

A closet drama by  
Noel Wilkie & Peter Parlow

*There Are No Folks*

Automatic Moving

Published by Automatic Moving in 2016

All Rights Reserved

For rights, email: [contact@automaticmoving.com](mailto:contact@automaticmoving.com)

Copyright © 2016 by Noel Wilkie, Peter Parlow  
& Automatic Moving Co.

*There Are No Folks*



**This is a work of fiction inspired by actual events in public record. Resemblance to real persons and events beyond publicly available information and quotations accessible via Internet search is purely coincidental.**

## **Characters**

FRANCIS MCDORMAND / STATE TROOPER DIANE PERKINS-VANCE

VIN DIESEL / MAINE WARDEN SGT. TERRY HUGHES

CHRISTIAN BALE / CHRISTOPHER THOMAS KNIGHT

## **Setting**

*An imposing soundproof wall is the defining feature of the set, built floor to ceiling and stretching from backstage directly through the audience to the rear, effectively splitting the theater into two theaters. On the stage, the wall contains a wide Plexiglass window which is one-way glass in Act One (mirrored on the left side), and normal transparent glass in Act Two. There is a door near the window connecting the left and right spaces defined by the wall.*

*The wall segregates the audience, if there is an audience. Those to the left or right of the wall might only catch glimpses or hear snippets of performances on the other side. The set—and thus, play—is separate yet connected and impossible to fully know.*

## Act One

*30 hours after the arrest and detention of CHRISTIAN BALE / CHRISTOPHER THOMAS KNIGHT at the Kennebec County Jail.*

*The left side of the wall is an interrogation room with a small table, a small boundary microphone on the table, and two folding chairs. The right side is an observation room with a few wheeled office chairs, a telephone on a table, a potted plant, an audio speaker. Everything spoken in the interrogation room can be heard from the microphone through the speaker, but obviously not the other way around.*

*CHRISTIAN sits alone in the interrogation room, staring straight ahead, very still except for the nervous bouncing of his knee and the occasional rough itching of his scalp. In the observation room, behind the one-way mirror, stands VIN DIESEL / MAINE WARDEN SGT. TERRY HUGHES, thick arms clasped behind his back, watching the captive.*

*FRANCIS MCDORMAND / STATE TROOPER DIANE PERKINS-VANCE enters the observation room from offstage, balancing three very full cups of Starbucks coffee, a chewy chocolate cookie, and a notebook tucked under her armpit. She taps VIN on the shoulder.*

FRANCIS     How's our little hermit faring?

VIN            Huh? Oh. Hey.

FRANCIS     Here's your gift card.

VIN            How much left?

FRANCIS     One? Two dollars?

VIN            Shit, Diane, that was supposed to last!

FRANCIS I wanna see what Chris thinks of Starbucks.  
I got him a Caramel Macchiatto.

VIN Where's *my* Caramel Macchiatto?

*She hands him a cup.*

VIN (*tasting his coffee.*) What is this? Soy? Ug!

FRANCIS You'll survive, Terry. (*looks through window.*)  
OK. I'm goin' in.

*Hands full with coffee, she doesn't go anywhere.*

FRANCIS (*nodding at door.*) You mind?

VIN *grumbles, hand on door to the other room.*

VIN Two dollars. That's my paycheck, Vance!

FRANCIS A gift card?

*Annoyed, he opens the door.*

VIN Ya don't look a gift horse in the...

FRANCIS Shhh!

FRANCIS *enters the interrogation room. The door closes behind her. On the other side, VIN sullenly watches through the window, hands on hips. CHRISTIAN glances up.*

FRANCIS (*smiling.*) Hi, there. How'd you sleep?  
First night indoors in a bit, huh?

*She places the two coffee cups on the table between them, adjusts her belt and holster, pulls out an Android phone with thick rubber casing, casually checks her texts, then sits down.*

FRANCIS I got us some coffee. From Starbucks. You heard of Starbucks? It's like the biggest coffee chain in history.

CHRISTIAN *dumbly stares at her. Behind the mirrored glass, VIN shakes his head. He takes a sip and grimaces.*

VIN It is soy! I specifically told her: "No soy!"

FRANCIS (*continuing.*) Used to be mostly Dunkin' Donuts around here but Starbucks kinda edging in. I feel bad 'cause I like it better. I dunno, more sophisticated or something. (*sips her coffee.*) This one's for you. And the cookie.

*She pushes the goodies closer. CHRISTIAN doesn't touch them. FRANCIS opens her notebook and pulls a pen.*

FRANCIS And then there's Tim Hortons. They have better food, although the coffee thing, I dunno, not quite right. Maybe 'cause it's Canadian. You know Tim Hortons. My dad used to take me there when I was in the Academy... been around least since the 60s, way before you, y'know, went to the woods and all...

CHRISTIAN *scratches his scalp, saying nothing. VIN is pacing.*

VIN Dandruff. Of course. (*shudders.*) *Disgusting.*

*He unconsciously runs a hand over his smooth, bald head.*

FRANCIS OK. Let's get it to it. I know you're not much for words, Chris. You certainly have the right to remain silent and all that. Anything you say now is voluntary, OK? (*pause.*) You understand?

CHRISTIAN *doesn't respond.*



FRANCIS *(opening a folder, she passively leafs through it.)*  
Gotta be honest. Paperwork's already in for two counts of burglary and theft. Wanna be clear. You're not leavin' anytime soon. *(pause.)* But I'm here to help, OK? I know that sounds hard to believe. I got you in this room against your will and all... but. Well. Believe me. I get it. But, y'know... in some cases... talkin' does help.

VIN Nice one.

FRANCIS OK. You see, you walk into a courtroom with these counts... and I'm guessin' there'll be at least a few more... well. A judge is gonna take it as presented. By the book. You might be lookin' at 30 years. As long as you were in those woods. And that's a long time.

*She studies him for a while.*

FRANCIS You're an odd guy.

CHRISTIAN *looks up, squinting.*

FRANCIS What I mean is: as far as everyone else is concerned, you're an oddball. *(scans her documents.)* Terry caught you with over \$200 worth of frozen meats? You obviously didn't do it for... for... well. Why did you do it? I mean, everything. If you can tell me *why*, you can tell a judge. Why you walked into those woods in 1986 and never turned back?

CHRISTIAN *shifts in his chair.* FRANCIS *taps her fingers on the table, waiting.* VIN *crosses his arms and lets out an exaggerated sigh.* FRANCIS *also sighs at the same moment.*

FRANCIS OK. Hmm. OK, so I thought we ended yesterday on a pretty good note, Chris. Maybe let's take it

easy and pretend it's yesterday. You were talkin' ... about the ice storm of '98? Super cold, wasn't it?

CHRISTIAN (*suddenly.*) No.

FRANCIS No?

CHRISTIAN Warm. (*pause.*) Cold. Repeat.

FRANCIS (*smiles.*) Right. Over many days. Coating everything in heavy ice. Power lines down all over the state. (*pause.*) Though I guess that didn't mean much to you, huh? You've been blacked out for 27 years.

CHRISTIAN (*swallows, scratches head.*) When the wind picked up, then it was trouble. Trees falling... like bowling pins.

VIN (*chokes on coffee.*) Bowlin' pins? Who is this guy, Rip Van fuckin' Winkle?

FRANCIS Jeez. Were you scared? (*pause.*) Did'ya think of leavin'?

*He's quiet for a moment.*

CHRISTIAN Where else was I gonna go?

FRANCIS "Where else." Well. I don't know. To a house? To a cabin? You tell me.

CHRISTIAN No. I was gonna stick it out. I had to.

FRANCIS Why did you "have" to?

CHRISTIAN *squirms.*

CHRISTIAN It's... I don't know?

FRANCIS When those trees were "fallin' like bowlin' pins," what was goin' through your head?

CHRISTIAN I don't know!

*He looks away.*

VIN He's playin' you, Vance! Visions of sugar plums! Big Macs! The Hamburgler! Not answering the question!

CHRISTIAN Are we alone?

FRANCIS Why do you ask?

VIN A mooch! Early retirement! Just ask him about the *campsite*, Vance! If he really did spend 30 years in the woods... I bet you a Starbucks gift card there *is* no camp!

CHRISTIAN (*eyes the mirror.*) Are we being watched?

VIN Or if there is: full of porn and booze! No doubt, no doubt! This guy's got *taste!*

FRANCIS Well, I gotta say, Chris, it's kinda part of the deal, y'know. You were *arrested* and all...

CHRISTIAN I've seen the cheesy shows. I know what you guys do.

FRANCIS What do we do?

CHRISTIAN Good cop? Bad cop?

VIN (*mocking voice.*) "Good cop? Bad cop?"

FRANCIS We're just doin' our job, Mr. Knight.

CHRISTIAN But if he's listening...

CHRISTIAN *eyes the mirror for a long time.* VIN *glares back, unseen.*

FRANCIS What's up?

