

DOGS

Pilot Episode: "Sundrop"

Written by

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EXT. A FOREST - NIGHT

A POV shot: we track slowly forward, stealthily, like a predator, trees and snow on the ground silver-lit by the full moon, a nocturnal winter world, hypnotic and throbbing.

A voice-over begins, world-weary, ragged, struggling to form the words. The voice of a man we will come to know as FORK:

FORK (V.O.)

When I was younger, I used to think
life was some kind of cosmic joke.
But give life enough time and pain,
you stop laughing.

Dark, amorphous shapes in the forest loom into view then dissolve into the darkness.

FORK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The worst kind of pain is hunger.
The constant longing for what you
can't have. Maybe that's the price
for being human.

We move low across the snow-covered forest floor.

FORK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But now? That pain's fading. Some
days I even forget how bad it hurt.

We push through dense branches toward a clearing.

FORK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Some days I imagine I just dreamed
that life. Unless the dream is the
life I'm in now. Nothing to have.
Nothing to want.

We pause at the edge of the woods, a dark field ahead, in which cattle stir -- sensing the approach of a predator.

FORK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Just living --

A cow slowly lifts its head to sniff the air.

FORK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Free -- To be what I am.

A pair of large, non-human eyes suddenly appear in the dark forest, reflecting the light of the full moon. Suddenly, the creature springs forward from the trees.

A GUNSHOT RINGS OUT and reverberates through the trees, and we CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP on a rifle gunsight being lowered, revealing the flecked, weather-worn face of hunter BILL COADY (70's).

TIM (O.S.)
You get him?

BILL
Yuh. Got him.

We are now in:

EXT. A DIFFERENT FOREST - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun sinks along the forested shoreline of Lake Superior.

Bill heads toward his kill, followed by TIM KEENE (20s, fit, clean-cut) and ANDY WERTHAM (30s, overweight), all three dressed in hunters' camouflage and bright orange vests. Their breath steams the air, boots crunching crisp snow.

They come upon the dead body of an emaciated wolf, crimson blood seeping from a bullet hole and staining the snow.

TIM
You reckon that's the one?

Bill screws up his face.

BILL
Nah. She's starving. One we're after's gonna be bigger. And well-fed.

Surly, Bill looks up at the sinking sun.

BILL (CONT'D)
We better get back before we lose the sun.

EXT. THE FOREST - LATER

The sun has dropped, leaving a dull blue gloom across the forest. Bill drags the wolf carcass behind him, its legs now bound with twine, while Andy and Tim follow a short way behind, deep in conversation.

TIM
It's not about willpower. It's about mindset. Where the mind goes, the body follows.

ANDY
(out of breath)
Easy to say in your 20s, Tim. Just wait 'til your 30s when your body's got a mind of its own.

Bill scans the tree line, irritated by the chatter.

TIM
That's why you have to outsmart it.
You ever tried paleo or keto?

ANDY
I got a wife and kids who live on
pancakes and grilled cheese, when
the hell am I gonna --

TIM
-- Well that's what I'm saying --

BILL
(finally snapping)
-- Would you just stop saying
anything? The wolves don't wanna
hear this shit any more than I do.

Tim and Andy look chastened.

TIM
Sorry Bill.

ANDY
Maybe it's moved on? New territory?

BILL
Doubt it. It's got a taste for
livestock and pets around here.

Bill pauses, looking around at the gathering shadows.

BILL (CONT'D)
We'll try again tomorrow.

Bill carries on, followed by Tim. Andy hangs back.

ANDY
Nature calls. Be right with you --

Andy waits until he's alone, undoes his pants and squats.

EXT. LOGGING ROAD CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

Bill and Tim approach a mud-spattered heavy duty pickup truck parked in the clearing. Bill clicks his key fob and the truck starts up remotely.

BILL
We'd 'a covered a lot more ground
without your buddy back there.

TIM

(sighs)

Andy's a good guy. But -- yeah.

Bill drags the dead wolf to the back of the truck and lets down the rear tailgate.

BILL

Gimmie a hand will you?

Tim helps Bill lug the carcass on to the truck.

EXT. THE FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Andy has clearly just defecated, and sniffs the air looking less than impressed. He looks around uncertainly for something to clean up with, settling on a large frond.

His attention is suddenly drawn by a faint sound and movement from somewhere in the deepening shadows. He frowns.

ANDY

Tim?

He squints at a half-seen shape in the dark woods.

ANDY (CONT'D)

That you?

EXT. LOGGING ROAD CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Bill closes up the tailgate.

TIM

So how many wolves you ever killed on one of these culls?

BILL

Killed? Eleven. Shot twelve.

He turns to Tim with a flinty look.

BILL (CONT'D)

You get close enough to shoot one, you make damn sure you kill it.

Tim nods as he takes this wisdom in. Suddenly:

PIERCING SCREAMS are heard from the woods.

TIM

... Andy?

Bill grabs his gun and runs for the woods. Tim stands frozen, watching as Bill disappears into the dark woods.

Tim is frozen to the spot, listening with growing horror as Andy's screams intensify -- then abruptly end. Moments later a GUNSHOT RINGS OUT.

TIM (CONT'D)

Oh crap.

Unsure what to arm himself with, Tim grabs a shovel from the back of the truck and hesitantly takes off into the woods.

EXT. THE FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Tim stumbles through the darkening woods, adrenaline coursing through his veins. He rounds a bend to discover Bill bent over on his haunches, his gun on the ground beside him.

TIM

You okay? What happened?

Fighting for breath, Bill shakes his head, and gestures to a spot at the edge of the trees.

In the gathering gloom, Andy makes out a terrible sight: Andy's mutilated corpse, throat torn open; guts, blood and viscera spilling onto the snow.

TIM (CONT'D)

Andy?

Bill stares on, his breath strained and heavy. He clutches his chest and falls forward into the snow.

ANDY

-- Bill?

INT. FRAN AND FORK'S HOME - NIGHT

FRAN FORCHETTE, mid-30s, munches on chips, curled up happily on a sofa beside her husband JOHN 'FORK' FORCHETTE, late 30s. Her face contorts with amusement at the TV show. His is serious, detached, cerebral, like his mind is elsewhere.

The show they're watching erupts with GUNSHOTS.

FRAN

Okay, this is why cop shows drive me crazy.

FORK

Lemme guess. You're jealous of all the people TV cops get to shoot?

FRAN

No. It just bears zero relation to reality.

More GUNSHOTS. Fran scoffs. Fork lets out a weary sigh.

FORK
Well I don't care. Let's watch one
you wish-listed.

As Fork reaches for the remote, Fran's phone RINGS. She checks the caller, frowns, and answers with an 'official' tone:

FRAN
Forchette.
(listening, then
reacting:)
Oh my God.

EXT. LOGGING ROAD CLEARING - NIGHT

A police car pulls up beside an AMBULANCE and Bill's PICKUP. Fran, now in police uniform, gets out, taking in the scene.

Bill is on a gurney in the back of the ambulance, an oxygen mask strapped to his face. Fran makes her way to Bill's pickup, where she sees Tim in the front seat.

FRAN
Tim?

He doesn't answer. She TAPS on the window. He starts, nervous. Seeing it's Fran, he opens the door.

FRAN (CONT'D)
You okay?

Tim nods -- but the look in his eyes tells us otherwise.

EXT. THE FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

Tim leads Fran towards work lights set up in the forest.

TIM
Bill and me'd just gotten back to
the truck, and then we heard the
screams and came running. That's
when we found --

He gestures toward two PARAMEDICS who are loading Andy's remains into a body bag.

TIM (CONT'D)
Then Bill keeled over.

The paramedics stand aside and Fran squats down to take a closer look. She shines her flashlight to illuminate Andy's horrific wounds.

FRAN

Oh Andy --

Shaken, she stands up and turns to Tim, who's looking away.

FRAN (CONT'D)

Did you see it?

TIM

What? The wolf? No, by the time we got here he was already...

He motions at the bloody scene, clearly distraught. Fran puts a comforting hand on his arm, then nods to the paramedics. They zip Andy up.

EXT. TOWN OF SUPERIOR BAY, MI. - MORNING - MONTAGE

Light SNOW FALLS over Superior Bay. The downtown cluster along the water speaks of the old town's past:

The old ore mining wharf. Rusting barges. Old harbor buildings. An old brick Main Street. The clock tower on the local college campus.

Newer buildings are from the 1960s - the campus, government offices -- and the police station.

