

SHROOMTOWN

Written by

George Opacic

george@opalideas.com

1 INT. YVR AIRPORT ARRIVALS AREA, SPRING, LATE NIGHT

1

Quiet airport Arrivals area, late at night. A bored security guard is seated at the base of an escalator.

A trickle of people start coming down the escalator, then dozens. Some, in suits, take the adjoining stairs. The suits move hurriedly, as if it is a race. Couples and individuals are moving sedately on the escalator. Generally they are relieved to be home. A few look around anxiously for people who are to meet them.

2 INT. SUBWAY CAR, SAME NIGHT

2

A couple is relaxing in the nearly empty Canada Line "Skytrain" car, sitting by the rear door, looking into the dark night as they leave the airport, heading home. Their two pieces of matching dark green luggage rest in front of them at the door. The luggage still has their long white airline tags wrapped around the handles.

NATALIE KAROL is in her late fifties, faintly academic in the way she confidently takes in her surroundings. Her brown pony-tail and pale complexion are reflected in her bright, casual clothes. Her blue baseball hat says "Team Zlin", written under a sleek golden single-seat airplane. She is a city person. Her head lies peacefully on her husband's shoulder.

BRAM KAROL is sixty-plus, though, because of his white hair, he could pass for an older person. He is wearing muted coloured, no-wrinkle, airline travel clothes, as his preferred practical threads. He is over a head taller than Natalie.

Speaking contentedly,

NATALIE

Happy to be home? With those reassuring mountains ringing us?

She is looking north at the lights of Cyprus Bowl and the occasionally visible Grouse Mountain.

He nods, and yet his tone is less than affirmative.

BRAM

Yeah. Good to be home. You did really well in the aerobatics, Nat. Coming in the top three in the senior division is outstanding.

NATALIE

Yeah, I'm going to have to take a few more days off to wind down.

BRAM

I thought we'd need a stretcher to take you away from the plane.

NATALIE

Absolutely dead when I stepped out on the wing. Don't remember you catching me...
At least I didn't damage Ronny's new Zlin. He'd never let me near it again.

He gives her a hug.

BRAM

You kidding? He painted your name on it! If you didn't have that graduate class to teach he wouldn't have let you get away from his hangar.

They settle against each other, Natalie smiling, Bram working into a frown. She notices his frown.

NATALIE

What's the matter, Bram. Miss the warm sun? I know you'd rather be in the outdoors.

BRAM

Nah...
Just thinking.

In his mind is the vision of a broad meadow with short grass and mushrooms growing among tree stumps and downed trees, rotting into new growth. The mushrooms become smiling heads that turn to beckon to him. He shivers suddenly.

NATALIE

What? Need more time off?

He shifts in his seat. She lifts her head off his shoulder.

Bram thinks, then decides to voice a thought, tentatively,

BRAM

That guy -- what's his name -- fueling up the planes...

NATALIE

Marty? He's a flake!

She sits up. All attention.

BRAM

Well yeah... But what he said
about...

Bram glances around the bright car.

BRAM (CONT'D)

You know... Shrooms.

Her eyebrows run into her forehead, causing unflatteringly large wrinkles.

NATALIE

Bram! You don't believe that load
of claptrap, do you?

He settles back into the seat.

BRAM

You're right. Claptrap...
But it would be, well, an
interesting, ah, experience.

He glances at her then sees her open mouth of surprise.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Like, I mean if it was real.
I mean, it would be interesting if
that really did happen to your
mind.

They pass through two stations. Natalie is now seated stiffly, without further discussion.

Bridgeport Station's announcement comes on. At the stop, a few more passengers board. One thirty-something guy is in an altered mental state. The AMS GUY lurches into the car and takes a position over the luggage belonging to Natalie and Bram.

AMS GUY

Going.
(loudly, to no-one in
particular)
GOING TO FLY AWAY!

He reaches toward the higher of Bram's luggage handles.

Bram gently puts his hand in front of it, stopping AMS Guy from claiming it. Eye-to-eye, Bram shakes his head slightly, noticing the glazed stare that sees a different universe.

Natalie stiffens, putting her hands half up, ready for action.

BRAM

Not yours. Take a seat, fella.

AMS Guy turns away to follow another apparition toward the front.

AMS GUY

SEAT! MY SEAT IS... moving...
away.

He staggers into an empty seat to claim it before it gets away from him.

Natalie turns to Bram, whispering urgently,

NATALIE

Is THAT what you want to be? He's
at the bottom of his slippery slope
- look at him!

Her dagger stare bores into Bram's consciousness until he must answer. Patting her hand,

BRAM

Of course not, Nat.
(tempting fate)
You must have seen enough of that
at the U. That study you did on
methadone replacement therapy? You
know he's on crack.
That's what crack does to you.
Definitely not in my future.

He pats her hand again reassuringly.

3 INT. BRAM'S CONDO, THAT NIGHT

3

In bed, Natalie is laying nervously awake, thinking.

She finally decides to turn toward Bram to interrogate him.

NATALIE

Can I ask you...

He interrupts.

BRAM
About being a drug addict?

She pauses. He slips his hand under her shoulder.

NATALIE
Bram, your...

BRAM
Are you going to be all psycho-
speak, dear. You know I don't
understand that complicated stuff.

She whacks him on his exposed shoulder.

NATALIE
Ohhh! I've seen you in court!
Nobody I know is better at
understanding the human psyche.

He smiles at her.

BRAM
Flattery will get you smothered by
my large, sweaty body.

He makes a move toward her.

NATALIE
Back off you mmfff...

He is all over her, muffling her grinning mouth...

...Later, she is about to doze off but suddenly wakes up.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
Ohhh! Stop changing the subject!

His arm snakes under the covers to envelop her.

BRAM
You're the subject. There's no way
I'm going to change you.

She snaps away.

NATALIE
Stop that! I want to talk about
your sudden desire to chemically
mess with your mind!
(her tone becomes tender)
That's not you.

He shrugs.

BRAM

I don't know. It was the allure of a, a shortcut to nirvana. Of course I know it's silly. Maybe I just had to let it take a slow walk in the recesses of my oh-too-straight-laced mind.

(he kisses her cheek)

I think it's over now.

He nods at her, smiling his cherub-nice smile.

In his mind, Bram sees the Nice Cherub over his right shoulder. Nice Cherub nods down at Bram's head in appreciation. Over Bram's left shoulder, Not-Nice Cherub blows him a wet raspberry. The cherubs fly at each other into a silent donnybrook with many cartoon expletives exploding around them.

4

INT. LAWYERS OFFICE, MONDAY MORNING

4

Bram is looking comfortable in an expensive striped dark blue suit, standing in his personal office near its open door. He is quickly sifting through pages in a thick file. Something catches his attention. Yelling back through the door toward the row of desks in the main room,

BRAM

Sudhra, did you get the transcript?
I don't see it in here.

At the front desk to his left, young VINCE, his clerk/receptionist/almost-articling-junior-lawyer, pops his head up to see if he is needed.

SUDHRA SHARMA is Bram's new legal assistant. She is slim with long black hair. Her black pants-suit and frilly white shirt are intended, she hopes, to make her look more lawyer-like. Many glittering items of jewelry are scattered over her. Sudhra feels she is ready to be a lawyer.

SUDHRA

Oh. The examination was 56 pages and the affidavit was another dozen. I didn't think you needed it in this pack...

Bram rolls his eyes to the outside window.

BRAM

(with patience)
I need all the documents in the file, Sudhra.

(MORE)

BRAM (CONT'D)
 If it takes another folder, fine.
 Case management...
 (muttering to himself)
 101.

He steps forward to hand the unfinished file back to Sudhra at his door. In a hurry, he drops the heavy document pack into her arms.

BRAM (CONT'D)
 Now, please. I have to see
 Montgomery in half an hour, and I
 need the file before I head for
 Abbotsford.
 (he turns pointedly to get
 an affirmation)
 Ok?

Sudhra nods contritely.

Bram quickly steps behind his desk to retrieve his black mid-sized briefcase.

Sudhra shrugs as she turns toward her desk in the open area outside of the partners' offices.

Bram puts the briefcase prominently on his desk, takes his phone off the dock and slips it into his inside suit pocket.

BRAM (CONT'D)
 (louder, to Sudhra as he
 steps out of his office)
 Put the file back in my briefcase
 and bring it down to my car,
 please. You know where my extra key
 is?

He hurries out as she nods and mumbles a

SUDHRA
 Yes.

In his mind, Bram is standing on the window ledge about to jump off but being held back by Vince, who is holding the tails of his suit-coat.

5 INT. PUB, MONDAY, NOON

5

The SILK PURSE is a legal-themed pub near the Provincial Court. It has a central area with several crowded tables - all occupied by young suited folks earnestly arguing over hockey teams, three varieties of football, and whether skis are better than snowboards.

The perimeter of the pub is decorated with stocked book shelves, classical statuettes and Flemish paintings. The ambient sound is at least 90dB, allowing for private conversations in the leather trimmed booths around the perimeter. All but one are occupied.

The maitre 'd is escorting Bram and a client, MONTGOMERY, to the open booth.

6 INT. PUB BOOTH, AFTER 1:00 PM

6

Bram hands Montgomery an envelope. They shake hands and Montgomery gets up to leave.

MONTGOMERY

This should do it, then. Thanks for your help, Bram. I'll expect your call if they get cold feet and want to settle.

Bram nods,

BRAM

I'd give them until 6 or 7 tonight. The psychology of it is that if they're at all interested in settling before tomorrow's hearing, it usually happens before they wrap up for the night. The other lawyer is sick and tired of it by now. We'll talk tonight, one way or the other.

Montgomery smiles as he leaves.

Bram is left in the booth to relax for a few minutes.

In his mind he sees himself in a joust, proudly wearing silver armour and an open helmet with a floppy turkey-tail of feathers on top. He is sitting tall on a prancing white horse holding a lance, his opponent is lying in a crumpled mound on the other side of the rail. The audience are dressed in colourful flowing robes, throwing bundles of mushrooms toward him.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Huh?

Shaking his head back to reality, he leans over slightly to overhear a sharp laugh from the booth behind him. A friend from school he recognizes as FRED has that distinctive high-pitched voice.

Fred carries on in a whisper.

FRED
Never forget it, man. Never! Two
days with alushes...

He chuckles.

Reflected in the window, Bram sees Fred's thirty-year-old companion put his finger to his mouth sternly. The man looks around without noticing Bram.

Bram pulls out his phone and does a quick search with StartPage.

The suggested websites are mostly Mexican, with an "x" in place of the "sh". Reading the list, Bram gets the drift.

To himself,

BRAM
Fred's gonna talk to me. Have to
know what he's on about.

He notices the Nice Cherub with a raised finger about to say something.

BRAM (CONT'D)
(under his breath)
Bugger off.

7 **EXT. SIDEWALK, SEVERAL MINUTES LATER**

7

Bram is outside leaning against another restaurant's patio fence next to the Silk Purse. He waits as Fred approaches, then puts out a hand.

BRAM
Hey Fred! Fancy seeing you here. I
thought your office was way down on
Georgia.

Fred smiles a greeting.

FRED
Oh, hi Bram. How you doing?
Yeah, I was, ah, meeting with a
client...

He looks around instinctively.

Bram smiles.

BRAM

Yeah, when I want to meet somebody privately, I usually go some place away from my office, too.

Alarmed, Fred is about to bolt.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Whoa there cowboy! It's cool. Take a slow breath. I'm on your side. Honest.

He puts both hands in the air, palms out.

Fred is very uncomfortable. With a quick shake of his head he starts to walk away.

Bram strides with him. In an encouraging tone,

BRAM (CONT'D)

Listen, man, I'm not going to do anything. I just want to know.

Fred stops and faces Bram. Sweat has formed on his forehead.

FRED

Know what?
What... do you know?

With a deprecating nod,

BRAM

Well, nothing about you. But, like, I overheard. Alushes.

FRED

Oh shit.
(really nervous)
Ah, I can't...
Bram, you can't tell anyone!

BRAM

Ok, but I don't know what not to tell.

Fred scans around, then nods across the street at a quieter part of the block. The old Art Gallery building has benches off the sidewalk.

They wait for traffic to clear. Behind them, in the window of the restaurant, Fred's lunch companion looks at them with a very worried look.

Fred composes himself.

FRED

Listen Bram. You can't let this go anywhere. Please. Nobody must hear this!

Jesus! It could ruin me! And I've just put down everything I have on a new condo.

(with rising fear)

You could put me on the street!
Please!

Bram takes his arm to calm him.

BRAM

Hey Fred! Take it easy, man.
Nobody's going to get you. Take it easy.

Let's sit down over on that bench and you can tell me what the hell's bothering you. Ok?

Fred nods in reluctant agreement. Dodging cars and then bikes, they walk to a park bench to sit down. Bram quickly brushes off the dust first.

Distracted, looking around, Fred finds a tissue in his suit pocket to wipe his nose.

FRED

God. You just hit me between the eyes, Bram. I didn't think...

(he holds in a shudder)

Ok. I'm going to tell you a story and I want your ABSOLUTE promise that it goes nowhere else!

Bram's eyebrows tighten. He is certain he actually sees his two Cherubs battling each other across the park.

FRED (CONT'D)

(more alarmed at the
pause)

Bram?

Shaking himself out of his thoughts,

BRAM

Uh, yeah. Of course, Fred. I can see it means...

Fred is hyper.

FRED

It means my life, Bram. And I never really realized it before. An actuary absolutely lives on trust, and...

Ok. This is what happened.

(he wipes his nose again)

One of my clients is, well, making a lot of money in, you know, hallucinogenic stuff.

BRAM

Drugs.

FRED

No! Well... yes, but not, like, the hard stuff. He's not a criminal drug-dealer, like...

So you know about aluxes.

(he looks at Bram but Bram makes no move)

I heard about the BC version at Thompson in my last year. There was a group that was always on about going to pick mushrooms at this secret place and they'd stay away for the weekend and come back late on Monday.

Well, anyway, I was scared to go with them, then.

So my client, a couple weeks ago, he says he wants to negotiate a deal on his fee. He says he'll pay three-quarters and give the rest in a "special product". One thing led to another and I'm out in the middle of some damn forest in a cabin and he comes back with a few mushrooms.

BRAM

You trusted him? They could have been poisonous!

FRED

Shit Bram! I know! I'm sitting in the middle of friggen nowhere and this guy could've killed me and buried me in the bush and nobody'd ever know!

(sweating, he breathes hard then starts to calm down)

So, I figured, what the hell!

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

Why would he go to the trouble of making me tea out of mushrooms if he wants to get out of a couple hundred dollars? Anyway, he's telling me some hippy shit about a mind-blowing adventure and I slug it down without thinking. Nearly burned my throat. I forgot it was hot tea.
 (he smiles)
 And that was the last time I had a worried bone in my body.
 (looking right at Bram)
 Until you fucken slapped me awake ten minutes ago.

Fred glances away then back at Bram. They sit for a while staring at the passing cars.

BRAM

Fred?

FRED

Uh huh?

BRAM

What was it like?

Fred relaxes and smiles,

FRED

After a few minutes... I don't know. Maybe it was a couple hours. I was outside. The trees were waving to me. They started glowing green and some other bright colours and I heard them whispering to me. The clouds came down to embrace the trees and the ferns and bushes were grinning at me. The ground was like a two-foot-thick pillow, and then it got even better as they pulled the real me out of my wet brain...

Fred lapses into reverie.

FRED (CONT'D)

Back at work, I saw things -
 (reacting to Bram's raised eyebrows)
 No, not like that. I saw connections, obvious solutions. The numbers spoke to me like never before.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

Work became fun and, and people in the office have been asking me for advice on tough questions...

(reverently)

Never happened before.

Bram doesn't want to break in, but finally, in a soft voice,

BRAM

Fred? Was it worth it?

Snapping back to reality,

FRED

Oh god. It was, then. But now... You just made me a haunted man, Bram. Just like that. I can't have anyone know what I did, Bram. It's, well, I'm not sure if it's actually illegal, but I know it could ruin my career! Who would hire a mind-blown actuary? God...

He turns to Bram in desperation.

FRED (CONT'D)

I am pleading with you, Bram. Please. Please forget we ever had this talk. Please?

Nodding,

BRAM

Of course, Fred. Of course. We're friends. And I very much appreciate you telling me that. I've always wondered, myself... Ah, Fred...

FRED

Huh?

BRAM

Do you feel in control of it? Did it pull you down a slippery slope?

FRED

What? No! Nothing like that at all. Not pulling me - not pushing me. It was, like, a wonderful meadow I came across and now that I'm on the other side, I can keep walking.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

With a stronger stride than I've
ever had... Only... I can look back
and see it...

They sit quietly for a while. Bram finally shakes himself
awake.

BRAM

listen. I have an appointment in
Abbotsford, so I have to take off.
Ok? You ok?

They don't notice Fred's lunch companion, a hard-faced
younger man with a tattoo peeking above his collar, staring
at them with clenched jaws from the other side of the street.
The man takes a picture of them with his cellphone.

8 INT. BRAM'S CONDO, EVENING

8

The condo's kitchen is separated from the living room by two
steps down and a low glass divider that has a variety of
small plants and other decorations hanging from it. A silver
Zlin airplane of about six centimetres in length sits
unobtrusively between the plants. Natalie is at the kitchen's
island pouring wine for Bram and herself. She brings the
glasses up to Bram, who is sitting in a comfortable reclining
chair, reading on his tablet.

NATALIE

Is that the case you're working on,
dear?

She places his drink on the small table next to his chair,
then takes the other large reclining chair, resuming her
crossword puzzle, peering up at him periodically.

Bram composes a wry reply,

BRAM

I'm on probation, I take it? Nat,
you know that rule number eleven
forbids either of us from
performing any official work until
nine p.m.
(he turns his tablet to
show her)
See?

The screen has a picture of the interior of a log cabin.

Curious, she leans in closer. Wanting to break the ice,

NATALIE

Is that from the new condo building up near Little Mountain? Sure looks like it's out in the sticks...

Pretending to be offended,

BRAM

My dear, such a condescending statement is not worthy of a professor of psychology, whether we live in Shaughnessy or not.

He closes the tablet just as his phone dings.

NATALIE

Whoever it is, tell them about rule number eleven.

Reaching for his phone on the table,

BRAM

Yes dear.
 (he taps his phone)
 Hello?
 (he does a double take at the phone, checking the number)
 I'm sorry, I...
 Ah, who is this?...
 Excuse me, but my office hours...
 No. My office hours are 9 to 5...
 No, it will have to wait until tomorrow...
 That's right. Good ni...
 Good night.

He ends the call, then copies the phone number to clipboard and opens a browser.

Natalie has been listening, fascinated.

NATALIE

You're rather cavalier with your clients, Bram. Is your appointment book getting that thick?

He enters the number into the browser on his phone, shrugging at not finding a match.

