

The Mountain in the Mirror

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EXT. A MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

It's snowing hard. The mountain bends up towards the sky, craggy, mysterioustic. The wind howls relentlessly.

Gradually, everything intensifies: the snow, the howling, the darkness. The snow threatens to envelop the screen.

Suddenly, a gunshot. The shattering of a mirror. The darkness turns to a warm color as the snow swells and transitions to...

INT. STOPPER HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

The snow becomes bubbles in a glass of bubbly champagne in a cracked mirror. It was broken by a rogue champagne cork.

There's a party in the house. Friends, family, gathered for a small going away soiree.

VAUGHN STOPPER, 40's, and his brother, ROBIN STOPPER, 20's, hold their champagne glasses, relaxing.

VAUGHN

Sorry about the mirror, bro. I'll call someone to fix it before I leave tomorrow.

ROBIN

No one's gonna be up that early to fix a damn mirror. Don't worry about it.

VAUGHN

Hey. I said I'd call somebody. Alright?

ROBIN

Vaughn...

VAUGHN

Don't give me that look...

ROBIN

I'm gonna miss you.

The brothers pull into a hug. MOTHER STOPPER, tipsy, breaks them up obnoxiously to give her two cents to her sons.

MOTHER

Robin! When are you going to get a girlfriend!? Your mother wants grandchildren and Vaughn certainly isn't going to be very productive in that regard for much longer! Do they even have women in Bakarakawhatever?

VAUGHN

Bhakartha, mom, and yes, I'm sure they do, but I won't be seeing any where I'm going.

MOTHER

Cause you wanna go live up in a mountain like one of those Buddha monk people, shave your head, sit still for 20 hours a day...

VAUGHN

It's nothing like that, ma...

MOTHER

Then why are you leaving us? Are we not good enough for you anymore?

Robin slowly slinks away. Mother Stopper chatters on.

CUT TO:

EXT: STOPPER HOUSE ROOF - NIGHT

Robin sits on the roof looking out at the forest that stretches around the house.

Below, the hum of conversation indicates that the party thrums along.

Vaughn pulls himself out a window.

VAUGHN

Thought I'd find you up here.

He sits next to Robin and the two stare into the silence.

VAUGHN

You left me back there.

There is no response from Robin. Vaughn gestures towards the expanse in front of them.

VAUGHN

Remember that forest? Playing there as kids?

Robin still doesn't answer

ROBIN

I keep going over it in my head.

VAUGHN

What?

ROBIN

You. Leaving.

VAUGHN

Oh that. I thought -

ROBIN

It's not much different, is it? The kind of life you're thinking of living in the mountains. I mean, I'd get it if you wanted to move to like Chicago or New York or even L.A., hell you've got the money.

VAUGHN

Hey, life savings don't come cheap.

ROBIN

If you want the small town life, you've got it here. But what you're talking about, you'd be by yourself in the wilds, roughing it in sub-zero temperatures, at altitudes thin enough for you to asphyxiate in.

VAUGHN

That don't sound fun to you?

ROBIN

Sounds crazy. Sounds like you're crazy.

VAUGHN

Trust me bro, it is different from here.

ROBIN

Yeah, you're right. At least here you get to see other people, have a little human interaction. Up there -

VAUGHN

There'll be no one. Absolute solitude. It's where I belong.

ROBIN

It sounds empty. Just as empty as living here.

VAUGHN

It's a different kind of empty.

There is a contemplative silence.

VAUGHN

Oh, before I forget.

Vaughn fishes in his pocket and flips a coin to Robin.

VAUGHN

Here. I still owe you.

Robin catches the coin and looks down at it.

ROBIN

I don't deserve this.

VAUGHN

Yeah you do. You passed.

The coin has a face on one side and a wolf on the other. Vaughn stands on the roof, like he's going to go back inside.

ROBIN

I don't want it.

Vaughn just laughs.

VAUGHN
Sucks, doesn't it?

He kicks Robin off the roof.

CUT TO:

EXT: THE MOUNTAIN, A CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Robin sits by himself in front of a cackling fire. He was not sleeping; his eyes are wide open. He sits for a while, listening, thinking. It snows lightly.

A grizzled SHERPA is with his beast of burden, an ox or a yak. He counts out a wad of paper bills in his hand.

His English is subpar, but he can make out raised voices happening at another campfire.

FATHER CROMWELL, an old, well dressed pastor, argues with BERNICE, a young but experienced scientist.

CROMWELL
Look, I'm as skeptical about this as you are, but you can't deny -

BERNICE
Yes, I can't deny what's in front of my eyes, but the problem is we're not seeing the full picture.

CROMWELL
And what happens when we do? If we do?

BERNICE
I'll share what I find with anyone who wants to know. I want to satisfy the curiosity of the people who can't accept their loss on faith. People who aren't like you.

CROMWELL
I am here to pay my respects to a dear old friend of mine. This becomes harder to do when I have to subject myself to your tests. It is not what he would've wanted.

BERNICE

Father Cromwell, we're nearing the altitude where people started disappearing. I need to start running these tests or we'll never know what happened to these people, or what happened to us and why we're the only ones who remember them.

CROMWELL

I don't need to know what happened. Like I said, I'm here to pay respects. I also happen to be leading this expedition -

BERNICE

No you're not. He is.

She gestures to the Sherpa, who looks up from his money counting.

CROMWELL

I'm paying him to. Point is, I have authority, and I refuse to let you violate -

BERNICE

No one's violating...

CROMWELL

- my beliefs. I can't speak for the others, but I'm sure that they would agree with me...

They continue arguing. Nearby, RACHEL and MICAH, a married couple in their 40's, very normal, who look straight out of a home living commercial, listen and talk.

RACHEL

We really should go say something.

MICAH

I want to, but...you don't mind if Bernice does the tests, do you?

RACHEL

No, not at all, though I don't think Pastor Cromwell would take kindly.

MICAH

That's putting it mildly.

Micah looks around the campsite. He spies CORBIN, a rebellious looking youth, receding within himself and his earphones at the adjacent campfire. He has piercings.

MICAH

Maybe we should talk to Corbin. See what he thinks.

RACHEL

Oh, we should just leave him alone.

As though he didn't hear her, Micah calls out to Corbin.

MICAH

Corbin?

Corbin doesn't answer. Micah is undeterred.

MICAH

Hey Corbin, whaddya think...he's ignoring me. He's...why is he -

RACHEL

Honey, he has his earphones in. He can't hear you.

MICAH

Ah.

Bernice and Cromwell's argument has gotten even more heated. The fire burns between them.

BERNICE

Pastor, I've already come this far. Please don't make this trip have been for nothing.

CROMWELL

For nothing? The purpose of this trip has nothing to do with your own agenda.

BERNICE

Pastor, this issue would have attracted more attention in the world if people had remembered anything about the missing persons. As it stands, though, there are no records of anyone entering or leaving Bhakartha and, even stranger, no records of them ever existing. Birth certificates, marriage certificates, utility bills, nothing exists with these people's names on it anymore. And no one remembers them. I mean, there are parents who don't remember they have children! Now, I don't know if all of us here are a bunch of insane people connected on a crazy collective consciousness, but I need to know. And so do all the people who don't know they need to know. So believe me when I say I am acting in everyone's best interests.

CROMWELL

Some people don't want to know. I don't want to know. I just want to believe.

BERNICE

No one's stopping you. Just let me do my tests.

CROMWELL

You do your tests, you show no understanding for what I believe in, and you want to call it the greater good, you call it progress.

BERNICE

People who stand in front of progress get flattened by it, pastor.

A moment of indelible tension. Both parties feel threatened. Robin walks in between them with a sausage on a stick.

Bernice and Cromwell are struck with the guilt of having disrupted the group. They continue talking in hushed tones. Robin cooks his food.

CROMWELL

I don't want to stop you, Bernice. I am not unfeeling. Everything that's happened the last few months...I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to know what's going on.

BERNICE

Then why won't you let me try and help?

Despite their lowered voices, Robin can still hear every word that is being said. He listens intently.

CROMWELL

Because I'm scared.

BERNICE

You admit it?

CROMWELL

There's nothing wrong with admitting it. But I am scared. I'm scared we're going to find something horrid and unnatural. Things like this don't just happen. It's like these people vanished from the face of this mountain, off the face of this earth. I've asked you this before, but I'm going to ask you again. Do you believe in a higher power?

BERNICE

My answer is the same as it was before.

CROMWELL

As is mine.

BERNICE

You want to stay ignorant. I understand. You're scared of the unknown.

CROMWELL

No. I'm scared that we're going to learn something we've known all along.

Cromwell's words resonate in Robin. Micah and Rachel walk up to the fire, tentative.

MICAH

Pastor? Bernice? I don't mind if you do these tests.

RACHEL

Me neither. If it helps you cope, Bernice, then we'll do it.

Bernice looks ready to say something about how this isn't for herself, but stops, ready to take her victories where she can.

MICAH

I can't speak for Corbin, though. He seems very entranced in his, ah, earphones.

CROMWELL

Corbin is under my care, but I do not control him. He will do what you want if you ask nicely, I believe.

BERNICE

Robin, are you OK with the tests?

ROBIN

I didn't sign no waiver, Doc.

BERNICE

I've already told you, I'm not a doctor. And these are just simple tests, blood pressure, reflexes, nothing intrusive. Please, I know you want to find out what happened to your brother as much as any of us want to know what happened to our loved ones.

Robin looks at Bernice, then into the fire. Eventually, he nods.

ROBIN

Yeah. Fine.

She smiles triumphantly, then looks at Cromwell. He sighs.

CROMWELL

It looks like you have me outnumbered.

BERNICE

You can still refuse if you want -

CROMWELL

No. I'll do the tests.

BERNICE

Thank you. Thank you, all of you. I know this will help, I just know it.

CROMWELL

The Sherpa says we're heading into rough territory tomorrow. After all the excitement, it's probably a good idea to get some rest. All of us.

The crowd slowly disperses. Robin walks back to his campsite. He kicks some snow on the fire and watches it sizzle out. Then, he goes into his tent, closes it, lies down, and closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. A FOREST - DAYTIME

Robin opens his eyes. He is young, only about seven years old. He blinks. Dust falls into his eyes. They tear up. A punch lands across his face. He falls.

Vaughn, the puncher, stands over him. He is also young, about twelve.

Around them, the forest is falling into autumn, yellow, brown, red leaves falling, acorns falling.

Robin landed on a patch of leaves. He sniffs.

VAUGHN

Come on, get back up.

Robin just lies there. Eventually, he sits up.

ROBIN

I don't think I -

VAUGHN

What, you gonna chicken out on me?
Chicken?

Robin wipes his face and slowly rises to his feet.

VAUGHN

That's better. Now, do me.

Robin hesitantly clenches his little fist and swings himself forward at Vaughn. The punch lands, but Vaughn is unmoved.

VAUGHN

No!

He punches Robin back, who is again sent to the ground.

VAUGHN

You're doing it wrong.

Robin sits up again and touches his face gingerly.

VAUGHN

You're gonna get beat up again.

ROBIN

Fine.

VAUGHN

Don't say that. It's not fine. Those bullies ain't nothing special and neither are you if you keep letting them wail on you.

He offers Robin a hand. Robin takes it and Vaughn pulls him up, only to punch him down again.

VAUGHN

Don't be a pushover, bro! If you wanna learn how to fight, the best way to learn anything is to practice. Keep doing it. So you gotta fight whenever you can! Don't trust anyone who's not trying to beat you up.

ROBIN

And trust the ones who are?

VAUGHN

Don't trust anyone.

Robin gets up. He tries another weak punch, but Vaughn deflects it, sending Robin off balance, and punches him in the chest. Robin staggers back and falls against a tree.

Vaughn looks at Robin who has begun sniffing, nursing his wounds. Vaughn's look is one of disgust, disdain, distaste.

VAUGHN

Jeez...My hands are getting tired.

