

Recognition

a television play by

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EXT. SKI SLOPE, DAY

A woman comes to stop on a flat in the slope and looks out over whatever lies below. Her cheeks are flushed. She may look straitened. She takes this pause on purpose. As she reaches up to remove her goggles another skier crashes into her from behind.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM, AFTERNOON

The woman, MALINA, lies in bed propped up at the waist. Her entire head, save the nostrils and mouth, is wrapped in tan gauze. A large window looks out onto the bright ski slope. Snow-cool afternoon light floods the room. Wooden furniture with pinkish cherry veneer, white sheets, white curtains.

A POLICEMAN sits by the door, watching an animated video on his phone at low volume. DR. WILLIAMS (60, an affable internal medicine doctor) flies through the door and begins speaking the very second he appears.

DR. WILLIAMS

It's very good--you're going to be fine. I'm a little surprised, given how severe it seemed at first. And how long it took us to get to you.

DR. MARCH (62, a specialist in neurology, severe, all business) follows Dr. Williams into the room. She stands by the foot of the bed as he speaks excitedly, pacing the room.

DR. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

I had thought that, just considering how severe it was and, well, how long it took us to get to you ... to get you open ... well.

(he pauses and reconsiders)

I'll just say this: I continue to be amazed at what a body can do.

He smiles. He has been checking things around the room, making some notes in a little pad. Malina stirs and begins to paw at the bandages covering her face. She feels for a seam around the eyes. Her movements are slow--these are her very first moments awake since the accident. Dr. Williams takes a seat by her bedside. He watches as she explores the gauze.

DR. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

It was a very violent thing.

(long pause)

(MORE)

DR. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

Parts of your brain shifted in the crash. By the time we got to you they had already settled into their new arrangement. I was so confused--after we got to you, got you open, got a good look--that I called in all the other doctors. Very unusual, to have the parts move around like that. And yet, as I say, you will be fine. Actually, your brain does not even seem to have been damaged. The parts, I mean. The structure was obviously lost. Valiantly! It took the impact for you. So. You'll have to learn to make do with the new ... organization.

(he waits for a response)

I suppose it;s not clear yet if you can talk still. Can you talk?

MALINA

Yes.

DR. WILLIAMS

Well okay, so you can! Very good. And do you remember your life, who you are, that sort of thing?

MALINA

(after hesitation)

Yes. I ... know things about myself and my life, if that's what you mean.

Malina's tone is strange. The words are weightless, as if she were unfamiliar with them.

DR. WILLIAMS

Yes, that's all I mean. Very fine, fine indeed. Do you remember the accident too?

MALINA

Can I take this bandage off?

DR. WILLIAMS

Not yet, no, I'm sorry. Listen, I have to come clean about something quickly: there's another person here, a specialist I called in. I'd like to introduce you to Dr. March.

(MORE)

DR. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

Dr. March is already an intimate acquaintance of yours. And mine, in fact.

Dr. March colors.

DR. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

She was the surgeon for an epilepsy operation I had done many years ago, to cure a kind of poet's mania I had then...

DR. MARCH

It is good to hear you speak, Malina. When this sort of thing happens, it can sometimes take a while for old abilities to return. Sometimes they never do. You should be prepared for that too. The brain is a system of connections. It is built to adapt, to make new connections. In an important sense that is all it ever doing.

MALINA

What about my body?

DR. WILLIAMS

Nothing to worry about. Bruising, pain, you should expect some pain, but nothing is really damaged.

DR. MARCH

But again, be careful: you will be uncoordinated. Your body will know what to do still, but you'll have to relax. Let the body drive--at least for a few weeks, until you've recovered those pathways. The same holds for thinking.

DR. WILLIAMS

Don't go picking any battles of wit.

DR. MARCH

Yes. No battles generally. How are you feeling, by the way? In there.

MALINA

(slowly)

Strange. Thirsty. I feel like I was just born. And left out in the sun.

DR. WILLIAMS
(laughing, shaking head)
Remarkable! I somehow can't believe
you are alive.

MALINA
Me neither. It doesn't feel like I
am.

DR. MARCH
That will come with time. For now,
keep the bandage on and rest.

Dr. March leads Dr. Williams a few paces away from Malina for
a private conversation.

DR. MARCH (CONT'D)
You should release her tonight. The
sooner she gets back into the
world, the more function she has a
chance of recovering. The challenge
will do her good while everything
is still so plastic. The more
input, the more ... *varied* the
actions, the more capacity she
will recover. Or discover.

DR. WILLIAMS
Tonight, then, if that's your
recommendation.

DR. MARCH
No sooner than dusk, though--strong
light won't be good. Not least
because it might induce sneezing,
which, given the state of her head
and neck, must be avoided.

DR. WILLIAMS
Very good. Thanks again, Dr. March.
You saved me.

DR. MARCH
That's okay.
(looks over at Malina)
It's interesting, at least.
(and out the window)
It was a pretty drive up here.
Usually I hate long drives. As you
know. I just wish I knew how to
ski.

DR. WILLIAMS

Me too. We could take a lesson,
maybe. Next time.

Dr. March laughs and smiles, looking nowhere. The policeman in the corner sighs and gets to his feet, approaching Malina. He takes a seat at her bedside and looks for something on his phone.

DR. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

Okay, I'm gonna finish here. You
should get going, eh?

DR. MARCH

Yes.

(then, remembering)

Sorry, wait, how are you? No
migraines, head trouble?

DR. WILLIAMS

Ah, my post-op. I'm fine. It's all
gone. Gone a long time now! No head
trouble, no words, no golden light.

(he shows his prescription
pad)

Blank!

Over at Malina's bedside, the policeman (a young officer who looks like he wishes he were not working) has found what he was looking for. A phone number in an email. He zooms in clumsily and searches for a piece of paper to copy it down. There is none. He looks at Malina and grimaces.

POLICEMAN

Uh, hello miss. I'm here from the
police on behalf of the county. To
be honest with you I don't know a
lot about what's going on. So
better save your questions.

Malina says nothing.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)

I have a message. Sort of an order,
actually. Basically, the skier, the
guy that crashed into you, died.

(considers for a second)

Did you know that? Sorry.

MALINA

I knew that.

POLICEMAN

(relieved)

Good. Good. Well, he died and it turns out he has no kids, no wife, no one. But he had a little money and he had a will. In cases like these, the county of residence can take over dealing with the estate and the will, but we don't have jurisdiction to actually execute it. That would go to next of kin. But he doesn't have any, so in this case ... the executor's responsibility passes to you.

MALINA

To me?

POLICEMAN

Yes.

MALINA

But he crashed into me. It wasn't even my fault.

POLICEMAN

Well, not necessarily. Maybe you know car accidents, like, rear-ending? I used to work traffic stuff so I saw it all the time. Always the fault of the car in front.

MALINA

I think this was different.

POLICEMAN

(losing interest)

Yeah, maybe. The fact is, you're on the hook. It's not about guilt anyway. It's a ... legal thing. There just isn't anyone else connected to him. Legally speaking. So the execution of the will falls to you.

Dr. Williams has come over to listen. Dr. March has departed.

MALINA

Can I refuse?

POLICEMAN

Not really. Well. Not without punishment.

MALINA
(without anger, but
confused)
Okay.

POLICEMAN
Good. Now, I don't have the will
with me, how could I? So I need to
call someone. Can you remember a
phone number if I read it to you?

MALINA
Sure.

Dr. Williams nods, excited.

POLICEMAN
817. 665. 6263. Got it?

MALINA
817--

POLICEMAN
Hooooooooold up! Let me get to the
phone. Phone app.

He exits the email app, accidentally reopens the video he was
watching (a cartoon called *Coptoons* where the characters are
all animal cops), exits that quickly, finds the phone app,
and enters 817.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)
Okay, go.

MALINA
817--

POLICEMAN
817817? Now I *know* that's not
right. Start again.

MALINA
817.

POLICEMAN
Sure.

MALINA
665. 6263.

POLICEMAN
Okay. Calling.

The phone rings. The policeman puts it on speaker and places it on Malina's stomach. Dr. Williams goes to the window and plays with the fabric of the curtain. A LAWYER (busy, in-the-middle-of-something voice) picks up after five or six rings.

LAWYER

Yup?

POLICEMAN

Hi, it's Dieters. I'm here with the woman from the ski accident. Um...?

MALINA

Malina.

POLICEMAN

Malina. Listen, I need you to read out the will.

LAWYER

Oh, I attached it to the email.

POLICEMAN

Yeah I couldn't open it on my phone.

LAWYER

Come on Dieters it's a PDF. You can open that on your phone. Did you even click on it?

POLICEMAN

It was corrupted.

LAWYER

Your *phone* is corrupted?

POLICEMAN

Will you just read it out, please?

LAWYER

Just give me a second, I'm looking for it.

(sounds of looking)

Is it pretty up there?

The policeman looks out the window. Dr. Williams obligingly steps aside.

POLICEMAN

Gorgeous. It's insane.

LAWYER

Cruiser didn't have any trouble
with the ice?

POLICEMAN

Hah! If I'd taken the cruiser, it'd
be my will you'd be looking for.
Took the truck.

LAWYER

(laughs)

Good. Here it is. Okay, put me on
speaker.

POLICEMAN

(not stirring)

Sure, go.

LAWYER

I quote:

(clears throat)

In the event of my death, I ask
only one thing. There was a woman
in Massachusetts, in the town of
Extremadura, near Northampton. I
was stationed at research base
there right out of college. We got
to know each other. I can see now
we were in love; though we did not
treat each other that way at the
time. I would have been about
twenty-one, twenty-two. She was a
little older. Now: I have reason to
believe that she may have had a
child out of our time together. I
would like someone to track her
down and find out if that is true.
If it is true, pass on my entire
estate to the child and mother. If
there is no child, please do not
bother her and don't mention my
name or fate. Whatever it was. I
hope you do find her and I hope
she's well. Her name was Elvira. I
never knew her last name.

(a long pause. Then
soberly:)

End of will.

MALINA

Elvira.

POLICEMAN
 (also sobered)
 In Extremadura, near Northampton.
 Do you have that?

MALINA
 Extremadura.

EXT. STRIP MALL PARKING LOT - LATE TWILIGHT

Malina, wearing dark sunglasses, walks slowly, awkwardly, with extreme physical confusion, across a mostly empty parking lot. She stops sometimes to lean on cars. There is snow on the ground, half melted. Someone walks out of the Petco carrying a big bag of dog food on his shoulder and stops, watching Malina's strange shuffle. She breathes heavily.

INT. TRAIN CAR - AFTERNOON

Malina sits at the window seat. New England winter scenery rushes by outside. She still wears sunglasses. In a notepad on the seat-back tray in front of her (marked with the hospital's name) she has been doing exercises: counting objects in the car, writing the names of things out the window, listing objects by association.

A MAN (about her age, normal type) returns from the cafe car with a coffee and muffin. He sits down next to her. She watches with curiosity as he adds creamer and sugar to his coffee and stirs. She writes "coffee, cream, creamer, sugar - > to stir, to mix in." He tears his muffin in half and adds creamer and sugar to that too, which she observes without special reaction. "To lace, to dress -> to dress up."

He tucks into his meal, making a mess. He adds bit off muffin to the coffee on purpose sometimes. All this is performed on top of his open laptops keyboard.

MALINA
 Excuse me.

He looks at her. She patiently waits for a response.

MAN
 Yeah?

MALINA
 Where did you get that?

MAN
(pointing)
Cafe car. Go like, three cars--

INT. CAFE CAR

Malina walks up to a booth where two women about her age sit talking. One, SIMONE (intense, gleam-in-eye type, black hair, guru), seems to hold extreme power over FINA (meek, fearful, sick of herself), who is hanging on Simone's every word. They are in the middle of an emotional moment.

SIMONE
(laying her hands on top
of Fina's)
...you won't get another like her,
not in this future. Lobstermen,
sailors, fishermen, fish--there are
so many things a person can do,
appear to be--a rexall
conventioneer. I mean go around on
that stupid train and sell--

MALINA
Can I sit here?

Simone looks up and smiles, nodding, gesturing yes. Fina smiles weakly, following Simone's lead, but looks reluctant to lose the moment. Malina sits on Simone's side. Fina has been crying.

SIMONE
(to Malina)
Nice to see you.
(returning to Fina)
Right, so ...