BRAM

Not here. Whatever. If he calls tomorrow I guess I'll find out.
 (mumbling)
 (MORE)

BRAM (CONT'D)

Make a John Doe contact... John Doe

6

(done, he looks over at
Natalie)

No idea who that was, but he
certainly thought he could impose
on me. I was about to shut him up
with a mention of rule eleven.

Bram replaces his phone with his tablet, pulls up the log
cabin picture and sits back to contemplate it and more
pictures on the real estate site.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Some places don't need a rule
eleven...

With furrowed brows Natalie tries to see inside his thoughts.

NATALIE

What's occupying that wayward mind
of yours, now?

She considers, then shakes her head, returning to her drink
and the crossword.

Over Bram, his two Cherubs are in a pulling match with his
heart.

9

INT. BRAM'S LEGAL OFFICE, NEXT MORNING

9

Bram's legal office has the obligatory ostentatious high
front desk and plush leather couch in the waiting area. The
firm name is frosted elegantly into the glass front, seen
backwards from the office:

Mandelstein, Karol, Plessey
Attorneys At Law

From inside, we see Bram unlocking the front door, juggling
his briefcase and a newspaper. With the door opening, he
hears the other elevator stop at his floor. Bram stays at the
open door to let in the sole passenger, VINCE.

VINCE is on the short side, particularly when standing next
to Bram. His dark hair tries really hard to look civilized,
but pops up in places. Vince is chewing his ever-present gum.
He blows a bubble as he holds his skateboard hidden a bit
behind his leg. His suit jacket looks like it is very
uncomfortable on the wiry frame that is more used to zipping
down streets than flipping through legal files.

VINCE

Thank you, sir. I would have been here earlier but I, ah, met an old friend who, ah, needed to be advised of the benefits of some people boarding in a suit.

Vince's wry smile is spoiled with the need to clean his reddened nose. He takes a tissue from a pocket to get it done quickly.

Bram tries to avoid a smile, but misses.

BRAM

That's ok, Vince. Don't get any blood on your shirt.

Here,
(he hands the newspaper to Vince)

And,
(Bram stands for a few seconds until he can catch Vince's eye)
My prior advice to you about wearing a helmet and knee pads was not optional. If I see you in your suit on the skateboard without at least the former item, you will be looking for other employment.

Bram's tone is low-key but firm.

They both step inside, with Vince quickly placing the newspaper in the centre of the low glass table in front of the couch.

As he turns to go behind the reception desk he bumps into Bram, who is deliberately hovering behind him.

VINCE

Oh! Sorry sir! I didn't...

BRAM

(quietly)

I did not hear a positive affirmation of your compliance with my directive.

Flustered, Vince steps back, bumping the back of his leg and the skateboard into the low table with a thud.

VINCE

I'm sorry, sir. I didn't... Ah...

Reluctantly taking a fatherly stance, and with his Not-Nice Cherub satirically wagging a finger at Vince,

BRAM

Look. I'm not going to give you a song-and-dance about a prescriptive set of rules on what to wear and how to behave. The reason we took you on, Vince, one of several reasons, is because we honestly believe you have the potential and the desire to become a valuable addition to the bar of this fair city.

(Vince is about to reply
but Bram holds up a hand)

This isn't some bullshit pep talk, Vince. And I'm not coming at this from an employer-employee relationship, and not from a false "between friends" thing. This is one human being to another.

(the elevator makes
noises, attracting both
their eyes)

Here - come into my parlor...

VINCE

Said the spider to the fly?

They step into Bram's office.

10

INT. BRAM'S OFFICE

10

Bram leads Vince in and places his briefcase next to the desk.

BRAM

Close the door, please. Sit.

Vince flips the door closed then takes the soft, comfortable chair near the door, placing his board on the floor next to it.

It is Bram's turn to flash his wry smile, indicating with his hand the nearer, harder chair by his desk.

Vince exaggerates getting up to take the closer chair.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Another thing I'm not going to do is ask what you want to do with your life...

VINCE

But in voicing the topic you are thereby seeding it in the minds of the jury.

Pleased, Bram carries on.

BRAM

And with that clever little brain of yours you are trying, vainly, to ingratiate yourself. But, Vince, clever repartee is not sufficient in this endeavour. Lawyers must see the consequences of the consequences. Parsing out a statement is for year one. Witty comebacks are for the after-exams party. You may fall back onto that platitude of, "to be good you have to be smart". You should know by now that being "good" is not good enough for me.

Bram leans back in his chair, pausing, daring Vince to say something.

He doesn't. Vince does a minor adjustment of his bum on the hard chair.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Listen. I'd like you to understand something about life. I've gone through all this, more or less successfully. My mentoring you is, from my perspective, a pleasure and a pain. The pleasure comes from being able to offer you shortcuts through the game of life. Your legal career is just beginning. If I can show you a few quick ways up a ladder, I get a shot of pleasure knowing you will have a chance to avoid the snakes. My pain comes from two sources.

(Vince squints as he suppresses a yawn)

Right... First, your standard comeback is, "I already know that". Which tells me that you did not comprehend.

(he pauses to let that percolate through Vince's glazed eyes)

(MORE)

BRAM (CONT'D)

A bigger pain is my feeling that I am cheating you.

(Vince is alerted)

By not falling into the mouth of the occasional snake, you may not be learning in a way that is important. Emotional content is critical to long-term memory.

He pauses to allow Vince to respond. It takes a while for Vince to realize it is his turn.

VINCE

Ah, well, sir, I can honestly say that I sincerely appreciate...

Bram cuts in,

BRAM

"...the opportunity, blah blah." Fine.

Ok. Let's get back to the point.

(Vince shifts uncomfortably)

So what's the big picture, here? Complying with the rules and not embarrassing the firm with a conviction of skateboarding without required safety equipment?

Vince is about to answer, but, with difficulty, holds back.

BRAM (CONT'D)

No. That would be cause for a reprimand, at least.

(he leans forward)

I would probably delegate that task to Sudhra.

Faining pain,

VINCE

Nooo!

Bram holds up his hands,

BRAM

No, I wouldn't do that to you. On a first offence.

(he sits back again)

Ok, listen. What's your greatest asset?

Modestly, Vince relaxes and tries to think of the correct answer.

VINCE

I suppose...

BRAM

Your brains.
Covering them with a helmet when you exceed the speed of a run on an inherently dangerous device, is the least I would expect of you, as, I hope, an intelligent young man.
(he looks pointedly at the board on the floor)
And what's your second greatest asset, as a lawyer?

VINCE

Well, I...

BRAM

Trust. Your trustworthiness in the minds of colleagues, clients and courts.
(pleased with what he came up with, he mumbles to himself)
I should write that down before I forget it.
(he scribbles quickly on a pad as he finishes)
I don't mean that you shouldn't skateboard to work, Vince. Lord knows it's almost as convenient as taking the bus for a few stops, like I do.
(lowering his voice slightly to an intimate level)
Leaving my car parked downstairs started as a symbol for staff to sign on to the transit idea. It's become a brilliant move. Anyway, buses and skateboards...

VINCE

No crowds, sir. Those buses are a zoo in the morning.

Nodding,

BRAM

Zoo squared, at times, I'll give you that.

(he carries on)

Let me put it this way. If you had a jury selection to do and your client was a rich banker, would you work to get skateboarders on the jury?

Almost falling into the trap, Vince pulls back from the brink.

VINCE

Profiling. You wanted me to select based on demographics.

BRAM

Exactly. We all profile. It only takes a few seconds, doesn't it? As you skate down the street, every eye turned in your direction profiles you. In the vast majority of cases it makes no never-mind. So, it's your decision, Vince. How do you want to be perceived by the three Cs?

You can do whatever-the-hell you want after work.

(he looks down then
reconsiders as he sees
his Not-Nice Cherub perk
up)

Up to a point.

Your decision. Your life.

They both nod.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Now let me get to work here.

They exchange soft smiles as Bram opens his briefcase.

Bram's Nice Cherub gives him silent applause.

11 **EXT. SIDEWALK, RAINING, LUNCHTIME**

11

Despite a steady rain, the sidewalk is crowded with umbrellaed people in suits and business-casual, all heading purposefully somewhere.

Bram has a dark green umbrella with a border of reflective two-centimeter circles, which he closes up as he comes to the door at his regular restaurant, the Silk Purse. He shakes the umbrella free of drips then joins the short line just inside the door.

12

INT. PUB

12

As Bram is led by the maitre 'd to his regular table, the Silk Purse's owner, an entrepreneurial former woodcarver from Haida Gwaii called SIMSON RAMSEY, greets Bram from his table by the kitchen.

SIMSON

Hi, Bram! How you doing? Did you still want to know about that lodge near Sandspit?

Bram is noncommittal.

BRAM

Hi Simmy. Thanks. Still have to get up the courage to pass it by the boss.

He smiles politely as he carries on to his table.

Shortly, digging into his salad, Bram sees Fred, with a wet hood over his head peering through the window. He motions for Fred to join him.

Coming out of the now light rain, Fred removes his dripping coat without noticing that it is spraying onto passing tables. Diners stare at him harshly but without comment. With a cursory scan, Bram notes that Fred is abnormally disheveled and is wearing the same clothes that he was wearing the other day.

He drops his coat onto a chair next to Bram and plops down across from him. Fred absently pulls back the hood.

Bram brushes back his hair, hoping Fred will do the same. He doesn't. A vacuous stare is the extent of Fred's interaction.

Chewing another mouthful of greens, Bram is sympathetic.

BRAM (CONT'D)

You look rough, Fred. Not getting enough sleep?

The sounds take a while to percolate into Fred's awareness.

FRED
Huh? Sleep. Should get some. You're
killing me, Bram.

BRAM
(gently)
I haven't seen you for a couple
days. How am I killing you?

Fred slumps forward, wanting to rest his head on the table.
The dish and cutlery get in the way. He raises his head
slowly, pain in his eyes.

FRED
You are the Sword of Damacles. When
are you going to fall?

Bram shakes his head deliberately, locking his eyes on
Fred's.

BRAM
Not going to happen, Fred...
Do you hear that? Will not happen.

Bram stretches his left arm across the table toward Fred. The
words and gesture cause a softening in Fred's features.

Taking a sip from his coffee,

BRAM (CONT'D)
Want a coffee? You look like you
could use it. And maybe a soup,
too.

With his cup, Bram catches the attention of JAMES, the
server.

James brings the coffee carafe,

JAMES
Fill up, sir?

Bram places his cup into a better position for the fill-up.

BRAM
Yes, please. And I think my friend
would like some?
(waiting for, and getting
a nod from Fred)
And what soup do we have on today,
James?

JAMES

We have a delightful Creamed
Potato-leek, along with Eastern
European Chicken Soup with real
matzah balls.

Bram's eyes light up.

BRAM

James, the next time I come in and
you don't tell me what soup you
have I shall lash you vigorously
with a cat-o-nine-noodles!

He imagines his Not-Nice Cherub wielding a great whip of
spaghetti, fettuccine and wet lasagna noodles lashing the
helpless back of James in bondage.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Oh well. Fred?

Awaken by the conversation, he shakes his head clear of weird
visions.

FRED

Ah, let me try the chicken soup.
Probably need it.

JAMES

Excellent choice, sir. And as you
eat it, please be sure to tell your
companion just how wonderful it
tastes!

Bram gives a dismissive

BRAM

Gherrr. Make sure it's hot enough
this time, James.

Fred sits in one position staring at a shelf of books against
a wall.

James returns with a steaming bowl of soup.

As he places it before Fred on the table, the activity wakes
him up.

FRED

Oh, ah, thank you.

Without another word, he slowly picks at the soup, taking
half-spoons of the chicken broth mechanically.

Something, perhaps his shrunken stomach, demands that he increase the pace. His first tentative spoon-slice into a matzha ball intrigues him. The taste produces a body-wide relaxation of muscles, which Fred eagerly follows with an inhalation of the whole bowl. He fastidiously captures the last few drops on his spoon and downs it. He absently breaks open a sugar and stirs it into his coffee.

Seeing Fred's transformation, Bram sits quietly through the sudden activity. His Nice Cherub is aghast at the slurping. As Fred settles back into his chair, sublimely satisfied, Bram carries on with his salad.

BRAM

Feel better now, Fred?

A smile and a slight nod in reply.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Good simple food can have a calming effect.

FRED

Especially if you're starving.
Thank you, Bram. That was the first meal I've had for a while.
What did you say that was?

BRAM

Matzah balls. My mother used to make it. It's an eastern European thing, mostly Jewish, but everybody had some version of it. This is one of the few restaurants that has it.

He looks around for James.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Must be short again or James would've told me it was available. Anyway.

(he finishes his salad)

Fred, you need a break. Can you take some time off?

With half a nod,

FRED

I probably can...
Yeah. You're right, Bram. Good idea. I'll get my projects organized and give them to the others in the office.
Yeah. I'll do that.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

Thanks, Bram. All I needed was a push in the right direction.

Without another word, Fred gets up and leaves. Getting to the door, he feels for his coat. All the while, Bram tracks him with a grin, knowing Fred will be right back.

On his way back, Fred sheepishly looks through his pants pockets for money.

FRED (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry, Bram. I, ah, I guess I'm a little distracted...

(not finding anything but a key-ring in his pockets)

I don't, ah, have any money on me...

Bram stands up to reach out his hand.

BRAM

Forget it. Listen, take some time off. If you need help, please call me.

Take your coat and get organized at the office.

(they finally shake hands)

Call me when you get back. Ok?

As he slips his coat on, he notices a paper that is crinkling in his coat pocket, reminding Fred.

FRED

Oh! I almost forgot this! Bram, you...

(he drops his voice to a whisper, glancing around as he speaks)

Sorry, Bram. This was the address you wanted.

He passes the paper to Bram quickly, palm down, nodding and winking.

James is nearby and comes over.

JAMES

How was the soup, sir?

Very pleased with life at this time, Fred shakes James' hand, too.

FRED

That was so... soothing! I will be
back for more! I will!
See you later.

Bram and James watch Fred make his somewhat clumsy way out.

James shakes his head.

JAMES

Lawyers do have unusual clients.
(he turns to Bram with a
consoling smile)
At least the ones who are brought
here by my favourite lawyers.

BRAM

Not a client. An acquaintance who
desperately needs a friend. Or two.
Treat him kindly when he comes
again, James.

James gives an acquiescing bow then rushes off.

Bram slowly finishes his lunch. He occasionally glances at
Fred's paper on the table next to his plate. The address is
in the Downtown East Side. His two Cherubs are having a
scuffle, trying to reach the paper.

Bram pulls out his phone, tapping his password and selecting
a name from "Contacts".

BRAM (CONT'D)

Hi Vince. Anybody looking for
me?...
Ok, I'm going to see somebody at
this time. It shouldn't take a full
hour. You can text me if something
comes up, ok?...

He taps off, putting the phone and Fred's paper in his shirt
pocket.

13

EXT. POWELL ST. SAME AFTERNOON

13

Powell St., in the Downtown East Side, where a number of
people who work in the area make their way carefully down the
wet sidewalk. The rain has stopped. The street is also
populated with people either in an altered mental state, or
wanting to get there. Most look to be desperate in a
nonspecific way, hurrying to nothing in particular, except
perhaps to their next shot of pain absolver.

There are groups seated against a dirty brick wall selling junk amongst themselves, jealously watching over their own meager goods; more than one is having an earnest conversation with an inner self. Whether open for business or closed up, windows and doors on the dingy buildings are all heavily barred.

Bram is holding his jacket on an arm, trying not to be too conspicuously a lawyer. His bright, clean, rich clothes stand out like white neon. The few people who look at him for more than a glance, nod and sneer to their buddies at Bram.

He imagines himself in the black-and-white movie, *Third Man*. Dressed in a trenchcoat, he strides through dark alleys populated by ghouls and goblins, as his Cherubs huddle together in fear high on a steel stairway.

With a reassuring touch to his phone, he pulls out Fred's paper. He confirms the address.

A hand-painted sign above the store in front of Bram says:

"Jim-Jam Whoopla"

The sub-text says:

"Batteries Not Included"

There are no windows. The door has an elongated oval glass pane that allows Bram a barred view of the interior. The closed door is protected with bars on the outside and a grill-work on the inside. As Bram is about to open the door, a tattooed and tee-shirted YOUNG MAN, with the obligatory shaved head, steps in front of him.

YOUNG MAN
Can I help you, buddy?

Very quickly, Bram stops his instinctive response of raising an arm in protection, converting it to a short half-wave.

BRAM
Hi. Yeah. I want to go in.

YOUNG MAN
Buying?

BRAM
That's right. Is it open?

The young man takes his time to look Bram up and down.

YOUNG MAN
A cop?

BRAM
No. Just buying.

Stepping aside slowly,

YOUNG MAN
Fine. Take your time, sir. The
people inside will help you.

He reaches to open the door for Bram, who tentatively steps
in.

14 INT. JIM-JAM WHOOPLA

14

Stepping through the portal, Bram's nose can't help sneezing at the pungent odour of marijuana. Several people inside turn to see who sneezed. The store has clean floors with low counters on three sides that look like they were bought at the bankruptcy sale of a jeweler. The glass tops show ordered rows inside, of cheap plastic containers each with a name on the front, containing sealed plastic bags of products. The products look like small dried clumps of weed, which is what they are.

Two young people are serving a few customers at the counters, using weigh scales, while others are toward the back looking over shelves of glass and plastic apparatuses.

An older fellow, VELOCITY, in a hawaiian-print shirt approaches Bram.

VELOCITY
You're new here. I'm Velocity. Can
I help you?

Bram holds back his amusement. He nods at Velocity.

BRAM
Pleased to meet you, Velocity. I'm
Jim. I was just look...
Well, actually, I was wanting
information.
(they both end up nodding
at each other with a
knowing smile)
Ah, I wanted to speak to someone
who knows about aluxes?

Velocity keeps his smile. He takes in Bram's clothes, noticing the cellphone in his shirt pocket.

VELOCITY
Jim, is that phone recording at
this time?

BRAM
Huh? Oh, no. No, of course not!

He takes it out and taps it on. The password screen stays on
for a few seconds then blanks.

Bram slips the phone into his back pocket.

BRAM (CONT'D)
Back there, all it would pick up is
an occasional fart.
Ok?

Velocity nods.

BRAM (CONT'D)
Sorry. Like I said, I'm just
looking for information. Not a cop.
Just curious.

With an inhalation,

VELOCITY
How can I help you?

Bram scans the product counters.

BRAM
That's weed, right?

Velocity wants to launch into an extensive rebuttal, but says
only,

VELOCITY
Yes.

BRAM
What do you know about aluxes? I
know someone who had a good
experience and I wanted to, well,
find out more about it.

VELOCITY
I'm sorry, sir. Psilocybin is a
prohibited substance.

He stands directly in front of Bram, daring him to dig
deeper.

One of the customers, VERONICA, who'd been sampling in the back, lightly bumps Bram's arm as she makes her way to the door.

