

An Illustrated Screenplay

The
Republic

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Automatic Moving

Published by Automatic Moving in 2017
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The Republic



CAST OF CHARACTERS

Statesmen - All Statesmen are middle-aged or older

GAVIN COOK	Philosopher, carpenter, chemist, firewood purveyor
BENOIT GOUBEAUX	Tobacconist, herbalist, mental therapist
WILLIAM COUGHLIN	Game and firewood purveyor, carpenter
MATTHEW NASH	Tuba instructor, farmer, cook
JEFFREY DIPPLE	Fine artist, house painter, chicken farmer
KELLY MAYCUMBER	Poet, goat milk purveyor, masseuse
RICHARD CHASE	Stenographer, house cleaner, farmer
TIMOTHY KO	Electrician, ceramicist, BENOIT's caretaker

Townspeople

LINDA SCHALLER	Unemployed young wife of WILLIAM COUGHLIN
EXECUTIONER	Unemployed man
JANE OTIS	Yoga instructor, friend of LINDA
JULIA PINBERRY	Unemployed local teenager
BRAD TAYLOR	Student, boyfriend of JULIA PINBERRY
BRANDON	Leader of the tableau vivant troupe
MILO & DAVE	Tableau vivant troupe
Various townspeople	
Partygoers	

Locations

Statesmen's cabins
LINDA SCHALLER's house
Statesmen's meeting lodge rented by day as JANE's yoga studio
EXECUTIONER's mountain cabin
A clearing in the forest
The surrounding woodland
A goat paddock
A shed
Town

ACT I

SCENE 1. A CLEARING IN THE FOREST - SUMMER DAY

KELLY and young JULIA hold hands, as if about to kiss. Their movements are slow, nearly static.

SCENE 2. LINDA'S HOUSE - LATE AUTUMN DAY

Bicycle in hand, MATTHEW peers through a window. He sees a tuba and a stack of sheet music near a crackling fireplace. A recording of a piano can be heard.

MATT

William Coughlin! I know you're in there. There's no use... open the door!

WILL

What?? I'm undressed!

MATT

Well, put on some...

WILL

What... do you *want*, Matthew?

MATT

William. Mr. Goubeaux sent me. You opened his roof and haven't bothered to close it. He's quite agitated. I don't know if you've noticed... but there's a chill in the air...

WILL

You're trespassing in my backyard!

MATT

"Your" backyard? Well, ha ha, I was hoping to see thirty cords of wood, chopped and stacked, ready for our consumption. Because it's not at *your* cabin. At least what I could see from the property line. And I... well, the others and I have talked. No meetings yet, but casual conversations, and we've come to the consensus that throughout the summer, neither of us has heard a chain saw... an ax... coming from those woods. Now what I have heard, William, are rumors. About you. Going out to dinner. With your wife. Drinking at cafés, bars...

WILLIAM sighs.

MATT

What is wrong with you? Are you sick?

WILL

I have a week.

MATT

Yes. But if wood is not delivered by Sunday, I will be forced to take back my tuba. No more lessons. And the others will do the same in regard to their services. Now, these services may not be relevant to you, judging by the way you've lived for the past year. I understand your cabin and life with us may seem a distant dream. But remember... that this... here... *this* is the dream. This is unreal. The only relevant aspect to your life is your contracts!

Satisfied with his pep talk, MATTHEW mounts his bicycle:

MATT

Now, what should I tell Benoit?

WILL

I'll be there tomorrow.

MATT

What? Speak up.

WILL

Tomorrow! Tomorrow!! God damn you, old man! Clean your ears!

MATT

Good boy. And please: keep my instrument in its case.



SCENE 3. MEETING LODGE - NIGHT

All the Statesmen except JEFFREY are assembled in the dark, spacious meeting room. A photo of an Indian woman hangs on a wall. A painting of a lotus on another. A few of the men smoke rolled cigarettes. GAVIN vapes on a glowing e-cigarette. BENOIT fiddles with his cane and MATTHEW paces the floor. RICHARD reads from a transcript as GAVIN records what is said on a typewriter.

RICH

(reading)

Jeffrey. "So he just lives there." Matt. "Basically. By the good graces of that bourgeois cunt, that neoliberal whore..." Gavin and Kelly suddenly enter. "Is it cold out?" Gavin mutters something I couldn't understand. Tim. "My Gavin, no pipe?" Gavin. "It's an e-cigarette." Tim. "E-cigarette?" Gavin. "*Electronic* cigarette. It cuts the tar..."

MATT

Jump the chitchat, Richard.

RICH

(shuffling papers)

Hmm, let's see. Gavin accused the affected members of willingly buying into a monopoly. Matt. "Willingly?" Gavin. "Yes, you must have known William's wife was paying for everything. But you were pampered. And now you suffer." Matt interjects. "Irrelevant." Then a heated argument ensued which my arthritic fingers could not keep pace...

BENOIT

Read through it, Richard. This is important. Some of us are curious.

RICH

Matt made the point that William's use of the woman's money is not proved, what is at issue is his criminality. Gavin. "From where I stand, he's not a criminal. He has broken no contracts with me."

BENOIT

Well put, Gavin. Well put. And how did you, my dear Matthew, respond to such clear-eyed logic?

MATT

Mr. Goubeaux, you of all people should recognize...

BENOIT

Why me of all people, Matthew?

RICH

Your roof, Benoit.

BENOIT

I will see that my roof is taken care of. My roof is not the most pressing matter...

MATT

What is a pressing matter if not your health and safety?

BENOIT
I will not be bullied, Matthew, into siding with the majority because of my physical defect...

GAVIN
Benoit. I understand, but these men could freeze to death.

BENOIT
Well. These men made bad decisions.

MATT
And you?

BENOIT
I made good decisions. Gavin may ask for more in return for his firewood if he is honest about what it is actually worth, while you...

GAVIN
What they mean, Mr. Goubeaux, is that William's crimes... against all of them... will soon become relevant to all of *us*. If Matthew has no wood and no game, he may renege on his contracts to you. And who of us will stand forward and side with you, when... your refusal to punish William brings us to ruin?

BENOIT
We shall see then. I am quite confident of my axiomatic presence within this state.

BENOIT grabs his cane and feebly rises.

BENOIT
... and you, Gavin. And Kelly. You are foolish to be plied by these men. I know why you plan to sign against William, but bear in mind, I control the source of your entrepreneurial dreams. There is no nicotine without tobacco. And no pleasure without nicotine. Come along, Timothy.

TIM
Coming.

TIMOTHY puts on his coat.

MATT
What is it you want? I'll double my services for the next month!

BENOIT
Who said I wanted anything? I'll be expecting the transcript tomorrow, Richard.

Exit BENOIT and TIMOTHY.

MATT
Asshole!

RICH
Why is Tim so loyal?

MATT
Wood. The old man is keeping him warm.

GAVIN
There's nothing I can do. I signed for six cords.

MATT
What does he want? He doesn't care about William.

KELLY
It's not about protecting Will. It's about us. He wants the control.

MATT
Yes, he is a tyrant. I'm quickly coming to realize that. I repeat for the record: you are a tyrant, Benoit!

GAVIN
This isn't...

RICH
Productive.

GAVIN
Yes. We shouldn't let our meetings circulate around Mr. Goubeaux. He'll come around soon enough. Now I wish to give Kelly the floor and speak about the circumstances following Benoit's signature...

MATT
Look. It's snowing.

KELLY rises, taking the floor.

KELLY
I was recently speaking to my friend's younger brother. A boy of fourteen. He was up on Overlook Mountain, smoking marijuana with some friends, when a large man wearing a leather jacket appeared from the woods...

SCENE 4. BENOIT'S CABIN - DAY

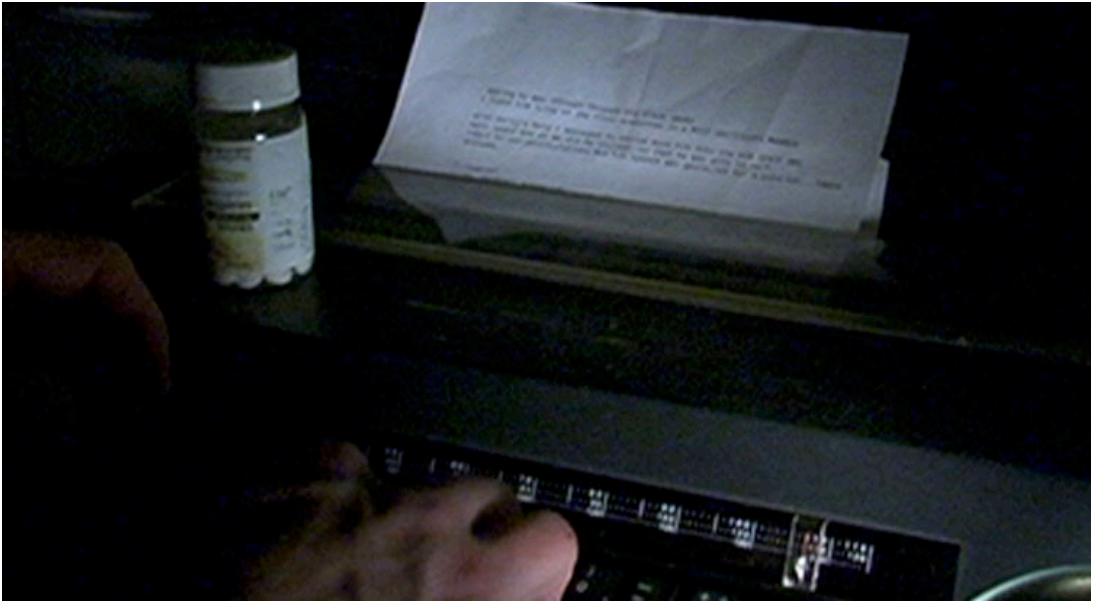
GAVIN reads from a transcript as RICHARD types away. BENOIT stirs logs in the fireplace.

GAVIN [READING]: "... the large man told the boys it was his property, but did not order them to leave. Time passed and they struck up a conversation."

BENOIT
Have we seen him since?

GAVIN
We've bartered with him on a non-contractual basis a couple times.

BENOIT
I'm talking about little William.



GAVIN
You don't wish to hear... ?

BENOIT
No, Gavin. I'm interested in little William.

GAVIN
We haven't seen him.

BENOIT
You've looked?

GAVIN
Yes. Doesn't that worry you? Are you capable of living through the winter without repairs to your roof?

BENOIT
Tim is weak. A nicotine addict. He cannot do without it. He will fix my roof in lieu of little William.

GAVIN
But what if you are wrong...

BENOIT
Then I'll make due. Yet when this is all over, I won't be so forgiving. You can mark that line, Richard. Do not tread on me, Timothy. Or Matthew. Or any citizen for that matter!

GAVIN
Without the roof fixed, you will use up your firewood by mid-February, and I am not obligated to supply you with more. No citizen is obligated.

BENOIT
Supply me with the wood you don't have?

GAVIN
With Will's wood. When it surfaces.

BENOIT
When it surfaces.

GAVIN
It's still possible.

Silence.

BENOIT
Enough. Our time is up. I have an errand to run. If you would please leave my home.

GAVIN
Would you like to give us a list of demands, on record... while Richard is here transcribing?

BENOIT
Let his old fingers rest. We all need a bit of rest.

SCENE 5. A DIRT ROAD - DAY

BENOIT, GAVIN and RICHARD watch BENOIT hobble up the slope. He holds out his cane for support. RICHARD reaches to help, but GAVIN pulls his hand away. BENOIT struggles forward on his own.

BENOIT
I will be expecting the transcript tomorrow.

SCENE 6. JEFFREY'S TRAILER - DAY

BENOIT
Jeffrey! Jeffrey!!

BENOIT rings a bell attached to a pole at the roadside. JEFFREY pokes out the window:

JEFF
Good morning, Benoit.

BENOIT
The painting. Have you begun it?

JEFF
No, uh... I'm...

BENOIT
Good, good. I wanted to propose an alternative to our agreement. I need a man to escort me back and forth to the lodge.

JEFF
Uh, where's Tim?

BENOIT
Never mind Tim.

JEFF
Is he gone? His house has been dark for...

BENOIT
He moved in with Matthew, Jeffrey. A little socialist experiment. But forget them. Are you interested?

JEFF
I can't attend meetings until I'm better.

BENOIT
But you need not attend, Jeffrey, only walk...

JEFF
I have bronchitis...

BENOIT
Only ten minutes there, ten minutes back-

JEFF
I don't need your tobacco... is what I'm trying to say.
(pause)
The painting will have to wait.

BENOIT
Then may I inquire from whom you are procuring your heating wood?

JEFF
Same as you. Same as everyone for that matter. I'm sure someone else will escort you.

BENOIT
And what are you doing for Gavin in return for this generous winter gift?

JEFF
I'm giving him my tobacco. For his experiments.

BENOIT
Experimentation takes risk! Are you prepared for that?

JEFF
You leave us without much choice in the matter.

BENOIT
Well, walk me to the lodge, ten minutes a day, and use my firewood without being beholden to this e-cigarette insanity. Is that an option?

JEFF
Will you sign, old friend?



SCENE 7. MEETING LODGE - NIGHT

MATTHEW, RICHARD and KELLY are present. KELLY types as MATTHEW reads from a transcript.

MATT

Mr. Goubeaux was silent for a moment. And then, as if summoning the crows in the treetops, he yelled, "I'm not obligated to give you my tobacco, or any smokers here. Gavin should remind himself of that."

(pause)

I must say, it's a sad and curious fact you smokers smoke to relax, yet you are forced to work more for the pleasure!

RICH

Please.

MATT

Yes, you work to smoke, Richard. You work... to smoke.

RICH

It's hardly much work.

MATT

Hardly? Massaging Benoit's gamy legs with your bare hands?

RICH
Fifteen minutes a day.

MATT
Bathing him...

RICH
Two times a week.

MATT
Yet any time he chooses. Bound by your addiction to his every whim. Without a contract, Mr. Goubeaux treats you like children... no, not children: babies! Crawling half blind towards his nicotine teats for your hourly feedings. And what kind of power could you ever hope to wield from this position?

RICH
I just don't see it. Our services are trivialities. His necessities are small. He eats no meat. No dairy. Drinks no alcohol. And the food he does eat, he has plenty of: canned tomatoes, pickles... and hot water. Even that he sips daintily.

MATT
But company, it's your company which he gorges upon! To an egomaniac like Benoit, your company is the ham hock and rump on which he feasts. We all have appetites, and his are emotional, not physical... If Timothy fixes the old man's roof, I will evict him from my home. Gavin will loan him no firewood. And I would like the rest of you to assure me that you will not accept him into your heated homes.

RICH
I won't take him in.

KELLY
Neither will I, nor Gavin.

RICH
He'll return to Benoit's then?

MATT
I should think so. And we do not want that to happen. We do not want the man's roof fixed, we do not want him wielding his rule over Timothy who would indulge him to no end. We cannot extend this ordeal into the balmy spring, and by then...

RICH
What does Timothy require to keep with us?

MATT
Timothy wants his sacrifice divided amongst us. I think it fair. I've promised him the main room with the fireplace. As a show of commitment, he wants you to pool whatever tobacco you have remaining--to split it to include him--and join in this general strike against that aspiring dictator on the hill...

SCENE 8. BENOIT'S COTTAGE - EVENING

KELLY reads from a transcript as RICHARD types. BENOIT listens closely as he sips from a mug. His cottage is in disarray.

KELLY

(reading)

"... he treads on us. The old crookshanked... weasel treads on us! And don't edit that, Richard. I mean every word." Richard. "That fucking wife." Matt. "William's wife is irrelevant. And so is Benoit. We must prepare for what is relevant. Benoit will come around. I didn't want to say this earlier, out of fear of scaring the old man, but today Kelly and I drove by that woman's house. And we heard a wood splitter in action. Chugging industriously through the cold, December air." Richard. "So there is a wood splitter?" Matt. "It appears so, it appears so."

BENOIT

Pfff! Liars! All of you!

KELLY

Benoit, Gavin wonders if you don't misunderstand his plans for the e-cigarette experiments? We will always need your tobacco.

BENOIT

(mocking)

Oh, yes, I'm so confused by these new fangled modern developments, Mr. Maycumber! Would you send Gavin over and show me how to use the light switch!

RICHARD chuckles.

BENOIT

It was I who ran the power lines through this place. some thirty years ago.

(low, spoken into French)

Opine not on the wonders of progress, Mr. Cook. Not to me.

KELLY

What prevents you? Honestly. Do you care for him?

BENOIT

Care for whom?

KELLY

William. You spent plenty of time with him in the past year.

BENOIT

I was his therapist, Kelly. He needed my psycho-spiritual guidance on certain matters.

RICH

Did he ever explain, the reason... for his behavior?

BENOIT
I'd be breaking a contract if I divulged. But he mentioned nothing about a wood splitter.

RICH
Well, he's broken a contract with you. One that puts you in jeopardy.

KELLY
Do you have a list of demands yet? For us to consider?

Typing stops.

BENOIT
Richard, why have you stopped typing?

RICH
I've performed my two hundred lines.

BENOIT throws a pouch of tobacco across the table.

BENOIT
Do two hundred more then! And blow smoke rings in Timothy's face with his own stash!

KELLY
Richard has quit smoking.

A long pause.

BENOIT
Richard? I pay you in tobacco to type. How am I to express myself if not by your hand, Richard?

RICH
You could walk down to the lodge and...

BENOIT
Walk! You know I cannot... !

KELLY
Or you could write your thoughts by your own hand and leave them in the mailbox.

BENOIT
This is...

KELLY
Discrimination?

BENOIT
Don't mock me, Kelly. I have every right to throw this tobacco in the fireplace! All of it!

KELLY
It may come to that without that roof fixed. But these men seem to be getting along fine without your patronage...

RICH

We could perhaps be convinced to take up the habit again.

Exit RICHARD and KELLY. BENOIT massages his legs by the fire, fuming. Then takes a pencil from his bureau and begins writing.

BENOIT

(writing)

My demands are thus...

He accidentally drops the pencil and it rolls across the floor. He tries to retrieve it with the tip of his cane, but he loses grip of the cane.

BENOIT

Dammit!



SCENE 9. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

KELLY is lying shirtless on the couch. GAVIN enters and GAVIN puts a Bach Cantata on the record player.

GAVIN
What are you thinking about, Kelly?

KELLY
I'm composing a sonnet.

GAVIN
For yourself?

KELLY
For a woman.

GAVIN
The prostitute?

KELLY
I don't know any prostitutes. The baker.

GAVIN
May I hear what you have so far?

KELLY
"I met you here... in August. How then, we pictured the dormant buds of spring. Memories of their dark youth, now cracked the gentle casings to make this summer. This hot summer. And now... that hot summer. A summer that was... is now a dark and dormant memory... 'neath the icy caps of February... "

GAVIN
February?

KELLY
I'll have it done by then. "What makes movement about ourselves... that undertakes the joy into the soil of sadness, that reaches farther... "
(pause)
What's wrong?

GAVIN sits beside him. KELLY gives GAVIN a shoulder rub.

GAVIN
You sure the man's not sick?

KELLY
Sick? He looks healthy. He has the most amazing eyes.

GAVIN
Mentally.

KELLY
Well, Julia's brother found him endearing. A big oaf in want of friends.

GAVIN

Yet he boasts so openly. About such brutality. Without shame.

KELLY

Only hearsay.

GAVIN

A nationalistic fool.

KELLY

Blackwater, Gavin.

GAVIN

A corporate tool, then.

KELLY

You had a job once.

GAVIN

No empathy, no conscience, no...

KELLY

He's young. And without William, we need that.

GAVIN

William has a soul. The soul of an artist...

KELLY

By a modern standard, perhaps. But this other man has work ethic. Like your master Bach.

(pause)

The spirit is found in the details of the steady craft, not in the wild ideals...

KELLY picks up a wooden chair and holds it for GAVIN to see:

KELLY

I'm no carpenter, but this is a perfect dovetail.

GAVIN

Craft without soul is horrifying.

KELLY

Yes, but... growing older... and older... as the days grow colder... is more horrifying. It isn't like you to prejudice, Gavin. Do you love him?

GAVIN

Of course. Don't you?

KELLY

From afar, he looked like a Thomas Harte Benton figure, illuminated by a rosy and melancholic... autumnal light. I saw the state... organic, just and clear... those eyes...

GAVIN

I'm thinking about William for now.



SCENE 10. BENOIT'S CABIN - DAY

BENOIT hobbles to his mailbox and deposits an envelope. He clangs the bell again and again and again:

BENOIT
If my demands are not met by tomorrow noon, I will burn every last shred of my tobacco! You socialist totalitarian scum!

SCENE 11. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

KELLY is asleep on the couch. RICHARD's voice echoes outside.

RICH
This is private property. See the sign?

LINDA
My husband lives here.

GAVIN walks outside, his voice joining the others.

LINDA
Hi, I'm...

GAVIN
Will's not here.

LINDA
I'm just dropping off his stuff. Can I leave it on the porch?

GAVIN
He hasn't been here in weeks.



SCENE 12. OUTSIDE - A MOMENT LATER

LINDA's car is parked in the road. GAVIN helps her lug a bunch of stuff from the trunk.

LINDA

You know that truck? The white pickup he drives around. That's mine.

GAVIN

I know that.

LINDA

Well, he plans to claim it through alimony.

GAVIN

Alimony.

LINDA

Along with... I think he's trying to get at my money. And my house. I think. He'll never get it.

GAVIN

No.

LINDA

This is his meat. It might be freezer burned.

GAVIN takes the packages of game, each marked a different animal.

LINDA

I was gonna throw it out, but I figured you guys could use it. If you don't want it... how do you dispose of meat? Take it to the dump?

GAVIN

We'll take it. Thank you. That's very thoughtful.

SCENE 13. GAVIN'S CABIN - A FEW MINUTES LATER

LINDA and GAVIN enter with the meat.

LINDA
Jesus it's cold in here!

GAVIN
Well, your husband's firewood never came through. I've been lending to the others.

LINDA
He didn't bring it by?

GAVIN
Wait, there *is* wood?

LINDA
A shit load, man. He ordered it from Home Depot. I dunno, when he left my house...

GAVIN
How long has he been gone?

LINDA
Two weeks? Yeah, he carted it all away, I thought to here. Wow. I knew he was selfish but... wow. How much was it? I'll write you a check, you can order some more.

GAVIN
No. It's between him and...

LINDA
How much?

GAVIN
This has nothing to do with you.

LINDA
I'm partially responsible. Will's lost his mind. And he made promises that he didn't keep. And I'm his wife.

GAVIN
You're not responsible.

LINDA
I feel responsible.

KELLY
May I ask a question?

LINDA notices shirtless KELLY on the couch for the first time. She looks at him with a curious smile.

KELLY
What do you think's going on in his head?

LINDA
Maybe he doesn't like you guys anymore, I guess. Are you Gavin?

GAVIN
I am Gavin.

LINDA
You're Gavin. Okay.
(pause)
Well, if you need to find him, my girlfriend saw his truck... my truck... in town a few times. I just hope you find that wood before the blizzard.

GAVIN
Blizzard?

LINDA
I feel like I've heard people talking about a blizzard?



SCENE 14. JEFFREY'S TRAILER - DAY

MATTHEW and RICHARD stand outside, talking to JEFFREY through his window while he inspects a cut of game. RICHARD takes notes.

MATT
I helped her carry the rest of Will's possessions to his porch. Kelly gave her a bottle of milk as a token of thanks. She looked in on her husband's cabin then drove away. By dusk, we had gathered William's things in his shed for safekeeping. Matt retrieved his tuba, and the game was divided amongst those who were owed it.

JEFF
I just don't understand. We were good and kind to him and he failed us in the harshest time!

MATT
Who knows, Jeffrey. He obviously has mental problems. He couldn't think clearly.

RICH
Wait, sorry, are we due for a blizzard?

They look to the sky.

JEFF
How much wood does Gavin have left?

MATT
Two or three weeks worth. Kelly has moved in with Gavin to conserve, and Richard might consider the same with you, Jeffrey, once you are germ-free...

JEFF
I just... I don't want...

MATT
Don't think about the tobacco, Jeffrey! Isn't it nicer not to smoke? Don't you feel... *vigorous*?

JEFF
You don't understand, Matthew.

MATT
I assure you, Goubeaux is bluffing. If he burns his tobacco, he'll get none of your vegetables. None of Tim's massages. No cooking, no walks in the woods... yes, he'll die. And you and the others can grow your own tobacco... in his field. And this is why you need to be brave. You need solid contracts for your vice, or else he'll always have his way over you! Indeed, you can live without nicotine as much as I can live with Timothy's early morning flatulence!

RICHARD chuckles.

MATTHEW hands a document to JEFFREY through the window:

MATT
His demands. Now, a simple "yes" or "no" will do. I assure you, his wants are becoming less and less relevant. A "no" marks the difference between the utopia you and I deserve... and the totalitarian winter that rotten old tyrant desires.

JEFFREY places his mark, his vote.

MATT
You are a good man! I will commission a painting when all is said and done! A nude! Can you do that, Jeffrey?

JEFF
In my sleep.

SCENE 15. BENOIT'S CABIN - DAY

MATTHEW and RICHARD stop at BENOIT's mailbox.

MATT

(shouting)

The transcript is in your possession, Mr. Goubeaux! Read it over. You'll find some interesting developments. We'll be poring over your list of demands this evening. The meeting is at the lodge, as usual. I hope you can make it!

They walk off.

SCENE 16. MEETING LODGE - NIGHT

All are present except JEFFREY and BENOIT. RICHARD reads BENOIT's demands as GAVIN types:

RICH

(reading)

"From Matthew, the use of his organ and his collection of sheet music. Additionally, reduce his allotment of the following herbs by one fourth: Saint John's Wort, sage, rosemary. That he repair my roof, supplying the necessary materials, along with and reimbursement for lost heat sustained during the period spanning November 21 until he nails the last nail in the last shingle of the damaged area."

(pause)

What's your response, Gavin?

MATT

Please note that Jeffrey has already denied Benoit's advances...

GAVIN

How is Jeffrey?

MATT

Good. But he trades in bronchitis for symptoms of withdrawal. The poor, insatiable man. Once cured and now made sick by health itself. Gagging on fresh, unpoisoned air. But he holds fast. He will not cave. Not until Benoit's signature!

RICH

Any news on the enemy of the state?

MATT

Squatting in the woods, Richard.

TIM

Monsieur Goubeaux! Moved to the forest!?

Loud laughter.

KELLY

Benoit is not our enemy. He acts in self interest, guided by dreams and libido... that invisible and infinite governor of this, oh... so infinite universe. But he has broken no contracts.

MATT

Yes. Yes. Well put, Kelly. Poetical and factual.

GAVIN

As for William, yes, we know he is living in the woods somewhere on the east side of town. We know he has a white truck. We know he frequents the free store. We know he's threatening alimony. We know... we think he's applied... for a job.