FINA
The Problem.

SIMONE
Yes: you are not brave enough. Not
the way things are right now. I can
tell just from your tone of voice
and the way you explained the
situation.

FINA
But--

SIMONE

What she said to you, how long you were out of touch--none of that's evidence. What is immediate to me, here and now, is the way you are ... there is nowhere else for the problem to be.

Malina writes something in her notepad. It looks like a long division problem, which she then sets to work on.

FINA

(broken down and a little annoyed by Malina's presence)

Well what the hell am I supposed to do then? I mean come on. Come ON. I know I'm not brave. I've known that my entire life. But I work around it. Everything I do is to work around it.

SIMONE

Stop. Shut up. Think wider.

A beat. Fina takes a deep breath.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Did you know cowardice is an alien organism? It's not obvious how it got here. Got into us. Some of us are working on that--don't worry about that part. What you need to worry about it is getting it back out.

FINA

Okay. Worrying is a strength of mine.

Malina laughs loud, surprised. Simone smiles very peacefully.

SIMONE

(smiles)

Here's what I want from you. Try something for me. As soon as you get off the train--what's your stop?

FINA

Troy. End of the line.

SIMONE

End of the line. Good. As soon as you get off at Troy, go and hurt someone.

FINA

...Okay.

Malina listens attentively, making a note next to the long division problem.

SIMONE

Hurt anyone you can, whatever way comes to you is okay.

(looks out window)

Look at all this. Hurting others is the core of our humanity. It is part of what we have been put here to do. The other parts, the nice parts ... *dissolve* ... when separated from that faculty. There are whole systems in your body and being and mind that you will never activate without going out and hurting someone. Capacities--out of which human freedom and flourishing are composed as essentially as all colors from their primaries.

Simone squeezes Fina's hands.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

So I can do things you can't. I am not alienated from my primary capacities.

Simone squeezes harder, Fina tries to withdraw.

MALINA

Hey, you're hurting--

SIMONE

(ignoring Malina)

Listen to me, actually. Think about your problem. Think how simple it would be to solve if you could just hurt her. Isn't that what you want? What you were crying about?

Fina nods, grits teeth, squeezes back. Malina smiles and withdraws her hands.

FINA

Mmm. Okay.

(starts gathering her things)

You know, I always get the good things out of the way first. When I was young someone told me to do it that way. So you're always doing the best thing you can. And it seemed tidy to me.

(standing up to go)

But I see what you mean, I mean, I think ... I see what you want me to see. Okay. Thank you Simone.

Simone smiles serenely and gives Fina a conspiratorial goodbye nod.

SIMONE

God keep you.

Fina departs.

Minutes, perhaps hours pass. Simone and Malina sit peacefully together on the same side of the booth. Simone is deep in thought or reverie, looking long out the window. Malina returns to her exercises. She studies various things around the train car. Sometimes she takes breaks, resting her head on the table.

Leaving some station, Simone watches a girl shove her younger brother to the ground. She turns suddenly to Malina, who is inspecting the stain at the bottom of Simone's coffee cup.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Do you need money?

MALINA

No. Do you?

SIMONE

I don't need money.

A beat.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

I only meant: you're not going to get anything? Why'd you come to the cafe car?

MALINA

Someone sent me.

SIMONE

Who?

MALINA

Guy. A man.

SIMONE

I see. Do you want something? I could get you something if you want. Food, coffee?

MALINA

I can't have coffee. I was in an accident. It's hard for me to think straight.

SIMONE

Coffee might help. It's a drug. It straightens your thoughts. Untangles, parallelizes. Technically speaking it pulls them towards something infinitely far away.

MALINA

I know. I don't need to get all stretched out yet though.

SIMONE

What about having something to eat?

MALINA

I could eat something.
(gets up)
Do you want anything?

SIMONE

No.
(starting to get up)
Well yes. Let me. I want to pay.

MALINA

It's okay.

Malina displays a black metal card with the word ESTATE printed on it.

MALINA (CONT'D)

I don't have to pay.

SIMONE

Me neither. That's why I wanted to.

Malina tries to understand this sentence for a long five seconds.

MALINA

What--

SIMONE

Get me a coffee, I guess. Since you don't want one.

Malina picks out a muffin and orders a coffee. While she waits, she watches Simone sitting alone in the booth. Simone smiles back to her warmly, screwing up her eyes, then looks out the window with the same odd keen expression as earlier. The cafe worker hands Malina a tray with coffee and a pitch-black chocolate muffin. Malina tears it in half and begins adding creamer and sugar to it.

Simone squints, noticing something. She tracks a fast, darting movement, then watches something fall. All assurance disappears from her face. Fear. She screams, grabbing the table, wrenching herself out of the booth, leaving her large hiking backpack behind. Malina looks on with curiosity as she picks up the tray and takes a step towards the booth.

Simone sprints to Malina, grabbing her by the arm and pulling her toward the space between carriages.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

No no no, come on, shit, in here.

Malina breaks away to grab the receipt and then jogs to join Simone in the vestibule.

INT. VESTIBULE - CONTINUOUS

Simone pulls Malina to the window and cranes her neck. She is badly shaken.

MALINA

What is it? I can't see anything.

SIMONE

It's gone already. Worst possible sign, worst time for it. Shit. We have to get off. Next stop we are getting off.

Malina hands Simone the coffee and takes a bite of her muffin.

MALINA
 (reacting to muffin)
 Whoa.
 (to Simone)
 What did you see?

SIMONE
 (sips coffee, closes eyes)
 Two eagles. Flying close together
 and climbing. As if they were
 attached. I thought they might be
 mating, but the season's wrong.

Simone opens her eyes, grimaces. Malina tears a bit of the muffin off and puts it in Simone's coffee cup. She gets a strange look in return.

SIMONE (CONT'D)
 Then they must have caught a draft
 because suddenly they rose straight
 up. Some air column. From
 underneath I could see now they
 both had their claws in the same
 poor animal. A pregnant hare, late
 along. And as they fought, flapping
 and pecking and climbing the hare
 ... tore in half. Fell.

MALINA
 (returning to window,
 craning neck)
 Strange.

SIMONE
 Do you understand how bad of a sign
 that is?

MALINA
 I don't really know about signs.
 What does it mean?

SIMONE
 I'm not sure. Usually I have so
 little to work with--leaves,
 numbers, names--so most of the
 effort is just detecting a signal
 at all. Most cases all you really
 need to know is that there is a
 sign at all. But when it's this
 severe ...

TRAIN PA
 Now arriving: Amsterdam, New York.
 Two minutes to Amsterdam, New York.

SIMONE

We need to get off here.

MALINA

I need to make a connection in
Troy--

SIMONE

You cannot stay on this train! Are
you listening to me? What's your
name?

MALINA

Malina.

SIMONE

Malina. *You will not get to Troy on
this train.*

Malina looks at Simone with obvious puzzlement, trying to
figure out whether or not to believe her.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

I can get you to Troy, if that's
where you need to go. I promise.
But you need to get off here, with
me. Please, Malina.

Malina looks one more time out the window.

MALINA

Yeah, okay okay. Shouldn't we warn
everyone?

SIMONE

Oh. Yes, okay. Great. Do you have a
bag?

MALINA

No.

SIMONE

So you go warn the cafe car, I'll
start on this direction.

Malina nods and heads back into the cafe car.

INT. CAFE CAR - CONTINUOUS

She takes a bite of the muffin.

MALINA

(announcing)

Hello everyone, sorry. We all have to get off the train at this stop. There was a terrible omen. One of the worst possible. We believe something very bad will happen to you or to the train. Or possibly just to me. Thank you.

Her placidity makes the announcement confusing. The other passengers mostly just stare back. Malina heads back to the vestibule. One person gets up shrugging as if to follow orders and leave but is pulled back down by their partner with a look like "what are you doing?".

INT. VESTIBULE - CONTINUOUS

Simone is exactly where Malina left her, leaning on the wall and looking at her phone. The train is slowing to a stop.

MALINA

Did you tell them already?

SIMONE

What? Oh, yeah. They're gonna pass it on.

TRAIN PA

Amsterdam, New York. Please get off.

The door opens.

EXT. AMSTERDAM STREET ALONG THE WATER - LATE AFTERNOON

Simone and Malina stroll along the riverside in silence. A large dam is visible in the distance. There is no one out.

Rain begins to fall. Malina holds out her hand, catches some, and investigates it. Out on the river, the first spots of rain twinkle and trail on the sliding surface.

SIMONE

What's with the black card?

MALINA

It's an estate card.

SIMONE

Who died?

MALINA

A stranger. He crashed into me and died. Accidentally.

SIMONE

And you inherited his estate as damages?

MALINA

No, no. I have my own damages. I have to execute his will. The card's for expenses while I track down this old girlfriend of his. Travel, food, etc.

SIMONE

Wonderful. You can buy us dinner.

Simone redirects them.

MALINA

I can only expense necessary purchases.

SIMONE

I can be necessary.

INT. PIZZERIA - SHORTLY AFTER

Simone and Malina sit inside a low grade sit down pizza place waiting for their food. Vinyl red checker napkins, yellow rice in the salt shaker. Rain beats against the windows.

SIMONE

Okay, let's see. Where does this woman live, the one you're looking for?

MALINA

Extremadura. Near Northampton.

Simone raises an eyebrow.

MALINA (CONT'D)

You know it.

SIMONE

Never been.

MALINA

The man was there for a while working on a research base.

(MORE)

MALINA (CONT'D)
That's when he got to know this
woman. Elvira.

SIMONE
They were in love.

MALINA
Yes. They were young, though. It
was his first ... job out of
college.

SIMONE
And they were sleeping together.

MALINA
Yes.

SIMONE
I get it. There's a child.

Malina doesn't respond.

SIMONE (CONT'D)
(confused)
Is there a child?

MALINA
He didn't know. That's what i have
to go and look for.

Simone is unsettled. The WAITRESS, a very old woman, comes by
with a plate of sautéed chicory and two sodas.

WAITRESS
Chicory and sodas. Pizza's'll be
right out, daughters.

MALINA
Thank you.

Simone is shaking her head about something. Malina sips her
soda. Her eyes bulge. She takes off her sunglasses.

MALINA (CONT'D)
Woah.
(another sip)
That is so good.
(sip, swill)
So good. What the hell?

SIMONE
Look, I'm going to help you.

MALINA

Does yours taste like this?

Simone pushes her soda over for Malina to taste. Malina tastes.

SIMONE

I'm going to help you get to
Extremadura. There's a bus to
Bennington you can take tonight;
I'll put you on it.

Maline pushes Simone's soda back and points at it.

MALINA

That's *really* good.

Malina returns to drinking her own soda, focusing on its flavor. Simone absently sips her own.

SIMONE

I know someone you can meet there.
He can send you the rest of the
way.

(sips soda again)
That is good. Damn.

MALINA

I can get to Extremadura that way?
From Bennington?

Simone nods. Malina records the plan in her notepad.

SIMONE

He was working on the research
base?

MALINA

Yes. Do you know it?

SIMONE

A little, yeah. When was this?

MALINA

I'm not sure. Fifteen years ago?

SIMONE

Okay.

MALINA

Do you know what sort of research
they were doing?

SIMONE

No. Not really. Something with animals. Distinguishing animals. Genetics maybe? We all heard stories. Told stories. Made them up.

Simone laughs. Malina makes another note.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

What if you find the child? What then?

MALINA

Kill it.

Simone is surprised. Malina looks determined. She holds Simone's eye contact, takes a sip of soda, then breaks and laughs.

MALINA (CONT'D)

No. Not kill it. I don't know. The child gets the money.

The waitress brings the pizza. It looks terrible. At the same time, a few teenagers enter with a parental figure, a mean looking balding man. They sit near them.

WAITRESS

Pizzas.

Before she can leave, Simone grabs the waitress's arm.

SIMONE

Do you have a deck of cards?

WAITRESS

Yes. And other things. Train games, war games, scramble.

SIMONE

Just the cards, please.

The waitress walks to the corner of a restaurant where she extracts a deck of cards from the wooden cabinet serving as a table for the self-serve water station. A rubber ball, some jacks, and some army men fall to the floor when she pulls the cards out.

WAITRESS

(calling to back)

Ethan! Mr. Ethan!

She brings the cards to Simone.

MALINA

Thank you.

WAITRESS

Sure thing. You two sisters?

