CAPTAIN FANTASTIC

by
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EXT. WASHINGTON STATE. OLYMPIC PENINSULA. DAWN.

In the early morning dawn, a light rain patters onto the surface of the Hoh River in Washington State's Olympic Peninsula.

Giant Fir branches in the lush rainforest undulate, almost dancing in the soft rain.

Tall grass parts and out of the morning fog comes a young man, completely COVERED IN MUD, a bow and arrow in his hands.

This is BODEVAN. He's sixteen, with wispy hair down to his shoulders.

Bodevan's fingers examine the muddy ground. Deer track. Leading to the river.

He signals with his free hand.

Five KIDS glide into the clearing. They range in age from 14 to 5. They all have long, unruly hair, dirty faces, and wear, over the usual kid's clothes of t-shirts and jeans, what looks like animal skins. They are: two twin 14-year old girls, KIELYR and VESPYR; RELLIAN, a boy of 12; ZAJA, a 7-year old girl; and lastly, NAI, a 5-year old boy.

Bo - his body rigid, instantly alert - gestures and they all immediately pause.

Not twenty feet away, a large ROOSEVELT ELK dips its mouth into the river and drinks.

Slowly - Bo raises his bow.

The elk turns its head, sensing something.

Bo freezes - perfectly camouflaged in the tall grass.

The elk sniffs the air, but as the children are all covered in mud and animal skins, it smells nothing. It relaxes, drinking from the river again.

Bo sights the elk. He exhales, silently.

And he releases the arrow.

The arrow pierces the animal's neck. It's a perfect kill-shot. The elk does nothing more than flinch. It walks a few steps and then just folds, hemorrhagic shock taking over.

The other kids surround Bo, staring down at the fallen elk.
Like some primordial warrior, his entire naked body camouflaged by mud, BEN CASH rises out of the grass. He's 45 and has a formidable beard, but his body is lithe and muscular, fit like a man half his age.

He hands Bo a massive, serrated hunting knife.

Bo leans down and slits the elk's throat.

Ben plunges his finger in the elks's throat. He paints a stripe of blood across Bo's face.

BEN

Today. The boy is dead. And in his place. Is a man.

Everyone pauses for the deep solemnity of the moment.

Ben raises his hand high in the air and lets out a VICTORIOUS BATTLE CRY.

The IMAGE FREEZES - Ben's eyes fierce, mouth wide open in a scream, spittle shooting out - as the title comes up around him:

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC

EXT. TEPEE. MORNING.

While Ben and Bo attach the deer's feet to rope, swing the rope over a tree, and string it high off the ground, we get our first glimpse of their "home."

In a clearing, hidden under a canopy of enormous Douglas Fir trees, a large Tepee sits next to a fire pit.

Behind the Tepee, a few of the kids jump on small wooden platforms, grab hanging rope, and pull themselves up on these little "elevators." Cascading high into the trees above the Tepee is a kid's paradise of funky tree houses, zip lines, rope bridges, hammocks, and observation platforms.

BEN

Training in 5!

EXT. FOREST. MORNING.

In another meadow, all the children hold wooden sticks as Ben teaches them what looks like commando knife-fighting. This is not a suburban mall karate class.
Bo slashes at Ben with his stick. In one swift movement, Ben deflects with his forearm and hip-throws Bo. Bo hits the ground hard, Ben's stick already pressing into Bo's throat. A kill strike, shocking in its sudden violence.

The others watch, taking all of this utterly seriously, then break into pairs and practice the move.

Rellian stares at his father.

RELLIAN
This is not normal. We are not normal.

Ben watches Kielyr and Vespyr. They're attacking and defending like it's a choreographed dance.

BEN
If you don't stab to kill. Really stab. For the liver. Or the kidneys. She'll never learn.

ZAJA
Shouldn't we aim here? A knife in the lungs creates pneumothorax. Or next to the sternum, to penetrate the heart? That would be instant death.

Ben looks over at his 7-year old, standing next to Nai.

BEN
If it makes you happy, Zaj. Sure. Aim for the heart.

Vespyr eyes her sister, but is still hesitating.

BEN (CONT'D)
The stick will break before it hurts her.

Vespyr attacks again, but this time she overcompensates, Kielyr's parry is ineffectual, and Vespyr's stick hits her sister in the stomach. The stick breaks and Kielyr YELPS in pain.

BEN (CONT'D)
Good.

KIELYR
What?! How is that good? She stabbed me! She fucking stabbed me!
BEN
Then you better learn to defend yourself.

Ben hands Vespyr another stick.

EXT. FOREST ROAD. DAY.

In a meadow, a long dirt logging road seems to simply end as it hits the thick wall of the forest.

Ben and the kids untie hidden ropes and toss aside the mass of brambles and fallen tree branches that are tied to the trees, dismantling a thick wall of foliage.

BEN
Try not to kill each other before we get back.

Now Ben and Bo move a large branch, revealing that the dirt logging road does not just peter out into the meadow. That was a decoy. The logging road continues in another direction entirely, but was completely hidden by the branches and brambles they just cleared.

Sitting on the dirt road is a beat-up, 36-foot long yellow 1989 Thomas Saf-T-Liner school bus.

KIELYR
If training is over, can we take Steve somewhere for class later?

NAI
Why don't we have a Mommy?

This catches the attention of all the kids. They all stop and look at Ben.

BEN
You do have a Mommy.

VESPYR
You said she would only be gone for a month.

BEN
It hasn't been very long.

KIELYR
It's been five months, two weeks, six days, and eleven hours.
BODEVAN
Mom is very ill.

KIELYR
Don't talk to us like we're your inferiors.

BODEVAN
Who knew there were so many geniuses in the world.

VESPYR
Dad, Bo is being sarcastic.

Ben works to free another large branch.

BEN
That was sardonic. Sarcastic would be... "Your genius is blinding."
They're both mocking, but sarcastic is directed at a person and meant
to hurt. Sardonic is less direct and is said more for laughs or for
wit. Grab the end.

Vespyr and Bo grab the other end of the branch and help Ben move it away.

VESPYR
We DO know about Mom.

BODEVAN
You think you do, but you have no concept of the scope or the depth
of her illness.

VESPYR
Dad, Bo is being condescending.

BEN
Bo's right. Mom has to be in a hospital now.

VESPYR
But you said hospitals are only a great place to go to if you're a healthy person and you want to die.

ZAJA
You said Americans are undereducated and overmedicated.
KIELYR
You said that the AMA are avaricious whores only too willing to spread their fat legs for Big Pharma.

BEN
There isn't enough neurotransmitter serotonin in Mom's brain to transmit serotonin from neuron to neuron, so selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors and tricyclic antidepressants are the only known way to deal with it.

RELLIAN
Exactly when is Mom coming back?

BEN
That's what I'm going to find out.

Ben and Bo climb on the bus and the glass doors close behind them, revealing on the outside of the door panels, the spray-paint stencilled word: Steve.

After "Steve" passes, the other kids re-seal the hole in the grove and re-tie the branches to the trees, thereby again masking the road to their camp.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. DAY.

Steve the Bus dips into a valley and passes a golf course.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

The interior of Steve has been customized, the rows of seats removed and replaced with a dining table, a mini-kitchen, a refrigerator/freezer. It looks more like a suburban RV than a school bus. There's even an American flag on the back wall.

Ben picks up the PA microphone (it looks like a CB radio), flips a switch, and his voice his amplified throughout the bus.

BEN
Ladies and gentlemen, I give you yet another great example of civilization: man shall conquer the wild, tame tree and mountain, lake and stream, and replace them with:
BEN (CONT'D)
The 18-hole golf course.

Bo, the only passenger, smiles at his dad.

EXT. SMALL TOWN DINER. DAY.

In a small town, in front of a Mom and Pop Diner, Bo and Ben exit the bus. As they do, a group of TEENAGE GIRLS are just leaving the diner. One of them holds the door for Bo. She smiles at him.

TEENAGE GIRL
You comin' in?

Bo nods and reaches for the door, but avoids her eyes.

TEENAGE GIRL (CONT'D)
'Bye.

Bo turns red and just nods.

As the girls walk away, the one who held the door for Bo looks back at him, then says something to her friends, who all check Bo out and giggle.

BEN
Go talk to her.

BODEVAN
Ask her what she thinks about the working people creating an armed revolution against the exploiting classes and their state structures?

BEN
Marxists can be just as genocidal as.... No. Just... I don't know. Talk about -

BODEVAN
Whether or not she's a Dialectical Materialist and accords primacy to the class struggle?

BEN
Avoid... Marxism. Or telling her you're a Trotskyite.
"Trotsky-IST."
Only a Stalinist would call a Trotskyist a "Trotskyite." And I'm not a Trotskyist anymore. I'm a Maoist.

Ben smiles. He hands Bo a key. And they both, at the same time, check their watches.

10:14.

If you're not back here by 10:24, I'll assume you've been compromised. You know what that means.

INT. SMALL TOWN DINER. DAY.

In the back of the diner, Ben is on a public phone. His body is tense. We don't see who he's talking to (but will come to realize that it's HARPER, his sister).

The doctors are very positive. She's had a real breakthrough.

At that, Ben's entire demeanor changes; his body relaxes and he laughs, the intense stress - visibly - releasing.

Ben? You okay?

Yeah. No. I'm just... this is good.

The Zyprexa and Lamictal seem to be - finally - the right balance. May I say something? As your sister?

Of course.

Things need to change now. Seriously change. Leslie is very ill. From now on, she has to be somewhere where she can be monitored on a daily basis.
BEN
Call Jack and Angie back. Tell them that me and the kids will pick Leslie up in a week.

HARPER (O.S.)
They're YOUR in-laws.

BEN
And they won't speak to me. I'll call you tomorrow, we can figure out exactly when I can come get her. And Harper? Thank you.

HARPER (O.S.)
Okay.

Ben hangs up the phone.

INT. POST OFFICE. DAY.

Bo opens a large post office box. Inside, the box is packed with mail. There are the new issues of "Scientific American," "National Geographic," "The New Yorker," and "The Economist."

And then a stack of large envelopes.

Bo looks at the first one. It's marked, "PRINCETON UNIVERSITY."

EXT. PARK BENCH. DAY.

Bo sits on a a park bench staring at the contents of one of the envelopes.

The paper reads, "We are pleased to welcome you to Harvard University, the class of 2014."

He looks at the other envelopes, all now opened. They are from Dartmouth, Brown, M.I.T., Yale, and Stanford.

On top of the opened envelopes are welcome letters from every university.

EXT. TEPEE. DAY.

The inside of the Tepee is the size of a large one-bedroom apartment. Beds and dresser drawers surround a wood-burning stove, but what's more apparent is that the interior is immaculate. Musical instruments, toys, and equipment are neatly piled, beds carefully made, books perfectly stacked.
It's as clean and organized as the inside of a military barracks.

The kids dance and chant "Mommy's coming home!" over and over again. Rellian is particularly gleeful. He pulls Ben into their spinning circle and hugs his Dad.

Bo pulls the magazines from the post office box out of his backpack and drops them on Ben's bed.

He makes sure no one sees - then takes the university acceptance packages out of his backpack and hides them under his mattress.

**EXT. BEACH CLIFFS. DAY.**

It's cold and it's raining. Above the beach, Ben and the kids are perched on an enormous rock formation that juts into and above the ocean. They pass around a pair of binoculars.

**VESPYR**


**BEN**

Good. Now -

**ZAJA**

Why are so many of them beaching themselves and dying? I read in the Economist that along the Pacific coast last year, 37 died in California, 24 in Washington and Oregon, 7 in British Columbia, and 22 more in Alaska. Scientists are baffled.

The others all gasp and applaud at something that they see in the distance.

**KIELYR**

That was a big one!

**ZAJA**

Are they starving? Are they being poisoned from pollution? Do whales have suicidal feelings? If a whale -
Ben stares at Zaja and she stops speaking.

BEN
Thank you. Now. I want to discuss whaling and its horrific legacy.

EXT. TEPEE. DAY.

Ben watches as, in front of their Tepee, strung from a rope on a tree, the twins dress the elk that Bo shot that morning: peeling off its skin and cutting out the innards of the animal with none of the squeamishness of 14-year olds and all the skill of experienced butchers.

Behind them, 12-year old Rellian, with a flint that he extracts from a pouch on his belt, makes a fire in a large pit in front of the Tepee.

VESPYR
Where's the boning knife? Dad.
Zaja.

Ben nods and walks toward the bus.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

Ben ambles to the back of the bus and opens a closet.

Zaja sits on the floor, cleaning the skeleton of a small animal with a 6-inch boning knife.

The inside of the closet has been turned into some kind of grotesque Death Shrine. It's plastered with actual animal skeletons, magazine photographs of dead bodies from the Holocaust, and pictures of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge.

From the look on Ben's face, this is the first time he's seen Zaja's interior design.

BEN
Jesus.

Zaja looks at the photo on the wall. She shakes her head no.

ZAJA
Pol Pot.

Ben puts out his hand and Zaja passes him the boning knife.
EXT. TEPEE. NIGHT.

Flames illuminate the faces of the family, as they eat roast venison, sitting on the ground in a circle around the fire.

By the light of candles and kerosene lamps, the kids are all reading books way beyond their years: Nai is reading the Encyclopedia Brittanica, he's on letter "J"; Kielyr is reading "Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies" by Jared Diamond; Rellian reads Dostoyevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov;" Bo is reading a college Calculus textbook.

BEN
Zaj. Page.

Zaja holds "Middlemarch" by George Eliot. She glances at the page number.

ZAJA
398.

Ben records this in a notebook.

BEN
You still liking it?

Zaja nods.

BEN (CONT'D)
I thought you would. To stay on schedule for the test you need to be finished in 8 days. Vesp?


VESPYR
Just finished Chapter 12, "The World on a String."

Ben looks up at her.

VESPYR (CONT'D)
What.

BEN
Are you having trouble with quantum entanglement?

VESPYR
No.
BEN
Planck length vs. Planck time?

VESPYR
I'm fine.

BEN
Good, then tomorrow you can give a little presentation on M-Theory, argue counter-points with Bo and Rell vis-a-vis Witten and Dirac.

Vespyr makes a face at Kielyr. Neither sees that Ben catches the look.

Ben puts down his notebook. He watches the children reading for a moment.

