

**Picket Charlie**

by  
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An environmental action/thriller

First Draft (1.9.4), April 28, 2022

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FADE IN:

SUPER: Picket: a. A detached body of soldiers serving to guard an encampment. b. To enclose, fence, or fortify.

c. A last stand of defense.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND - NIGHT

DRIVING RAIN pounds a rustic island. WIND and LIGHTNING buffet a dense canopy of PINE FOREST.

A LIGHT from a LOG CABIN pierces the darkness. The CHRISTMAS CAROL "OH TANNENBAUM" can be heard from inside the cabin.

SUPER: 60 years from yesterday.

INT. LOG CABIN - NIGHT

SAMANTHA WALDEN (Sam) decorates a Christmas tree while her dog, LUCKY, warms himself by the fireplace.

Sam HUMS along with the singing, if you can call it that, from a RADIO TRANSPONDER:

SQUAD LEADER (O.S.)  
(singing off key)  
*Oh Christmas Tree, Oh Christmas tree, hmm, hmm, hmm something or other-*

SAM  
(singing along)  
*-your branches green delight us-*  
(to Lucky)  
God, he sucks-  
(into radio)  
You suck! You couldn't carry a tune in a bucket!

SQUAD LEADER (O.S.)  
Are you kidding me? I've got the voice of an angel. A beautiful, god-damn angel-

SAM  
Oh please-

SQUAD LEADER (O.S.)  
 (louder and more off  
 key)  
*Oh Christmas Tree, Oh  
 Christmas Tree-*

SAM (CONT'D)  
 (singing along)  
*Abies Balsamea, Abies  
 Balsamea-*

SQUAD LEADER (O.S.)  
 Really? Genus and species? You're  
 such a tree nerd. It's Christmas,  
 for God's--

STATIC from the Radio. More THUNDER.

SAM  
 (to Lucky)  
 Damn storm must have knocked out  
 the-

DISTANT BURSTS OF GUNFIRE pierce the THUNDER.

Now alert, Lucky GROWLS and springs to attention.

Sam drops the Christmas ornament and grabs her GREEN  
 CAMOUFLAGE KEVLAR VEST and ASSAULT RIFLE.

She and Lucky rush out into the driving rain-

-And are met by more GUNFIRE as SCREECHING CHAIN SAWS start  
 echoing through the forest.

They sprint sure-footed through the rain and forest toward  
 the noise.

Without loosing stride, Sam scoops up muddy sod and smears it  
 across her face and hands.

LIGHTNING ricochets across the sky, bouncing off the forest  
 offering brief glimpses of the sprinting duo-

-Including the shoulder patch on Sam's body kevlar:

US FOREST RANGER, SPECIAL OPS

EXT. SHORES OF MUIR ISLAND - NIGHT

More DRIVING RAIN. The SCREECHING is LOUDER. A RUSTY BARGE  
 beaches next to a pair of old Jet Skis on the rocky shore.

A DOZEN BEAMS OF SWARMING HALOGEN LIGHTS empty out of the  
 barge and spread out quickly through the dense woods, taking  
 up perimeter positions -

-And a HIGH-POWERED FLOODLIGHT abruptly bursts on, lighting the mist-soaked woods.

Further up the shore, Sam and Lucky scramble down a steep embankment emerging at the rocky shoreline below.

They find a BULLET-RIDDLED ALL TERRAIN VEHICLE-

Its SEARCH LIGHT points straight down - to a DEAD BODY, dressed in the same camouflage as Sam, laying face down in the surf. The man's body is riddled with bullets.

Sam sees the darting HALOGEN LIGHTS through the trees-

She grabs the radio headset from the dead Ranger and slips back into the forest.

SAM

Squad Leader, Squad Leader do you read? Copy-

EXT. SHORES OF MUIR ISLAND - NIGHT

STILL RAINING. The SCREECHING is deafening. The floodlight bathes TIMBER PIRATES ("jacks") cutting down trees to load into the barge as the armed halogen-lighted pirates guard.

Sam's SQUAD LEADER, his hands in the air, is pushed to his knees by two pirates as deadly bits of bark and tree trunk shrapnel explode around him.

No one notices Sam and Lucky take position on a nearby ridge.

POV THROUGH SAM'S GUN SCOPE: a quick count of pirates and jacks, freezing at the sight of her Squad Leader.

Sam, her hands shaking, trains the gun on the pirate closest to him-

A nearby BRANCH SNAP-

Lucky's ears prick up-

TWO HALOGEN LIGHTS close in on them--

The dog bolts toward the light-

Sam HESITATES, then follows the dog-

None of the jacks below notice the two lights go dead-

EXT. MUIR ISLAND FOREST - NIGHT

STILL RAINING. Sam re-takes her position overlooking the tree cutting operation and the prisoner--

Her radio ear piece crackles to life.

SQUAD LEADER (O.S.)  
(scared but defiant)  
Oh Christmas tree, oh Christmas  
tree, your branches green delight--

POV THROUGH GUN SCOPE: just as the pirate SHOTS the kneeling Squad Leader in the back of the head!

Shocked, Sam bolts upright.

LIGHTNING flashes-

SAM  
NO!!!

The jacks can't hear her scream over the DEAFENING SAWS.

A PIRATE emerges from the thicket behind Sam-

She doesn't see him.

LIGHTNING FLASHES - Lucky leaps up and grabs the pirate by the neck and SLAMS him to the ground-

MORE LIGHTNING - The pirate wrestles free, points his gun at the dog-

-Sam turns and shoots him. In a death spasm, he WILDLY sprays GUNFIRE into the air.

The jacks hear that. They drop their saws, scrambling for their weapons just as-

Sam SHOTS OUT the floodlight.

Suddenly, It's DEATHLY quiet.

Just the sound of RAIN and WAVES.

LIGHTNING THUNDERS across the sky.

MORE STEADY RAIN.

Sam, her hands still shaking, BLINKS rainwater out of her eyes.

Somewhere, a small branch SNAPS.

The pirate jacks panic, blindly FIRING in all directions.

Sam returns CONTROLLED BURSTS of MACHINE GUN FIRE, cutting through undergrowth, taking out the pirate jacks one by one.

She stops firing.

It's QUIET.

Except for the rain.

The pirates all dead.

Behind her, a tree branch SNAPS. Sam spins ready to fire.

Lucky appears and stops at her side.

Relieved, she collapses against a tree and hugs the dog, burying her head - and grief - in the nape of his furry neck.

DISSOLVE TO:

I/E. SAM'S CABIN - EARLY MORNING

A thick marine layer of fog clings to the island.

Sam is a tall, lean and purposeful woman. She's shed the top half of her uniform and furiously chops firewood in a khaki tank top. Her assault rifle is propped against the nearby porch railing.

Her bare shoulder is tattooed with a PAIR OF BABY SHOES.

SHEEP AND GOATS graze alongside MINIATURE HORSES in a small split rail pen next to a wooden barn. Lucky lays on the porch keeping a watchful eye.

Behind the barn, a sleek WIND TURBINE pokes over the misty forest breaking the illusion of a 19th century farm.

She splits the last of the wood. Her hand shakes. She clenches them into a balled fist. Doesn't help. They still shake.

She carries an armful of firewood to the porch, stacking it while Lucky watches.

SAM

What? Don't look at me like that-  
Not you. I did what I had to,  
right?

(pauses)

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)  
 Hey, wasn't it your turn to chop  
 the wood today?

Lucky yawns and lets out a sigh.

Sam shakes her head and walks to the barn, the horses follow her along the fence line. She grabs a bucket of oats and feeds them.

Out of tasks, she heads back to the cabin and sits at the RADIO TRANSPONDER.

SAM (CONT'D)  
 Picket Charlie to base. Over.  
 (STATIC/NOISE)  
 Picket Charlie to base, do you  
 copy? Over.

STATIC.

She gives it a whack on the side and tries again.

SAM (CONT'D)  
 Picket Charlie to base. Over.

SILENCE.

She heads out to the porch and sits next to Lucky.

SAM (CONT'D)  
 Still nothing. No com-sat, no  
 radio. Nothing. We'll try smoke  
 signals next.

She rubs the dog's shoulder and neck and sighs.

SAM (CONT'D)  
 We've put this off as long as we  
 can. You ready?

Lucky leans into Sam, resting his head on her lap.

SAM (CONT'D)  
 Yeah, I know. Me too.

Suddenly overwhelmed by grief, her chin quivers. Lucky sits up and licks a tear from her cheek.

SAM (CONT'D)  
 Thanks little man. To everything  
 there is a season. C'mon, duty's a  
 bitch. Time to plant--

EXT. MUIR ISLAND BLUFF - LATER THAT MORNING

Lucky stands guard as Sam digs TWO GRAVES for her fallen comrades. Behind her, ROWS OF PINE TREES stretch into the mist.

Waves crash below them and the rotting frames of SUBMERGED BUILDINGS peek through the water. The ABANDONED SKYLINE OF CHICAGO shines faintly on the horizon.

She drags the bodies to each grave, keenly respectful.

After burying them, she places on each grave DOG TAGS and a green and gold UNIFORM SHOULDER PATCH:

US FOREST SERVICE - ET PRAESIDIA AD SILVAM.

She finishes by planting PINE SAPLINGS as headstones.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MUIR ISLAND FOREST - DAY

Sam and Lucky walk a path between neat rows of young pine. The trees stand about eight to ten feet tall. She carries her assault rifle, shovel and a burlap backpack.

She stops and inspects a tree, picking off dead needles. She brushes away debris from the tree's base, revealing a BARCODE embedded in the bark.

She scans the barcode with a HANDHELD READER and methodically scoops a soil sample into a small glass vial with a matching barcode, labeled: CO2.

She carefully places the tube in a case from her backpack.

Something above catches her attention. She reaches up on tip toes and gently inspects the pine's crown.

A BEETLE crawls on a branch. She takes the bug, shows it to Lucky, smiles, and places it in a canister for later study.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SHORE OF MUIR ISLAND - LATER THAT DAY

The MARINE LAYER of fog clings to the shore as Sam and Lucky hike the rocky shoreline near last night's battle.

They carefully avoid stepping in the foamy surf.



Lucky disappears into the mist as Sam surveys the damage.

She balls her fist and steps over the body of a DEAD PIRATE to examine a MARRED TREE.

FRESH SAP from the wound drips down the bark. She scans the barcode at the tree's base and takes a soil sample.

She pulls a BODY off a TREE STUMP and takes another soil sample at its base.

She sits on the stump, trying to ignore the dead, and jots notes into a frayed journal.

She doesn't notice Lucky return with a soggy BASEBALL CAP.

The dog drops the cap in her lap. Sam picks it up with her pen, mindful of contamination.

SAM

What trouble is this, my friend?

Lucky sniffs the air and heads back into the mist.

SAM (CONT'D)

You know you shouldn't be fishing anything out of the lake. It's poisonous.

Sam stows her gear and follows him into the mist.

She finds him standing over a HALF NAKED BODY holding a military assault rifle, face down in the water.

Sam cautiously approaches, motioning the dog to clear.

She kicks the rifle out of the way. Careful of the surf, she puts on a pair of rubber gloves, and turns the body over.

It's a handsome young man, BILLY ZHANG, with a GASH on his forehead. He's HANDCUFFED and his WRISTS ARE BLOODY AND SWOLLEN. He's barely conscious.

He gasps for air.

She drags him out of the water and checks his pulse. He coughs up water and slips back into unconsciousness.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - DAY

Sam drags Billy's body back toward her cabin on a MAKESHIFT SLED made of pine boughs.

It starts to RAIN.

INT. BARN - DAY

IT'S RAINING. The barn doors swing open and Sam drags Billy to a horse stall.

She runs a rope through his handcuffs and around a stall pole, knotting it off, and drags him into the stall.

Exhausted, she shuts the stall door and collapses against it.

SAM  
 (to Lucky)  
 You couldn't find anyone a little lighter?

INT. SAM'S CABIN - LATER THAT NIGHT

RAIN pelts the cabin windows as Sam fusses in the kitchen. The centerpiece of the cabin is a large stone hearth fireplace that warms the entire lodge.

Lucky lays in front of the fire keeping a watchful eye.

SAM  
 I know what you're thinking.

Lucky watches her work.

SAM (CONT'D)  
 What? He's fine in the barn.

Sam busies herself making dinner.

SAM (CONT'D)  
 Sure, it's unseasonably cold for December. But it's nowhere near freezing. He'll be fine.

Lucky doesn't take his eyes off her.

SAM (CONT'D)  
 He'll be fine. Fifty degrees never killed anyone. The barn is dry and there's plenty of straw in the stall.  
 (beat)  
 I know his wet clothes are toxic and should be burned.  
 (beat)  
 What do you want from me?  
 (MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)  
(another beat)  
Okay, okay. Jeez, you're hard on a  
guy.