CHRISTIAN *(to mirror.)* I don't like you, sir.

VIN You don't *like* me? Who said you're supposed to *like* me.

FRANCIS Sergeant Hughes? Why don't you like Sergeant Hughes?

CHRISTIAN He tackled me. *(resolutely.)* He's scary.

VIN Tackled you!

CHRISTIAN In a very... aggressive manner. *(pause.)* I think he may have cracked my rib.

VIN Your *rib*? I'll crack *all* your ribs, you fuckin' piglet!

FRANCIS *writes this down.* CHRISTIAN *looks away and hunches down.*

CHRISTIAN He's creepy. Those muscles. Not like muscles you build living in the wild. Show muscles. You know Kojak? He reminds me of Kojak.

FRANCIS Ha ha! That's so true! We call him Kojak all the time.

VIN *(clenching his Macchiato.)* Bum. Vagabond.

CHRISTIAN Kojak was violent.

VIN'S phone is vibrating. *He grabs it from his pocket.*

VIN Violence. *Silence.* Fagabond! (*answering phone.*)  
Yo, Kev?

VIN *exits offstage.*

FRANCIS Um. OK. Well. He's not that bad. But I think...  
I don't know if he's in yet.

CHRISTIAN Are you sure?

FRANCIS Yeah. He's not here. (*hesitates.*) We're alone.

CHRISTIAN *keeps nervously glancing at the mirror.*

FRANCIS So why did you stick it out? (*pause.*) The ice  
storm.

CHRISTIAN (*looks down.*) It's not like...

*He stops.* FRANCIS *waits.*

CHRISTIAN It's not like I didn't think of giving into it. When  
the wind blew my tent away... left me huddled  
under my coat... only my body heat... keeping me  
alive?

*Again, he stops.* FRANCIS *adjusts her posture, chin resting on  
hands, waiting for more.*

CHRISTIAN I made a pact.

FRANCIS (*nods.*) You weren't gonna leave.

CHRISTIAN No. Yes. No matter what. No matter how cold. No matter how... if... I died. I intended to die out there. If necessary.

FRANCIS And you didn't die.

CHRISTIAN No, I did not. But I came...

*He stops.*

FRANCIS What? (*gazes at him.*) What, Christopher?

CHRISTIAN It's just so strange. Being here now. This heated room. This... (*looks up.*) This buzzing light. I itch all over. (*itches himself.*) We don't even think about what makes things happen. We just itch. The lights just work. Your phone. You just plug it in. I've never used a cellphone. But I know it just works. You just communicate. You don't think. You don't think. (*pause.*) You know, in my jail cell, I can see the TV through the bars. And it's just *insane*. Do you know the Kardashians?

FRANCIS Ha ha!

CHRISTIAN That's what he watches. The guard.

FRANCIS Oh, Erasmo? He's a good guy. He's from LA.

CHRISTIAN I don't know. It's too much.

FRANCIS It must be overwhelmin'. The world is. Isn't it?

CHRISTIAN It's too much.

*Silence.*

FRANCIS (*writing.*) So you almost died that winter night in '98. (*pause.*) Almost.

CHRISTIAN *nods*. FRANCIS *lays her pen down and thinks for a while. She glances at the mirror, then back to CHRISTIAN.*

FRANCIS     What do you think it's like? Dyin'?

*No response.*

FRANCIS     You don't have to answer that. (*pause.*) I mean, I can't answer that. So I have no right askin'. But I just feel... the more you tell me, y'know, about your experience... the better it'll be for you. Details like that... will help. A judge takes it as presented. It'd be so much better if she can connect with you a bit, and say, y'know, with complete confidence, that everyone refers to him as a hermit. But he's actually a human being. His name is Christopher Thomas Knight.

CHRISTIAN    My name hasn't meant much to me for a long time.

FRANCIS *nods. She looks at her notes, recalibrating. Meanwhile, VIN re-enters the observation room. He's wearing an earpiece and in the middle of a phone conversation.*

VIN            (*into phone.*) No way, Kev. I can't talk about a sequel 'til we finish *Furious 7*. Don't even start. Don't even...

FRANCIS     (*looking up.*) So you made a pact.

VIN            (*into phone.*) Hold on, bud. (*to himself.*) What's his pact? She said he made a pact.

CHRISTIAN *is silent.*

VIN            What's your *pact*, buddy? Jesus fuckin' christ!

CHRISTIAN *scratches his scalp.*

FRANCIS Like... a suicide pact?

CHRISTIAN *shakes his head.* FRANCIS *patiently waits.*

VIN Then what! A super PAC? Ha ha! *(to phone.)* Just a sec, Kev! Yeah, it's the hermit. Fuckin' unreal. I knew it was our man the moment I caught him in the high beams. Motion sensors, baby. *(pause.)* Huh? I know, I know. A summer camp for cripples. And like, every camp 'round North Pond. *(pause.)* Yeah, since 1986. Reagan. Chernobyl. This guy's a disaster. Ha ha. Everything he owned was stolen just about. Already, people callin' the station for interviews, man oh man. *(pause.)* No, not *me*. This dumb hermit. *(pause.)* I'll give a press conference, sure.

CHRISTIAN *looks up and finally answers.*

CHRISTIAN A pact with myself.

FRANCIS A pact with yourself.

*He nods.*

FRANCIS OK. So *why*.

CHRISTIAN *shifts, unresponsive, uncomfortable.*

VIN *(rolls eyes.)* *Jeezzzus!* Like gettin' a closeted lesbian to go down on you! *(to phone.)* No, I'm not talkin' from experience! Well. Maybe? Ha ha. I love lesbians, Kev, don't get me wrong. I know your sister's one. She's been very supportive of my career. *(pause.)* Oh, she's not? I would have sworn... ?



VIN *grabs his Macchiato, takes a sip then gags, angrily slamming it down.*

VIN Ugg! This Macchiato's gonna give me tits!  
(*to phone.*) Tits. Soymilk. *Estrogen*, bro.  
(*to himself.*) God, this is unbearable. I need a *real* coffee! (*to phone.*) I need a real coffee, Kev. Let's do this later, another time, OK? OK. Bye.  
(*looking through window.*) And he hasn't even touched that cookie!

VIN *fumbles for his Starbucks card, looks at it, remembers.*

VIN Fuck!

*Throwing his hands in the air, VIN storms offstage. Both FRANCIS and CHRISTIAN turn to face the mirror. Then CHRISTIAN looks at FRANCIS. She turns and they lock eyes.*

CHRISTIAN (*suddenly.*) "Sooner or later in life we all discover that perfect happiness is unrealizable, but few of us pause to consider the opposite: that so, too, is perfect unhappiness. The obstacles preventing the realization of both these extreme states are of the same nature: they derive from our human condition, which is hostile to everything infinite."

FRANCIS Whoa. That was... did you... ?

CHRISTIAN I stole it. (*pause.*) Primo Levi.

FRANCIS Primo who?

CHRISTIAN Levi. I stole one of his books.

FRANCIS Yikes! That's impressive stuff! You memorized it, too?

CHRISTIAN *stares straight ahead like a soldier. He nods almost imperceptibly.*

FRANCIS     You must have done pretty good in school...  
                  You study literature in high school? Before you  
                  went in the woods, what did you want to, uh, be?  
                  A writer?

CHRISTIAN *looks down at his hands.*

CHRISTIAN *(low.)* I'm just a thief.

FRANCIS     *(pressing on, referring to her notes.)* Oh right,  
                  computer engineering. Pulled that from your high  
                  school yearbook. Hmm, I guess you do seem like  
                  a computer guy. Been awhile, huh? Used those  
                  old Macintoshes? They're doin' pretty well now...  
                  biggest company in the world! You coulda been  
                  rich!

CHRISTIAN No. I'm just a thief.

FRANCIS     *(clears throat.)* That was a joke, by the way.

CHRISTIAN Why else would I be here?

FRANCIS *raises an eyebrow.*

CHRISTIAN Why else would Sergeant Hughes have tackled  
                  me?

FRANCIS *waits for him to continue.*

CHRISTIAN *(low.)* I'd like to be returned to my cell now.

FRANCIS     *(shakes head.)* I'm sorry. But that's not gonna  
                  happen. It can't happen. *(pause.)* But why would  
                  you want to go back to your cell? We can relax

here. There's more room. There's no coffee or cookies in your cell...

CHRISTIAN *looks at the cookie.*

FRANCIS You don't like cookies?

*He looks away from the cookie.*

FRANCIS We don't have to talk if you don't want.

CHRISTIAN *stares past her.*

FRANCIS I know you like bein' alone. I'm not offended.

*She sneaks another glance at the mirror, choosing her words careful.*

FRANCIS I like some alone time myself. Well, within reason... a couple hours a day alone very important to me... and my husband... he's at home writin' scripts a lot, but we kinda worked out a rhythm... an agreement...