EXT. THE POLICE STATION - DAY

A WOMAN places flowers among piles of bouquets around a FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH of ANDY in his POLICE UNIFORM. A tribute.

CHIEF CHIN (O.S.)

An officer dies in circumstances like this -- what do you even say?

INT. THE POLICE STATION - DAY

Fran, Tim, and several other UNIFORMED OFFICERS lean on desks, facing their boss, the weary and wise-looking POLICE CHIEF DESMOND CHIN (50s).

Chin struggles to swallow down his emotions as he addresses his troops.

CHIEF CHIN

We sign on for this job, we know the dangers. We all know sometimes a brother falls in the line of duty. But this -- When they authorized this goddamned cull none of us could have foreseen this.

(MORE)

CHIEF CHIN (CONT'D)
 A fellow officer, off-duty,
 volunteering to keep us safe. Only
 to -- to -- I mean, a goddamn wolf...

His voice tails away. He lowers his head and catches himself.

CHIEF CHIN (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry, folks. Excuse me.

He turns to retire to his office, passing Fran. He mutters to her quietly.

CHIEF CHIN (CONT'D)
 Fran, you got a moment?

INT. CHIEF CHIN'S OFFICE - DAY

Fran closes the door as Chin removes his hat and places it on the desk before slumping into a chair behind his desk.

CHIEF CHIN
 A goddamn wolf -- I mean, if I'd
 known something like this could happen --

FRAN
 It's no one's fault, Chief.

CHIEF CHIN
 Yeah, well, you know there's plenty
 of questions being asked already.
 We'll need to make a full report.
 You okay with taking that on?

FRAN
 Sure.

Chin nods his gratitude.

EXT. UPPER PENINSULA UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY

A LAMPPOST bears a "NO CULL" poster. Beyond it, an anonymous 1960's university campus building.

Staring from a second-floor window into the falling snow, we recognize Fran's husband, Fork.

INT. A CLASSROOM - DAY

Fork gazes absently out the window as his class of COLLEGE STUDENTS writes in exam booklets with furious concentration.

Fork checks his watch and lets out a deep sigh before staring once again out of the window.

The intense silence is broken by the distant GONG of the campus clock tower. Fork turns to face his class.

FORK
Alright, time. Pens down please.

The students close their papers and stretch as Fork makes his way to his desk.

FORK (CONT'D)
Papers on my desk as you leave and
see you all next week.

Fork sits back down at his desk as the students file past, placing their completed exams in front of him. As Fork gathers them into a neat pile, one last paper is SLAPPED down emphatically on top.

Fork looks up startled to see a final student, BOBBY BONAKOWSKI (21, punkish) grinning down at him.

BOBBY
Really enjoying the class, Professor
Forchette.

FORK
(taken aback)
Okay, Bobby.

Bobby gives Fork a smile dripping with irony, then lopes out. Fork frowns and watches him go -- that was weird.

EXT. LOGGING ROAD CLEARING/FOREST - DAY

A police car sits parked on an isolated stretch of road.

Beyond it the treeline -- forbidding and mysterious.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

Fresh snow partially covers the bloodstained area where Andy was attacked. Fran pokes around at the spot while Tim looks on. She finds evidence of human excrement.

FRAN
Looks like this is where he relieved
himself --

Fran squats and scans around, putting herself in Andy's shoes.

FRAN (CONT'D)
So he was right here while you and
Bill continued that way to the road?

Tim nods. She turns her gaze the other way.

FRAN (CONT'D)

So most likely it came at him from
somewhere over this way.

TIM

I guess so.

Fran stands and looks over the ground around them.

FRAN

Looks like it dragged him this way.
You can see the scuffle --

She takes in where the snowpack was obviously disturbed.

FRAN (CONT'D)

Fresh snow's covered any animal
tracks...

She sighs at the lack of meaningful evidence.

FRAN (CONT'D)

Walk me through it again, will you?
You heard the screams, you came
running with Bill --

TIM

Right, we're at the truck. Bill grabs
his gun and we start running back --

FRAN

So you got here first?

TIM

Ah -- no, I mean, kind of around the
same time --

FRAN

And you're where?

TIM

Just around here. And Bill's there,
where he takes his shot at it.

FRAN

Bill shot at it?

TIM

Yeah. Did I not...?

FRAN

No. So -- you saw it?

Tim shuffles awkwardly as he realizes he needs to adjust his
story slightly.

TIM

Actually, now I think of it, Bill was just a bit ahead. And I heard the shot as I was coming up.

Fran frowns at Tim's new version of events.

FRAN

Huh. So *Bill* saw it?

Tim shrugs a maybe.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Chief Chin leans on the desk beside the station receptionist MAY, a willowy looking woman dressed older than her age.

CHIEF CHIN

You set this up yourself?

Chin is looking at a CROWDFUNDING PAGE to raise money for Andy's family.

MAY

Yes sir. To help Andy's family. Is that okay?

CHIEF CHIN

So you're telling me anyone can just come on this thing and leave a donation?

MAY

Yes sir. You can crowdfund just about anything these days.

May answers a call as he gazes at the screen, trying to make sense of it.

CHIEF CHIN

Huh. People are good.

The receptionist looks up from the phone.

MAY

Chief? There's been another animal attack.

EXT. FARMSTEAD OUTSIDE OF TOWN - DAY

Dense, foreboding forest encircles a remote farm field.

CHIEF CHIN (O.S.)

So you figure it happened last night?

BESS (O.S.)

Yup.

In the field, the farmer, BESS DALE, a hard-looking middle-aged woman in glasses and tractor cap, tugs on a hand-rolled cigarette as Chief Chin stands over a horrifically mutilated cow, its viscera spread across in the fresh snow.

CHIEF CHIN

You hear anything?

BESS

If you ever heard a cow scream, you'd know it. Guess that's why it gets the throat first. Shut it up. Then just has at it all down here.

Chief Chin examines tracks in the slurry of red snow and slush: cows, boots -- and dog-like tracks.

CHIEF CHIN

Guess these are the wolf tracks --

BESS

Naw. That's Ticker.

She points at a big German Shepherd tied up by the house.

BESS (CONT'D)

He was out here helping himself when I came out. Had to tie him up.

Chief Chin removes his hat and runs his fingers through his hair, out of ideas.

CHIEF CHIN

Well we got another team out on the cull. Hopefully this shouldn't be a threat much longer.

BESS

If it's a wolf.

A beat. They look at the mutilated cow.

CHIEF CHIN

Why d'you say that?

BESS

Well -- doesn't look like any kinda wolf attack I seen before.

Chin raises an eye at Bess.

CHIEF CHIN

What are you suggesting?

Bess stares at Chin with a serious, conspiratorial look.

INT. STUDENT BAR - COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

A group of STUDENTS sit at a corner table, among them a self-assured, punkish girl in a leather jacket, MIO (mid 20s).

STUDENT ONE

-- Don't you get it? They're basically arguing that cattle are property that exists solely for exploitation as food --

STUDENT TWO

-- Give it a rest --

STUDENT ONE

-- So if wild animals threaten the supply, they can justifiably murder them. Not only is the premise flawed, it's immoral on every level.

STUDENT TWO

Well then I guess this dead cop just evens up the score. Right, Mio?

The students look to Mio -- clearly her opinion carries some weight. Mio continues chewing gum for a moment then shrugs.

MIO

Who gives a shit? Bullshit like this is exactly what the ruling elite want us arguing about while they're busy fucking us all in the ass.

BOBBY (O.S.)

You should have been a poet babe.

Mio barely registers a self-satisfied grin and glances up at Bobby who has appeared at the table.

MIO

Bobby, I am so not your *babe*.

Bobby shrugs and grins inanely. He gestures to her that he wants to talk privately and she gets up.

MIO (CONT'D)

See you guys later.

INT. FORK'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Fork bends over a cheap folding desk in his messy, cubbyhole office, wearily marking the exams. He finishes one, shoots himself in the head with a finger-gun -- and marks it with a C MINUS in red ink.

FORK

Moron.

His phone rings. He checks the screen and answers.

FORK (CONT'D)

Hey there officer.

Intercut with:

INT. FRAN'S POLICE CAR - DAY

Fran speaks with him on the car's paired speaker. Tim sits in the passenger seat.

FRAN

Hey professor. You home yet?

FORK

No, still busy confirming that my teaching this semester's been an utter waste. What's up?

