

**RIM OF THE WORLD**

CHAPTER 1

"THE HAZE"

written by

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**EXT. THE HAZE - DAY?**

A dense, mustard-tinged fog obscures all. In nature, this noxious yellow color means only one thing: *death*.

For what feels like an eternity all we see is the fog. Drifting listlessly. It's ethereal. Mesmerizing...

... until a SILHOUETTE appears in the distance.

At first it seems like a mirage. It's there. Then it's gone. We only catch glimpses of it as the fog clears. Then, with each lumbering step, it comes into focus...

It's a MAN wearing a gas mask and a heavy trench coat. He grips a UTILITY CASE in his gloved hands. This is OWEN, 42.

PSSSHHH SHOOO PSSSHHH SHOOO

He breathes heavily, condensation forming on the plasti-shield protecting his eyes. A CAMERA is mounted to the side of his gas mask. Its red light BLINKS like the warning light on a buoy.

As he presses on, a skeletal object materializes before him. It looks alien. Like whale bones scattered on the ocean floor. But then we see that it's only a JUNGLE GYM with twisting monkey bars and a geodesic dome. We now understand that we're in a...

**CITY PARK**

Owen follows a well-worn path that cuts through the park's now-desiccated grass. When he steps onto a tuft of the arid grass it puffs into ash and swirls away into the fog.

Owen slows as he arrives at a small WINDMILL perched atop makeshift scaffolding. Its rotor SQUEAKS as the blades spin. The sharp noise punctures the silence.

SQUEEE SQUEEE SQUEEEAAAAAAKKKKK

OWEN

I've arrived at Weather Station  
Delta. Don't see any immediate  
damage. Wind might've knocked the  
connection to the terminal loose.

A COMPUTER TERMINAL sits atop a stack of crates near the base of the windmill. Owen sets his utility case beside it. The terminal's display is dead. He presses a key. Nothing. Checks the power cable attached to the back. Secure.

OWEN

Terminal connection is solid. Must  
be an issue at the power supply.

He follows the power cable as it snakes toward the windmill. After a few steps, he freezes.

OWEN  
What the hell?

He bends down and lifts the thick power cable. It's been severed. Not just cut... *chewed through*.

*SQUEEE SQUEEE SQUEEEAAAAAAKKKKK SQUEEE SQUEEE SQUEEEAAAAAAKKK*

He takes quick, shallow breaths as panic sets in. His eyes move from the shredded cable down to the dry grass.

There, carved in the grass, he sees a clear PATH where *something* has moved through it. He tracks the trail with his eyes until it disappears into the wall of fog.

OWEN  
Is it possible...?

A gust of wind tears through the park. The fog clears just enough for Owen to see something in the distance...

An ANTLERED CREATURE. Its head SNAPS up. *It sees Owen too.*

Owen hesitates, curiosity outweighing fear... Until the creature LUNGES toward him. He nearly leaps out of his skin. He scrambles backward and sprints toward the jungle gym.

The creature gives chase. He can hear its POUNDING FOOTFALLS bearing down on him. The jungle gym reappears ahead. *If only he can make it under the geodesic dome he might be safe...*

The creature closes the gap. It's only a few feet behind him now. But he doesn't dare look back. He's almost there.

The creature unleashes a hair-raising, GHOULISH SHRIEK as Owen dives for safety under the dome. But before we can see what happens, the fog condenses and blocks out the entire scene.

And then the fog is whipping past us. And we realize we're RISING UP through the clouds.

**IN ONE CONTINUOUS SHOT** we RISE higher...

and higher...

and higher...

... until we BREAK THROUGH the top layer of the fog and find ourselves looking at a PERFECT SUNNY DAY.

Blue sky. Bright sun. It's absolutely picturesque.

In the distance, a landmass emerges from the haze like a remote, volcanic island. As we MOVE TOWARD IT IN THE SAME SHOT, we see evergreens carpeting the rocky hillside.

We CONTINUE FORWARD and see a FIGURE sitting on a metal guardrail overlooking the haze. Finally we LAND ON...

**EXT. SCENIC VIEWPOINT - CONTINUOUS**

MAEVE MORGAN, 16, sits on the guardrail with her feet casually dangling over the edge. She stares out at the haze through two curtains of tangled brown hair.

The haze stretches on as far as the eye can see. From here it looks as gentle as the ocean on a calm day. The clouds swell and undulate, currents carve through it. It's hypnotic...

Maeve snaps out of her reverie as bike tires SCRAPE to a stop in the gravel behind her.

ALMA (O.S.)  
Shoulda known you'd be down here.  
Come on. We can't be late or else  
my mom is gonna kill me.

Maeve turns and slides back over the guardrail to find ALMA ESTRELLA, 16, an Hispanic girl with black hair pulled back tight into a bun, and JOEY OKAMOTO, 17, a half-Japanese beanpole of a boy, fittingly wearing a beanie. They stand with their bikes, ready to roll.

MAEVE  
Wouldn't want to ruin your mom's  
big day, would we?

Maeve lifts her bike off the ground and rides toward them. Then she races right past them onto a two-lane roadway.

MAEVE  
Loser has to pick up the winner's  
work rotation!

JOEY  
Not fair! You got a head start!

He speeds after her. Alma shakes her head and then kicks off.

The trio race up the road and pass a green highway sign. As they continue on, we FOCUS ON the sign. A red line of graffiti makes it fittingly read:

RIM OF THE WORLD HWY

And we ROLL CREDITS.

**EXT. RIM OF THE WORLD HIGHWAY - DAY**

Maeve, Alma, and Joey continue their lighthearted bike race. Joey overtakes them as they pedal up a steep hill.

JOEY

Hope you like cleaning bedpans.

ALMA

Aw seriously? Didn't you have hospital duty last week?

JOEY

I drew it again! So you best believe I'm winning this race.

MAEVE

Well, there's one thing you're forgetting.

Joey summits the hill and disappears over it as he responds.

JOEY

I'd love to know, but I can't hear you all the way up here.

Maeve digs in and crests the hill. A steep drop greets her. She smirks, leans over her handlebars, and takes the plunge.

She scorches down the hill like a peregrine falcon diving toward its prey. She gains on Joey. Then she surpasses him.

MAEVE

You forgot that I'm not scared of the downhill!

Joey can only smile as he watches her blaze past him, her flannel whipping behind her like a superhero cape.

Alma starts down the slope tentatively, her hands riding the brakes as she goes. She shouts after Maeve.

ALMA

Do you have a death wish?!

Maeve keeps her speed as the road levels and twists into a serpentine. She makes a blind turn and... Shit!

Maeve swerves to avoid slamming right into a horse! A MOTHER with a BABY pressed against her chest rears the horse up. The Mother shouts at Maeve, but Maeve is already well past her.

MOTHER

Hey! Watch it!

Before she can say anything else, Joey zips past. Then a moment later, Alma rides by.

ALMA

Sorry!

The Mother shakes her head as the teens round a bend.

MOTHER

Townies...

Maeve, Joey, and Alma laugh as they continue along the winding road. They seem absolutely care-free. Yet, all along, the haze is in sight just beyond the guardrail.

They remain unfazed as they pass a cluster of rusted cars on the shoulder of the road and a cabin covered in overgrowth with a sun-faded American flag in the yard.

**EXT. BIG BEAR CO-OP - WESTERN GATE - MOMENTS LATER**

The road turns away from the haze to reveal a SHIMMERING LAKE to their left. They pass more overgrown homes. They pass more PEOPLE. Some ride horses, some ride bikes, and others walk on foot. Up ahead, the people have formed a line leading to a makeshift metal gate that spans the road. It's open.

ALMA

Hey, we should get in line.

MAEVE

You sound like your mom.

ALMA

That's not a bad thing.

MAEVE

If you think I'm stopping right at the end of the race, you're crazy.

Maeve picks up speed. Joey matches. Alma reluctantly joins.

RHODA STEINMAN, 65, as white-haired and kindly as Mrs. Claus, sits at a table with a pen and clipboard in hand. A SECURITY GUARD pats people down before they step through the open gate.

MAEVE

Hi, Rhoda!

Rhoda barely has time to register Maeve as she shoots through the gate, her arms up in celebration like the winner of the Tour de France. Joey and Alma pass just after her.

ALMA

Sorry, Rhoda!

The Security Guard looks to Rhoda for orders.

RHODA

Oh, they're harmless. Let 'em be.

**EXT. BIG BEAR CO-OP - STREETS - CONTINUOUS**

The teens ride through the streets, which are noticeably devoid of cars. Although most of the buildings are empty, there are signs of life: freshly-painted storefronts, semi-permanent structures along the sidewalks, and handmade street signage.

They pass a large COMMUNITY BOARD that's equal parts newspaper, social hub, and vigil. One headline dominates the mélange:

**TOWN HALL - RESTORING POWER TO THE CO-OP (& free lunch!)**

**EXT. VETERAN'S PARK - CONTINUOUS**

A crowd has gathered at Veteran's Park, an open space off the main road that butts up against the lake. The crowd is so large that it spills into the expansive church parking lot next door.

A small stage with a podium, a microphone, and an amp has been erected at the back of the park near the water. A tall EVERGREEN TREE has been placed just behind the stage.

The teens come to a stop as people around them join the crowd.

JOEY

Whoa, you weren't kidding. This must be the real deal.

ALMA

My mom says it's going to change everything.

MAEVE

Right. And how many times have we heard that before?

Alma looks for a way around the growing crowd.

ALMA

It's not gonna matter if we can't even see what's going on.

Maeve scans the surroundings and spies the church roof.

MAEVE

I've got an idea.

**EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER**

The teens scope out the perimeter of the church looking for a place to climb up onto the roof.

JOEY

Maybe we can use that dumpster?

