

THE COLD PLUNGE
Pilot

Sunny Bleckinger

PILOT

NOTE: A slash (/) indicates where the next speaker's line, or the following action, begins.

ALL SCENES ARE DAYTIME

100 EXT. ALASKAN WILDERNESS

100

Deep in the snow-covered woods. It's quiet. No wind, no movement. Until:

A large MOOSE steps into view. An older female, she moves slowly. Then pauses, one ear flicking. Her EYES GLAZED.

She snorts, VAPOR blooms from her nostrils.

She walks to a SPRUCE TREE and sniffs it, her MUZZLE caressing the BARK. *It smells good.*

The moose jams her lower TEETH into the bark, pulls off a STRIP, and CHEWS. Then pauses to look STRAIGHT AT THE CAMERA as if to say, "What are you looking at?"

She pulls off another strip of bark while giving us some mean SIDE-EYE. Then walks off someplace else--to eat in peace.

We hear the HUM of a small airplane passing overhead.

101 EXT. ABOVE ALASKAN WILDERNESS

101

We pop up high to follow a two-person airplane, the PIPER SUPER CUB. It glides past endless SPRUCE TREES covered in SNOW. One FROZEN LAKE, then another. And then a powdery field, all white and sparkly.

102 EXT. AIRSTRIP

102

The small airplane lands at an isolated airstrip.

The only passenger is PETAL (34, female), her hair tucked in her knitted cap. She steps off the plane in a bright SNOWBOARDING ONESIE that swishes loudly.

It's ridiculous. And she doesn't care. It's warm.

She takes in the expansive nature, its brutal temperatures and pristine snow. She's unsure if this is a good move, but she's here now.

The PILOT (50s, male) wears all denim, has a tangle of hair and a pair of AVIATOR GLASSES on his weathered face. He opens the side of the plane to retrieve the luggage.

Waiting for them on the tarmac is FISH (20, male), wearing a POSTAL PARKA and FAUX-FUR HAT, ear flaps down. His cheeks are perpetually flushed from the cold air.

The Pilot hands Petal her luggage and she turns to see Fish approaching.

PETAL

Hi, I'm Petal. Thanks for /
picking... me... up.

Without making eye contact, or acknowledging her in any way, he reaches for her luggage. It's awkward.

PETAL

Oh it's okay, I've got it...

He's still trying, so she lets him.

PETAL

Okay, thank you.

He stands there with the luggage. It's heavier than he realized.

PETAL

You must be Alex Fisher?

He almost looks up at her, but his eyes stop at her shoulders. She's a foot taller than him.

FISH

Everyone calls me Fish. Sometimes
they say Go Fish.

A little laugh to himself. Then he gives an angry squint to the Pilot, who takes off his sunglasses and squints right back at him. They seem to be dead serious.

Fish abruptly turns and starts walking to his MAIL TRUCK, a Grumman LLV.

The Pilot follows.

PETAL

Okay.

103 **EXT. AIRSTRIP - MOMENTS LATER**

103

The three of them walking, Fish and Petal in the front, the Pilot right behind them.

Petal's jumpsuit is *swishing loudly*. Fish softly mimics the sound. Petal notices.

PETAL
It's loud, huh.

Fish barely smiles and looks down.

PETAL
It wasn't my first choice, believe me. I don't even snowboard.

Beat.

FISH
I played hockey. Puffins.

PETAL
That was your team name?

Fish turns to the Pilot behind them, and yells in his face.

FISH
PUFFINS!

PILOT
Alright man, that's enough.

104 **INT. MAIL TRUCK - LATER**

104

Fish is driving his mail truck down a country road between fields of snow.

The grey upholstery on the two front seats is well-worn, the cold metal flooring in the back is streaked from endless use. The Pilot has taken the sole mailbag for a seat.

Petal's up front, staring at the foggy edge of the windshield. She looks--sad. But she blinks it away and distracts herself with the landscape passing by.

They come to a crossroad with a stop sign, no other cars in sight. Fish comes to a complete stop, turns around and gives the Pilot a MEAN SQUINT.

The Pilot looks away, his weathered face inscrutable.

PILOT
It's your beef, man. It's not my
beef.

Petal finds it awfully silly.

PETAL
Ok, what is all this?

Fish faces forward, eases on the gas.

FISH
Beef.

PETAL
("Not funny")
Ha ha.

PILOT
He thinks I'm his dad.

FISH
No I don't.

The Pilot smiles and shakes his head.

FISH
My dad isn't ugly.

PILOT
Nice.

FISH
Or stupid.

PILOT
Alright man, come on.

Beat.

FISH
You're not my dad.

PILOT
I know man, it's okay. Just drive,
will you?

Petal listens to them, not bothered by their tension, but
interested, like it's a stage play.

She opens her LARGE HANDBAG, pulls out a stack of CHOCOLATE
CHIP COOKIES, wrapped in cellophane. She tries to open them
quietly but the *crinkly* noise is wildly loud.

Both men pretend not to notice. But they've stopped talking.
Petal takes a huge bite from one and talks while chewing.

PETAL
The airport in Anchorage has this
little cookie shop.

PILOT
Mrs Gems.

PETAL
Mrs Gems, that's right. Mmm. So
good.

She looks happy for a moment, then sadness rushes over her. She takes another massive bite. She's enjoying the cookie so much that she momentarily forgets there's anyone else in the truck.

Fish's knuckles go white as he grips the steering wheel, his face showing visible anger. *Why. Isn't. She. Fucking. Sharing?*

The road curves and Fish SLAMS ON THE BREAKS. Bits of cookie get stuck in Petal's throat and she starts CHOKING.

The Pilot DEFTLY SLIPS between the two front seats, PUNCHES the button on Petal's seatbelt then wraps his arms around her and PULLS HARD on her chest. Again. AGAIN.

She COUGHS, bits of cookie fly out and SPLAT on the windshield.

Petal holds her chest where his knuckles bruised her, gives the Pilot an exhausted but grateful look.

But he's staring ahead.

The splat goes blurry and we look beyond it to see why Fish stopped. A large MOOSE, about twenty feet away, is nibbling at something in the middle of the road.

FISH
(*"My nemesis"*)
Uncle Jo.

The moose lifts its head to look at them, its ANTLERS rising, piercing the low sun. An absurdly large creature.

PETAL
(throat scratchy)
It's huge.

