

# RUMORS OF POLAR BEARS

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A full-length dramedy by  
Jonathan Dorf

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

DEME, 18, female, survivalist meets teen next door.

ROMULUS, 15, male, Deme's brother, happy go lucky, a bit punk and sensitive all in one bundle.

ADAM, male, around Deme's age, punk meets beach meets Mad Max.

EVE, same age, Adam's girlfriend and not the sharpest tack.

SCRUBS, 13, hyperactive girl, something of a mascot like Anybodys from *West Side Story*.

IKE, 18, male.

TINA, 18, female, Ike's girlfriend.

### Inhabitants of New San Francisco

ANDI, 18, female, their leader, short for Andromeda.

CASSIE, 15, female, her younger sister, short for Cassandra, green meets punk.

DOC, 18, female, a self-styled "doctor."

### Noah and Mrs. Middleton's Former Pre-K Drama Class

ECHO, an impish boy a little younger than Scrubs.

NOAH, around Deme's age, once a child prodigy musician, could be played by the actor who played Adam or Ike.

MERCURY, mid-teens, either gender, injured member of Mrs. Middleton's Former Pre-K class.

### The Bikers

PAN, female, leader of a Mad Max-like gang of bikers terrorizing the West.

KALI, female, the consummate schemer and brains behind Pan.

TEEN CAPTIVE, female, though could be male.

### Peoples of the First Nations

NANNURALUK, male, around Deme's age or slightly older, leader of the First Nations tribe.

KINGUYAKKI, female, Romulus' age and younger sister of Nannuraluk. Must be played by the actor who plays Cassie.

UGALIK, male, brother of Kinguyakki and on his way to becoming a shaman. Echo's age, he should be played by the same actor.

ENSEMBLE to play the inhabitants of New San Francisco (this group only must be all female), Mrs. Middleton's Former Pre-Kindergarten Drama Class, bikers, First Nations warriors, flexible in number but preferably 6-8 minimum, with no maximum.

Only Deme, Romulus and Scrubs appear in all three parts of the cycle, so productions wishing to limit cast size are encouraged to use multiple casting. Here is one possible cast:

DEME

ROMULUS

SCRUBS

ADAM/NOAH

EVE/KALI

IKE/NANNURALUK

TINA/PAN

ANDI/TEENAGE CAPTIVE

CASSIE/KINGUYAKKI

DOC/MERCURY

ECHO/UGALIK

ENSEMBLE

## NOTES ON NAMES

Some names are fairly obvious in their pronunciations, but others not so much. To that end, below is pronunciation and origin information where I felt it might be useful:

DEME (DEM-ee) is short for Demeter.

ROMULUS (RAHM-u-luss) comes from the Roman myth. When shortened to Romey, however, it should be pronounced RO-mee (as in Romeo).

KALI (KAH-lee) is named for the Hindu goddess of death.

NANNURALUK (nah-noo-RAH-luke) is one of the names for "polar bear" in Inuit.

KINGUYAKKI (king-oo-YAH-kee) means "Northern Lights" in Inuit.

UGALIK (OO-gah-leek) means "arctic hare" in Inuit.

## SETTING NOTES

Settings can be largely suggested, though the kiddie pool is necessary, and there likely should be at least a few selected set pieces that hint at the recycled nature of New San Francisco. In the Cambridge-Isanti production of the one-act (Act I), they constructed an elaborate city of recycled junk that hung in the air, whereas New San Francisco was entirely suggested in the Capital production. A good designer should feel free to go to town, as long as the set doesn't prevent the play from moving quickly.

The kiddie pool itself is most likely round and plastic, the kind that parents put in the yard for their small children — making it all the more ridiculous when the teens frolic in it.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

In Act I, Scene 1, "freeway" may be replaced with "highway," depending on what suits your production. Likewise, it is not impossible for productions to substitute local examples for the geography used in the play, but great care should be taken to find examples that have the same sensibility. Thus, beginning in Act I, Scene 3, you may use something other than "New San Francisco," but try to find a word that is not only similar in meaning, but also in its musicality.

Similarly, in Act I, Scene 6, productions may substitute equivalent local examples for the Colorado River, California and Nevada, keeping in mind that in the original example, there really is considerable tension over this water. The line that refers to "mass evacuations of coastal regions" could be "shore regions" or "the flood plain" or something similarly appropriate if the location you're using is near a lake or river instead of an ocean.

It is important to avoid blackouts as much as possible between scenes.