She grabs her coat, a clean uniform and blanket from a closet.

Then, as an afterthought, a bottle of whiskey and her gun. She opens the door and turns back to Lucky.

SAM (CONT'D)  
C'mon. If I have to go out in this,  
you're coming with me.

She holds the door open until he follows.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

IT'S STILL RAINING. Billy is still unconscious.

Lucky supervises as Sam puts rubber gloves on, pulls off his wet shirt, shoes, and pants and throws the contaminated clothing in a burn bucket.

She takes a long hit off the whiskey bottle.

SAM  
So, little man, what do you think  
we have here? He doesn't really  
look like pirate material.

She covers his naked body with the blanket and sits at the far side of the stall. Lucky lays down next to her.

Sam takes another pull of whiskey, listens to the rainfall and drifts off into an uneasy sleep.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. SUNNY BEDROOM - MORNING FLASHBACK

POV of a man's hand stretching out across lush downy pillows. It belongs to AARON WALDEN. His muscular chest and square jaw frame a kind soul.

Crisp bedroom curtains dance with a fresh morning breeze.

He rolls over, smiles, and his loving eyes glimmer as they catch the morning light.

He reaches out, as if to caress a cheek--

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. CHICAGO WATER TOWER, MICHIGAN AVENUE - DUSK FLASHBACK

The pinnacle of the famous water tower juts out of inky black water. The Hancock Tower burns in the distance.

Dead perch float alongside plastic cups and trash.

Aaron's hand bobs into frame. It holds a BABY'S PACIFIER.

FLASH CUT TO:

I/E. BARN - MORNING

Sam wakes with a start.

Billy stares at her; he's inches from her face, naked, his arms pulled taught from the rope.

BILLY

Where are my clothes?

SAM

I threw them out. They're contaminated from the lake.

Sam hands him the uniform trousers and politely turns her head as he quickly, and awkwardly, pulls them on.

Her gun is propped in the corner, out of reach.

SAM (CONT'D)

I see it's unusually cold for December--

BILLY

Why am I hand cuffed?

SAM

You came that way.

BILLY

What am I doing here?

SAM

Funny, that's at the top of my list, too. What are you doing here?

Billy ignores her, suddenly throwing his rage and all his weight against the rope.

BILLY  
What am I doing here?!?

Lucky GROWLS.

SAM  
Easy, now.

She slowly stands, carefully grabbing the gun in the corner.

SAM (CONT'D)  
I suppose you could say you're my prisoner.

Panic flashes in his eyes before he regains a semblance of composure. Sam smiles.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Let's try this again. What's your name?

He frowns, pained by the question.

SAM (CONT'D)  
I'm not asking for the nuclear codes. I just want to know your name.

Silence.

SAM (CONT'D)  
What. You got amnesia or something?

BILLY  
Sure. Something like that.

SAM  
Okay, then.  
(beat)  
Do you remember how you got here?

BILLY  
(barely a whisper)  
No.

Sam is unsure of what to say next. But she believes him.

SAM  
I'm Sam. Samantha Walden. Pleased to meet you.

She reaches out to shake his hand, then thinks better of it.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Are you hungry? I'll make us some  
breakfast.

He ignores her.

SAM (CONT'D)  
I figure it's the least I can do  
for a dead man walking. I mean, who  
knows what cancers you've got now,  
after floating in that toxic soup  
we fished you out of.

Still no reaction as he rubs his sore wrists.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Listen, I'm new to this whole  
prisoner thing, too. It's not what  
I'm here for. Give me a break,  
okay?

That's not what he was expecting.

SAM (CONT'D)  
It's just the three of us, pal. I  
promise I'll be civil as long as  
you do the same.

She holds up her hands and crosses her heart.

SAM (CONT'D)  
I promise. Beats the alternative.  
You can stay here if you want. Your  
choice. There's a bucket of oats-

She opens the stall door and waits for him. He decides  
anyplace is better than the stall.

BILLY  
Three?

SAM  
You, me and Lucky.

She points down to the dog. He growls.

BILLY  
Why do you call him Lucky?

SAM  
'Cause with his bad attitude, he's  
lucky I ever give him a meal.

She fake smiles at Lucky. The dog yawns, lifts his leg on the barn door, pees, then leads the trio toward the cabin.

SAM (CONT'D)

Just for the record, Lucky prefers a hot meal and voted to eat your still beating heart and warm gizzards while you were passed out last night.

BILLY

I see. Nice dog. What is this place?

He glances around, his eyes stopping at the ax and woodpile.

SAM

Picket Charlie. Don't get any funny ideas.

Sam motions him up the steps, keeping a healthy distance as they go inside the cabin.

INT. SAM'S CABIN - MORNING

She motions for Billy to sit at the table. Lucky half crouches an arm's length away, his eyes focused on Billy.

Billy holds up his handcuffed wrists.

BILLY

What do ya' say?

SAM

See, now that's a funny idea. What'd I say about that?

She keeps the gun pointed at her guest and starts banging around in the kitchen.

BILLY

Sorry, it seems like the hospitable thing to do.

SAM

Says the guy who's having a stranger make him breakfast after she pulled his sorry ass out of the poisonous surf of Lake Michigan before he drowned to death and won't even share his name.

Staring at the gun, he nods and changes tact.

BILLY  
What's Picket Charlie?

She scoops some steaming oatmeal into bowls and serves him.

SAM  
Muir Island station, Picket  
Charlie.

He looks at her blankly.

SAM (CONT'D)  
The Lake Michigan Pickets.

Doesn't mean a thing to him.

SAM (CONT'D)  
United States Forestry Service,  
Military Operations.

BILLY  
You're Forestry Military Ops? I've  
heard of you guys- fighting out  
west. 'Stumpy's' right?

SAM  
Yup. Citizen 'Stumpy' Soldier. At  
your service.

She takes a bite to eat.

SAM (CONT'D)  
You, my friend, have washed up on  
the most valuable real estate in  
North America.

BILLY  
How do you figure?

SAM  
Haven't you heard? The price of  
timber is more valuable than gold.  
And, it's prime beach front  
property- if you don't mind the  
carcinogenic surf.

He motions to the handcuffs.

BILLY  
Am I under arrest?

SAM  
I'm not sure. Should you be?



He ignores the question, continues to devour his meal.

BILLY

This is good. Thank you.  
(pausing to swallow)  
You don't look like a Stumpy-  
soldier.

SAM

I'm not. I mean, I am, technically.  
But I'm an arborist. By training. I  
take care of the forest - all the  
trees on the island.

BILLY

Like a Christmas tree farmer?

Sam chuckles.

SAM

No, not like that at all. A farmer  
implies there's a crop to be  
harvested.

She points to the patch on her jacket with her spoon.

SAM (CONT'D)

'Et Praesidia Ad Silvam.' Protector  
of the Forest. I've sworn an oath  
to grow and defend the trees.

BILLY

Why?

SAM

A tree is only as strong as its  
forest. And this planet is only  
habitable because of its forests.  
Considering all the shit that's  
gone down since the flood- seemed  
like a good call.

She eyes him intently.

SAM (CONT'D)

I was in the first class of  
recruits - got stationed here 12  
months to the day Chicago was  
evacuated. Been here since.

BILLY

That's a long time to be stuck on  
an island.

SAM

I suppose. So Mister John Doe,  
what's your story?

Billy shrugs. She fiddles with the RADIO as they eat.

BILLY

I don't have a story.

She receives nothing but STATIC and NOISE.

SAM

Everybody has a story. How'd you  
wash up on my beach?

BILLY

I don't know.

Billy's bowl is empty. He eyes up her bowl.

SAM

You want some more?

Billy eagerly gives her his bowl.

BILLY

Yes. Thank you.

SAM

Do you remember your name yet?

He shakes his head as she gives him a second bowl of food and  
returns to the radio.

BILLY

Do you really think there's anyone  
on the other end of that?

She gives up on the radio, trying not to show her concern.

She grabs a piece of TOAST and her COMPUTER ROLL from her  
backpack, UNROLLS THE FLEXIBLE CARBON FIBER KEYBOARD on the  
table and powers it up.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Nice computer.

SAM

This old thing? It's been here as  
long as I have.

THIN, GLASS-LIKE HOLOGRAM PAGES flicker to life above the  
keyboard.

BILLY

I haven't seen a working one  
forever.

Sam cleans up her "desktop," closing open HOLOGRAM PAGES including a photo of her and Aaron, the man in her dream.

BILLY (CONT'D)

You said we're on Muir Island?

She brings up a satellite map of North America.

The map shows a vastly changed continent. Water covers what used to be Florida and up the east coast to the Chesapeake Bay. Most of Louisiana is under water, too.

SAM

Yes- it's part of Picket Charlie-  
here. Chain of islands and swamp  
going north to Green Bay-

Sam zooms into the Great Lakes- it's radically different now: Southern Ontario is under water. Lake Michigan covers parts of Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana and northern Illinois.

New island chains along Lake Michigan and parts of Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota are highlighted with PICKET ALPHA through PICKET FOXTROT.

BILLY

What are these? What's a 'picket'?

She zooms into Lake Michigan, north of Chicago.

SAM

The Pickets? It's mankind's last  
line of defense. After The Flood a  
string of secure forest reserves -  
pickets - were established to  
replenish North American forests -  
to scrub carbon from the atmosphere  
on a massive scale.

BILLY

Like the Amazon?

SAM

Yup.

She points to islands and swampy marsh running along the new western coast of Lake Michigan.

SAM (CONT'D)

Picket Charlie goes up to Superior, here- to Picket Bravo, and into Michigan- Picket Alpha, here. You never heard of any of this?

BILLY

No. I thought you were all fighting fires and looters out west.

She pushes the map to the Rockies and western states. It's parched desert now.

SAM

We were. But Picket Tango in the northern Cascades is the last forest west of the Rockies. Everything south of Seattle is a lost cause.

She taps the map near Seattle with her spoon. Everything south of it is desert.

SAM (CONT'D)

What I don't understand is - why the attack last night? There's been small poaching up and down the Pickets for months now, but nothing coordinated like this.

BILLY

You haven't seen the refugee camps. There's no heating or cooking fuel. People are desperate.

SAM

What about the solar and wind farms?

BILLY

Guarded by militia and mercenaries. They drive the battery cells from the farms to the highest bidder. And it certainly ain't any of the refugee camps.

SAM

But there's more than a million people just in the Naperville and Elgin camps-

BILLY

It's even worse in Rockford.

Billy studies the map while eating.

BILLY (CONT'D)

It's like a bad dream. Hard to believe everything went to shit so fast-

SAM

So fast? This 'shit' that could have been totally avoided if our parents had a fuck to give? Scientists were warning about the Antarctic ice shelves collapsing for decades, then one day, boom. They're gone. Everyone was so shocked. Florida and the Gulf under water, like it was a surprise. I remember the fear in friend's eyes - everybody kept pretending like nothing bad happened.

She gets lost in her oatmeal for a moment.

SAM (CONT'D)

Then a month later Ophelia and Patricia hit? Twin hurricanes. The strongest category fives ever to make landfall - in Arkansas! All those refugee camps down south. Gone. I mean nobody living in Des Moines or Decatur ever thought they'd have to deal with hurricanes and refugees, right? When strangers in far away places lose their homes, it's sad. Life goes on. When you loose your home, it's tragic. But millions of people dead or homeless? Entire cities and states gone- How the fuck do you process that?

(pause)

The power grid gone. The internet gone. Convenience stores gone. When you realize everything you take for granted is gone-- All of a sudden, growing trees to save the world seems like a good idea.

BILLY

I don't like to think about it.

SAM

Sorry. Lucky's not much for conversation and it's nice to have someone to talk to.

Sam turns off the computer and rolls it back up, placing it in her backpack and goes back to the radio.

BILLY

So how do we get back to shore? You got a boat or plane?

SAM

No. No airstrips or ports. Too much wasted space. Here, it's all about the trees.

BILLY

So I'm stuck here?

SAM

Pretty much. You're stuck here until late spring and the next supply drop. Unless I get this radio working and can call in an airlift. But being stuck here isn't so bad. Lucky and I are nice enough sorts-- So that's my story. Now it's your turn.

BILLY

Like I said, I don't have a-

SAM

Nonsense. You washed up on U.S. Forestry land, armed. That has all the makings of one hell of a good story.

She gets up and walks over to the fireplace.

BILLY

It's not what you think.

SAM

I'm not thinking anything yet, but if you're making me guess, I'd say you're involved with the timber pirates. They're the only ones crazy enough to navigate these waters.

BILLY

No, it's not like that at all. I'm looking for my little brother. He went missing from the Naperville camp a week ago-

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. NAPERVILLE REFUGE CAMP - DAY

The camp is muddy and overcrowded. Makeshift tents and FEMA trailers stack into the distance. A YOUNG BOY - Billy's brother - wanders toward a CROWD OF REFUGES.

