

NO PLACE FOR A SPARK

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. MIKE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sunshine pours through the living room window as MIKE BERYL (35) and his wife MELODY BERYL (33) prepare for a camping trip for their anniversary. They are avid outdoor enthusiasts and their experience and enthusiasm shows.

They kneel beside the coffee table and pack their large backpacks. Various camping and outdoor gear is spread out all over the living room. Two celebratory glasses of wine sit on the couch's end tables, half finished.

The two continue to place various items into their bags as they talk. The conversation shows their playful, effervescent relationship.

MELODY

Bear spray, check.

MIKE

Multitool, check.

MELODY

First aid kit, complete with medicinal alcohol--

MIKE

(overly pleased)

Flask of *non-medicinal* alcohol, check and check.

MELODY

We've had these water purification tablets for like ten years and haven't ever used them.

MIKE

It only takes one time where things go sideways...

MELODY

(playful)

I know. I'm just saying.

MIKE

(playful)

Saying what?

MELODY

That we're too good to let anything go sideways.

MIKE

Famous last words, baby cakes.

MELODY

Well tell me this then, Mr. man cakes...

MIKE

What's that, Mrs. Cakes?

MELODY

I understand the need for water purification in an emergency - But why do we always take them with us...

Melody holds up a metal filtration flask.

MELODY (CONT'D)

When we take a microbial water filter every time?

MIKE

What happens if we lose either of them?

MELODY

How? How would we lose one and not the other when they are packed in the very same bag?

MIKE

You know what? I'm really liking how smart you're getting.

MELODY

Getting?

Melody takes her wine glass and takes a sip.

MIKE

Because you've made me see something...

MELODY

Oh yeah? And what's that?

MIKE

We need to put the filter in my bag.

MELODY

(feigns exasperation)
Right.

Melody grabs a sheathed hunting knife and lunges at Mike, mock stabbing him in the chest. Mike absorbs his mate into his eager embrace.

MIKE

Well if I knew you would resort to murder, I would have agreed with you.

MELODY

That's what it takes, huh?

MIKE

Yep.

They kiss, very much in love.

MELODY

That is a good point though - put them in different bags. Extra safety - just in case.

MIKE

No, you're right - we only need to bring one - we're always so tight for space. I need to learn to relax a little.

MELODY

Learning to relax huh?

He smiles and nods. She's caught in his eyes.

MELODY (CONT'D)

You still surprise me.

They smile... and kiss again.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. MIKE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Same living room only now it's Mike, ALONE.

Instead of camping gear, the coffee table and end tables are filled with a huge spread of flowers and condolences cards.

Mike holds a black and white photo of a smiling Melody in one hand and a glass of wine in the other.

He takes a deep look into Melody's eyes... then sets the picture down on the coffee table.

He then picks up his smart phone and opens his photos. Mike swipes through several pictures of him and Melody - a lot of camping pictures, a nice dinner, an amusement park, a party.

He stops at one - a close up of both their smiling faces - gazes longingly at it.

MIKE

Cheers.

He takes a sip.

INT. MIKE'S OFFICE - DAY

A modern office space filled with office "pods" of computer work stations.

Mike is sitting at his desk, staring blankly at his programming task on the screen - the code looks like an unconquerable mountain to him.

Mike's boss, JEFF (40s) walks up behind him, a smartphone in his hand.

JEFF

Hey Mike. A word with you?

Mike stirs from his stare. Turns to his boss.

MIKE

Hey Jeff, sure.

Jeff walks up to his desk and sits on it. This is going to be a personal chat.

JEFF

How are you doing, Mike?

MIKE

I'm Ok. I should have this module done by Wednesday.

JEFF

I don't mean with work.

Mike is silent. Jeff looks at his phone.

JEFF (CONT'D)

I get it. It's not comfortable talking about this stuff.

MIKE

I...you know...

Mike is still at a loss to describe where he's at. Jeff is now scrolling on his phone.

JEFF

(looking at phone)
I care about my employees.
(looks at Mike)
But you look like you aren't going to make it through the day, let alone the P.I., and I need to make my metrics...
(looks at his phone)
Do you need more time?

Mike pauses.

MIKE

No, no. I'll be fine... It's been a year. I'm fine.

Jeff looks at Mike.

JEFF

I'm giving your tasks to Kate.

INT. GYM - NIGHT

A standard late-night gym.

MONTAGE - MIKE WORKS OUT

-- Mike does kettle bell swings.

-- Mike bench presses an impressive amount of weight.

-- Mike punches the heavy bag. His swings increase in intensity until it is an ALL OUT ATTACK ON HIS PAIN.

END MONTAGE

INT. COUNSELLOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A modern, comfortable therapy office. Mike sits in a chair across from THERAPIST (female, 50s), also seated in a chair.

THERAPIST

It's totally okay to need time to heal. It's normal. What would be abnormal is if you went ahead as if nothing had happened.

MIKE

It's been almost year. Shouldn't I feel some closure or something?

THERAPIST

Mike, a year is not long when it comes to losing a spouse.

MIKE

Sure you're not just telling me that so you can keep me around?

THERAPIST

I'm happy to see you as long as you need, but I'm happier to see you healed - safely on the other side.

MIKE

'Safely on the other side'...
Sounds nice...

Mike is looking out the window, the Therapist eyes him with concern.

THERAPIST

Healing is totally possible, Mike. You're not the first person to lose someone he loves deeply... But you'll have to come to the point of letting go of the tight grip you have on the wound - and doing that might feel like dying.

(beat)

But you have to choose this.

MIKE

It just doesn't feel like anything's getting better - the hole she left - is still as big as ever.

THERAPIST

All wounds heal with time - you just don't always notice when the healing is slow.

Mike considers this, looks at the Therapist.

MIKE

I don't know if I believe it, but it feels good to hear someone say it.

THERAPIST

You are going to make it to the other side. It'll be a battle, but when you get there, you're going to feel this burden lifted. *Scars will remain*, but the pain will be gone, and you're gonna say - you know what - my therapist was right.

MIKE

I just need to find out how to speed it up.

THERAPIST

Don't try to do that. The only way to healing is through - not around. You're going to have to feel the full brunt of the storm before the wind dies down. If you avoid it, you'll just delay it.

MIKE

So what can I do? Like, practically - what can I do?

THERAPIST

Take that trip you're planning. The fact that you're being intentional about getting the healing you need - you'll find the healing hears you... Don't try to force it and don't be closed minded to how it comes to you - it could come in a way you don't expect... The healing knows.

Mike stares out the window, he's not sure whether he's buying this.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Mike walks in a seedy district of the city. He turns into an alley where his car is parked in a small alley lot.

A little beyond the lot, a STEPFATHER (30s) and a CHILD (female, 11) are being accosted by a RUFFIAN (30s) with a pool cue.

Ruffian swings and hits Stepfather, hard, in the gut with the cue - he GRUNTS, collapses to his hands and knees, WHEEZING.

CHILD
 (crying)
 Dad Please! Fine I'll go with you.

RUFFIAN
 Yeah you will.

Ruffian raises the cue to swing again. Child tries to hold Ruffian's arm. Ruffian pushes her to the ground.

STEPFATHER
 No, please!

Ruffian swings, hitting Stepfather over the back, breaking the cue. Stepfather drops flat. Child SCREAMS. Ruffian drops the broken cue.

RUFFIAN
 (at Child)
 Now come here.

Child struggles to get up. Stepfather takes the broken cue nearest him and STABS Ruffian in the foot.

STEPFATHER
 Keep your hands off her.

Ruffian SCREAMS, and KICKS Stepfather in the head. He's dazed but still stirs.

CHILD
 Stop. Please! I'm coming.

Ruffian, limping, grabs Child, still crying, and pulls her along, toward the other end of the alley. Stepfather pulls out his phone and taps it, and sees Mike approaching his car.

STEPFATHER
 (at Mike, dazed)
 Hey, stop him. There's a restraining order.

MIKE
 Just call the cops.

STEPFATHER
 I am...

Stepfather pulls himself up into a sitting position, cringing in his soreness, holds the phone to his ear. He looks at Mike with pleading eyes.

STEPFATHER (CONT'D)

But they'll be gone...

(beat)

Please.

Ruffian and Child disappear out of the alley.

MIKE

Not my problem.

Mike gets in his car and drives away.

INT. MIKE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Same packing preparations happening in the same living room, as before - various camping and outdoor gear is spread out all over the living room, only now the sunshine in the window is replaced with grey clouds and rain.

Now there is only one backpack being packed, by Mike, very much ALONE.

The photo of Melody is now sitting on the couch beside Mike as he packs. A full glass of wine also sits on the end table beside it. A half-full glass sits on the other end table.

Mike places a bundled coil of rope in the backpack.

He reaches for another item, a BOTTLE OF PILLS, but he stops himself from picking it up, instead just lets his fingers trace over it. The label on the bottle shows it's a prescription for powerful painkillers, for "Melody Beryl".

He looks at the picture of Melody. He picks it up and turns it face down on the couch.

He puts the pills in the backpack.

He picks up his wine and clinks it to the full glass on the other end table. One sip left and he downs it.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - PARKING LOT - DAY

A small, overgrown gravel parking lot at a hiking trailhead in the mountains.

Mike, driving his SUV-style vehicle, pulls into the parking lot and parks. No other vehicle there.

He gets out of the car and stretches. He does a few body twists and then touches his toes, grabbing and holding them.

He opens the rear hatch and checks his backpack. Water bottle and bear spray in the side netting pockets - check. All latches and zippers are done up.

He grabs his hiking boots and puts them on the ground. With the hatch still open, he sits on the back of the car and begins removing his shoes, and putting on his boots.

Boots on, Mike grabs his hiking poles and straps them to his backpack.

Continuing his pre-hike ritual, he unzips a pocket on his backpack and removes a bottle of sunscreen. He sprays his arms, legs, and face, and rubs the sunscreen on so he's covered.

When finished, he takes a look at the bottle, breathes a laugh... Puts the bottle back in the pocket.

He pulls the backpack up onto his back, and adjusts the straps on his chest and then clicks in the waist strap. He's comfortable.

He closes the car hatch. He pulls the key fob out of his pocket and hits the lock button. The car chirps.

He turns and sets out toward the signpost that marks the start of the trail.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - DAY

Mike takes in the view - rolling hills covered in trees, and mountains off in the distance.

Mike looks at his nearby surroundings - conifer trees, birch trees, mossy ground. Birds flit in the trees. Squirrels chirp. His footfalls the only other sound in the vast outdoor landscape.

He stops. Breathes in deeply as he takes it all in. He is in his element... But he still remembers...

FLASHBACK - INT. MIKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Mike, seated at his work station, chatting with LING (20s) standing beside him. Both are looking at the monitor.

MIKE

I've checked it a few times but
it's still not compiling.

LING
This has been keeping you after
work all this week, hasn't it?

MIKE
I told Jeff I was up for a
challenge and I got one.

LING
You volunteered for the death job.

MIKE
Yeah, stupid, right?

Ling studies the code.

LING
You're setting up the right
variables...

Mike's phone vibrates. It shows an incoming call from "Mel"
and shows a picture of his wife.

Mike glances at the call, his hand moves towards the phone
but then STOPS.

LING (CONT'D)
(pointing)
Maybe this...

He looks back at Ling.

Mike grips the phone but lets the call continue to ring.

LING (CONT'D)
You're using the alpha database at
the beginning but down here it's
some sort of temp database...

Mike groans and releases the still ringing phone and moves
his hands to his keyboard.

MIKE
You're right.

He starts typing.

MIKE (CONT'D)
How'd I miss that? You're a life
saver.