MATT

And the third man? Is he open-minded?

KELLY

He's quite friendly. I gave him two bottles of goat's milk for a handmade quiver. And he recently gifted me this chair.

KELLY holds up the dovetailed chair.

RICH

Which of us will go to visit him? To finalize the deal?

GAVIN

I'll go. I'll take Kelly.

MATT

But you've done so much.

GAVIN

Yes, but William owes all of you something. He owes me nothing. It is most prudent.

MATT

Well, you are a philosopher amongst tradesmen. You know the meaning of... process... better than any. But your services will not go unrewarded. I have yet to repay you for the wood.

GAVIN

Would you deign give a tone-deaf intellectual a lesson or two?

MATT

Gladly.

They shake, sealing the deal. Sound of car pulling up outside.

RICH

It's Jane.

MATT

What time is it?

JANE enters.

MATT
Miss Jane Otis!

JANE
Sorry, time's up, boys. Or weren't you told? I have a lesson at nine. I talked to... the painter... Jeffrey.

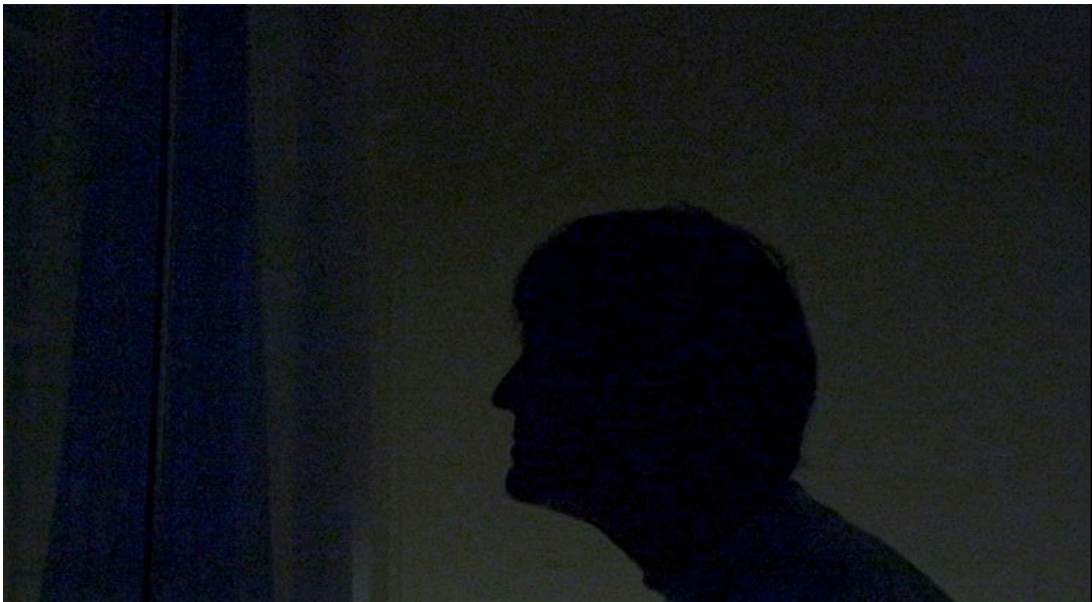
MATT
(sighs)
Jeffrey's been out of commission. It's okay. We're done here.

The gather their things and file out.

JANE
Oh wait, Matt, I'm going away this weekend. Here's the rent.

MATT
Thank you.

MATTHEW hands the money to RICHARD, who counts it. As they exit, JANE pulls from her bag a boom box, a Tibetan bowl, a water bottle and other paraphernalia for her yoga class.



SCENE 17. BENOIT'S CABIN - NIGHT

A group of Statesmen approach BENOIT'S cabin, careful not to cross the property line. A light is on. MATTHEW clangs the bell.

MATT
(shouting)
Benoit Goubeaux! We have our responses to your list! And the latest transcript!

TIM
No smoke.

GAVIN pulls the transcript out of BENOIT's mailbox.

MATT
Is this the latest?

RICH
Looks like yesterday's.

MATT
Benoit Goubeaux! Are you there? Hallo!

RICH
(whispering)
Is he dead?

MATT
Monsie-r-r-r- Goubeau-u-u-u-x!!!

A faint groan from within.

MATT
It sounds like he's hurt?

Another groan, louder this time.

GAVIN
May we enter your property, Mr. Goubeaux?

JEFFREY appears, dressed in a bathrobe and holding a lantern.

JEFF
What's going on??

MATT
Do we have permission, Mr. Goubeaux? To enter your property, Mr. Goubeaux?

Another groan.

MATT
Yes?

Everyone looks to GAVIN. He moves forward, crossing the property line, and they follow. They disappear into BENOIT's dark cabin, leaving JEFFREY with his lantern, only their voices heard.

GAVIN
How long have you been here??
(pause)
Since last night?
(pause)
How did this happen?

More groaning. Muttering.

JEFF
Has he fallen and can't get up? Help him up!

MATT

You were trying to cover that drafty hole in the roof, weren't you? But you could not... you could not, Benoit! I presume you climbed on this stool and you fell over? But it was not your job. Timothy was happy to provide this service yet...

JEFF

What is going on? What do you see?? Give him a hand!

MATT

A village is not run on shrewdness alone. It takes skill... and strength... and *able bodies!*

KELLY

Will you let us help you, old friend?

GAVIN

Benoit, please! Your lips are blue, your fingers red! You are seriously injured and there's no need to sacrifice yourself for some... you are not the criminal here!

One more groan.

JEFF

Is he hurt? Give him a blanket at least!

GAVIN

What is it, Benoit?

(pause)

He wants to read the transcripts?

MATT

The transcripts are in your mailbox, Benoit.

BENOIT

(sputtering)

Do not! Tread on me!!!

MATT

Would you have us leave your property?

BENOIT

I deserve to know!!!

MATT

You deserve nothing except what you can get. I suggest you sign and match your desires to reality. It's far more comfortable. With Mr. Goubeaux's consent, let us proceed.

Papers shuffling. Then KELLY reads a contract aloud:



KELLY

"Warrant of mutual protection. William Coughlin, with this permanent signature, I make my intent to protect myself from your transgressions against my property conscious in the eyes of the state we once shared. You will never hear or see these words. As you will soon never have heard the wood thrush song, the motor of our truck, the water of the stream behind what was once your cottage. Bear in mind, that however much I wish these words could land on your ear, I realize your attitudes and opinions are by now irrelevant. In short, these words are not for you, but for myself and my fellow citizens to appreciate. At the cadence of... your final living breath... a utopia will flourish once more. A steady and slow rise to pleasure. The mellifluous buds of worn out trees will creep into the late March air, and it will be something you will not know. The enthusiastic sun will beat upon what was once your roof, and you will not feel it. The inky night will encroach on the last light of the crescent moon, and you will not witness it with that quiet awe which comes in sad moments. Because, in a few short days or weeks, after your last breath has been sucked from this wintry world, you will have sucked your self into the oblivion that is your empty mind... your still and silent body. You will be not the criminal you are in life. Not the transgressor. No, you will become a thing of honesty. A thing again of beauty. You will become nothingness, which is what (as much as it pricks our hearts to say), you have become in the eyes and mind of the state you chose."

JEFFREY finally crosses the property line and peers through the window. He can see the men circled around BENOIT, who lies half naked and motionless on the floor.

KELLY

"Be conscious when it comes and take pleasure in your final moment. In addition to the terms above, I, Benoit Dominique Goubeaux, do hereby extend my contractual obligation to supply tobacco to the following citizens for a period of six months: Jeffrey Dipple, Gavin Cook, Kelly Maycumber, Richard Chase and Timothy Ko."

BENOIT

(barely intelligible, in French)
And *you*, Gavin?

GAVIN

(in French)
We have decided.

BENOIT

(in French)
You want to make me your slave!

MATT

English! English! This is a meeting.

GAVIN

He thinks we want to enslave him.

MATT

Nature itself enslaves you. Your physiognomy enslaves you. You cannot expect to appeal to men for protection from nature's slavery. For while nature contains all that is living and dead, it contains no crimes.

He holds out the pen. BENOIT is firmly silent.

RICH

(whispering)
Benoit, please! Sign it! I... me... Richard. I need you. The state needs you!

BENOIT

Fix. My. Roof. *Gavin*.

MATT

Don't stoop to amendments, Gavin! You owe him nothing.

GAVIN

I'll do it.

With that, the men lay hands on BENOIT, setting him in a chair and wrapping him in a blanket. Tea is brought over. A fire is made. RICHARD tries to lighten the mood.

RICHARD

(relieved)
He gave Kelly a chair, Mr. Goubeaux! Hand made, without one screw or nail.

KELLY

It's true, you'll see. The man is a noble man. Quiet and strong and thickly built. I like to picture him from afar. Not too far... but not close enough to see his eyes. You will meet him soon. Like a Thomas Harte Benton figure... illuminated by a rosy and melancholic autumnal light. I saw the state in the man: organic, just and clear...



SCENE 18. MOUNTAIN CABIN - DAY

On the side of a mountain is a small cabin. Next to it, a shed. A large man is perched on the roof hammering shingles. This is man is referred to as the "EXECUTIONER".

KELLY

(continuing)

His broad and muscled back. Skinning game. Chopping wood. Wait, no, I jump ahead... fixing a roof. The roof of a newly built shed on top of the mountain... behind the cabin he built himself... a shelter shaped and contained by the extent of his abilities alone.

The Statesmen's communal truck pulls up. GAVIN and KELLY hop out. EXECUTIONER jumps from the roof to greet them.

LATER -

Inside the cabin, GAVIN, KELLY and EXECUTIONER sit at a table, studying drawings of WILLIAM's cabin and property.

KELLY

The plot is five point four acres. A woodstove, running water, basic electric. In the summer, this becomes a stream. I've seen trout running through it.

EXECUTIONER

I don't understand. You tryin' to sell me a house?

KELLY

Would you be interested?

EXECUTIONER

I got no money, ha ha, you know that, Kelly!

GAVIN

Suppose we give you this house.

EXECUTIONER

Give it to me?

KELLY

Suppose.

GAVIN

And suppose you treated it like your home, made repairs, took care of it... and suppose the man who had been occupying it before you... suppose he returned and slept in your bed... used your wood, your possessions...

EXECUTIONER

Hold up, I'm sorry, brother, what's your name?

GAVIN

Gavin.

EXECUTIONER

Okay, Gavin. I'm confused, there's a... ?

KELLY

I think Gavin is positing a hypothetical situation.

EXECUTIONER

Sure, but who's on the deed? Me or this guy?

GAVIN

You shouldn't think of it like that. If this was your house. What would you do if he entered it? If this was... the 1700s? If you were a pioneer?

EXECUTIONER
If he slept in my bed? I would throw him out.

KELLY
If he crawled back in?

EXECUTIONER
I would... show him my gun.

GAVIN
If he charged you with a knife?

EXECUTIONER
I would shoot him. Blow his brains out. I dunno.

KELLY
What if I said most of us are convinced this is your home?

EXECUTIONER
Most of you? Ha ha! Who are you guys??

GAVIN
Who are we? We're individuals. We're anarcho-libertarians.

EXECUTIONER
I know you're libertarians... but for real?

KELLY
Let's just keep going with this, if you don't mind. Suppose: this is your home.

EXECUTIONER
How the *heck* is this my home?

GAVIN
The man who once claimed it as his home has broken private contracts. For us to consider this home to be yours... and not, well, ours or nobody's... you must fulfill some contracts. Since you've bartered with us before, it would be similar. But official.

KELLY
Simple stuff: firewood, game... Things I'm sure you can handle. He was a very small man.

GAVIN
Now, these contracts bar you from appealing to police, courts, and external bodies of so-called "law" if the other party reneges...

EXECUTIONER
So what's the point of a contract without a court?

GAVIN
Because we respect the contracts. And you are free to exchange protective services with other citizens by signing a contract of mutual protection. Everything we do... is determined by contract.

KELLY

Remember how we last met? How we sat there, fantasizing about a minimal state? A state where you wouldn't be taxed for putting up a shed on your own property? A state where your labors wouldn't be exploited to support some drug addict, some cripple... or some other person's child? A state where no one would be forced to support you for your own shortcomings? Where your only limit is your own abilities? A place where you were free to flourish as a creative and embodied individual?

A long silence.

EXECUTIONER

It's like a dream, bro.

(pause)

But you guys aren't jokin', are you?

GAVIN

If this was not a hypothetical scenario, is this a life you are interested in living?

EXECUTIONER

Everything is bartered?

GAVIN

Yes, we reject money almost entirely.

EXECUTIONER

What, no gold standard?

GAVIN

No. Money is a service the state provides like anything else. And in our small nation, access to money quickly gives an artificial, monopolizing advantage. Imagine two carpenters who both sprained their backs. One of them went to a hospital for treatment, and the other didn't. The one who did is able to continue working and inherit the other's contracts, disregarding his skill... his natural skill.

EXECUTIONER

You don't have... doctors?

KELLY

We use home remedies, of course, but...

EXECUTIONER

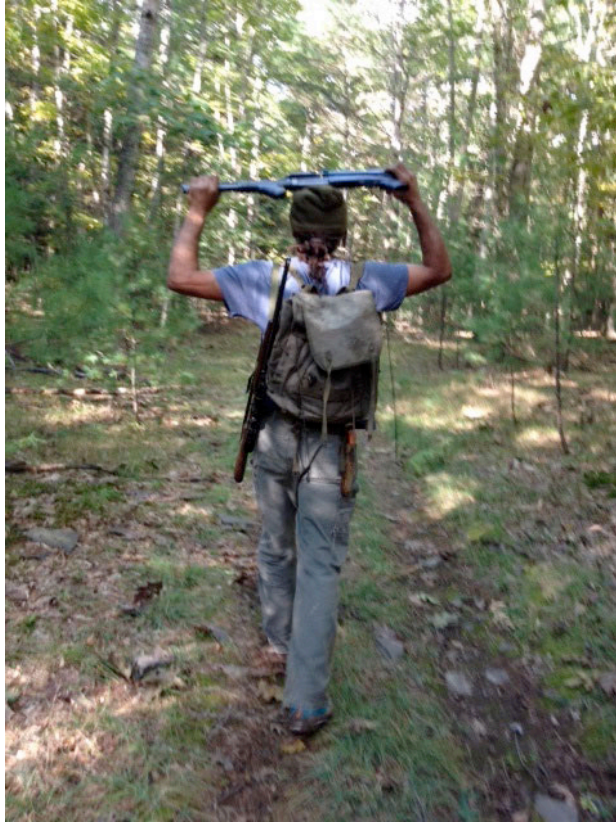
What if a bear attacked you?

GAVIN

Then I made bad decisions. I wasn't careful. But we all die eventually. The question is who amongst us are lucky enough to understand how and *why* we died... what brought us to our deaths. Who amongst us can actually take pleasure in death?

EXECUTIONER

Can you?



GAVIN
I think I can answer yes.
(pause)
I was very impressed by your chair. I wanted to give you
this... in exchange.

He hands EXECUTIONER a book.

EXECUTIONER
(reading)
"The Gentle Rise of Pleasure to a Land Eternal. By Gavin
Andre Cook." What? You, Gavin? Kelly said you were a
carpenter!

KELLY
You also do many things, don't you?

EXECUTIONER is silent, flipping through the book.

GAVIN
I'm afraid you must think consider our hypothetical
quickly. The days are getting colder...

SCENE 19. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

TIMOTHY deposits a package of tobacco next to GAVIN's mailbox. He rings the bell. TIMOTHY reads aloud:

TIM
"Six months worth. Enjoy it. Your faithful slave, M. Goubeaux."

SCENE 20. MEETING LODGE - DAY

There is a yoga class in session. A number of women from town stretch along to JANE's commands. LINDA is attendance.



SCENE 21. MEETING LODGE - NIGHT

Night has fallen and the building has been converted in a meeting lodge. All Statesmen are present except BENOIT.

TIM
Is he seeing someone? A woman?

GAVIN
Not that I know. He seems quite lonely.

MATT
Maybe she left him. Maybe he needs to make... child support? Is there a child?

GAVIN
Does it matter? I suspect he's sick in some way. Or has a fear of death which trumps a desire for freedom. But he'll do the deed. And he'll do it well. He obviously has the skills.

RICH
Yes, but to trust a non-citizen? Such an important contract this time of year backed by what? His word?

KELLY
He's quit trustworthy, Richard. He doesn't have that Mediterranean propensity for telling fiction. He has a Germanic quality. Native American perhaps. A strong and silent type.

RICH
Yes. But he loves money.

MATT
I see him changing his mind on that... once justice has been served. Once guilt creeps into his youthful, sinewy form. Once the deed, however justified, has been done...



SCENE 22. TOWN - NIGHT

TIMOTHY and RICHARD rustle in a dumpster behind Dunkin' Donuts. They come up with a bag of day old bagels and a large sack of expired coffee beans.

SCENE 23. LINDA'S HOUSE - DAY

LINDA is on the couch. GAVIN stands nearby.

GAVIN
"Three thousand five hundred and six dollars and ninety-nine cents." We only ask because you offered in the past... Will's wood debt.

She studies him.

GAVIN
May I ask something? When you said William "hated us"...

LINDA
I was only...

GAVIN
You brought up my name.

LINDA
Mmm. That doesn't make sense to you?

GAVIN
No.

LINDA
You're too honest.

GAVIN
I don't understand.

LINDA
You're too honest. That's why he hated you. That's why he envied you.

(pause)
William was not honest. I'm sure you can vouch for that. He was honest with me... well, no, he took my money, but relationship-wise, he was honest with me. But he wasn't honest with himself. Do you realize that throughout our entire marriage, he never ever fucked me? He wasn't impotent. He would cum on my chest... my thighs... my face... but he wouldn't fuck me. So naturally, he thought I was sleeping around... to satisfy myself. Does that make sense?

Silence.

LINDA
He would fucking lose it if he saw you here.

GAVIN
How long did he have this fantasy?

LINDA
(yawns)
You're right. It was a fantasy. I dunno. A year, who knows. He thought that's what I was doing at yoga.

(pause)
I know. You're a middle-aged man. Past your prime. Doesn't make sense, does it?

(pause)
What do they think of me? The men... Kelly and...

GAVIN
I think Kelly finds you quite beautiful.

LINDA
Really? I always thought he liked them young.

GAVIN
Well. You are young.

LINDA
Oh, relatively. And the others... the chubby bashful one... and the dopey one?

GAVIN
Honestly?

LINDA
They hate me, don't they?

GAVIN
They call you a liberal whore. A bourgeois cunt.

LINDA
And you guys want my money.
(pause)
See? You're too honest.

SCENE 24. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

GAVIN inspects a hundred dollar bill. One of many in an envelope.

After a while, he puts it in the drawer of his work table, which is set up as a makeshift chemistry station. On the table is the sack of Dunkin' Donuts coffee beans, a brick of tobacco, a chemistry textbook, various tools and a large beaker bubbling with freshly brewed coffee. GAVIN clamps the hot beaker and places in a bucket full of snow to cool. He opens the textbook and measures powders, setting them aside in little bowls.



SCENE 25. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

All men except BENOIT are gathered, watching GAVIN swish a tiny amount of clear liquid in a beaker. He pours droplets of the liquid into cups of water:

GAVIN
Two milliliters equals a strongly brewed cup.

JEFF
It's flavorless.

GAVIN
Yes, granted we drink coffee for its flavor. But I think besides the nicotine, we smoke for the sensation of breath. It's a primal thing. Life affirming.

MATT
And terminating.

GAVIN
Until now.

TIM
And you create that sensation with vapor?

GAVIN
It's quite simple in fact. A small heating device, activated by suction, vaporizes the liquid nicotine...

RICH
I feel it, Gavin. Verily, I feel a buzz!

KELLY pokes at the wasted coffee beans in the trash bin.

MATT
You should make us some caffeinated biscuits. We could go to the moon by your science.

GAVIN
The moon?

MATT
Why not? Seems ideal. Men like us...

GAVIN
There's no oxygen on the moon.

MATT
Ahh, always thinking of our health!

GAVIN
As far as my health depends on yours, yes.

KELLY
And no fire, I'm afraid.

TIM
Hmm... and no wood. And no deer, nor bear nor...

KELLY

Poetry. The moon is supposedly a cracked, dry and empty place.

MATT

Perhaps you'd find it inspiring to look at planet Earth. The Earth is actually much more beautiful than the moon... it too glows from afar, does it not, Gavin?

GAVIN

Yes. In many splendid colors.

ACT II

SCENE 26. A CLEARING IN THE FOREST - EARLY WINTER DAY

JULIA and a young female friend perch on a rock, bundled in winter jackets. KELLY stands in front of them, orating.

KELLY

I met you here... in August. Here... here did we let the stately funeral of lusty summer, pass over our naked skins. The urge to grab a drum, a horn, a tambourine, barely suspended on the strings, vibrating, the waters boiling of your childish heart. Oh, my love. How then while all around us rang in fanfare 'n feasted o'er the corpse of that season, didst you recall the dormant buds of spring. Like dark youth, their honeyed casings cracked to make this summer. That summer! That hot summer. With winter winds, capping chilly streams, do you still keep your youthful eyes on memories of sappy buds... and sprightly fawns? Or do you love the bawdy music that August made, in the rustling branches of the leafless maple... its melancholic cadence ringing through the village by the cold bells of January.

KELLY bows. The young woman gives him a bag of bread. He counts the loaves. JULIA holds out her hands to KELLY. He takes them slowly to his chest.

SCENE 27. FOREST - DAY

GAVIN chops wood. Some pieces he throws into a pull cart. Others, he tosses into the forest.

SCENE 28. MEETING LODGE - DAY

Seen through the window coated in icicles, women's feet suspended in the air. Yoga is in session.

SCENE 29. A STREET IN TOWN - NIGHT

MATTHEW shims the latch of a newspaper box while TIMOTHY keeps watch. MATTHEW grabs a few newspapers, and they walk away, reading.

SCENE 30. BENOIT'S CABIN - NIGHT

RICHARD bathes BENOIT in an old tub. BENOIT's chest is wrapped in a bandage. TIMOTHY sits on the toilet, reading aloud the newspaper. It is an article titled, "Poaching Tragedy" illustrated with a picture of a bloody pheasant.



TIM

"... Blackstone, then thirteen, pleaded guilty to three counts of hunting off-season and hunting without a mentor, a requirement for those holding a junior license. Following his probation violation, the teen attended a mandatory boot camp and lost hunting and fishing privileges for life in twenty-eight states. In light of Mr. Coughlin's death, authorities from the FWS are attempting to match ballistics evidence from a number of game carcasses found in the area to Mrs. Blackstone's boyfriend's gun. 'We are trying to establish a pattern of gross negligence in the young man's actions that will hopefully weigh on the manslaughter charges, and the adult vs. minor debate,' said McChesney, 'If not for William Coughlin's family, for the people of this county who wish to utilize these public spaces responsibly without fear of death or injury.' In addition to his widow, Mr. Coughlin leaves behind a father, George Coughlin and a stepmother, Macy Dubois."

(aside)

Well, our man is something of a savant!

BENOIT

Or lucky.

TIM

Lucky? Ha. A shot through the heart of a pheasant, flying to roost, into the temple of an enemy of the state? Such luck I'd be glad to reward. Even for merely being in the right context.

BENOIT

That poor bird. What context was he in? An innocent pawn in a hired killing.

TIM

Kelly says the man wants to return the money in exchange for citizenship.

BENOIT

Certain people cannot think ahead, can they? Can he provide firewood?

TIM

Well, he claims to have forty cords on his property. Many large trees fell in the summer storm a few years back. Of course it needs to be chopped... but dry as a bone, Benoit.

BENOIT

What is stopping him, eh? What is stopping this perfect man from moving into that empty house and alleviating these socialistic conditions for us, eh? Not that I don't like your company, Timothy, but...

(water pouring)

Ow! Richard! Pour it by my feet!

TIM

Gavin refuses.

BENOIT

Is this true, Richard?

RICH

Gavin doesn't trust him.

BENOIT pulls himself up and RICHARD dries him off.

BENOIT

And you believe him.

RICH

Of course, Gavin is...

BENOIT

Honest? Gavin has done so much for all of you? Yes, well... Gavin *chose* to do so much. My mother chose to have a child. She fed me her milk, changed my diapers... sent me to school... but do I owe her anything for it? Hmm?

RICHARD and TIMOTHY carry BENOIT into his bedroom.

BENOIT

No! I owe her nothing! I didn't ask to be brought into this hopeless place!

RICH
But we must give him something. Mr. Cook has decided to take on William's contracts.

BENOIT
Oh! And you don't think he enjoys this new communal lifestyle? Sharing beds? Dividing food? Tipping his soup bowl to the weak and needy? Perhaps its own perverse reward! What a wonderful... "compassionate" man.

TIM
Why the contracts, Richard?

RICH
Perhaps he feels some sorrow... about... ?

BENOIT
I feel sorrow. I let the sorrow for little William enter my heart every night. But I'm not driven to break my back over it... do the boy's chores over sorrow. Would you, Timothy?

TIM
No.

BENOIT
And you, Richard?

RICH
(pause)
No.

BENOIT
Thus, we shall sleep well tonight. Dreaming what angels dream. Guiltless, free flowing... rivers... of pure intent.



SCENE 31. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

GAVIN removes his coat and snowy boots. The fire is blazing. On the table, a glass of warm goat milk accompanies a wooden artist's mannequin posed as a nude lady. JEFFREY relaxes in the study, wrapped in a bathrobe, making himself at home.

JEFF

Ahh, there you are. I've coughed up the last of this cursed bronchitis or whatever it was... now I wish to smoke again.

GAVIN pulls a massive brick of tobacco marked "JEFFREY" from a trunk. He scoops a handful of the yellowish shredded leaves, laying it on a scale.

JEFF

This is allowed, isn't it?

GAVIN

Keep in mind it will be gone soon.

JEFF

How soon?

JEFFREY puts his nose to the tobacco and inhales.

GAVIN

A couple weeks. If everything goes well. Does that make you sad?

JEFF

It's like saying goodbye to a dictator. I'm grateful but a little nervous. If my father flogged me daily, I'd still be sad to see him go. But I know I shouldn't. I trust in you, Gavin. I know the future will be great. We've been ignoring our ridiculous situation for too long now. Yellow toothed and wrinkled and... who knows what mysterious demons creak and groan within our bodies. Ha.

(pause)

Speaking of groaning... how's the life of a young man treating you? William's chores?

GAVIN

You think it ridiculous? Like a girl trying out for the football team to prove a point?

JEFF

I always trust there's purpose in what you do.

GAVIN

It's invigorating. Now, here's two ounces. I'll deduct two hundred fifty milligrams from your allotment.

JEFF

And how many milligrams till... is it August?

GAVIN
Four thousand.

JEFF
Ooh.

GAVIN
That's four grams.

JEFFREY stuffs his pipe.

JEFF
Hmmm. So much... yet so little.