Costumes should reflect the nature of the times: patched, dirty, mismatched and improvised. Mrs. Middleton's Former Pre-K class might wear clothing that is several sizes too small, while Noah's clothes might have been his father's, too big and patched and mended repeatedly. Except for the Inuits and the New San Franciscans and to a lesser extent the Bikers, nobody would be likely to have the ability to wash themselves and their clothes regularly, as they live on the road. Be particularly careful that footwear is appropriate; it's likely to be falling apart or "creative," if it exists at all.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The play premiered at Capital High School in Helena, Montana in May 2014 under the direction of Justin Olson with the following cast:

Deme – Jade Merriman

Romulus – Spencer Lamb

Scrubs – Bailly Noble

Adam, Pre-Kindergartener – Shane Adams

Eve, First Nation Warrior – April Kortz

Ike, Pre-Kindergartener – Zackary Heinze

Tina, Biker – Emily West

Andi – Kaitlynn Lindbo

Cassie/Kinguyakki – Paige Belstad

Doc, Pre-Kindergartener – Claire Peterson

Echo/Ugalik – Caleb Noble

Noah – Jackson Haddon

Mercury, Warrior, New San Franciscan – Mary Hartman

Pan – Adrianna Jones

Kali – Summer Diegel

Teenage Captive, New San Franciscan, Biker – Ali Barnicoat

Nannuraluk – Walker Lamb

New San Franciscan, Pre-Kindergartener, Warrior – Hannah Mondy

New San Franciscan, Pre-Kindergartener – Lena Tupper

New San Franciscan, Pre-Kindergartener – Julia Fisher

Biker, Warrior – Courtney Bawden



New San Franciscan, Biker – Lexi Brink-Woods

Stage Manager – David Jenks

Light Design/ Assistant Director – Don Phillips

Assistant Director – Brenda Lamb

The original one-act version of *Rumors of Polar Bears* premiered at Cambridge-Isanti High School in Cambridge, Minnesota in May 2010 under the direction of Kelly Fairchild-Fahrni.

Special thanks to Jonathan Munoz-Proulx, who directed the first reading of the full-length play, and to Dr. Lawrence Kaplan of the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, for his assistance with the Inuit language.

**ACT I: OIL AND WATER****SCENE 1**

*(The near future. Somewhere in California, north of Los Angeles. DEME, 18, female, appears in a spotlight. Her clothes are survivalist meets teen next door, but it's better if the light can hit just her face. Her head is well-covered to shield it from the sun.)*

**DEME:** I always wanted a baby polar bear. Its fur would be so white, I could hold it in my arms and rock it to sleep at night, and it would be soft and pure next to me. And each day we'd play games, the kind of games that parents and their baby polar bears play, and as it gets older it would know how to be. *(Beat.)* That's how it is with a lot of things. If we only got them when they were babies, maybe a lot of these things wouldn't have happened. And now the polar bears have gone far, far away. Or maybe they're just gone.

*(Lights up to reveal Deme in a blighted landscape. Nearby, a squatter tent dwelling that has the feel of having been patched and mended repeatedly. ROMULUS, 15, enters. His clothing has the same survivalist streak, with a hint of punk in his boy next door wear. He has a bag slung over his shoulder.)*

**ROMULUS:** Sun's down.

**DEME:** And?

**ROMULUS:** Friday night. *(Beat.)* Friday night!

**DEME:** Don't know how you even keep track.

**ROMULUS:** *(Singing it like a jingle:)* Friday night is party night. *(Points at his watch:)* It's magic. The magic watch that never stops.

**DEME:** It will.

**ROMULUS:** Sourpuss. (*Singing again:*) Friday night is party night. Make your work week come out right.

**DEME:** Speaking of work...

**ROMULUS:** Let's not speak of it. (*Once more singing:*) Friday night—

**DEME:** If you sing that one more time...

**ROMULUS:** You'll what.

**DEME:** Don't push me.

*(Romulus pushes her super gently, just to be annoyingly literal.)*

You know that's not what I meant.

**ROMULUS:** (*Singing:*) Friday night—

**DEME:** Don't—

**ROMULUS:** (*Continuing:*) is—

**DEME:** Romulus, I mean it.

**ROMULUS:** (*Beat.*) Here.

*(He pulls a bunch of cans out of his bag.)*

Tuna. Garbanzo beans. Creamed spinach. Creamed corn. Cream of wheat. Score or what?

**DEME:** You always do this.

**ROMULUS:** I didn't know cream of wheat came in a can. (*Beat.*) I always do what?

**DEME:** You always hold a few back until I'm mad, and then they pop out, peace offering.

*(Romulus digs into his bag and pulls out one more can: peas.)*

**ROMULUS:** I come in peas. (*Beat.*) Is it working?

*(She hauls off as if to hit him. He flinches, but she runs her hand through his hair gently. Then she grabs his hair hard.)*

Ow! I thought you liked peas.

*(She kisses his hair and lets go.)*

**DEME:** How many cans are left down there?

**ROMULUS:** Dunno. It's dark.

**DEME:** More or less.

**ROMULUS:** Less. Come on—it's Friday night. Can't we be all end of the world again on Monday? *(Beat.)* What?

**DEME:** That's such a Mom thing.

**ROMULUS:** Yeah? *(Beat.)* I think I remember less each day.

**DEME:** *(As their mom.)* Don't be all end of the world, Deme.

**ROMULUS:** I write in my book, but it just feels less and less real.

**DEME:** Dad had no sense of humor.

**ROMULUS:** I don't remember him at all.

**DEME:** You were three.

**ROMULUS:** Three should be good for something.

**DEME:** That was a crowded year.

**ROMULUS:** I hope he doesn't hate me for not remembering.

**DEME:** *(Beat.)* Why are we talking like this? It's Friday night. *(Singing:)* Friday night is party night.

**ROMULUS AND DEME:** Make your work week come out right.

**ROMULUS:** I'm goin' in head first this time.

**DEME:** Ha.

**ROMULUS:** One of these days I will. Dive bomber!

**DEME:** You ready?

**ROMULUS:** You got the stuff?

*(Deme pulls a shoulder bag of her own from inside the squat.)*

**DEME:** Do you have to ask?

*(Romulus howls, as if sending a signal to distant friends. He's answered by cawing and barking and howling from elsewhere in the area.)*