FRAN

I'm gonna be late. There's steak in the freezer I forgot to pull out this morning.

FORK

So you want me to whip out the hard meat as soon as I get home. Got it.

He grins.

She rolls her eyes. Tim doesn't know where to look.

FORK (CONT'D)

Anything special you want me to do with it? Tenderize it? Give it a rub? Think we might have some jerk spice. Want me to jerk that meat for you, or --?

FRAN

-- John? I'm in the car on speakerphone with Tim.

Fork closes his eyes - shit.

TIM

Hi Fork.

FORK

Hey Tim. Just keeping it fresh.

TIM

Okay.

FORK

Guess I'll just leave the steak to thaw then.

FRAN

Good idea.

She rings off, suppressing a smile.

Fork hangs up and turns up the next exam paper.

The name on the front reads: BOBBY BONAKOWSKI.

FORK

Bobby Bonakowski. Will he scale the heights of another F --?

Fork sighs and begins to read. But right away there's something surprising to what he's taking in. He rechecks the name on the front of the paper.

FORK (CONT'D)

No way.

He frowns, reads on...

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Fran and Tim pull up in their squad car in front of a rundown rural house surrounded by an acre of unmowed lawn which backs onto the forest.

INT. BILL'S HOUSE - DAY

A DUCK DYNASTY-type reality show plays quietly on TV as Bill eats Pringles from a can in his Lazeboy recliner, wearing bathrobe and pajamas. One hand dangles in front of his curled-up ROTTWEILER, which licks his fingers gently.

BILL

Angina attack, apparently. Not a full on heart attack. Though you could'a fooled me with the pain.

We reveal Fran and Tim sitting opposite on a plaid sofa.

FRAN

Well, I'm just glad to hear it wasn't anything worse.

BILL

Well, the young doc at General said to go home and "chill" for a few days. He actually said "chill" if you can believe that. Dunno what he expects me to do. Put my feet in the fridge I guess --

He chuckles to himself. Shifting in his chair, his pajama leg pulls up, revealing DEEP OLD SCARS on his calf and shin.

Tim stares at the scars as Fran carries on.

FRAN

So are you okay out here alone? You need us to organize some help or --

BILL

Been here ten years, Fran. I can look after myself just fine. Anyway, you didn't come all the way out here just to ask on my health, so --?

He motions them to get on to the business at hand.

FRAN

Well, we're just tying up a few loose ends, making sure we understand all the circumstances. Tim told me you fired a shot when you got to Andy, is that right?

Bill nods.

FRAN (CONT'D)

So you saw the wolf that attacked him?

Bill takes a moment before answering.

BILL

Honestly -- I don't know what I saw. It was pretty much dark, and my eyes tend to water in the cold.

Bill stares into space as if trying to conjure the memory, then sighs.

BILL (CONT'D)

Thought maybe I saw something in the trees. Shot on reflex.

FRAN
 Something? What -- like a wolf? More
 than one wolf?

BILL
 I -- I don't know.
 (to Tim)
 You didn't see?

Tim pulls his eyes from Bill's ugly leg scars.

TIM
 Well, I -- I was behind you.

BILL
 After all the humble brags 'bout how
 fit you are, thought you would'a
 beat me there by thirty seconds.

TIM
 I was just -- well, Andy. That's all
 I saw. Then you.

It hangs there.

BILL
 (to Fran)
 You find any tracks?

FRAN
 Unfortunately fresh snow covered up
 pretty much everything.

BILL
 Well. I'd be back out there tracking
 it myself but -- apparently I have
 to "chill".

Bill toasts her with his Pringles can. Fran and Tim stand up
 to go.

FRAN
 Alright, Bill. You feel better now,
 huh?

Fran and Tim head for the door. Bill's ROTTWEILER watches
 them go with its dark, dull eyes.

INT. FORK'S CAMPUS OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Fork sets Bobby's exam down and leans back.

FORK
 No way. No fucking way.
 (MORE)

FORK (CONT'D)

You are not remotely capable of this,
Bobby Bonakowski.

He sweeps up the paper along with several others and stuffs them into his briefcase.

INT. THE STUDENT BAR - DAY

Mio is now deep in conspiratorial conversation with Bobby over at the bar.

MIO

So how are you feeling?

BOBBY

Amazing. Seriously -- it's incredible.
I totally crushed it.

MIO

Crushed what?

BOBBY

The exam.

MIO

(intrigued)
It helped?

BOBBY

Are you kidding? I'm telling you,
it's like a light's come on and
everything's just started to flow.
You gotta try it.

MIO

Maybe.

BOBBY

What the hell are you waiting for?

Mio smiles coyly and shrugs.

MIO

Maybe I'm smart enough already.

BOBBY

Well look, I'm meeting my connect
later. This could be huge.

MIO

I thought we agreed this was gonna
stay on campus?

BOBBY

Yeah but -- think about it. This thing's a game changer. I mean, you don't wanna just create another elite out of people who've already made it here, right?

Mio eyes Bobby uncertainly -- he's changed.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Right??

Mio senses she is being outmaneuvered.

MIO

You sure you can trust him?

BOBBY

Course I'm sure. You and me are gonna change the world.

He looks at her, deeply attracted.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

You wanna come back to my place and fuck now?

Mio's smile fades.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Hey, come on, we both feel it.

MIO

What I feel is that I've got work to do. So how about you speak with your guy and let me know what he says?

EXT. SUPERIOR BAY - VARIOUS SHOTS - SUNSET TO NIGHT

The sun drops over the main wharf on the downtown lakefront.

Darkness descends over the campus.

Stands of trees fall into foreboding darkness.

INT. FRAN AND FORK'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Fran is beating a steak with a mallet. Her earbud is in while she speaks on the phone with her mother.

FRAN

I'm not saying you need to move there now, mom. I just think it makes sense to get on the waiting list.

(MORE)

FRAN (CONT'D)

It's fully assisted living -- which
you already give dad.

(beat)

But what if something happens? I'm
just saying, you're on your own
looking after Dad --

She beats the steak, frustrated, as her mother launches into
a reply we can't hear. She rolls her eyes over at Fork...

... Who sits at the kitchen table, glum, drinking a beer.
When Fran motions him to set the table, he hops to it, laying
out plates and cutlery.

INT. KITCHEN - OVER DINNER - LATER

Fran and Fork sit eating, mid-conversation.

FRAN

-- I don't know. I guess it spooked
me, seeing Bill, out there all alone,
laid up. No one to help him. I mean,
Dad's already there but Mom's too
stubborn to see how -- fragile their
situation is. You know?

Fork's eyes are on his plate, he's barely listening.

FRAN (CONT'D)

John?

FORK

(looking up)

Sorry. Yeah. I guess it is pretty
fragile when you get that age.

FRAN

What's up? Is it your thesis again?

FORK

(irritated)

No.

FRAN

Okay --

FORK

Sorry. It's just -- I got a case of
student cheating I'm probably going
to have to take to the Dean, which,
frankly, is a meeting I'd rather not
have to have just at the moment.

Fork heaves a sigh. Fran nods understandingly.

FRAN

So who cheated?

FORK

Some kid in my third year philosophy class. Last term he could barely stay afloat. Today he hands in an exam paper at a level I can barely manage myself.

FRAN

You think he plagiarized it?

FORK

Well, if he did, I don't know how. It was an in-class exam, I was there.

FRAN

Could he have hidden a phone under his desk? Or --

FORK

-- No. This was a full essay based on specific exam questions I wrote myself. You can't just find the answers somewhere and copy them.

FRAN

Could he have gotten the questions in advance?

FORK

Only if he found a way to hack into my computer. But -- I don't know. There's something else about him the last while. He's -- changed.

FRAN

Well, people do change. And maybe you're a better teacher than you give yourself credit for.

FORK

Maybe... But I'll still have to see the Dean about it.

He looks over at the clock on the kitchen wall.

FORK (CONT'D)

I gotta go. I'm meeting Dave for a beer.

He stands to clear his plate.

FRAN

What, now? You do know where we are
on the calendar, right?

She points to a kitchen wall calendar -- three days in a row
are marked off with bright red hand-drawn HEARTS.

FORK

Oh. Yeah. I'm supposed to be there
in ten --

FRAN

Well then. We've got two minutes.

She starts unzipping his jeans. He looks down, eyebrow cocked.
She looks up, smiling.