SCENE 32. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

GAVIN is up late, working. Nearby, JEFFREY snoozes on the couch.

GAVIN quietly walks past the bedroom: KELLY is sleeping in the nude on his bed, sprawled like a starfish.

GAVIN exits the cabin.

SCENE 33. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - NIGHT

GAVIN enters with a flashlight, his breath visible in the unheated space. The room is mostly empty space with scattered furniture. Some boxes rest on the floor, filled with loosely packed, nondescript junk. GAVIN flips through some photos of LINDA, other people. He unzips a long canvas bag to find a rifle.

Shivering, he takes the gun and departs.





SCENE 34. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

GAVIN holds a tuba to his lips, thinking. Toilet flushes. MATTHEW enters.

MATT

You don't think your silence can be heard from the bathroom? F scale.

MATTHEW arranges GAVIN's fingers to the correct position.

GAVIN

It's counterintuitive.

MATT

It's counter intuitive because you haven't got the breath. Have you exercised your breath? No. That is something I expect you to work on independently. I didn't walk over here to tell you this. I came to hear music, no matter how primitive.

GAVIN

Is there something else we can trade?

MATT

The contract is for lessons and I will give you lessons.

GAVIN

I would much rather listen to you, to be honest... I've heard you're working on a suite for the tableaux. May I hear?

MATTHEW takes the tuba and cleans the mouthpiece with an antiseptic wipe. He checks the valves, then begins playing.

GAVIN stands by the fire and listens, absently thumbing through his chemistry book. Music stops.

GAVIN
Why have you stopped? It sounded beautiful.

MATT
You don't listen.

GAVIN
No, it...

MATTHEW approaches, picking up an e-cigarette from GAVIN's work table.

MATT
A prototype?

GAVIN
Ha, no. Factory made.

MATT
And yours will follow this design?

GAVIN
More or less. Cruder, I suspect. Perhaps a plug-in model.

MATT
Quite marvelous, this science.

GAVIN
Would you like to try it? It's perfectly healthy. Have you ever experienced nicotine? Just suck on it. Here, a fresh cartridge.

MATTHEW studies the e-cigarette, then puffs it. He licks his lips.

MATT
Minty.

GAVIN
This one's flavored.

MATT
Could you design flavor extracts of your own?

GAVIN
I suppose.

MATT
Benoit's rosemary perhaps? Or lemon thyme, or ooh!

MATTHEW's face suddenly crinkles as the nicotine buzz kicks in.

MATT
What a strange... it's so instantaneous, ha ha ha! Whoa, my... my legs! I should sit.

He nearly falls. Smiling, GAVIN helps him to a chair. MATTHEW looks around with a confused, bewildered expression.

MATT
I... can't... believe... my head. Wow... how you handle
such feelings on a regular basis!



SCENE 35. WOODLAND - DAY

A squirrel plays in the trees. GAVIN kneels on the ground, aiming WILLIAM'S rifle at it. Finally, the squirrel runs away.

EXECUTIONER
Why didn't you shoot?

EXECUTIONER is standing further up the hill.

GAVIN
How'd you find me?

EXECUTIONER
I Googled the yoga studio.
(pause)
The air feels cleaner here. Cold, but not uncomfortable.
I feel more relaxed than in town or at my house.

GAVIN
This is private property.

Silence.

GAVIN
These woods are private property.

EXECUTIONER
Listen, I respect that. I do. But we had a special deal, right? All that... like, I should be doing this. I'm a good hunter. I don't know if Kelly told you, but I got trees and...

GAVIN
You're not a citizen. You accepted money.

EXECUTIONER
I want to give the money back. I see that now. I think you and Kelly really saw something in me. I didn't know a utopia could exist on earth. I didn't know you were serious... can you really punish someone for being stupid? For being slow?

GAVIN
No one's punishing you. It's just the way it is.

GAVIN holds out the rifle.

GAVIN
Here's your gun.

EXECUTIONER
My gun? That's not my gun.

GAVIN walks away.

SCENE 36. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

JEFFREY sits on GAVIN's bed, sketching his own hand. Outside, someone is chopping wood. Sound of a car pulling in. JEFFREY looks out and sees LINDA and GAVIN.

GAVIN
It hasn't been delivered yet, I'm afraid.

LINDA
Did you guys... I was at the funeral this weekend. I realized... did anyone tell you? Not that you were obligated. To be honest, I didn't feel like... it's just, his mom... loves me? For some reason.

GAVIN
How was it?

LINDA
Weird. *Weird*. The newspaper called me a widow. I'm a hipster. Widow. There's probably two of us? In this whole world?

GAVIN
What's a hipster?

LINDA

A hipster, Gavin, is a stylish young person. Ironically detached from things... that normal people find important.

GAVIN

Will you retain this detachment after what's happened?

LINDA

I guess I kinda married him out of irony. Maybe I'm not a widow. But... you know, I never considered myself a hipster until people started calling me one.

GAVIN

Well. I hope you feel better.

LINDA

Where are you going?

GAVIN

I have to take a shit.

SCENE 37. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

GAVIN enters, wiping his hands.

GAVIN

Jeffrey. These clothes. Please.

JEFF

(yawns)

It's strange she would single you out of all us. Us, aged and dying men...

GAVIN snorts, lighting his Bunsen burner. JEFFREY lights a cigarette and leans against the doorway.

JEFF

Your humility trumps your honesty. She likes you. I saw her yesterday. When she saw you walking by with your heavy load, she ran out as if to... "bump into fate." Ha ha!

(pause)

Tell me. Does this executioner have strange eyes?

GAVIN

Did he come by here?

JEFF

No. Matthew and I were at the free store, picking out sweaters... and blankets, and we found a hulking man with pale blue eyes, sitting on a milk crate. He was reading your book, Gavin. And every time I glanced at him, he would quickly look away. Seemed quite... sad? A "soul in limbo," Matthew called him.

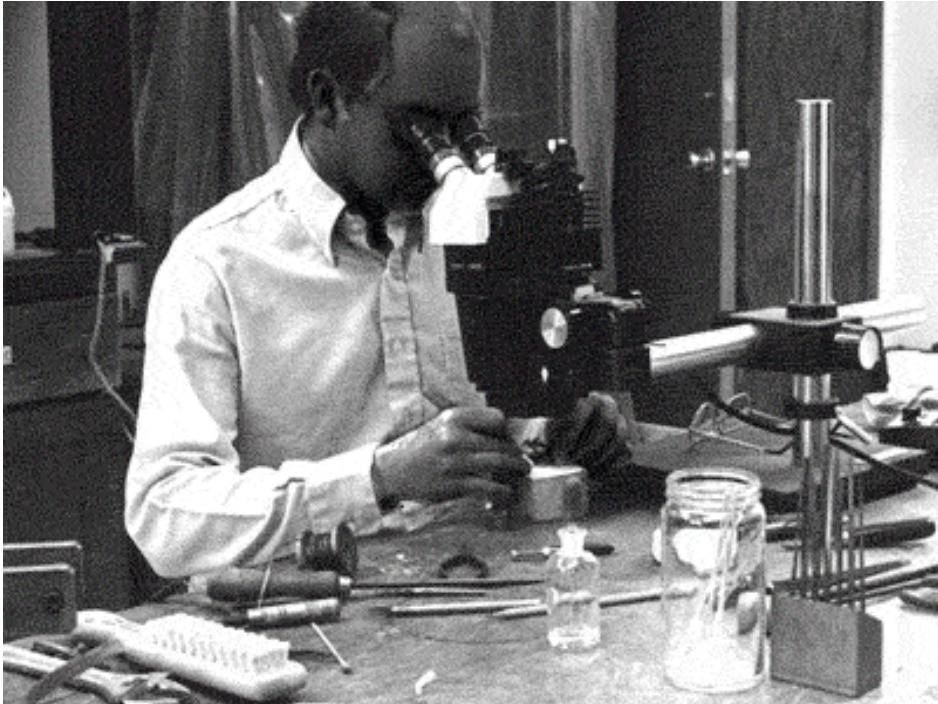
GAVIN

Jeffrey. Will you leave my study? I need to work.

JEFF
Where's Kelly tonight?

GAVIN
Kelly and Matt and Timothy are a slumber party. Would you care to join them?

JEFFREY huffs, puts on his coat, departs.



SCENE 38. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

Alone in his cabin for the first time in a long time, GAVIN reads by his work bench. A small pile of tobacco lies on the table. A bunsen burner is cooking. Yawning, GAVIN puts his finger in the bubbling solution.

He returns to his book. He feels his head. His eyes go cross and he begins to drool. He suddenly topples to the floor...

JEFF
... making my way through the black smoke, I found him lying on the floor, contorted in the most grotesque manner. With Kelly's help, I managed to move him into the main space... "



SCENE 39. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - DAY

All except GAVIN and KELLY are assembled in the newly established neutral property, WILLIAM's former cabin. BENOIT is unusually suppressed and quiet.

JEFF
(continuing)
Once revived, Gavin was able to react to our gesticulations. But his speech was incomprehensible for a good five to ten minutes...

TIM
Hoarse?

JEFF
No. Garbled. Gibberish.

MATT
And what was his first, er, comprehensible statement?

JEFF
Something about suing me. For trespassing.

MATT
But you're his legal guest, his roommate, are you not?

JEFF
He's dropped the accusation. It was a knee jerk reaction.

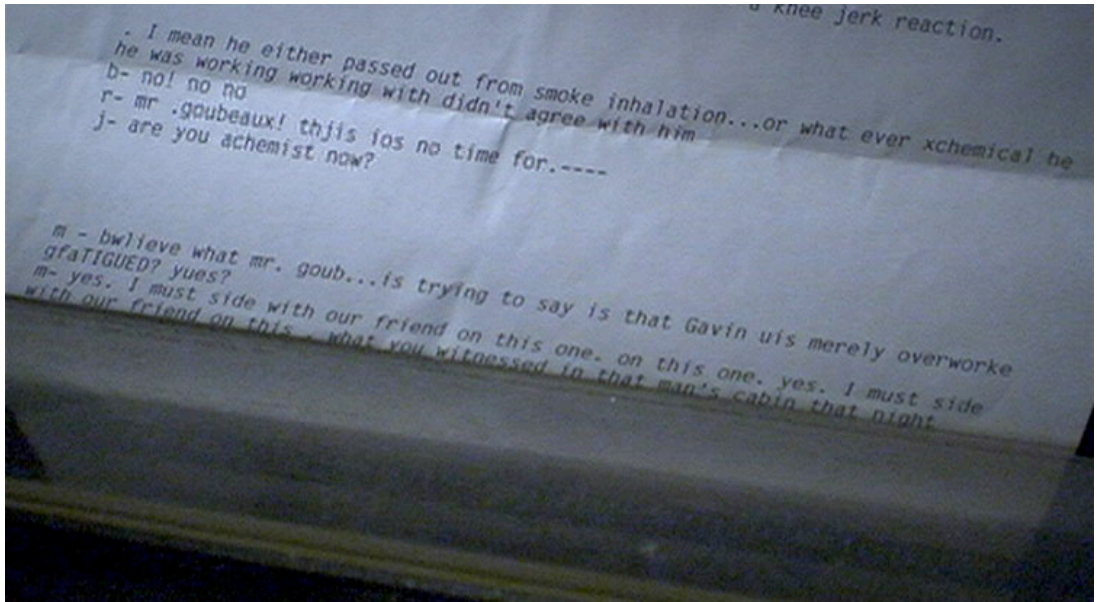
MATTHEW chuckles, shaking his head. TIMOTHY brings BENOIT his tea.

JEFF
Either he fainted from smoke inhalation... or whatever chemical he's working with didn't agree with him.

BENOIT
No. No, no, no.

JEFF
Are you a chemist now?

BENOIT does not respond, merely stirs his tea with care.



MATT
I believe what Mr. Goubeaux is implying is that Gavin is overworked. Fatigued. Yes? Yes, I must side with our friend on this one. What you witnessed, Jeffrey, was the result of biology, not chemistry. Old age. Have you ever stayed up for forty hours? Not thoroughly coherent, were you?

JEFF
Discombobulated, indeed.

MATT
Yes. Mr. Cook merely fell asleep at the wheel. He performs the labors of two men, lest we forget. One of them young.

JEFF
Yes, and why?

TIM
He feels guilt.

Silence.

BENOIT
(suddenly)
Jeffrey. Will you recount that little story from the other day? About Mr. Cook.

JEFFREY sighs.

MATT
It's alright, Jeff, if it's factual and relevant...

JEFF
Well. Mrs. Coughlin stopped by. She spoke with Gavin on the front lawn, chitchat mainly. He was curt and a bit distant with her, as he's apt to be. But when he walked in... I looked into the hallway... and caught the man, smiling, into the mirror. And then... he began to adjust and fix his graying hair.

A few men raise their eyebrows and smile.

BENOIT
And the next morning, Jeffrey?

JEFF
The next morning, he gave himself a nice little haircut.

RICH
This is insulting. This is insulting! While we suffer these... these...

TIM
Subpar!

RICH
Forget subpar! Call it what it is. Breach of contract. I did not sign for this dilly-dallying! This firewood...

TIM
"Firewood"! Ha! Misshapen, unseasoned or...

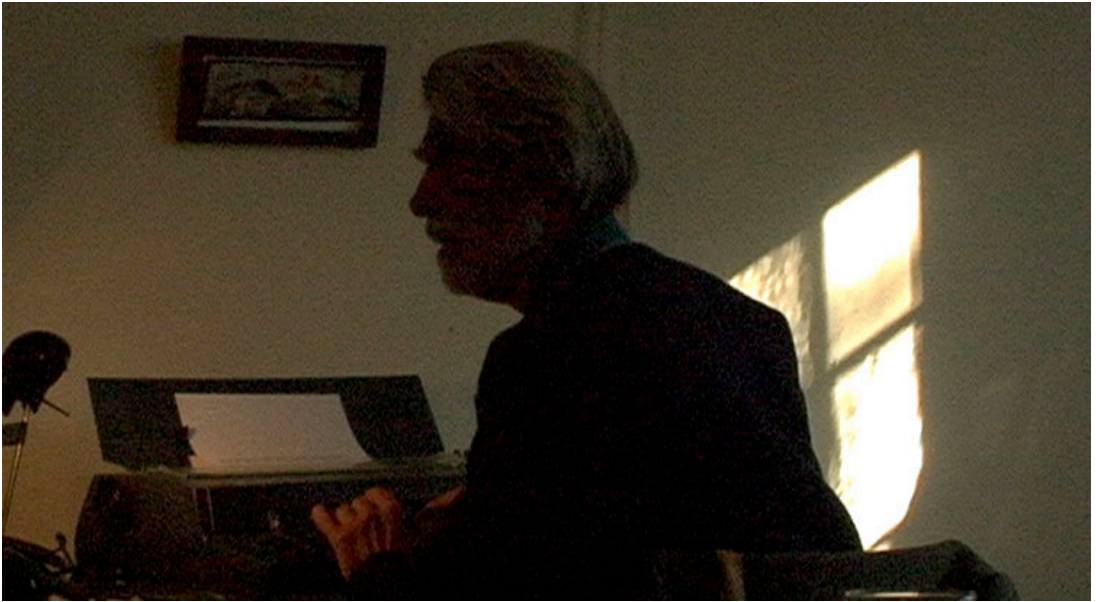
RICH
Rotten! Pillbug infested! Mushroom covered! A constant chore to keep it burning, oozing and sizzling so loud I can barely hear my own thoughts!

JEFF
And I haven't heard one shot coming from those woods!

TIM
And I've watched Gavin at your roof, Benoit. I'm worried for you!

RICH
And what about this e-cigarette? Is it a reality, or... I have half a mind to ask for my tobacco back.

MATT
Good luck on that. It's gone, Richard.



JEFF

Six months worth of golden, tar-laced tobacco, boiled away and condensed to a small jar of clear liquid. This big.

(pause)

The next step is the fabrication of the devices. He claims a week or two.

RICH

What if he fails?? I have only two ounces... if I run out before he's finished with these "devices," what am I to do? Pour this nicotine into my soup to tide myself over?

JEFF

Nicotine soup, ha ha!

RICH

Don't laugh, Mr. Dipple!

TIM

You of all people, Richard! You pushed hard for the device!

RICH

And now I will push hard to bring him to court!!

MATT

Calm down Richard! Mr. Dipple! Calm down, please. I believe I speak for us all when I say we do not want another trial. Let me remind you that Mr. Cook has done much for us this season. If not for him, we'd be dead. Or worse, we'd be slaves to this perspicacious old dandy.

He pats BENOIT on the back.

MATT
... to prevent a trial... and further hardship and confusion, we must be clear with Gavin. If this other man... the third man... insists on fraternizing with us, bartering services, providing us with drier wood, fatter game, well... *inevitable* is the key word here. Gavin should understand this. His calling is science, and he needs to focus on that calling. He is contractually obligated to do so.

MATTHEW looks to BENOIT. BENOIT nods in agreement.



SCENE 40. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

GAVIN is tucked in bed, looking sick. His place is tidier with JEFFREY and KELLY moved back to their own cabins, although his work table remains in shambles. He reads aloud to himself from a transcript by RICHARD, full of misspellings when typed in haste:

GAVIN
(reading)
"... is calig is science! And he ness to focus on that... calig? He ig contractually obligated to dos."

Shaking his head, GAVIN lays the transcript aside.

A knock on the door.

GAVIN

Who is it?

GAVIN weakly makes his way to the door, opening it to see LINDA. She's all dolled up in a fur coat and lipstick. Parked behind her is the white pickup truck.

LINDA

Hey, Gavin. Do you guys want this truck?

GAVIN

No?

She shrugs, peering past him at the crackling fire.

LINDA

Ahh, the wood finally came through, huh?

GAVIN

No. Hold on.

He returns with the envelope of money and WILLIAM's old rifle.

GAVIN

We decided we won't be needing the money. But thank you.

She hesitantly takes the envelope. He gives her the gun, too.

LINDA

I don't want that.

(pause)

I'm sorry I was weird the other day. I, um, wasn't able to tell you why I really stopped by. I saw you... looking at me. When I was doing yoga? I want you to know that it didn't... bother me. I looked at you, too. Chopping wood. I found it to be a beautiful.

GAVIN

Do you practice yoga to look beautiful?

LINDA

The way it makes me feel.

(pause)

I dunno. I dunno why I do anything. Do you?

(pause)

I'm beginning to feel like a widow. Like my mom. I feel old.

(pause)

I want to come inside, please.

SCENE 41. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

LINDA is alone in the study, sitting on a chair by the fire. She's removed her fur coat and boots. After a long time, GAVIN enters with two glasses of what looks like rosé.

LINDA
So what should we talk about?

GAVIN
Whatever you want.

She takes a sip of wine and grimaces.

GAVIN
It's diluted. With water.

LINDA
Why would you ever?

GAVIN
I don't think you would understand.

LINDA
Because you don't have enough money to drink real wine?

GAVIN
No. My friend makes this wine.

LINDA
He doesn't have enough... grapes?

GAVIN
No.

LINDA
You don't wanna get drunk?

GAVIN
More or less.

Silence.

LINDA
Why are we sitting here, together. You're not very entertaining with your watery wine and your one line... responses.

GAVIN
I don't know.

LINDA
Do I make you nervous?

GAVIN
Not at all.

LINDA
Why not?

GAVIN
You just don't.

LINDA gets up and studies the objects and books in his place. After a while, GAVIN shuts his eyes.

LINDA
Are you tired, Gavin?

GAVIN
Mmm hmm.

She watches him for a while.

LINDA
You're so boring. You're so boring. You're the most boring man I've ever met.

GAVIN smiles.

LINDA
What are you guys doing with Will's house?

GAVIN
I think it'll be a communal space for a while.

LINDA
Can I have it?

GAVIN
No.

She paces around, then goes to his bedroom and lies in his bed.



SCENE 42. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

LINDA awakens in GAVIN's bed. GAVIN is asleep in his chair by the fireplace. She goes to him.

LINDA
(whispering)
Gavin. Wake up, Gavin. Can you come to bed?

GAVIN
(groggy)
To my bed?

LINDA
I'll be there soon.

She disappears to the bathroom. A minute later, she comes skipping back, shivering, her face scrubbed and hair pulled back. She takes GAVIN by the hand and they pulls him into the bed. She scurries under the covers and holds him:

LINDA
Is this bad?

GAVIN
No.

LINDA
How can we be sure?

GAVIN
How did you expect to get home? If I accepted your truck?

LINDA
I would walk.

GAVIN
I don't believe you.

LINDA
In my memory... I've dreamt about this for many years. Have you?

GAVIN
Yes. But not you.

LINDA
Who then?

GAVIN
I mean this feeling.

LINDA
What does it feel like? For you?

GAVIN
Almost too powerful.

LINDA
You can fuck me. I don't mind. Please. I want you to...

GAVIN feels her under the covers. LINDA moans. Time passes and she moans harder, grips him tight, reaches for him. He withdraws his hand.

LINDA

Why?
(pause)
Did you come?
(pause)
What is it?
(whispering)
Are you impotent?

He shakes his head no.

LINDA

You're happy now.
(no response)
You know... what's weird? I usually feel guilty... after I come. I did with my husband. But with you I feel peaceful. Maybe I was actually always cheating... on *you*.

GAVIN chuckles.

LINDA

Oh my god, you laugh? You can laugh! Makes me think of when I was little... I had a Furby. I was never so happy as the first time I made him laugh. Until now...

GAVIN

What's a Furby?

LINDA

A Furby? A Furby is... well, it's like... a little governess. A male governess. They're from Indonesia, uh... they educate and entertain wealthy children? Like a little midget.
(no response)
No, it's a toy... you fool!

GAVIN is still confused.

LINDA

Like a Tickle Me Elmo. You must know that.

GAVIN

No.

LINDA

A Tickle Me... Elmo?

She tickles him. He chuckles again and rolls over.

LINDA

Oh, there's an ant on your chest... pop! Ha, you're gullible. You know, Jane... tells Matt... you know, the tuba guy? Okay, does Matt ever talk about how funny Jane is?

GAVIN
I suppose.

LINDA
Yeah, well, do you know the show Seinfeld?

GAVIN
I think I've heard of it.

LINDA
Yeah, well, Jane just repeats jokes from Seinfeld. It's like the... biggest sitcom... in TV history.

GAVIN
So she's not actually funny?

LINDA
No. She's a Buddhist. I mean... in this context, your world, she's funny. But in the real world... Oops, didn't mean that!

(pause)
I actually feel like... you're realer, I mean more real, than any man I've met. I'm bothered you don't want my money! I'm bothered you drink watery wine! And live in a cold apartment... I mean cabin... and that... you're not stylish. But, all things considered...

GAVIN
Am I beautiful?

LINDA
Yes. Am I?

GAVIN nods. LINDA rolls over and holds him.



LINDA
Do you think that kid really did it?

GAVIN
No.

LINDA
He confessed.

GAVIN
People confess to crimes they didn't commit all the time.

LINDA
I'm not stupid. What I'm saying is that... my opinion is, whoever confesses should be allowed to take responsibility.

GAVIN
What if the real killer went out and killed you.

LINDA
Well, what if this kid... never got a chance to feel... the deep sorrow? That he needed to feel. What if this kid felt so bad... yet society kept telling him he was good... and he was never able to... to... be allowed to have those feelings. It's a stupid thing about the world! That emotions need to follow acts. Sometimes... emotions just appear, out of nowhere? And sometimes acts lead to no emotions. We make these laws to fool ourselves that there's an order or something... That's why I think the legal system is superstitious!

GAVIN
It's just cathartic.

LINDA
Exactly.

GAVIN
No, your view of the world... is cathartic.

LINDA
The world is cathartic. There's no point other than to experience... different things. You of all people should not respect the laws of the land out there.

GAVIN
If laws are founded on just principles, I should. If all parties consent.

LINDA
How do you know if you really consent? How do you know if there's meaning in the thing that means something to you, like a beautiful tree that you cut down? You could say... oh, but the owl lives in the tree. But what is the point of the owl. What does it do? It eats mice. So? But we depend on mice. So? So what... what's the point? Can anyone prove there's anything under... us?

GAVIN

If there was no point, we wouldn't move. If there was no mechanism to existence.

LINDA

I don't know. I'm just arguing. I don't always see it this way. For some reason, I feel comfortable enough to think... in weird ways... with you...

GAVIN suddenly rises.

LINDA

What?

GAVIN

I need to work.

LINDA

Chop wood? In the middle of the night?

(pause)

You know it doesn't look like work, when I watch you, you know that? The creases in your brow... your muscular... ture? You look more like a statue. Like yoga.

GAVIN

Because you're rich.

LINDA

And?

GAVIN

No one forced you to stretch... and hold positions. To you it is aesthetic. Like your yoga.

LINDA

No one forced you to chop wood.

GAVIN

Nature does. The cold. The snow.

LINDA

You could just die... or get a job.

GAVIN

I could. So could you.

A long pause.

LINDA

Is this weird?

GAVIN

It doesn't feel weird.

LINDA

I'm so tired.

GAVIN

Sleep. I need to work.

LINDA
Can I live with you? This winter?

GAVIN
Why?

LINDA
I'm so lonely. I've always been lonely.

SCENE 43. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

GAVIN and LINDA have breakfast together. LINDA watches him eat.

GAVIN
Why aren't you eating?

LINDA
Because I didn't tend the chickens... that laid these eggs. I didn't milk the goat for this cheese.

GAVIN
I didn't either.

LINDA
But you did something in return. Isn't that how it works?

She sidles up to him and holds him.

LINDA
Unless. Am I a prostitute? Are you trying to pay me for sex... with eggs and bacon?

GAVIN
We didn't have sex.
(pause)
Does that bother you?

LINDA
No? As long as you're happy.

GAVIN
The breakfast is a gift.

She shakes her head no.

GAVIN
Why don't you go out for breakfast then.

LINDA
That's not fair... to you. And I like being hungry. It's invigorating.

GAVIN smiles.

GAVIN
Well, I need to work.

LINDA
Work work work. So work.

GAVIN
You could walk around.

LINDA
Outside? What will the others say?
(in a voice)
"So soon. Look at that... that... liberalized slut, look at her traipsing around our perfect little... libertarian utopia!"

GAVIN
Who cares what they say. Just don't trespass. Everyone has a bell on his mailbox.

LINDA
This sounds fun. A world of discovery awaits me. New personalities, new faces, like a book!

GAVIN helps her into her fur coat.

GAVIN
Just don't go into that little cottage over the way. An old ogre lives inside. He'll try to turn you against me.

LINDA
Really. Why?

GAVIN
Because of my science experiments.

LINDA
You're probably simplifying him.
(pause)
I feel like I've known you forever.

LINDA exits.



SCENE 44. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - DAY

LINDA is stopped out front, gazing at the cabin. Inside, someone is moving, doing what sounds like cleaning, moving, rearranging. They stop when they notice her.