FISH
That's Uncle Jo.

PETAL
Is it safe to go around?

PILOT
No.

The moose groans, snorts and STEPS BACK. Then it BLARES at them, rich overtones that almost change the color of the air.

FISH
He's a little bitch.

The moose gives them a hard stare while urinating in the road.

PILOT
This isn't good.

Now Petal's nervous. The Pilot knows what he's talking about.

PETAL
Can't we back up?

The moose stops urinating and, oddly, SQUINTS at them. Then makes his eyes very big, and squints again.

PILOT
This isn't good.

PETAL
So do something.

Fish reaches over, pops open the GLOVE BOX, pulls a HANDGUN.

PETAL
No not--not that!

The moose lowers his head, PAWS at the ground and CHARGES--all fourteen hundred pounds running straight at the mail truck.

PETAL
That! That--shoot it!

The animal PLOWS into them, the entire vehicle SHAKES.

PETAL
(terrified)
What do we do? Shit. What do /
we--

Fish snaps off his SEATBELT and steps outside.

PETAL
Fish, careful, Jesus!

The moose BLARES again. Fish takes a POWER STANCE eight feet from the animal, legs wide, BOTH ARMS above his head, hands gripping the gun, and--

BLAM!

--he shoots at the sky.

The moose startles, but doesn't back up. He SNORTS and takes a step towards the mail truck, lowers his head and leans his face *right up to the windshield*, his antlers SQUEALING on the roof, his nostrils FOGGING the glass.

He looks deep into Petal's eyes, who is frozen in terror.

In the corner of Petal's vision, Fish can be seen taking a wide step towards the moose, another power stance, arms above his head, gun straight up.

FISH
Uncle Jo!

BLAM!

Someone taught Fish to do this. He follows the steps to a tee.

The moose doesn't care. He snorts again, holds his gaze on Petal as a glob of MUCOUS lowers from his NOSTRIL, touches the windshield and wobbles down the glass.

We are in Petal's paralysis now. Fish sounds unnaturally distant and slightly blurred as he takes another wide step towards the moose, another power stance.

FISH
Uncle Jo!

BLAM!

Then another sound, a constant tone, that seemed far away, but it's coming closer.

It's the Pilot in the driver seat, laying on the HORN. How long has he been there?

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP.

And that does it. It's too loud, too persistent, the moose finally turns and ambles off.

PETAL
Oh my god. Oh my god.

The Pilot climbs back to his mailbag seat, Fish gets in, returns the gun to the glove box.

PILOT
(dry but sincere)
Nice power stance.

FISH
I learned it from my real dad.

The Pilot ignores this.

PILOT
(to Petal)
You okay?

PETAL
What was that?

Fish leans towards her, a tissue in his hand.

FISH
That was Uncle Jo.

He wipes the wet cookie off the windshield, firmly--SQUEEEAL.

105 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS 105

We're high above the town. The damaged mail truck trundles down the road, towards the small town of Prallenburg several miles away, little chimneys curling smoke into the air.

106 EXT. PRALLENBURG 106

We pan over the town. The roads are narrow and winding, built before cars. Most buildings are single-story homes or shops with little apartments above.

A wooden church looms in the center. And a few blocks down is Mischa's Pancake House, with the largest parking lot around, room for twenty vehicles. And it's full.

107 INT. MISCHA'S PANCAKE HOUSE 107

It's the busy breakfast hour.

People eat loud and talk loud. The servers push TROLLEYS loaded with plated PANCAKES, single stacks and double stacks. It's all they serve, that and BACON. No one needs to order, they just lift a FINGER for a plate, two for a double.

MYRNA (39, female) and CARL (65, male) are seated at a booth.

Both in POSTAL UNIFORMS, her top is long-sleeved with a crossover NECK TAB; he wears a blue postal SWEATER.

Carl eats happily. Myrna depressed, looks off into nowhere.

MYRNA
What did you do after Elena...

CARL
(chewing)
...Became a moose?

MYRNA
(hates to say it)
Yes, what did you do after your
wife became a moose?

CARL
Well let's see...

He never hears her tone, he always answers sincerely.
It's so annoying.

CARL
That was on a Sunday and the next
day was a Monday so... I went to
work.

MYRNA
That's it? You just went to work?

CARL
It was a Monday, and I work on
Mondays. So, yeah.

MYRNA
But wasn't everything different?

CARL
Everything? No.

He opens his pill box, swallows his daily dosage.

CARL
The house is quieter. And it
doesn't smell as good as it used
to. But I put on records and I got
these plug-in air fresheners...

He watches a server push a pancake TROLLEY past them.

CARL
We should have another.

MYRNA
I'm full.

CARL
 (calling to server)
 Miss. Miss!
 (excited)
 Here she comes.

Myrna hesitates to look back and--yep, just as she thought.

MYRNA
 She's wearing the shirt.

Myrna's world goes quiet. All sounds are distant *as if we're underwater*. She speaks to no one because no one listens anyway:

MYRNA
 Again.

A beat, inside her silence. Then the world SNAPS back into place with a loud voice:

SERVER
 Who's ready for more!

The SERVER (female, early 70s) lifts two PLATES of pancakes from her trolley.

CARL
 I am!

MYRNA
 I'm full.

The server sets down both plates next to their empty plates. And swaps out a new PITCHER of syrup.

Her T-SHIRT reads "No Pain, No Gain" with a photo of two babies silkscreened underneath.

SERVER
 They're real warm and the maple
 syrup is warm and together they're
 just mmmmm--

MYRNA
 I'm not eating this.

SERVER
 --mmmmmmmmmm!

MYRNA
 Also, you know that shirt is maybe
 not the most professional--

SERVER
Twelve hours of labor, but I'm not complaining.

CARL
I've never heard you complain.
You're just a hard worker.

SERVER
That's right. Did you see what it says? It says, No Pain, No Gain.
See?

She grabs the bottom of her shirt and pulls it down so it goes tight against her cone-shaped WIRE BRA.

CARL
Oh wow, that's yeah, I see it.

Carl blushes and looks down at his food like a teenager.

MYRNA
I can't do this.

Myrna starts to get up.

CARL
Wait, your question. Maybe she can help.

MYRNA
No.

SERVER
What question?

MYRNA
Oh my god.

Myrna PLOPS back down.

CARL
Myrna's wondering what people do after their other half becomes a moose.