MAEVE

Oh, sure. That'll be nice and quiet. We're trying not to alert everyone to what we're doing.

LUCAS (O.S.)

And what, exactly, are you doing?

The teens whip around to see LUCAS REDDING, 45, sitting tall atop his horse. He has the look of a rugged cowboy with sandy brown hair peeking out from beneath his Stetson, a stern look on his tanned face, and a sheriff's badge pinned to his shirt.

ALMA

Oh, uh, hi, Sheriff. We were just... seeing if we could find any chairs. My mom wanted us to track some down.

LUCAS

Doesn't look like you're having much luck.

ALMA

Ha. No, well, we just got started.

LUCAS

Hope you get it all figured out.

He turns the horse to leave, but stops after a few steps.

LUCAS

Y'know, there's a beautiful old Jeffrey Pine on the other side of the church. Might be the tallest one in the city.

(beat)

You be safe now, alright?

**EXT. CHURCH ROOF - MOMENTS LATER**

Joey reaches out to help Alma hop from the tree limb to the church roof. As their hands touch, there's a brief but perceptible spark between them. Maeve clocks it.

ALMA

Thanks.



The teens cross the roof and sit down at the front edge. They have a great view of the crowd, the lake, and the city.

MAEVE  
See? Much better.

**EXT. VETERAN'S PARK - ROTUNDA - SAME TIME**

GABRIELLA "GABBI" ESTRELLA, 48, her black hair pulled back as tight as her daughter, Alma's, paces back and forth while practicing her speech, glancing down at her papers every now and then to confirm she has it memorized.

Her husband, ESTEBAN ESTRELLA, 52, shakes his head of salt and pepper hair and chuckles.

GABBI  
What's so funny?

ESTEBAN  
You! You're acting like you haven't had that speech memorized for a week already. And you're pacing so much that you're making *me* nervous. And I don't even have anything important to do.

GABBI  
You know this one's different.

ESTEBAN  
I do. And just like all the other speeches, you're going to nail it.

ODELL GASKINS III, 55, an African American man with a once-athletic physique that's gone soft with age, enters the rotunda wearing a well-worn baseball cap over his bald head.

ODELL  
It's all set up for you whenever you're ready, Gabbi.

GABBI  
You're sure it's going to work?

ODELL  
Don't worry. I'll make you look good up there.

GABBI  
It's not about me looking good. It's about giving these people what they deserve. Giving them something that inspires them.

(MORE)

GABBI (CONT'D)

Gives them hope.

(beat)

I should add that to the speech.

ESTEBAN

No. No more adding. It's perfect  
how it is. You ready?

GABBI

I'm ready.

Esteban gives her a quick kiss. She takes one final, deep  
breath and exits the rotunda.

**EXT. VETERAN'S PARK - MOMENTS LATER**

Gabbi takes the stage to the sound of light applause. She  
stands behind the podium, which has a RED LEVER beside it.

Odell stands stage right along with LESLIE WIGENHOFFER, 70, a  
man who looks like he was plucked from "The Grapes of Wrath."

GABBI

Good morning, everyone.

The amp is LOUD. It blasts her voice into the crowd and  
immediately produces harsh feedback. The crowd recoils.

GABBI

Sorry about that. It's been a  
while since any of us has used a  
microphone. Let's try that again.

(beat)

Thank you all for being here. For  
those of you who live here in the  
Co-Op, you're familiar - maybe  
even a little too familiar - with  
who I am. But for those of you who  
are joining us from Sugarloaf, or  
the hills, or even from Freedom,  
my name is Gabriella Estrella and  
I'm the Civics Chief here in the  
Big Bear Cooperative. Together  
with the Utilities Chief, Odell  
Gaskins the Third, and the  
Agricultural Chief, Leslie  
Wigenhoffer, we make up the  
elected triumvirate who oversee  
daily operations. Let's give them  
both a hand, whaddya say?

Odell and Leslie give a wave and the crowd politely claps.

GABBI

Now let me address the elephant in the room. I'm using a microphone, which uses power. Power that usually goes to better use than hearing me talk.

(beat, crowd laughs)

But that's exactly why we've asked all of you to join us today. To talk about power. Power has been a precious, elusive, and finite commodity in our community. Odell and our incredible utilities crew kept us afloat with a patchwork of wind power, electric batteries, and timber. But that barely scratched the surface of what our people needed. What our people deserved. Because power is what *empowers* people and communities. It's what--

VROOOM VROOOOOOOOOM

The loud, unmistakable revving of a large engine rips through the scene. The crowd turns at the sound. Gabbi looks around for answers but only receives shrugs. On the...

### **CHURCH ROOF**

The teens see the source of the sound before the crowd - an oversized PICKUP TRUCK with inverted black and white American flags flying from its bed. Black plumes of smoke rise from side-mounted exhaust pipes. TWO MEN in camo ride in the back.

ALMA

I don't like the look of this.

The truck rolls up behind the crowd and parks. The DRIVER hops out and climbs into the truck bed.

### **ON STAGE**

Gabbi glances into the periphery of the crowd and meets eyes with Lucas, still atop his horse. He gives her a nod and trots off toward the pickup. She collects herself.

GABBI

I see we have some new visitors joining us. All are welcome here in the Co-Op. Now is also a good time to remind all of you that there will be a free meal following today's event...

The sound of her speech fades as Lucas arrives at the...

**PICKUP TRUCK**

LUCAS

What are you doin' here, Danny?

DANIEL "DANNY" REDDING, 47, is hard to read with most of his face obscured by a thick beard, military-grade sunglasses, and a desert camo baseball hat. But his smile sure seems insincere.

DANNY

Is that how you greet family these days? Thought the *Cooperative* was all about community and love.

The Men beside him, CHIP, 36, lanky, and HUGH, 40, "big-boned," snicker like the diligent toadies they are. It's impossible to ignore that all three of the Men are white.

LUCAS

You didn't answer my question.

DANNY

We came cuz we were invited. You heard the lady. "All are welcome." And now I'm here I also find myself intrigued by this "free meal." Free meal. How 'bout that. Sounds good, huh, boys?

Chip and Hugh nod their heads.

DANNY

Or are you here to tell us we're doin' something illegal? Y'all have so many laws it's hard to keep 'em straight. But I s'pose that's your job, ain't it? Tell people what they can and can't do.

LUCAS

Main rule around here is "don't be an asshole." If you can handle that then we're square.

DANNY

Sir, yes, sir.

(beat)

Now, if you don't mind, we're tryin' to hear what the nice lady has to say.

Lucas begrudgingly turns and leaves.

**ON STAGE**

Gabbi's speech continues. She's found her stride again.

GABBI

...and that's why Veteran's Park is such a fitting place for this momentous occasion. All of us have lost people. Family. Friends. Loved ones. These ten years have been the biggest challenge humanity has ever faced. But we persevered. And we'll continue to persevere. Together.

(beat)

I know the holiday season looks different these days. But this year we have a gift that will make things look a bit more familiar.

(then)

After years of tireless work and extraordinary effort, we are overjoyed to announce the completion of the Solar Grid Project. It will provide enough power for the entire Cooperative and everyone in it.

(re: red lever)

This lever is connected to the new solar grid. When I pull it, we will officially enter a new era in our society. An era that brings power to the people.

Gabbi PULLS the lever.

For three long, heartstopping seconds nothing happens...

Then the evergreen behind her LIGHTS UP with colorful string lights. A star shines bright atop it. It's a Christmas tree!

The crowd cheers and claps. Some whistle. Others cry. It's a beautiful, joyous, hard-earned moment. Gabbi smiles just as--

Danny's voice, amplified by a MEGAPHONE, cuts across the park.

DANNY

Don't believe the lies. This is just another way to control you. Get ready for more rules. More regulations. This power isn't for you. It's for her.

BOOs erupt from the crowd.

DANNY

Go ahead and boo. You know I'm right!

Lucas spurs his horse toward the truck. He dismounts at speed, keeps his momentum, and vaults into the truckbed.

He grabs Danny's arm. Chip and Hugh leap up to stop him. Lucas is ready for the fight. It's about to get ugly when--

GABBI

Stop! Let him speak his mind. Here in the Co-Op we don't believe in silence. Or violence.

Lucas gets the message. He reluctantly releases Danny.

DANNY

(to Lucas, winking)

Almost had ya.

(to crowd)

Thank you, ma'am. I'm just here to offer an alternative. Because *Cooperative*. It's a funny word, ain't it? Back in the old world there was a different name for it. *Communism*. My daddy used to say if it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck. Well... y'all know the rest.

As he continues, most of the crowd isn't buying it. Except one woman. JEAN MORGAN, 47, a woman with the nervous energy of a spinning plate, nods along as she absorbs the rhetoric.

DANNY

If you're tired of being told what to do, what to eat, when to sleep, and when to shit, then I've got an offer for you. *Freedom*.

(beat)

Freedom is more than a community. It's an ideal. It's a place where you decide what's right for your family. A place where traditional values are upheld. Where God is still the supreme authority.

(then)

If that sounds like a place you want to live, I'll be at the DMZ the rest of the day ready to answer any questions y'all might have. Sure hope to see you there.

Danny puts the megaphone down and grins at Lucas.

LUCAS

Alright you've said your piece.  
Now let these folks enjoy one  
goddamn minute of happiness.

DANNY

I don't know why you put up with  
the bullshit around here. Move to  
Freedom with us. It's where you  
belong. Got some nieces and  
nephews who could use an uncle.

LUCAS

I'm good where I'm at.

Lucas hops out of the truck and starts to walk away.

DANNY

You're still the worst liar I've  
ever met.

(beat)

One more thing, Lucas.

(off Lucas stopping)

Merry Christmas.

Lucas scowls. We stay with him as the truck fires up and peels  
out. Then a voice CRACKLES over his WALKIE.