CHRISTIAN'S *eyes also keep flitting towards the mirror.*  
FRANCIS *notices.*

FRANCIS Terry?

*She rises and opens the door to the observation room.*

FRANCIS Terry?

*She shuts the door.*

FRANCIS We're alone.

*She sits.*

FRANCIS *(reviews her notes.)* So... um. Where were we? Well, um, for “just a thief,” already a lotta clamor about you. Barely two days and people callin’ up the station wantin’ to talk to the “North Pond Hermit.” How does that make you feel?

CHRISTIAN I’m not a hermit.

FRANCIS I understand the term has negative connotations.

CHRISTIAN I mean... in the woods... I lost my identity. With no audience, no one to perform for, I was just there. There was no need to define myself.

FRANCIS *calmly listens.*

CHRISTIAN I didn’t even have a name. I became irrelevant. The moon was the minute hand, the seasons the hour hand... I found a place where I was content...

*He trails off.* FRANCIS *nods, impressed by this observation, waiting for him to continue.*

CHRISTIAN The “North Pond Hermit,” huh?

FRANCIS Yup.

CHRISTIAN Is that what that pond is called? Funny.

FRANCIS What’d you think? It didn’t have a name? Like people just forgot to name it? Ha ha! Like that can even *happen* in the world these days! *(pause.)* *Everything* has a name these days. Sometimes a buncha names. There’s always a name or a word for something... *(pause, thinks.)* There’s almost *too* many names. Which... I guess that’s why I wanna know why, Chris. I think you have it in you. The name for it. The words for it. It doesn’t have to be perfect!

CHRISTIAN Ug! I can't just spout off... fortune-cookie lines... *hermit wisdom*... from my hermit home! I know that's what people want! What they expect! Why is everyone asking *why*! Why why why! Why???

*He stops, surprised at his own emotions.*

CHRISTIAN You're probably gonna take that line and put it on a coffee mug.

FRANCIS No.

CHRISTIAN Or your husband is gonna turn it into some stupid movie... or a TV show.

FRANCIS No. No one could turn your experience into a show.

CHRISTIAN Then why are you asking me? What's the point? Why can't you leave me alone!

FRANCIS Cause I have a job to do.

CHRISTIAN *grunts.*

FRANCIS You broke the law. I'm a cop, so I have the right to detain you and ask questions. You have the right not to answer them, of course. But I have a right to keep you here, and ask.

*No response.*

FRANCIS Y'know, my husband once said... Well, there's a nice little tag line he gave me once: The only control actors really have is saying "no." You have no other control, no matter how big a movie star you are. "No" is about as far as you're ever

gonna get, which is pretty damn powerful.  
(*pause.*) Do you want a lawyer?

CHRISTIAN No.

FRANCIS Why not?

CHRISTIAN (*takes a breath.*) I acted like a punk. (*pause.*)  
I make no excuses for it. It is inexcusable.  
(*pause.*) Write that down. Those people? The ones  
I took from? The properties I violated? The trust?

FRANCIS *writes all this down.*

FRANCIS The trust?

CHRISTIAN The social contract? I broke it. (*pause.*)  
In...ex...cus...able.

FRANCIS *looks at him with understanding.* CHRISTIAN *hangs his head for a long time.* FRANCIS *lays down her pen and speaks kindly.*

FRANCIS Listen. It's... it's natural to feel guilt. It's OK.  
(*pause.*) Guilt is one of the most natural feelings a  
human can know. It makes you stronger, y'know?  
It's OK. We're all guilty of somethin'.

*No response.*

FRANCIS Y'know, my sister. She works in a prison.  
(*pause.*) That's right. She's a chaplain. In a  
maximum security prison. (*pause.*) Taught me a  
lot when I came on this job. She once said what  
you create... becomes reality for others. History...  
analyzin' everything every which way... at the  
end of the day: doesn't really matter... in the face  
of how others feel, y'know? How they perceive  
you, y'know? (*pause.*) In a lotta ways... you're

lucky, Chris. I sort of envy your position. I mean, you're startin' fresh, right?

*No response.*

FRANCIS I don't think there's anything wrong with *transforming* yourself. As long as you stay *true* to yourself. My sister always talks about the difference between ethics and morality. You know, related but different. Morals... well, those are more about the human condition. More universal. Ethics, on the other hand... are like rules for society. Shortcuts, maybe, to being moral. My sister would say you have to concern yourself with being ethical, and the morals follow. Funny, isn't it? It's like, your behavior dictates who you are. But then who you are... determines your behavior. It's a circle. You can't have one without the other. I really believe that. And when you're given a chance to change... well, that's a blessing.

CHRISTIAN I'm not religious.

FRANCIS I'm not saying...

CHRISTIAN I believe in no one. Least of all *myself*.

FRANCIS That's a silly thing to say. No offense.

CHRISTIAN *lowers his eyes.*

FRANCIS What I mean is...

CHRISTIAN (*suddenly.*) I made it *ugly*. That was awful of me. I took it way too far. I mixed up fact and fiction.

FRANCIS     You mean enterin' those woods? Leavin' your family? Stealin' from the community? Rejectin' society?

CHRISTIAN   No. Getting caught. I didn't factor it in. I thought about killing myself but I chickened. I was weak. *(pause.)* I wish I had died out there. I wish I were dead. If I were dead, it'd be easier for everyone. I'd finally be alone.

FRANCIS     Don't say that. Don't ever say that.

CHRISTIAN *looks away.*

CHRISTIAN   What I've done is worse than suicide.

CHRISTIAN *drops his head. It's possible he's about to cry. Meanwhile, VIN enters the observation room from offstage carrying a very small, generic Styrofoam cup of coffee.*

FRANCIS     We need a break. *(rises.)* Let's take a break. Drink your coffee. Eat your cookie. I'll be back, OK?

*She gathers her stuff. As she steps away, CHRISTIAN raises his head.*

CHRISTIAN   You... you remind me of the forest. *(pause.)* I feel at home with you.

FRANCIS     *(surprised.)* Oh. Thank you very much? *(pause, thinking.)* Um, you'll take us on a tour of your campsite, right? You can promise me that, right?

CHRISTIAN *nods.* FRANCIS *smiles. She opens the door and moves into the observation room where VIN is waiting.*

VIN           *(mocking.)* "You remind me of the forest."

FRANCIS     Don't start.



VIN *snickers*. Then FRANCIS *laughs, too*.

FRANCIS Boy. It's surreal... he's surreal! Ha, when he mentioned the Kardashians, I kind of had to laugh. I don't think my husband knows who the Kardashians are, but he did.

VIN How's that possible?

FRANCIS He's very focused on his own thing. Wait, you mean my husband or... ?

VIN *is staring through the window at CHRISTIAN, who is staring at the cup of coffee and chocolate cookie in front of him.*

VIN Great job on the campsite intel.

FRANCIS What do you mean?

VIN Yesterday he wouldn't say shit about it. Now he's gonna take us on a tour. Thanks to you. He likes you. First woman he's seen in three decades. You got points, you know? Gotta use that. I'm sure that campsite's gonna give a butt load of evidence. Not just People magazines... (*waves a piece of paper.*) I've estimated at least five hundred robberies. I'm sure it'll go up. This dude's movin' from the forest to felony-ville. Grand larceny. Chief just authorized raising his bond... what with all the attention floodin' in. Imagine if some nutcase offers to bail him out? Some crazy wacko flush with bitcoin settin' him free? I worked too hard for that to happen!

FRANCIS Terry, for the love of god, some compassion.

VIN Why? He's a hardcore thief.

FRANCIS Did you see him? At the end?

VIN At the end?

FRANCIS At the end, when he... when he said he wished he would've *died* out there.

VIN Pffft. Is that all it takes?

FRANCIS He's ashamed. He's *ashamed*. He didn't want to steal. He's... he's....

*She turns to* VIN, *who is starting at* CHRISTIAN *with morbid fascination.*

VIN Wow. He's starvin'. He wants that Starbucks. He's starvin'. Isn't he starvin'? Am I crazy... or is he the hungriest he's ever been? He won't let on, of course. Ha ha, what a scrub!

FRANCIS No. I think he's authentic.

VIN You're a woman.

FRANCIS Come on.

VIN Oh, it's easy bein' authentic when you're poppin' a boner. Wait'll he blows his load. He'll be a wage slave like all the rest.

FRANCIS *Come on.*

VIN Authentic. Ha, bullshit! This guy's such a fuckin' freeloader it's unreal. Remember what he said yesterday about listenin' to Rush Limbaugh? And fuckin' Lynyrd Skynyrd? Poser! Bet you my squad car he goes on welfare once he's outta jail... *when* he's outta jail. That'll be the Medicare you and I work off our asses to support. That, or

he goes back to the woods and starts stealin'.  
Maybe he'll bring you with him, huh? A little  
Elisabeth Smart action? Ha ha!

FRANCIS God. Disgusting.

VIN You gotta watch out. He likes you.

