



The Farrell family (from left to right): Keith, Paul, Michelle, and Wanda. Picture taken circa Christmas of 1974 or 1975.

***BAPTIZED IN FIRE: TRAUMA, STORYTELLING, AND SURVIVAL***

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

On the afternoon of September 13, 1977, my grandfather was burned on more than two-thirds of his body while working as a lineman for Nova Scotia Power. Despite a less than 10 per cent chance of survival, he is alive today thanks to the support of his wife and two children. My creative research project analyzes the benefits of model stage theories of healing following such a traumatic event. The research focuses on how trauma impacts families, how families can navigate recovery, and how storytelling is a crucial aspect of the healing process. The therapeutic potential of the screenplay emerges by establishing the connection between contemporary screenplay structure and models of healing used in psychology. This culminates in my creative piece, a screenplay based in part on the first four months of my grandfather's recovery—a survival narrative seeking to help trauma victims become trauma survivors.

## DEDICATION

To my family.

In particular: Corey, who always makes me laugh whether I need it or not. Mitchell, who promised to write the soundtrack. Dad, who would secretly rather watch *Taken* again but would see this instead if he knew it would make me happy...or if Liam Neeson was in it. Mom, whose dream has always been to help her children's come true. Nanny and Buddy, who taught me what dancing is all about.

And in loving memory of Keith Paul John Farrell (March 10, 1968 - August 27, 1999).

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I would also like to thank my mother. As a writer, I have frequently doubted the efficacy of my aspirations. It is difficult to find someone who understands and supports your goals, rarer still to have someone who protects them. Mom, you have always gone above and beyond to do all of the above for me. I could not have come this far without your unconditional love and support.

There is no more vulnerable act as a writer than sharing your ideas with others. My younger brother, Mitch, was the first outside of my academic circle to know about my project (in full detail) and met it with a degree of excitement I can only compare to the feeling of watching him perform live. Mitch, your passion for music inspires me in words that could only be expressed in one of your songs.

Finally, this project would not exist without my grandparents, Wanda and Paul, better known to me as Nanny and Buddy. This was inspired by them. At their home in Amherst, Nova Scotia, where they have lived for nearly fifty years, is a wall of family photos that leads to their living room. At the top is a quote that says, "All because two people fell in love." I think that sums it up pretty well.

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## Introduction

On September 13, 1977, my grandfather, Paul Farrell, a lineman for Nova Scotia Power, was burned on more than 65 per cent of his body when a transformer exploded in his face. He had just turned 31. He suffered third-degree burns and underwent countless surgeries to remedy issues both directly and indirectly related to the accident for years afterwards. However, the first four months of his recovery—September to December of 1977—were the most crucial, where his odds of survival were at their bleakest. Medical professionals at Victoria General Hospital in Halifax, Nova Scotia, gave him a marginal chance of survival. His wife and my grandmother, Wanda, juggled life at home, where my seven-year-old mother, Michelle, and nine-year-old uncle, Keith, waited eagerly for their father to return. With their combined love and support, my grandfather was able to endure months of grafting, physiotherapy, and a bout of pneumonia to beat these odds and return home in time for Christmas of the same year. It was the first major victory in what became a much longer battle.

Four decades later, in 2017, I interviewed my grandparents as the centrepiece of a radio documentary for a third-year journalism class at St. Thomas University. At the end of the term, the final product, “A Love Strengthened by Fire,” aired on *Shift* with Vanessa Vander, a program on CBC radio in Moncton, New Brunswick. I had always felt that my grandparents’ experience made for a compelling, inspiring, and valuable survival story, but this project was my first attempt at telling it, and the positive reaction from friends and family encouraged me to adapt it into a longer format. As an aspiring screenwriter, the screenplay became my chosen medium. As the blueprint for film, the screenplay is a

valuable medium for telling trauma stories. As Gail Finney suggests, film is the modern equivalent of theatre, the medium the Greeks used to establish tragic drama in the West (89). When the stage had been set, “all that was necessary for a tragedy was . . . a family undergoing crisis, or even trauma” (Finney 89). My grandparents’ experience fits this short list of criteria.

I considered adapting “I’m Coming Back, Wanda...,” written by Robert Collins for *The Reader’s Digest* in 1979. Collins’s article is a brief retelling of my grandfather’s accident and recovery; however, I decided against this when revisiting my radio project. During our interview, I asked my grandmother if she thought the accident made her and my grandfather stronger as a couple. She said, “I think [we were] strong to begin with, or we would’ve never gotten through it in the first place” (St. Peters). Though an inspiring sentiment, this is not the ideal starting position for a strong character arc in a screenplay. This perspective satisfies a seven-page article or 10-minute radio program, but it is hard to sustain in a longer format such as this. Though my radio piece inspired me to expand, it also necessitated an alternative approach.

In *Inside Story: The Power of the Transformational Arc*, Dara Marks argues that the “most essential demand for a well-dramatized script” is the need for transformation (113). For an audience to absorb the theme of the script effectively, they must connect to the protagonist and their journey. And Marks’s ideal protagonist is not inscrutable: “We don’t see a reflection of our humanity in perfection; we see it in imperfection” (104). If my grandparents were strong from the beginning of the accident, it limits the space for internal transformation when depicting their recovery. As such, though it is ruthless to the



real events, an adaptation approaching their story from this perspective would come off as disingenuous. Because this story involves those close to me, I also felt it necessary to place emotional distance between myself and the characters. As David Trottier says in *The Screenwriter's Bible*, "A possible problem with autobiographical writing . . . is that we usually love our central character. So we protect her. [The] solution? Use yourself and the people you know as a basis for the fictional characters you create . . . create enough distance to be objective" (207). Creative liberties are sometimes necessary to overcome these protective instincts. Though Marks insists writers can only write what they know, she agrees with Trottier, saying, "Stories, even if based on true events, are never the real experience, only a *representation* of that experience" (24, original emphasis). Ironically, to capture the essence of my grandparents' story, I was left with constructing a new one and using theirs as inspiration.

However, perhaps the main reason I chose to create a fictional story rather than directly adapt my grandparents' experience was so that I could combine it with another defining tragedy in their lives that occurred two decades later. In 1999, my uncle Keith passed away from esophageal cancer at 31-years-old, the same age my grandfather was when he was burned. My grandparents consider his death the worst day of their lives. To this day, my grandfather insists that he would go through the accident all over again if he could have his son back. When reading memoirs of burn survivors in preparation for this project, I discovered that this was a common sentiment among those who had also lost loved ones. In *Flashback Girl*, Dr. Lise Deguire writes about her experiences as a burn survivor after a barbecue fire left her with third-degree burns on 65 per cent of her body

when she was four-years-old. Though she was neglected by her parents, who abandoned her in a burn unit for months, and was subjected to subsequent ridicule by other children at school, Deguire says the worst experience of her life was the moment she learned her older brother had died by suicide. She writes, “My brother died 40 years ago, but years are meaningless when it comes to choking grief. [His] death stands as the single worst thing that has happened to me. Not the fire, him” (101). Despite the intense bodily pain these individuals have experienced because of their accidents, many of them cite losing loved ones as their greatest challenge.

The profound effect this type of loss has had on my grandparents made me realize how important it is to their story, a struggle I also wanted to portray. The appreciation for what they have overcome has always been tempered by the grief of what they could not. This balance of triumph and tragedy is true of the healing process for a trauma survivor, who is always in the process of healing. As such, I felt there needed to be an element of unresolved grief tempering my protagonist’s sense of achievement and incorporated the pain of losing a loved one. My challenge as a writer was how to keep this part of my grandparents’ story while maintaining dramatic unity. In an adaptation, I would need to use numerous flashbacks or flashforwards to link these chronologically distant events, depending on which I chose as the main focus of the script. However, Trottier says the majority of flashbacks and flashforwards are unnecessary as they are “usually used as a crutch, an easy way to introduce exposition” (141). Additionally, when a screenplay is adapted, flashbacks and flashforwards expose viewers to new actors playing the same parts. Audiences might respond by subconsciously disconnecting from the characters,

undoing all of the screenwriter's previous efforts and sending the timing and impact of the story into disarray. I did not want to disrupt the narrative this way as I felt it would negatively affect its emotional resonance.

As a result, I avoid using flashbacks in my script, at least in the traditional sense. When flashbacks occur, I show what the character experiences rather than what they see. For example, when the protagonist, Nora, sets off the smoke alarm, it triggers anxiety in her daughter, Tildy. I withhold what she recalls of the incident and to what degree, but her reaction implies she is recalling something that impacts her negatively. This satisfies the ongoing research debate on flashbacks and their content by refusing to choose sides. On one side, scholars like Cathy Caruth and Bessel Van der Kolk argue that trauma leads to incomplete memories or, in some cases, the complete inaccessibility of memories (154; 167). On the other side, those like Joshua Pederson and Richard J. McNally suggest that trauma results in enhanced rather than impeded memory, especially when regarding the traumatic event (337). More importantly, however, this approach shows how my project is more concerned with the role of memory and its impact on the traumatized individual than with its content.

With these factors in mind, I make these isolated incidents—a traumatic accident and the loss of a loved one—simultaneous events in my story to display dramatic unity according to the internal struggle/external obstacle dyad of Marks's model. She says "the transformational arc tracks the protagonist's internal struggle to rise to meet the external challenge by overcoming internal barriers" (Marks 29). Applying this to my screenplay, the protagonist's grief over a recent miscarriage is the internal struggle she faces as she

nurses her husband back to health. This adds to her interpersonal conflicts, undermining her potential for positive change by further isolating her from others. During her family's recovery, she finds value in sharing her pain and discovers that her previous attempts to deal with problems by herself threatened her relationships and well-being. The result of my work is *Baptized in Fire*, a screenplay about a family learning to come together after tragedy threatens to tear them apart. The story is inspired by the first four months of my grandfather's accident and recovery.

While writing, I became interested in trauma theory and the healing process. In my research, I discovered that model stage theories of healing used for traumatic events resemble popular methods of structuring screenplays, such as Christopher Vogler's 12 Stages of the Hero's Journey, based on the work of Joseph Campbell. What began as a love letter to my grandparents has become an exploration of loss and how we develop support systems to heal from shared tragedy.

What remains the same, however, is the project's theme that pain shared is pain divided. In *Baptized in Fire*, we follow the Lovelaces—on the surface, a seemingly tight-knit, middle-class, suburban family. When the patriarch, Bill, is burned in a car accident on his way to work, the family is torn apart both emotionally and geographically. The children, seven-year-old Tildy and 13-year-old Clyde, are left home with their maternal grandparents, Frank and Maggie, while their mother, Nora, travels with Bill to support him during his recovery. On their way to the hospital, Nora has a miscarriage, unaware she was even pregnant. When Bill's doctor provides Bill's bleak prognosis, Nora decides to keep the miscarriage to herself to maintain his already weakened spirits. She clashes

with Bill's mother, Evelyn, over his care while struggling to keep her secret as her body begins to show signs of the loss. The children have their own struggles under the care of the emotionally-reserved Frank and Maggie. Having been in the accident and walked away physically unharmed, Tildy has survivor's guilt, withdraws, and acts out at school. Clyde becomes frustrated with the adults' attempts to keep him and Tildy at home and carry on as if everything were fine. When faced with losing Bill for good, Nora finally accepts the help she needs. After Bill improves, the family returns home for Christmas while still dealing with their shared trauma.

*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* defines trauma as the “intense fear, helplessness, or horror” following an event involving “actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self and others” (McNally 79; APA 427-428). In much simpler terms, trauma is “too much too much-ness” (Kiser, Baumgardner, and Dorado 245; Shengold 1). In this context, I explore how trauma can impact individual family members based on age, sex, and relation, as well as the family as a unit. Each member is the main character of their journey and a secondary character in journeys of others. In a screenplay, “secondary characters create an orbit around the protagonist [by] either providing assistance or resistance to the attainment of his or her goal” (Marks 58). In the study of trauma, psychologists similarly call these individuals “secondary victims” (Remer 52). Family psychologist Rory Remer classifies secondary victims as “anyone in the social support network of a trauma victim” (52). Yet, Remer says secondary victims can become primary victims if dealing with their own traumas

while supporting others (60). It is thus important to follow each character's journey to better understand trauma and its effects.

To do so, we must examine how a traumatic event can fracture a family before we can study the pieces left in its wake. In their book, *The Patient in the Family: An Ethics of Medicine and Families*, Hilde and James Lindemann Nelson suggest families impacted by traumatic events are constantly between stages of togetherness and separation. They write:

members may unwittingly trample on the intricate web of relationships of which families are woven. This upsets the delicate balance between loving intimacy and individual growth that family members must continually maintain: too intense an intimacy is stifling and oppressive, yet, with too much distance, families become a mere aggregate of strangers. The balance is hard enough to maintain under the best of circumstances, but when a family is in trouble it becomes even harder.

(Nelson and Nelson 3)

For the Nelsons, a family must strike a balance between the cynical and romantic view of a family's function or threaten dissolution. If a family fails to maintain a tension between individuality and belonging, it "either collapses under unrealistic demands for emotional fulfillment, or its members drift off to pursue their personal projects in splendid isolation" (Nelson and Nelson 34). If a family keeps this tension, members get a healthy balance of individuality and belonging. Children achieve a sense of belonging when parental figures share their family history, which often comes in the form of shared family stories, usually told by grandparents (Nelson and Nelson 39). A cogent example of this in my screenplay

is the scene where Maggie tells Clyde how his parents met at a dance, during which his father repeatedly stepped on his mother's toes. This becomes important information that helps bring their family together. Toward the end of the script, Clyde suggests Bill stand on Nora's toes so that they can dance to the end of a hospital hallway, a feat contributing to Bill's temporary release. In contrast to belonging, children achieve individuality when authority figures share power with them, delegating responsibilities proportionate to the child's age and ability (Nelson and Nelson 39). In my script, there is an initial imbalance between individuality and belonging. Rather than sharing their power with the children, adults exert it over them. By inserting him and Tildy into their father's recovery, Clyde rectifies this imbalance and shows that such an imbalance is a symptom of how trauma impacts adults and children differently.

Trauma frequently causes children to develop disobedient behaviours. Like the grandfather, Frank, many adults see these as attention-seeking, one of the most common myths of childhood behaviour after a traumatic event (Walker 34). In reality, children act in ways preserving the integrity of their world and resist encroaching forces threatening to change it (Nicholson, Irwin, and Dwivedi 30). Such behaviour depends on the type of trauma to which a child is subjected. Child psychologist Lenore Kerr suggests there are two types of traumas—aptly termed Type I and Type II—and that each impacts children differently. Kerr sees Trauma Type I as an isolated incident, like a car accident, causing fully-fledged memories, retrospective reconstructions, and misperceptions of the trauma (14). In contrast, Trauma Type II results from a recurring incident, like abuse, and leads to denial, repression, dissociation, self-anesthesia, an identification with the aggressor,

and aggression toward others (15). The car accident in *Baptized in Fire* would result in Type I Trauma, and Tildy's behaviour fits its symptoms. Stressors reminding her of the event, like the smoke alarm, make her anxious. She also reworks the small details that precede the accident, believing she knocked the bottle of oil onto the engine when, in reality, it was Bill. She therefore misperceives the accident as being her fault. Guilt is common in survivors of events causing the death or impairment of others, but it is even more common in young children as young as Tildy. Debra Kaminer and Gillian Eagle link this to a child's egocentric worldview (131). Since children see themselves as the centre of their own little worlds, they not only feel compelled to maintain integrity of these worlds, but they also feel solely responsible when this integrity is compromised. This causes children "to seek explanations for bad events that are self-referenced and faulty in terms of logic," like unfounded self-blame (Kaminer and Eagle 131). Many children also acquire rituals to protect themselves, like Tildy's hoarding of flammable materials (Kaminer and Eagle 131). However, some of Tildy's behaviours, such as her aggression toward her classmate, align with Type II Trauma symptoms. Kerr says this crossover occurs when an isolated incident leads to ongoing fallout, like the death or injury of one's parent(s) (18). Such is the case in *Baptized in Fire* as the car accident injures Bill permanently.

Because she was in the accident, Tildy's behaviour is also more regressive than Clyde's and resembles that of post-traumatic stress disorder (or PTSD). In their study of stress response and adaptation in children, Duncan B. Clark and Thomas W. Miller find 30 per cent of children involved in accidents causing severe burns develop symptoms of



PTSD (7). Drawing on psychologist Norman Garmezy, Clark and Miller define three protective factors available to traumatized children: personality characteristics (such as autonomy and self-esteem), family cohesion (such as warmth and lack of discord), and external support networks (such as schools and friends) (9; Yule 225). Each of these resources are deficient for Tildy's, which can have adverse effects and replace a child's egocentric worldview with a desire for stable attachment (Holmes 68). In Tildy's case, the adults make all the decisions and avoid addressing feelings; her family is separated and contentious; and after her fight, the school pairs her with a teacher's aide, further isolating her from her peers.

Tildy shares these circumstances with Clyde, but his symptoms are milder due to his degree of separation from the accident. As a male teenager, he also reacts differently than she does. According to Kaminer and Eagle, traumatic events tend to impact females and children more so than males and adults (128). They also suggest that, in occupying the stage between child- and adulthood, adolescent responses are often a corresponding mixture of those of a child and an adult. Like children, adolescents frequently respond to traumatic events by rebelling against authority figures, especially in challenging parental attitudes and behaviours (Kaminer and Eagle 134). Clyde does so by ditching school for the library, where he researches Bill's condition. Like Tildy's collection of flammables, Clyde hoards information to exert his control. Where children and adults differ is in their capacity to think beyond their current circumstances. Whereas a child's view of the future is limited, made more so by a traumatic event, an adult's view is less precarious (Kaminer and Eagle 133). In their cocktail of child and adult responses, it is therefore common for

adolescents like Clyde to feel responsible for the outcomes of the future rather than those of the past. Whereas Tildy feels responsible for their family's recent travails, Clyde feels responsible for their recovery.

Adults experience the same symptoms of Trauma Types I and II—issues with memory, repetitive behaviours, trauma-specific fears, and altered perspectives on life, people, and the future—to varying degrees. However, since their mental faculties are more developed than children's, adults are likely to recover faster and depend less on help from outside sources. Adults are consequently less likely to seek support than are children. As such, though children and adults share the desire to heal, their approaches can be notably different and, in some ways, at odds with one another. Whereas many children and adolescents seek togetherness because of low levels of mastery and self-esteem, many adults use separation—either physical, emotional, or both—as protection, which can challenge a family. This is especially true of parents like Nora, who wish to maintain at least the appearance of control and high self-esteem for the benefit of their children. These individuals often view traumatic stress as a “contagion” and will isolate the afflicted to limit its spread (Schumm et al. 39; Riley and Eckenrode 771-772; Figley 21-22). As a secondary victim of Bill's accident, Nora tries to protect the children from his pain. She tells Bill's mother, Evelyn, that she does not want them to see their father unless his survival becomes assured.