**ROMULUS:** To the party pool!

*(Lights dim, except for the spotlight on Deme.)*

**DEME:** The year Romulus turned three, I remember a man in a designer pin-striped suit and perfectly polished shoes swinging a sledgehammer at every inch of his Hummer, screaming that he would no longer be part of the problem. And when he's done, he sits on the curb and points at me to come closer and he says he wants to set it on fire, but he can't, because he just can't hurt the planet any more. He grabs my hand and starts to cry, and he says he's sorry he's crying, but he can't help it and isn't there some way he could give back the Hummer and the half hour showers for just one more minute with his wife? And then he stands up, wipes his face, tells me the Oil and Water Wars are all his fault, and throws himself onto the freeway below. *(Beat.)* I made that up. Not the Hummer or the hammer or the crying or him taking my hand or the freeway. But the Oil and Water Wars didn't start for another week, and that's just what we call them now because there's nobody to tell us different.

*(The lights may go to black if absolutely necessary, but it would be better for them to crossfade and come up on the new location.)*

**SCENE 2**

*(Not far away, and not long afterward. A kiddie pool, empty of water, sits in an otherwise barren patch of ground. A nearby sign used to read "Danger: Keep Out," but danger has been crossed out, and the words "private club" scrawled in graffiti over top. Enter Deme and Romulus.)*

**ROMULUS:** We're never first.

*(ADAM, Deme's age and dressed in a sort of punk meets beach meets Mad Max chic, steps out of the shadows.)*

**ADAM:** And you never will be.

*(EVE, same age, his girlfriend and probably not the sharpest tack in the box, jumps out right after.)*

**EVE:** Ambush!

**DEME:** You're just a regular Bonnie and Clyde.

**ADAM:** Adam and Eve, thank you very much, and we coulda' water whacked you no thing.

**ROMULUS:** But you gave the signal.

**EVE:** *(Mimicking him:)* But you gave the signal.

**ADAM:** Maybe we been waiting, watching for weeks, studying your ways...outlaws...

**ROMULUS:** Yeah, and maybe our parents are waiting for us at the spa.

**EVE:** What's a spa?

**ADAM:** Baby, it's not important.

**EVE:** I hate it when he uses words I don't know.

**DEME:** *(To Adam:)* You're right.

**EVE:** I'm a poet.

**DEME:** We shoulda been more careful.

**ROMULUS:** But –

**DEME:** Shut it.

**EVE:** (*Continuing her thought:*) Show some respect.

**ADAM:** Hey – we're here. It's all good.

**DEME:** Yeah, Eve. Give us one.

**EVE:** (*Beat.*) OK. (*Her poem:*)

Day hot sun dry hot  
My favorite time is night  
Pool of water wet!

**DEME, ADAM AND ROMULUS:** Amen.

**EVE:** Let's get this party started!

**DEME:** Where's Dare? And Tina and Ike?

*(SCRUBS, the youngest at 13 or 14, bounds out of the bushes. She's the Anybodys of their world.)*

**SCRUBS:** What about where's me? I call first into the party pool!

*(Scrubs races out of her punk-Mad Max-tomgirl wear and into – considering the elements and dangers of exposure – a not quite bathing suit lickety split, jumping into the empty pool.)*

**ROMULUS:** Hey – it's my turn.

**SCRUBS:** Party water!

*(Romulus races to strip to a not quite bathing suit of his own.)*

*(Chanting:)* Pour! Pour!

**ROMULUS:** Wait!

**SCRUBS:** Pour! Pour!

*(Deme pulls a gallon jug out of her bag and pours its contents into the kiddie pool. The resulting "pool" is laughable: we're talking inches of water.)*

Woohoo!

*(Enter TINA and IKE, about the same age as Deme, Adam and Eve. They dress about the same, but with maybe just a bit more of a designer edge. They look gaunt.)*

**ROMULUS:** That's enough, Scrubs. My turn now.

**SCRUBS:** Says who?

**ROMULUS:** Says me.

**EVE:** I says too.

**DEME:** *(To Ike and Tina:)* Where's Dare?

**SCRUBS:** I just started partyin'. *(Her party call:)* Rock on! Rock on hard!

*(Scrubs jumps around and frolics as if this is the best thing ever.)*

**IKE:** He's tired.

**DEME:** *(To Romulus:)* You gonna dive in?

**ROMULUS:** Maybe I will.

**DEME:** Romey says he's going to dive in.

*(Adam tries to push his way past Romulus, but Romulus blocks him.)*

**ROMULUS:** It's my turn.

**ADAM:** Not if I get there first.

**DEME:** Tina, you OK?

**EVE:** Ad, let him go.



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*(Adam and Romulus struggle playfully. Of course, just as Adam starts to get past Romulus, he has to stop to strip down to his swim gear, which gives Romulus time to block him again.)*

**ROMULUS:** Not this week.

**ADAM:** *(Grabbing him again:)* I am the king of the party pool!

**SCRUBS:** Party, party!

**EVE:** Adam!

**ADAM:** I'm just havin' fun with him. *(Beat.)* Fine.

*(Adam lets go of Romulus, then feints at him. Romulus flinches, but stands his ground.)*

**ROMULUS:** Blow, Scrubs.

*(Beat. Scrubs gets out. Romulus jumps in.)*

Party, party!