SCENE 45. JEFFREY'S TRAILER - DAY

LINDA rings the bell. No one responds. She crosses the property line and peers through the window. JEFFREY's trailer is a small, live-in studio full of paintings: realistic portraits, landscapes, still lives. All done in a conservative yet sumptuous style. LINDA turns to see JEFFREY tossing out the compost.

LINDA
Oh, hi!

JEFF
Uh, Linda? Right?

LINDA
Sorry... I rang the bell. These are marvelous paintings!

JEFF
Thank you. Thank you.
(pause)
Would you like to come in?

LINDA
Sure.

They enter the cabin.

JEFF
I'm very sorry... about your loss. Your husband meant a lot to us, too.

LINDA
Wo-o-w-w! Wow, Jeffrey! You're an undiscovered genius! These are really beautiful!

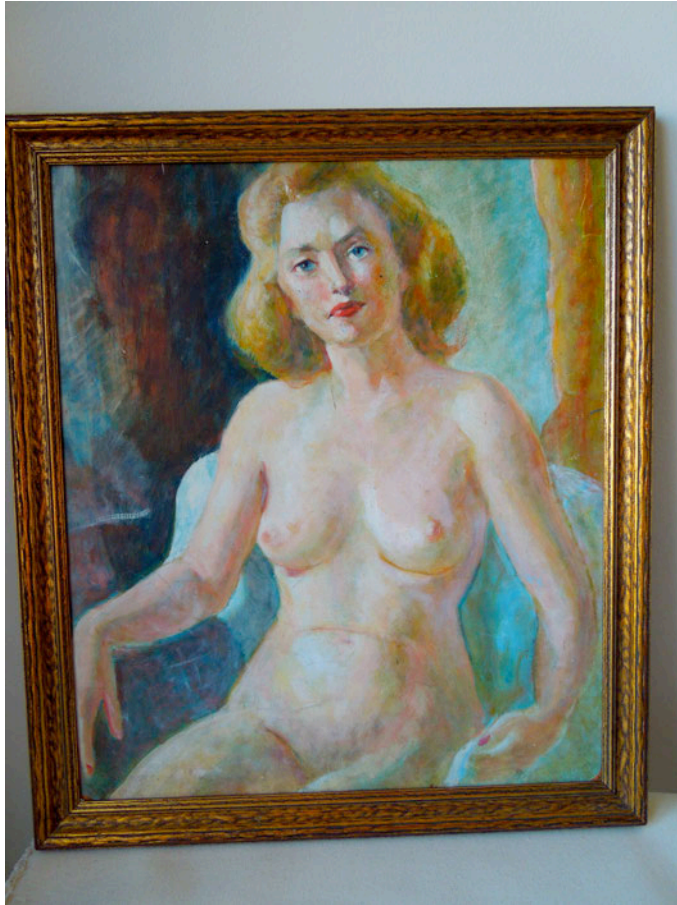
JEFF
Well... ha, I'm sure you'll recognize town hall there.

LINDA
Mmm hmm. Who's that? The lady?

JEFF
Just... a woman from my mind's eye.

LINDA
Really? She's beautiful. She really is.

JEFF
She looks a lot like my mother, actually.



LINDA

I have a friend... who's a painter. But his paintings are all abstract. He did a painting of me and I hated it. I would love... I would love to pose for a painting like this.

JEFF

For your own... possession?

LINDA

No, not necessarily. Just... to have it exist? I mean, I would like to see it, yeah.

JEFF

Would you pose nude?

LINDA

Sure. That would be amazing. In this style, yes, anything.

JEFF

This just might work, Mrs. Coughlin.

LINDA
Oh, that's not my last name. I never took Will's name.
It's Schaller.

JEFF
Well, come right this way, Ms. Schaller. Unless...
you're not busy are you? For some preliminaries?

LINDA
Free as a bird, Jeffrey, free as a bird!

SCENE 46. MATTHEW'S CABIN - DAY

A bit later, LINDA and JEFFREY gather at MATTHEW's place to plan the painting. LINDA poses in her yoga outfit in front of MATTHEW's organ. MATTHEW assists:

MATT
Hand up a little... yes, yes... hmmm... it's hard.

LINDA
How about this?

JEFF
Quite nice.

MATT
I think we need some...

LINDA
Or this?

MATT
Hold on, hold on...

MATTHEW produces a bunch of artificial flowers.

MATT
The thing is, I can't lend you this organ. I'm still
composing...

JEFF
No need, no need. I've seen it enough.

LINDA
Can I move?

MATT
What about... some iridescent... see through...
translucent fabric? Just to break up the composition.
Add a little, eroticism, say... here... and here?

LINDA
And can we do roses? White... pink and red? And yellow?

MATT
Yes, wonderful! This could be your best work yet, Jeffrey. I only wish you wanted my musical services instead of my vegetables. But: you are a visual... man. Yes.

MATTHEW inspects a contract for the commission of the painting.

MATT
Now, before I sign, Jeffrey, I've noticed all your females, well, they look... they look a bit like *you*.
(pause)
I know it's a common habit of even the greatest artists. But I want you to really put in your effort this time... capture Linda's specific likeness! She has a very beautiful face. With very subtle particulars: the way her nose meets the bridge; the shape of her lips... Can you do this, Jeffrey?

JEFF
If she's willing to sit.

MATT
And what does she get?

LINDA
The experience! Plus the satisfaction of living after death.

MATT
Have you eaten, Ms. Schaller? And you, Jeffrey? A post-contractual brunch?

They move into the kitchen where MATTHEW prepares some breakfast.

LINDA
If the woman ends up not looking like me... will you not supply him with vegetables?

MATT
I should think not. But he'll manage it, I'm sure.

LINDA
But how do you prove... she does or doesn't look like me?

MATT
It will... just look like you, or not look like you. Quite fundamental, isn't it, Jeffrey?

The bell rings.

MATT
Who is it!

GAVIN
Gavin! May I enter your property?

MATT
(à la Seinfeld)
Hell-l-l-l-l-l-lo! Gavin! Ho ho!

LINDA looks at him strangely.

MATT

Just a little inside joke between Jane and me. She says my potbelly reminds her of a jovial old man. So, it goes!

Enter GAVIN. MATTHEW continues with his joke, patting his belly, and LINDA starts laughing. Encouraged, MATTHEW prances around the room, pretending to talk with his belly button:

MATT

La la la... la la la!

LINDA

(laughing)

Stop! Please! Please! I can't take it!

GAVIN

Do you have a soldering iron I could borrow?

Sweating, MATTHEW finally sits with a satisfied smile:

MATT

It's on the desk in there. My, you look good. Rested.

GAVIN mutters something and rummages through the desk.

MATT

La la la!

LINDA chuckles again, still wiping tears from her eyes.

MATT

Gavin, you know Linda?

GAVIN

Of course.

LINDA

We slept in the same bed last night.

JEFFREY and MATTHEW look at each other. GAVIN pays them no mind.

MATT

Well, you know, Linda here is posing for a nude portrait! A most wonderful... favor to me.

JEFF

No, to me. I've never had such a beautiful model.

MATT

Yes, but who will benefit?

JEFF

Me. My portraits will be in high demand after this!

LINDA

We'll all benefit from this experience?

The three shake hands. Then Mathew holds up his glass.

MATT
To ourselves... who will each benefit, equally, in our own separate way.

Exit GAVIN.

MATT
Goo-o-o-od bye! La la la!

LINDA does not laugh this time. MATTHEW looks disappointed.

LINDA
Thanks for breakfast, guys. I'm just not hungry... now.

JEFF
When should we meet for the sitting?

LINDA
I'll stop by. Thanks.

Exit LINDA.

JEFF
So many new faces!

MATT
Indeed. Tell me, when is this mountain man due to arrive?

JEFF
Soon, I think? The tableaux? Kelly tells me he's already signed away his mountain property to a distant cousin...



SCENE 47. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

GAVIN solders a cylinder (cartomizer) to a small flashlight. He fills a test tube with water. Then he puts on latex gloves and a mask. From a jar labeled "Nicotine," he fills an eyedropper, and counting, drips the nicotine into the water.

LINDA enters. GAVIN barely notices.

LINDA
Hey, should I go home? Gavin.

GAVIN
Hmm?

LINDA
Are you mad?

GAVIN
I was in a rush to get back here.

There is a long silence as GAVIN fills another test tube.

LINDA
It's just... I'm not used to non-jealous people. If Will found out I was posing nude for someone!

GAVIN
Does it bother you I'm non-jealous?

LINDA
No?
(pause)
What happened here?

GAVIN
I fell asleep... while working. Looks worse than it was.

LINDA sits on his lap. GAVIN peels off his gloves.

LINDA
What are you working on?

GAVIN
I'm... fabricating my own e-cigarette. Too many of us smoke here. We're getting old and...

LINDA
You can *do* that?

GAVIN
Sure. The chemistry's pretty simple. I've already made pure caffeine. Nicotine is more complex but of the same principles. The pleasurable part of the cigarette is not the bad part.

LINDA inspects the beginning of his prototype: a strikingly homemade contraption made out of found objects.



LINDA
You like pleasure.

GAVIN
Are you teasing me? I'm like all people. I like pleasure. But I like pleasure without... the pain of sickness the next day. Or shame and guilt. Pleasure without... harming others... or without causing my own decay.

LINDA
What does it look like? The nicotine.

GAVIN
It's clear. Like water. A little syrupy, maybe.

He shows her the jar. After a while, tears come to LINDA's eyes.

LINDA
You're so wonderful.

GAVIN
You don't mean that.

LINDA
I do. I wanna be like you.

GAVIN
You are like me.

LINDA
I love you.

GAVIN
You love... William. That's why you're crying now.

She grips his arm.

GAVIN
You wish this was his arm.

LINDA
I'm telling you. It's you. I've never loved him. It's
you.
(pause)
What. *What?*

GAVIN
You're so young. You'll grow bored of me. I'm so strict.
So austere in your eyes...

She reaches to his crotch. He pulls her hand away.

LINDA
Show me.

GAVIN
Show you what?

LINDA
What feels wonderful. What gives you pleasure. What
makes you reject me?

GAVIN
I don't reject you.

GAVIN suddenly stands.

LINDA
See! Where are you going?

GAVIN
Lie down, there.



As he speaks, GAVIN disappears into the kitchen, leaving only his voice.

GAVIN
Take off your shirt.

LINDA unbuttons her shirt. GAVIN reenters with a bottle of wine, a crust of bread, a cutting board and a knife.

GAVIN
Lie down.

LINDA lies on the sheepskin rug near the fireplace. GAVIN places the cutting board beside her.

GAVIN
Here. Pretend you made this cutting board.

LINDA
But I don't know how to...

GAVIN
Imagine you do. You ground the wheat. They're your friend's eggs. The water came from a well you dug. Cut off a piece. Slowly.
(pause)
Now take a little butter, butter that was made from the milk of your own cow. Butter the slice. Not too much, not too little...

The butter slides from the knife. LINDA chuckles, but returns to her task with determination.

GAVIN
You take a bite. Small. Smaller. You let that wheat... and butter... dissolve in your mouth. Slowly. You don't chew until you've let each flavor... from the obscure to the obvious... work themselves out in your conscious mind.

LINDA
It reminds me of something.
(chewing)
It's good.

GAVIN
You fill the bottom of your glass. Only enough to fill your mouth. You inhale the aromas, separating the history from the wine. The soil. The native soil. The rain. The colors of the grapes. You've seen them in July. You remember everything. And like the physical qualities... of the bread... the butter... the wine, you experience the memories they inspire. Like leaves in a free flowing stream they pass through you: Fish. Mothers. Fathers. Friends... colors.

LINDA sighs.

GAVIN

And then you take a sip. Just one, Linda. And you hold it. Because you know... that an anxious... weak... thoughtless woman would quickly get drunk on the river of life... of experience she finds in her glass. But the free-woman knows... that the pleasure... the method... that allowed her to experience this... this unspeakable beauty, was static. Not dynamic, not a wave that crashes, not a drunk that rises and falls miserably, but a controlled swell. A swell that this libertarian... this statesman... has been cultivating for a long time.

LINDA swallows.

GAVIN

She knows that to take that extra sip... come to orgasm... carelessly... into the night air, steal when she's hungry, hit when she's angry, intrude on the property of another... when she feels like it... She knows that this will take the beauty, the freedom, out of her every action. And, lying on a bed. A bed... a bed of sheepskin... from her own sheep, slaughtered some distant summer... she knows that with merely a sip of that heavenly brew, she will dream what angels dream. Guiltless, free flowing... rivers... of pure intent.

Eyes shut, LINDA lies back and softly moans. She rolls her head to GAVIN and smiles.



LINDA

Come here.

GAVIN lies beside her.

LINDA

We should be married.

GAVIN
There's no need.
(pause)
Why do you say that?

LINDA
It's just strange that... I wish we'd always been together.

GAVIN
It doesn't make a difference, does it?

LINDA
No. So you're never gonna have kids?

GAVIN
None of us. Does that make you sad?

LINDA
Not for myself. For you. And Mr. Dipple. And... hmmm.
You're all just gonna... grow old here. And die. Without anyone to help you. Alone.

GAVIN
We all live alone. Why are we shocked that death is the same.

LINDA
Death.

LINDA breathes deeply. As she exhales, she shivers.

SCENE 48. ROAD - NIGHT

A young Romanesque-looking man hops out of a van. It's BRANDON.

BRANDON
(calling out)
Hello? Hello??

Horn honks, laughter from the van.

BRANDON
Cool it, guys!

A lamp appears, floating in the trees. It's MATTHEW.

MATT
You're on private property, sir.

BRANDON
Yeah, uh... I'm looking for a man named Kelly?

MATT
Mr. Maycumber? Is he a friend of yours?

BRANDON
Yeah.

MATT
It's quite late. Is he expecting you?

MILO
(from van)
We're here for tableaux!

MATT
Tableaux performance is tomorrow.

BRANDON
Aw fuck! Tomorrow??

MATT
Yes. Tomorrow. Midnight.

BRANDON
I got the dates confused. Where's my phone?

Two more young guys jump out of the van, MILO and DAVE.

BRANDON
Hey, do you got a place we can crash overnight? An extra cabin? We just need a floor, sir.

MATT
Yes, I understand, it's just...
(shouting)
Mr. Maycumber!
(no response)
You boys wait. Stay in the van. I'll be back.

MATTHEW tromps off, leaving them in the dark.

MILO
What we gonna do, Brando?



SCENE 49. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

Meanwhile, GAVIN is working late on his e-cigarette experiments. A desk lamp illuminates five homemade devices, each made of salvaged tubing--small flashlights, old metal pens, stems from broken pipes. He takes diluted nicotine solution and fills the cartomizer of one device. He plugs it in and starts puffing.

GAVIN continues vaping, lost in thought. Then his eyes open wide. He drops the device and jumps for water, swishing it in his mouth and quickly spitting it to the floor. He clutches his head.

GAVIN
(whispering)
Fuck. My god, *fuck*...

Ten minutes have passed. GAVIN emerges from the bathroom, recovered. He paces around the main space and stokes the fire. Sleeping on the sheepskin rug is LINDA. She has been here the whole time. She never left. Her chest gently rises and falls.

GAVIN casually rifles through her purse, studying each object from another world a tube of lipstick; eyeliner; a folding mirror; contact lens case; allergy medicine; a pair of expensive looking gloves; a condom. The accoutrements of a modern, young woman.

SCENE 50. BENOIT'S CABIN - DAY

GAVIN tears rotten insulation from BENOIT's roof. BENOIT hobbles out with a mug of hot water.

BENOIT
Wasn't covered properly, was it?

GAVIN
No. All moldy.

BENOIT
Figured as much. Have yourself a break.

GAVIN
Thank you, but I'm still...

BENOIT
Come, come, Mr. Cook. You're fatigued. I can hear it in your hammering.

GAVIN smiles and sits, legs dangling from the roof.

BENOIT
I noticed the light in your study last night, Mr. Leonardo... Davinci! He he, will you make your deadline? Tonight, is it not? To fulfill your contract with the others?

GAVIN
The electronic cigarette. Yes. I think so.

BENOIT
(yawning)
I was going to say rocket ship, but... good. Very good.

A silence.

GAVIN
Mr. Goubeaux. Thank you for taking in those men last night. I would have offered a couch but...

BENOIT
Oh, no. No. 'Twas my pleasure. They're good company. Very beautiful men. "The tableaux boys!" He he he!

GAVIN gets to his feet and nearly tumbles.

BENOIT
Careful now!

BENOIT suddenly looks grim, as if reminded of something. LINDA's laughter echoes in the distance. His smile returns:

BENOIT
Ah, Ms. Schaller! Tell me, is she your Rupert?

GAVIN
My Rupert?

BENOIT
Is she the template for all that's lovely? If she left you now, would the world become subpar? And if she left the world, well... I dare not express the hell that encompasses me since his death.

GAVIN
Do you mock me?

BENOIT
"Mock you?" Why? So soon? So young? So different? So muddled, murky... so much history? So little? Phaw! Mock you! I loved Rupert in an afternoon. Ours made yours look like a slow growing marriage of convenience. Of *circumstance*.

Silence.

GAVIN
I could love her.

BENOIT
Well that's good then. Although...
(pause)

Rupert and I, well, 'twas to our boon... to our pleasure that the U.S. government has shown little interest in the anus of man. Much less in the things it produces. Yet a woman's uterus! To keep that safe from tyranny without! And hers especially, so young, so fertile I imagine...

GAVIN
Our love is platonic.

BENOIT
So you're being careful then.

GAVIN
Yes. More than careful.

BENOIT
That's smart. And she's tolerant of your care?

GAVIN
I think so.

BENOIT
Well. I don't know what William complained about. Seems like the perfect girl. Beautiful. Young. Celibate. It's a shame she wasn't a candidate for citizenship instead of that Blackwater fellow. You could then protect this perfect love through contract. Like Rupert and me...

GAVIN
Oh, I'd rather let things fall where they may. Love is nothing but open and free.

BENOIT
Hmm. You must love her very much.
(pause)
Well, speaking of open and free, I'm off to Matthew's "All-you-can-eat-breakfast-buffet." Your hippieish ways are contagious, Mr. Cook. Should I bring something back for you?

GAVIN
Thank you. I've eaten already. Oh, tell the others I'm using the truck for a few hours. There's a construction site with a huge stack of particleboard in...

BENOIT
Don't get caught, my friend. Tableaux... vivant!

GAVIN smiles. BENOIT disappears inside.

SCENE 51. MATTHEW'S CABIN - DAY

All Statesmen assembled except GAVIN. They huddle in the kitchen eating bacon and drinking watery coffee and watching LINDA perform a vaudevillian dance to a ditty plunked out by MATTHEW on the organ. BENOIT enters and everyone stops.

BENOIT
Linda, is it?

LINDA
Yes?

BENOIT
May I be frank with you?

LINDA
Yes?



BENOIT
Gavin. Did he return the money you so kindly lent us?
All... three thousand five hundred...

LINDA
... six dollars and ninety-nine cents. Yes, he did.

BENOIT
Thank you. I'm sorry if I interrupted your dance.

LINDA
No problem.

MATT
She moves like a bird, Benoit.

BENOIT
She has skills, has she?

LINDA
Of course I have skills. Many skills... er, Benoit.
Benoit?

MATT
Can you... chop wood?

LINDA
Ah, no.

TIM
Can you shovel snow?

LINDA
I'd rather not.

JEFF
Can you... fix an engine? Or drain a sink?

LINDA
Not if my life depended on it, Jeffrey.

MATT
So you have no important skills.

LINDA
What about my company? Isn't that worth anything? You know... like Snow White? She had jam sessions with the dwarves, didn't she?

KELLY
She worked hard, to my recollection. Swept the dusty floors... cooked and...

LINDA
I can cook. I'm probably better than... who made the breakfast? No offence, but the meat's a bit...

MATT
Dry... mmmm. Well.

KELLY
We'll be getting fresh venison for tonight.

LINDA
What's tonight?

BENOIT
Will you be attending?

MATT
Tableaux. Annual tableaux vivant.

LINDA
Sounds... weird? I guess, if Gavin doesn't mind.

MATT
Gavin? It's not on his property. It's in the new communal space. You'll be our guest.

MATT
Now, if you don't eat your breakfast... I will finish it for you, Linda! But bear in mind, I have a stake in your figure... or have you forgotten my painting?

JEFF
Our painting. But yes, you must eat something.

SCENE 52. MEETING LODGE - DAY

GAVIN passes in the communal truck. JANE runs out of the lodge, wearing only her unitard and waving an envelope:

JANE
Hola, señor!

GAVIN rolls down the window and she hands him the envelope.

GAVIN
Thanks.

JANE
Hey, I wanted to talk to you... how late do you guys occupy the studio?

GAVIN
How late?

JANE
It's just... the thing is... sometimes my clients complain that it smells like smoke.

GAVIN
Oh, we...

JANE
I used to smoke... like a chimney, so I'm not judging...

GAVIN
No, we'll stop. We'll definitely stop.

JANE
Thanks, Gavin.

JANE rubs her arms from the cold, then notices something yonder.

JANE
Hell-o!

BRANDON and the tableaux troupe jog past, fit and trim and shirtless despite the winter weather. Tinny hip-hop leaks from their iPod headphones. DAVE boxes the air. BRANDON tackles him and they roll into a wrestling match. MILO joins and they pin BRANDON. As they jog away, BRANDON catches up and snatches MILO in a headlock...

SCENE 53. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

GAVIN quietly opens a large package in his study. He pulls out some small boxes.

LINDA
Matthew stopped by. He wants you to pay him a visit.

GAVIN jumps, startled. He turns LINDA at the kitchen table, fiddling with something.

GAVIN
I'm sorry? A visit?

LINDA
Uh huh. He is in need of a certain object.

She pantomimes playing the tuba.

LINDA
He wouldn't let me give it to him without your permission.

GAVIN notices LINDA is tinkering with WILLIAM's rifle.

GAVIN
What are you doing?

LINDA
I'm studying the mechanics.

GAVIN
For what?

LINDA
I wanna learn how to hunt.

GAVIN
Why?

LINDA
Because I like meat. I want it to be fair.

GAVIN
Well, you need a license to...

LINDA
Here? You don't have a license. William didn't... !

GAVIN
Yes, but...

LINDA
But what?

GAVIN
You can't hunt here.

LINDA
Why?

GAVIN
Well, the others would consider it poaching. If you want, you can accompany me on a hunt...
(pause)

What?

LINDA
After all I've done for you.

GAVIN
For me?

LINDA
For all of you. I donated four thousand dollars to this place and... !

GAVIN
We haven't used your money.

LINDA
Really? Then why is it that when I looked in that envelope, there was five hundred missing and...

GAVIN
I borrowed. I was going to spend it, but I chose not to.
Here. One, two, three, four. Five. Here.

He lays the cash on the table but LINDA ignores it, pouting.

GAVIN
I told you I didn't want that money on my property.
(pause)
What? What is wrong with you?

LINDA
It's just funny. Alllll men are the same. From the skinny
ones to the fat ones. Hmmpf. To the *old* ones.

GAVIN
You should leave.

LINDA scoops the money off the table and stands.

LINDA
You're just like my husband. You even look like him.

GAVIN starts chuckling.

LINDA
What.

GAVIN
I look like him? Will was short and white, I'm black
and...

LINDA
I thought you guys didn't care about that stuff?

Silence.

GAVIN
You're very beautiful.

LINDA
(with sudden emotion)
You're better than him. You are! I heard you working on
that roof!

GAVIN reaches out. She tenderly grabs his arm.

LINDA
As I kissed him... I wished this was... your arm. Your
chest. Your lips.

She holds him. She kisses him passionately. He pushes her away.

GAVIN
You're too young.

LINDA
No. We're perfect together.

GAVIN
I can't satisfy you.



LINDA
No. Yes. You can. It feels real.

GAVIN
Will it feel good?

LINDA nods, and keeps kissing him.

GAVIN
What about... after?

LINDA
Do you love me?

GAVIN
Yes.

LINDA
It feels like heaven after. It feels so good.
She pulls a condom from her, unwraps it, then unzips his pants.

GAVIN
No.

LINDA
I wanna live with you forever. For eternity.
She pushes him into a chair and straddles him.

LINDA
(whispering)
You're so much bigger than him. You look nothing like him. You satisfy me. I heard you working on that roof this morning...

SCENE 54. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - DAY

WILLIAM's former cabin has become the new communal space. While JEFFREY and RICHARD tidy up, TIMOTHY measures water and pours it into a large jug. Then he adds wine. He swirls the liquids into a soft pinkish, diluted blend.

SCENE 55. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

LINDA lies alone in bed, naked, staring at the semen captured at the tip of the used condom.

LINDA
Why won't you answer me?

GAVIN
How long since when?

LINDA
Since you made love.

GAVIN
Ten minutes. Why?

LINDA
No. Before that.

GAVIN
I've never.

LINDA looks surprised. GAVIN enters from the bathroom, drying his face, already dressed.

LINDA
You're a virgin?

GAVIN
I was.

Without looking at her, he disappears into the study.

LINDA
Now I feel... I feel guilty!

GAVIN
Why?

LINDA
Cause I just stole your virginity.

GAVIN
Stole? I chose.
(pause)
What are you doing with that?

LINDA
Checking for holes? Isn't that smart?

LINDA lets the limp condom plop on the bedside table.

LINDA
Just so you know, I would take the morning after pill.

GAVIN
Mmm hmm.

LINDA
I would.

GAVIN
But you don't have to.

LINDA
Yes, but I would.

GAVIN
But what if you didn't?

LINDA
If I didn't. Then you'd be a father. Does that scare you?

GAVIN
Please throw that away.

LINDA
Because I don't know. Seems like... out of all places, this would be the perfect place to raise a child. And you're stern but... you'd make a good father.



GAVIN reenters and stares at her.

GAVIN
Is this your desire... to get pregnant?

LINDA
Why? Because I'm approaching thirty?

GAVIN
Because of the way you're talking.

LINDA
Hypothetical? I'm curious. Say there was a hole in it. Say that somehow, I dunno, one of your sperm found its way... up my fallopian tube... and reached my egg and...

GAVIN
And that's why.

LINDA
That's why what?

GAVIN
(sighing)
It's about freedom, Linda. It's about my rights... as an individual. Please throw that away.

LINDA
What are you scared of? I just want to know. I don't... ha ha, believe me, I'm just curious! If I was pregnant...

GAVIN
Who's child would it be?

LINDA
Well, yours and mine?

GAVIN
Exactly. And we will disagree.

LINDA
Will we?

GAVIN
Probably?

LINDA
So?

GAVIN
So either our disagreements will result in one of us oppressing the other, or our disagreements will be brought forth... to be solved...

LINDA
I wouldn't make you pay child support!

GAVIN
... through the total force of that disgusting and base and ignoble and oppressive empire you so casually refer to as the United States. That's why, if you're curious. Now put that away.

Silence.

LINDA
Is it yours?