SIMONE

No.

WAITRESS

Hm!

She leaves to attend to the new table.

SIMONE

Let's see about this child.

Simone deals out cards in the shape of a Celtic cross, all face down. Slowly, she reveals them, working from the insides and then outward in a spiral. She looks at them for a long moment.

MALINA

You can tell about the child from that?

SIMONE

From these I can't. It's harder with regular cards. Partly because they can't be upside down. Or they can but you have no easy way of knowing.

(spins a few cards to illustrate)

So you have to think -- which of these *might* be reversed relative the others? But then reverse one, now the others mean something different. You need to rethink your last reversal. You can keep spinning, try everything each way-- it's like a puzzle with light switches, the light switches in some stranger's house. Your grandmother's house. You try each permutation. And still there might not be one that makes sense. Why should there be? They're just cards.

Simone gathers all the dealt cards, cuts them into the deck, and deals a fresh five.

SIMONE (CONT'D)
 (announcing)
 Let's see about this *child*.

She reveals the cards. She looks more satisfied.

	2 of Spades	
Jack of Hearts	3 of Hearts	Ace of Diamonds
	10 of Spades	

MALINA
 Better?

SIMONE
 Much better. Still not clear. Maybe
 less clear, but better.

Simone spins the Jack around and around with her finger.
 Malina eats her pizza.

SIMONE (CONT'D)
 This child. Something happened to
 it. Interfered with it.

Loud BANG. The lights go out. Lively distorted choral music
 begins to play from the speakers. One of the teenagers shouts
 in surprise and the man laughs a cruel laugh at him.

The waitress walks out with a platter of candles. Each
 candlestick is brass and splits like a tuning fork into two
 prongs. The smallest legitimate candelabra. The candles
 themselves are white.

WAITRESS
 Seven o'clock lights out you know
 the rules!

She makes here way through, setting a candlestick down at
 each table with diners. There are few, so the room stays dark
 and sparsely lit.

Simone brings the light nearer the cards. Malina is staring
 at the face of the teenager who shouted. He stares back at
 her.

SIMONE
 It is like the child does not
 exist.

MALINA
 So maybe he was wrong. Maybe there
 never was a child. Maybe it died.

SIMONE

No. I know what he means by child. There is *something* there, even still. But it isn't quite ... it's like something stopped it from coming to exist fully. Something got in the way. Look, Reds on the outside, at extremes, and blacks too, spades, but on the other axis. Reds carrying all the potential, all the sort of ... stuff ... that needs to *discharge*, what's coming, fine, okay, so spades suited vertically ... must have to do with the past love, the woman and the man back *then* ... but what the hell, three of hearts under the CROSS? What's that about?

The teenage boy is mouthing something to Malina, which seems to bother her. She looks away quickly.

MALINA

Is that a special card?

SIMONE

No. Not at all. It's a three of hearts. You know as much as me.

MALINA

I just had my brain rearranged.

SIMONE

It's a nothing card.

MALINA

Even reversed?

SIMONE

Reversed it would be the Jack of Hearts. But it can't be--it's already here.

(tapping it)

In a different position.

MALINA

You don't reverse the suit?

SIMONE

What's the opposite of a heart?

MALINA

A spade?

SIMONE

Maybe. But wait, we get one more card. The cross. What's crossing the child. You draw it.

Simone hands the deck to Malina, but holds onto her wrists with a light pinch between the thumb and forefingers.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

I want to see if I can feel you ask. Do you know how to ask?

Malina shakes her head no.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

When you draw a card for reading, you need to focus hard on what kind of question you want the card to be answering. Most people that can't read, can't focus. If you can focus well, you'll read. It's like shooting a gun. Have you ever shot a gun--like a rifle, sharpshooting?

Malina thinks. She seems distracted by Malina's grip on her wrists and a little confused.

MALINA

I'm not sure--I was just in a brain accident--

SIMONE

Okay, that's okay. All I meant is you need a lot of focus for it to work. You feel your consciousness narrow to a point. Everything shrinks in around your question. If you don't know what you are asking, you won't know what to make of your answer. It won't be an answer. So focus, now, any way you know how, and ask your question to the deck.

MALINA

Okay.

Malina and Simone hold intense eye contact.

SIMONE

Shrink around your question. Second skin. You know second skin?

MALINA

Uh--

SIMONE

Doesn't matter. It's working. It's all you want to know. The cross is all you want to know. You feel yourself getting sure. Surer. When you're ready, take a card.

MALINA

From...?

SIMONE

From anywhere.

Malina reaches to pull a card from the top of the deck. Simone's hands travel with hers. As she draws the card, Simone gasps, recoils, then pounces to press the card and Malina's hand against the table.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

(angry whisper)

NO! NO! Do not look at this card.
God, how did you do that?

Malina fights with her for control of the card. They struggle, knocking over the soda.

MALINA

It's my card. Let ... me ... see it
... ah!

SIMONE

No NO!

Simone wins control of the card. Both catch their breath.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Malina. Please. You know I can't let you look at this card. Why did you do that?

Malina lunges for the card but misses, knocking the candle over. The soda on the table catches on fire, burning a green flame. Simone pats it out with her sleeve, already covered in pizza from the struggle.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Stop! What are you doing!?

MALINA

I want to see the card. I asked for it; I deserve to see it. It's for me.

SIMONE

You didn't ask about the child. I'm not going to let you see it.

MALINA

(about to cry)

That's not fair--

SIMONE

Just stop okay? I won't look at it either. But I can't let you, not after the question you asked. I'm sorry.

MALINA

I just wanted to know ...

Simone puts the card in her pocket and reaches for Malina's hand. Malina pulls away.

SIMONE

I know. Believe me, I know. But there are some questions you cannot ask.

Malina ignores her. She watches the rain against the restaurant window. The teenage boy gets up and approaches their table.

INT. BUS DEPOT - NIGHT

Malina settles into a seat by the window on an almost empty bus headed for Bennington, Vermont. She places a to-go pizza box on the seat next to her. As the bus executes a many-pointed turn to exit the depot, Malina gets glimpses of Simone, who stands at the parking lots edge, watching the bus depart. Simone takes the playing card from her pocket and--the bus turns, she goes out of sight, Malina jumps up, runs across the aisle to see--lays the card face-down on the pavement, turns, and walks away.

INT. DISUSED NEW ENGLAND INDUSTRIAL BUILDING - NIGHT

Dr. Williams and Dr. March walk with purpose through the abandoned building. They wear doctor's coats and blue nitrile gloves; one carries a trunk. Both wield large metal night-watchman flashlights. Bluish-greenish moonlight slants through broken windows of the factory brick facade. Stacked on the floor are the remnants of evacuated businesses: vulcanized rubber molds, filing boxes, custom connectors.

Dr. Williams pauses at a knocked out window before continuing.

DR. WILLIAMS

I wonder how she's doing out there.
How far along in her ...
adaptation.

DR. MARCH

She'll be impressionable. Easy to
talk to, fast learning, credulous.
Like a child.

DR. WILLIAMS

Sounds pleasant. Maybe I should get
injured.

DR. MARCH

Maybe you should. Everyone, maybe--
I used to dream about that. A
calamity to shock the system, to
get us out of this ... *thing* we've
done.

DR. WILLIAMS

(skeptical)
And get to where?

DR. MARCH

I'm not sure. There must be other
arrangements. Other ways we could
be. You can't see that?

They have arrived. A cleared area in the top floor. Dr. Williams opens the windows, then sets to work assembling some kind of lensed machine from the pieces in his case. Dr. March applied lipstick.

DR. WILLIAMS

I can *imagine* other ways. But each
is weightless. Paper cutouts,
plaster saints. Whereas this world
... has conviction. Don't you feel
that? It has its own obscure
principle.

Dr. Williams mounts the camera-like apparatus out the window and takes a reading. Red and white lights flash.

DR. MARCH

Well. I don't think this way
anymore, so I won't argue. But you
must know, if you're honest--

Dr. Williams turns the camera around, so that it faces Dr. March, and sets it to operate. He approaches her. He raises a gloved hand to her face and touches it with a gesture somewhere between an inspection and a caress.

DR. MARCH (CONT'D)
--that this world is weightless
too.

She pulls him in for a deep kiss. They each of them take a long breath, affected by passion and emotion. They continue to kiss, now removing each other's coats, shirts, belts.

The machine buzzes. Indicator lights flash and click.

EXT. ROAD INTO BENNINGTON - EARLY MORNING

The red and white lights of the roadway, headlights and taillights, swim about in the silent early winter morning. The sun is not yet up, but the sky is lightening. Malina's bus stops outside a pharmacy. The driver immediately gets out and climbs into the small sleeping cabin built into the driver's side wall. Malina steps down onto the curb holding her pizza box and notepad. She wears the sunglasses on her head.

EXT. BOTTOM OF BENNINGTON SKI SLOPE - JUST AFTER

Malina wanders up to the small ticket kiosk at the bottom of the ski slope. No one is on the hill, but two shady figures on short skis linger ten feet off and watch her. They roll and share a cigarette as she deals with PIO (26, sharp but fallen in with a deadbeat crew), the kiosk attendant. He plays with his phone.

MALINA
Pio?

Pio looks up, not yet putting his phone down. The sound of a short video repeats.

PIO
Yeah?

MALINA
I have this for you.

She opens the pizza box and removes a thick manilla envelope. She pushes it under the glass divider to Pio. The shady figures notice--one elbows the other and points. Pio opens the envelope and inspects the contents without letting her see.

PIO
Who's this from?

MALINA
Simone.

PIO
Ah, Simone. Alright, thank you. You
can let her know I got it.

MALINA
Hmm. I don't have a way to contact
her.

PIO
(laughs)
Well don't worry about it then.
She'll make contact if she has to.

MALINA
Alright.
(takes out notepad)
Let me take a message.

PIO
I guess ... I mean just say I got
it. Like: "delivery received."

The figures approach. They seem considerably more down on their luck than Pio. They wear nasty expressions. MASON (30s, tall and slim) draws a large hammer from inside their long jacket. The other, POLLY (30s, compact, sporting fedora, watch, and a sports coat over a winter jacket), sidles up alongside Mason. They move awkwardly on the short skis. Because the kiosk is slightly raised up, they have to shimmy their way up to it. Even once they get to the top, they have to constantly adjust their footing to keep from sliding down.

MASON
Hey, Pio! This is robbery! Give me
all you got or the girl gets it.

Malina takes a few steps back (very carefully and somewhat awkwardly) so that she is out of range of the brandished hammer. Mason turns as if about to go after her and gestures with the hammer. The weight shift causes them to lose their balance and in panic swing the hammer claw into the wooden ledge of the kiosk. The wood is rotted from damp and crumbles away. Mason falls face-down and gives a mournful moan. They take a deep breath, then climb back to their feet clutching at Polly and glaring at Malina.

PIO
C'mon guys...be careful.

MASON

I could get to her in the blink of an eye. Or I could send Polly after her. So the threat stands. You have to give me all your money. Or she gets it.

PIO

The money?

MASON

No, the hammer. I'll kill her.

PIO

With a hammer?

MASON

It's a big hammer.

Mason shows how large the hammer is. Pio sighs and removes a large stack of small bills from the envelope. They lie flat but don't look new. He opens the register.

PIO

Where did you even get that hammer?

MASON

It's Polly's.

PIO

Where'd you get the big hammer, Polly?

POLLY

(grinning)

I manifested it.

PIO

From where?

POLLY

Toolshack I found.

Pio counts out the money from the register, then replaces it with money from the envelope. He tapes the money from the register into a roll and puts it in his pocket. Now he begins counting the remaining money from the envelope into three unequal piles. Mason and Polly have dropped the robbery act and now look eagerly at the bills.

MASON

Where's this batch from anyway?

PIO
Simone.

MASON
Ah, Simone.
(turns to Malina, points
with hammer)
How do you know Simone, frined?

PIO
Here, Polly.

Pio pushes a stack to Polly,

POLLY
Thank you kindly.

MALINA
I don't. We met on a train.

PIO
Mason. Here.

Mason shoves the bills into an interior coat pocket.

MASON
Train where?

MALINA
I don't know where she was going. I
was headed to Troy. Actually, the
reason I--

POLLY
You were on that train?!

Polly prods Mason, causing them to lose balance. Mason swings
at another part of the kiosk on the way down, this time with
the hammer end of the hammer.