Then he picks up his guitar and sings "Little Red Corvette," by Prince.

The kids ignore him, but gradually, one at a time, each of them pick up a different musical instrument - a flute, drums, a trombone, a violin - and joins him.

Soon, everyone is up on their feet. Dancing and singing and playing their instruments - illuminated by the light of the fire - grooving to their Prince cover and having a blast.

INT. TEPEE. NIGHT.

The sound of WHIMPERING.

In the dark, Ben opens his eyes.

He looks over and sees Rellian, tossing, twitching. Then Rellian grunts and jolts up.

Ben holds him, rubbing Rellian's shoulders, soothing him.

BEN
Shh. It's okay. You just had another nightmare. I'm here now.

Rellian swallows. He's sweaty and confused. He pushes Ben away.

RELLIAN
I'm fine.

Ben nods and moves back to his bed.
EXT. GAS STATION PARKING LOT. DAY.

In the parking lot of a roadside gas station, Ben dials a number on a pay phone.

    HARPER (O.S.)
    Ben?

Immediately, from the tone of Harper's voice, he can tell something is very wrong.

    BEN
    What is it?

Silence.

    BEN (CONT'D)
    Harper.

Ben hears a sharp, irregular exhalation of breath. Whatever's wrong is serious enough to be very difficult to say.

    BEN (CONT'D)
    Tell me.

    HARPER (O.S.)
    Leslie killed herself last night.

The blood drains from Ben's face. He is frozen for a moment. No reaction whatsoever.

    BEN
    How?

Another pause.

    BEN (CONT'D)
    Harper, tell me.

    HARPER (O.S.)
    She jumped out of a window.


    HARPER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
    Ben?

Ben hangs up the phone.
EXT. FOREST. NIGHT.

Around a big fire, all the kids sit together, staring expectantly at their father.

Ben takes a deep breath.

BEN
Last night. Mommy killed herself. She jumped out of a window. Your mother is dead.

As the reality of Ben's words hit them, utter devastation passes over the children's face. And then, in a matter of seconds, they all burst into tears, snot comes out of their noses, tears roll down their faces, some of them are almost hyperventilating. Grieving openly and deeply, it's like something out of Greek Tragedy. Elemental. Primal.

ZAJA
What's going to happen to us?

BEN
Nothing is going to change. We'll continue living exactly the same way. We're a family.

Rellian stands. He yells. Savage, guttural shouts. They're fierce and pained, like an trapped animal.

RELLIAN
Mom! Mom!

He picks up an axe, but just paces, red-faced, not knowing what to do with it.

Bodevan moves to stop his brother, but Ben holds Bo's shoulder.

Rellian takes an axe and slams it, over and over again, into a tree. Harder and harder.

RELLIAN (CONT'D)
Fuck you! Fuck you! Mom! Mom! Fuck you, Mom, you fucking...!

Rellian drops the axe and runs off into the darkness of the forest.

INT. TEPEE. NIGHT.

LESLIE's face. Smiling. Giggling.
She is leaning over, swaying back and forth, dragging her long auburn hair across Ben's face.

She dips down and kisses him. Over and over again. She's laughing.

She SPEAKS, but NO SOUND comes out of her mouth.

**INT. TEPEE. NIGHT.**

Ben opens his eyes. He sits up and blinks, peering into the darkness of the tepee. The kids are asleep.

Leslie is not there.

He lights a candle and opens a dresser. Under his clothes, he withdraws a hidden manila folder. One file is marked **WILL AND TESTAMENT.** He rifles through the papers until he finds what he's looking for. He reads. His face turns white.

**BEN**

Jesus fucking Christ.

**THE WAIL OF BAGPIPES.**

**EXT. TEPEE. DAWN.**

Ben stands outside the Tepee. He brings his bagpipes to his lips again and blows. Out comes that eerie and persistent **WAIL.**

The kids pile out of the Tepee.

**EXT. FOREST. MORNING.**

Ben bolts through a dense rainforest - creating an obstacle course as he goes - dodging trees, leaping over rocks and fallen logs.

Straggling behind, the kids all follow his exact movements.

He reaches a meadow, stops, and clicks his stopwatch as each kid passes him. First comes Bo.

**BEN**

1:05. Worse then yesterday!

Then the twins.

**BEN (CONT'D)**

1:11. I'm embarrassed for you.
Then Rell.

**BEN (CONT'D)**

1:18. You're plateauing. You're going back to eccentric contractions and leg cycling.

Then Zaja and Nai pass him.

**BEN (CONT'D)**

1:26 and... 1:29. Fine if you both were THREE! Subpar! This is subpar! No rest!

Ben dodges back the woods and the kids follow.

**EXT. MEADOW. MORNING.**

In a meadow, Ben leads everyone through a complicated series of calisthenics: jump squats into burpies into holding plank. This is hard-core performance training and the kids move through the exercises like athletes.

**BEN**

The Rule of Three. Nai.

**NAI**

You can survive 3 minutes without air.

**BEN**

Zaj.

**ZAJA**

You can survive 3 hours without shelter.

The kids are in plank, holding themselves in a push-up position only by their elbows.

**BEN**

Kielyr.

**KIELYR**

3 days without water.

**BEN**

Vesp.

**VESPYR**

3 weeks without food.
BODEVAN
Dad.

BEN
Hold it.

BODEVAN
Dad.

BEN
Keep holding. Rell.

The kids are now really struggling, sweating, their small bodies quivering with effort.

RELLIAN
3 years without human companionship.

BODEVAN
DAD! When's Mom's funeral?!

Ben finally turns to look at his son.

**EXT. GAS STATION. DAY.**

Ben is on a pay phone, at a roadside gas station, talking to Leslie's father, JACK.

JACK (O.S.)
The utter recklessness, the instability and insecurity that you have brought to her life -

BEN
WE decided to live here. BOTH of us. This was a mutual decision.

JACK (O.S.)
This is YOUR goddamned fault!

BEN
Leslie had a disease. She needed to be in a good facility, you'll only pay if she's treated near you, fine. We did that. Listen. I found her Will. I assume you know that Leslie was a Buddhist.

There is a long pause on the line.

JACK (O.S.)
Leslie was a nudist?
BEN
Buddhist. Leslie was a BUDDHIST. She wanted to be cremated. Not buried. It was very important to her that -

JACK (O.S.)
I have just lost my only child. I'm in no mood to discuss the particulars of her funeral.

BEN
There's more. Look, this is... strange, I admit, but in her Will, Leslie clearly stipulated that -

JACK (O.S.)
I rue the day she met you. Wherever you are, you stay there.

BEN
Jack.

JACK (O.S.)
You are not welcome here. Is that clear? You show up. I will have you arrested.

The phone goes silent.

BEN
Can we just speak civilly? Jack? Hello?

ANGIE, Leslie's mother, now speaks.

ANGIE (O.S.)
Leslie is in Heaven now. She is finally at peace.

BEN
When's the funeral?

ANGIE (O.S.)
In three days. Here in Phoenix. At our church. How are the children?

BEN
They're... in shock.

ANGIE (O.S.)
It's been years.
BEN
Did you hear what Jack just said?

ANGIE (O.S.)
I miss them. The children.

BEN
Angie. Jack just said he'll have us arrested if we come. Did you hear that?

ANGIE (O.S.)
He's very upset. I'm sorry. It's best to do what he says.

There's a CLICK and a DIAL TONE as she hangs up the phone.

EXT. TEPEE. NIGHT.

Ben is cooking venison over a large fire. The kids sit around it, watching the flames.

BODEVAN
Mom hated those people.

Nai comes out of the Tepee. He's completely naked.

BEN
Clothes when we eat.

Nai disappears back into the Tepee for a second, then comes back out wearing a beat-up Batman costume.

VESPYR
We're in the very unique position of hating those people.

BEN
Can "unique" be modified?

All the other kids respond with a "no!"

VESPYR
Whatever.

NAI
We don't hate Nana and Grandpa, but the rest of her tribe are fascist capitalists.

KIELYR
You're just repeating whatever Dad says.
NAI
I'm writing down everything you say. In my mind.

KIELYR
You don't even know what a fascist is.

NAI
Violent nationalist militants, supported by big business and they're - totalitarian single-party dictators.

Kielyr pauses for a second, surprised by the accuracy of Nai's description.

KIELYR
We're her family. We have to go.

VESPYR
Grandpa said we can't.

Ben takes venison off the fire and cuts it into small pieces.

ZAJA
What will happen to us if they arrest you? Will they take us away from you?

At this, all the kids turn to look at Ben.

BEN
There is that possibility.

Zaja comes out of the Tepee.

ZAJA
Dad. I think Rellian ran away again.

EXT. FOREST. NIGHT.

Ben, a kerosene lamp in his hand, walks through the dark forest.

He finds Rellian sitting on a rock by the river. Rellian doesn't turn to look at his father.

RELLIAN
How'd you find me so quickly?
Ben holds the lamp just off the ground, revealing shoe prints in the dirt.

**BEN**

You don't want to be followed, you should take off your shoes.

Rell is silent.

**BEN (CONT'D)**

Mom's illness had nothing to do with you guys. It was chemical. She loved you very much.

Rell still says nothing.

**BEN (CONT'D)**

It's not your fault. And it's going to be okay. But I can't help you. Unless you talk to me.

**RELLIAN**

Talking!

**BEN**

Come here, buddy.

Rellian bolts up and dodges Ben.

**RELLIAN**

I hate my fucking shit-ass life!

Rell storms back in the direction of the Tepee and Ben follows.

**EXT. TEPEE. NIGHT.**

Like they're on a train platform waiting to depart, the kids are now all standing out in front of the Tepee; they've got old suitcases and duffel bags, toys and books, packed and ready. Only Nai is still bringing out clothes from the Tepee and packing stuff on the ground.

**NAI**

We want to see Mom.

**VESPYR**

We want to honor her life.

**ZAJA**

I want to give a speech. Tell Mommy that I love her. For the last time ever.
Without saying a word, Ben immediately carries their luggage and toys and books back to the Tepee.

KIELYR
We're her family. We have to go. We need a ritual. To heal.

VESPYR
Yeah, for the grieving process.

ZAJA
Plus Grandpa can't oppress us.

RELLIAN
It's the least you can do.

Ben stops. He looks at Rellian.

BEN
What does that mean?

RELLIAN
You know.

BEN
No. I don't.

RELLIAN
Forget it. But I know.

VESPYR
We're strong. We're ready.

KIELYR
We are defined by our actions, not by our words.

At this, Ben smiles.

NAI
That's your favorite sentence. In English.

His arms loaded with toys and books and luggage, Ben opens the Tepee flap and disappears inside.

**INT. TEPEE. NIGHT.**

Ben is unpacking one of the kid's suitcases, shoving clothes back into a chest of drawers.
RELLIAN
What's the fucking point of all our stupid fucking training then?

NAI
If we're defined by our actions. Then we have to go.

RELLIAN
We're her real family.

VESPYR
Give us the mission!

ZAJA
We want the mission!

NAI
"Mission: Rescue Mommy!"

Ben stares at his kids. He shakes his head no.

EXT. TEPEE. DAWN.

In the soft, early morning rain, Ben stands outside the Tepee. He blows his bagpipes.

EXT. GRANITE ROCK. MORNING.

The rain is now POUNDING. Ben leads the kids as they climb up the face of a vertical granite formation. They all wear climbing harnesses, carabiners around their belts, and are tied onto the bright orange climbing rope, following Ben as he makes his way up the face. It's an expert grade and they're all struggling.

Without warning, Rellian slips - plummeting at least ten feet - falling hard. The rope catches and he swings, spiraling into the granite face. He smashes his hand against the rock, but finally manages to steady himself, grabbing hold of the face with his other hand.

RELLIAN
Fuck!

Rellian is shaking, trying to catch his breath. He looks down. Hundreds of feet below are a cluster of massive rocks.

ZAJA
If you hit the rocks below you, you'll die from blunt force trauma.
Or internal bleeding from massive bone fracturing or splenic flexure of the large intestine.

BEN
Yes, thank you, Zaj.

RELLIAN
My hand.

Ben stares down at Rell.

BEN
You're alive.

RELLIAN stares at his hand. No bones are sticking out, but it's throbbing.

BEN (CONT'D)

RELLIAN
It's too far.

BEN
Know that you can make it and you will.

RELLIAN
I can't. My hand.

The other kids wait, looking up at Ben for guidance. Ben doesn't move.

BEN
There is no calvary. No one will magically appear to save you in the end.

RELLIAN grits his teeth. He stretches out his leg again. But he's losing balance. Right before he slips, he pushes off with his other foot and swings, just managing to land on the far edge that seemed too far. As soon as he lands, he swings and leaps again, finding a hand hold with his good hand. He looks up at his dad and nods.

Ben smiles. Then continues to climb.
EXT. TEPEE. DAY.

It's no longer raining as Ben bandages Rellian's hand.

Rell flexes his fingers. He grimaces and without looking at his father, plops down in front of the fire, joining his brothers and sisters.

For a long time, Ben watches his kids.

They all just stare into the fire. Clothes soaked. Exhausted. Depleted. Emotionally numb.

    BEN
    Class time.

Without a word of protestation, they drag themselves up and trudge toward the bus.

EXT. OLYMPIC MOUNTAINS. DAY.

Steve the bus is high in the Olympic mountains, winding down a country highway.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

Ben glances into the rearview mirror. All the kids look absolutely despondent. Listless and lost. Staring out the window. Or at nothing.

Ben grabs the PA radio and flips the switch.

    BEN
    We can't go to Mommy's funeral. We have to do what we're told. Some fights, you can't win. The powerful control the lives of the powerless. This is how the world works. It's unjust and unfair. But too bad. We just have to shut up and accept it.

Ben looks back at the kids. They look devastated.

    BEN (CONT'D)
    Well, FUCK THAT.

Ben jerks the wheel, swerving off to the side of the road. He yanks down a window and moves two enormous speakers so that they're pointing outside the bus.

He sits back down, hit's the cassette player, and cranks up "Immigrant Song" by Led Zeppelin.
He turns back toward the kids and yells over the music.

    BEN (CONT'D)
    So they know we're FUCKING COMING!

All the kids stand and yell in excitement.

Ben peels out, kicking up dirt and - in the middle of the empty country highway - makes a slow U-turn, now heading in the opposite direction.