As the primary victim of her own traumatic event—her miscarriage—she tries to protect them from her pain as well. However, she simultaneously avoids Clyde and Tildy because, as her children, they may remind her of the child she lost and serve as potential

stressors that could re-traumatize her in the future. Robert Jay Lifton calls these stressors “indelible images,” imprints of the traumatic event forcing the survivor to recall or relive the experience (Lifton 30; Hawkins 117). Bill and his recovery are also indelible images to Nora. During our interview, my grandmother compared my grandfather’s recovery to raising a baby. The same is true for Nora, who is faced with tasks analogous to those of a mother caring for her child. She cleans and feeds Bill, teaches him how to communicate (via sign language), and helps him walk again, all childrearing milestones. When Bill finally walks for the first time, Nora is drawn to the blood dripping down his legs from the splitting skin on his thighs, an image which recalls the blood that dripped down her legs when she miscarried in the ambulance. At different times, then, Bill is the indelible image of her miscarriage *and* her miscarried child. However, since Nora cannot avoid Bill and his recovery, nor does she desire to, she is forced to limit these images in other ways, causing her to keep others at bay. She resists Evelyn for challenging these coping mechanisms and will not tell Bill about the incident for fear his spirits are too weak to handle the information. As such, even those close to her geographically are held at an emotional distance.

Nora also suppresses her body, hiding the signs threatening to voice the truth for her. Yochai Ataria suggests that it is common for one to avoid their body after a traumatic incident. Like Kerr, Kaminer, and Eagle, Ataria defines one’s relationship with their body according to Trauma Types I and II. In the former, one may dissociate from their body, a process affording them momentary reprieve (Antaria 224). In the latter, one may disown their body, a process detaching them from reality (Antaria 226). Nora’s behaviour aligns

more with the former as she acknowledges her situation but opts not to address it in order to protect herself and others. Consequently, Nora's emphasis on separation alienates both her loved ones and herself. These differences in child and adult trauma responses closely resemble the tension between individuality and belonging the Nelsons argue is required to keep the family together. Many professional therapeutic approaches to healing from a traumatic event champion this balance as well. In addition, however, they emphasize the need for a middle ground.

Many psychologists view the healing process as a rite of passage, a process that can be mapped and charted accordingly. Most of their resulting models rely on the work of French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, who argues all rites of passage have three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation (Layne 59). French psychologist Pierre Janet's model of healing closely resembles Van Gennep's work on rites of passage and is similarly composed of three stages: stabilization, processing, and integration (Hawkins 119). Successors have broken down these models even further, at times adding several more stages. Remer's six-part model is as follows: pretrauma (or trauma awareness for secondary victims), the traumatic event, crisis and disorientation, outward adjustment, reliving (reorganization for secondary victims), and integration and resolution (54-57). These models are becoming more detailed and diverse, but their applications are easily mismanaged.

In describing his model, Remer says the primary victim's needs take precedence after a traumatic event: "the primary victim is and must be the focal point of the healing process if the relationship is to survive. Their needs must be given primacy" (59). He also

says missteps occur when members of the primary victim's support system misinterpret what primacy means: "If . . . we mean that the primary victim would have to heal entirely before the healing of any secondary victims occur, the relationships would most likely break up before the healing could occur, which is entirely too often the case" (Remer 59). Primary and secondary victims must work together to heal themselves and each other to succeed in these healing processes. If one attempts to traverse these models alone, they often reach a point where they stay fixed between two stages, which are most often the latter two: transition and incorporation, processing and integration, reorganization and resolution. Remer argues the only way to move forward in this scenario is to increase one's resources and pathways of exchange by lowering personal defences, developing new interaction patterns, and implementing these into personal relationships (56). In other words, the healing process is more effective when approached as a group, rather than an individual, endeavour.

Other models establish how a family like the Lovelaces can traverse these stages when there are multiple traumas occurring simultaneously. The most prominent of these models is Reuben Hill's ABC-X Model of Family Stress, an equation whose balance determines how successful a family's recovery will be. In Hill's model, **A** represents the traumatic event, **B** available resources, and **C** the perception of the event. These factors contribute to **X**, the overall level of crisis caused by the event (Schumm et al. 34-35). After a traumatic event takes place, the level of crisis is determined by how well those impacted by the event perceive the outcome, coupled with how well they manage their available resources (Schumm et al. 34-35). One's perception of the event determines the

type and amount of resources needed just as their available resources determines their perception of the event. Combined with Stevan E. Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory, the resource (**B**) variable can be broken down into four subcategories: object resources (wealth), personal resources (self-esteem), energy resources (invested time), and condition resources (relationships) (Schumm et al. 35-36). The majority of these resources correspond to how well the family functions as a unit. In addition, the overall perception of the event is more balanced and accurate when more members of the group or family are allowed to provide their input. Like those mentioned above, Hill's model values interdependence over the radical forms of dependence and independence defining the common and habitual responses of children and adults, respectively. The Lovelaces' goal is to meet each other in the middle to develop a revised and balanced approach to dealing with their trauma.

Marks suggests interdependence is often the goal of most screenplays as well. The conflict propelling most screenplay narratives is the imbalance of valuing self over others or others over self (Marks 155-156). In *Baptized in Fire*, Nora sees her actions as selfless—valuing others over self—by protecting others through separation. However, she fails to realize her actions are motivated by the desire for control, an approach that values self over others. Her goal is to recognize this and balance the scales. By pushing others away, Nora limits her resources and restricts their pathways of exchange, resulting in her fixed position between the lattermost stages of the healing process. Mothers often occupy this position after losing their child before or shortly after giving birth. Using Van Gennep's model, Linda Layne says a pregnant woman is “more than one, but less than two” until

she gives birth (59-60; Stacey 89). The separation of the child marks the transition from woman to mother, whereafter she incorporates the child into the family and reintroduces herself as their mother (Stacey 89; Layne 59-60). Yet, “there are no rites to incorporate the woman” who experiences a pregnancy loss, leaving her trapped between transition and incorporation (Layne 60). Because Nora must remain at the hospital to care for Bill, it represents this liminal space between transition and incorporation, as mothers usually mark their passage from one stage to the other by returning home from the hospital with their child. Though this is most applicable to first-time mothers, with Clyde and Tildy at home, Nora’s status as mother is unstable without her surviving children present to help reaffirm her position. Citing Dr. W. Gill Wylie, the Nelsons claim that hospitals “tend to weaken the family tie by separating the sick from their homes and their relatives” (13). This occurs in the script, bolstering Nora’s separative approach and contributing to her struggle with the last two stages of recovery.

Nora’s actions restrict Bill’s ability to heal as well. Her support is crucial to Bill’s recovery, but limiting other familial resources prolongs the process. It is only by unifying the family and lowering her defences that Nora is able to progress in the healing process and help others do the same, which improves the family’s interpersonal relationships and ability to cope with traumatic stress. This response was natural for my grandparents, who maintained constant communication with their loved ones, especially with their children. For Nora, however, this is a learned process. At her lowest moment, when Bill’s odds of survival are bleakest and she can no longer handle everything on her own, Nora reaches out to others for help. Accepting the assistance of Evelyn, Clyde, and Tildy eases Nora’s

burdens, allowing her to better help Bill as a secondary victim of his trauma and heal as the primary victim of her own. Clyde and Tildy's conditions also improve in the process. By closing the gap between home and the hospital, Nora sees the importance of valuing self and others equally in order to heal as a collective.

This process is fittingly similar to that of skin grafting, an important procedure in the treatment of burn survivors. This involves removing skin from undamaged areas to rebuild the tissue in other areas (Roth and Hughes 60). The family's emotional support is similarly grafted onto Bill's well-being and contributes to his overall recovery. However, because grafting requires damaging one area to heal another, the consequence is exposure to pain. Taking grafts is an excruciating procedure, but for reasons that may be ironic to those unaware of the mechanics. Deguire notes this when reflecting on her own grafting experience. She writes:

Grafts are not painful, because the skin is so badly burned that the nerve endings are dulled or even non-existent. Donor sites are another story . . . these non-burned donor sites become the most painful areas. Removing the top layer of skin leaves a red wound, completely skinless and exposed, with all nerve-endings intact. (35)

Likewise, receiving support is not necessarily painful; however, giving support can be, especially when the process is designed to scar. When Tildy first sees Bill in the burn unit, she is hesitant and scared. She does not take to her father immediately. However, when she does at the end, her emotional support proves vital for his emotional recovery. As such, though Nora is reasonable in her fear of exposing her family to more pain, her



desire to keep their family divided is misguided as the potential benefits outweigh the detriments. The pain is acute but necessary for healing.

Not only are these model stage theories appropriate for the subject matter of this project, but also for the medium in which it is presented. The linearity of healing models like Van Gennep's, Janet's, Remer's, and Hill's are compatible with screenplay structure because contemporary screenplay structure is based on Joseph Campbell's Stages of the Hero's Journey (Vogler 6). Campbell's coming-of-age framework predates some of the aforementioned healing models, such as Remer's, but it is composed of similar stages: a pretraumatic ordinary world, a call to adventure most often incited by a traumatic event, denial, meeting mentors, crossing thresholds, facing tests on approach to a great ordeal, being reborn, being rewarded, and returning home rejuvenated to share the reward with others (Vogler 8). This connection becomes even clearer when simplifying Campbell's model. Sociologist Arthur W. Frank cites Campbell's work as foundational to recovery narratives and reduces his framework to three stages that closely resemble those of Van Gennep and Janet's models: departure, initiation, and return (117-118). And like those other models, Campbell's constructs a transformational arc, recalling Marks's criterion for a well-crafted screenplay.

There is an argument to be made that healing is too disorderly and chaotic for the efficacy of model stage approaches. There are often setbacks in the healing process, and it is not always successful. Some never heal from their trauma, and family members do not always survive their ails. Frank says we should not shy away from these instances, which form the basis of what he terms "chaos narratives" (97). These narratives respond

to “restitution narratives,” stories which emphasize a cure or complete recovery marked by restored health (77). Restitution narratives are stories whereby the proverbial Phoenix rises from the ashes virtually unscathed. Alternatively, chaos narratives depict situations in which health is not and cannot be restored. Frank says, “a true chaos story cannot be told” other than “around the edges” of the wound (100, 105). As opposed to the Phoenix rising from the flames, the protagonist of a chaos story is left writhing in the inferno and chewing on the ashes—an archetype Frank calls “Cinder-Biters,” borrowing from Robert Bly (111). As such, traumatic events have the potential to resist narrative structures and concrete resolutions altogether.

However, other scholars claim there may be order even in chaos. Patrick Brady says it is a natural response to perceive order where there is chaos and perceive chaos where there is order. These responses are attempts to make sense of our triumphs and tragedies. Brady writes:

we may have the impression that we perceive reality as totally disordered, but actually our faculties of perception are such that they impose order on reality in the course of perceiving it. Consequently, an impression of disorder may merely reflect some sort of overload of those faculties of perception; and the degree of order actually present independently of our perception remains problematic, unknowable. (66)

It is logical, then, that trauma and recovery are composed of order *and* chaos rather than one or the other. As such, setbacks in the healing process do not necessarily discredit the orderliness of the above mentioned models. Models such as Remer’s anticipate chaotic

setbacks, suggesting there are moments where the individual may regress to an earlier stage of the healing process before continuing to move forward (54-57). In Campbell's model, the protagonist may fail certain tests before reaching a great ordeal, and threats often resurface on the road back with their reward (Vogler 136, 190). Marks notes these setbacks as well, suggesting they often bridge the second and third acts of a script (292). Part of the healing process in *Baptized in Fire* is accepting the reality that everything cannot be controlled. Nora feels guilty for her miscarriage and Tildy for Bill's accident, but neither could control these events, nor prevent them from happening. The path to valuing self and others equally requires the release of one's desire for control, leading those like Nora and Tildy to recognize the presence of chaos and let go of what they cannot control. Despite their linearity, then, these healing models recognize order and chaos—breakthroughs and setbacks—rather than simply championing the former by discrediting the possibility of the latter.

Another potential issue with these models is that of support systems. If narrative approaches to trauma and the healing process require a support system, what happens to those without the type of support system like those of my grandparents or the Lovelaces? Are they plagued with chaos, forever fixed between stages of the healing process? Just as it is natural to make sense of reality by imposing order where there is none, an individual may impose a support system where one is missing. In the absence of an organic support system, it is natural to fill this void with a system of one's own design. When a system is established, one can progress through the stages of the models mentioned above. Deguire writes about this in her memoir. With the exception of her older brother, Marc, Deguire

describes her family as a collection of self-involved individuals, uninterested in solving each other's problems. However, Deguire credits the continued success of her recovery to the support system she constructed from a handful of close friends, health professionals, her husband, and their two daughters.

Trauma survivors can also construct support systems by telling stories. Memoirs like Deguire's and stories like *Baptized in Fire* allow survivors to build a community of readers devoted to healing, some of which may be survivors themselves. Recalling Hill's ABC-X Model, storytelling increases resources and pathways of exchange by stretching the parameters of one's support group beyond the family to include the larger community. Like the Nelsons, Anne Hunsaker Hawkins says storytelling is the bedrock of integration and belonging:

Survivors of trauma are never able to totally put the experience behind them and move on in life as though it didn't happen . . . [but] it is this exchange—and I do believe it goes both ways, the act of telling and the act of listening—that creates the sense of human community needed to turn trauma victims into trauma survivors. (127)

This passage from victim to survivor is emblematic of the individual reaching the final stage of the healing process. The ability to tell our stories shows that we have integrated our trauma into the larger narratives of our lives. Imperative to Nora's healing process in *Baptized in Fire* is telling others about her miscarriage. Until she shares this information with her family, Nora cannot receive the necessary resources required for her to progress in this healing process. She takes strides in her recovery by sharing with others, and is

better equipped to help Bill with his recovery as well. Frank argues that because chaos narratives cannot be told, the ability to speak or write about it marks the end of its being chaos (105). However, it does not necessarily mean a cure has been found in the event that chaos becomes speakable. The reality of chaos is not undercut by the emergence of a restitution narrative but rather tempered by an alternative that combines aspects of both chaos *and* restitution narratives.

Though Frank defends the validity of chaos, he also highlights the middle ground between restitution and chaos when discussing “quest narratives” (115). This alternative suggests it is possible for survivors to “meet suffering head on . . . accept illness and seek to *use* it” (Frank 115, original emphasis). By foregrounding the protagonist’s quest from victim to survivor, these stories hold chaos at bay without denoting its existence (Frank 115). After all, one cannot prevent what they do not see as possible. In quest narratives, the Phoenix rises from the ashes but is scarred and continues to spit out residual cinders throughout their lifetime. Campbell’s model is the definitive quest narrative framework with the emphasis not on a cure but continued healing. Considering that contemporary screenplay structure is modelled on Campbell’s work, it is the most suitable format for recovery stories like *Baptized in Fire*.

An audience’s desire for resolution, especially in filmgoers, can undermine the quest for the sake of restitution. The writer’s challenge, then, is to reconcile this desire with the implication that the quest is still ongoing after we fade to black and the credits start to roll. The best way to do this is with an open-ending. Marks says the end of the transformational arc does not mean the characters’ lives are free of future conflict. She

suggests even the clichéd happy ending does not have to “appear as if everything in the protagonist’s life is resolved forever . . . many very positive endings indicate that there are more struggles on the horizon, but that the protagonist is now better equipped to handle life’s battles” (Marks 306). Kenneth Lonergan, writer/director of *Manchester by the Sea*, is known for leaving his scripts open-ended. In a promotional interview on the film, he echoes Marks’s sentiments:

I feel best when there’s a resolution, but I think it’s a resolution of the problem that’s set up in the story. One thing that I don’t care for is when, in addition to that, the movie or the play feels obliged to wrap up the character’s entire life by the end because, as far as I know, nobody’s life is wrapped up until they’re dead.

And even then, their friends and relations are still alive. (DP/30: The Oral History of Hollywood)

*Baptized in Fire* has such an open-ending. The family makes it home for Christmas, but it is only the first milestone in a much longer journey of recovery. Bill has more surgeries scheduled for after the holidays, and the family is still dealing with the emotional fallout of his accident and Nora’s miscarriage. The family has resolved the problem established in the story, but there are more problems that lie ahead. Bill’s unfinished truck, still in the stages of restoration, represents this open-ending. That Tildy’s makeshift family crest—a heart made of two dangling, *untied* shoelaces—is emblazoned on each door emphasizes this further. And in the last scene, Nora sets her pregnancy test in the medicine cabinet as opposed to throwing it away. As she closes the mirrored door of the medicine cabinet, the test disappears behind her reflection. This expresses that her recovery is not yet complete;

however, at the same time, it marks a big step forward. As Layne says, the accumulation of artifacts related to the lost child—such as clothing, toys, pictures, etc.—shows that the survivor of pregnancy loss is assembling the tools to construct a narrative, a key moment in their recovery (162). Nora's milk had the potential to be one such tool, but it became the ink she refused to write with when she chose to soak it up, plug the leaks, and seal the cracks in her body. Yet, her actions by the end show a willingness to start. In many ways, the Lovelaces are not without future hardships, but they are better equipped to face them in having learned to share their burdens.

In spite of distilling recovery into finite steps, model stage approaches emphasize the importance of open-endings and present recovery as continuous. For example, Remer concludes his six-part model by saying that “resolution does not mean a finished product but rather the ability to see more clearly the ongoing aspects of the healing process and their continuance, perhaps forever” (57). This emphasis on open-endings has also caused a shift in the direction of literary trauma theory. Michelle Balaev suggests many authors of modern trauma fiction have opted for open-endings. In these stories, “The traumatized protagonist's inquiry into previous ‘truths’ of the self or formulations of identity produces a change in consciousness . . . that takes the protagonist on a transformative journey, one that does not necessarily provide relief from suffering or redemption” (165). This extends to cinema as contemporary filmmakers, like Lonergan, continue to strive for ambiguity in their work. “The solution,” says David Bordwell, “is the open-ended narrative . . . the pensive ending acknowledges . . . life is more complex than art can ever be, and the only way to respect this complexity is to leave causes dangling, questions unanswered” (61).

This, of course, is not an excuse for authors to leave their stories completely unresolved. The challenge is recognizing which ends to tie and which to leave dangling. As long as the characters have transformed in some way by the end of the story, their recovery can be left unfinished or ongoing.

Authors of trauma fiction recognize that audiences read their work “*to witness a change of character through suffering*” (Frank 128, original emphasis). The change is in how the traumatized storyteller, and by extension the audience, views trauma by the end. The storyteller and audience come to accept trauma “as the cost of changes [they like]. Losses continue to be mourned, but the emphasis is on gains” (Frank 128). This makes the story itself the reward that the traumatized individual shares with others: a journey highlighting “alternative ways to experience suffering” (Frank 119). In *Baptized in Fire*, the family mourns their losses throughout their journey, but sharing their experiences with each other makes them stronger, so they accept these losses as consequences of valuable change. Storytelling becomes Campbell’s coveted elixir. Distilling experience by creating and sharing stories is “not just something that benefits the trauma survivor, but . . . the larger society, and . . . authors believe that each of them is a storyteller with a mission” (Tal 121; Hawkins 122). My mission in writing this story is one I inherited as the son and grandson of secondary survivors, and this presented me with my biggest challenge as I periodically questioned my right to tell a story based on something I did not experience.

In some sense, this is not my story to tell, especially if read as a metaphor for true events. Frank writes, “Metaphors . . . can be powerful means to healing. But generalized



metaphors, offered as storylines for others' self-stories, are dangerous" (136). Frank uses the Phoenix metaphor as an example here as well, which is apt for a story that is, in part, about a burn survivor. He suggests this metaphor can present "the burning process as too clean and the transformation as too complete . . . while the Phoenix remembers nothing of its former life, the victim of some trauma . . . does remember." (135-136). But *Baptized in Fire* is an exception to the rule with an open-ending that resists the closure of the healing process. The Phoenix is scarred and will thus remember their traumas. In addition, it is a common mistake to assume these stories must be told by those who experienced the event firsthand, especially when writing quest narratives. Again drawing from Campbell, Frank says that "the hero who thinks he travels on his own will fail. Falling into the hubris that one's voice can ever be entirely one's own is . . . one of the failures . . . quest stories risk" (135). In a solo outing, *Damaged Identities: Narrative Repair*, Hilde Lindemann Nelson supports Frank's argument by suggesting the narratives of our lives are made up of equal parts autobiography and the stories that others write about us. Though Nelson privileges first-person perspectives, she writes, "my own stories about who I am don't necessarily trump other people's stories about me, even though it might be supposed that I have more authority over my identity than others" (71). Like the Lovelaces, this is a crucial lesson I learned while developing this project.