VERONICA

Pardon me.
 (politely, as she squeezes
 by)
 Thanks, Vel. I'll have to see if
 this works better than the other
 variety.

Turning toward Veronica, Velocity's attitude becomes fatherly, even though she is no more than a few years younger.

VELOCITY

Ok, Veronica. Remember to try it at
 different times of the day, first.
 See what the best effect is.
 Take care.
 (he turns back to Bram as
 she leaves)
 Different varieties have to be
 tried with MS. Some work better on
 a person than others...

Velocity tails off. Bram tries to pick out any symptoms of multiple sclerosis from Veronica as she walks to the door. He doesn't notice anything.

VELOCITY (CONT'D)

Last month she was confined to a
 wheelchair.
 (he adds for the record)
 But, of course, I'm not offering
 any medical advice.

Bram nods.

BRAM

Of course not.
 Listen, Vel. I know you have to be
 cautious in the extreme, but all
 I'm after is information. What can
 I do to convince you that I just
 want to speak honestly, with no
 ulterior motives?

Velocity silently crosses his arms.

Bram deflates. He has always been good at understanding body language. His Not-Nice Cherub shakes his head sadly.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Ok. Thanks anyway.
Maybe we can talk another time.

VELOCITY

Glad to help, Jim. As you can see,
we have a poor little place with a
few customers, so anytime you want,
I should be free to speak with you.

Bram reaches out his hand. Velocity takes a second to
respond, giving him a limp three-finger handshake.

15 **EXT. POWELL ST.**

15

Bram steps out to Powell St. He heads west back toward his
office. Seeing Veronica ahead of him, he increases his
stride. He notices a local denizen approach Veronica more
abruptly than should be normal. The man speaks to her. A few
more quick steps places Bram closer to Veronica.

Carrying a large, street-worn gymbag, the denizen has an
elevated level of purpose, compared to the others on the
street.

Bram has a vision of a bull shark sharply circling around a
coral reef with the Neil Young song, "Cough Up The Bucks" in
the background.

BRAM

(mumbling to himself)
Street dealer.

Veronica is shaking her head at the dealer.

VERONICA

No! Not interested! This is
medicinal. I can't live without it.
Bugger off!

Bram moves up beside her.

BRAM

Veronica, can I help you?

As soon as the denizen sees Bram he takes off.

Veronica looks weak, so Bram holds out an arm.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Here, let me help you. Would you
like a coffee? There's a coffee
shop about a block away.

She hesitates, then feels comfortable with someone who was speaking with Velocity.

VERONICA

Well... sure. I could use a rest. Before I take the number 4. Had to walk a long way to get here. Couldn't afford a bus pass this month. Gonna have to risk the Transit cops on the way back, though.

(she leans more heavily on his arm than he expected)
I, ah, I'll sit with you. Don't have enough for a coffee. It takes everything I have to pay for my medication.

(changing her tone to rough)

After rent and the food I don't get at the Mission.

(she looks up at Bram and adds aggressively)

And the government don't cover weed for me, even if it's the only thing that works!

She wants to walk away from Bram but is too weak. He feels her arm start to shiver. She is upset at her MS showing up.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Ah shit! Had to leave it too late for this batch.

Bram puts his other hand over hers on his arm.

BRAM

Come on. We'll both have a snack. Then I'll find a rental car and drive you... where are you going?

She doesn't answer.

Continuing along the street, they stop to cross at an intersection.

BRAM (CONT'D)

I'm a lawyer. Not allowed to be unkind to damsels in distress.

She grins at him. He notices her poorly surviving teeth. The word "lawyer" registers with her and she is about to pull away. Bram holds her arm gently but firmly. She accepts him. Resigned,

VERONICA

Thanks. I mean it. Don't have much reason to thank any lawyers. Can't say as I've actually talked to one, like, just shooting the breeze. Last one talked to me, threw me out of his building - my apartment. Then I had to rent a room along with a few others in this old house over on the far end of Eton - near Hastings Park?

Bram nods noncommittally.

They arrive at the coffee shop.

16

INT. COFFEE SHOP

16

Bram brings two coffees on a tray with two muffins, placing the tray on the table in front of Veronica.

BRAM

Use the creamers and sugar as much as you need, Veronica. I take mine black.

(he looks at her with exaggerated sternness)

Now, since I bought these two muffins, and I only need one, I must insist that you have the other one. Do you like lemon-poppysseed or cranberry-oatmeal?

He sits down and waits for her to make a forced choice.

Veronica takes a polite second then chooses the cranberry-oatmeal.

VERONICA

Thanks. The poppyseeds stick in my teeth.

She thankfully munches into the muffin. After a couple bites, Veronica reaches for the coffee, pouring in sugar and a creamer and giving it a quick stir.

Not touching the other muffin, Bram sips his coffee.

BRAM

Veronica, I want you to finish both muffins, if you can.

(he holds up a hand at her protest)

(MORE)

BRAM (CONT'D)

I can write it off as client costs.
Listen. All I'd like is to ask a
few questions and you can answer as
you wish. No obligations.
Ok?

Veronica hesitates for half a bite.

VERONICA

What do you want?

She digs back into the muffin. Bram gives an involuntary look
around.

BRAM

You may not have heard anything
anyway.

(he leans forward, with a
quiet voice)

What do you know about... magic
mushrooms?

Veronica stops in mid-bite. She hesitates. Her hand drops the
remainder of the muffin onto the plate. She stares at him
eye-to-eye.

VERONICA

What do you want with shrooms?

BRAM

Just interested. A friend said he
kind of liked it and I'm... just
interested.

He turns his head away from her, focusing on the tablet that
a young, androgenous person is using at a window seat.

Veronica takes a sip.

VERONICA

That's how it starts. "Just
interested".

You don't want to go there, mister.

Shit! You're a lawyer! What the
hell do you want to get involved in
that for?

She picks up her muffin, finishing it off.

Bram imagines Nice Cherub floating over her, wagging his
finger aggressively.

17

INT. CAR INTERIOR, 15 MINUTES LATER

17

Bram is driving Veronica in a short-term rental. Settling onto East Hastings, they both start to talk at the same time. Veronica keeps talking.

VERONICA

I usually take the number 4 bus
cause it goes right by my place.
You're going to have to turn down
one of the streets toward Eton
before I recognize anything.

She glances at Bram.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Ah, thanks for this. Hey! I don't
even know your name.

With a quick smile,

BRAM

I think Vel knows me as Jim.

VERONICA

Huh?
Oh. Whatever. Jim, or whoever you
are, thanks for this ride. And the
muffins. It means a lot to me.
Really.
(wryly)
But then how would a fancy lawyer
know how it is to worry sick about
whether to spend your last few
bucks this month on food or
medicine.

She compulsively checks in her purse to see if the bag of weed is still there. To herself, but loud enough for Bram to hear,

VERONICA (CONT'D)

And here's you, ready to blow
twenty dollars on some goddamn
hippy mushrooms.

BRAM

Twenty?

VERONICA

Probably a hundred by now. I don't
know, do I? I couldn't scrounge up
enough to smell the bag, could I?

He turns north, driving past a mix of light industrial buildings and empty lots. Bram turns east on Eton.

BRAM

So, you don't know anybody who'd have some?

VERONICA

Maybe.

They approach the end of the street. She points to the oldest house on Eton.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Here! That's my place.

As Bram parks, Veronica searches for the door handle.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Take my advice, Jim-the-fancy-lawyer. Shrooms ain't for you. Won't do you no good.

She finds the handle and starts to open the door.

BRAM

I appreciate the advice, Veronica, really. But my curiosity is aroused.

(he locks onto her eyes as she is about to step out)

Indulge me. Do you know somebody who can get shrooms?

She swings her legs out the door, looking over her shoulder.

VERONICA

Not promising anything. I can ask. Drop by in a couple days.

(she climbs out then leans back in, smiling)

Bring some muffins.

18

EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY, 2 MONTHS LATER, NOON

18

The highway winds through deep rock canyons. Pines grab their precarious hold into narrow cliffs overlooking the two-lane road. The route opens up as the road crosses a river and enters a wider valley. After the bridge, the naked rocks and boulders of the fast flowing river are replaced by smaller rocks and sandy shores, with a slower river that seems to have been half-dammed by a rockfall under the bridge area, eons ago.

The flood plain next to the river is overflowing with tall grasses and reeds. Bram's new beige SUV lopes steadily down the highway. Natalie is seated beside him. In the back seat, his Nice Cherub is asleep while Not-Nice Cherub stares expectantly out the window.

19 INT. BRAM'S CAR

19

Natalie, in the passenger seat, is flipping between an unwieldy magazine with maps in it and her cellphone's tiny map while she awkwardly and nervously sips from her coffee cup.

Bram has a contented smile, taking in the wider river and thick trees away from the low flood-plain area. Natalie drops the map and phone into her lap, frustrated.

NATALIE

Damn cellphone reception just stopped. You say this sideroad is coming up but I can't even find it on the map. I told you to get me an aeronautical map. These cheap tourist things don't show anything important except for motels and coffee shops.

He takes a few seconds to answer, then nods ahead.

BRAM

That opening about a kilometre ahead...

Natalie squints down the road without luck.

NATALIE

What opening? You're just making it up...

They get closer to where Bram had estimated, so he slows down.

A slight change in the precipitous slope to the left of the road does have a few old tire tracks going over the edge. Bram creeps forward then stops right on the slope.

Natalie nearly jumps through her seatbelt, trying to stop Bram from driving any further.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

What are you doing! Bram!

He slowly nudges the SUV forward, engaging 4-wheel drive. The path becomes a little more obvious, but they are still heading down and pushing through high grass growth. As they level out they leave the highway behind, invisible from where they are. Bram applies all his concentration to stay on the little used path. Natalie's eyes are wide and not at all comfortable with this excursion into the dangers of the wild country.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Bram?

BRAM

Yes dear?

NATALIE

Did you bring a very big rifle?

With some effort, he holds back a guffaw. The trees and bushes are close to both sides of the car. He makes continual moves around branches, a few downed poplars and new-growth bushes.

BRAM

They haven't had elephants around here for the past twelve thousand years, dear.

He sees a flash of hide-clothed hunters throwing spears down from a cliff onto a mastodon.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Going to have to run up and down this lane, later, to flatten it out.

NATALIE

Bram?

BRAM

Yes dear?

NATALIE

When you stop I am going to scratch your eyes out.

BRAM

Yes dear...
I believe we should see... Yes!
There it is. This open area coming up is near the outskirts of the property.

She scans around nervously.

NATALIE

Open area? You mean the missing two trees constitutes a clearing?
Is the rifle in the back? I may use it on you before we go any further.

She squints vainly into the shadowy, verdant, late spring forest as far as she can see. They climb up a low esker that forms a distinct line through the valley, separating the river and highway from the stream. On top of the esker, Bram stops to peer through the trees to see the valley on the other side. There are too many trees in the way so he carries on down the slope.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Ok. The esker I can figure out.
Probably running 20 degrees north.
More importantly, are the bears hibernating at this time of year?

Steering the SUV around the perimeter of another clearing in the path, Bram keeps a sharp eye out for movement.

BRAM

I'm going to...

THUMP! They hit a dirt mound then listen as it scrapes ominously under them.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Sorry about that. I was saying that I want to tramp down some of the undergrowth in this area before we drive into the meadow.
(looks over at her)
To find it easier.

He indicates another clearing coming up through the bushes. Turning through an opening, it gets brighter as they move away from the shadows of the tall trees.

Natalie relaxes perceptively with the sun coming into the car. She catches a glimpse of a building on the far side of the meadow.

NATALIE

Oh! Look! There's a cabin or something over there.

Bram nods and heads toward it, picking up the trail.

20 **EXT. OHMIS'HUM VALLEY, AFTERNOON**

20

A wide but shallow, quick-flowing stream splashes over rocks from the nearby high slopes, coming onto a wooded valley that is just under a kilometre across, bounded by the esker on the east side and the mountain range on the west. Beavers have created their own habitat by damming the stream three-quarters of the way down the valley to form a small lake. Beyond that the stream is free and it has punched through a shallow part of the esker to join the larger river. A building sits about a hundred metres in from the beaver lake, almost next to the beaver dam, on the edge of a hectare of cleared area.

21 **EXT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM, LATE AFTERNOON**

21

Natalie waits warily in the SUV while Bram sorts through the back of the vehicle. She slaps a mosquito on her neck.

NATALIE

Did you put it right on the bottom?

Waving at his own cloud of mosquitoes as he moves bags around, Bram digs out the rifle case from between boxes. He pops his head up and with some urgency,

BRAM

Found it. And you may not care at this point, dear, but I'm being eaten alive by three point seven million mosquitoes, and counting. If you don't mind, slather some repellent on yourself and bring it out here, please.

Natalie remembers the repellent. She finds it in the centre console and delicately puts a small dab on the back of her neck.

The horde finds its way to the front of the SUV and it now attacks the pale-skinned container of blood with a vengeance. Natalie starts waving desperately at the attackers and remembers the repellent once again. This time she lathers it on thickly to more and more of her skin.

A plaintive request from the back refocuses her attention.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Dear?

Jumping out with the precious defensive elixir, she hurries around the SUV. Bram grabs it from her hand and wipes down with some desperation.

BRAM (CONT'D)

I hope this stuff works.
We must be the only mammals in the
region.

Still waving at the buzzing horde, they run the rifle case
and a couple random boxes up the wooden stairs to their new
dwelling.

With the mossies being held temporarily at bay, Bram takes a
second to look around from the porch.

BRAM (CONT'D)

The woodwork on the main cabin is
in good repair. Windows are
intact...

NATALIE

And hopefully mosquito proof...

BRAM

Lets see if the lock is...
(he leans the rifle case
next to the door and
pulls out his keys)
Yes, the lock works. But we have to
do this in military precision.

NATALIE

What?

BRAM

In double-quick time, brush off the
mosquitoes, push the door open,
rush in with our boxes and slam the
door closed. All with allowing an
absolute minimum of the vicious
blood-suckers in.

She nods. They gather themselves for the action.

BRAM (CONT'D)

First, shake off any mosquitoes
that are on our clothes...
(he pulls expertly at the
cloth on his shoulders
several times and lets it
snap back down)
Right. Now!

They rush through as narrow an opening as possible and he
kicks the door shut behind her moving heel.

The oppressive drone of the mosquito swarm is left outside. A few high-pitched buzzings can be heard in the large front room where they are.

BRAM

Sorry I couldn't carry you over the threshold, dear. This time of day is when the little buggers are at their worst.

Putting down their boxes and the rifle case, the two start occasionally slapping at the mosquitoes that got in. The slapping quickly becomes an obsession for both of them, the search-and-destroy mission carrying them throughout the building. Bram, and then Natalie, use dish cloths from one of the boxes to reach the mosquitoes hiding on the ceiling.

Distracted by the washroom facilities, Natalie is finally satisfied enough with the lack of pests to use the cloth to do some dusting.

NATALIE

Bram?

From a couple rooms away,

BRAM

Yes dear?

He can be heard whipping his cloth expertly.

Natalie has her hand on the tap at the washroom sink.

NATALIE

Does the water work? Can I use the sink?

Bram shows up at the door, weapon at the ready. He flicks it at a suspicious spot on the top of the door.

BRAM

When the agent flew me in last week, he said he'd leave everything on for us. Should work.

NATALIE

Yeah. How did a guy who couldn't care less about flying in a float plane get to drop in on the lake, here, while his mad-about-flying pilot wife has to mark papers?

She turns the cold water tap. A spurt of air startles Natalie, then the water flows normally.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Did you say we have an unlimited supply?

Bram reaches over to the hot water tap to turn it. The same spurt and startle occur.

He holds a finger in the flow to check its temperature.

BRAM

Yes, they ran a supply pipe underground from a spot higher up in the middle of the stream. Seems to have been engineered really well. The papers and specs are in a drawer in the kitchen. There's a water quality report showing...

She interrupts,

NATALIE

Too much detail, Bram. You say it works - that's all I want to know.

A rapid scrambling on the roof stops their conversation. Bram lifts a finger as he listens.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Wolf?

BRAM

Squirrel, I'd say.
(the noise moves over their heads)
There!

Pointing at the window, they see a squirrel flying from the roof to a tall red cedar next to the cabin. It disappears up the tree.

NATALIE

Say hello to Rocky...

BRAM

The Flying Squirrel. If he was any bigger maybe he could distract the mosquitoes while we bring in the rest of the boxes and stuff.
(he thinks briefly)
Tell you what. These mosquitoes are at their worst now.

(MORE)

BRAM (CONT'D)

If we take our time to clean up in the cabin, it'll be safer to bring in the rest of the load in the evening.

Her turn to cogitate.

NATALIE

Ok, but we need that one box of kitchen things. Remember? I packed it with tea, cookies, teapot, cups and cutlery.
Be a dear and find just that one box and we'll be ok for a while.

Natalie's wifely smile is greeted with Bram's deflated resignation.

23

EXT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM, LATE AFTERNOON

23

Once again lathered with mosquito repellent, Bram is transferring boxes and bags from his SUV to the porch of his newly acquired cabin.

At the door, he yells inside.

BRAM

Natalie!

NATALIE

(muffled from inside)
Are you ready to come in?

BRAM

Not yet. I decided to stage everything next to the door and bring it all in later when the buzzing horde goes off to sleep. In the meantime I can reconnoiter.

He waves at a few insistent mosquitoes that test his defenses.

BRAM (CONT'D)

I'll hand you the kitchen box and stay out here for a bit.

NATALIE

Now?

He opens the door quickly, nearly smashing into Natalie on the other side.

BRAM
 Oh! Sorry, Nat.
 Here.

She takes the box and kicks the door closed in his face.

24 INT. VERONICA'S CABIN, WEEKS LATER

24

Veronica's small cabin has a wardrobe on the wall across from the only window. One of its doors is open, showing a few brightly coloured dresses in bold native prints. Veronica's bed is in front of the wardrobe, with a small table and chair on the wall under the window. A dark wooden Haida mask frilled with feathers is the only decoration in the room.

Veronica is sitting on the bed actively speaking with Natalie, who sits down beside her.

VERONICA
 And this, what's his name, Shable?

NATALIE
 Schaeuble.

VERONICA
 Him - he really was a creepy guy to start with, Natalie. I hope he didn't blame me for his bad trip. I tried and tried to coax him into a better mood. He should have known better than to come here with such a bad attitude, to get so drunk, too...

NATALIE
 Well, there was nothing much more you could do to help him, dear. He wouldn't listen to a word of advice from either of us. More interested in wandering around looking for different mushrooms. We probably should have insisted on waiting till Bram comes, tomorrow. It seems that some of these people just need the strength that a guy can give them during a mindtrip.

VERONICA
 The new guest cabin being a longhouse was a good touch. Most of them really go along with my native clothes and that cleansing ceremony that Bram came up with.

Natalie gets up, placing her hand on Veronica's shoulder.

NATALIE

The ceremony is something Bram made up from what they do in Peru. I'll talk to Bram about Schaeuble. We'll probably give him his money back just to shut him up.

