. One word, maybe two. Also lost to the river.

They stand there a moment longer. The water.

They walk back.

POLK (CONT'D)
 (quiet, different now -
 the showman gone)
 That'll do.

He turns toward the barge. The walking stick tapping.

POLK (CONT'D)
 First crossing. Load 'em up!

MIRA
 Alright then... Harlan and I will
 wait. You guys go ahead.

Robert, Liv, and Calloway lead their horses onto the barge. Hooves on wet timber - hollow, uncertain. The horses don't like it. Calloway's horse balks, pulls back. He talks it forward, low and steady.

Polk unties the mooring line. The barge shifts, catches the current - and the cable overhead goes taut with a deep metallic groan.

Polk takes his position at the crank. A heavy thing - iron gears, a wooden handle worn smooth. He pats the railing.

POLK
 (to the barge)
 Come on, Margaret. Don't be
 difficult. We've got guests.

He turns the crank. The gears catch - a slow, grinding clank. Then another. Then a rhythm. Each turn pulling the barge a few feet along the cable.

The river is loud now. Not the distant roar from the rim - this is close, fast, heavy. Water slapping the hull. The gears grinding. The barge rocking.

LIV
(gripping something)
How deep is it here?

POLK
Deep enough to swallow you whole.

A beat. Still cranking.

POLK (CONT'D)
(conversational, like
nothing's happening)
Any of you ever eat a pelican?

LIV
What?

POLK
Pelican. Big bird, big beak. They
come through here in the spring.
Terrible. Don't ever eat one.

He cranks. The gears grinding, the cable sliding through the housing. The barge inching across. The current pushing, the gears holding. Every few turns a deep clank as the mechanism catches.

Halfway across, the current hits harder. The barge tilts. A horse stumbles, hooves scrambling on wet wood.

ROBERT
Easy - easy -

POLK
(calm, still cranking)
She does this every time. Halfway.
Just hold 'em.

Calloway has all three horses by the bridles. Talking to them. The river roaring underneath.

The far bank getting closer. Gravel scraping the hull. The barge nudging into the shallows.

POLK (CONT'D)

Alright, get ready. Just walk 'em
off slow.

They approach the far bank. Cable straining. The clanking of the gears and latch mechanism.

Polk locks it in position, then moves to the gate. A heavy latch is unslung, then the gate sliding open on rusty wheels.

POLK (CONT'D)

OK, off. On you go.

They lead the horses off. Hooves splashing in shallow water, then gravel, then solid ground. The horses shake themselves - the sound of it, the relief.

CALLOWAY

Thanks, Polk.

POLK

Anytime, son. Anytime.

And remember, just because a
pelican, doesn't mean a pelishould.

Alright, let me go get your
friends.

The game slams shut. The gears grind again.

EXT. RIVER BANK

MIRA

So... I'm guessing he won't ask for
another secret.

HARLAN

No. Probably something else.

The crank starts up again from the far side. The grinding of gears carrying across the water. Getting louder.

MIRA

Here he comes.

Polk cranking, steady.

The barge bumps the bank. Polk locks the gears. Moves to the gate - the heavy latch, the rusty wheels sliding.

POLK

Two riders, two horses. And you're
in luck - Margaret likes you
already. She told me on the way
over.

MIRA

The...ferry. She told you.

POLK

She's rather opinionated.

They lead the horses on. Hooves on wet timber. Mira's horse
steps on easier than the first group's did. Harlan's follows.

POLK (CONT'D)

Alright. Second payment.

HARLAN

Let's hear it.

POLK

(a beat, considering them)
Yes, exactly! I want to hear a
song.

MIRA

A song.

POLK

I want a song. Anything. I don't
get music out here. Lewis can't
carry a tune for shit.

Mira and Harlan look at each other.

HARLAN

(quiet)
I do have a harmonica.

POLK

(delighted)
Oh, that's even better. You play it
on the way across. The river likes
music. Makes her behave. You play,
and you sing. Agreed?

MIRA

Sing? No, I can't-

HARLAN

Agreed.

POLK

Wonderful! This will be a treat.

Polk slams the gate shut. Releases the mooring line. The cable goes taut. He starts cranking.

POLK (CONT'D)

Go ahead.

Harlan pulls out the harmonica. A beat.

HARLAN

Well... How about this?

Then he plays - something quick, simple, a little rough. The notes carrying out over the water, mixing with the grinding of the gears and the current underneath.

Mira finds her place in the song, and begins to sing. Haltingly, then gaining confidence.