I am not the only one who has written or tried to write about my grandparents' story. As I mentioned, *The Reader's Digest* published "I'm Coming Back, Wanda..." by Robert Collins in 1979, a seven-page story on my grandfather's accident and recovery. Collins brings closure to his telling of the events while still implying a future beyond its

last lines. He writes toward the end, “To other patients in Victoria General’s Burn Unit, [Paul] is the indomitable spirit who periodically braves more surgery—no one can say how many more operations will be necessary” (55). Collins also uses an open-ending; however, though he does a commendable job, he is handcuffed by the page count, and this leaves the children’s roles underdeveloped. He includes crucial milestones, such as the children’s first visit to the burn unit and when they see their father’s unmasked face for the first time; yet, he writes little about their emotional journeys. In his depiction of the former scene, Collins says, “As Wanda led them down the hospital corridor, Keith held back. ‘I want to see him, Mommy, but I’m *nervous*’” (53, original emphasis). He only scratches the surface here because of the page limit, so he resolves this conflict a few sentences later. In contrast, I am privileged with a much longer format, and though my fictional retelling is now only *inspired by* my grandparents’ story, my aim is for a more complete and balanced result.

Many years ago, my grandmother started writing a book about my grandfather’s accident, but she grew frustrated with how to tell the story and eventually stopped. Even so, the fact that she felt ready to construct a narrative contextualizing their trauma is an accomplishment in itself. I hope this project at least picks up where she left off. After all, though theirs is a story forged in fire nearly fifty years ago now, the ending is still being written, and one cannot turn the page on an unfinished story. *Baptized in Fire* started as another chapter of this story—a metaphor joining who the characters become with who their likenesses have always been (Frank 130). It has since grown into an exploration of trauma, recovery, and how the screenplay is the ideal medium for exploring the healing

process. For Remer, this process is “like a dance, the partnership must develop a subtle communication that makes the flow, the movement, collaborative” (59). This is also an ongoing process. The Phoenix may rise from the fire and dance on its ashes, but they are not a professional whose movements sweep the ashes off the dance floor by the time the song is over.

My grandparents’ story has shown me it is possible to heal from personal trauma. It has inspired me to see my potential to overcome such an experience if I am ever faced with doing so. I hope that *Baptized in Fire* will do the same by inspiring other survivors to tell their stories and help increase the resources and pathways of exchange for those in the early stages of recovery. These survivors are encouraged to take the creative liberties they feel are necessary to tell their stories. Accuracy is important, but a survivor’s ability to reshape their experiences is a sign they have mastered their trauma. As Laurel J. Kiser, Barbara Baumgardner, and Joyce Dorado suggest, the therapeutic power of storytelling is “reworking the trauma . . . an individual (or family) impacted by trauma can gain a sense of mastery over the traumatic event by talking or playing out . . . what they wished had happened or what they would have liked to have done differently” (247; Lantz and Rainz 169). If healing is like a dance, I know the creative liberties I have taken to craft a work of fiction rather than an adaptation of my grandparents’ experiences are necessary and admissible. Implementing these changes was the best way to fulfill the flawed Phoenix archetype defining the quest narrative upon which many recovery stories are based. For whereas Bill and Nora Lovelace frequently step on each other’s toes before finding their rhythm, Paul and Wanda Farrell seldom miss a beat.

BAPTIZED IN FIRE

Written by  
Joel St. Peters

FADE IN:

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

A hand places thick strips of bacon into a greased-up frying pan. They SIZZLE on impact.

The hand rises to wipe sweat off the brow of NORA, about 35. She is tightly wound and thinly spread, held together by her long skirt and stuffy blouse.

The counter before her is divided into stations: a couple of lunchboxes with an open sandwich in front of each one, a few open books, and the stove. She closes the sandwiches, erases something from one book, and jots something in the other.

NORA

(shouts)

Come on, Tildy! You can't be late! We don't want to set a bad habit on your first week back!

She reaches the stove. Grease SNAPS out of the pan, catching her wrist. She winces, quickly sucks on the burn, then moves the contents in the pan.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - TILDY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

TILDY, 7, kicks a floral shirt and pair of shorts under her bed. She clips the buckles on her overalls, slides into her shoes, and grabs a lace in each hand.

She makes two loops.

TILDY

Bunny ears, bunny ears, playing by a tree. Bunny ears, bunny ears, trying to catch me.

She twists the loops around one another.

TILDY (cont'd)

Bunny ears, bunny ears, jumped into the hole, popped out the other side, beautiful and bold!

She tries to pull one loop through the other, but the laces fall to the sides, tangling her fingers instead.

She throws her hands in the air. She rises to her feet and makes for the door, stumbling on her laces, falling to her knees. She huffs, gets back up, and exits.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Nora cracks a few eggs into the frying pan, and the grease SNAPS, catching her arm again.

She turns, clutches her arm, and bends at the waist.

NORA

Son of a--  
(Tildy enters view)  
--biscuit.

TILDY

Are you okay?

NORA

I'm fine. Why'd you change? I had you all done up.

TILDY

I didn't wanna wear that. Too girly.

Tildy walks to CLYDE, 13, seated at the table with his face buried in a book. Glasses hang low on his nose. A soggy bowl of cereal and a half-empty (or half-full) glass of juice sit off to the side.

She points to her laces.

TILDY (cont'd)

Can you help me with these?

He turns the page without looking up.

CLYDE

I'm a little busy right now.

TILDY

No you're not. Put that stupid book down and help me.

CLYDE

I would, but, unlike your shoes, my hands are tied.

TILDY

Shut up!

NORA

Enough. Come over here, and I'll do them. Clyde, finish your breakfast.

CLYDE

Uh-huh. Just a few more pages.

NORA

Now.

Without picking up his head, Clyde grabs a spoon and shovels the mush into his mouth, dumping some on the table.

Nora rolls her eyes. She grabs Tildy's shoelaces and quickly ties a bow on one of her shoes.

Clyde haphazardly wipes up his spill, smearing the mush into the table cloth.

NORA (cont'd)

Don't, Clyde. You have to dab it or it'll stain.

Nora gets up, walks to the table and cleans up Clyde's mess.

TILDY

Mom. I think breakfast is on fire.

Nora turns to see the smoke, then races to the burner.

NORA

Get your dad. It's... done I guess.

Tildy exits, one shoe untied.

Nora reduces the heat, grabs a spatula, and moves around the charred eggs in the pan. She suddenly notices the smell.

She tucks her chin to chest, kinking her neck like a hose. A deep breath. Her eyes widen. She covers her mouth and dashes from the room.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Nora bursts in, kneels in front of the toilet, and upchucks. She wipes her mouth, braces, then hurls again. She pauses a moment, enough time for confusion to spread across her face.

She crawls to the counter, opens a drawer. Inside is chaos. She rifles through it, then pulls out a pregnancy test. She rips the stick from the package.

INT./EXT. LOVELACE HOUSE - GARAGE - MORNING

A MAN on his tip-toes is bent into the engine of an old Chev pick-up, panting heavily. Tools are strewn across the floor.

A bottle of motor oil sits balanced on the frame.

MAN

C'mere, you no good, almost got it.  
Aha! Wait, no, no, no!

Tildy arrives behind him, just in time to hear a wrench fall from his hand, clinking on its way to the floor.

MAN (cont'd)

Ah, for Christ's sake. You goddamn piece of shit!

She laughs. Surprised, he shoots up, hitting his head on the low-hanging hood. She laughs harder.

MAN (cont'd)

Oh, so you think that's funny, eh?

He turns, revealing the grease-streaked, mustachioed face of BILL, 36. He looks, anachronistically, like Thomas Magnum -- if he were undercover at an auto shop. Despite all that dirt on his face, his piercing eyes shine through in bright pools of blue.

BILL

You wanna reach under there and grab that for me?

TILDY

Can you tie my shoe first?

BILL

I thought you had it down?

She shrugs. He grabs a dirty, old rag from his back pocket and wipes his meaty hands semi-clean.

BILL (cont'd)

C'mere.

She does as she is told.

BILL (cont'd)

You do the bunny ears thing?



TILDY

Yeah. But I don't get it. Why would the bunny hide from me if it really wants to catch me?

BILL

Well, it's not literal, it's... Let me see how you did it.

Tildy drops. She forms two loops with her laces, wraps them around each other, and pulls them. The laces fall limp.

BILL (cont'd)

You forgot somethin'. Here, try this.

He swings the rag over his shoulder, then drops to one knee. He takes a lace in either hand. As he ties a bow, he says:

BILL (cont'd)

Over, under, pull 'em tight. Harder, harder, with all your might. Loop-de-loop and come about. Now pull those laces inside out. Okay? Now you give it a try.

He unties his boot. She grabs the laces.

TILDY

You got big feet.

BILL

Least they're not stinky like yours.

She repeats the process, tying a tight knot on Bill's boot.

BILL (cont'd)

Not so hard now, is it? You'll get it. Now, grab that wrench already, will ya?

Tildy climbs under the truck and pulls the wrench out, her face and hands now covered in dirt.

BILL (cont'd)

You wanna help me with this?

TILDY

Okay.

BILL

Hang on to that.

He lifts her up and dangles her over the engine. He picks out a part tucked in an area too tight for him to get at.

BILL (cont'd)  
You see that loose part right there?  
Give it a few cranks.

She reaches for it as he lowers her inside. His arm bumps the jug of oil, spilling its already shallow contents all over the engine.

He pulls out the rag and wipes up some of the inky sludge.

BILL (cont'd)  
I'll get that after. Come on to 'er!

She extends further and tightens the piece as best she can.

BILL (cont'd)  
That oughta do it. Let's see.

With Tildy still in tow, he walks to the driver's door and opens it. He turns the keys and the engine rumbles to life.

BILL (cont'd)  
It's al-i-i-i-ive! Great work, missy.  
What'll that be then, cash or credit?

He tickles her mercilessly. She squirms about in his arms.

TILDY  
(laughing)  
Stop it! Mom said breakfast is ready.

BILL  
Great. But let's clean you up before she sees you like this. You must get some tired carryin' around those big pipes all day, huh?

He wipes her face with the other side of the rag. He points to the side mirror. She examines his work. They look almost identical; twins born thirty years apart.

BILL (cont'd)  
There. Beautiful.

He smiles. Then, A puzzled glance. He sniffs. Moves closer to the engine, bends over, and sniffs again.

BILL (cont'd)  
You smell that?

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP. The smoke detector sounds off from inside the house.

Bill shuts the truck off and races for the house with Tildy in his clutches, slamming the truck's hood down on the way.

The bottle of motor oil lies on the ground, slowly dripping its last drops into a small puddle.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - BATHROOM - MORNING

The BEEPING continues. Nora drops her pregnancy test inside the drawer, slams it shut, and runs for the kitchen.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Black plumes of smoke fill the room. Clyde's outline stands at the center of it as he lifts the skillet from the burner.

Nora scoops Clyde up in one arm while grabbing the pan with her free hand. She tosses the pan in the sink and turns the water on. It SIZZLES furiously, smoke wafts from the basin.

Bill and Tildy burst in. The room erupts in a fit of coughs, everybody desperate for clean air.

BILL

What's goin' on? Is everyone alright?

NORA

We're fine.

(to Clyde)

You okay, hun?

Clyde nods.

Nora grabs an oven mitt and fans the smoke away. Bill sets Tildy down. He approaches the smoke detector and resets it.

Clyde goes back to the table and opens his book.

Nora grabs a sponge and scrubs the blackened bits from the pan, each scrub harder than her last. Bill reaches for her arm.

BILL

Here, let me get that. You're trying to do too much.

Her rapid-fire arm knocks his hand away.

NORA

It's fine. I've got it under control.  
How's the truck coming?

She closes the lunchboxes and sets them on a table outside the kitchen.

BILL

All fixed, thanks to Tildy. Thought she was as good as toast this time.

NORA

Good. We can't afford a new one.

BILL

We will, soon enough.

NORA

Not with you getting paid in excuses and favours. I looked at your books. We can't pay debts with rain cheques.

BILL

I'm just cutting some people a break until they can afford to pay me back. You know, the barter system. Besides, Christmas's just around the corner.

NORA

Christmas is three months away, Bill, and the barter system is "you scratch my back, I scratch yours." Our backs are still itchy here.

BILL

Well, then just let me help already, will ya?

He dances his fingers up her back. She swats his hand away, hiding her smile with annoyance.

NORA

Knock it off.

BILL

Ouch. Look. I'll get them soon. You and I both knew going out on my own was risky. Besides, doesn't it take like three years or somethin' for a business to turn a profit?

NORA

Yeah, and that was a year ago. That list of yours is starting to become one big I.O.U.

BILL

They're good for it. You'll see. If it keeps building, I think we'll be afloat by the holidays. Emma Kramer called me the other day. That's one more name we can add.

He walks to the fridge, grabs a pen, and jots "Emma Kramer" on a piece of paper stuck to the fridge with a few magnets. The phone rings.

BILL (cont'd)

And I betcha that's another one. Good thing I got my pen ready.

Nora motions for the receiver. Bill stops her.

BILL (cont'd)

I got it.

(answers)

Yellow. Oh. Yes, I'm her father. Yes. She said what?... She's what?

(sterner)

Christ Almighty, what asshole came up with that solution? Oh. So, that's it then? Okay. Well, thanks for nothin'.

He hangs up. Tildy moves to the table.

BILL (cont'd)

Tildy's suspended.

NORA

What?! What for?

BILL

She called a classmate a "son of a bitch." The principal just got off the phone with his mother. I guess she wasn't too happy about it.

Nora looks around for Tildy. She is nowhere to be seen. His head still buried in his book, Clyde points under the table.

Nora darts in that direction. She lifts the table cloth and finds Tildy balled up underneath.

NORA  
Why would you say that?

TILDY  
I was just telling the truth. Jayce  
Palmer is a real son of a bitch.

NORA  
Tildy!

BILL  
Palmer.

Bill dashes to the list and scribbles, "Olivia Palmer."

NORA  
What've I said about those words? If  
we don't have anything nice to say,  
we don't say anything at all. Do you  
hear me?

TILDY  
Like "Son of a biscuit?"

BILL  
They're overreacting.

NORA  
You would think that. You're the one  
teaching her these things. Were you  
talking like that when you guys were  
out there banging on that bucket of  
bolts?

BILL  
I may have said a few of prayers.

NORA  
That's not funny, Bill. God. I can't  
believe this. One day back and she's  
suspended already.

BILL  
I know. I know. What're we gonna do?

NORA  
I'll take her. Who knows what she'd  
pick up after a whole day with you.  
Better not say those kind of things  
around the kids at my office, Tildy.

BILL  
That won't be a problem around them.

NORA

They can read lips, Bill. Clyde, go  
get your things.

She strips the book from him.

CLYDE

Hey!

NORA

Get your stuff.

She tosses it on the table. Clyde gets up and sulks to his  
bedroom. Tildy crawls out from underneath the table.

BILL

Can your parents take her?

NORA

They're out of town until tonight.

BILL

Let me do it. It'll be fine. Besides,  
she's pretty handy. What d'you think?  
You wanna come to work with me today?

TILDY

I call shotgun!

NORA

Fine. But this isn't a reward. Make  
sure she knows it. And actually try  
to get paid today. Nothing homemade.

BILL

Only if you promise to stop burnin'  
all our food.

Clyde passes, his backpack slung loose around his shoulder,  
and snags his lunch on the way by.

BILL (cont'd)

Hey! Hold it, Speedy Gonzalez.

Clyde turns. Bill grabs the book off the table and lobs it  
to him. Clyde catches it, hiding a smile on his way out.

NORA

Why do you always have to make me  
look like the bad guy? What about  
breakfast?

He looks through the smoky haze of the kitchen.

BILL

We'll grab somethin' on the way.

INT. BELL SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - STAFF LOUNGE - MORNING

Nora rushes through the door, then drops her bag beside the counter-top. ADDISON, mid-20s, sits at the table, sipping a coffee. Her face is bright, her skin glowing.

Nora opens the cupboard for a mug. Addison checks her watch.

Nora pours herself a cup and takes a deep drink.

ADDISON

Who's fault was it this time? Bill or the kids?

NORA

Little of both.

ADDISON

That's what I got to look forward to?

Addison gets up from the table, revealing a baby belly.

NORA

Afraid so.

ADDISON

You guys ever think of having more?

NORA

Sometimes.

Addison rinses her cup in the sink.

ADDISON

Three's good. At least, Roger seems to think so. He says that one would be spoiled, and two would always be competing.

NORA

Just tell him about the middle child thing. That would change his mind.

ADDISON

Yeah. To four most likely. No thanks. Have mercy on my body.



NORA  
Only takes one.

ADDISON  
Great. You gonna take over my class  
when I go off next week?

Addison checks her watch again and exits. Nora follows.

NORA  
No thanks. I don't know how you keep  
control over so many of them at once.  
Besides, I don't care for talking in  
front of crowds.

ADDISON  
Well, it's a good thing you wouldn't  
be talking then, isn't it?

Nora settles in behind her desk. A nameplate in front of her  
reads, "ADMINISTRATION."

NORA  
Don't do that.

ADDISON  
What?

NORA  
That's a Bill joke.

ADDISON  
Just sayin'. You'd be good at it.

NORA  
(signs)  
And I will take your word for it.

Addison disappears down a hall of classrooms.

A flashing red light fills the room, emanating from a device  
on the wall where a class bell would be.

Kids start to file in from outside. As they walk past Nora's  
desk, some sign "Good morning." She returns the greetings as  
she alternates between Bill's books and the school's.

INT. SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Students are in their seats as their teacher, MR. SALTZMAN, grabs a stack of papers and starts to hand them out row-by-row. From his desk, Clyde eyes him like a hawk.

MR. SALTZMAN

I finished grading your quizzes over the weekend. As I've said before, if you need extra help, I'm always free at lunch and after school.

He sets a paper onto Clyde's desk. Clyde flips it over and sees "B+" in the top corner of the page, marked in red pen.

CLYDE

I thought I did better than that.

MR. SALTZMAN

B+ is a good grade, Clyde.

CLYDE

But I swore I knew everything on it.

MR. SALTZMAN

You should be happy with that. Don't let perfect get in the way of good.

Saltzman carries on down the row. Clyde's eyes stay fixed on the page. He disregards the check marks. He sees only Xs.

Static comes over the intercom, followed by a booming voice.

INTERCOM

Attention, everyone. We're commencing a fire safety drill. After the alarm, leave your belongings and follow your teachers in a single-file line along the designated pathways for headcount in the courtyard. Thank you.

The fire alarm RINGS.

Everybody gets up and starts to form a line. Clyde folds up the quiz and stuffs it in his pocket.

INT. HARDWARE STORE - AFTERNOON

Bill scours the aisles, carrying boxes of nails and screws.

At the checkout, Tildy's tiny hands place more boxes on the counter. An elderly store clerk, GRETA, rings in the items.