EXT. DOWNTOWN SUPERIOR BAY - NIGHT

Fork walks with a folder under his arm. He enters a sports
bar, "YOOPERS." Local college team logos are prominent.

INT. YOOPERS SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

Fork sits at the bar with DAVE, an untidily dressed academic
in his late thirties. Fork drains his beer while Dave scans
the pages of Bobby's exam.

Dave puts down the paper and gives an approving nod.

DAVE

I'd give it an A, if not an A-plus.

FORK

That's what I thought. But last term
he was a C minus student.

DAVE

Huh. You run it through the plagiarism
database?

FORK

Course I did. No hits. Nothing.
Besides, it was an in class essay.

DAVE

You spoken to him?

FORK

Haven't had the chance. I will,
obviously.

DAVE

Well, it's weird --

FORK

-- You're damn right --

DAVE

No, I mean, I've had something similar with a couple of my students --

FORK

-- You've had students -- ?

He points at Bobby's exam, meaning, 'like this?'

DAVE

Nothing this extreme, just a couple in my class suddenly making unexpected progress. I just thought maybe they weren't trying before. I mean, we all change, right?

Dave drains his pint and signals for a refill while Fork stares into space, lost in thought.

EXT. ROAD ON THE EDGE OF TOWN - NIGHT

Bobby, a dark silhouette of black leather, tears along a remote stretch of forest road on his motorcycle.

He pulls up on a gravel shoulder where the road becomes a bridge and pushes his bike out of view.

EXT. A REMOTE BRIDGE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Bobby scrambles down the escarpment beside the bridge and waits in the cold, pounding his arms to stay warm. He checks the time on his phone and grimaces.

A sound from within the trees draws his attention.

BOBBY

Rabbit?

Bobby stares uncertainly at the dark woods.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

That you?

There's no answer, and moments later he hears a MOTORCYCLE pulling up above and killing the engine.

A moment later, Bobby watches as a grizzled, denim-clad figure clambers down the bank and strides toward him. This is SPIDER, a biker in his late 30s with multiple piercings and tattoos.

Bobby looks at him warily.

SPIDER

You Bobby?

BOBBY

(uncertainly)

Yeah. Where's Rabbit?

SPIDER

You're not dealing with Rabbit no more. You're dealing with Lazarus.

BOBBY

You're Lazarus?

SPIDER

Nope. Gonna take you to him.

He motions Bobby to follow him. Bobby hesitates, not sure he likes where this is going.

EXT. ROAD AT BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT

Spider mounts his custom Harley as Bobby retrieves his bike.

SPIDER

Try and keep up.

Spider fires up his Harley and speeds off. Bobby has to hurry to start his bike up and follow.

INT. YOOPERS SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

Fork and Dave are now drunk. The bartender delivers another pair of pints.

DAVE

So how's the thesis coming?

Fork looks over at him darkly.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Whoa. Gotcha.

FORK

Yeah.

DAVE

Dude, you just gotta get it done.

FORK

Really? Well thanks for that.

Dave holds up a hand of apology. Fork shakes his head by way of apology.

FORK (CONT'D)

You know, when I started I used to sit at the laptop for six, seven hours, bashing away at it. Felt like I was getting somewhere. Now I sit there playing Freecell. You'd be amazed how much Freecell you can play when you're pretending to work.

DAVE

So stop pretending and write whatever you can. No one says it has to be the most brilliant thing ever written.

FORK

Maybe I do.

DAVE

Right, the good is the enemy of the great. Unless the desire for great stops you doing anything at all.

Fork, in a dark mood now, drains most of his pint in one go.

EXT. BUCKY'S ROADHOUSE - NIGHT

A low rumble of loud music emanates from a scruffy bar on the side of a secluded road. Outside a couple of bikers smoke dope beside a long row of Harleys.

Spider pulls in on his bike followed by Bobby.

They park and dismount, Spider heading for the door. Bobby hesitates, staring at the entrance with foreboding.

SPIDER

Let's go, college boy.

He leads him inside.

INT. BUCKY'S ROADHOUSE BAR - NIGHT

Raucous music. Tough tattooed BIKERS shoot pool and hang out with BIKER CHICKS.

Spider leads Bobby through the throng and clouds of dope and tobacco smoke toward a back room.

SPIDER

Wait here.

Spider disappears into a back room, leaving Bobby to take in the scene.

At the far end of the bar a POLE DANCER works on a raised stage. Bobby notices the bikers are all wearing the patch of THE THERIANS biker gang.

The door opens.

SPIDER (CONT'D)

Okay.

Spider beckons Bobby to step inside.

INT. BUCKY'S ROADHOUSE - BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bobby enters into relative quiet as the door closes behind him. The room has dark walls of wood. It's almost like a dark forest in here. Strange furniture made of tree boughs.

The 'music' in the room is recorded sounds of a forest: insects, birds, leaves rustling, wind, distant thunder, the odd piercing CRY of an animal.

As Bobby takes it in, he hears a voice from the darkness.

LAZARUS (O.S.)

(mocking)

Hello Bobby. Heard all about you.

Bobby realizes he is being spoken to by a man seated with his back to him. Spider motions Bobby forward and he steps around to face the seated biker.

This is LAZARUS, heavy-set, bald, and menacing. He motions Bobby to take a seat. As he sits, Bobby immediately notices a deep round indent in the center of Lazarus's forehead, the soft flesh pulsing.

BOBBY

You're Lazarus?

Lazarus doesn't answer, instead staring intently at Bobby, who is doing his best to appear casual.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

So where's Rabbit?

LAZARUS

Brother Rabbit took a vacation. So now you deal with me.

Bobby is transfixed by the hole in his head.

LAZARUS (CONT'D)

You know staring's rude?

BOBBY

Sorry, man.

Lazarus grins and slowly leans forward. Points at his hole.

LAZARUS

When you open up your third eye, you
see a whole new world. Can help if
you wanna try?

Lazarus looks hard at Bobby.

BOBBY

I think a limited view suits me.

LAZARUS

Let me know if you change your mind.
Or want me to change it for you.

Bobby is unsure whether to take this as a friendly rejoinder
or a threat. Back to business:

BOBBY

So what did Rabbit tell you?

LAZARUS

Enough.

Lazarus lights a cigarillo and sucks in a lungful of smoke.

LAZARUS (CONT'D)

Seems you and I have much to discuss.

Lazarus stares at Bobby hard. Bobby grins uncertainly.

EXT. A ROAD OUTSIDE TOWN - DAY

Fran's police car drives along a road banked by thick trees.

The car passes a section of modest houses backing onto trees,
before Fran pulls into the driveway of a modest bungalow.

She gets out, in uniform, carrying a package, and lets herself
in to the house.

FRAN

(entering)

Helloooo --

INT. CHUCK AND GRACE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Fran enters into a well-kept living room where her ailing
father, CHUCK (70s), sits in his wheelchair, hooked up to an
oxygen tank. He folds away a newspaper and puts his hands in
the air in mock surrender.

CHUCK
I didn't do it, officer.

Fran walks over and greets him with a kiss.

FRAN
Hey dad. How's it going?

CHUCK
Got my throne. Got my scepter...
(his oxygen tank)
King of the world here.

Fran gives a sympathetic smile.

FRAN
The doctor came?

CHUCK
Yup.
(before she can say
more)
What you got there?

FRAN
(holding up the parcel)
Apple blueberry.

Chuck nods his approval. Then:

CHUCK
Sorry to hear about your colleague.

FRAN
Yeah. We're all still in shock.

Chuck nods and taps his newspaper - which shows half a headline: LOCAL POLICE OFFICER KILLED.

CHUCK
We think the world runs on our terms.
Reality is, we don't know jack.

Before Fran can respond, her mother calls out --

GRACE (O.S.)
Francine? That you honey?

FRAN
Yah.

Fran steps through into --

THE KITCHEN

GRACE, a frail, neat woman in her late 70's, is working on a watercolor: a landscape showing the view of the tree line off the back of the property.

GRACE
Shouldn't you be at work?

FRAN
Just heading in. Made you a pie.

Fran puts the food parcel into the bare fridge and looks at her mother's painting.

FRAN (CONT'D)
So how many have you done now of this same view?

GRACE
(dabbing at her picture)
What makes you think it's the same?
It's always changing. Or at least the way I see it is.
(smiling)
More blurred for a start --

Fran follows her gaze out the kitchen window to the treeline. She stares at the dark trees.

GRACE (CONT'D)
(breaking the spell)
There's coffee there if you want.