TRISTAN (O.S.)

Sheriff. This is Operations HQ.  
We've got a situation.

**EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER**

Alma and Maeve snicker as Joey clumsily descends the tree. He  
finally drops unceremoniously to the pavement.

MAEVE

Alright now that all that's over  
with, let's head up to the lodge.  
Shoot some bottles or something.

ALMA

I can't. I'm gonna be stuck on  
family duty the rest of the day.

JOEY

Seriously? But it's like, a day  
off. An actual day off.

ALMA

With my mom in charge I don't get  
any days off. Ever.

(MORE)

ALMA (CONT'D)

(beat)

See you guys tomorrow for the gift exchange?

MAEVE

Yeah, yeah. Don't pull a muscle putting on a fake smile the rest of the day.

Alma heads off. Now it's just Maeve and Joey. Without the third, pivotal piece of their triad the energy immediately becomes infused with the awkwardness of adolescence.

JOEY

So... can you help me with something?

MAEVE

As long as it's nothing weird.

**EXT. OPERATIONS TEAM HQ - BASKETBALL COURT - DAY**

A scuffed and scarred basketball BANGS off a backboard and drops through a naked hoop.

BERETTA (O.S.)

Ball back.

ALEJANDRO "SMITH" DIAZ, 28, sweats through his tank top as he catches the ball and throws it back toward the free throw line. His fraternal twin brother, ANDRES "WESSON" DIAZ, looks similarly-winded as he lopes after the ball.

SMITH

You know, you don't have to say "ball back" every time.

BRIANNA "BERETTA" CARTER, 30, grins as she grips the beat-up basketball in her strong hands.

BERETTA

Just making up for all the times you don't get to say it.

Wesson steps up to guard her.

WESSON

Go easy on her. Beretta's just desperate to have balls.

BERETTA

Guess we both have that in common.



SMITH

Brooooo, at least give him a final meal before you execute him! Damn!

WESSON

Alright, alright, I'll give you that one. But now I'mma have to guard you for real.

Beretta jukes left. Then right. Wesson keeps her boxed in.

WESSON

See that? Got nowhere to go now.

Beretta smirks and SHOULDER CHECKS him. He falls flat on his ass as she blows past him, spins around Smith, and sinks a layup. Wesson gets up with his arms in the air.

BERETTA

Ball back.

WESSON

Foul! Come on! That was charging!

BERETTA

Only a foul if the ref sees it.

Wesson looks toward the sideline to plead his case.

WESSON

Winnie! Ay, Winchester! Weigh in on this.

Relaxing in a lawn chair on the sidelines reading a pulp paperback through his aviator sunglasses is WINSTON "WINCHESTER" GREENE, 53. He turns a page without looking up.

WINCHESTER

Y'all are playing two v one. Don't look to me for help.

A door on the wood-slatted building behind Winchester opens. COLTON "COLT" TOWNSEND, 65, marches through. His close-cropped hair is like a snow-capped peak atop his craggy face.

COLT

Get prepped. We've got a developing situation.

BERETTA

Sir?

COLT

I'll brief you inside.

Colt turns and heads back in. Beretta, Winchester, Smith, and Wesson all share a knowing look - *this must be serious.*

**EXT. VETERAN'S PARK - DAY**

Gabbi and Esteban stand by the stage. She shakes hands with a COUPLE as she finishes up her conversation with them.

GABBI

That's right. We'll be restoring power in waves over the coming weeks. A schedule will be posted on the board. Take care now.

As the Couple exits, Gabbi switches to a hushed, venomous tone.

GABBI

That goddamn redneck. He's got some nerve. The most significant moment in our history... ruined.

ESTEBAN

It wasn't ruined. No one will even remember it happened. What they'll remember is that tree lighting up.

GABBI

The audacity to call their town *Freedom*. You'd think that--

Before she can finish, Alma runs up to them.

ALMA

Mom! That was a great speech.

GABBI

Thanks, sweetie. I'm surprised you could hear it from the top of the church.

(off Alma's reaction)

We'll talk about that later. Right now it's time to celebrate.

The family turns toward the Christmas tree.

ALMA

It's beautiful.

GABBI

It really is. Merry Christmas.

Gabbi squeezes Alma's shoulder in their side-by-side embrace. The nice moment is interrupted as Lucas arrives on his horse.

GABBI

What is it now? Is it those men in the truck? Did they do something?

LUCAS

No. Operations Team. It's urgent.

GABBI

When it rains it pours.  
(to her family)  
Go ahead and get the food going.  
Make sure everyone gets some.

ESTEBAN

Don't worry. We've got it. Do what you need to do.

LUCAS

I'll ride you over.

He reaches down and helps her up into the saddle behind him. As they ride off across the park...

COLT (PRELAP)

The situation is this: Dr. Owen Morgan failed to report in during the designated window...

**INT. OPERATIONS TEAM HQ - COMMAND CENTER / LOCKER ROOM**  
**- DAY**

As Colt provides a mission briefing to Beretta, Smith, Wesson, and Winchester, we INTERCUT with the team gearing up.

**COMMAND CENTER:** Colt stands in front of a bank of monitors and radio equipment as he addresses the team. TRISTAN HUMPHRIES, 30, scrawny, sits next to Colt wearing big headphones that make his head look even smaller than it is.

COLT

... He departed the lab at eleven-hundred to troubleshoot unresponsive equipment at Weather Station Delta...

**LOCKER ROOM:** The team zips up their jumpsuits. Then they pull on boots. Then gloves.

COLT (O.S.)

... He was scheduled to report in at twelve-hundred. It is now twelve-thirty with no comms...

**COMMAND CENTER:** Colt continues.

COLT  
... As you know, that triggers an  
immediate search-and-rescue  
operation...

**LOCKER ROOM:** The team duct-tapes their wrists and ankles to seal any leaks. They click into tactical harnesses. Then they grab their gas masks.

COLT (O.S.)  
... Based on our limited  
operational window and his last-  
known location...

**COMMAND CENTER:** Colt pauses before he continues.

COLT  
... we'll be utilizing Mercy.

We now see the team standing at attention. A ripple of fear washes over their faces. But they remain professional.

COLT  
Is Mercy prepped and ready?

WINCHESTER  
Ran a full diagnostic on her this  
morning. All in the green.

Winchester looks like he's got more to say, but holds back.

COLT  
What's the issue?

WINCHESTER  
With respect, sir, we've only run  
the drill a few times. And never  
in the haze itself.

COLT  
A man's life is on the line. Can  
you do it or not?

BERETTA  
We can do it, sir.

Winchester flashes her a look. She ignores it.

COLT  
That's more like it.  
(beat)  
Now go get the rotors spinning. I  
want you to dust off the second we  
get approval from the chief.

**EXT. CITY HALL - DAY**

Lucas and Gabbi dismount at a single-story brick building. It has the unmistakable, milquetoast look of an elementary school. Because that's exactly what it is. As Lucas ties the reins to a bike rack, we see the Big Bear Elementary School marquee now features block lettering that reads: BIG BEAR CO-OP CITY HALL.

**INT. CITY HALL - A/V ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Gabbi sits at a desk rubbing her temples. Tristan's fuzzy voice scratches through a CB radio in front of her.

TRISTAN (O.S.)

Ma'am. We have a narrow timeline.

Do you grant authorization? Over.

Lucas, hat in his hands, approaches the desk.

LUCAS

I don't mean to overstep, but if they haven't heard from him... out there... Look, I know you want to save everyone you can. But during that first surge we lost a lotta good folks. They ran right out into that poison to try and help. And now... They're not around to help anymore.

There's a deeply personal tone to Lucas' words. Gabbi sighs.

GABBI

And don't you remember how that felt? To be completely helpless? I do. And I made a vow that day that I would do everything in my power to never feel that way again.

(beat)

We have to have hope. Otherwise, what's the point of any of this?

After a beat she reaches forward and presses the 'talk' button.

GABBI (CONT'D)

Authorization granted. But I want you to scrub the operation if there are any complications. Do you understand? *Community first.*

TRISTAN (O.S.)

Copy that, Chief. *Community first.*

Gabbi closes her eyes. She battles a siege of emotions.

GABBI  
 (half sotto)  
 Goddammit, Owen, you always knew  
 how to complicate things.

On the sound of helicopter rotors FIRING UP we--

CUT TO:

**EXT. OPERATIONS TEAM HQ - TARMAC - DAY**

Helicopter blades spin up to speed. Winchester sits in the pilot seat with Smith beside him. Wesson sits in back. Colt stops Beretta as she steps in, shouts to her over the rotors.

COLT  
 Owen always wore a camera on  
 excursions. If you can't recover  
 him, you must recover the camera.  
 Understood?

Beretta nods. She climbs in and, as she slides the door closed, we see the word "MERCY" painted on its side. The rest of the chopper is painted white and red with a blue medical insignia.

Colt backs away as the chopper dusts off. As it departs, we get a view from above the tarmac. It's now clear that the Operations Team HQ was originally the Big Bear Airport.

**EXT. VETERAN'S PARK - DAY**

CLOSE ON: A cafeteria tray with a meager serving: a quarter of a corn cob, a stodgy biscuit, and a bowl of colorless soup.

IRIS MORGAN, 10, a young girl with scraggly, straw-colored hair, happily slurps down her soup.

Across the folding table sits her mother, Jean. We recognize her as the one nodding along during Danny's speech. She sneers at the food and pushes the tray away.

JEAN  
 And here I thought they might  
 serve us something special. But  
 it's the same old crap. Shame on  
 me for expecting anything else.  
 (to Iris)  
 Don't you think we deserve  
 something special for a change,  
 sweetie? I think we do.

Iris shrugs. She's heard her mom say all of this before.