Polk cranks in time with it. The barge moving across the Columbia. The canyon walls catching the sound, sending it back.

POLK

(quiet, almost to himself)

There it is. There it is.

On the far side of the river, the group hears Mira's singing from a distance.

LIV

Is that-Mira??

The barge continues, with Mira singing, and Harlan playing, from the middle of the Columbia river.

As they arrive at the far side of the river, the song winds down, and Mira's voice fades.

ROBERT

Bravo!

The group claps.

LIV

Mira, that was so good!

Polk opens the gate.

POLK

And we have arrived. Off you go.

The horses walk off the barge, find their footing on the shore, rejoining the group.

MIRA

Thank you, Polk. That was surprisingly fun.

POLK

You are very welcome. Godspeed, travelers. I am paid in full, and grateful for it.

LIV

Goodbye, Polk!

The horses continue up the embankment, finding the road again.

SCENE 16 - "REMEMBERING COLTER"

EXT. WEST BANK - COLUMBIA GORGE - LATE AFTERNOON

They climb the west bank. The river falling behind them - the roar thinning to a murmur, then gone. Just wind and hooves on a gravel road that cuts up through sage and basalt.

Nobody talks. Keeper trots close to Harlan, head low.

CALLOWAY

We've made some good distance.
There's a flat spot up ahead. Creek bed, some tree cover. We should stop for the night.

MIRA

Yeah, sounds good.

They make camp. The sounds of it - saddles lifted off, the heavy exhale of unburdened horses. Blankets shaken out. Firewood snapped from dead sage. Flint on steel. The fire catching.

Harlan tends the horses. Mira sets water to boil. Calloway walks the perimeter - his boots in the brush, Keeper padding alongside.

Liv sits by the fire.

LIV

Dad. Come sit down.

ROBERT
In a minute.

He doesn't move.

LIV
Something's bothering you.

A beat. The fire popping. The wind through sage.

ROBERT
I'm fine.

LIV
I know the flavors of your
moodiness.

Robert doesn't answer. The wind. A horse stamps.

LIV (CONT'D)
Dad.

ROBERT
(quiet)
Colter had a wife.

LIV
What?

ROBERT
The man in Spokane. Colter. He had
a wife. Did you see her? When they
took him?

A beat.

LIV
I saw her.

ROBERT
She was standing right there. Ten
feet away. And she couldn't do
anything. Nobody could do anything.
And then he was gone and everything
in her life had changed.

The fire.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
You know what Colter probably
believed? Same thing I do. That you
don't just survive - you rebuild.
You figure things out.
(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

You push forward. You make the world better than the one that fell apart.

A beat.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

And they took him for it. Not for building a weapon. Not for hurting anyone. For believing that people deserve more than this.

LIV

We don't know why they took him.

ROBERT

The Listener thought someone was collecting forbidden technology. It makes sense that it was Colter. Maybe he ran some kind of black market, I don't know.

But if they take me, Liv. If I'm gone. What do you do?

LIV

Don't.

ROBERT

I need you to think about it.

LIV

I don't want to think about it.

ROBERT

Colter's wife didn't think about it either. She thought he'd always be there. And then he wasn't. And she was standing in the street with nothing - no plan, no idea what to do next.

His voice cracks. Not much. Just enough.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I keep seeing her. Standing there, lost. And I keep putting your face on her.

Liv doesn't speak for a long time. The fire. The wind.

LIV

(quiet)

That's why you've been so quiet.

ROBERT

I've spent ten years telling you the world should be better than this. That we shouldn't just accept what they've done to us. That people are meant to build, and learn, and grow. And I still believe that. But Colter believed it too. And now his family is alone.

Footsteps in the brush. Mira, coming back from the creek with the kettle. She stops. She's heard enough - the last few sentences, maybe more. She doesn't announce herself. She sets the kettle on the fire, quietly, and sits.

MIRA

(after a moment, not
looking at him)

You're not Colter, Robert.

ROBERT

I'm exactly Colter. I just haven't been caught yet.

MIRA

You want to save your daughter.
That's not the same thing.

ROBERT

It looks the same to them.

A beat. The kettle starting to tick on the fire.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

And what happens after? Say we get there. And Liv will be okay. Then what? I just - stop? Go back to the settlement and pretend I don't know what's in that facility? Pretend I don't know how to bring the lights back on?

MIRA

Yes. That's exactly what you do.

ROBERT

You really think I can?

MIRA

I think you have to. And I think that's why I'm here. Not to help you get in - to make sure you get out.

He looks at her. She's not smiling. She means it.