GRETA  
Shouldn't you be in school?

TILDY  
I got suspended.

Bill arrives behind Tildy, slapping more boxes down.

GRETA  
I see. She's the spitting image of  
her father, Bill.

BILL  
Mm-hmm. Spits words like him, too.

GRETA  
Acid tongue? That's not good. \$65.05.

Bill opens his wallet, only to find it completely empty.

BILL  
Wife's got all the cards.

GRETA  
I'll just put it on your account.

BILL  
Thanks. I'll take my lumber, too.

GRETA  
It's already out back.

She hands him his bagged items.

EXT. HARDWARE STORE - LUMBERYARD - AFTERNOON

A truck is parked in the lot, already loaded up with lumber. With the help of a lumber worker, DANNY, Bill piles the last of it onto the back of his truck.

Tildy loads small pieces she can handle.

BILL  
It's ten Crescent. We'll follow you.

DANNY  
Sure thing.

Tildy makes for the truck. She trips over her feet and sees that, once again, her laces are the culprit. She bends down to tie them.

BILL  
C'mon, Tildy. We're running late.

TILDY  
My shoe's untied.

BILL  
You can tie 'em on the way.

Bill and Tildy pile in the truck.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - AFTERNOON

The lumber truck is in the lead as Bill's truck rides along, both kicking up clouds of dust in their wake.

INT. BILL'S TRUCK - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

Bill drives casually with just one hand on the wheel. Tildy fiddles with her laces.

TILDY  
What does acid tongue mean?

BILL  
Means you say things sometimes that aren't nice. Those words hurt burn like you're spittin' acid.

TILDY  
Like a lizard?

BILL  
I guess so.

TILDY  
Cool.

BILL  
Uh-huh. Wait, no. No, it's not cool. You shouldn't say those words.

TILDY  
Why not? You say 'em.

BILL

I know. But you shouldn't. You can't, okay? From now on, you can't say 'em.

TILDY

But I was just tryin' to be like you.

Bill sighs, looks over. Her seat belt now unbuckled, she is bent over, further fiddling with her laces.

BILL

You wanna be like me? Why don't you start by puttin' your belt back on.

TILDY

I almost got it though. Over, under, pull 'em tight...

BILL

Seriously. You're makin' me nervous. Just leave it alone.

TILDY

Harder, harder, with all your might.

Bill reaches over to stop her, taking his eyes off the road. The truck starts zig-zagging across the gravel.

Tildy looks up, her eyes widen.

TILDY (cont'd)

Daddy, look out!

Bill looks forward to see a utility poll.

Tildy SCREAMS.

Bill braces her with his arm.

--SMASH!--

INT. BELL SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Nora sits at her desk, ferociously clacking the keyboard on her desktop. Her bloodshot eyes dart from the pages of her books to the computer screen. The power cuts out. Darkness.

A BOY races down the hallway, his face white as a sheet.

BOY  
(signs)  
Come. Quick.

NORA  
(signs)  
What's wrong?

BOY  
(signs)  
She's leaking.

She gives the boy a confused look, then one of realization. She shoots up from her office chair and follows the boy as they run back to the classroom.

INT. BELL SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF - MOMENTS LATER

Nora follows the line of fluid on the floor with her eyes to see Addison seated at her desk with her legs stretched before her. The children are circled around her.

NORA  
I'll get my car.

She races from the room, disappearing down the dark halls.

INT./EXT. BILL'S TRUCK - AFTERNOON

The front of the truck is folded like paper. Inside, Bill and Tildy are draped unconscious over the airbags. Bill's arm has taken most of the brunt force from Tildy's impact.

The engine HISSES through the busted grille.

Downed power lines strangle the hood of the truck as gray smoke creeps out from underneath.

Bill awakens, looks around. The power lines SNAP angrily.

He tries to move, but the crumpled dashboard has his legs pinned. He painfully moves his arm, nudging Tildy.

The power lines CRACK.

BILL  
Tildy? Tildy, wake up. Are you okay?

She awakens. Stunned, she looks around, fear on her face.

TILDY

Daddy?

BILL

You're okay, hunny. Just stay calm.

Danny arrives at Bill's side.

DANNY

I called the ambulance, okay? Just don't move.

The lines SNAP and CRACKLE again, this time louder.

The smoke under the hood blackens, followed by a flicker of orange and yellow. Seconds later, fire bursts from the hood.

TILDY

Daddy?!

The fire spreads quickly. Bill tries harder to break himself free but can't. Tildy WHINES. Bill looks to her, the flames, then Danny.

BILL

Get her. Quick. Get her outta here!

Danny races to the other side, rips the passenger door open, grabs Tildy, and pulls her from the cab.

TILDY

No! Don't! Don't leave him!

BILL

It's okay, Tildy. It'll be alright.

The inferno moves across the hood and catches the dashboard. Bill moves faster, but still nothing. Then, the fire catches the sleeve of his shirt and sets him alight.

His SCREAMS start low, but quickly get louder as the flames take over his body -- licking and biting his skin.

As Danny runs to his truck with Tildy in his arms, she looks over his shoulder to see Bill's body writhing and contorting in his seat.

TILDY

(rapid fire)

No! Don't! Go back! Daddy!

Danny sets Tildy in the passenger side of the lumber truck, then grabs an extinguisher from the floor.

Tildy pounds on the window, tears streaming down her face. The reflection of Danny dowsing Bill with the extinguisher projects over her face. Sirens enter, washing the image in red.

EXT. SCHOOL - COURTYARD - AFTERNOON

Teachers march up and down lines of students. Mr. Saltzman taps them on the head as he goes by. Clyde re-examines his quiz. A murmur grows until it takes over the crowd. In the noise, Clyde hears over his shoulder:

STUDENT #1	STUDENT #2
Whoa. Do you see that?	Is this for real?

STUDENT #3  
I thought they said it was a drill.

Clyde looks up to see a spiral of black smoke billowing over the distant treeline. The growing sound of SIRENS makes him turn around.

Fire trucks whiz past, followed by ambulances.

INT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY ROOM - AFTERNOON

Nora guides a waddling Addison inside as they approach the HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST.

NORA  
Okay, Addison. Just breathe.  
(to receptionist)  
Pregnant woman here.

The receptionist offers her a clipboard.

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST  
Fill out these papers, please.

NORA  
No, we don't have time for all that.

ADDISON  
I can feel something.

ROGER  
Addison! I got your call.



Addison turns to see her husband, ROGER.

ROGER (cont'd)  
I'm her husband. I can take it from here.

The receptionist hands Roger the clipboard.

ADDISON  
Thank you, Nora.

A nurse arrives with a wheelchair. Addison settles in, then she and Roger are ushered off to the Delivery Unit.

NORA  
Good luck!

A barrage of nurses and doctors runs passed Nora. She steps aside -- a near miss.

NORA (cont'd)  
What's going on?

RECEPTIONIST  
They're prepping a burn patient for emergency transport.

As Nora heads for the exit:

TILDY  
Mom!

Nora looks down the hall to the Transportation Unit, passed all the nurses and doctors in a rush to get there. She sees Tildy through the legs of the hospital personnel.

NORA  
Tildy?!

Nora races down the hall. Tildy and Danny are seated with a nurse, VIVIANE. Nora squats in front of Tildy and takes her by the hands.

NORA (cont'd)  
What're you doing here? What's wrong, hunny? You're shaking.

VIVIANE  
She's in shock right now, but she'll be fine. Are you the mother?

NORA  
Yes, yes. I'm her mother.

VIVIANE  
Then I gather you're also the wife?

NORA  
Yes. Oh, my god. Where's Bill?

VIVIANE  
He's been in an accident.

NORA  
What kind of...

As the medical staff rush by her, she realizes it.

NORA (cont'd)  
Oh, God. no.

She pushes by Viviane.

NORA (cont'd)  
Bill!

Viviane grabs her around the arm, pulling her back.

VIVIANE  
Wait. Listen to me.

NORA  
Take me to him. I need to see him.

Tears begin to well up in Nora's eyes.

VIVIANE  
Just a second. You need to know how serious this is. His face is burned black, and he's heavily sedated. Be ready to see it because we need his heart rate stable for transport. He needs you to be strong, okay?

NORA  
Okay, okay. I just need to see him.  
(to Tildy)  
I'll be right back, okay?

Nora turns and runs after the sea of people. Tildy sits all by herself, anxiously kicking her feet back and forth.

At the end of the hall, Nora pushes her way through a crowd, following a faint voice at the centre.

BILL  
(weakly)  
Where is it? Do you know? Do you?  
Please. Just tell me.

Nora forces her way through the people, bursting into the empty space in the middle. There, on a stretcher with two paramedics prepping to put him into an ambulance, is Bill: blackened, tender, and raw. His eyes are sealed shut.

Nora composes herself and then approaches the side of the stretcher.

A nurse reaches out to stop Nora. Viviane stops the nurse instead. Bill's shaking body RATTLES the stretcher.

NORA  
Bill?

BILL  
Nora? Is that you?

NORA  
It is. Bill, you're shaking so hard.

BILL  
They took my wedding ring, Nora.

NORA  
Don't worry about it. I'll find it.

BILL  
How does it look? Is it bad?

NORA  
(swallowing her shock)  
No. No, it's not that bad.

Her hand trembles as she reaches out to touch him, but the tender appearance of his body prevents her from doing so.

PARAMEDIC #1  
I'm sorry. We have to take him now.

As the commotion begins again, the nervousness of the room seeps into Nora, she looks around, panicking. Her thoughts rush in and out her mind like a shaken bottle of bees.

VIVIANE

Go with them.

NORA

I can't, I-- My daughter-- She's--

VIVIANE

--We'll take care of it.

NORA

But Vic General's two hours away.

Viviane pulls Nora aside.

VIVIANE

(whispers)

If you don't go right now, you may  
not get to say goodbye later.

The paramedic avoids her gaze, an affirmation.

Nora looks down the hall where Tildy sits all alone. She has to close her eyes to turn away from her daughter. She climbs aboard the ambulance.

Viviane shuts the doors and bangs on the back. The ambulance flashes its lights. As it drives on, the faint reflection of Tildy on its back windows grows smaller and smaller.

EXT. ICE HOCKEY ARENA - NIGHT

A couple of cars idle at the curb. Clyde exits the building with a teammate, ETHAN, both carrying hockey gear.

ETHAN

Hey, you wanna ride home?

CLYDE

No, it's okay. My mom'll probably be  
here any minute now.

ETHAN

Alright, later man.

Ethan gets into a car and it pulls away. Other players exit the building, hop into cars and leave. Clyde drops his gear and rotates his stiffened shoulder.

He sits on his gear bag and waits, fiddling with his hockey stick. A blanket of warm light from the arena hugs his back but is quickly stripped away.

INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT

Nora sits beside Bill, watching as the fluid drips from an I.V. bag. PARAMEDIC #1 sits beside her as #2 tends to Bill.

NORA  
(to Paramedic #1)  
I don't understand it. His body... It looks so painful, and yet he's hardly said a thing.

PARAMEDIC #1  
That's normal. The pain only kicks in as he starts to heal. That's when his nerves wake up.

BILL  
--Nora.

NORA  
Yes. I'm here.

BILL  
How're the kids? How's Tildy?

NORA  
She'll be alright. Just try to relax.

She places her hand on his shin, the only part of his body that looks safe to touch. The ambulance begins to shake as the road becomes rougher. Bill winces.

NORA (cont'd)  
Is he alright?

PARAMEDIC #2  
It's just the movement. His skin's tender right now.

Another bump rocks the ambulance even harder, causing all inside to jump. This time, Nora winces with him.

Bill's heart rate monitor begins to race. His body shakes.

NORA  
What's wrong?

PARAMEDIC #2  
He's going into the shock.

Nora grabs her abdomen, in visible pain this time.

She reaches below her skirt and wipes her leg. She brings her hand to her face. It's covered blood. Her blood.

She is light-headed now. Her body swaying back and forth. She falls backward into Paramedic #1's arms. He taps her face repeatedly.

PARAMEDIC #1  
Miss? Are you okay? Miss?

BILL  
Nora! What's wrong? What's happening?

Paramedic #1 lifts his head to speak, but Nora grabs his arm. He looks down. She shakes her head. The fear in her eyes tells him what to say.

PARAMEDIC #1  
It's okay. She just bumped her head.

Paramedic #1 nods his head to Paramedic #2. In response, Paramedic #2 plunges a needle into Bill's arm.

BILL  
(growing weaker)  
Is she okay? Please. I need to know  
my wife is okay. I need to know. I...

Bill's voice fades into a void of unconsciousness. Nora tries to regain control over her breath while a look of exhaustion overpowers her.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - TILDY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Tildy sits on the edge of her bed. Her eyes are wide and blank. Her face obscured by strands of hair clumped with dried sweat.

MAGGIE (O.S.)  
How much do we tell them?

FRANK (O.S.)  
Keep your voice down.

She swings her feet back and forth, her untied shoelaces sweeping through the air.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - NORA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

As Nora opens her eyes. The room comes slowly into focus. Her pulse BEEPING steadily on the monitor at her bedside.

When she realizes where she is, she shoots up in her bed. She pulls the I.V. from her arm.

She rips the blanket off her gowned body, forces herself from the bed, and exits the room.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - BURN WARD - MOMENTS LATER

Nora wanders the halls. A faint SCREAM draws her in the direction of a room at the end of the hall. As she gets closer, she moves faster toward the sound.

Once she reaches the end, she bursts into:

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - O.R. VIEWING ROOM - MORNING

Down below on the operating floor, Bill is on the table, shrieking through swollen lips whilst a team of surgeons removes the dead flesh from his body.

In the viewing room, other doctors watch the proceedings through glass like visitors at the zoo. Some take notes. Among them, DR. NEWMAN, sees Nora and pulls her outside.

DR. NEWMAN

You must be Nora. I'm Dr. Roy Newman.

NORA

What're they doing to my husband?

DR. NEWMAN

Debridement. They're removing all his dead skin so the layer underneath can take its place.

NORA

Can't they put him under?

DR. NEWMAN

If we did, he might not wake up. Come with me. I'll explain more.

The SHRIEKS get louder. She winces like she can feel it, covering her ears and shutting her eyes.

NORA  
I can't leave him like this.

DR. NEWMAN  
There's nothing that you can do for him right now. Come along. There're things you need to know.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - DR. NEWMAN'S OFFICE - MORNING

Nora sits in front of a large desk across from Newman. His nameplate identifies him as Chief of Surgery. Bill's chart is in front of him. She finally notices her gown.

DR. NEWMAN  
I imagine things are little fuzzy at the moment. You lost a fair amount of blood, and it soiled your clothes. I don't know if anybody's told you yet, but, unfortunately, you--

NORA  
--Yes. I know.

DR. NEWMAN  
Forgive me. It's just that you were unconscious when you arrived. So, I wasn't sure if you'd remem--

She shakes her head as if to knock his words away.

NORA  
--Please. Just tell me what's going on with Bill. Will he be okay?

She fights her tears, wiping away the few that fight back. Dr. Newman examines the file.

His words are a haze to her.

DR. NEWMAN  
(reading from chart)  
Your husband's in critical condition. He's one of the worst cases I've ever seen, and the worst to survive. If he weren't as young as he is and as fit as he was, he probably wouldn't have. But I still hesitate to give him more than a ten per cent chance. More than two-thirds of his body's been burned.  
(MORE)



DR. NEWMAN (cont'd)

He's swelling faster than we can take it down. It's a massive strain on his organs, and it's only getting worse. All his bodily fluids are rushing to the surface of his skin. He's at risk of mass dehydration. As for the skin itself, it's essentially one big open wound. Even if we stop the swelling, his risk of infection is severe. It's going to be a long road. A day by day battle. Not just for him, but for the both of you.

She's stunned, ready to fall out of her chair.

NORA

Ten per cent?

DR. NEWMAN

I wish I had better news for you, I do. But, this is the reality of the situation.

She takes this in, her head still spinning.

NORA

Well, where do we go from here then? For God's sake, isn't there anything else you can do for him? There's got to be something?

DR. NEWMAN

He'll need grafting. Sometimes they take right away. But sometimes they require multiple rounds. With third-degree like his, he'll need several rounds as it stands. It can be very painful. They might contract, split open, and bleed.

A SURGICAL NURSE opens the door and peeks her head inside.

SURGICAL NURSE

Excuse me, doctor. We're finished. I'll be in later to dress him.

DR. NEWMAN

Thank you.

She gives Nora a quick, sympathetic nod, then exits.

DR. NEWMAN (cont'd)

One more thing. As his symptoms get worse, he might not be able to make his own decisions. If that happens, you'll have to do so on his behalf. That can be a lot to handle on your own, so if you want to call someone to help you--

NORA

--I'll be fine. Can I see him now?

He reaches in his desk and pulls out a mask and gloves.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - BILL'S ROOM - MORNING

Nora enters, masked and gloved. In the center, Bill floats in a bath of cloudy water.

He has no ears, no discernible nose, and his skin is a mix of bright pink and red. His eyes are swollen shut.

Nora approaches, kneels beside the tub. Slightly startled, Bill jerks in the water. Nora hushes.

BILL

(laboured)

Who's...that? Is it...you, Nora?...  
Please. Tell me...it's you...and...  
not...another scrub.

NORA

It's me, sweetie.

She lies a gloved hand on the edge of the tub. Tears form against her will, he can faintly hear her start to weep.

BILL

It's alright...to cry. Do me a...  
favour...Put 'em in here...Nurses  
say...salt is good for my...skin.  
Y'know they...circumcised me?

NORA

I see that.

BILL

Think they put it...with my...ring?

She laughs, wipes her tears. Bill laughs, wincing.

NORA  
Are you okay?

He breathes rapidly, trying his best to settle the pain.

BILL  
Take my...mind off it and...paint me  
a...picture, would you?

She looks around the room.

NORA  
Well, it's small but the bed looks--

BILL  
--Of...you.

NORA  
(clears throat)  
There's not much to work with.

BILL  
Not...possible.

NORA  
Well. I've got a mask on. And gloves.

She looks down at her gown.

NORA (cont'd)  
And that sweater the kids gave me for  
Christmas. That itchy thing they said  
they made but left the price tags on.

BILL  
How...are they?

NORA  
Good. Tildy's okay. She wasn't hurt.

BILL  
Are you...okay?

He reaches out his hand. She pulls back.

BILL (cont'd)  
What's...wrong?

NORA  
It's just not a good idea right now,  
hun. The doctor said that you could  
get an infection.

BILL  
But...you're not...sick.

NORA  
I know. We just have to be careful.

She sets her hand on the ledge of the bathtub, using it to pillow her head.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - NIGHT

Nora, now in scrubs, looks through a women's clothing rack.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Clyde and Tildy are seated at the dining table with their grandparents, FRANK and MAGGIE, mid-60s. Tildy pushes the food around on her plate, a blank expression on her face.

The screeching of the metal on porcelain fills the vacuum.

MAGGIE  
Tildy. Eat your food, alright, don't play with it.

TILDY  
I'm not hungry.

MAGGIE  
Then don't play with it.

TILDY  
When's Daddy coming home?

CLYDE  
Yeah. Has anyone heard from Mom yet?  
Is Dad okay?

Frank and Maggie exchange concerned looks.

FRANK  
He will be. Your mom'll see to that.

Clyde starts to get up.

CLYDE  
Maybe I should call her.

FRANK

Not right now. Just sit down and eat your supper. We'll know when we know, but until then don't get yourself all worked up. All worryin' does makes it worse than it already is.