JEAN

And with how much they work us...  
It's a trust thing. That's what it  
is. They don't trust us to be  
adults... And *that woman*. She's a  
handful, isn't she? You know she  
just loves telling us all what to  
do. I'm getting sick and tired of  
it. I really am...

(to Iris, re: soup)

Careful, honey, we don't actually  
know what's in that.

Iris stops slurping and pushes the bowl away. She inspects the  
soup as if a sea creature might emerge at any moment.

**INT. LUCKY BEAR SOUVENIRS - DAY**

Shafts of light sneak through slits in boarded-up windows.

**SMASH!**

One of the boards BREAKS, sending swirls of dust into the stale  
air. Maeve slips through the window. Joey follows. As they dust  
themselves off, they take in the scene.

The store is filled with bear-themed knick-knacks. Row after  
row, shelf after shelf. Bear mugs, bear clocks, bear lamps.  
Carved bears, painted bears, teddy bears.

JOEY

Sweet! I can't believe all this  
stuff is still here.

Maeve wanders an aisle full of painted, ceramic bears.

MAEVE

And I can't believe you waited  
until today to find a Christmas  
gift for Alma. Actually, I can.

JOEY

I didn't wait until today. I  
just... I wanted to find something  
special, y'know?

MAEVE

And this is what you came up with?

Maeve stops in front of a smiling CERAMIC BEAR FAMILY. She  
stares at it. Then caually swipes it off the shelf like a bored  
cat. It SHATTERS on the floor. Joey jumps.

JOEY

Jesus! What was that for?

MAEVE

Just modernizing some of this art.

(beat)

Can you believe people used to spend money on this shit? It's just useless junk.

JOEY

I dunno. I think it's nice.

Maeve rolls her eyes and continues on. Then something catches her eye - a SNOW GLOBE with a skiing scene inside. She reaches forward. For a beat it looks like she'll knock this off the shelf too. Instead, she grabs it and shakes it.

As the flurries drift within the globe, a change sweeps across Maeve's face. A deep, desperate sadness surfaces. As the reverie deepens--

JOEY

That's it!

Maeve snaps out of it. Joey reaches over and takes the snow globe out of her hands.

JOEY

It's perfect. She's gonna love it. She always talks about how much she misses the winters. Y'know, back when it actually snowed.

Maeve snuffles and wipes away a tear. Joey clocks it.

JOEY

You OK?

MAEVE

I'm fine. I think the moldy teddy bears are getting to me.

Maeve hurries away and climbs back outside.

**EXT. LUCKY BEAR SOUVENIRS - CONTINUOUS**

Maeve finishes wiping the tears from her face. Collects herself. Then she hears a THRUMMING noise approaching.

She looks up to the sky. Joey climbs out and joins her.

JOEY

What is it?

MAEVE

Listen. I think it's a--



Before she can say it, Mercy roars into view low over the treeline. Both teens are gobsmacked. They track it as it passes right over their heads.

JOEY

Whoa! Where's it going?

Maeve stares after it. The blood drains from her face.

MAEVE

The research station.

(beat)

I gotta go.

**EXT. VETERAN'S PARK - SAME TIME**

People throughout the park stand and stare at the chopper. Frantic, excited chatter courses through the crowd.

Odell and Leslie are as surprised as anyone.

LESLIE

Don't believe I saw that on today's schedule.

ODELL

Neither did I.

Jean and Iris watch the helicopter as it passes overhead. Iris tugs on her mom's coat. Jean looks panicked. Crazed.

IRIS

Mommy. What was that? Mommy?

JEAN

Shhh. Mommy's thinking.

(re: Rhoda nearby)

See Rhoda over there? I need you to go stay with her for a bit. OK?

IRIS

But why?

JEAN

Just do it. I don't have time to argue with you. Do it for mommy.

Iris reluctantly wanders over to Rhoda. Now alone, Jean begins to hyperventilate. She closes her eyes. Tries to balance her rushed breathing. The world spins around her. She grabs hold of a chair and finally centers herself.

She grips the chair tighter, her panic transforming into fury. A determined look cements itself on her face.

**INT./EXT. HELICOPTER - DAY**

Beretta stares out the window. From above she can see the overgrowth encroaching on the fringes of the city like mold overflowing its petri dish. Then the city gives way to forest. And the forest gives way to the haze. Then it's only haze beneath. Haze as far as the eye can see.

As the chopper banks left, the land comes back into view. A large peak looms over the landscape - San Gorgonio Mountain.

WINCHESTER

Son of a bitch.

BERETTA

What is it?

WINCHESTER

See that up ahead? On the horizon.

The chopper turns and Beretta zeroes in on the horizon. There's an unmistakable rise to the clouds. They're darker, denser than the fog below. Like a tidal wave out in the open ocean.

WINCHESTER

Swellstorm. Big one.

WESSON

We gotta scrub the mission, right?  
I don't know about you, but I  
don't wanna be in a helicopter  
when that thing hits.

BERETTA

No. We've got time.

WINCHESTER

These things kick up a lot of wind  
even before the front comes in.

BERETTA

We have our orders. Don't scrub  
for anything less than thirty  
knots.

Smith and Winchester share a concerned look.

**INT. CITY HALL - A/V ROOM - DAY**

Gabbi sits at the desk. Tense. Focused.

TRISTAN (O.S.)

Team is arriving at the target  
now.

(MORE)

TRISTAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Once they descend into the haze  
we'll lose comms for the duration  
of the operation.

GABBI  
Understood. And what about the  
swellstorm?

TRISTAN (O.S.)  
Conditions are still within  
operational parameters and are  
expected to hold. We'll update you  
as soon as the team resurfaces.

GABBI  
Copy.

Gabbi eyes Lucas. He sits anxiously, hands folded, head down.

GABBI  
You still think it's a bad idea.

LUCAS  
I don't like anyone being out  
there. Didn't like when Owen  
decided to go. Don't like it now.

Gabbi startles as the door swings open. Odell steps through.

ODELL  
Mind explaining what's going on?  
We've got a thousand confused  
people out there who just saw a  
helicopter fly overhead. Might as  
well have been a UFO.

GABBI  
There wasn't time to convene. I  
had to make an executive decision.

Odell gives Lucas a clear look - *you mind?* Lucas gets up.

LUCAS  
I should go. Few things I wanna  
keep my eye on.

Gabbi gives him a reassuring nod as he exits.

ODELL  
Executive decision, huh? Been  
makin' more of those lately.

GABBI

Dammit, Odell. This isn't some power play.

(beat, controlled)

It's Owen. He didn't check in.

Odell processes the information. He takes off his hat, rubs his bald head, and sits.

ODELL

Shit.

(after a long beat)

We shouldn't have let him go.

GABBI

Let him? Once he had his mind set on it there was no stopping him.

He was determined. He had to go.

Whether we wanted it or not.

Odell shakes his head, chuckles despite the grim circumstances.

ODELL

He always was too smart for his own good. But if anyone can survive out there it's him.

GABBI

That's what I'm counting on.

ODELL

Does Jean know?

Off Gabbi's resigned expression we--

CUT TO:

**EXT. CITY HALL - DAY**

Lucas unhitches the reins when he sees Jean beelining toward the front door. He moves to intercept her.

JEAN

Don't you dare. I don't need someone else telling me how I'm supposed to be behaving.

LUCAS

Ain't my intention.

JEAN

Then what? Gonna stop me from going in there? You'll need to arrest me. *Sheriff*.

LUCAS

No one's getting arrested. Look, you want to know what's going on? I'll tell you. And I'll tell it straight. Or would you rather hear it from the politicians in there?

His words land. The piss 'n vinegar bleeds out of her. And now real emotions flood in. Her chin wobbles as she asks...

JEAN

Is he... is he alive?

**INT. CITY HALL - A/V ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Jean enters. Gabbi and Odell tense up, ready for a fight. Jean trembles, holding in her emotions like a jar of bees.

GABBI

Jean. I'm glad you're here. We were going to--

JEAN

Lucas told me everything. I don't care what you have to say. I just want to be here.

Gabbi hesitates, but Odell nods his silent approval to her.

GABBI

OK. Of course. The team's going in now. They'll be out of radio contact during the operation.

JEAN

How long will they be down there?

GABBI

Thirty minutes.

Gabbi looks down at her wristwatch - 1:28 pm.

**EXT. ABOVE THE HAZE - DAY**

The chopper settles into a hover just above the fog.

WINCHESTER

Showtime, lady and gentlemen. I'll get you as close as I can. Timer starts when the doors open.

He holds up an AIRHORN CANISTER.

WINCHESTER

You hear the horn, you get back to your ropes. Double time. Capiche?

(over radio)

HQ, Mercy is beginning her descent. Over and out.

TRISTAN (O.S.)

See you on the other side, Mercy.

WINCHESTER

Buckle up.

And with that, the chopper drifts downward, cutting the tops of the clouds into shredded wisps. Then it plunges into--

### THE HAZE

The helicopter jostles and buffets as it acclimates to the new atmosphere. It's a rough entry.

SMITH

Ay man, is that normal?

WESSON

Look around, bro. None of this is normal.

WINCHESTER

Gimme a sec. Just gotta change the rotor speed to compensate for the increased air density.

Winchester flips a few switches. The rotor speed slows. The constant THRUMMING deepens into a sonorous, droning bass. The chopper balances out and continues its descent.

A gust of wind crashes into the side of the chopper. It PITCHES sideways but Winchester stabilizes it.

WINCHESTER

I'm already clocking wind gusts at twenty-five knots. I don't know if she'll hold for thirty minutes.

BERETTA

We won't need it.

The chopper dips and drops as it drifts downward until, finally, almost imperceptibly, it stops and transitions to a hover.

WINCHESTER

End of the line.