25 **EXT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM, LATE NEXT NIGHT**

25

The main cabin is dark. A figure comes up stealthily from the lake. He stays to one side of the path, moving forward in stages. The dark figure is a man with a baseball cap worn backwards and carrying a canister with a nozzle. The moon is bright enough to produce reflections off his glasses.

He steps quietly to the back of the cabin, next to the bathroom window. Leaning on the tree nearby, he pulls a lighter from his pants pocket, getting it ready in his left hand. With his right hand he tilts the canister slowly to pour liquid at the base of the window.

As he is about to light the liquid, Rocky the squirrel makes a flying leap from the tree to the roof and loudly clambers up.

From the window a light comes on brightly, shining right in the eyes of the intruder. He is startled and steps backward, bumping into the tree, which knocks the lighter out of his hand.

The intruder bails, running for the lake with the canister sloshing at his side. After a couple minutes, frantic splashing can be heard as the intruder paddles away.

26 **INT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM CABIN**

26

Bram is padding to the bathroom. Inside, he is about to pull his shorts down to sit on the can, but stops to sniff the air. He steps to the window, pulling up his shorts, sniffing.

Alarmed, Bram heads for the front door, grabbing a coat and flashlight.

27 **EXT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM CABIN**

27

Stopping on the patio, Bram listens and hears the frantic paddling, fading away to the north.

He shines the light along the path. Nothing unusual.
 Bram walks cautiously around the cabin to the back window.
 As he approaches he sniffs the air.

BRAM
 Gasoline.

28 INT. BRAM'S LEGAL OFFICE, NEXT MORNING

28

Vince is at the front desk, speaking on the phone. A client comes in.

VINCE
 Ah sir, can I put you on hold for a
 minute? Someone's just come in...

With his wireless headset on, Vince is able to stand up to greet the client. As he gets up he scans the appointment schedule on his monitor.

VINCE (CONT'D)
 Good morning. May I help you?

The client, CLAYBORNE, a forty-something woman dressed in an unusually bright pink dress and very high heels, has a southern USA accent.

CLAYBORNE
 Miss Plessey should be expecting
 me, young man. Clayborne.

VINCE
 (nodding)
 Yes she is. Can I ask you to take a
 seat, please? Miss Plessey has just
 stepped out for a minute.

He notices Plessey rounding the corner from the washroom beyond the elevators.

VINCE (CONT'D)
 Oh. Here she is now.

He nods at Plessey, indicating the client.

Plessey enters the office and greets Clayborne as Vince returns to the phone call. The two women walk into the back offices.

VINCE (CONT'D)

Sir? Sorry about that, Mr. Karol...
 (he is alarmed by what is
 said on the phone)
 Gasoline?... Thank god for that!
 You didn't get a glimpse...
 Ok, wait a minute while I...
 (he grabs a pen and starts
 writing)
 Fred?... Ok... If he's away?...
 Oh... Right. Right away... A
 dog?... Ok... Sure, I can...
 Right. Got it...
 (worried)
 Take care, sir.

29 **EXT. OHMIS'HUM VALLEY, A WEEK LATER, NOON**

29

The same lunch companion with whom Fred had been speaking in the restaurant, called SAMMI, has a camera with a long zoom lens trained on the cabin. His neck tattoo is more visible above a tight camo shirt. His free hand waves occasionally at mosquitos, around his camo toque. He is about 300 metres from the cabin, on a rise across the stream, hidden behind a young alder, staring at the cabin. A gravel-and-dirt road is below him. He sees no movement from inside the cabin.

Sammi mumbles as his arm holding the camera gets tired.

SAMMI

Bloody bugs! Gonna eat me alive.
 (he makes a decision)
 'Nough of this shit! Schaeuble can
 take his own turn with the bugs.

Sammi roughly tosses the camera into a gymbag and backs away from his hiding spot.

He leaves in his new quad, taking the narrow dirt road that is on the opposite side of the stream to Bram's cabin.

30 **EXT. FOREST ROAD, MINUTES LATER**

30

The quad sprays gravel coming out of the forest trail and nearly slams into a khaki-coloured SUV that is parked across the trail where it joins the narrow road.

Sammi angrily rises up from his seat to look into the open side window of the SUV. The double barrels of a shotgun are shoved at his face. Sammi's mouth opens wide in fear. He puts his hands up but as he does so the quad starts rolling forward and bumps into the SUV.

SAMMI

Oh shit. No! I didn't do that!

The barrel of the shotgun points up slightly then

:BANG!

Sammi drops against his handle bars and takes off down the road at full throttle, bent down, without a look back.

As he drives a hundred metres away he hears another

:BANG!

and at the same time, plinks sound at the back of his quad. Sammi weaves as much as he can in and out of the ruts, still at full throttle.

Slowing down slightly a kilometre down the road he angrily mumbles,

SAMMI (CONT'D)

That's it! You're bloody-well going down Mr. Lawyer! Don't care how many friggen thugs you got working for you! I got the mob on my side!

INT. MORLEY, CORP. GIROULL'S OFFICE, SAME DAY

Corp. Giroull is lounging in his police office chair, speaking on the phone.

SERGE

Me, I don't care what happens to to the lawyer and his wife... Dougie, I understand... Yeah, your money would help but my mother's cancer is at stage three and the damn doctor isn't doing anything but chemo and radiation... Thank you...

(getting aggitated)

The only thing... so the internet stuff is wrong?... This PSK works, damnit! Everybody says so! And that goddamn resort has a big X marked on it! The only place they say it can be found...

(settling back)

Right. Thank you. We work together.

31

INT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM, NOON

31

Natalie is in the kitchen dancing to Creedence Clearwater Revival, lip-syncing perfectly, with the music turned up quite loud.

She is happily making sandwiches and tea for lunch.

The present song is *Up Around The Bend*.

Bram comes into the kitchen jiving along with Natalie.

As the song winds down he turns the volume on the player to low.

NATALIE

Hey! What are you doing!

She flings a thin slice of banana at him. He catches it and pops it into his mouth. Wiping his hand on his pants, he stands to ogle Natalie, who, due to the heat, is wearing very light clothes.

BRAM

Mmm. I love the entertainment! And banana-and-peanut-butter sandwiches. Very retro. Are we having milk, too?

She slinks over to plant a sensuous kiss on him.

NATALIE

Not unless you bought a cow, Mr. Back-to-nature.

Turning the sound up, she embraces him and they grind to the music.

BRAM

There. Way out in the wild woods we don't have to worry about what the neighbours might say about the music. In fact, it probably keeps the furry grumps away.

He sees a picture of black bears dancing and eating sandwiches in the meadow, with his two Cherubs playing air-guitar.

They kiss again. What he said just registers.

She tries to pull away to ask a question, but he playfully holds on.

NATALIE
What furry grumps?

Thinking fast,

BRAM
Well, that mining exec who's coming
up in a week-and-a-half. Former
prospector. Probably still has a
full beard and chest hair poking up
past his turtleneck.

Natalie love-slaps him in the chest.

NATALIE
Ohhh! You told me he was a
starched-up old fuddy-dud.

BRAM
Must have been thinking of his
Controller. That's next month.

They do a slow twirl to Neil Young's *Heart of Gold* playing in
the background.

Their new dog barks from outside, at the foot of the front
porch.

Bram stops to listen as Natalie dances over to the kitchen
island to finish the sandwiches.

BRAM (CONT'D)
Is Misha chasing Rocky again?
I think I better take her out for a
run in the back forty-two again.
After lunch.

He takes the boiling kettle to the kitchen island and fills
up their glass tea infuser.

BRAM (CONT'D)
What tea did you use this time,
dear?

Natalie is carrying the plates of sandwiches to the wooden
table overlooking their front porch.

NATALIE
Earl Green. I added some cinnamon
so let it sit for a few minutes,
Bram. Your maple syrup is in the
cup.

Misha barks a couple more times. Sitting down at the window, Bram can see the strong mixed-breed dog listening intently at something beyond the stream.

BRAM

Better not be that sonofabitch fire bug. If Misha doesn't take some chunks out of him, my new shotgun will.

Munching her sandwich, she says matter-of-factly,

NATALIE

I'm glad you showed me how to shoot that thing, but I do hope I never have to use it.

Remembering something,

BRAM

Oh! I was talking to someone who says he's a volunteer with the RCMP. I remember there was this auxiliary constable program... Anyway, he said he does patrols around here so we might see him. Don't take any potshots at a khaki-coloured SUV that has a guy in it called Murph.

She is all attention.

NATALIE

He may not have the opportunity to give me his name, Bram, before I find the trigger on the shotgun.

Bram holds up his hands in mock surrender.

BRAM

Ok, Calamity Jane, hold on. Murph's a nice guy. You don't want to go pointing that thing at him. He might get scared.

He slips close enough to embrace her again.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Murph's about Veronica's age, almost my height, bald shaven, and...

NATALIE

That matches most of the people
I've seen around here...

BRAM

And he has a pronounced lisp.

NATALIE

Ok, so I put the barrel up to his
nose and he's going to say, what?
Don't thoot?

She falls away from Bram into hilarious laughter. He grins
but shakes his head slowly at her.

BRAM

You were supposed to MAKE the
cookies, not eat them.

The dog, Misha, looks in at them with her paws scratching the
window pane. She cocks her head a couple times at her new
masters, gives some low whines, then turns to face the noises
she heard from across the stream.

Misha settles into a sitting position to resume her guard
duties. She picks her head up at noises from the smaller
cabin next to the main one. We see Misha's tail wagging, as
she greets another dog, a larger Rottweiler, who approaches
and dances around Misha. They both hear a command from the
smaller cabin.

NATALIE

Veronica'll be over in a minute.
(she gets up mid-sandwich)
I'll get her lunch ready.

Putting another sandwich on a plate, Natalie adds two
cookies. With a smile to Bram, pronouncing the word cookies
with extra care,

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Bram, do you want one of her
cookies?

Quickly,

BRAM

Ah no thanks. Need to keep a clear
head this afternoon.

(hearing Veronica on the
porch, he lowers his
voice)

The Natural Resources guy is coming
over, remember?

She shrugs.

NATALIE

So? He doesn't like mellowed
cookies?

Sitting at the kitchen table, Bram gives her a patient look.

BRAM

We have to step carefully, dear. I
like what's happening here. Let's
not let anybody rock our boat. Here
we are - you, writing your book on
a sabbatical. Me, helping the local
carpenter trim logs and fit all the
heavy damn things into place for
the Longhouse...

NATALIE

Yeah.
(she drapes over his
shoulders)
Couldn't do this in the big city.

BRAM

And I can wind down my more urgent
cases for a while.

He turns his head to give her a kiss. She goes back to
preparing Veronica's lunch. He stretches out comfortably. He
sees his Nice Cherub lounging on the couch in front of the
fireplace, while the Not-Nice Cherub pokes his grinning evil
head through the blackened grill, rubbing his hands.

At the opening door, Veronica is dressed in a bright First
Nations outfit. Holding a shillelagh in one hand, though not
leaning on it, she lets herself in.

VERONICA

Hi folks!
(with a broad grin)
Another lovely day in paradise!
Oh! Neil Young! I love that guy!

Waving her shillelagh, she pirouettes, just a bit awkwardly,
to her chair at the table. Sitting down, she places the
shillelagh against the wall.

The Needle and the Damage Done freezes her in the chair. As
the riff starts she sways slowly to the beat. Natalie and
Bram pour tea and finish their sandwiches.

Waiting for the song to finish, Bram asks gently,

BRAM

How are you feeling these days,
Veronica? The medication seems to
have improved your dance step.

VERONICA

Couldn't be better, Bram. And
Natalie. Thank you so much.

Smiling at them, she bites into a cookie.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

For a city girl, Natalie, you make
a fine batch of cookies.
(she looks at her)
I hope the medicine doesn't cost...

NATALIE

My dear, I don't want you to think
about that again. Part of your
salary.
(smiling at her gently)
We need a good person to take care
of this place when we're in town.

Nodding,

VERONICA

So happy that you asked me to help,
dear. All I need is Sheila,
(she pats the shillelagh)
Rotty and Misha - and the shotgun -
and I'm in the best shape I could
ever hope to be. Ranch Ohmis'hum is
such a beautiful place to... be.

Eyes down, she takes a few more slow bites of her sandwich
and a cookie as Natalie cleans up the other dishes.

Bram is lost in staring at the view outside.

NATALIE

We still have that guy coming next
week?

Bram reaches to his hip automatically for his absent
smartphone. Grinning wryly, he tries to remember details.

BRAM

Tuesday, I think. Yes, it's the day
after their corporate meeting.
Said he and a friend are coming up
on their bikes.

(MORE)

BRAM (CONT'D)

That would be Harleys, so we should hear them as they get off the highway.

Natalie is about to turn on the water in the sink.

NATALIE

Them? No more than two, I hope.

BRAM

Yeah, just two. He was cagey about the other one. I made it clear that our Rules of Conduct are absolute and nonnegotiable.

Veronica is a slow eater. She takes a few more bites. She sways her head then her body to Neil Young's *Driftin' Back*.

VERONICA

The last couple times worked fairly well. Do you want me to make the tea for them in the same way? I think this outfit kind of fits the scene.

Bram is lost in thought, but snaps out of it.

BRAM

Yes, that worked well, Veronica. I think they feel more comfortable putting their, ah, mindtrip in your hands. Probably wouldn't trust a lawyer.

(he focuses on Veronica)

Did you read through that material I gave you before? On what they do with the ayahuasca ceremonies in the Amazon?

She nods slowly.

VERONICA

Yeah, but... We're not doing THAT are we?

BRAM

No, like I said, it was just to give you the flavour of what they do. Our clients are only here for a weekend, not nine months.

He smiles but Veronica has something on her mind.

VERONICA

Ah...
 (she resolves to say
 something painful)
 Ok. I gotta say this and I don't
 want you to take it wrong, ok?

Bram and Natalie turn toward her.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Listen. You know I'm an Indian.
 (she puts up a hand to
 ward off comment)
 My mother was a Haida, from
 Skidegate... I don't know what I
 am. You know I got these outfits
 from a stall in D.T.E.S. before we
 left.
 (she hangs her head
 briefly)
 Ok. I got problems. And I want to
 stay here to help you. I really do.
 But I feel like, like we grabbed
 this grinning Jesus orca and it's
 pulling us all along and I just
 know it's gonna DIVE any time now.
 (she puts her head into
 shaking hands, crying)
 And I can't swim any more!

Natalie immediately moves to her side, consoling,

NATALIE

Oh my dear, there there. You know
 we're here for you.

Veronica leans her head against Natalie's hip.

Still crying,

VERONICA

I don't wanna go under again...

32

EXT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM, 1 HOUR LATER

32

DERK WAGNER, with the Ministry of Natural Resources, is driving toward the Ohmis'hum cabin in a flat green-painted 4x4 pickup truck. He stops near Bram's SUV, writes notes in a binder, puts it away, then exits. He shuts the door quietly, as he always does. Derk waves to Bram, who approaches from the cabin.

DERK
Hello again, Bram.

Stretching out a hand, Bram smiles his friendly client smile. His Nice Cherub waves with one hand, holding Not-Nice Cherub behind his back.

BRAM
Good to see you out here, Derk.
Wasn't sure if you'd find your way
from the highway.

They shake hands.

DERK
No problem. Been here many times
when old Oscar first built it.
Like I told you, he and his
daughter were quite a pair. Glad to
see someone here who knows what the
law means.

Derk flashes a brief grin and searches Bram's face for signs of malfeasance.

Satisfied, he casts his eye around the buildings.

Still probing,

DERK (CONT'D)
You been busy. Those cabins in the
back are new.

Bram knows the dance moves.

BRAM
Yes. As I said, we have a
caretaker, Veronica, who lives in
the smaller cabin, there.
(he points it out)
I'd like you to meet her shortly.
And we built the longhouse for my
business clients. As I explained,
some of my clients wanted a quiet
place to debrief after difficult
negotiations. It is intended to
give them a local atmosphere. They
will come out here knowing they can
let their hair down, fish, and no
nosy reporters are going to be
taking their pictures.

Nodding,

DERK
 Right. No fishing boat yet?
 (before Bram can make
 something up)
 And that Rules of Conduct you
 showed me...

BRAM
 Absolute law. As you read it, any
 and all our guests must absolutely
 follow it. When they come here they
 will respect the forest and its
 animals.

He leads Derk toward the porch of the main cabin.

Derk is still assessing what he sees around the clearing. He
 does a double-take when he looks toward the beaver lake. A
 float-plane - a Stinson - is tied up at the new dock,
 partially hidden by trees.

DERK
 A visitor?

Bram smiles.

BRAM
 That's Natalie's new toy. A Stinson
 with Stol mods...

DERK
 Short take-off and landing...

BRAM
 Right. Natalie's quite a pilot,
 actually. Always does well at
 aerobatic competitions.

Derk nods.

DERK
 Even with floats, that Stinson'll
 handle well. Have to remember that,
 if I ever need search-and-rescue
 help.

BRAM
 Natalie and Veronica are inside.
 Can I ask them to make us tea or
 coffee? You can tell her about any
 Sar requirements you may have.

Bram sees through the window that Natalie has finished
 cleaning up and airing out the kitchen.

They can hear Neil Young's *Get Back To The Country* playing inside. It puts a livelier step to Derk's feet as he takes the stairs.

To distract Derk as they reach the door, Bram asks,

BRAM (CONT'D)
Say, you must know Murph...

DERK
Hah! Yes I know Murph. Everybody
around here knows Murph. Why?
What's he done now?

33 **EXT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM, SEVERAL DAYS LATER, EARLY MORNING** 33

The sun has reddened a long row of clouds to the east of the cabins. Dark shadows are left over from the moist night.

A dog, Rotty, gives a final whimper as he lies at the base of a tree behind the cabins. Foam and poisoned food are dripping out of his mouth.

Misha frantically runs up, licks his face, lets out a howl, then runs into the trees. She comes back to lick Rotty's face again, then runs to the main cabin, howling.

In a robe, Natalie runs out of the cabin holding the shotgun. Misha howls, leading Natalie to the dying Rotty. Veronica runs out of her cabin, half dressed, wielding Sheila. They both kneel, in shock, beside Rotty. Their pet shows no life.

Taking in the vomit, Natalie is mad as hell. Her trigger finger tightens on the shotgun. Veronica becomes inconsolable, sobbing with Rotty's limp head in her lap.

Natalie's face hardens. She runs back to the cabin and comes out right away with keys in her hand. She jumps into the SUV, placing the shotgun on the passenger seat. The SUV screams off toward the highway.

34 **INT. VERONICA'S CABIN, HALF HOUR LATER** 34

Veronica is sitting on the edge of her bed, tightly bent over her knees, sobbing.

Natalie, shotgun in hand, opens the door and walks in.

NATALIE
It was some fucken son-of-a-bitch
with a gas can.
(MORE)

NATALIE (CONT'D)
 He was going to kill us. I'll bet
 he was that night-crawler from
 months ago...