CLYDE

Maybe something's wrong though? What if that's why she hasn't called yet?

MAGGIE

Let's just calm down. The best thing we can do for him is carry on. It'll be a lot easier for him when he gets back to know that nothing's changed.

Maggie gets up and swipes Tildy's plate from under her fork.

The front door opens and A BEEPING starts. Nora enters with an armful of books. She shuts the door, types a code into a burglar alarm on the wall and the BEEPING stops.

Tildy gets up and slips by virtually unnoticed.

MAGGIE (cont'd)

What are you doing home this soon?

NORA

I'm going back in the morning. Told them to call me if anything happens or before they do anything.

Clyde gets up and motions for the books in Nora's arms.

CLYDE

Let me help you with those.

NORA

No, it's okay. I've got them.

FRANK

What are they, and why so many?

NORA

I stopped by the school on my way.

MAGGIE

I'm sure they could've found someone to take over while you're gone.

NORA

They'll just mix everything up. Have it in an even bigger mess when I get back. It's easier if I do it myself. We can use the money.

CLYDE

Well, I was thinking we could set up a donation page.

NORA

I don't know about that, Clyde.

CLYDE

Why not?

Frank gets up from his seat and grabs his coat off the back of the chair. He puts it on and pats his pockets.

FRANK

HEre, Nora. I'm going for a smoke. You see my lighter, Mags?

NORA

It's a nice thought, Clyde, but we'll be fine. I could use the distraction anyway.

MAGGIE

--Check your pocket. Clyde, your mother's--

CLYDE

But you just said we could use the money.

FRANK

--I did. Maybe it fell out. Is it over by you? Can you check?

NORA

I also said I could use the distraction. The work gives me both.

MAGGIE

No. I don't know, Frank.

CLYDE

But people want to help.

FRANK

Fine. I'll just have to use the one in the car.

Frank heads for the door. Nora takes his seat, unloading the books on the table. Maggie picks up the remaining dishes and takes them to the kitchen.

MAGGIE

She's right. Family matters are best kept private, Clyde.

CLYDE

But, Mom, you're always after Dad to get what his clients owe him.

NORA

That's different. That's money he's earned for doing his job.

CLYDE

Well, now his job is to get better. What difference does it make?

NORA

You know why dad takes less than he's worth? Because it's easier for people to look you in the eyes if they don't feel like they owe you. Let's not put him in that position either.

CLYDE

When can he come home?

NORA

I don't know yet.

CLYDE

Well, could I call him? Is he awake?

Maggie returns with a plate of food, and sets it in front of Nora.

Nora grabs a fork and arranges the food into separate groups on her plate, making sure do not touch each other.

MAGGIE

Easy, Clyde. That's enough for now.

CLYDE

But, I've been waiting all day.

NORA

I'm sorry. I don't have anything for you right now, Clyde.

CLYDE

That can't be true. Stop lying to me!

MAGGIE

Hey! Go to your room and cool off.

He storms away. Nora sighs as she cracks one of her books. She jots notes and readies her calculator.

She shudders at Clyde's door SLAMMING in the distance.

MAGGIE (cont'd)  
Don't worry about him. He'll settle  
down eventually. Need anything else  
before we go?

Nora shakes her head.

EXT. LOVELACE HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Frank stands smoking his half-gone cigarette, the spiral of smoke materializes in the patio light. Movement in a nearby window catches his eye.

He moves closer to get a better look. Tildy is on all fours and appears to be looking under the bed.

Maggie exits the house and approaches.

MAGGIE  
I think she's alright for now. Ready?

FRANK  
Yeah. Hey, what's she doing in there?

Maggie takes a look.

MAGGIE  
What all kids do. She's checking for  
monsters, I imagine. Come on.

He drops the cigarette butt and snuffs it out with his foot.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - HALLWAY - MORNING

Nora runs down the hall, bumping into hospital personnel on her way. She looks tired and disheveled.

NORA  
Oh, God. Excuse me. Pardon me. Watch  
out. Bill, I'm so sorry I'm late, I--

She turns and bursts into:

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - BILL'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

An LPN is changing Bill's bandages with the tray beside her.

An elderly woman, EVELYN, spoons food into Bill's mouth. She scrapes the excess away with the spoon.



Bill is bandaged from head to toe, hooked to an IV. A couple of low-BEEPING monitors are at his bedside.

NORA

--Evelyn?

BILL

(slightly choking)

No-uh.

EVELYN

Easy now. Thirty-six-years-old, and I still gotta tell you not to talk with your mouth full.

(to Nora)

Good morning. Sorry it took this long for me to get here, but I grabbed the earliest flight I could.

LPN

I'm all finished here, Mrs. Lovelace.

EVELYN

Alright.

NORA

Okay.

Nora looks at Evelyn with confusion, realizing that the LPN was looking at Evelyn the entire time.

EVELYN

Thank you, Kathleen.

She nods, grabbing the tray on her way out. Nora approaches the bed as Evelyn spoons more food into Bill's mouth.

NORA

When'd you get in?

EVELYN

Last night. I was planning on staying over, too, but the hospital was overcrowded and they needed all the space they could get. Had to book a room at the Westin. Course, I could have been here sooner if you'd called.

NORA

I'm sorry. I was going to. It's just I got caught up here. Then I had the kids and work.

EVELYN

I know, but you didn't have to leave him. I could've stayed. You remember how it was when his brother got sick. I never left his side.

BILL

(obscured speech)

Oh, guh, Muh. It ithes.

Bill tries to scratch. Evelyn stops him.

EVELYN

I know, Bill, but that'll just make it worse.

NORA

Why is he talking like that?

EVELYN

Skin's tightening around his mouth, so they got me to feed him.

NORA

Alright. Well thank you for looking after him while I was gone, but I'm here now, and I can handle this, so you can--

EVELYN

--I don't mind. Owen was so weak by the end I had to feed him sometimes, too. Nothing I'm not used to.

Dr. Newman and a team of nurses enter the room.

DR. NEWMAN

We're ready for him, Mrs. Lovelace.

EVELYN

Okay.

NORA

For what?

Another confused look from Nora. Anger mixed in this time.

DR. NEWMAN

(to Nora)

I explained to Mrs. Lovelace earlier, but--

NORA

--I'm Mrs. Lovelace.

DR. NEWMAN

Right. Well, with his skin seizing, we need to start the grafting right away. I have surgeons waiting to do so as we speak.

NORA

What does that involve?

EVELYN

They'll take strips of skin from the areas of his body that aren't burned and transplant them to--

NORA

--I'm sorry, but I asked him.

DR. NEWMAN

She's right.

NORA

Well he'll be under this time, right?

DR. NEWMAN

No.

NORA

Why not?

(to Evelyn)

How could you say yes to this?

DR. NEWMAN

Normally we would, but he's too weak right now. His nerves are still numb enough that he likely won't feel any pain. But, we need to go. Mrs. Love-- your mother-in-law tell you the rest.

EVELYN

I will. You can take him now.

The nurses try to take Bill, but Nora grips the bed harder.

NORA

This is not your decision. I'm his wife, and--

EVELYN

--You weren't here. If you want to make the decisions, you have to be here. Otherwise, I'll be forced to make them for you.

(MORE)

EVELYN (cont'd)  
 (to nurses)  
 Go ahead.

The nurses wheel Bill away as Nora loosens her grip but her spiteful eyes stay locked on Evelyn.

INT./EXT. FRANK & MAGGIE'S CAR - AFTERNOON

The reflection of power lines rising and dipping in between power poles is superimposed on Tildy's face.

TILDY  
 It's my fault, Grampy.

FRANK  
 What?

TILDY  
 Daddy. It's my fault, isn't it?

FRANK  
 Of course not. That's foolish talk.  
 Did someone tell you that?

She shakes her head.

TILDY  
 I just feel like it is.

FRANK  
 Well don't, okay?

TILDY  
 But I can't help it.

FRANK  
 Just don't think about it, alright?  
 When you get a cut or a scrape or a  
 bruise do you think about it gettin'  
 better? No, it goes away on its own.  
 And so will this.

TILDY  
 But what if it doesn--

--Frank looks ahead, rams on the brakes, and honks his horn.  
 The car in front of them is creeping along.

FRANK  
 What the hell's the hold up?

He looks out the window to see Bill's mangled truck sitting in front of **Lenny's Auto Shop**. A couple people inspect it.

FRANK (cont'd)

Oh, Christ.

He slaps his blinker on.

INT./EXT. FRANK & MAGGIE'S CAR/LENNY'S AUTO SHOP

Frank's car pulls into the lot. He takes a cigarette out of the package in his breast pocket. He pulls the lighter from the power outlet and lights it.

FRANK

Just wait here. I'll be right back.

Frank gets out of the car and approaches the truck, shooing the patrons away like a flock of hungry seagulls.

Tildy focuses on the truck: the front is crumpled up like an accordion, and the driver's seat is black and charred.

She looks at the cigarette lighter. She pushes it in, and it lights up with a bright red glow. It pops back out.

INT. LENNY'S AUTO SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

LENNY, a scruffy old man wearing flannel and torn ball cap, is behind the counter. A BELL rings as Frank enters. Lenny shoots up.

LENNY

Hey, Frank. What can I do for ya?

FRANK

What's Bill's truck doin' out front?

LENNY

What d'ya mean? What'm I s'ppos--

FRANK

Tow it over to his place. I'll find somethin' to do with it.

LENNY

Sorry, I can't. The fire department still needs it. They've been in and out all day checkin' it over.

FRANK

Then do it when they're done. In the meantime, take it around back. I got the grandkid in the car. She doesn't need to see that.

He exits, setting the BELL off again.

INT. FRANK & MAGGIE'S CAR

Tildy pulls the lighter out, and looks at the orange spiral. She examines her thumbprint. She spots a match. She presses her thumb to the lighter.

The pain forces it out of her hands and onto the floor.

Frank lowers into the driver's side to see Tildy sucking on her thumb. He buckles his seat belt.

FRANK

What's wrong?

TILDY

Nothing.

He reaches for her hand.

FRANK

Alright. Then stop that. You're too old for that kinda thing.

She yanks it away and hides her thumb in an improper fist. He gives her a strange glare as he shifts the car in gear.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Clyde walks along, dodging the looks of oncoming students. As he does, he faintly hears:

STUDENT #1

...I heard that he was  
electrocuted.

STUDENT #2

...been better off dead.

STUDENT #3

...like a zombie.

He arrives at a door and enters:

INT. SCHOOL - NURSE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The SCHOOL NURSE looks up from her computer.

SCHOOL NURSE  
Hi, Clyde. Is everything okay?

CLYDE  
Do you know anything about burns?

SCHOOL NURSE  
Some, but nothing like what you're looking for, I imagine.

CLYDE  
Would the library have anything?

SCHOOL NURSE  
Maybe. Look. I'm sorry to hear about your dad. It's got to be hard on you. If you need time out of class, I can write you a note if ever you need it.

CLYDE  
Can I have one now?

She pulls a notepad out of her desk, writes something down, then tears it off and hands it to him.

INT. SCHOOL - LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Clyde approaches the LIBRARIAN's desk.

CLYDE  
Do you have a box I could borrow?

LIBRARIAN  
A box? Must be a big project.

She scans under her desk and pulls out a large plastic bin.

CLYDE  
Thanks.

Clyde grabs the bin and starts scouring the stacks of books. He stops before a shelf of books, all of which are on wound and patient care.

He traces his finger along the stack. He takes one and then another, placing them neatly in the bin. After a moment, he swipes in the rest of the shelf.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - BILL'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

A NURSE carefully washes Bill's bare body with a cloth. She rounds the bed where Nora and Evelyn stand.

NURSE

Can one of you give me hand? I gotta get underneath and change his bedpan.

Nora steps up. The nurse readies at Bill's shoulders while Nora positions herself at his lower back. Nora mirrors the nurse as she tucks the sheet under Bill's body.

NURSE (cont'd)

Alright. On the count of three, lift.  
One. Two. Three.

They both pick up on Bill's body, but Nora withdraws from a pain in her chest, and Bill's lower body drops back down to the bed. He GRUNTS from the sudden fall.

NORA

Oh god, I'm sorry, sweetheart.

She tries to pick up again but winces. Evelyn steps forward.

EVELYN

Here. Let me get th--

NORA

--No, it's alright I got it.

NURSE

Look. As hard as it is for us, it's even harder on him when we mess up.

Nora reluctantly steps aside, and Evelyn takes her place.

NURSE (cont'd)

Alright, same thing. One. Two. Three.

They pick his body back up with no problem this time. The nurse gives Nora a clean cloth, and she begins wiping his backside.

On the chair beside the door is Nora's purse. It vibrates, but no one notices.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Maggie dices veggies at the kitchen counter as Frank looks through the drawers.



Clyde enters, carrying his bin of books. He slings sets it on the table and slings his backpack on a dining chair.

MAGGIE

Hey. How was your day?

CLYDE

Got some books to help with Dad.

FRANK

Where'd you find the time to do that?

CLYDE

Nurse gave me a note.

MAGGIE

Clyde. Don't let this get in the way of your schoolwork. There is nothing in those that the doctors don't know already anyway.

FRANK

Exactly. They've got it handled. You got plenty of other stuff you should be focusing on. Don't you got a game or a test coming up or something?

(to Maggie)

Where's the barbecue lighter?

Maggie moves the box off of the table and starts to set it. Clyde picks up the box.

MAGGIE

I'll just do them in the oven.

(to Clyde)

Go get your sister and wash up. And put those things in your room, okay?

Clyde walks down the hall to his room, but hears something from Bill and Nora's room.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - BILL & NORA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Clyde opens the door. Tildy stands at the bedside table, a phone to her hear.

TILDY

Come on. Pick up. Pick up. Pick--

Hi-- NORA'S VOICE Hi, Mom! TILDY HO--

NORA'S VOICEMAIL  
--it's Nora. Sorry I can't get to the  
phone right now. Leave a mess--

--Tildy hangs up with a sigh, then picks it up and starts to dial again. Maggie enters behind Clyde.

MAGGIE  
Matilda May. What're you doing?

TILDY  
Mom won't pick up.

MAGGIE  
Don't bother her now. She's busy.

She walks over and grabs Tildy's by the hand. She takes the phone from Tildy's other hand and sets it on the table. She leads Tildy out of the room with some resistance. Clyde can still hear the phone on the table.

VOICEMAIL  
The number you have dialed is either  
incomplete or out of service. Please  
hang up and try your call again.

MAGGIE (O.S.)  
Clyde. Come get cleaned up, please.

TILDY (O.S.)  
Ow, Nanny, that hurts.

MAGGIE (O.S.)  
What happened to your hand?

Clyde exits for the bathroom.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Clyde enters. He looks in the sink and spots an angry, red wound on Tildy's thumb.

It's fine. TILDY

Clyde grabs her hand and looks at it himself. Maggie looks through the medicine cabinet for a bandage.

CLYDE  
It doesn't look fine, Tildy.

Maggie continues looking. She finds the package of bandages. She hands the package to Clyde.

MAGGIE  
Here.

Tildy pulls away.

TILDY  
No. Don't. It'll go away by itself.

She exits. Maggie follows after her, bandage in hand.

EXT. LOVELACE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - EVENING

Nora walks from the car carrying a big bundle of groceries and her workbooks. She struggles to shut the car door with everything in hand. She drops some items, and they scatter.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Nora opens the oven, slides a pan of leftovers on the rack, then closes it.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - BILL & NORA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nora sleeps with books, loose and balled papers spread all around her.

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

Her eyes shoot open. She jumps up and makes a tear for the kitchen.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Nora turns on the light and opens the oven. A cloud of black smoke bombards the open air. Coughing, she gets a hand towel and waves the smoke away. Clyde enters in his pajamas.

CLYDE  
Mom? What's going on?

She pulls the leftovers out of the oven with her bare hands.

NORA

Ah, dammit!

She drops the pan. Its burned contents spill on the floor.

CLYDE

Are you okay?

NORA

I'm fine, just turn that thing off!

He grabs a chair and sets it under the smoke detector. Then, he climbs on top and shuts it off. He climbs down, sees that Nora is in pain.

CLYDE

Are you hurt? Let me see.

NORA

Never mind, Clyde. I'm fine.

He reaches for her hand.

CLYDE

It's alright, I can help, I--

He grabs her hand, but she rips away.

NORA

--Just leave it alone!

CLYDE

Fine, you do it!

NORA

Clyde, wait, I--

--But he's already gone. She turns on the sink, and runs her palms under cold water. Her hands tremble. She winces, grabs at her breast.

She pulls her hand away to find a milky substance. She looks down at her chest to see it is also wet around her breasts.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The smoke detector stops. On the way to his room, Clyde sees Tildy's door slightly ajar. He silently approaches her room.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - TILDY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Clyde opens the door enough to peek inside. Tildy is on her side, her back turned to him, seemingly still and quiet. He steps away from the door.

From the front, Tildy's eyes are squeezed tight. Her cheeks lined with tears, and she mutters to herself.

TILDY

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry...

She wraps a pillow around her ears to silence her thoughts.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - EXAMINATION ROOM - MORNING

Nora sits on an examination table with her chest exposed as Dr. Newman examines her breasts. Her hands are bandaged.

DR. NEWMAN

What happened there?

NORA

It's nothing. Just a little accident.  
What's going on? Should I be worried?

DR. NEWMAN

No. No, lactation is somewhat common after miscarrying at twelve weeks or later, which is about where you were when you arrived.

NORA

I didn't know it was that far along.

Newman grabs his clipboard and jots down some information.

DR. NEWMAN

You didn't notice you weren't getting your period?

NORA

I had some bleeding. I thought it was just light flow. Nothing serious.

DR. NEWMAN

Well, every pregnancy is unique. It's not abnormal that you weren't showing as much as before. Spotting's another story, but it happens. Taken together they were probably precursors.

He pulls off his gloves, goes to the counter, and washes his hands in the sink. He grabs a few sheets of paper towel from a dispenser on the wall and dries his hands.

NORA

Can give me something for the pain?

DR. NEWMAN

Nothing worth their side effects. I think you just have to let it pass. Keep a pump with you in your purse, or somewhere close by. Just in case.

He opens a drawer underneath the sink and pulls out a tiny bottle. He sits back down and hands it to her.

DR. NEWMAN (cont'd)

I can give you this. For your hands. It should prevent an infection. For your husband's sake.

Nora removes her hand-wraps, squeezes some cream from the bottle, and rubs it in.

NORA

Thank you... So, what was it?

He looks up from his clipboard, confused.

NORA (cont'd)

The sex. I'd like to know.

DR. NEWMAN

Oh. Well, maybe now isn't the right--

NORA

--I want to know. What was it?

He goes back to his clipboard, avoiding her eyes.

DR. NEWMAN

It was still very early.

NORA

I've done it twice already. So I know if I was as far along as you said, it wasn't that early.

(off his pause)

Tell me, dammit! It's my body! It was my child! I want to know what I lost!

DR. NEWMAN

Boy. It was a boy.

Nora places a hand on her belly. Tears build in her eyes.

DR. NEWMAN (cont'd)

Have you talked to anyone about this?

NORA

No. Can I have a moment alone?

He nods, then walks out. Once the door is closed, she sobs. She slides her bra on, shrugging its straps up and onto her shoulders. She does the same with her shirt as she gets up.

She walks to the door, grabs paper towel from the dispenser, and stuffs it in each cup of her bra. She buttons her shirt. She takes a deep breath and exits.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - BILL'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bill is in bed, completely bandaged, which now includes his eyes. His mouth is fitted with a device to keep it open.