OVER THE MUSIC

EXT. WASHINGTON COUNTRY HIGHWAY. DAY.

Steve the Bus slowly winds its way down the snow-peaked Olympic Mountain range.

EXT. WASHINGTON COUNTRY HIGHWAY. DAY.

And, on a country highway, down past Olympia. There's nothing but thick forests of Douglas Fir, Spruce, and Western Hemlock as far as the eye can see.

From the back of the bus, Zaja stands.

    ZAJA
    Road kill! Dad! Stop Steve!

Ben slowly pulls the bus over.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

Ben opens the doors and Zaja climbs back on the bus. She opens a towel and shows her dad what she found: a smashed squirrel, stiff with rigor mortis. She looks elated.

    ZAJA
    And I don't have one like this!

Ben tries to smile.

EXT. PORTLAND, OREGON. DAY.

Steve the Bus, now on Highway I5, passes Portland, Oregon. Snow-capped Mount Hood appears in the distance.
INT. STEVE. DAY.

Now past the city and into the Cascade Mountains south of Portland. Vespyr looks up from her book.

VESPYR
What's a "bordello?"

Ben looks over to see Vespyr reading "Lolita," by Vladimir Nabokov.

BEN
A whorehouse.

VESPYR
Oh.

BEN
I didn't assign that book.

VESPYR
I'm skipping ahead.

BEN
And?

VESPYR
It's interesting.

BODEVAN
Illegal word!

ZAJA
Dad! Vesp said "interesting!" NAI Dad! She said "interesting!"

BEN
"Interesting" is a non-word. You know you're never allowed to use it. Be specific.

VESPYR
It's... disturbing.

BEN
More specific.

VESPYR
Can I just read?!

BEN
After you answer the question.
VESPYR
There's this old man. Who loves this girl. But she's only -

BEN
That's the plot. That wasn't the question.

Vespyr pauses, considering how to articulate her feelings about the book.

VESPYR
Because it's written from his perspective, you sort of understand and sympathize with him. Which is sort of amazing. Because he's basically a child molester. But his love for her is beautiful. But it's also kind of a trick, because it's so wrong. He's old and he basically rapes her. So it makes me feel.... I hate him and I feel sorry for him. At the same time.

Ben smiles.

BEN
Well done.

Vespyr rolls her eyes and goes back to her book.

NAI
What does "rape" mean?

BEN
When one person, usually a man, forces another person, usually a woman, to have sexual intercourse.

NAI
Oh.

BEN
Who's hungry?

All the kids say, "Me!"

NAI
What's sexual intercourse?

BEN
When a man sticks his penis in a woman's vagina. Anyone spot any animals yet?
This baffles the 5-year old Nai.

NAI
Why would a man stick his penis in a woman's vagina?

BEN
Because it gives them both pleasure. And the combination of a man's sperm and a woman's egg creates a baby and continues the human race.

NAI
But that's where she pees.

BEN
Pee comes not from the vagina, but from the urethra, which is within the outer labia. But yes. That is where she pees.

This seems to further confuse Nai.

NAI
I'm sad.

BEN
So am I. So is everyone. Everyone! Keep an eye open for game of any kind.

EXT. STEVE. DAY.

Steve is parked in a small town, in front of a bank.

EXT. BANK. DAY.

A BANK TELLER counts some bills in front of Ben, who's now dressed in a vintage suit. Ben looks over at his kids, all waiting patiently on a bench.

They are all dressed in second hand clothes. The boys in suits, the girls in dresses and frilly shirts. They look like a Seventies folk band.

The teller hands the bills to Ben and Ben counts. Bo joins him at the counter.

BODEVAN
I want to go to college.
Ben laughs.

BODEVAN (CONT'D)
This won't last forever.

This stops Ben. He stares at his son.

BEN
You're serious.

BODEVAN
We're not all going to just live with you forever.

BEN
You're too young to go to college.

BODEVAN
I'm ready. It's what I want.

BEN
Okay, we'll talk about this later.

They join the others, but everyone is frozen, just staring at the other BANK CUSTOMERS.

BEN (CONT'D)
Now what?

Zaja looks deeply disturbed.

ZAJA
What's wrong with everyone?

BEN
What do you mean?

KIELYR
Are they sick?

BEN
Who?

NAI
Everyone is so fat.

Ben looks around the bank. His kids are right. The other customers, without exception, are all overweight.

BEN
Yes, they are.

NAI
Fat like hippos.
ZAJA
That's not nice to say.

NAI
But look.

ZAJA
You can think it, but we don't make
fun of people, right Dad?

BEN
That's right. We don't make fun of
people.

VESPYR
Except Christians.

ZAJA
Yeah, we don't make fun of people.
Except Christians.

BEN
Come on.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

They drive through the small town and toward the freeway. And
then the FLASHING LIGHTS of a police car are behind them.

BODEVAN
Dad. Gun it.

BEN
Too late.

Ben pulls Steve over. He looks back at his kids.

BEN (CONT'D)
Be calm. Remember your training.

Ben opens the doors and OFFICER HAYES peeks in.

BEN (CONT'D)
Afternoon, Officer.

OFFICER HAYES
License and registration, please.

Ben reaches into the glove compartment and pulls out his
papers.

OFFICER HAYES (CONT'D)
You know why I pulled you over?
BEN

No, sir.

OFFICER HAYES

Your left rear brake light is out.
Alright, give me a second.

The officer returns to his car and puts Ben's info into the computer of his patrol car.

BODEVAN

We should never leave the forest.

The very idea agitates the other kids.

KIELYR

Maybe we should go back.

NAI

Are we going to jail?

BEN

That's entirely up to you. This. Right now. This is your first real test.

Just then, Officer Hayes peeks in the bus. He hands Ben back his papers.

OFFICER HAYES

Okay, so I'm gonna give you this ticket for the light. You get the bulb replaced, bring the receipt in, court might waive the fee.

Ben takes the ticket.

BEN

Sure thing. Sorry about that.

Officer Hayes looks around the bus. The interior of Steve is clean and organized and he sees nothing suspicious.

But then he looks at the children. He stares at them long enough to make Ben nervous.

OFFICER HAYES

No school today?

Bo stands and addresses the officer.
BODEVAN
Man, by his sin, has become
separated from God, and only
through personally accepting the
gift of reconciliation purchased by
Jesus at the cross can he regain
his fellowship with God.

Nai jumps out of his seat.

NAI
Jesus is the way, the truth, and
the light!

The officer stares at the kids.

BODEVAN
We're home-schooled.
(to Ben)
Father? May I?

Ben looks at Bo. He has no idea what Bo's doing.

BEN
You may.

Bo signals for the other children and takes Officer Hayes by
the hand.

All the children hold hands and begin singing the Christian
hymnal, "One Day When Heaven Was Filled With His Praises."

As they sing, Officer Hayes - with every line - grows visibly
uncomfortable.

The children belt out the song.

ALL THE KIDS SINGING
"Jesus came forth to be born of a
virgin, Dwelt among men, my
example is He! Living, He loved
me!"

OFFICER HAYES
I should probably -

ALL THE KIDS SINGING
"Dying, He saved me! Buried, He
carried my sins far away! Rising,
He justified freely forever! One
day, He's coming, O glorious day!"
OFFICER HAYES
Look, sorry - I got to get back to work here. Drive safe, Mr. Cash.

After Officer Hayes leaves, Bo looks the his dad.

BODEVAN
Power to the people.

BEN
Stick it to the man.

EXT. STEVE. DAY.

Steve is parked alongside the highway.

On a hill, Kielyr moves silently through some tall grass, a bow and arrow in her hand.

She peers over a ridge. Down below is a flock of sheep, grazing.

Ben and the kids join her.

KIELYR
They're just standing there.

EXT. HILL. DAY.

Crouching in the grass, now much closer to the grazing sheep, Kielyr raises her bow.

She aims, holding a sheep in her sights. So long that her pull arm trembles.

Then she lowers her bow. She can't do it.

Nai runs up the ridge.

NAI
Dad! DAD!

EXT. HILL. DAY.

Ben, followed by the other kids, runs down the hill to see:

Rellian, the flint still in his hand, has set a fire in the brush.

Ben rushes over and stamps it out with his feet.
BEN
Why would you do that?

Rellian remains silent.

BEN (CONT'D)
You could have set this whole hill on fire.

Rellian says nothing. He turns, trudging down the hill and towards the bus.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

They drive in silence. The mood is somber.

NAI
I miss Mom.

The kids all look distraught.

VESPYR
Mi maltrafas panjon.

KIELYR
Minn deziras panjon veni subte.

BEN
No! No Esperanto. I am not joking.

KIELYR
Tro malbona.

BEN
No foreign language unless the language is spoken by all. You know the rule.

VESPYR
Jes, tro malbona.

BEN
(in German)
You can speak German.

KIELYR
Ni parolas kiu ni deziras.

BEN
(in Mandarin)
Or Mandarin.
VESPYR
Ni estas indiferenta.

BEN
NO ESPERANTO!

VESPYR
La kulpo ne estas nia ke vi ne povas parol Esperanto.

The kids all look deeply unhappy.

NAI
I'm hungry.

BEN
Then maybe one of you should have shot the fucking sheep.

**INT. DINER. DAY.**

They all sit at a table in small town diner, examining menus. The place is half-empty, but there are some ELDERS, another FAMILY, a couple of TRUCK DRIVERS.

BEN
How many people in here?

The kids scan the diner.

VESPYR
Dek.

BEN
English.

Vespyr holds up both her hands: 10.

NAI
No, 11.

BEN
How many exits and where?

KIELRY
Antaupordo, versajne unu en la privat, malantaux la kuirejo.

ZAJA
She forgot that one. 10 o'clock, left of the bathroom.
BEN
Tell me why this matters. In English. Or no food.

Kielyr looks at Vespyr.

KIELYR
Never be caught unaware.

BEN
More specific.

KIELYR
Have a plan for every situation. And every possible contingency. Before it's too late.

BEN
Good.

The kids examine the menu.

BODEVAN
They have chicken.

ZAJA
What's a Coke?

BEN
Poison water.

KIELYR
Can I have the grilled-cheese?

BEN
No.

NAI
What's a... milk shake?

VESPYR
Can I have a hamburger and fries?

BEN
I'm going to pretend that you never asked that question.

ZAJA
Can I have -

BEN
Okay, everyone up. We're going.
BODEVAN
What? No. Why?

Ben holds up the menu.

BEN
Because there is no actual FOOD on this menu!

He walks toward the exit and the kids follow him out.

INT. SUPERMARKET. DAY.

Ben pushes a shopping cart through a vast, crowded, supermarket.

He passes Bo. They don't acknowledge each other.

Ben turns the corner and passes Kielyr and Vespyr. Again, they don't look at each other.

Ben now passes Rellian, pushing a shopping cart. Inside, sitting around some food, is Zaja.

Ben spots a large display of soup cans, stacked high into a massive pyramid display. He examines the ingredients of one of the cans.

BEN
Oh, God.

He grabs his chest and careens around the supermarket aisle, slamming into the shelves, knocking food onto the floor. He fumbles with a bottle of medicine. He manages to open it, but is trembling so violently that he only ends up spilling the pills all over the floor.

A few PATRONS rush over to see what's happening.

BEN (CONT'D)
My pills! My....

And then he collapses to the floor.

Someone yells, "Call 911!"

The patrons are now joined by THREE SUPERMARKET EMPLOYEES. They try to help Ben, but he is flopping around on the floor too violently for them to get a hold on him.

Nai runs up.
NAI

He can choke!

Nai pushes his way in and shoves Ben onto his side, manipulating him into a fetal position.

NAI (CONT'D)

Everyone get back! Just get back!

QUICK SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Bodevan, pushing a cart full of food, charges through the side doors of the supermarket and races through the parking lot.

- Kielyr and Vespyr, their backpacks stuffed with food, are led out of the opposite side of the market by an ELDERLY COUPLE.

- Rellian and Zaja stop at the cash registers.

RELLIAN

An old man's having a heart attack!
Call 911! CALL 911!

The last supermarket EMPLOYEE abandons his register and runs toward the commotion.

Rellian and Zaja unfold some paper bags, load up their groceries, and walk slowly and calmly out into the parking lot.

INT. SUPERMARKET. DAY.

A crowd of employees and patrons surround Ben and Nai. They watch as Ben's fierce trembling subsides.

NAI

He's okay now.

Slowly, Ben's eyes seem to focus. He sits up. Breathes in and out.

BEN

Okay. Sorry. Okay. I'm okay.

As Ben leans back against an aisle, Nai gathers the spilled pills and puts them back into the bottle.

EXT. SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT. DAY.

Nai escorts Ben through the parking lot.
BEN
Sorry about the fuss.

The SUPERMARKET MANAGER follows them, nodding.

MANAGER
Sure we can't get you an ambulance or anything?

BEN
No, no. Just forgot to take my pills. I'm fine now. Really.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

Ben pulls Steve out of the parking lot. He picks up the PA radio and speaks the following:

BEN
"No reason to get excited," the thief, he kindly spoke. "There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke. But you and I, we've been through that. And this is not our fate. So let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late, HEY!"

He flips a switch and Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower" - here sung by Jimi Hendrix - BLASTS throughout the bus.

The kids bounce hard into each other, shouting and laughing and dancing.

EXT. HIGHWAY. DUSK.

As Steve continues down a highway, the sun is setting and city lights can be seen in the distance.

EXT. ROADSIDE CAMP. NIGHT.

Now dark, the bus is parked somewhere off the freeway. Ben is setting up a fold-out table and chairs as the kids carry bags of groceries off the bus.

BEN
What else?

BODEVAN
Flawed exit strategy. Everyone went out the same front doors.

(MORE)
No one utilized the loading dock area at all. If it got blocked, we'd all be trapped.

Inadequately planned extraction point. We probably shouldn't have all gone directly to the bus. Predetermined pickups would have been much less risky.

Positives. You came in stacked by 2 minute intervals. Whose idea was that?

Nai raises his hand.

Good work, buddy. And I would be remiss if I didn't single out Kielyr and Vesp specifically for praise here. Improvising on the spot, having an elderly couple escort them out, that provided additional cover and showed on-the-fly analytical thinking beyond their 14-years. Bo's mission was well planned.

Bo smiles, feeling proud.

Good mission needs a name.

"Mission: Free the Food!"