MIRA (CONT'D)

We save Liv. And then we walk away. From all of it. The generators, the computers, whatever's down there.

We leave it in the dark where it belongs.

Liv watches them. Something shifting between her father and Mira that she doesn't have a word for yet. Not warmth, exactly. Something harder than that. An agreement.

ROBERT

I hear you.

The kettle boils. Mira pours.

Calloway comes back from his perimeter walk. Sits.

MIRA

Here. Mint tea, from Oren and Abby.

CALLOWAY

(accepts a cup)

Thanks. Creek's running clear. Good water. We can refill everything in the morning.

ROBERT

(quieter now, settled)

How far to the pass?

CALLOWAY

Two days. Depends on the snow.

HARLAN

(from the horses, calling over)

Anybody save me some of that?

MIRA

Come get it before it's gone.

Harlan walks over. The slight hitch in his step - the ribs, always the ribs. He sits. Takes the cup. Blows on it.

The fire. The wind dying down. The creek nearby, a quiet thread of sound. Keeper settling at Harlan's feet with a long exhale.

LIV
(quiet, to Robert)
Dad.

ROBERT
Yeah.

LIV
I'm not going to have to stand by
and watch you get taken away.

ROBERT
(a beat)
Better me than you.

LIV
We're *both* going to make it through
this.

ROBERT
We need to plan for the possibility
that we don't.

A beat. Liv knows she needs to tell him something.

LIV
I'd be okay, Dad. Mira, Calloway,
Harlan - they'd help. They'd look
out for me.
(then)
I'd be okay.

ROBERT
(a sigh of relief)
Okay. Good.

She leans against his shoulder. He lets her. The fire pops.

SCENE 17 - "THE CASCADES"

EXT. CASCADE FOOTHILLS - I-90 - DAY

Two days later. The road climbing. The horses' hooves on cracked asphalt, then patches of ice.

MIRA

The horses are getting tired.

ROBERT

Yeah, we've probably gained two thousand feet of elevation.

LIV

And back into the snow.

CALLOWAY

Tunnel should be about three miles ahead. Old railroad grade - we leave the highway, cut south along the tracks.

ROBERT

And it goes under the mountain pass?

CALLOWAY

Two miles straight through. Comes out the other side above the South Fork. From there it's downhill all the way to the lowlands.

MIRA

You've been through it?

CALLOWAY

No. But I've talked to people who have. Years ago.

They turn off the highway. The old railroad grade - a flat cut through the trees, the rails long gone, the ties rotted or buried. Snow deeper here, sheltered from the wind.

Two feet deep. The horses pushing through it. Labored breathing. The creak of leather.

HARLAN

They're working hard. Snow's getting deep again.

CALLOWAY

I know. It's not far.

They ride. The snow getting deeper. The trees pressing in.

Then the grade levels out. Widens. And ahead - the tunnel mouth.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

There.

They stop. The horses blowing hard, steam rising from their backs.

LIV

Is that it?

CALLOWAY

That's it. Old railroad tunnel.
Wide enough for a full-size train.

LIV

It's huge. But - the snow. It's
drifted right up against the
opening.

ROBERT

How deep is that drift? Eight feet?
Ten?

HARLAN

At least. But look - there's a gap
up at the top of the arch. Three
feet of clearance, maybe.

CALLOWAY

That's just the drift at the tunnel
entrance. We can dig through.

ROBERT

That's... a lot of snow.

CALLOWAY

Once we're inside, the tunnel will
be clear.

ROBERT

Let's get a closer look.

They dismount. Boots in deep snow. Wading forward toward the
mouth. Climbing the snowdrift.

Calloway crawls up the drift, and looks under the arch.

Silence. The wind. The horses breathing.

CALLOWAY

(from inside, his voice
echoing)

Robert. Come look at this. Inside.

Robert joins him. The gap is tight - snow below, fractured
concrete above, the smell of wet rock and something stale.
Dripping water.

ROBERT
(quiet)
Oh. Damn.

CALLOWAY
It's done. The whole section is
down.

ROBERT
How far? Can we -

CALLOWAY
Robert. Look at it. That's a
hundred feet of mountain sitting in
this tunnel. We're not digging
through that.

They lay there in the snow. The dripping. The cold.

ROBERT
(barely above a whisper)
So we go over the pass.

CALLOWAY
In this snow? At three thousand
feet elevation? There'll be ten,
fifteen feet of snow up there. The
horses can't do it.

Silence.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Let's go tell them.

They wade back out into the daylight. The group is waiting.
The horses standing in the snow, heads low. Mira reads their
faces before they say anything.