Veronica sharply sucks in her breath. She picks her head up,
 face contorted in grief and confusion.

VERONICA
 Gas can?

Natalie leans her shotgun against the wall. Her face is hard.

NATALIE
 Caught him driving his quad to the
 highway. Went over the near
 shoulder like a maniac. Was in the
 air as he hit the other side of the
 road. Went over the other side and
 smashed into the rocks at the
 bottom. Think he must have drowned
 in the river. Have to call the
 cops.

Veronica shakes her head once. She can't take it in.

VERONICA
 River?

Natalie stands up.

NATALIE
 Get yourself cleaned up, Veronica.
 I'm going to call the cops. After I
 get dressed.

She thinks for a second.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
 Leave the shotgun here, ok? It
 doesn't come into it.
 (pausing)
 Shit. Have to call Bram first.

RCMP corporal SERGE GIROULL is climbing slowly up the steep
 driveway to the highway. He stops to investigate tracks near
 the top. Placing one of the small yellow evidence cones next
 to the tracks, he speaks over his shoulder to MURPH - Murphy
 Connor. The ancillary constable is at the bottom of the slope
 taking pictures of evidence next to the cone markers that are
 along the driveway.

Serge has a Quebec accent.

SERGE

Hey Murph. Be sure to get these tracks in the right light. The quad track is definitely under the SUV.

Murph has a high-pitched voice with a slight lisp.

MURPH

Thure lookth like what, what Mrs. Karol told us.

A firm shake of his head from Serge as he slowly continues over the slope's edge. He says with conviction,

SERGE

This evidence is getting pretty conclusive, Murph. She shot at him and chased him to the road up here, where he plunged over the far side of the road and died in the river.

Murph freezes in confusion. He turns to look at the track to see if he missed something. Serge stops abruptly at a piece of black plastic. Without touching it, Serge looks at the gravel around it, then focuses on the plastic.

SERGE (CONT'D)

Ah-huh! Her SUV is beige, right?

Murph looks up to see what Serge has found.

MURPH

Yeah. Beige.

Nodding, Serge bends closer to the five or six centimetre piece of plastic.

SERGE

And the quad has black plastic bumpers.

(he places a cone next to the plastic piece)

Make sure you get this with the hole and beige mark in full light.

36

INT. LOCAL POLICE BUILDING, 3 DAYS LATER

36

The police station is in the small town of Morely, 10 miles from Ranch Ohmis'hum, and a full day's drive, in good weather, from anywhere else on the planet.

The old buildings reflect that it used to be a mining town, then forestry, and now it's barely holding on to its few long-time residents, serving as a way-station between distant places.

Through the windows, across the street, can be seen a small grocery store. The store is the only active business in town, serving fuel and food to passers-through, and basic supplies to residents. Beside it is the local administrative building, a two-storey clapboard structure. Behind both buildings is an open field with a marked-out helicopter landing area. A bedraggled windsock flies from the back roof of the store.

The older police building has a high counter separating the public from a part-time civilian receptionist and the police office. One door is half open. The name on the door says
"Cpl. S. Giroull"

Another door is marked as "Detention".

INT. GIROULL'S OFFICE

Turned away from the closed door, Cpl. Giroull is speaking in harsh whisper on the desk-phone.

SERGE

Yes, he's here now. Look outside your store. That's his SUV... Right... I heard from my sister last night. Mother is getting worse... Thank you, Dougie... That idiot, Sammi got himself killed... Don't really know but I will make sure the evidence points right at her... Karol's wife... Right. See you later, my friend.

INT. POLICE BUILDING FRONT ROOM

Bram is leaning heavily on the counter, arguing with Serge.

He angrily handles a file on the counter.

BRAM

Charging her under section 469, based on this evidence, is wildly excessive, Corporal! You have no evidence that that piece of plastic even came off the quad, and saying that the half-hole came from her shotgun is preposterous!

(MORE)

BRAM (CONT'D)

Did you imagine she drove the car
at high speed down that dangerous
back road, in the dark, bumping the
quad and firing from the window
like some cowboy movie?

He takes a short breath, calming himself down. Serge stands
noncommittally, looking down at the counter.

BRAM (CONT'D)

The justice laid out bail
conditions and that she be released
into my custody forthwith.

(he glares at Serge,
pushing his own papers
toward him)

Do I have to go back to the JJ to
say that you obstructed her
release?

Serge moves slowly to one of the file drawers. He pulls out
the only Current file. Taking out forms and Natalie's ID
cards, he places them on the counter.

SERGE

These are Mrs. Karol's papers. I
will leave her Private Pilots
Licence here for now.

(he turns to the Detention
door)

She will be out shortly.

37 **EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE POLICE STATION, FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER**

Bram is escorting Natalie to his business-owned SUV, a dark
blue luxury model.

He heads for the driver's side, clicking the door locks,
while they approach from the back of the SUV. Natalie is
fuming.

NATALIE

What's he want with my pilots
licence?

BRAM

(tentatively)
You're a FLIGHT risk?

She turns on him with a fist that she wants to fling at his
chest. He keeps going to his door.

NATALIE

Are you on his side!?
 (she turns away to grab
 the door handle angrily)
 And what's that about section 469?

BRAM

Manslaughter, in this case.

NATALIE

That sonofabitch is going to be my
 real victim! Damn cop's looking for
 something to pin on me. What the
 hell's the f...

...as she slams her door shut. Bram gets in, quietly
 absorbing Natalie's f-bomb-filled outburst. A particularly
 salty sentence causes him to look at her in surprise.

38

INT. COURTROOM, 6 WEEKS LATER

38

A preliminary hearing is underway at a circuit court being held in Morley. The building houses the area's administrative offices and the court is using a small meeting room, which is also the district council meeting room. It was built many years ago with funds donated by a local forestry company, so varnished softwood occupies the walls and furniture. The appearance is very much like an oversized rec-room.

The only person in the public seating is an older man who is the owner of the local gas station/convenience store - DOUGLAS Dougie WYNTHOUSE. When their eyes meet, Dougie nods very slightly to Serge, in the witness chair.

The visiting JUDGE, Anna Wysziski, is of the curious type who likes to understand things. She closely follows each question and the manner of the answers. Bram is representing Natalie. The crown prosecutor, SUMMER TILDE, has been accompanying the court for her first time. She is naively certain of anything the police bring to her.

Tilde is politely questioning Cpl. Serge Giroull.

TILDE

Corporal, you stated that the
 previous owner of the Ranch had
 been investigated numerous times as
 a result of the use of psilocybin,
 obtained from a prohibited
 psychedelic mushroom.

SERGE

Yes ma'am. While I've been assigned here, we received seven complaints from neighbours and I attended each time, speaking to Mr. Oscar Redtree or to his daughter, Constance Redtree. Their place is called Shroomtown by most people. Everybody knows that this a secret place where mushrooms grow.

Bram is about to object but lets it go.

TILDE

Ah, to your knowledge, did the ranch owner obtain the psilocybin from anywhere except the Ranch?

SERGE

No ma'am. They freely stated to me that they were harvesting the mushrooms from their property.

TILDE

At what time of year did the harvesting occur?

Bram jumps up quickly.

BRAM

I object to that question, my Lady, as it lacks relevance and may prove prejudicial outside of these proceedings.

The judge thinks for a few seconds then raises an eyebrow.

JUDGE

Yes, Mr. Karol, it may at that. Sustained.

Serge grins briefly toward Dougie. Tilde refers to her notes, crossing out that question then carries on.

TILDE

Corporal, I'd like to return briefly to the black plastic piece which you found at the top of the driveway leading to, ah, Shroomtown?

Bram stands briefly.

BRAM
Ranch Ohmis'hum, My Lady.

TILDE
Ranch Ohmis'hum.
You stated that forensic analysis
confirmed that the hole was made by
a shotgun pellet?

SERGE
Yes ma'am.

TILDE
Have you been able to determine if
the size of the hole matched the
pellets in the shotgun that was in
the possession of Mrs. Karol?

SERGE
Yes ma'am. It was determined that
the shotgun was loaded with #1
buckshot and that matched the hole
in the plastic piece.

Placing her notes on her desk, Tilde finishes.

TILDE
Thank you Corporal.
My Lady, that completes my
questions.

The judge turns to Bram.

JUDGE
Do you wish to cross?

Bram is up with notes in hand.

BRAM
Thank you My Lady.
Corporal, when you and your
auxiliary constable were collecting
evidence, did you state an opinion
to Mr. Murph Connor about what the
evidence shows?

Wiping the side of his nose,

SERGE
I may have. After we carefully
collected all the evidence and had
time to consider it.

BRAM

Did you state your opinion before or after finding the piece of black plastic?

SERGE

Definitely after. I believe it was while we were sitting in my office, later that day.

Bram makes a quick note.

BRAM

Have you ever seen the psychedelic mushrooms on Ranch Ohmis'hum, which you referred to as being harvested by Oscar Redtree?

SERGE

(uncomfortably)

Ah, well, I can't say. I may have. I don't... I'm not expert in its identification. But everybody knows...

BRAM

Thank you Corporal, but I'm asking what YOU know, not what everybody knows. I take it your answer is no?

Serge mumbles and nods as Bram checks his notes.

BRAM (CONT'D)

No? Thank you. Now, as you were collecting evidence along the driveway leading to the highway, did you find any shotgun shell casings?

SERGE

Ah, not at that time...

BRAM

At what time did you find shell casings?

SERGE

Well, we did not find any.

BRAM

Did not find any at all?

SERGE

No sir.

BRAM

Did you find any shotgun pellets, particularly leading up to the highway slope, or on it?

SERGE

Ah, no sir, but...

BRAM

You found no shotgun pellets anywhere along the driveway or on the highway shoulder?

SERGE

(resigned)

No sir.

BRAM

Now, Corporal, I will finish with my last question. Where is the body of the alleged driver of the quad that was found on the rocks on the far shoulder of the highway?

SERGE

(he turns to the judge)

With the location of the crashed quad, on the edge of the river - it's a very fast-flowing river, My Lady - the body must have been thrown out of the quad and into the river, then swept downstream.

BRAM

Speculation. So you have no body.

SERGE

We are still searching...

BRAM

Was there any evidence of blood or other disturbance of the rocks below the crashed quad?

SERGE

...No sir, we did not find any.

Bram pauses, spreads his arms out, and,

BRAM

So you found no evidence of a shooting and you found no body. What evidence led you to charge Mrs. Karol?

SERGE

My Lady, the strong evidence of the black plastic piece that I found on the shoulder had a hole in it made from a shotgun pellet and it also had a scrape of beige paint that is the same as the beige on the vehicle Mrs. Karol was driving. That, combined with her obvious anger at finding one of her pet dogs poisoned, we believe she was prompted to chase the owner of the quad, shooting at him, then causing him to crash into the rocks...

BRAM

(interrupting)

So, Corporal, aside from your wild speculations, your evidence for bringing this very serious charge against Mrs. Karol is solely a piece of plastic. It has a half-hole in it that you presume to have been made by a shotgun blast and a scratch of beige paint. Have you confirmed, forensically, that the plastic piece is indeed from the quad and not a passing semi-trailer?

SERGE

We believe that it may have come from the bumper that was severely damaged and burned...

BRAM

You have brought no conclusive evidence for that, Corporal. Have you found the pellet that you allege made the half-hole in the plastic?

SERGE

(dejected)

No sir.

BRAM

Have you matched the beige paint to Mrs. Karol's SUV, as opposed to a fence post that a passing semi-trailer's black bumper may have scraped in Kansas?

The judge smiles. Serge suppresses a snarl.

SERGE

No sir.

BRAM

(turning to the judge)
My Lady, I submit that Mrs. Karol has nothing to answer, here, and I move dismissal of all charges.

Tilde, dismayed, jumps up.

TILDE

My Lady...

The judge holds her hand up.

JUDGE

Defence has brought compelling points and I can see no evidence presented by Crown that would warrant this to continue. All charges against Mrs. Karol in this matter are ordered withdrawn.

39

INT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM CABIN, LATER THAT EVENING

39

Natalie is sitting at the dining room table, still fuming. Bram is making tea. He arranges cookies on a large plate while the water boils. Veronica is sitting in one of the comfortable wicker chairs near the window. She is bent over, sobbing quietly into a hanky.

Misha, outside on the porch, lets out a sad howl.

Shaking her head, Natalie stops staring out the window angrily and finally notices that Veronica needs support. She gets up to crouch sympathetically in front of Veronica.

NATALIE

Veronica, my dear. It's been almost two months. It's time to put it all behind us. We'll train that new guard dog and he'll keep Misha company.

Bram brings over the plate of cookies.

BRAM

The tea'll be ready in a minute.

NATALIE

Here,
 (taking the cookies and a
 couple serviettes from
 Bram)
 you haven't had your medicine in a
 while. It'll do you good.

After a pause, Veronica slowly wipes her face with one of the serviettes. Her hand shakes uncontrollably.

VERONICA

Thank you, Natalie. You are such a
 dear.
 (a quick smile)
 I don't know what I'd...
 (her eyes squint in pain)
 And all this is happening because
 of me! Ohhhh...

Bram is sympathetic but he resolves to break the cycle. Gently and clearly,

BRAM

Veronica, please stop it. You're
 making Misha howl.

Natalie glares at him with dagger eyes.

NATALIE

You insensitive...

Bram puts a severe finger up at her, with a sharp shake of his head.

Natalie holds it in with some effort.

Veronica looks up at Bram, her eyes red.

VERONICA

Sorry, Bram. You're right. Have to
 control it.
 Poor Misha. And here's me feeling
 sorry for myself.

Natalie cocks her head, surprised. Veronica holds her shaking hand with her other one.

NATALIE

My dear, eat some cookies. I'll put
 the tea together.

Natalie pulls back the bed covers as Bram joins her in bed.

NATALIE

What did the cop say to you?

BRAM

When?

Natalie turns to face him, forcefully speaking, not allowing any bullshit.

NATALIE

When we were leaving the courtroom.

He flashes a smile.

BRAM

Two words, and it tells me a whole chapter. He said, "You're carded."

Confused,

NATALIE

Huh?

BRAM

It tells me he's bought - or he's doing this on his own. Carding is what cops do in the States, and in a couple of the bigger cities up here. They hassle blacks - or hispanics, or native kids around here. They make up some excuse for detaining them, process them, which means taking fingerprints, DNA and searching everything they can on and around them. This way they get hundreds of young people into the database. Charges are either dropped, paid off, or sent to clog the courts. The point is, there's now a rap sheet on everybody in the poor neighbourhoods they want to "suppress". They use the rap sheet to further intimidate and lock them up later.

(he leans on an elbow,
daring her to get angry)

How do you think the prisons get to be bursting at the seams - with crime stats going down?

(MORE)

BRAM (CONT'D)

It's not as if there's an apartheid war going on in the States, or here, is there?

Natalie stares at him, about to explode in indignation. He briefly stifles the explosion with,

BRAM (CONT'D)

So, now, Serge wants to use that tactic here. Against us. That tells me he has a strong interest, probably a monetary interest, in bringing charges against you. Or me. Me is the target. The cop would have no reason to threaten me with carding unless he's being pressured by somebody. And the possibilities are limited.

Natalie can't contain herself any more.

NATALIE

That goddamn sonofabitch ... How can he get away with it?

He rolls back to stare at the ceiling,

BRAM

How can a whole police force on the island get away with carding its own new mayor?

NATALIE

... God, we're so screwed up, aren't we?

She lays quietly, eyes open.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

What are the possibilities?

BRAM

No evidence for any of these, but... to start with, the client Veronica called the creepy one. His name is something like Schaeuble?

NATALIE

Yeah - Schaeuble. But why would he...

BRAM

I didn't know this at the time, or I wouldn't have let him in. He's a small-time developer and slum landlord who seems to be the boss of a guy that Fred - you remember Fred...

NATALIE

Uh-huh. That little mouse you introduced me to in the restaurant? All he wanted was chicken soup.

BRAM

With matzha balls. Yeah, him. He's a good actuary. Anyway, Fred had a client who... well, never mind the long story. I made points with a guy on Powell who knows Veronica, so he filled me in on some background. Fred's client's boss is this creepy guy and some other character who is probably a supplier. Schaeuble owns a pharmacy business together with his slum buildings, and his boy Sammi seems to be working the drugs side. The usual M.O. is to supply their tenants...

Natalie is frustrated.

NATALIE

You really need to fill in a few more details, Bram. I can't follow what the hell...

Bram rolls toward her.

BRAM

Let me just give you the outline, ok? So Schaeuble and his gang is a possibility, and there's relatives of old man Redtree. They may want the mushrooms, themselves. And, of course, Serge could be acting on his own, also looking for a place to retire to, with a side income to supplement his pension.

She sighs, lowering her head into the pillow. She shakes her head.

NATALIE

God! And I thought aerobatics was tiring... What do you think?

BRAM

No idea. Though Murph seemed to be hinting at wanting to talk to me about it.

NATALIE

Hinting?

BRAM

Well, it was like a Monty Python sketch. Nod nod, wink wink. I thought he was making a pass. Didn't have time to talk with him right then...

She lets out a laugh.

NATALIE

Huh! I needed that vision before I go to sleep! Heh! You and Murph in the back of his...

Bram's two cherubs are rolling across the ceiling laughing their heads off.

BRAM

Natalie! I was being facetious! Anyway, I'll have to get back here soon after tomorrow. That fairly routine case I mentioned is in New West, and Vince and Suhdra should have my files ready.

NATALIE

So what can we do in the meantime, Bram?

Bram considers briefly.

BRAM

Keep the new guard dog on his leash for now till he gets used to us all. Veronica'll keep a close eye on Misha. And until I get cameras on our SUVs, we need to have our cellphones ready for immediate recording.

41 **EXT. HIGHWAY, 2 DAYS LATER**

41

Bram's dark SUV is picking up speed on the highway, leaving the ranch driveway behind. A police cruiser pulls out from the shoulder and slips up close behind him. Before he can get a kilometre down the road, the cruiser's lights start flashing. Bram pulls over with the cruiser right behind him on the shoulder.

After a pause, Serge gets out of the cruiser and walks up to the SUV, one hand on his holstered gun.

Bram rolls his window down before Serge arrives behind his door. Bram puts his hands in plain sight on the wheel. Tracking Serge in his outside mirror, Bram turns his head slowly so he can talk to him.

BRAM

Hi Serge. I take it you didn't stop
me to talk about this fine weather.
(he nods at his cellphone
on the dash)

And before you say anything, I
would like to advise you that we
are being recorded live-to-internet
on my cellphone's camera and mic.

Serge steps back, his gun-hand clamping tightly. Pausing for a few seconds, he steps forward again.

SERGE

Hello Mr. Karol. I was just going
to advise you that we have still
not found the body of the quad
driver. That's what I was doing.
Looking for him.