Beretta, Smith, and Wesson grab their ropes and clip in. Winchester reaches over and grabs Smith's arm.

WINCHESTER

Change of plans. Too much chop. I need you for weight and balance.

SMITH

The two of them won't be able to cover enough ground if--

BERETTA

If Winchester says he needs you to stay then you stay. Mercy's our one way in and our one way out. We can't let anything happen to it.

Smith quiets down. Winchester turns to the backseat.

WINCHESTER

And the two of you. You go down together. You come back up together. It'll be a whole lot smoother that way.

BERETTA

We know the drill. Start the timer.

Beretta nods to Wesson. They each grab their door handles and, with one final, silent signal, yank the doors open.

The outside world comes rushing in. Wind blasts them and sends violent ripples across their jumpsuits. Beretta and Wesson face one another, backs to the open doors.

BERETTA

One... two... JUMP!

Beretta and Wesson go screaming down their cables. They're completely engulfed by the impenetrable fog.

BERETTA'S POV: The dense atmosphere blurs past her boots. No ground in sight. Just endless haze. Then, as suddenly as a deer leaping into headlights, the ground materializes.

**EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS**

Beretta pulls back and slows just enough to land with a solid thud. She looks over as Wesson SLAMS into the ground. Hard.

BERETTA

Wesson!

Beretta unclips and scrambles over to him. He starts to gingerly get to his feet as Beretta grabs him and helps him up.

WESSON

I'm good. I'm good. Just came up quick is all.

He grimaces as he unclips and takes his first step.

BERETTA

You sure?

WESSON

Tweaked my knee, but I'll be alright once I start moving.

BERETTA

Copy. We'll start here at the weather station. If we don't find anything then we'll follow the route back to the research station. We'll have to move quick.

Beretta starts forward. Wesson limps after her.

*SQUEE SQUEE SQUEEEEEAAAAAKKKK*

Beretta looks up and sees the windmill emerge from the fog. Its blades are spinning uncomfortably fast.

Beretta hurries over to the stack of crates. She sees Owen's UTILITY CASE. Her face says it all - *not a good sign*.

WESSON (O.S.)

Ew. What the hell is this?

Beretta jogs over to him. He lifts his leg and stares at a viscous discharge slowly sloughing off the sole of his boot. It drips free and splats back onto the puddle he stepped in.

Beretta's flashlight rakes across the puddle. It's more of a fleshy mass than a liquid. It has a bilious, placental quality like a vulture's acidic, half-digested vomit. A web of sinewy, INK BLACK TAR weaves through it. Whatever it is, it's *nasty*.

WESSON

You seen anything like this before?

BERETTA

No. But it must be fresh. Organic stuff like this doesn't last long out here.



**IN THE HELICOPTER**

Winchester struggles with the cyclic stick as he battles against the strengthening wind gusts. The chopper teeters.

WINCHESTER  
Gettin' dicey. That gust was  
twenty-eight knots.

SMITH  
They've only been down there a few  
minutes.

WINCHESTER  
I know. I'll give 'em as much time  
as I can. You just be ready with  
that airhorn when I tell ya.

**IN THE PARK**

Beretta and Wesson trudge forward along the main trail. The wind sends sheets of fog across their path, allowing for only brief pockets of visibility. As the clouds part we see--

A BODY. Face down. 20 yards away.

And then it's gone. The haze coalesces to obscure it.

BERETTA  
There! Up ahead.

She takes off.

WESSON  
Hey! Wait up!

He grits his teeth as he starts to jog after her. He settles into a lumbering half-limp, half-run.

Beretta arrives at the body, which lies just a few feet away from the geodesic dome. *So close.*

She grabs the shoulder and rolls it over. A GROTESQUE FACE stares up at her, mouth open as if gasping for air. It's Owen.

Wesson shambles up beside her.

WESSON  
Shit. Is he...?

BERETTA  
(distracted)  
Yeah. But I don't understand...

She stands and scours the surroundings.

WESSON

What are you looking for?

BERETTA

His helmet. Why isn't he wearing it? And where the hell did it go?

Fear flashes across Wesson's face. He looks over his shoulder, but all he sees is haze.

WESSON

I don't like it. Any of it.

(beat)

Let's just get back to Mercy and get out of here.

BERETTA

Not until we find that helmet. He had a camera mounted to it. We need that camera. Colt's orders.

WESSON

Whoa whoa whoa. That wasn't part of the plan. Find him and get out. That's it. I'm not stickin' around longer than I have to.

BERETTA

This is the new plan. Either you help me look for it or you go back to the chopper.

(beat)

Not like it could have gotten far.

Wesson shakes his head, resigned. He gestures to her - *after* you. She leads him into the dense plumes of fog.

**EXT. VETERAN'S PARK - DAY**

Maeve speeds down the road on her bike, hops off without losing any momentum, and drops the bike into the grass. She runs across the park with her head on a swivel, searching the crowd.

The scene is calmer now. People are milling about, eating, playing. Maeve weaves between them. Then she spots her target.

Iris. Doing cartwheels for Rhoda, who appears to be properly awed by the spectacle. Maeve hurries over.

RHODA

Hi, Maeve. Iris was just showing me her incredible cartwheels.

IRIS

Yeah! Look, look!

Iris does another set of cartwheels.

MAEVE  
Yeah they look great.  
(to Rhoda)  
Have you seen my mom?

RHODA  
No, I haven't. She went off  
somewhere so I've been watching  
Iris while she's gone. Not sure  
when she's coming back.

MAEVE  
Typical.

RHODA  
It's no bother. I like getting to  
spend time with the kiddos.

MAEVE  
Alright, well, thanks for watching  
her. I'll take her home.

RHODA  
Might be best if she stays with  
me. I really don't mind.

MAEVE  
It's fine, I know how to take care  
of my own sister.  
(to Iris)  
Come on, Iris. We're going home.

Iris skips over and takes Maeve's hand. They walk off together  
across the park. Iris waves back at a concerned Rhoda.

### IN THE HELICOPTER

The helicopter careens sideways. Smith braces himself as  
Winchester regains control. He corrects their altitude.

SMITH  
Damn! That was a big one.

WINCHESTER  
(checking instruments)  
Too big. You got that horn?

Smith holds up the airhorn canister.

WINCHESTER  
Hit it.

**IN THE PARK**

Beretta and Wesson press onward. Then they hear something...

aroooooooooooo... aoooooooooooo...

Wesson perks up at the distant sound of the airhorn, muffled and muddled by the thick atmosphere. He stops walking.

WESSON

Hear that? It's the airhorn.

Beretta keeps moving forward, feigning obliviousness.

WESSON

Beretta! You hear me?! Time's up.  
We gotta go. Screw the camera.

Beretta stops. Marches back to Wesson.

BERETTA

Get back to Mercy. Tell them to hold position until I get there.

WESSON

Don't be stupid. I'm not leaving you out here alone.

BERETTA

You're injured and slowing me down. Look. I'll find the camera and probably beat your slow ass back to Mercy anyway.

WESSON

Why do you care so much?

BERETTA

Because, unlike you, I care about following orders.

(beat)

Now go!

Before he can argue, Beretta jogs off and vanishes in the haze.

**INT. CITY HALL - A/V ROOM - DAY**

The wall clock TICKS. The sound is cold and menacing in the otherwise silent room. 1:50 pm

Jean bites her nails like a rabbit gnawing through a garden fence.

JEAN  
Shouldn't we have heard something  
by now?

ODELL  
Radio signals get all garbled up  
down there. We won't hear anything  
until they're out.

GABBI  
We gave them thirty minutes. No  
need to worry yet.

JEAN  
Oh so now you're gonna tell me  
when it's OK to worry?

Gabbi starts to rebuttal, but wisely bites her tongue.

**IN THE HELICOPTER**

Smith reaches back and helps pull Wesson through the door.

SMITH  
What's going on? Where's Beretta?

WESSON  
We've gotta hold here until she  
gets back.

WINCHESTER  
Why isn't she with you?

WESSON  
She needed to find his camera.  
Colt's orders. She wasn't gonna  
leave without it.

SMITH  
So you found him...?

Wesson lowers his eyes and gives a solemn nod.

WINCHESTER  
Nice of Beretta to go for a stroll  
in the goddamn park, but we don't  
exactly have a few minutes to  
spare. The batteries are bleedin'  
juice fighting against the wind.  
And I'm barely keepin' us level.

SMITH  
Well we gotta wait for her. Not  
like we can leave her out there.

Winchester doesn't respond. *They can* leave her out there. And they might have to. Off his resigned expression we return to...

### **THE PARK**

Beretta stands at the precipice of a concrete slope. The wind is punishing, each gust nearly toppling her over. She takes a tentative step down the incline, arms out to find her balance.

She gains confidence after a few steps. Too much confidence. She slips when she steps onto a patch of loose sediment and skree. She falls on her ass and slides to the bottom of the...

### **STORMWATER CULVERT**

She stands and brushes herself off. She feels around the back of her jumpsuit. No holes. She sighs and collects herself.

The wind is calmer down here. The fog less dense. Beretta presses on and reaches the end of the channel. It dead ends in a concrete culvert with a large stormwater tunnel in the wall.

The culvert is filled with detritus and debris. Anything not nailed down has been blown into this pit and trapped by the concrete alcove: trash cans, tree limbs, fence posts...

*And Owen's helmet.*

BERETTA

There you are.

Beretta rushes over to it, bends down, and scoops it up. The camera is badly dented and deformed. Possibly broken beyond use. But after a tense moment the red light BLINKS.

Beretta stands. As she turns to leave, something catches her eye. The stormwater tunnel. The heavy metal grate over the entrance has been peeled open like a tin of anchovies.

She stares into the tunnel. It's pitch black. The wind WHISTLES through the opening before disappearing into its dark depths.