BILLY (V.O.)

- He went out for heating fuel and never came home-

The boy turns and looks back before disappearing into the crowd.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S CABIN - MORNING

BILLY

-I tracked him to downtown Chicago- inside the old Loop-swamp.

SAM

Are you nuts? I wouldn't step foot in there with a platoon of marines.

BILLY

It's not like I had an option.

SAM

You're lucky to be alive. So what happened?

BILLY

I was jumped from behind and woke up on a boat, handcuffed with a bunch of other people-

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. PIRATE SLAVE BOAT - NIGHT

Scared WOMEN AND CHILDREN huddle near the bow of the overcrowded boat. Billy and OTHER MEN sit handcuffed nearby.

BILLY (V.O.)

-They were separating women and children from the men. Domestics and sex workers from day laborers-

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S CABIN - MORNING

BILLY

Two men were arguing over the 'market price' of the children. It was dark. Kids crying, people yelling--

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. PIRATE SLAVE BOAT - NIGHT

A PIRATE tries to separate a WOMAN and CHILD. Billy's brother hides behind her. The woman resists.

The pirate yanks the child free, then heaves the woman overboard as she SCREAMS.

He leans over the side and SHOOTS into the darkness.

Billy's little brother is terrified.

Another PIRATE, partially blocked from Billy's view, pulls the gun from the shooter.

JACKSO (O.C.)

Bullets cost money. That water's as good as a bullet.

The entire boat suddenly LURCHES with a LOUD SCREECH. Everyone is thrown to the deck. There's an EXPLOSION.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S CABIN - MORNING

BILLY

We hit something and started taking on water-

SAM

Submerged warehouses or factories leaking God knows what. So then what?



BILLY

The boat sank pretty fast. There were more explosions. People screaming. Desperate. Climbing over bodies chained together. I managed to grab a gun-  
And shot every bastard I could.

There's a pained silence.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I kept firing even after I ran out of bullets- then someone hit me from behind. Next thing I know, I'm naked in your barn.

SAM

Did you find your brother?

Billy looks up at Sam-

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. SHORES OF LAKE MICHIGAN - NIGHT

Burning flotsam and jetsam litter the lake. Billy's brother bobs face down in the surf.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S CABIN - MORNING

Billy fights his anger and grief- and shakes his head no.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHICAGO NAVY PIER - MORNING

The top half of the famous Ferris wheel juts out of the surf.

An old pontoon party boat, now converted into a pirate ship with a 50mm machine gun mounted on the bow, is tethered to one of the wheel's rusting gondolas.

Spray painted on the pontoon hull: a SKULL AND CROSSBONES logo that looks strikingly like JACKSON RUMPT-- the fierce, bare chested man decorating gold garland on a bent metallic Christmas tree.

HELMET JOE, a spindle-shanked rat of a pirate, scans the lake with a pair of binoculars from the gondola.

HELMET JOE

We got dick, Captain. Nothing.  
Jacks shoulda been back already.

JACKSO

You know the drill. Gather the  
troops.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - DAY

Sam works taking soil samples while Billy sits and leans  
against a pine tree. He listens to the wind SOUGHING through  
the branches.

BILLY

I like it here. It'd be a perfect  
day, except for these handcuffs.

SAM

Yup. It would. It'd be even more  
perfect if I hadn't had to bury my  
squad leader yesterday.

He watches her carefully fill a vial with dirt.

BILLY

What are you doing?

SAM

Science stuff.

BILLY

Seriously, what's that for?

SAM

I'm checking the carbon levels in  
the soil. Besides absorbing carbon  
from the air, the forest prevents  
soil erosion, keeping carbon and  
other greenhouse gasses safely  
stored in the ground.

BILLY

That's convenient.

SAM

That's brilliant.

BILLY

C'mon. Brilliant? A coincidence of  
nature at best.

SAM

Don't underestimate the intelligence of a creature you know nothing about. Trees are very evolved. Can you hand me that?

She points to a vial in her backpack.

BILLY

This?

She nods.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Evolved. Like whales and apes evolved?

She nods again.

SAM

They use the trapped gasses in the soil for the good of the whole community. They nurture their young and sick by transferring carbon, water and nutrients through the soil to where it's needed most. So yeah, I'd say that's evolved. I'd even say, it's brilliant.

She finishes her tests and packs up her gear.

SAM (CONT'D)

We've made the mistake of thinking of a tree as a single organism. But they're all connected. They're communal. They're part of something bigger.

BILLY

You sound like one of those hippie-dippie tree huggers.

SAM

Those amateurs?

(beat)

I'll let you in on a secret.

She leans in close, almost intimately.

SAM (CONT'D)

Look around you. It's all alive. We're surrounded by one giant collective organism.

Sam smiles, picks up her gun, and leaves. Billy looks around, skeptical, then follows her up the trail.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND FOREST RIDGE - DAY

The sun peeks through the marine layer. Sam and Billy walk along a path overlooking a steep bluff.

BILLY

Can I have my gun back?

SAM

No. It's illegal to carry an unregistered firearm on Forest Service land.

BILLY

You know it's mine. Isn't that the same as registering it?

SAM

You gonna tell me your name?

BILLY

If I tell you my name can I have my gun back?

Sam shoots him a stern look. Billy shrugs.

BILLY (CONT'D)

You can't blame me for trying- Hey, who was the guy in the photo on your computer? Is he your boyfriend or husband?

SAM

Was something like that.

There's a break in the fog revealing the horizon. Billy stops and gasps at the distant ABANDONED CHICAGO SKYLINE.

BILLY

We're this close to Chicago?

SAM

Yes, it's been kind of a buffer for us. At least it used to be. The constant fog is perfect for the trees and all the sunken debris and toxic waste in Lake Michigan makes it too dangerous for boats. C'mon.

She marches into the forest underbrush. Billy's mesmerized by the city skyline until it's hidden again by the fog.

He scrambles to catch up to Sam.

I/E. GREENHOUSE NURSERY - DAY

They hike past a large greenhouse nestled in a clearing.

BILLY  
What's that?

SAM  
That? That's my nursery.

She stops and ushers Billy inside. There are rows and rows of baby tree saplings.

SAM (CONT'D)  
These are my babies.

She hands Billy a potted tree. It has a barcode similar to those in the forest.

SAM (CONT'D)  
I've been cross breeding species to come up with hybrids that grow fast and can absorb higher levels of carbon.

BILLY  
I didn't take you for a mad scientist, Doctor Frankenstein, type.

SAM  
That's Frankenstein.

BILLY  
What?

She takes the sapling and gently places it back with the others.

SAM  
Never mind. It's less Frankenstein more Mendel. C'mon. This way.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

They rest in an older part of the forest, surrounded by dense rows of tall, straight pines gently swaying in the breeze.

BILLY  
It's so peaceful here.

SAM  
You're in a sanctuary. This is holy ground. You're a guest in their world now.

BILLY  
Their world?

She smiles and nods.

SAM  
Do you feel it?

BILLY  
Feel what?

SAM  
The calm.

Billy doesn't follow.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Breathe deep. Go ahead.

Billy takes a deep breath.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Good. Keep breathing and focus on the sougning.

BILLY  
The 'sougning'?

SAM  
Yeah, listen.

She pauses to listen to the wind SOUGHING.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Hear it? The wind through the pine boughs.

BILLY  
Yeah. I never noticed it before.

SAM  
That's 'sougning'. It's an old medieval word.

She pauses to listen again.

SAM (CONT'D)

Its been said whoever knows how to speak to the trees - and how to listen to them - can learn ancient wisdom and truth.

Billy takes another deep breath.

SAM (CONT'D)

Feel any different?

Billy smiles.

BILLY

Yeah. It smells so clean, so calming. It's refreshing-

SAM

Isn't that cool? It's part of the forest's defenses. The pines release an aerosol particulate from their needles that trigger dopamine levels to rise in mammals.

She breathes deep.

SAM (CONT'D)

The trees are getting you high.

BILLY

No shit. Why?

SAM

Blissed out animals tend not to chop down trees. C'mon, I want to show you more.

They continue, walking deeper into the forest.

BILLY

You talk about the trees as if they're consciously working together.

SAM

They are. We're in the midst of a group of highly complex social creatures that work together, routinely communicate with each other, and take deliberate actions to protect themselves and their neighbors.

BILLY

You just described people.

SAM

Did I?

BILLY

C'mon. This is more tree hugger bullshit.

SAM

No bullshit. Just science.

BILLY

You mean to tell me these trees talk to each other? That this "soughing" is a language?

SAM

Yes, they talk to each other. But not through their branches. It's all underground. Like the neural network in our brain, they have a highly evolved mitochondria network connecting them. They share food and water with each other, even sharing with other species. They also warn each other of danger.

BILLY

Why would they do that?

SAM

Same as humans. They're stronger when they work together. The trees figured out long ago that by working together they can change the world. Literally. By itself, a tree is just another tree at the mercy of the wind and weather and all the shit this planet throws its way. But working together, as a community-- by creating a forest-- trees create their own ecosystem that moderates heat and cold and water storage and humidity-

BILLY

And getting us high-



SAM

And getting us high. They figured out way before we did how to control and change the environment to their advantage. They all work together, regardless of their differences. They know they're stronger within a bigger, more diverse community.

She stops and turns to Billy.

SAM (CONT'D)

And that is something humans have not seemed to learn yet.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - DAY

An early 21st century MARINE AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT VEHICLE (AAV) cuts through the strong chop of the lake. Rusted and pitted with blast burns, it's held together with sheet metal.

Its US military insignia is spray-painted over with the word "DOMINION" and JACKSO'S SKULL AND CROSSBONES logo.

WRECKS OF BUILDINGS poke through the lake swell as Jackso barks orders below from the open hatch.

JACKSO

Hard to port, now!

The AAV makes a turn, but is almost swamped as it's tossed by a fierce wave.

STEEL GIRDERS stab out of the water.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

Son of a bitch! Watch the bow, two o'clock!

The AAV avoids the first two girders, but the third steel beam digs into the hull, SHRIEKING METAL ON METAL.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

Jesus H.--

Jackso leans out over the side of the hull and sees a HOLE gashed above the waterline.

He reaches over, grabs the AAV PILOT by the lapels and tosses him overboard.

Inside, a DOZEN TIMBER PIRATES scramble to cover the hole.

HELMET JOE

Hey, Captain, we're taking on water-

Jackso reaches in and grabs the HELMET off his bald head--

JACKSO

Take the helm. Now!

-- and climbs out over the side of the AAV. Helmet Joe grabs the wheel.

A CHURCH STEEPLE appears in front of them.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

Hard to starboard!

A huge swell slams the AAV, nearly tossing Jackso overboard.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

Son of a--

He jams the helmet in the hole, and uses his gun to hammer it in tight as he's slammed by more waves.

The make-shift patch secure, he climbs toward the top hatch.

But another wave hits him and Jackso loses his footing.

He grabs for a side rail, pulling himself up by one hand.

He rides another wave clinging to the side then climbs back into the top hatch. Just another day at the office.

Muir Island appears on the misty horizon- and Jackso grins.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

Aye, there be whales! Full steam ahead!

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - DAY

Sam and Billy hike deep inside the forest.

BILLY

What kind of tree is that?

SAM

Magnolia.

She picks a large fruit off another tree.

SAM (CONT'D)

And this is a Paw Paw tree. *Asimina triloba*. Or, as I like to call them, a Wisconsin banana tree.

She takes a bite of the fruit and passes it to Billy.

SAM (CONT'D)

As southern species migrate north, we're seeing incredible growth rates that are significantly higher than we predicted, and their carbon absorption rates - their ability to scrub carbon from the atmosphere - is years ahead of what we thought possible. We're scrubbing eight tons of carbon an acre. An acre! Sorry, I'm in total tree nerd mode.

BILLY

No worries. I like it. Your passion, I mean. That's rare, these days.

Sam blushes.

SAM

Hey, you want to see something cool?

BILLY

Do I have a choice?

SAM

No. C'mon.

She hikes deeper into the forest. The neat rows of planted trees giving way to older forest.

SAM (CONT'D)

I'm going to show you something so wonderful, so rare, so amazing, it'll knock your socks off.

BILLY

Maybe these handcuffs, too?

EXT. OLD GROWTH HEMLOCK GROVE - DAY

They emerge in a clearing. On the far side is a massive grove of OLD GROWTH HEMLOCK TREES.

BILLY  
A bunch of giant old pine trees?

SAM  
Not just any old pine trees. *Old growth Hemlock.*

BILLY  
Yeah, so?

SAM  
Those trees are over five hundred years old.

BILLY  
Thus, the 'old growth'?

SAM  
This big one here- I call her Old Dutch. After my great aunt.  
(she whispers)  
I can't be completely sure, but I reckon she's almost six hundred years old.

BILLY  
(whispers back)  
Why are we whispering?