The call from Mel stops ringing, but Mike doesn't notice.

He keeps working.

END OF FLASHBACK

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT DAY

Mike looks sad, pained...

Nature is pristine... but it's no consolation...

Mike STOPS and lets out a FURIOUS, LOUD GROAN OF PAIN.

He steadies his breathing.

He keeps walking, but slowly, under the weight of the world.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - FIRST HILL - DAY

Mike approaches a small hill a little further up the trail. The trail rounds a bend in the trees.

As Mike rounds the bend, he sees ALEX (20s) sitting on a rock, near an intersection where the path splits in two, drinking from his water bottle. Alex is wearing a large hiking backpack, similar to Mike's.

Mike is caught off-guard as he didn't expect anyone else to be on the trail. He doesn't speak right away, and keeps taking a few more steps towards him.

Alex finishes his swallow.

ALEX

Hey.

MIKE

Hey.

ALEX

Was that you screaming? You okay?

MIKE

Yeah... I--

Mike scrambles but, basically seamless.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I twisted my ankle a little bit.

ALEX

But you're okay?

MIKE

Oh, yeah - it really wasn't bad...
I'm just not that good with pain I
guess.

Alex smiles, but considers Mike with suspicion.

ALEX

You seem to be walking fine.

MIKE

It was not that bad.
(beat)
I'm a wuss.

Mike takes out his water bottle and takes a swig.

ALEX

I've got a tensor bandage if you
think it would help.

MIKE

No, I'll be fine. Thanks though.

He replaces his water bottle.

ALEX

Yeah dude.

MIKE

I'm kind of surprised to see
someone out here. There weren't any
other cars in the parking lot.

Alex stands and brushes himself off - a delay?

ALEX

I came from a different trailhead.
Been hiking for a few days...

MIKE

Hardcore... Where's your tent?

Alex smiles.

ALEX

I just use the tent the forest
gives me.

MIKE

So like, a lean-to?

ALEX

Yeah man - you know what I'm talkin' about! Lean-to's - the most badass shelter you can have in the forest. Ever slept in one?

MIKE

(okay then)

No, just tents for me.

The words remind Mike of why he's here.

MIKE (CONT'D)

But I should soldier on.

Alex takes a moment, thinking about Mike's hurry.

ALEX

Fair fair.

Mike looks to his left, towards where he's headed and then looks back at Alex - he realizes he needs to ask...

MIKE

Which way you headed?

It must be one of the two paths on either side of Alex.

Alex coughs and clears his throat.

ALEX

Excuse me.

Mike eyes Alex - again, is he delaying?

Alex points to the path to Mike's left, Mike's way, as he continues to clear his throat.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You?

Mike hides his annoyance.

MIKE

Me too.

Alex looks off down the trail, back at Mike, seemingly excited at being able to hike with someone.

ALEX

Well then, I guess--

MIKE

But listen - Really not wanting to offend you - but I'm kind of looking for a bit of peace and quiet with this hike - you know - personal reasons - so I'd really rather hike alone...

Alex raises his eyebrows.

ALEX

Oh.

MIKE

...But you can go an ahead if you want.

ALEX

Totally okay. No, no - No offense taken - totally - you can go ahead. I wanted to take a longer break anyway.

MIKE

Sure. Thanks. I appreciate it. Again - no offense.

ALEX

Dude. Don't even think about it.

MIKE

Thanks.

Mike starts walking.

ALEX

If you twist that ankle again - you know I'm always within screaming distance.

Mike laughs.

MIKE

Good to know.
(beat)
Have a good hike.

ALEX

You too.

Mike walks off on the leftward path.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 2 - DAY

Mike continues to take in the outdoors.

He closes his eyes and calms himself from the unwelcome and unanticipated encounter.

He just wants silence, to be alone.

He hasn't walked far, and he hears a SCREAM.

MIKE
(to himself)
What?

As unwelcome as it is to have someone else on the trail, Mike cracks a smile at the lunacy of what he's heard. It's gotta be Alex. Is he joking? He's gotta be.

Mike keeps walking.

Mike's smile changes to frustration.

He stops.

He rolls his eyes.

He takes another moment to stew in his frustration - looks at the sky.

He turns around.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - DAY

Mike rounds a corner and sees Alex, backpack off, who is clutching his hand and appears to be in pain. Mike walks up to him.

Alex shakes his hand, grunting and groaning.

ALEX
Gah!

MIKE
Hey, what happened?

ALEX
Damn bee stung me.

MIKE
Are you allergic?

ALEX

I don't know. Never been stung
before. Burns like fire though.

Alex keeps shaking his hand. He's in pain, and not happy.
Angry even.

MIKE

Well I was still in screaming
distance, so...

ALEX

Grrr-ahh!

Mike is a little surprised that a grown man is responding
this way.

MIKE

How much is it swelling up?

Alex looks at his hand. The area around the sting is swollen,
but nowhere else.

ALEX

Looks like a radioactive mosquito
bite.

MIKE

Yeah, they're nasty... Your
breathing seems fine - are you
feeling light-headed at all?

ALEX

I don't know.

MIKE

What about your pulse?

ALEX

I don't know... Just my arm, is on
fire.

MIKE

Well if you're not having trouble
breathing, and your pulse is
normal, then you're probably not
allergic.

Alex still struggles with the pain.

ALEX

What do I do with this?

Mike tries to hide a smile.

MIKE
You just gotta... take the pain.

ALEX
How long does it last?

MIKE
It'll burn for maybe half an hour -
then it's gonna itch... I have pain
killers, but it'll fade by the time
they take effect.

Alex scans the ground, still very agitated.

ALEX
Where is that bee? It's dead right?
They die after they sting you? If
not, I'm gonna kill it.

MIKE
Honey bees die after they sting
you, other bees don't.

Alex continues to shake his hand and look around.

ALEX
(yelling)
I'll kill you!

Mike laughs, but is still unsure of Alex.

MIKE
I usually have calamine lotion with
me, but my w-- but I don't have it
today...

Alex calms down a little.

ALEX
It's okay. You said I'll be fine.

Mike just wants to go on alone.

MIKE
You sure?

ALEX
Yes. My breathing's fine. I'll be
fine. Just go on ahead again.

Mike considers the situation.

MIKE
Okay.

ALEX
Thanks for coming back, man.

MIKE
(it's nothing)
Yeah.

Mike turns around and walks onward on the path.

He's free - that was close - but...

ALEX
Actually...

Mike turns around.

MIKE
Yeah?

ALEX
My pulse is a bit fast. It's probably just my temper... but if there is any chance I'm allergic, I should probably have someone around... Right?

Wanting to be alone, Mike at first tries to deny this logic.

MIKE
Well you know, you're not light headed, and--
(realizing he sounds evil)
--You know what? Of course.
(starts walking back)
I'm good to hang around for a while.

ALEX
But if you wanna bolt, go ahead.

MIKE
No. No. I'm good... I'd want someone to do the same for me.

ALEX
Thanks, dude.

MIKE
No good being within screaming distance if you can't scream.

Alex' first smile in a while.

Alex picks up his backpack and puts it on.

The two start walking onward.

ALEX
 (dramatic voice)
 In the woods... no one can hear you
 scream.

Still awkward.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 I'm Alex by the way.

Alex holds out his hand. Mike reaches out slowly, shakes it.

MIKE
 Mike... What was that exactly?

ALEX
 Alien... The movie...
 (beat)
 Did you watch it?

This seems to be an odd shift, but okay.

MIKE
 Alien? Yeah, I saw it... Really
 only like the first two.

ALEX
 I love 'em all, every one. This
 universe is just, ah...
 (no words)
 Superb...

MIKE
 Why do you like it so much?

Alex takes a swig from his water bottle, grimacing as he uses his stung hand to open the lid.

ALEX
 So many things. The setting, the
 practical effects... Such a
 terrifying enemy...

MIKE
 True, it's pretty scary.

ALEX
 Well, you start out thinking it's
 just a mindless, ravenous monster -
 but then, as you see more of it,
 you see that it is intelligent -
 more intelligent than the humans...

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)
and it's still ravenous - and still
can't be reasoned with.

Alex looks at Mike.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I take it as a metaphor for our
worst enemies in life... What are
your enemies?

Mike really doesn't want to talk about this, but also doesn't
want to let on that this is the case.

MIKE
I dunno - work maybe.

ALEX
What is it about your work that
makes it your enemy? - your worst
nemesis?

MIKE
My uh, boss - he's a bit of a jerk.
Doesn't really care, you know?

ALEX
How long have you been working for
him?

MIKE
Seven years... It's a good job,
pays well.

ALEX
Are you sure that's your real
enemy. There's nothing, deeper?

Mike thinks... he really doesn't want to talk about this.

MIKE
Yeah... guess I'm pretty boring.
Don't even have interesting
enemies.

Alex thinks.

ALEX
Not married?

Beat.

MIKE
No.

ALEX
Relationships?

MIKE
I've had some, but... not right
now.

ALEX
What if I told you that your enemy
is you, Mike, not your boss?
(beat)
Would that blow your mind? You get
it?

Mike thinks that's totally lame, but, hey, it's an out.

MIKE
Wow. Yeah. You know, that's deep.

Alex gives the mind blown sign with his hands and makes an
EXPLOSION SOUND.

ALEX
Right?

MIKE
Thanks - I'll be thinking about
that...

He won't be.

Alex smiles, contented in himself.

They walk on for a moment in silence.

A faint AIRPLANE SOUND comes from the distance.

MIKE (CONT'D)
(noticing the sound)
What's that?

ALEX
What?

MIKE
The sound.

Alex looks up for a moment - still nothing to see - but he
hears - then looks back to the trail.

ALEX
Water bomber.

The sound gets louder as a WATER BOMBER plane comes into view from behind them - its trajectory bringing it almost directly over them.

They watch it fly over them and continue on in the direction they are moving.

ALEX (CONT'D)

There's a fire up at Metal Creek - just up the highway about ten twenty minutes. They've been running water to it for the last few days. Steady trips.

MIKE

Too many forest fires these days.

ALEX

It's so dry.

MIKE

Yeah, climate change, eh...

ALEX

Everything we do is connected. It all comes back to us in the end.

Another few moments of silence.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Forest fires aren't all bad of course. Need them to keep the forest healthy - burn away the old - make room for the new - it's a cycle - been there for millions of years.

MIKE

True, but--

ALEX

Would be worse without any forest fires.

MIKE

But things are bad right now. It's a problem if there are too many of them.

(beat)

Wouldn't you say?

ALEX

Yes, of course you're right. Can't have them getting close to people.

MIKE
Yeah, exactly.

ALEX
Really messes with our insurance
rates.

Beat.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I mean people are rarely ever in
danger... but there are other
impacts - economic and
psychological...

MIKE
How's the hand?

Alex squeezes his hand, open and closed a few times. Cringes.

ALEX
I had almost forgot about the pain.

MIKE
It'll be gone soon, don't worry.
(beat)
But listen - you're talking is
steady - you've got no breathing or
dizziness issues - I think we can
certify you're non-allergic...

Alex considers things for a moment.

ALEX
Yeah. Definitely, man. Don't let me
hold you back...
(he stops)
I'll chill for a while.

Mike stops.

MIKE
I'll stay if you still want me to.

ALEX
Super kind of you, but no, you're
right, I feel fine... Good to know
I'm not allergic.

MIKE
Ok... I'll keep going then. Thanks.

Mike feels dumb for thanking him.

ALEX

Yeah yeah.

Mike starts walking onward.

MIKE

Take care.

ALEX

You too.

(beat)

Remember - you're your own enemy.