MYRNA
It's okay, really, I don't--

SERVER
When your father went, that son of a bitch--

MYRNA
Mom.

SERVER (MRS GLASS)
He left me alone with two babies.

MYRNA
He didn't know you were pregnant.

She lets go of her shirt to stack Carl's empty plates, looking at him as she does so.

MRS GLASS
All alone.

CARL
That couldn't have been easy.

MRS GLASS
It wasn't.

She pushes the stacked plates to the opposite edge of the table, while locking eyes with him.

CARL
I think I need another pill.

MRS GLASS
I'll get you some water.

But she doesn't move, just stares at him. And he stares back, a deer in headlights, wanting very much to look down her shirt but *holding her gaze* instead.

Myrna feels ignored and alone. She pours MAPLE SYRUP onto her empty plate and gazes at it, like it's a drug, a cure. Then she lays her CHEEK right there in it.

The warm syrup relaxes her and everything else--sounds, people, pain--it all fades away. *The drug is working.*

Her REFLECTION shimmers in the sweet substance as it coats her hair. The smallest of SMILES spreads on her face, the same smile mirrored in the syrup.

She feels better and it is nice to see her this way, if only for a moment.

108 EXT. PRALLENBURG

108

We're above the town again and we see Fish's mail truck stop at a small home. The Pilot climbs out the back with his DAY BAG and starts to wave, but Fish is already driving off.

The Pilot takes this in stride and walks to his front door.

109 EXT. POST OFFICE**109**

Fish's mail truck parks at the Prallenburg Post Office.

He and Petal step out and go through the employee door and into:

110 INT. MAIL ROOM - CONTINUOUS**110**

A square room with orange-brown walls. One CLERK fills a LOUD SORTING MACHINE, another removes PACKAGES from a cage on wheels and a third pulls ENVELOPES from a grid of metal slots.

PETAL
(gross)
It's hot in here.

DESK FANS point at the clerks, all of them wearing SHORTS. The sorting machine sounds like it might die at any moment.

And then it does. CHAGA-KAGA-KAGA.

Sudden quiet. Except the desk fans.

Petal turns to ask Fish something--

PETAL
Why is it so--oh!

--but he's DROPPED HIS PANTS, revealing a pair of POSTAL SHORTS underneath.

PETAL
Dude.

He ignores her, casually steps out of his pants, folds them over his arm and lays them in a CUBBY. Then hands Petal a pair of shorts and a button-down shirt, both shades of Postal blue.

FISH
Your SR Uniform. After you change into that, I will issue the rest.

PETAL
Right.

111 INT. CABIN**111**

Close on a BUTT in long underwear, a pair of reinforced PANTS pulled up and fastened. A PARKA zipped and buttoned.

This is the TRACKER (female, 58). Her GREY HAIR has a fresh CREW CUT. Her face weathered from a lifetime of Alaskan frost.

She lives alone. Light shines through small, fogged-up windows. A bed in one corner, the other corner a makeshift kitchen with two electric burners and a sink.

Slits of orange glow from a WOOD STOVE, a pot of COFFEE on top.

A TELEPHONE on the wall *rings*. The Tracker steps over to answer.

TRACKER

Yeah?... Yeah I'm heading out...

You sure? You don't have to come.

(beat)

I know you can handle it but--

(beat)

Alright, see you there.

She hangs up, opens a BOX OF POLAROIDs and flips through it. Takes one out and looks at it, her face tender.

It's a picture of the *moose from the opening scene*. Handwriting in the white bar at the bottom reads: ELENA.

She tucks the photo in her side-leg POCKET, pours the coffee in a THERMOS and steps outside with a backpack and an AIR RIFLE.

112 INT. MAIL ROOM

112

Fish is issuing gear to Petal, who is now in postal shorts and a short-sleeved shirt, a Postal Eagle on the pocket.

They're standing on opposite sides of a long steel table, a pile of gear between them. Fish lifts an ICE SCRAPER.

FISH

Ice scraper.

He air-scrapes an imaginary windshield, takes it very seriously.

FISH

Sometimes the ice is thick and you have to try different angles...

He mimes all of this. The MECHANIC walks up, wearing a once-white thermal and overalls, grease on his hands.

MECHANIC

Uncle Jo again?

FISH

(still scraping)

Uncle Jo again.

MECHANIC
What can ya do.

A passing comment, but it stops Fish's miming.

FISH
There are steps. You take a wide
stance...

The mechanic has heard this before.

POSTAL MECHANIC
Yeah, well here's Pemberton's key.
I'll get your truck back in shape.

He walks away.

PETAL
So with the moose, that was-
normal?

Fish looks at her and blinks.

FISH
Yes.

Then he looks down at the supplies.

FISH
Let's see.. you get a flashlight.

He points it at HER FACE, clicking it on and off.

FISH
On / off switch. Flashlight.

Petal squints in the light, annoyed, and shields her eyes with her hand. Then SHE SEES SOMETHING. Something *very interesting*, just behind him.

PETAL
Huh.

113 INT. GMC JIMMY

113

Carl driving, Myrna in the passenger seat, one side of her hair *stiff and shiny* from the maple syrup.

CARL
Your mother sure is nice.

MYRNA
If you want to date my mom--

CARL
What, no. I'm married. I'm just
saying she's nice, is all.

Myrna looks in the back seat to see Carl's TROMBONE CASE.

MYRNA
You gonna see Elena?

CARL
Every day.

MYRNA
You must miss her.

CARL
I just said "everyday." How could
I miss / her-

MYRNA
I know.

CARL
-if I see her everyday?

MYRNA
You're right.

CARL
She's my wife.

MYRNA
I know.

Beat.

CARL
I love my wife.

His words came out flat.

Myrna looks out the window at all the familiar homes covered in
snow. She knows everyone in town.

And she feels *so alone*.

114 INT. MAIL ROOM

114

Petal's crouched down by an old CERAMIC RADIATOR. Fish stands
over her, watching.

PETAL

If we attach a thermostatic valve,
then we could adjust the heat.

Fish looks at her like she's speaking another language.

PETAL

My dad used to fix these.

FISH

We don't touch the radiators.

PETAL

Why not? I mean, it's a bit
excessive in here, dontcha think?

He considers this.

FISH

The heat is good for the muscles.