MIRA
It's blocked, isn't it?.

CALLOWAY
Collapsed. Long time ago.

A long beat. The wind through the pines. Snow falling from a
branch somewhere - the soft thump of it.

HARLAN
What about the highway? Over the
top?

CALLOWAY
I've been watching the snow since
we left the river.
(MORE)

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

It's two feet here, in the trees,
at two thousand feet. The pass is
another thousand feet up, exposed.
It'll be ten, fifteen feet deep.

HARLAN

The horses can't do that.

CALLOWAY

No. They can't. We're not getting
them through the tunnel, and we're
not getting them over the pass.

Nobody speaks. The weight of it settling.

LIV

So what do we do?

Calloway looks at the snow. Looks at the trees. Looks at the
horses.

CALLOWAY

(sighs)

We leave them.

HARLAN

What?!

CALLOWAY

The horses. We leave them here, at
the tree line. There's forage lower
down, there's water. They'll find
their way. But they can't go over
that pass, and we can't stay on
this side of it.

HARLAN

You're out of your mind.

CALLOWAY

We can build snowshoes. Green wood
and leather - I can build five pair
by nightfall. On snowshoes, we
float on top of the snow. We carry
what we can on our backs and we
walk over the pass.

ROBERT

How far?

CALLOWAY

Fifteen miles to the summit.
Another ten down the other side to
where the snow thins out. Two days,
maybe three.

ROBERT

Liv - can you do this? Twenty-five
miles on foot, over a mountain
pass?

LIV

(steady)

Can you?

A beat. Robert almost smiles.

ROBERT

Fair enough.

HARLAN

(quiet, hard)

I'm not leaving the horses.

Everyone turns to him.

CALLOWAY

Harlan -

HARLAN

I said I'm not leaving them. We've
brought them a thousand miles. They
carried us through everything. And
now we just - turn them loose?

CALLOWAY

We turn them loose alive. That's
better than driving them into snow
they can't survive.

HARLAN

No. Fuck that.

He turns away. Walks back to the horses. His hand on the
bay's neck. The horse nickers - that low, trusting sound.

The wind. The snow. Nobody follows him.

MIRA

(low)

Give him time.

I don't see how there's any other
choice. Let's make camp here.

CALLOWAY

I'll start collecting green wood
for the snowshoes.

MIRA

How can I help?

CALLOWAY

Start pulling out whatever leather
we can cut into strips. Saddlebags,
whatever.

ROBERT

We'll make the fire.

CALLOWAY

OK.

Calloway walks into the timber. Mira start unloading
saddlebags and gear.

They make camp at the tree line.

A fire started, sheltered by the pines.

Liv and Robert sit by the fire. The pop of the wood. The wind
above them in the canopy.

LIV

You okay?

ROBERT

I thought the tunnel would work. I
really did.

LIV

I know.

ROBERT

I had it all laid out in my head.
Two miles underground, come out the
other side, ride down into the
lowlands. Easy.

LIV

Nothing on this trip has been easy,
Dad.

ROBERT

(a small laugh)
No. It hasn't.

The fire. The wind.

LIV

We'll walk. It's twenty-five miles.
People walk twenty-five miles.

ROBERT

In deep snow. Over a mountain. In
winter.

LIV

So it'll be a long couple of days.

Robert looks at her.

ROBERT

When did you get like this?

LIV

Like what?

ROBERT

Tougher than me.

LIV

Somewhere around Billings, I think.

Calloway comes back with armloads of green wood - young fir,
flexible, the right diameter. Drops them in a big pile by the
fire.

He sits and starts working, stripping branches.

ROBERT

You're good at that.

CALLOWAY

Been building snowshoes since I was
a kid.

LIV

Let us help?

CALLOWAY

Sure. Here.

He hands her some branches

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Start stripping these, the way I
do.

The sound of knives on green wood. Bark peeling. Branches
snapping clean.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

(to Mira)

Mira - I need leather strips. Long as you can get them, about an inch wide. That saddlebag there will work, the worn one. Cut it into strips along the grain.

The rasp of a blade through hide.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Robert - see those two forked branches? Hold them steady for me while I bend the frame. I need even pressure on both sides or it'll snap.

The creak of a branch being bent - slow, careful, the wood protesting. Robert grunting with the effort of holding it.

ROBERT

Got it...

CALLOWAY

Good. Hold it right there. Don't let it spring back.

The tight wrap of cord around the joint. The squeak of wet leather pulled taut.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

(to Liv)

Now the crosspieces. Liv, take those thin ones you stripped and lay them across the frame - two inches apart, like rungs on a ladder. I'll lash them as you go.