A CD player sits on the bedside table. Evelyn leafs through a collection of CDs. She holds one up.

EVELYN

How about some George Jones?

Bill shakes his head slightly -- a barely discernible move. Nora enters, her purse around her arm.

NORA

What's all this?

EVELYN

Since hearing's all he's got for now, I thought he'd like some tunes. Don't worry. I sterilized them. Waylon?

Bill shakes his head again.

NORA

That's a nice thought, but I want to start teaching him sign language. It would be good for his hands.

Nora pulls books from her purse and lies them on the table, on top of CD player. She grabs one and peruses it.

EVELYN

That's not a bad idea. Maybe you can teach me a bit. You know, so I could keep it up while you're gone.

NORA

It'll just slow me down if I have to stop and explain it to you.

EVELYN

I'll watch. I'm sure I can pick up a little on my own.

NORA

I really think this would be easier one-on-one.

EVELYN

I just thought it might speed things up. Especially since you can only be here half the time.

NORA

I'm doing my best. He knows I've got work. I've got the kids.

EVELYN

Why not bring them here? You're all welcome share my room.

Nora shoots up and pulls Evelyn aside, hushing her voice for Bill's sake.

NORA

I don't want them to see him until I know they're gonna keep him.

EVELYN

We could call them.

NORA

When we have good news, we'll call.

EVELYN

Well, they should have something to hang on to, don't you think?

NORA

They do! If we do all that and then we lose hi--

--the previous word causes this one to catch in her throat.



NORA (cont'd)  
They don't need these memories. I'm  
protecting the ones they've got.

EVELYN  
Why don't we ask Bill what he wants?

NORA  
If you'd let me do this, we could!

Nora sits down again and leafs through the book, attempting to sign the words on the page. She winces.

She tries again, but this time the pain is too much for her. She cries out in frustration. Evelyn grabs the book, pulling it gently from Nora's lap.

EVELYN  
Here. Let me help you with that.

Nora grips it tighter, but Evelyn refuses to let go.

NORA  
No. If he can go through this, I can  
get through this. I can do it. I can.

EVELYN  
You don't have to do it by yourself.

Evelyn pulls the book free and lies it across her lap.

EVELYN (cont'd)  
Okay, Bill. Give me your hands.

Evelyn starts to make the shapes using Bill's hands. Nora, teary-eyed, is left to watch.

EXT. LOVELACE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - AFTERNOON

A tow truck pulls in with Bill's truck on the back, lights flashing. Frank steps outside to meet it. Lenny climbs out of the truck.

Lenny starts lowering Bill's truck.

FRANK  
Hey, Len. How much do I owe you?

LENNY  
Forget it. It's the least I could do.

FRANK

Thanks.

LENNY

No problem. You need anything. Parts, equipment, whatever. Just come by or give me call. Bill gave me a deal a while ago, and I been meanin' to pay him back somehow.

Tildy runs from the house.

TILDY

Get it outta here! Don't go near it!

Lenny starts to hoist the truck back up.

FRANK

No, Len. Bring her down. It's okay.

TILDY

No, don't!

She buries her face in Frank's leg.

FRANK

Whoa. Stop. It can't hurt you. Look.

Frank approaches the truck. Tildy pulls him back, her eyes fixed on the tow truck's flashing lights.

TILDY

No, don't do it! Stay away from it!

FRANK

Okay, okay. Turn the lights off, Len.

Lenny does as told. Maggie comes out of the house.

MAGGIE

I'm sorry. I didn't see her leave.

She kneels before Tildy.

TILDY

I don't want it here, Nanny.

MAGGIE

I know. Hey. You've got crayons in the house, right?

Tildy nods.

MAGGIE (cont'd)  
Okay then, why don't we get you to  
work on something inside for a bit?  
Maybe you can design something for  
the truck. You could help that way.

Maggie walks Tildy back to the house. Frank turns to Lenny.

FRANK  
Tuck it away in the garage.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - EVENING

Nora enters an aisle with parenting supplies. Jars of baby food, diapers, and bottles stock the shelves. She stops at the breast pumps. She reaches for one.

ADDISON  
Nora?

Addison approaches, pushing a cart with her two-month-old baby inside. Nora jams the pump into her purse.

NORA  
Hey, Addison? What're you doing here?

ADDISON  
We thought we'd come to the city for  
the day. I needed to get out, and we  
thought we'd do some early Christmas  
shopping. I'm so sorry about Bill. I  
think about you guys every day.

Addison hugs her. Nora tightens her coat upon retreat.

NORA  
Thanks.

ADDISON  
What're you doing in this aisle?

NORA  
(thinks on it, then:)  
Doing some Christmas shopping myself.  
You were next on the list. Thought I  
would get you something for the baby.

ADDISON  
Really? That's so sweet of you. Here.  
Allow me to introduce you.

NORA

No, that's okay. You don't have to do that. I'm just about to--

ADDISON

--With all you're going through right now, you still find it in yourself to think of your godson. I knew I made--

NORA

--Godson?

Addison leads Nora around the back of the cart to see the baby. The baby is all smiles.

ADDISON

Yeah. If you're willing. This is Sam.

NORA

He's beautiful, Addison, he is, but I should really get going. It's getting late, and I gotta get on the highway.

Sam wraps his hand around Nora's finger. Her eyes gloss. She swallows hard, avoids his eyes.

ADDISON

You alright?

Addison extends her hand, Nora pulls hers away.

NORA

Yeah. I just need to get home.

She walks steadily away from Addison and the baby.

ADDISON

Well, okay. Just think about it. And give Bill our best!

Nora hastily wipes tears away from her eyes. As she reaches the exit, the alarm BEEPS. A SECURITY GUARD approaches. She realizes the pump is still in her purse.

SECURITY GUARD

Ma'am? I'm gonna have to check your--

The security guard approaches and takes her by the arm. She looks around at the growing number of eyes now fixed on the scene, piercing her all over. Shaken, she tears up, and her discomfort spreads to the guard.

NORA

No. I'm sorry. Please. I just forgot.

She pulls the pump out of her purse. The guard lets go and backs away, returning to his post. She gets in line at one of the checkouts, noticeably embarrassed.

INT./EXT. NORA'S CAR/HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Nora drives, her car swerving a bit in the lane.

In the car, her eyes are dark and baggy. Dried lines of salt streak her cheeks. Bit by bit, her eyelids grow heavier. She closes her eyes and swerves into the other lane.

The sound of a truck HORN. Her eyes shoot open, and she sees the headlights of a transfer truck headed straight for her.

She swerves to the right, and the car skids along the gravel shoulder, eventually coming to a stop.

She catches her breath, wide awake now. She starts to pound the steering wheel as if to shake the pounding in her heart.

INT. THE WESTIN HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

Nora approaches the WESTIN RECEPTIONIST at the front desk.

NORA

I need a room. One bed.

After checking the computer.

WESTIN RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry, but there are no more one bedrooms available.

NORA

Can you call someone for me?

The receptionist picks up the desk phone.

INT./EXT. THE WESTIN - EVELYN'S ROOM - NIGHT

A KNOCK. Evelyn approaches the door in her sleepwear. She opens it to see Nora, her face as white as a ghost.

NORA

I didn't know where else to go.

Evelyn wraps her arm around her and takes the shaken Nora inside, shutting the door behind her.

INT. THE WESTIN - EVELYN'S ROOM - LATER

Nora is asleep on a cot. She tosses and turns a few times, groaning softly. Her eyes shoot open and she rises in bed, hyperventilating. She grits her teeth in pain. She flings off the blankets.

Her chest has soaked through her shirt. She sneaks out of the cot as best she can.

INT. THE WESTIN - EVELYN'S ROOM - BATHROOM

Nora enters. She sits down on the toilet lid, tears some toilet paper, and tries to wipe her body clean.

Evelyn walks in, startling Nora.

EVELYN

I'm sorry!

Evelyn steps out and shuts the door but leans against it.

EVELYN (cont'd)

Is there anything I can do?

NORA

The pump's in my purse.

A few moments of silence, then a KNOCK.

EVELYN

Is it alright if I come in? I can leave it on the other side of--

NORA

--No. It's okay.

EVELYN

Are you sure?

NORA

Yes. Please. Just come in.

Evelyn enters and then hands Nora the pump. In tears, Nora attaches the pump to her chest. Evelyn rubs Nora's back as she squeezes the pump's handle over and over like a stress ball. The suction produces a gentle HISS.

NORA (cont'd)

I'm sorry. I think I got some on the sheets. I didn't know this was going to happen. I'll clean it. I promise.

EVELYN

Oh, please. Don't be silly. You know, when Owen was going through chemo, he would get sick all the time. And I'd sit beside him, rubbin' his back just just like this. Here.

Nora twists one of the bottles off, then hands it to Evelyn. Evelyn pours its contents down the sink.

At the sound of it echoing down the drain, Nora tightens her eyes, squeezing tears onto her bare lap.

Evelyn tears off some more toilet paper and hands it to her.

A moment of silence, then:

EVELYN (cont'd)

I had no idea.

NORA

Neither did I.

Nora stops pumping and the HISSING comes to an end.

Evelyn helps detach it from her chest, then sets it on the counter.

NORA (cont'd)

We talked about having one more. I wasn't sure if I wanted to, but now every time I feed Bill, bathe him... Every time I look at him, all I can think about is that we'll never get to do those things with them.

Evelyn sits across from her on the edge of the bathtub.

EVELYN

I wish I could tell you the pain goes away but, in a way, all motherhood is loss. There's always a goodbye at one point. You just hope to be the one to say it first. It's not your fault.

NORA

How did you ever get through it when Owen passed?

EVELYN

Well, I'm not much for religion, but I always liked Mary. She must've been the first one to measure her time on earth before and after the death of her son. Only a mother would look at time that way. But when she did, the world did too. She didn't have to do it alone. Does he know?

NORA

No. He can't. He's too weak. I can't lose him, too. I just can't, Evelyn. I can't, I--

--Evelyn hushes Nora as she pulls her into an embrace.

EXT. SCHOOL - MORNING

A light dust of snow covers the grass. Frank and Maggie's car idles, curbside. The back doors open. Clyde and Tildy jump out with their backpacks on and lunches in hand.

MAGGIE

Have a good day you two. We'll See you after school.

They pull away.

Clyde watches their car exit the lot and disappear up the street. The bell RINGS. Tildy heads for the school, Clyde walks in the other direction.

TILDY

Where're you going?

CLYDE

Don't worry about it.

TILDY

What if I need you?

CLYDE

You'll be fine.

He continues down the sidewalk. She looks ahead at the kids entering the building, then walks forward.



INT. SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Tildy is at her desk. Students stare at her as they walk by. JAYCE walks into the room, laughing with a group of friends. At the sight of him, Tildy becomes possessed by anger.

She gets up and storms after him, balling up her fists.

TILDY

Jayce!

He turns to see her running straight at him, knocking aside chairs and desks.

She leaps on top of him, flailing her arms, striking him in the face.

Other students move back

A TEACHER enters the room.

JAYCE

What're you doing! Get off me! You're crazy!

TEACHER

What's going on in here?! Tildy, stop that, right now!

The teacher grabs Tildy under the arms and peels her off of Jayce. Blood drizzles down his nose. Tildy flails around in the teacher's arms but cannot break free.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - LATER

Frank and Maggie exit the building with Tildy. Frank walks ahead with furious pace while Maggie walks behind, holding Tildy's hand. They struggle to keep up with him.

MAGGIE

Will you slow down already?

FRANK

I can't believe you were that close to bein' suspended again, Tildy.

TILDY

I'm sorry.

FRANK

The hell's a teacher's aide anyway?

MAGGIE

Someone who'll help her one-on-one.

They reach the car. Frank gets in the driver's side. Maggie helps Tildy climb into the back then enters the passenger's side.

MAGGIE (cont'd)

Maybe we should take her to somebody.  
Someone she can talk to.

FRANK

No. That'll just cause more problems.  
It's just an attention thing. If she  
keeps it up though, they'll probably  
do it for us. They'll have her taken  
away from us. That'll be next.

MAGGIE

Oh, don't say that. No they won't.

FRANK

You don't know that. Then she'd never  
see any of us again. Is that what you  
want, Tildy?

She shakes her head and sinks into her seat with a look of  
fear on her face.

MAGGIE

Stop it, Frank.

FRANK

To never see me and Nanny again?

TILDY

No. I don't want--

MAGGIE

Enough, Frank. That's too--

FRANK

--Or Mommy? Or Daddy?

TILDY

(crying now)  
I didn't mean t--

MAGGIE

(voice raised)  
That's too far, Fra--

FRANK

--Or Cly--?

TILDY

--I'm sorry!

MAGGIE

--Stop! You're scaring her.

MAGGIE (cont'd)  
(to Tildy)  
It's all right, hun. You're not going  
anywhere, and neither are we, okay?

FRANK  
Well, she needs to know what all this  
could do, Mags.

He looks in the backseat and softens at the sight of her  
trembling.

FRANK (cont'd)  
No, Tildy. They're not gonna take you  
away from us. But, from now on, we're  
not lettin' you out of our sight.

Maggie takes out her phone and starts to dial.

FRANK (cont'd)  
What're you doing?

MAGGIE  
What do you think? I'm calling Nora.

FRANK  
Don't do that. Not right now. She's  
dealing with enough as it is.

Maggie hangs up the phone, cutting off Nora's voicemail.

MAGGIE  
Fine. Then let's go. Tildy needs to  
rest, and you need to cool down.

Frank checks his watch.

FRANK  
We're here now. Might as well wait.  
Clyde'll be gettin' out any minute.

TILDY  
No he won't.

MAGGIE  
What was that, hun?

TILDY  
He's not coming. He's not here.

Frank looks in the rearview.

FRANK  
Then where is he?

She shrugs. He looks forward and starts the car.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - BILL'S ROOM

It is almost complete darkness if not for the pinholes of light peeking through the fabric.

Then, strip by strip, bright light peeks through until it overpowers us completely. Bill blinks and the room slowly focuses from a blur. The outline of someone's face.

He blinks again to see Nora's masked. His visions becomes hazy again, obscured by tears.

NORA  
Can you see us?

Bill nods.

Nora's eyes wrinkle just above her mask, indicating a smile.

She leans forward to hug him but restrains herself. Instead, she sits and holds his hand. Dr. Newman and Evelyn stand on the opposite side, also masked.

Evelyn reaches out and grabs Bill's other hand. Bill is now a fraction of the weight he was when he first arrived.

EVELYN  
Your eyes are as blue as ever, Bill.

DR. NEWMAN  
We're gonna check your grafts, Bill.  
Try not to move.

Evelyn and Nora hold Bill forward as Dr. Newman unzips the back of Bill's suit and peels it down. The grafts resemble mesh, as if his whole body were covered in a net.

DR. NEWMAN (cont'd)  
Hmm. Alright.

He grabs a clipboard from the bedside table, then proceeds to jot something down.

NORA  
What's wrong?

He points with his pen.

DR. NEWMAN

Well, do you see these pinker areas here?

(off their nods)

That's what we're looking for. That means they've taken.

(he points elsewhere)

But these white ones haven't, which means they'll need to be replaced.

He writes down a couple more notes, then sets the clipboard down and secures the pen between his teeth. He gently slips Bill's suit back up and secures it.

Evelyn and Nora slide the blanket off Bill's legs and help him out of bed, sliding the side-rails down in the process. They steady him as Dr. Newman slides the leg portions down.

DR. NEWMAN (cont'd)

They're good. Your skin's starting to seize a bit around your shoulders and elbows. I'll have to book an O.R. for more grafts and see if we can fix it. You can put him back down.

Evelyn and Nora lie Bill in his bed in a smooth coordinated fashion, then slide the side-rails back up.

DR. NEWMAN (cont'd)

Last thing, Bill, and this might be a little uncomfortable, but I'd like to check how things are settling on your face, alright?

Dr. Newman starts at the top of Bill's head, unraveling the bandages securing his face mask. Nora swallows hard, trying to keep her composure. Bill jerks in pain.

DR. NEWMAN (cont'd)

Hold him steady.

Bill squeezes Nora and Evelyn's hands as the mask comes off.

DR. NEWMAN (cont'd)

They need some more time, but these intricate areas tend to take longer.

Dr. Newman fills out the rest of the chart.

BILL  
 (signs to Nora)  
 Is it bad?

NORA  
 No. Not as bad as you think.

EVELYN  
 You look good, Bill. Strong.

Nora puts on a smile, but he sees the effort behind it.

BILL  
 (signs)  
 What is it? What's wrong? There's  
 something you're not telling me. I  
 see it in your eyes.

NORA  
 No, I promise. Everything's fine.

EVELYN  
 (to Dr. Newman)  
 Can we talk to you outside?

Evelyn grabs the stack of CDs on Bill's bedside table and hands them to him.

EVELYN (cont'd)  
 Here, Bill. Put on something good.  
 Come on, Nora.

NORA  
 I'll be right back.

On the way to the door, Evelyn turns on the radio on the bedside table, then she, Nora, and Dr. Newman step into:

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Dr. Newman flags a nurse. She nods and enter Bill's room.

EVELYN  
 I've been thinking. Is there any way  
 he can come home for Christmas? Even  
 if only for a few days?

DR. NEWMAN  
 I don't know about that. Those areas  
 around his joints are seizing.  
 (MORE)

DR. NEWMAN (cont'd)  
Quite honestly, I would be surprised  
to see him moving at all.

EVELYN  
Maybe that's because we have him all  
cooped up in his bed. We need him up  
and moving.

DR. NEWMAN  
For the grafts to heal, it's best we  
restrict his movement as best we can.

EVELYN  
That's on his torso though. You said  
his legs looked good.

DR. NEWMAN  
(thinks on it, then:)  
Well, we can intensify his exercises  
and stimulate his blood vessels. See  
if that helps with his tissue growth.  
They'll likely tear and that'll hurt,  
but it may build the muscle and help  
him retain partial mobility. It's up  
to you, Nora.

But she is focused on Bill, looking through the window in  
the door of his room, watching him flip through the CDs.

DR. NEWMAN (cont'd)  
(louder)  
Nora?

This breaks her trance. She turns around.

NORA  
Yeah, that's a good idea.

Evelyn looks stunned.

DR. NEWMAN  
Okay. I'll arrange it with physio by  
the end of the day.

NORA  
How mobile does he have to be though?

DR. NEWMAN  
Tell you what. If you can get him to  
the end of this hallway by Christmas,  
I'll let him go home.  
(MORE)

DR. NEWMAN (cont'd)  
 Just for a few days. If he can do it,  
 I'll schedule the grafts for the New  
 Year.

Dr. Newman receives silent approval from her and Evelyn. He walks down the hall.

Evelyn opens Bill's door and gets greeted with music.

EVELYN  
 Put on "I'll Be Home For Christmas,"  
 Bill. We have something to tell you.

Nora smiles to herself, then follows Evelyn's lead.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Clyde, with backpack slung around his back, walks up to the front desk where the PUBLIC LIBRARIAN is sitting behind her desk. Clyde sets some books in front of her.

CLYDE  
 I'd like to check these out.

PUBLIC LIBRARIAN  
 Got your card with you?

Frank enters the front door. He locks eyes with Clyde.

EXT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - MOMENTS LATER

Frank rushes outside, trying to be as discrete as possible. He has a firm grip on Clyde's arm, dragging him behind.

As they approach the car parked at the curb, Frank thrusts Clyde in its direction. Maggie and Tildy wait inside.

FRANK  
 Get in.

He opens the driver's side door, ready to enter.