He rolls his shoulders, pulls his elbows back to stretch. The bottom of his SHIRT flares out. Petal sees up his TORSO and he is *muscular*. And kind of hot.

This irritates Petal. She stands up and looks away.

PETAL

Alright so anything else, or can I
get started on my route?

He nods at the pile of supplies on the table.

PETAL

I know how to use these.

FISH

Good. Show me "ice scraper."

Petal gives him a look, *No fucking way*.

115 INT. GMC JIMMY

115

Carl and Myrna pull into the parking lot at the Post Office.

CARL

She should be in there by now.
Fish picked her up.

MYRNA

You sure you want me to train her?

CARL
Well it's not really training.
She's been doing it a long time.
Just show her our ways.

Myrna takes off her seat belt and Carl blurts:

CARL
Sorry about my temper earlier. I
get nervous sometimes, I don't
know why.

MYRNA
Me too. It's okay.

She opens the door to step out and he blurts again:

CARL
Everyone likes you, you know.

MYRNA
Thanks.

CARL
I saw that you didn't go to the
team-building event? It was fun.
You should--

MYRNA
I was tired.

CARL
Yeah. I'm always tired.

She steps outside and Carl *finally gets it out*:

CARL
I'm retiring.

Myrna stops, halfway outside.

MYRNA
I know.

CARL
You could be the next Post Master.

She hates to let him down.

MYRNA
I know.

CARL
But you won't.

MYRNA

I--no, I'm sorry. It's not for me.

CARL

It's a good job.

Myrna looks at him, this older man who is still so young. Who is twisting himself into knots to avoid the truth.

MYRNA

Then don't retire. It's not what you think.

CARL

Don't retire? That's funny. Like one of those jokes. You know, those jokes? Those funny jokes?

MYRNA

I should get going.

CARL

Oh yeah. Me too.

She gets out and Carl stares at nothing for a moment. Then he remembers what he needs to do, and shifts into Drive.

116

INT. MAIL ROOM

116

Fish is looking at a clipboard. Petal's dressed for her route: Parka with a postal emblem sewn on the pocket and pants with stripes down the side.

FISH

And the boss arranged temporary housing for you. So when your husband gets here--

PETAL

He won't be joining me.

Petal realizes she's said too much, *more than she's admitted to herself*. She tries to cover it:

PETAL

Not yet. He had to stay longer for work.

Fish seems oblivious.

FISH

Okay well if you like this place, rent's due on the first.

(MORE)

FISH (CONT'D)
 Or--you could rent the Post
 Master's place in a couple weeks.

PETAL
 Oh wow, where's he going?

Fish suddenly *stiffens*, looks afraid.

FISH
 I have to, um...

He leaves, awkwardly.

From behind Petal, a voice:

MYRNA
 Hey are you the new transfer?

PETAL
 (turning around)
 Hi, yes. Petal--*Bunce*.

Petal's eyes dart to Myrna's hair, shiny and sticking out--on
one side.

Myrna misses Petal's reaction, she's looking past her, at
 Fish's hasty retreat.

MYRNA
 (quietly)
 Get over it.

Then she sees Petal's face, confused.

MYRNA
 Oh, sorry.
 (waves it away)
 Old stuff. I'm Myrna. Myrna Glass.
 You're riding with me this week.

Petal is unsure if this is a good or a bad development.

PETAL
 Great.

117 INT. MAIL TRUCK

117

Myrna's driving her mail truck. Petal's in the passenger seat.

A full minute of awkward silence.

Then Petal thinks of something.

PETAL
Fish was--running away from you.

MYRNA
Yeah.

PETAL
Can I ask--why?

MYRNA
Probably these hips.

She pats her side. Then shakes her head, almost smiles.

MYRNA
Burgers and a movie. What am I, a kid?

PETAL
He asked you out?

MYRNA
I think he misses his mom.

PETAL
Oh.

MYRNA
No, he just likes older women.

PETAL
Oh.

Petal tries to forget this--immediately.

PETAL
Is there a map of your route in here?

MYRNA
Maybe in that bin.

She points to the space between their seats.

MYRNA
I haven't looked at it in awhile.

PETAL
Yeah, I know what you mean, once you learn it...

She looks in the back.

PETAL
Where are the trays?

MYRNA
I don't use trays.

PETAL
("Weird")
Cool.

Beat.

PETAL
So how do you sort the mail?

MYRNA
I have a system. By the end of the
day we'll do twenty, maybe thirty
houses.

PETAL
("That's it??")
Cool.

Beat.

MYRNA
(Begrudgingly)
How many do you do?

PETAL
In a day? Um, well...

MYRNA
Say it.

PETAL
Five or six hundred.

MYRNA
Yeah, and with five or six hundred
mistakes. No, I'm not going to
rush this.

118 EXT. EDGE OF WILDERNESS

118

The chrome HANDLE of a GMC Jimmy is pulled open. Carl takes out his TROMBONE CASE and looks to the horizon.

CARL
Alright honey-bear, where are you.

He's parked at a FIELD OF SNOW. A wall of SPRUCE TREES stands a couple hundred feet away, the branches holding clumps of white.

The entire scene feels colorless and yet somehow not cold. Still and yet somehow ready to burst with activity.

CARL
Where are you?

Somewhere a thin branch SNAPS and falls.

Then a woodpecker RATTLES away. Pauses. Rattles again. And then, nothing.

There she is. A MOOSE with no antlers steps out from the woods. *The same moose from the first scene.* She flicks an ear and looks in Carl's direction.

CARL
("My love")
Elena.

The moose CALLS.

CARL
Okay, hold on. I just gotta get this ready...

Carl unsnaps the trombone case, removes the instrument, inserts the SLIDE and the MOUTHPIECE. He flutters his LIPS and begins their old tune: *It Had to be You.*

The moose regards him, then walks off into the woods.

Carl suddenly stops playing.

CARL
Elena? Where are you going? We're not finished.
(beat)
Elena?

She keeps walking away, pretending not to hear.

119 EXT. EDGE OF TOWN - CONTINUOUS

119

Further off now, we see Carl and the moose from another angle.

It's the Tracker's POV.

She's crouched among the spruce trees, watching them through BINOCULARS, a *burning cigarette* in the other hand.

TRACKER
She's going away for a bit, Carl.

She takes the binoculars from her eyes.

TRACKER

But she'll be back. They always
come back.