**ADAM, EVE, SCRUBS AND ROMULUS:** Party, party! [etc.]

*(Adam, Eve and Scrubs dance around the party pool, while Romulus frolics in it. Deme studies Ike and Tina, who looks longingly at the pool. Beat. Tina can't take it anymore and runs for the party pool, pushing the others out of the way and drinking from the pool.)*

**ROMULUS:** Don't drink the party water.

**ADAM:** Yeah – if you drink it, what are we gonna party in?

*(Tina stops drinking.)*

**TINA:** Sorry. I was just really...thirsty.

**DEME:** Where's Dare?

**EVE:** Yeah. How we gonna party in the pool if you drink the water? Then we'd have to be sad all the time.

**IKE:** Dare's tired. He's lying down.

**DEME:** *(Beat.)* Is he lying down, Tina?

**IKE:** I just told you –

**DEME:** Tina?

*(Beat. Tina shakes her head.)*

Romey, get out of the water.

**ROMULUS:** But we're partyin' –

**DEME:** Get out of the water now!

*(This time Romulus doesn't hesitate. He gets out and grabs his clothes. During this exchange, the others retreat ever so slightly from Ike and Tina. To Tina:)*

Where's Dare?

**TINA:** We thought he just got too much sun – his skin had this splotch –

**DEME:** All over or in one place?

**TINA:** One place. Like a dot.

**DEME:** Like a bite?

**TINA:** I dunno. And then he got a fever and the sweats and more splotches and we kept givin' him water but it didn't help and then he...

**DEME:** We have to leave.

**ROMULUS:** Leave? Why?

**EVE:** Adam, what's going on?

**DEME:** Leave for good.

**IKE:** There's nothing wrong with us.

**DEME:** And Dare's just tired. Right, Ikey?

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*(Tina can't help herself. She drinks voraciously from the kiddie pool.)*

**SCRUBS:** Tina, you're drinking the party water.

**DEME:** Show us your splotches.

**IKE:** We gave our part to Dare, that's all.

**DEME:** I bet you got 'em too.

*(Until the end of the scene, Deme keeps her distance from Ike and Tina.)*

**IKE:** Tina, stop it!

*(Tina stops drinking again.)*

**DEME:** We've gotta go.

**ROMULUS:** Where?

**DEME:** I don't know yet. North.

**ROMULUS:** Why do we have to go anywhere?

**EVE:** Yeah. We live here.

**DEME:** *(To Eve:)* Nobody says you have to go anywhere.

**ROMULUS:** So why do I?

**ADAM:** You can stay with us.

**DEME:** How long do you think you got?

**EVE:** Yeah. Stay with us.

**DEME:** How long 'til you get whatever they got?

**ADAM:** We go out there, we get water whacked for sure.

**SCRUBS:** I ain't gettin' water whacked.

**DEME:** For what? For our nothing?

**ADAM:** They won't know that.

**DEME:** There's no they. When's the last time we even heard a voice?

**ROMULUS:** *(Beat – indicating Ike and Tina:)* We can't just leave 'em here.

*(Deme starts to pack. Beat. Romulus seethes, but he joins Deme in packing, getting road clothes, etc. Adam, Eve and Scrubs follow suit.)*

**DEME:** And we didn't. *(Beat.)* I had a string from the place where the cans had almost run out.

*(She lets the string go, and Ike grabs it. Deme begins to walk, and it unravels until it extends across the stage. Adam, Eve, Romulus and Scrubs walk near Deme, while Ike and Tina walk at the end of the string, with Ike holding it.)*

That was how far they had to be. Romey wouldn't look at me for three days. But none of us caught what they had. And on the fourth day –

*(Ike lets go of the string, and the lights fade on him and Tina.)*

It could have been any of us. It could have been all of us. *(To Romulus:)* It could have been you.