He sends one last fist into Robin's stomach. Robin doubles over, coughing and Vaughn steps backwards, admiring his work.

VAUGHN

Look at you! You're not even angry. How are you supposed to fight back if you're not angry? Come on, I know you were angry at some point. You had to have been if you came to me to learn how to fight back.

ROBIN

I never asked you. You said I needed it.

VAUGHN

Yeah, cause you're my brother. I'm not gonna let some no-name loser bully pick on you. Now get. Up.

Robin once more picks himself up. Tears trickle down his face silently. He stands ready.

ROBIN

Thanks, Vaughn.

Vaughn cracks a smile. Then he cracks his fist across Robin's face. Robin's face is pushed offscreen, then floats back. Another crack, and Robin's face returns. Another crack, but this time, Robin's face returns much older.

Then, there is a slap, as though he has finally stopped the punch from landing.

CUT TO:

INT. A TENT, THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

Bernice's tent has some makeshift lab equipment set up. It's all easily packable, but clashes with her living space. It's messy and the group is moving out soon.

Robin is gripping Bernice's wrist tightly. She has an instrument in her hand like she was about to use it on Robin's face. Bernice is shocked at Robin's grip.

ROBIN

Not the face, Doc.

BERNICE

But Robin, almost half of the test -

ROBIN

Not. The face.

Bernice almost tries to make another objection, but something in the tone of Robin's voice, something in his eyes, plus he won't let go of her...She nods understandingly. Robin releases her wrist.

Bernice looks at Robin carefully. She wants to ask, but thinks better of it. Robin looks back appreciatively. She puts her instrument away and takes out another one.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

Robin opens the tent flap to Bernice's living place cum laboratory. The snow has stopped for now and the sun is very bright.

Rachel and Micah are taking down their tent and also having a bit of trouble doing so. Corbin watches. His countenance does not betray amusement, but he is chuckling inside.

MICAH

Hey Corbin, do you have any idea how to...

RACHEL

I think this part goes here, honey...

MICAH

We're kinda helpless, as you can see.

Corbin approaches the couple. He begins packing the tent up the right way.

MICAH

Wow. You're awful good at this Corbin.
You go camping often?

Corbin looks at Micah. It's a look that says "Look at me, do I look like I go camping ever?" But Micah doesn't perceive it and Corbin just says

CORBIN

I read the instructions.

MICAH

Ah right! Of course! The instructions.

An awkward silence. Micah clears his throat uncomfortably.

MICAH

You know, you really should take your piercings out, son. You're going to get frostbite.

Corbin stops the tent packing. Micah looks scared that he has said something wrong. Corbin rises, but before anything can happen, Robin walks up to him.

ROBIN

Corbin. Doc wants to see you now. I'll finish this.

Corbin gives Robin a look. It's not a grateful look, but he probably wants it to be, and he shuffles off to Bernice's tent.

RACHEL

Thank you, Corbin.

Robin picks up packing the tent where Corbin left off.

ROBIN

You know, Micah, you should leave the kid be.

RACHEL

That's what I've been telling him, but-

MICAH

What? Leave him be? Am I bothering him?

ROBIN

I'm not a good reader of people, but I would say that judging by the fact that he don't talk - ever - I don't think he wants to be talked to, either.

RACHEL

You hear that, Micah? That's what I've been trying to tell him.

ROBIN

Look, I get it. You lost a kid. Corbin lost his parents. You're trying to cope by being a guardian for him and you think that'll help him cope too. But when a person don't talk, forcing them ain't gonna help. And just cause a person don't talk when you think they aughtta, don't mean they ain't thinking about important things. They're just...thinking.

He stuffs the compressed tent into a pack and hands it to Micah.

ROBIN

I can't tell you to do nothing, but I think Corbin would appreciate it if you left him alone. Let Cromwell handle him since he knows the kid. And don't worry about your daughter. No one said anybody who disappeared has died. Yet.

He walks off to pack his own things. Rachel puts a reassuring hand on Micah's shoulder.

MICAH

Rachel...I love Annie very much, but I think it was a mistake coming here.

RACHEL

We're not used to this life. Roughing it in the wilds with rough people. But that doesn't mean we can't learn. And if Annie is still alive...

MICAH

Oh...

They embrace.

At another camp place, Cromwell is arguing with the Sherpa. He has a map of the mountain and the two of them are pointing to different areas.

CROMWELL

Well, it seems to me like you're just trying to milk me for money.

SHERPA

No, not money. You listen. Not go there. We go around.

CROMWELL

Tell me why. The clearing is perfect. It's easy to cross. There's no chance of an avalanche because it's not surrounded by mountainsides. The route you're proposing would take us three extra days and would require us to climb around a steep part of the mountain.

SHERPA

No. No go because...

He gestures frantically and says a word in his own language. Cromwell sighs in exasperation. Robin passes by.

ROBIN

You get what you pay for, Pastor. Cheaper guides don't speak many languages.

CROMWELL

(sarcastic) Yes, thank you, Robin.
(Beat) I'm sorry. I'm just trying to...

SHERPA

Is danger. Not go there.

CROMWELL

How is it dangerous? That plateau looks like it might be the safest place on this entire mountain. It cannot harm us there.

ROBIN

Maybe listen to the man, Pastor. He knows his way around. And besides, nature isn't the only thing that's dangerous on this mountain. That's why we're here, right?

Cromwell ponders these words, then he sighs and nods.

CROMWELL

Very well. (To Sherpa) We'll do it your way.

The Sherpa smiles, relieved, and pats Cromwell's arm.

SHERPA

You trust me? No?

CROMWELL

Yeah. Sure. (To Robin) Tell that scientist to get her things together.

The Sherpa leads his beast of burden away to gather everyone's gear and Robin leaves to go get Bernice.

Cromwell looks up at the sky and then out across the vast expanse before him. For the moment, he is alone.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN - A CLIFFSIDE

The party walks along a very steep and narrow trail. The Sherpa's animal can fit, but it wobbles awkwardly.

The animal grunts and groans with the Sherpa leading it and the party. Cromwell and Corbin follow behind him, Robin and Bernice behind them, and Micah and Rachel behind them.

CROMWELL

Corbin, take your piercings out. It's only going to get colder from here.

Corbin looks at his pastor and silently obliges.

MICAH

(calling from the back) That's what I told him!

Corbin is visually annoyed. Rachel hits Micah, who is surprised and almost falls off the mountain. Not really, though, of course.

MICAH

Jesus, Rachel!

CROMWELL

Language.

MICAH

Jeez Louise, Rachel!

RACHEL

Oh be quiet, you big baby.

Micah and Rachel whisper argue. Cromwell speaks to Corbin in hushed tones.

CROMWELL

You mustn't be cross with Micah. He is trying to help.

CORBIN

I don't want help. I don't need help.

CROMWELL

I remember you saying the same thing to me twelve years ago when you met your parents.

Corbin stares forward, saddened at the mention of his lost foster parents. Cromwell, realizing his mistake, looks apologetic

CROMWELL

I'm sorry. (Beat) If you don't put up with him for you, at least do it for him.

Corbin is still unresponsive, but he is pondering. Cromwell takes his silence for disregard and drops the subject.

CORBIN

What do you think would've happened if the mission trip hadn't come to this mountain?

Cromwell turns to Corbin. It is a hollow question, asked more for assurance than an answer.

CORBIN

They had already finished. They could've come home. But they had to go mountain climbing. A vacation. Fun.

Cromwell begins to see where the conversation is going and he braces an answer.

CORBIN

Pastor Drew was in charge of the mission trip. It was his idea, wasn't it?

CROMWELL

Yes, it was. Corbin, you shouldn't -

CORBIN

He's the reason all this is happening.

CROMWELL

Well, I doubt he caused everyone to disappear from existence, if that's what you mean.

CORBIN

You know exactly what I mean.

CROMWELL

Corbin, stop. There's no point in applying blame in this situation. All the signs point to something so far beyond our control that bringing up hypotheticals is pointless. It's just going to agitate you.

CORBIN

Agitate!? I'm climbing a mountain right now! I'm already pretty goddamn agitated!

Rachel and Micah have long since stopped whispering. Everyone was able to hear Corbin's outburst. They all defer to the silence that follows.

The Sherpa, aware of only raised voice behind him, turns and gives a questioning thumbs-up.

SHERPA

We ok?

No response. The man just smiles and continues leading.

Corbin takes his earphones out. Cromwell tries to get in some words before the young man begins drowning the world in noise.

CROMWELL

Pastor Dave is my oldest friend. I know that he wouldn't have purposely led the mission trip into danger.

CORBIN

I know. I'm sorry.

CROMWELL

Corbin...you know that if we don't find your parents...they are in a better place.

CORBIN

Yeah. I just don't want to be alone.

He covers the headphones over his ears, shutting himself out of the world.

Cromwell thinks about advising Corbin to keep one ear open, but thinks better of it.

ROBIN
Headphones. Swell idea.

BERNICE
I'd settle for just a decent pair of earmuffs.

ROBIN
At least it's not snowing anymore.

SHERPA
Snow? There is snow soon. Big snow.

BERNICE
Really? How do you know?

The Sherpa pulls a smart phone from out of his jacket. Bernice is mystified.

BERNICE
You can get reception all the way up here?

SHERPA
Is good thing. Called "Seven Day Forecast."

Bernice sheepishly looks down. Cromwell disapproves.

CROMWELL
You could've mentioned we were running into a blizzard sooner.

The Sherpa just shrugs.

SHERPA
You have "Seven Day Forecast" too?

Cromwell puts a hand to his temple, exasperated.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

True to the Sherpa's word, it has begun snowing. It falls slowly, but steadily, not quite a blizzard yet.

On the face of the mountain, a dim flickering light can be seen near the center.

Very softly, there is the distant, almost inaudible sound of a wolf howling.

INT. MOUNTAIN CAVE - NIGHT

The cave is just a small alcove. It's not very deep. A couple fires have been set within.

Corbin is nestled in some climbing gear, relaxing. The Sherpa's animal is with him, but Corbin for the most part ignores it, despite the beast occasionally licking him, which he doesn't mind.

He looks up slowly in surprise. A look of worry crosses his face. Was it just his imagination, or...

There is a din at the campfire next to his. Micah is telling everyone a story.

Corbin decides the sound must have been part of Micah's performance so he shrugs it off. He settles back into his seclusion, somewhat uneasier than he was moments ago.

The group minus Corbin and the Sherpa, who is out scouting ahead, are around the fire.

Micah, with Rachel's help, tells a story about his daughter. The members of the group listen with varying amounts of attentiveness.

MICAH

Now, Annie, she wasn't -

RACHEL

Isn't.

MICAH

She isn't a girl who will let you talk to her like that. She'll give you the old one two, just like her dad taught her.

CROMWELL
(incredulously) You box?

MICAH
No, but I watched all the Rocky movies with her. Anyways, this boy thinks he can get rough with my Annie, but nope. Annie knocks him right down on his b - uh...ahss...uh...butt. Just...pop!

BERNICE
Pop?

MICAH
Yep. Just like that.

BERNICE
Wow. I think I need to rewatch Rocky.

MICAH
Nobody messed with her after that. Called her Annie Oakley, they did.

ROBIN
They didn't before? Your last name is Oakley, right?

MICAH
Yes, but now they meant it. Annie...Oakley.

CROMWELL
(low key sarcasm) She sounds like a delightful young woman.

RACHEL
Oh stop being silly, Micah. She took kickboxing lessons. And she never touched a hair on anybody's head. She did it all for the rush, she said. The sports she did. Kickboxing, fencing, spelunking, mountain climbing, she was just trying to find some excitement in her life.

MICAH
Yes, well the boy was -

RACHEL

Her opponent in the Ohio State
University Fencing Tournament.

CROMWELL

Fencing? What happened to boxing?

RACHEL

Micah is needlessly embellishing the story.

MICAH

Hey, don't blame me...still a pretty
cool story...