We can feel the chill that goes down Beretta's spine.

She snaps out of it. Turns. Runs. Ascends the slope to...

### **THE PARK**

She runs as fast as she can, clutching the helmet. She passes the geodesic dome and Owen's lifeless body. Then she passes the windmill and the computer terminal.

Finally she stops. Looks around frantically.

BERETTA

Shit. Where's the rope? Where's  
the goddamn rope?

The fog is impenetrable. The wind is ravaging. Panic sets in. Her breathing becomes heavy, erratic. She twists and turns. Starts running one way, stops, then runs back the other way.

Then she hears it. A low THRUMMING above. Mercy! She cups her ear to get a better sense of its location. It's hard to hear over the wind, but she keys in on it and moves toward it.

Then she sees the rope! Hallelujah.

### IN THE HELICOPTER

Mercy rocks back and forth. Winchester struggles with the cyclic stick as if he's having an intense arm wrestling match - one that he's losing.

WINCHESTER

I can't hold her much longer.

SMITH

I'm going down there to find her.

WINCHESTER

The hell you are. No one else  
leaves this boat.

SMITH

You gonna stop me?

A tense standoff. Winchester scowls.

WESSON

Enough, you two! Jesus can't we--

A monstrous gale broadsides the chopper. ALARMS blare to life.

WINCHESTER

Hang on!

He pulls hard on the cyclic stick. The chopper rolls sideways.

### IN THE PARK

Beretta arrives at the rope right as it lurches away. Shit! She grabs it. *Wrong move.* The rope jerks her off her feet. She SLAMS into the dirt. CRACK! She lets go of the rope.

Fracture lines spiderweb across her plasti-shield mask. HSSSSSSSSS. The toxic gas seeps in!

BERETTA

Shit! Shit!

She grabs at her mask. Tries to cover the leak with her gloves. No use. She pulls at the duct tape on her wrists, but she can't find any purchase. She's out of time. And out of options.

She takes a deep breath. Holds it... And holds it... And we--

HARD CUT TO:

**INT. OPERATIONS TEAM HQ - COMMAND CENTER - LATER**

ANGLE ON: The radio. Silent.

Tristan presses the headphones tight against his ears.

COLT

Anything?

Tristan answers with a grim shake of his head.

**INT. CITY HALL - A/V ROOM - SAME TIME**

ANGLE ON: The wall clock. 2:09 pm

*TICK... TICK... TICK*

Jean leaps out of her seat. She seems manic, unpredictable.

JEAN

Now am I allowed to be worried?!  
You said thirty minutes!

GABBI

I know. But Tristan just said it  
could be a mechanical--

JEAN

I don't care what Tristan said.  
You think he's telling the truth?

ODELL

Let's take a breath, Jean. Maybe  
step outside.

Odell reaches for her arm. She rips it away from him.

JEAN

Don't touch me! Everyone's always  
trying to control me. I've had it!  
(pointing at Gabbi)  
And you! You let him go out there.  
You knew this would happen.

(MORE)



JEAN (CONT'D)

And now he's dead. We all know it!  
He's dead and so are all the  
people you sent in after him. I  
hope you're happy. I hope you're  
*proud* of yourself. All this blood  
is on your hands.

(beat, snidely)

You don't even belong here.

Gabbi jumps up to face her. The gloves are off now.

GABBI

Don't you dare. Don't you dare  
paint me as some outsider who  
doesn't care about the people  
here. I care. About everyone in  
this community. I care so goddamn  
much it's hard to breathe.

JEAN

Is that right? Well maybe if you  
cared a little less about Owen,  
none of this would have happened.

This puts Gabbi on her heels. Odell gives her a look - *what's that supposed to mean?* Just as Gabbi starts to respond--

-- the radio CRACKLES.

WINCHESTER (O.S.)

(over radio, jumbled)

... is Mercy ... do you copy?

(now clearer)

Again, this is Mercy reporting in.  
Do you copy?

Gabbi's shoulders immediately relax. They all turn to face the radio, hungry for the update.

TRISTAN (O.S.)

Mercy this is HQ. We copy you.  
Good to hear your voice. Over.

WINCHESTER (O.S.)

Wish I were reporting with better  
news...

Gabbi's face falls. Jean's mouth twists into a scowl.

**EXT. CITY HALL**

Jean BURSTS through the front doors. Gabbi hurries after her.

GABBI

Wait! Jean!

JEAN

No. No more. I'm done with the Co-Op. I'm gonna do what I should have done a long time ago.

GABBI

Let's just talk about this. We all know what you're feeling. We can--

JEAN

How about this? Fuck you. And fuck this *community*.

Jean storms off leaving a defeated Gabbi in her wake.

**EXT. OPERATIONS TEAM HQ**

Mercy kicks up dust as it settles on the tarmac. Colt watches the rotors slow to a stop. The doors open. The crew steps out.

It's a quiet moment. Colt says nothing as Smith and Wesson shamble past him with their heads down.

Winchester examines the helicopter's exterior. Frowns at the damage. Colt walks over.

WINCHESTER

You don't have to say it. I know. And if I had to do it again, I'd make the same choice.

COLT

Not here to question your judgment.  
(re: Mercy)  
This can wait. Go ahead inside. Get cleaned up. Get changed. Then we can debrief.

Winchester nods and walks past him. Colt turns to watch him go. He clenches his jaw, his face betraying his true frustration.

**INT. OPERATIONS HQ - LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

**BANG!**

A boot SLAMS into a bank of metal lockers. Hand-painted nameplates adorn the top of each locker: Smith, Wesson, Winchester, and Beretta.

**BANG!**

Another boot hits the lockers. Wesson violently tugs and rips his jumpsuit off. He's fending off tears with frustration.

Smith puts his hand on Wesson's shoulder. Wesson shakes it off.

SMITH

Yo, bro. Come on. There's nothing you could have done.

Wesson shakes his head. Sits. Puts his head in his hands.

WESSON

I just wanted to be a firefighter. Like dad. I didn't ask for any of this shit.

Smith is surprised by Wesson's vulnerability. He sits beside him and puts his arm around his shoulders. Wesson allows it.

SMITH

I know. He'd be proud of you.

As they share this tender, brotherly moment, we BOOM DOWN to one of Wesson's boots lying on its side. Entrenched in the treads we see globs of the VISCOUS SUBSTANCE he stepped in...

#### **EXT. BIG BEAR CO-OP - EASTERN GATE - AFTERNOON**

Jean rides her bicycle toward the Eastern Gate. Much like the Western Gate, this flimsy, chain link fence feels more like security theater than a serious fortification.

Right now it's wide open as folks return to their homesteads outside the Co-Op. Jean breezes through toward...

#### **SUGARLOAF - STREETS**

Jean rides her bicycle down Highway 38, the main thoroughfare that hugs the central mountains like a sideways horseshoe, connecting the Big Bear Co-Op to the north, Sugarloaf to the east, and Freedom to the southwest.

Sugarloaf resembles a ghost town. Streets, businesses, and homes are overrun with vegetation. It's a sharp contrast to the well-kept state of the Co-Op. Jean cruises through, eyes ahead.

As she puts Sugarloaf behind her, she passes a green road sign riddled with bullet holes: SUGARLOAF POP. 2,115.

#### **EXT. THE DMZ - LATER**

Jean turns off the highway and continues down a country road. She slows her bike as she approaches a small airplane hangar.

The curved metal roof gleams like a conch shell in the warm afternoon sun. Danny's TRUCK is parked haphazardly out front.

BINOCULAR POV: Jean rides past the truck, dismounts, and places her bike against the hangar.

Lucas, posted up in the forest nearby, lowers the binoculars, disappointment and concern etched across his face.

**INT. THE DMZ - SAME TIME**

WREN, 32, Korean, looks willowy thin in her loose tanktop as she flits like a hummingbird from table to table. Her sleeves of tattoos are on full display as she sets down drinks and swoops up empty glasses.

She HUMS as she makes her rounds. The muffled tones are enough to indicate a beautiful voice buried within.

DRUNK PATRON

You gonna sing for us?

WREN

If I sang for you you'd have  
nothing to dream about tonight.

The Drunk Patron and his pals chuckle as Wren dances past their table without breaking stride. She slows as she sees Danny, Chip, and Hugh leering at her from the corner table.

Danny waves her over. She pastes on a smile and heads his way.

WREN

Need somethin', Danny?

DANNY

See, me and the fellas were having  
some philosophic disagreements  
about the origin of all this toxic  
haze. You know how it is.  
Everyone's got their own little  
pet theory. But Hugh might be onto  
something with his. And he thought  
you might be able to back him up  
on it. Isn't that right, Hugh?

Wren, sensing a trap, arches her eyebrow at Hugh.

HUGH

Well, I've heard people talkin'.  
And they say China's actually got  
real tall elevation. Like we got  
here in the mountains.

(MORE)

HUGH (CONT'D)

So I was thinkin', a country with  
as high elevation as all that,  
well they'd benefit the most from  
somethin' like this happenin'...  
Right?

Hugh trails off, his resolve weakening as Wren folds her arms  
and gives him an icy stare. Danny smiles, enjoying himself.

WREN

Was there a question in there?

HUGH

Yeah. I mean, do you think it was  
them who done it?

WREN

Insulting racism aside, no. I  
don't think it was *them who done*  
*it*. China, like every developed  
country, had their biggest cities  
on the coast. Which is at sea  
level. Most of their population  
would have been wiped out just  
like the rest of the world.

HUGH

Maybe they moved 'em all up to the  
mountains before they did it. You  
hear about anything like that?

Wren leans forward seductively and motions with her finger for  
Hugh to come closer. He takes the bait and leans in.

WREN

(coolly)

I'm not Chinese, you ignorant  
redneck. And if you ask me a  
question like that again, your  
next round of moonshine is gonna  
taste a lot more like arsenic.