CLYDE  
 No.

FRANK  
 I'm not gonna tell you again. First  
 your sister, and now this.



CLYDE

What do you mean? What happened?

FRANK

If you were at school like you were  
s'pposed to be, you'd know.

CLYDE

Just tell me!

Frank looks around and sees that people are staring as they  
pass on the sidewalk.

FRANK

(stifling his voice)

Not here. The whole world doesn't  
need to know our business.

CLYDE

But I do! I don't know anything! It's  
been two months now, and I don't know  
if my dad's okay. Whether he can see,  
hear, talk, or smell. If he's got all  
ten of his fingers and toes. Two arms  
and legs. And I'm sick of it! We need  
to know something!

FRANK

You're grounded. There's something.

Maggie rolls down the window.

MAGGIE

Hunny, just get in the car, alright?

Deflated, Clyde opens the back door and gets in.

INT. THE WESTIN EVELYN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nora is seated on her cot doing bookwork, her papers spread  
out everywhere. She shifts uncomfortably, then reaches into  
her shirt and pulls out some tissues and throws them in the  
garbage beside her.

Evelyn enters with a few bags of groceries and sets them on  
the table. She reaches into one bag and pulls out a ball of  
leafy greens. She tosses it to Nora.

EVELYN

Here.

Nora catches it. She looks it over, confused.

NORA

Cabbage?

EVELYN

I read online it helps if you stuff  
your bra with cold cabbage leaves.

Evelyn unloads the rest of the groceries, then sits across  
from Nora on the bed.

NORA

I feel so stupid doing this. God, I  
remember girls in high school doing  
it. I never thought that I'd be one  
of them. Not at thirty-five.

EVELYN

We do what we need to. By the way,  
thanks for today. I know a helping  
hand is not an easy one for you to  
grab, so I appreciate it.

Nora nods.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - CLYDE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Clyde is on his bed with his nose in a book. A KNOCK on  
the door. His eyes stay on the page. Another KNOCK.

MAGGIE (O.S.)

Can I come in?

He says nothing, just turns the page. She enters anyway.

MAGGIE

I've thought about what you said the  
other day. You're right. You deserve  
to know something.

He shuts his book. She sits down on the edge of his bed.

MAGGIE (cont'd)

Have your parents ever told you how  
they met?

He opens his book. She takes it from him, snaps it shut  
again, and sets it beside her out his reach.

He reaches for the book. She pulls it further from him.

MAGGIE (cont'd)

Oh, come on now. Trust me. You won't find it in any of those books.

He submits with a sigh.

MAGGIE (cont'd)

Your mom was a real shy girl when she was young. She wasn't really what you call the social type. But, one night, a group of her girlfriends convinced her to come to this dance at school.

CUT TO:

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - BILL'S ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Nora and Evelyn sit at the side of Bill's bed, sign language books spread open over Bill's legs. Nora and Evelyn's voices are faint compared with Maggie's.

MAGGIE (V.O.)

While she's there, this boy comes up and asks if she'd like to dance with him. So, they get on the floor, and she starts making all of these weird faces like something's bothering her.

Nora stretches her mouth open like a singer performing warm-up exercises, starting with her lips pursed, then stretching them as wide as she can. Bill and Evelyn try to do the same.

NORA

(kissing sound)

Muah, muah, muah.

MAGGIE (V.O.)

He can't figure out why this is, and she's not saying. A couple minutes go by and she still making them. So, he stops, tells her he'll be right back, and runs out the door. It wasn't ten minutes before he was back.

NORA

Muah, muah, muah.

EVELYN

Muah, muah, muah.

Nora and Evelyn make shapes with their hands and Bill tries to mirror them as well. Nora laughs when he gets them wrong.

MAGGIE (V.O.)

He asks her to finish, but when she sees him, she starts giggling. Before you know it, she and her girlfriends are laughing so hard they all nearly pee their pants.

Nora tries to mould his hands into the right shape. Evelyn helps with the other hand.

NORA

No, look. Like this.

MAGGIE (V.O.)

He says, "What's so funny?" So one of her girlfriends says, "What happened to your moustache?" He says, "She was makin' all of these faces, so I went home to get rid of it."

She playfully swats his hands when he again does it wrong. He gives her the finger. Evelyn erupts with laughter.

MAGGIE (V.O.) (cont'd)

And she says, "No, you were stepping on her toes, you dumby." And then he starts to laugh.

EVELYN

Well, he knows that one.

Nora joins in. Though struggling, Bill does too.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - CLYDE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Clyde now listening intently to his grandmother's story.

MAGGIE

Not only did they finish that dance, they danced the rest of night. Never got off the floor again. Needless to say, that boy was your dad.

He softens, letting a slight smile crack through.

CLYDE

No, I didn't know that. Dad always has a mustache.

MAGGIE

Trust me. I don't know what he had then, but it was not a mustache.

They laugh. She pokes at his fuzzy upper lip.

MAGGIE (cont'd)

By the look of things, you could go for a little shave yourself.

CLYDE

Think he'll be able to show me when he gets back?

MAGGIE

Sure. Gramp could show you if you--

CLYDE

--Yeah, right.

MAGGIE

He's not so bad. It's just how he is. It might not seem like it, but we're trying to give you two a normal life. We just want to protect you.

CLYDE

You can still tell us the truth.

MAGGIE

We can't tell you everything that's going on because we don't know much either. We only know what Mom tells us, and she doesn't say a lot. Even if you're stepping on her toes. But what I can tell you is that there's not a person in this town who knows more than we do.

CLYDE

Fine. I just don't get why we can't talk about it.

MAGGIE

When we grew up, you didn't discuss your problems. If somebody told you to suck it up, walk it off, or move on, you did all three. And that was it. That was the end of it.

The door creaks open as Tildy starts to enter. She retreats when she spots Maggie.

MAGGIE (cont'd)  
It's okay, hunny. You can come in.  
We're finished for now, I think.

Maggie gets up and leaves.

Tildy takes her place on the bed.

CLYDE  
Hey. What's up?

She raises her bandaged thumb.

TILDY  
Will you help me? It's starting to  
hurt a little.

CLYDE  
Sure. I could use the practice.

She plops on his bed and slides closer to him. He takes the  
bandage off her thumb, forcing her to wince.

He examines it closely.

CLYDE (cont'd)  
It looks a bit infected. Wait here.

He leaves the room for a second. She spots the books on his  
bed and opens one. He returns with a first aid kit, and she  
quickly shuts it.

He squeezes the ointment on his finger, then rubs it on her  
thumb. Her face contorts.

CLYDE (cont'd)  
How'd you do it?

TILDY  
I touched the hot stick in Grampy's  
car. The red one.

CLYDE  
Hot stick? Oh. Why?

She shrugs.

TILDY  
It just looks like something you're  
supposed to touch. It hurts.

He pulls out some tape, a cotton swab, and gauze.

TILDY (cont'd)  
You think Daddy feels that all over?

CLYDE  
You miss him, don't you?

Another nod. He puts a cotton swap on her thumb and secures it with gauze.

CLYDE (cont'd)  
Me too. And I don't want to wait to see him anymore. We should go. Just me and you. Tomorrow.

TILDY  
How're gonna do that? My aide won't let me go anywhere by myself. Can't we just go tonight?

CLYDE  
No. We'd just set the alarm off, and I don't know the cod--  
(thinks for a moment)  
I know what we're going to do, okay? But you can't tell anyone. You gotta promise. This may be our only chance. I'll need you to do something for me.

She nods.

He wraps the finished bandage in tape, securing it on her thumb. He scrunches up the wrappers into one big ball and shoots it into a garbage bin by the door.

INT./EXT. LOVELACE HOUSE - GARAGE - MORNING

Tildy enters. Frank lies underneath the front of the truck, wheeling around underneath. A toolbox lies off to the side.

Tildy swipes a couple dust masks and a package of ear plugs out of the toolbox, crams them in her pockets, and leaves.

INT./EXT. FRANK AND MAGGIE'S CAR/SCHOOL - MORNING

Frank and Maggie's car pulls up. Clyde and Tildy jump out, backpacks on but with no lunches this time.

MAGGIE  
Where're your lunches?

He pats himself all over. Tildy carefully mirrors him.

CLYDE  
You know, I think we forgot them.

MAGGIE  
Well, here then.

Maggie reaches into her purse, takes out a bill, and hands it to him. He keeps his hand out. She gives him another.

FRANK  
Keep an eye on your sister.

CLYDE  
Will do. See you later.

FRANK  
Not until we see you go in.

Clyde and Tildy turn and walk away from the car. She grabs his hand as they approach the building.

INT. SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

The moment they enter, Clyde peers through the glass door over his shoulder to spot his grandparents' car pull away. He turns back to Tildy.

CLYDE  
Did you get them?

Tildy digs into her pocket, pulls out the dust masks, and hands them to Clyde. He stuffs them into his backpack.

CLYDE (cont'd)  
Alright. Good. Just keep an eye on the clock.

They diverge, going their separate ways down the hall.

INT. SCHOOL - TILDY'S WORKROOM

Tildy sits at a table with her TEACHER'S AIDE, the only two in the room. Tildy is colouring on a piece of paper.

TEACHER'S AIDE  
That's a nice drawing. What's it for?



TILDY  
It's for my dad.

TEACHER'S AIDE  
He'll like that. Do you see him much?

TILDY  
Not yet.

Tildy looks up at a clock on the wall. She reaches in her pocket, pulls out the ear plugs, and inserts them. With a confused expression, the aide looks at the clock and then back to Tildy.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY

Clyde walks down the hall with a plastic card in his hands that reads, **HALL PASS**. He looks up and down the hall.

Clyde yanks the fire alarm and the sound blares throughout the hall. He dashes for the boy's bathroom on the opposite side of the hall and enters.

INT. SCHOOL - BOY'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

A boy steps out of a stall and walks out of the room. When gone, Clyde walks into it, closes the lid, and gets on top of it. He pushes one of the ceiling tiles up and aside and pulls out his backpack.

INT. SCHOOL - TILDY'S WORK ROOM

Tildy's aide gets up from the table.

TEACHER'S AIDE  
(to herself)  
That's funny. I didn't think we were  
expecting a drill today.  
(aloud)  
Okay. Leave your things here, Tildy,  
and follow me.

Tildy gets up with the drawing still in her hand. Her aide takes it from her and puts it on the table.

TEACHER'S AIDE (cont'd)  
You can finish that later. Let's go.

The aide takes Tildy by the hand and pulls her to the door. Tildy meets this with some resistance as she looks back at the drawing.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY

Clyde hides away in the bathroom, which opens into the hall.

Classroom doors open, and students, led by their teachers, pour outside. In seconds, the hall becomes a sea of people moving in the same direction.

Tildy and her aide enter the hall. Tildy pulls away, losing her aide in the crowd, dodging and weaving around the other kids until she meets up with Clyde near the washrooms. When the coast is clear, they run, hand-in-hand, in the opposite direction.

INT. SCHOOL - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Frank and Maggie stand at the front desk with the secretary, PRINCIPAL REED, and Tildy's aide, examining security camera footage.

The footage shows Clyde pull the fire alarm.

PRINCIPAL REED

It's a serious violation, Mrs. Berry. We tell all of the students that the alarm can only be pulled when there's a fire. To do so otherwise prevents those in actual danger from getting the help they need.

MAGGIE

We understand, Howard. And we're so sorry.

PRINCIPAL REED

Well, you're lucky you're not being fined. It took some explaining, but luckily one of the first responders was there when Bill was hurt, so he agreed to let you go with a warning. Given all they've been through, I'm willing to do the same.

MAGGIE

We appreciate it more than you know.

PRINCIPAL REED

Allison said she saw Tildy put some sorta plugs in her ears just before the alarm went off.

FRANK

Did she say where they were going?

TEACHER'S AIDE

No. Nothing.

She hands him Tildy's folded drawing. He unfolds it to find a red heart composed of two dangling, untied laces, crudely drawn in crayon.

TEACHER'S AIDE (cont'd)

She was working on this before the alarm sounded. Said it was for her father.

Frank thinks on this for a moment, then his eyes widen, and it comes to him.

He looks at Maggie's purse.

FRANK

Lunch money, my ass.

Playing on the footage: Clyde and Tildy run from the school.

INT./EXT. BUS - AFTERNOON

The bus rides along the highway, cutting through the snow.

Inside, Clyde and Tildy sit side-by-side. Tildy glares out the window at the power lines, peaking and dipping between utility poles, forming a seemingly endless wave.

On his cellphone, Clyde looks at a map of the hospital.

CLYDE

He should be on the third floor.

His phone vibrates. The caller ID reads: **NAN**. He pushes a button, declining the call. He pulls a book from his bag, opens it, and starts reading.

TILDY

What if he doesn't want to see us?

CLYDE  
Why wouldn't he?

TILDY  
Maybe he's mad at me.

CLYDE  
Don't think like that.

TILDY  
But, what if--

CLYDE  
--Tildy. I really need to focus on  
this, okay? Everything'll be fine.

He returns to his book, and she goes back to the window.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - BILL'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Bill's pulse spikes rapidly on his heart rate monitor.

Bill SCREAMS in pain as he pushes his feet against the palms of a burly PHYSIO NURSE, trying to straighten his legs while the skin on his thighs splits open. Bill squeezes Evelyn and Nora's hands.

PHYSIO NURSE  
Harder now, Bill. You can do better.

EVELYN  
You heard him, Bill. Those legs have  
climbed ladders and lifted walls.

He pushes harder, SCREAMING louder as he does. After a few moments, he stops and his body falls limp.

BILL  
(signs)  
I can't. Please. I can't.

NORA  
Okay. Let's stop. He needs a break.  
He needs get his strength back.

Evelyn and the Physio Nurse look at one another.

EVELYN  
Then why don't we go get some lunch?  
We should get our strength back too.

Nora kisses Bill on the forehead through her mask and his bandages, then follows Evelyn and the physio nurse outside.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - KITCHEN

Frank opens and closes drawers, sometimes fishing through the contents, rattling the silver- and Tupper-ware inside. Maggie enters, phone in hand.

MAGGIE

Still nothing. What're you doing?

FRANK

Have you seen my cigarettes lately? I could really use one right about now.

MAGGIE

No, but can't say that I'm too broken up over it.

Frank waves her off, then goes back to looking.

FRANK

Don't get it. I've looked everywhere. Everywhere except...

He stops. He shuts the drawer.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - TILDY'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Frank enters and looks around. He walks to the nightstand by her bed. A family photo of Bill, Nora, Clyde, and Tildy sits on top of it. He looks through the nightstand, dressers, and closet. Nothing.

He plops on the bed so hard the mattress sinks. The back of his heels BUMP something hard underneath the bed. He swings his feet back and hits it again.

He leans over and lifts the bed skirt. He slides a box out from under the bed, brushing aside a floral shirt and pair of shorts. He picks it up and sets it on his lap.

Inside the box are his Zippo, a couple of barbecue lighters, a carton of matches, and candles. On top of the heap is his package of cigarettes.

He takes out his Zippo, then CLICKS it open and closed. He looks at the photo on the nightstand to find Tildy smiling back him.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - CAFETERIA - AFTERNOON

Nora sits across from Evelyn and the physio nurse, eating the end of their meals in the sparsely crowded room.

EVELYN

You know, you shouldn't let him give up every time things get difficult.

NORA

He's tired. Takes a lot out of him.

EVELYN

It takes a lot more to hold it in.

NORA

What would you have me do?

PHYSIO NURSE

Show him he's wrong. You can't do it for him. If he wants to think that he can't do it, make him do that all by himself. Don't stand next to him and agree with him. I know it might feel like the supportive thing to do, but you don't want him to think that you believe it too, do you?

Nora picks at what remains on her plate, moving the food around, mixing them indiscriminately.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Clyde moves quickly, while a timid Tildy follows behind.

TILDY

Clyde, wait.

CLYDE

What do you mean? We're so close.

Tildy catches up. As they near the end of the hall, a NURSE exits Bill's room just around the corner. Clyde holds Tildy back while they sneak a peak.

NURSE

I'll be back, Bill. Just hang tight.

Clyde reaches in his backpack, pulls out the dust masks, and hands one to Tildy.

CLYDE  
Here. Put this on.

She does. He secures the other on his face. The nurse walks down the hall. Clyde pulls Tildy's hand, but she stays put, jerking him back slightly.

CLYDE (cont'd)  
What're you doing? Come on. This is it. We're here. We made it.

TILDY  
What if it's not him?

CLYDE  
It is. You heard his name.

TILDY  
But what if--

--He pulls her off of the wall, so excited he threatens to yank her arm from its socket. They race around the corner.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - BILL'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Clyde and Tildy enter to see Bill lying in bed with his head slightly turned as he gazes at falling snow out the window.

BILL  
Tha wuh qui--

CLYDE  
Hey, Dad.

At the sight of them, Bill rises.

BILL  
Wuh ah yuh guhs duh-in huh?!

Clyde slings his backpack off and approaches the bed. Tildy stays by the door.

CLYDE  
(speaking fast)  
We missed you. We didn't wanna wait any longer. How're you? Look. I got all these books on how to take care of you when you're home. Come here, Tildy. It's okay.

Her eyes widen. This frail figure does not look like the strong man she once knew.

She shakes her head and steps closer to the door.

BILL  
Iths ok. Iths me.

Tildy runs from the room.

CLYDE  
Tildy!

He runs after her.

Tears fall from Bill's eyes like snow outside his window. He grips his bed's side-rails. He braces and extends his feet as far and hard as he can. He grits his teeth, then opens his mouth so wide his mouthpiece falls out.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - HALLWAY

Clyde bursts out of Bill's room, then runs after Tildy.

CLYDE  
Tildy, wait!

As Tildy reaches the end of the hall and turns the corner, she collides with Nora, Evelyn, and the physio nurse. She smashes into Nora's legs.

NORA  
Tildy?  
(spots Clyde)  
What're you guys doing here?

Before either of them can respond, a piercing SCREAM lets out of Bill's room and echoes down the hall.

All eyes are fixed on the doorway as Bill's bandaged hand wraps desperately around its frame.

He pulls himself out of the room and into the hall. He is shaky on his feet like a baby deer. Tildy shields herself with Nora's legs.

NORA (cont'd)  
Bill!

She steps toward him, but Evelyn forces her back with an outstretched hand.



EVELYN

Let him try. You can do it, Bill!  
Come on now!

Bill looks up to see everyone standing before him. He grips the railing and slowly pulls himself up, yelling as he does.

Clyde sees the influence these words have on his father.

CLYDE

Come on, Dad! We believe in you!

Nora is overwhelmed by the sight of everybody cheering him on. She sees Bill's hold on the railing grow tighter after each cheer.

It seems to be working.

NORA

Al...Almost the...Almost there, Bill!  
We're here! You can do it!

Bill pulls himself to his feet. He YELLS louder with each step. The skin on his legs cracks and blood runs down his legs. Nora sees it and cannot fight tears back any longer.

PHYSIO NURSE

You got a crowd behind you now, Bill!

But, despite himself, he looks drained.

NORA

Something's not right.

CLYDE

Keep going...

TILDY

What's wrong with him?

EVELYN

Come on, Bill...

NORA

We have to stop, Evelyn.

She steps forward. Again, Evelyn tries to hold her back.

EVELYN

Are you crazy? He's almost there, we  
can't give up now. Keep coming, Bill!

NORA

Stop it! Let go!

She fights with Evelyn. Bill takes one final step, then collapses upon the floor. By the time his body hits the ground, we can hear a pin drop with it.