FRANCIS I'd be surprised. Been looking at People mag the  
past 30 years... what am I compared to Kim  
Kardashian? Airbrushed Kim Kardashian.

VIN You're real. A real woman. (*possibly serious.*)  
You, Perkins-Vance, are *authentic*.

FRANCIS (*a little flattered.*) Thanks.

VIN *pats her shoulder.*

FRANCIS (*brushing him off.*) Kojak.

*He raises an eyebrow with mock offense.*

VIN I'm serious now. He could be a serial killer.

FRANCIS *rolls her eyes, heads to door.*

VIN A kidnapper?

FRANCIS Get back to work.

VIN A date rapist??

*Exit FRANCIS into interrogation room. VIN closes the door  
behind her.*

CHRISTIAN Who was that?

FRANCIS Oh, um...

CHRISTIAN He's here, isn't he. He's watching us?

FRANCIS Yes. He works here.

*Suddenly, the door opens and VIN enters. He hands FRANCIS her notebook.*

VIN You forgot this. (*looks at CHRISTIAN.*) Howdy, partner. Why the glum face?

CHRISTIAN *visibly recedes, lowering his eyes.* FRANCIS *glares at VIN.*

VIN Oh right! He wants *privacy*. Like he's used to. Right, right. My bad. My bad, Diane, my bad. Well, I'll be on my way, then! (*he turns, then stops.*) Not gonna drink your coffee, Chris? That's no regular joe! Caramel Macchiato! A personal fav! Much better than this burnt oil slick I'm drinkin'! (*winks at FRANCIS.*) Lemme tell you: "The delicious, multi-layered Macchiato begins with milk steamed until it's stretched and smooth to bring out its natural sweetness and is topped by a dense, creamy foam. Then rich espresso is poured over and through the foam, where it mixes with the milk and creates a brown mark on top..." Don't that make your mouth water?

FRANCIS OK, Terry. I'll take it from here.

VIN Toot-toot-tootsies!

VIN *waves, then moves back into the observation room, sniggering to himself. He watches them through the window.*  
FRANCIS *shakes her head, chews her pen, gets her bearings.*

FRANCIS Sorry about that.

CHRISTIAN *nods.*

FRANCIS How you feelin'? Need anything? Tissue? Water?

CHRISTIAN I'm fine.

FRANCIS Good. (*reviews notes.*) Let's talk more about the campsite. When you take us there... what are we going to find? Anything we should know?

CHRISTIAN *seems to be thinking.*

FRANCIS Any surprises.

CHRISTIAN You won't... you won't find it without me.

FRANCIS OK?

CHRISTIAN Not to brag.

FRANCIS No, tell me.

CHRISTIAN It's got heavy camo. I couldn't take any risks. Pretty much everything... is disguised.

FRANCIS Wow. OK. (*writes in notebook.*) Where'd you learn this? How to do camo and... camp in the dead of winter and stuff? You were too young for the military.

CHRISTIAN I figured it out. Trial and error. I'm not bragging. I have to admit that it's contradictory that I like being invisible. A fucking actor who says he wants to be invisible? Oh yeah, good choice, mate! But it worked. It worked for years.

FRANCIS Did you ever... if you knew it was empty... sleep inside a cabin?

CHRISTIAN *looks up.*

CHRISTIAN Never once did I sleep inside.

FRANCIS Wow.

*She writes this down. The door opens a crack. VIN pokes his head in.*

VIN Diane? A word.

FRANCIS Can it wait?

VIN Nope. Nope, it cannot.

FRANCIS *(to CHRISTIAN.)* Excuse me.

FRANCIS *rises and follows VIN into the observation room.*  
VIN *swiftly shuts the door.*

FRANCIS What?

VIN I just want you to ask him where it is, OK?

FRANCIS That's what I'm doin'!

VIN No, you're lettin' him brag... *mess* with you. All that "You won't find it without me" bullshit.

FRANCIS Well, I'm sure he's right...

VIN No! Hell no, he's not fuckin' right. I track! I know how to track. He could tell us the smallest details and I could... I tracked his ass, just ask his ribs!

FRANCIS Wait. Did you use excessive force?

VIN Fuck no! He's a liar. An attention whore. And he's using this interrogation room as his personal

theater. (*takes a breath.*) He probably has the coordinates. Just *ask*, OK?

FRANCIS *considers this.*

VIN We don't need to hear the *reasons*. About his *feelings*. We just need the evidence, OK? The stolen property. The tools. Whatever. For forensics. We don't even know if there *is* a campsite! You ever consider that? If there's no campsite, it's just some retard breaking into a summer camp for retards: one shot deal, Vance, not very sexy!

FRANCIS It was a summer camp for *disabled* people, Terry! You're so disrespectful!

VIN (*leans in close.*) It could all be made up! It could all be a *lie*!

FRANCIS *shakes her head.*

VIN I was in the Marines eight years. This loser's story doesn't add up. No campfire in the winters? Not a single night spent indoors? I call *bullshit*.

FRANCIS No. He's tellin' the truth.

VIN How do you know?

FRANCIS I just believe the guy, OK? (*pause.*) Unequivocally. I believe him.

VIN (*throws up hands.*) Fine. *Fine*. But if he's playin' you, you're gonna feel pretty stupid.

FRANCIS Well, what do you want me to do?

VIN            I want you to go in there and tell him... cause he sure as hell won't hear it from me... tell him, "I love hearin' about your feelings and philosophy, hermit man, but I gotta go home to my husband and my son, so unless you can tell me the exact coordinates to your campsite, we're just gonna call this a night. You can go watch late nite with Erasmo. From your *cell*."

FRANCIS *smirks*.

VIN            See how he reacts. (*looks at CHRISTIAN.*) Jesus, he's literally *undressing* that cookie with his eyes...

FRANCIS      I think *you* want that cookie!

VIN            Fuck yes, I do. And I admit it, too.

FRANCIS *sighs*.

VIN            Call it off, Diane.

FRANCIS      Don't you think that *process* is in any way important?

VIN            Process?

FRANCIS      How he got from point A to, y'know, point Z? The whole... thing. Like, studyin' the character?

VIN            *Di-annnnne...*

FRANCIS      Hear me out, Terry! (*sighs.*) I mean, the whole emotional-recall thing can be very good for another actor, but it doesn't work for me. For me, it's all about emotional catharsis. And y'know, where you find catharsis just varies from person to person... me, you, Christopher Thomas Knight.



(*pause.*) Like, the more we know about the character, the better. (*pause, thinks.*) Listen. A piece of advice. You don't have to pretend to be neutral, Terry, you can actually *be* neutral. That's part of belief. I really believe that: to believe, we've gotta be neutral. That's how you get into the role. At least... that's how *I* do it. I'm not gonna tell you how to do it. (*pause.*) I just believe the guy, OK? I believe we gotta hear him out... so we can figure out what's goin' on.

VIN *has crossed his arms. He vigorously shakes his head.*

VIN That comes later. It's our responsibility to bring the goods to market, Vance. The *evidence*. Then we can get all... *sociological*. Write some poems. Be his therapist.

FRANCIS So cynical!

VIN The taxpayers are footin' the bill to keep guys like this outta their fuckin' houses! Away from their kids, right? I mean, has it occurred to you how much value this guy has extracted from the state over his measly life? *Never* worked. Stole *everything* he ate. I'm talkin' *everything*! *Everything* he wore. *Everything* he read. All the police who were called to investigate. My *personal* investigations... I caught that guy on my *birthday*, Diane! On my personal b-day when I coulda been at home, kickin' it! Yeah, dude, I was on that guy's ass for *four* years. I fuckin' trained! I installed those sensors, I planned it out, I broke the case wide open! You're fuckin' *right* I'm not neutral!

FRANCIS I know, I know. Congratulations.

VIN           And now this. *This*. I mean, look. A facility to keep him cozy and safe. Lights. Chairs. Walls. Water. A secretary out in the lobby. Our main man, Erasmo. Hundreds of thousands of dollars. Maybe more!

FRANCIS     Are you an accountant now?

VIN           (*building steam*.) He didn't say the closest thing to "Hi, Mom" to his mom for 27 years! *Unbelievable!* Where's the loyalty? What did they teach us in the Academy.... remember? First thing they taught us? You know it! Say it!

FRANCIS     Uh...

VIN           C'mon! Say the motto!

FRANCIS     (*clears voice*.) Integrity. Fairness. Compassion. Excellence.

VIN           That's right. Fuckin' *ethics*, Diane. You got 'em. I got 'em. *Semper Fi*. But this fool? He's treatin' gettin' caught like his *retirement plan*. We're his 401k, Diane, don't you see that? He got caught 'cause he got old. He *needed* to get caught. Before he died out there. All this bullshit about him being a self-made man, an outdoorsman hero, buncha B.S.! He didn't even go fishin' 'cause it was too much work, god almighty, he just stole! Makes me friggin' *sick*. He was just *waitin'* to get caught!