Your mission, you want to start?

Bodevan pulls a package out of a bag.

8 packets of Salmon jerky.

Nutritional value?

Mainly protein and healthy fats, including Omega 3s.
BEN
Continue.

BODEVAN
One pound dried organic apricots.

All the kids raise their hands.

BEN
Kielyr.

KIELYR
Beta-carotene.

Why?

KIELYR
Your body converts it into vitamin-A. Plus it prevents free radicals.

Bo continues to pull food out of various bags.

BEN
Rell, you want to take this one?

Rellian shakes his head no.

BEN (CONT'D)
Anyone?

KIELYR
Cantaloupe for vitamin-C; tomatoes for lycopene, one of the strongest carotenoids; spinach for lutein and zeaxanthin, again carotenoids; lentils for isoflavones, fiber and protein; peanut butter for good fat, skim milk for vitamin-A, B, and D and for calcium; and lastly watercress and arugula for penethyl isothiocyanate, believed to arrest the development of cancer cells.

Ben nods.

BEN
"Operation: Heart Attack."

NAI
That makes no sense.

BEN
Open my bag.
Nai reaches into his father's bag and pulls out a cake.
The kids stare, frozen.

BEN (CONT'D)
Happy Noam Chomsky Day.

VESPYR
It's today?!

KIELYR
Oh, my god! TODAY is Noam Chomsky Day?!

Ben cuts the cake and as soon as he passes them a piece, the kids practically inhale it.

BEN
Who wants to see what's in Steve?

All the kid's faces light up and they bolt toward the bus.

INT. STEVE. NIGHT.

As they climb onto the bus, everyone, apart from Rellian, sings, "Happy Birthday to Noam, Happy Birthday to Noam, Happy Birthday, Uncle Noam Chomsky, Happy Birthday to you!"

On the table, under a photo of Noam Chomsky, sits a pile of wrapped presents. They immediately rip at the wrapping paper. Bo pulls out a black compound hunting bow with multiple cords and pulleys.

BODEVAN
Dad! A Diamond Ice Storm?! Thank you so much.

Bo tests the pull.

The twin girls and Zaja unwrap massive knives, as long as their forearms.

KIELYR
A new knife!

VESPYR
So beautiful!

BEN
Inside the detachable hand guard are sewing needles, matches, a magnifier, fishing hooks, line and some sinkers. And see?
The plastic shell has a can-opener, sharpening stone, animal snare, snakebite kit, and a flashlight.

ZAJA
Thanks, dad!

Nai's present is an old, 1970s copy of "The Joy of Sex." He flips through it, eyes wide.

BEN
Pictures.

Nai stares at a drawing. He looks horrified.

Rellian opens his present, also a compound hunting bow and a quiver of arrows. But he just puts them on the table and sits, staring at his shoes.

BEN (CONT'D)
It's the same one Bo got, but with a 40 pound pull. And those are Striker Broadheads. Razor sharp.

Rellian shrugs.

BEN (CONT'D)
What?

RELLIAN
What kind of crazy person celebrates Noam Chomsky's BIRTHDAY like it's some kind of official holiday?! Why can't we just celebrate Christmas like everybody else?!

BEN
We're not like everybody else.

RELLIAN
We're freaks.

BEN
You would prefer to celebrate a magical fictitious elf instead of a living humanitarian who has done so much to further human rights and understanding?

RELLIAN
Whatever.

BEN
Let's have a discourse.
RELLIAN
Forget it.

BEN
No. Explain. Take the opportunity provided to make your case. We are all open to hearing your arguments. If they're valid, if you persuade us, I'm absolutely open to changing.

RELLIAN
No, it's great. Yea, Noam Chomsky Day!

Rell climbs into his sleeping loft.

Nai opens another present. It's the same knife Ben gave to the twins. Now Nai's face lights up.

NAI
Yes! Thanks, dad.

Little Nai runs up and hugs his father.

INT. STEVE. NIGHT.

All the kids are asleep in their lofts.

Out in the mountains in rural Oregon, Highway I5 is dark as Ben drives through the night.

EXT. HIGHWAY. MORNING.

Bo peeks out from the back of the bus. He rubs his face and squints as the morning light hits his eyes.

BODEVAN
You drove all night?

Ben glances up at Bo in the rearview mirror and nods.

BODEVAN (CONT'D)
I'm going to college.

BEN
I have to think about that.

BODEVAN
There's nothing to think about.
Ben stares at his son for a moment. He shakes his head no.

Ben: You're too young.

Bo slams his fist into a seat and stomps back to his sleeping loft.

**EXT. HIGHWAY. DAY.**

As Steve travels along, the rural communities of Northern California slowly transform into suburbia.

**EXT. SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA. DAY.**

Steve now drives through the outskirts of Sacramento, California. And into rush hour. Ben picks up the PA radio.

Ben: And to my left, please see the results of having Corporations, through their lobbyists, determine the law. Why create alternative means of transportation when we can just widen the roads? ExxonMobil, Chevron and ConocoPhillips collectively made $58.3 BILLION last year. Instead of spending our money on health care, education, infrastructure, we shall pray at the altar of Saudi Princes, we shall enter, for oil, unwinnable foreign wars, spend your tax dollars on the occupation of foreign countries, create more enemies who want to kill us. Good American men and women die every day. Our democracy is one of the brightest lights of social justice in the history of mankind. (MORE)
BEN (CONT'D)
But hear freedom ring! Let's go shopping! We can drive to the Mall!

NAI
What about Prince?

BEN
Different one.

The kids stare out the window, amazed at the endless miles of cars.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD. DAY.

The bus winds through tree-lined, middle class neighborhoods. Most of the homes are new and have grass lawns out front.

EXT. HARPER'S HOUSE. DAY.

The bus pulls in front of a two-story house.

INT. HARPER'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

JACKSON, Harper's 13-year old son, sits in front of his computer, playing Grand Theft Auto 5. He wears extra-large skater clothes, has a shaved head, and is on the heavy side.

Over the SOUNDS of EXPLOSIONS and GUNFIRE and SCREAMS, Bo, Kielyr, Vespyr, and Zaja just sit on Jackson's bed, trying to make sense of this alien environment.

The walls are plastered with band and movie posters. People they don't recognize and movies they've never seen or heard of.

Jackson looks over at his cousins.

JACKSON
Someone want to play?

All the kids jump up and fight to be the first to play.

INT. HARPER'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Ben is in the shower, covered in soap. Relishing the comfort of a good warm shower.

Over the sound of the water, he hears SHOUTING. He turns off the water.
More SHOUTING.

Ben grabs a towel and jumps out of the shower.

EXT. HARPER'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Ben runs into the driveway of Harper's house to discover his sister HARPER and her husband DAVE, with a fire extinguisher, dousing a trash can, that's still on fire.

Rellian stands close, just staring into the flames.

Once the flames are out, Dave turns to Rellian.

    DAVE
    What happened?

Rellian look at Dave.

    RELLIAN
    What do you mean?

    DAVE
    I mean, how did the trash can catch on fire?

    RELLIAN
    It didn't "catch" on fire. I lit it on fire.

Dave stares, confused.

Rellian holds up his flint.

    RELLIAN (CONT'D)
    It's not hard.

Dave and Harper look at each other.

Ben puts his hand on Rellian's shoulder, but Rellian immediately shrugs it off and trudges back toward the house.

    BEN
    He's fine.

INT. HARPER'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Nai is alone in the living room, staring at a framed photograph on the wall.

It's of Ben and Leslie, taken at their wedding. She's wearing a white dress, pushing cake into Ben's mouth.
JUSTIN (O.S.)
Life's a bitch.

Nai turns to see JUSTIN, Harper's 15-year old son. He is dressed in the same over-sized skater clothes as his brother, has the same shaved head and bulky frame.

NAI
Yeah.

JUSTIN
Then you die.

Nai nods.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Life fucking sucks, man.

Nai has no answer for this. He bites his lip.

HARPER (O.S.)
Dinner! Everyone!

JUSTIN
Dude.

Justin just nods his head over and over. Then he spots the knife on Nai's belt.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Whoa! Can I check that out?

Nai hands Justin his new knife. Justin swings it around.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Rad.

Harper comes into the room.

HARPER
Boys, dinner!

Her face drains of blood when she sees the knife. She rushes over and yanks the knife away from Justin.

HARPER (CONT'D)
Ben! Ben!!

Ben runs in.

BEN
What? What?!

Harper holds out the knife.
HARPER
What is this?

BEN
Jesus, you scared me. It's okay. It's Nai's.

HARPER
This is Nai's? Nai is 5.

BEN
He is.

HARPER
Do I really have to say this out loud? Why does a 5-year old have a real sword?

BEN
It's not a sword. It's a knife.

HARPER
Why does a 5-year old have a knife... this BIG?!

BEN
It's primarily for butchering meat, but you can use it for making skins, creating shelters. It has many uses.

Harper stares at her brother for a minute. Then she shakes her head, resigned disappointment on her face.

HARPER
I'm putting this in the knife drawer. He can have it back when you leave.

INT. DINING ROOM. HARPER'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

The dining room is nothing especially elegant, but compared to what Ben's kids are used to, this is very formal. Napkins are lined up at every seat and glasses and silverware set out.

Harper and Dave are placing food on the table: roasted chicken, mashed potatoes, and salad.

HARPER
Jackson! Now!

Jackson sulks in. His face is buried in his Nintendo DS.
HARPER (CONT'D)
Not at the table.

Jackson plops down and continues to play.

HARPER (CONT'D)
Jackson.

JACKSON
Alright!

Once everyone sits, they pass the food around and Dave holds up the wine bottle for Ben.

BEN
Please.

HARPER
Everything is local and organic and non-GMO. I'm just saying.

Ben smiles and Dave passes Ben the wine bottle. Ben pours himself a glass.

BEN
Bo, little Syrah?

Bodevan nods and Ben pours his 16-year old son some wine.

Justin and Jackson freeze, wide-eyed.

Ben, without asking, pours all his kids about a shot of wine.

HARPER
Ben.

BEN
It's one of the great pleasures in life, it's not crack.

ZAJA
What's crack?

BEN
A crystallized, highly addictive form of the stimulant cocaine. Accelerated the decimation of urban inner-city neighborhoods in the mid-1980s. Crack heads, some of them were kids, were killing each other for their Nikes.

Harper smiles. Weakly.
HARPER
Children do not drink wine.

BEN
In France, children drink wine all the time. It's a digestive.

HARPER
Well, we're not in France.

Ben smiles. He pours the wine from his kid's glasses back into his, now very full, wine glass.

NAI
They killed each other for Nike? The Greek winged Goddess of Victory?

At this, Justin and Jackson laugh.

JACKSON
He's joking, right?

They can see, by their cousin's faces, that he is not.

JUSTIN
They're like Adidas. But cooler.

ZAJA
Who's Adidas?

Justin and Jackson cannot believe their ears.

JUSTIN
You're serious?

Zaja nods.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
They're shoes.

Everyone is silent for a moment. Harper and Dave share a look.

DAVE
Ben. We're... I'm so sorry for your loss.

BEN
Thanks, Dave.

DAVE
I don't... really know what else to say.
Dave looks at Harper for help.

BEN
It's okay. I know you had issues with Leslie. It's not a secret.

DAVE
I wouldn't say that!

BEN
Last time we saw you, you called her a "fucking bitch."

HARPER
Ben!

BEN
It's okay. The kids know. Right guys?

All of his kids nod, completely unaffected by it.

Justin and Jackson look absolutely stunned.

DAVE
No, wait. I said... we all had a huge fight about sugar... I gave the kids Frosted Mini-Wheats! The extremity of her position... She was YELLING at me, she PUSHED me, and I said -

BEN
"Don't be such a fucking bitch."

HARPER
Ben!

DAVE
That kind of language is inappropriate in front -

BEN
They're just words. YOUR words. But just words.

HARPER
Not spoken in this household.

BEN
Absolutely. Understood.

There is another protracted and awkward silence. Dave looks very concerned.
DAVE
My point was... it's not easy to express... to try and articulate... When someone dies....

Dave gives up. He sighs.

DAVE (CONT'D)
We're all... devastated. So very sorry.

Ben nods.

BEN
None of us grew up with a ritual that helps us deal with the confusion and sorrow that comes with death.

JUSTIN
Dad, how did Aunt Leslie die?

Dave looks at Ben. Then back at his son.

DAVE
Well. Aunt Leslie was sick. And she had some... complications. From her sickness.

BEN
She had a mental illness called Bipolar Affective Disorder. Her moods would swing radically from "mania," she would be elated, excited, have so many plans and ideas for the future, to severe depression, where she'd be almost catatonic, silent, utterly without hope. We think it first started after Bo was born, the genesis of which was probably a form of postpartum psychosis, but we weren't really able to diagnosis -

HARPER
I'm not sure the kids need to know all the details.

Dave tries to take over.

DAVE
The doctors put her in the hospital. They gave her medicine. But she was... really sick.

(MORE)
And she... died. Sick people die. Sometimes. They die. And she... died.

His children look at him, confused by the inadequacy of his explanation.

DAVE (CONT'D)
It's hard to explain.

BEN
She jumped out a window. She killed herself.

HARPER
Ben!

BEN
My kids know.

Harper bursts into tears and runs from the room. Dave pauses. Then he stands.

DAVE
Excuse me.

Dave follows Harper.

As soon as he's gone, Ben pours wine into each of his kid's glasses. Then he holds up his wine glass.

BEN
To Mom.

All the kids say "to Mom," clink their glasses, and drink.

Ben looks at Justin and Jackson, holding a finger to his lips.

BEN (CONT'D)
Shhhhh.

INT. BEDROOM. HARPER'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Ben is standing in the doorway.

BEN
They should know the truth.

HARPER
Protecting children from certain concepts that they're too young to comprehend is not lying to them!
Harper and Dave are sitting on their bed; Dave is consoling her.

DAVE
Okay. Guys. Let's keep our voices down here.

HARPER
We do the best we can! That's all everyone's doing. The best they know how! I'm sorry it does not meet your high standards!

DAVE
This is a very hard time right now, we're all still probably in shock. Everyone's very... raw. Let's just... dial it back a notch.

They are all silent for a moment.

BEN
I apologize for not respecting the way you do things in your home.

HARPER
Okay. Thank you for saying that.

Harper wipes the tears from her eyes.