**ROMULUS:** Don't expect me to say thanks. *(Beat.)* And now what?

**DEME:** We keep going.

**ROMULUS:** What's wrong with here?

**DEME:** Too hot.

**ADAM:** It's perfect.

**EVE:** Yeah. I love it.

**DEME:** It'll get worse.

**ADAM:** We're almost out of cans. We gotta restock.

**DEME:** From where? Got a better chance up north.

**ADAM:** Yeah—of runnin' out.

**DEME:** I heard buzzing last night.

**ROMULUS:** Every time you hear a bug now we move?

**EVE:** I don't think so.

**SCRUBS:** You don't even know that's what happened.

**ROMULUS:** Not for sure.

**ADAM:** *(Running at Eve:)* Buggggzzz... Bzzz...

**EVE:** *(Playing:)* Don't let it get me!

*(Adam chases Eve. Scrubs joins in. Even Romulus gets into it, as they run all over the stage, with Romulus ultimately pantomiming a horrible death just as he looks up to realize that he's surrounded by TEENAGE GIRLS armed with makeshift weapons. Your production can use as many women as it likes, but there should be enough that the five characters already on stage appear to be in jeopardy.)*

**SCENE 3**

*(Very theatrically, perhaps even as a dance sequence – but more hip-hop/street/modern than ballet – the armed Teenage Girls break apart the group, prodding them in separate directions. One by one, they are whirled toward DOC, female, 18 or 19 and wearing a surgical-style mask and gloves, then returned to the middle – all except for Romulus, who disappears completely. Deme, Adam, Eve and Scrubs are left alone on stage.)*

**DEME:** How long has it been? *(Beat.)* It's been too long. *(Beat – to the now vanished Teenage Girls:)* Hey! Why you takin' so long on him? *(Pause.)* Hey!

*(A liquid-filled metal canister rolls onto the stage. They eye it suspiciously.)*

**SCRUBS:** What is it?

**DEME:** Don't touch it.

**SCRUBS:** But what is it?

**ADAM:** Maybe it's a bomb.

**EVE:** Don't play.

**ADAM:** I'll protect you, baby.

**SCRUBS:** *(Poking at it very gently:)* It's squishy.

**DEME:** It's metal. *(Beat.)* I said hey!

**SCRUBS:** Maybe they killed him, and that's his blood.

*(Deme leaps at Scrubs, who zips out of the way. Adam and Eve restrain Deme.)*

**ADAM:** *(To Scrubs:)* You shut up. *(To Deme:)* Come on – you know she's just trouble with legs. *(Beat.)* You good?

**DEME:** As long as she stays over there.

*(Adam and Eve let Deme go, though both stay close. Deme feints at Scrubs, who flinches and keeps her distance.)*

**ADAM:** If everybody's too creepers to look, I'll do it.

**EVE:** Careful, baby!

*(He gets in front of it. Studies it. Beat. He opens it, then gets down and sniffs.)*

**ADAM:** Water.

**DEME:** Sure?

*(Beat. He tips it toward his mouth.)*

**EVE:** Adam!

*(He sips.)*

**ADAM:** Wet. Water.

**EVE:** They gave us water?

*(Eve and Deme gather around for their drink, but Scrubs hangs back.)*

**DEME:** Save some for Romey.

**SCRUBS:** *(Beat.)* What about me?

*(Deme gives her a long look, then turns away.)*

I miss the party pool.

*(Deme steps out of the scene.)*

**DEME:** Scrubs is—

*(Scrubs walks into Deme's "out of time" moment.)*

**SCRUBS:** I can talk about myself.

**DEME:** Scrubs has no sense of boundaries.

**SCRUBS:** So? *(Beat.)* Fine.

*(Scrubs goes back into the scene.)*

**DEME:** That's how she's been since we found her. Yeah, if she does the tellin', she'll leave out the part where she's a stick-thin carcass on the side of the road a few hours short of a prophet to send her home. But as cold as the body's goin', the eyes are fire. She shoulda been dead a week before we found her, but those eyes didn't believe they should close. *(Beat.)* Those eyes believe in the polar bears too. Even if sometimes I want to stick my fist so far up that big mouth it's gonna come out the back of her head and wave.

*(The lights shift.)*

Give her a sip. *(To Scrubs:)* But count to 100 in your head before you swallow it. Slow.

**SCRUBS:** But —

**DEME:** 100.

**EVE:** *(Sidling up to Deme:)* Do you get more out of it that way?

**DEME:** I just want her to shut up for a couple minutes.

*(The lights fade on them and up on where Romulus stands alone. CASSIE, same age as Romulus and dressed in a green meets punk motif, as are most of the others of her settlement, watches him, cautious but compelled. A pair of Guards from the raiding party stand at a watchful distance.)*

**ANDI:** *(Off:)* Don't go near him.

**CASSIE:** I'm not.

**ROMULUS:** Where's Deme?

**ANDI:** *(Off:)* You are.

**ROMULUS:** Where's my sister?

**CASSIE:** The other ones aren't broken. Why should he be?



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*(Doc, backpack slung over her shoulders, approaches.)*

**DOC:** Only takes one. *(To Romulus:)* Turn out your pockets.

*(Romulus obeys.)*

**ROMULUS:** What are you doing?

**DOC:** I'm a doctor.

*(She shoves a thermometer in his mouth.)*

**ROMULUS:** There's nothing—

**DOC:** Don't talk.

**CASSIE:** He's fine.

**DOC:** *(To Cassie:)* Move back.

*(She pulls the thermometer out of his mouth and checks it.)*

**ROMULUS:** You can't be a doctor. You're my sister's age.

**DOC:** *(Meaning he's not sick:)* OK.

*(Doc takes off her mask.)*

Welcome to New San Francisco.