Evelyn's arm falls limp. Nora takes advantage and pushes passed her. She, Clyde, and the physio nurse race to the other end of the hall as Tildy clings to her grandmother.

Nora scoops up Bill's body, now dead weight in her arms.

NORA (cont'd)

Bill?! No, no, no. Don't do this.

She rolls him over, and he coughs into her arm. His eyes close, and his head falls the other way, leaving a rusty-coloured spot on her sleeve. Nora pats his face.

NORA (cont'd)

Come on, hunny, wake up... Wake up!

The physio nurse flags more medical staff, who jump into action and rush to help. A group forms around Bill.

A mix of sadness and guilt takes over Evelyn's face. She looks down at Tildy, quivering at her side.

INT. NEWMAN'S OFFICE - EVENING

Nora sits across from Dr. Newman, his face sympathetic.

NORA

What's wrong with him?

DR. NEWMAN

I'm not sure yet. We're running some tests, but it looks to be a coronary issue, which... I would prepare your family for the worst.

Nora is speechless, helplessness totally envelopes her.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - BILL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Bill is unconscious in bed. A NURSE (the one that had left his room earlier) checks his vitals. Clyde and Tildy watch their father intently, his belly slowly rising and falling.

Nora enters.

NORA

Where's your grandmother?

CLYDE

She left.

NORA  
Where'd she go?

CLYDE  
She didn't say.

NORA  
Alright. Come on. Let's go find her.

CLYDE  
No. We can't. He needs someone here.

NURSE  
I can watch them.

Nora briefly hesitates, then nods. She runs down the hall. Clyde reaches into his bag, pulls out a book, and opens it across his lap.

Tildy is struggling to colour a drawing on her lap as the paper crumbles over the shape of her thighs. He hands her one of his books.

CLYDE  
Here. This might help.

She slides it under her drawing.

TILDY  
Thanks.

CLYDE  
I should've showed you these sooner.  
Then maybe you wouldn't have been so  
scared. I'm sorry.

Clyde spots her drawing: a stick figure portrait of their family holding hands and smiling with corresponding names floating above their heads. The figure labeled "Daddy" is faceless.

CLYDE (cont'd)  
How come he doesn't have a face?

TILDY  
Because I don't know what he looks  
like anymore.

Clyde looks at the open pages of his book showing medical photos of burn patients. He closes it.

CLYDE  
 He'll look like our dad.  
     (points to drawing)  
 It doesn't matter how you fill this  
 in because this--  
     (points to "Daddy")  
 --is never gonna change.

The nurse looks at him and smiles before grabbing Bill's chart.

TILDY  
 Do you think he'll blame me for what happened?

CLYDE  
 Why would he?

TILDY  
 Because. I spilt the oil all on the truck. I made us crash. I--

CLYDE  
 --Did you put that pole on the side of the road?

TILDY  
 No.

CLYDE  
 Did you cover the road with gravel?

She shakes her head.

The nurse looks up from the chart.

NURSE  
 Nobody is here on purpose, sweetie. Accidents happen. And when they do, the only thing that you can control is how you choose to help those who need you. Right?

Tildy nods.

She looks down at her swinging feet and sees that a lace is untied. She bends over to tie it, but has difficulty. Clyde puts his book back in his bag.

CLYDE  
 Let me see that. I'm gonna show you how to do this once and for all.

Tildy lifts her foot and lays it on his lap. She watches closely as he makes a loop.

INT. THE WESTIN - EVELYN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Evelyn packs her suitcase, her folded clothes piled on the bed. Nora bursts through the door.

NORA  
What're you doing?

EVELYN  
Don't worry. My flight leaves first thing in the morning.

NORA  
What? No. You can't do this to him.

She steps inside and closes the door. Evelyn stops packing and turns to face her.

EVELYN  
I'm not. I'm doing it for him. He's safer without me here. Did they say what's wrong?

NORA  
We're still waiting on the results, but it doesn't look good.

Nora sits on the cot. Her head hangs to the floor. Evelyn moves her suitcase to one side and sits on the bed across from her.

EVELYN  
I'm sorry. I pushed him way too hard. I just didn't want to hear the words, "there was nothing more you could've done." Not unless it was really true this time. You know what Owen's eyes told me before they closed that very last time?  
(off the shake of  
Nora's head)  
There was still more I could've done. In spite of everything I did for him, there was still so much more.

NORA  
And you still believe that?

Evelyn nods. Nora gestures to her belly with her eyes.

NORA (cont'd)

Then why did you tell me it wasn't my fault when you don't believe the same about yourself?

EVELYN

Sometimes when someone you love is in pain, you tell them what they need to hear before you're ready to say it.

NORA

Look. I am not ready to say goodbye. But, if I'm going to, I don't want to say it all alone. I need you and the kids there. Please. I want your help.

EVELYN

Let me grab my overnight bag.

She grabs her suitcase and slides it off the bed.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - DR. NEWMAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Nora and Evelyn sit side-by-side across from Newman, who looks through a chart.

NORA

Pneumonia? But how could he have been infected? We were so careful.

DR. NEWMAN

The fluid in his lungs probably built up from a lack of mobility. In fact, if he hadn't moved, we might not have caught it. The burn masked a lot his symptoms.

EVELYN

So then what do we do?

DR. NEWMAN

Right now, we're draining the fluid from his lungs, and we've given him antibiotics. The rest is up to him.

Nora takes Evelyn's hand as they let this sink in.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - BILL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Bill is asleep, his bed surrounded with plastic sheets that extend to the ceiling, separating him from everyone else.

Evelyn and Tildy sleep on a cot a few feet away from Bill's bed. Nora sits at Bill's bedside with Clyde, doing his best to examine Bill's bandages from a distance.

Nora and Clyde speak quietly.

NORA

What do you think? Do you approve, or would you have done them differently?

CLYDE

It's pretty good, I guess.

NORA

I saw Tildy's thumb. Did you do that?

He nods.

NORA (cont'd)

You're pretty good at that.

CLYDE

I should be. I had a lot of time at home to read about it.

NORA

You know, I only kept you guys away because I was wanted to protect you. It's not like there's a book on how to handle these things.

He passes her a book from his bag. She smirks.

NORA (cont'd)

Smartass.

She opens it and they begin reading together in silence.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - BILL & NORA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Frank tosses and turns, wide awake. He bumps into Maggie, waking her up. She rolls over and turns the lamp on while wiping the sleep from her eyes.

MAGGIE

What's wrong?

FRANK

I can't sleep.

MAGGIE

Is it the box?

FRANK

She wasn't checking under there for monsters, Mags. She was stowing 'em away. Startin' think I belong under there, too.

MAGGIE

No you don't... You wouldn't fit.

He smirks.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Maybe we can't protect them from all the tough things they see. Maybe all we can do is make it easier for when they see them.

He thinks on this, then he rolls over and climbs out of bed with a grunt only a man his age would make.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Where're you going?

FRANK

Outside.

MAGGIE

At this time of night?

But he has already left the room.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - BILL'S ROOM - MORNING

Lying in the cot next to Tildy, Evelyn opens her eyes to see Nora in the chair beside Bill's bed with Clyde's head on her shoulder, both asleep and with the book across their laps.

A RUSTLING draws Evelyn's attention to Bill's bed. She spots his toes wiggling beneath his blankets.

EVELYN

Nora. Nora, wake up. Look!

Nora opens her eyes and her attention goes directly to Bill. His eyelids flutter as if connected to his toes.



And then, they open.

NORA

Oh, my God!

She leans forward and Clyde falls, shooting him awake.

CLYDE

Dad!

The excitement wakes Tildy.

TILDY

Daddy? Daddy, you're awake!

BILL

It's al-i-i-i-ive.

Tildy knows this voice and meets it with a smile.

NORA

How do you feel?

BILL

Like somebody's steppin' on my chest.

DR. NEWMAN (O.S.)

That's normal. It'll pass.

They turn to see Dr. Newman, masked, standing in the door. He steps inside the room, and they all put their masks on.

DR. NEWMAN

Welcome back, Bill. All of that fluid was compressing your lungs and likely made it harder for the blood cells to carry the necessary amount of oxygen to your damaged tissues. If you don't mind, I'd like to have a look at your grafts if I can.

Dr. Newman approaches, unzips the plastic sheets, and steps inside. Nora, Evelyn, and the kids follow close behind.

BILL

Wait. What about the kids?

NORA

It'll be okay.

Bill thinks on this a moment, then looks over to Dr. Newman and nods. Dr. Newman approaches the side of the bed.

He unwraps the bandages around Bill's head and removes his face mask and mouthpiece. He steps aside, revealing Bill's face to Clyde and Tildy for the first time:

His skin is bumpy like molded clay with fresh fingerprints. He is bald, except for a few dark strays sticking out here and there; his ears are no more; his eyelids are lash-less, painted along the ridges in a mix of dried and fresh blood.

BILL

So, what do you think?

TILDY

It's...

CLYDE

...different.

BILL

That's it? You don't think I look like a monster or somethin'?

CLYDE

Of course not.

BILL

(to Tildy)

What about you?

Clyde looks at her with silent encouragement. She looks in her daddy's eyes. Bright pools of blue still shine through. She shakes her head, leaning in as if to tell him a secret.

TILDY

Monsters hide under the bed, Daddy. They don't lie on top of them.

And suddenly those bright pools of blue overflow. He pulls her the rest of the way and wraps his arms around her. The pain is more than worth it.

DR. NEWMAN

It's better already, Bill. In fact, we might be able to get you out of isolation sooner than I thought.

TILDY

Does that mean he can go home now?

EVELYN

Not yet, sweetie. Not until we can get him to the end of that hallway.

NORA

Anything about that in here?

Nora picks up a book out of Clyde's bag and tosses it to him. He catches it.

CLYDE  
I don't think so.

He sees at the radio on the bedside table, then looks down at Dr. Newman's feet.

CLYDE (cont'd)  
What size shoes do you wear?

Dr. Newman meets this with confusion.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - GARAGE - MORNING

Frank works on Bill's truck. A man and wife, MIKE and PAIGE, approach him. Mike carries a tray of food in his hands.

MIKE  
Hi.

Frank gets up and shakes his hand.

FRANK  
Hi. Who're you?

MIKE  
I'm Mike. This is my wife, Paige. We live a few blocks over. We wanted to bring something by for the family to say Happy Holidays. You know, he did some work for us a while back.

He offers the tray to Frank.

FRANK  
Oh. Thank you.

MIKE  
Give him our best when you see him.

FRANK  
You bet.

PAIGE  
Hope you got lots of fridge space.

FRANK  
I'm sure we can find a place for it.

PAIGE  
Must have a big one then, huh?

FRANK  
(scanning the tray)  
Well, I mean, don't get me wrong or  
anything, this is real generous and  
all, but it's only--

--Frank looks over their shoulders to see another group of  
people coming up the driveway.

PAIGE  
A few others had the same idea.

FRANK  
You don't say.

He looks over them again to see more people have followed.

INT. VICTORIA GENERAL - HALLWAY - MORNING

Bill sits in a chair while Tildy slides Dr. Newman's shoes  
onto his feet. She ties one. He observes her proudly. When  
she finishes, she helps him to his feet. He approaches his  
wife stiffly, like a toddler's first steps.

Clyde stands at the end of the hall with the radio in his  
hands. Evelyn and the sock-footed Dr. Newman stand beside  
him. Tildy joins them.

NORA  
Are you sure about this, Clyde?

CLYDE  
It's worth a shot.

Bill's bare feet are planted in front of Nora's on the tile  
floor. He shakily raises one of his feet and plants it onto  
one of hers, then does the same with the other foot.

Clyde pushes a button on the radio and music starts to play.  
Nora steadies Bill in her arms and slowly lifts her foot to  
the music. The other follows in a box step, taking them two  
steps closer to the end of the hall.

They repeat, the music slowly getting closer with each step.

BILL  
Been a while since we did this. No  
funny faces this time?

NORA

Well, you're a lot lighter than you used to be.

BILL

How come you didn't just tell me?

NORA

I didn't wanna step on your feelings just because you were doing the same to my toes. Not as hard, at least.

Bill smirks, then becomes sullen.

BILL

Look at us now. Look at me. You find it harder to do that now, don't you? I can see it in your eyes. That look that tells me you lost something.

NORA

No. It's not that.

BILL

It's okay. I understand what you--

Suddenly the music grows further...

NORA

--I lost a baby, Bill. Our baby.

BILL

What? How? When? I didn't know you--

...and further...

NORA

--Me either.

BILL

Why didn't you tell me?

...and further away until she can no longer hear it.

NORA

You were so weak. I couldn't risk it. But you need to know that look is not because I don't see the man I fell in love with. It's because the woman who did feels lost. She's not gone. Trust me, I know she's here.

(MORE)

NORA (cont'd)  
I think she just needs more time to  
feel like herself again.

She starts to cry. Silence passes between them for a moment.

BILL  
So does he. They'll do it together.  
Tell each other where they've been.  
When she's ready.

She nods. He wipes a tear from her cheek.

BILL (cont'd)  
Y'know, if this stuff really is good  
for the skin, you and I are gonna be  
young forever.

She laughs. The music over the radio faintly grows as well  
as the voices on the other end of it.

EVELYN	RADIO
(barely audible)	(barely audible)
...you're almost there...	... <i>crossing you in style</i> ...

NORA  
I think we've earned it.

CLYDE	RADIO
(slightly louder)	(slightly louder)
...just a few more steps...	... <i>you heart breaker</i> ...

BILL  
I think we're owed it. We'll add it  
to the list.

TILDY	RADIO
(back to normal)	(back to normal)
...you did it!	... <i>I'm going your way</i> ....

Bill and Nora look around them. They made it. They look at  
the other end of the hall.

Bill's room looks so far away.

EVELYN  
So, what do you think?

DR. NEWMAN  
I don't know. I--

EVELYN  
--never said he had to do it alone.

He looks to the kids. They steady Bill as he dismounts from Nora's feet. Clyde checks him over, adjusting his bandages.

DR. NEWMAN

Well. I'll need my shoes back.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

The fridge is filled to the brim with casserole dishes and Tupperware containers all neatly labeled with posted notes.

Maggie closes the fridge door, and the list meets her face. She hears a car pull into the driveway.

She looks out the window and beams. She runs from the room.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Frank presses a sheet of paper against the door of the truck and starts to peel it back off. He hears a car door shut and then someone's footsteps approaching from over his shoulder.

FRANK

Just go to the door. My wife'll--

TILDY

--You found it?!

He turns to see Tildy. He pulls her in for a hug.

FRANK

I did. So, what do you think?

Tildy examines the passenger door: her drawing of the heart composed of two dangling shoelaces is spread across it with the words **LOVELACE CONSTRUCTION** encircling it.

TILDY

I like it.

FRANK

Me too. Anything that wears its heart on its sleeve can't be that bad, huh?

She wraps her little arms around his neck. He completes the embrace, holding her tighter than before.

He looks up at the car in the driveway to see Nora, Evelyn, and Clyde taking Bill out of the back seat.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Tildy opens the door as Frank and Clyde help Bill into the house, each shouldering an arm.

Nora and Evelyn follow close behind.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Frank and Clyde stop in front of a lounge.

FRANK

Okay. Easy now.

They slowly place Bill into the chair.

Presents lie under a tree placed in the corner of the room. Nora kneels in front of Bill with a case beside her. Maggie enters the doorway.

NORA

Where did all of this come from?

MAGGIE

People have been coming off and on for the last couple of days.

Nora opens the case, revealing bandages, creams, adhesives, tapes, pins, and a pair of scissors. She starts unwrapping the bandages on Bill's arms.

NORA

Did you get their names?

As she answers, Maggie briefly disappears before returning with a piece paper in each hand.

MAGGIE

I made a list, but I almost didn't have to. Most were already on this one you have hanging on the fridge. Almost identical.

She waves them in her hands. Nora looks at Bill.

BILL

I told you. I'm a man of my word.

NORA

Yeah, and I'm a woman of mine. The nurses gave me this before we left.



She reaches into her pocket and pulls out his wedding band.  
She slips it onto his finger. He smiles at the sight of it.

BILL

No luck with the other thing then?

She smirks as she continues to unravel his bandages.

Tildy and Evelyn enter with pillows and blankets.

TILDY

We got these for his chair.

NORA

Great idea, sweetie. Clyde, can you  
grab those dressings? I'll need you  
to--

CLYDE

--I know.

She nods at him with a smile.

NORA

Right.

Tildy grabs materials and joins her brother.

Evelyn moves Bill forward to pad his chair with blankets,  
then tucks a pillow behind his head.

NORA (cont'd)

Mom, Dad. Wanna give us a hand?

FRANK

Sure.

MAGGIE

What can we do?

CLYDE

I'll show you.

He ushers them into the living room and gives them some  
materials from the kit.

CLYDE (cont'd)

Mom, is there more of that cream? I  
can't find any.

She looks through the kit.

NORA

There might be some in the bathroom.

She rises and slips out of the room while Frank and Maggie follow along with Clyde.

INT. LOVELACE HOUSE - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Nora opens the mirrored door of the medicine cabinet above the sink and fishes through the inside. No cream in sight.

She slides open the drawer and sifts through its contents.

She stops.

She slowly pushes the cream aside to reveal her pregnancy test. She pulls it out to get a better look.

A faded double line stares back.

She looks at the trash bin beside the toilet, back at the test, and finally to the cabinet before her. She sets the test on a shelf inside.

She swings the mirror door closed and the test disappears behind her reflection.

She examines herself for a moment before closing her eyes and taking a deep breath. In...then out.

CLYDE (O.S.)

Mom? Did you find anything?

(beat, then:)

Mom?!

She grabs the cream and shuts the drawer. She leaves, but we stay on the mirror.

Just outside the door, she walks back down the hall. From the bathroom, we see her walk down the living room stairs and out of focus.

NORA

Here.

She hands Clyde the cream and rejoins the family as they work together to make Bill comfortable. And as the focus shifts from the bathroom mirror to their activity in the living room, we:

FADE OUT



The Farrell family (clockwise from top): Paul, Wanda, Ethel (Paul's mother), Michelle, and Keith. Picture taken on Ethel's 80th birthday, November 7, 1988.

## Afterword

The concept of debt is prevalent throughout this script. Nora feels as though Bill is owed more for all of the work he does for others and refers to his client list as “one big I.O.U.” Evelyn feels like she owes a debt to her children, and she is still haunted by how events turned out with Bill’s brother, Owen, whose very name contains the word “owe.” And when Bill and Nora dance to the end of the hallway, Bill suggests that life owes he and Nora for what they have just gone through. He says in reference to Nora’s tears, “If this stuff really is good for the skin, you and I are gonna be young forever.” Nora argues that they have “earned” it, whereas as Bill suggests they are “owed” it. By the end, most of these debts have been collected. Evelyn has helped Bill in ways she could not help his brother, and most of Bill’s clients have offered their condolences and well wishes in the form of food and Christmas gifts, satisfying the debts they owe him. In keeping with an open ending, however, the one debt left to collect is that final promise that Bill and Nora will be forever young.

My grandparents often say they feel robbed of their youth because of all the time they have spent in hospitals over the years. I think they feel especially cheated out of time with their children, worsened by the fact that their son passed away so young. I think that my mother may share this sentiment as well, having unconsciously forgotten some of her early childhood, a likely coping mechanism. This project’s final purpose is fulfilling that promise of eternal youth. With the Lovelaces, the Farrells will be forever young between these pages and, maybe one day, will be so on the silver screen. They say film is forever. So is family.

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