FRANCIS     You're the one who caught him. You didn't have to. You coulda let him go die.

VIN           That's not the point!

- FRANCIS     A tree falls in the forest... no one's there to hear it...
- VIN            His tree crashed into all kinds of lives, scarin' the *daylights* out of old women and kids...
- FRANCIS     Sure, it woulda been one thing to catch him ten years ago, Terry. But now? He's blind as a bat. A middle-aged man. Have some *compassion*. You caught him 'cause you wanted to play the big action star. Admit it! So now what? I'll tell you what. Now we're doin' this. Now we have to deal with the situation... *responsibly*. It's called *due process*.
- VIN            (not listening.) We *work* to add to this world! He takes! He's a negative entity... negative like a... like a pinched dark bunghole suckin' us in! A nasty black bunghole with shit to show for it! (*cracks knuckles*.) The taxpayers entrust *us* to keep the negative entities at bay!
- FRANCIS     Are you sayin' you kicked his ass?
- VIN            What?
- FRANCIS     Are you sure you didn't use excessive force?
- VIN            Listen. If I say "Get on the ground, hands on your head" and you don't comply within a reasonable time frame? I'm gonna make it happen, whether your ribs... or your *feelings*... like it or not. (*pause*.) *What?* Why are you looking at me like that?
- FRANCIS     I don't know, Terry, it's just... I'm surprised. Your views are surprisingly conservative.

VIN            Ug! There's not enough money to keep this going!  
(*pause.*) There is *not enough* money to keep this  
going! (*violently rubs his head.*) Why do I feel  
more and more that I'm talking to a *wall*!

FRANCIS *stares at him.*

FRANCIS    (*slowly.*) I don't think... your opinion... at this  
stage... matters.

VIN            Is it because I'm a POC?

FRANCIS    A pact?

VIN            A POC. Person of color.

FRANCIS    (*confused.*) Uh... what? You're not... Aren't you  
Italian or somethin'?

VIN            I'm mixed, OK! My dad was black. (*pause.*)  
As far as I know. My mom is honest. She  
wouldn't lie. My dad was black. I'm a POC.  
(*pause.*) I am.

FRANCIS    You look white.

VIN            You don't know anything about black culture.

FRANCIS    Nope.

VIN            Naturally! I mean, *jesus*, your husband's movies  
hardly have any... I swear, *white* as the freshly  
fallen snow!

FRANCIS    You're just jealous he never cast you.

*He frowns.* FRANCIS *squints, studying him.*

FRANCIS    Hmm. I guess I do see it.

VIN            See it?

FRANCIS      Yeah.

VIN            *Thank you.* So a POC can't have my views? You think I can't have certain views? Certain *opinions?* Cause of who I am? ( *rubs his head.*) I've been livin' up here for a long time. Payin' taxes for a long time. Contributin' to the local economy. The gift card? Ha ha. It's been hard. It's been hard. But I've been doin' my part. I mean, I'm the guy who went out and caught the guy!

FRANCIS      (*sighs*) I know, I know.

VIN            Everyone was whining about their shit disappearin'. Their L.L. Bean fleece sweaters. Their coolers and Kahlua bottles. I went out and caught him, OK? Now *I* want justice.

FRANCIS      Justice.

VIN            Accountability. I want... (*glaring at CHRISTIAN.*) *Him* to be held to the same standard as *me*.

FRANCIS      Sure.

VIN            I'm a Game Warden. I'm a conserver. I'm a *conservative*.

FRANCIS      OK.

VIN            (*sudden emotion.*) I've earned the right!

FRANCIS      Jeez, where are these issues comin' from, Terry?

VIN *stops, looking a little embarrassed.*

FRANCIS     You're being so *dramatic*. You don't think we all deal with this? How we're perceived? (*pause*.) You think it's easy bein' a woman cop? You think it's easy fieldin' your sexist remarks all the time, like, "Hey, that hermit really likes you, baby"? You think it's easy always bein' the woman from *Fargo*? I mean, I'm blessed and everything, I mean, things have been good, but what about when I'm old and gray... sittin' in a retirement home in Florida or god knows where... and some young orderly is wipin' my ass, sayin', "Hey! I'm wipin' the ass of that lady from *Fargo*!" You think that's fun to think about, Terry? You that'll be the case? Huh?  
*Donchathink?*

VIN            I'm not trying to...

FRANCIS *crosses her arms.*

FRANCIS     Well, I'm not Marge. Marge is a role. Just a role. I'm a human being, OK? I'm Diane Perkins-Vance.

VIN *quietly finishes the last drops of his coffee.*

FRANCIS     So lemme tell you what Diane believes: I happen to think police work can be broader than catch and incarcerate. I believe we're at a point where we can humanize the process. Rehabilitation. Reintegration. Society is changin' more and more in that direction. And it probably always will. And you know why? 'Cause it's more *effective*.

FRANCIS *turns to the window and watches CHRISTIAN, who hasn't changed position.*

FRANCIS     You have a right to your political views... talk to my husband about that, for cryin' out loud... but you don't have a right to inject your politics into your job... especially *this* job...

VIN            My "right wing" politics.

FRANCIS     No. Well. I...

VIN            I'm just tellin' it like it is. I'm gettin' too old to mince words, man. More and more I ask myself: what's wrong with people nowadays? Everybody's so selfish! Remember those parents who abandoned their kids in Palermo?

FRANCIS     Yup. Got your picture in the paper for that one.

VIN            Remember how much that burned me up? How close they came to killin' those little kids, leavin' 'em in the woods overnight while they partied, smokin' crack and eatin' bath salts? That shit sticks with me to this day!

FRANCIS     Pretty different situation, Terry.

VIN            No. It's exactly the same. It's exactly the same. You can take any one of these characters and swap 'em out for Christopher Thomas Knight. It doesn't matter. They're all negative entities. I don't care who they are on paper.

*He goes silent, breathing heavily. FRANCIS studies him.*

VIN            What?

FRANCIS     I don't like your tone. I'm just doin' my job. We don't get to judge these guys. We just ask the questions. We sit down and we treat them like human beings and we write down the answers.

VIN *sighs, pacing.*

VIN Oh man. Goddamit. (*sighs.*) How long you been on the force, Diane? I forget. You know I've been 18 years. I'm lookin' forward to a pension, good little retirement package. All I'm sayin' is that it burns me up pretty bad when people come along expecting handouts...

FRANCIS I thought you liked your job.

VIN It's not that. I like my job. But it's not forever. A guy's gotta *relax* sometime. We're gettin' old, too, y'know!

FRANCIS I dunno. I don't feel old. I like my job. I like to work. It's who I am.

VIN *seems to be calming down, finally listening.*

FRANCIS (*continuing.*) I mean... I guess what it is: I'm happy? (*pause.*) Or at least content. I'm fine with that. I'm doin' fine. (*pause.*) You ever hear of Primo Levi?

VIN Primo who?

FRANCIS Levi. Apparently he said some nice stuff about that. Happiness and all that.

VIN He was a cop?

FRANCIS He was a writer.

*They go silent for a bit, watching their silent captive.*

VIN (*suddenly.*) Are we fightin'?



FRANCIS     You started it.

*She moves to the door.*

VIN            I'm sorry. I'm sorry, but... (*suddenly grins.*)  
                  Sugar plums. Big Macs. Kim Kardashian!

FRANCIS     Jeezum crow. You're bipolar.

VIN *chuckles, rubs his head.*

FRANCIS     You got yourself all worked up. You're sweatin'.

VIN            I need an iced coffee. (*tosses Styrofoam cup.*) This  
                  jailhouse shit's terrible.

FRANCIS     Could use one myself. Starbucks? My treat?

VIN            What about the "North Pond Hermit"?

FRANCIS     (*glances over shoulder.*) Aw, he likes being alone.

VIN            Are you gonna tell him?

FRANCIS     No.

VIN *grins.*

VIN            Y'know, even if we leave, he'll think he's being  
                  watched.

FRANCIS     Then we're doin' our job.

*Together, they walk offstage. CHRISTIAN remains in the interrogation room, knee bouncing, eyes fixed on the coffee and cookie. After a moment, as if psychically sensing he's finally alone, he seizes the Caramel Macchiato, greedily sucking it down and savoring the cloying, creaming sensations while stuffing the cookie into his mouth like a feral pig.*

## Act Two

*One year later, and 30 minutes before the Co-Occurring Disorders Court graduation ceremony at the Kennebec County Superior Court.*

*The left side of the wall is now a waiting room lounge with a few tables, chairs, a water cooler, and some uninspired party decorations: clumps of tinsels, colored paper tape, balloons on the floor. The right side is a courtyard with an outdoor cigarette receptacle, a trash can, a weatherproof plastic bench, etc. The window has been converted to normal transparent glass.*

CHRISTIAN BALE / CHRISTOPHER THOMAS KNIGHT *sits alone in the lounge, drinking from a grande cup of Starbucks coffee, the milk foam catching on his upper lip.* FRANCIS MCDORMAND / STATE TROOPER DIANE PERKINS-VANCE *enters the courtyard from offstage. She peers through the window, taps the glass, waves, then enters the lounge through the door.*

FRANCIS     *(smiling.)* Hi there, Chris! It's been so long!