She lifts the cigarette to her mouth, inhales and--

TRACKER

OW--fuck.

It had burnt down smaller than she'd realized and the stub
singled her finger. She flicks it down, then looks over her
shoulder.

TRACKER

Come on, that was funny...

No response.

TRACKER

Alright, then.

She takes her GLOVES out of her pocket, puts them on. Then gets
up, moves with quiet speed in the direction of the moose.

The camera stays where it is. We see a second pair of WINTER
BOOTS following right behind her.

120 EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET

120

We see the *same pair* of WINTER BOOTS crush snow. But this time
it's Myrna. She closes the door of her mail truck and walks to
the back where Petal's waiting.

They're parked at the end of a residential street: small houses
with thick strips of snow between them.

Myrna yanks one of the canvas MAILBAGS from the back of the
truck and lets it drop in the snow.

She loosens the CORD at the top of the bag and peers at the
pile of ENVELOPES inside.

MYRNA

Just let me find the mail and
you'll walk it over to the box.

Petal raises her eyebrows, tongues at something in her lip.
This is going to take forever.

Myrna reaches down into the mailbag, deep enough that her CHEEK
now rests on top of the envelopes, and her syrup-stiffened HAIR
is pointing straight up.

She suddenly relaxes, almost smiling at Petal.

MYRNA

It's still warm. From the mail
room.

PETAL

Huh.

Petal stands there, arms folded while Myrna closes her eyes and feels around inside the bag.

MYRNA

Found one.

Myrna stands up, pulling a BROWN ENVELOPE out of the bag and handing it to Petal.

MYRNA

Walk this over to that box, I'll
find the rest.

One envelope at a time? The absurdity--oddly--cheers Petal up. It's kind of entertaining.

PETAL

You got it.

Petal walks to a mailbox with a *single envelope*.

The FLAG is up. She opens the box and pulls out a STAMPED ENVELOPE, then inserts the one she was holding.

This simple, familiar motion relaxes her and she almost laughs, looking forward to the day when this is a funny story she can tell another post office in another town very, very far from here. She turns to look back and--

PETAL

Holy God.

A large MOOSE is standing right behind Myrna, watching her dig in the mailbag. Petal feels paralyzed and barely able to speak.

PETAL

Moose. That's a moose. Myrna!

Almost in perfect symmetry, Myrna stands up from the mail as the moose lowers its snout, licks its lips and then--

--LICKS HER HAIR.

Myrna smiles as if it's a trusted pet. She reaches up to rub the creature's neck as it licks her head clean.

MYRNA
(laughing)
Okay buddy, okay. Easy now.

121 INT. MAIL TRUCK - LATER

121

Myrna DRIVING through a residential neighborhood.

MYRNA
They like maple syrup.

PETAL
Yeah but that is dangerous. I've
encountered moose before and they
are very dangerous. I know.

MYRNA
Well according to the town he's my
father so--it must be fine.

PETAL
What?

Myrna takes a beat. It's hard to admit this to an outsider.

MYRNA
Everyone believes that moose is my
father.

PETAL
Really?
(playfully)
Does he bear any resemblance?

MYRNA
That's what they say.

Myrna feels a darkness descending on her. But also, clarity.

MYRNA
There's this lake. It looks like
the other lakes. Freezes like the
other lakes. Except in the middle,
the middle has this slushy
opening. People jump in and, and
they don't come up.

PETAL
Why would they do that?

MYRNA
They think they'll transform.

PETAL
Into moose?

MYRNA
You saw Fish's Uncle Jo.

PETAL
Yeah but / that--

MYRNA
And now you saw my dad.

PETAL
("bullshit")
Come on...

Myrna stops at a stop sign.

MYRNA
Don't worry, it's not real.

Then turns the corner.

MYRNA
Except the part where people jump
in a frozen lake.

PETAL
Right.

MYRNA
It's sort of the town religion.
Well, not sort of. It is.

Pre-lap: CHURCH BELLS chiming.

122 EXT. CHURCH COURTYARD

122

Five KIDS stand in a circle in the snowy church courtyard. A PAINTED EGG in a serving SPOON rests at each of their feet. The spoons are balanced on rocks, their handles angling upward.

The children are quiet, obedient and *immensely bored*.

They're waiting for FATHER VAL (male, mid-40s), who is crouched in the snow, carefully measuring the distance between each child's egg and a METAL BOWL in the center, which is filled with snow and water to make it *slushy*.

One of the kids, in a brief act of rebellion, lifts his foot above his spoon handle, ready to stomp down and send the egg flying. Val, eyes on his measuring tape, notices.

FATHER VAL
You know you have to wait.

The boy puts his foot down in the snow, disappointed. Val checks the tape again.

FATHER VAL
Quarter inch too far.

The boy quickly adjusts his spoon and egg.

BOY 1
Can I now?

Val has explained this a million times.

FATHER VAL
After we measure them all.

Several kids sigh in a way that seems exaggerated but at their age it's sincere. One little girl puts her gloved hands to her cheeks, her mouth hanging open. *How much longer?*

Then she looks down at her egg.

GIRL
Father Val.

FATHER VAL
Just a sec.

Val continues measuring.

GIRL
Father Val.

FATHER VAL
(To a different kid)
Half-inch too close. Move it here.

The kid does so.

GIRL
Father Val.

FATHER VAL
Yeah?

GIRL
Mine's broken.

FATHER VAL
Okay, get a new one.

The girl goes to a BASKET full of painted eggs. And Val takes her cracked egg, admiring it, talking to himself as much as he is talking to the children.

FATHER VAL
She was so beautiful. And so delicate.

Close-up on the egg. It has two blue dots for eyes, a red smile, a frilly skirt glued around the middle. And a long crack through the face.

FATHER VAL
The first to find the secret of the lake. The first to take the plunge.

Another boy lifts his knee, stomps on the spoon handle and sends his egg flying. It lands perfectly in the bowl of slushy snow, the paint on its face "bleeding" in the water.

GIRL 2
Hey! You have to to wait.

An argument ensues between the kids, some wanting to stomp, others wanting to wait.

Normally Val would step in but he's distracted. Across the street he sees a mail carrier bent over a mailbag, digging through its contents.

FATHER VAL
(longing)
Myrna.

Then he sees an unfamiliar mail carrier appear from the other side of the mail truck.

FATHER VAL
(calling to kids)
Hey I'll be right back. Just going to get the mail.