POLLY (CONT'D)
That's the train that exploded!

MASON
(weakly)
Cool.

MALINA
It exploded?

POLLY
I wasn't there, but yeah. That's
what they're saying.

PIO
(to Malina)
What's in Troy?

MALINA
Another train. I need to get to
Extremadura to execute a will. I
was in an accident, brain accident,
so now I have to find someone in
Extremadura. Simone said you could
tell me the best way to get there.
It's near Northampton.

PIO
Sure, I know Extremadura. Never
been. Always heard ... strange
things. We could get you there. Or
at least to Brattleboro.
(looks to Mason and Polly)
If Simone says so.

Pio exits the kiosk. All head for the parking lot. Malina
follows at a distance.

MASON
(bitterly)
'If Simone says so.'

POLLY
Cheer up Mason. You like to travel.
It's like being dead.

Mason nods gravely.

POLLY (CONT'D)
We can spend some money in
Brattleboro. Buy a new coat or
something. You gotta spend the
money somehow!

PIO
You can't take it with you!

MASON
No you cannot.

They arrive at Pio's simply gray car. He unlocks it.

PIO
You--what's your name?

MALINA
Malina.

PIO
Pio. Mason, Polly.

MALINA
Nice to meet you.

PIO
You take shotgun.

INT. PIO'S CAR - MORNING

As Pio drives, Mason and Polly lean around the seats to talk to Malina. The car is full of garbage and produces strange beating sounds which come in and out of phase.

POLLY
So if she's there, Elvira, but
there's no kid, do you still tell
her? About the death?

MALINA
I'm not supposed to.

PIO
Better not to. Would you want to
know an old lover died?

MASON
Wouldn't you?

PIO
Never. I wouldn't want to know that
a current lover died; this extends
from that. It's best when people
disappear.

MASON
I bet you do think that.

PIO
Shut.

MASON
I say tell her. She should know he
was still thinking about her.

MALINA
Even at the very end.

MASON
It's romantic.

PIO

It's depressing. No one is better off knowing something like that.

MASON

It's a pretty stupid kind of being better off where you can't afford to know the truth.

PIO

There's no stupid kind of being better off.

MASON

I bet you do think that.

PIO

Rogue. I'm going to turn this car around.

Mason laughs.

POLLY

He didn't know anything? The skier?

MALINA

As far as I know, he never tried to contact her.

PIO

He knew better.

MASON

He *thought* he knew better.

PIO

That's what the phrase means.

Later on, approaching noon. They pass a sign for Brattleboro. Malina has put her sunglasses back on and her notepad out. She's been doing math problems again.

MALINA

Does anyone know any riddles? I need stimulus.

The others think for a minute.

POLLY

I have one. What slew none, yet slew twelve?

PIO

What slow none, yet slew twelve?

Malina writes it down.

POLLY

What slew *none*, yet slew *twelve*?

Polly smiles with satisfaction as Pio and Malina concentrate.
Mason smiles to himself.

EXT. BRATTLEBORO MAIN STREET - NOON

The car slows to a crawl. All the shops along the main street are closed and dark. A few wrapped up walkers walk by with grocery bags, taking care on the icy sidewalk.

PIO

Everything's closed.

MASON

Yeah, what's the big idea?

POLLY

It's Easter.

MALINA

Easter?

POLLY

Look.

Children root around in mulch and debris near the road and in alleyways, sometimes turning up silver plastic eggs. They stow these eggs in wicker baskets worn on their backs like peasants.

MALINA

What are they doing?

MASON

What are you, Quaker or something?

Pio pulls over and turns to address everyone.

PIO

Listen. Shops are closed. I've got a friend I been meaning to see, a girl I went to highschool with. She lives near Shelburne Falls--that's basically on the way to Northampton, dead south of here. Why don't we make a day trip out of it? It's Easter. We got nothing to do.

MASON

Are you serious? Why would we go to Shelburne Falls to visit your friend? Polly and I gotta get back to Bennington--

POLLY

(shrugs)

I got nothing better to do.

MASON

Better, better--what am I supposed to do with that? Polly, come on. Let's hang out here, Alyohin's place isn't far. The mill. Let's go see him. Something will be open; we can spend the money.

POLLY

I dunno, I want to drive. It's cold out. I'm going with them. I've never seen the falls.

Mason groans.

POLLY (CONT'D)

Just come. It's good to push. More stimulus, right?

Polly winks at Malina. She smiles.

MALINA

You should come, Mason.

Mason assents with exaggerated weariness.

POLLY

Yes!

PIO

Wonderful.

MALINA

Thank you. Thank you everyone.

Pio peels away from curb, heads back for highway.

MASON

I do have one demand.

EXT. GAS STATION

Pio fills the car up while Malina, Mason, and Polly head into the convenience store. Mason rubs their hands together, stopping for some reason to look through the window of the gas station.

POLLY

But you know what year it is?

MALINA

I don't have amnesia. My brain just got rearranged.

POLLY

So you remember everything.

MALINA

I remember some things.

POLLY

Some things?

MASON

Not easter.

MALINA

I think that's normal.

MASON

Maybe for a Quaker.

MALINA

I'm not a Quaker.

MASON

Seems difficult to prove.

POLLY

Lay off her.

MALINA

Yeah, lay off me. What, you remember every day of your lives?

MASON

Well. Not directly.

POLLY

I don't.

MASON

But we don't exactly take care of ourselves.

Mason and Polly have taken baskets at the convenience store and are filling them up with sodas, energy drinks, junk food. Mason grabs a Gatorade and shakes it to show Polly.

POLLY

Good idea.

Polly grabs one too.

MALINA

I guess it's like: I know who I am.
Same as you do. Or not the same,
since I don't feel like that
person, but I know the same things
about them as you would. My life
before, my job, my childhood--all
of it. It's just not really ...
connected to me. Right now.

MASON

You think it'll come back.

MALINA

(smiling)

Not sure. Can I get this?

She holds up a can of root beer. Mason and Polly smile.

INT. STORE COUNTER

Polly lays everything on the counter. Mason and Malina hang behind, out of earshot.

POLLY

(pointing to a vape)

Good afternoon. May I have a vape
as well.

CLERK

Sure. What's your poison?

POLLY

Surprise me.

Polly takes out the big roll of bills he received earlier and begins counting them out.

MALINA

(to Mason)

What's with the money?

MASON
Counterfeit. Play money. Someone
prints it way up north.

MALINA
North of here?

MASON
(shrugging)
Canada maybe. It always comes in
small bills.

Mason hands her a bill to look at. She holds it up to the
light.

MALINA
Looks pretty real.

MASON
I think they make it out of real
money. Like ones into fives and
tens.

MALINA
How come you guys get it?

MASON
I don't know. Lucky, I guess.

MALINA
And it's legal?

Mason laughs, but the question sounded genuine.

MASON
It's genuine.
(a beat)
So you have a job? You said--

MALINA
Doesn't matter.

MASON
Just trying to be polite--

MALINA
(placid)
It's just not something I want to
talk about.
(returning to bill)
You don't know how you get them?

MASON
(imitating her tone)
Doesn't matter.

She laughs. Polly is exchanging some information with the cashier, who has loosened up.

MASON (CONT'D)
Through Polly, who knew someone.
You make it known that you want
some and they send it to you. Polly
thinks the government does it.

Polly walks up, holding up stuffed plastic bags.

POLLY
To stimulate the economy.

EXT. GAS STATION

Polly, Mason and Malina walk to the car. Pio, inside, is on his phone, texting.

MALINA
And it always comes through Simone?

MASON
Don't know.

POLLY
(smiling)
Cop question.

MALINA
But you've met Simone? Both of you?

MASON
Cop question.

POLLY
Yes.

MASON
Who hasn't?

INT. PIO'S CAR - SOON AFTER

The bags sit untouched inbetween Polly and Mason on the backseat. Pio reaches back to try and grab something. Mason slaps his hand away.

MASON

Not yet.

PIO

I'm thirsty.

MASON

It's not far to the spot. It'll be better to wait ... just think of it. A winter picnic with my three best friends.

PIO

How far Mason.

MASON

Ten miles.

PIO

That's far.

Pio floors it. Hits 90 right as the trees on the median end and a cop appears.

POLLY AND MALINA

Cop.

PIO

What?

MALINA

Cop.

She points. Pio looks in rearview. The cop car doesn't move, He speeds up again.

PIO

They're not gonna hurt us.

MASON

(under breath)

They're more afraid of us than we are of them.

POLLY

Maybe they're radioing ahead. Turn the thing on.

PIO

Oh yeah.

Pio turns on a dash-mounted police scanner with wires leading into the car radio.

The sound of police chatter comes intermittently though strong static. Faint music comes in and out.

POLICE VOICE 1
...don't think it was fair for her
to leave without saying sorry,
knowing that the lack of closure
would mess him up for future
relationships, over.

POLICE VOICE 2
I never said it was *fair* dumbass I
said--

POLICE VOICE 3
She's gonna come back man I promise
you that and when--

POLICE VOICE 2
I'm sorry did you hear me say over?

POLICE VOICE 3
Did I hear you say what?

POLICE VOICE 1
No fighting on the--

The music swells so loud it drowns out the voices. Synths,
bouncy lead bass trancelike, sliding in and out of phase.

MALINA
Wow.

POLICE 1
Why would they have her leave if
she was gonna come back over.

POLICE 3
Maybe we're supposed to think--

POLICE 2
(annoyed)
Sorry guys I got musicked say it
again--

Pio turns the volume low.

PIO
We're fine, see?

MALINA
What was that music?

PIO
(laughing)
That's Ox Man.

MALINA
Ox man?

MASON
Some guy who broadcasts illegally
on the police frequency. He's been
at it for like a decade.

PIO
Man I forgot about Ox Man. Signal's
so weak in Vermont.

POLLY
We must be getting closer. It's in
Mass somewhere right?

PIO
They hate this guy so much. But
they can't find him.

Pio turns the scanner back up. Strange music and mixed
chatter accompanies them down the highway. It is late
afternoon.

EXT. WOODS OVERLOOK

Malina, Mason, Pio, and Polly sit on a rock shelf in the
woods, looking out through a cleared section at miles of
hilly northeastern terrain. Up here the pines are dull gray;
in the valley below all branches are bare. Everyone looks
cold.

Around them on the rock are spread the gas station treats.
They stuff all the trash they generate into a bag held down
by Polly's foot. Malina is drinking her soda and gnawing on a
slim jim.

MASON
So who's this friend, Pio? What
should we know about her?

PIO
Emmeline. We were in highschool
together. She was really my
brother's friend, but we knew each
other. Really smart. Reconnected at
the funeral--
(to Malina)
My brother died a few years ago--
(MORE)

PIO (CONT'D)

(to all)

And try to see each other every now and then. I try to see her anyway. I ... uh ... kinda worry about her. It's like: we're deadbeats, great. But we do it in our own way and it works okay the way we do it. But she's mixed up with worse stuff, same kinda stuff my brother was...

Polly grimaces and eats a chip.

POLLY

But she knows we're coming.

PIO

Yeah yeah I texted her. Don't worry. She said we can stay the night if we ned to.

Pio checks phone.

MASON

Why would we spend the night? Shelburne Falls is like half an hour from Extremadura.

PIO

Right. She was just being nice. She's a nice girl.

MALINA

When did you last see her?

PIO

I called her a few days ago. She didn't seem great. But it's hard to tell. She's smart, you know, so when something's off it's not so obvious. She could lose and lot and there'd still be, like, stuff there.

MASON

That's sweet.

PIO

Shut up.

MASON

No I mean it. You're sweet.

Malina takes out her phone and looks at her lock screen. She has missed some calls.

MALINA

Someone's been calling me a lot.

MASON

Woah, you have a phone?

MALINA

Yes. Why shouldn't I have a phone?

MASON

I don't know. Because you are from the past...?

MALINA

I'm not from the past. My brain was rearranged, that's all.

POLLY

Who's calling? Does it say?

MASON

Maybe it's your family. Your boss. Your lover?

Mason seems a little too eager to learn if Malina has a lover.

MALINA

I don't have the number saved.

MASON

Could be a secret lover.

POLLY

Or a secret boss.

MALINA

I don't remember having a secret boss.

MASON

Well. No one remembers everything.

PIO

Mason, leave her alone.

POLLY

Why don't you just call them back?