CROMWELL

Fencing is split by gender.

RACHEL

Yes. Nobody knew she was a girl until
after she took her mask off. Of course,
it was violating the rules, so she was
disqualified and given a stern talking-
to by the officials.

In the background, Corbin rises from his place and goes to
the mouth of the cave.

MICAH

They gave the title to the boy. And
boy, was he sour about it. Talking all
kinds of trash.

CROMWELL

From my experience, there isn't too
much of a discrepancy of skill between
male and female fencers. I've beaten
and been beaten by both equally.

MICAH

(mock incredulosity) Pastor Cromwell,
you fence?

CROMWELL

Yes. I've been fencing since my college
days.

MICAH

Oh.

RACHEL

You misunderstand, pastor. She was never trying to prove anything. It was all just good fun to her.

MICAH

That's what she would call all this. Good fun.

RACHEL

I swear, we're going to find her here and she's going to pretend nothing's wrong, even though she knows she's in big big trouble. And she'll come up to us and say, "Hey Mom, hey Dad. Isn't this all some good good fun?"

Rachel smiles emptily and Micah laughs at the thought.

CROMWELL

(sincerely) She does sound like a delightful young woman.

Micah excuses himself and goes to his part of the cave, hiding his face. Rachel looks alone, so Bernice goes to sit next to her and talk to her. Cromwell crosses himself and begins to say a silent prayer for everyone.

Corbin goes up to Robin. He talks quietly.

CORBIN

You got a minute?

ROBIN

Yeah, you need something?

CORBIN

No, but...ok hear me out.

ROBIN

Ok.

CORBIN

I think I hear wolves.

Robin freezes in alarm for half a second at the mention of wolves, but it is a look that passes over his face and it is gone.

ROBIN

No such thing as mountain wolves, I don't think.

CORBIN

Yeah, I know, but I'm hearing something and it sounds like howling.

ROBIN

You ever heard a real wolf howl? It ain't the same in the movies, you know.

CORBIN

I definitely heard something. That I do know.

ROBIN

Well, we'll tell Pastor Cromwell when he's done.

CORBIN

I would've gone to him first, but he's going to say I'm imagining it. I listen to too much "raucous music," according to him.

Robin looks over to Cromwell, whose head is still bowed in prayer. He contemplates and slowly gets up.

ROBIN

(to Corbin) Alright, let's go take a look. (to everyone else) We're going to go wait for our guide by the entrance.

CROMWELL

(not changing his posture) He's late. Make sure he knows that.

ROBIN

Yes sir.

Robin and Corbin walk to the mouth of the cave. The darkness is very present. The falling snow reflects some of the firelight from within the cave, but the expanse of darkness seems to be devouring what light it touches.

Robin walks forward into the darkness. Corbin stays back a bit. The apprehension builds.

There is the sound of shuffling. A pinprick of light is seen.

ROBIN
Who's there?

SHERPA
Hello?

Robin breathes a sigh of relief. The Sherpa appears from the darkness using his phone as a flashlight.

ROBIN
Did you see anything out there? Any
wolves or animals?

SHERPA
Wolves? What?

ROBIN
Nothing. Let's get you back inside with
some food.

CORBIN
(urgently) Robin.

Robin and the Sherpa turn back to the cave mouth. There is something menacing in the darkness. A guttural growl. A black wolf shifts slowly from the darkness and into view.

Its fur is matted from the snow, but unmistakable muscle and sinew ripple as it advances. It begins to bare its teeth as a deeper growl echoes from its lungs.

All three people are frozen. They don't know what to do.

ROBIN
Get back. Slowly.

SHERPA

No. No move.

CORBIN

Oh my God.

ROBIN

We can't sit here.

SHERPA

I have gun.

ROBIN

What?

SHERPA

Gun. You know. Bang bang.

ROBIN

Where?

SHERPA

Pocket.

Robin's hand is already close to the Sherpa's pocket. He is able to slide his hand in without much movement. When he pulls it out, he is clasping a simple pistol.

The wolf almost instinctively senses danger and tenses. It is ready to pounce on a moment's notice. Robin's hand tightens on the gun. The whole situation is waiting for a match to light the fuse.

And then it comes.

MICAH (O.S.)

Are you guys alright over there?

The wolf barks and jumps forward. The Sherpa, Corbin, and Robin run back into the cave. Robin fires shots at the wolf, to scare it, not to hit it. It is taken aback for long enough for the three to run into the cave. The wolf gives chase immediately after.

There are screams of terror. Confusions. Sounds of "What's going on" and "What the hell." The beast of burden neighs and bucks.

The fires are doused somehow. The only light source becomes the weak light from the Sherpa's phone that was dropped in the snow. It's not a good light source, and creates more shadows and darkness than light.

The wolf corners Micah. The man is frantic, kicking and flailing and screaming.

Robin has the gun. He aims it at the hulking shadow of the wolf. He doesn't pull the trigger.

MICAH

Oh God, help!

CROMWELL

Robin, kill it!

ROBIN

I...

His hand shakes. The wolf launches itself forward at Micah.

Robin shoots at the wall next to the wolf three times in rapid succession. Each shot lights up the cave instantaneously. Three distinct frames of the wolf tearing something, people huddled in a corner, and Robin, looking gaunt with fear.

The wolf turns its attention to the armed man, to its threat. Its jowls drip with something, probably blood, maybe saliva, but no one can see because of the darkness.

It circles Robin. Robin moves with it, aiming the gun, this time straight at the beast.

CROMWELL

Robin. Kill it. Now.

The wolf stops moving. It growls deeply. Its haunches tense. Robin's finger tightens. The wolf pounces.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

An ant marches industriously forward. It encounters a crumb of bread, which it picks up and begins carrying back home.

Gradually, its movements slow. It begins steaming. Concentrated heat forces it to fold in on itself. The crumb drops to the forest floor.

Young Vaughn Stopper stands over the unfortunate ant with a magnifying glass. His face is one of revelry and fascination.

VAUGHN

Hey Robin, come over here!

Young Robin Stopper had been making a small log cabin with twigs and leaves. He did not hear his brother's call.

VAUGHN

Get over here, stupid!

Vaughn runs to Robin and kicks his creation over. The boy drags his younger brother to where there are lines and lines of ants carrying antly items into a group of rather large anthills.

Vaughn waves his magnifying glass in Robin's face.

VAUGHN

It works! Look. Watch!

He carefully selects a victim and focuses the sun's beams onto the ant. Robin watches the writhing insect with no expression on his face.

Vaughn laughs and crushes the smoldering ant under his foot.

VAUGHN

That's so awesome. Isn't it?

ROBIN

What about his friends?

VAUGHN

You want me to do them too? That'll take a while, but we'll get there.

ROBIN

No. Don't. I mean they'll miss him. His family too.

VAUGHN

They don't care. Ants don't care about anything. They're stupid. Look how small they are.

ROBIN

I don't get it. Why kill them? What did they do to you?

VAUGHN

Cause it's funny. Jeez, what's wrong with you, bro?

ROBIN

I don't like it.

VAUGHN

Maybe you gotta do it to understand. Here, try it. You'll change your mind.

He holds his magnifying glass out to Robin, but Robin doesn't take it. He just looks down at the ground.

VAUGHN

Go on. Take it.

Robin starts walking away. Vaughn goes after him.

VAUGHN

Hey where do you think you're going? Do it!

He grabs Robin roughly and stops him. Robin feebly attempts to pull away.

VAUGHN

If you do it, I'll give you Dad's coin.

Robin stops struggling and looks at Vaughn in disbelief. Satisfied at having hooked him, Vaughn lets go. He holds his magnifying glass out again.

ROBIN

Really?

VAUGHN

Sure.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out the coin: man on one side, wolf on the other. Robin stares at it in wonder.

VAUGHN

Do the thing.

He pushes the magnifying glass into Robin's hand. Robin takes it uneasily and goes to the anthills.

VAUGHN

Now, focus the light onto them. You gotta do it just right. Put the glass about this high. That's how you'll get the light to be the strongest. If you want, you can lure them to you with this bread. It's funnier that way.

He scatters some crumbs among the ants. There is a mass scramble for the food.

VAUGHN

Pick one and focus on it. Follow it when it moves. Don't let up.

Robin clumsily handles the magnifying glass. The pinprick of light dodges to and fro from ant to ant, before finally stopping on one.

VAUGHN

There you go. Wait for it...

The ant starts moving slower. The tiny spotlight wavers.

VAUGHN

Keep it on, keep it on...

The ant begins to burn. Suddenly, the light disappears. The ant, despite being very warm, is otherwise unaffected and continues on its way.

VAUGHN

What the hell, bro?

ROBIN

I'm sorry. I can't do it. You can keep the coin.

Vaughn flips the coin and catches it in his palm. It lands wolf side up.

Vaughn's hand clenches around the coin into a fist. He brings it across Robin's face.

VAUGHN

I tried. But you really like being stupid. You like it too much.

He grabs Robin by the collar and shakes him violently.

VAUGHN

These ants are not your friends!
They've never done anything for you.
I'm your brother. And you won't listen to me!

He lets go of Robin and snatches his magnifying glass back. Robin tries to shrink. He can't go anywhere. He can't do anything. He is trapped.

VAUGHN

Well, you know what, you can just join the ants since you love them so much.

He throws Robin into the cluster of anthills. Robin yelps and tries to get up, but Vaughn kicks him back down and kicks the anthills on top of Robin. The ants scramble frenetically towards the large disturbance.

Vaughn puts his foot on Robin's face, forcing it down as ants crawl around him.

VAUGHN

Try not to scream. They're going to go into your mouth.

Robin does not listen and continues screaming and flailing. The ants still manage to crawl onto the boy.

ROBIN
Stop it! Stop it!

VAUGHN
Are you talking to me or the ants?

He laughs at his own joke. The ants come closer to Robin's face. Closer, closer, closer...

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN - CAVE CAMP - NIGHT

The older Robin's face is on the ground. Its eyes are wide open. Something is pressing it on the cold snowy ground.

Sound is muffled. There can be heard a terrible bellowing sound. The entire cave is orange, like someone struck a flare.

Sounds of people. Walking around Robin. There is a distinct rhythmic counting down, like "3, 2, 1" and suddenly, with a collective heave, the weight is lifted off of Robin. Sound returns to normal.

Cromwell pulls the wolf's body off of Robin, with the help of the Sherpa. The thing is massive. Blood oozes from a fatal wound on its belly.

Corbin sits with the Sherpa's dying animal. Its horn is gored and it has suffered claw wounds on its neck. Its bellows of pain echo around the cave.

Bernice is in the corner tending to a body. Rachel hovers over her, incredibly worried.

Cromwell struggles with the wolf's body. It weighs him down.

CROMWELL
(to Sherpa) Check on him.

The Sherpa kneels down next to Robin. He is unconscious, though his eyes are wide open. He is also unscathed, mostly. Not all his wounds are on the surface of his skin.

The Sherpa has no idea what to do medically speaking. He pokes Robin's face, shakes him some. Upon lifting Robin up a little, he notices something underneath him.

He reaches down and picks up a coin that was in the snow buried underneath Robin. One side has the face of a man, the other has a wolf's head.

It's an intriguing find. The Sherpa forgets for a second about Robin and breathes on the shiny coin, brushing some of the snow off of it.

Satisfied with his discovery, the Sherpa pockets the coin. He turns his attention again to Robin.

The gun is still clenched in his hand, but the trigger finger is loose. Wanting his weapon back, the Sherpa reaches for the gun.

Robin breathes in deeply and reflexively points the gun at the Sherpa. The grizzled man starts and puts his hands up.

Neither man says anything. Neither man moves. Robin looks deeply at the Sherpa. The Sherpa looks back a bit shaken. His mind is racing. The coin...

Robin slowly lowers the gun. The Sherpa relaxes. He forgets about taking his gun back and stands up, helping Robin up as well.