The kids ignore him. They're deep in a group argument, emotions flaring.

123 EXT. MAIL TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

123

Myrna just pulled a BUBBLE MAILER from the mailbag. She and Petal are in mid-conversation.

MYRNA
He was born into it, he didn't
have a choice.

PETAL
He's killing people.

MYRNA
Well... he just walks them to the
lake, they—

PETAL
They don't know what they're
doing.

MYRNA
Neither does he.

Myrna hands over the bubble mailer.

MYRNA
Just take it to him, I'll find the
rest.

124 EXT. CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

124

Father Val meets Petal on the sidewalk just outside the Church.
She hands him the bubble mailer.

PETAL
Here you go.

FATHER VAL
Thanks.

She starts to turn but he stops her.

FATHER VAL
I'm Father Val.

He puts out his hand.

PETAL
Petal Bunce.

She *hates* having to shake his hand.

FATHER VAL
So you're training with Myrna?

PETAL
Yeah. Just this week.

Val looks at Myrna, still digging in the mailbag.

FATHER VAL
How's she doing?

PETAL
("None of your business")
She's fine.

FATHER VAL
I've been hoping to talk to her
but she's so distant.

(Beat)

PETAL
Sorry, I need to get back.

FATHER VAL
Of course. Um, thank you for this.

He holds up the bubble mailer.

As Petal walks away, Val watches Myrna. She stands up from the mailbag with two envelopes in her hand. *She looks happy.*

FATHER VAL
(quiet, proud)
Good for you.

The sight of her smiling in the sunlight is wildly comforting to him. Until he turns around.

FATHER VAL
(annoyed)
No, guys, come on.

He hustles to the kids where two of the boys are *wrestling*. It's ugly. The other kids stand around awkwardly.

PRE-LAP: Crowd YELLING, angry sports fans.

125 EXT. ICE RINK

125

SUPER: FOUR YEARS AGO

The entire town is out for the game, and they're not happy. The ref just made a bad call.

They're booing from a long SNOW BANK, their stand-in for bleachers, sitting on camp chairs or blankets, holding mugs with warm, spiked drinks.

The scoreboard, large plastic flaps with numbers that one person manually changes, reads 2-2. A large digital clock shows one minute left.

A YOUNGER FISH, age 17, sits in the "penalty box", a wooden bench with 4-foot sheets of plywood propped up around it.

His HELMET is off, hair matted with SWEAT, eyes darting between his PENALTY CLOCK and the game.

Ten more seconds and he's free. He puts his helmet back on, stands up and... *He's out!*

Crowd starts CHANTING, soft at first but growing:

Go Fish.
Go Fish.

The other team has the PUCK. Their guy can't move forward. So he passes. Fish watches, then goes *where no one else goes.*

Go Fish.
Go Fish.

The opposing team passes again. They're being pushed back. Then another pass and out of nowhere... *Fish intercepts!*

A SWELL OF EXCITEMENT from the crowd, and their chant goes on.

GO FISH.
GO FISH.

He RIPS the puck at his teammate who is near the goal, it *rockets* through his legs, a silent missile aimed at the goalie who can't see it until it's too late.

SCORE!

An explosion of joy. We've never seen Fish this happy. Until an opposing player accidentally bumps into him. Fish throws off his helmet and starts STRANGLING him.

126 EXT. ICE RINK - MOMENTS LATER

126

Fish is back in the penalty box. The game still going.

He looks up at the SCOREBOARD, 3-2.

The CLOCK counts down: four, three, two--he cracks the slightest smile as we hear BEEEEEEEP.

He scored the winning goal.

His FACE, all pride.

127 INT. POST OFFICE - PRESENT

127

The same proud face, a little older, lost in a memory and
LOOKING UP at an imaginary scoreboard.

Which are now FLUORESCENT LIGHTS, buzzing.

Fish's face droops into the boredom of his current life:
sitting alone at the front counter of the Post Office.

Carl walks in, takes a look at Fish. Folds his arms like a
coach and stands next to him.

CARL

Fish.

FISH

Boss.

They don't look at each other, they just watch the blurry
movement through the foggy GLASS-FRONT of the building.

CARL

How you, uh, how you holding up?

FISH

I'm good.

CARL

Good.

(beat)

Should be lunch time soon.

Fish glances at the clock above the glass front doors.

FISH

Seventeen minutes.

CARL

That's right.

Beat.

CARL

Something I've been meaning to
ask.

FISH

Okay.

CARL

You know, I'm retiring soon.

FISH

I know.

CARL
And someone needs to take my
place.

FISH
I know.

CARL
And... that someone could be you.

Fish considers this, then:

FISH
You should ask Pemberton. He would
be perfect.

CARL
Right, yeah. That's a good idea.

128 EXT. POST OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

128

Carl walks out to the employee lot, passes another postal worker, a big guy, mid-50s, calm, intelligent eyes.

CARL
Morning, Pemberton.

PEMBERTON
Morning, Boss.

They both continue on. But Carl stops and turns, considers saying something, hesitates. *He can't get it out.*

Pemberton goes inside. Carl walks to his GMC Jimmy, defeated.

129 INT. GMC JIMMY - MOMENTS LATER

129

Carl driving, his mind preoccupied, he doesn't notice as he passes Myrna's mail truck going in the other direction. They don't notice either.

WOOOSH.

130 INT. MAIL TRUCK

130

Myrna DRIVING.

PETAL
So I gotta ask. Do people have a
choice? Is there some kind of
lottery?

MYRNA
The tradition is, they jump at
retirement.

PETAL
Jesus.

MYRNA
They spend their whole life
preparing for it.

131 EXT. CHURCH

131

MYRNA (V.O.)
Going to that church every week.

Carl parks in the empty church lot. The kids from the egg game
are walking home in pairs, one is alone.

132 INT. EMPTY CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

132

MYRNA (V.O.)
Eating pondweed and tree bark. As
if that's gonna save them.

Carl walks past the empty pews to the altar, sees the familiar
strands of pondweed drying on muslin. He grimaces at the sight.

PETAL (V.O.)
They eat it?

MYRNA (V.O.)
Well they spit it out but not soon
enough. Tastes awful.

Carl considers turning around, going for pancakes instead.

But then the PRIEST appears, swinging his SILVER INCENSE BURNER
from it's chain. Thick SMOKE surrounds Carl, who COUGHS.