SAM  
Because no grand dame ever wants to hear her age bandied about.

BILLY  
Ahhh, you are a tree nerd.

She smiles and curtsies.

SAM  
Thank you.

Billy wanders into the field to get a better look at the massive trees.

SAM (CONT'D)  
This is the very last Hemlock grove left in North America.

He's about to step into a patch of YELLOW WILD FLOWERS.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Be careful. Stay clear of that- it's Wild Parsnip.  
(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

This strain is especially toxic and will burn your skin clean off.

She leans against a massive 10 foot wide trunk.

SAM (CONT'D)

Isn't it wonderful?!

BILLY

A bunch of old pine trees. Sure.

SAM

You don't get it. It's *Tsuga canadensis*. Hemlock! It was supposedly wiped out a generation ago. This tree is the most efficient carbon scrubber on the planet.

BILLY

Sounds cool.

SAM

This supposedly extinct tree is the key to our survival. These old growth trees remove carbon from the atmosphere by the ton! This grove alone holds a reserve of over a quarter million tons of carbon! If we can unlock its secrets, learn how it works--

BILLY

We could go back to having white Christmases again?

SAM

Yes, but that's not-- I don't think you understand the importance of--

BILLY

Will Hemlock bring back my brother?

SAM

No, but--

Billy turns and starts walking back into the woods.

BILLY

This doesn't really help me then.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND SHORE - DAY

The AAV smashes through surf, beaching next to the barge and last night's battle.

The stern door opens and the DOZEN HEAVILY ARMED TIMBER PIRATES secure the beach.

Jackso surveys the damage as he strides up to the tree stump Sam sat on earlier. He HUMS John Prine's *"That's The Way The World Goes Round."*

He uses his foot to turn over the body next to it, shakes his head, and takes the dead man's spare ammo clip.

JACKSO

(sings)

*You're up one day, the next you're  
down. That's the way that the world  
goes 'round...*

Helmet Joe sidles up to Jackso.

HELMET JOE

Looks like they got ambushed good,  
real good, Captain.

JACKSO

You think? How 'bout you use your  
head for something more than a hat  
rack. Get this cut timber into the  
barge and get me the best jack crew  
in Chicago out here to finish  
cutting.

HELMET JOE

But sir-

JACKSO

(slightly irritated)

What is it?

The pirate taps the dead body at their feet.

HELMET JOE

This was the best jack crew.

JACKSO

(more irritated)

They don't look so good now, do  
they?

He slaps the underling upside his head.

HELMET JOE

No, sir.

JACKSO

Then get me one that breathes.

He marches toward his men.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

We're going to find the Rangers that did this and we're going to kill each and every one of them. As of today, this island is ours.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - DAY

Billy watches Sam pack up her gear. Lucky sniffs something on the wind and bolts to attention.

SAM

What is it Lucky?

BILLY

What's up with him?

Sam becomes all business. She nods and Lucky runs off into the woods.

SAM

I don't know. But I've learned to trust his instincts. His name ain't Lucky for nothing. We should get back to base.

She quickly slides on her backpack, motions to Billy to follow and quietly steals into the woods.

They make their way back, avoiding the path and keeping in the brush.

Billy slips and takes a header into some mud. He struggles to get up with limited use of his hands.

BILLY

How about we take the path? This ain't working for me.

Sam motions him quiet.

BILLY (CONT'D)

(under his breath)

You try doing this in handcuffs.

They get to the edge of the previous night's battle.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
How soon til we're back at the  
cabin-

SAM  
Shhh. Something's not right.

He nervously looks around. She motions toward the just-cut clearing.

BILLY  
(whispers)  
I don't see anything--

SAM  
Exactly.

He sees last night's carnage for the first time.

BILLY  
(whispers)  
--but bodies.

SAM  
No. All the cut timber. From last  
night. It's gone. Stay here, I'm  
going to check the barge, I'll--

The barrel of an ASSAULT RIFLE presses against her head.

She drops her rifle and slowly lifts her hands up. She turns to see FOUR HEAVILY ARMED TIMBER PIRATES, one with a gun pressed to Billy's head, too.

EXT. SAM'S CABIN - TWILIGHT

The cabin and barn have been ransacked. Jackso and his men sit around an open fire pit roasting one of Sam's GOATS.

The patrol escorts Sam and Billy up to the fire.

IT STARTS RAINING again.

JACKSO  
My my, what do we have here?

GRIM EYE JOE  
Found 'em by the clear cut site.

Sam surveys the scene, noting how outnumbered they are.



She nods toward the roasting goat.

SAM

They're for milking, not eating.

Jackso shrugs.

JACKSO

They're delicious. Right boys?

SAM

You're trespassing on federal forestry land. You've vandalized, illegally harvested - and are now eating- federal property. Oh yeah, and you're responsible for the murder of United States forestry rangers.

Jackso picks meat off a bone with his teeth, the grease running down his hand.

SAM (CONT'D)

You're in quite a bit of trouble, mister.

Jackso licks the grease off his hand and laughs. He ignores her and turns to Billy, pointing to the handcuffs.

JACKSO

What's your story? You don't look like Ranger material.

BILLY

I'm not. I'm just in the wrong place at the wrong time. I'm her prisoner. For trespassing. At least, I was her prisoner.

He holds up his cuffed hands for effect.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Can you help a guy out?

Sam rolls her eyes.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I don't have a dog in this fight. Really.

Jackso eyes him, then nods to the pirate guarding him. The guard pushes him forward, away from Sam.

JACKSO  
(to Sam)  
The keys?

BILLY  
Ah, thank you, so much!

She shrugs.

SAM  
I have no idea.

JACKSO  
No worries.

He nods to the guard, and motions to the chopping block in front of the porch.

BILLY  
Wait, what?

Helmet Joe grabs the axe from the wood block and grins at Billy.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
Hey guys, can we at least look at all our options here. Anyone good at picking a lock?

The guard shoves Billy to his knees and pins his cuffed hands square on the block.

Helmet Joe places the axe on the chain links between his two wrists, getting his aim right.

His greasy hands slide on the handle and Helmet Joe makes a half hearted effort to lick his fingers clean.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
Guys, no. It's okay. No need to do this--

Helmet Joe heaves the axe up and over his head.

JACKSO  
Stop.

Helmet Joe stops mid-swing.

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
(to Sam)  
How many more Rangers are here on the island?

Sam glares at Jackso.

SAM

Enough.

Billy fearfully begs Sam.

BILLY

Please. Don't-

JACKSO

How many?

SAM

Enough to haul all your sorry asses  
off the island in body bags.

Jackso sighs, not taking his eyes off Sam.

JACKSO

Take the cuffs off at the wrist.  
Not the chain link.

Billy tries to pull away, but the guard keeps his forearms  
pinned to the block.

BILLY

No, please, no!!

Helmet Joe gingerly places the axe blade on Billy's wrist.

JACKSO

(to Sam)

How many Rangers are on the island?

Billy pleads to Sam with his eyes. Sam's expression is  
impenetrable.

BILLY

No, Oh God, no!!

Helmet Joe hoists the axe up high, starting his swing.

SAM

Stop. He doesn't deserve that.

Jackso waves Helmet Joe off.

SAM (CONT'D)

How do you sleep at night? You come  
here and kill, threaten and  
destroy. For what?

JACKSO

Have you been to a refugee camp? I give people jobs. I sell them heating fuel. I give them a reason to get up in the morning. They need me. I give them hope.

SAM

Hope, my ass. You sell desperate people illegal timber at black market rates they can't afford. For what? A quick buck? You kill in seconds what takes centuries to grow.

JACKSO

And you killed my men. I take what we need to survive. I came to take the trees.

SAM

Those trees aren't yours for the taking. Rangers died protecting this forest so our children get a better chance of survival. They're our last defense against climate change.

JACKSO

Children? Our children?

Jackso takes the axe out of Helmet Joe's hands.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

What do you know about my children?

He swings the axe like a baseball bat, getting closer and closer to Sam's head.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

Let me tell you about *my* children. I had two daughters. Two beautiful, smart, loving daughters. The first winter after The Flood, they went out to collect firewood- sticks, branches, old books, anything we could burn to keep warm. They never came back. I found them the next morning, frozen to death, less than a mile from home.

SAM

That's terrible. I'm sorry.

JACKSO

You talk of global warming? My children *froze* to death because we couldn't heat our home. Do you know what it's like to lose everything you ever cared about?

He grabs her hair pulling her close to him.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

To fuck with your 'global warming'. And to fuck with your saving 'my children'. My '*profit*' is helping people survive today, here and now.

He holds the axe to her neck and gets in her face.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

You're going to tell me how many more Rangers are out there so my men can neutralize them. Then, we're going to cut down every last goddamn tree on this island.

SAM

Et Praesidia Ad Silvam.

He presses the axe against her throat.

JACKSO

What did you say?

SAM

Suck my dick, Jack.

He drops the axe to his side, but pulls out a KA-BAR knife.

JACKSO

Then we won't be needing your friend anymore.

He hurls the knife straight at Billy's head.

Billy defensively throws his hands up--

--and the blade stops an inch from his face--

--caught in the chain link of the handcuffs.

Before anyone can react, Billy swings the handcuffs around the neck of his guard, stabbing him in the throat with the wedged knife.

Sam turns and knees her guard in the groin. As he doubles over in pain, Sam flips behind him just as Jackso throws the axe at her.

It embeds in the guard's chest and he crumples to the ground.

Lucky springs out of the brush attacking a pirate, biting his forearm until he drops his assault rifle.

The Pirate stabs at the dog with his KNIFE, just missing his head and embedding in a tree trunk. Lucky ferociously lunges again, BITING OFF TWO OF THE PIRATE'S FINGERS.

Sam grabs the guard's assault rifle and takes out TWO MORE PIRATES as she shouts to Lucky.

SAM

Lucky. Off!

Jackso grabs a log from the fire and lunges at Billy.

Sam's gun jams.

She cold cocks Jackso with it and grabs Billy.

They run into the darkening forest as fast as they can.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - NIGHT

IT'S RAINING. Sam, Billy and Lucky race through the woods, Sam guiding them deep into the dense, wet forest.

EXT. CAVE - NIGHT

IT'S RAINING. Sam scrambles up a mossy out cropping of rocks and slips into a dark crevice.

Lucky stands atop the rocks and sniffs the air while Billy catches his breath.

Sam pops out of the fissure and ushers them both to follow.

SAM

C'mon. In here.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

Sam pulls a glow stick out of her backpack.

SAM

It's pretty tight, but it's dry and hard to find. This should buy us time.

BILLY

Buy us time for what? So we can get killed tomorrow instead of today?

SAM

So we can come up with a plan to protect the forest from these maniacs.

BILLY

Why? Just let them cut down a few trees-

SAM

Yeah, no. Not an option.

He's struck a nerve.

BILLY

I say, give him what he wants and he'll go away.

(pause)

How can you sit here and let people in the refugee camps freeze to death?

SAM

I said no. Not on my watch.

BILLY

Listen, I didn't sign up for stumpy duty. I'm not cut out for this sort of thing.

SAM

You handled yourself fine with that knife.

BILLY

That wasn't me. It was fear. Pure unadulterated fear. I'm scared shitless.

SAM

Well, you channeled it well. I'm impressed.

Billy leans back. The complement calms him. Calms her.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Let's see the knife.

He flips his wrists around and the wedged knife swings up. He awkwardly tries to pull it out with his chained hand.

SAM (CONT'D)  
May I?

He nods. Sam coaxes it out of the chain.

BILLY  
Thank God.

She takes his hands and lays them flat on her lap and cajoles the handcuffs lock with the tip of the knife.

SAM  
Let's say you and that crack-brained pirate are right. Then what? What happens next year? When these trees are gone?

BILLY  
What do you tell all the people that won't make it to see next year?

SAM  
My mission is to protect the only species with a proven track record of terra-forming this planet's atmosphere for human survival.

She throws down the knife.

BILLY  
Billy.

SAM  
What?

BILLY  
Billy. My name is Billy.

Sam smiles.

SAM  
Billy, eh? It's nice to formally meet you. All this excitement must have jarred your memory.



BILLY

No. I mean, yes, but no. I may have trust issues.

SAM

Ahhh, I see. What was it- the homemade breakfast or the lecture on old growth carbon retention?

Billy laughs despite himself.

BILLY

Both. And the fact you saved my life back there. Thanks.

SAM

You're welcome, Billy. And that's twice now, I saved your life. For the record. But, you're still under arrest.

He nods and watches her take the knife and work the lock.

SAM (CONT'D)

Why are you nervous about sharing your name?

BILLY

I don't know who to trust any more.

He watches her intently.

BILLY (CONT'D)

There was more. On the boat.

SAM

You don't have to tell me if you don't want to.

BILLY

My brother was on the boat.

She stops picking the lock.