Robin doubles over a bit in pain. He holds his midriff. It was crushed by the wolf.

He surveys the scene. The Sherpa goes towards his animal, which Corbin has taken to stroking.

Robin stumbles to Cromwell. The old pastor has succeeded in wrestling the wolf off of himself.

ROBIN

What's a wolf like this doing in the mountains?

Cromwell doesn't know the answer. Nobody does. So nobody says anything.

CROMWELL

I'm glad you're ok. That's more than I
can say for Micah.

Bernice steps back. Her hands are covered in blood. She
reveals what remains of Micah.

It's actually pretty alright, considering. Only his leg and
parts of his body were mauled by the wolf. He is still very
much alive, but is presently unconscious.

ROBIN

God...is he gonna live?

CROMWELL

Not if we don't get him some real
medical attention.

Bernice hands Rachel a cloth and tells her to apply it to
Micah's forehead. Then, she walks to a bucket of melted
snow sitting over a fire and washes her hands.

Cromwell motions to the Sherpa's animal. Its whinnies have
been going on the entire time. The Sherpa approaches it
with a knife. Its head lies in Corbin's lap.

CROMWELL

That animal saved your life. And
probably all of ours as well.

Corbin remains motionless as the Sherpa kneels by the
animal. His body obstructs view of the gruesome scene.

There is a small motion of his arm. The cave is silent now,
save the crackling of the fire and the dripping of water,
blood, or both.

The Sherpa stands and cleans his blade in the snow. Corbin
has spatters of blood on him. His eyes are dead and
straight ahead; he still strokes the dead animal as though
it were still alive.

CROMWELL

Someone needs to get Micah back down to
a hospital.

RACHEL

Wait, you're not actually considering continuing with the expedition, are you?

CROMWELL

This changes nothing. I'm going forward.

BERNICE

I agree.

RACHEL

Have you all lost your minds?

BERNICE

Rachel, we have just been attacked by a wolf. Wolves don't live in this part of the world. If there's one thing all this has convinced me it's that we need to figure out what's going on more than ever.

RACHEL

He's dying!

MICAH

What? Oh God! I'm dying?!

He awakes with a start and begins panicking. The pain is unbearable.

Bernice rushes to him with a needle of sedative.

BERNICE

Hold him!

Rachel cannot move; the horror has her stuck in place. Cromwell goes to him and pushes his shoulders down.

MICAH

Why didn't you kill it?! There was a gun I heard a gun somebody should've shot it! Killed it!

The guilty gun and the guilty man shrink from the group.

MICAH

Annie, I want to see my Annie...

Bernice slides the needle in. Micah screams louder.

MICAH

Rachel, honey, you have to find her!
But don't let her see me like this no
please just find her tell her...tell
her...

His voice dies in his throat. He slumps. The cave is quiet again. Save for the drip. Drip. Drip. Drip.

Bernice and Cromwell stand. They look at each other. A look of mutual agreement between them, the first ever.

CROMWELL

I'm going up.

BERNICE

As am I.

They turn to Rachel. Her eyes are wide. She doesn't know what to do.

CROMWELL

Rachel, take Micah back down with you.
I'll have the Sherpa -

RACHEL

I think I have to keep going.

CROMWELL

Don't be ridiculous, child. Your
husband -

RACHEL

Asked me to find our daughter. She's
not dead. She's out there. She's all I
have.

BERNICE

Give us a picture. We'll know what she
looks like. We'll look for her.

RACHEL

So will I.

CROMWELL

You're not thinking clearly, Rachel.

Rachel sinks to the ground, crying. Cromwell goes to her side to comfort her.

Bernice pauses and thinks of something. She goes to her equipment and takes out her scanning device.

BERNICE

I need to get a -

Cromwell shoots her a look that says with conviction "Not. Now."

She turns away from him, unaffected, and goes to Robin, hoping for cooperation.

Cromwell's face twists in disgust, but he changes it quickly to help Rachel as she sobs.

BERNICE

Robin, I need to do some scans.

ROBIN

Yeah, gimme a sec, Doc.

He doubles over in pain as he stands up straight. Eventually he is up enough. He looks at Bernice.

BERNICE

First let me see if you're hurt. Stay still.

She brings the instrument across his chest.

ROBIN

I'm fine. Just got the wind knocked outta me.

BERNICE

You cracked a few ribs. I think you should head back with Micah, too.

ROBIN

That ain't happening, Doc.

BERNICE

I'm not a doctor, but I know a serious injury when I see one.

ROBIN

If you ain't a doctor, you can't give me no doctor's orders. I'm staying with you.

BERNICE

You'd only slow us down. We need -

ROBIN

Am I gonna die?

BERNICE

Robin...

ROBIN

Am I!?

BERNICE

Not yet, but -

ROBIN

Then I ain't leaving!

BERNICE

Robin?

ROBIN

What?

BERNICE

Um...

She looks down at his hand.

ROBIN

What!?

BERNICE

The gun...

He is still holding the pistol. It's clenched in his hand. Robin sees the gun. He just sees it. He sees it very much.

He slowly puts it in his jacket pocket. The Sherpa almost protests, but does a double take. It's not a big enough deal for him to get Robin riled up again.

BERNICE

Are you sure that's safe?

ROBIN

I'm not leaving.

Bernice looks at Cromwell for support, but the old pastor ignores her (on purpose?) caring for Rachel, who, tired from grief, has cried herself into unconsciousness.

ROBIN

'sides, if you and the pastor go up together, you'll tear each other apart.

BERNICE

Well, someone needs to go with Micah.

Cromwell looks to Corbin. He has not moved from his previous position. His eyes are dead still.

The pastor gets up gently and goes to Corbin. He puts a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

CROMWELL

Corbin? Listen, son, I think it'd be a good idea if you head back down the mountain with Micah. I'll send the Sherpa with you to help you. Everything will be alright, ok?

Corbin nods a small nod. His hand still strokes the pack animal's dead body.

Cromwell stands, worried, but satisfied with Corbin's reaction.

Bernice walks towards Corbin with her equipment, but as she passes Cromwell, the older man grabs her arm, not gently.

She wrests herself from him. Tension, tension, everywhere.

BERNICE

If our guide is going back down the mountain, how will we get up?

ROBIN

The plateau.

Cromwell checks if the Sherpa is listening. He is dragging the wolf's body out the cave, leaving a trail of blood. Bernice stops him saying she needs a tissue sample.

CROMWELL

Precisely. We're on the side of it. If we break out the climbing gear, we can get on top of it. After that, it's almost an upward walk towards the summit.

ROBIN

The Sherpa would disapprove.

CROMWELL

You want to go up, yes? We don't have many choices. I'm more worried about the climb up to the clearing. Will you be able to make it?

ROBIN

Worry about Rachel.

CROMWELL

No, there's no way she's coming. We'll leave shortly, before she wakes.

ROBIN

I don't respect that, pastor. If she wants to come, let her come.

CROMWELL

She's not thinking clearly.

ROBIN

Things have never been clearer for her in her entire life. They say you have a perfect clarity of everything when you're about to die. I think we've all just experienced that "about to die" feeling. Trust that clarity. Trust what she wants.

CROMWELL

I won't fight you, Robin. I just...

He puts his hands to his face and lets out a strangled sigh.

ROBIN

If she can't wake up soon, then fine, she goes back down. You are right about one thing. We need to get moving immediately. Snow's picking up.

The pastor nods, his face still in his hands.

CROMWELL

You're right about the clarity. Like seeing your life flash before your eyes. I saw everything I still wanted to do, not much at my age, but there was enough. Everything I missed too, all the regrets, all the mistakes. And all the lives I should've saved, all the souls I could've saved, all of them were with me. They were all saying things, but I couldn't understand it. It was just...noise. A cacophonous symphony of the damned. They were looking for another.

He slumps, dejected and exhausted from the emotional release.

CROMWELL

What about you? You had a clear shot of the wolf several times, but you never took one. What did you see?

He can't say anything.

ROBIN

I just saw a wolf.

The Sherpa kneels by Corbin, who still hasn't moved. He doesn't know what to do.

He waves his hand in front of Corbin's face. Nothing happens.

He decides it's ok to move his former pack animal. He grabs it by its horns and drags it off Corbin.

No reaction. The Sherpa drags the animal to the front of the cave along with the wolf, which Bernice has successfully extracted a tissue sample from. Her only triumph of the night.

The Sherpa looks back at Corbin, seeing if he's still unmoving.

Corbin closes his eyes. Rachel opens her eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

It's half an hour later. The makeshift campfire has been snuffed. Snowing's gotten much harder. Cromwell carries a light. The Sherpa carries another and Micah on his back.

Cromwell has a map and is handing the Sherpa a wad of cash.

CROMWELL

Hospital. You know?

SHERPA

Yes. Where you go? Not go...there?

CROMWELL

Just get him to safety. His life is depending on you.

The Sherpa is suspicious of this question dodging, but he drops the subject upon receiving the money.

Bernice gives Corbin a bunch of medical stuff. Pills mostly.

BERNICE

If he wakes up, give him one of these. It'll numb the pain. If he's still in pain, I've prepared a couple needles of sedative. Try not to use them if you don't know how -

CORBIN

I'm pre-med.

BERNICE

Oh. Good. Then I'm sure Micah is in capable hands. Still, don't knock him out unless you absolutely have to. Pills first, then needle.

Rachel takes her husband's hand. She kisses him on the forehead.

RACHEL

I'll find her.

Cromwell takes Corbin aside after Bernice is done with him.

CROMWELL

I'm sorry you have to give up the search for your parents, but I promise you, if they are still alive, I will make sure they get back to you safely.

CORBIN

Thank you.

The pastor embraces his youngest friend. They've got one heck of a backstory. Not now, though.

Cromwell, Rachel, Robin, and Bernice watch Corbin and the Sherpa carrying Micah walk back down the cliffside path. Their lights disappear too quickly into the darkness and the snow.

BERNICE

Gentlemen. Lady.

The diminished party heads up the mountain path in the order mentioned above.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN - A CLIFF - NIGHT

Still snowing. The four people climb a mountain. It's not too difficult of a face. Unexperienced mountain climbers, such as the characters, should be able to climb it.

Robin still has cracked ribs, so he doesn't carry heavy bags. Regardless, every movement is an effort and a grimace.

Everyone else is dealing with their own issues. Bernice hangs on tightly to all the research she's conducted over the past couple of days. Rachel struggles for good footholds. Cromwell is indecisive as he reaches for rocks to pull himself up on.

The howling wind is the only sound. Limbs and bodies scaling the cliff face. As the climbing continues, the snow intensifies. Several shots of this go by.

Another shot of snow. Indiscernible from other shots. Suddenly, a hand reaching up. It grabs the ledge of the cliff. Cromwell pulls himself up. He's made it to the top.

Another hand reaches up. Cromwell grabs it and helps Bernice up the cliff. It's rough and the two end up falling backwards onto the snow.

As the two dust themselves off, Rachel struggles with the cliff, crawling and rolling herself up until she is on her back on the very edge of the cliff, exhausted and breathing heavily.

Robin is still climbing. His ribs aren't doing him any favors. He shakily grabs the edge of the cliff. He tries to pull. But he strains something. With a yelp, he loses his grip and slides down a few feet.

Rachel looks over the edge and yells something. The wind drowns her speech.

Robin regains his footing and reaches for the cliff again. He's still not strong enough to pull himself up and he slips, but in a much more fatal manner. He's about to fall off the side of the mountain.

Rachel dives forward and grabs his hand. But she's not stable and Robin is heavy. She begins slipping quickly off the edge with Robin.

Cromwell joins the fray, holding Rachel's shoulders and pulling with her. Down below, Robin lets out screams of agony as he dangles by the fractures in his abdomen.

Cromwell and Rachel pull, but it's not quite enough. The pastor looks back at Bernice. She is holding her equipment tightly so the wind doesn't blow it away. She also looks kind of scared.