Mike turns and points at Alex as if to say "You got it!".
Then turns and continues forward.

Alex watches stoically as Mike leaves.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 2 - DAY

An unspecified amount of time later, Mike walks on. He closes his eyes and breathes in the fresh air, and the silence...

...He's not happy. But at least he's alone.

He keeps walking.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 2 - DAY

A small stream with stepping stones.

Mike cross it without issue.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 2 - DAY

There are more flitting birds, big white clouds, tall green trees. But he's not taking them in.

He's depleted. He kicks a rock.

He looks ahead, down the trail. Then from behind him, he hears:

MELODY (O.S.)

Babe.

Mike spins to look towards the sound of the unexpected voice.

Suddenly, as if in a dream, MELODY IS THERE WITH HIM, about twenty feet back on the trail. She's wearing her backpack and stands and smiles at him... That smile.

She motions for him to come back to her.

Mike walks back to her, entranced.

MIKE

Did you see something?

MELODY

A raccoon.

(pointing)

Just by that tree over there... I think it's got babies...

Mike looks into the trees, sees.

MIKE

Oh yeah, there! Aww, cute...

He looks back at Melody.

MIKE (CONT'D)

See how cute they are?

MELODY

Yeah yeah, well they don't vomit and have diaper blow-outs.

MIKE

But look at the care she's showing them. Same care you would have - it just comes from having offspring... Trust the raccoon, babe.

MELODY

Nope, can't do it. Don't trust anyone wearing a mask.

He looks back at the raccoons.

MIKE

True, better watch your snacks - or, you know, give them over - she's got a family to feed.

Mike looks back at Melody but, SHE'S GONE. He comes back to reality.

He stands there, ALONE, in the silence of the forest.

He knows where he is, but he's lost.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 2 - REST SPOT - DAY

Further down the trail, Mike sits on a fallen tree and snacks on some trail mix he's got in a zip-lock bag. The fallen tree is wedged in a way that there is a gap under it, but the gap is mostly filled in with thick grass.

He looks all around.

The area directly behind the tree is clear enough and grassy enough that it's perfect for a nap.

He climbs over the tree, puts his pack down, opens it. Takes out a light jacket and folds it up to use as a pillow.

He sets it down and lies down.

He's totally hidden from view from the trail.

Mike looks up at the sky.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 2 - REST SPOT - DAY

Mike awakes. He doesn't know how long he was out, but now he hears someone (must be Alex) sitting on the log, resting, just like he, himself, was before.

Mike listens to see if Alex knows he's there.

He hears Alex eating an apple - chomps and slurps.

Mike stays quiet.

Mike turns his head to the side. He sees ALEX'S OPEN BACKPACK TIPPED DOWN TOWARDS HIM, UNDER THE LOG, PUSHING THE GRASS BACK, only inches away from him. Mike can see partially inside - he sees some red flares.

The pack is in reach, and the opening is under the log, out of view of Alex, so Mike slowly and quietly reaches out to it and lifts the opening for a better view inside.

He doesn't completely see everything inside but what he sees, surprises him: SEVERAL CLEAR BOTTLES OF GASOLINE-COLOURED LIQUID, A SAT-PHONE, AND A MINI FIRE EXTINGUISHER.

Alex gets up from the log.

Mike quickly removes his hand from the bag, and pretends to sleep.

Alex stretches and groans. Then he picks up his backpack, closes it, puts it on, and starts walking.

As Alex's steps fade, Mike breathes easy.

He gets up. Everything is as it should be in the forest.

Mike checks his phone signal. One bar - intermittent.

Unsure what to do - he looks back where he came from - he looks ahead - the path narrower and the forest denser going forward.

MIKE

Whatever.

He continues on.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 3 - DENSER FOREST - DAY

Mike takes in the dense forest - the unique trees, the moss, the stone formations. He looks behind him.

Suddenly Melody is there again. She's just a few feet away, tying her boot lace.

She finishes tying it...

...Looks at Mike with a look of concern...

MELODY

Those my pills?

He looks at her, knowing it's just a reverie - but he remembers her with such exquisite detail - she's as beautiful as ever...

MIKE

I don't want to talk about it...
Can't I just walk with you for a while?

They walk in silence for a few moments.

MELODY

I forgive you. You know that right?

Mike takes this in...

MIKE

I don't know if I can accept that.

MELODY

You need to try.

MIKE
I'd still have you.

MELODY
You don't know that.

MIKE
I just want to be together again.

MELODY
That's not how it works... You need
to make the most of your life, now.

MIKE
I can't...

But she's gone, and Mike is talking alone.

He stops.

Emotions high.

Should he listen to her? He turns around.

The pain is too much.

He turns back around. Swallows tears.

He keeps walking.

He hears a RUSTLING off to the side of the trail - SOMETHING
LIVING.

He stops.

He looks closer...

...It came from behind a tree...

Mike hesitates - if it's Alex, does he want to find him?

...He steps closer, slowly...

...Looks behind the tree--

A squirrel JUMPS in fright and SKITTERS OFF into the forest.

Mike shakes his head.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 3 - DENSER FOREST - DAY

Mike walks on.

He rounds a bend.

Alex is there. Standing still in the middle of the trail, facing forward. Mike could once again do without the intrusion - especially Alex.

Mike walks slowly up to Alex, who stays silent, looking away.

MIKE
Hey.

ALEX
Shh.

Alex lifts his hand, as if to tell Mike to stop.

MIKE
What is it?

ALEX
(whispering)
Quiet.

Mike takes a few cautious steps forward.

MIKE
(whispering)
What is it?

ALEX
(whispering)
Think I heard a bear.

MIKE
(whispering)
Sure it wasn't just me?

Alex points forward and off to one side, where there is some dense brush among the trees, hiding part of the forest from view, just a few dozen meters ahead.

ALEX
(whispering)
Came from up there.

MIKE
(whispering)
Shoulda been making more noise on the trail.

ALEX
(whispering, curt)
Yeah, well I wasn't. You weren't either.

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

(beat)

Might not be safe to continue.

Mike contemplates this. Does he really trust Alex?

He doesn't want to turn around - though he hopes Alex will.

MIKE

(whispering)

You're right - might be a bear. But I've got bear spray - so I'm willing to take the chance... I'm gonna keep going... If I had an extra bottle, I'd share, but...

Alex takes another moment to survey the scene and contemplate.

ALEX

(whispering)

I've got bear spray too.

(beat)

I'll keep going too, if you are... two are better than one.

Alex takes a few steps forward.

ALEX (CONT'D)

(whispering)

It's easier to make noise when we're together... just for a while.

Mike hates the thought, but sees some logic to it. Guess it can't hurt - might satisfy some mounting curiosity he has about Alex as well.

MIKE

(whispering)

Sure. Sounds good. Just for a while.

They walk onward, quietly, past the point where Alex said he heard the bear.

After several meters...

ALEX

(loudly)

HUP HUP HUP!

Mike scares at the sudden loud outburst, then gets hot but stays quiet, listening for any change in the surroundings... Nothing...

MIKE
Tryin'a kill us or what? Noise'll
scare away a black bear, but it'll
make a grizzly attack!

Alex listens as he walks. No apology.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Not how I want to die!

ALEX
How *do* you want to die?

Mike is silent for a moment, surprised by the bold question.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Sorry dude - bad joke. Lighten
up... There aren't grizzlies in
this area.

Mike still not happy.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 3 - DENSER FOREST - DAY

Mike and Alex continue to hike and converse.

ALEX
I'm sure you know you have to
replace bear spray every few years?
It expires.

MIKE
I like when it expires - then I get
to pull the pin on it.

Alex smiles.

ALEX
Me too! Gotta get some trigger
practice with the release
mechanism.

Alex mimics a quickdraw shot from the hip.

MIKE
It's all in the aiming and
firing... Envision the bear moving
at you, gauge the speed, fire low
in front of the bear, so the bear
runs into the cloud...

ALEX
You're a pro. I respect that.

MIKE

(deflecting)

Not really... Just been hiking a while...

(beat)

Never had to use bear spray though.

(beat)

You ever come across a bear before?

Alex is silent for a moment. Looks contemplative.

ALEX

I did once...

Mike listens, hoping for more of the story.

ALEX (CONT'D)

...With my father, when I was young. 14 years old.

MIKE

What happened?

ALEX

My father killed it.

MIKE

No shit. Like with a gun?

ALEX

No gun. Only had a hunting knife.

MIKE

Seriously. He killed it with a hunting knife?

ALEX

I might've finished it.

MIKE

What? You're joking.

(realizing)

Wait. What happened to your dad?

ALEX

The bear got its victim... but was repaid in full. I made sure of that.

MIKE

Sorry for your loss... Fourteen...

ALEX

I loved my father.

MIKE

But you killed a bear with your bare hands... no pun intended, really. I, uh... sorry, I don't mean to make light - it's just a cool thing to be able to say... sorry, not *cool*, it's - you know.

They walk in silence for a moment.

ALEX

I helped raise my siblings after that, but my mother took it the hardest.

MIKE

Must have been hard.

ALEX

The bear is a symbol of power. To be killed by something like that... is an honour... better than getting cancer, or growing old and weak.

(beat)

To have killed a bear - it's an even greater honour...

Mike takes this in for a moment. Decides he wants to lighten the mood...

MIKE

Did it make a nice rug?

Alex doesn't recognize this as a joke.

ALEX

Winter coats for my sisters.

Mike is once again taken aback...

ALEX (CONT'D)

And the meat lasted us for over a year.

MIKE

What? How did...?

Mike doesn't know how to ask this.

ALEX

It was a hunting trip. We had an ATV and a trailer.

MIKE
Where was this?

Alex looks around as if to gauge his surroundings.

ALEX
Northern B.C.

They keep walking.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Ever skin an animal?

MIKE
No, couldn't do it.

ALEX
Why not?

MIKE
I grew up liking animals too much.
My mom is a vet - so hunting was
kind of the opposite of what we
believed in.

(beat)
I probably had every kind of pet
you could have, growing up -
turtle, hamster, ferret, snake...
lion--

ALEX
Lion?

MIKE
Well, it was a collie, but it had a
mane like a lion. Moof. Great dog.

ALEX
Moof? What does it mean?

MIKE
Short for Mufasa.

ALEX
Strange name.

MIKE
Didn't you watch Lion King?

ALEX
My parents were quite strict about
films when I was growing up.

MIKE
But you like Alien.

ALEX
After my dad died I started
watching movies, but not kids
stuff.

MIKE
Hm... I grew up on cartoons.

Alex takes this in.

ALEX
Your mother was a veterinarian -
what was your father?

MIKE
Performer. Did live shows.

ALEX
What kind of performer?

MIKE
Magician... Never got very big
though. No Penn and Teller...

ALEX
Ever want to follow in your
father's footsteps?

Mike reflects a moment.

MIKE
Yeah, I did actually, when I was
young, but... not a magician... I
wanted to be a clown...
(smiles bashfully)
But ended up being a programmer.

Alex laughs, then thinks for a moment.

ALEX
So you didn't learn how to be
tough.

Mike laughs, unsure how to take this.

MIKE
Just cause I wanted to entertain
people, or sit at a desk, doesn't
make me - not tough... Just cause I
haven't killed a bear...

They walk in silence for a few moments.

They begin to hear the sound of a stream.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 3 - STREAM - DAY

They round a corner and see a wide, fast-moving stream that cuts off the path.

A LOG that had served as a bridge across, is broken at the middle - the nearer half is still in place but it doesn't extend far enough to cross the stream - the far half lies down river on the other side.

Mike and Alex walk up to the stream, see the broken log, and survey the situation.

Mike delays, hoping Alex will turn back.