Smiling, twisting more to look at Serge,

BRAM

Well, its good to see you out here,
Serge. Murph's been the only patrol
I've ever seen here. However, may I
say that after a few months, if
there is a body, it would have been
swept downriver and be in the sea
by now.

SERGE

You never know, sir.

Serge stomps away.

42 **INT. SERGE'S CRUISER**

42

Serge slams the door. He sits staring at Bram's car going down the highway again. After stewing for several minutes, something comes to him.

SERGE

Hey! Wait a minute!

He pulls out his cellphone and checks the reception.

SERGE (CONT'D)

MERDE! No bloody reception out here. Until the damn Pass. Sonofabitch!

He tosses his phone on the seat and takes off after Bram.

43 **EXT. HIGHWAY PASS, 10 MINUTES LATER**

43

Serge's cruiser comes at high speed up to a sharp turn at the narrowing of the valley - the Pass. He slams on his brakes then drifts, squealing tires, around the turn. He slams his brakes on again as he sees tire tracks weaving from the cliff face on the right then sharply leading to a break in the barrier on the left, over a long fall to the river below.

Smiling, he stops, snaps on the emergency lights, then gets out.

A cloud of gravel dust still sits over the shoulder as he walks up to the broken guardrail.

Looking back along the line of rubber, he sees gravel sprayed from both shoulders onto the road. He turns to the guardrail.

SERGE

Ah, gee. It looks like smarty-pants lawyer followed Sammi into the river. Too bad.

Hum. Smarty-pants entered the highway without stopping and having due care for traffic, and he was weaving as he drove at excessive speed. Have to write you up for a book-full of charges!

(he walks up to push against a broken end of the guardrail)

Maybe add damage to public property.

He rubs his hands. He slowly shakes his head as he looks down the steep fall.

SERGE (CONT'D)
Might take days before we organize
a search party.

44 **INT. LOCAL POLICE BUILDING, LATER SAME DAY** 44

Serge is in his office writing the report. Murph is at the door.

Murph is surprised at Serge's comments but says nothing.

SERGE
His car might be down the river by
now. We have to organize the search
first thing in the morning, ok?
Oh! Almost forgot. You'll have to
visit the grieving widow to advise
her. Yes?

He looks up to see Murph shrug then leave the office.

45 **EXT. HIGHWAY PASS, LATE AFTERNOON** 45

Murph's pickup is parked near the broken guardrail, his hidden strobe lights flashing. He is standing on the shoulder, smiling at the tire marks and gravel.

Kicking at some of the gravel, he returns to the truck, still grinning.

46 **EXT. PORCH OF RANCH OHMIS'HUM CABIN, LATER THAT EVENING** 46

The sun casts some light onto the clouds, spraying them with a dark pink to purple glow.

With his baseball hat in both hands, Murph slowly walks up the steps of the porch. Natalie is seated on a rocker, a crossword book in her lap. Her shotgun leans against the cabin wall. The new dog, Wolf, barks at Murph from the end of his leash. Misha sits tensely at the foot of the stairs.

Natalie respectfully ignores Murph's lisp.

MURPH
Mrs. Karol, you know I don't agree
with Corporal Giroull. I had to let
him take all the rope he wants.
Your husband told me to.

Natalie's head snaps toward him.

MURPH (CONT'D)
 Something funny's going on. Gotta
 talk to him. He inside?

NATALIE
 (shaking her head)
 Haven't seen him since he left for
 New West this morning.

A pained look takes over Murph's face.

MURPH
 Ma'am, I gotta talk to him.
 Corporal Giroull'd get really sore
 if he knew what Mr. Karol and I
 did.
 (she does a double take)
 Like, nothing serious. But we
 shouldn't have talked. About the
 case, like. And I know he just
 pulled a stunt on Corporal
 Giroull... At least I hope so. I
 really hope so.
 (pleading)
 If he's here I gotta talk to him!

Natalie stands up, putting her crossword book on the chair.
 She shrugs.

NATALIE
 Murph, I honestly haven't seen Bram
 since he left for New West this
 morning.

Misha barks, nervous. Wolf barks loudly.

Murph steps back down the steps.

MURPH
 Ok. Ok... So, I have to say
 something... I don't think it's
 true but Corporal Giroull said I
 have to tell you.
 (he looks up at Natalie)
 Corporal Giroull said he thinks
 Bram had an accident...

Natalie is shocked. A hand is at her mouth.

MURPH (CONT'D)

Mrs. Karol, I have to say it but I don't believe it 'cause I know something's wrong. Those tire marks was made a week ago by a tourist who lost his trailer. It was when Corporal Giroull was in the city at a meeting. So I don't think...

She plops back into the chair, confused. She reaches for her phone to call Bram.

47 **EXT. BACK 42 CABIN, SAME EVENING**

47

The sun's last light is too far gone to show much of the front door of the old log cabin. This cabin was built years before the others on Ranch Ohmis'hum, so it shows its age. Behind the cabin, in full shadow, is Bram's dark SUV.

Bram gets out of the SUV, holding a light. He sweeps the light along the path to the cabin as he walks carefully in the dark. As he opens the door to step inside, an object is swung at Bram's head from inside, flooring him over the threshold. His phone in the SUV can barely be heard dinging.

48 **INT. BACK 42 CABIN, NEXT MORNING**

48

Bram is tied with a narrow yellow rope around his legs and arms. He is lying awkwardly on an old grey couch. A thicker rope is twined through the yellow one, holding him to the couch. A cloth gag is tied around his head with the ends stuffed into his mouth. Blood is dried in lines down one side of his face from a cut where he was hit last night.

Groaning, he tries to wriggle the ropes free. It doesn't work.

From behind the half-opened door, a man in a black HEAD MASK whispers loudly.

HEAD MASK

If you behave I'll come back with water. If not, you'll die here.

The door is closed. Steps can be heard scraping away in the patches of gravel.

49 **INT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM MAIN CABIN, SAME MORNING**

49

Natalie is pouring hot water into the tea infuser. Her cellphone rings from the table. Its vibration is loud.

She puts the kettle down and skips over to pick up the phone.
Tapping it,

NATALIE

Hello?...
Oh, hi Vince. Thanks for returning
my...
No, he left yesterday...
(agitated)
Of course. He left in the afternoon
and was going directly to New
West...
Yes, the same hotel. Vince, you're
getting me worried. I couldn't
reach him yesterday but we have
crappy reception out here. I want
you to start calling around from
your side... Sudhra can ask for a
continuance - is that what you call
it? And I'm going to get a hold of
Murph... You know him?... Right.

Natalie jabs at her phone making mistakes.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Ahhh!

She finally connects to Murph.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Murph, listen... listen. Bram
didn't make it to New West
yesterday. Have you heard anything?

50 **EXT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM, LATER THAT MORNING**

50

Murph's pickup truck comes roaring up to a waiting Natalie.
She jumps in and they take off down the driveway.

Veronica is standing on the porch with the shotgun in one
hand and the other hand up to her mouth. Tears have streaked
her face. Wolf, still on a leash, is barking toward the far
meadow, a distance beyond the cabins.

51 **INT. BACK 42 CABIN, SAME MORNING**

51

Head Mask opens the door, quickly stepping in. He is dressed
all in black except for blue nitrile gloves that cover his
hands. A small pistol is in one hand with a short plastic
bottle of water in the other. Bram mumbles through the gag.

He sees the height of the man next to the door and that the black outfit is tightly fitted over a paunch. The man in the head mask steps toward Bram, whispering harshly,

HEAD MASK

Shut up.
 (he waves the pistol at
 Bram)
 You get one of these. The gun or
 the water. Not done with you yet so
 take the water.

Bram nods. The man unscrews the top, dropping the cap on the floor. Slipping the pistol into a pocket, he yanks at the gag, allowing enough room for water to get poured in. Bram turns his head as much as he can to accommodate the pour but a lot spills, mixing with the dried blood on his face.

Bram notices a small mole on the edge of the man's left eye.

The man pulls the bottle away from Bram's mouth and tosses it carelessly into a corner, where it dribbles out the rest of its contents.

HEAD MASK (CONT'D)

Enough. Back later. Have some
 business to do.

He leaves, closing the door. The vehicle can be heard quietly driving away.

52

EXT. DRIVEWAY TO RANCH OHMIS'HUM, MINUTES LATER

52

The man in the head mask is parked off to the side of the driveway, waiting. A quad comes slowly down the Ranch access from the highway. Driving it is Serge, dressed in camouflage. Serge parks the quad and turns off the engine. His passenger is wearing a floppy hat and sunglasses. He removes them as he gets out of the quad. It is Dougie.

SERGE

Shh.
 (whispering)
 Like I said, don't like you here.
 Somebody might see you.

Very quietly,

DOUGIE

If we're going to do business out
 here I want to see it for myself.

Head Mask parks out of the way and joins them. Whispering,

HEAD MASK
Come this way. This path might lead
to some of the mushrooms.

Frustrated,

DOUGIE
Which ones? We don't know if
they're here...

HEAD MASK
Did you bring the bag and pictures?

DOUGIE
Yeah. Still want to check it out
myself.

HEAD MASK
Ok but I'll get it out of the
lawyer...

They walk down the path for several minutes, frustrated.

They come back disappointed. Still whispering angrily,

DOUGIE
Serge, take me back to my car. And
you. You better get it out of him
now or...

SERGE
You have to shoot him. Either way.

Head Mask stops in his tracks. Dougie hands him a fast-food bag. Serge carefully pulls a pistol out of his pocket, using gloves, and hands it to Head Mask. As the other two carry on to the quad, he moves resolutely to his vehicle, pocketing the pistol and holding the bag.

53

INT. BACK 42 CABIN, LATER

53

Bram is sweating, trying as hard as he can to loosen the ropes. He has more wiggle room than before. Exhausted, he takes a break. Hearing the quiet wheels of a vehicle slowly approaching, Bram throws himself into a convulsive last effort. It works. One hand is freed. He quickly works on his other hand, getting it out of the rope but with blood from his wrist dripping onto the couch.

He hears the wheels come to a stop at the door. Bram wraps the rope around his wrists so they appear to be tied. Just in time, as the door opens slowly. Head Mask peers inside then comes in, closing the door behind him.

Bram notices the expensive but dusty black leather shoes on the man. Carrying a fast-food bag, he walks up to Bram. Whispering,

HEAD MASK

Still got the gun. Want some food?

Bram nods.

HEAD MASK (CONT'D)

I'll take the gag off if you play nice. Or you're dead. Got it?

Bram nods again, staying still. The man steps closer, looking over the ropes. He places the bag on the couch against Bram's hands.

HEAD MASK (CONT'D)

Stay still. I'll take the gag off.

As he works at the knot against Bram's mouth he is disgusted with the saliva on it, even with his gloves on. Bram catches a glimpse of a container with a syringe in the food bag.

HEAD MASK (CONT'D)

Shit!

He wiggles the gag down around Bram's neck.

HEAD MASK (CONT'D)

Now I want you to shut up until I ask you a question, right? And if I don't like your answer you're gonna go to hell!

(pulling the bag of food closer, he wiggles it)

From my friend in town. First question. Answer right and you get a bite of this.

He pulls out a breakfast sandwich with his left hand. Bram's eyes wander to the man's belt. He can't help staring at it. It is dark brown and the thickest belt he has seen.

HEAD MASK (CONT'D)

Now. You have to tell me a secret. Which of these mushrooms is the magic one?

He puts the sandwich down to pull out two pictures. Bram recognizes one as a deadly variety that grows on the Ranch alongside the Liberty Cap. He croaks out,

BRAM

The larger one is called Destroying
Angel. Deadly. The little Liberty
Cap is the magic mushroom.

Head Mask then pulls out a third picture showing a flat
colourful mushroom.

HEAD MASK

And this one?

Bram looks it over.

BRAM

Don't know. Lots of that one around
but we don't use it.

HEAD MASK

(showing excitement)

Lots? You know where?

Starting to lose his whisper, Bram recognizes Head Mask as
Schaeuble. Getting excited, Schaeuble leans in to give him
the sandwich. Bram lashes out with his freed hands, grabbing
Schaeuble by his shirt collar. In a flash, he wraps the loose
rope around Schaeuble's neck, holding tightly with one hand
while grabbing for the pistol. Schaeuble struggles but is off
balance, falling with his back against Bram. He struggles
with his weapon. Bram locks onto his hand holding the pistol
in a death grip. Bram tightens his hold on the rope around
his neck.

Schaeuble coughs, trying to breathe. As he weakens, Bram
wrestles the pistol from his hand.

Bram loosens the rope around his throat slightly, allowing
Schaeuble to suck in a long breath. Bram tosses Schaeuble to
the floor.

Hoarsely, Bram growls at Schaeuble while pointing the pistol
at him.

BRAM

On your knees. Now!
Crawl over to the wall... Lay flat
on your stomach. Do it!... Turn
your head away to the wall.

Schaeuble complies, still coughing.

BRAM (CONT'D)

So you were going to stick me with
a syringe full of, what? Coke?

Placing the pistol on the couch, Bram unties the rest of the ropes holding him, keeping a watchful eye on Schaeuble.

Standing up, Bram gets really mad.

BRAM (CONT'D)
 You shithead! I oughta just shoot
 you and bury your worthless corpse
 out here!

Bram struggles with wooziness, plopping down on the couch. Schaeuble turns to get up.

BRAM (CONT'D)
 Stay right there!

He points the pistol a bit unsteadily. Schaeuble doesn't chance it, laying back down on the dirty floor.

SCHAEUBLE
 We can work this out, buddy. I'm
 sorry. I didn't mean to...

BRAM
 Shut up!...
 (feeling in his pockets)
 What did you do with my phone?

Checking the pistol, he sees the safety. He moves it to Live then back to Lock.

BRAM (CONT'D)
 A Beretta Tomcat. This pee-shooter
 have any bullets in it?

He pops up the barrel then clicks it back down.

SCHAEUBLE
 Listen, buddy...

BRAM
 Shut the hell up!

Schaeuble shrinks against the wall, waiting for a shot. Thinking for a while, Bram makes a decision.

BRAM (CONT'D)
 Ok. We're going to switch places. I
 like the way you used these ropes
 but I'm going to do you one better.

Several minutes later, Schaeuble is trussed up tightly on the couch.

Bram steps away from his handiwork to admire it.

BRAM (CONT'D)

I won't gag you. If you yell out, the only people to hear you will be my wife and Veronica. And their dogs. If they find you here, they are most likely to put the dogs inside with you and close the door. Your call.

He grins at Schaeuble's back.

BRAM (CONT'D)

A Beretta like this is a small caliber thing. But I imagine if I shot at your knees it would do some damage. What do you think?

Bram makes clicking noises by pulling out the magazine and replacing it. Schaeuble tries to turn his head to see Bram.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Turn your head back!
No breakfast sandwich, you sonofabitch. Just the ability to walk - or not.

Schaeuble stiffens.

SCHAEUBLE

No! Please!

Growling as menacingly as he can,

BRAM

Was Sammi working for you?

SCHAEUBLE

Ah...

He hears another click.

SCHAEUBLE (CONT'D)

Yes! Yes, he, he owes me money. Owed. Haven't seen him for months. Must have drowned when he...

Angry,

BRAM

Tried to kill my wife!?

Quickly, pleading,

SCHAEUBLE

He was a loose cannon! Couldn't control him! I was going to have to...

BRAM

Get rid of him yourself?

SCHAEUBLE

He was a loose cannon.

BRAM

And you're not?
Ok. Serge?

Schaeuble shifts uncomfortably.

BRAM (CONT'D)

What about the cop?

SCHAEUBLE

Well, we, ah, had an arrangement...

Moving in to hover next to Schaeuble's ear.

BRAM

What? To have him kill me and cover it up? Is that what you were going to do with me here? Overdose me and say I was a crazy druggie?

He takes a swipe at Schaeuble's head with the pistol butt.

SCHAEUBLE

Ahw! Don't shoot! Don't shoot me! I can help you! I'll testify against Serge. He was the one who wanted you dead! Not me! LISTEN! We were both Members. Knew him from New Brunswick. Ok? There's one more retired Member in this and I can deliver them both!

Ready to hit Schaeuble again, Bram stops. He thinks.

BRAM

Ok. You're going to testify. And it better be good. You'll be comfortable here while I make some arrangements. If I see you out of this cabin I'm going to sick the dogs on you. Then shoot you.

Bram takes the pistol apart, removes something, then puts it back together and places it on the couch.

He gets up slowly to not disturb his aching head.

SCHAEUBLE
Listen listen! You don't
understand! You have a very special
mushroom here.

Dismissively,

BRAM
Yeah sure. And you want a long
mindtrip, you shithead.

SCHAEUBLE
No no! The third one. Very
important!

BRAM
Huh? Whatever. We'll talk about it
when I get back.

At the door, he turns toward Schaeuble.

BRAM (CONT'D)
I'll close the door so no dogs get
in. Relax. I'll be back shortly.

Schaeuble wriggles around to try to get loose but Bram is out the door and it shuts. Schaeuble yells after him.

SCHAEUBLE
P.S.K! Remember PSK!

Bram's SUV door is heard opening and closing. The car drives away.

54 **EXT. BACK 42 CABIN, 15 MINUTES LATER**

54

The weather is moist, having rained an hour earlier.

Serge, still dressed in camouflage and blue gloves, keeps his head down, looking for non-muddy places to step. He sneaks up to the door of the cabin. Scanning around deliberately, Serge tip-toes inside.

Loud whispering and a struggle can be heard inside the cabin. Clicks can be heard, accompanied by Schaeuble yelling. A muffled pop stops the struggle.

A few minutes later, Serge peeks through the door. He comes out, carefully stepping off to the side of Bram's or Schaeuble's older footprints, searching again for hard ground.

He disappears into the forest. A quad's engine can be heard at low speed, moving away.

55 **EXT. HIGHWAY, MINUTES LATER**

55

Serge is driving his quad quickly down the empty highway. He slows down at a spot where the shoulder widens out to become a place to stop next to the swift, turbulent river. Driving to the far side of the open area, he slows down to ease the quad into the bushes. His cruiser is already parked there, hidden from view.

Maneuvering the quad behind the cruiser, he stops, gets off the quad to pop open the cruiser's trunk, then pulls out a tee-bar attachment. He hooks the quad to his cruiser's hide-away trailer hitch.

Serge changes out of the camouflage into his uniform, then slips in and drives away, pulling the quad.

56 **INT. SERGE'S CRUISER, MINUTES LATER**

56

Serge looks satisfied with himself. He hears a call on his radio.

O.C. MURPH
Cruiser 10.

Serge picks up his mic.

SERGE
Go ahead Murph.

O.C. MURPH
Corporal, are you coming back to Central soon? There's a missing person report.

Serge thinks briefly, holding the mic at his mouth.

SERGE
Be there in about an hour. Is it urgent?

O.C. MURPH
Should be ok for now.

SERGE

10-37.

57 INT. LOCAL POLICE BUILDING

57

Murph is on the admin side of the police counter. He puts the com mic down. Natalie is on the customer side of the counter. They are alone in the building.