CROMWELL
DROP YOUR SHIT AND HELP, GODDAMMIT!

His voice roars over the howling wind and the screaming man. Startled, Bernice grabs Rachel by the ankles and helps pull.

Slowly, Robin's arms emerge, followed by his head and torso. Cromwell grabs his writhing body and gives one final pull. All four people fall into the snow.

They lie there, who knows for how long. They're all panting now. Robin is moaning in pain. Bernice's belongings have been scattered around. Some things have probably been lost.

Rachel begins to rise. She pushes herself up into a kneeling position and looks up towards the summit of the mountain. She is shivering uncontrollably.

RACHEL
What's up there, anyway? On the summit.
We keep trying to reach the top of the
mountain as if it will answer all our
questions. Nobody actually knows, do
they?

Cromwell rises too and helps Robin up into a sitting position. Bernice tries to gather her things again.

RACHEL
What are we doing here?

Rachel slowly stands. Bernice looks at some of her things. Unsalvageable.

RACHEL

We're going to die here.

Bernice's face contorts in anger. In a fit of rage, she turns and punches Rachel across the face.

It was a spur of the moment thing, followed by instant regret. Rachel falls back to the ground. She can't go into much more shock than she already has been in, so this just makes her quiet.

Bernice puts her hands on her mouth, appalled at her own actions and begins apologizing profusely. She goes to Rachel's side.

Cromwell dives at Bernice and pushes her to the edge of the cliff. Without his support, Robin falls back into the snow.

Bernice looks scared. Cromwell is also scared, but it manifests itself more as anger.

BERNICE

I'm so sorry I didn't mean to I've just been so on edge and -

CROMWELL

I think everyone's nerves have been a bit frayed lately. But you are still in control of your actions and you need to control yourself.

BERNICE

Yes. Yes. I know. I'm sorry, I'm sorry...

Cromwell backs up. Rachel has helped Robin up again. They sit watching the argument.

ROBIN

I don't know.

RACHEL

What?

ROBIN

I don't know why we're going to the summit. I don't know what we'll find there, probably more rocks, more snow, more questions. It's the only place in plain sight, though, and I do know that I have something that needs doing up there.

RACHEL

We're all put on this Earth to do something, Robin. But I'm not sure what that is for me anymore.

ROBIN

We were all put on this mountain to do something, too. You're here to find Annie. For Micah.

Rachel scoffs.

RACHEL

Yeah. For Micah.

Cromwell helps the two onto their feet.

CROMWELL

You ok to keep moving?

ROBIN

Just gimme a direction, pastor.

Cromwell points towards the summit.

CROMWELL

That way.

Bernice's load is considerably lighter. She tries to talk to Rachel, but is brushed away. It's not anger, just resignation.

The four of them trudge towards the summit, into the thick snow.

FADE IN:

EXT. LOWER MOUNTAIN, TREELINE - NIGHT

The same shot of snow. Micah wakes up with a start.

MICAH

Gah!

CORBIN

Careful. Here take this.

He gives Micah the pills. Micah swallows them with a handful of snow. He's still on the Sherpa's back.

MICAH

Where are we...where are the others?

CORBIN

Let's rest for a while. I'll change your bandage.

He motions to the Sherpa. They set down on a nearby rock. Micah is lain down on a rock slab.

MICAH

How bad is it? It doesn't feel too bad.

CORBIN

Save your breath. Don't talk.

MICAH

I didn't know there were wolves in this part of the world. At least not wolves like that. Big black wolves. Wolves around here are small and grey. At least that's what the travel guide said.

CORBIN

Please Micah...you've lost a lot of blood.

MICAH

I can take it. I think your pills are kicking in. I can hardly feel my leg.

Corbin grimaces as he removes Micah's leg bandage.

MICAH

Oh. Oh my. Is that...my leg?

Corbin silently reapplies a fresh bandage. He opens Micah's jacket to bandage his side. Micah lets out a pathetic scream at the sight of himself.

MICAH

Ah! Ah!

CORBIN

Be quiet, please. You'll be fine.

SHERPA

I will go forward to see. Maybe more wolf.

CORBIN

No, I might need...ugh...never mind.

The Sherpa disappears into the woods.

CORBIN

Hurry back!

Micah is quiet now, resigned to the snow falling onto his face.

Corbin finishes up and tosses the dirty bandage aside. His piercings are back in.

MICAH

Aren't those supposed to be disposed of properly?

CORBIN

Don't tell me how to do my job.

MICAH

Sorry. Are you an actual doctor?

CORBIN

I'm in school for it.

MICAH

So quasi-professional opinion, am I gonna make it?

Corbin is silent. He takes his earphones out.

MICAH

Don't. Please don't. I need someone right now.

Corbin looks down at the groveling Micah and takes pity on him. He puts his earphones down.

MICAH

I'm a pharmacist myself. Given out plenty of prescriptions in my day.

Corbin just nods. He has no idea what to say to the garrulous man.

MICAH

Hey, if you're going to become a doctor, that means in a few years, I might be filling out some of your prescriptions. Ha! Imagine that.

CORBIN

It's a...small world...I guess.

MICAH

You bet it is. I just hope your handwriting is decent. It is such a pain trying to read chicken scratch. One time, I almost accidentally gave a patient Viagra instead of morphine. Ha ha ha...that would've messed up her day...

Corbin can only look at Micah. He hides abject terror in his eyes, but Micah can see into them.

MICAH

Corbin, are you ok?

CORBIN

Are you kidding with me? No. I'm not ok. What do you think this is, a walk in the park? My parents are missing, I almost died, not to mention the fact that I might be insane, and you...you are dying. How can you keep talking like that? Like...like we're going to be home in time for breakfast and

nothing will ever be wrong with our
lives again?!

MICAH

Well, I'm not sure. And I don't think
you can be sure that we're all going to
die up here either. You say I'm dying.

CORBIN

No, I didn't mean...I meant -

MICAH

I saw it myself. It looks scary.

CORBIN

We just need to get you to a hospital.

MICAH

And you'll get me there, right?

CORBIN

I don't know. I mean...I just don't
know anything.

MICAH

It's ok, Corbin. You can lie to me.

Pause as Corbin is thinking.

CORBIN

Yeah. I will do it.

MICAH

Just promise me one thing.

CORBIN

I don't know if I can.

MICAH

I'm slowing you down. If it comes to
it...

CORBIN

No...

MICAH

...remember it was just lie.

CORBIN

You can't ask me to do that.

MICAH

Yes I can. You haven't taken your Hippocratic Oath yet.

CORBIN

I'm not lying, Micah. I will get you to a hospital.

MICAH

There. Now see who's being optimistic.

This silences Corbin. So they sit in silence. Only the sound of wind. The pines are rustling too. Snow falls.

Then, there are sounds of heavy footfalls. Someone is running. Panting. Through the trees. Stumble. Continue.

More footfalls. Close ups of various parts of a running person's body. A few legs...someone is being chased?

Footfalls approach. Corbin looks up. Micah groggily sits up.

MICAH

What...is someone running?

CORBIN

(calling out in front of him) Is that you?

The Sherpa bursts into view. He has been running. He is out of breath.

SHERPA

Come. Quickly. But quiet. Must be very very quiet.

The urgency of his voice leads Micah and Corbin to not question him immediately. Corbin takes a turn carrying Micah.

The three slip into the snow. As they disappear, Corbin is heard asking the question.

CORBIN

What happened?

FADE IN:

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN PLATEAU - NIGHT

The climbers appear from the snow slowly; their shadows are seen first before their bodies.

The wind is significantly stronger. Snow cuts their faces like glass. The party is struggling to move forward.

CROMWELL

(shouting over the din of the wind) We need to get our masks on!

Everyone gets an oxygen mask out.

BERNICE

Hold hands!

ROBIN

What?

BERNICE

We won't be able to hear each other through the masks and it's going to be almost impossible to see if this blizzard picks up. Hold hands!

The group huddles. The masks come on. The instant they do, the wind stops howling. There is only the sound of four distinct instances of breathing.

One hand grasps another. One hand grasps another. One hand grasps another. Close ups only as everyone moves forward. A few POV shots as well.

Labored breathing. Crunch of snow. It goes on like this for a bit.

Between the thickening snow and the fogging of the masks, it really does become impossible to see. But they keep moving forward.

Suddenly, a scream. Two hands lose their grip on one person. Crunch of snow.

Two hands reach out desperately grabbing for the lost person. Two hands find each other and hold fast.

Heads turn trying to make out if everyone is ok, but no one can see. They are stiff and exhausted and practically brain-dead. They keep moving.

From a shot, we can make out about three shadows walking forward.

A particularly rogue wind. Person in front stops, off-balance. The people behind them keep moving forward. There is a collision. This force, coupled with the wind, knocks people off their feet. Handholds are lost. Crunch of snow.

Some people roll in the snow. They've lost each other. Someone flails about helplessly. Someone just stays in the snow, unmoving. Someone's mask is too foggy. It's frustrating. They take their mask off.

It's Bernice. The second her mask comes off, the sound and fury of the wilds picks up. She cries out in shock as a wall of wind and snow hits her face.

She surveys what she can. She discerns two shadows relatively close to her. Her head turns wildly, looking for a third shadow.

Over the sound of nature, a gunshot.

Bernice freezes (not quite literally).

BERNICE
ROBIN!? IS THAT YOU?!

There's no answer. Her voice hardly picks up a few feet in front of her, but it's just enough for the person thrashing frantically in the snow. They stop and turn to Bernice and start moving towards her.

The two meet up. The other person takes their mask off. It's Cromwell.

BERNICE
Did you hear that?

CROMWELL
I can't hear anything!

BERNICE
I swear I heard -

CROMWELL
Where is everyone?

BERNICE
I saw someone...

She looks back to where she saw the shadow in the snow.
It's gone now. Was she just seeing things? What's going on?

CROMWELL
Wait here?

BERNICE
Not possible. Just keep moving.

The suggestion goes against the pastor's better nature, but
it's cold and difficult to think. They put their masks on.

The sound is shut out again. They grab hands. They move on.

More walking. Two shadows pushing forward. The one in the
back stumbles on something. Loses the grip of the person in
front. Crunch of snow.

The person in the back has fallen in the snow. They dig
around the snowdrift, looking for the thing they tripped
on.

They grab onto something. They pull it into view. It's a
body.

They drop it and scream in surprise and horror. Who is it?

BERNICE
Who...

She takes her mask off again. The sound of the mountain
again. She brings her face close to the body's.

Another gunshot interrupts Bernice's observation. She's less sure if it was a gunshot this time. But there was definitely a noise. She yells out.

BERNICE
IS ANYBODY OUT THERE!?

It falls into the masked silence again. Someone breathing heavily. Someone digs themselves out of the snow. They bring a body with them.

The person looks around them. There are shapes moving in the snow. There are definitely people out there, but something about them makes them unfamiliar. Different people?

The person touches the body. It's dead. It's been dead for a while. Shapes in the snow move closer.

The person drops the body back in the snow. Their breathing is pained. Shapes in the blizzard rustle. Crunch of snow.

Something is moving closer to a shadow sitting in the snow. They have a gun in their hand. Not a pistol. A rifle.

The person sitting in the snow turns their head at a sudden sound. A gunshot? Whatever it was, they sense danger.

They rise and try to sneak through the cover of snow. They come to a rather large rock and they lean against it.

There's a shape approaching the rock and a shape leaning against it.

The person leaning on the rock sinks behind it and pulls a pistol out of their jacket pocket. They try their best to hide from something...they don't even know what.

They look around, trying to find the shape that's moving closer to them, closer and closer...

But all they can hear is breathing. And the crunch of snow. Crunch. Crunch. Crunch.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FOREST - EVENING

Crunch of leaves. Small feet prowling. Rustling.

Vaughn paves a way through the underbrush. He is loud about it. He wants someone to know he's coming.

Someone looks out at Vaughn from under the roots of a tree. His breathing is shallow.