GAVIN
It is mine. It is very much mine.

LINDA
I know it came from your penis, but it's in my condom. I bought it at CVS.

GAVIN
It's on my property.

LINDA
I'm on your property. Am I "yours"? Hmm?

She suddenly dips her finger in the condom.

GAVIN
Put that... *away*.

LINDA
Do as you say? Like your pet?

She slides her glistening finger under the bedcovers.

LINDA
... or get *scolded*? Hmm??

LINDA closes her eyes and exaggeratedly moans. GAVIN violently seizes her hand from the covers. He flings the condom into the fireplace.

A long silence.

LINDA
(softly)
I was just flirting.

GAVIN wipes her hand clean with a rag. The bell rings.

MATT
Mr. Cook! Mr. Cook! Anyone home!

GAVIN
(low)
I want you off my property.

GAVIN goes to the closet and grabs the MATTHEW's tuba. Exit GAVIN, door slamming hard behind him.



SCENE 56. A SHED - DUSK

The tableaux boys are hard at work. Outside on the snow, DAVE cuts shapes out of plywood. MILO sprays them gold. Within the shed, BRANDON lies on a mat, shirtless with black sweat pants. His eyes are closed as if meditating. After a while, he starts doing push-ups really quickly. LINDA wanders by, wrapped in one of GAVIN's blankets and looking sleepy.

LINDA
Hi.
(pause)
Aren't you cold?

BRANDON
I'll be colder tonight.

LINDA
You slept at Benoit's last night.

BRANDON
You live here?

LINDA
I'm dating a guy here... so, kind of?
(pause)
What was it like at Benoit's? Cold?

BRANDON
A little strange actually.

LINDA
How? Was he weird?



BRANDON

No. Monsieur Goubeaux was very nice. Very hospitable. Strange in a... a different way. He told us a story before bed, about his lover... A man named Rupert. Did you know him?

LINDA

No. I think so... maybe?

BRANDON

Rupert broke his spine a few years back and chose not to go to the hospital. For three days and three nights, he refused help from anyone. And Monsieur Goubeaux sat beside all that time. Not sleeping or eating. Just talking. Until finally Rupert... "Noble Rupert" he called him... closed his eyes to this world.

LINDA

He told you all this?

BRANDON

Yeah. Me and Milo. We slept on Rupert's bed. Had the weirdest dreams. I can't say if they'll make me perform better or worse...

LINDA

What were the dreams about?

BRANDON

I'd rather not say.

LINDA

Were they violent?

BRANDON
(sighing)
I'd just rather... keep them to myself.

LINDA
Well, you guys are welcome to stay in our place tonight.

BRANDON
Thank you. Maybe we will. We'll see how it goes.
Sometimes we feel like heading out afterwards.

He commences with his pushups, huffing and puffing in loud staccato.

As LINDA turns to go, she notices a crate of wine by the door. She slips a bottle into her blanket and walks away.

SCENE 57. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - NIGHT

In the front yard, the Statesmen and an assortment of friendly townspeople gather in front of a low stage lit by a single spotlight. Some sit on logs, others lean against trees. KELLY approaches JULIA, who sits alone on a stump, looking bored and texting on her iPhone.

KELLY
(whispering)
Julia. What time is it?

JULIA
Almost midnight.

KELLY takes the stage and notions for quiet.

KELLY
The Marxist proclaims that freedom is found through historical process. Whether it be the process of feudalism giving way to capitalism, then to the communistic state, or the very process of fixing a roof, freedom and enlightenment for this most logical man is the result of suffering through an act in time. From point A to point B. From wood to flame. From labor to consumption. But what of the man who doesn't believe in time? In history? In process? A man who does not see why A must follow B. A man who can trade... a hat for a spoon, or a painting... or trade nothing at all? A man for whom the beauty of the static poses of these young actors does not contain or conceal or result from a suffering body... a history... cultural, evolutionary or economic? Is this man then incapable of engaging in freedom? No. For I believe as much as it would pain Herr Marx, this man... is already free.

KELLY quickly take a seat next to JULIA. The spotlight goes down. Nothing can be seen. Music begins.

The spotlight rises on BRANDON, MILO and DAVE. They are fully nude and completely painted gold, shivering from the cold.



The light goes down, and then rises, revealing them in a static pose: MILO and DAVE support BRANDON as he pantomimes hammering something, as if on a roof.

Darkness, then light: now like lovers, MILO and BRANDON are embraced in a stationary kiss.

Darkness, then light: they hold BRANDON, hammer in hand, as if he is falling from a roof. A look of terror is etched on his golden face.

In the audience, a tear gleams in GAVIN's eye. He shoots a glance at KELLY, who also seems moved.

Darkness, then light: the three men stand in a triangle, facing away from each other.

Darkness, then light: BRANDON man lies on the ground. MILO stands above him, a rod in his heart.

Darkness, then light: the three men tip golden shovels against the same spot of ground.

GAVIN notices a dark silhouette moving down the snowy hill, joining the crowd. It's EXECUTIONER. He's carrying a sack of fresh game.

Darkness, then light: DAVE stands alone, tending the earth.

Darkness, then light: BRANDON rejoins the men. Each pose with a different tool.

Darkness, then light: BRANDON holds an ax, chopping imaginary wood.

Darkness, then light: the tableaux boys hold hands around BRANDON, who stares up to the sky, as if in spiritual exaltation.

Darkness. Light returns, and RICHARD quickly approaches EXECUTIONER, welcoming him to the communal space where all have begun to gather.



SCENE 58. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - LATER

Inside, RICHARD assists EXECUTIONER, spreading the freshly bagged meat on the kitchen counter. EXECUTIONER gazes around the cabin:

EXECUTIONER

Wow, it's bigger than I imagined... from those drawings...

RICH

Well, I'm glad... because it's soon to be yours. If you're wondering, we put your boxes and things in the bedroom.

EXECUTIONER

Oh.

Silence.

RICH

Did you see the performance?

EXECUTIONER

Oh! Yeah, I was late... but some of it. Pretty spectacular stuff! I was like... what the heck? This place is as amazing as I ever hoped. I liked it. I like it! "Tableaux."

RICH

Would you throw some wood on the fire? It's nearly out.

EXECUTIONER
Gladly, brother.

RICH
I'll go skin the game.

EXECUTIONER busies himself with the woodstove, huffing and puffing until the flames catch. MATTHEW, KELLY, a couple of young women tumble inside to warm up. EXECUTIONER smiles to himself, blushing. MATTHEW hands a glass of diluted wine:

MATT
Do you like rosemary?

EXECUTIONER
Rosemary?

MATT
The plant.

EXECUTIONER
Sure, I love rosemary.

MATT
Then rosemary it is.
(pause)
Do you like talking?
(lower)
In the other room?

EXECUTIONER
Oh. Sure.

EXECUTIONER and MATTHEW exit to the next room. Meanwhile, everyone has come in from the cold. They fill the kitchen and overflow into the main space. Outside, the tableaux men are piling their things into the communal truck.

GAVIN
Oh! I almost forgot!



GAVIN pulls from pocket his new e-cigarettes. They look much sleeker than his earlier versions, almost professional looking. The men stare at the devices like apes with fire.

GAVIN
To a new era!

JEFFREY starts puffing one.

JEFF
Was it hard?

GAVIN
Well, some difficulties... many, I should say, but...

TIM
You pulled it off.

BENOIT
How did you go about diluting the nicotine?

GAVIN
Water.

BENOIT
Water? H2O?

GAVIN
Yes.

TIM
Dilute it... ?

BENOIT
Dear Timothy, nicotine can be deadly. A common insecticide in its purified form.

JEFF
It's poisonous?

BENOIT
If you don't dilute it, yes. But luckily the man has plenty access to water.

GAVIN
Yes. Even a few ounces of pure caffeine would send a child to the emergency room, Jeffrey. Don't worry. I've been vaping all day.

GAVIN takes a ceremonial puff.

BENOIT
Gavin is your praegustator, Jeffrey. Keep an eye on him.

GAVIN
I feel vigorous. Yes, Benoit, I feel *free*.



SCENE 59. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - MEANWHILE

MATTHEW displays his tuba EXECUTIONER, who studies it with fascination.

MATT

A vastly underrated sound. That's why there's not much literature for it. But I write much of my own music. And... I do transpositions. Just completed a whole book of Brahms' lieder...

EXECUTIONER

Brahms?

MATT

Brahms. A nineteenth century composer. A sort of middle man between classicalism and romanticism. I like the middle men.

EXECUTIONER

Not too much... not too little.

MATT

And in that, you find everything.

EXECUTIONER takes a slow sip of the diluted wine. MATTHEW grins.

MATT

So... how much wood is the music of Brahms worth to you?

EXECUTIONER

Wood?

MATT

Wood or game? Whatever.

EXECUTIONER
Mmmm... I dunno.
(reaching for tuba)
I can...

MATT
(German accent)
You can keeps ze instrament in zure pozzession during ze
veeks ov your lessons!

EXECUTIONER
Ha ha! What's that voice?

MATT
(suddenly serious)
Keep it in mind, the rest of the citizenry will approach
you tonight with equally enticing propositions. But
don't forget the necessity of beauty in your life. Will
you stay for my suite?

He smiles and exits. EXECUTIONER follows but JEFFREY suddenly
appears.

JEFF
Got a minute?

SCENE 60. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

Alone and away from the party, LINDA sits in GAVIN's chair, drinking
from the stolen bottle of wine. Her head droops.



SCENE 61. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - NIGHT

Out in the yard, KELLY dumps entrails into a bucket. JULIA stands by a tree, texting. RICHARD works the grill. A woman shouts something to KELLY. He does a little dance, then walks away.

SCENE 62. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - NIGHT

Inside, JEFFREY and EXECUTIONER have just wrapped their conversation

JEFF
It's wonderful having you here.

EXECUTIONER
I'm glad. I hope... I can be of service.

JEFFREY exits. EXECUTIONER looks around as if expecting another suitor. In the hall, he sees TIMOTHY and a male stranger kiss. Disinterested, EXECUTIONER returns to the kitchen to observe the goings-on. MATTHEW comes in with a plate of venison. Sitting next to JULIA is a young guy named BRAD who is drinking from his own six-pack of beer.

MATT
I'll tell you, Richard carves that venison with such cold precision, he's nearly fascistic about it. If you reach for a cut without his permission... he snaps! Heh heh!
(German accent)
No meat... fuh you! Heh heh. He's the venison Nazi!

BRAD
Ahh, ha ha, Seinfeld, man! I did *not* peg you as a Seinfeld fan... *awesome*.

MATTHEW looks confused. BRAD cracks a fresh beer.

BRAD
Lotta people tell me I look like Jerry Seinfeld! I never met my dad, so... you never know, right?

MATT
Your father is a fortunate man.

BRAD
Huh?
(pause)
What? What'd you say?

MATTHEW sighs and goes to the window, where JEFFREY is trying his new e-cigarette.

MATT
Jeffrey, may I?

JEFF
But you don't...

MATT

I don't smoke, Jeffrey, and vaping is another story. At a party, after a hard day... I might indulge myself.

JEFFREY hands over the device. MATTHEW wipes it with a disinfectant wipe. EXECUTIONER watches their every move.

MATT

Our dear friend Gavin made these. Wonderful, groundbreaking stuff!

MATTHEW takes a puff and exhales like a fancy lady. Across the room, BRAD lays his hand on JULIA's lap. She pulls it away and shoots him an annoyed glance.

SCENE 63. A GOAT Paddock - NIGHT

KELLY leans on the fence of a nearby paddock, gazing at the sky and passively listening to the sound of MATTHEW warming up on his tuba. BRAD appears, beer in hand, making a variety of sounds with his mouth.

BRAD

(police siren)

Woo ooh, wooo ooh wooo ooh!

(pause)

Wow! Hey! I'm Brad, Julia's boyfriend. You're Kelly, right?

They shake hands. BRAD sees a goat.

BRAD

Bleat! Bleeat! Bleeat! What's your name, little guy?
Bleat! Bleeat? Come on, dude!

KELLY

Jessica.

BRAD

Jessica?

(hippie voice)

Awe, shit! You're a milking goat. Sorry, dude, I'm a little drunk. Yeah, y'know... walkin' around this place... I gotta say, man.

(Texas accent)

I'm into permaculture... off the grid type stuff... so I've seen a lot of attempts... but this... *this* is the real deal!

(normal voice)

Julia tells me you're a poet, man. She says you're really amazin'!

KELLY

Well, she's amazing.

BRAD

(valley girl voice)

Like, she is. Y'know, like, she really likes you. Like... I mean, we love each other... we're in love... but she, like, loves you too, man. I think that's great.

KELLY

I'm glad you see it that way, Brad. Sometimes... at night... when I'm alone... I think of her. And her body. And how... we'll never be together. And I picture her dying.

BRAD

(Southern judge voice)

Two years, Mr. Maycumber. Uno... dos!

BRAD rests his elbows on the fence, and returns to his normal voice.

BRAD

I must confess something. Julia...

(sighs)

She wants... me to make love to her in your bed tonight.

(stuffy English general voice)

So, at three ante meridiem, we planning on sneaking into your house. If you walk in... or walk by the window and stop in confusion... would you be penalized for seeing something? For the light... reflecting off her naked body... and touching thine naked eye? *Hmmm??*

KELLY

Do you think light... actually touches the thing it shows?

BRAD

Yes?

KELLY

Do you think if...

BRAD

Ye-e-e-s?

KELLY

Somehow...

BRAD

Mmmm?

KELLY

A microscopic particle of her sweat...

BRAD

Go on?

KELLY

A wild, wayfaring electron...

BRAD

An electron?

KELLY

From the atoms in the cotton of her underwear...

BRAD

Atomic particles?! A... physicist? I pegged you as a poet, Maycumber!

KELLY
Might get picked up by light... and land...

BRAD
Land where? Where, Maycumber! *Speak*, man!

KELLY
On my lips.

BRAD
"On my lips?" Well! I think that's... a probability.
We'll leave the window open! Good afternoon!

He does an exaggerated military click-of-the-heels, and disappears into the darkness.



SCENE 64. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - NIGHT

Inside, MATTHEW plays his tuba suite for the dinner crowd. GAVIN listens attentively. JEFFREY is ensconced between two town ladies on the couch. One of them lightly kisses him on the cheek. He hardly registers it, staring into the distance and slowly, peacefully inhaling his e-cigarette.

GAVIN
Matthew's playing is wonderfully... distinct tonight.

The town lady says, "He's good."

JEFF
It's strange. In a good way. The cigarette, I mean...

GAVIN rises.

JEFF
Home?

GAVIN
I need to urinate.

RICH
Are the tableaux performers washing up?

GAVIN
No, they've left.

The town lady goes, "Awww". GAVIN exits.

SCENE 65. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

Drunk on wine, LINDA dances all alone—a strange, slow, swaying dance.

SCENE 66. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - NIGHT

MATTHEW's suite trickles into the chilly night air, where GAVIN is urinating against a tree, backlit by the porch light. EXECUTIONER appears in the doorway, a gigantic silhouette.

EXECUTIONER
Hey.

GAVIN nods.

EXECUTIONER
How's it goin'?

GAVIN
Fine.

EXECUTIONER
Can I ask something? Do you not like me? I noticed you... you haven't propositioned me. For a contract.

GAVIN
That's because I don't need anything from you. I'm a vegetarian. And I chop my own firewood.

EXECUTIONER nods. He goes back inside. GAVIN finishes his piss to the final strains of MATTHEW's suite.

SCENE 67. A GOAT PADDOCK - DAWN

The night is over. The sun is beginning to rise. KELLY is fast asleep in a shed; a natural poet able to sleep like a babe in the woods in the dead of winter. From far off, strange and foreign noises can be heard...

JULIA
(orgasming)
K-K-K-Kelly!!

SCENE 68. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - DAWN

Inside, TIMOTHY is sleeping. EXECUTIONER is watching GAVIN. GAVIN and BENOIT watch MATTHEW, who is still playing tuba, slower now and with less care.

LINDA
(knocking on window)
Gavin. Gavin! Can you take me home?

LINDA's tired face appears in the window. A moment later, she enters, stumbling and banging into things. The music stops.

LINDA
Gavin!

GAVIN
No.

LINDA
I'm drunk! Want me to die in a car accident?

Silence.

LINDA
Hmm? Hey! Psst!
(pause)
How wonderful. He's punishing me!

MATT
You view being punished as not getting your way... when it involves someone else's rights?

GAVIN
Would you like to come here and sit beside me?

LINDA
No. No, that's a weird question!

Silence again.

LINDA
Long silence! Then... that is a weird! Question! I don't even know what's wrong with me!



BENOIT

There's nothing wrong, my dear. You're simply sad.

LINDA realizes EXECUTIONER is staring at her.

LINDA

(low)
What's wrong with you!

EXECUTIONER averts his eyes. LINDA plops beside a random sleeping lady and starts drinking more wine. Ignoring her, MATTHEW picks up where he left off on the tuba, then notices EXECUTIONER staring at him.

MATT

It's a simple one. Would you like to try?

He offers the tuba to EXECUTIONER.

MATT

You blow. I'll do the fingering.

LINDA

Ahhh! *Ewww*! Ha ha... gross! That's so sick...
Ha ha ha ha!

LINDA laughs and laughs until she falls, literally rolling on the floor. MATTHEW tries to ignore her. EXECUTIONER huffs and puffs and MATTHEW does the fingering, and music magically forms. LINDA stops laughing.

LINDA

Wow. It's...

EXECUTIONER suddenly stops playing. He whispers something to MATTHEW, then reaches for the disinfectant wipes.

MATT
What? It's been wiped...
(pause)
You're not sick, are you?

LINDA
(mockingly)
Uhhhhh ooooooh! Shit!

MATT
Ms. Schaller!

LINDA
(giggling)
Wha-a-a-a-t?

Everyone focuses on EXECUTIONER.

EXECUTIONER
What??

MATT
Are you *sick*?

EXECUTIONER
I... I...

JEFFREY begins to open the windows.

JEFF
Are you sick!

EXECUTIONER
No? What do you mean by sick?

MATT
What do you mean by "What do you mean?" Are you sick or *aren't* you?

By now, many have moved to the door. Some even stand outside.

JEFF
What are your symptoms?

LINDA
(British accent)
The pla-a-a-a-ague is upon us!

MATT
Linda! I don't like this... this...

JEFF
Yes, I don't like this either.

EXECUTIONER suddenly stands.

EXECUTIONER
Listen. Please. Don't leave. Please. I'm sorry!

MATT
Are. You. *Sick*.

EXECUTIONER

No. Sorry. I have nothing. Nothing in me. But you guys... you guys shouldn't leave!

JEFF

We're just confused...

EXECUTIONER

Yeah, ha ha!

(forced laugh)

You know what? I'll leave. I'm gonna go to sleep now. So you guys have a good time.

Blushing, he pushes his way out the front door into the cold early winter morning.

BENOIT

(shouting after)

Where are you sleeping??

EXECUTIONER

Umm...

(pause)

I'm gonna camp. If that's okay?

BENOIT

If that's okay with you.

EXECUTIONER

Yeah, you guys have fun.

LINDA snorts.

MATT

No. I don't like this. I don't like this at all!

SCENE 69. WOODLAND - DAWN

GAVIN follows EXECUTIONER into the woods. He whistles at him. EXECUTIONER sheepishly turns.

GAVIN

It's too cold to camp!

EXECUTIONER

I've camped plenty of times in this weather.

GAVIN

You know. Back there, that's your property. If you're sick... you haven't committed a crime. It's they that have no right to occupy your property without your consent.

EXECUTIONER

They have my consent. I see what you're sayin', Mr. Cook, but... yeah, they have my consent.

(pause)

Listen. If you ever need anything... 'cause I don't just chop wood and hunt. I'd like to learn philosophy... from you. Learn the *truth*.

(pause)

I really liked your book, brother.

GAVIN nods.

EXECUTIONER

It's like my life is changing... at an unbelievable pace right now!

LINDA

(in distance)

How bout this, Jeffrey... !

JEFF

(in distance)

Ms. Schaller...

LINDA

(in distance)

No, no, no! Jeffrey, Jeffrey, bring your canvases and charcoals! To my place... do some sketches there, Matthew can come too... party round two, guys!!

EXECUTIONER

What's that woman's problem? She's not a citizen, is she?

GAVIN

No.

EXECUTIONER

She's out of control.

GAVIN

She lost her husband... a few weeks ago.

EXECUTIONER

Was he the guy I killed?

GAVIN

Yes.

EXECUTIONER

It's weird. These past few weeks... I've felt like a murderer. I've never felt that before. I've killed guys for my job... but... well.

(sighs)

It feels good to be here. It feels good to be here... Gavin.

He turns, and trudges up the hill. GAVIN shudders from the cold.



ACT III

SCENE 70. A CLEARING IN THE FOREST - DAY

KELLY sits on a rock, writing on a little pad. Here and there he pauses, thinking. He gently puffs his e-cigarette.

Snow crunches. He looks up to see JULIA, red-faced and a bit out of breath.

JULIA
Sorry I'm late!

KELLY smiles, and rises to greet her.

SCENE 71. A GOAT Paddock - DAY

JEFFREY and TIMOTHY lean against the fence, vaping their e-cigarettes. After a while, JEFFREY turns to TIMOTHY with a smile.

TIM
What?

JEFF
This is nice, isn't it?

TIM
This field? This day?

JEFF
This winter.
(pause)
I sleep less. I don't snore anymore. I can walk for miles without stopping. I feel young. Is that silly?

TIM
No. It's how you feel that counts. Not how you look, heh heh!

JEFFREY looks to the horizon.

JEFF
My god, do you see that light.

TIM
Mmm hmm.

JEFF
It's like spun gold. I've never seen it like that!

TIM
"The mellifluous buds of worn out trees will creep into the late March air, and it will be something you will not know. The enthusiastic sun will beat upon what was once your roof, and you will not feel it. The inky night will encroach on the last light of the crescent moon, and you will not witness it with that quiet awe which comes in sad moments... "

JEFF
Why do you think he stays so far away from us?

TIM
Who?

JEFF
The new game and firewood purveyor? Matthew's new tuba student? Your new carpenter? My new snow shoveler?

TIM
Well, doesn't that explain it?

JEFF
Could he be sick?
(pause)
Remember how he...

TIM
Sick? Pfff, no. Have you seen him at Goubeaux's roof? Ripping out the fetid rot with his bare hands? Gavin would never subcontract with a sick man, would he?

JEFF
No. So what is the nature of their exchange?

TIM
Gavin teaches philosophy. Once a week, half an hour.

JEFF
And for that, he's free?

TIM
Who?

JEFF
Gavin. That roof was his only real obligation.

TIM
Free? I don't know? I've seen him in his study, toiling away. Supposedly fine-tuning our e-cigarettes...

JEFF
Fine-tuning? Could they get better? They're perfect.

TIM
Perhaps a thinly veiled ruse. It's been nearly a month since Ms. Schaller has left. And without a word, well...

JEFF
Ahhh.

TIM
He's heartbroken.

JEFF
I do hope she returns. For Gavin's sake and for mine... and Mr. Nash's! I've a portrait due in two weeks! And I've not much to work from other than a few sketches. I can't quite remember. Her memory is fading. I see her like a pale reflection in the ice. Fair, pale, hazel-eyed...

TIM
Hazel? You must go pay her a visit. They were brown.

JEFF
Brown? Nooo. They were *exotic*. Mysterious. Perceptive, lively and sensitive. "Brown!"

SCENE 72. WOODLAND - DAY

GAVIN and EXECUTIONER sit by a frozen stream, studying GAVIN's book.

EXECUTIONER
It's not a question. I'm curious what you mean.

GAVIN
Let's read it then. You'll read for the just man and I'll read for the inquisitive man.

EXECUTIONER
The "just man"? Are you kiddin' me?

GAVIN
(reading)
"But this still confuses me. Are emotions then only aspects of the mind which are in our control?"

EXECUTIONER
(reading)
"Yes. When one is not enslaved by another, and when one has not enslaved another, a choice can be made about how to view and experience the sensations that enter our minds. In the Utopian state, emotions are present as music is present. Or a painting. Like a villain in a tragedy, we do not fear the sword which he carries. We are not made anxious by his threats. We can empathize with them, we can know what they mean. But they will never cause us to run away. To scream."
(stops reading, pause)
I was just gonna say... that's how I feel.

He notices GAVIN is preoccupied, fiddling with an e-cigarette.

GAVIN
Huh?



EXECUTIONER

That's how I feel about Mr. Coughlin. I have no guilt. As I'm readin' this, I'm thinkin', "Wait a minute, buddy, am I just?" But then I keep readin' and you talk... all this... enlightenment... and love? And I don't feel that either.

GAVIN

Well. You didn't know him.

EXECUTIONER

But I want to. Not know him but... it's like when the citizens talk about him, there's this sad look in their eyes. Or gratefulness. Or I dunno. But I wanna feel that. Sometimes I feel like I had nothin' to do with it. Like someone else did it.

GAVIN

You did it.

Silence. Wind blows.

GAVIN

That wind. Can you feel it? There's nothing more to it.

EXECUTIONER

To what?

GAVIN

The feeling it gives you.

A pause.

EXECUTIONER

Like you know when you're having sex with a girl.

(pause)

Oh. I'm sorry. Are you queer?

(pause)

Are you a homosexual?

GAVIN

No. I just don't have sex.

EXECUTIONER

May I ask why not?

GAVIN

Many reasons. My own protection from another's pregnancy. Even with a condom, the risks...

EXECUTIONER

You could have anal sex.

GAVIN

It's overwhelming.

(pause)

Why do you bring it up?

EXECUTIONER

I was never overwhelmed... or enslaved by it. I was just starin' at her face the whole time. She was moanin'.

(mimics moaning)

I couldn't tell how she felt. Her face. Sometimes it would look sad? Or in pain... or or... joyful. Like switching... swishing... like water. It makes me think about the just man. How the whole world can be a play.

They go silent. EXECUTIONER stares at GAVIN's cigarette.

EXECUTIONER

I can't believe you made that.

GAVIN

Would you like to try?

EXECUTIONER

Naw. I'd rather watch.

(pause)

Is that annoying?

GAVIN

Yes. It is.

SCENE 74. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - NIGHT

Other than the soft clicks of the hot woodstove, the cabin is quiet. EXECUTIONER enters. He hangs his coat. Taking a seat, he studies a jar full of pencils and feathers. He realizes there is a pot on the woodstove. It is a stew, simmering away. He tastes it, then glances around the cabin:

EXECUTIONER

Hello?

On the counter is cutting board strewn with turnip tips and celery roots. A man's coat hangs from the bedroom door. EXECUTIONER silently enters: in bed lies a form. Dark hair poking from a heavy quilt. EXECUTIONER calmly draws his knife.

EXECUTIONER

Hello. Wake up.

It is LINDA. Crouching, EXECUTIONER lays the blade against her neck. He studies her face. She looks very different: short dyed hair and something puffy about her face. Her eyelids flutter, she sees the knife, she is very still.