HARPER (CONT'D)
I know Leslie's been sick for years. But I can only imagine how difficult this time must be for you.

Dave stands up and moves toward Ben.

DAVE
Do you need a hug?

Ben looks at Dave.

BEN
Thanks, Dave. I'm good.

EXT. YARD. HARPER'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

It's raining outside. On the back porch behind Harper's house, Ben is helping the kids arrange their sleeping bags.

Dave opens the screen door.
DAVE
No, hey. Guys! What're you doing?!

BEN
We always sleep outside.

DAVE
It's pouring. I made up the rec room downstairs. Who wants to sleep on Toy Story sheets?!

ZAJA
What's a Toy Story sheet?

None of the kids have any idea what Dave is talking about, but the idea of sleeping inside is obviously attractive.

BODEVAN
Can we?

Ben ignores the hopeful faces of his kids.

BEN
We're fine here.

Dave looks at the kids. They're plainly not fine with this decision, but Dave doesn't know what to say. He just nods and goes back inside.

INT. KITCHEN. HARPER'S HOUSE. MORNING.

It's the morning chaos in every house with kids and parents who work. Harper simultaneously prepares breakfast for everyone and, at the same time, is packing up lunch for Justin and Jackson.

She sets out a platter of scrambled eggs and toast on the kitchen table.

HARPER
We're going to fly in Sunday morning. We can only stay until after the ceremony because the kids have school on Monday.

Jackson is playing his Nintendo DS under the table.

HARPER (CONT'D)

JACKSON
Can I be excused?
HARPER
"May I..." No. And put it away or I'm going to throw it in the trash can.

JACKSON
Alright!

HARPER
Actually, you may be excused on one condition. Please show your cousins the new computer.

JUSTIN
Can we play Xbox?

HARPER
One game.

JUSTIN
Yes! JACKSON Yes!

All the kids jump up and follow Justin and Jackson into the adjacent room. VIDEO GAME SOUNDS start almost immediately.

Dave and Harper exchange a look. Dave nods.

DAVE
How are the kids?

BEN
They're fine. They're strong.

DAVE
How long have you been there? Wherever it is you're living now.

BEN
We left Boulder when Bo was about 3. Lived on that farm we had in Oregon until he was 7. No, 8. I guess we've only been in the forest for... about 8 years.

DAVE
How do you still have money?

Ben smiles.

BEN
I buy only what I need.
HARPER
You want to live in the trees, fine. That’s entirely up to you. But your children are without a mother now. What you do will have a lasting impact on their entire lives.

BEN
And that. That is precisely WHY I am doing what I am doing.

DAVE
We're really - may I?

Harper nods.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Harper and I have been talking... The kids need stability. Structure. Like normal kids. They need to go to a real school. So they can get real jobs when they're -

HARPER
Oh, for Christ's sake.

Harper just can't take it anymore. She jumps up.

HARPER (CONT'D)
You're going to get them killed! You have any idea what you're doing to them?

BEN
Saving their lives is what I'm doing.

HARPER
Oh, don't be ridiculous.

BEN
Is knowing how to set a bone or treat a severe burn ridiculous? Is knowing how to navigate by the stars in total darkness ridiculous? How to identify edible plants, how to make clothes from animal skins, how to survive in the forest with nothing but a knife?

Harper looks ashen.
HARPER
Jesus.

BEN
They have the cardiovascular and muscular endurance levels of elite athletes.

HARPER
They're children! They need to go to school and learn about the world!

BEN
Jackson! Justin! Come here a second.

After a moment, Jackson and Justin peek in.

JACKSON
What?

BEN
How old are you now, Jackson?

JACKSON
13.

BEN
Can you tell me, what's the Bill of Rights?

Jackson shrugs.

JACKSON
What something costs?

BEN
Justin, you're 15, right? What is that, ninth grade?

JUSTIN
Yeah.

BEN
That's High School now? You like your school?

Justin shrugs.

BEN (CONT'D)
Can you tell me what the Bill of Rights is?
JACKSON
A government thing. Like rights that people have and stuff. In America.

BEN
Could you be more specific?

Justin shrugs again.

BEN (CONT'D)
Zaja! Come here please!

Ben turns to Harper and Dave.

BEN (CONT'D)
Zaja just turned 7, by the way.

Zaja walks in.

BEN (CONT'D)
The Bill of Rights.

ZAJA
The first ten amendments to the constitution, limiting the power of the government and guaranteeing our liberties and freedoms.

BEN
More specific.

ZAJA
Amendment 1: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to -

BEN
Stop. Regurgitating memorized amendments is not what I’m asking. I think we went over this pretty well.

Zaja bites her lip.

ZAJA
Without the Bill of Rights, we'd be more like... China. For instance. Here at least warrantless searches are illegal; we have free speech; (MORE)
citizens are protected from cruel and unusual punishment, are protected from -

HARPER
That's enough.

BEN
How would you characterize the 2010 Supreme Court decision on Citizens United?

DAVE
Ben.

ZAJA
Corporations have rights as people, so there's no spending limit on candidates. Which means our country is ruled by Corporations and their lobbyists who fund candidates and command their fealty by demanding that -

HARPER
Enough! Okay? Jesus Christ, Ben! You made your point! We get it.

BEN
Wouldn't that be nice.

EXT. HARPER'S HOUSE. MORNING.

Steve pulls away, leaving Harper, Dave, Jackson, and Justin watching from the curb.

Nai looks out the back window of the bus and waves.

Behind their parent's backs, Jackson and Justin surreptitiously flip Nai off.

EXT. HIGHWAY. DAY.

Steve travels down Highway 99, through the Central Valley.

EXT. LAS VEGAS, NEVADA. DAY.

As the sun sets, the bus makes its way through the suburbs of Las Vegas.
**EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." EVENING.**

Steve pulls into a RV park.

**EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." EVENING.**

Steve is now parked alongside rows of Winnebagos. Ben and Bo are out front, starting to fix dinner.

An **ELDERLY COUPLE**, on their evening stroll, amble by. Ben smiles.

BEN
How you folks doing tonight?

The couple smile and walk by.

A small RV pulls up alongside Steve. **KARIN**, a pretty blonde teenager, comes out.

NAI
I'm going for wood.

Ben looks over to see Nai holding a small axe.

BEN
Come here.

Ben bends down into the pre-made fire pit, lights a match, turns a switch and - instant fire.

NAI
That's cheating.

BEN
Yes, it is.

Karin and Bo make eye contact, but Bo looks away.

**ELLEN**, Karin's Mom, exits her RV. She's about Ben's age and attractive.

ELLEN
Hello.

Ben smiles and nods.

Ellen watches Ben for a minute, as he sets up dinner for his kids.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
You know anything about broken heaters?
INT. ELLEN'S RV. NIGHT.

As Ben tries to diagnose the problem, Ellen trails him around her RV. He lights all the burners on her stove. They all work.

BEN
I'd have the system checked to make sure there's no LP leaks. If that's clear, have the LP pressure set, so you'll know if you have a faulty regulator. If that's okay and you can set the pressure at 11 inches of water column, then you have to figure out how air is getting in. See if there's air in the gas line system. But let's check if the heater lights.

Ellen laughs.

BEN (CONT'D)
That's funny?

ELLEN
I didn't know it was actually broken.

She smiles.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Why don't you come over here?

For a moment, they just stare at each other. She smiles. There is a palpable sexual tension between them.

Ben walks away from her, over to the water heater.

BEN
You're a very attractive women.

Ellen moves closer.

BEN (CONT'D)
In another life, I'd like nothing more than to make love to you with the passion and longevity of a sex-obsessed 17-year old boy.

ELLEN
That sounds nice.

BEN
But I just lost my wife.
Her demeanor changes, transforming instantly from flirtatious to maternal.

ELLEN
Oh, my God, I am so sorry. When?

BEN
Two days ago.

The recent nature of this makes Ellen gasp. She slowly moves to Ben and hugs him.

BEN (CONT'D)
No. I'm fine. He gently pushes her off of him.

ELLEN
Your wife just died.

BEN
I'm fine. 

ELLEN
Honey.

She reaches for him again.

BEN
I'm fine.

Ben moves away from her and lights the water heater.

EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." NIGHT.

Lit by a single street lamp, down by the river on some grass, Bodevan is moving through a series of yoga Vinyasa. He holds pigeon pose.

KARIN (V.O.)
Is that yoga?

Bodevan looks over to see Karin sitting on her skateboard.

BODEVAN
Your breath, they call it "pranayama," flows with your movements, your "asana." It's supposed to connect the mind and body and fuel your "samadhi."

KARIN
That really works?
Bo shrugs.

Karin nods. Then she moves closer.

    KARIN (CONT'D)
    How old are you?

    BODEVAN
    19.

    KARIN
    You in college?

Bo pauses, then nods his head yes.

    KARIN (CONT'D)
    Where do you go?

    BODEVAN
    Harvard.

    KARIN
    Seriously?

Bo nods again.

    KARIN (CONT'D)
    I love Boston.

    BODEVAN
    Yeah. It's... pretty cool. I mean, the Boston Massacre. The Boston Tea Party. Battle of Bunker Hill. The Siege of Boston. It has a rich history for an American city. Plus, you know, it's the home of America's first public school. Boston Latin in 1635. First subway in the U.S. In 1897. It also -

Karin laughs.

    KARIN
    I'm Karin.

    BODEVAN
    Bodevan.

Karin makes a face.

    KARIN
    Bodevan? What kind of name is that?
BODEVAN
My parents made it up.

KARIN
That's weird. Why?

BODEVAN
Our names are unique. There's just one of us in the whole world.

KARIN
That's weird.

Bo nods. He looks away.

EXT. RIVERBANK. NIGHT.

On the concrete walkway by the river, Bo walks next to Karin as she skates, bobbing her head to the music coming out of her iPod. She takes out her iPod earbuds and puts them in Bo's ears.

KARIN
What's your favorite music?

Bo considers this.

BODEVAN

This makes Karen smile.

KARIN
Where you from?

BODEVAN
All over. Most recently Paris. In the Marais. Near Victor Hugo's house. My family's only here for my dad's sabbatical. He's working on a book about... Dr. Spock.

KARIN
Star Trek's awesome.

Bo pauses.

BODEVAN
Which star?
KARIN
Spock. The guy with the ears. He's from Star Trek.

BODEVAN
No, he was from Connecticut, I'm pretty sure. Right after Yale, he wrote "Baby and Child Care" in 1946. One of the seminal works on child-rearing.

Karin laughs.

KARIN
I was talking about the TV show.

BODEVAN
Oh, yeah. Right. I know that one. It's... awesome.

Karin pulls an Ollie off the lip of the sidewalk and lands it.

BODEVAN (CONT'D)
Where's your dad?

KARIN
He got remarried and moved to Florida. Where's your Mom?

BODEVAN
I'm not supposed to talk about it. She works for the U.S. government.

KARIN
Like James Bond?

Again, Bo doesn't know this reference.

BODEVAN
I don't... know. State Department. But it's sort of... secret.

KARIN
Seriously? My Mom works at a dentist's office.

BODEVAN
I'm just not supposed to talk about it. Due to its highly classified nature.

Karin smiles at Bo, clearly taken with him.
He tries to hold her gaze, but can't.

**EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." NIGHT.**

Karin and Bo walk through the mostly dark RV park. She grabs his hand and pulls him toward her. Her body is so close that Bo can smell her.

She kisses him.

Bo is utterly stunned. This is his first kiss. He's slow to respond, but then, he can't stop. It's tender and sweet.

Bo's face is flushed and he's breathing rapidly. Instantly and deeply in love. He looks like he might cry.

KARIN
You okay?

Bo nods and she kisses him again. This time, the kiss lasts much longer.

KARIN (CONT'D)
You kiss good.

BODEVAN
So do you.

They kiss again, this time their hands exploring each other's bodies. Karin finally breaks it off.

KARIN
Follow me. But we have to be totally quiet.

He nods and they sneak behind a few trailers.

ELLEN (O.S.)
It's almost midnight.

Bo and Karin turn to see Ellen, Karin's Mom, waiting up in a chair in front of her Winnebago. She looks very pissed off.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
I sincerely hope you two lovebirds haven't been doing what I think you've been doing.

Bo looks at Karin. Then he gets down on one knee. He clears his throat.
BODEVAN
I'm considering a career in computer programming. Which can be highly lucrative. Though, of course, I'm young, so I'll keep my options open. I don't have my own house. Obviously. But I know I could provide a good home. Someday I want kids. Not now. Of course. Someday. I'm not religious, but I'm tolerant. If you are. Religious that is, not tolerant. Or... both. What's your last name?

KARIN
Warrick.

BODEVAN
Karin Warrick. Will you be my wife?

Karin stares at Bo. Then she looks at her Mom. Then they both burst out laughing.

For a moment, Bo isn't sure what to do. His face turns red. He stands. And tries to pretend like he was joking.

ELLEN
Okay, funnyman. Your dad's probably waiting up.

Bo nods.

KARIN
'Night.

Bo nods again and stumbles toward Steve.

EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." MORNING.

Bo has made breakfast for the other kids. They're all outside, sitting on benches, eating oatmeal.

The door to Steve flies open, slamming hard against the side. Ben strides out, naked. He stretches.

The elderly couple from the day before walks by. They gawk at Ben, a completely naked man.

BEN
It's just a penis. Every man has one.
The kids stare at Ben, eating their cereal, not the slightest bit embarrassed. Like he's done this a thousand times before. Which he has. As Ben continues, a few of the kids mouth the words along with him.

BEN (CONT'D)
We are not Puritans. We are all just animals of the earth. Is a dog embarrassed to defecate in the dirt? Of course not.

Appalled, the couple scurries away.

NAI
You can put your penis away now.

EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." MORNING.

Ellen and Karin wave goodbye.

Bo is in the back seat, looking out the window, staring at Karin as the bus drives away.

He puts his hand against the glass.

EXT. FREEWAY. DAY.

Steve drives along a freeway, a vast desert on all sides.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

Ben grabs the PA radio.

BEN
Ladies and gentlemen, if I can have your attention please. About an hour south of here lies Camp Grant. In the late 1800s, whites arrived in this area by the thousands, depleting the food and water supplies of the indigenous people. Horrific acts of violence were committed on both sides. But as the US government wasn't doing anything about the frisky natives, people thought they'd better settle this themselves. So in the pre-dawn hours of April 30, 1871, 146 armed men surprised a camp of Apaches. Almost all women and children, as the men were off hunting for food.