BILLY (CONT'D)

So was that pirate - I recognized his voice.

SAM

What happened?

BILLY

My brother didn't make it off. He died without me. Alone. No one should die alone.

She caresses his hand. Then starts picking the lock with a new sense of urgency.

SAM

You can't blame yourself for things out of your control. Don't punish yourself for surviving.

Billy watches her work, eager to change the subject.

BILLY

Your hands are pretty soft for a stumpy soldier.

SAM

It's important to moisturize every night.

BILLY

Of course.

SAM

I saw this in an old movie once. I think I have the lock if I-

The knife slips, slicing Billy's forearm.

BILLY

Shit!

He pulls his hands away.

SAM

Sorry!

She rips her sleeve off, goes to the cave entrance to wet it down and hurries back to dab at the blood.

BILLY

Thanks for nothing. I run through the forest in a storm chased by crazed timber pirates with a knife wedged between my wrists and not a scratch. Twenty seconds in your soft, moisturized hands and I'm bleeding out like a pig.

She cleans the cut with the torn sleeve, wet with rainwater.

SAM

I said I'm sorry. It slipped.

Finished, she slaps the knife in his hand.

SAM (CONT'D)

Here. Hold on to this and stay put.  
I'll be right back.

She disappears out of the cave, into the darkness.

BILLY

Hey, wait. Where you going? The  
cuffs. I didn't mean--

She's gone. He sighs.

He looks over at Lucky. Lucky bares his teeth, letting out a  
low GROWL.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I heard her. I'm staying put.

A moment later Sam reappears with an armful of large sticks  
and broken branches. She drops them at Billy's side.

SAM

Like I said, we need a plan. We'll  
get the cuffs later. Let's put the  
knife to good work and start  
sharpening the ends into sharp  
spears.

BILLY

Are you serious? This is your plan?  
Homemade spears against an army of  
heavily armed pirates?

Sam leans in close, calmly picks up a branch, and hands it to  
Billy.

SAM

That was all I could carry. I'm  
going back for more. If you want to  
stay alive to see tomorrow night,  
start sharpening now.

She doesn't wait for a response. She turns and disappears  
into the darkness.

EXT. SAM'S CABIN - NIGHT

IT'S RAINING. Jackso sits on the top step of the porch as a pirate loads Sam's chopped firewood into a cart. Through the open door behind him, we see the cabin's been ransacked.

HELMET JOE

Sir.

JACKSO

What is it?

HELMET JOE

Word from the replacement jacks -  
They got through the shallows and  
are landing now. They're eager to  
start.

JACKSO

No. Get 'em fed and have 'em rest  
up 'till dawn. I don't want to lose  
any more jacks while this stumpy  
Ranger is loose.

He pulls out an old handheld device and shows Helmet Joe a map of the island.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

At sunrise, take two men and escort  
the jacks here.

He points to a remote inland part of the island map.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

The mother lode. Those trees are  
huge- we'll make a fortune.

Jackso turns to the men gathered around the fire.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

Hear that, men? The jacks start at  
first light. I want that stumpy  
dead by the time the first tree  
hits the ground.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

IT'S STILL RAINING OUTSIDE. A pile of sharpened SPEARS sits at Billy and Sam's feet.

Sam braids pieces of vine together into a makeshift ROPE as Billy whittles a new spear.

BILLY

So, what's the story with the shoes? On your arm.

SAM

They're baby shoes.

BILLY

I kind of figured that. It's not something I'd expect to see inked on the arm of a fearless killing machine.

Sam attempts to deflect the question.

SAM

The short story?

(she pauses a beat)

"Baby shoes. For sale. Never worn."

BILLY

What?

SAM

It's Hemingway. He supposedly won a bet writing a short story with only six words.

BILLY

Oh. So what's the long story?

SAM

The long story? "Baby shoes. For sale. Never worn." That's the long story.

BILLY

Sorry. I didn't mean to bring up any bad memories.

She manages a weak smile.

SAM

Thanks. It's okay. It's- it is what it is. You know?

Billy nods. He goes back to work on the spear.

SAM (CONT'D)

Aspen. Her name was Aspen, would have been, Aspen if she was born. I was in my third trimester, and very pregnant, when I lost her.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)  
Miscarriage. The same day I lost my  
husband.

BILLY  
The flood?

She nods.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry to hear that.

Sam smiles, lost in her memories.

SAM  
Aspens are so beautiful. And  
resilient. They can grow pretty  
much anywhere. Did you know they're  
the only trees that can  
photosynthesis through their bark?

BILLY  
No. I didn't know that.

SAM  
It's what makes them so strong. So  
unique.

She pulls the knot in her vine rope hard.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Too bad they can't grow under  
twenty feet of water.

Billy puts his hand on hers and gently squeezes it. She's  
grateful for the silent gesture.

BILLY  
So what are the odds we get out of  
this alive?

SAM  
The odds? We're out manned four to  
one. Only have one clip of bullets  
left. Two knives. We've had no  
sleep, got no food or water. And,  
there's no back up cavalry coming  
for another two months.

Billy holds up his handcuffed wrists.

BILLY  
Don't forget these.

SAM

Right. Correction. We're out-gunned and my wing-man can't even wipe his own ass. I think the odds are still in our favor.

BILLY

Really?

Sam smiles.

SAM

Did you forget, a forest is communal. We have an island of allies. We may be out manned, but we're not out numbered. We're going to use the forest's natural defenses to protect us.

She picks up one of Billy's spears.

SAM (CONT'D)

Our first line of defense - as any gardener will tell you - a ring of thorns. C'mon. The sun will be up soon. We have a lot of work to do.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - NIGHT

RAIN and MIST continue to pelt the pre-dawn island.

Jackso and his men fan out through the forest in twos and threes; slowly, methodically, quietly.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS GLEN - NIGHT

DRIZZLE and MIST continues. Sam kneels down at the glen's edge and surveys the damp blanket of lush green undergrowth.

SAM

This is perfect.

She puts on a pair of gloves.

BILLY

What is?

He starts to step into the glen.

SAM

No, don't.

BILLY

Why?

SAM

It's a trichome. It's a field of Nettle. Do not step in it.

BILLY

Why? It looks like ivy.

SAM

Yup. Ivy with a vicious attitude. It's our second line of defense.

She carefully picks a nettle at the stem and holds it up close for Billy to see.

SAM (CONT'D)

If you didn't like getting cut by that knife, you definitely won't like this baby. It's covered in thousands of tiny razor blades.

BILLY

A death by a thousand paper cuts?

She rips a piece of her shirt sleeve and sticks it onto a thorny branch where it can be easily seen.

SAM

Yeah, something like that.

She carefully moves to the edge of the glen, searching the ground near trees.

SAM (CONT'D)

Ah, here we go. Our third line of defense.

BILLY

Those? They look like house plants my grandmother had in her window.

She carefully picks the wide leaves and fills her vest pockets.

SAM

It probably is. It's Dumb Cane. *Dieffenbachia Seguine*. It's an idioblast. They're the land mines of the flora world. They're a ticking time bomb of calcium oxalate crystals full of poisonous venom just waiting to detonate.



BILLY  
(under his breath)  
Who knew grandma was such a bad  
ass.

After stuffing her pockets with the leaves, she stands and goes back to the edge of the Nettle.

SAM  
Hopefully, it won't come to this.  
It's for close range, hand to hand  
combat.

She nods to his cuffed hands.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Probably not your strong suit.

BILLY  
Exploding house plants of venom? By  
all means, be my guest.

I/E. GREENHOUSE NURSERY - NIGHT

IT'S RAINING. Jackso and his men stumble upon the Greenhouse. Jackso signals his men to circle around it, cautious of an ambush.

Once clear, he and his men enter. They methodically search the inside for Sam.

HELMET JOE  
Clear. All clear, sir. What now?

Jackso picks up a sapling.

JACKSO  
There's nothing of value here. Burn  
it. Burn it to the ground.

Lucky watches the intruders from a safe distance as the greenhouse goes up in flames.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS GLEN - NIGHT

MISTY RAIN Continues. Billy pulls large rocks out of the soft ground as Sam scoops out hands full of soil, making a shallow trench.

Lucky bounds out of the shadows toward Sam and Billy. He's agitated.

SAM

What is it, little man?

The ORANGE GLOW of the fire lights up the distant horizon behind him.

SAM (CONT'D)

Oh no. No. No. No. No-

She wipes her hands on her pant legs and grabs her computer roll from her backpack.

SAM (CONT'D)

We don't have much time. Here,  
Lucky...

She unrolls the computer and straps it tight around Lucky's back like a saddle blanket, keyboard facing outward.

BILLY

What're you doing?

SAM

Our gadget play.  
(under her breath)  
Let's hope it ain't a Hail Mary.

The computer roll secure, Sam hits a few buttons, grabs the assault rifle, stands up and starts running in place, baring gritted teeth.

SAM (CONT'D)

Do I look fierce?

BILLY

Totally bad ass. Um, and a little  
nuts, too.

A thin blue light pulses from the computer, scanning her.

SAM

Good. Nuts is good, too.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - SUNRISE

A dank MARINE LAYER replaces the rain.

Jackso spots a torn piece of cloth in a branch and motions to the others.

He points down to broken branches and footprints in the wet soil and uses hand signals to re-direct his men up the hill toward the cave.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS GLEN - SUNRISE

Sam and Billy are spreading leaves and branches over ground along the Nettle patch.

Lucky, all business, bounds out of the nearby underbrush, and takes position next to Sam.

SAM  
They're close by. You ready for this?

BILLY  
No, but do I have a choice?

SAM  
Not really. Okay. Go. Get in position.

Billy nods and starts to leave.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Billy.

He turns. Sam throws him a wooden spear.

SAM (CONT'D)  
You'll be okay. We've got this.  
You've got this.

Billy nods again and hurries off into the underbrush.

Sam looks down to Lucky.

SAM (CONT'D)  
C'mon. It's time to take our island back.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS NEAR CAVE - MORNING

Jackso and his men fan out through the forest, slowly making their way up the misty hill towards the cave entrance.

Lucky appears on top of an outcropping of rock, sniffing the wind.

The nearest pirate, SCAR FACE JOE, sees him, takes aim, but the dog disappears back into the mist before he can shoot.

Eyeing his prey, the pirate changes direction and follows.

He sees Lucky through the brush and charges forward.

He jumps over a fallen tree--

-- landing in a trench  
camouflaged with leafy branches, IMPALING both legs with  
wooden spears jutting upward.

He lets out a BLOOD CURDLING SCREAM.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS NEAR CAVE - MORNING

Jackso hears the SCREAM, motions to the THREE closet pirates.

JACKSO  
C'mon, this way!

They run through thick forest underbrush toward their injured  
man. The agonizing CRIES get louder.

SCAR FACE JOE (O.S.)  
Oh God, help me!! Aawwgh!

As Jackso bulldozes toward the screaming, he motions his men  
to take up flanking positions.

Two pirates scramble downhill through a small clearing.

SCAR FACE JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Awhhhgh, Oh God, please help!!

They scramble over a thick fallen tree, the first one  
grabbing a branch for leverage - he doesn't see the vine  
attached to it--

-The branch snaps, the vine drops a counter-weighted SPEAR-  
-IMPALING the second pirate through his chest.

The first pirate turns, steps back in horror, and trips into  
a shallow pit, IMPALED by a dozen spears.

The limp second pirate falls forward, but doesn't hit the  
ground. He's left dangling by the spear and vine trap.

Meanwhile, the third pirate spreads out in a wide flanking  
position in thick underbrush.

SCAR FACE JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Aghhh! Help me!!

Sam pops up in front of him. He fires a round, but she's lost  
in the underbrush before he can fire again.

He hurries into the thick undergrowth after her.

A BRANCH SNAPS to his side. He pivots, sees Sam again, and fires-

- Sam disappears in the thick, the pirate takes the bait, dashing after her.

SCAR FACE JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Oh God, Oh God, Aghhh!

In the clearing in front of him, he sees Sam again. He fires. Misses.

Something's off. She's running, but not moving.

Lucky is stuck in the underbrush, a branch has snagged him by the computer roll. Sam's HOLOGRAPHIC image projects into the clearing.

The pirate cautiously approaches. He steps between Lucky and the projection. Realizing he's been duped, he follows the light stream toward the trapped dog.

Just as he shoots, Lucky breaks free and runs off. The holograph glitches, dying as bullets shred the computer.

The pirate pokes at the tattered computer roll with his assault rifle, hears another SNAP, turns--

-- To see the real Sam throw a spear through his chest.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS NEAR CAVE - MORNING

Jackso races blindly through fog toward the SCREAMS.

SCAR FACE JOE (O.S.)  
Someone help me!! Awgh!

Jackso runs through underbrush as the WAILING gets louder.

SCAR FACE JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Aaawww, God! Please help me!!

The mist clears.