MIKE

Water's moving pretty fast...
doesn't look safe to walk through.

ALEX

It's deceptively deep... water like
that can sweep you off your feet.

MIKE

Yeah, one slip in that and you end
up hitting your head pretty hard on
a rock.

Neither move, but continue to stand there, just looking.

Mike sighs heavily.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Looks like the end of the road.

Alex turns around and looks at the surrounding forest. He's looking for something...

MIKE (CONT'D)

What are you looking for?

Alex walks into the trees, keeps looking as he responds.

ALEX

A bridge.

Mike watches Alex as he surveys the ground for deadfall.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Come here. I may need your help.

MIKE

I don't think you can get a log all the way over the river, even with two people.

Alex keeps looking.

ALEX

Do you see the way the old log is angled?

Mike glances back at it.

MIKE

Yeah. So.

ALEX

If I find the right log, we can use the old log as a ramp... we position it just right, and work together... we could totally get it across.

Mike looks at the old, broken log. He's not fully convinced.

ALEX (CONT'D)

But, can't do it myself...

(looks at Mike)

I'd appreciate it if you stayed around to help.

Mike contemplates things for a moment. He has a chance to leave, but does he want to? He's come all this way...

MIKE

Sure.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 3 - STREAM TREES - DAY

Mike walks into the trees and starts looking around, off to the side of Alex.

ALEX

Try to find one about eight to ten inches in diameter.

MIKE

River is about fifteen - twenty feet across, so need something around twenty feet long... That's gonna be heavy.

ALEX

The two of us can do it - I can tell you work out a little - you don't look too strong, so it'll make it harder - but still possible.

Alex keeps a straight face, then smiles. Mike laughs to himself and shakes his head.

MIKE

Yeah, I need to up my game.

They wander through the trees for a few moments, looking for the right sized log.

Mike spots one with a rotted end that might fit the bill.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Here. Take a look at this one.

Alex comes over and looks at the deadfall log that is partially covered in vegetation.

ALEX

(pointing)

That end is too rotted.

MIKE

But if we cut it off there, it might still be long enough.

Alex contemplates, looks Mike up and down again.

ALEX

It's too thick - it'll be too heavy.

MIKE

Try me.

Alex looks at Mike - smiles.

ALEX

Okay then.

Alex takes off his pack and retrieves a hatchet. He closes his pack before placing it on the ground.

Mike also takes off his pack, opens it and retrieves a hatchet. He sets his pack down, still open, noticing that Alex closed his.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 Start cutting it off at the rotted
 end. I'll deal with the other end
 and cut off the branches.

Mike follows his orders and walks to the thicker, rotted end, and begins chopping. Each chop, digging a little out of the log - it'll take a while.

Alex begins chopping on one of the several branches that sprout out of the log all the way along. Each branch takes a few swings to clear.

Then Alex starts to clear off the bark.

MIKE
 Why the bark?

ALEX
 You'll see.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 3 - STREAM - DAY

Mike and Alex grunt as they carry the heavy, skinned, and de-branched log up the edge of the stream. Alex leads, walking backwards, and turns his head periodically to gauge the route.

ALEX
 Almost there.

Mike's teeth are clenched and struggles to maintain a good grip as sharp protrusions poke into his hand every time he readjusts his grip...

MIKE
 I can't hold it.

ALEX
 Don't drop it, we're almost there!

Mike groans and struggles, then...

MIKE
 Ahh!

Mike drops his end - it THUDS onto the ground causing the log to BUCK in Alex's hands. Alex grunts painfully as his end is jarred from his hands and THUDS to the ground as well.

Mike grips his hand in pain, blood coming from a cut. They're both angry.

ALEX
Come on! What's wrong with you?

MIKE
I told you I couldn't hold on!

ALEX
Learn how to carry something heavy!

MIKE
I could handle the weight - it was the grip!

ALEX
What's the difference - if you can't handle it, you can't handle it!

MIKE
You didn't clear it off smooth enough! What did you think was going to happen?

They both fume in silence for a moment.

ALEX
Are you cut?

MIKE
It's fine...

Mike takes up a stance in front of the log end again.

MIKE (CONT'D)
I'll put antiseptic on it after. We doing this or what?

Alex looks at Mike...

...Then grabs his hatchet and trims some more from Mike's end.

He finishes, then smiles at Mike.

ALEX
We're doing this.

They each go to their ends, bend down and pick up the log. They walk the remaining steps to the "bridge".

Alex sets his end down on the broken, old log, which sits at an angle to the stream.

Mike's hand hurts but he does his best to hide the fact.

MIKE

What now?

ALEX

Go ahead and put it down. Chill.

Mike puts his end down.

MIKE

No problem.

Alex looks at Mike and surveys his capability.

ALEX

Now for the fun part.

Mike looks at the log with uncertainty.

MIKE

I've got a rope if we need it.

ALEX

No rope needed. Now we make sure the log is balanced on the old log, we both lift your end, keep it low and then rush forward, pushing as hard as we can and launch the other end to the other side of the river.

Mike thinks about it, runs the process through his mind.

He chuckles.

MIKE

Worth a shot.

ALEX

Yeah!

They position themselves at Mike's end, brace their footing, and bend down to get a good grip. They're very close to each other and wait a few moments to let themselves get a solid grip.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Ready?

Mike turns to Alex and nods.

MIKE

On Three.

Alex nods.

MIKE (CONT'D)

One... Two... THREE,

They both push forward with all their might, keeping their end as low as possible. The log slides smoothly across the other log, extending out over the river - at the last possible moment, they give one final push and launch the log forward.

The log's momentum carries it over the river and it plows into the bank on the other side. IT'S A BRIDGE.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Wooo! Let's go!

ALEX

Yeah baby!

Both of them are breathing hard. Alex offers Mike his hand.

Mike looks at it and clasps it, they shake hands. They both CRINGE from the pain still in their hands.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Your crazy idea worked.

ALEX

You can lift heavy things after all.

They smile.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I couldn't have done this without you, Mike... I'm someone who lives by taking what the universe gives, as fate...

(beat)

It looks like, this - you and I meeting up and helping each other out... was meant to be.

MIKE

(coo coo)

Maybe you're right.

They look again at their new bridge.

ALEX

Now - how's your balance?

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 3 - STREAM - DAY

Mike and Alex cross the log without any issues.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 3 - DAY

Mike and Alex walk along the path. It's still wide enough for them to walk side by side.

ALEX

Where did you get your love of the outdoors?

MIKE

I grew up a city boy. Didn't start hiking until I was in university. Friends had to drag me out, but didn't take long and you couldn't keep me away... You?

ALEX

My dad grew up on a farm and spent most of his time outside. He showed me a lot about the forest.

MIKE

Farm boy.

ALEX

Well, I was born there and we lived there for a while before my dad had a falling out with my grandfather and they moved out to the city... but we went back one summer - my grandfather was sick and didn't want to leave this world without making things right with my dad...

MIKE

Did they get a chance to patch things up?

ALEX

Supposedly. The day before my dad died.

(beat)

My grandfather outlived my dad by another two years, but he was never the same after. Never got to really experience the benefit of patching things up.

MIKE

Harsh.

ALEX

Harsher on my mom. She had her hands full with a son that wasn't exactly cooperative - didn't have the skills to deal with losing a father... She stayed around for another 6 months - my grandma helped out - but eventually we moved back to the city...

MIKE

You probably couldn't wait to be back.

ALEX

I hated it.

(beat)

In my heart, I'm still on the farm... walking on the trails behind our house - with my dad... I felt free there... Like you could do whatever you wanted and it didn't matter.

(beat)

How was your childhood, Mike? Hope it wasn't all sad like mine?

MIKE

Good I guess... My parents would take us camping in the summer - I was happy because I had my DS along... Even took us to Hawaii one year.

Alex considers this.

ALEX

...My mom had to work two jobs just to keep us alive.

(beat)

And the jobs she had to take... were not good... people take advantage of a single mother who's new to the city, who is desperate for work.

MIKE

Yeah, people can be jerks.

ALEX

But adversity makes us stronger...
and people who take advantage of
others find out they can't keep
doing that before there is
pushback...

MIKE

What kind of pushback?

Alex laughs.

ALEX

Look at us. We're bonding! Who
would have thought, eh?

Alex gives Mike a friendly punch on the arm.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Fast friends.

Mike is still a bit weirded out, but tries not to show it.

MIKE

What's life without friends?

ALEX

Exactly. It's nothing. It's too
much time with yourself and the
time you spend with yourself is
just repeating the things you hate
about your life - about life in
general - both are futile
endeavors.

MIKE

I don't know - I've learned some
things by self reflection. Had a
coach who told me the unexamined
life is not worth living...
Probably wouldn't have gotten
married if I hadn't done that.

ALEX

Self reflection... sounds better
than stewing in your regrets...

Mike is silent but nods in acknowledgement.

ALEX (CONT'D)

So marriage was a good decision
then?

MIKE

Yeah, I mean--

The pain returns. Mike hasn't thought of this question in this new phase of life and doesn't know how to answer it.

The path becomes more narrow, Mike walks ahead and they're now single file.

Alex catches a glimpse of Mike's left hand which doesn't have a wedding ring on it.

MIKE (CONT'D)

...Who doesn't want love in their life?

Alex is silent.

MIKE (CONT'D)

But I agree - doesn't help to dwell on the unfairness of life.

ALEX

So you agree life is unfair?

Mike takes a moment to respond.

MIKE

Sometimes...

ALEX

Most of the time. Criminally unfair. The things people do to each other... the world is on fire with this... and the damage it does just piles on... what can you do except watch the world burn?

Mike absorbs this statement in the midst of swirling emotions.

MIKE

Yeah... exactly.

Alex takes in Mike's response for a moment.

ALEX

How did your marriage end?

Mike is jarred by the question, and rubs the place on his finger where his wedding band used to be... But his heart is not ready for this conversation.

MIKE

I've - uh - enjoyed hiking with you and everything, but I think I'm ready to go on alone again.

(beat)

You may have guessed - I'm out here to process some stuff. And I gotta do that on my own, you know?

ALEX

To look at yourself...

MIKE

Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

ALEX

...and stew in your regrets.

Mike gets what Alex is implying. He smiles taking it as a joke.

MIKE

I'll be okay.

ALEX

Didn't suggest otherwise.

MIKE

So I'll just go on ahead, unless - if you want to, you can go on ahead - I can take a break - I'm good either way.

ALEX

You're way too polite - you know that?

MIKE

Sure. Guilty there.

Alex looks Mike in the eyes, Mike is uncomfortable with this and looks away.

ALEX

You go. I'll have my lunch...

MIKE

Thanks. Appreciate it.

ALEX

Watch yourself up ahead. I read that the trail turns into a ledge - gotta watch your footing.

MIKE

I know - hiked it before. But thanks.

Alex nods.

ALEX

Have a good one.

MIKE

You too.

Mike turns and walks on, Alex watches him.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 3 - DAY

Mike continues down the path on his own. He hops over a fallen log.

He takes a few more steps then stops.

He breathes in a big lungful of fresh air, and exhales.

He looks around at his surroundings... he can't shake the sadness.

He keeps going.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 3 - LEDGE PATH - DAY

The path turns into a stony path that hugs the side of a high rock wall. The ledge overhangs a deadly drop. A series of chain handholds are bolted to the sides of the rock wall all along the ledge, about four or five feet apart.

Mike sips from his water as he approaches the ledge. He stows his water and then tightens his backpack straps.

Mike looks behind him - he's not totally convinced he can trust Alex - but the path is clear - no sign of his unwelcome new friend. He turns back and Melody is there at the ledge, backpack on. She smiles at him as he approaches... then steps onto the ledge ahead of them and reaches for the first chain.