(MORE)
Eight old men and 110 women and children were massacred in under 30 minutes. Twenty-seven children were sold into slavery in Mexico. This was the Camp Grant massacre. No one was ever prosecuted. Today, there is no physical marker locating this site, no day of remembrance.

He lets this settle in.

**BEN (CONT'D)**

On a lighter note, we should be at Nana and Grandpa's in about an hour and a half.

**EXT. FREEWAY. DAY.**

Now the bus exits the freeway. The terrain here is markedly different. Long gone are the mountains of evergreens. It's now the red dirt and rock formations of the Southwest desert.

**EXT. SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA. DAY.**

Surrounded by cactus and palm trees, hundreds of rotor sprinklers SHOOT water over a vast golf course.

Steve winds past the course, which stretches into the distance, as far as the eye can see.

**EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD. DAY.**

The bus drives past one mansion after another, finally pulling off in front of an iron gate and a grass lawn. The sign on the gate reads, "Mirabel Community and Golf Course."

A long driveway leads to, in the distance, enormous Southwest Mission-style homes, all bordering the actual golf course.

**INT. STEVE. DAY.**

Ben idles for a moment at the sign on the gate. Then he pulls the bus back onto the road.

**ZAJA**

Aren't we going to say hi to Nana and Grandpa?
EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD. NIGHT.

The bus is off the main street, partially hidden by trees. Their grandparent's home can be seen in the distance.

INT. STEVE. MORNING.

It's now morning and Ben is wearing a baby blue vintage tuxedo, the shirt with enormous ruffles. He's helping the kids, as they scramble around, trying to get dressed.

Each kid is wearing their favorite piece of clothing. The twins wear pink tights and Tu-Tus, Nai has on his frayed Batman costume, Zaja is wearing what looks like some kind of military outfit, and Bo is wearing his thrift-store suit.

Rellian is still in his pajamas, staring at them all.

RELLIAN
We can't go like this.

BEN
We can do whatever we want.

RELLIAN
Then I'm not getting dressed.

BEN
Then go in your pajamas.

BODEVAN
He's right. It might upset people.

Ben doesn't answer; he continues to help the younger kids dress.

RELLIAN
Dad, please?! Please. Everyone is going to laugh at us.

BEN
Who cares what total strangers think? This is for Mom. She'd love what you're wearing. She'd think it was fun.

RELLIAN
We're supposed to wear black! It's a funeral.
BEN
For them it's a funeral. For us -
this is her goodbye party. And
we're not wearing black to a party!

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY.
A black limousine pulls out of their grandparent's driveway.

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY.
Ben waits a beat, then follows.

EXT. CHURCH. DAY.
Black Lincoln Town Car limousines line the street in front of the church.
Steve pulls up and parks next to them.

EXT. CHURCH. DAY.
In a walkway behind the church, Bo - his feet held by Ben - climbs through a small window and disappears.
After a moment, Bo opens a door, revealing the church kitchen.
Ben nods and the kids follow him in.

INT. CHURCH. DAY.
A sea of mourners in BLACK sit a Spanish Mission style church for the funeral Mass.
The PRIEST, what's left of his hair is grey, stands in front of the congregation, an enormous statue of Christ on the Cross above the altar at his back. As he speaks, in a flat voice, incense smoke rises behind him.
PRIEST
O God, to whom mercy and
forgiveness belong, hear our
prayers on behalf of your servant
Leslie Cash, whom you have called
out of the world: and because she
put her hope and trust in you,
command that she be carried safely
home to Heaven and come to enjoy
your eternal reward.

Just then, Ben and his brightly-colored family walk to the
front of the church.

They pass Harper, Dave, Justin and Jackson, who find it hard
to mask their utter shock at the sight of what Ben and his
kids are wearing.

Ben and the kids sit in the first row.

Jack and Angie, also in the first row, now turn to see Ben
and his family. Jack's face turns bright red, but there is
nothing he can do now.

Ben nods at Jack. Jack looks away, at the priest.

The priest eyes the newcomers for a second, then continues.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
Speak to us now, your words of
eternal life. Lift us from anxiety
and guilt to the light and peace of
your presence, and set the glory of
your love before us; through Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.

The entire crowd repeats, "Amen."

PRIEST (CONT'D)
I did not know Leslie personally.
But I understand that she was a
loving mother who gave up her law
practice to raise her children.
Leslie loved her mother, Angela,
her father, Jack, and their dogs,
Harvey and Little Bear. They have
told me that she also loved
gardening. And classical music.
Particularly Glenn Gould's version
of the Goldberg Variations. And
walks in the moonlight on the
beach.
BEN
Oh, for fuck's sake.

Many people look over at Ben. The priest, however, ignores him completely.

PRIEST
And she loved her husband Ben and their children -

BEN
I'll take that as my cue, if I may.

Before Jack can stop him, Ben jogs to the front of the church. He stands directly in front of the priest.

BEN (CONT'D)
First off, Leslie practised Buddhism. Which, to her, was a philosophy and not an organized religion. In fact, she abhorred organized religion, thought it the single most dangerous fairy-tale ever invented, used to strike fear and obedience into the hearts of the unthinking. She saw it not just as a source of injustice, but crimes against humanity, and what's more, the only thing worse than death to her would have been the knowledge that her rotting flesh was to be trapped for all eternity in a box in the middle of a fucking golf course.

At this, there are audible GASPS from the congregation.

Jack pushes his way out of the pew and whispers to some USHERS.

BEN (CONT'D)
Though the absurdity of being eulogized by someone who didn't even know her has exactly the kind of comedic flourish that she would have cherished.

Ben looks at his kids. They nod at him, encouraging him to continue.

BEN (CONT'D)
If nothing else. Leslie had a sense of humor.
The ushers, guided by Jack, now inch toward the podium.

**USHER**
Sir? Please?

Ben ignores them. He takes a piece of paper from his jacket.

**BEN**
I want to read you all something.
So you know what I mean. I found this after her death. It's Leslie's Will. And I quote, "In the event of her death, Leslie Anne Cash, as a Buddhist, wishes to be cremated. Her funeral, such as it is, shall be a celebration of the life-cycle, with music and dancing. After, it is her expressed desire that her ashes shall be taken to a nondescript location, preferably public and heavily populated so as to be utterly unremarkable. At which point her ashes, promptly and unceremoniously, are to be flushed down the nearest toilet." End quote.

Ben looks up at the mourners.

**BEN (CONT'D)**
Now THAT's comedy.

The ushers rush Ben. He resists, but there are too many men for Ben to fight and he is overpowered.

**BEN (CONT'D)**
I'm not finished! You're not listening. She did not want this!

The ushers drag Ben toward the entrance of the church.

**BEN (CONT'D)**
Let go of me! This is against her wishes! She was my wife!

Bo gathers the kids and they follow as their father is dragged - fighting - out of the church.

**EXT. CHURCH. DAY.**

Ben and the kids sit on the steps of the church. They watch as the CONGREGATION leaves the church and all the mourners walk toward their waiting cars.
Jack and Angie finally come out.

JACK
You are the worst thing that has ever happened to me.

Angie looks dazed. Or severely medicated.

ANGIE
It's nice to all be together.

She hugs the kids.

JACK
You ruined her life. But you are not going to ruin her funeral.

BEN
Jack, you remember your grandchildren.

Jack pauses. He looks at his grandchildren. And softens.

JACK
Hey, guys. Come here.

The kids run up to Jack and he hugs them.

JACK (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, kids. We'll see you back at the house after. But your father has demonstrated that he is unfit to attend the funeral.

BEN
The funeral's not over.

JACK
It is for you.

BEN
I won't allow you to bury her.

JACK
You follow us to the cemetery. I will have you arrested. And I think we all know what that would mean.

Jack takes Angie by the arm and leads her to his Town Car.

BEN
You're not serious.
JACK
Test me.

BEN
You can't bar us from her funeral.

JACK
Who do you think the local police are going to listen to? A long-standing member of this community? Or a hippie in a blue tuxedo?

Jack climbs into his Lincoln Town Car and leaves.

BEN
I'm not a hippie.

The kids watch as their grandparent's limo disappears into the distance.

BEN (CONT'D)
Everyone back on Steve! Let's go!

VESPYR
Where are we going?

BEN
We're going to stop the funeral.

RELLIAN
He said no. Dad!

But Ben's already on the bus, the engine running.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

Ben is keeping a fair distance, but still following the funeral procession of black cars.

BODEVAN
We can't go. Dad!

RELLIAN
Listen to us!

NAI
Why can't we go to Mom's funeral?

ZAJA
Because of dad.

NAI
Because of his speech?
EXT. CEMETERY. DAY.

In the distance, the long line of black cars lead into the rolling hills of a cemetery.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

As they near, Rellian and Bo are getting increasingly freaked out.

RELLIAN
No! Dad, stop Steve!

BODEVAN
Dad! You heard grandpa! He'll have us arrested if we show up.

RELLIAN
Dad! Listen to Bo!

BEN
They will not stop us from saving Mom!

KIELYR
Let's go home.

VESPYR
Dad! Abort the mission!

ZAJA
Yeah, abort mission!

BEN
We are rescuing Mom!

BODEVAN
Mom is dead! She's dead! Okay?! This is not what she would have wanted you to do!

BEN
They have no right!

Bo now yells.
BODEVAN
I don't want to lose you!

This stops Ben. He looks at Bo.

BODEVAN (CONT'D)
We can't lose you too.

Ben finally hears his son. And it breaks his heart.

EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." NIGHT.
It's now dark as the bus pulls into another sad looking RV "campground."

EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." NIGHT.
Ben sits outside the bus, playing his guitar in front of a small fire.

Zaja walks toward the bus.

BEN
Hey, get your flute. Let's play.

Zaja stares at him; she seems to be hiding something behind her back.

BEN (CONT'D)
What have you got there?

She opens her hands revealing a dead lizard.

ZAJA
I have work to do.

Zaja climbs on the bus.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD. NIGHT.
A quiet street, lit by a long line of street lamps.

Rell is throwing rocks at one of them. Bo walks out of the darkness.

BODEVAN
It's okay to be sad about Mom.

Rell just keeps flinging rocks at the light.
RELLIAN
She wanted to be flushed down the toilet.

BODEVAN
No one understood how ill Mom really was.

RELLIAN
Dad MADE her crazy. That's why she killed herself. She wanted to leave. Dad's dangerous.

BODEVAN
That's ridiculous.

RELLIAN
Mom had psychotic episodes or hallucinations or whatever. Of smashing our heads in with rocks. I heard them talking about it.

Bo stares at his brother.

RELLIAN (CONT'D)
You think you know everything. You think our lives are so great. Nana and Grandpa's lives are better.

Rell turns and runs back toward the RV Camp.

INT. STEVE. NIGHT.

Ben finds the twins in their sleeping lofts.

BEN
Who wants to go on a mission?
Secret Ninja ice cream mission? You can plan it, I'll do whatever you want.

VESPYR
Fornirn.

KIELYR
Ne volas iri.

VESPYR
Ni ne volas al lud kun vi!

KIELYR
Las ni sole!
Ben doesn't understand what they're saying, but the tenor of their voices is clear.

**EXT. STEVE. NIGHT.**

Ben walks out of the bus and finds Bo, reading.

**BEN**

You want to play some music?

Bo opens his backpack and hands Ben his stack of college acceptance letters. Ben sits and reads the letters.

**BEN (CONT'D)**

Well done.

**BODEVAN**

Thanks.

**BEN**

Very impressive.

**BODEVAN**

I guess.

Ben passes the letters back to Bo.

**BEN**

All this time, you've been deceiving me.

**BODEVAN**

What? No.

**BEN**

I allowed you to go to the library and you were sneaking around behind my back, taking the SATs, contacting and applying to universities.

**BODEVAN**

Not like that.

**BEN**

We're not an accredited home-school, but secretly, you filled out these applications, you got your work approved, you managed to create acceptable transcripts.

**BODEVAN**

No.
BEN
All without my knowledge or approval. A carefully planned, masterfully orchestrated act of betrayal.

BODEVAN
No!

BEN
I don't know what's more impressive. The acceptances. Or the great artistry required to conduct long-term subterfuge, all by yourself, while - on a daily basis - lying directly to my face.

BODEVAN
It was Mom.

Ben stares at Bodevan. This is clearly a surprise.

BODEVAN (CONT'D)
It was her idea. She helped me. With everything.

Ben is silent for a moment. The absurdity of it makes him laugh.

BODEVAN (CONT'D)
I just want to go to college.

BEN
You speak four languages. High math! Theoretical physics! What are they going to teach you there?

BODEVAN
I know nothing.

Ben stares at his son.

BODEVAN (CONT'D)
Mom understood! She knew! We're freaks. You've made us freaks. Unless it came out of a book. I don't know anything about ANYTHING!

Bo storms into the bus.

Ben sits there for a second, at a loss.

NAI (O.S.)
Dad?
Ben looks up to see Nai, naked.

BEN
Put on some clothes, buddy.

Nai shakes his head no. He holds a piece of paper and reads.

NAI
"Don't try and get me. This is real this time. - Rellian."

INT. STEVE. NIGHT.

Ben drives Steve down a city street. All the kids are standing, peering out the windows as they drive through the night.

BEN
He couldn't have got very far.

NAI
Is he going to die?

BEN
No, buddy.

ZAJA
According to the FBI statistics, in exurban and suburban, semi-dense residential areas, there was an average of 1,242 incidences of violent crime, murder, forcible rape, aggravated assault -

BEN
Zaj!

ZAJA
I'm just saying, he COULD die. Statistically speaking.

BEN
He'll be fine. Rell is confused. We're all confused. The world is a confusing place. We just have to find him.

BODEVAN
I know where he went.

Everyone turns to look at Bo.
EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Ben jumps off the bus and runs up to the front door of Jack and Angie's house, followed by all the kids.

   BEN
   No. Bo, make sure everyone stays on Steve!

The kids roll their eyes and trudge back towards Steve.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Ben pushes his way into the house, Angie right behind him.

   ANGIE
   Ben, no. No!

Angie steps in front of him, physically stopping him. Behind them, all over the walls, are mounted game trophies: deer, wild boar, pheasants.