*She holds out her hand. Chris shakes it without rising.*

FRANCIS     Great to see you! Congratulations!

CHRISTIAN   Thanks.

FRANCIS     It's so amazing they reduced the sentence... you did it! I knew you had it in you.

CHRISTIAN *kind of grunts.* FRANCIS *looks around the room.*

FRANCIS     Wow. It's all done up in here! This is a good program. Helped a lotta people. *(looks at CHRISTIAN.)* You're looking good! Healthy!

CHRISTIAN *nods.*

FRANCIS I won't keep you long. Sorry I haven't been by to visit... it's been a busy year. How's work goin' with Ashley?

*No response.*

FRANCIS Ashley Gaboury? Your probation officer?

CHRISTIAN Oh, I thought you said "assy."

FRANCIS "Assy?"

CHRISTIAN Like it smells like shit in here. (*sniffs air.*) Doesn't it?

FRANCIS (*frowns.*) I'm not sure. (*pause.*) She's a sweetie, right?

CHRISTIAN She's OK.

CHRISTIAN *shifts in his seat, rubbing his fingers, impatiently glancing around.*

FRANCIS You nervous? To graduate?

CHRISTIAN My lawyer told me not to talk to media.

FRANCIS Ha! I'm not media, Chris!

CHRISTIAN Well. A lot got out. What we talked about. Last year. *Alone.*

FRANCIS (*genuinely surprised.*) I was doin' my job! You seriously thought I didn't file a report? What did you think we were *doin'* in there, Chris?

CHRISTIAN We were never alone.

FRANCIS     Ha ha! What? You said you saw all those “cheesy shows!” You know how it works!

*Laughing, she tries to pass it off, move on. Christopher looks away, sipping his coffee.*

FRANCIS     Cut me a break, Chris. You said a lot to that GQ reporter, too.

CHRISTIAN   I ended that. It’s not in anyone’s interest to know that much. I understand people are interested, I get that they want to hear about it, but to me I look at it as...

*He suddenly goes quiet.*

FRANCIS     As what?

CHRISTIAN   *(reluctant.)* As... you do not reveal your secrets.

FRANCIS     Secrets?

CHRISTIAN   Silence is to me normal, comfortable. At first, I was surprised by the amount of respect it garnered me. Now I know.

FRANCIS     Hmm. Well. I guess you’re the one to know. You’ve been gettin’ tons of press. You’re famous now! That woman who wanted to marry you, that guy who offered to bail you out last year... But I can understand it makes a person a little paranoid. People think they know you.

CHRISTIAN   Maybe they do.

FRANCIS     I don’t think so. You’ve always gotta protect who you are, *inside*. The real you.

CHRISTIAN   The “real” me?

FRANCIS     Yeah. I mean, I was completely naive about the business of being an actor. My family didn't go to the theater or to the movies. We watched television, like every 1960's small-town American family, and I certainly never thought about being on TV. I thought I was going to be a classical actor in the grand tradition... But then when things took off, I had to learn there's *you* the actor. And then there's *you* the person.

CHRISTIAN (*disinterested.*) Maybe there's just me.

FRANCIS     I think we're saying the same thing?

CHRISTIAN (*sighs.*) I'm not making any excuses, I'm not whining, I'm not going, "Oh well, if it hadn't have been for that..." Hey, listen, I did it, it's in the public space. Hey, I take the consequences for it. But it's that. It's a creative trust. I've just never been comfortable with the revealing of those mysteries which I think are wonderful mysteries.

FRANCIS     "Wonderful mysteries?"

FRANCIS *seems confused by CHRISTIAN's attitude. He hasn't made eye contact with her and seems to be playing to an audience. She takes a breath, gives him a moment.*

FRANCIS     So are you at least feelin'... content?

CHRISTIAN   Society is horrible. I'm very unhappy. But I'll manage. I'll be OK. I'm always OK.

FRANCIS     Unhappy? Not happy to graduate?

*He doesn't respond.*

FRANCIS     Heard you're livin' with your mom?

CHRISTIAN Ug. I can't stand her. And my sister. Sometimes I want to smack them. *So* annoying.

FRANCIS Um. Well... Brothers get you a job? That's pretty good.

CHRISTIAN "Arbeit Macht Frei."

FRANCIS What's that?

CHRISTIAN Work makes us free.

FRANCIS Now *that* I agree with. I get a lot of satisfaction from my job. Who said that? Uh, what's his name... the guy you like, Primo Levi?

CHRISTIAN The Nazis said that.

FRANCIS'S *smile fades.*

CHRISTIAN Have you ever read *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by William Shirer?

FRANCIS *purses her lips, glances over her shoulder to the window and the outside world.*

FRANCIS Well. Hmm. No. I haven't. (*pause.*) OK, Chris. I guess we should... (*gets serious.*) What are the conditions of your graduation?

CHRISTIAN Conditions?

FRANCIS Like, what do you have to do?

CHRISTIAN (*slightly mocking tone.*) Oh, well, I'm a thief, so I have to not steal. I have Asperger's, so I have to be social. I'm an alcoholic, so I have to keep sober.

FRANCIS You're an alcoholic?

CHRISTIAN Whatever they say.

CHRISTIAN *winks.*

FRANCIS I thought you drank to fatten up. To survive in the woods?

CHRISTIAN I did. But oh, I've been known to imbibe a wee too much Schnapps, ha ha! The hammered hermit! Peachy!

FRANCIS No. That's not you. That's a joke?

CHRISTIAN When I came out of the woods they applied the label "hermit" to me. Strange idea to me. I had never thought of myself as a hermit. Then I got worried. For I knew with the label hermit comes the idea of crazy...

FRANCIS You don't have to worry anymore.

CHRISTIAN Right.

FRANCIS You're not a hermit anymore.

CHRISTIAN Wrong. I am. They were right.

FRANCIS Are you saying you're crazy? You're not better?

CHRISTIAN I'm not saying *anything*. My lawyer told me I'm just a hermit. It's what I know. It's my *character*. My lived experience... I've done it my whole *life*. I'm just your friendly neighborhood hermit!

FRANCIS (*shakes head.*) No, Chris, no, I don't believe that! You're too smart. Too sensitive. You're well-

read! We talked about this, remember? You're like... you've been waiting to come out of your shell, like a hermit crab or... someone with *talent*, like Thoreau, or ...

CHRISTIAN Thoreau? *Pfffft*. Dilettante!

FRANCIS *stops, unable to retort.*

CHRISTIAN Oh, you should have seen me in my twenties! I was lord of the woods. I ruled the land I walked upon. I was tough and clever!

FRANCIS (*almost to herself.*) But you'd old now.

CHRISTIAN Hee hee! I *am* old! I'd be dead out there by now!

*He softly chuckles.* FRANCIS *shuts her eyes, rubs her face.*

FRANCIS You're confusing me, Christopher.

CHRISTIAN What's so confusing?

FRANCIS It's hard to believe... I mean... After all this time, you seem...

CHRISTIAN Sick? Isn't that what I'm supposed to be?

FRANCIS *doesn't reply.*

CHRISTIAN You have to have contact with other humans in order to get sick. (*smiles.*) You have to have contact with other humans in order to... *graduate.*

FRANCIS *looks up.*

FRANCIS Oh boy. (*tentative, of two minds.*) Man. When I hear this it's like... I think... (*pause, thinks.*)



I think the thing I do most in film: I listen. Which is hard if you don't believe the person talkin' to you. (*pause.*) But if you truly listen to the other characters, then somethin' happens to your face. Enough happens to your face, and you don't have to project in any way, you can just let it happen...

CHRISTIAN *folds his arms, watching her.*

FRANCIS One of the problems I had when I was younger... I had no idea what the arc of the character was, I had no idea how the character's story told the story of the play. I was just going scene to scene to scene. If I was lucky, it came out okay through the rehearsals... (*thinks.*) Now. It's like when you talk about death. I think back to when we first met. The way you almost died in the ice storm of '98. I mean, how can you laugh when you're talkin' about life and death? What's your arc, Chris? I thought you'd... I dunno... care *deeply* about those sorts of issues... livin' alone and all, gettin' caught and... rehabilitated? With all the time in the world to think about... what matters?