EXECUTIONER

Who are you?

(pause)

William's widow.

(pause)

What's wrong with you?

LINDA

I was looking for the keys... to my truck.

EXECUTIONER

Your truck? No. This is private property.

He sheaths the knife. LINDA backs out of bed, grabs her coat, and boots, hurries outside. EXECUTIONER watches through the window, then locks the front door.

SCENE 75. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

The light in GAVIN's study is on. Banging on the front door.

GAVIN

Who is it! What's the meaning of... ?

GAVIN emerges from his study looking angry and sloppier than usual. LINDA has let herself in. As GAVIN's eyes adjust, his expression softens:

GAVIN

Your *hair*.

LINDA

It's my natural color.

GAVIN

What are you doing here?

LINDA
I missed you?

GAVIN reaches out to hold her. LINDA begins to cry.

LINDA
I threw up so much the next morning. All I could think about was you. I had to leave.

SCENE 76. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

A bit later, LINDA is set up in GAVIN's bed, sipping soup.

GAVIN
Alcohol poisoning is usually a brief affair, is it not?

LINDA
I threw up soooo much, Gavin. I think I tore my digestive tract. But I'm non-contagious.

GAVIN
I wouldn't care either way. I'm happy you're back.

He lies next to her and strokes her skin.

LINDA
Is there meat in here?

GAVIN
Would you like some?

LINDA
Why do you love me?

GAVIN
I don't know.
(pause)
Do you still want to marry me?

LINDA
Is it possible?

GAVIN
I've been thinking about it. Maybe you and I could write up some sort of contract.

LINDA
A contract? What about?

GAVIN
I don't know. Vows. Like any other marriage. Like. I will be with you, through health... and sickness.



He kneels beside the bed and feeds her a spoonful of soup.

GAVIN
I will never share our union with another woman.
Mental... physical, spiritual...

LINDA
Spiritual?

GAVIN
Well, our love. I will be faithful, in other words.

LINDA
What's mine is yours? What's yours is mine?
(pause)
We will share this house... this property... you and I?
Husband and wife?

GAVIN nods and smiles.

LINDA

So if a crime was committed against it... from a cracked window to a... a broken ax handle? It would be as much concern to me as to you?

GAVIN

Why would you want to be concerned?

LINDA

What if you were killed? Or injured? Who would speak for you? Other than your wife. Who would bring forth complaint in court? Who would protect the house and yard in your absence?

(pause)

Get some paper, darling. We'll draw it up.

GAVIN

It's a little late.

LINDA

Give me your hand then.

(reciting)

I, Gavin Andre Cook... philosopher, carpenter, maker of e-Cigarettes... do solemnly swear that...

(pause)

What? Cold feet?

(pause)

You are a typical man.

GAVIN

No. Your concerns are the masculine ones.

LINDA

Masculine? You brought it up.

GAVIN

I brought up love. Devotion. But not property.

LINDA

A typical man.

(pause)

William...

GAVIN

(interrupting)

What about *William*? William signed a contract knowing it meant nothing.

LINDA

Our marriage?

GAVIN

Yes.

LINDA

"Meant nothing"? Not according to the United States.

GAVIN

Yes. But so what. He had no possessions according to your United States. No money. He could cheat on you, ignore you. What ever he wanted. It was pointless.

LINDA
A piece of paper.

GAVIN
If you died, he might have inherited your home. Your money. But his property--from his land to the littlest item--would never be yours. Because we never acknowledged your marriage. We can't. You're not a citizen. I don't want to lie to you.

LINDA
Then why did you bring it up.

GAVIN
Because I love you.

LINDA
(whispers)
Or 'cause you're a romantic...

GAVIN
But do you love me less?

LINDA
As a person? No. I love you more each day.
Circumstantially? Yes. We're in an unfortunate position.

GAVIN
Unfortunate?

LINDA
Our love has no protection. But we must try not take it personally. Right?

GAVIN hangs his head. LINDA reaches for his hand.

LINDA
I like it here.

GAVIN
You can stay here as long as you want. Use anything of mine. For all eternity. You have my word.

She kisses his cheek.

LINDA
There's something I haven't told you. I forgot... Jane is leaving when her lease is up. She's starting a business in Denver.

GAVIN
She... ? Why are you telling me this now?

LINDA shrugs, and continues eating.



SCENE 77. BENOIT'S CABIN - DAY

BENOIT puffs his pipe by the kitchen window, watching. A knock on the door.

BENOIT

Please don't knock while you're working here! Here, have some nettle tea. Do you good.

EXECUTIONER

Thank you, Mr. Goubeaux.

EXECUTIONER enters holding a bucket of nails and hammer.

BENOIT

Look at that. Another of Gavin's floozies?

EXECUTIONER joins BENOIT at the window. LINDA walks down the road.

EXECUTIONER

Naw, that's the same one. Linda.

BENOIT

Linda, William's widow? That's interesting. She was studying you on the roof for quite some time. At first I thought she was impressed with your workmanship... but it seems she was waiting for you to leave. Can you explain this?

EXECUTIONER

No.

BENOIT

Strange.

EXECUTIONER

She slept in my bed yesterday.

BENOIT
So it's she that's the promiscuous one!

EXECUTIONER
No. She just slept. I found her when I got home.

BENOIT
Ahh, then. She must be confused.

EXECUTIONER
Gavin should lay some ground rules. She could get hurt.

BENOIT
(excited squeal)
Oooo!

EXECUTIONER
Lay out the terrain. Is what I mean.

BENOIT
Yes, yes, I know exactly what you mean. But it used to be her husband's house. Do you know that of course.

(pause)

And the tuba.

(pause)

And the roof... this was her husband's job... before it was Gavin's... before it was yours. What does she think? He's gone yet these things will remain... open? An empty cabin? An empty heart? No. Every hole unfilled means another... somewhere else... fulfilled. From the empty lungs of a young man to the rusted pipes of an old tuba; from the barrel of a gun to the fresh wound of a deer... an empty forest to a full, roaring fire...

EXECUTIONER
And smoke to the starry skies.

BENOIT
To acid rain! Yes! Forget ground rules. Gavin should teach her universal law!

(pause)

But I appreciate your presence. We all do. Will I see you tomorrow?

EXECUTIONER
On the dot, Mr. Goubeaux.

BENOIT
Glad of it. Between you and me, you're the best man who's had a go at this roof. Even better than Rupert. And I loved Rupert. Deeply. There's a hole in my heart that will never be filled.

EXECUTIONER
I'm sure Rupert was a good worker.

BENOIT
You're a good man.



SCENE 78. WOODLAND - DAY

MATTHEW, RICHARD, TIMOTHY and JULIA race toboggans down an icy hill.
KELLY is flag man at the bottom.

KELLY
Wait...
(shouting)
You're on private property!

A stranger has appeared at the top of the hill.

LINDA
No, it's me! Linda!

MATT
Hallo-o-o-o-o-o! Linda! Helloo-o-o-o-o-o!

All start doing the Seinfeld call, beckoning her over. LINDA bounds happily through the snow, and they crowd around her.

MATT
Your hair, Linda!

RICH
Where have you been?

LINDA
I've been a little sick.

TIM
Wait, sick?

LINDA
Alcohol poisoning. But I'm better now.

MATT
Why would you do that to your hair? Your lovely locks!

JULIA
I like your haircut.

LINDA
It's my natural color.

MATT
Yes, but the painting, Linda! The glorious nude that you promised... ?

JULIA
I like it, Linda. You look like a little boy.

MATTHEW sighs and sucks his e-cigarette.

KELLY
Come now. We've winners and losers to make before dinner. Which team will you be on, Linda?

JULIA
Be on our team!

They clamor up the hill. MATTHEW hangs back for a while, studying LINDA. Then running to catch up, he yanks LINDA's cuff, toppling her to the snow.

JULIA
Sly dog, Matthew!

KELLY
Base betrayer!

They tackle him, and the big human pile slides down the hill. Throwing snowballs, LINDA turns and her smile drops. EXECUTIONER has arrived with a rifle slung over shoulder.

MATT
Who goes there!?
(pause)
I'm joking!

They all breath heavily, waiting for EXECUTIONER to speak. He does not speak.

RICH
Um, off for the hunt?

MATT
We saw a herd of deer run up that way 'bout an hour ago. A big male amongst them...

EXECUTIONER
Oh, yeah?

Another silence. JULIA snickers.

EXECUTIONER
How those sleds workin' out for you?

MATT
Great! Wonderful! Thanks again.

EXECUTIONER
Good to hear it, buddy.

He turns and heads into the woods.

MATT
(low)
He's a strange man. A bit stupid.

JULIA
Hey, that's not nice. Why doesn't he ever hang out with us?

RICH
(whispering)
He might be *sick*, Julia.

SCENE 79. JEFFREY'S TRAILER - NIGHT

KELLY and JULIA sit on a love seat, sipping mulled wine and whispering sweet nothings. Vaping, MATTHEW circles JEFFREY who studies LINDA's face as she poses on a stool.

MATT
So can it be done, Jeffrey?

JEFF
Yes. Yes, I think so. A little puffy, but... luckily, we have the sketches.

MATT
She's been sick, Jeffrey. That's why she stayed away. Nothing against us.

JEFF
Hmm. Have you seen a doctor?

LINDA
It was alcohol poisoning.

JEFF
Oh. Good.

MATT
Have you heard, Linda, I am embarking on my first concerto? A tuba concerto!

LINDA
Wow.

MATT
And Kelly here is writing an epic. His first as well.

LINDA

Lot of free time these days, huh?

MATT

It appears so. But we won't squander it, Linda. We plan on holding salon style events in the lodge. Perhaps you can convince Ms. Otis to hang Jeffrey's paintings on the wall? We don't smoke anymore, so...

LINDA

Oh, that's no problem. Jane is moving to Denver. She...

The men go silent.

JULIA

Isn't that good news?

KELLY

No, my love. Your town government demands property taxes to pay for your high school! We must have rent, I'm afraid. And Jane, well... she's a flexible tenant.

JEFF

Linda! Would you have any use for the lodge?

LINDA

To rent it?

MATT

Good thinking, Jeffrey. Start a business or...

LINDA

Ahhh.

(pause)

No can do... I've given my money away.

MATT

You've... *given*... your money away?!

She nods. They stare at each other in wonderment.

MATT

To whom?

LINDA

To charity. A charity for homeless people... kids.

JEFF

How much money was it?

LINDA

Around a million. Including the house, which is worth a half mil...

Audible gasping, followed by a heavy silence.

JULIA

That's amazing, Linda!



SCENE 80. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

EXECUTIONER paces about GAVIN's mailbox, a large envelope in hand. LINDA appears.

EXECUTIONER
Good evening Ms. Schaller. Is Gavin due soon?

LINDA looks petrified.

EXECUTIONER
What's wrong?

LINDA
N-nothing. He's not... in there?
(pause)
No. Then I don't know.

EXECUTIONER nods and gazes out into the darkness. LINDA hurries into the cabin, locking the door behind her.

SCENE 81. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

Loud banging on door.

GAVIN
Open the door! Open the door!! Linda! Are you in there??

LINDA dashes to the window. GAVIN is stomping outside, clutching EXECUTIONER's envelope and a package. She lets him in.

GAVIN
Argh! It's freezing! Why would you lock this door?

LINDA
Come here... here. I'm sorry, I'm sorry! Come here!

She holds him, warming him, then takes the package.

LINDA
What is this?

GAVIN
Livers and kidneys. I ordered them for you. You should eat them. I think you're anemic.
(shivers)
Brrr! You're so warm! Here, let's make a...

LINDA
What's in the envelope?

GAVIN
I don't know.

LINDA
It must be important. He was pacing at the mailbox like a Roman sentry waiting to deliver it.

GAVIN
(chuckling)
His lessons, I presume. Pages and pages of tedious... the ramblings of a sycophantic nitpicker.

LINDA
Is he a good student?

GAVIN gathers kindling to make a fire.

GAVIN
No. He's an ox. A big dumb ox. Of course, Aquinas was known as the ox. But he had... creativity.

LINDA
(softly)
I had a dream. We thought he might be sick. But he was sick. Like... "sick" sick, Gavin. Really, really sick.
(pause)
You don't see it? Am I insane?

GAVIN
No. He's done horrible things.
(sighs)
Sometimes I wish he would return to his mountain cabin. I wouldn't lift a finger to stop him. But why are you so concerned?

LINDA
Could you?

GAVIN
Could I what? Send him home? He hasn't broken any contracts, and I suspect he won't... any time soon. Or ever. He's perfect. Like an ox.

LINDA
No. Could you lift a finger. Are you... capable. He's huge.

GAVIN
Just don't enter his property. You know the borders?

LINDA
Why would I want to?

GAVIN
Have you been?

LINDA
(offended)
No?

GAVIN
Good.

The fire having caught, he stands and holds her.

LINDA
Gavin. I feel guilty.
(pause)
About William.

GAVIN
Why?

LINDA
Because... I used to mock him. I used to belittle him. Toy with him. And... he was so small... like a miniature man. Did you know that before he died, I closed down our joint account... just to teach him a lesson? That's the money I gave it to you.
(pause)
And now he's dead.

GAVIN
Do you miss him?

LINDA
No. But I feel. I feel somehow...

GAVIN
You've done nothing. Do you want to go hunting tomorrow?

LINDA nods.

GAVIN
(upbeat)
Okay. But I must warn you. I'm not the best shot.

LINDA
Can we have some wine tonight?

GAVIN
There isn't much.

LINDA
Just one drop? By the fire.

GAVIN
If that's all the luxury you crave, then yes.

SCENE 82. WOODLAND - DAY

Echoing gunshot. LINDA limply drops the rifle. GAVIN stands beside, watching carefully.

LINDA
Honey, I...

GAVIN
Here. Look.

He takes LINDA's index finger and holds it in front of her eyes.

GAVIN
Close your left eye. Now the right.

LINDA
Huh.

GAVIN
If it doesn't move, it's not your shooting eye.

LINDA
So... right eye... is my shooting eye. I was aiming with the wrong one.

GAVIN
Good. Try again.

She kisses him on the forehead, then aims the rifle.

SCENE 83. WOODLAND - DAY

Echoing gunshot. MATTHEW, JEFFREY and RICHARD walk down a path, chatting and vaping. GAVIN and LINDA spill from the woods, playfully wrestling. The men look annoyed. GAVIN stops.

LINDA
Hi de ho, boys! Supper's on! Look!

She swings a dead squirrel by its tail.

JEFF
Mr. Cook. May we speak with you for a moment?

GAVIN
Right now?

JEFF
You've got time before dinner.

GAVIN nods. He kisses LINDA, then walks over to them. LINDA smiles, then frowns.

SCENE 84. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

Alone, LINDA paces the shadowy interior. She studies GAVIN's secondhand scientific equipment on his workbench. Nearby is the envelope dropped off by EXECUTIONER. Opening it, LINDA finds a topographical map of WILLIAM's property; the outline of her dead husband's property. There's a note clipped to the front that that reads, "For LINDA."

SCENE 85. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

GAVIN enters. He finds LINDA in the study, sleeping in his chair. Some packages from store-bought e-cigarettes are on the desk. He quickly throws them to the fire. Then he sees the topographical map. LINDA opens her eyes.

GAVIN
I think it would be wise of you to go home.

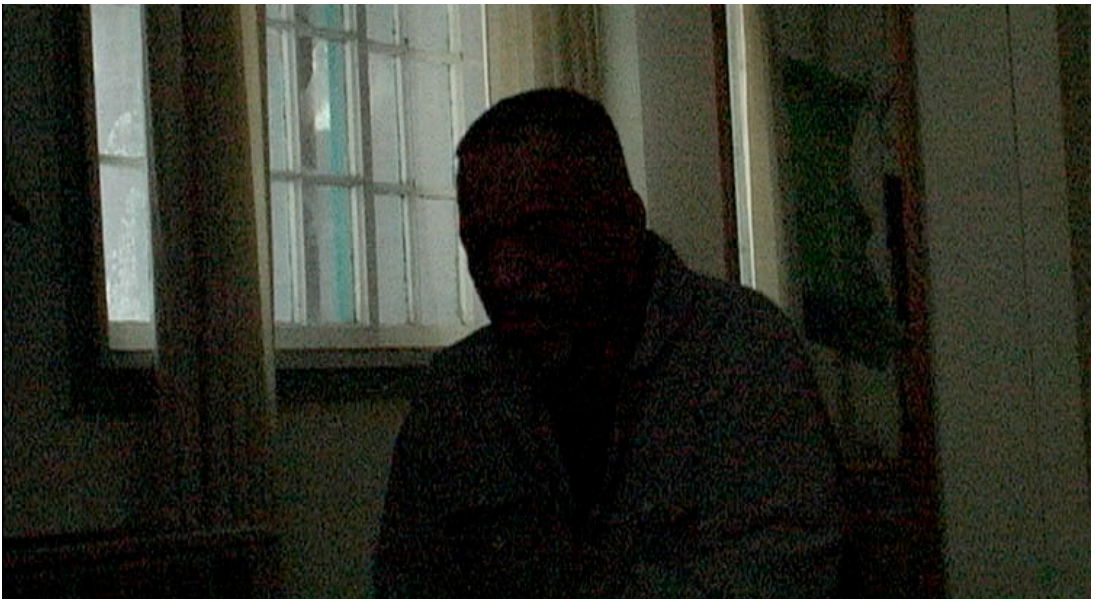
LINDA
I have no home.

GAVIN
(sighing)
Linda, Linda, Linda.

LINDA
What did they say about me?

GAVIN
You can't hunt.

LINDA
But I was in your care.



GAVIN
So.

LINDA
So?

GAVIN
I can't hunt.

LINDA
But you can. You're free.

GAVIN
Everyone of us has signed with him for meat. For wood.
We impede his ability to provide these things by fooling
around. All the signatories agree.

LINDA
We're not fooling around! I'm learning and you're
teaching.
(pause)
Did he... who decided this... ?

GAVIN
You should go home, Linda.

LINDA
I don't want to leave. I have no home.

GAVIN
Because you stupidly gave away your home! Go get a job.
Rent an apartment. Live with your parents. Go...

He stops, noticing LINDA is stroking the lines of the map.

GAVIN
Because you love him.
(pause)
You do. But he's dead. He's gone. There's nothing here.

LINDA
I don't love him.

GAVIN
What?

LINDA
(crying)
I don't. I never did. Why do you assume... that I love
this man... when I've said over and over that I hated
him!

GAVIN
You're crying.

LINDA
I don't love anyone.

GAVIN
Is that why you're crying?

LINDA
Ha ha ha!

GAVIN
Why are you crying?

LINDA
Because... I feel sick to my stomach.

GAVIN
Because you miss him.

LINDA
Because I feel guilty.

GAVIN smiles. He wipes the tears from her cheek.

LINDA
That is my fucking house!
She grabs the map and waves it in his face.

LINDA
This is my fucking... house!!!

GAVIN
Shhhh! Linda. Please.

LINDA
What? What?

GAVIN
Please... keep it down.

LINDA
You're scared?? Why don't you just do what you want to do! If you're free! Are you not free?? If you're not guilty. If you're not a slave!!

GAVIN
I am free.

LINDA
No you're not. You're like me. You're like my husband. You will never fulfill your desires...

GAVIN
Because I won't have sexual intercourse with you? Is that what this is about?

LINDA
Because you can't even take care of yourself! What happened, Mr. Cook? You used to be so active! Chopping wood, fixing stuff... a real man, ha ha! And now you buy meat... you wait for your weekly delivery. What's next, he gonna spoon-feed you mashed squash... while you take a *shit??*

GAVIN
Shut up... !

LINDA
Or would you rather... take my truck down to the grocery store? Buy yourself a roasted chicken? With my fucking money!!

GAVIN
Shut *up!!*

GAVIN suddenly grabs her, knocking over his chair.

LINDA
(struggling)
Or did you run out after all your trips to the mall... to buy your fucking *e-cigarettes!*

GAVIN
Quiet!!



SCENE 86. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - NIGHT

EXECUTIONER rewinds an old cassette player. MATTHEW's tuba rests on his lap. He's practicing.

LINDA
(distant echo)
You tyrant!

Banging, crashing, sobbing in distance. EXECUTIONER thinks for a while. He presses play, then brings the tuba to his lips.

MATT
(voice on cassette tape)
Practice track. Two lieder.

Piano accompaniment begins. With a focused expression, EXECUTIONER plays along to the mournful melody, to his best ability.

ACT IV

SCENE 87. A CLEARING IN THE FOREST - DAY

KELLY waits for someone. The day is unusually warm. His e-cigarette is beeping: out of power. He moves on with a sigh.

SCENE 88. MEETING LODGE - NIGHT

The meeting is over. The men file out to the road. GAVIN alone remains, looking glum.



SCENE 89. JEFFREY'S STUDIO - DAY

In her fur coat with little beneath, LINDA poses in a chair as JEFFREY works a large canvas. He grumbles, erasing his mistakes.

JEFF
Are you cold, Linda? Would you like me to add some wood?

LINDA
No, I'm fine. I'm comfortable.
(pause)
Jeffrey. What are all these meetings about?

JEFF

Oh. The meetings are about meetings. If you can believe it. As was expected, the new tenant refuses to let us use the lodge to run affairs of state. A most inflexible man.

(pause)

What was that... try for the expression you made at Matthew's... when we first met. Linda makes a face:

LINDA

This? So where will you hold meetings?

JEFF

It was a bit more playful.

LINDA

Playful?

JEFF

Seductive.

LINDA slits her eyes and purses her lips.

JEFF

I'd rather not have any meetings, but... hmm, no. You look malicious. Downright malicious.

(sighs)

JEFFREY stands and paces, vaping his e-cig.

LINDA

Maybe I'm just not pretty anymore...

JEFF

No, it's... well. Matthew insists on seeing the "pre-tableau Linda." And it's hard to piecemeal it together. The body's already perfectly drawn. To add your new face, your long hair, that singular expression you dawned that day...

(sighs)

A bric-à-brac lady. Why did you ever leave us?

LINDA

It's hard living with Gavin.

JEFF

Yes, I know first hand what it's like bunking with that austere man.

LINDA

Are we taking a break?

JEFF

Tell me, Linda. What does he do all day? Is he... in-and-out?

LINDA

Hmm?

JEFF
Does he go away often? Errands?
(pause)
Well?

LINDA
I don't know.

JEFF
But you live with him! Like husband and wife! You've
seen him... tinkering away at these devices?

JEFFREY flamboyantly proffers the e-cigarette.

LINDA
Why do you ask?

JEFF
Just curious, my dear. Well. Our time is up. You are
released from custody!

LINDA
When should I... ?

JEFF
No, no, no. I think I'll attempt it from memory. There's
no use going about like this. Wasting your valuable
time. Memory is complete. Memory is eternal. Yes. You
are free to go, Ms. Schaller. "Free as a bird," I should
say!



SCENE 90. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

Bell rings. LINDA approaches the cabin and slow. EXECUTIONER is at GAVIN's mailbox, ringing the bell. Next to him is a large wooden cart on skis, filled with his possessions.

LINDA
Can... I help you with something?

EXECUTIONER
Naw. I need to speak to him in private. Do you know when he'll be back?

LINDA
I never know. He's been going away a lot. Lately.
(pause)
He's given me the authority to allow people in and out of his property.
(pause)
Would you like to wait on our porch?

EXECUTIONER pulls a small package from the cart.

EXECUTIONER
I was gonna give this to him. Some livers and kidneys.

LINDA
Gavin cancelled his game contract with you.

EXECUTIONER
Yes. He did. But... I've heard you've been sick. Anemia or something?

LINDA
Thank you. You can put it in the snow there.

LINDA disappears into the house. EXECUTIONER takes a seat on a stone and watches the road.

SCENE 91. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

LINDA wakes from a nap. Yawning, she adds wood to the fire. Visible outside is EXECUTIONER just sitting like a statue, or a dog. LINDA can't help but smile. She opens the door.

LINDA
I was just about to put on some tea. Would you like some?

EXECUTIONER
Oh.
(pause)
Sure. If you don't mind.

He turns back to the road.

LINDA
Come in. It's getting windy.

A FEW MOMENTS LATER -

EXECUTIONER has made himself at home. He talks loudly at the kitchen table.

EXECUTIONER
You could hit it on the leg or... it's pretty hard to kill it. An untrained hunter. The thing could be runnin' around the woods for days. You'll never find it. And...

LINDA
(pours tea)
So this was Jeffrey's idea?

EXECUTIONER
Jeffrey's and Matthew's and Timothy's. I just said, "I hope she's got good aim... or else, the herds will get skittish." Plus the sound and all.

LINDA
Will you teach me so that doesn't happen?

EXECUTIONER
(sipping tea)
But my intention was never to monopolize the forest. For game... or wood... or anything. It's just... the way things turned out.

LINDA
What did they expect. You are the strongest man here. My husband was in the same predicament... and he was half your size. Youth, I guess.
(pause)
What?

EXECUTIONER is gazing around the cabin.

EXECUTIONER
It's just... I've never been on Mr. Cook's property before. It's a pretty nice place he's got here.
(pause)
Why do you want to learn how to hunt so bad? Mr. Cook...

LINDA
(mocking)
Mr. Cook, Mr. Cook! Ha ha ha.

EXECUTIONER
Doesn't he take care of you?

LINDA
Haven't you heard us arguing? And it's just been getting worse and worse.
(pause)
I'm sorry if it...

EXECUTIONER
No. I'm sorry.

LINDA
Ug. The first few days were like heaven. And now, pfft, I gave everything away for those few days... I'm sure you heard about my house... and my "fortune." You think I'm stupid, huh?

EXECUTIONER
I did the same thing.

LINDA
You did?

EXECUTIONER
I gave away the cabin I built with my own hands.

LINDA
Yes, but I have nothing.

EXECUTIONER
No money at all?



LINDA suddenly exits to the bedroom, and a moment later returns with the envelope of cash, tossing it on the table.

LINDA
All I have is in here. It was around four grand and now it's down to... I dunno... forty dollars? And I haven't even spent a penny!

EXECUTIONER shrugs.

LINDA
What? What's your problem? Do you think I'm lying?

EXECUTIONER

Gavin. He made those e-cigarettes, right? By his own skills... and... his own knowledge and...

(pause)

He didn't buy them. Right?

Silence.

LINDA

No. Of course not.

EXECUTIONER

I appreciate your honesty. And I'm sorry about your situation.

LINDA

Thank you. I can tell you respect him a great deal.

EXECUTIONER rises.

EXECUTIONER

Will you give him this letter? Please do not open it.

LINDA

Yes.

EXECUTIONER

Thank you. I hope you resolve this marital dispute.

LINDA

So when can we hunt?

EXECUTIONER

Whenever.

Exit EXECUTIONER.

SCENE 92. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

GAVIN enters and hangs his coat.

LINDA

A man dropped off a letter for you today. I want you to read it out loud so I can hear it.