   BEN
   Where is he?

Angie pauses, seeing the anxiety on Ben's face.

   BEN (CONT'D)
   He's my son.

Angie finally nods her head.

   ANGIE
   Follow me.

She leads him down a hallway.

INT. DRAWING ROOM. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Ben follows Angie into the drawing room. Jack and Rellian are sitting on a couch, watching television.

   BEN
   Okay. Rell. Get your things.

   JACK
   One second there.

Rellian doesn't move.

   BEN
   Rell, come on.
JACK
I said, one second.

Ben ignores Jack and speaks directly to Rellian.

BEN
Rell, look at me. I understand that you're angry for making you go to the church dressed like we were. And I apologize. But sometimes you have to do things that you -

JACK
Rellian has something to say.

BEN
- that you don't want to do, that you do because it's what someone -

RELLIAN
You killed Mom!

Ben pauses.

BEN
You have no idea what you're talking about.

RELLIAN
I heard you. I heard you fighting about where we live! I heard.

BEN
Mom and I made certain decisions about how -

RELLIAN
You're the worst dad in the whole world! I want to live here, with Nana and Grandpa!

Rell is so angry that his face is turning red.

BEN
Well, that's not possible.

RELLIAN
Fuck you. I hate you! I fucking hate you!

Rellian bolts out of the room, followed by Angie, leaving Ben and Jack alone.

Ben turns, calling after Rell.
BEN
Come back here right now!

Not five feet from Ben's head, an arrow THUDS into the wall. Ben jumps.

BEN (CONT'D)
Jesus!

He stares at the arrow, buried deep in the wall.

BEN (CONT'D)
What the fuck.

He turns to see Jack lower Rellian's bow.

BEN (CONT'D)
That almost hit me.

Jack examines the bow, then points to the various mounted game around the room.

JACK
If I had wanted to hit you, I would have hit you.

Jack pours himself a drink, but doesn't offer one to Ben.

JACK (CONT'D)
Isolated from the world. No friends their own age. It will have a profoundly deleterious impact on them. For the rest of their lives.

BEN
You just shot a fucking arrow at me!

Jack sips his drink.

JACK
You told us that they were in school.

BEN
Leslie and I are their teachers. Were. Their teachers.

JACK
You teach them to steal?

BEN
Of course not.
JACK
"Operation: Heart Attack."

BEN
That was part of their training.

JACK
So you're training them to steal.

BEN
Their mother just died. They were in shock. They were devastated. They needed something to distract them. It was for Noam Chomsky Day.

JACK
Noam Chomsky Day. Right. That's when you gave the children weapons.

BEN
Tell Rell that we're going. Right now.

JACK
How did he break his hand?

Ben pauses.

BEN
He fell. And it's not broken.

JACK
Climbing a rock face. In the rain.

BEN
It was an accident.

JACK
He has bruises all over his body.

BEN
They're scratches. It's nothing.

JACK
It's child abuse. Even if they make it through whatever it is you're doing to them, they'll be completely unable to survive as adults, totally unprepared for the real world.
BEN
And I think the opposite is true. Are you going to get him or do I have to?

JACK
Rellian is legally old enough to choose. Perhaps you didn't know that. But I intend to honor his wishes.

Jack hands Ben a business card.

JACK (CONT'D)
My lawyer's card. Angie and I have decided to file for the custody of the children. I know you don't have a phone. But I strongly suggest you call him immediately so we're not forced to issue a warrant for your arrest.

Ben rips the card in half.

BEN
He is my son. I'm not leaving without him.

Jack picks up the phone and dials.

JACK
Who's this, please?
(pause)
Hello, Bill. It's Jack McCune, up in Mirabel. Listen, I think I just saw someone prowling around outside the house. Could you send a car over right away?
(pause)
Thank you very much.

Jack replaces the phone and stares at Ben.

JACK (CONT'D)
Perhaps you'd care to explain Rellian's injuries to the police. I'm not sure I could.

With that, Ben leaves.
EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.
Ben slams the door to Jack and Angie's house and runs toward the bus.

INT. STEVE. NIGHT.
Ben starts the bus and peels it out of the gravel parking lot.

BODEVAN
Where's Rell?

VESPYR
How come we're leaving without Rell?

Ben says nothing, barreling down the driveway.

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.
In the darkness, Ben and the kids, now all dressed in black, lie in the brush, surveilling their grandparent's home.

Ben - looking through binoculars - watches as Jack shakes hands with a POLICE OFFICER in the driveway. The officer gets in his squad car, drives down the gravel driveway, and disappears.

Ben passes the binoculars to Vespyr.

BEN
Prisoner located. Third window from the left. Second floor.

Vespyr peers through the binoculars.

VESPYR
Target locked.

BEN
Mission is a go.

Bo slaps Vespy on the shoulder.

BODEVAN
You got this.

ZAJA
Don't fall.
VESPYR
Yeah. Thanks.

ZAJA
You'll fracture your cranial. Or the impact will cause acute subdural hematoma. Or your vertebra could pop out off your back in an axial compression fracture -

BEN
Zaj.

KIELYR
Bring him home, Vesp.

Vespyr jumps up.

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Vespyr scurries up a drain pipe and flings herself onto the roof of her grandparent's house.

She crouches in the dark. The roof is too steep to simply walk across to the second story window.

She gathers rope off her back. Connected to one end is a small metal climbing hook. She tosses it, aiming for a brick chimney near the window.

She misses.

She collects the rope and tries again.

This time the climbing hook connects.

She yanks it tight and climbs up the roof. It's steep, it's slow going, but she's strong.

She's now within 5 feet of the chimney. She reaches out with her hand to grab the brick.

The chimney shifts, a few bricks pop out, and - in an instant - Vespyr tumbles down the roof.

She bumps and somersaults, head over heels, her hands grasping at the roof as she falls, but there's nothing to hold.

And she flips over the edge...

Dropping twenty feet... until her body slams against the gravel driveway with a sickening thud.
NAI

Vesp!

Everyone leaps up and races to her.

The lights of the parking perimeter FLASH on.

**INT. AMBULANCE. NIGHT.**

In the back of an ambulance, Ben kneels next to Vespyr, lying on a gurney.

Her eyes are closed and an oxygen mask is on her face.

An EMT PARAMEDIC monitors her vitals.

**INT. HOSPITAL. NIGHT.**

Ben runs, helpless, next to the EMTs as they race Vespyr on the gurney down the hallway.

**INT. HOSPITAL. NIGHT.**

Ben paces the hallways.

The kids sleep on hallway benches and on the floor.

**INT. HOSPITAL. NIGHT.**

It's the middle of the night. The corridor is now dimly lit and empty.

Ben sits against a wall on the floor.

A DOCTOR comes out of Vespyr's room and Ben leaps up to meet her.

**DOCTOR**

She has a decent concussion. But we did a CAT scan and there's absolutely no damage to the brain. A simple fracture across the tibia and fibula on her left leg. She'll need a neck-brace and a cast. But she's fine.

Ben can't help but cry, but he's doing everything he can to pretend like he's not.
DOCTOR (CONT'D)
I'd like to show you something.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. HOSPITAL. NIGHT.
The doctor clicks on a light on a wall-mounted light box and illuminates an X-Ray.

DOCTOR
Top vertebrae. That's a bruise.
What was she doing on a roof?

BEN
Just... playing.

DOCTOR
Exactly how far did she fall?

BEN
Twenty feet or so.

Ben leans in. An infinitesimal white coloration, about the width of a hair and no longer than a finger nail, is barely perceptible across one of the vertebrae.

DOCTOR
She a gymnast?

Ben shakes his head no.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
But she plays a lot of sports.

Ben shakes his head no again.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Hmm. For a girl her age, she's unusually strong. Physically.
It's... remarkable.

The doctor points to the bruise on the X-ray.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
We have seven vertebrae in the neck. A break in any of the first four, a tear to the spinal cord, I'm talking even a millimeter more than what happened here - a millimeter. Your daughter would be dead. You are a very lucky man.
INT. HOSPITAL. NIGHT.

In the dark room, Ben sits next to a sleeping Vespyr, holding her hand. He watches the EKG monitor. Watches as her heart beat bounces up and down, up and down.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY.

Ben ambles into the foyer of Jack and Angie's house. By himself. He inhales deeply. Takes in the place.

Then he walks back out.

After a moment, he comes back in, now carrying some luggage.

Bo enters and leans against the wall.

Now Nai comes in. He wraps his little arms around Ben's legs.

Then Zaja enters.

And now Jack and Angie come in, followed by Kielyr and Vespyr, on crutches and in a neck-brace.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

A formal dining room. Everyone, including Rellian, is eating dinner around a long table.

They eat in silence.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Nai and Zaja share a room. Ben tucks them each into their beds.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Vespyr and Kielyr are in another room, each in their own bed. Ben kisses Vespyr on her forehead.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

In yet another room, Ben moves to tuck in Rellian, but Rell turns away from him. Ben tucks in Bo.

BODEVAN

This house is crazy. All these rooms for two people.
Ben stares at his boys. He nods.

   BEN
   'Night.

**INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. MORNING.**

All the kids lie on a huge bed, watching television.

As soon as Ben walks in, Bo jumps up and turns it off.

   BODEVAN
   Nai and Zaja had never watched a whole television show before.

Ben looks at all his kids. They look contrite.

   BODEVAN (CONT'D)
   It was just the news.

Ben smiles. He turns the television back on and walks out of the room.

**EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY.**

On the massive grass lawn in back of their grandparent's house, Ben watches as his kids play a soccer game with Jack, who seems to be coaching them. They're all laughing and having a great time.

Angie appears in front of Ben, blocking his view.

**INT. GARAGE. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.**

The garage is enormous and filled with all kinds of athletic equipment and ephemera: his-and-her bicycles, golf trophies, golf carts.

Angie is on the floor of the garage, fishing around in a cardboard box. She passes a photograph to Ben.

It is a photograph of Leslie at her High School Prom. She has a bleached blonde streak in her hair, frosted eyeliner, and both her dress and her date's tuxedo are the height of 1980s fashion.

   ANGIE
   That boy, what was his name? Dean? Derek?
BEN
Dirk. Dirk Modzelewski.

ANGIE
Lord, you're right. He was as dumb as paint. Cute, though. I think she was just with him for the sex.

Ben looks at Angie, not sure whether or not to laugh.

Angie smiles and they both crack up.

Angie passes Ben another photograph. This one is of Leslie at her Law School Graduation. Leslie has a huge, goofy smile on her face.

BEN
She looks like she's fourteen.

ANGIE
There's all kinds of stuff in here. I want you to take whatever you want.

Ben reaches into the box and pulls out an ancient, yellowed children's drawing, signed by Leslie in a child's scrawl.

ANGIE (CONT'D)
And there's also this.

Angie passes over a handwritten letter.

ANGIE (CONT'D)
Right before you called about getting her treatment, she sent me two letters. No return address. I wanted you to see. Read here.

Angie passes over another letter and points to a paragraph.

BEN
(reading)
"You don't need to come get me anymore. Burn the other letter. What Ben and I have created here may be unique in all of human existence. You can't understand. No one can. We've created a paradise out of Plato's Republic. Our children shall be Philosopher Kings. It makes me so indescribably happy. I'm going to get better out here. I know I will. Because are defined by our actions, not our words."
Ben stares at the letter.

**INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.**

Ben walks into Rell and Bo's room. They're both watching television. He stares at his kids for a moment.

**BEN**
That spring. When the twins were 4. Those black bear cubs we found. Someone shot their mother. And we fed them. Remember the night when it snowed almost 10 feet? We hiked up that mountain. In the silence. It was so clear. Bright. Almost like it was daytime. And we saw the Milky Way.

Ben sits down.

**BEN (CONT'D)**
That summer with that full moon. Over the Pacific. Silver water as far as you could see. Like it was the whole world. Mom made that rabbit stew. With the wild ramps that Zaj collected.

Rell turns up the volume on the television. Ben speaks over it.

**BEN (CONT'D)**
Like being an astronaut. Unless you've been, you can't understand. I gave you that. At least.

Rell turns the volume up again. It's now blaring.

Ben nods. He stands. And he then leaves the room.

**INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. MORNING.**

Jack and Angie sit on a sofa in the hallway, right outside of the dining room.

Jack sips his morning OJ. He kisses Angie's hand.

**INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. MORNING.**

The kids sit in a circle on the floor of the formal dining room, staring at Ben. They look stunned.
NAI
Like forever?

BEN
Nothing's forever.

NAI
But like, not going home.

BEN
Yes. Like not going home.

KIELYR
Dad.

NAI
You don't love us anymore?

BEN
Of course I love you.

NAI
Then why are you doing this?

BEN
BECAUSE I love you.

The kids try to comprehend what they've just been told.

NAI
No.

VESPYR
But we want to live with you.

Ben stares at his children. The moment stretches.

BEN
I almost got you killed.

VESPYR
The bricks just popped out.

Ben shakes his head no.

BEN
You don't understand.

VESPYR
Fine. Then explain. Explain.

Ben smiles. Wrestling with his guilt and culpability renders Ben mute for perhaps the first time in his life. He tries to articulate his thoughts. He fails.
BODEVAN

Dad.

Ben looks up at Bo. He looks so lost.

BEN

Yeah.

BODEVAN

You okay?

Ben stares. Almost like he's talking to himself.

BEN

Mommy was so sick. I knew it. I did. I knew. I should have....

He doesn't finish his sentence.

BODEVAN

Mom was chemically imbalanced.

BEN

I thought. It would help her. I really thought she'd get better there.

BODEVAN

It's not your fault.

BEN

It was too much. Living in the woods. For that long.

NAI

I don't want to live here.

ZAJA

This house is a vulgar display of wealth.

KIELYR

And an unethical use of space.

NAI

Why can't we just stay with you?

Ben focuses on his kids.

BEN

If you do. I'm going to get one of you killed.
BODEVAN
We can figure out something else.
This can't be the only choice. Dad.
Dad?

Ben is silent.

NAI
Dad!

Ben doesn't seem to hear them. His eyes are dead. He looks so old, suddenly.

The kids look at each other, unsure how to proceed.

Finally, Bo gathers his siblings and walks them out of the room.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY.

Ben ambles, disorientated, into the hallway.

Angie stands as soon as she sees him.