Lucky stands defiantly, fiercely baring his teeth, 40 yards straight ahead of Jackso.

Jackso takes aim and fires.

Lucky lunges into the underbrush, REVEALING SCAR FACE JOE DIRECTLY BEHIND HIM.

## SCAR FACE JOE (CONT'D)

Hel--

Jackso's bullets smash into the man's forehead.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - MORNING

Billy stands petrified in the middle of the forest listening to the battle rage around him.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS NEAR CAVE - MORNING

On heightened alert, a pirate moves cautiously through the woods.

He passes a tree, not seeing Sam on a branch above him.

Spear in hand, she waits until he's directly below and jumps--

He turns and she misses, but knocks his gun out his hands.

He grabs the end of her spear and they fight hand to hand - *each holding one end of the weapon* - trying to gain control of it.

Sam uses the spear as leverage, and parkours up the side of a tree doing a back flip over him.

The twist loosens the pirate's grip and she slams the spear into his foot.

He WHELPS in pain.

She grabs a fist full of DUMB CANE from her pocket and shoves it in his mouth.

She pushes the blunt end of the spear hard against his jaw, clamping his mouth shut and pushing back him against a tree.

The plant idioblasts burst inside his mouth causing PARALYSIS throughout his face and throat.

He drops his grip on the weapon--

-- clawing desperately at Sam's hands to open his mouth.

She pulls the spear away--

-- swings it around and--

-- drives the tip up through his jaw into his skull.

Before his body drops to the ground, the ROAR OF CHAIN SAWS ricochets through the forest.

Sam freezes, zeroing in on the source of the sawing.

SAM  
No. The hemlock--

She grabs the pirate's assault rifle and runs toward the old growth forest.

A pirate appears in front of her. She shoots him in the head without missing a stride in her step.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS NEAR CAVE - MORNING

Billy hears the ROAR of the CHAIN SAWS. He turns away from the sound-

- and turns right into the grinning face of Jackso Rumpf.

JACKSO  
And that's the way the world goes round. I'll be taking that.

He motions for Billy's spear, but Billy resists.

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
What? You planning on running me through with that? You don't strike me as a Lord Of The Flies type guy.

Jackso grabs the spear away.

BILLY  
Please, I didn't--

He shoves his gun in Billy's gut and pushes him forward.

JACKSO  
Yeah, yeah, nobody ever does. C'mon move it, Piggy.

EXT. OLD GROWTH HEMLOCK GROVE - DAY

Helmet Joe kicks back and relaxes against the massive base of a Hemlock as TWO ARMED PIRATES watch his CREW OF LUMBERJACKS cut down an ancient tree.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS GLEN - DAY

Jackso scans the forest for Sam as he marches Billy toward the Old Growth Hemlock and the roaring CHAIN SAWS.

BILLY  
You killed my brother.

JACKSO  
I've killed lots of people. He probably deserved it.

BILLY  
He was ten.

Billy stops.

JACKSO  
C'mon. Keep moving.

BILLY  
This way is not so good. I recommend going around the glen. Through here.

Jackso thinks about it for a second.

JACKSO  
Nice try, Piggy. We go forward. Move it.

Jackso shoves Billy forward. Billy takes cautious steps forward, feet from the glen, and stops.

BILLY  
I really recommend going around the glen.

Jackso sees the ripped shirt sleeve stuck to the branch.

JACKSO  
She's really got a spell on you, doesn't she, little Piggy. Did you guys set a trap over there for me? Is that her plan. You trying to lure me into--

Jackso steps onto the leaves and branches covering the rocky trench-holes they dug last night.

He steps down hard, twisting his ankle as his foot lands awkwardly in the small hole.

Billy turns and shoves him as hard as he can into the glen.



Jackso tumbles into the nettles, landing on hands and knees.

Hundreds of tiny razors slice the open skin of his hands, arms and chest.

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
(in pain)  
AHHHH! What the fuck!!

Billy kicks him hard in the ass and Jackso face plants into more nettles.

He BELLOWS in pain.

Momentarily blinded by pain, Jackso randomly fires his gun, Billy ducks behind a tree for cover.

The screaming stops. Billy doesn't move.

Billy waits. Doesn't hear anything.

He turns to look back and turns right into Jackso's gun barrel, pointed directly in his face.

BILLY  
I told you not to go that way.

JACKSO  
Fuck you.

He SHOOTS Billy in the foot.

Billy YOWLS.

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
Now, we're even. We both hike through this goddamn forest in pain. Try anything like that again and I shoot daylight clear through your skull. Now get moving.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - DAY

Jackso marches Billy through the woods, if you can call it that. Billy's limp worsens and Jackso is pre-occupied scratching the thousands of micro-cuts all over his body.

BILLY  
You shouldn't scratch like that. It only makes it worse.

JACKSO  
What are you, my fucking mother?  
Shut it and walk.

They hobble forward in silence for a bit. Jackso scratches his sleeved arm.

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
Fuck. What was that shit? It  
stabbed right through my clothes.

BILLY  
You got yourself into some nasty  
shit, my friend. Mother Nature's a  
bitch. I'm telling you, scratching  
will only make it worse.

Jackso tries to stop scratching, but can't.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
(under his breath)  
Suit yourself.

They continue toward the Old Growth forest.

JACKSO  
What is it? Poison Ivy?

BILLY  
No. Worse. You got bit by the  
forest. That shit is deadly.  
Sharper than razor blades. And you  
got yourself impaled by thousands  
of 'em. Every time you scratch, you  
push the razors deeper into your  
skin.

JACKSO  
Impaled? Hardly.

BILLY  
I'm telling you. The forest doesn't  
like you here.

Jackso holds up Billy's hand-made spear.

JACKSO  
It's gonna take a bigger stick to  
stop me.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS GLEN - DAY

Sam emerges out of the underbrush at the edge of the glen.

She stops when she sees the crushed bed of Nettles.

She spots the blood soaked ground where Billy was shot, picks up their trail, and stealthily takes after them.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - DAY

Jackso and Billy plod their way forward.

A patch of WILD PARSNIP catches Billy's eye.

BILLY

I need to sit for a minute.

He stops next to a thick patch of the poisonous flower.

JACKSO

Keep moving.

BILLY

Just give me a second. Please?

Jackso nods and surveys the forest for incoming threats.

JACKSO

Try anything smart and I'll shoot you in the other foot. Understand?

Billy sits and leans against a tree. Jackso stands right next to the Wild Parsnip.

He pulls his handheld device from his pocket and checks it.

BILLY

I remember you. You were captain on that ship. You were going through the pockets of the dead. Stealing whatever you could.

He tucks the device away and looks at Billy.

JACKSO

Stealing? How do you steal from a corpse?

BILLY

You took what doesn't belong to you.

JACKSO

I take what I need, whatever's useful to survive.

BILLY  
Even if it's not yours?

JACKSO  
That's right.

BILLY  
That's stealing.

JACKSO  
Actually, it's not. I was within my rights. I was salvaging under maritime laws of the high sea.

BILLY  
But Michigan is a lake.

JACKSO  
I rightfully claimed property abandoned on navigable waters. Property with no hope of being returned to its owner.

BILLY  
Because your crew murdered the owners. Nothing was abandoned.

JACKSO  
Nevertheless. I took as I needed. Your friend out there would say I 'recycled' it.

He smirks at the thought.

BILLY  
What about those kids you killed. You go through their pockets, too?

JACKSO  
Those kids were cargo.

Jackso puts two and two together.

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
*Your brother--* My cargo. Plus, I'm the captain. I can do what I want.

BILLY  
Is that part of the 'law of the high seas,' too? Funny, hearing a pirate talk about laws and rights.

Jackso presses his gun barrel against Billy's chin.

JACKSO

You think you're pretty smart, now,  
do you?

He presses the gun harder, pushing Billy's head against the tree--

-- POV from Sam's ASSAULT RIFLE GUN SIGHT- Jackso is blocked by a tree. No clear shot --

Jackso presses the gun hard to Billy's chin.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

Do you?!

Billy doesn't respond.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

I didn't think so.

Jackso pulls the gun away and starts pacing in front of Billy, coming closer to the Wild Parsnip--

-- POV from Sam's ASSAULT RIFLE GUN SIGHT- Jackso is still blocked by trees. No clear shot --

Jackso edges closer and closer to the Wild Parsnip.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

I've seen your type before. Always quick with the tongue, but never willing to put anything behind it. Quick to take a stand, as long as it didn't inconvenience you, or require any heavy lifting. I have contempt for your kind.

Jackso stops short of the Wild Parsnip, the tall willowy yellow flowers sway inches from his face and open chest.

BILLY

I wouldn't--

JACKSO

You wouldn't what? You wouldn't take a stand, even if your life depended on it?

BILLY

I wouldn't step any further.

JACKSO

What? This?

He turns back to the man size plants.

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
 (mocking)  
 Is the forest going to bite me  
 again?

BILLY  
 Bite? No. I wouldn't say bite.

Jackso turns and points his gun at Billy- inadvertently brushing his arm against the wild parsnip closest to him.

His arm quickly BLISTERS RED.

JACKSO  
 Son of a bitch!!

BILLY  
 More of a burn than a bite.

Furious, he aims the gun at Billy, pulls the trigger--

- And his TRIGGER FINGER EXPLODES as the gun is torn from his hand, flying into the patch of Wild Parsnip--

--POV through Sam's GUN SIGHT: Jackso HOWLS, in shocked horror, grabbing at his bloodied hand--

She runs toward them--

With his good hand, Jackso grabs his Ka-Bar and lunges at Billy as he scrambles to stand upright.

The knife plunges into the tree where Billy's head was.

With his good foot, Billy kicks Jackso's feet from under him.

On all fours, Billy still tries to stand up.

Jackso yanks the knife free and lunges again --

But he's jerked backward by Sam, putting a choke hold on him with the rifle.

She heaves him up, flipping him backward over herself --

-- into the Wild Parsnip.

Jackso CRIES OUT in pain as his CHEST, ARMS AND FACE BLISTER AND BURN RED.

Sam pulls Billy up and drags him into the underbrush.

SAM  
C'mon. We gotta go!

EXT. OLD GROWTH HEMLOCK GROVE - DAY

TWO JACKS work a POWER SAW through the base of a giant Hemlock while an armed pirate, CUTTHROAT JOE, stands nearby.

Lucky emerges from the underbrush near the pirate. He starts BARKING, until he has Cutthroat Joe's attention.

The pirate raises his rifle and takes aim, but Lucky sits, thumping his tail on the ground.

Cutthroat Joe can't pull the trigger.

He lowers his gun.

Lucky lays down, his tail wagging.

The pirate sets the gun down, grabs jerky from his pocket and cautiously approaches the dog, jerky in hand.

Lucky watches him advance.

The pirate gets within arm's length, crouching low with the jerky.

Lucky continues to wag his tail.

The pirate hides his KNIFE in his other hand.

CUTTHROAT JOE  
Here, boy.

Lucky doesn't move, except for his wagging tail.

The pirate inches closer, smiling at the dog.

CUTTHROAT JOE (CONT'D)  
Want some jerky, eh?

He's close enough to pet the dog now. He holds the jerky out in front of him; in front of Lucky's face.

Lucky ignores the meat, keeping eye contact with the pirate.

CUTTHROAT JOE (CONT'D)  
Who's a good boy-

He continues smiling at the dog.

A muscle in the pirate's face twitches, betraying him, right before he swings the knife forward--

Lucky LEAPS UPWARD, sinking his jaws into the knife arm.

Cutthroat Joe SCREAMS as Lucky RIPS his bicep from the bone.

The knife falls harmlessly away as the two wrestle.

Lucky grabs the pirate by the throat--

--tearing through his jugular --

-- shaking his kill with all his might.

The jack crew keep SAWING, oblivious to the bloody fight going on nearby.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - DAY

Jackso SCREAMS - equal parts pain and anger - as he desperately scurries out of the Wild Parsnip, ripping his shirt off his BURNED AND BLISTERING BODY.

He rushes to a nearby creek and plunges into the cool water, spreading oozing mud on his arms and chest for relief.

Working through the pain, he rips part of his pant leg off and wraps it around the stump of his shattered finger.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - DAY

Sam helps Billy through the woods. She stops near an outcropping of moss covered rocks.

SAM

We need to get that foot cleaned and wrapped.

BILLY

I'm okay. I just need to rest here.

SAM

If by okay, you mean you look like shit, than yeah.

BILLY

Gee, thanks. And I thought you were starting to like me.

He gets back up, but Sam firmly pushes him back down.



SAM

If we don't get that foot clean,  
you may get tetanus or worse, you  
could lose it to gangrene.

BILLY

I guess that would make us both  
stumpy's.

She fake smiles as she starts unlacing his bloodied shoe.

SAM

You're no good to me handcuffed *and*  
with only one leg.