CHRISTIAN *watches her.*

FRANCIS (*sighs, rubs face.*) You know. I'm gonna level with you here. Right before we first met. Last year. I went to a doctor. And they found a lump. A lump in my armpit... right here. They ran some tests. And it was premalignant. They cut it out. But... but... they're keepin' an eye on me. When they found it, I thought I had cancer, oh, for sure, for sure. I thought I'd die. Leave my kid alone. I mean, my husband's pretty good, but y'know, not havin' a mom is super tough. I thought I'd leave him alone... and... and... it all hit me. Death. Like it hadn't hit me in decades. I will be no more. This whole thing. Me. My face. (*rubs her face.*)

My hands. My name. My house. My job. No one knows this, but sometimes the terror hits me so so hard. I dunno. Not of dying, but of what life is. Sometimes... it does feel like this pointless... *spectacle*? The way you talked about our society. The Kardashians. The materialism. Just gets worse and worse, doesn't it? I used to pray to god... now even that seems like any other shallow pastime. Any other thing you'd tweet about. So what? If life is that, and then it vanishes? Why bring us into an insane world and then rip us out? What's the point? (*pause.*) I guess... the way you lived your life out there, and the way you talked about almost dyin' out there... in the woods alone... and... I guess, how you just embraced it. I still want to know what you went through. I won't tell anyone. I truly won't tell anyone. I won't!

CHRISTIAN *is silent.*

FRANCIS No?

*He is silent. She waits.*

FRANCIS Nothin'?

*Nothing.*

FRANCIS (*lowers her head.*) OK. That's OK. I know it's hard.

FRANCIS *sighs. The she looks up and smiles, her eyes wet.*

FRANCIS I always try... to stay positive. Take it one day at a time. Deep down, I'm a positive person. No matter what role I'm supposed to play. I'm a character actress, plain and simple.

CHRISTIAN (*unfazed.*) Really? That seems so basic. Me, I kind of like movies where I just get to be dirty and crawling in the mud, like *Rescue Dawn*. It was all very primordial stuff, and with this one it was all about wearing the same clothes day after day and getting sweaty and dirty and sun exposure, and it's meant to be like that; Westerns are meant to be dirty, they shouldn't be all nice and clean. And I like getting my hand dirty. You know, really *become* the character. (*heavily blinks.*) A little bit after you arrested me, when I was in jail those seven months, I had a freak-out. I kind of exploded. At that asshole cop. Your friend...

FRANCIS Wait. Terry? What happened?

CHRISTIAN In jail. I was nearly always tired and nervous. It was too loud. Too colorful. The lack of aesthetics. The crudeness. The inanities. The trivia. And that asshole... Hughes... Sergeant Hughes... he kept messing with the lights. He was there, messing with the lights. For days. Had all these tools. The noise. Getting in my eyeline. And I sort of exploded. It was only once. I said some terrible things. But you know what? It felt good. It felt like I was finding my character. It felt like me. I had never exploded at someone before. Not like that. Not since I was a kid, before I went into the woods. It felt like something all my own. People wanted me to apologize. So I apologized. I said sorry to the Sergeant. It wasn't about him, really. But I wasn't sorry. Why apologize... why *explain*... your own experience? I mean, it's yours. It's no one else's. That's all that matters.

FRANCIS What did Sergeant Hughes think?

CHRISTIAN I don't know. (*pause.*) Honestly though? I don't give a shit.

*A long silence.*

FRANCIS I thought this program helped you.

CHRISTIAN Oh, it did!

CHRISTIAN *winks. Meanwhile, VIN DIESEL / MAINE WARDEN SGT. TERRY HUGHES enters from offstage into the courtyard. He casually lights a cigarette and smokes, gazing off into the distance.*

FRANCIS *(suddenly rising.)* Well. I won't keep you. I just... wanted... thought I'd check in. Congratulate you. Since we had such a nice talk. That time. Last year. *(pause.)* OK, Chris. I'm gonna go.

*Arms folded, CHRISTIAN nods. He almost smirks.*

FRANCIS Bye, Chris.

FRANCIS *exits through the door into the courtyard. For the remainder of the act, CHRISTIAN sits alone in the lounge, arms crossed, slightly smirking, sipping his coffee and impatiently bouncing his knee. Smoking his cigarette, VIN nods when he sees FRANCIS.*

FRANCIS *(flustered.)* What are you doin' here?

VIN *(checks time on his phone.)* I gotta testify. Poachin' case. *(looks up.)* What's wrong?

FRANCIS *sighs and plops on the bench.*

VIN You're pale, Vance. What's goin' on?

FRANCIS I think everything he said... is bullshit! I don't know? He's so different! He said all kinds of...

VIN           Who? What?

FRANCIS     Christopher Thomas... the *hermit*.

VIN           (*puffing*.) Oh, right. He's graduatin' today. Good for him.

FRANCIS     Good for him? I thought you hated him.

VIN           Hate's a strong word.

FRANCIS     Not for you.

VIN           Whadya mean? I don't get it.

FRANCIS     It's like we *never* met. Never ever spoke before. *Ever*. He's a stranger!

VIN *watches her*.

FRANCIS     They say he has alcohol problems. *Alcohol* problems? In the *woods*? Alcohol is a problem in society! If you're all alone, it doesn't affect anyone but yourself! I just don't get it! Could he be playin' the system?

VIN           Not very fair of you. Alcohol's a silent killer.

FRANCIS     I mean, what do you do... puke on your tent, forget to put out your campfire? He survived so hard and so long... alcohol problems were the least of his worries. My *husband* has alcohol problems...

VIN           C'mon.

FRANCIS     It just doesn't explain anything! You can write the guy off, oh, he has alcohol problems. He drinks

too much. That explains everything. But it doesn't! It doesn't explain *why*!

VIN            He's a thief. He's got Asperger's. And he's a drunk. OK. We figured him out. What's the big deal, Diane? What's so hard to believe?

FRANCIS      No, no, *no*! There *has* to more going on with him. He's an individual... he's unique. He had *unique* experiences! They're writin' songs about him. He's a folk hero!

VIN            A *folk hero*? Maybe he's just an asshole.

FRANCIS *looks glum.*

VIN            Where are all these "folks" who see him as a hero? Some guy with a Youtube channel? Playin' an acoustic guitar with his son who's probably a manager at Panera? A paralegal? These are the "folks"?

FRANCIS      You sound crazy...

VIN            There are no *folks*, Diane! These days? No way! Everyone has iPhones. Everyone's on the internet. *Everyone*. Look at it this way. Remember... like, 27 years ago... when someone cooked some really nice fancy meal. I mean *really* nice. I'm not talkin' about, like... Betty Crocker. I'm talkin' about some dish with organic roast chicken and pomegranate seeds and some fuckin' balsamic reduction and some poached pears or... y'know, if someone made that back then, you'd be like, holy shit, this is amazin'. Now it's like, "Holy shit, this is amazin'. I'm gonna go watch Netflix. Wow. That movie was amazin'. Oh goodie, organic pomegranate ice cream, thank you very much. Amazin'." But does it feel amazin'? No.

Not like it did where there were *folks*. That guy with his fuckin' fake-ass folk song...

FRANCIS Did you even listen to it?

VIN I saw it on Youtube. (*waving cigarette, singsongy.*) "The North Pond Hermit." "The North Pond Hermit." (*shakes head.*) Don't you see? As if it's like that anymore. Nowadays... days when folk heroes like Bob Dylan sell their notebooks... manuscripts... for like 2 million dollars. Are those the folks you're talkin' about? The folks spendin' millions on scraps of paper? Everyone... this so-called hermit... he's as dependent on the state... modern culture... as dependent as any of us. Always has been. Always will be.

FRANCIS I think we agree.

VIN We don't.

FRANCIS We do.

VIN We don't. Prove it.

FRANCIS OK. There are no folks anymore. But Chris gives us a reason...

VIN A reason?

FRANCIS I mean... this guy *reminds* us...of an existence which we are so... out of *touch* with nowadays!

VIN Like what?

FRANCIS Solitude. Sufferin'. Silence.

VIN           What solitude? What sufferin'? What silence?  
He's *famous*. Maybe he always wanted this.

FRANCIS    You think he did it for show?

VIN           Yes.

FRANCIS    He lived his life... for 27 years. For *show*?

VIN           Yes! Because it can't be proved otherwise! He's  
the same as the Kardashians now! I mean, if he  
were serious... if he were real... if he were a *folk  
hero*... he woulda never been caught. We wouldn't  
even know he exists. He'd be that fallen tree in the  
forest, just like you said. But he's not. So it's all a  
show, whether you agree or not, y'know,  
regardless of his *intent*. I don't give a shit why he  
walked into the woods 27 years ago. What I care  
about is the result: a *show*. (*karate chop gesture*.)  
He mocks you, Diane! He's a common criminal.  
He's not special, OK? Which is totally fine! We  
deal with guys like him everyday. But you know  
what a hypocrite is? The *word* hypocrite?  
It's Greek... for *actor*. Playing a part!

VIN *cracks his back and sighs*.