She grabs it and steps further out onto the ledge.

She sidesteps forward and reaches for the next chain, grips it.

She turns back to Mike. Smiles.

MELODY
Coming or not?

Mike is overcome with emotion, but is drawn forward.

MIKE
How did you become so brave?

MELODY
What? You mean to marry you?

Mike smiles at the dig.

MIKE
Come on, I was the safe choice.
Someone who never took risks. You
told me that.

He reaches out and grips the first chain, begins to sidestep
on the ledge.

MELODY
True.

She takes another step.

MELODY (CONT'D)
But that's why I needed to be
brave.

MIKE
(nervous)
What do you mean?

She stays silent.

Mike lets this sink in, grabs another chain and takes another
step towards her. Melody's smile fades as he gets closer, but
she focuses on her handholds.

MELODY
Listen, I need something from you
too.

MIKE
What?

She grabs another chain and makes another sidestep. She looks
at him earnestly.

MELODY
I need *you* to forgive *me*.

MIKE

I-- I--

MELODY

I'm so sorry.

Now her eyes are full of fear.

Melody lets go of the chain and leans backward, falling off the ledge.

MIKE

(screaming)

MEL!

Mike releases his hold on the chain and reaches down to try to grab her, but she's vanished into thin air - his balance is thrown off and HE FALLS FORWARD OFF THE LEDGE, but CATCHES HIMSELF WITH HIS ARMS AND UPPER BODY.

But the ledge is topped with loose rocks and his pack is heavy - he makes an attempt to pull himself up but the effort only causes his grip to loosen and his weight pulls him down - he yells as he CATCHES HIMSELF WITH ONLY HIS HANDS, hanging fully outstretched.

He looks down - THE DROP IS CERTAIN DEATH.

His fingers struggle to find firm grip on the rocky edge.

They're slowly slipping...

A HAND REACHES DOWN AND GRIPS HIS. It's Alex.

Alex strains to hold onto Mike's arm while laying flat along the narrow ledge.

ALEX

Got you.

Alex strains but can't lift Mike from his position. Mike strains, trying to hold onto Alex's arm with both hands.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Can you use your legs to help push you up?

MIKE

I'm trying.

Mike struggles to use his legs to help lift himself, but the rock wall is too smooth.

MIKE (CONT'D)
I can't. It's not working.

Alex REALLY STRAINS HARD, yelling as he does, to try and pull Mike up. He can't - there's nothing he can grab onto.

ALEX
(strained)
I've got no leverage.

Alex breathes, then STRAINS HARD again. No progress.

Mike looks down again.

He looks up into the sky... This is why he came out here...

MIKE
Just let me go.

Alex looks at him.

ALEX
We're gonna get you out of this...
Can you get at your rope?

Mike thinks.

MIKE
Do you have my arm? I might be able
to reach with my other arm.

ALEX
I've got it.

Mike lets go of Alex's arm with one arm - Alex continues to strain - Mike reaches down to the bottom zipper of his backpack.

He unzips it and pulls out a rope.

ALEX (CONT'D)
(strained)
Throw one end up here and run the
other end through your backpack
straps.

Mike lets out a certain length of rope below him, then tosses the bulk of the coil up, it lands beside Alex.

Alex struggles to maintain a good grip on Mike's arm.

Mike runs the other end of the rope under his straps.

ALEX (CONT'D)
(strained)
You know which knot to make?

MIKE
Yeah. Just never had to tie it with
one hand...

Mike struggles through tying the know onto the other portion
of rope feeding under the straps. He manages to do it.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Okay, got it. I don't know if it'll
hold.

Alex is breathing hard.

ALEX
Ok, grab my arm with both hands
again.

Mike complies.

Alex lets go with one arm and grabs the rope and coils it
around his hand several times so it won't slip. He cinches it
up so there is no slack in the rope.

ALEX (CONT'D)
(strained)
Ok, you're gonna have to let go now
- but I've got you with the rope,
okay - on three...

Mike considers this.

MIKE
Okay.

Alex breathes hard, preparing himself for the transition.

ALEX
One...Two...THREE!

BOTH RELEASE THEIR GRIP and MIKE SLIPS SLIGHTLY as his weight
pulls on Alex's wrapped hand. ALEX SCRAMBLES TO READJUST HIS
POSITION, PLACING HIS FEET ON A ROCK RIDGE ON THE CLIFF EDGE
FOR SUPPORT and grabs at the rope with his other hand - HE
DOES.

Mike grunts as his body drops and slides against the cliff
wall.

In his new position, no longer on the ledge, Alex can sit up and lean back, pulling with all his might. HE YELLS AS HE PULLS WITH EXTREME EXERTION.

Mike works with the pulling, using his arms on any holds he can find on the ledge.

MIKE'S UPPER BODY COMES UP OVER THE EDGE - he pulls on the ground using any hold he can get... then MIKE RAISES A KNEE OVER THE EDGE... Alex still straining with all his might... then THE OTHER KNEE COMES UP. HE'S SAFE.

The two lay on the ground, breathing hard...

ALEX (CONT'D)

They always say these knots could save your life one day...

Mike laughs through his hard breathing. He looks over at Alex.

MIKE

Thanks.

ALEX

No problem, bro.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 3 - LEDGE PATH - DAY

Mike and Alex sit on the ground beside the ledge, they haven't moved from this spot since Alex rescued Mike.

ALEX

Fate, I'm tellin' you...

Mike gives a slight laugh.

MIKE

How 'bout 'destiny'... Destiny sounds better. Maybe destiny is when good things happen.

ALEX

Yeah. Destiny.

Alex smiles.

ALEX (CONT'D)

All I know is that if life tells you to be best buds with someone, you gotta listen.

Mike feels drawn back to reality with Alex, and GLANCES, UNNOTICED, AT ALEX' BACKPACK.

MIKE

Listen... I'm grateful for saving my life - I'm taking you for a beer after this - but I just don't do the whole 'best buds' thing.

ALEX

Yeah, no for sure. I understand. Totally.

Does he? Alex looks like he's hiding disappointment.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I don't make friends that easily.

Mike takes a swig from his water bottle. Pauses to think.

MIKE

Are you a multi-level marketer or something?

Alex smiles.

ALEX

Just an upbringing thing I guess... Losing a father and stuff.

MIKE

Didn't your mom--

ALEX

Set me up on friend dates? No - I wanted to stay to myself so I did. I'm what you call a strong-willed loner.

Mike gazes out into the distance - still not sure he wants to be with anyone, let alone Alex.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Guessin' after this, you're heading back?

Mike takes a moment to answer, keeps looking off into the distance.

MIKE

Not sure.

ALEX

Not many people would keep hiking
after almost falling off a cliff...
There's something different about
you Mike.

Alex eyes Mike to see how he'll respond...

Mike stays quiet.

Alex considers how to go from here.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I won't ask.

Mike knows what this is about, thinks about it.

MIKE

I've got stuff I'm dealing with.
I'm not always in a good
headspace... a good hike can help,
you know?

ALEX

Help how?

Mike is silent, looks away.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Now I need to decide whether I'm
being your friend if I let you go
on...

Mike is jarred that Alex would suggest not letting him
continue.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Someone who almost died might not
have the clearest head, might
endanger themselves...

Alex gets up and dusts himself off. He picks up his backpack
and puts it on.

ALEX (CONT'D)

But you seem okay to me... As long
as we stay together for a while...

Mike is relieved Alex isn't pushing it further - relieved he
can continue - even if it means being with Alex longer.

MIKE

Fair enough.

ALEX
Ready to go?

Mike gets up, puts on his backpack and cinches up the straps.

MIKE
Lead on.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 3 - LEDGE PATH - DAY

Mike and Alex cross the ledge using the chain handholds. They move carefully and methodically.

They make it to the other side and continue on along the trail.

ALEX
Easy peasy.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 4 - SPARSE PATH - DAY

Some time has passed. The trees are somewhat sparse here and the trail more rocky, but it is wide enough for them to walk side by side.

The sparse forest is still as peaceful and beautiful as ever.

ALEX
..It's the way Jokic can mastermind offense from the post, find open teammates, hit em' with pinpoint passes.. Just crazy vision of the court... his game IQ is off the charts.

MIKE
How can't you say Curry? Easy the best all-round player... I mean, the range, the release, using screens to get open looks... the way he can create his own shot - just pure poetry to watch.

ALEX
Both worth the price of admission to watch.

MIKE
You go to games?

ALEX
Just been to a few.

MIKE

Nice.

ALEX

Expensive... but worth it...

There's a lull in the conversation.

MIKE

I haven't asked you what you do.

Alex walks in silence for a few moments, just looking ahead.

ALEX

I'm a hacker...

(beat)

...White hat. Do contract work.

MIKE

Always wondered what that would be like.

ALEX

Not that interesting actually...
Not like Mission Impossible...
Gotta write a lot of reports. What about you?

MIKE

Programmer. Resource management software... Also not as glamorous as the movies make it look.

Alex laughs.

Mike decides this is his opportunity...

MIKE (CONT'D)

Ever get tempted to turn to the dark side?

ALEX

Would I tell you if I did?

MIKE

Just two programmers out in the middle of nowhere... if the trees won't tell, I won't either.

They take a few steps in silence.

ALEX

I tried to adjust the life insurance policy my dad had.

MIKE

Wow... What happened.

ALEX

I got in... Wasn't that hard actually - it was a medium size company, used only a packet-filtering firewall... I had full access to everything...

MIKE

And?

ALEX

Backout out... didn't do it... I realized that it was going to raise red flags... that there was enough redundancy in their accounting that they'd be able to see something was done even if there was nothing that traced back to me.. Didn't want to risk my mom getting nothing...

MIKE

And that's it? Your first and only foray into a life of crime?

ALEX

You're asking a lot of personal questions all of a sudden...

Awkward.

Alex slaps Mike on the back and laughs.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Kidding bro.

Mike smiles.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Anyway. That company went under a few years later - so they're not even around to care, if you told them about it... Only did ethical hacking after that...

(holds up his hand)

...scout's honor.

They take a few more steps, rounding a corner, and get to another crossroads in the path, marked by a dead tree.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 4 - DEAD TREE FORK - DAY

They walk in silence for a few moments as they approach the fork.

ALEX

Look, Mike.

(beat)

I don't know which way you're headed, but I can't let you go on alone...

MIKE

What are you talking about?

ALEX

I'm guessing you know... No wedding ring... Always wanting to be alone... Being a little too eager for me to let you go... You've got a plan, don't you?...

They get to the crossroads and stop.

Mike gazes off to the right, in the direction he was planning to go.

MIKE

Guess I let the cat out of the bag, didn't I...

ALEX

A little...

Mike exhales deeply. The emotion of almost dying is still with him.

He starts to cry. Alex watches him stoically for a moment, then puts his arm around him.

MIKE

You're right... I probably shouldn't go on by myself...

ALEX

So you... can rethink this?

Mike nods.

MIKE

It's selfish, right?... Other people experience loss and get through it...

Alex nods.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I've got other people in my life -
my parents, brother...

(beat)

I've got complete strangers-

(gestures at Alex)

-who are caring for me... Like a
good friend... If they can look out
for me that way, seems like I
should for myself...

(faces Alex)

I can't say I wouldn't do it in a
moment of weakness - so I'd be
grateful to go back with you...

Alex takes a moment before responding.

ALEX

What was your plan?

MIKE

What?

ALEX

Your plan, tell it to me. Be
specific.