*(Lights up on the rest of the stage – and the entirely recycled set of New San Francisco, which can be as elaborate or as suggested as your production needs. Deme, Adam, Eve and Scrubs are there, reunited with Romulus. Deme hugs him tight.)*

**SCRUBS:** *(Looking around her:)* Rock on!

**ROMULUS:** I'm fine.

**DEME:** I didn't know what—

**ROMULUS:** I'm fine. *(Beat – not so harsh:)* I'm fine. Really.

*(Deme nods.)*

**SCRUBS:** Rock on hard...

**DEME:** New San Francisco.

**ANDI:** We started with nothing.

*(Each New San Francisco Chorus line is meant to be said by a different individual, though it is possible for your production to experiment with having the same line said by multiple actors at once.)*

**NEW SAN FRANCISCO CHORUS:** We love it here.  
We like it.

**ANDI:** Everything is made out of something that was before.

**NEW SAN FRANCISCO CHORUS:** We have a stream.  
We think it's clean.

**ADAM:** I smelled the water, and it doesn't smell.

**NEW SAN FRANCISCO CHORUS:** We boil it in case, but we  
think it's clean.

**ANDI:** We heat our water with the sun.

**NEW SAN FRANCISCO CHORUS:** Can't be too careful.  
Not after what happened before.

**CASSIE:** Warm showers.

**NEW SAN FRANCISCO CHORUS:** A sauna.  
We got a spa.

**SCRUBS:** Rock on.

**NEW SAN FRANCISCO CHORUS:** We have light here.  
Cooking.  
And a garden.  
Steamed veggies.

**ROMULUS:** No more fishing in dark holes for cans.

**EVE:** New San Francisco.

**ANDI:** And it was good.

**CASSIE:** As good as it gets.

**NEW SAN FRANCISCO CHORUS:** Don't forget the windmill. Two next week.

Then three.

Our carbon footprint...

**CASSIE:** Invisible.

**ANDI:** Give more than we take.

**EVE:** New San Francisco.

Sun, wind, water – starting over.

Makes it feel like home.

**NEW SAN FRANCISCO CHORUS:** Some of the plants aren't as green as they were.

Some of the plants are turning brown.

There's not as much water as there was.

There's water on the other side of the mountains.

Salt water.

The other side of the mountains is underwater.

With water we can't drink.

**ANDI:** Water for the plants.

**CASSIE:** I see green again.

**NEW SAN FRANCISCO CHORUS:** Breathe again.

We can all breathe again.

Cassie sees it.

The visions.

They're never wrong. It'll all heal.

**ADAM:** I could get used to this, baby. Livin' the spa life.

**EVE:** Spa. Why is everybody so nutty about spa?

**ADAM:** Compared to before, this is heaven.

**ANDI:** You help, you can stay.

**EVE:** Tell me what spa is right now, or I'm gonna scream.

**SCRUBS:** I want to see me some plants.

**FIRST TEEN GIRL:** I'll show you.

**SECOND TEEN GIRL:** We garden.

**ADAM:** Spa is the most beautiful word in the world.

**SCRUBS:** Can I garden?

**EVE:** More beautiful than party pool?

**FIRST TEEN GIRL:** Rock on, girl.

**SCRUBS:** (*Recognizing a kindred spirit:*) Rock on!

*(Scrubs exits with the First and Second Teen Girls.)*

**ADAM:** Somebody take us to the spa.

**EVE:** To the spa!

*(The Third and Fourth Teen Girl [or any others from the New San Francisco Chorus] escort Adam and Eve offstage.)*

**ROMULUS:** I'll do something. We help we can stay, right?

**ANDI:** That's right.

**ROMULUS:** What you want me to do?

**DEME:** (*Sotto to Romulus:*) We're not staying.

**ROMULUS:** Why not?

**ANDI:** What can you do?

**DEME:** Not the right place.

**ROMULUS:** Why not? (*To Andi:*) What needs doin'?

**DEME:** This valley's dying.

**ROMULUS:** You got it flipped. They're bringing it back. (*To Andi:*) You got something for me, right?

**ANDI:** We got work for everybody that wants it.

**ROMULUS:** I want it.

**DEME:** There are no polar bears here.

**ROMULUS:** How do you know they're anywhere?

**ANDI:** The water in the valley is headed this way. We're gonna dam it up, use it for the gardens. You can help with that.

**DEME:** (*To Andi:*) Thanks, but we won't be staying.

**ANDI:** If we can just get the salt out.

**ROMULUS:** I'll help.

**DEME:** We'll do what we need for a couple weeks of road food.

**ROMULUS:** I don't care about stupid polar bears.

**ANDI:** Polar bears?

**DEME:** We're going north. That's where they are.

**ANDI:** Polar bears are killers.

**DEME:** We'll be safe there.

**ANDI:** You're safe here.

**DEME:** Are we?

**ANDI:** Things are good here.

**ROMULUS:** I want to stay.

**ANDI:** (*Beat.*) You don't look for a killer—unless you want to die.

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**SCENE 4**

*(Later that day. Cassie approaches Romulus, who writes in a small, ratty notebook. Andi and Deme are in their respective corners of the stage, unlit.)*