MALINA

Later.

Malina sips soda and closes her eyes, trying to stay in the state of uncomplicated pleasure. She shivers with cold. A beat as all eat, drink, and think.

PIO

Do you remember what you did for work?

MALINA

Guys, I remember everything. I think you may be the ones with memory issues. My brain was rearranged, but its all still in there. It's just not connected up in the same way.

PIO

Does it hurt?

MALINA

No. I feel good. I just don't feel like anyone in particular.

(thinking for a second)

When I think back on events in my life, I don't remember how I made the choices I made. I don't understand why I did any of it. That's where the ... *break* is. That's what took the impact.

She makes a gesture of rupture.

POLLY

(wide-eyed)

Woah.

MASON

So you don't remember why you fell in love with your secret lover?

MALINA

Falling in love isn't a choice.

PIO

(to Mason)

Why do you care all of a sudden? How would you liked to be asked something personal like that?

MASON

This isn't about me. I didn't have my personality knocked out of me. No offense.

POLLY
Mason, come on.

MALINA
It's okay. I don't think Mason's
being mean.

MASON
I'm honestly not.

Malina passes Mason her soda to try. Malina stands. She draws her hands together formally.

MASON (CONT'D)
Thanks.

MALINA
I appreciate all of you helping me.
The doctors warned me to be careful
who I spent time around these first
weeks as brain is reforming. I've
decided to trust you all because I
feel like I should. So please don't
do something bad to me.

She sits down again. All eat.

EXT. EMMELINE'S HOUSE, PORCH - EVENING

Pio, Mason, Malina, and Polly walk through the screened in porch of Emmeline's house, a white New England home of the type you'd find just off a state highway. It's seen better days. Overgrown, lots of debris on the porch, but objects, not trash. Broken things.

INT. EMMELINE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A dingy living room with lava lamps in flow. Low light, dark curtains drawn, television on. Six or seven people lie about in a drugged state. Some sit against the wall, some sleep, some lie all the way down. The place has the ambience of an opium den. Some people look over at them, but no one moves to get up or greet them. Pio looks around for his friend.

On a coffee table strewn with unidentifiable drug paraphernalia the few awake members of the crew play some kind of card game. The rules are unclear. All move slow.

Pio crosses the room, scanning faces. Malina and the others follow him. He stops and kneels down over one of the people lying all the way down, head leaned awkwardly against the side of the couch.

PIO
Emmeline? Hey, hey, Emmeline.

He prods and shakes her gently. His touch is tender. Malina stands next to him while Mason and Polly keep distance, watching the television. Emmeline makes a sound, a sort of groan while smiling. Her eyes do not open.

PIO (CONT'D)
Hey, Emmeline. Wake up. It's me.

Her eyelids flutter. She looks glazed, dreamy. She tilts her head up. Her cheeks are flushed; her lips are unnaturally red. Sweat shines on her brow. She looks at Pio without recognition.

EMMELINE
Hi?

PIO
Hi Emmeline. It's me, Pio. I'm here with some friends.

Briefly her smile disappears and there is a flash of panic. Her brow furrows and her breath and heartbeat quicken. Then, as quick as it came, the feeling abates and the same dumb peace resumes in her aspect. Her eyes drift from Malina to the others as if not processing. Mason and Polly glance over, then back to the television.

There is an infomercial playing with closed captioning. A presenter, a woman with shining, oiled skin, stands at a table in front of a black backdrop. The table is covered in dark blue velvet. Displayed are coins of various sizes--commemorative coins, it seems: graphics flash now and then and scroll away on the bottom, visible in-between caption sets. A set of quarters represent the phases of the moon. She manipulates a pen light over them at angles to show the surface detail. The autogenerated captions lag so far behind that it is always describing something long past. Sometimes, it pauses a long time between words, especially when the next word is difficult to spell.

EMMELINE
Hello guys.

She smiles to herself. Her teeth are stained. Her gums look raw and have been bleeding. Her eyelids flutter again.

MALINA
What's wrong with her?

Pio sits down next to Emmeline and massages his temples.

PIO

Nothing.

MALINA

Is she sleeping?

PIO

Not really.

(addressing the room)

Hey, what did she have?

No one responds.

PIO (CONT'D)

(annoyed)

None of you know what she had? Or when? You're in her fucking house. You know she, like, grew up here. She was a kid here with her family and stuff.

One of the card game players, NATAN (45, sharp, brave, lost, wearing a dirty white cutoff shirt), speaks without turning his head.

NATAN

Star. She had some star and hour ago. We all did. You should calm down.

Natan collects an entire row of cards from the grid and begins laying down new ones ametrically, irrespective of the grid. Polly watches the game closely.

PIO

Okay. Thank you.

MALINA

Star?

Malina is staring at Emmeline. Mason responds without looking away from the television. The presenter picks up a coin with metal tweezers and deposits it in a metal pan over a butane burner. The coin starts to melt. The CC describes an experience she had traveling along through Southeast Asia.

MASON

It's a kind of ... it's something you can do. Makes you feel different. Relaxes you.

POLLY

Sort of. When it's over, you don't feel relaxed.

MALINA

She looks pretty relaxed.

MASON

She is. But the person that relaxes
isn't the same person who took it.

MALINA

Is it bad for you?

The presenter shines her light on the melted metal.
Shimmering rainbow effects of shook foil and film.

NATAN

Star is completely natural.

Natan looks up at Polly, who has reached down to flip a card.
It seems to have been a good move: a chain of new flips
follow.

PIO

(considering)

It was really just star?

NATAN

Just star.

The woman pours some of the coin metal onto the tablecloth.
Smoke.

PIO

...Can I have some?

EXT. EMMELINE'S HOUSE, PORCH - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Natan is preparing star for Pio, grinding up some red
ocherlike mineral and working in distilled water with a
painter's trowel, scraping and mixing until the right
consistency of paste is reached. Malina, Polly, and Mason sit
with them on weather-stripped wicker chairs. Green streamers
hang and blow in the gentle wind. Everyone but Natan clutches
their coat close about them.

NATAN

In Extremadura? Was he working on
the research base?

MALINA

Yes!

(taking out notepad)

You know it?

PIO

It's so close, everyone around here will know it. Emmeline would too, if she wasn't so out of it.

NATAN

(nodding)

I used to spend a lot of time there.

MALINA

On the base?

NATAN

No, god. In Extremadura. I was seeing this guy, kind of secretly. He lived there and worked on the base. Like most people there. It was really a base town.

MALINA

Wait, when? Did you know a woman named Elvira?

NATAN

Elvira?

He thinks.

NATAN (CONT'D)

No. I mean--that's the name of the mountain. Up where the base is. But I never knew any woman named that. I was there 2012, 2013, right before they shut down. He was doing computer stuff.

MASON

It shut down?

MALINA

It shut down in 2015.

NATAN

Here.

Natan hands the plate with paste and trowel to Pio.

PIO

Thanks. Anyone else?

Everyone else shakes their heads. Pio uses a finger to place a dot of the paste on each cheek and rubs the rest into his lips and gums.

With his clean free hand he rubs the paste on his cheeks in. When finished, he goes inside. Polly and Mason exchange looks of concern, annoyance--what can you do?

POLLY

I always heard they were messing with animals. Torture. Making frankensteins.

MALINA

Insects.

NATAN

Yeah, it was insects.

Natan looks at Malina with puzzlement. He wonders how she knew that.

NATAN (CONT'D)

You had your memory wiped in this crash?

MASON

No. Stupid question.

NATAN

Oh yeah?

POLLY

Her brain was rearranged.

MALINA

My brain was rearranged.

POLLY

But she remembers everything.

MASON

Only what she already knew.

NATAN

But her brain was rearranged.

POLLY

Now you're getting it.

A beat.

MALINA

What did they do with the insects?

POLLY

I always heard it was animals. Animals frankenstein.

Malina's phone buzzes. She looks at it, silences it, and puts it away.

NATAN

No, they don't modify the insects.
They're not mutants or anything. Or
no more mutated than you or me.
They just don't fit neatly into the
taxonomical tree. The ...
hierarchy. You know?

Natan gestures extensively, drawing an invisible graph on the ground with his finger.

NATAN (CONT'D)

It turns out some organisms need to
be in two places in once, under
this one here but over thing at the
same level, so you lose strict
levels and end up with loops.

MALINA

Cycles.

NATAN

Exactly. So you can go back where
you started. And when you do the
taxonomy on paper, it's fine, you
don't notice it across all those
entries. It might be that the ...
true shape really does have those
loops in it. The problem is that it
changes what kind of object it is,
mathematically. It's not as easy to
work with with all the loops in it.
It all gets inefficient. Again,
this is just what I remember from
my what my boyfriend told me. God
rest his soul. He was on the
algorithm side, building the system
and so on. The biologists were the
ones trying to actually close the
loops.

MALINA

How do you close a loop
biologically?

MASON

He died?

NATAN

Who?

MASON
Your boyfriend?

NATAN
Oh no. I hope not. He got married.
This random woman. I think it was
always his plan--we always had to
be secret. Sneak around. Kinda fun,
fun criminal feeling, you know? For
a while. And then you get very very
sick of it. So when he decided he
needed to marry her and told me
basically to fuck off I wasn't so
sad. Hmm. I wonder if he did die. I
didn't.

Natan finishes his drink, some kind of yellow liquid that
seems necessary to come down from the drug cleanly. He chews
the dregs. Malina's phone rings. She looks at it.

MALINA
Excuse me.

Malina picks up the phone and leaves the porch, beginning a
slow loop of the house. Most windows are dark. A few motion
sensitive lights turn on.

MALINA (CONT'D)
Hello?

DR. WILLIAMS (O.S.)
Malina, hello! I'm glad I finally
managed to get you. This is Dr.
Williams. Your doctor from the
hospital, yes? You remember me?
Tall guy, white coat--

MALINA
Yes.

DR. WILLIAMS
Of course you do. Wonnnderful. I'm
here with Dr. March, the
specialist.

DR. MARCH
Hello Malina.

A beat.

MALINA
Is everything ... alright? Am I
alright?

DR. WILLIAMS

We hope so. What do you think? We wanted to check in. Are you getting enough stimulus? New input? Challenges? Material?

MALINA

I guess.

DR. WILLIAMS

You find that hypothetical kid yet?

MALINA

No.

DR. WILLIAMS

Damn. And how is your feeling? Normal?

MALINA

No. I don't know. I don't feel like myself. Like the person I know about.

Malina peeks through the back door glass she sees Pio, cheeks wet with tears, resting his head in Emmeline's lap. She sits in the same position as before, drinking some of the same yellow liquid as Natan.

DR. MARCH

You do feel like *someone*, though?

MALINA

Someone else.

DR. MARCH

That's perfectly normal. Listen, Malina, now that you're up on your feet again, we wanted to ... warn you about something. Are you by yourself?

MALINA

Yeah.

DR. MARCH

Then listen: you need to be careful with what kind of stimuli you expose yourself to. You're like an infant; you are learning to think. Connecting up. You are extremely, extremely susceptible to bad influence. Bad morals and bad ideas. Bad ways of doing things.

Malina has made it around the house. She stands a ways off from the porch, looking in at the group.

DR. MARCH (CONT'D)

Malina?

MALINA

This is a medical problem?

DR. MARCH

Yes, Malina, it's a matter of *fitness*. You could permanently damage yourself. Malformation--

MALINA

How am I meant to tell good from bad?

DR. MARCH

Well, the simplest way is to take stock of your state before and after the interaction. If interaction increases your power to act, good. If it diminishes it, if it leaves you less capable, bad. To all else you should be indifferent.

MALINA

That's it?

DR. WILLIAMS

That's just one heuristic--

MALINA

That's okay, I understand. Sorry, I have to go.

DR. WILLIAMS

Wait, Malina, sometimes you evaluation may appear--

MALINA

Sorry, is there anything else important? About my brain or body? I really can't talk longer.

DR. MARCH

(urgent and stern)

Do not go sleeping anyone that takes an interest in you.

MALINA

What? Really?

DR. MARCH

At least wait for a real connection. If it's real, you will know. So if you don't know, it's not.

MALINA

Are you serious?

DR. WILLIAMS

You'd better listen to her Malina. She's a specialist.

DR. MARCH

And try to keep a clean space. Don't waste electricity, that's immoral. Don't use headphones too much; it's good to be alone with your thoughts. Make sure--

MALINA

Alright, I have to go. Sorry. Thank you.