Murph shrugs.

MURPH

What do you think, Mrs. Karol?

NATALIE

Did he have something to attend to this morning?

Shakes his head,

MURPH

No. He's never out there. He always leaves me to do the patrols. Up to no good, him. If he's behind Mr. Karol's disappearance...

Natalie's cellphone dings. She notices the name on the screen and speaks quickly.

NATALIE

Vince! Any news?... Intermittent cell service around here... Can you drive up to the Ranch?... Great! Keep driving. I'll feed you here... Stay on the highway until you get to the river valley... Yes, the Pass... What do you think, about two hours?

Murph scribbles a note and hands it to her. She reads it as she speaks on the phone.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Murph will meet you at the turnoff to our driveway... Yes, that's Murph... A khaki-coloured SUV.

58 EXT. BACK OF GAS STATION, 30 MINUTES LATER

58

Getting to the town, Serge drives to the large field behind the garage/convenience store. He drops the quad next to the store's back door.

Taking a paper bag from his car, he writes Dougie's name on it, puts the gun inside, then places the bag on the quad's floor.

59 **INT. BRAM'S SUV, LATER SAME MORNING**

59

On the highway, Bram is driving into the sun, in the opposite direction to Serge, looking for better reception. He nervously scans ahead for traffic. Seeing a turnoff that heads toward the river, he slows down to take it.

The blood is still caked around Bram's head, originating at a cut near the top. His shirt is a mess of blood and dirt, heavily creased from having slept in it on the couch. His pants are soiled. Bram groans from a headache periodically through squinting eyes.

At the end of the turnoff there is a place to park next to the river. Large rocks have been moved to make enough room for a little-used boat launch. Bram parks, sits for a minute, then slips his head against the window, asleep.

60 **EXT. RIVER EDGE, 1-1/2 HOURS LATER**

60

Slumped in his SUV, Bram wakes up with a start, then groans at the head movement.

Up on the highway, slightly visible through the bushes, Bram does not see Vince speeding by.

Bram opens his door, but sits for a while on the seat to rest with his head down.

61 **EXT. RIVER EDGE, HALF HOUR LATER**

61

Bram is bending over at the river's edge in his underwear, washing his shirt and pants. He has cleaned up the blood on his head.

Bram walks up to the SUV and digs out a first-aid kit. He adjusts the outside mirror to try to see his wound. He finally turns his head so that the window reflection works with the re-adjusted mirror to see what he needs to work on.

A few minutes later, a large patch-work bandage covers his wound.

While fussing with his clothes hanging on some bushes, he hears his car phone dinging. Moving as quickly as he can to the car, he pauses to breathe heavily, then answers.

BRAM
Hello?

O.C. VINCE
Bram? Is that you, sir?

BRAM
Vince? Yeah. Most of me.

O.C. VINCE
Where are you, sir? We've been searching everywhere...

BRAM
Stop with the sir, Vince. I'm ok, now. Was trussed up like a pig all night. Got away. It was that... a client of the Ranch. He's safe for now.

O.C. VINCE
Was that guy's name Schaeuble?

Taken aback,

BRAM
How do you know him?

A pause.

O.C. VINCE
Sir, he's been found dead. On your ranch. The RCMP have a warrant for your arrest. It's going to take us a while to get away from the guy who found him - the chief cop.

Bram is floored, and speechless.

O.C. VINCE (CONT'D)
Sir? Are you ok? Bram?

BRAM
Ah... Vince. I need some time. To figure this out...
Listen, don't talk to the RCMP guy, Serge something. Can't think...
He's likely the killer. He's involved, anyway...
(he tries to clear his head by wiping his eyes)
Where are you? We need to talk.

O.C. VINCE
I'm at the Ranch, with Mrs. Karol.
She's listening in.

Bram hears Natalie cut in.

O.C. NATALIE
Bram, are you alright, dear? What
happened?

Bram shows relief to hear Natalie's voice.

BRAM
Very good to hear your voice, dear.
I was hit on the head by Schaeuble
and spent the night trussed up in
the old Back 42 cabin. He was alive
when I left him this morning...
Are we secure on this line?...
Probably not. No matter. Before I
appear at the cop shop we need to
talk.
(he thinks quickly)
Listen, dear. Know where the
Ranch's water pickup is?

O.C. NATALIE
You mean... Oh! Ok?

BRAM
Serge is likely going to follow you
if you leave the Ranch. I'll ask
you to be perspicacious as you
transcend Adam's ale toward the
orient.

O.C. NATALIE
Got it. When?

He thinks briefly.

BRAM
About dodecahedral times three.
Will that be enough time for you?
(muttering)
Those crosswords of yours come in
handy.

Bram's SUV cautiously pulls up to the end of the same forest
road that Sammi had used to spy, overlooking the Ranch.

The Ranch's stream is immediately below the widened terminus of the mostly dirt road. In the middle of the stream at that point is a metal stake that anchors the water supply pickup for the Ranch.

Waiting impatiently, leaning against the SUV, Bram finally sees Natalie and Vince walking quickly up the path on the other side of the fast-flowing stream. They wave to each other.

As they get to either side of the stream, about five metres wide at this point, Natalie starts to wade across.

Bram holds up his hand. They talk over the sound of the running water.

BRAM

Hold on, dear. Stay on that side.
It's dangerous and I don't want you
getting wet. It could give Serge a
clue as to where I am.

She reluctantly steps back onto the dry stones, knotting her hands.

NATALIE

Are you hurt? Bram! What's that
bandage?

Alarmed, she steps forward again and Vince is about to join her, but Bram holds up his arm again. Firmly,

BRAM

Hold it! Please! I'm fine. I
promise you! Just a small cut that
I disinfected and patched up with
the first aid kit in the car.
Listen, we don't have time. Let me
tell you what happened and what I
need you two to do.

He looks around curiously at a distant sound.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Where's Murph? Did you tell him I'd
be here?

At that, he realizes the sound is a car engine from the road further up.

Seeing that Bram is about to bolt, Vince yells out,

VINCE

That'll be Murph. He said he was going to come down the forest road.

Bram relaxes. As he watches Murph's vehicle approach, he sees a very brief flash of the highbeams. Then he sees that Murph has a passenger.

Yelling at Natalie and Vince without looking at them,

BRAM

Quick! Get into the bushes! Hide! I think Serge is with Murph!

Vince pulls a very reluctant Natalie into the undergrowth.

Murph is driving his SUV. He wheels around the graveled terminus, stopping with his window near Bram. Murph has his hand out the window hanging down. He flashes a stop sign to Bram. As he opens the door to get out he raises his voice to Bram.

MURPH

Mr. Karol, stay where you are please.

Serge jumps out, running toward the side of the gravel next to the stream. He quickly looks around but sees nothing.

Turning back to Bram, with a sneer,

SERGE

You're under arrest, Mr. Karol! Murph, put the cuffs on him.

Murph is getting out of the vehicle. He stops at the order then shrugs. He reaches for his cuffs. Walking over to Bram, he whispers under his breath, as he puts the cuffs on, loosely.

MURPH

He threatened me with a conduct hearing, Mr. Karol. He's acting crazy. Don't push him.

Murph steps away from Bram but Serge wiggles his handgun at them both.

SERGE

Stay right there, Murph ol' buddy. This is as good a place as any to finish this off. When I got here, you both had shot each other. Too bad.

He holds his weapon up to shoot just as Vince yells from the bushes on the other side of the stream.

VINCE

STOP THAT! We can see everything!

He ducks back behind a small tree.

From another tree, Natalie yells out,

NATALIE

YOU'RE THE ONE UNDER ARREST, YOU SONOFABITCH!

Natalie is peeking from a larger tree trunk. As Serge twists around to see who yelled, Murph pulls Bram to the other side of the SUV then into the bushes. Serge spins around, not sure who to shoot at.

He bails, jumping into Murph's still running SUV and takes off down the forest road.

Murph runs out of the far side bushes, with Bram stumbling behind.

MURPH

DAMN! He's going to wreck my truck!

Natalie jumps out on her side of the stream then waves, stepping toward Beaver Lake.

NATALIE

MURPH! Come with me! We can catch him with my plane!

Murph starts toward the stream but hesitates.

MURPH

Your plane? I, ah, don't really like it when the wheels get higher than I can jump.

Working his way out of the cuffs, Bram yells at Vince.

BRAM

Vince you go with her! Keep her out of trouble!

He shakes his head unsteadily at Murph.

BRAM (CONT'D)

God! I'm asking Vince to keep Natalie out of trouble.

(MORE)

BRAM (CONT'D)
 (he pulls his keys out of
 a pocket)
 Murph, you're going to have to
 drive my car.

Murph finds his legs and stomps past Bram, grabbing the
 offered keys.

NATALIE
 (yelling)
 BRAM! Contact me on VHF 126.7!

He waves at her as she and Vince run down the path along the
 stream.

63 INT. NATALIE'S FLOATPLANE, MINUTES LATER

63

Natalie is in the pilot's seat, left side, with Vince beside
 her. She is pulling up from the lake. Her headset is already
 on. She speaks into the attached mic then sees that Vince is
 still struggling with his headset. She waits for him to get
 it on his ears. As soon as he does, she starts speaking,
 startling Vince.

NATALIE
 Bring your boom mic down. See him?

VINCE
 Huh? Oh, not yet. Do I have to
 press a button or something?

NATALIE
 Voice activated.
 That forest road ends at High
 Street.
 (nodding, then glances at
 Vince as she pulls the
 control stick back some
 more)
 Named by old man Redtree. He was
 being funny. First we establish
 whether the friggen idiot is going
 east or west from there.

Vince is in a completely new environment. He is entirely
 distracted by the view of the receding lake.

VINCE
 Holy shit! Look at that...

Understanding but not in a mood to rubberneck, Natalie
 demands,

NATALIE
 Keep your eyes on the forest road,
 Vince! Do you see him yet? I'm
 going to call Bram.

She confirms that the radio is on 126.7 then switches on the radio. Her voice still comes through to Vince, confusing him more.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
 Xray delta delta, Bram, are you on,
 over?

Clicks and then a loud background noise with Bram's tinny voice.

O.C. BRAM
 Here, Natalie. Awkward sitting on
 the passenger side. Ah, over.

NATALIE
 Delta delta, I'll tell you when we
 catch up to him, out.

Vince looks around desperately, seeing only a blur of green, not able to distinguish a forest from a lake. When they reach 1000 feet above ground she reduces power. The deafening noise is now quieted by their headphones and the plane decelerates perceptively. Vince is alarmed. He reaches for the controls. Natalie slaps his hand away forcefully.

VINCE
 What happened! Are we going down?

NATALIE
 NEVER TOUCH ANYTHING IN HERE UNLESS
 I TELL YOU!
 Vince, if we get into trouble
 you'll be able to tell by me
 reaching for the door handle.

VINCE
 WHAT!?

Grinning,

NATALIE
 Joke. You just let me handle the
 plane. Your job is to find Murph's
 SUV.

She pulls a 60 degree bank to fly back toward the forest road.

VINCE

AHH!

The left wing appears to be knife edge to the trees below. He begins to look pale. The strange instruments are dancing around and showing incomprehensible things.

Glancing at Vince,

NATALIE

Sorry Vince. I forgot you're new at this. Later, I'll take you up in an aerobatic machine and show you some real flying. For now... There's the road.

She nods ahead. Vince chances a look outside as she levels out. Natalie pushes the throttle and control stick hard forward then pulls the stick back a bit as she sees Vince go white-knuckles on his knees.

64

EXT. SKY

64

The clear blue sky's sole occupant is Natalie's white and green floatplane. It is nosing down toward the forest road, then levels out near treetop height. Below them, Serge is kicking up dust as he careens along the bumpy track. The road is dirt except for its ends. Gravel starts flying as Serge reaches High Street. He takes the right turn too fast, spinning across High Street's pavement then barely getting it under control. As he starts to speed up again, Serge looks up through his windscreen to see the floatplane passing overhead.

Serge takes off down the road with the floatplane staying just over the trees above him.

High Street bends around a low outcropping of rock, leaving the road free of trees for almost a kilometre. Natalie swoops down over the SUV, distracting Serge. He weaves the vehicle from lane to lane, slowing down. Natalie pulls a hard hammerhead, turning the lumbering floatplane as tightly as it can to double back on the SUV.

Through the window, Vince can be seen to be distress.

Natalie zooms along the road from behind Serge to pass very low over him, the floats almost touching the top of the vehicle.

As Natalie pulls up for another turn, Serge puts his handgun outside the window and takes a couple shots at the plane.

65 **INT. NATALIE'S FLOATPLANE**

65

Natalie pulls a few notches of flaps, causing the plane to nose up a bit. She sees Vince reach for his knees again.

NATALIE
Flaps. Have to slow down enough to stay with him.

A very pale Vince resolutely looks down as he sees the flashes from Serge's handgun. A light thud from outside gets Vince's attention but he doesn't notice the new hole in the right float.

VINCE
Look out! He's shooting at us!

Natalie quickly retracts the flaps and pulls the plane up and right, away from Serge's line of fire. The rapid maneuver makes Vince clutch at his knees ever tighter. Through clenched teeth,

VINCE (CONT'D)
God! Will you please stop that!?

Natalie lifts her hand off the control stick.

NATALIE
You want to take over?

VINCE
NO! f-FLY IT!

NATALIE
(switching the radio on)
Delta delta, being shot at. Will stay behind...

66 **EXT. HIGH STREET**

66

Serge flings himself back and forth on the seat as much as he can in the SUV to try to get off another shot. As he leans to the passenger-side window the vehicle swerves out of control, spins onto a shoulder and smashes down the low bank to crumple heavily into a tree.

Steam hisses from the engine compartment.

Catching up, Murph pulls Bram's SUV to a sliding stop beside his crashed vehicle. Murph is almost in tears as he jumps out to tenderly survey the damage to his SUV.

Bram makes his way on unsteady legs to the driver's door. He hauls it open. The windshield has been smashed from the inside. Serge's limp body is crumpled across the seats. His blood is everywhere.

Bram is about to back away when he barely hears a quiet hissing groan. Their eyes lock.

SERGE

Mama's cancer.
 (cough, gurgle)
 Shrooms must save her. Dougie's
 company will make PSK to help.
 That's why he set up here. No other
 way...
 (gurgle)

Bram yells to Murph,

BRAM

Murph! He's still alive!

Bram moves as quickly as he can toward his SUV.

BRAM (CONT'D)

I'm calling for an ambulance!

From the crumpled front end, Murph shakes his head.

MURPH

No reception. No medic. We're too
 far away from everything. We're on
 our own. It's why we're all here...
 We're on our own, Mr. Karol.

Bram runs as fast as he can to his SUV. He grabs the VHF mic from inside.

BRAM

Natalie! Can you land nearby? In
 that cleared area behind us? Need
 to air-evac Serge.

O.C. NATALIE

Delta delta, will try. Only a few
 gallons of fuel left, over.

Natalie does another white-knuckle-inducing sharp turn. The open area shows up in front of them. She slows down with flaps and low power, to skim over the area.

Seeing a good place to land, Natalie swings the plane around and lowers the landing gear.

NATALIE

Hold on Vince. That ground looks a bit rough.

His eyes are wide and his hands can't clench any tighter.

She switches on the radio again.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Delta delta landing. I'll get as close to the road as I can. We'll take him back to town for the air-evac.

68 **EXT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM DOCK, AN HOUR LATER**

68

Natalie's floatplane comes low from the direction of town then turns for a water landing.

As Natalie taxis back to her dock where Veronica is waiting, the right side float very slowly begins to take water. Too distracted to notice, she docks to the left side. Vince scampers out her door with her, as the right float settles slowly lower. Dealing with the docking process, Natalie comments to Vince.

NATALIE

The helicopter should be to town shortly. We can drive back there to make sure.

Nervously chewing his bubble gum on the dock, Vince looks back at the floats, pointing.

VINCE

Is that one supposed to be lower like that?

He is pushed out of the way by an alarmed Natalie, who jumps into the water.

NATALIE

SHIT! Have to beach it! Quick! Untie the rope!

Only one of the mooring ropes has been tied. Vince quickly unties it then helps Natalie push the heavy machine around so that its right float is supported by the muddy shore.

She hands the rope from the right float to Vince.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Hold the line so it doesn't float off!

Working feverishly, Natalie uses a pump to empty the right float. She runs up the shore and comes back with a hefty two metre fence post. Puffing,

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Vince, slip this post under the float right there.

(she points to a marked spot that says "Lift Here")

Lift the float carefully while I get this wood under it.

Natalie takes a large piece of firewood that was on the dock.

69 **EXT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM DOCK, SEVERAL MINUTES LATER**

69

Natalie is drenched from the water and sweat. Vince is still holding onto the post. He resumes his nervous chomping.

Exhausted, Natalie inspects the top hole in the float, then feels around the now-dry bottom for the entry hole.

NATALIE

Here it is. Straight through.

(sarcastically)

Now all I need is a float repair kit.

Vince pops a gum balloon. Natalie double-takes at the gum then grins at Vince.

VINCE

What?

70 **INT. LOCAL POLICE BUILDING, HOURS LATER**

70

Through the front window of the police building can be seen the rotating tail-blade of a yellow helicopter. It is on the far side of the local gas station/convenience store. The store's owner, Dougie, is stomping from the helicopter, approaching the cop shop. Dougie is an older but fit-looking businessman. His belt is a very thick dark black. His expression is getting angrier as he reaches the door of the building.

Inside are Murph, a uniformed CONSTABLE, Bram, Natalie, Vince and the part-time secretary. The latter is very nervous.

Bram combs his hand through Natalie's disheveled and still-wet hair. She tut-tuts at his head bandage, tenderly circling it with a finger.

They are on the customer side of the counter, waiting for something to happen.

Dougie bursts through the door, startling Carmen. She shrinks as small as she can behind the counter.

He stomps aggressively toward Bram, his red face and bulging neck veins making him look fearsome.

DOUGIE
LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE! YOU KILLED
AN INNOCENT COP. AND NOW YOU'RE
KILLING HIS MOTHER!

Face to face, Bram controls himself.

BRAM
What's PSK?

Dougie tries to take a swing at Bram but his arm is held back by a struggling Vince. Murph runs from his side of the counter to the front, getting between Bram and Dougie.

MURPH
Stop that!
(puffing)
What do you know about all this?

Dougie yells,

DOUGIE
Arrest him! He as good as killed
Serge! Arrest him, man! If you
won't I will!

Murph pushes Dougie to the side. More angrily than he is used to, Murph tries to speak clearly despite his lisp getting in the way.

MURPH
I was there. The Corporal was going
to shoot us both! He shot at Mrs.
Karol in the plane, then he crashed
my truck into a tree! What do you
know about all this?

Dougie is confused and shakes his head. Murph glances at Bram, then back to Dougie.

MURPH (CONT'D)

What is PSK?