Vaughn stops. He turns his head slowly.

VAUGHN

I can hear you. You can't hide from me.

He walks out of view of the person hiding under the roots. It's young Robin, looking older than before. He retreats back into the safety of the tree.

There's a snapping of twigs. Buzzing. Robin hugs his knees close to his body.

Something is thrown in between the roots of the tree. Robin begins swatting himself. It was a hornet's nest.

Yelping, he tries breaking through the tangle of roots, but they are strong and he can't quite make it through. He gets stuck. Vaughn can be heard laughing somewhere nearby.

Vaughn walks within view of Robin. He holds his hand out to his younger brother, offering to pull him out. Robin ignores the hand and tears at the roots.

Vaughn grins and retracts his hand. Robin eventually extracts himself from the grip of the tree. Several angry hornets follow behind him.

VAUGHN

Quick run!

The brothers book it through the forest. They make it to a river.

Robin pauses to catch his breath. Vaughn starts laughing hysterically.

VAUGHN

Bro, that was so awesome! Ha ha!

Robin has some stings on his legs. He goes to the river to run some water on the wounds.

VAUGHN

And you thought I didn't know where you were.

ROBIN

I knew.

VAUGHN

Then why'd you let yourself get cornered like that?

Robin just shrugs. Vaughn sighs.

VAUGHN

Whatever. I'm bored of hide and seek anyways. Let's play something else.

ROBIN

We should go home soon. Mom told us to be home before sundown for dinner.

VAUGHN

She'll come get us, don't worry. We still have some time to play something.

ROBIN

I'm tired. I don't want to play anything anymore.

He stands in the river, the water rushing past his ankles. Vaughn pushes him into the water.

ROBIN

Hey!

He splashes into the river, getting his clothes all uncomfortably wet. He stands and shakes himself off.

He pushes Vaughn, who stumbles back.

ROBIN

What was that for?

VAUGHN

Nothin'.

Robin grumbles and pulls his shirt off. He strips to his underwear.

Vaughn watches on like a predator, approaching him from behind, unaware by Robin.

Robin wrings his clothes out and takes a closer look at his stings as Vaughn circles in front of him. Vaughn has on a wolfish grin.

ROBIN

What? Get away from me.

VAUGHN

Do you hate me?

Robin looks taken aback by this question. He looks down and focuses on his clothes again.

VAUGHN

I asked you a question.

Robin, satisfied enough with the dampness of his clothes, puts them back on. Vaughn grabs him by the scruff of his neck.

VAUGHN

Hey! Answer me!

Robin manages to wrest himself away from Vaughn. It's a lot different from earlier. Vaughn notices.

VAUGHN

You're getting the hang of not getting your ass kicked. You still won't talk, though. Think we gotta beat the words out of you.

Robin stands steadfast as Vaughn circles him. He's ready.

But before anything can happen, in the distance, someone calls out.

MOTHER STOPPER (O.S.)
Robin! Vaughn! Dinner!

Vaughn closes in on Robin, but he just grabs him and puts his arm around his brother and walks him towards the voice.

VAUGHN
Come on. Dad said he'd be home for dinner tonight.

CUT TO:

INT. STOPPER HOUSEHOLD, KITCHEN - DUSK

Mother Stopper washes her hands in a kitchen sink as a door opens and closes off screen.

MOTHER STOPPER
Carl?

The boys come into the house, dirty and wet. Vaughn races up the stairs.

In the house, there are various homely effects, but what should really be prominent is the mirror, the same one that was shattered in the beginning.

Robin goes into the kitchen. Mother Stopper looks expectantly, but finds only her son.

MOTHER STOPPER
Ugh, Robin, have you and your brother been horsing around by the river again? I told you not to go there, it's dangerous.

ROBIN
But Ma, there were hornets.

She sees his legs and the swollen stings.

MOTHER STOPPER
What were you doing messing with hornets? You boys have no sense, no sense at all.

Robin looks down sadly. Mother Stopper sighs.

MOTHER STOPPER

Alright, go get changed and get ready to eat. We'll put some ointment on there later.

Robin wants the ointment now. He doesn't move, but he doesn't talk either.

MOTHER STOPPER

Well go on!

Robin walks away. Mother Stopper resumes her kitchen work.

CUT TO:

INT. STOPPER HOUSEHOLD, DINING ROOM - EVENING

Vaughn, Robin, and Mother Stopper sit at the table, eating. There is a noticeable absence of a father.

They go on in silence. Crickets and cicadas are droning on outside. Vaughn pokes at his food.

MOTHER STOPPER

Vaughn, quit playing with your food.

VAUGHN

Dad said he'd be home.

MOTHER STOPPER

I know. Eat your food.

Vaughn begrudgingly puts his food up to his mouth, but he puts the fork down again. Mother Stopper just sighs. Robin eats slowly in silence.

The door opens. Heavy footfalls, like someone stumbling. Someone swearing.

FATHER STOPPER walks into the dining room. He is bedraggled, and very clearly drunk. The children don't notice, though.

VAUGHN

Dad! It's about time you got home!

MOTHER STOPPER
God, no...What happened?

FATHER STOPPER
I was fired.

MOTHER STOPPER
Fired? Jesus, Carl!

He sinks into a chair and grabs some of the food to eat.

VAUGHN
Dad?

MOTHER STOPPER
Vaughn, you and your brother need to go upstairs now. Dinner is over.

VAUGHN
But Dad just got home.

FATHER STOPPER
Listen to the bitch, squirt.

MOTHER STOPPER
Carl!

Vaughn obediently puts his utensils on the table and goes up the stairs. Robin is still at the table. His legs need lotion.

MOTHER STOPPER
Robin, go now.

Robin exits the dining room as well.

CUT TO:

INT. STOPPER HOUSEHOLD, UPSTAIRS

Vaughn hangs by the top of the stairs, looking at the lights downstairs. The mirror should be partially visible from his point of view.

Raised voices begin coming in from below. Robin passes Vaughn, but Vaughn grabs him.

VAUGHN

Watch. I think something's happening.

The brothers observe the scene through the mirror, which only gives them half of the picture.

MOTHER STOPPER

How many times have we been over this?
You can't drink while you're at work!

FATHER STOPPER

Shut up! You don't even know what you're talking about. The drinking came afterwards this time. God, I knew this would happen...lost my goddamn lucky coin...

MOTHER STOPPER

That's what you're going to blame it on? Tell me what really happened. You screw something up again? Did you...

FATHER STOPPER

(Overlapping) They're all a bunch of bastards at the factory anyways. Was getting bored of working there anyways.

MOTHER STOPPER

(continuous)...sleep with the foreman's wife again? I mean, what the hell do you mean you were getting bored! We can't afford for you to do whatever you damn well please-

FATHER STOPPER

Don't talk to me like that! Don't you dare talk to me like that! You don't know anything, bitch! You don't know anything!

MOTHER STOPPER

I know you're nothing but a scumbag and a worthless piece of -

She's cut short. A movement in the mirror. A thud of a fist on face.

There's a piercing scream from Mother Stopper, cut short by gurgling. In the mirror, Father Stopper has a death grip on something.

Then, a pop. The mirror shatters. It brings with it flowers of red.

Dead silence for a minute. Robin doesn't really know what's going on, but Vaughn, sensing danger, runs into his room.

Robin looks into the shattered mirror. It lets him directly see his mother. And she sees him.

Mother Stopper smiles. She beckons to Robin.

MOTHER STOPPER

Robin, come down here. Do you still want lotion for your stings?

He does. He walks down the stairs tentatively, unsure of what exactly transpired.

Down the stairs, Father Stopper lies face up on the ground. His eye is gone and he's in a puddle of blood.

Mother Stopper has a gun in her hand. It should look similar to Robin's gun in the mountains.

She is still smiling. She beckons to Robin and goes to the cupboard behind her. She puts the gun up there and takes out a bottle of lotion.

Robin is stock still, staring, horrified, at the body of his father. The dead eye stares back at him.

MOTHER STOPPER

Robin?

Robin starts and looks at his mother. She has the lotion. She goes to him with it, but the mirror catches her eye.

Still smiling, she takes Robin and stands him in front of the bloody and shattered mirror.

The shards of the mirror reflect several versions of Robin and his mother. Father Stopper's body can also be seen in some of the shards

MOTHER STOPPER

Look Robin. It's you.

There's a rippling in the plethora of Robins looking back at the real Robin. There's that sense of danger.

In one or several of the shards, a snarling wolf slides seamlessly in, and without warning, barks and pounces.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN, OUTSIDE THE CAVE - DAWN

The snow is dying down. The wind doesn't howl anymore. Rather, it whistles, and the snow brushes by in flurries.

There's a trail of blood going from the cave. It was there from when the Sherpa dragged the wolf out. The blood trail is followed and followed.

The wolf is seen. Dark, majestic, mysterious, dangerous, and dead. Very, very dead.

The entire wolf's body is seen until the face is seen. The face is seen for a while. Then the eyes open. They are yellow and fierce. Growling is heard.

CUT TO:

INT. A WHITE ROOM

Robin wakes up. He blinks. He sits up quickly.

He cries out in pain. He looks down at his abdomen. He lifts his shirt up to reveal that his body has been bound.

He looks around. The room is sparse. The only thing inside is the bed Robin was laying on and a small table next to it.

On the table is everything that was in Robin's pocket. A wallet, a phone, a set of keys, and a gun. No coin.

Robin pats his body, looking for the coin. He gets agitated. He can't find it.

His eyes turn wild. He flips the bed, grunting and panting. The table is upturned. The gun clatters to the ground.

The door to the room opens. MCGINNIS, a guard, walks in, carrying a rifle and dressed in white fatigues and winter wear.

He sees Robin and Robin sees the gun. He dives for the pistol.

MCGINNIS

Hey!

Grabbing the gun in a slide, Robin points the pistol down and fires. He hits the Guard's foot. McGinnis falls in pain. Before he can react, Robin is there. He kicks McGinnis in the head with brute force, knocking him out.

Robin can hear footfalls from down the hall outside. Gun in hand, he rushes out the room and runs down the hall.

The hallways are white and brightly lit. It's so unnaturally bright. Robin is running. There are people running behind him.

People with guns in front of him. They yell something inaudible. It looks like they're telling him to stop. Robin can't hear them over a ringing din in his ears.

He fires a couple shots in their general vicinity. They dodge to the side, giving Robin enough time to open a door along the hallway and get in.

In the room, Robin tips a table and barricades the door. Thudding of people banging and trying to get in.

Robin sees what's in the room. It is similar to the one he woke up in. On the bed, lying unconscious, is Rachel.

Robin rushes to her side and tries to shake her awake.

ROBIN

Rachel!

He feels her skin. Looks for a pulse. He can't feel anything over the pounding of his own heart.

Thumping gets louder. Door gets looser. Robin panics and bangs on the wall. It gives a little.

Desperate, Robin bangs the wall harder. It gives a bit more. He throws his full force and shoulder at the wall. Cracks appear in the corner of the wall.

Stepping back, Robin aims the gun and shoots at the wall. The bullets make the wall crack dramatically. Louder banging indicates that people are almost through the door.

Robin takes a step back and braces himself. He runs full force at the wall.

On the other side, Robin crashes through the glass wall. Shards go flying everywhere. He lands on the broken pieces as the door to the room behind him breaks down. A flood of guards flow in.

Robin is rolling on the broken glass, a ringing in his ears. He gets up gingerly, splinters digging into his hands. Behind him, white lumps get into something resembling a formation.

Robin looks up. It's out of focus, but he sees someone approaching. He quickly raises the gun.

CROMWELL

Robin, calm down.

Pastor Cromwell approaches Robin, with his arm outstretched and his palm open wide. Robin back away, unsure of what's happening.

RACHEL

Robin?

Behind him, but not behind the wall of guards who have guns trained on Robin, Rachel sits up groggily. She looks around confused.

RACHEL

What's going on?

ROBIN

I don't...I don't...