LIV

Like this?

CALLOWAY

Yeah. Good.

They work. The knife. The creak. The lashing. A rhythm develops - Liv laying crosspieces, Calloway binding them,

Mira feeding leather strips, Robert bending the next frame. The fire popping. The wind in the pines above.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

OK, let's see how this works. We'll tie them this way, so your heels can raise up when you walk.

Calloway tests one - steps into the binding, walks out into the snow. The crunch is different - wider, shallower. He doesn't sink. The snowshoe spreads his weight across the crust and holds.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
(from out in the snow)
They'll work. Four more like this.

He comes back. Sits. Keeps working.

HARLAN
(from the edge of camp, in the dark)
Make mine bigger. I'm heavier than the rest of you.

CALLOWAY
(nods)
Alright, Harlan. I'll make yours bigger.

The fire. The knife. The lashing.

SCENE 18 - "SNOWSHOES"

EXT. CASCADES - MORNING

CALLOWAY
(low)
Sun's coming up. Let's get moving.

Boots on frozen ground. The camp stirring - blankets shaken stiff with frost, the creak of cold leather. Breath visible in the gray light.

MIRA
God, it's cold.

ROBERT
Colder than yesterday.

CALLOWAY
Good. Cold means the crust will hold. Easier walking.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
Only what you can carry on your back.

(MORE)

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)

We're going fifteen miles uphill in snow. Every pound matters.

The sounds of packing - saddlebags opened, contents sorted, hard choices.

ROBERT

Food. Water. Blankets. The map.

MIRA

Medical supplies. I'm not leaving those.

CALLOWAY

How heavy?

MIRA

Heavy enough. I'll manage.

CALLOWAY

Bow and quiver are coming with me. We'll need to eat on the other side.

HARLAN

What about the rest? The tack, the grain, the -

CALLOWAY

Stays with the saddles. We can pour out the grain for the horses, then cover the rest with the tarp. When we come back this way, it'll be here.

HARLAN

Yeah. OK.

I'll get the saddles off.

Harlan unsaddles the horses. One at a time. The familiar sounds - the cinch loosening, the creak of the saddle being lifted off, the horse shaking itself free. He does it slowly.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Goddamn it.

The bay first. The saddle set on the ground. Harlan runs his hand down the horse's neck, along the shoulder, down the leg. Checking him one last time. The horse stands still for it, patient, trusting.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Sorry, girl.

MIRA
(gentle)
Harlan. It's time.

HARLAN
(barely audible)
Yeah. I know.

He steps back. The horse doesn't move. It stands there, watching him, waiting for the next thing - the saddle, the direction, the day's ride. The thing that always comes next.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
Go on, now. You'll be alright here.

Harlan turns away. Walks to the group. Doesn't look back.

The horses stand in the clearing. Unmoored. One of them nickers - a question with no answer.

CALLOWAY
They'll head downhill. There's grass under the snow at lower elevation. They'll find it.

MIRA
Alright, let's get these snowshoes on.

Nobody responds. They strap on the snowshoes. The unfamiliar bindings, the wide awkward frames. The first steps - ungainly, shuffling, wrong.

LIV
Whoa. This is awkward.

ROBERT
It really is. Just go slow.

CALLOWAY
Give it time, you'll find the rhythm.

They walk out of the tree line and into the open snow. The world changes. The trees fall away. The mountain opens up - white, vast, featureless. The wind hits them full, carrying ice crystals that sting the skin.

And the sound. The sound changes. No more hooves. No more saddle creak, no more tack jingle, no more heavy rhythm of horses that has been underneath every scene for a thousand miles. Just the crunch of snowshoes. Just breathing. Just the wind.

Behind them, in the trees, one of the horses whinnies. High, confused. Then another answers it. Then silence.

Harlan walks. Keeper beside him, paws punching through the crust, scrambling, finding his way.

They climb.

LIV

(V.O.)

We left the horses at the tree line. I keep listening for them - the hooves, the breathing, the way the saddles would creak when we lean into a turn. They've been the background to our whole journey, but now there's nothing. Just snow and wind and the sound of our own feet.

Dad is scared now, in a way I've never seen. He never thought the nannies could just take him away like that. I told him I'd be ok without him. It's not true. But he needed to hear it.

The Cascades are above us now. Snow deeper than I've ever seen. The tunnel was supposed to take us under, but the mountain had other plans. So we're going over.

We're still moving. One foot, then the other.

That's all there is now.