MIKE

Why? I--

ALEX

You've got to speak these things
out to fully release them. Believe
me, Mike - it's the only path to
healing... If you keep it hidden -
it's just going to resurface.

Mike looks away, contemplates this...

He stares for a long time.

He points to the right.

MIKE

I've got a place picked out. A few
kilometers up this way. It's where
Mel and I would go - it was our
spot...

Mike takes off his backpack, opens it and digs out the bottle
of pills. He looks at them.

He holds them out to Alex. Alex takes the bottle.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Pain killers... my wife had cancer.

Alex looks at the bottle, sees Melody's name on them.

ALEX
This is the right step, Mike.

Mike nods - still emotional.

Alex takes a long drink from his water bottle.

ALEX (CONT'D)
...But I'm not going to go back
with you... I think you should keep
going - Not alone - I'll stay with
you, for sure - but I think you
need to go to your spot and... say
goodbye - *to your plan* - forever.

Mike ponders this with uncertainty.

ALEX (CONT'D)
If you're truly giving up on your
plan - you gotta do it right.

Mike, still emotional, nods.

MIKE
Okay. I think I understand.

ALEX
This way?

Alex points to the left.

MIKE
Yeah, another few kilometers...

Alex thinks for a moment.

ALEX
Did you read about the trail
conditions down that way?

MIKE
No - usually do - not this time.

ALEX
Well it said the rain washed out
the trail that way.

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

If we go to the right it'll take a little longer but there's a crossover path that will take us past the washed-out area... just want to save our boots from getting soaked...

Mike hesitates.

Alex puts his hand on Mike's shoulder and looks him in the eyes.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Listen, Mike. You have to want this. I'm not going to force you.

MIKE

No. I want it. You're right. I have to say goodbye to this, for good.

Alex smiles. Gives Mike a pat on the side of the arm.

ALEX

Cool.

MIKE

It's what she would want. I think it's what she's trying to tell me.

Alex eyes Mike for a moment, then turns and starts forward.

ALEX

Ready then?

MIKE

Look Alex...

Alex stops and turns.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Thanks again, for everything... Not everyday you get your life saved by someone... twice... Don't know what I can do to repay you for something like that...

ALEX

Life is gonna get better, Mike. You may not believe it, but it will. It's gonna take some work to heal, but you can. You're even gonna find someone new and you're gonna learn to love again - And when you do...

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)
just name your firstborn son after
me.

Mike gives a small laugh.

MIKE
Sure thing.

Alex opens his arms up for a hug. Mike reciprocates.. They hug and then pat each other's backs.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Thanks.

ALEX
Thank you, for letting me into your
life, buddy.

They release the embrace.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Can I look you up sometime when
we're back home? I mean - I trust
you're going to get whatever help
you need - but I wouldn't be a good
friend if I didn't check in on you.

Mike thinks about this for a moment.

MIKE
Yeah, for sure... gimme your phone,
I'll put in my number.

ALEX
Just tell me - I got a good memory.
Plus I never bring a phone when I
hike.

MIKE
No phone? Really?

ALEX
Just feels like you're that much
more connected to nature when you
know you don't have an option to
connect to the rest of humanity.

MIKE
Doesn't sound safe.

Alex smiles.

ALEX
I know what I'm doing.

Mike isn't sure what to think of this - doesn't sit right, but he accepts it.

MIKE

Okay well, 250-555-7947... Mike
Beryl.

Alex looks off into the distance for a moment... then back at Mike.

ALEX

Stored. Never forget it now.

Mike isn't sure this is a good thing.

They start walking down the rightward path.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 5 - RIGHTWARD PATH STREAM - DAY

They stand in front of a wide, crossable-but-quickly-moving stream that is cutting off forward progress - not as fast or deep as the previous one, but exactly what Alex said they would be avoiding by taking this path...

ALEX

Well, what are you gonna do?

Mike just stares out at the flowing water.

ALEX (CONT'D)

The write up didn't say anything
about this trail being blocked.

Mike takes out his water bottle and takes a drink while he thinks about what to do.

ALEX (CONT'D)

What do you think?

Mike closes up his water bottle and looks at Alex.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 5 - RIGHTWARD PATH STREAM - DAY

Mike and Alex have their boots and socks off and carry them in their hands as they wade across the river. They cringe as the water is very cold.

They have to watch their footing, as the rocks they are walking on, are very smooth and slippery.

As they near the middle of the stream, the water goes up to their knees. They cringe some more.

Suddenly a few dozen meters upstream A LARGE GRIZZLY BEAR POKES ITS HEAD OUT OF THE TREES and walks up to the stream to drink.

Mike sees and freezes, but stays calm.

Alex hasn't seen it yet and takes another step.

Mike puts both boots under one arm and slowly readies his bear spray.

MIKE
(sharp whisper, at Alex)
Hey!

Alex turns to Mike, who shows him his bear spray and then nods in the direction of the bear.

Alex turns and sees the bear.

Alex is freaked but remains quiet as he puts both boots under one arm and reaches behind his back under his shirt and pulls out A HUNDGUN. He rapidly tosses the backpack around his shoulder again, cocks the gun, and points it at the bear. Mike is shocked at the sight of the gun.

MIKE (CONT'D)
(off the gun, sharp
whisper)
Whoa, hey! Easy!

The bear turns its head to the two of them and just stares.

The two talk in hushed whispers.

ALEX
I bring more than bear spray.

MIKE
You can't shoot it!

ALEX
Why not?

MIKE
Look at the size of that thing. A handgun is just gonna piss it off. And we'll have nowhere to go.

ALEX
I can get it in the head.

MIKE
You can't be sure...

ALEX
I'm a trained shot.

MIKE
If you're wrong, we're dead.

Alex keeps the gun trained on the bear, which sniffs at them, then dips its head in the stream and drinks.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Maybe it just wants a drink. Just take it easy and let's see what it does...

Alex adjusts the gun and keeps it ready. Mike keeps an eye on both the bear and Alex.

The bear finishes drinking and takes a step into the stream, but it is crossing straight across, not coming towards Mike and Alex.

Alex keeps the gun trained on it as it moves slowly across.

It gets to the other side and keeps moving into the trees, in the direction that Mike and Alex came from.

The two finish crossing the river - can't go back where they came...

They keep moving forward along the path, before putting their boots on, to create some distance between them and the bear.

After a few moments they find a clearing with some rocks to sit on.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 6 - RIVERBANK - DAY

Mike and Alex each sit on a rock and start putting on their socks and boots.

ALEX
That was a big poppa.

MIKE
Good thing he wasn't hungry.

Alex looks in the direction the bear went.

ALEX
Can't exactly go back now.

Mike thinks about this...

He looks at Alex...

MIKE

It's getting late, but I don't like the idea of staying put either.

ALEX

What are you thinking?

MIKE

Keep moving, just for a ways.

ALEX

There's supposed to be a clearing just a little ways up, let's stop there and we can rest and decide what to do. It'll give us good sight lines if poppa comes back.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 6 - CLEARING - DAY

Mike and Alex have their packs off, they sit on large fallen logs - Mike's pack beside him, Alex's pack is behind him, out of view from Mike. The tree line is several meters away from them, giving them a good view of the landscape all around.

Mike eats some trail mix. Alex holds a resealable bag containing slices of leftover pizza, and is eating a piece.

ALEX

Didn't bring anything else to eat?

MIKE

No, I...

Alex holds out his bag containing more pieces.

ALEX

Slice of pizza?

MIKE

No, I'm fine.

Alex retracts the bag.

ALEX

I always bring leftover pizza - easy prep - good hiking fuel.

MIKE

Good idea...

Alex looks at Mike, who seems lost in thought. He holds out the bag of pizza again.

ALEX

You sure you don't want some? You might need energy... if you have to fight a bear.

Mike looks at Alex, smiling.

Mike takes the bag.

Mike looks at the pizza through the bag.

MIKE

What kind you got? Any ham and pineapple?

ALEX

What is life like with defective tastebuds?

MIKE

Amazing... Just wait a few years until your tastebuds mature, then you'll enjoy grown-up food too...

Alex seems surprised that Mike is pushing back.

ALEX

Nice - that's the side you've been holding back...

MIKE

It's okay to be young... you get to have your mom cut up your mac and cheese for you--

ALEX

(genuinely pissed)
Just leave my mom out of this!

Awkward silence while Mike adjusts to this turn in attitude.

MIKE

Yeah, of course man. Sorry.

Alex takes a bite of pizza. Mike selects a piece of pizza and takes a bite. More awkward silence.

Suddenly Melody walks up to Mike and kneels down in front of him. They look deep into each other's eyes.

MIKE (CONT'D)
What are you doing here?

Alex continues eating his pizza, not hearing or seeing any of this.

Melody takes Mike's free hand.

MELODY
I can't let you be completely alone
with this fruitcake.

MIKE
He saved my life.

MELODY
True, but...

MIKE
But what?...

MELODY
Don't believe a word that comes out
of his mouth.

She's gone.

Mike looks at Alex. Alex reaches behind him and takes a banana out of his bag. He looks at Mike, smiles, he CRACKS the banana open like he's snapping a neck. He peels it and takes a bite.

MIKE
I've got extra bags - for your peel
- can't have the bear following us.

ALEX
(deadpan)
I was gonna eat it.

Mike stares at Alex, who continues eating.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Kidding, Mike. Kidding. Looked like
I made you lose your mind there.

Mike smiles.

MIKE
Thanks for keeping things light.

Mike takes another bite of his pizza. Alex finishes the banana, takes out a camping trowel from his backpack.

ALEX
I'm covered.

MIKE
Normally that's fine, but a bear
will find that... And we're coming
back this way...

Alex looks at Mike.

ALEX
Right you are... I'll take a bag
then.

Mike got out a resealable bag from his backpack and hands it
to Alex.

Alex takes it, seals the peel inside, and reaches back and
places it in his backpack.

MIKE
So where were you planning on
staying the night before this day
got derailed?

ALEX
Not derailed - destiny, remember?

MIKE
Right... Destined then.

ALEX
Another night in the forest
AirBnB... Not too far from here
actually.

MIKE
After we get to my spot...

ALEX
We can head back to your car, or
spend the night - whatever you
want... I'm with you the rest of
the way, no matter what...

MIKE
Should be enough time to get all
the way back tonight... But don't
want it to be getting too dark...
should get moving.

Mike starts to get up. Alex puts a hand on him.

ALEX

Chill. Rest. We have loads of time.
Let your food digest - just for a
while...

Mike is uncertain but sits.

Alex takes a drink from his water bottle. Mike grips his
water bottle and looks at Alex drinking.

A breeze drifts through them. Alex looks into the sky. Waits.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Wind is shifting.

Alex looks at Mike, smiles. Something's different.

MIKE

Hopefully it'll bring some rain.
These forests could sure use it.

ALEX

Exactly, it's a tinderbox out
here...

Alex looks off in the direction of a nearby hill.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Did you know that if a storm were
growing and lightning struck the
top of that hill over there...

(pointing)

...the fire could be down here in
less than 10 minutes...

Mike decides to ask.

MIKE

How do you know this kind of stuff?

ALEX

They talk about it in the local
news - how fast fires can move...

Mike considers this response - makes sense.

ALEX (CONT'D)

A fire on *that* hill would be super
bad because the wind could funnel
it southeast to reach Spring Bend
in about an hour.

Alex looks off in the distance again.

ALEX (CONT'D)
We want weather to blow in - just
not the kind that starts fires...

Alex looks at Mike.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Interesting how weather is both the
solution and the problem, isn't it?

MIKE
But what is it exactly, that's
making the weather patterns?

Mike looks at Alex.

MIKE (CONT'D)
There's always a deeper cause...