Rachel sees all the guards and their guns and Robin with his and Cromwell reaching out to him. She calls out fearfully.

RACHEL

Robin...put the gun down.

Robin shakes his head furiously to clear it.

CROMWELL

There's no need to fight. Robin, give me the gun.

RACHEL

Robin, please.

Robin blinks furiously. He looks around. Slowly, he lowers the weapon.

Cromwell, his arm still outstretched for the weapon, lowers his hand, realizing he's not taking the gun from Robin.

The guards behind Robin close in. Rachel stands from the bed.

RICHELIEU (O.S.)

Now, now, let the man breathe.

RICHELIEU walks into view behind Cromwell. He's middle-aged and looks rich. He's dressed as such. The guards back off.

RICHELIEU

There's no problem here. Return to your posts. And tend to Mr. McGinnis.

The guards file out. Robin gingerly places the gun in his pocket, his hands bleeding from the glass.

Richelieu does not protest or attempt to take the gun away. He just smiles and leans forward.

RICHELIEU

I'm sorry about the confusion, Mr. Stopper. I assure you, I mean you no harm. Please, feel free to keep your weapon on you, as a gesture of my goodwill.

CROMWELL

Robin, it's alright. He saved us. From the blizzard.

RICHELIEU

Ah, my name is Walther Richelieu -

He extends his hand instinctively to shake, but quickly retracts it remembering Robin's cut hands.

RICHELIEU

Oh dear, again, my apologies. Please, if you would follow Pastor Cromwell, he will take you to the infirmary to get you patched up. I believe your doctor has already set up shop there.

Robin backs away from Richelieu. There's still blatant distrust in his eyes.

ROBIN

She ain't a doctor.

Cromwell puts his arm around Robin's shoulder and walks with him out the door. Richelieu calls out as they walk out.

RICHELIEU

I do hope you will join us for lunch, Mr. Stopper. I will endeavor to answer any questions you might have.

Robin and Cromwell exit, leaving Rachel, confused as all heck, standing with Richelieu. He smiles.

RICHELIEU

Mrs. Oakley, it's a pleasure to finally see you awake.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MANSION, HALLWAYS

CROMWELL

We lost each other in the blizzard. I'm not even sure what happened. I don't

remember anything. Just blacking out and then waking up in here.

ROBIN

Where is here? What is this place?

CROMWELL

Richelieu, he calls this place his mansion. It's up in the mountains, for...well I don't know why. He says he'll explain it over lunch today.

They arrive at the infirmary. Cromwell opens the door.

Inside, it is clean and sterile, as white and bright as the rest of the place. There is a high-tech sciency looking workstation in the corner and a few beds are lined against a wall.

McGinnis is lying in one of these beds having his leg tended to by Bernice.

BERNICE

Alright, Mr. McGinnis, everything looks good. You can go now.

MCGINNIS

Thank you, doctor.

Bernice just smiles politely and nods. McGinnis walks past Robin, shooting him a look. Robin completely ignores the man he shot and goes to Bernice.

BERNICE

What the hell were you thinking?

ROBIN

Good to see you too, Doc.

CROMWELL

Lunch is at 1, Robin. You're invited too, Bernice.

The pastor leaves the infirmary with McGinnis.

Bernice takes some medical equipment. It's something futuristic looking, but Robin isn't surprised by it. It's a

part of the world. The instrument goes over his cuts, sealing and disinfecting them.

BERNICE

You should get rid of that gun before someone really gets hurt.

ROBIN

You don't trust this place either.

BERNICE

I will reserve judgment until this Richelieu explains his story.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MANSION, THE ROOM WITH THE SHATTERED GLASS

RACHEL

You're not answering me! Where is my husband?

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN, TREELINE - DAY

RICHELIEU (V.O.)

I assure you, Mrs. Oakley, I have men looking for your missing party as we speak.

The trees are seen, laden with snow. Someone moves heavily through the forest. Their footfalls are ragged.

Corbin trudges along, leaning against trees for support. He is almost blue from the cold.

He tries moving forward more, but falls, landing on his hands and knees. He looks down and forward. He's landed at someone's feet.

He looks up. Standing above and in front of him is one of Richelieu's guards, his face covered by a balaclava.

The guard points his gun straight at Corbin's face. His eyes betray every emotion he is feeling at the moment: confusion, resignation, exhaustion, fear.

ROBIN (V.O.)
What's the last thing you remember?

CUT TO:

INT. THE MANSION, THE INFIRMARY

BERNICE
It's difficult to recall. Everything just seemed like a dream. The blizzard, the wolf, the mountain itself, everything. And as weird and unexpected as it is, right now, this place is the only thing from the past week that feels real.

ROBIN
Did you find bodies too?

Bernice looks up from her work, a look of recognition in her eyes.

BERNICE
Yes, I think, I can just remember. Something...I don't know. It just feels so...you know.

ROBIN
Yeah.

Bernice carries on. She finishes and puts her equipment away.

BERNICE
If you haven't noticed, our good pastor has taken a liking to Richelieu.

ROBIN
He's just tired. We all are.

BERNICE
All the same, I'd keep my distance. And watch out.

ROBIN
I didn't need you to tell me that, Doc.

BERNICE

Right.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MANSION, DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

The dining room has a big glass wall which gives a view of the entire mountain. The sky is big and blue.

RICHELIEU

I was born into a rather wealthy family, but I never bought into the affluent lifestyle. There was too much suffering around me to make me feel comfortable.

At the table, there is a scrumptious spread. It's a lot of veggies, though.

Rachel is wolfing down her meal, while Cromwell sits next to Richelieu listening intently and eating politely. Robin hasn't touched his food and Bernice fidgets with something.

McGinnis and another guard are standing in the background, hard to see, but hard to forget. Richelieu sits outlined in the window wall.

RICHELIEU

Let's see, I always liked animals. Animals, they know humans better than we know each other, I always thought. I went to school for biology, zoology in particular. Received my doctorate at the University of Western Texarkana and decided to start a facility devoted to the preservation of all kinds of animal life. Basically, people send me animals and I keep them safe.

BERNICE

From what?

RICHELIEU

Oh, any number of things. Deforestation and pollution, most obviously. I take overgrown pets, too. In Everglade, for

example, many people own pythons, but release them into the wild when the snakes get out of hand, which disrupts the natural ecosystem. I encourage them to send the animals to me. In fact, the wolf you encountered was a particularly rare pureblood lupis lupis. It escaped a few days ago and my men have been searching ever since. That's when they found you. You say it died? A shame.

BERNICE

I don't see any animals.

RICHELIEU

They're in labs down below. Yes, we do study them. As a scientist yourself, I'm sure you respect that. Might I ask what your field of study is, Dr. Caulfield?

BERNICE

So you study animals in a highly inaccessible and frankly unheard of mountain range, away from prying eyes and animal rights regulations.

RICHELIEU

Yes, I realize that sounds like I'm hiding something. I assure you, my taste in location has nothing to do with my ethicality towards animals. In fact, you are all free to see the labs any time you wish.

BERNICE

Yes, I'm sure we'll be allowed to see what you're allowing us to see.

Bernice steals a very obvious glance at McGinnis who shifts uncomfortably.

Cromwell looks distasteful at the confrontational tone, but he knows he has no more jurisdiction here in the mansion.

Richelieu simply smiles.

RICHELIEU

The guards are here to protect the animals, Dr. Caulfield.

Bernice is about to make a smart retort, but Robin interjects.

ROBIN

The missing people.

Richelieu pauses, as though expecting Robin to say more, but he doesn't.

RICHELIEU

Ah yes, I've heard about your plight. I'm afraid I've not seen anything to corroborate your story.

Robin rises slightly, annoyed and a bit hostile. The guards stand more alertly.

ROBIN

Then the bodies out there. Who put them there?

Richelieu smiles again, his wide comforting smile. Is there something else in that smile? Robin can't tell.

RICHELIEU

Bhakartha is a dangerous place, Mr. Stopper. Climbers trying to scale her face do so at their peril. The people you found underestimated the grandeur of the mountain and paid the ultimate price. They are now a part of Bhakartha, encased in the cold, doomed to have their death preserved by the icy peaks they sought to conquer.

Bernice blinks furiously and Rachel stops eating for a second. Robin stares into Richelieu's eyes.

RICHELIEU

If you think one of your missing peoples is one of the bodies buried in the snow, you are free to go out and look. There are still several hours

until sundown. I'll have a detail assigned to you to ensure your safety.

Robin grinds his teeth, but he hides it from Richelieu. He sits back down fully.

ROBIN

Forget it.

RACHEL

I'll take you up on that offer, Mr. Richelieu -

RICHELIEU

Please, just Walther -

RACHEL

I need something to do while you look for Micah.

CROMWELL

Yes, about that, Mr. Richelieu, I was wondering if there was anything I could do to help you search for Corbin and Micah. They are still in danger.

ROBIN

And the Sherpa. You're looking for three people, in case that fact was looked over.

RICHELIEU

Yes, I'm aware of the situation. Pastor, if you could tell me where they were headed last you saw them, perhaps my men could narrow down the search.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN, TREELINE, DURING THE BLIZZARD - NIGHT

CROMWELL (V.O.)

They were just headed down the mountain path. They must've made it to the treeline before the blizzard hit fully.

This is what we see. The wind whips the trees. Branches and twigs blowing viciously. The blizzard isn't as bad this far down, but it's still dangerous. Some trees are almost parallel to the ground. A small tree falls.

One particular clump of fallen trees is focused on. There are tent cloths nailed to the trunks. The Sherpa can be seen hammering stakes into the dead trees.

Satisfied with his work, he unzips the tent flap, unleashing a wall of snow on the inside. He promptly zips it back up when he gets in.

CUT TO:

INT. THE TENT

Micah is prone on the ground. Corbin opens a can of beans. Light comes from an electric lantern.

The Sherpa sits with a plop, disrupting the makeshift lean-to a little. The wind strikes the tent cloth.

Corbin succeeds in opening the beans and pours some on a disposable plate and gives it to the Sherpa. The Sherpa smiles warmly at Corbin.

CORBIN

Get your head up, Micah. You need to eat.

MICAH

I don't want to.

CORBIN

You know you need to.

MICAH

How much longer do I have to live?

CORBIN

Thirty minutes. Now eat.

MICAH

I don't want beans to be my last meal.

CORBIN

Well, I'm sorry I can't whip up a steak or something for you.

MICAH

We can go back up the mountain. The wolf is still there. And so is that yak thing. (To the Sherpa) What kind of animal was that anyways?

The Sherpa shrugs. Corbin lets out an exasperated sigh.

CORBIN

Fine.

Micah looks up from his position.

MICAH

Too soon?

Corbin starts eating the beans.

MICAH

C'mon crack a smile, I'm trying my best here.

Corbin finishes half the beans and leaves the plate next to Micah. He also puts the bottle of painkillers there.

CORBIN

I'm going out to keep watch. Pop a pill if it starts hurting.

He opens the tent flap, exits, and zips it back up. Micah turns to the Sherpa who has finished eating his beans.

MICAH

Are you sure you saw something? I mean, I don't want the poor kid to stand out there all night.

The Sherpa nods gravely.

SHERPA

Danger. Must watch night.

Micah sighs and lies back down fully. He dips his finger in the beans and sucks on it.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE TREELINE, THE TENT

Corbin huddles and hugs himself to keep warm outside. He stands there, not sure of what he's looking for.

Time passes. The forest comes alive every once in a while with every passing wind. The whispers say things, but Corbin drowns everything out by burying himself deeper in his jacket.

Corbin blinks a few times. The light inside the tent is gone. But there's something beyond the trees. Some kind of glow.

The light is bright and uninviting. There are several of them. Like flashlights (They are flashlights).

Corbin wonders if he should go investigate or go back in the tent. But curiosity gets the better of him. He walks forward through the snow towards the lights.

He goes from trunk to trunk, hiding himself as best he can.