VAL
Breathe in deeply. Your body
fights it because you fight it.

Carl takes a deep breath, pulling in thick tendrils of smoke.

VAL
Accept it as if it were pure
mountain air.

Carl exhales and barely stifles another COUGH.

Val sets the incense burner on its TRAY and pinches one of the strands of PONDWEED, lifting it high and letting it sway in the smoke.

CARL

I did have a question.

Val keeps his eyes on the pondweed, watching it blur in and out of the smoke.

VAL

Go ahead.

CARL

I was wondering... how... I might initiate a delay?

VAL

It is one week before your plunge. If we delay your holy sacrament, then we must delay your plunge.

CARL

I was actually wondering if I could delay my plunge.

VAL

You can't. It's scheduled for next week. And the final plunge is the week after. The *final* plunge.

Carl looks down like a sad child.

VAL

How long did you want to delay?

CARL

I hadn't really thought about it. But--well--five years would be lovely.

The priest blanches.

CARL

Or one.

Val sets the incense burner on its tray.

VAL

The final plunge is in two weeks. *The final* plunge. There won't be another.

CARL

I know.

VAL
Then you know you'll be alone.
That's not good, Carl. You need
someone.

CARL
Of course. You're right.

On Carl's face. He has someone in mind.

133 INT. PANCAKE HOUSE

133

Mrs Glass moves effortlessly around the diner, watching for raised fingers, dishing out pancakes, and lingering just a little whenever she hears a conversation that sounds private.

Then she stops at a booth where Fish sits alone.

MRS GLASS
More coffee?

FISH
Yes.

She fills his mug.

FISH
And...?

He nudges his PLATE a couple inches towards her.

MRS GLASS
I'll be right back for that.

FISH
No, wait. Do you see anything?

MRS GLASS
I see everything, Fish.

FISH
I mean on the plate.

She looks at the heavy diner plate, a few splotches of MAPLE SYRUP, and nothing else.

MRS GLASS
Give me a clue.

FISH
It's also a card game.

MRS GLASS
Oh.

FISH
This is a good time, right?

MRS GLASS
Fish.

FISH
I know how before, when I sold you those stamps, that was not the right time, you explained that. But this?

MRS GLASS
Fish.

FISH
I ate it all. My whole plate.

MRS GLASS
Fish.

FISH
What?

MRS GLASS
Those two little words cannot replace the three little words that no one ever said to you.

FISH
I know but you used to say it.

MRS GLASS
That was at your hockey games. Everyone was cheering for you.

FISH
It's not that hard to say. A little cheer. Doesn't have to be loud.

MRS GLASS
Ok. Go Fish.

FISH
Doesn't sound like you mean it.

She whispers it, like a mother doting on a small child.

MRS GLASS
(whispering)
Go Fish.

FISH
 (happy)
 Well, alright. Because you know I
 cleaned my whole plate.

MRS GLASS
 Yes, you did.

She starts to leave and Fish blurts:

FISH
 Wait, um...

MRS GLASS
 Fish, I've got a lot of tables.

FISH
 I know, I was just going to say,
 um...

MRS GLASS
 What?

FISH
 Thank you.

134 INT. EMPTY CHURCH

134

Val stands holding a pose, arms wide, one knee bent and a toe pointing to the ground. A trio of SANCTUS BELLS in each hand, he shakes them in a specific, and jerky, rhythm.

Carl has a question but is unsure when to interrupt. Then he just goes for it.

CARL
 Father, I do have another
 question.

Val, facing away from him, grimaces. It's been a long day.

He gathers his patience and turns to face Carl.

VAL
 Yes, go ahead.

CARL
 Well, you said the final plunge is
 coming up. And that, well--why
 can't there be anymore?

VAL
 It's written in the scripture.

Val resumes his jerky dance, making sharp twists of his wrists to ring the bells.

CARL

But I've never actually seen--

Val cringes, puts the bells down on the altar, and gives in.

VAL

Okay.

He walks to a shelf at the side, removes a thick TOME and flips through it. Then presents it to Carl, pointing at a line.

CARL

(reading)

"The blessing on the lake will last one hundred years."

VAL

The date is clear.

CARL

Why a hundred?

VAL

(reluctant)

It might help if I explain the science behind it.

CARL

Really? Sorry, I just never thought that you...

VAL

I have nothing against science. What it tells us is correct. But it's young, whereas religion is ancient, and shrouded. So we must trust religion until science catches up. In this case, we're lucky. The science is there.

135 INT. MAIL TRUCK

135

Myrna's DRIVING, Petal's in the passenger seat.

MYRNA

It's so obvious. Any fifth grader can see it's a hot spring. Although "hot" isn't the word. The heat's been fading as long as we've been here.

(MORE)

MYRNA (CONT'D)

That's why it doesn't do much to the lake, most of the surface freezes. The few bubbles of warmth that do rise up, they're only enough to keep this slushy opening in the center. It's not warm, but not nearly as cold as the rest of the water.

136 INT. EMPTY CHURCH

136

VAL

Shall I tell you again of the Princess, and my great, great grandfather?

CARL

The Priest.

VAL

The Founders. They were the first to discover this magic. And they knew.

CARL

The magic is real.

137 INT. MAIL TRUCK

137

Myrna DRIVING.

PETAL

Why moose?

MYRNA

I guess 'cause they're around. An easy thing to point at. I don't know. None of it makes sense. The things people buy.

PETAL

But not you.

MYRNA

No.

Myrna relaxes, smiles at a memory.

MYRNA

when I was growing up, I always wondered where my dad went.

(MORE)

MYRNA (CONT'D)

I had never met him. The story was he got a wild hair one night, it was after my mom got pregnant but before either of them knew, and he ran out there and jumped in. Anyway at twelve I walked to the center of the lake, right up to the slushy opening.

We HEAR: Tentative FOOTSTEPS on crackly ice.

MYRNA

I couldn't see anything through all the pebbles of ice floating there, so I squatted down and put my hand in it, swirled 'em around. That's when the ice that I was on, it snapped.

We HEAR: Thick ice SNAPS, a body PLUNGES into water. Sonically we travel with her underwater. Large BUBBLES wobble past.

Incidental music enters, a steady pulse with dark tones.

Music continues until Scene 126.