GAVIN

A man?

LINDA

Yes. It's on the coffee table.

GAVIN

Why don't you come out here.

LINDA

Because I'm tired and sick. Did you find it?

GAVIN picks up the letter.

GAVIN

Did he come by here?

LINDA
Would that bother you?

GAVIN
I don't want him in my house. He's sick.

LINDA
I invited him. We had tea, Gavin.

GAVIN opens the letter and scans it:

GAVIN
Ugh, his writing repulses me so. It's like...

LINDA
Read it to me. Out loud.

GAVIN
This is my business, Linda.

LINDA
It's my money.

GAVIN tries the bedroom door. It's locked. LINDA has locked herself in.

LINDA
I want to go to sleep. Read it now.

GAVIN sighs. He reads, facing the locked door.

GAVIN
"My Beloved Statesmen... "
(pause, mocking)
And *Linda*...
(rushed, sarcastic manner)
"My Beloved Statesmen. Two nights ago, I could not help overhearing a meeting which circulated the activities of my most esteemed teacher, Mr. Gavin Cook. If this was intended to be a private meeting, I apologize, but with the windows shut and the curtains drawn, your voices were still audible. And for good reason! You were upset. Scared. And torn about important issues. But I believe that whether private or not, I will become involved in the situation in some way. Having been, as I was surprised to discover the only citizen to spend any time with the accused man...
(pause)
... since the indoctrination of his groundbreaking innovation into our state, many of you have questioned casually whether I have any information which might weigh on your contracts with Mr. Cook.
(pause)

Let me express in these words most explicitly that the nature of our relationship has been up to this point a purely intellectual one. I have never spoken to him about his private life. His work in both chemistry and electronics have been as much a mystery to me as to the rest of the citizenry. But having gotten to know the accused, throughout this long and glorious winter, I am confident his intelligence and skill would more than suffice to bear such wondrous, and as I have only heard, pleasurable, fruit. More importantly, I have learned by and with him that if intelligence is a just appreciation of reality, and reality is all there is, then an intelligent man must be honest about what there is, from the stars to his feelings.

(pause, sigh)

It only follows that I believe he has not used American currency in his line of production because I believe him to be intelligent. But still, an investigation and a trial--if evidence warrants--must take place.

(pause)

Gavin would be happy to prove to his contractual signatories that his services were rendered most just. I'm sure of this. However... "

(pause, sigh)

In the bedroom, LINDA sits on the bed, staring out the window. Her eyes are wet. She has been crying. As GAVIN reads, she almost seems to be mouthing the words.

GAVIN

"... beyond my opinions, my views on the matter are irrelevant. I write to you, dear friends, because the impassioned voices which have awoken me the past nights have demonstrated that if this meeting is to take place, it must be conducted in an interior space both heated and legally communal so as not to indebt the citizenry to a single citizen.

(pause)

Knowing that I am the only citizen not contractually invested in the Benoit tobacco, I am signing my property to the state for the duration of the trial of Mr. Cook. It will again be a communal space, owned by all until Gavin is exonerated or found guilty, or until the weather improves. As for myself, I will be camping in the cowshed built by Rupert at the outskirts of our woodland."

LINDA clenches her fist. She cries hard now, but stifles it.

GAVIN

"To those of you who are worried about my departure for valid, personal and legal reasons, be assured. Next to your mailboxes, I have left any products and services which will see their due date over the next few weeks. As to Mr. Goubeaux's roof, it is fully insulated and protected by a tarp. The shingles have been cut and drilled. I will apply them upon my return, which will precede the first day of spring with enough time to complete the job."

(sigh, pause)

Linda. You cannot...

LINDA
(crying)
Is that it? Is there more?

GAVIN
(rushed reading)
"Yours by the bonds of love and justice, An Inquisitive
Man." Please, Linda, open this door...

GAVIN
(banging on door)
Linda! Please. Let me into my room! Please!!



SCENE 93. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - NIGHT

Dice roll. MATTHEW, TIMOTHY and RICHARD sit around a monopoly board. Per the EXECUTIONER's will, the cabin has been returned to a communal space.

MATT

I will wager you... a pear, Timothy, they've copulated. Possibly even by the old catholic method of protection!

TIM

(rolling dice)

Drat!

RICH

Which is?

MATT

Isn't it... after her period? Or, no, before. Yes, directly preceding it?

TIM

With your eyes open. At midnight. All saints day. Wearing rain boots...

RICH

I wonder, though, Can't you... er... dip it in for a few, then pull it out, clean it off... ?

MATT

Are you mad? I've looked into this. You know we have a fluid known as pre-ejaculate, eh! And within a drop of this... substance, is contained... 10 million sperm at least, each hungry for a chance at... *life!*

TIM

Then I hope she has enough money left over to afford birth control.

MATT

Ha. Gave it away. Yes, indeed.

RICH

Kelly and I walked by her mansion last week on our way to the pond. A jungle gym on the front lawn, teeming with sickly-looking children, bald and gaunt... some in wheelchairs. It was quite sad.

Dice roll.

MATT

Ahhh! Park Place! You are finally mine! And you, Timothy?

RICH

He's still in jail, Matthew.

MATT

Yes. Such is life. Such is life.

SCENE 94. WOODLAND - DAY

EXECUTIONER sits on a bucket at the entrance of a ramshackle cowshed, writing in a notebook. At his feet is a small fire heating a camping kettle. Distant gunshot. He looks up.



SCENE 95 . WOODLAND - DAY

Standing on a high ledge, EXECUTIONER gazes across a valley streamed with power lines. In the distance, LINDA checks on her shooting targets. She is out practicing. After a moment, she turns and waves. EXECUTIONER approaches.

LINDA
I have... good news!

EXECUTIONER
Good news?

LINDA
The trial is over! You can come back! Gavin is innocent!
Are you surprised?

EXECUTIONER
(sighs)
I am relieved. It's all over for him.

LINDA
Yes. There was a minor investigation. Minor. Aaaand...
he proved he made the cigarettes. Goubeaux dropped the
charges. Everyone's pretty happy.
(pause)
So you can come back.

LINDA holds up a target.

LINDA
Notice anything?

EXECUTIONER
No?

LINDA
(laughs)
That's cause I can't hit it!

EXECUTIONER
Would you like some tea, Ms. Schaller? Pine needle tea?
(pause)
Like the Indians did.

SCENE 96. WOODLAND - DAY

A little bit later. LINDA sits with EXECUTIONER at the cowshed. He pours her tea.

LINDA
Did Rupert build this shed? I can tell it was nice at
one time.
(pause)
It's peaceful here. Are you getting a lot of writing
done?

EXECUTIONER
Um... yeah. Mostly going over old stuff.

LINDA
I've always wondered what it would be like to write
something. I was one of those girls... in college...
who'd get one of the nerdy guys to write my papers for
me. With, uh, veiled promises of sex...

EXECUTIONER
And did you?

LINDA

Did I what? Deliver? No, ha ha. And now... well, I pay the price. Because I'm mystified by a lot of things. I really am.

EXECUTIONER

Ms. Schaller. I've wanted to talk to you about something. For a while, now.

LINDA

(suddenly hesitant)

What?

EXECUTIONER

It's more of this... this feeling I owe you an apology. I've been thinking about how you must feel. Trapped? And stuck... with nowhere to go. With Gavin, I mean.

LINDA

But that's my business.

EXECUTIONER

I guess it is.

(pause)

Then maybe it's just a selfish thing... for me... but I've felt ashamed for a long time. Basically... something tells me that if I had never asked for money in the first place... the three thousand five hundred and six dollars and ninety-nine cents?

LINDA nods.

EXECUTIONER

... they would've never approached you for the money. And you wouldn't be stuck here. You're unhappy. And you're sick.

LINDA

It's not your fault.

EXECUTIONER

But you can go... and go to the doctor. You can go on welfare. You're not forced...

LINDA

No. That is a selfish way of looking at it. I'm here by choice. I don't want to go on welfare. Or pay taxes. Or get a job. This was an intentional choice. Maybe a bad choice. But still, an intentional choice.

(pause)

Are you here by choice?

EXECUTIONER

Choice driven by circumstance. It's complicated.

LINDA

Well. I can relate.

(pause)

Does it have to do with money?

EXECUTIONER

I always did things for money. People would look at me and say, he can do many things. Things that take skill. And things that bother other people. Like killing anyone. Give him money, money. But none of those people respected me. None of them wanted me to be free. None of them cared... if I died... without ever having lived. Without ever having tasted a... a single drop of water. Without ever having felt anything. Grief. Joy. Love? Until I met Gavin.

LINDA

Remember the night of the tableaux?

EXECUTIONER

Yes. That's when I knew. I knew I made the right choice. Whether by circumstance. Or by free will. It was the right choice.

LINDA

(low)

I had a dream about you that night. You were so... you were full of dark energy. So full of pain!

He suddenly turns to her with wide eyes.

LINDA

You are sick!

He tries to speak but cannot. LINDA watches him, transfixed:

LINDA

I'm sorry. Are you dying?

EXECUTIONER

I feel no empathy for anyone or anything. I am a sociopath.

(pause)

Ever since I was little, I...

(pause)

I used to think I was an... an alien, it's true, Linda! Do you know what a reptilian is?

LINDA

(softly)

I think so.

EXECUTIONER

A doctor told me, "No. You're just... you just gotta mental disorder, buddy. Sorry."

(pause)

"Sorry. Thus is life." Ha ha. Shit.

LINDA

Were you going to get treatment with my money?

EXECUTIONER

Oh no. I divided my yearly salary at Blackwater by twenty-two. The money represented my fee per kill. Just a fee. It meant absolutely nothing.

LINDA stifles a groan. She tries to laugh it off.

LINDA
Ha. Wow. You're too honest.

EXECUTIONER begins weeping. LINDA pulls the envelope of cash from her pocket:

LINDA
Can you hold on this for me. Before Gavin takes it all. He's innocent... but I don't trust him.

EXECUTIONER
(choked up)
Gavin... has changed.

LINDA
Yes.

EXECUTIONER
He doesn't want you to be free.

LINDA
(pause)
Yes.

EXECUTIONER
Linda. Linda! I read that boy Rusty Blackstone was acquitted. I read they saw... a cop and his wife saw him at a McDonalds miles away! At the T.O.D.

LINDA
T.O.D.?

EXECUTIONER
Time of death.

LINDA
No?

EXECUTIONER
... and he was at a rave the whole rest of the night, and there were security cameras and...

LINDA
No...

EXECUTIONER
I must confess.

LINDA
No.

EXECUTIONER
I must. I want to. There's an empty jail cell down there, Linda, it's got my name on it...

LINDA
They'll find someone to fill it.

She reaches out and holds his hand.

EXECUTIONER

No. There's a right man. And a wrong man...

LINDA

Please don't. You don't understand... what you've done.
You don't understand! You're not the right man...

EXECUTIONER

I am! I want to. I want to! I should be killed!

LINDA

But you're innocent.

EXECUTIONER

But I did it. I'm the man who killed William! Hired for
money! I did it, I did it!!

LINDA

But you're not responsible! You're guilty only... only
of circumstance. You were hired! You're not responsible!

EXECUTIONER stares at the roof of Rupert's cowshed, then breaks
down, weeping pathetically.

EXECUTIONER

(crying)

I took the money... I always take money! I am
responsible, I am always responsible!

LINDA

(gently)

You're not responsible, you're not responsible...
someone *else* is... someone else is responsible... !



SCENE 97. BENOIT'S CABIN - NIGHT

Inside, BENOIT and GAVIN engage a heated argument, uncharacteristic and off-the-record. BENOIT accuses GAVIN of a new deceit: using only water in the latest batch of e-cigarettes. No nicotine at all. GAVIN loses his temper.

SCENE 98. MATTHEW'S CABIN - NIGHT

Costumed in a nightcap and gown, MATTHEW closes his curtains. He hurries to a large painting, freshly unwrapped and hung above his luxuriant bed. Hopping under the covers, he pulls out his e-cigarette and vapes while stroking his crotch, staring at the image before him, the portrait of LINDA...

After a while, he knits his brow. He jumps up for a closer look:

MATT
No... *no*... !

His expression sours to a man's who has just been swindled.

MATT
(Like Seinfeld's "Newman!")
Dipple!!!

SCENE 99. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

LINDA lies in bed, a drugged look on her face. Rushed footsteps, front door slams. She continues moving her hand beneath the sheets.

GAVIN
Motherfucker! Mother... *fucker!* Linda! How much is your truck worth?

LINDA
I don't know.

GAVIN
Where is it?

LINDA
I don't know?

GAVIN
Linda! If I don't get more e-cigarettes... or tobacco... or propylene glycol! Do you know what propylene glycol is? It dilutes it, it dilutes... that *poison!!*

LINDA
Why don't you just quit? Why don't you all quit??

In the other room, something is thrown.

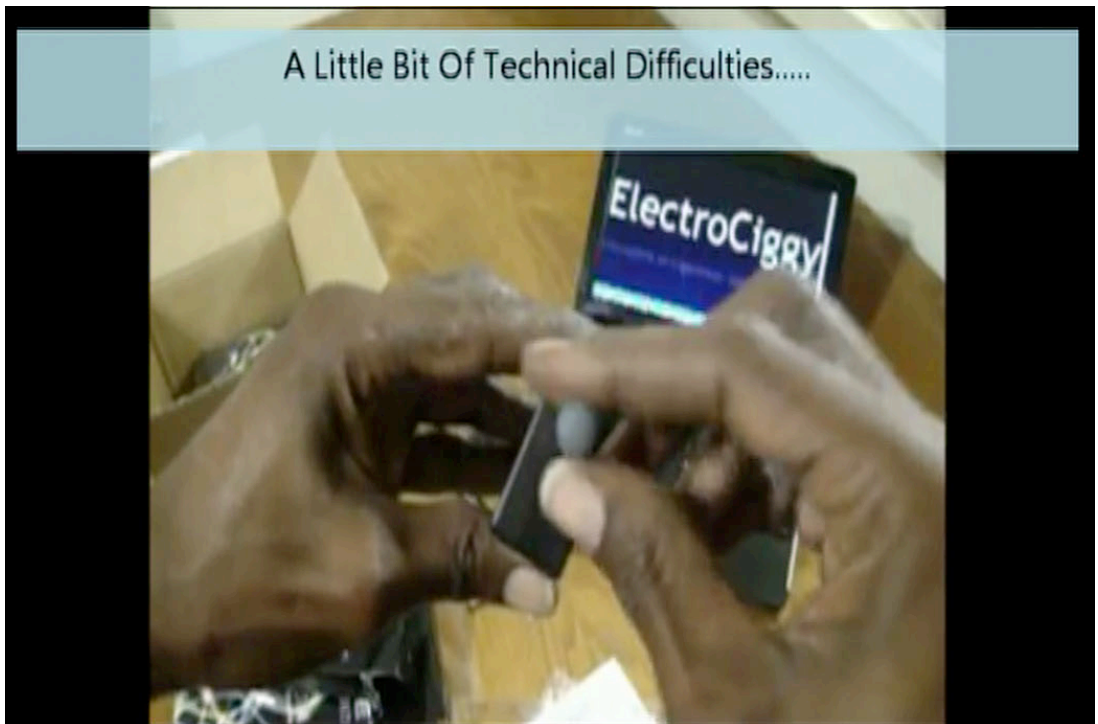
GAVIN
I will quit! I can quit! They can quit! But I cannot *force* them to quit! I signed... a contract... my name to a contract which promises six months of e-cigarettes. If I do not... if I do not keep them smoking, Goubeaux will bring me to court!

LINDA
I don't understand you.

GAVIN
Goubeaux relies upon their addiction! Their need... for tobacco! Intervention on my part is an act of force!

Something else is thrown in anger.

LINDA
Well. You have a problem.



GAVIN dashes into the bedroom. He gropes for her hand. It is wet.

GAVIN
Linda. Linda, Linda! Please. I would do anything for you!

LINDA
No. You would not.

GAVIN
I would. Do you see my tears? They're for nothing but you.

LINDA
You want my money.

GAVIN
Goubeaux wants money! Fucking... *Goubeaux!*
(takes breath)
I want us to be together.

LINDA
Then marry me. Marry me. You can have anything of mine.

GAVIN
In my dreams! In a perfect world! But the world is so... rigid! Full of walls! I cannot, I just cannot. But we can have... love, love! I want to provide for you and... cook for you and hold you when you get home! And touch you, lick you, kiss you! Make you feel good all over, I want to make you laugh and sing and... I want to fuck you, that's the honest truth! The only truth I know, Linda, let me see your body, please!

LINDA hides her face.

GAVIN
Linda. I *love* you.

LINDA
What if I was pregnant?

GAVIN
You would give birth on our floor!

LINDA
(shuddering)
What if... my child ran... into Matthew's garden and stole his tomatoes? And threw them against his window?? Or crawled into Jeffrey's studio... and got his little hand prints all over those meticulous fastidious paintings...

GAVIN
Jeffrey will lock his door!

LINDA
What if he cried so loud...

GAVIN
Don't do this to me, Linda!

LINDA
... that no one could sleep?? Would you protect him?! Our child? Would you defend him in a court of law??

GAVIN
Yes.

LINDA
Even though he trespassed... even though he vandalized and caused noise pollution?

GAVIN
(choking up)
Yes.

LINDA
... even though he is not yourself!

GAVIN
(about to cry)
Yes!

LINDA
Would you be able to? Would you have the right!
Logically or legally or...
(pause)
I can't be with you. I cannot. I cannot.

SCENE 100. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

Arguing, MATTHEW and JEFFREY approach GAVIN's mailbox.

MATT
And the canned tomatoes, yes. Signed, sealed and...
well, not delivered. Not yet...

JEFF
Well! I'll just have to retrieve my portrait, then.

They ring GAVIN's bell.

MATT
That is fine, Jeffrey, that is fine. Better you do that.

JEFF
Ask Richard what he thinks of it!

MATT
Richard? Ugh. Richard is one man. One man who lost his
eyeglasses in July, I must remind you...

They ring the bell again.

MATT
Where is the man? Sleeping in like a regular teenager?

JEFF
Well, he's been under a lot of stress lately...

The cabin is silent.

MATT
I do hope he got our request...

JEFF
Look here!

Behind the mailbox is a package taped with a note. MATTHEW crouches.

MATT
It's from Gavin.

(reading)
"To Matthew and Jeffrey... "
(pause)
I can hardly read his handwriting, scrawled like a child's!

JEFF
Go on, go on!

MATT
(reading)
"Please find within six months worth of e-cigarettes ... "

JEFF
Six months!

MATT
Prolific, indeed!
(reading)
"... blended with rosemary. I hope you don't mind."
(pause)
Mind? Sounds delightful!
(reading)
"If you could pass them out to the others, I would be grateful. Signed, G. Cook."

JEFF
Well.

MATT
I would have preferred to speak to the man himself... but this will do! Frankly, I'm surprised he turned it around, I'm sorry to admit...

JEFF
Faith, Matthew, faith.

MATT
Ah! So it's faith which guides your hand?

Ignoring him, JEFFREY squint his eyes.

JEFF
Something is amiss. Do you think he's sick? And Ms. Schaller, how is she?

MATT
(softly)
"Alcohol poisoning." Ha.

They gaze at the dark cabin.

JEFF
I don't feel so well myself...

MATT
Are we due for a blizzard?

JEFF
Hmm, perhaps...

ACT V

SCENE 101. A CLEARING IN THE FOREST - DAY

There is no one in the clearing.

SCENE 102. GAVIN'S CABIN - NIGHT

LINDA is gone. GAVIN is alone. He is disheveled, pacing the floor. He looks greasy and wan. He takes a deep swig of red wine, undiluted. He digs for an old tobacco pipe with a bit of half burnt tobacco inside. He lights it, inhaling the stale smoke. He stares at his empty bed.

SCENE 103. GAVIN'S CABIN - DAY

Morning. GAVIN wakes on the floor. He rubs his head and looks around. Wind and snow patter against the window. He clambers to his feet, holding his head. Outside, it is snowing hard. He pulls his old pipe and smokes the tar, the wood. Nothing. There is no tobacco left. LINDA is gone. And there is no tobacco left.



SCENE 104. KELLY'S CABIN - DAY

The hissing of the blizzard muffles everything. Nothing can be seen except white. Underdressed, GAVIN stumbles through the snow until he reaches KELLY's mailbox.

GAVIN
(ringing bell)
Kelly! Kelly!

KELLY
Hello! Gavin! It's been a long time! What brings you to my house?

GAVIN
The speech, Kelly!

KELLY
What??

GAVIN
Aye! The speech, the speech, the speech! Why would you say such ridiculous things! A cup for a spoon, a spoon for a... for a hat?! It cannot be done. *Ridiculous!*

KELLY
Oh, you mean the tableaux.

GAVIN
The roof, Kelly! History in the roof! I've heard some nonsense poetry from your mouth... but this is the most absurd!

KELLY
You do not like my poetry?

GAVIN
No! I do not! I think it's rotten! These golden men... and spoons... they dig into my skull and feed my brains to pigs!

KELLY
Well, that one I didn't write. It was Mr. Goubeaux's.

GAVIN
Monsieur Goubeaux! The weasel! He wafts through every... little hole... like Rupert's halitosis! And he's my boss now, too! Yes! I'm on lunch break...

GAVIN begins to walk away, fading from view.

GAVIN
... I must clock in!

KELLY
But I'm through with poetry!

GAVIN
Through with it? Just like that?

KELLY

Julia is gone... have you heard? She's in her father's custody on the other side of this country. It's a pain that cannot be described through words!

GAVIN

Laying down your quill?! I get my first job and you're going into retirement! When shall we ever meet?!

KELLY

Switching trades, perhaps? Can you see me as a physicist? Or is it too late?

GAVIN

Too late?! Bah! Why not! What's your first project? How about a noose! There's gravity in that invention!!

GAVIN is now invisible, only his voice trails on.

GAVIN

Or a spaceship! A spaceship! I'll take us to the moon! Live in a cave together!

KELLY

But, wait! There's no oxygen on the moon!

GAVIN

Perfect! Perfect! A just place for just men like us! I should love it there. And no poetry! No poetry!! All roofs and walls like my master Bach!!!



SCENE 105. JEFFREY'S TRAILER - DAY

Blizzard continues. Coughing and looking sick, JEFFREY picks sticks from his wood pile. The sound of thunder. He freezes. Then man-made sounds: Trumpets, drums, farts, police siren, bells and whistles. And then, like the howling in on the wind:

GAVIN

(distant)

Willi-a-a-a-am! Williaaaaam Coughlin! Where art thou! William! The roof! The roof must be completed! You cannot just... leave it! Exchange it! Think of other things! It must be done, my boss is angry!!!!

TIM

(voice, reading)

"Gavin's ebony skin stood out against the white snow, rendering his garish movements even the more so. The whites of his eyes showed wildly as he imitated sundry sounds: Natural, mechanical. Thunder. sirens. The din of wind and hail, of wheels and pulleys, the sound of trumpet, pipe, panpipe... "

SCENE 106. MATTHEW'S CABIN - DAY

A new day, the blizzard has passed. MATTHEW leans out the window as TIMOTHY reads from a transcript, standing in knee deep snow. RICHARD types in the kitchen.

TIM

(reading)

"... Even the noise of animals, sheep, dogs, birds. No sound or gesture was beneath him. Debased. A debased... man."

They shudder.

MATT

So where is he now?

TIM

Oh, he ventured home after a half an hour of that display. Raised his liberty flag. One could hear murmuring from inside for a while.

MATT

Linda?

TIM

Jeffrey could not tell. But he didn't call for long.

MATT

Yes. And how is our friend Jeffrey?

TIM

Tucked away in bed. Drinking nettle tea.

MATT

Bed. That's where I should be. A warm fire, wrapped in wool. And sweating it out!

He presses a hot water bottle against his head.

TIM

He would like to add his turnips to his soup.

MATT

"His" turnips? Are you quoting? Or working on assumption?

TIM

Well, you did sign...

MATT

I signed! Read this contract! I signed for a *portrait* and I believe I have received a... a...

RICH

Spoon?

MATT

A vanity mirror! Look! Look for yourself!

TIMOTHY climbs the sill and peers in to study the painting of LINDA.

MATT

Well??

TIM

Hmm, it's...

MATT

Ah! On paper! Cast your vote on paper! Here!

TIMOTHY makes a mark on MATTHEW's tally sheet.

MATT

Now, if Jeffrey is keen on my turnips and celery root, which I am sure would expedite his recovery, he should take it upon himself to locate Gavin... and secure his vote! This portrait was supposed to be my winter comfort... the longer this uncertainty prevails, the more I feel cheated!



SCENE 111. MATTHEW'S CABIN - NIGHT

A piece of paper printed with two rows of checkboxes is pinned above MATTHEW's nightstand. All boxes are checked except one. Above the boxes it reads, "Does the figure depicted in the painting resemble Jeffrey Dipple in a way that goes beyond his and Linda Schaller's real physical similarities?"

MATTHEW sits at the desk in a flowing nightgown, talking to himself.

MATT

But where is Gavin?

(Linda's voice)

"Oh... he's taken ill, I'm afraid. He's sleeping. Quite ill... and... "

(normal voice)

Oh, enough about him. Your husband is most irrelevant at the moment. But you on the other hand... quite relevant!"

MATTHEW quickly recounts the vote.

MATT

"Relevant and... lovely? Yessss... turn around. That's nice.

(Linda's voice)

"Would you like to see my breasts?"

(normal voice)

Just a little. Not too much. Perfect. Perfect!

(Linda's voice)

"Do you like the flowers I picked out?"

(normal voice)

Oh, yes. Lilies are much better than roses.

(Linda's voice)

"And this green translucent shawl? You don't mind how it barely covers my ass?"

(normal voice)

Mind? I love it.

(Linda's voice)

"And my hair? It's not too light?"

(normal voice)

No, no, no...

(Linda's voice)

"You don't think he'll be jealous?"

(normal voice)

No... I mean! Yes. But... but he...

MATTHEW falters. He checks the vote one last time:

MATT

But he has not *voted*!!! Mr. Cook! Mr. Dipple!! Mr. Ms. Schaller... Ms. Dipple! The whole lot... .rotten, pillbug infested, mushroom covered, oozing and fizzle and sizzle and... !

SCENE 112. JEFFREY'S TRAILER - NIGHT

MATTHEW is at JEFFREY's mailbox. JEFFREY stands in the door, bundled to the tip of his nose. They look like old biddies.

MATT

Do you want those vegetables or not!?

JEFF

I called on him. He wouldn't respond. Neither would Linda.

MATT

Did you yell?

JEFF

As loud as you did when you woke me now!

MATT

Woke you! Oh, your vanity astounds me, Jeffrey, all consuming! You'd have your pitiful, sniveling face plastered over this whole earthy realm if you had your way!

(low)

Oh, I could *kill* somebody!

JEFF

Are you also sick, Matthew? You sound very ill!