Fran looks away, and steps over to pour herself a cup.

FRAN
(quietly)
How's dad doing?

GRACE
Same stubborn bastard he's been for the last fifty years.

FRAN
I mean how's his --
(she taps her chest)
What did the doctor say?

GRACE
Same same.

Fran sighs. She sits at the table.

FRAN
So listen, I stopped by Ironwood.

GRACE
 (sighing)
 Frannie...

Fran fumbles in her bag and pulls out a brochure.

FRAN
 The assisted living units look really nice. And you'd have everything right there, the staff, meals --

GRACE
 -- Fran, sweetie, we're not leaving our home.

FRAN
 Just -- at least give it some thought.

GRACE
 I have.

Grace forces a smile. Fran gets up.

FRAN
 Okay, well.

Fran moves over to give her a kiss, and heads out to the kitchen, where she finds Chuck is gone, the door open.

FRAN (CONT'D)
 (concerned)
 Dad?

She hurries for the door --

EXT. CHUCK AND GRACE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

-- Fran steps outside to discover her father smoking a cigarette in his wheelchair.

CHUCK
 Just getting some air.

FRAN
 Smoking? Seriously?

Chuck returns a guilty shrug and contemplates his cigarette.

CHUCK
 If there was another way?

FRAN
 Oh Dad.

Chuck gazes off at the tree line.

CHUCK
You know I heard it past few days.

FRAN
What's that?

CHUCK
That wolf. Up in there. Just --
howling. Saddest goddamn sound you
ever heard.

He erupts into another coughing fit.

Fran looks at him with concern. Her CELL RINGS.

FRAN
Forchette.

She listens, screwing up her face at unwanted news.

FRAN (CONT'D)
I'm on my way.

She pockets her cell and exchanges a look with her father.

CHUCK
All alright?

FRAN
Just work.

CHUCK
Right. And you think I'm the one
your mother worries about.

They exchange a smile of understanding. Then:

FRAN
Dad? If you hear it again -- call
me, okay?

He nods. Fran heads for her car.

INT. THE CORONER'S OFFICE - DAY

Fran, Chief Chin and Tim are gathered with the coroner DR. LUCA, a rotund man with gray beard. They stare down at Andy's grey corpse laid out on a gurney. Dr. Luca indicates the severed throat.

DR. LUCA
-- Hard to be certain about the exact
cause of death, but most likely it
was either asphyxiation or blood
(MORE)

DR. LUCA (CONT'D)
 loss from the severing of the carotid
 artery --

CHIEF CHIN
 So what did you want to show us?

DR. LUCA
 Well, the trauma at the throat --
 that's consistent with a wolf attack.
 But these --

He pulls back the sheet covering Andy to reveal deep, wide
 GOUGE marks on his torso.

DR. LUCA (CONT'D)
 These are harder to explain.

Fran winces at the sight. Tim looks green and lurches away.

TIM
 Mind if I wait outside?

Chief Chin notices Tim's discomfort.

CHIEF CHIN
 That's okay Tim, go ahead.

Tim excuses himself and Fran, Chin and Dr. Luca return to
 Andy's corpse.

CHIEF CHIN (CONT'D)
 So what? You're saying it wasn't a
 wolf did this?

DR. LUCA
 No. I'm just saying these marks don't
 seem consistent. Nor does this.

He points down to Andy's calf, where a deep, ugly bruise
 sits - a symmetrical halfmoon curve. Like a heel print.

FRAN
 What about DNA?

DR. LUCA
 We sent samples to Lansing. It'll
 take a few weeks.

Chief Chin heaves a deep sigh.

CHIEF CHIN
 Well, I went over to Dale's place
 the other day. She lost another cow.
 (MORE)

CHIEF CHIN (CONT'D)

And she didn't think it was a wolf
either.

FRAN

She say what she thought it was?

Chin raises an eyebrow and points to the sky.

CHIEF CHIN

Little green people.

DR. LUCA

Some people should stay off the
internet.

Fran holds her hand over gouge marks along Andy's flank. She notices how the four deep gouges align with her fingers.

FRAN

And what do you think, Dr. Luca?

Dr. Luca pauses, thinking.

DR. LUCA

I think we need to keep an open mind
to the possibilities.

Fran looks at Chief Chin. They turn as from outside there are the sounds of Tim vomiting.

FRAN

Maybe I'll drop out and see Bess
Dale.

Chief Chin nods his assent.

INT. / EXT. SQUAD CAR - DAY - DRIVING

Fran's hands grip the wheel tight. Lost in thought.

Tim gazes into the treeline along the highway.

HIS POV -- from the moving car, the trees flying past in a hypnotic blur.

FRAN

You okay?

Tim snaps out of his reverie, turns back to her.

TIM

Yeah. I guess. Just -- parts of this
job. You know?

Fran gives a knowing nod.

FRAN

I know. It's a crazy world out there.

The car swings off the main road and bumps down a dirt track.

INT. BESS DALE'S BARN - IN DARKNESS - DAY

The metal shed door rattles open. Bess Dale shows Fran and Tim inside the barn.

In the center, from a hook, hangs the mutilated cow's carcass, now half-butchered.

FRAN

This is it?

BESS

City was gonna take too long to collect it. Decided to save what I could. Can do you some topside if you're interested?

FRAN

(making an excuse)
Vegetarian.

Fran smiles and pats her stomach before inspecting the skinned carcass.

FRAN (CONT'D)

I was hoping to see its injuries, but looks like I'm a bit late --

BESS

I have pictures.

INT. BESS DALE'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

Fran examines a photograph displayed on a laptop screen: the dead cow with its throat torn out. CLICK. Another shot -- gouges on its flanks, like the ones on ANDY. CLICK. Another - the blood in the snow all around it.

BESS

Took those after the sun came up. Attack was earlier, woke me up about four-thirty.

FRAN

You heard it?

BESS

Just the screams.

FRAN
The cow's screams?

BESS
Uh huh.

Fran cycles through a few more pictures -- to shots of a different cow, mutilated.

FRAN
This is a different cow?

BESS
Last one was the third since February.
And mine aren't the only ones --
that's why Bill got the cull approved --
for all the good it's done.

Fran frowns at the sight of four deep gouge marks -- marks that clearly mirror those seen on Andy's corpse.

FRAN
They all have these same claw marks?

BESS
I guess.

FRAN
Well, it's been a long winter. Maybe
the lack of food's bringing them out
of the wild.

BESS
Maybe. But if you ask me, a hungry
wolf would eat more. I've seen a
pack take a cow down to the ribs.
This thing's killing -- but it isn't
eating. Not much anyway.

Fran considers, looking at the cow field in the photo.

FRAN
Mind if we take a look out in your
paddock?

EXT. FARMER'S FIELD - DAY

Fran examines the area of dried blood where the most recent cow was attacked. There's snow and muck and all kinds of prints around her.

Meanwhile Tim looks at the dark tree line, fifty yards away.

FRAN
See anything?

TIM
Just thinking it must have come out
of the forest.

Fran's eye settles on the barbed wire fence that keeps the
cattle penned - halfway to the tree line.

She trudges over. Tim follows.

FRAN
If it did, it had to get past the
fence.

They stop at the barbed wire. Fran points Tim to follow the
barbed wire, away from her.

FRAN (CONT'D)
Why don't you take a look that way.

TIM
What am I looking for?

FRAN
I don't know. Prints. Blood maybe.
Anything.

He shrugs and walks away along the fence.

Fran turns and walks slowly the other way, her eyes scanning
the ground both sides of the fence.

Tim scans the ground in front of him - but his eyes are drawn
repeatedly to the dark tree line.

A SPLOOSH sound. He looks down to discover he's stepped in a
huge cow patty. He heaves a sigh.

Fran continues to scan the fence.

Tim steadies himself on a fence post to clean off his boot,
when his hand catches on something where the barbed wire
meets the post -- a hank of cloth. With BLOOD on it.

Fran's continuing her search when --

TIM
(at a distance)
Fran?

EXT. FARMER'S FIELD - WITH TIM - MOMENTS LATER

Fran leans in close, inspecting the hank of cloth: faded
denim, from jeans or maybe a jacket.

Scanning around, Fran fixates on the snow heading toward the trees. There are a few faint indents -- possibly older prints that have been snowed over.

She ponders this, then gently pulls the torn denim from the barbed wire and post. It's clearly well-worn, with a torn piece of embroidery attached, from some kind of sewn-on patch.