BILLY

You *do* like me--

He winces in pain as Sam takes off the bloodied shoe and  
checks out the wound.

SAM

Let's not get ahead of ourselves. I  
need to get you back to the cabin.  
We've got to get this bullet out of  
your foot. I've got First Aid  
supplies there. I can--

BILLY

You need to get to the Hemlock.

SAM

After we take care of this foot.

BILLY

Listen, we just passed a creek.  
I'll wash out the wound, but you  
should go-- FUCK ME!

He CRIES OUT in pain.

She holds up a bloodied bullet, smiling at her handy work.

SAM

I'm sorry. You were saying?

BILLY

What the fuck!? Aren't you supposed  
to warn a guy before you dig a  
bullet out of his wounded flesh  
with your bare hands?

SAM

It would have been much worse if I warned you beforehand. You know, anticipation's a bitch.

BILLY

Fuck, yeah, it is. So is this!

SAM

What? I could see it sticking out. I don't think you can make it to the cabin, but let's get to that creek so I can clean it out and get you back to the cave.

BILLY

Isn't that what I just said?

SAM

C'mon.

Billy resists.

BILLY

No. You go to the Hemlock. I'll go to the creek on my own. I'd feel more comfortable if you were kicking pirate ass then cleaning my foot.

SAM

I'm hurt. You don't trust me.

BILLY

Damn straight.

He grits his teeth as he grabs her shoulder to get up.

BILLY (CONT'D)

We can meet at the cave tonight.

Sam hesitates.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I'm good. Really. Those hemlock got seniority. They need you more than I do now.

He takes a step forward, slips on the mossy stones and collapses in pain.

SAM

I'm not so sure about that.

She helps him back up, supporting him as they circle back to the creek.

EXT. OLD GROWTH HEMLOCK GROVE - DAY

The SAWS are DEAFENING. The timber jacks are still working on the same massive Hemlock, while their FOREMAN JACK approaches Helmet Joe.

HELMET JOE  
What's taking so long?

The Foreman Jack riffles through a TOOLBOX Helmet Joe is leaning on.

FOREMAN JACK  
These saws aren't big enough.  
They're for smaller trees. If we're  
not careful, we'll snap the blade  
or burn through the auger drive.

Helmet Joe nods, not having any idea what he's talking about.

The Foreman Jack can't find what he's looking for.

FOREMAN JACK (CONT'D)  
Have you seen the oil can?

Helmet Joe nods to a nearby stump. The Oil Can sits on top of it.

HELMET JOE  
You should be more careful. That  
can is worth two month's wages-  
Hey, have you seen Joe?

The FOREMAN JACK shakes his head as he walks away, grabs the oil can and gets back to work lubricating the running saw blades so they don't overheat.

Finished, he puts it back on the stump.

Lucky watches from the underbrush.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - DAY

Jackso stands in front of the Wild Parsnip staring long and hard at the ground in front of him. His gun lays in the thick of the poisonous plant.

He pulls out the small handheld device, checks it, and secures it back in his pocket.

He grabs what's left of Billy's spear and uses it to fish the gun out.

The distant SAWING STOPS.

Jackso looks up with alarm.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - SAME TIME

Sam and Billy stop and listen. The SILENCE is loud.

EXT. OLD GROWTH HEMLOCK GROVE - DAY

The jacks working the Hemlock lean and rest against the tree. Their chain saws stopped; overheated and belching smoke.

FOREMAN JACK  
Son of a bitch!

He reaches for the oil can, but it's gone again.

FOREMAN JACK (CONT'D)  
(shouts to Helmet Joe)  
You take the oil can?

Helmet Joe shakes his head no.

HELMET JOE  
(muttering under his  
breath)  
Some' bitch Joe probably took it.  
There'll be hell to pay when the  
Cap'n shows up. Hell.

The FOREMAN JACK steps in a patch of oil.

FOREMAN JACK  
What the--?

There's another small puddle of fresh oil in the grass ahead of him. He follows it.

One puddle leads to another and leads into the underbrush on the far side of the clearing.

He sees the oil can laying on it side in a small gully.

FOREMAN JACK (CONT'D)  
Son of a bitch!

He retrieves it, never seeing Lucky leap from the embankment.

The dog grabs the burly man by the head and drags him to the ground.

EXT. OLD GROWTH HEMLOCK GROVE - LATE AFTERNOON

Jackso marches past the DEAD BODY of Cutthroat Joe into the Hemlock grove and the resting timber jacks.

HELMET JOE  
Captain, boy am I glad to see you.  
What happened to your--

JACKSO  
What the hell is going on here?

HELMET JOE  
There's been some complications--

JACKSO  
Complications? I'll say. Why aren't  
these jacks working?

HELMET JOE  
That's what I'm trying to tell you.  
Joe went missing and it's all gone  
to shit.

JACKSO  
Joe's over there. He's not missing.  
He's dead.

HELMET JOE  
He is?

Furious, Jackso cold cocks Helmet Joe with his gun.

JACKSO  
You listen to me. And listen like  
your life depends on it.

HELMET JOE  
Yes, sir, I--

Jackso grabs Helmet Joe by the throat and shoves his gun in his ear.

JACKSO

I said listen. Not talk. If these jacks don't have these trees cut down and loaded by tomorrow this time, I am going to shoot you, cut your head off, and make that miserable bitch of a wife of yours serve soup to your shit stained kids out of your empty skull. Got it?

Terrified, Helmet Joe nods.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

Good.

Jackso lets the poor man go.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

Now, let's try this again. Why aren't these jacks working?

HELMET JOE

The trees are bigger and harder than they expected. The saws- they're out of juice.

Jackso checks his hand held monitor and abruptly turns and marches back into the woods.

JACKSO

So. Cut it by hand. You have twenty-four hours.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

Sam tends to Billy's wounded foot. It's swollen and looks nasty.

She pushes up his pant legs exposing DARK LESIONS on his leg.

BILLY

(wincing and in pain)

What'd you say this morning? Dead Man walking?

He lowers his pant legs back down, careful not to touch the exposed wounds.

BILLY (CONT'D)

So we're stuck in here again tonight.

(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

We've got no spears to make. Got any cards, we can play Sheepshead?

SAM

No cards.

BILLY

Did you ever hear the story about the magician who came up with the greatest act of all time?

SAM

No.

She dabs at the bullet wound, trying to clean it. He flinches in agony each time.

BILLY

(gritting his teeth)

He spent years in seclusion perfecting his routine, then one day he goes to his manager and says, 'I've got an incredible grand finale to my act- it's death defying, it's mesmerizing, it'll thrill audiences with a spectacle that'll never be topped!'

SAM

Shhhh. Let's focus on getting your foot cleaned and wrapped proper.

He ignores her and continues.

BILLY

(wincing)

The manager was hooked and asked to see the trick-- AGGGHHH.

SAM

Sorry.

BILLY

Son of a bitch!

SAM

I know it hurts, but it may already be infected. I have to clean it.

Billy nods and closes his eyes as she scrubs the wound.

BILLY

(through gritted teeth)  
So the magician pulls out a sledgehammer and sets it on the manager's desk saying, 'I want you to hit me over the head with this hammer as hard as you can.' So the manager grabs the sledgehammer, but seeing that it's a real sledgehammer, he hesitates. But the magician insists, saying, 'hit me as hard as you can.' So the manager hits the magician over the head as hard as he can and-- AGGHH.

SAM

Sorry. My bad. Almost done.

BILLY

(still wincing in pain)  
And he knocks him out cold, putting him in a coma--

SAM

Hold that thought. I need to go wash these rags out. I'll just be a second.

Before he can respond, she darts out of the cave with the bloodied rags.

INT. CAVE - MOMENTS LATER

Sam returns with clean washed rags.

SAM

So, what happens to the magician-

Billy is sound asleep. She carefully re-wraps his foot, trying not to wake him.

Exhausted, she leans against the damp rock wall and closes her eyes.

BILLY (O.C.)

Is it worth it?

She opens one eye. Billy is awake.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Is it worth it?



SAM

Is what worth it--

BILLY

This? What you're doing here. Why bother? Your family is gone. Nobody cares. The pirate Jacks of the world don't give a rat's ass about anybody else. It's every man for himself.

Sam thinks a bit before answering.

SAM

Have you ever heard of Margaret Mead?

BILLY

No. Who's that?

SAM

She was a famous scientist, an anthropologist, way back in the 20th Century. She was once asked by one of her students what she considered to be the very first sign of civilization in any culture. Guess what she said?

BILLY

I don't know. Spears? Tools to hunt with?

Sam shakes her head.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Clay pots to cook with?

Sam smiles, nodding to the fresh dressing on Billy's wound.

SAM

She said the first evidence of civilization was a fifteen thousand year old fractured femur. A broken leg.

She picks up a twig and snaps it in two.

SAM (CONT'D)

A broken leg in any animal is a death sentence. Easy prey for a predator. Now, it takes your average adult human about six weeks to heal from a broken bone.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

No animal, not even human, can survive in the wild that long with a broken bone. This particular femur had been completely healed. That means someone spent six weeks caring for the safety of another, rather than abandoning them to save their own life. A healed femur means someone has helped their fellow human.

She looks away, still battling her demons, before continuing.

SAM (CONT'D)

My husband and daughter might be dead, and the world we grew up in is long gone, but I will not abandon my mission protecting these trees if it means caring for future generations of people to come.

BILLY

God, if I wasn't in these handcuffs right now, I'd hug you.

Sam blushes. Then, pulls him by the handcuffs closer to her.

She kisses him.

BILLY (CONT'D)

This beats Sheepshead any day.

She smiles and kisses him again.

SAM

Making more spears isn't a bad idea. I'm going to go wash out these rags and I'll bring back some wood for you to whittle.

BILLY

Great.

She grabs up the bloodied rags and turns back to him.

SAM

If you're lucky, I may even help you whittle your wood.

She winks at him and slips into the darkness beyond the cave.

Billy smiles and closes his eyes.

He listens to the wind SOUGHING through the forest.

He can hear the distant SURF of the lake--

And the metallic SNAP of a GUN'S HAMMER being cocked.

He opens his eyes and looks down the barrel of Jackso's pistol.

JACKSO

Where is she?

I/E. CAVE - NIGHT

It STARTS RAINING as Sam makes her way back to the cave, a bundle of wood in her arms.

She enters the cave.

SAM

Did you miss m--

The cave is empty.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS NEAR CAVE - NIGHT

IT'S RAINING. Sam emerges from the cave.

There are two sets of footprints in the mud.

She runs as fast as she can. Hell's furies released.

I/E. SAM'S CABIN - NIGHT

IT'S RAINING. She emerges from the woods in front of the empty cabin. Everything is shot up and in ruins.

Not a pirate in sight.

She sprints up the front steps into the cabin. It's completely trashed.

The radio transponder is shot up to pieces.

She goes to the kitchen pantry. Under a ransacked shelf of cooking supplies, she reaches for a hand gun taped to the underside.

She checks the clip, and tucks it in her pants.

She heads to the fireplace and yanks away stacked firewood, retrieving another hidden hand gun.

She checks the clip as she darts down the front steps and into the woods.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND SHORE - NIGHT

IT'S RAINING. A red bearded pirate, GINGER JOE, keeps guard near the AVV and the barge full of fresh cut timber.

Sam sprints out of the woods straight toward the guard.

GINGER JOE

Hey, you--

She shoots him in the head and jumps up on the AAV behind the open pilot hatch.

She waits a beat. Nobody emerges. She jumps in. Empty.

She emerges and checks the barge. It's clear, too.

Lucky appears, BARKS once, and dashes back into the woods.

Sam follows.

EXT. OLD GROWTH HEMLOCK GROVE - SUNRISE

IT'S RAINING. Two timber jacks set an old-school manual tree saw up against a Hemlock and start to cut by hand.

HELMET JOE

No, no that one. Start with the big one.

He points to Old Dutch.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - MORNING

IT'S RAINING. Sam and Lucky race through the forest.

EXT. OLD GROWTH HEMLOCK GROVE - MORNING

IT'S RAINING. Sam bursts from the woods and shoots the closest timber jack.

The second timber jack reaches for his gun, but she shoots him, too.

The two jacks cutting Old Dutch lunge for cover.

Helmet Joe ducks for cover shooting wildly at Sam.

She returns fire, CHARGING STRAIGHT TOWARD HIM. She unleashes hell without losing her stride.

She fires at Helmet Joe until the clip empties.

He waits a beat, thankful to still be in one piece, and returns fire, shooting wildly without looking, then listens.

Hearing the quiet, he cautiously peeks out to see if he hit anything.

A KNIFE plunges into his forehead, buried up to the hilt.

Sam grabs the assault weapon from him and yanks the knife out of his head.

He topples to the ground.

She sheaths the knife and methodically moves past massive Hemlock, assault rifle ready.

A timber jack, YELLOW JACK, runs scared into the forest.