MATTHEW storms off into the darkness, howling.

MATT

Mr. Cook! Mr. Cook! Wake up, Mr. Cook! *Linda!*

SCENE 113. TIMOTHY'S CABIN - NIGHT

In his tiny cabin, TIMOTHY is wearing headphones and listening to the radio on a portable TV. GAVIN's six-month supply of e-cigarette cartridges is spread on the table. TIMOTHY screws a new one cartridge into his device, leans back in his chair and sucks away: thick white vapor forms halos around his head. He chuckles loudly at whatever he's listening to. MATTHEW's howling is heard in the distance.

BENOIT

(reading)

"And for fifteen minutes I called to them. Nothing. Not a light. Not a sound. Only his Gadsden flag whipping around." Richard. "And this morning?" Matt. "Nothing. Still. Silent. And walking back, I happened upon Timothy... "

SCENE 114. BENOIT'S CABIN - DAY

BENOIT leans on the mantel, puffing his pipe and reading a transcript aloud. He rushes through most as if a waste of time. MATTHEW listens nearby, thermometer in his mouth, looking sick.

BENOIT

(reading)

"... I casually brought up his health, and one after the other I discovered he had the same symptoms. Headaches, fatigue... at first slight, then more and more acute."

MATT

What is your opinion, Benoit?

BENOIT

Well, it's quite obvious. You men are suffering from the flu. And it's no wonder. Staying up 'till dawn. Drinking. Fraternizing with strangers.

MATT

Yes, but...

BENOIT

But what?

MATT
May I speak frankly? Off record?
(pause)
This whole trial. The false e-cigarettes or what have you. I know it was proven that Gavin manufactured them... and produced the nicotine solution himself. But I cannot help but wonder... about this *nicotine*. This poisonous substance in its natural state. It is poisonous, isn't it?

BENOIT
Yes.

MATT
Then... ? Hmmpf! Is it my paranoia or... ?

BENOIT
You think this is... is... a faulty...

MATT
A faulty batch! Or... the first batch, he produced himself. Linda... ran out of money?

MATTHEW jumps to his feet.

MATT
The pressure of the trial?

BENOIT
Mr. Nash. Adequate distance. Please.

MATT
But what if I have no germs? What if...

BENOIT
You don't believe him capable of producing?

MATT
Do we know? Are we capable of knowing? I'm not. Are you?

BENOIT
Well, you did sign...

MATT
Oh, Benoit, please! It was the only way! The only way to survive the winter. What other choice did we have?
(grumbling)
What other... choice?

BENOIT
And what about my roof? Why isn't it done? he said he'd return, is our new man sick as well? He's usually so honest.
(pause)
Well, where is he? The first day of spring has passed.

MATT
I believe I've heard shots coming from those woods.

BENOIT
Have you?



MATT

I believe so. And our game has been delivered.

BENOIT

Hmmm. And he's the only other besides myself without an e-cigarette...

Silence.

MATT

Yes. The only sensible ones. Or am I overreacting?

BENOIT

I don't know. I just don't know. But everything's an option.

(pause)

I would ask only you keep this theory to yourself. As far as you know, you and the others have the flu... a serious strain, perhaps. Gavin didn't take precautions. practically naked in the snow. Ha ha. But I will investigate.

BENOIT takes MATTHEW's e-cigarette and drops it into a ziplock bag.

BENOIT

Stay in bed. Get plenty of rest. Tell the others the same.

MATTHEW nods, making for the door.

MATT

I will.

(pause)

And Benoit...

BENOIT
Yes?

MATT
I was never comfortable with the way William's trial was handled. The way we... well, exploited your ill-health and your natural defect.

BENOIT
Well. I made bad decisions.

MATT
You are a noble man.



SCENE 115. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - DAY

BENOIT hobbles to the property line and rings the bell. After a while, the door opens and LINDA appears.

BENOIT
Heavens, you surprised me! I was expecting to see a burly ox-like man and...

LINDA
What do you want?

BENOIT
What are you doing in there?

LINDA
I'm cleaning.

BENOIT
Cleaning? Hmm.
(pause)
Is he in there?

LINDA
No.

BENOIT
Well, where is he?

LINDA
I don't know.

BENOIT
Are you... just cleaning... as a favor or... ? I'm
sorry, I don't quite understand. Do you have his
permission?

LINDA
Is there something you want from him?

BENOIT
It's just... my roof! It's supposed to be done!

LINDA
I don't know.

BENOIT
May I come inside?

LINDA
No.

Silence.

BENOIT
You know, Linda. I must admit I was being a bit...
dishonest. When I said I was surprised to see you in
this house, I was lying. I've heard you and Mr. Cook
fighting, and...

LINDA
Well, that's over now.

BENOIT
Are you at least... curious... as to his present
condition?

LINDA
What do you mean?

BENOIT
Well! Ha ha. I don't know if you've heard but Gavin has
been... quite uncommunicative... the past few days.

LINDA
That's his right, isn't it?

BENOIT
It is, it surely is. But he was sick before his silence.
Very sick. Such strange behavior. And now others are
coming down with similar symptoms.

LINDA
Hmmm. I'm sorry. I don't know what to say.

BENOIT
You won't check up on him? Perhaps... save him... let us help him, you won't... ?

LINDA
No.

BENOIT
Help a man you once loved?

LINDA
I never loved him.

BENOIT
And what about... ?

LINDA
I love no one.

BENOIT
Do you live here now?

She does not respond. BENOIT smiles. He adjusts his scarf to go, then stops.

BENOIT
Linda! I forgot to ask you of your health! How are you faring these days?

LINDA
I'm fine.

BENOIT
I've heard you vomiting. In the morning. Sickness. I could... perhaps treat you in some way. If you desired, well, maybe we can come to... contractual agreement... on a casual friendly basis? Will you consider it?

LINDA
I'll think about it.

SCENE 116. MATTHEW'S CABIN - DAY

Wrapped in a fluffy bathrobe, MATTHEW sits by the window, fidgeting and waiting. Bell rings. MATTHEW jumps.

RICH
May I cross?

MATT
Yes, yes, yes, yes!

RICHARD approaches the open window.

MATT
(impatient)
Any news of Gavin??

RICH
No. Still quiet. Quiet still. Not a light.
(pause)
Benoit believes he has the flu.

MATT
"The flu"! Well, yes. Perhaps.

RICH
Perhaps?

MATT
Or he ran away? What ever it is, we should know. We
deserve to know... what is in store for us.

RICH
You're not suggesting we trespass!

MATT
Richard! What if he's dead!

RICH
I won't.

MATT
What if we're dying! Doesn't that frighten you?

RICH
I'm fine.

MATT
You're fine.



RICH
Yes. And I'm sure you will be. Take Goubeaux's advice:
don't strip naked and crawl through the snow. Don't
drink. Don't fall in love with young women. You'll make
it.

MATTHEW thinks on this for a while.

RICH
Now I've been told you have my e-cigarettes. Six months
worth. Gavin gave them to distribute...

MATT
I haven't given them to you??

RICH
Um...

MATT
Oh, yes, yes!! I do! I have them! Wait right there!

MATTHEW races to grab RICHARD's allotment.

MATT
Here you are! Here! I'm... so sorry!

RICH
It's quite alright, I...

He seems befuddled by MATTHEW's eagerness.

RICH
Uh. Thank you. Well. Good day.

MATT
Yes, um, oh Richard! Would you like a pear?

RICH
A pear?

MATT
Monsieur Goubeaux is giving me some medicine. Would you
mind picking it up for me... and dropping it off, here,
at my window... in say... four hours?

RICH
For that, a pear?

MATT
Yes. Just in time for desert. It's quite ripe! The way I
know you like it!

RICH
Mmmm. Okay?

MATT
Thank you. And if I'm asleep... wake me. I should like
to keep myself, um... updated... on any... developments.

RICHARD raises an eyebrow, nods, then departs.

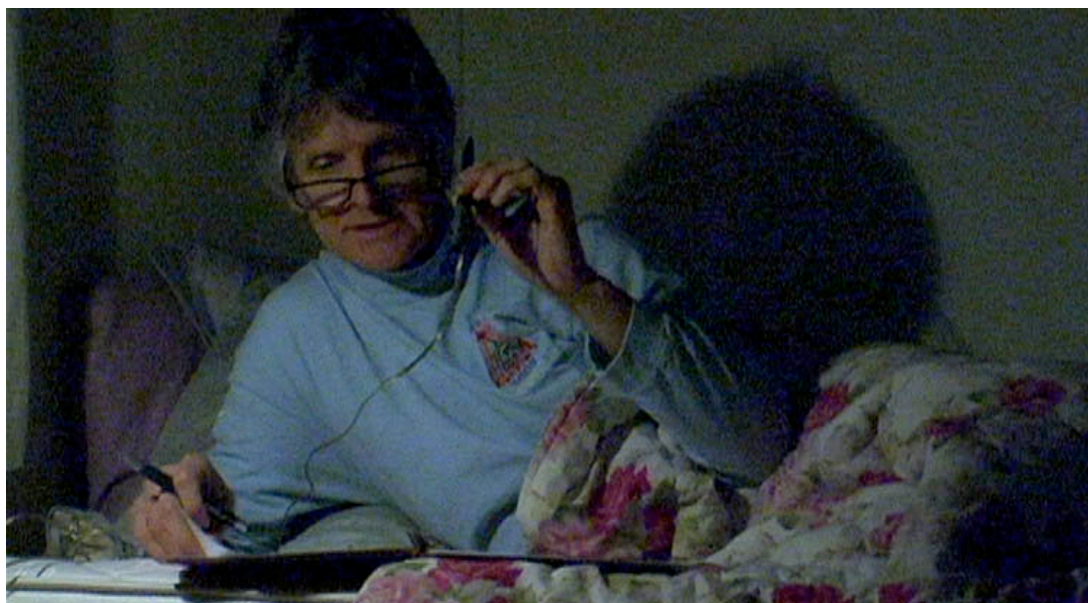
SCENE 117. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - NIGHT

A dim light shines in the window. Someone is practicing warm-up scales on tuba inside the cabin.

JULIA

(voice, dictating)

My cherished friend. How are you? I saw on the news there was a blizzard there. It must be beautiful. I'm picturing your quaint cottage wrapped in snow and it makes me a little woeful. In fact, I wonder if you can tell from these words that I am weeping. That it is hard for me to actually write these words. Indeed. It's true. It's a difficult letter for me to write. Because I love you, to be sure. I love you and will always love you, but also because I fear that this letter will make you loath me. And that is something I wish from the bottom of my childish heart to prevent. But here goes. Kelly. I fell in love with someone else. It began three weeks ago. And now, well, it is becoming serious. Serious enough for me to give my heart over to him and only him...



SCENE 118. KELLY'S CABIN - NIGHT

KELLY reclines by his night stand, reading a letter. He mouths the words as if speaking himself.

JULIA

(voice, dictating)

... Before you jump to conclusions, please believe me when I say this was my own choice. He does not even know of this but it is a step I feel I must take on my own. After I drop off this letter at the post office, I will go to his house and tell him. But I felt that you deserved to know as soon as my mind was made up. Do you understand what this means? I am not your lover anymore. You may think of me as you wish, but henceforth, we will no longer be unified. In soul. In mind. In dreams. In feeling. All of our shared sense of what it means to exist has been cleaved by this, oh, most bittersweet decision of mine. Please don't try to convince me otherwise. Just accept it, Kelly. Accept it as you accepted me for all my flaws, and I accepted you for yours. The noble man will let reality be what it desires to be... and this is reality, and you my dear, are nothing if not a truly noble man. Julia.



SCENE 119. MATTHEW'S CABIN - NIGHT

Bell rings.

MATT

Richard!

JEFF

No. It's Jeffrey. We've been handing out a list... of symptoms. It will go to Goubeaux. He will decide on what he wants in return.

MATT

Where is Richard? What time is it!

JEFF

Late? I'll leave it in your mailbox. Deliver it to Timothy next. And be quick about it.

MATT

Yes.

MATTHEW hurries out to retrieve the paper.

MATT

Jeffrey! Wait!

JEFF

Yes?

MATT

What is this? Echinacea? Wild ginseng? It notes Richard... is this his order? Is he sick??

JEFF

Oh, of course. Aren't we all?

MATT

Richard is sick! You're sure of this!

JEFF

Yes. He's in bed.

MATT

Oh... I don't believe it! I don't believe it!

JEFF

What is your obsession with Mr. Ko? I've never seen you so concerned for another before!

MATT

Never mind me! You return to your property, to your proper bed!

SCENE 120. WILLIAM'S FORMER CABIN - NIGHT

LINDA and BENOIT sit at a table. LINDA vapes on an e-cigarette while BENOIT watches her closely.

BENOIT
No pleasurable buzz? No... dizziness?

LINDA
Nothing.
(pause)
I can taste... a little sage?
(pause)
Rosemary?

BENOIT
(sighing)
"Made sick by health itself." Bastard.

LINDA
He wasn't... a bad person. Just dishonest.

BENOIT
And what about you?

LINDA
I have no money.

BENOIT
No furs? No jewels?

LINDA
No.



BENOIT inhales a few puffs from the e-cig and lets the vapor sit in his mouth. He exhales with a scornful sigh.

BENOIT

What a pathetic man. What a weak... and ignoble... irresponsible man. Do you agree?

LINDA

I don't know. We weren't involved in any real way.

BENOIT

What could be more real than love?

LINDA

We didn't sign anything.

BENOIT

So?

LINDA

His business is none of mine.

BENOIT

I would like it to be your business. Do you see that? How I rely on these men... desiring my tobacco... year after year?

LINDA

Yes... I do.

BENOIT

But?

LINDA

But I don't smoke. Nor will I ever smoke.

MATT

(voice)

Goubeaux! Goubeaux!!

BENOIT

Excuse me, Ms. Schaller.

BENOIT opens the door and calls outside.

BENOIT

Here, Matthew!

MATT

Where are you!

BENOIT

At the communal space!

Meanwhile, LINDA adds logs to the fire.

MATT

It's still...

BENOIT

Would you mind waiting for a moment?

MATT

But...

BENOIT
I'm in a meeting. I will be with you shortly.

Closing the door, BENOIT turns to LINDA.

LINDA
I don't think... I'm capable of not saying anything.

BENOIT
There is an infinite number of things in this world to which we do not put words. To which we do not... describe. For they are unimportant. The color of your hair. Of your eyes. A speck of dust on your face. Depending on whether or not they are linked to another's desires, needs... once survival is linked... well, there comes an obvious value to the things we were once so casually silent about. There's value in saying it. And there's value in not saying it. The flu. Withdrawal. Just the flu? Or withdrawal? Is there a difference, really? For me... there's a *value*. Perhaps you could say, six months of tobacco in your silence?

LINDA is silent.

BENOIT
So. What about the things I notice. Things that I could or could not say about you. Do you see value in these things?

LINDA
What things?

BENOIT
Hmmm, a bulky jacket? Morning sickness?
(pause)
Do you know what I did in exchange for the roof repairs? I was his mental therapist.
(pause)
"The condom broke last night. And I enjoyed it."

LINDA
(low)
Mr. Goubeaux.

BENOIT
Hmm?

LINDA
You are a tyrant.

BENOIT
Yes, my dear. And so are you.

A silence ensues.

MATT
(knocking on door)
Benoit!!

BENOIT
Come in, Mr. Nash!

MATT
Do I have his permission.

BENOIT
His permission? No. I believe it is a communal space for now.

MATT
Communal?

BENOIT
Yes, my little grasshopper. Hop forth. Up you go.

MATTHEW rushes inside:.

MATT
You won't believe it! Benoit, it's the trial...

He skids to halt.

MATT
What's she doing here?

BENOIT
She is my guest.

MATT
But...
(pause)
We must talk!

LINDA gets the drift and exits. MATTHEW kneels in front of BENOIT, practically shaking.

BENOIT
Yes? The trial?

MATT
... of the century! I was right, Benoit! I was right! Accidental... .intentional... poisoning of the entire citizenry by a Mr. Gavin Cook! An insanity plea may be made, I suspect!

BENOIT
An insanity... by whom, by yourself?

MATT
No, by... I mean!

BENOIT
Matthew, your shoe is untied!

MATT
But Benoit!

BENOIT
Tie it, please, before you continue. And stop spitting in my face!

MATTHEW ties his shoe.

MATT

Richard was the guinea pig! He switched to the new batch and is sick... sick! Like the rest of us! The correlation is concrete! Gavin obviously purchased his devices, up to the trial, he ran out of money... and tried to make them... and *failed!*

BENOIT

Well, what do you want from me.

MATT

I... well, first! I wish to switch back to your tobacco.

BENOIT

Switch back?

MATT

Switch to! And second...

BENOIT

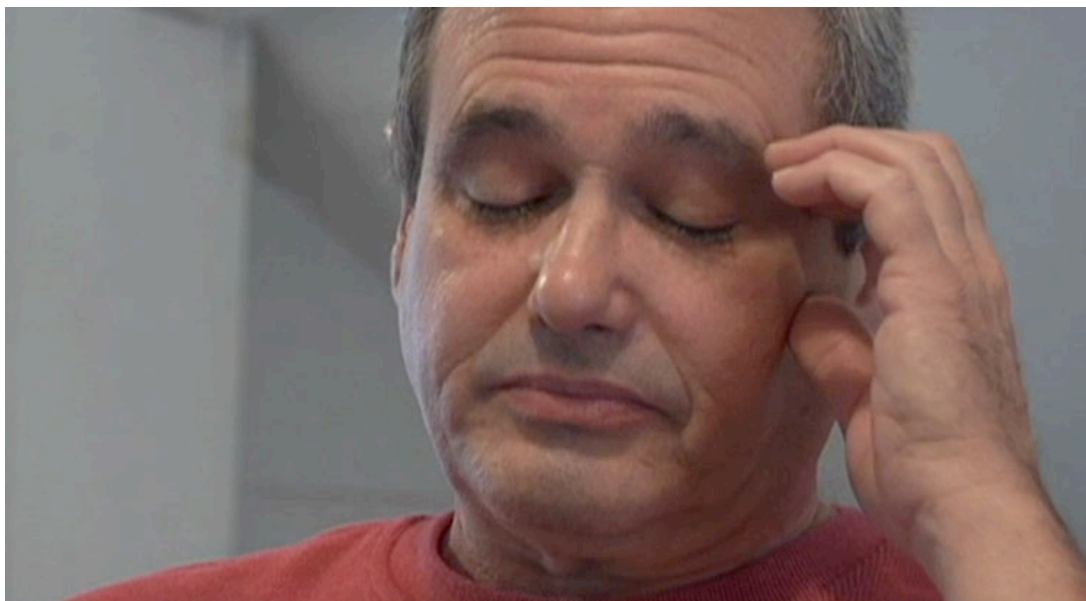
No tobacco remains. Only the nicotine in your cartridges.

MATT

Oh! He will hang for this! Hang!

(pause)

Figuratively, of course!



BENOIT

Well. Ha ha. How prescient. Gavin is dead, Matthew.

MATT

Dead?!

LINDA reenters. There is a heavy silence.

BENOIT
For a day or two, by the looks of it.

MATT
I must get to the hospital!

BENOIT
Asphyxiation. A plastic bag wrapped around his head. Not some poisoning... or illness. A conscious... let's say, intentional choice to end his consciousness.

MATT
Suicide?

BENOIT
Intent, Matthew! A plastic bag; in... tent.

BENOIT takes a drag of the e-cig and blows a vapor ring.

BENOIT
I've been puffing on it all day.
(pause)
I feel vigorous, Matthew, in fact...

MATT
(low)
Dead...

BENOIT
... I was wondering if we could come to an agreement. My personal allotment of tobacco for your device and cartridges. I haven't voiced this concern to anyone, but for the past few months I've been noticing a mysterious pain in my chest.

MATT
Cancer?

BENOIT
Well. Could be cancer. Could be heartburn. But I mustn't risk it if I wish to see my eighty-fifth year...

MATTHEW sits back, letting it all sink in.

MATT
Dead, you say.
(pause)
Suicide, you say?

BENOIT
Would you like to view the body? His cabin is open to the public.

MATT
Then what is wrong with me. With us? With *all* of us?

BENOIT
Well... you. I suppose you have the flu. Have you taken the bee pollen yet? The willow bark tincture?

MATT
I sent for it and Richard...

BENOIT
Ha ha, well. Linda. How do you feel after taking the bee pollen?

MATTHEW looks to her as if she were his mother.

BENOIT
Linda. How do you... feel?

LINDA studies the arm of her chestnut chair.

MATT
Why doesn't she answer?

BENOIT
She's upset.

MATT
(softly)
Of course.

LINDA finally looks up.

LINDA
I feel fine. Better.

MATT
About... about Gavin? Or... ?

LINDA
About everything. I no longer feel guilt. Or shame. About the things I've done. In fact, I can view it from afar.

MATT
View what? What have you done?

LINDA
I killed my husband.

MATT
You killed your husband. And you feel no guilt!

BENOIT
She didn't kill him, Matthew. He was executed.

MATTHEW stares at LINDA, then looks around the room. His tuba is leaning against the wall.

MATT
My instrument! I thought I'd never see it again!
He fingers the brass-work, gleaming in the firelight.



MATT

Yes. Yes, Benoit. I should definitely like to take you up on your offer. The pollen and the tincture and whatever else you think will benefit me...

BENOIT

Good, Matthew, good. Leave Ms. Schaller with her things. We'll go and fetch it together.

(pause)

But you haven't signed yet, have you? I can't quite recall...

MATT

Signed what?

BENOIT produces a document from his pocket. MATTHEW reads aloud BENOIT's original terms and conditions; his demands:

MATT
(reading)
"... The use of his organ and his collection of sheet music. Additionally, reduce his allotment of the following herbs by one fourth: Saint John's Wort, sage, rosemary... "

TIM
(voice, reading)
"... set of mugs, demitasses and plates to match... in hunter green and powder blue... and that if they chip for whatever reason, they be replaced in... "

KELLY
(voice, reading)
"... foot and hand massages be extended to 45 minutes, and that he would deign to make eye contact with me from time to time... "

JEFF
(voice, reading)
"... accurate reproduction of Michelangelo's Madonna..."

SCENE 121. MATTHEW'S CABIN - DAY

JEFFREY reads aloud to MATTHEW.

JEFF
(reading)
"... and Christ done in cherry with a stand of elm." I've never sculpted in wood, Matthew!

MATT
I'm sure you can manage, Jeffrey. Just put your mind to it.

MATTHEW drinks from a warm, brown drink.

JEFF
And you feel better?

MATT
Yes. Not... all the way, but yes. Getting there.

JEFF
And Linda?

MATT
You'll see for yourself. I hope.

JEFF
(sighs)
Are there any cherry trees in this land?

Bell rings.

LINDA
May I enter your property, Mr. Nash?

MATT
Ahh! You found my note, Ms. Schaller! You may!

As he goes to the door, he turns to JEFFREY.

MATT
Now, remember our agreement. If her estimation does not suit you... economically, that is...

JEFF
I know. I know!

MATT
(enters)
Hee-e-ello, Linda. He-e-elo-o-o-o!

LINDA looks at JEFFREY, who rolls his eyes.

LINDA
Still?

JEFF
Yes.

MATT
What??

JEFF
It's... it's become a little stale, Mr. Nash.

LINDA
I'm sorry.

MATT
Well!

JEFFREY coughs. LINDA eyes the portrait, covered in cloth.

LINDA
So this is it.

JEFF
Now may I remind you, we seek only honesty. To quell Matthew's... er... consumer anxiety.

MATT
Or to solidify Jeffrey's artistic... integrity. You do him no service by flattery.

LINDA
Yes. Of course.

JEFFREY lifts the veil. LINDA studies the painting. MATTHEW picks up his tuba and softly puffs a tune. JEFFREY shoots him a glance of annoyance. A long time passes.

LINDA
The eyes.

JEFF
Shhh! Your mark!

LINDA takes the voting paper. She makes a mark. A smile comes across JEFFREY's face.

MATT
I feel like a fool, Jeffrey.

JEFFREY shakes his head understandingly. MATTHEW hoists a few boxes of vegetables onto the table.

LINDA
Make sure you look them over carefully, Jeffrey.
(pause)
You cannot return... vegetables. Can you?

MATT
Ha ha, no! You cannot return... .vegetables. When you buy them... well, they are yours!

LINDA
(laughing)
Sir, this plum... is bruised! I'd like to return it!

MATT
(laughing)
There's a silk worm in my ear of corn... I'd like to exchange it... for a pear!

JEFF
A good sport, at least. Well, good day, sir, madam. I appreciate your honesty.

Exit JEFFREY.

MATT
Linda! What are you doing later? Have any plans?

LINDA
Hmmm. No?

MATT
Well... I have some rice... and beans and... if you're free?

LINDA
Well, that's very kind. I... you're too kind.

MATT
Too kind?

He picks up his tuba and plays a ditty. LINDA smiles. He keeps at it.

LINDA
Pretty impressive.

MATT
Ahh, it's easy! See!

He takes her hand and lets her run it over the buttons.

LINDA
I should go. Work.

MATT
Linda. Wait. I want to reassure you that while some of us... well... may appear apprehensive about this whole... change... you are a woman after all. And quite a beautiful...

LINDA
I need no reassurance. Our borders are not threatened by attraction. Or love. This is why we have painting. Poetry. Music. The necessity of beauty is to see that which we would love to touch... but know would enslave us if we did...

She hovers her hand over MATTHEW's tuba, no longer touching.

LINDA
... and to see it through the window of another man's cabin. A man who is armed and willing to kill for protection...

MATT
... and to make it lovelier by that protection. If not even more desirable...

LINDA
... and safer still.

MATT
Yes. That is the only love for just men. Such as ourselves.

MATT
Thank you, Linda. We'll continue this lesson after dinner.

LINDA
Should I bring anything?

MATT
No. Just yourself. Just yourself.

SCENE 122. WOODLAND - DAY

LINDA pulls the reins of her cart, a sturdily-built device on skis loaded with slate shingles.

The sound of hammer blows on a far-off roof, fading away.

END



IMAGE CREDITS

By page number

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5. Still frame, MiniDV, 2012-2013, Automatic Moving Co.
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29. Still frame, S16mm film, 2012-2013, Automatic Moving Co.
31. Composite of portfolio images of actor/stunt performer Michael Barkowski
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39. Still frame, MiniDV, 2012-2013, Automatic Moving Co.
43. Photograph of painting by George W. Bush
45. Photograph of studies for The Republic by Max Galyon
47. Still frame, MiniDV, 2012-2013, Automatic Moving Co.
48. Still frame, MiniDV, 2012-2013, Automatic Moving Co.
50. Photograph, 2010, Rex Larsen, The Grand Rapids Press
53. Photograph, "Gary Stewart Working on a 1608 Jacob Bauer Trombone", National Music Museum, University of South Dakota
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102. Painting (section), "Drinking Bacchus", oil on canvas, 1623,
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