There's lettering on the patch - just one letter partially visible -- it looks like a "T."

Fran pulls out a plastic evidence bag and slips it inside.

INT. THE CLASSROOM - DAY

Fork faces his philosophy class. Bobby sits by the window, watching Fork with interest.

FORK

The rest of this term, we're going to be investigating one single question. How do we know what we know?

The students exchange looks. Bobby pipes up.

BOBBY

Wikipedia?

Laughter. The BUZZER sounds to end the class.

FORK

I am of course talking about our perception of what is real - but you already *know* that, right?

Fork speaks up as the students get up to shuffle out.

FORK (CONT'D)

By the way, your exam scores are posted on the class site. Any questions, come see me.

Fork packs up his lecture notes and stuffs them into his briefcase, alongside a thick sheaf of ruffled pages - his marked up mess of a thesis. Irritated, Fork jams his notes in -- then notices Bobby standing over him.

BOBBY

My mark wasn't posted.

FORK

No. That's right.

BOBBY

Why not?

FORK

Because you and I have an appointment
to see the Dean about it.

Bobby doesn't like the sound of this.

INT. THE DEAN'S OFFICE - DAY

The Dean, CHARLOTTE ROBICHAUD, fifties and austere, scans
Bobby's exam paper and looks up, cocking an eyebrow.

Fork and Bobby sit in chairs across from her desk.

CHARLOTTE

You're standing by your claim that
this is your work?

BOBBY

It is my work.

FORK

You've seen Bobby's work from last
term. Quite a leap, wouldn't you
say?

Bobby leans back, as if amused by all this.

CHARLOTTE

Indeed it is. Care to enlighten us
Mr Bonakowski?

BOBBY

(shrugs)
Started taking my studies more
seriously. Is that a crime?

CHARLOTTE

No. But cheating will get you expelled
from this university.

BOBBY

So I didn't cheat.

FORK

(irritated)
We know you did. I don't know how,
but it's obvious to everyone this
isn't your work.

BOBBY

Sure it is.

(MORE)

BOBBY (CONT'D)

I credited every source I cited.
Just like I'm sure you have in your
thesis.

He holds Fork's gaze, a subtle challenge.

FORK

Bobby, if you come clean now, I'll
recommend suspension instead of
expulsion.

BOBBY

You want me to take the exam again?
(to Charlotte)
I can prove it's mine.

FORK

Bobby, enough --

CHARLOTTE

John, let's hear what Mr Bonakowski
has to say for himself please.

Bobby glares at Fork before smiling politely at the Dean.

BOBBY

Okay look. Up 'til a couple months
ago I admit, I was -- not really
into being here. But then -- my dad
died. And so I took a good long look
at myself. And I decided I wanted to
live up to my potential. I credit
Mr. Forchette's teaching as an
inspiration.

He grins at Fork. Fork is not buying it.

FORK

Okay, Bobby. Since this is your work,
why don't you tell us something more
about your ideas on the relationship
between reality and object?

Bobby double checks with the Dean then shrugs.

BOBBY

Whatd'ya wanna know?

FORK

Why not explain a little more of
your thesis in this paper?

BOBBY

Okay. Well, what I was trying to argue is that for humans, sensory perceptions underlie our understanding of what is factual -- that is, true and real. I perceive the blueness of your shirt, so do you, and so does Dean Robichaud. We're agreed on that, right? Fork's shirt is blue.

Fork frowns at the use of his nickname.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Thus, the connection between seeing and believing. The danger is, when we "reliably" and "objectively" perceive the same phenomena, like the sun coming up and going down, it can lead to mistaken beliefs, like the earth being the center of the universe. Wasn't 'til the telescope extended our vision that we perceived the humbling reality. With our limited senses, we're all too prone to mistake what *seems* for what *is*. So how can we ever claim to 'know' the truth of anything -- like cheating --

He picks up his disputed exam paper, to finish his point.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

-- Without a higher standard of proof?

Bobby is set to continue, but Charlotte interrupts.

CHARLOTTE

Alright Bobby, you can stop there.

Fork stares at Bobby with an air of irritation as Charlotte gathers her thoughts.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Bobby, given your past performance, you can understand our concern.

BOBBY

No hard feelings.

CHARLOTTE

So we'll make a note of your improvement and hope to see it reflected in your work going forward.

BOBBY

So I'm -- good to go?

Charlotte nods. Fork sighs, exasperated. Bobby jumps up and heads for the door.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

See you in class, Mr. Forchette.

Fork gets up to follow him wearily out.

CHARLOTTE

John? Can I have a word?

FORK

Look, I don't know how, but there's no way he --

CHARLOTTE

-- That's not what I wanted to talk about.

(checking her watch)

Can you walk with me?

With a sense of doom, he nods.

EXT. CAMPUS - LATE AFTERNOON

Fork holds the door for Charlotte as they step out into the cold and walk towards a nearby parking lot.

CHARLOTTE

There's no easy way to say this. I've been in touch with your thesis advisor at U of M.

FORK

I know. I'm late.

CHARLOTTE

Eighteen months, John. And that was your second extension.

FORK

Look, it's an ambitious thesis. And the fact is, my teaching workload here eats up so much time, so finding time to focus --

The BELL from the campus clock tower begins to TOLL.

CHARLOTTE

Well, John, that's the job. Teaching while doing your research. You've been here almost five years, and when you came, you said you were six months from delivering. And now, since you haven't, I'm in a bind.

FORK

What do you mean?

Charlotte takes a breath as they head into the parking lot.

CHARLOTTE

Questions are being asked, John. Without your doctorate, it's increasingly hard for me to justify keeping you here. The fact is, next year, we've got several more qualified applicants for the courses you're teaching. In all fairness --

FORK

-- You're not hiring me back?

She presses her keyfob and the doors to her Lexus unlock.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry, John. You need to get your thesis approved by May or I won't have a choice.

As she gets into the car and pulls out, Fork stands in the cold, absorbing the ultimatum.

INT. FRAN AND FORK'S HOME - NIGHT

Fran sits at her laptop, eating sunflower seeds and spitting shells into a bowl. Beside her is the piece of denim in its evidence bag.

FRAN

How do I even write this up? Andy's attacked by a wolf no one saw. Coroner says he died from wounds to the throat consistent with a wolf attack -- but that other wounds aren't. Bess Dale's cattle, same thing. So what do I say - that it's maybe probably a wolf, but we haven't got airtight proof, so put a pin in that?

She looks over at Fork across the room, staring at a dog-eared, marked-up printout of his thesis. He's far away.

FRAN (CONT'D)

John?

FORK

Mmm-hmm.

FRAN
What do you think? You're the writing expert here.

He looks over, pained. He suddenly launches himself over to the liquor cabinet and pours a large whiskey.

FRAN (CONT'D)
Whoa.

She watches him down the drink in one long gulp.

FRAN (CONT'D)
You want to tell me what's going on?

FORK
Why'd I ever think it was a good idea to move up here?

He pours another shot.

FRAN
What? Nobody made you move up here --

FORK
-- You wanted to be closer to your folks, so what was I going to say?

FRAN
Hey, I'm sorry, have I done something you need to blame me for?

He looks at her like the answer may be yes.

FRAN (CONT'D)
If you're saying you're somehow stuck here because of me, just remember, you were "stuck" back in Ann Arbor too. And you know what? You'll be stuck wherever you go if you can't figure yourself out.

Fork looks at her accusingly, then slumps onto the sofa.

FRAN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

She moves over beside him to offer comfort.

FRAN (CONT'D)
You're in a rut, that's all.

FORK
Yeah, well the only difference between a rut and a grave is the depth.

Fran is momentarily at a loss for words.

FRAN
So why not let me help you?

FORK
Because you can't.

FRAN
Maybe talking it through will help
you find the clarity to get going.

FORK
What clarity? I don't even know what
it is I'm trying to do anymore.

FRAN
Come here.

Fran pulls him over and he rests his head on her shoulder.

FRAN (CONT'D)
We're lucky. We have each other. We
live in a good place. And we get to
do work we like.

He closes his eyes, pained.

FRAN (CONT'D)
We've got it better than plenty of
people. Including some we know.

Fork considers then looks at her, remembering.

FORK
Andy. Funeral's tomorrow, right?

FRAN
At three. Was hoping you'd come.

FORK
Yeah. Sure.

Fork pulls her into a hug -- and stares into the distance,
his face full of worry.