As she turns to pursue, she's shot at by a greasy bearded timber jack, BEARDED JACK, on the far side of the tree she's next to.

EXT. MUIR ISLAND WOODS - MORNING

IT'S RAINING. The terrified Yellow Jack races through the woods as fast as he can.

There's a HOWL that echoes through the trees. The jack sees a black shape racing through the woods.

He fires randomly into the woods as it closes in-

He loses sight of it. Sure that he hit it, he stops to take a breath.

There's a GROWL.

He looks up, all the blood drains from his face. Lucky stands fierce on a boulder inches from his face, staring eye to eye--

YELLOW JACK

Fuck.

EXT. OLD GROWTH HEMLOCK GROVE - MORNING

IT'S RAINING. Bearded Jack ducks behind the far side of the giant Hemlock Sam uses for cover.

They both circle the tree's massive trunk bit by bit, like a dog chasing its tail in slow motion; neither able to see the other.

Sam picks up a stick and SNAPS it in two. Bearded Jack pauses.

She quickly turns around and runs the other way.

Bearded Jack decides to turn directions, too.

BEARDED JACK  
Come out and show yourself--

He runs right into Sam.

She fires point blank at his face and charges off before his body hits the ground.

She rounds another Hemlock, stopping dead in her tracks.

Billy is STRUNG UP by his handcuffs and CHAINED to the trunk of Old Dutch.

He kneels on the saw blade stuck in Dutch's trunk.

SAM  
Billy!

BILLY  
Sam, don't! It's a trap!

JACKSO (O.C.)  
(mockingly)  
Sam, don't, it's a trap.

Sam looks around; she can't tell where his voice is coming from.

She looks at Billy. He shakes his head, warning her off.

JACKSO (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
You have single handedly killed off  
two of the best jack crews this  
side of the Rockies.

SAM  
And your crack team of pirates.

Jackso steps out from behind a Hemlock tree. He holds a gun in one hand, a hatchet in the other.

JACKSO

And my crack team of pirates.  
Bravo, you're some kind of nasty-  
ass stumpy-lovin' ranger from hell.

SAM

I did have help from my dog.

JACKSO

How inspiring. And comforting.

He throws the hatchet at Billy. It imbeds in the tree, inches from his head.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

We got our ass kicked by a girl and  
her dog!

She takes a careful, purposeful, step toward Jackso.

He points the gun at her. She stops.

SAM

Tell you what, let's make a deal.  
You let him go, I let you live and  
I promise not to tell your friends  
about kicking your ass.

JACKSO

How sweet. You'd do that for him?  
You think you're in that strong a  
bargaining position? Have you given  
any thought to how I knew where  
this big timber was? Or the cave?  
Do you think our first encounter by  
the water was by chance?

Sam doesn't take her eyes off of Billy as Jackso slowly walks toward him.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

I know your every move. Well,  
Billy's every move, to be precise.  
Who do you think planted him here  
on the island?

Billy shakes his head, no.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

Piggy here is my ace in the hole;  
my get-out-of-jail-before-the-  
stumpy-bitch-burns-the-place-down  
card.

SAM  
I don't believe you.

JACKSO  
I assure you. He's *my* man.

BILLY  
No. That's all lies, Sam. I've never even met this maniac before yesterday.

JACKSO  
Oh, you're mistaken. The night on the boat. I saw the damage you did, the chaos you wreaked. You cost me a fortune.

He pulls out his hand held device.

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
To repay your debt, I attached a tracking chip and tossed you on the beach.

BILLY  
No way. That's all a lie.

JACKSO  
Is it?

He flashes the screen at Sam; a map of the island and a blinking light on top of their current location.

BILLY  
That's not me. Sam, you got to believe me.

SAM  
He didn't have any tracking devices attached to him when I found him.

JACKSO  
Oh yes he did.

BILLY  
That's bullshit! He's lying, Sam!

JACKSO  
I didn't attach it on the outside-

Without warning, he pulls the hatchet from the tree and CHOPS OFF BILLY'S HAND.

Billy SCREAMS.



Without the hand, he slides out from the chain mooring, collapsing on the ground in agony.

Jackso nonchalantly picks up the hand, fishes out the tracking chip, and tosses it aside.

JACKSO (CONT'D)

Much easier - and quicker - to get out, than it was to put in.

SAM

What the fuck is wrong with you?!

JACKSO

As I told you before. He had a debt to repay. He's repaid it. It's a simple transaction--

SAM

Life is not a transaction! It's not to be bought and sold!

JACKSO

Indeed it can. I bought his life relatively cheap. Now, I'll make a fortune with these trees.

SAM

Over my dead body.

She charges, knife drawn. Jackso points his gun at her.

JACKSO

If that's your price, suit yourself.

He SHOOTs, but Billy lunges in front of Sam, taking the bullet.

SAM

No!!!

Billy collapses to his knees.

BILLY

Dead man walking, remember. Us stumpies got to--

He reaches for Sam with his good hand, but slumps at her feet.

Jackso tries shooting again, but he's out of bullets.

Enraged, Sam SMASHES into him with all her might.

THEY FIGHT.

Jackso chases Sam up the side of the massive Hemlock and they FIGHT VERTICALLY, HAND TO HAND COMBAT IN THE TREES.

Sam parkours up the tree, using branches as leverage to KICK Jackso, but the pirate matches her moves, grabs her leg and YANKS her from her branch.

She FALLS- but wraps Jackso in a HEADLOCK with her thighs and grabs hold the next branch as he loses his balance.

He DANGLES below her.

She SQUEEZES HARD as he thrashes about until he grabs hold her legs-

He KIDNEY PUNCHES her but she squeezes harder.

He pulls out a KNIFE-

Just as he THRUSTS UPWARD, she loosens her grip, LETTING GO.

He FALLS to a branch below and the knife is knocked out of his hand, falling to the ground below.

Sam SCRAMBLES upward, climbing to dizzying heights. Jackso right on her heels.

She climbs to a point where the branches can no longer support her weight. They bend, defying gravity, SWAYING BACK AND FORTH.

SAM  
(fiercely)  
Et Praesidia Ad Silvam. I am the  
protector of the forest!

She lures Jackso onto one of these branches.

JACKSO  
You're a little squirrel with  
nowhere else to hide. A little,  
dead, squirrel.

She LEAPS to the swaying branch of another, taller, tree - Old Dutch.

SAM  
This little 'squirrel' is in her  
element.

She SCRAMBLES HIGHER and wraps her arms around the branch.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Hello, old Dutch. Looks like it's  
just you and me-

Jackso JUMPS to Old Dutch, landing a few branches below Sam.

SAM (CONT'D)  
(to Old Dutch)  
-We got this. Right, girl?

Sam pulls herself up higher, taunting Jackso.

SAM (CONT'D)  
"It's remarkable how closely the  
history of the apple tree is  
connected with that of man."

JACKSO  
What?!

SAM  
Henry David Thoreau.

Jackso has her cornered. Victory is his. He gloats as he  
pulls himself onto the same branch.

JACKSO  
I'll be sure to put that on your  
grave.

Sam smiles.

SAM  
Without the apple, where would  
Newton be?

Jackso doesn't get it, until Sam pushes hard, pressing all  
her weight on the branch they share.

JACKSO  
What? Stop, no-

The branch resists.

She pushes down hard again.

IT SNAPS -

- and they both fall -

- bouncing -

- off branches -

- like rag dolls -  
 - as they tumble down -  
 - head over teacups -  
 - branch to -  
     - branch to -  
 - branch to -

-Sam hits a thick branch, catching it with her arm.

She dangles by one bloody arm.

Wincing in pain, she looks down.

A splintered BRANCH has IMPALED her leg.

Jackso is snagged in a branch below her.

He looks down and watches broken branches continue falling to the ground.

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
 (painful, through gritted  
 teeth)  
*That's the way the world goes  
 round. You're up one day, the next  
 you're down--*

He looks up and sees Sam dangling above.

Her arm slips and she falls, grabbing the branch by one hand.

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
*It's half an inch of water, and you  
 think you're gonna drown--*

He ignores the pain and slowly pulls himself up onto the branch and inches his way toward the trunk.

He carefully stands up, testing the weight of the branch. It seems just strong enough to hold him.

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
*That's the way the world goes  
 'round.*

Sam musters all her strength to keep from letting go.

Below, Jackso inches toward her, he can almost grab hold the bloody branch sticking out of her leg.

Sam's bruised and sweaty fingers start to slip...

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
*That's the way the world goes  
 'round.*

He grabs for the impaled branch, but needs another inch.

The WIND picks up.

As it SOUGHS through the trees.

The branches start SWAYING.

Sam is swung closer to Jackso.

More wind and Old Dutch's trunk starts to sway, too; there's a deep, almost inaudible, GROAN as if Old Dutch is awakening and the branches swing to life in bigger and bigger arcs.

SAM  
 Thanks old girl.

She grabs hold of the branch with her other hand-

He tries to keep his balance and gauge the timing as the branches swing Sam back and forth toward him.

JACKSO  
 You're up one day, the next you're  
 down--

He reaches out and touches her boot, but can't get purchase.

JACKSO (CONT'D)  
 That's the way the world goes round-

The wind SOUGHS louder, the branches sway in bigger arcs.

Jackso knows he can reach her.

He smiles.

More SOUGHING, the branches dancing in the wind now.

He times it perfect, reaches out to grab her--

- there's a CRACK --

-- and the branch supporting him SPLINTERS AND BREAKS.

He lunges for her leg --

-- misses --

-- and falls --

-- crashing

- to the earth below.

He smashes hard, IMPALING HIS CHEST on a thick shard of tree branch.

The wind continues to SOUGH, but the branches stop swaying.

Sam climbs toward the trunk and sits on the wide tree limb.

SAM

(wincing)

'Come, girl, sit down and rest--

She wipes blood and snot from her face.

With grit, she pulls the broken branch out of her leg. And leans back, against the trunk.

SAM (CONT'D)

-And the tree was happy.'

Sam makes a tourniquet with the branch and a tattered piece of her pant leg and carefully climbs down out of the tree.

She limps over to Jackso.

Barely alive, he eyes her.

He spits up blood.

JACKSO

(labored singing)

*You're up one day, the next you're  
down...*

(coughs up more blood)

I used to sing- my daughters to  
sleep with this--

Jackso dies before he can finish.

She limps over to Billy.

He looks up at her, gasping for life.

BILLY  
I'm finally out of those damn  
handcuffs.

She tries comforting him, cradling him in her arms.

SAM  
Yeah, but this is not how I had it  
planned.

BILLY  
Me neither.  
(gasping for life)  
I never finished my story--

SAM  
What? Oh, the magician? He's in a  
coma, right?

BILLY  
Yeah, for like five years.  
(wheezing)  
Everyone's left him for dead.  
(wincing)  
Then one day his manager gets a  
call--  
(coughing)  
He's awake! The manager can't  
believe it. He rushes to the  
hospital to see the magician--

SAM  
Yeah--

Billy coughs, spitting up blood.

BILLY  
(smiles through the pain)  
And the magician looks up... and  
says, 'ta-da!'

Billy coughs more, gasping for life.

He smiles at her.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
Ta-da.  
(pause)  
Thanks for not letting me die alone--

He starts slipping away.

She hugs him fiercely, rocking him like an infant. Crying.

SAM  
How come everything I touch dies!?!

BILLY  
(gasping)  
I've never felt more alive-

He's gone.

SAM  
NO!!

She pounds his chest. Wipes her dirty hand on her bloodied shirt and digs into the bullet hole with her bare hand.

SAM (CONT'D)  
No! Not on my watch!

She pulls out the bullet.

She rips her shirt off and wraps it tight around both his wounds. It's no good. He's not breathing.

She pounds on his chest.

SAM (CONT'D)  
No way!

She hits it again. Harder.

He gasps. He spits up blood. His eyes open.

She cries relief.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Oh my God, yes!

She cradles his head in her hands, tears streaming.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Ta-da!

BILLY  
(weak, barely audible)  
Ta-da-

She kisses him.

DISSOLVE TO:



EXT. MUIR ISLAND - DAY

Sam, on her knees, plants a SMALL PINE SAPLING over Jackso's fresh grave.

She finishes, hugs Lucky, and reaches out to Billy, who helps her up with his good hand. Both have clean dressings on their wounds and are on the mend.

BILLY

He doesn't deserve a good burial.

SAM

Maybe not. But that little tree deserves a good planting.

Billy tosses the handcuffs on the grave and the pair limp into the misty forest, Lucky right behind them.

SUPER:

"FOR ME, TREES ARE LIKE... GREAT, SOLITARY MEN, LIKE BEETHOVEN AND NIETZSCHE. IN THEIR HIGHEST BOUGHS THE WORLD RUSTLES, THEIR ROOTS REST IN INFINITY." - HERMAN HESSE

FADE TO BLACK.

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