DR. MARCH

No, wait! M--

INT. DISUSED NEW ENGLAND INDUSTRIAL BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Dr. March sighs as the sound of the disconnect plays from the phone. She and Dr. Williams are propped up on elbows on the floor, naked and dirty on their lab coats. Both still wear gloves. Dr. Williams sucks his teeth, then gets up and heads over to the blinking lens machine.

EXT. EMMELINE'S HOUSE, PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Malina rejoins the porch group. They have just agreed on something.

MASON

What about Pio?

NATAN

He'd be okay here for a few hours. It's not dangerous in any immediate way. Emmeline will take care of him.

MASON

It's his car though.
(to Malina)
(MORE)

MASON (CONT'D)

And I guess we should ask you. It's your mission.

NATAN

I was asking your friends if I could go with you to Extremadura. Now, tonight.

Malina looks toward the inside of the house. Her thoughts are elsewhere.

MALINA

These aren't my friends.

NATAN

Of course not.

A difficult moment of silence.

MALINA

I don't mind if you come. You want to see about this guy, I guess?

NATAN

Yes.

MALINA

Good. And you know the town, so you could be useful to me.

Malina turns now to look at Mason and Polly. She speaks directly and simply, as she did when first out of the hospital.

MALINA (CONT'D)

You two are coming too?

MASON

(with edge)

We don't have to.

POLLY

Yeah, it's your mission.

MALINA

Do you want to come?

MASON

I thought we'd doing you a favor by coming. A continuation of the already considerable favor of driving you here. You can. You're allowed to do whatever you want. Or did you not figure that out yet.

MALINA

I don't want to fight with you
Mason. But I don't know you. I
don't even know Pio, but he was at
least the person someone told me to
ask for help. And now he's gone all
red.

NATAN

He's fine--

MALINA

None of you have to execute this
will. Do you want to come? Why
would you want to come? Is it a bad
sign I'm not understanding?
Honestly. Are you being nice? Are
you going to kill me or something?

MASON

What?

POLLY

We're not going to kill you.

MASON

You think we kill people?

POLLY

We're not that kind of thing. We're
not violent.

MASON

Yeah, what? Have you seen us kill
anyone? Also, why are--

MALINA

Okay okay. Please don't yell at me.

NATAN

Yeah lets all quiet...

MALINA

You all know more than I do about
what's going on. I don't know who
you are or what you are to each
other. I can't tell what you want
or why you're doing things. I don't
know what world this is yet. You,
(she nods at Natan)
I know why you want to go. And you
can help me. You two, I don't get
it.

MASON

You need me to spell it out? It's nighttime in Shelburne fucking Falls. What else is there to do?

NATAN

Come on--

MASON

Actually, we're *outside* Shelburne Falls. We came all this way. Our friend is decapitated on star and lovesick; there's no getting him out of there until he comes down. Why not go see the town with the freak research base?

POLLY

Animals frankenstein.

MASON

New stimulus, right? On top of all that, you can't go without us. It's our friend's car. Half the reason I want to come is to keep an eye on you.

MALINA

To protect me?

MASON

(softening)

That's not really what I meant, but that too. No offense, but you might need help with the execution. And you don't seem particularly wily.

Polly throws an arm over Mason's shoulder.

POLLY

We're wily.

MALINA

I'm not wily. Okay. You'll help me then? To look for Elvira?

They nod. Natan heads inside.

NATAN

I'll get the keys.

INT. EMMELINE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Pio is as before. Emmeline strokes his hair. She is still spaced out but there is more awareness than before. Natan suddenly looms. He crouches.

NATAN

Hi Pio. How are you?

Pio makes a pleasurable groan.

NATAN (CONT'D)

Gooooood. I need your car keys. You parked me in.

Pio makes an expression of confusion.

NATAN (CONT'D)

Pio, I need to go to work. I need your keys. I need to go, Pio.

Pio tries to prop himself up.

NATAN (CONT'D)

I really need to go now. I need the keys, Pio. I'm sorry. Hey. I'm really sorry. I just need to go. Then I'm gone.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The hazard lights of a night construction crew shine. Workers in hi-vis rake a black, steaming mass out. Pio's car flies by. The worker's take no notice and continue raking placidly. Flashing lights but no siren radiate from the empty police car assigned to the road crew.

INT. PIO'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Natan drives, Malina rides shotgun, Mason and Polly sit in the back. For a moment all ride in silence. Mason is thinking about something, still bothered. They lean forward.

MASON

I know the argument's over and we made up--

POLLY

Mason--

MASON

But I thought of something else to say. Who are you to talk about not knowing someone and not understanding what they are up to? We still don't know who the fuck you are! You know, great, you remember everything. Wanna maybe tell us any of it? You know enough to put us in jail if you want to. I don't even know where the fuck you came from.

POLLY

Mason, just leave it.

MASON

Also: how did you know all that stuff about the research base?

NATAN

Actually, yeah, how did you know that stuff? I was wondering about that too.

Malina looks out the window and doesn't respond. More road work slows them down, cones forcing them all the way onto the shoulder. More workers, more hi-vis, more steaming mass. The car crawls by.

MALINA

(slowly)

When I was lying on the slope, he spoke to me. Neither of us lost consciousness in the crash, but I was in too much pain to move. He spoke to me he lay there dying. I think it helped my brain survive.

A beat.

MALINA (CONT'D)

I couldn't move. I just listened and watched the sky.

NATAN

What did he talk about?

MALINA

About her, Elvira. Some things about the base and the work they did. Some other things. Regrets. Desires. I don't think he understood he was dying.

NATAN

Then why would he tell you all that.

The car takes an exit for Extremadura.

MALINA

Because he was dying. It was automatic. Autonomic, like, convulsive. He spoke fast and strong. Like it was important to him.

MASON

Probably he was.

POLLY

It was his life.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO EXTREMADURA

On the road into town the police have set up a checkpoint. There are two squad cars, one on each side of the road. The road is blocked off with plastic barricades. Two policemen, one holding a rolled up spike strip under his arm, the other holding a coffee with one hand and his phone in the other. Together they watch a *Coptoons* video on the phone.

Natan drives up and rolls down the window. SPIKES, the cop with the spikes, comes over, writing down their plate number in his notepad.

SPIKES

Good evening.

NATAN

What's going on? Can we not get in?

SPIKES

Depends. You guys criminals?

NATAN

No.

SPIKES

Sympathetic?

NATAN

No.

SPIKES

Good. What's the reason for your visit?

NATAN
I'm visiting an old friend.

SPIKES
Fine. Good. What about the rest of
you? Just coming along?

MASON
(including Polly in
gesture)
We're here to stimulate the local
economy.

MALINA
And I have to execute a will.

SPIKES
Ha! Ha!
(waving other cop over)
Hey, hey, c'mere! You gotta hear
this.

The other cop, WILL (a bruiser if ever there was one) wearily
puts his phone away and comes over to the other side of the
car.

SPIKES (CONT'D)
Tell him what you just told me. Why
you're here.

POLLY
We're here to stimulate the local
economy.

Will nods, feigning interest, then looks at Spikes.

SPIKES
No, not that, you.

MALINA
To execute a will?

Will's face drains.

WILL
That's my son. The fuck are you
getting at?

SPIKES
Nah, Will, calm down--

WILL
You stay the fuck away from Junior.

SPIKES

No, will, it's like when someone dies--

WILL

You'll have to execute through me first.

He swings the semiautomatic rifle around from his back to his front.

SPIKES

It's a legal term, Will, cool it.

Will cools it but still seems suspicious.

MALINA

I'm not gonna execute anyone.

SPIKES

Heh. I used to say that. It sneaks up on you.

WILL

(nodding)

Until you learn to sneak up on it.

Will and Spikes share a failed handshake/dap. Will turns back to Malina and points threateningly at her.

WILL (CONT'D)

Stay away from my family.

MALINA

I will.

WILL

No. I will. You gonna.

Malina nods. There's a pause.

NATAN

So ... can we go in tonight?

WILL

Yeah, sure. Oh, wait. You guys criminals?

SPIKES

Already did that. They're clean. Listen, guys, you can head in, but be careful.

Will goes to clear the barricades manually.

SPIKES (CONT'D)

Don't stay out too late and don't
head into the mountain. Cool?
There's a manhunt on.

MALINA

A *manhunt*?

SPIKES

That's right. That's why we stopped
you. Someone blew up a train in New
York. Chase has been going on for a
while, but they're closing in.
We're closing in. Just be careful.
And be on the lookout, for, uh ...
hey Will! Could you get the, uh ...

He makes a square with his hands. Will nods, goes to his car
and brings a red plastic folder full of papers over. He
passes three into the car. WANTED posters. Malina switches on
the light inside the car to get a better look.

Across the top of the page: WANTED: FUGITIVE. Below it, a
drawing--it looks like a conventional police sketch but the
proportions are strange, exaggerated like a Venus figurine. A
large head in partial profile looks down on a model train,
reaching out for it.

SPIKES (CONT'D)

They followed her into the hills.
These hills. That one.

He points to the mountain over town.

WILL

Elvira.

MALINA

Elvira...

NATAN

(reading from flyer)
'The Sorceress.'

MASON

What?

NATAN

That's what it calls her.
'Sorceress.'

SPIKES

Oh, that's not related. It's like
... whatsit ... hurricane names.

WILL

Goes alphabetical through the nouns. Next fugitive gets the next noun. Sandman, Shoeshine, Source. And cetera.

POLLY

What happens when they run out?

SPIKES

Dunno. Gonna be a while.

EXT. EXTREMADURA MAIN STREET - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Malina has stepped out of the car. All the shops are closed. Some lights are on in the apartments above.

MALINA

This is where she used to live.
Above the convenience store.

She heads over to it. In the car it's awkward. Natan stabs at the radio to cut the silence. The scanner turns on. Anxious police chatter about the manhunt. Mostly trying to figure out where other units are, where everyone is. The whole time the same music as before cutting through.

Malina scales an exterior staircase leading to the apartment door. She knocks. After a while an old man answers the door. They exchange some words. She heads back to the car.

NATAN

No lucl?

MALINA

There was an old man, the guy that runs the store. I think I woke him up. He said he thought he knew who I was talking about. Elvira. Said a lot of young people went up to the base after it closed and camped out, squatted.

POLLY

So she's up there.

They all look at the mountain.

MALINA

Or maybe she came back. He wasn't sure. Most of them came back eventually.

They drive slowly toward the mountain.

NATAN

They're guarding the trailhead.

A few police stand around a car at the start of the mountain trail. Natan keeps driving.

NATAN (CONT'D)

There's another entrance down here.

They continue in silence along the edge of the mountain park.

NATAN (CONT'D)

Used to walk here at night
sometimes. Together. Because there
was no one around. And 'cause it
was nice. Here, look.

There's another entrance, guarded by a single small cop. He sits on a stool watching a video on his phone. They drive on. Mason punches Polly lightly on the shoulder and grins.

MASON

Easy.

Polly nods.

NATAN

I want to go see him. His house,
whatever. It's close.

MASON

Why don't you let Polly and me out
here?

MALINA

What? Where are you guys going?

MASON

Gonna go shopping.

EXT. HELICOPTER OVER MOUNTAIN - CONTINUOUS

A helicopter circles the mountain, shining a large spotlight down on it. The beam tracks as the helicopter swings. Two cops in the back, a SERGEANT (classic homely sarge) and a new RECRUIT (speaks with a British affect) who he's training, scan the ground with binoculars. They wear headsets to communicate over the noise. Even in the headsets, the music from the Oxman comes in sometimes.

SERGEANT
I got nothing.

RECRUIT
Come again?

SERGEANT
Nothing!

RECRUIT
What am I looking for?

SERGEANT
Same as ever. Blonde woman,
youngish. Probably running.

EXT. QUIET STREET, EXTREMADURA - CONTINUOUS

Natan and Malina sit in the car outside a house. Warm lights glow in the windows in a cozy, wintry sort of way. A woman and two kids appear and disappear every now and then. She looks for a moment at the car. Natan breathes heavily.

MALINA
This is it?

NATAN
Definitely.

MALINA
Okay. Let's go talk to them.

She starts to get out of the car.

NATAN
What? No, no, I can't talk to them!

MALINA
You said he might know some things
about Elvira. Maybe she does too.