**CASSIE:** Dinner's almost ready.

**ROMULUS:** Not from a can?

**CASSIE:** Not from a can. What's that?

**ROMULUS:** Helps me remember things.

**CASSIE:** What kind of things?

**ROMULUS:** Things I don't want to forget.

*(There's an awkward silence.)*

**CASSIE:** Sorry about my sister.

**ROMULUS:** Sorry about my sister.

*(Another awkward silence.)*

**CASSIE:** Not your fault.

**ROMULUS:** Not your fault.

*(Again, awkward, but there's a shared recognition of the ridiculousness of the moment, and a hint of attraction in the air.)*

**CASSIE:** What's it like?

**ROMULUS:** What?

**CASSIE:** Out there.

*(Romulus shrugs.)*

What's that mean?

**ROMULUS:** Sometimes stuff just *is*, you know?

**CASSIE:** *Is* good or *is* bad?

**ROMULUS:** How come there's no other guys?

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**CASSIE:** Sometimes stuff just *is*. (*Beat.*) There were, where we used to be. The twins, Matthew and Luke. Then there was John...and Peter. Peter was the funny one. He'd find these dead flowers on the ground, and he'd try to water them with spit and give them to me. One time, his mouth is so dry, there's hardly any spit and what there is can't get into the air—only he doesn't know it. And so he smiles and gives me these dead dandelions and then he realizes he's got this glob all over his chin, and he's trying to get it with his tongue while he's still smiling and bowing and holding out the flowers. I'm like, "Peter, I think the dandelions could use a few more drops." And he says, "I think you're right." And he wipes them on his chin and put them in my hand. (*Beat.*) He was the first to go. Andi says that's so he could be at the gates for us. I don't know what that means. I just know he's gone.

**ROMULUS:** I think I would've liked him.

(*Cassie nods.*)

**CASSIE:** And then we left and found this place.

**ROMULUS:** Why do they say you see things?

**CASSIE:** Because I do.

**ROMULUS:** How?

(*Cassie shrugs.*)

**CASSIE:** (*Beat.*) I've got some pictures before the—Andi calls it Tipping Day.

**ROMULUS:** Pictures of what?

**CASSIE:** (*Continuing her thought:*) Like it was happening a little all the time. Just a little. So little you don't even notice. Until one day it just...tipped.

(*She pantomimes a tipping motion with her hands.*)

**ROMULUS:** I want to see the pictures.

**CASSIE:** It's almost like that here. Like it was before.

**ROMULUS:** Please.

**CASSIE:** I can show you.

**ROMULUS:** I'd like that.

*(He reaches out and takes her hand. Enter Adam and Eve.)*

**EVE:** The spa!

*(Enter Scrubs from another direction.)*

**ADAM AND EVE:** *(Rocking out:)* Spa spa spa [etc.]

**EVE:** They've got this glass that makes the rocks hot.

**ADAM:** From the sun.

**EVE:** And they steam.

**ADAM:** Best ever...

**SCRUBS:** What about the party pool?

**ROMULUS:** That was good times.

**ADAM:** That was nothing.

**CASSIE:** What's the party pool?

**EVE:** Zero.

**ADAM:** The spa is the new party pool.

**ROMULUS:** Just this place we used to go.

**ADAM:** The party pool is dead. Long live the party spa.

**SCRUBS:** The party spa.

**ADAM, EVE AND SCRUBS:** Party spa! Party spa! [etc.]

*(It looks like they're about to parade off.)*



**ANDI:** Dinner time.

**ADAM, EVE AND SCRUBS:** Party spa...

**ADAM:** After dinner! Party spa—

**EVE, SCRUBS AND ROMULUS:** After dinner!

*(All start to dance offstage as the lights dim, herded by Andi.)*

**ROMULUS:** You should come.

**CASSIE:** I've been to the spa before.

**ROMULUS:** But not the party spa!

*(Romulus and Cassie hurry to catch up. Deme remains, almost reclusive in one corner, watching.)*

**SCENE 5**

*(After dinner. From offstage, we hear "party spa, party spa" and other improvised sounds of fun. On stage, Cassie and Andi are in one area, and Romulus and Deme are in another. The conversations are separate, though intertwined.)*

**ROMULUS:** Come on—everybody's there.

**DEME:** The party spa?

**ANDI:** This is a bad idea.

**CASSIE:** Come on—it's just one night.

**ROMULUS:** *(Singing the jingle from before:)* Friday night is party night.

**ANDI:** Pretty soon it'll be just one more night and one more night after that—

**DEME:** How do you even know it's Friday?

**ROMULUS:** The magic watch that never stops.

**CASSIE:** You say you want it to be normal, but you don't want us to do normal things.

**ANDI:** The party spa is normal?

**DEME:** Things don't stay forever, Romey.

**CASSIE:** Romey says it'll be the most fun I ever had.

**ANDI:** Romey?

**ROMULUS:** You always see the worst in everything.

**ANDI:** *(Realizing Cassie likes him – teasing:)* Romey...well, if Romey says...

**DEME:** I see what's real.

**ANDI:** Romey Romey Romey...

**CASSIE:** (*Embarrassed:*) Stop.

**ANDI:** Romey —

**CASSIE:** Stop.

**ANDI:** (*Finishes "Romeo":*) —O.

**ROMULUS:** Your polar bears aren't real.

**CASSIE:** Did you just smile?

**ANDI:** No.

**DEME:** They are.

**ROMULUS:** They're ghosts. It's like some guy a long time ago said, "I think there's some polar bears up north." Or maybe he didn't even say up north. Maybe your head made that up. Maybe all he said was "I saw polar bears once. At the zoo. Before everything fell apart. Before it all tipped."