Ben appears suspended, just sort of shuffling in place; he has no idea where to go next.

Angie rushes over and pulls him into a hug. She pats the back of his head, soothing him like he's a child.

Jack doesn't move. He stares down at the floor, giving them some space, trying to be as respectful as possible.

INT. DRAWING ROOM. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Rellian, in his pajamas, finds Jack on the couch, watching the evening news. He plops down next to his grandfather.

Jack smiles at him.

RELLIAN
So when are we going to move my mom's body?

JACK
Move it where?

RELLIAN
I mean, so she can be cremated.

Jack smiles again.
JACK
Oh. We're not doing that.

This confuses Rell.

RELLIAN
No. But it was in her Will.

JACK
I understand. But we're not burning her body.

Rell stands up. He's so agitated that he's buzzing, but does his best to calm his voice.

RELLIAN
Grandpa? We have to cremate her. She had really specific instructions. About what she wanted.

JACK
Your mother had no idea what she wanted.

Rellian's face flushes red.

RELLIAN
No! It was super important to her. She wanted music and -

JACK
Do not raise your voice to me, young man. You understand?

Rell stares at his grandfather.

RELLIAN
Can we please have a discourse?

Jack laughs.

RELLIAN (CONT'D)
Don't I at least get my chance to argue my -

JACK
This is not up for discussion. I'm a grown-up. You're a child. I make decisions that you won't understand. One day you will. No one said it's fair. But that's life. Might as well learn that now.

(MORE)
It's a waste of time to fight it. You will not win. Is that understood?

Rell continues to stare at Jack. Then he nods.

Jack musses up Rellian's hair.

Good. I'm getting some ice cream, you want some ice cream? We have Cherry Garcia and coffee, if Nana didn't polish it off.

Jack moves off the couch and ambles toward the kitchen.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. MORNING.

Ben stands in front of a mirror, a hair clipper in his hand. He slowly, methodically, buzzes off his massive beard.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. MORNING.

Everyone is eating breakfast. There is fresh-squeezed orange juice, croissants, jam.

The kids stare at their father, his face newly shaved.

No one speaks.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. MORNING.

Ben is unpacking Steve, piling some of the kid's things onto the gravel driveway.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. MORNING.

Black. A light switches on revealing, in a basement, all the kids crouching in the dark.

Bo tip-toes down the stairs and joins the huddle.

Okay. We're safe.

After the death of a partner, in a long-term relationship or marriage, the surviving partner is 79% likely to take their own life within the first six months.

(MORE)
And in suicide cases, the surviving partner is 90% likely to kill themselves within the first TWO to THREE WEEKS.

RELLIAN
I'm leaving.

Rell marches up the stairs.

ZAJA
"Mission: Rescue Dad and Mommy." First objective. We provide Dad with a clear goal and legitimate closure. Secondary objective. We rescue Mommy's body.

Rell turns to look at his brothers and sisters.

ZAJA (CONT'D)
Fuck Nana and Grandpa.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY.

Ben stacks some boxes and a pile of the kid's clothes in Jack's office.

JACK
You know where you headed?

Ben shakes his head no.

JACK (CONT'D)
How will I contact you?

BEN
I'll call you in a couple of days.

Jack nods. He extends his hand and they shake.

BEN (CONT'D)
Zaja likes to collect things. Dead things. She's kind of an amateur taxidermist.

JACK
Okay.

BEN
Nai doesn't like to wear clothes.

Jack nods.
BEN (CONT'D)
Vespyr and Kielyr like to speak in Esperanto.

JACK
Okay.

BEN
Bo wants to go to college. He got in everywhere. I don't know how we can afford it exactly, but -

JACK
Ben. I'll take of it. We'll take good care of them. There's nothing to worry about. I promise. You're doing the right thing.

Ben nods his head.

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY
Ben walks across the gravel to Steve.

INT. STEVE. DAY.
He climbs up and closes the doors.
He looks around. Without the kids, the bus is so empty.

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY.
He pulls Steve out of the gravel parking lot.

INT. STEVE. DAY.
Ben is driving down the highway.
He bursts into tears. All the pain, the grief, the intense sadness of Leslie's death and from leaving his children - it all finally just pours out.

EXT. HIGHWAY. DAY.
In the desert, Steve drives along a highway.
EXT. CAMP. NIGHT.

Off the highway, in front of the parked bus, Ben sits staring into a small fire.

RELLIAN (O.S.)
I don't hate you.

Ben looks up to see Rellian standing not 5 feet away. For a second, Ben's not sure whether or not he's hallucinating.

RELLIAN (CONT'D)
I just wish you'd helped Mommy.

Then Ben sees the rest of his kids. Bo, Vespyr, Kielyr, Zaja, and a completely naked Nai walk down off the bus.

Rellian hugs his dad.

BEN
Me too.

RELLIAN
We want to complete the mission.

KIELYR
We want to save Mom.

BEN
There is no mission.

ZAJA
"Mission: Rescue Mommy."

VESPYR
Mom wanted to be cremated.

RELLIAN
We want to honor her wishes.

NAI
And flush her down the toilet.

Ben looks up at his kids.

BEN
I'm not ever going to put you in danger again.

BODEVAN
"If you assume that there is no hope, you guarantee that there will be no hope.

(MORE)
If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, that there are opportunities to change things, then there is a possibility that you can contribute to making a better world."

Ben smiles.

BEN
Noam Chomsky.

RELLIAN
Please.

EXT. CEMETERY. NIGHT.
Steve pulls alongside a dark cemetery.

EXT. CEMETERY. NIGHT.
By nothing but the light of the moon, the kids scale the iron-wrought cemetery fence.

Ben throws over a large duffel bag and then jumps the fence.

EXT. CEMETERY. NIGHT.
They walk, silently, through the dark cemetery. Long shadows creeping across a moon-lit landscape.

They stop in front of a freshly covered grave.
Zaja reads the gravestone.

ZAJA

Nai unzips the duffel bag, revealing shovels and rope.

NAI
Otherwise she has to lie under that bullshit forever.

Ben and the kids thrust shovels into the freshly laid grass patches above the grave and dig.
EXT. CEMETERY PARKING LOT. NIGHT.

Everyone is now covered in dirt. Struggling through the parking lot under its weight - silent pallbearers - they carry their mother's casket to the bus.

They place it in front of the bus. As they catch their breath, the kids now finally take in what they've done.

ZAJA
Mommy's in here.

For a moment, they all forget where they are and what they're doing. And touch the casket, imagining their mother inside.

EXT. CEMETERY PARKING LOT. NIGHT.

Steve pulls out of the cemetery parking lot.

INT. STEVE. NIGHT.

Steve drives through the night.

INT. STEVE. NIGHT.

Everyone is awake as the bus travels down the freeway.

They all crouch near the casket, resting in the center of the bus.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

Inside the small bathroom on the bus, Bo switches on a hair clipper. He slowly runs it across his scalp, lopping off his long hair.

He stares at himself in the mirror, his head now buzzed.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

Bo comes out of the bathroom.

The kids look at their brother, but say nothing.

INT. STEVE. NIGHT.

Ben drives through the night. He looks in the rearview mirror.
All the kids, apart from Bo, are now finally asleep. Bo and Ben look at each other.

Ben rubs his chin. No hair.

Bo rubs the top of this head. No hair.

Bo smiles at his dad and Ben smiles back.

**EXT. BEACH CLIFFS. MORNING.**

As dawn breaks over the horizon, Steve is parked on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. This early, the sky is an electric blue; the clouds, striations of yellow and orange.

Leslie's body, tightly wrapped in a clean white sheet, lies on top of about a cord of dry firewood and newspaper, creating a massive funeral pyre.

Ben gestures at Nai.

**NAI**

Mommy. I love you. I love your hair. I love your smell. I love your face. I love your belly button. I love your sparkly shirt. I love how you cook. I think... that's about it. I love how... you wear the same costume as me on Halloween.

Ben nods at Zaja.

**ZAJA**

You will always be my mommy. And I will never forget you and I will remember you every second of every day of my life. And when you burn up, only calcium, potassium, magnesium and trace element compounds will remain. And as your ashes mix with water and decomposing plants, you will be carbonates and oxides. You will be liming agents, raising pH, and neutralize acid in the earth and you'll make the soil happy. So things can grow. And I love you forever.

Ben nods at Vespyr and Kielyr. They step forward, reading from a piece of paper.
KIELYR AND VESPYR
"I think again over my small adventures. My fears. Those small ones that seemed so big. For all the vital things. I had to get and reach. And yet there is only one great thing. The only thing. To live to see the great day that dawns. And the light that fills the world."

Ben gestures and Bo steps forward.

BODEVAN
I had you as my mom. For 16 years. I hope you're happy now. I hope you're laughing. We're going to be okay. As a family. Everything's going to be okay.

Ben steps forward.

BEN
Hey, Caterpillar. It's me. I'm sorry. That I didn't know what to do. I'm sorry if I made things worse.

Ben lights a wooden match and passes matches to the kids. Together, all the children reach up and light the pyre. The newspaper and kindling catches, engulfing Leslie's body in flames.

Rell plugs in his guitar.

RELLIAN
This was Mom's favorite song.

Rellian sings "When Doves Cry," by Prince.

RELLIAN (CONT'D)
"Dig if you will the picture. You and I engaged in a kiss. The sweat of your body covers me, Can you my darling, can you picture this? Dream if you can a courtyard. An ocean of violets in bloom. Animals strike curious poses. They feel the heat, the heat between me and you. How can you just leave me standing? Alone in a world that's so cold? Maybe I'm just too demanding. Maybe I'm just like my father, too bold. (MORE)
After the first verse, the other kids join, playing their various musical instruments and singing along.

As above them all, black smoke billows - the music builds and now everyone, including Ben, is dancing and rocking out, singing and crying and laughing.

And it's a party.

INT. SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. DAY.

Ben and the kids ride the people-movers down the terminal.

INT. BATHROOM. SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. DAY.

The entire family - Ben, Bo, Rellian, Vespyr and Kielyr, Zaja, and Nai - are crowded into a small toilet stall.

Ben pulls a paper bag out of his backpack. He opens it wide enough for the ashes inside to be visible.

Then he pours.

They all stare at Leslie's ashes in the toilet bowl.

There is a moment of silence.

And then, they all just start laughing.

NAI
Bye, Mommy.

And Nai flushes the toilet.

INT. SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. DAY.

At the ticket gate, all the kids hug Bo.

NAI
Why are you going to the Philippines?

Bo shrugs.

BODEVAN
I just put my finger on a map.
ZAJA
The Moro Islamic Liberation Front
kidnapped an American last year.

BEN
He'll be fine.

ZAJA
'Cause if they kidnap you...

She looks at Ben and then stops.

ZAJA (CONT'D)
Forget it.

BEN
Go ahead. Say it. You know you want to.

ZAJA
If they kidnap you, you could die.

BODEVAN
Then I better watch out for them.

Ben hugs his son tightly.

BEN
When you have sex with a woman, be
gentle and listen to her. Treat her
with respect and dignity, even if
you don't love her.

BODEVAN
I know.

BEN
Always tell the truth. And always
take the high road.

BODEVAN
I know.

BEN
Live each day like it could be your
last. You drink it in, be
adventurous, be bold, but savor it,
it goes fast.

BODEVAN
I know.

Ben stares at his son.
Ben nods and he and the kids walk away. After a moment, Nai runs back and hugs his brother's knee.

Then he runs back and joins his family on the people-mover.

EXT. GAS STATION. DAY.

Rellian is speaking into a payphone at a roadside gas station.

RELLIAN
It's what I want. It's what we all want. Swear you won't try to stop him.

JACK (O.S.)
Where are you?

Rell looks around.

RELLIAN
I can't tell you that.

JACK (O.S.)
Just tell me where you are and everything will be okay.

RELLIAN
I'll call again. In couple of weeks. And everything is okay.

Rell hangs up the phone. After a moment, Ben and the rest of the kids come out of the gas station convenience store, carrying waters and some fruit.

BEN
You hungry?

RELLIAN
Okay.

Ben hands him an apple and they all walk back to Steve.

BLACK.
EXT. DIRT ROAD. MORNING.

A yellow school bus, passing through farm land in Western Oregon, kicks up dust on a dirt road.

EXT. VEGETABLE GARDEN. DAY.

Vespyr and Kielyr run through a large vegetable garden - lines of lettuce, broccoli, cabbage, kale, and Swiss chard in raised-beds - neatly organized in perfectly-spaced rows.

They run toward Steve - propped up and without wheels - sitting at the edge of the garden.

INT. STEVE. DAY.

The interior of Steve has been completely gutted and transformed into a gigantic chicken coop. Dozens of CHICKENS cluck when Vespyr and Kielyr enter the bus.

VESPYR
Hey, guys.

The girls pour feed into 12-gallon, galvanized steel poultry feeders.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Vespyr and Kielyr walk into the kitchen of a funky house: the furniture appears second hand, the walls are all painted different colors, kid's drawings cover the walls.

The place is also cluttered with string and tape, hanging found objects creating bizarre sculptures; bicycles, skateboards, musical instruments, and toys cover every surface.

KIELYR
We have to buy more feed. We only have enough for another two days or so.

The twins pass Ben and sit at the breakfast room table. They fix themselves bowls of cereal and immediately fall into reading their books.

BEN
You both finish the "Madame Bovary" book report?
KIELYR
Plus Mr. Bertrang let us do "The Tin Drum" for extra credit.

VESPYR
That shit is intense.

Now Rell, Zaja, and Nai come in, each carrying a basket of freshly picked vegetables: broccoli, mesclun, romaine lettuce, peas, green beans, and squash.

BEN
Bus is here in 10.

They put the vegetable baskets on the counter - next to their school backpacks - and sit down to eat breakfast. They also all read or work on their homework.

In real time, Ben makes lunch for his five kids: he takes out the bread. Puts peanut butter on one side. Jam on the other. He puts an apple into each paper bag.

He sets them out on the counter, each bag identified with their name. He stares at the lunch bags for a moment.

Then he breaks some broccoli into stalks and places a piece in each bag.

Ben sits down next to his kids, watching them eat.

Without looking up from his book, Rellian pours cereal and milk into a bowl and passes it over to his dad.

Ben smiles.

And then - for an extended period of time - they all just continue to eat in silence.

BLACK.

THE END.