NATAN
You can go ask. I'm gonna wait it
out here.
(before she can walk away)
If he's in there, see if you can
get him to come to the door or
something. I wanna see him.

EXT. GENERAL STORE, EXTREMADURA - SAME TIME

Polly and Mason knock on the doors of the just-closed general store, begging the proprietor inside to let them in. They make puppy eyes. Polly drops to his knees in supplication. Warily, the proprietor assents.

EXT. QUIET STREET, EXTREMADURA - CONTINUOUS

Malina nods to Natan. She goes to the door of the house and knocks. The WOMAN (about 40, serious, suspicious) appears quickly.

WOMAN

Hello?

MALINA

Hello. Sorry to bother you. I'm not from around here and I'm looking for someone.

WOMAN

This about the manhunt?

MALINA

No. Unrelated. No one's in trouble.

WOMAN

There's no one here but me and my kids right now.

MALINA

No no, I just am gathering information.

WOMAN

Alright.

MALINA

How long have you lived here?

WOMAN

Twelve years.

The children appear behind her.

MALINA

They were born here?

WOMAN

Yes. Sorry, who are you looking for? We're about to eat.

MALINA

A woman named Elvira. She lived above the convenience store 2008, 2009, maybe before or after too.

WOMAN

Yes, I remember Elvira. We weren't close. Or similar. But it's not a big town, I knew her.

MALINA

Do you know if she had a child sometime around then?

WOMAN

A child. Never heard about one. But maybe that was after she left.

MALINA

She left?

WOMAN

(shrugging)

She's not here anymore. Why are you ... looking for her?

MALINA

Someone told me she went up the base after it closed.

WOMAN

Oh yeah, maybe. Some people did, people she would hang around with. Hippies, kinda. Like. 2009 hippies.

MALINA

They live up there?

WOMAN

Not anymore. I don't think. But yeah, in the old company housing. Deadbeats, you know? I mean. Not bad people, just ... whatever. It's funny. My husband used to live in those shitty company rooms.

MALINA

He worked there.

WOMAN

Yeah, he did. Computer stuff.

MALINA

Is he home? Maybe he remembers something.

WOMAN

He's on his way back from work. You could wait up for him if you want.

MALINA

Maybe I will.

WOMAN

Uh ... you wanna wait inside?

MALINA

Nah, I like the car. It's okay to park it here?

She points.

WOMAN

Fine by me.

Malina returns to the car. Natan has reclined his seat out of view.

EXT. PARK, EXTREMADURA

Malina, Polly, and Mason sit at a picnic table in a park. They have stuff, newly purchased, arrayed about. A roll of canvas, flashlights, hinges, straps. They drink malt liquor and gatorade.

It has begun to snow. Malina watches it drift through the path of the park lights. She seems unusually low.

MASON

He just wants to see his boyfriend.

MALINA

Guess so.

MASON

You think he's okay?

MALINA

Yeah. At least until his boyfriend comes back.

MASON

I meant with the car.

MALINA

Me too.

POLLY

How long?

MALINA

Hour or two.

MASON

Mm. We should get started then.

Polly nods. He passes a flashlight and a forty to Malina. She doesn't react.

POLLY

What's up?

MALINA

She's not up there.

MASON

What?

POLLY

She'll be up there.

MALINA

(sighing, shaking head)

I don't think so. Damn.

Malina picks up the forty, opens it, and smells it.

MALINA (CONT'D)

So what's this for?

MASON

You still have a lot to learn.

MALINA

My brain was recently rearranged.

All share a weak smile. After a moment, Polly points to the black mass of the mountain. All angle toward it.

POLLY

Tonight we are breaking the law
without a plan. That's not hard to
do, but you need to be in a certain
state.

Mason points to the forty.

MASON

To let the genius flow. You need to
be unconscious.

Malina looks at them. Holds eye contact while taking a long
drink from the forty.

INT. EMMELINE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The television plays a new infomercial. A home ultrasound
kit. The woman from the coin commercial, wearing different
clothes, with a new haircut and color, possibly a wig, demos
on her own exposed stomach. CC: "You can use it on yourself,
even if you're not, you know, whatever. I mean, just to be
curious!" The ghost organs in black and white appear on a
small monitor on her demo table.

Pio is propped up, a little more present. He turns from the
TV and looks down the hallway. Emmeline is preparing the
recovery drink for him. He smiles.

The woman on the TV is now applying the ultrasound device to
a prop wall to "look for studs or rodents." Someone crouches
on the other side of the wall, mostly out of view. "CASH FOR
DIABETIC TEST STRIPS" scrolls along the bottom with a phone
number.

Emmeline returns, hands him the drink with a stirring spoon
still in it, and sits down next to him to watch.

EXT. SECOND ENTRANCE TO MOUNTAIN

The lone cop at the second entrance still sits on his stool,
playing a phone game featuring the characters from coptoons.
They push around blocks, sokobon style, and the same few
audio triggers blare out (e.g. "Shoot him! Shoot him!").

Suddenly, a voice calls out to him. He looks up into a bright
glow, dropping his phone. His eyes grow wide, he blinks, they
adjust.

THE VOICE

YOU are alive. *EVEN* if you aren't.
Aware of it yet.

A sheet of canvas, floating in the darkness, advances toward
him. It is lit from behind, the silhouette of a woman cast
against it. She moves strangely, dances, gestures
erratically. The voice must be hers. The canvas advances, but
the silhouette stays the same size.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

THINK about your problems. Now STOP. Try to be alone with your thoughts. Only first: DECIDE if you want to try. Only first: DECIDE if you want to decide. Thinking is like throwing and catching. It takes a while. STOP. I want to help you. STOP. I want to warn you. Do you know me?

He is stunned. Behind the canvas, Malina speaks, somehow affecting the conviction, richness and naturalness of a normal, healthy person. She speaks like an angel in Christmas play. As Mason and Polly walk the canvas forward slowly, one on each side, Malina moves closer, hence farther from the flashlight on the ground behind her and at a rate calculated to keep her silhouette the same size. The illusion produces the effect of the canvas growing from its center rather than moving closer.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

COWARDICE is an alien organism. It is a foreign body. It pulls on you; it might straighten you out. STOP. The body is fine. A set of threads. Don't go sleeping with anything. Try to be alone. STOP. You can't waste power. Wait for a real connection. Connections are all you are STOP!

Now they are on him; they pounce and wrap him up in the canvas. Mason and Polly rip something from his clothes--badge and nameplate--and roll him tight, securing the roll with straps. Malina runs to grab the flashlight and they take off in to the mountain.

Muffled babbling comes from the roll, which very slowly rolls down from the trailhead into the ditch by the side of the access road. Snow continues to fall.

EXT. HIGHER IN THE MOUNTAIN

Local police and state troopers sweep the mountain with large flashlights. Some troupes have automatic weapons, others wield clubs.

INT. PIO'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Natan lies low in the driver's seat. He listens to the scanner. Chatter from the searchers.

Someone trying to get in contact with the trail guards. The ox-man continues to interrupt.

Someone pulls into the drive way. For a long moment no one comes out. The driver is gathering himself. Finally, a man, Natan's old boyfriend, emerges. He walks to the door with a slightly hung head. Inside, through a window, Natan watches him greet his family with weak, warm hugs.

EXT. EMMELINE'S HOUSE, PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Pio stumbles to the edge of the porch and looks out.

PIO
(groaning)
No...

EMMELINE
What?

Pio descends the steps.

PIO
What the hell guys?

EMMELINE
What happened?

PIO
The guy, the guy with the necklace-
-he took my keys. Why would you
take my car, c'mon ...

EMMELINE
With a necklace?

Pio heaves a very heavy sigh, considering his options. After a minute he turns to Emmeline.

PIO
I need your phone.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH

Malina, Mason, and Polly hike furtively up the mountain, keeping to dark areas. Patrols sometimes come close by and they duck behind rocks or fallen trees. A searchlight sweeps toward them.

POLLY
Down, down.

All duck.

MALINA

We have to get to the top before
the patrols.

MASON

What's at the top?

MALINA

The summit.

POLLY

Okay, we're good.

They continue.

MASON

What's at the summit? I thought we
were going to the base.

MALINA

There's a path from the summit to
the base. That was one of the
things he told me when we were on
the slope. After work he'd come
back that way every day, even
though there was a faster way down.
He said he'd sometimes meet her
there, or she'd surprise him, come
up to meet him there after work.
They would ... have sex in the
woods sometimes. Looking out at the
town.

A pause.

MALINA (CONT'D)

If we can get to the summit we
should be able to find the path
to the base. All I'm saying is we
need to get there before they do,
because--

POLLY

They're closing on the top.

MALINA

Exactly.

POLLY

(pointing)

We gotta--look--get through a gap
like that. Everyone feeling--

Malina takes off running through the indicated gap. Mason and Polly run after her. Mason crashes into something and falls. A flashlight immediately lands on them.

DISTANT POLICE VOICE
Hey! You three! Who's that?

MASON
(to self)
Come on.

MALINA
Just Police, Officer!

Polly turns on his flashlight and points it back in the direction of the light.

POLLY
Just catching up! Thought we saw something back there.

A long pause. Mason gets to their feet.

DISTANT POLICE VOICE
Well! Alright! But hurry up! And keep your light on!

They run toward the gap.

EXT. EXTREMADURA MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Natan's boyfriend comes out of the house with a trash bag. Immediately tosses it down the stairs and sits to have a cigarette. The bag splits open and the boyfriend shakes his head. Natan nods, watching closely. A car turns onto the street.

Natan gets out and stands, leaning against the hood, facing his old boyfriend. About twenty feet separate them. There's not enough light for the old boyfriend to be sure it's him, so he stands, slowly, puzzled, and begins to approach.

Just as he steps off the stairs, the car driving by turns on its siren and lights. Natan, violently shocked out of the moment, whirls around. The boyfriend stops by the trash bag.

COPCAR PA
Hands on your vehicle. Hands on your *stolen* vehicle GOOD. You are caught. You are under arrest. Good? You cannot move.

NATAN

What?

COPCAR PA

You're caught! No stealing cars!
No! Hands on the vehicle! No
moving! Don't try anything.

No one gets out of the cop car. Tinted windows make it impossible to see in, especially at night. The lights continue now with no siren. A full minute passes as Natan stands there, bend awkwardly over the car. The boyfriend walks over, places his trash in the bin, and tries to get a better look at Natan.

EXT. SUMMIT

Ringed by pine trees on all sides but one, the summit, for the moment, is peaceful and dark. Through the break in the trees there is a view out over Extremadura below.

Malina, Mason, and Polly crash out from the trees, sweaty and out of breath. They wear their coats tied around their waists.

MALINA

Here.

Mason and Polly rest with their hands on their knees by the trees.

MASON

Which way now?

MALINA

Not sure.

POLLY

We have about five minutes before
the patrols get here.

Malina walks to the overlook point.

MALINA

The summit.

She touches the summit marker, a little eroded stone pillar.

MALINA (CONT'D)

Elvira...

POLLY
 Malina, get away from there.
 They'll see you.

Malina looks up at the blank night sky.

MALINA
 Moon?

MASON
 Let's find this path.

Mason and Polly start inspecting the perimeter for the trail down to the research base. Their flashlights pass over large rocks, old trash, trees and tree debris and suddenly--a figure, crouched over and smiling.

SIMONE
 (weak but placid)
 Hey.

Simone has dyed her hair blonde and she looks rough, injured, clutching a tattered sweater about herself. Someone else, small and out of the light, tends to her wounded abdomen. She winces now and then.

MASON
 Simone? What? What're you ...

Malina runs over and crouches down.

POLLY
 Simone ...

Malina embraces Simone.

MALINA
 What happened to you?

SIMONE
 Maliiiiiiiiina! Sweet Malina. I was hoping you'd be here. Looking for that woman. Or kid. I'm glad to see you...

MALINA
 We're headed to the research base. Come with us. Are you--

SIMONE
 (shaking her head)
 No. No one there.

MALINA

Some people went to squat there
after it closed--

SIMONE

There's no one there. I was just
down there. I came from there. No
one there anymore.

MALINA

(confused)

You came from the research base?

SIMONE

(smiling)

Yes. Exactly.

(wistful)

But everyone's gone now.

Malina sits and puts her head in her hands.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. She was there, at the
beginning. It's just the wrong
time, don't feel bad. It's the
wrong time; she left.