Alex smiles.

ALEX
That's a heavy topic... these
days... But do we really need to
get into that?
(smiles)
We're friends now - I'd hate to
ruin it with politics.

Mike smiles and then stares at the ground.

MIKE
So you're not afraid to get caught
with an illegal handgun?

ALEX
Only short-barrel are illegal
here... And there's a freeze on
purchasing, but previously owned
and registered handguns are still
perfectly legit.

MIKE
Oh... Didn't realize.

ALEX
Here you thought I was a
criminal...

Alex smiles.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Ever handled a gun?

MIKE

No, never.

Alex turns to his backpack, reaches in and PULLS OUT THE HANDGUN... He flips it smoothly so he's gripping it by the barrel... then holds it out to Mike, handle out.

ALEX

Go ahead.

MIKE

No, it's okay.

Alex shoves it closer to Mike.

ALEX

Come on. Don't be such a Canadian.
See how it feels in your hand.

Mike looks at the gun, looks at Alex... He takes it.

He feels the weight in his hand and studies it.

MIKE

Loaded?

ALEX

No good to me if it's not.

MIKE

Lighter than I expected.

Mike stretches out his arm, pointing the gun in no particular direction, and looks down the sight.

He then pulls it back in and holds the gun with two hands and studies the various design features.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I wouldn't trust this to protect
you from bears. Bears have
incredibly thick skulls.

This comment galances off Alex.

ALEX

I hate guns myself... But my mom
said I should bring it, so I bring
it.

Mike just looks at Alex.

Alex reclines a little, he's not joking.

MIKE

You're, uh, close with your mom?

ALEX

I was her favourite. My brother Roman... he just caused problems...

Mike keeps looking at the gun. He sees the safety is off.

ALEX (CONT'D)

After our father died, he got angry, he's start fights, hurt people... and he would drink. Yeesh, could he drink. And it just made him more violent...

Mike just listens, focused on the gun.

ALEX (CONT'D)

He loved to hunt, work with hides... But he started shooting the neighbour's animals. People were threatening my mom, demanding restitution, which she couldn't afford...

Suddenly Melody is standing there, off to the side between them. She looks off into the distance, seemingly taking in the scenery.

ALEX (CONT'D)

...she tried everything to get Roman to calm down but he just got angrier...

Melody turns and looks at Alex.

ALEX (CONT'D)

One day she told me we had to do something or he would ruin us. She told me I had to burn down the shed they gave him, where Roman kept his hides... Sounded crazy, but she told me to trust her...

Melody starts walking, slowly, towards Alex, keeping her gaze on him. (She's circling around the two men.)

ALEX (CONT'D)

I did it. But what no one realized is that Roman decided to get dead drunk in the shed that night, passed out under some hides... he burned to death...

Mike looks at Alex incredulously.

Melody keeps walking slowly, moving behind Alex.

ALEX (CONT'D)

No one knew... except her that is... She knew, and had me do it anyway... I read it in her journal a few months later... I was fourteen, so innocent...

Melody keeps walking, moving around Alex.

ALEX (CONT'D)

But a funny thing happened after that... The love I had for my mother became stronger than it ever was before. Life is loyalty, Mike. If my mom asks me to do something I do it...

Melody locks eyes with Mike and walks towards him.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Eventually you realize *all things are equal*, so it doesn't matter if we die, or kill... or choose to end our own life...

Melody walks behind Mike and runs her hand along his shoulder...

ALEX (CONT'D)

Our emotions are like our mother, guiding us home... No matter what, we end up in the ground...

(gestures at the forest)

And become the beauty of the earth once again...

...Melody continues around to the other side of Mike, her hand running along to the arm holding the gun.

ALEX (CONT'D)

We can't avoid it... It's pointless to resist.

SUDDENLY MELODY GRABS MIKE'S ARM AND LIFTS IT, SO THE GUN IS POINTING AT ALEX.

MELODY

He's messing with you. Don't let him.

But now IT'S JUST MIKE HOLDING THE GUN.

Alex looks at Mike with confusion.

ALEX
What's going on, Mike?

MIKE
Stop.

ALEX
Stop what?

MIKE
First you wanted me alive, and now
you want me dead... Which is it,
Alex?

Alex' look turns cold.

ALEX
First one, then the other...

Alex smiles.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Beats dragging you this far.

MIKE
It's one thing to watch the world
burn - it's another to *make* it.

ALEX
You're a better judge of character
than I gave you credit for, Mike.

Alex reaches behind him into his backpack and PULLS OUT A
MINI-CROSSBOW, COCKED AND LOADED. He points it at Mike.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Too bad it took you so long...

Mike looks at it for a brief moment before Alex PULLS THE
TRIGGER and the ARROW LAUNCHES INTO MIKE'S UPPER CHEST.

Mike, utterly shocked, looks at Alex and PULLS THE TRIGGER on
the handgun still trained on Alex, it just CLICKS, empty.

Mike contorts in pain, coughs, and inhales awkwardly.

ALEX (CONT'D)
...Can't really blame you - you had
a lot on your mind.

Mike drops the gun and slides forward, off the log, so he is leaning back against it.

Alex just waits for a few moments, eyes Mike carefully. He then gets up and pulls out a paracord rope from his pack.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Judging from that bloodstain,
there's a chance I missed
everything vital - between the
lungs, just above the heart...
although I may have nicked an
artery... Just pull it out if you
want to find out.

Alex walks to Mike, ties his hands together and then ties him to the log (a log much too heavy for one man to move). Mike is too overwhelmed to resist.

ALEX (CONT'D)

To be honest, it would be better to
bleed out than to go through what's
coming next.

Alex looks out to the top of the same hill he pointed out earlier. He turns back to face Mike. Mike coughs, and looks into Alex's eyes.

MIKE

Why?

ALEX

I have a job to do... mother's
orders... And it helps if I stay
ahead of any suspicion. When they
find you...

Alex pulls out the fire extinguisher from his backpack. He places it in Mike's pack. Mike looks at it with eyes full of pain.

ALEX (CONT'D)

...especially with this in your bag
- they won't look so hard for
anyone else...

Mike cringes in pain. Alex again reaches into Mike's bag and fishes around for a moment, finally pulling out a sheathed camping knife, which he slides into his back pocket. He also takes out Mike's water bottle, opens it and drinks the remainder, then tosses the bottle away.

He drops Mike's pack just out of his reach.

Alex then crouches down next to Mike, picks up the dropped handgun, pulls out a clip from his pocket and reloads it and tucks it back behind his back. He then reaches into Mike's pocket, pulls out his phone. Mike, still too shocked to put up any resistance. Alex pats Mike's other pockets.

Alex tosses the phone on the ground, bends down and picks up a baseball-sized rock and SMASHES the front of the phone several times - it's totally unusable.

Alex stands, picks up his pack and puts it on.

He looks once more at Mike.

Mike coughs.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I was very lucky to meet you,
Mike... You were right - Destiny.

Alex sets off in the direction of the hill.

Mike watches him as he goes.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 6 - CLEARING - DAY

Some time has passed and the death Mike was expecting has not come. He is still slumped against the log unable to move his hands apart and unable to move his arms more than a few inches because of the way they are tied to the log.

Mike hears a FAINT DRONE in the air - another water bomber drifts into view in the sky. It follows the same direction as before. Mike COUGHS and watches it, feeling that it mocks him as it passes almost directly over him.

Then it's gone.

Mike adjusts his body position and CRINGES IN SEVERE PAIN as any movement shifts the arrow lodged in his chest.

Mike SCREAMS, letting out the anger of his situation, and then CRINGES again - it even hurts to scream.

He steadies his breathing and lets the pain subside as much as possible.

The anger rises within him again and he SCREAMS again - this scream is deeper, and hurts him more. The pain brings tears.

MIKE
Why did you leave?
(beat)
Why did you leave me?

Then Melody is there. She sits down beside him.

MELODY

I was selfish. I know... But
imagine what you're feeling now -
multiply it by three or four and
then live with it for months...

Mike just stares at her, tears in his eyes.

MELODY (CONT'D)

I know I was supposed to beat it
so... so we could be together...

Now she is getting emotional too. Mike caught up in
listening.

MELODY (CONT'D)

That day, I just-- I just let it
get too far...

Mike cringes as he sobs. He looks into her eyes.

MIKE

I forgive you.

She turns to him, smiling through tears.

MELODY

Now forgive yourself.

Mike struggles through the tears, looks at the ground.

Melody gently puts her hands on Mike's.

MELODY (CONT'D)

Look at me.

He hesitates, and then looks.

MELODY (CONT'D)

There are other lives that need to
be saved.

Mike takes this in with confusion.

Melody gets up and begins to back away slowly.

MIKE

Wait...

She turns around and keeps walking.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Mel...

(beat)

I can't...

She turns her head half around as she keeps walking.

MELODY

You've got what you need.

She's gone.

Mike looks forlorn.

But Melody's words stick with him. He knows what she means. He lifts his shirt to reveal his SHEATHED MULTITOOL ATTACHED TO HIS BELT.

He adjusts his body (still painfully) so he can reach it, then unfastens the sheath top and pulls out the tool. He unfolds it and swings out the knife blade.

He repositions the knife in his hands and DROPS IT. It lands propped up slightly on a loose stick.

Mike lets out a PAINFUL WHIMPER.

HIS HANDS ARE NOT ABLE TO REACH TO THE GROUND.

He swivels his body so he is on his knees, above the tool. He GRIPS IT BETWEEN HIS KNEES, and swivels back to sitting - letting out a HALF SCREAM.

He pulls his knees upwards, towards his hands. He has just enough movement with his hands to grip the tool.

He breathes, CRINGING from the pain of these movements.

He positions the blade under the ropes around his wrists and begins to cut.

He makes remarkably quick work of them and before long has his hand free.

He cuts the rope tying the other hand to the log, and tosses away the ropes.

Mike GRUNTS PAINFULLY as he stands up.

He feels his chest under his shirt, GRIMACES, pulls out his hand and looks at it - his hand is stained with blood but not covered entirely. Alex was right that the arrow missed everything major.

He surveys the scene - his pack still where Alex left it... He looks back in the direction he came from... then turns and looks at the hill Alex is heading to...

Mike closes his eyes and with his arms hanging at his side, rotates his shoulders, baring his teeth and letting out A FURIOUS GROWL OF PAIN, channeling his anger, hoping it will help him find the strength for what he's about to do.

He resheaths his multitool on his belt. He looks inside the pack, sees the fire extinguisher, as well as a hoodie, which he pulls out and puts it on, painfully. He closes the bag and puts it on, cinches up the straps.

He takes one more look back towards the path back... it calls to him but he knows what he has to do... He turns and looks at the hill... he sets out towards it.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 7 - DAY

Mike hikes on as the sky gets dimmer. The trail is narrow but still a clear trail...

Mike gets to a fallen tree that crosses the path. It's low enough to cross but he'll have to straddle it. He gently lifts his right leg over the tree, heaves his body onto it, with a GRIMACE, and then swings his left leg over, and hops off, CRINGING.

He continues on.

MIKE

This is ridiculous...
 (as if to Melody)
 You wanted this... you're gonna
 have to help...

He keeps walking.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I'm scared, Mel...

Mike reaches a fork and it's not clear which way Alex took... He looks as far as he can down the right path... then the left... His eyes strain to see something he thinks he recognizes...

He walks forward down the left path.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 7 - LEFT PATH - DAY

Mike walks up to a crumpled resealable bag caught in some brush on the side of the path. He picks it up and looks at it - some pizza residue can be seen - definitely Alex'. He stuffs it in his pocket and keeps walking.