(to Danny)

We good here?

DANNY

Thank you for indulgin'.

As Wren departs, we stay with the table. Danny and Chip finally  
break and start laughing. Hugh's pudgy face turns cherry red.

HUGH

What? What's so damn funny?

CHIP  
She's Korean, you dumbfuck.

HUGH  
Well how was I supposed to know?

As Hugh and Chip bicker, something at the front door catches Danny's attention. Jean. She walks in and scans the room.

CHIP  
Didn't you ever wonder why  
everyone calls this place the DMZ?

HUGH  
I dunno. Cuz it's halfway between  
Freedom and the Co-Op?

CHIP  
Yeah. That's why it's a good joke.  
It works on multiple levels.

Danny hardly hears what Chip and Hugh are saying. He's locked in on Jean. Then she sees him too. She marches toward him.

DANNY  
Knock it off. Think we mighta  
hooked a live one.

Chip and Hugh straighten up as Jean arrives at the table.

DANNY  
Ma'am. Care to join us?

Jean looks at the Men: rugged, dirty, strong. A different breed than the folks in the Co-Op. She hesitates, then sits.

JEAN  
Thank you. Well, it's... I've  
just... I've been thinking of  
leaving the Co-Op for a while now.  
And, after today, I'm ready to get  
away from that place for good.  
Start fresh. I wanna move down to  
Freedom. If you'll have me.

DANNY  
One thing about Freedom, ma'am, is  
that we like to know who our  
people are. My name's Danny. This  
here is Chip. And this is Hugh.

JEAN  
Sorry. I'm Jean Morgan.

DANNY

Alright, Jean. It's a pleasure.  
(re: wedding ring)  
Is Mr. Morgan coming with you?

Jean looks down at her ring, surprised to see it there. She pulls it off her finger. It doesn't slide off easily.

JEAN

No. He's... not with us anymore.

Hugh and Chip share a surreptitious look - *that's good news.*

DANNY

Sorry to hear that. Any children?

JEAN

Yes. I'll be bringing my two daughters. One's ten. The other is sixteen. Will that be a problem?

Hugh and Chip perk up more - *that's even better news.*

DANNY

Jean, I think you and your girls will be a lovely addition.

**INT. ESTRELLA HOME - LIVING ROOM - DUSK**

A modest home for a family of three. It's tidy but seems impersonal. A bit cold. We might not pick up on it, but there are no family photos anywhere in the house.

Esteban packs the fireplace with fresh wood. Charred debris and a bed of gray soot attest to the fireplace's regular use. Esteban turns at the sound of the front door opening.

Gabbi shuffles in. She's tired. *Exhausted.* She crumples onto the sofa. Esteban sits beside her. Puts his arm around her. She leans into it, nuzzles into his chest.

ESTEBAN

I don't need all the details. Tell me what I can do.

GABBI

Stay here like this for a minute. I just need to catch my breath.

ESTEBAN

I'm sorry. I know this isn't how you imagined this day going. If you want to talk about it, we can.

GABBI

Saying that as my husband or as a therapist?

ESTEBAN

Husband. You'd need to schedule an appointment if you wanted my professional opinion.

Gabbi smiles. But it fades just as quickly as it appeared.

GABBI

We lost Owen. And Brianna. I knew the risks when he set up the research station. But Owen was so smart. It didn't seem possible that he'd actually die out there.

ALMA (O.S.)

Mr. Morgan is dead?

Gabbi twists to face a distraught Alma hovering in the doorway.

GABBI

I'm so sorry, mija.

ALMA

I've gotta go see Maeve.

Alma starts for the door, but Gabbi lurches to her feet. The tenderness evaporates.

GABBI

No you don't. You're staying right here. I heard about your stunt at the gate. Not to mention climbing on the roof of the church.

ALMA

I'm sorry, but--

GABBI

Zip it. Do you know how it reflects on us when you break the rules? We can't have our community members think that the rules don't apply to its leaders. It breaks trust. And when trust breaks...

GABBI

... the whole system breaks.

ALMA

... *the whole system breaks.*

ALMA

I know, I know.

(MORE)



ALMA (CONT'D)

But I'm not the leader. You are.  
Sorry I'll never be as perfect as  
you.

GABBI

You'll have some time to practice.  
You're grounded for two weeks. And  
I'm doubling your work rotations.

ALMA

Mom! That's not fair!

Alma looks to her father. There's no safe harbor there. He gives her a sympathetic but defeated look. Alma rolls her eyes, storms to her room, and SLAMS the door.

**INT. MORGAN HOME - LIVING AREA - EVENING**

Maeve rifles through a milk crate sitting on a cluttered kitchen counter. The crate holds a few raggedy vegetables, mason jars with unidentifiable contents, and homemade candles.

MAEVE

Jeez, not the best box this week.

Iris sits at a nearby table, which is also covered in junk. In fact, the whole house is dangerously close to hoarder status.

IRIS

I'm huuuuuunnngrrrrryyyyyyy.

MAEVE

I know. How about some...  
(picking up a jar)  
... pickles?  
(twisting the jar open)  
Yeah, pickles.

IRIS

Mom says we deserve better food.

MAEVE

Maybe don't listen to everything  
mom has to say, OK?

IRIS

Why?

MAEVE

Because.

IRIS

Because why?

Maeve sighs. She takes the jar and sets it in front of Iris.

MAEVE

Because mom hasn't really been the same since dad left.

IRIS

Then dad should come back.

Maeve searches for something to say, emotions beginning to well up inside her. Before she can say anything...

The front door BURSTS open. Jean blazes in, a woman possessed.

JEAN

Get your stuff together. Grab your clothes, whatever else you need.

MAEVE

Mom? What's going on?

JEAN

I'm not in the mood to fight, Maeve. Just do what you're told.

Jean disappears down the hallway. Maeve chases her into the...

### MASTER BEDROOM

MAEVE

Mom! Talk to me! What's going on?!

Jean ignores her. She pulls a suitcase out from beneath the bed, rips open her drawers, and stuffs clothes into it.

JEAN

There's nothing to talk about. Either pack your bags or help your sister pack hers. Now.

MAEVE

No. I'm not doing anything until you tell me what's happening.

(beat)

It's dad. He's gone, isn't he?

This breaks the spell. Jean slows, faces her daughter.

JEAN

Your dad was already gone. He abandoned us. And now he's dead. Satisfied? Now get your shit together. We're leaving this place. For good.

(MORE)

JEAN (CONT'D)

It's not safe for us here anymore.  
I'm taking us all to Freedom. It's  
already done.

The blunt truth hits Maeve like a punch to the gut. But her anger overrides her grief.

MAEVE

No way. I'm not leaving. And  
you're not taking Iris to that...  
*place*. If you wanna leave, then  
leave. But I'm staying here. And  
Iris is staying with me.

JEAN

That right? We'll see about that.  
(calling out)  
Iris! Sweetie! Can you come in  
here real quick?

Iris cautiously traipses in.

JEAN

(to Iris, sweetly)  
Honey, mommy is going to take us  
all to a nice new place. Do you  
want to go with mommy? Or do you  
want to stay here with your sister  
and never see your mommy again?

Iris looks up at a fuming Maeve, then over to her smiling mom.

MAEVE

Mom, that's not--

IRIS

I want to go with mommy.

Iris crosses the room to hug her mom.

JEAN

Good girl!

As Jean crouches down and hugs Iris, she flashes Maeve a satisfied, victorious smirk. She scoops Iris up and holds her.

JEAN

So? Are you coming with us? Or are  
you going to abandon us too?

Maeve stares at Iris. She looks sweet, innocent... and *impressionable*. Jean tightens her grip on Iris like a boa constrictor. Maeve clenches her jaw.

MAEVE

Fine. I'll go. But I'm not going  
for you. I'm only going for Iris.

**INT. ESTRELLA HOME - ALMA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Alma presses her ear against the door. She hears a door CLOSE down the hallway. That's her cue. She hurries over to her window, opens it, and climbs through.

**INT. MORGAN HOME - MAEVE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

The room is empty. Dark. Amidst the mess, a rectangular object wrapped in a gray cloth rests on the bed.

ALMA (O.S.)

Maeve! Maeve are you here?!

Alma rushes into the room, flustered. She clocks the open drawers and the clothes scattered on the floor. *Not good.*

Then she sees the rectangular object on the bed. She hurries over to it. "MERRY XMAS ALMA" is painted on the cloth. She unwraps it and holds it up.

It's a PAINTING of Alma, Maeve, and Joey on their bikes. It's beautiful. As she admires it, a NOTE falls off the back.

Alma picks up the note and devours its contents. Before she can finish, she hears the front door OPEN.

ALMA

Maeve! Is that you?

She runs to the...

**LIVING AREA**

And finds Lucas.

LUCAS

Alma? What are you doing here?

ALMA

It's Maeve. She's gone. Her mom took her and Iris to Freedom. We have to stop them! Their bikes are here. If we leave now we have time to catch up to them! Come on!

LUCAS

Whoa whoa whoa. Slow down. The only place you're going is back home. There's a swellstorm coming. It's not safe to be outside.

ALMA

No! We have to do something.

LUCAS

It's not illegal to move.

ALMA

So you're not even gonna try to do anything?

LUCAS

I *am* trying. I came to talk to Jean. But looks like I'm too late.

ALMA

You knew?!

LUCAS

I suspected.

ALMA

Well if you're not going to do anything, then I am.

Before Lucas can stop her, Alma sprints out the door.

LUCAS

(sotto)

Christ, these teenagers...

**EXT. BIG BEAR CO-OP - STREETS - MOMENTS LATER**

Alma races down the empty street, her puny, solar-powered bike lamp the only thing lighting her way. The wind is picking up in intensity. She hunkers down and pedals hard.