EXT. EDGE OF TOWN - NIGHT

The evergreens along the dark treeline sway hard in the wind
as we PUSH IN SLOWLY, closer and closer to the forest...

INT. FRAN AND FORK'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

In darkness, Fork sits in his underwear, his haggard face
lit by the glow of his laptop screen.

He looks over at the calendar on the fridge -- with its RED HEARTS drawn over Fran's fertility days, and ANDY'S FUNERAL marked for APRIL 10th.

Fork turns back to his laptop, fingers hovering over the keys - but not moving.

EXT. SUPERIOR BAY - MORNING

The wind is brisk coming in off the lake. Flags flap hard.

INT. FRAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Fran puts on her police dress uniform for Andy's funeral. She looks at herself somberly in the mirror as she places her dress cap atop her head.

INT. FRAN AND FORK'S KITCHEN - DAY

Fran enters in her dress uniform to find Fork... right where he was sitting last night. He looks haggard, bug-eyed.

FRAN

I pulled out your suit and hung it
in the shower to steam.

(noticing him)

What time did you get up?

(a closer look)

Have you been up all night?

FORK

Yeah.

She's almost spooked by his intensity.

FRAN

Okay... well, I need to get to the
station. I'll see you at the funeral?

He nods, still staring at his laptop. Fran looks at him with concern, then leaves.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - DAY

A brisk wind whips through the trees surrounding Bill's modest clapboard bungalow.

INT. BILL'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Unshaved, wearing longjohns, Bill hauls a black suit out of his closet and lays it on the bed. It has dust on the shoulders. He sighs and starts pulling off his longjohns.

INT. FRAN AND FORK'S HOUSE - DAY

Fork pulls on the trousers to a dark suit he clearly has not worn in some time. They're tight. As he sucks in his gut, his phone rings. He checks the ID and answers.

FORK

Dave?

(he listens, then)

What do you mean, others?

INT. YOOPERS SPORTS BAR - DAY

Back in his usual jeans and casual sports jacket, Fork sits with Dave over beers as he scans a student essay.

FORK

Seriously? This kid's a freshman?

Dave slides another paper over.

DAVE

And this one's a football player. Not to truck in stereotypes. He was near the bottom of my remedial composition class last year.

Fork scans this new paper with a look of surprise.

FORK

Holy shit.

DAVE

I know. Right? Suddenly he can write like Fuckscott Fitzgerald. And no hits on the cheat database.

FORK

So what are we looking at here?

DAVE

All I know is genius doesn't spread like chlamydia.

FORK

You should have heard the little shit in the Dean's office. I'm telling you, it's like it wasn't even him.

They exchange a look, weighing it up.

INT. BILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Checking himself in a mirror, Bill folds down the collar of a rumpled white shirt and straightens a black tie.

But his trousers are fitting loose - and he keeps grabbing them up.

BILL
Goddammit.

As he rummages in a drawer and pulls out some old suspenders -- he hear his dog suddenly erupt into WILD BARKING from outside.

BILL (CONT'D)
(calling)
Conor! Quit yapping!

Dog's barking intensifies -- and then turns into YELPS OF PAIN. Then there's ferocious howling and growling: the sounds of a DOG FIGHT.

BILL (CONT'D)
(calling)
Conor!

Suddenly - a FINAL YELP, then dead silence. Bill stands there, chilled. Holding up his pants, he turns to the door.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bill steps onto the rear stoop and stops short at the sight in front of him in the yard:

On the end of its long tether, his Rottweiler lies mutilated: throat torn out, guts all over, its lifeless carcass lined with deep ugly gouges.

BILL
Conor?

He approaches the mutilated dog, trying to make sense of it. He peers at the foreboding treeline behind his property.

BILL (CONT'D)
(grim, angry)
You piece a --

INT. BILL'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bill moves with purpose through the kitchen.

In the living room, he scans around -- spotting his shotgun leaning near the door. He heads for it --

But a CREAK from a floorboard in the other room makes him stop. He looks around, senses on high alert.

He takes another step towards his gun. And hears MORE FOOTSTEPS -- and sees a SHADOW move through a doorway.

He lunges toward his shotgun just as -- *he is torn out of the frame by a dark shape.*

We HOLD on his shotgun, leaning untouched beside the door, as Bill is mauled offscreen. As his screams come to a chillingly abrupt end, we...

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

POLICE OFFICERS in dress uniforms mill in front of the church.

In her dress uniform, Fran holds a bereft WOMAN (clearly Andy's wife) in a warm, sympathetic hug. Stepping back, she looks her in the eye and they exchange nods.

Andy's wife joins her TWO CHILDREN, and they head inside.

Fran checks her phone. It's just past 3 PM.

FRAN

Come on, John...

CHIEF CHIN

Fran?

She turns to find the chief approaching in his formal uniform.

CHIEF CHIN (CONT'D)

Sad day.

FRAN

Yeah.

CHIEF CHIN

Listen, Tim tells me you might have found something out at Dale's farm.

FRAN

Maybe. Might be nothing.

CHIEF CHIN

You put it in your report?

FRAN

It's not finished. But I will.

Chin gives Fran a reassuring clap on the shoulder and heads into the church.

Remembering Fork, she pulls out her phone and taps in a text:
WHERE R U?

INT. / EXT. FORK'S CAR - CAMPUS PARKING LOT - DAY

Fork's phone vibrates in his top pocket as he sits in his Toyota. He checks the text. Sighs. And turns off the phone.

A moment later, his eye tracks someone crossing the parking lot: Bobby, who furtively looks around before slipping into the science block.

Fork gets out of his car and follows.

INT. UNIVERSITY SCIENCE LAB - DAY

Mio sits at a laptop dressed in a lab coat, scanning line after line of computer code. Satisfied, she hits ENTER.

As the SOFTWARE CODE begins cascading down her screen, she moves over to a gleaming high-tech PRINTING DEVICE as it begins to HUM atop a counter.

She peers through the front 'window' into the device.

Her phone BEEPS - a text. She reads it, then goes to the lab door. She unlocks it and pulls the door open to Bobby.

BOBBY

Anyone ever tell you how hot you
look in a lab coat?

MIO

Hurry up.

She pulls him in quickly, shuts the door, and locks it.

Bobby looks over at the printer.

BOBBY

How's it going?

MIO

Dr. Furnish kept hanging around, I
couldn't get him out of here. Should
only be a few more minutes.

Bobby smiles charmingly, stepping closer.

BOBBY

How should we fill the time?

MIO

(all business)
You bring the money?

BOBBY

Why would I have the money? I get the money when I hand them the product.

Mio doesn't like how this sounds.

MIO

Them? So it's more than one guy?

BOBBY

You know, some people use "them" as an ungendered pronoun to respect a preference.

Mio rolls her eyes.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Besides, the less you know about "them", the better.

MIO

Why?

BOBBY

(shrugs)
Deniability. Protection.

MIO

Just so you know, tough guy, I'm not ashamed of this. Or afraid.

He shrugs, moves to the printer and peers through its window.

BOBBY

This is so cool.

MIO

It's not cool. It's science.

BOBBY

(turning to her)
You realize this is gonna be huge for us?

MIO

You need to work on your pronouns. There's no 'us' here.

He coyly pulls her to him by the lapels of her lab coat.

BOBBY

Well maybe there should be.

MIO

Get it into your head now. It's not why I came to you, it's not what we're doing, and it's not going to happen --

She gently removes his hands and takes a step back.

MIO (CONT'D)

-- And this is not about getting rich.

BOBBY

(smirking)

No, 'course not. Vive la revolution.

The printer stops HUMMING. Seems it is finished.

INT. SCIENCE BUILDING CORRIDOR - LATER

The lab door clicks. Bobby pokes his head out to check the coast is clear. He slips out, backpack slung over his shoulder. He checks the time on his phone, cusses, and hurries toward the exit...

Passing Fork, who watches him from behind some swing doors.

EXT. THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Bobby fires up his motorcycle and pulls away.

Having followed, Fork hurries to his car and jumps in. It fails to start on the first couple tries - then turns over. Fork pulls out after Bobby.

INT. THE POLICE STATION - NIGHT

A gloomy air hangs over the police station.

Fran is at her desk, deep in thought. After a few moments, she picks up the phone and dials a number. There's no answer -- from her reaction we can see she's concerned.

TIM

I'm sure he's got an explanation.