The path takes him around some trees and to the foot of the hill. Mike glances as far as he can up the hill, still no sign of Alex. He heads up the hill.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 8 - HILL - DAY

The path is quite narrow and hard to follow. Mike reaches another point where the path appears to branch into two directions - one branch continuing up and the other diverting off to the right.

Mike stands and surveys... He's had no water in a long time, he sways slightly as he stands there...

Suddenly Melody is there. She's walking on the right-hand path. She turns and looks at Mike, who gazes into her eyes... she turns and continues walking onward on the path.

Then she's gone.

Mike walks up to the area near where she was standing and sees a pool of runoff water. He looks at it.

He takes off his pack and gets down onto his knees. He gets out his water bottle and fills it with water from the pool. He then pulls out the water purification tablets from his pack, gets two tablets and puts them in the bottle.

MIKE
(at Melody)
Thanks.

He gets up and follows the path she was on.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 8 - HILLTOP BURN SITE - DUSK

The path leads to a large rocky outcropping at the top of the hill. Dense, dry trees all around. Mike walks to the base of the outcropping. The path takes you to the left of the outcropping, but there's also a path that goes around it to the right, and one that goes up onto the outcropping.

Where to now?

Suddenly a COUGH, coming from the other side of the outcropping, followed by SOMEONE CLEARING THEIR THROAT AND SPITTING. It's gotta be Alex.

Mike looks at the outcropping and judges it his best move. He silently climbs, staying low, until he can see over the other side. He is perched on the rocks above an approximately 10-foot drop, Alex below him.

He sees Alex, next to a GIANT MOUND OF DEADFALL LOGS AND BRANCHES. Branches of these are broken off leaving several sharp protrusions. Sticks and logs are scattered around. Alex drags another dead tree to the mound, throws it on.

Mike sees Alex' supplies near the mound: two large bottles of gasoline-colored liquid, some flares, three BBQ lighters, a box of matches, a SATphone, and a grey box with prongs sticking out of it. Alex' pack sits next to these.

Alex picks up the grey box. He slides open a panel on the box and presses something inside. He then digs a small handheld device from his pocket and presses a button on it. Suddenly the prongs on the grey box light up with BRIGHT ARCS OF BLUE ELECTRICITY DANCING BETWEEN THE PRONGS. This lasts for about five seconds and then stops.

Alex sets the grey box down at the base of the mound, and pushes into the mound. He grabs some sticks and dried moss and packs it down into and on top of the prongs.

Alex walks back to the supplies and picks up the bottles. He opens the first and dumps it over half of the mound. He tosses the empty bottle aside and opens the other and dumps it on the other half of the mound.

He goes back to his supplies and places the SATphone, matches and one lighter back in his backpack. He tosses the flares and other lighters onto the mound.

He cinches up his straps and takes one more look at his creation... He turns and walks down the path that takes him back to where he and Mike came from.

Mike watches him go. After a few moments, Mike moves back down the outcropping and circles around it on the opposite side that Alex went.

All the way around, he walks cautiously but concertedly to the mound. He bends down onto one knee, GRIMACING, next to the grey box. He reaches into the mound and pulls it out.

He stands up and backs away from the mound, so he has his back to the rocky wall of the outcropping he was previously on... He breathes... and looks at the grey box.

Mike looks around at the area around the mound.

He looks in the direction of Alex's path down the hill...

Can he do this?

He takes off his backpack and sets it down.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 8 - HILL - DUSK

Alex walks down the hill path, he has the remote control in his hand.

MIKE
(yelling from a distance)
Hey, Bro!

Alex freezes. He spins and sees Mike at the opening to the burn site area where the path reaches the top of the hill.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 8 - HILLTOP BURN SITE - DUSK

Mike looks out and sees Alex, they lock eyes from several hundred feet away.

Mike lifts up the grey box, high above his head.

MIKE
(yelling)
Found your toy.

From a distance Mike sees Alex's hand move, and the prongs on the box SUDDENLY IGNITE WITH ELECTRICITY.

Mike sees Alex's hand move again and then, BANG BANG, bullets whiz by and Mike scrambles back towards the mound, out of Alex's view.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 8 - HILLTOP BURN SITE - DUSK

The mound area is silent. No Mike, no Alex.

Like a ghost, Alex emerges from the far side of the outcropping, having circled around it to the right. Gun in hand, he surveys the mound area from behind the rocky wall, the lower ledge of which rises 3 or 4 feet above him.

He spies Mike from behind, hood up, standing behind a tree and in front of some brush, facing towards the main path. He sees an aerosol can in his hoodie pocket and his backpack is laying a few feet behind him on the ground.

BANG, BANG, BANG. Alex fires three shots into Mike's back. Mike stays completely motionless... and then slowly tips over from behind the brush... revealing it was just the HOODIE FILLED WITH BRANCHES AND BRUSH.

SUDDENLY AN ARM DROPS DOWN from the ledge, holding a can of bear spray, it SPRAYS in the direction of Alex. Alex immediately DODGES and steps forward towards the mound, BANG, BANG, CLICK, firing towards the ledge and depleting his clip.

Mike who was laying as flat as possible on the ledge, now launches off of it with A MASSIVE LEAP, arms forward, and DRIVES HIS MULTITOOL KNIFE BLADE INTO ALEX'S CHEST BELOW HIS SHOULDER, BOWLING HIM OVER.

The gun falls from Alex's hand as he falls to the ground, Mike twists and lands, sliding forward on his back, keeping hold of the multitool, CRINGING in pain, coming to a stop and holds his other hand to his wounded chest.

Alex reels in pain and places his hand on the wound from the multitool. He looks over at Mike and sees him slowly make his way to his feet. Alex also turns over and gets up, takes off his backpack and drops it. He touches his wound again.

ALEX

Looks like we're even.

Alex reaches behind him and pulls out MIKE'S SURVIVAL KNIFE tucked in his waistband. He unsheathes it, and holds it forward. Mike holds out his blade.

Alex walks forward and Mike walks backwards... They posture as the get closer to the mound. Alex takes a swipe, Mike hops backward, narrowly avoiding it. Mike takes a swipe that isn't close enough for Alex to have to dodge.

ALEX (CONT'D)

What are you even doing here Mike?
Turning over a new leaf to help
someone that isn't yourself?...
You're out of your league. You
realize that, right?

They adjust their footing, carefully watching each other.

ALEX (CONT'D)

This tough thing - just isn't you.

Mike stays silent.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Nothing to say huh?... Weak.

Alex LUNGES at Mike and Mike SWIPES at Alex's hand, landing A DIRECT STRIKE. ALEX SCREAMS and drops his knife. He immediately runs full force at Mike grabbing his knife hand, folding it back and disarming him using a trained technique. The multitool falls to the ground as Alex drives Mike against the rock wall of the ledge, directly across from the mound.

Alex holds Mike against the wall with one arm against his upper chest (his hand bleeding profusely), and with his other hand grips the arrow still lodged in Mike's chest. Mike, bares his teeth and GRIMACES, but doesn't scream.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You came back from the dead, to be a good person... just not good enough.

Alex GRUNTS and then YELLS in pain, and then LAUGHS.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Look on the bright side, Mike, you still get to die.

Mike removes his hand from his pocket, and lifts up one of ALEX'S LIGHTERS, he holds it in between their faces and STRIKES THE FLAME.

Alex looks at it... and then at Mike... he scowls.

MIKE BLOWS OUT A BLAST OF LIQUID FROM HIS MOUTH, WHICH IGNITES INTO A FIREBALL IN ALEX'S FACE. Alex YELLS and stumbles backward...

Alex trips over a stray log and falls backward full force onto the mound, right onto a stiff, sharp, broken-off branch on one of the logs, IMPALING HIMSELF.

Alex looks at the branch sticking out of his chest several inches, and struggles uncomfortably.

Mike walks closer to him... Alex looks at him with disbelieving eyes, he COUGHS UP BLOOD...

...Alex LAUGHS... Mike just looks at him...

ALEX (CONT'D)

Ready to watch the world burn?

Then Alex PULLS A LIGHTER from his pocket and STRIKES THE FLAME and drops it on the mound, Mike scrambles to stop him, but it's too late, the gas-soaked mound ERUPTS IN FLAME.

MIKE

Noo!

Mike rushes over to his backpack and pulls out the fire extinguisher. He runs back to the mound, already with flames reaching several feet high, and begins spraying it. The spray makes only minimal effect - the fire is too big and the extinguisher too small. He keeps spraying until the extinguisher is empty. The fire is still blazing.

MIKE (CONT'D)

No!

But he can't do anything.

Mike looks over at Alex who is motionless, eyes open and whose clothes are now burning. Then Mike sees the SATPHONE ANTENNA STICKING OUT OF ALEX'S CARGO POCKET.

Mike rushes over to Alex and shields himself as much as he can from the heat and flames as he reaches in and pulls out the SATPHONE.

SUDDENLY ALEX'S ARM THRUSTS UPWARD AND TAKES HOLD OF THE ARROW IN MIKE'S CHEST. His eyes like daggers, look into Mike's.

With his last strength, Alex YANKS OUT THE ARROW, coughing up more blood. Mike SCREAMS and falls backward, phone still in hand.

The flames rise higher and Alex's body is now fully engulfed.

Mike struggles backward and pushes himself, painfully, up to the rock wall and unfolds the antenna of the SATPhone. He dials 911 and waits for it to connect...

OPERATOR

911 emergency, how can I assist you?

MIKE

There's a new forest fire that started, just a few miles northwest of Spring Bend... I'm right here... If you get to it quick--

The phone BEEPS an out of battery sound and the line GOES DEAD. He tries the power button but IT'S DEAD.

Mike drops the phone.

He stares into the fire, now A MASSIVE BONFIRE, the heat of which is making him sweat.

He sees the grass and brush around the mound has caught fire and OTHER TREES ARE BEGINNING TO BURN. His eyes tear up.

Things start to swirl for Mike, as Melody walks up to him and kneels down. She's crying.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Don't cry. I'll be with you soon.

She just looks at him.

MIKE (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry...

MELODY
Don't be sorry.

MIKE
I failed.

MELODY
No...

MIKE
All those people...

MELODY
You saved them.

MIKE
What?

MELODY
You could have left, but you didn't.

Mike stares at her. She's smiling.

MELODY (CONT'D)
You still surprise me.

She gets up... and then she's gone.

Mike sheds tears... gazes into the fire... And then hears the FAINT HUM OF AN ENGINE... It grows LOUDER until it's right overhead... He watches as the WATERBOMBER, originally on it's way to Metal Creek, opens its tank doors and a white cloud of water cascades out... within moments a TORRENTIAL BLAST OF WIND AND WATER ENVELOPS THE BURN SITE.

The cloud dissipates. Mike, drenched, COUGHS and then WINCES in pain.

He looks at the mound, THE FIRE IS COMPLETELY EXTINGUISHED.

Mike lays down on the ground... he stares up into the sky.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL 8 - HILLTOP BURN SITE - DAY

Time has passed and a helicopter now hovers several hundred feet up. Mike is on a stretcher that is attached to a cable line dangling down from the helicopter. A RESCUER straps Mike into the stretcher.

RESCUER

We're gonna get you to a hospital
as fast as we can, okay?

Mike nods, his eyes look tired. He looks over to Alex's body, now completely burned and hanging lifelessly, and soaked with water.

The rescuer doublechecks the straps and signals the pilot using the radio attached to his uniform.

RESCUER (CONT'D)

Secure. Go, go!

The helicopter rises, lifting Mike up at first slowly, and then faster as it clears the outcropping. Mike is carried away above the trees.

FADE OUT:

THE END