VIN           I *know* you know what I'm sayin'! Because  
movies, both seein' movies and manifestin'  
movies, are a form of escapism. That's the goal of  
all movies: you are allowed to escape reality for a  
couple hours. But makin' movies, you can escape  
reality because you are focusin' on something that  
doesn't really exist. You are focusin' on a  
storyline that doesn't exist, stakes that don't exist,  
characters that don't exist. So I guess it's a form  
of escapism that's a part of the process of makin'  
movies as well. It's like a circle. You can't have  
one without the other. My point is that you get



sucked in, Diane, there are no fuckin' *folks* anymore!

FRANCIS This is so cynical.

VIN You're cynical for playin' into it. He's just a thief we caught. Doin' his time. Livin' with his mom. I mean, don't get me wrong, I'm happy he's graduatin'. Sucks to be him though. In general.

FRANCIS (*groans.*) God. Maybe you're right.

*She bites at her nails, unmoored.*

FRANCIS Is it true... is it true he snapped at you?

VIN He told you that?

FRANCIS He was practically braggin'!

VIN Hmm...

FRANCIS Why didn't you.... y'know, I mean... defend yourself? You just let him berate you like that and... ?

VIN Ha ha, man, "excessive force," Diane? Naw. Shit. I didn't tell you? That's funny. (*rubs head.*) Boy. It's been a long year. A hard year. For everybody. Hmmm. Remember all the budget cuts last fall? Remember how they could barely afford to fix the most... the most *basic* shit at the jailhouse?

FRANCIS *nods.*

VIN Well, I was lookin' to pick up some extra hours then... y'know, preparin' for Xmas and all. The lights kept goin' out... big short in the grid. Chief was puttin' it off, like, we don't have the

money to overhaul the system. But it needed to get done. Any fool could see that.

FRANCIS I remember. All the flickerin'. Could barely see.

VIN Yeah. Annoying. So I volunteered.

FRANCIS You fixed it?

VIN Well, not exactly volunteered. I offered to fix the system for half-price. Y'know, on top of my police work. Double-duty. Picked up some electric experience in the Marines, so I was like, what the hell.

FRANCIS OK?

VIN So there I was. Workin' my way down the line. Fixin' the grid. Job was a lot harder than expected. Kept me up late. And I was gettin' up early, too, for the beat.

FRANCIS OK?

VIN I guess all the testin' and rewirin' and messin' with fluorescent tubes really got under his skin. The hermit. I was workin' where Erasmo watches TV... like a snake nest of cabling. Took me a minute to figure it out. Actually, turned out it was the source of the problem. But your little buddy had no patience: sittin' there, freakin' out that he couldn't read his fuckin' book, *The Rise of the Nazis* or some bullshit. Screamin' the most obscene things at me... I was like, where you pick this shit up? Like, it was real modern, up-to-date cuss words... like stuff *I* would use! Stuff invented in the early 2000s at the earliest!

FRANCIS Wow.

VIN            He's nasty. He's a nasty nasty creature. Boy, it took a lotta patience not to bust a few more of those sweet baby-back ribs... Erasmo stopped me. But the worst thing 'bout it, Vance, it wasn't that gay hermit. It was the Chief. When the job was all through, Chief barely said a thank you. He acted like me fixin' the whole damn system...was the most *natural* thing in the world! Like, it was *normal* for me to be two things at once. Even asked me if I wanted to take on some extra shit at the courthouse. I tell you what! I almost quit. I almost quit that day.

FRANCIS     But you didn't.

VIN            No, I did not. But I learned somethin'. I fuckin' *learned* somethin'. A guy like me. A guy like me can't win. I can't get respect... unless I *do*. The more I *do*, the more respect I get. But it's always in proportion to the *doing*. The less I do, the less respect. It's like workin' out in the gym, right? When you got poppin' muscles, people think it's *natural*. The way it's supposed to be. But when you take a break, everyone forgets you. That you were ever a stud. That you ever *existed*. (*he pauses for effect*.) It's the opposite of being a hermit. The more he does... the less pure he is. The harder it is... to *respect* him. As a hermit. Someone who's not supposed to exist.

FRANCIS *intently listens.*

VIN            So when the shit went down... with the hermit. I almost didn't mind. Cause you know what? He was actin' exactly how he should, given his situation. Exactly how I expect a hermit like him to act: a snivelin' entitled little bitch. A little *phony*. Yeah, he revealed his true colors. Actually

made me feel kinda good... kinda comfortable. Like, at least he knows his place. He's found his... *true character*. And I guess I've found mine. Ha ha, maybe I'm gettin' *compassionate*. Cause the truth is: the older I get... the harder it's gonna be to *do*, and the less respect I'm gonna get. It's just the fuckin' reality. It's somethin' I've gotta deal with. You know what I'm sayin'?

FRANCIS *uncomfortably nods*.

VIN I *know* you know what I'm sayin'.

FRANCIS (*slowly*) *No Country for Old Men*.

VIN Ha, shit. Right. Wasn't cast in that one neither.

FRANCIS It reminds me... it's like... when I was in *Fargo*, everybody was always askin' me, what's the point of the "Mike Yaganita" scene? Why is it there? How does it fit in? Well, you see, I didn't get that scene 'til I saw the final film. I mean, my husband... I'm always around him and his brother when they're writin', but I don't ask questions. I try to stay out of their hair. But the Yaganita thing... After I saw the film and it was a big success and everythin', well, I realize only later it was all about character. I mean, of course, I *knew* it was about character, but I learned about *her* character. And in that way, I learned about myself. You see, Mike Yaganita is a liar. He's a very sweet, he's very sad, he's very charming... but he's a liar. That's the big fact about him. There's no facts in the face of that fact. He's a liar. And from the point of view of a cop, well, that's all that matters. The *facts*. Marge has to remember that she's a cop first, and a woman second.

VIN Isn't it the other way around?

FRANCIS     No. It can't be. Being a woman is a weakness in our society. To be a woman first is be disadvantaged. She can't fall into the motherin' role. Yaganita makes Marge understand this. And that's why she goes back to Jerry... and realizes he's full of shit, too.

VIN            She becomes hard.

FRANCIS     Yeah. She becomes hard. She has to. *(pause.)* But y'know, deep inside... she was *always* hard.

*They go silent for a moment. VIN lights another cigarette. He offers it to FRANCIS. She accepts. He lights another for himself.*

FRANCIS     Man, the more I think of it, the more insane it is he moved in with his mom.

VIN            Tell me about it.

FRANCIS     What a mooch!

VIN *just smokes.*

FRANCIS     Such a grown-up baby! He said he wanted to "smack her."

VIN            I heard he *did!* In a hotel room. His sister, too.

FRANCIS     What a creep.

VIN            Some people are like that. *(exhales.)* But y'know, I've been tryin'... to be a little more forgivin' these days. *(pause.)* My best friend died that year. It threw me for a loop.

FRANCIS I heard. I'm sorry. I know it's probably still painful.

VIN It was terrible car accident. He burned to death. And the whole time, we had a movie to shoot, y'know? A movie about cars. And people kept askin' *more* from me. More, more... when's the next film comin'? Will the franchise survive? What's gonna happen? I was tryin' to keep it close to the vest throughout the release. Paul used to say that the eighth film was guaranteed. And in some ways, when your brother guarantees somethin', you sometimes feel like you have to make sure it comes to pass... (*swallows.*) So if fate has it, then you'll get this when you hear about it. Number seven was for Paul, number eight is from Paul.

FRANCIS *nods.*

VIN I guess what I'm tryin' to say, Diane... it's us. We're the survivors. The *real* survivors. And that hermit? He's just a hermit. He never cared about anyone but himself. That's why he's a hermit. It's the definition. You can't take it personally. He's just an asshole hypocrite hermit who stole some stuff, got caught (by me, of course), tried in a court of law, and went through a program to get better and hopefully he stays better. And y'know, thank your lucky stars you're not him. I mean, we worked all our lives, earned our keep. We focus on what matters. Friends. Family. Doin' our job right. Even if it's two jobs at once...

VIN'S *phone vibrates in his pocket. He fumbles for it, answers.*

VIN Hello? Yo, Kev, what's up? I'm in the middle of a scene. (*pause.*) Oh, *shiiiteeee!* You for real? (*pause.*) Sweet, baby. Let's talk tomorrow. Lotsa love, bro. You rock.

*He hangs up. FRANCIS looks curious.*

VIN            Good news! Agent just signed me to reboot Kojak. Makin' a film starring *me*. As Kojak.

FRANCIS      I thought you hated that comparison!

VIN            Money talks, baby! I'll be whoever they want me to be.

FRANCIS      Is Kojak a person of color?

VIN            Sure he's a POC. He's Greek. Of courses he's a POC.

FRANCIS      Oh. Duh. I'm happy for you!

*VIN laughs, squeezes her shoulder.*

VIN            Well, partner. Back to work?

FRANCIS      *(smiles.)* Back to work.

*Together, they walk offstage. In the lounge, CHRISTIAN just sits there, staring straight ahead, sipping his Starbucks, bouncing his knee, alone.*

*End.*