Dougie spins away from Murph. He makes a dash for the door as the other constable steps over to stand in front of it.

Dougie smashes into him and gets away through the door. Reaching into his pocket, he pulls out a pistol. He yells at them,

DOUGIE

Everybody stay down!

He runs toward the idling helicopter.

71 **EXT. BACK OF GAS STATION**

71

Dougie runs up to the paramedics who have just loaded Serge's body into the helicopter. The pilot is already in the right-hand seat doing his pre-flight checklist.

Dougie waves the little Beretta and uses it to shoo the two paramedics away from the helicopter.

The pilot looks over his left shoulder at Dougie as he climbs in next to the strapped-down body. Seeing Dougie's Beretta, he puts his left hand up and quickly uses his right hand to squawk 7700 on his transponder - "hijack". The silent alarm is sent to any airplane in range.

72 **EXT. SKY**

72

In the cockpit of an overflying airliner, the pilot receives the transponder alarm and immediately relays it.

73 **EXT. LOCAL POLICE BUILDING**

73

The crowd from the cop shop pile out in time to see the helicopter spin up then lift away. Murph tries to jump at the landing skid but misses as it rises, falling into its dusty wake.

He sees the other constable reach for his handgun. From the ground he yells out,

MURPH

No! Pilot'll get hurt.

Frustrated, they all gather around to watch it head for the mountains to the north. Then it makes a slow turn back toward the Pass.

NATALIE
Pilot must be trying to slow him
down.

Murph remembers the floatplane. He turns to Natalie.

MURPH
Mrs. Karol! Your plane! Can you
follow him?

Bram is worried.

BRAM
Didn't you take a shot through a
float? You can't take off with it
like that!

Natalie lights up, grabbing Vince by the shoulder.

NATALIE
I just need my mechanic and
copilot. Let's go Vince!

Getting pulled along to one of the vehicles,

VINCE
Ah shit. Not again. I already left
my stomach someplace in the top of
a tree...

She yells at Murph,

NATALIE
We need a rope!

Bram is really worried now.

BRAM
A rope!? What? You plan on lassoing
the helicopter?

74 **INT. NATALIE'S FLOATPLANE, LATER**

74

The cabin is filled with the roar of a Lycoming at full
throttle. Natalie pulls off from the lake then does a crisp
left turn at 300 feet. She continues the climb, taking off
flaps and keeping a sharp lookout for the helicopter.

NATALIE
Vince, see if you can reach Murph's
rope behind your seat.

(MORE)

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Don't pull on anything unless you know for sure what it is, ok?

He squeezes his left arm awkwardly between the seats. As he feels around blindly, he touches something that's moving slowly. His face looks like a kid caught with his hand in mommy's lace drawer.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Anything?

VINCE

Damned if I know. Whatever this is, it's moving back and forth...

NATALIE

LET GO! Don't touch that! It's the control cables.

He quickly pulls his arm out and places both hands precisely in the middle of each leg.

VINCE

Shit! I ain't touching ANYTHING... Ah, Natalie. Way ahead and to the right. What's that?

NATALIE

BINGO! That's him.

As she pushes the stick full forward, Vince's entire bodily inerts move into his head filling up his eyes.

VINCE

AHHH!

NATALIE

That's become your favorite monosyllable, Vince. Is that what law school does to a brain? Hold on. I'm going to drop right in front of him.

Vince is turning a pale shade of fish belly. He tightens the hold on his legs. He talks, to take his mind off what his body is doing.

VINCE

Natalie?

NATALIE

Yes?

VINCE

Can you go faster than the helicopter?

NATALIE

With this Stol engine, we can hit 140, same as him. Why?

VINCE

Just wondering. The pilot must still be holding back. Natalie?

NATALIE

Yes, Vince.

They close quickly on the helicopter, which starts doing lazy S-turns.

VINCE

He's still bigger. And he has those big swishing blade thingies on top. How did you plan on stopping him?

NATALIE

Good question. I was thinking we could drop the rope into his blades. But there's a pilot...

VINCE

NO! We need what's-his-name to testify. His mangled body does us little good. Well, it WOULD be nice to see the sonofabitch burning in the wreckage of a crashed.. No. We have to bring him in with his voice-box operational. What's plan B?

They are above the helicopter, moving in a line to cross right in front. Natalie sees that the helicopter's registration number ends in CBL.

NATALIE

The pilot is probably being yelled at right now. If I can raise him on the emergency frequency... Or, if he doesn't answer I can scare the living bejesus out of them. Hold on.

According to his facial expression, Vince's bejesus is being scared out of him at this time.

Keying her mic, she calls the helicopter.

NATALIE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Charlie bravo lima, xray delta
 delta, over...
 (releases the mic switch)
 He better answer...

She zips into the helicopter's flight path, just missing the rotating blades.

75 INT. HELICOPTER COCKPIT

75

Dougie, in the left-hand seat, is wearing a grim smile. But his pilot is not happy with the pistol held at him. On hearing Natalie's call, Dougie yells,

DOUGIE
 DO NOT ANSWER THAT!

The sudden appearance of the floatplane roaring so close in front of their chopper panics them. The pilot slams the collective stick hard right. He reaches for the transponder to squawk 7700 again.

76 INT. FLOATPLANE COCKPIT

76

Natalie snaps her head to look back to find the helicopter. She hears the transponder's emergency signal.

NATALIE
 WHERE IS HE? WHERE'D HE GO?

Vince is staring blankly ahead, turning from fish belly to green.

She catches a glimpse of his face.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
 Vince NO! NOT IN MY PLANE!
 Quick! There's a barf-bag in the
 door pocket on your right side!

Pushing aside the mic, he limply reaches for the bag just in time to fill it.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Shit!...
Vince. Tie the bag up. I have to
get after him!

Like a robot, eyes front, he rolls and seals the flaps on the bag then holds the warm bag in his lap as Natalie makes a hard turn right to chase the helicopter. This does not help his complexion any.

77 **EXT. SKY**

77

The floatplane describes a tight turn then heads for the now distant helicopter.

Quickly catching up, Natalie keeps behind and to the right side.

Dougie looks out of his cockpit, left side, to find the airplane. He motions rapidly to head for the forested mountains. Flying low, they roar into a logged area that had its undergrowth burned by a fire. Dougie waggles the pistol to indicate some fast turns. The pilot sort-of tries to lose the airplane, but with each turn Natalie puts the floatplane onto a wing-tip and powers in behind him.

Following Dougie's hand instructions, the chopper makes a left turn toward an antenna tower, trying to swing in close to the guy-wires. Natalie stays away from them, arcing out and then back at the helicopter.

They get over a clear-cut area that has only a few lonely trees left standing.

Natalie roars ahead of the helicopter then distracts the pilot by rolling knife-edge from one wing to the other in front of them. Taking the cue, the chopper deliberately heads toward a lone standing tree, barely clipping it, then autorotating down to a touchdown in a cloud of grey dust.

At the same time, Natalie's engine starts sputtering.

NATALIE
Damn! Out of fuel!.

Vince's eyes go saucer-shaped.

Without missing a beat she finds a long, clear logging road within gliding distance, deploys the landing gear and plops down onto it with the engine off.

In the midst of the burned clear-cut area, on the logging road, the floatplane brakes to a stop on its extended wheels, about half a kilometre from the downed chopper.

Natalie quickly climbs out.

She starts running for Dougie, who has taken off from the helicopter.

NATALIE
COME ON!

Glancing back, she sees that Vince is still in his seat, not moving. She skids to a stop and considers going back, growling,

NATALIE (CONT'D)

VINCE! You can't be sick again!
Vince?

He starts to wobble out of his seat and gives her a tepid thumbs up. As he leans over the float on his shaky way out, he drops the bag of puke. It splashes against the float and onto the grey ashes covering the ground.

He weakly lifts his arm to point at the helicopter across the field.

VINCE
I'll check out the chopper pilot.

She turns toward Dougie, who has disappeared over a rise.

NATALIE
Damn wuss!

Natalie races across the rough field, dodging tree stumps and kicking up ashes.

Reaching the rise, she looks around for Dougie among the tree stumps. In the dust she sees fresh tracks that head for a dry hollow that may have been a creek earlier.

She hears a groan but doesn't see him until she runs to the top of the hollow.

Dougie is lying face-down on the rocks, not moving. Wary, Natalie climbs down the rocky bank. As she reaches him, she bends down to turn him over. He turns to face her with a manic grin, pistol pointed at her face. He pulls the trigger,

:Click

Her horror changes to immediate action as he tries to pull the trigger again. Now it is Dougie's turn to show horror. He does click the trigger but to no effect as Natalie kicks his arm. The pistol goes flying onto the rocks.

Dougie pushes at her with a leg, causing Natalie to lose her balance on the rocks. She falls down. He scrambles up and stumbles across the rocks to the bank but Natalie catches up and slams into him. They both go down, Natalie on top, with Dougie face down, one arm splayed out.

Huffing and puffing, she holds him down firmly with his one arm bent against his back.

She then pushes herself up unsteadily, to see if Vince is coming. Dougie moves suddenly to kick out at her legs, taking her down. He rolls over and springs on top of her in renewed rage. From the ground she punches him in the face, to little effect. He slaps her hard.

DOUGIE

You damn bitch! You've ruined
everything! I had this all planned
and approved! You and your damn
husband are messing with the mob
and I'm gonna kill you BOTH!

As he picks his hand up to slam a rock into her face, Vince comes flying at him, knocking him over.

They roll on the rocks. Vince ends up on top and starts pounding him and pounding. With effort, Natalie grabs Vince's right hand before Dougie's bloody face is smashed yet again.

NATALIE

HE'S DOWN!
Thanks... Vince!
Now we need that rope.

79

EXT. LOCAL POLICE BUILDING, LATER THAT DAY

79

In front of the cop shop in Morley, Bram is leaning against his dark SUV, supporting his newly bandaged head with a hand. Natalie and Vince drive up with Murph at the controls in her cream-coloured SUV. She waves to Bram. From the front passenger seat, Natalie flicks her thumb toward the SUV's rear seats. She gets out and heads right to Bram. Sideways to the Constable, she says,

NATALIE

In the back with Murph. He seems to have fallen against the rocks a few times while running away. He'll need the nurse. And somebody's going to pay to clean up the blood on my seat!

She tentatively caresses Bram's head, inspecting the bandage.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Nurse did a better job on that than you did.
(gently)
Does it hurt?

He shakes his head. Through clenched teeth,

BRAM

Medication kicking in.

He sees Vince giving Dougie's pistol to Murph.

Reaching into a pocket he pulls out a small metal thing.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Here, give this to Murph. It's from Dougie's gun. Firing pin comes in handy.

Natalie looks down at the firing pin in Bram's hand. She grabs him in an emotional bear hug.

BRAM (CONT'D)

What?

80 INT. BACK 42 CABIN, DAYS LATER

80

Vince is helping Bram to clean up the cabin after its recent use. Vince is shocked to see the blood on the couch and floor in numerous places.

Vince is standing over the couch.

VINCE

I think you should just dump this couch. No point in trying to clean it, or even recover it.

Smiling,

BRAM
 (facetiously)
 Yeah, right. We'll take it down to
 the dump.

VINCE
 Ok?

BRAM
 There is no dump, Vince. Around
 here we reuse, recycle, re-reuse,
 and maybe burn it if there's
 nothing left.
 (he pushes at the armrest)
 Still has springs and a frame. We
 can always get cloth and foam to
 recover it.

Vince shrugs.

VINCE
 It is different out here. God. This
 isn't even the country. It's beyond
 the fringe of the country.

BRAM
 A life where you live by your wits.
 Or you don't live.

Looking at the large blood stain left by Schaeuble, Bram gets
 melancholy.

BRAM (CONT'D)
 Not much left of a body once
 it's... gone.
 (he sits on the far
 armrest)
 All the grand plans he had to
 harvest PSK. He was some mob's
 point man.
 (he looks over at Vince,
 pushing dust and leaves
 into a pile)
 Schaeuble tried the magic mushroom
 tea. Veronica said he had a bad
 trip.
 (grinning)
 He probably didn't enter the calm
 state that he should have, at the
 beginning.

Vince pauses.

VINCE
Have you tried it?

Shaking his head, Bram sees his Not-Nice Cherub materialize and stare with anticipation at him.

BRAM
No. Too busy. Maybe have some time now...

Vince becomes animated. He is frustrated by all the new experiences.

VINCE
Sir! Bram. Please don't be a hypocrite! You're telling me to wear a friggen helmet when I skateboard and here you are, saying you want to rip out the only thing that makes you you! What's going on? Is that what you want me to do, too? Drink some friggen shroom-tea that'll yank out my mind and serve it back to me in psychedelic shreds?

Confronted, Bram gets defensive.

BRAM
No. It's not like that all, Vince. A couple people I talked to had what they called mind-changing experiences...

VINCE
And I can show you a bunch more on East Hastings who talk to Napoleon on a regular basis.

BRAM
That's not fair, Vince. The folks with issues down there have a range of problems.

Bram's Nice Cherub pokes his head through the wall, eyes wide. Not-Nice Cherub folds his arms and nods confidently. The vision distracts Bram briefly.

BRAM (CONT'D)
Ok, so there is some risk. But the reward...

VINCE

Is a fake. It's a smoke-screen. What you told me about the 3-Cs stuck in my head. You only have a few seconds, as you zip by in this world, for people to see who you are.

(he pauses)

I'll go you one better. The colleagues, clients and courts who see you, form an opinion, yes. Now give it a vector.

Bram raises his eyebrows and smiles.

BRAM

Trajectory and velocity? My, my Vince. I've created a monster.

Eagerly,

VINCE

Yeah. The 3-Cs form a trajectory of where you've been and where you're going. And how fast. It's like the baseball sluggers on steroids. When they suddenly jump levels beyond what their vector was, you don't trust them anymore. They become irrelevant.

BRAM

An asterisk.

(nodding; longer pause)

I guess neither of us would look good as an asterisk.

Bram waves to Vince to have a seat on the other armrest.

BRAM (CONT'D)

So, is it a slope? Is it the proverbial slippery slope?

Vince hesitates then takes a seat, head down, thinking.

VINCE

Don't know if that's the right way of thinking about it.

Warming to the analogy,

BRAM

Good. So if you're on a slippery slope, the idea is that you only have one direction to go.

VINCE

But what if I didn't want to step there in the first place?

BRAM

Exactly! We can have choice. Ok - we don't always look far enough ahead to see if we should be making a choice. Sometimes, someone else is leading us toward that slope and then we find ourselves on it...

VINCE

We does it have to be a slope. And slippery?

Nodding,

BRAM

Good. It may be steps. In that case, we can stand at any point on those steps and say, No. I'm going back up.

VINCE

It could be a long climb back.

BRAM

But you have the choice, and maybe there's a handrail to help. Over on the slope, maybe off to the side, you can see a handrail. Not easy to get to. You may have to crawl and claw over toward it.

VINCE

Like taking Molly.

BRAM

Ecstasy is seductive.

VINCE

I went to school with a girl - she was a great kid. Thought she had to take whatever the others were giving out at a party.

(shakes his head sadly)

She couldn't see the handrail. Me.

(MORE)

VINCE (CONT'D)
 And the slope turned into a
 cliff...

Bram's two Cherubs disappear in a puff of twinkling snow.

81 INT. RANCH OHMIS'HUM CABIN, EVENING

81

Seen through the picture window, the darkening evening has a few indigo wisps in the distance.

With the fireplace burning and providing the only shimmering light in the main room, Bram and Natalie are huddled in the loveseat on one side. Centred in the room, Murph is at an end of the big couch, with Veronica on the other end. Vince is making himself comfortable with pillows in a single chair. He reaches over to the low table to sip from his glass of wine. The cookies on a large plate look enticing so he puts two on a serviette then leans back in his chair.

Veronica smiles. Murph starts to say something to Vince but Veronica touches his hand.

MURPH

Ah...

Wry smiles pass between them. They both surreptitiously stretch on the couch and end up close together.

Bram's phone dings on the kitchen table.

He raises his head to look at it. Natalie's eyes pierce into him.

NATALIE

Don't you dare. Rule number eleven
 applies here.

Bram settles back uncomfortably.

After a short time he moves to get up. Natalie holds his arm gently but lets him rise.

BRAM

Just going to the can.

NATALIE

Fine. Down the hall to the right.

As he passes by the darkened kitchen table he picks up his phone with its slowly flashing indicator.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Hey!

BRAM
Need a night light.

NATALIE
Yeah, sure.

She toasts him with a sip of wine.

Bram comes back in a few minutes, reading from his phone.

BRAM
PSK is also known as Krestin. It's found in a white-and-orangey mushroom called Trametes versicolor. That's what they were talking about.

NATALIE
What are you on about, Bram?

She sips at her wine and takes a bite of a cookie.

Murph takes his hand from Veronica's as he twists around toward Bram.

MURPH
Yeah. PSK. What's it do?

Still reading,

BRAM
Clinical trials have concluded that PSK's enhancement of a cancer patient's immune system produces cancer reduction rates that exceed those of currently used chemical cocktails, with little to no side-effects. And this picture is the same mushroom that's all around here.

He shows his screen to the others. Veronica nods.

VERONICA
I've seen that stuff everywhere. Call it Turkey Tail. See how the circles of colour look like a feather tail?

Murph nods also.

MURPH

Yeah. Seen it grow on dead hardwood
in the bush.
It fights cancer?

BRAM

So it's not just our Ranch that has
these mushrooms?

MURPH

Nah. They're everywhere. Don't know
what Dougie and his mob thought.

Still reading,

BRAM

It says there are a number of
varieties. Some have more of this
PSK than others.

(looks over his phone at
Natalie as she slips
lazily down the couch)

Could be a good industry around
here growing and selling these
Turkey Tails.

Natalie plops all the way off the loveseat onto the thick
throw-rug. Lazily,

NATALIE

Very interesting. Nice mushroom.
Can we pick that topic up in the
morning?

Vince reaches for yet another couple cookies. Lazily,

VINCE

Say, Mrs. Karol. These are good.
Did you make these?

In putting his glass shakily onto the table he surprises
himself by plopping down to join Natalie on the rug. He
absently holds the hand with his cookies up. Settling against
the chair's front, he smiles at the fireplace as he gobbles
more cookie. With a bit of a slur,

VINCE (CONT'D)

Oh! Look at the way that wood is
popping sparks! Wow.

Bram stares over his phone at the sight of his pilot and
copilot sinking into oblivion on the rug.

Veronica and Murph giggle at Natalie and Vince.

MURPH

Gotta watch that wine-and-cookies
combo!

BRAM

(shaking his head,
mumbling to himself)
Hypocrite or just human. Sometimes
the trap is waiting for the best of
us. Or it's simple serendipity.

He shakes his head, still mumbling,

BRAM (CONT'D)

Anyway, you're at the top of the
steps and I'm your handrail.

Bram's Not-Nice Cherub starts to shimmer into view.

BRAM (CONT'D)

Bugger off.