After a while of moving like this, he pauses with his back to a tree. He stops to listen to everything.

The whistling wind. The rustling trees. The crunch of snow.

A light shines right behind Corbin from the other side of the tree. Corbin holds his breath. He can hear breathing.

Slowly, he turns his eyes, and then his head, to get a better glimpse of what's going on.

Two men clad in winter fatigues and masks pass from the other side. They carry rifles. Corbin's eyes grow wide.

They keep moving for a while and Corbin follows behind, making sure to not be seen. They stop at a clump of trees.

One of the men takes their mask off. It's McGinnis. He takes the other guard by the shoulder.

MCGINNIS

We've scoured the place. Regroup at the mansion. We'll look for them after this storm's cleared up.

The guard nods and walks in another direction. Corbin dodges back behind a tree.

McGinnis looks around. He heard something.

He lets his rifle hang by its sling and he takes a pistol out. He starts walking in a direction. The direction of the camp.

He stalks through the forest, flashlight in one hand, pistol in the other. Snow bites his face.

He wipes his face with his arm quickly and resumes his posture. Still nothing.

He takes another few steps forward. The wind picks up for a moment here, but there is an audible thwack.

McGinnis crumples to the ground. Behind him, Corbin holds a large tree branch.

He's quite shocked. He drops the branch and stands there a moment. Upon coming to his senses, he runs full sprint back to the camp.

Corbin comes to the camp and knocks the tent down. There is rustling inside the tent and the Sherpa pulls the tent off of himself and Micah.

MICAH

What gives?

CORBIN

There are men. With guns. I think they're looking for us. We have to move quickly.

MICAH

What? Who's up here with guns? What is going on?

The Sherpa understands Corbin's urgency and quickly starts packing. Corbin stops him.

CORBIN

No time. Leave it. I knocked one of them out. They'll be coming this way soon.

The Sherpa stands and nods. He goes to Micah to pick him up. Corbin goes to his backpack and puts the drugs back in.

MICAH

Look, Corbin, how do we know these guys aren't here looking for us to bring us to safety?

CORBIN

Rangers aren't typically armed to the teeth.

MICAH

I don't know, maybe they are in this part of the world.

Micah is securely fastened to the Sherpa's back. The grizzled man looks to Corbin for a direction.

Corbin leads him through the forest, away from the unconscious man.

They walk through the forest, no light to guide them. Corbin keeps his ears perked for distinctive sounds. Everyone watches out for flashlights.

In the dark, very little can be seen. Wafts of breath that swirl for a second before instantaneously disappearing. Some glints of dull reflected light: jacket zippers, piercings, watches.

Footfalls can be heard. Then suddenly, the wind picks up. The Sherpa, already unbalanced by the weight of the man on top of him, loses his balance. His foot meets a branch or a root. He tumbles to the ground.

Micah falls off of the Sherpa. He rolls on the forest floor, prickly with pines and branches. He rolls to a rocky

dropoff, drops several feet, and lands on his bad leg (both legs are bad). He cries out in pain. It's pretty loud.

Corbin doubles back and runs to Micah. He quickly puts his hand over Micah's mouth. Micah, in crazy pain, bites Corbin's hand. Corbin yells out too, but quickly catches himself. However, the yell was long and loud enough, and Corbin knows it.

CORBIN

Where...where did the Sherpa go?

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FOREST

The man in question is prostrate on the ground from his fall. A small glimmer of light catches his eye as it rolls away from him.

He recognizes the coin. He crawls forward, after the rolling piece of metal.

It rolls and rolls and the Sherpa crawls and crawls. Eventually, it stops and lands on the soft forest floor, wolf-side up.

The Sherpa digs around the brush and snow. He finds the coin and brushes it off and breathes on it and cleans it.

He observes it again. Man on one side, wolf on the other.

Suddenly, a light flashes in his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FOREST

Corbin holds Micah's mouth shut, safely this time, as the wounded man moans.

There's a gunshot. Both of them start.

CORBIN

No...

Micah groans even louder than before. Corbin has removed his hand from Micah's mouth in shock.

MICAH

I can't...I can't go on anymore...

Corbin's breathing grows rapid. He tries to control it but is unsuccessful.

MICAH

Corbin...I know...I know what I said earlier...but please...please don't leave me...

Corbin sits and thinks for a minute, still reeling. Quickly, he digs into his backpack and finds the needle that Bernice gave him.

CORBIN

This'll put you to sleep. It'll be easier to carry you. And you won't make so much noise.

He prepares the needle and a spot on Micah's arm.

MICAH

Please...don't...leave...

Corbin injects Micah. Immediately, the drug begins taking effect. Micah begins slipping.

MICAH

Annie...

He falls unconscious. Corbin stands. He stands and looks at Micah, lying in the snow at the base of a rock. Corbin's eyes are wet, but solid and glassy with ice.

Corbin backs away slowly. Then he turns and runs as fast as he can. He doesn't look back.

With Micah's mangled body in the foreground, Corbin runs further and further away into the background, becoming blurrier and blurrier.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FOREST

McGinnis walks in the snow talking into a walkie-talkie.

MCGINNIS

We've found two of them. The other went running. One team will stay and look for him. I'm taking these ones to regroup with Alpha at the mansion. Looks like they found some as well.

There is silence for a moment on the other end of the walkie-talkie. Then a familiar voice.

RICHELIEU

(through the radio) Let's not make another mess of things this time, yes, Mr. McGinnis?

MCGINNIS

Understood, sir.

He hangs up the walkie-talkie. It cuts the connection with a click.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN, THE PLATEAU - AFTERNOON

Rachel digs through the snow. McGinnis and a couple of guards can be seen behind her in the background.

She has a shovel. She digs around for a while. She moves to another place and starts digging there.

More digging. Eventually, she gives up her shovel and starts digging with her hands. She's desperate for something.

Her hands hit something. She uses all her might to pull something out of the snow.

It's a body, dressed in winter gear. During the day, it doesn't look so mysterious.

The face and the dead parts of the body are not seen. Rachel looks down at the body. She doesn't look scared or anything. She just looks at the body for a very long time.

Then she vomits to the side and into the snow. She takes a few heaves and then recovers.

She pushes the body off of herself. The guards look like they're laughing at her. Their faces aren't seen, though.

Rachel stands shakily. She brushes snow off of her. She looks up at the sky. It's blue and bright, not a cloud in sight.

From the sky's point of view, Rachel stands with a body at her feet, surrounded by several other holes that have half dug bodies in them. She's been digging for a while.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MANSION, THE LABS

Bernice walks through the laboratory. It feels more like a half zoo half lab, though. Some animals are in pens rather than cages.

Richelieu leads her past some sheep.

RICHELIEU

Some of the local shepherds ask for my help tending to their flock. I give my services to everyone.

Bernice says nothing as they walk past more animals. They pass some mellow animals like ostriches and peacocks. Then more animals like tigers and leopards and monkeys.

Scientists dressed in full body scrubs and masks do things with the animals.

RICHELIEU

You are free to come and go as you please.

BERNICE

I'd like to take a closer look at the animals.

RICHELIEU

Of course. You'll find all the instruments you need on the tables.

Bernice walks away from Richelieu.

RICHELIEU

I want to make your stay here to be as comfortable as possible. If there's anything you need, anything I'm missing, please let me know.

Bernice turns as she walks.

BERNICE

Find our missing people.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LABS, AN ANIMAL PEN

Bernice enters the pen. A plaque on the outside reads "Bengal Tiger, female specimen."

Bernice reaches into her pocket and takes out a vial. It is the tissue sample she took from the wolf.

She stands now in a small simulated forested area. There is a tiger in front of her.

She approaches the animal with an instrument in her hand. It's a tissue extractor.

The tiger growls low. Bernice is undeterred. She walks forwards slowly and steadily.

The tiger paws its way closer to Bernice. There are rumblings from its throat.

Bernice stops moving as she and the tiger meet halfway. The tiger circles Bernice closely, its tail whipping the scientist's arm.

BERNICE

What's your secret, tiger?

Suddenly, the tiger stands on its hind legs and pushes Bernice to the floor. Its face is close to hers. She can see every unfamiliar twitch in the whiskers, the sharp nebulous eyes. Saliva drips from the toothed gaping mouth.

Bernice is still unafraid. The tiger doesn't roar, but it moans and lows, like it's in pain. It rolls off of her.

Some of the resident scientists rush into the pen to subdue the tiger. One of them goes to see if Bernice is alright.

BERNICE

Leave her! She didn't hurt me.

The scientists ignore her and inject the tiger with something. The tiger looks at Bernice and the two feel a connection as it slumps into unconsciousness.

Bernice brushes off the scientists that have crowded around her.

BERNICE

I'm fine. Get off of me.

She exits the pen and slips two vials, one old and one new, into her pocket.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MANSION, A BAR

Robin sits at on a stool tendering a drink. A bartender stands behind a counter. The bar itself is just the counter and some drinks behind the bartender. There is a window wall from which the sunset over the mountain can be seen.

Rachel shuffles in and sits next to Robin.

ROBIN

You smell like death.

RACHEL

(to bartender) Whiskey. Just...whiskey.

ROBIN

Umm...he doesn't actually serve alcohol.

Rachel looks at the bartender incredulously, who just shrugs.

ROBIN

This is apple juice.

Rachel leans over the bar and reaches under the counter. The bartender looks like he's trying very hard to not say anything.

Rachel finds a bottle. It's clearly alcohol. Robin and the bartender look sheepish. Rachel walks away with the bottle.

ROBIN

Don't get too drunk.

RACHEL

Countin' on it.

She leaves and the bartender starts cleaning the counter. Robin is left contemplating his glass of apple juice.

McGinnis enters and sits next to Robin. He nods at the bartender and makes bar patron motions at the bartender who nods back and pours a glass of alcohol for McGinnis.

McGinnis kicks the glass back and motions for another. It gets filled.

MCGINNIS

Ten years in the Special Forces and I never got shot once. Two years working security for Richelieu and you pop me one right in the leg like it was second nature to you.

ROBIN

You looking for an apology? I'm sorry I didn't hit what I was aiming at.

McGinnis chuckles as he downs his second glass. He speaks as a third is filled.

MCGINNIS

You're a security risk. I don't know why we're letting you carry a gun around.

ROBIN

Take it up with your employer. Or back off.

McGinnis swallows his last shot of liquor and stands.

MCGINNIS

You can go ahead and assume that we're watching you at all times. Don't do anything stupid. And try the vodka. Apple juice isn't fitting for a stone-cold killer like you.

He laughs and leaves. Robin looks contained. His emotions are contained inside himself.

Then he swats his glass away, shattering it across the bar. He stands and leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LABS

Robin walks through the labs, looking at all the animals. He stops to look at the sheep.

All the sheep are moving in one direction. They're like masses of fluffy clouds being blown across the field.

There's a problem though. One piece of the cloud isn't moving with the rest. Robin walks forward.

One singular sheep cuts through the crowd. The bleating is deafening. One sheep jostles past the others, making a beeline for Robin.

Robin stops at the perimeter of the pen. The sheep breaks from the crowd and walks up to Robin.

Robin instinctively puts his hand out, like he is feeding the sheep. The sheep puts its mouth in Robin's hand.

Robin takes his hand back. There's something wrong. The sheep put something in his hand. He looks at it. It's his coin.

Robin stares wide eyed at the saliva covered coin. It's the same one, alright. Man on one side, wolf on the other.

The sheep bleats. Robin starts and looks at it. The sheep trots off to another part of the pen, away from the herd.

Where it's walking, the direction, towards the wall. Something about the wall. A crevice? Robin walks closer.

Bernice grabs Robin's arm.

BERNICE

Robin, I need to see you. Now.

The sheep bleats. Robin looks at the wall again. Something is off about the wall.

BERNICE

Robin, this can't wait.

The sheep bleats urgently. Robin turns from the wall and looks at Bernice. She has a look of alarm and concern.