Fran looks up to see Tim, setting down a coffee for her.

FRAN

Who?

TIM

Fork. I thought --

FRAN
No, I was trying Bill.

TIM
(realizing)
Oh yeah -- right. He never showed --

FRAN
Yeah. I hope he's okay.

TIM
Maybe he decided to sit it out. Don't
think he's one for emotional scenes.

Fran looks off, thinking, then stands.

FRAN
Think I'll take a run out there.
Just to make sure he's okay.

TIM
Now?

FRAN
Want to come?

EXT. THE REMOTE BRIDGE - NIGHT

Bobby's bike is parked just above the bridge.

Below it, Bobby moves down the bank, backpack on his shoulder.

He walks onto the disused rail track... where Spider waits.

SPIDER
You said eight.

BOBBY
Sorry man, couldn't be helped.

SPIDER
Well next time you fix a meet with
me you fucking show up on time.

BOBBY
Alright dude, no need to --

BAM! Spider punches him in the mouth. Bobby reels back,
spitting out blood.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Fuck man. Are you kidding me?

SPIDER
Next time be on time.

BOBBY

You know, I don't have to deal with you guys.

SPIDER

Well I got a feeling you're gonna want to.

We CUT TO - Fork, watching from the side of the rail cut. He sees Spider hand Bobby a bag. Bobby inspects the contents before rummaging in his backpack and pulling out a ziploc bag, which he hands to Spider. Spider inspects it. Nods.

Fork's eyes light up.

FORK

(muttering)

Got you. You little shit.

He watches as Bobby scrambles back up the bank.

INT. THE STUDENT BAR - NIGHT

Loud music pummels the raucous bar. Sporting a swollen lip, Bobby heads through a crowd towards Mio as she enters the bar. He pulls her to a corner, wearing a grin.

Mio is instantly worried at the sight of his fat lip.

MIO

What happened to you?

BOBBY

(re his lip)

This? Oh, I slipped outside.

Mio looks unimpressed by the obvious lie.

MIO

So did it go okay?

BOBBY

Better than okay. Like, way better.

He grins as Mio frowns uncertainly.

MIO

Okay...

He opens his backpack a crack to give her a look inside.

MIO (CONT'D)

Oh my God --

Her mouth falls open.

MIO (CONT'D)
How much did you charge?

BOBBY
Fifty a cap.

MIO
Shut. Up. I thought -- I don't know
what I thought.

BOBBY
Well here's the thing. They want ten
times as much by this time next week.

Mio absorbs the enormity of it.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Told ya it was gonna be huge.

They look at each other, pulsing with energy. Suddenly she
kisses him hard on the mouth.

Across the bar, Fork watches them from a corner.

When Bobby heads to the men's room moments later, Fork
follows.

INT. BAR MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Bobby stands at a urinal, smiling to himself. When he finishes
and zips up, he turns to go -- only to be grabbed by Fork
and slammed into a wall.

BOBBY
What the hell --?

FORK
Hey, Bobby. Shouldn't you be home
studying? You know, keep up those
grades?

A student steps in to see Fork pinning Bobby against the
wall. Fork smiles politely.

FORK (CONT'D)
Excuse us --

Fork shoves Bobby into a stall.

BOBBY
What is this? Payback for your big
fail with the Dean?

FORK

The Dean's not here, so let's cut the shit. What are you on?

BOBBY

What are you talking about?

FORK

I'm talking about Bobby the campus dealer and the new drug he's selling.

Bobby's anger suddenly melts into uncertainty.

BOBBY

I dunno what you're talking about --

FORK

The biker who gave you that fat lip. What he sell you?

Bobby sighs, trapped.

BOBBY

Look, it's not what you think, okay? I mean it's not illegal --

FORK

What's not illegal?

Bobby gently removes Fork's hands to reach inside a pocket and pull out a small plastic pill vial.

BOBBY

You ever hear of Candela?

Fork doesn't respond, prompting Bobby to continue.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

The neuro-upgrade patch? Big with the billionaires in Silicon Valley? You know, the smart get smarter, the rich get richer -- ?

FORK

You're dealing Candela?

BOBBY

Course not. Nobody can afford Candela.

He empties out a single, small orange caplet and holds it up for Fork to see.

FORK

So what's this?

BOBBY
Sundrop. It's a hack of the code
used in Candela.

FORK
You've got pirated Candela?

BOBBY
Same effects, fraction of the cost.

He offers it to Fork - who takes it and holds it up the light,
gazing into its orange liquid depths.

FORK
So this is Bobby's little secret --

BOBBY
(cagey)
Look, technically, I'm still the one
who wrote the exam. I mean if you're
trying to nail me for cheating.

Fork closes his hand around the capsule and looks at him.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Is that what you're doing here? Or?

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Fran and Tim pull up at Bill's place off the rural highway.

They park beside Bill's pickup truck.

Fran goes to the door and knocks while Tim ambles behind.

With no answer at the door, she calls:

FRAN
Bill? Bill!

No answer.

FRAN (CONT'D)
I'll check around back. Wait here in
case he's slow getting to the door.

He nods as she pulls out her flashlight and heads around the
side of the house.

EXT. BACK OF BILL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Following her flashlight beam, Fran emerges round the back
of the house -- and comes upon the remains of the dog. Her
breath catches. She moves closer, taking in the gory sight.

Swinging her light to the back of the house she sees the back door swinging ajar.

FRAN
(calling)
Bill?

No response. She pulls out her gun, moving slowly to the back door, and stepping carefully up and inside.

INT. BILL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She moves through his kitchen at the back, and then flips on a light to take in evidence of a struggle: a table and lamp knocked over.

She steps around the sofa and stops.

Looking through a door into the hall - blood is splattered up the wall.

Moving farther in, she finds Bill on the floor, covered in blood, seemingly dead.

FRAN
Oh no --

She hears a FLOORBOARD CREAK from the next room.

FRAN (CONT'D)
(calling)
Tim?

The police radio on her belt crackles into life.

TIM (O.S.)
Fran?

Fran freezes in her tracks, senses on high alert, listening. The sounds of movement in the next room have stopped.

She grabs the radio and whispers back.

FRAN
Where are you?

TIM (O.S.)
Right outside. You find something?

She hears something MOVING -- and peers down the hall, past Bill's body, to a closed door at the end.

She raises her gun.

TIM (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Fran?

FRAN

Police! Open the door, and get down
on the floor!

There's no response.

FRAN (CONT'D)

(screaming)

I said Police!

A tense moment of silence is broken by the sound of HEAVY
STEPS gathering pace, running at the door --

TIM (O.S.)

(over crackling radio)

Fran??

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! Fran unloads FOUR SHOTS through the
door. There's a horrific HOWL from the other side. Sounds of
someone or something - CRASHING around in a wounded rage.

And then a CRASH of breaking glass.

Fran realizes what this means.

FRAN

Shit.

She bolts at the door and kicks it open in time to see...

Curtains billowing in from the shattered window.

She hurries to the window and scans the rear of the property.
And then her eye catches it:

A DARK SHAPE, bent low to the ground, loping at speed straight
at the dark line of the forest.

Fran grabs her radio:

FRAN (CONT'D)

Tim! Suspect heading for the trees!

Seeing no sign of Tim outside, Fran curses under her breath
and jumps through the broken window, giving chase.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Fran runs towards the treeline. Her radio crackles.

TIM (O.S.)

Right behind you!

He is in fact well behind Fran.

She reaches the dark tree line and pulls out her flashlight, breathing hard. She shines the beam into the trees.

The light illuminates tree trunks, evergreen bows, but nothing else in the deep darkness.

She begins shining her light on the ground around her.

Tim races up to join her.

TIM (CONT'D)

What was it?

Fran shakes her head, then notices something in the beam of her flashlight. Tim shines his flashlight beam on it too.

BLOOD. In a patch of snow.

TIM (CONT'D)

Did you see it?

Fran's flashlight beam follows along the ground -- more blood in the snow -- and now clearly: heavy BOOTPRINTS.

FRAN

Not it. Who.

She shares a look of bewilderment with Tim.

INT. FRAN AND FORK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a laptop screen. A title page: THE LIMITS OF HUMAN PERCEPTION by JOHN FORCHETTE.

Fork stares at the screen, deep in thought, then looks at the orange capsule between his thumb and forefinger: mysterious, offering unknown promise --

As he opens his mouth and sets the capsule on his tongue, we --

CUT

TO

BLACK.