Behind her, Lucas appears on horseback. He gallops after her.

The Eastern Gate comes into view up ahead. It's closed. Alma doesn't miss a beat. She veers down an alleyway and up a hill.

Lucas watches her, but continues toward the gate.

**EXT. EASTERN GATE - HOLE IN THE FENCE - MOMENTS LATER**

Alma stops beside a wooden stake in the ground. Then she walks along the fence, counting the metal poles as she goes. 1...2...3...4. She stops and peels back a section of fence.

**EXT. EASTERN GATE - SAME TIME**

Lucas arrives at the fence. A GATE GUARD steps toward him.

LUCAS

Open it up.

GATE GUARD  
You're goin' out in this weather?

LUCAS  
Just do it. Hurry.

GATE GUARD  
Fine, fine. Hold your horses.

The Gate Guard chuckles at his own joke as he unlocks it.

Just as the fence opens wide enough to squeeze past, Lucas urges his horse through. The Gate Guard leaps out of the way.

**EXT. SUGARLOAF - STREETS - NIGHT**

Chip and Hugh load the bags and luggage into the back of the truck. Danny holds the passenger door open for Jean and Iris.

HUGH  
Looks like you're in back with us.

Hugh holds out his hand for Maeve, but she swats it away and climbs in herself.

**UP THE STREET**

Alma skids onto the main road 100 yards ahead of Lucas. Her face is a mask of determination. She pushes through the pain and rides faster than she ever has in her life.

**AT THE TRUCK**

Danny SLAMS the tailgate closed.

DANNY  
Lighten up, kiddo. You'll be in a nice warm home before you know it.

MAEVE  
I already had a nice warm home.

Danny responds with a grin. *He likes this girl.* He climbs into the driver's seat and starts the truck.

As the truck pulls away, Maeve looks back toward her old home. But then she shakes her head and stares down at her feet.

If only she'd kept looking back, she might have seen Alma in the distance speeding toward her. Alma calls out to her.

ALMA  
Maeve! Maeve! Wait!

But the wind drowns out her shouts. The truck picks up speed and disappears around a bend. Alma, defeated, slows to a stop.

A moment later Lucas stops his horse beside her. He dismounts.

ALMA

It's not right. They don't belong there. We have to get them back. We have to do something.

LUCAS

You and your mother. It's true. The apple doesn't fall far.  
(beat, sighing)  
Look, I'll head down there tomorrow and see if they're OK. If they want to come back, I'll bring them back.

ALMA

Promise?

LUCAS

I promise. But right now we need to get you home. This storm's only gonna get worse. OK?  
(patting his horse)  
And maybe slow the pace? Buttercup here doesn't see as good in the dark as she used to.

Alma, sullen, nods. They turn around and start back.

**INT. THE DMZ - EVENING**

The bar is empty. Wren HUMS as she sweeps the floor. It's a melancholy tune infused with nostalgia and yearning. The *SWEEP* of the broom creates a percussive accompaniment.

Wren stops humming when someone walks in. Without looking up...

WREN

Sorry. Party ends at sundown.

There's no reply. Wren stops sweeping and looks up at the intruder. It's Winchester, hat in his hands, head down.

WINCHESTER

Hey, Wren. Listen, something happened. To Berett-- to Brianna.

WREN

She OK?

Winchester's look says it all.

WREN

Why are you telling me?

WINCHESTER

I thought you two were...  
y'know... *close*.

WREN

(lying)

I don't get close to people.

(beat)

But you look like you could use a  
drink. Come here.

Winchester sits at the bar. She pours two glasses of moonshine. He takes a sip. Wren starts at a sip, then downs her entire glass. She pours herself another, her hand slightly trembling. Winchester clocks it, but says nothing.

The wind HOWLS outside. It rattles the hangar's metal hull.

WINCHESTER

I'd best get goin' before the  
swellstorm really picks up. You  
take care now.

Winchester gets up and heads out into the wind. Wren watches after him. The sound of the wind crescendos. It OVERTAKES all other audio and we--

CUT TO:

**THE HAZE - PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

The wind ROARS. It's dark, but the filtered moonlight imbues the fog with an ethereal, otherworldly glow. As we focus in on the hood of an abandoned car--

A HAND SLAMS against the metal. We TILT UP to reveal BERETTA, breathing heavily, fighting against the force of the wind. A red light BLINKS on her helmet. She's wearing Owen's mask.

She takes a moment to collect herself, then she pushes off and crosses the parking lot toward an expansive building. As she gets closer we see that it's a Wal-Mart Supercenter.

**INT. WAL-MART SUPERCENTER - MOMENTS LATER**

Beretta shambles down the aisles toward the back of the store. She passes rows and rows of products. *A mausoleum of consumerism.* She pushes through the saloon doors to the...



**STOCKROOM**

She finds a staircase. A sturdy metal door awaits at the bottom. She descends, grabs the door, and pushes it open.

**INT. RESEARCH STATION - CONTINUOUS**

Beretta pulls the door closed behind her. She's in a small vestibule with another door in front of her. She pushes it open. It HISSES as pressure releases. It seals behind her.

She rips off Owen's mask, falls to her knees, and takes deep, heaving breaths. Sweat drips off her nose and chin. It takes a beat, but her breathing finally returns to normal.

BERETTA

Fucking hell.

Beretta removes the memory card from Gavin's camera, crosses to a desk, and opens a laptop. It glows to life. Phew.

Beretta pauses. The laptop's desktop picture shows Owen, Jean, and a young Maeve enjoying a day on the ski slopes. It's a heartbreaking image. Crisp snow. Clear sky. Smiling faces.

She inserts the memory card and clicks into the most recent video file. It pops open. She scrubs backwards through the footage. Mostly nothing. Mostly nothing. Mostly nothing. Then--

Shock ripples across her face. Her jaw drops. She leans closer.

BERETTA

What in the fuck is that?

**EXT. HIGHWAY 38 - NIGHT**

The truck rolls down the dark, deserted road. Tall pines bend and lurch in the gale force wind. The truck rounds a bend and--

SCREEEEEEEECH. Nearly collides with a tree lying across the road. Danny gets out and investigates the situation with Chip.

CHIP

Don't think we can make it around.

DANNY

Could double back. Take Ironwood.

CHIP

You crazy? That'd take us right next to Freak territory.

As the two continue their discussion, Hugh slides closer to Maeve. Before she can move, he places his hand on her thigh.

HUGH  
You know you'd be prettier if you  
tried smilin'.

MAEVE  
Don't touch me.

Maeve tears herself free and leaps to her feet.

HUGH  
Now don't be difficult. Why don't  
you just go on and sit back down.

Maeve doesn't respond. Hugh frowns, gets to his feet, and grabs  
at her. Maeve evades him, but he keeps coming for her.

HUGH  
I said to sit down.

MAEVE  
And I said don't fucking touch me.

HUGH  
That wasn't the deal.

MAEVE  
Deal? I'm not part of any *deal*.

Hugh grabs Maeve's arm, tugs her closer toward him. Maeve  
PUNCHES him in the face. The shock of the punch makes Hugh  
loosen his grip. Maeve pulls herself free, jumps over the side  
of the truck, and books it toward the forest.

HUGH  
Boss! She's gettin' away!

DANNY  
What'd you do?! Go get her!  
(to Chip)  
And what are you waitin' for? Go  
with him for Chrissake!

CHIP  
Alright, alright. She won't get  
far. She don't know these woods  
like we do.

Hugh and Chip run into the forest. Jean jumps out of the  
passenger seat.

JEAN  
What's happening?! Where's Maeve?!

DANNY  
Don't worry, Jean. They'll bring  
her right back. I promise.

**EXT. FOREST - MOMENTS LATER**

Maeve sprints through thick foliage. A branch SLICES her cheek.  
CRUNCHING FOOTSTEPS are rapidly catching up to her.

Maeve turns to get a glimpse of her pursuers. *They're close.*  
Only a hundred feet behind her. She turns back around and--

Nearly falls off a steep bluff! She skitters to a halt. The men  
slow down and walk toward her.

CHIP  
You don't wanna go down there.  
Trust me. Just come back with us.

MAEVE  
There's something you should know  
about me.

Maeve looks down the steep slope below. Then back at the men.

MAEVE  
I'm not scared of the downhill.

She steps over the edge and slides at a breakneck speed down  
the slope. The velocity overwhelms her and she tumbles forward,  
barreling end over end.

Chip and Hugh rush over to the ledge to look for her.

HUGH  
Goddamn. She's crazy! How we gonna  
get down to her now?

CHIP  
I ain't goin' down there. That's  
Freak territory.

Holt's demeanor changes. He stiffens.

HUGH  
Hope she don't run into 'em.

Maeve SLAMS into the dirt. She's scraped and bruised but not  
seriously injured. She gets to her feet and winces at a pain in  
her ribs. She looks back up the hill. All clear.

Maeve holds her side as she pushes deeper into the woods. The  
wind is getting rougher. She stops and looks around - only  
trees in every direction. No shelter.

But then she sees an orange glow in the distance. A *fire*. Maeve buckles down and presses toward it.

As she gets closer, she sees SILHOUETTES around the fire. People! Excited, she picks up her pace. Then a wave of concern washes over her. She crouches behind a tree and peers out.

MAEVE'S POV: The view is obstructed by foliage. But she can see people moving around a large bonfire. They're wearing dresses. No. *Robes*. And there's something strange about the shape of their heads. It almost looks like...

*CRUNCH*.

Maeve whips around. TWO FIGURES loom over her, their faces hidden by wicker animal masks. A fox. And an antlered stag.

Maeve screams, but as we CRANE UP through the trees, her scream becomes indistinguishable from the howling wind.

**END OF EPISODE**