(laughs, coughs)

Why would she stay?

A long pause.

MALINA

He was so sure she'd be here. The
skier. Not at the base even. Just
... here somewhere.

SIMONE

Things don't always stay how you
leave them.

(wincing)

Argh! Fuck!

MALINA

I need to talk to her.

SIMONE

For him? What happens if you don't?

MALINA

(shaking head)

I just need to find her. I have to
ask her something, tell her
something. Did you hear anything
about a kid?

SIMONE

Malina, I haven't spoken with
anyone. There was *no one there*.

Malina sighs and stands.

POLLY

How did you know she was there?

SIMONE

What?

POLLY

At the base.

SIMONE

Oh. I ... communicated with her.
You know. There's a way sometimes,
when someone isn't there, to
connect. It's like remembering.
Remembering someone else's life.

MALINA

Can you do it here? Because I need
to talk to her.

SIMONE

(uneasy)

It's really not like speaking to
someone. It's not a phone call.
Besides--

MALINA

I need to know something from
Elvira. Elvira, I have a well
formed question for you.

SIMONE

Malina, it's not a good idea. I'm
tired, she's probably asleep. I
don't want to mess with her head.

MALINA

Elvira. Elvira. I am saying this to
you.

SIMONE

Malina, don't--

MALINA

Elvira. Do you remember when we
used to come up here after work? I
would meet you on my way back from
the base.

A long pause. Malina goes over again to the overlook. Her words have a new weight.

MALINA (CONT'D)

In the summer, when everything was so thick, it was easy to get out of sight. Twenty-what? Twenty something, I'm not sure. Healthy and young. Sex in the woods on a warm afternoon. Enough breeze, enough exposure--never so sweaty or sticky.

Another pause.

SIMONE

I remember. You were surprised how clean it was. You didn't believe me, that it would feel cleaner out here.

MALINA

One of those things you were right about. God. Clean and *clear*.

(small laugh)

I never felt so clear again. Everything afterwards became corrupted. Experience dirties everything, captures everything in associations. It's not pleasant to think about.

(a long pause)

I wondered a lot, later on, who you'd done it with before.

(another pause)

But that doesn't matter now. Where are you, Elvira?

SIMONE

Somewhere else. I'm not sure. Why?

MALINA

You didn't wait for me.

SIMONE

You didn't tell me to. And you never came looking.

MALINA

Not like that. I guess. But almsot every day since, I spent time looking for you.

(MORE)

MALINA (CONT'D)

In and out of windows, on the road,
in news photos, on the bus. I do
look for you. To see if you might
show up.

SIMONE

If you came to get me, I might be
there.

MALINA

Too late for that now.
(voice breaking slightly)
Something's happened to me.
(gathering)
I need to ask you something.

SIMONE

Did you really think about me that
often?

MALINA

Yes, really.

SIMONE

You never even told me you loved
me.

MALINA

I did love you. I love you, Elvira.

A pause.

SIMONE

When we were together, it wasn't
like that. It wasn't romantic. Do
you remember?

MALINA

...Yes.

SIMONE

You knew you were leaving. And you
didn't tell me until right at the
end. Do you remember that?

MALINA

Yes. Elvira, I remember everything.

SIMONE

I'm surprised. I never would have
said we were in love. Looking back
now...for, honestly, the first time
in, what?, ten years? I think I
know what you mean.

(MORE)

SIMONE (CONT'D)

There was something about it. It was special between us.

MALINA

Yes!

SIMONE

But you didn't love me at the time.

MALINA

I did.

SIMONE

No, you didn't. You really didn't.

MALINA

(tears welling)

I really did.

SIMONE

I was there too. You weren't bad to me. I don't regret it. But I know what love is like--already I knew it then and I've seen it since. It's more than just connecting lives.

MALINA

No, Elvira. I mean, yes, it is more than that. But it was with us too. You've forgotten what it was like. It wasn't chance; it wasn't like being cellmates.

SIMONE

No. It just wasn't serious. You know that. You knew it that last time I saw you, remember? I haven't thought of that in a long time. Do you remember how we said goodbye so fast? How you smiled and I was annoyed?

A pause. The patrols are closer now. Sometimes a flashlight beam lights the trees from below.

MALINA

It's alright. I didn't expect you to remember like I do. A few years out, when I realized what it had really been, I also realized you wouldn't remember it like I do. A memory of an emotion is so fragile and so easy to disrespect.

(MORE)

MALINA (CONT'D)

You think you remember the feeling, because you can name it or tell it as some story about some other younger person, but you don't *have* the feeling at all. You remember it, you tell yourself you remember it, just to survive losing something so beautiful. Only sometimes someone, like me, is randomly able to catch himself in the process of misplacing that memory. For a second you see it, what anyone honest would admit: there was a life there that you had, that was perfect, and is gone.

(a long pause)

I had to hold on once I saw it. But I got lucky. Or unlucky. Anyway it was a freak thing, I know that. I knew you'd have gone on. That's why I couldn't come looking for you.

Simone thinks.

SIMONE

You should be less precious with beautiful things. Maybe you're right: we had it perfect, in our naive way, back then. Maybe I forfeited that feeling to move on. But there can be many perfect scenes in a lifetime. Life itself is perfect--and there's more of it in every direction.

MALINA

I am not like you, Elvira, and I never was. I never had your confidence. How could I know I would find anything like that again? Why would I trust that, when I missed it even when I'd miraculously--

SIMONE

The confidence is self-acting. You just decide--

MALINA

Yes, well, great. I'm glad that it's self-acting. But I don't have it! I just don't have it.

SIMONE
No, you didn't.

Malina sighs.

SIMONE (CONT'D)
But it's a habit. You could develop it.

MALINA
No, I can't! Actually I can't.
Something happened to me. An accident. It doesn't matter.
Elvira, I need to know where you are.

SIMONE
(uneasy)
I told you, I'm not sure. Even now ... where are you?

MALINA
(uneasy too, unnerved by her uneasiness)
I'm ... not sure either. I hadn't...hmm...

SIMONE
I wonder where we are. Can you see anything?

MALINA
No.

SIMONE
Me neither.

MALINA
I think...I think we don't have long here. Wherever we are. God, I need to talk to you.

SIMONE
About what?

MALINA
Fine: once, at the end, when I knew my contract was over but--a few weeks before the end, remember this? I called out early to meet you at the lookout.

SIMONE

(smiles)

Yes. It was fall, but none of the leaves were down yet.

MALINA

Yes, exactly. We met at the lookout. There was no one around.

SIMONE

I remember it. We had sex in the open. In broadest daylight.

MALINA

I'm glad you remember.

SIMONE

Wow. I cannot believe I remember that so well. That was something we were good at, eh? And we knew. We were so proud of ourselves.

MALINA

It's not a small thing.

SIMONE

No, it's not. Hm. Why do you ... bring that up?

MALINA

I think--I have reason to believe that we ... conceived a child. Then, that time.

SIMONE

You have reason to believe? You were always worried--

MALINA

I can't go into that now, I think we have to hurry, but yet, because of work we were doing on the base, partly, but also I just was young and didn't know what was safe. We never really talked ... doesn't matter. I just, I thought *that time*, I had this sense ... I can't ... I had a sense that it had happened. Some fusion. Everything was so clean and clear. Like I could see through my extension, into my extended existence--like a branch budding, clean and clear.

(a pause)

(MORE)

MALINA (CONT'D)
I need to know if there was a
child, Elvira.

Simone does not respond. The shouts of police officers are closer still. Polly looks down the hill at what seem the nearest ones, judging how long they have.

MALINA (CONT'D)
I need to know.

Another pause.

SIMONE
It's not that simple.

MALINA
Elvira...

SIMONE
(through gritted teeth)
It's not that simple!

MALINA
Why do you *hide* from me?

SIMONE
If you ever found me ... you know
you'd kill me. AAAGHHH--

Simone gives out a long, loud, painful moan. Her eyes flash. With effort, she pulls herself to her feet, strengthening the moan into a yell.

SIMONE (CONT'D)
HERE! HERE!

She pulls a flare from somewhere and shoots it straight up into the sky. It blossoms. All watch in rapture--except Simone, who sprints off into the woods. Her attendant follows.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO EXTREMADURA

The two cops working the barricade at the town entrance stand, backs to the mountain, watching something on a phone. The tinny sounds of cartoon voices come through the speakers. Behind them, a flare snakes upward from the summit, emitting red sparks.

WILL
How do you think you simulate an
economy anyway?

SPIKES
Mice, maybe? Or ants?

EXT. QUIET STREET, EXTREMADURA

Natan, hands on the hood of his car, and his boyfriend, standing much closer now, watch as the flare starts to float back down to earth. Their faces are lit by the lights from the silent police car and its still-hidden officer.

EXT. SUMMIT

Malina, dazed, blinks tears from wet eyes as she traces the flare's tumbling descent. Mason and Polly watch too. All are slow and stunned. When the flare is out of sight, Malina looks after Simone in the direction of her escape.

From all directions, flashlights appear in the trees around the clearing.

POLICE
Don't try anything.

Millions of police emerge, encircling them.

POLICE 2
No moving!

SERGEANT
(into radio)
Got her. Up at the summit. Over.

POLICE 2
(into radio)
Copy.

Sergeant and Policeman 2 are standing very near each other. A loud burst of Ox-man's music drowns out any further response. All turn down their radios instinctively.

A policeman handcuffs Malina. It is the policeman from the hospital. He doesn't recognize Malina (and she has never seen his face).

POLICEMAN
Sorceress, you are under arrest.
(over shoulder to Mason
and Polly)
You guys too.

Another cop, Recruit from the helicopter, starts to handcuff Mason and Polly.

POLLY

Hold it, friend. You might want to
check out pockets.

Recruit pulls the badge from Mason's pocket and the metal
name tag from Polly's. He also removes their wallets and
several candy wrappers.

MASON

Special forces, bub. Who you think
sent up that flare?
(holding out cuffs)
Mind taking these off for me?

Recruit squints the badge.

RECRUIT

Special forces of the local police?

MASON

(nodding, big smirk)
Welcome to America.

POLICE 3

Don't give 'em a hard time,
recruit. Look, they've got
flashlights like us.

Police 3 removes their handcuffs. Mason and Polly fix the
badge and nameplate to their shirts respectively and head to
where Malina is being escorted away.

MASON

Hold it, friends. We were first on
the scene. Let us walk her.

POLICEMAN

Okay! Fairs fair.

MASON

(to Malina)
You're going away for a long time.

All walk slowly to the ski lift. The rest of the cops get on
first, filling many benches. Mason, Malina, and Polly
eventually board a bench all their own.

EXT. SKI LIFT DOWN MOUNTAIN

A lift full of cops descends the mountain. It is high
midnight and the stars are out. On the lift behind the cops,
Mason and Polly work on Malina's handcuffs.

Recruit is sandwiched between two state troopers who argue about an episode of Coptoons. Recruit, still uneasy about something, does not engage. Sometimes he checks over his shoulder.

COP 1

There's no way they are making it out--it's a *collapsed mine shaft*. It literally doesn't even matter they have a magic gun.

COP 2

Just wait man.

COP 1

I think they're killing them off. I bet the actors that, like, do the voices asked for more money or something, I'm telling you. It's lowkey a brutal business.

COP 2

Then why wouldn't they just kill them? Why cliffhangers like this? So the next episode is what, like, they're just dead?

COP 1

They'll stretch it out, but yeah. They're gonna die. Hey--we none of us live forever! It's gonna be *crazy*.

In the background, they've gotten one of the cuffs loose. Recruit turns to look and they all play innocent.

COP 2

No way. You know why? They spent the whole season building up this thing between Bunny and Frog. Like: he could betray her and get away with it. But not if she dies.

COP 1

My thing about that is: she *should*, but she *won't*.

COP 2

She should betray him? What? No one should betray anyone.

COP 1

It'd be more exciting. But she *won't*.

COP 2
She shouldn't.

In the background, Malina is fully free. Polly stuffs her cuffs into his coat. They eye the drop.

COP 1
Maybe.

They steel themselves.

COP 2
In the end, I mean, doesn't really matter what we think. Doesn't even matter what they think. Some things just happen.

Malina, Mason, and Polly drop off the lift and out of sight.

COP 2 (CONT'D)
Which ones?

END.