138 INT. EMPTY CHURCH

138

VAL

The founders of our town loved each other so much that a spell was created, a hundred year spell, to keep them together for eternity.

139 INT. MAIL TRUCK

139

MYRNA

They have no idea--what it feels like? Freezing cold water? All of your nerves light up. Every inch of your skin clenches and screams the same thing: get out. This is a mistake.

140 INT. EMPTY CHURCH

140

VAL

(MORE)

VAL (CONT'D)

And everyone after, once they can no longer perform their duties, at the time of retirement, they may also transform.

141 EXT. UNDERWATER

141

YOUNG MYRNA'S view underwater.

MYRNA (V.O.)

And down there I saw them.

Skeletons, some with skin, bloated with splotches of green. An arm bone sways gently, almost waving.

MYRNA (V.O.)

I don't know if I had swallowed water or what but my panic was gone and I--it didn't seem like I needed air.

We see Young Myrna's face go from PANIC to CALM.

MYRNA (V.O.)

That moment still haunts me. It must be when everyone thinks they'll transform. But it's when you give up. Something happens in the brain that makes you accept it. Welcome it.

She waves back at the skeleton.

MYRNA (V.O.)

I must have been closer to the surface than I realized. Someone shoved a tree branch in the water.

A branch full of pine needles PLUNGES down at us.

MYRNA (V.O.)

I watched myself reach for it and they pulled me up.

We travel with her up and out of the water.

Music continues, slowly building.

142 INT. EMPTY CHURCH

142

VAL
(MORE)

VAL (CONT'D)

Is this what you really want? To miss your chance? Your chance to reunite with your wife?

CARL

I don't know.

VAL

You were married for forty-three years.

CARL

We were.

VAL

She loves you.

CARL

She does.

VAL

And you love her?

CARL

Of course.

VAL

Then the choice is easy. Let yourself be with your love. While you still can.

Val lifts the pondweed above Carl, who tilts his head, opens his mouth, and takes it with his teeth, sneering at the taste.

143 INT. MAIL TRUCK

143

Music fades out.

Myrna DRIVING.

MYRNA

It was my sister. Twin sister.

These words are painful for Myrna.

MYRNA

Just when I needed her the most. The day before I'd told her we couldn't be sisters anymore.

(MORE)

MYRNA (CONT'D)

And then she sees me fall in the water, pulls me out and wraps herself around me, gives me all her warmth. It was the last time we hugged.

PETAL

What happened?

Myra sees everything that happened, can't possibly explain it all, and then the words come out.

MYRNA

We grew apart.

144 EXT. WOODS

144

The Tracker is deep in the woods, moving quietly.

MYRNA (V.O.)

Which tends to happen when you believe in different things.

She peers around a tree and there she is, the MOOSE she's been following, Elena, lying down by a large boulder.

MYRNA (V.O.)

I see the wilderness as it is.

The moose looks up at the Tracker, blinks slowly. Then moans.

MYRNA (V.O.)

And she sees it as the home of our relatives.

TRACKER

Elena. I'm here. You can sleep.

The moose watches a SNOW FLY crawl past. Takes a shallow breath, closes her eyes, exhales and then... nothing.

MYRNA (V.O.)

She sees it as her future home.

The tracker's eyes well up. She looks over her shoulder and finally we see her companion. MYRNA'S TWIN.

Her hair tied back. Rugged, warm clothing. Her eyes focused on the moose, *it's the first time she's witnessed this*. She forgets that she has a task to do.

The Tracker whispers to remind her.

TRACKER

Sasha.

Sasha (Myrna's twin) snaps out of it, takes some WHITE POWDER from her backpack, kneels in the snow and shakes it in a ritualistic fashion around the dead moose.

Then the Tracker kneels next to her and both women bow deeply, their foreheads pressing against the snow.

145 EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING 145

Myrna parks at a two-story apartment building.

146 INT. MAIL TRUCK - CONTINUOUS 146

MYRNA

But she's not going at retirement.

She turns off the engine.

MYRNA

She's going in two weeks.

PETAL

Why?

MYRNA

There was a contest.

PETAL

Jesus.

MYRNA

She thinks it's a great honor.

Myrna gets out, closes the door behind her. Petal sits a moment, floored by the culture she's entered.

147 EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - CONTINUOUS 147

Myrna yanks a MAILBAG from the back of the van and lets it drop in the snow, then tries to loosen the CORD at the top.

The cord is stuck in a tight KNOT. Petal walks up to see Myrna struggling with something that is normally easy. She looks like she might scream.

PETAL

Here. Let me.

MYRNA
(standing up)
Fine, sure. It's stuck.

Petal kneels down, struggles with the knot.

PETAL
Damn that is... tight.

She tries another angle, something gives.

PETAL
Okay...

And... she's got it. She unties the knot and opens the bag.

PETAL
Okay. So...

When Petal's at a loss for words, a loss for direction, she zeroes in on work. It always gets her through.

She squares herself around the mailbag.

PETAL
How does it work? I stick my arms
in like this?

MYRNA
No, I can--

PETAL
What does it feel like? What am I
looking for?

MYRNA
There's a lot of tenants at this
building...

PETAL
Pick one.

Myrna hesitates. She's never explained her system to anyone. *No one's ever asked.*

MYRNA
Well, Miss Schroeder and her
secret love, they always send
letters. His have scotch tape on
them, because he doesn't think
they'll stay closed. And Mr Vogel,
upstairs, he should be getting his
disco magazine.
(MORE)

MYRNA (CONT'D)

He's shy about it but the company sends them in this thick black plastic. It feels different than the other plastic and makes a little squeal if you rub it.

PETAL

I think I found one.

MYRNA

Really?

She pulls out an envelope.

MYRNA

That's not it.

PETAL

Oh.

MYRNA

But keep trying.

PETAL

Oh good. I thought you wanted to take over.

That's exactly what Myrna wants.

MYRNA

No it's the only way to learn. You should keep going.

Petal stuffs her arms back in the bag, going deep enough to rest her CHEEK on the mail.

PETAL

It's still warm.

MYRNA

The mail bag is waxed canvas, so it traps the heat in.

The camera pulls up and back from a crane, framing two mail carriers in the snow, *becoming friends*.

PETAL

Feels amazing, hugging it like this.

MYRNA

Yeah, I guess.

PETAL
Give me another. Those were too
hard.

MYRNA
Okay.

END EPISODE ONE