**ANDI:** You still see it green, right?

**CASSIE:** Green as grass grows.

**ANDI:** (*Beat.*) Go — with Romey.

**CASSIE:** Thanks!

*(Cassie gives Andi a hug and starts to go, lingering at the edge of the stage as if waiting for Romulus.)*

**ROMULUS:** You should come.

**DEME:** We need to go.

**ROMULUS:** Come on — it'll be like it used to be. Only better.

**DEME:** (*Beat.*) I'll look. For a minute.

*(He meets up with Cassie.)*

**ROMULUS:** To the party spa!

*(He starts to leave with Cassie, then reaches back and tugs at*

*Deme. She gives in and exits with them.)*

## SCENE 6

*(Enter Scrubs, fresh from the party spa. She should have her own light, and Deme should stay unlit and almost invisible.)*

**SCRUBS:** Deme ain't watchin', so I finally get to speak my mind. Whole time we're partyin' it up at the spa, she's watchin' us. I can't barely enjoy the wet hot 'cause I can feel her staring a hole through me, through everybody. *(Beat.)* And while we're on the subject, that part about me being half-dead, that's what we call an exaggeration. For real I'm just sleepin on the side of the road, catchin' my breath. Don't let her tell you different. My mom is sleepin' too. *(Beat.)* Only reason I even stick with her is that sometimes she teaches me stuff, only I hate all the stuff she teaches me. It's boring and useless. Like the word euphemism. Sleeping is a euphemism for dead.

*(The lights come up across more of the stage, and Scrubs joins Romulus, Adam, Eve, Cassie and some of the New San Franciscans, all dressed as if they've just come from the party spa – perhaps similarly to their party pool attire of earlier. Deme observes from a distance, and Andi enters sometime during this choral moment. Each of these lines could be said by any of the New San Franciscans, or anyone but Deme, Cassie, Romulus or Andi.)*

**CHORUS OF NEW SAN FRANCISCANS:** She needs to stop staring.

She needs to stop talking.

Maybe she's right.

The ground is turning browner.

The plants are dying.

You're imagining it.

She says it, and now you're seeing it.

Listen to Cassie, not to her.

*(To Romulus:)* Why did you bring her to the party spa?

She ruined everything.  
 The garden is fine.  
 Not if we waste the water.  
 You sound like her.  
 You sound like my mother.  
 I miss my mom.  
 I miss mine too.

*(Suddenly – and it's possible there could be a lighting change – the chorus shifts into an expressionistic moment that they are reliving:)*

**CHORUS OF NEW SAN FRANCISCANS:** Breaking news: units of the California National Guard have opened fire on Nevadans guarding the Colorado River aquifer.

The governor of California has denied all responsibility and said –

These units are acting alone.

Planes are coming.

Anonymous sources confirm California acted while it still had sufficient supplies of oil to carry out an attack.

Nevada retaliates.

Mass evacuations of flooded coastal regions are underway.

Fires are burning out of control and there is not enough water to put them out.

People are being left for dead.

On the side of the road.

Or worse.

There is panic.

Things are falling apart.

Breaking down.

It's chaos.

**ANDI:** Stop!

*(All comes to a grinding halt. Silence. It's as if that choral*

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*moment never was – almost.)*

*(Mostly directed at Deme:)* There was a man. A week ago.

**CASSIE:** What man?

**ANDI:** A man in the valley. I didn't tell you. He was just passing through. No reason to tell you about a man just passing through. *(Beat.)* I gave him half my water. He says, "You give me the other half, I'll tell you a story you won't never believe, but that don't mean it's a lie." I pour him all but one mouthful, and he moves real close and whispers, "The polar bears. They're real, and I know where they are." No matter what I say, he won't say another word. "I've said too much," he says, and he takes a swallow, and then he's gone.

**DEME:** Where did he go?

*(Andi points north.)*

A week?

**ANDI:** Give or take.

**CASSIE:** Why didn't you say something?

**ANDI:** Maybe 10.

**CASSIE:** You should have said something.

**ANDI:** Like what? A man came and then he left. It's not like the world ended. People are out there.

**CASSIE:** Not around here.

**DEME:** *(To Romulus:)* We'll leave soon as it's light.

**ADAM:** Not me.

**EVE:** We like it here. At the spa.

**ANDI:** You work, you stay.

**EVE:** Adam and Eve, workers

Party weekends at the spa  
Good, better and best.

**ADAM:** That's it, baby.

**DEME:** Nobody says you gotta come.

**SCRUBS:** I'm not goin' neither.

**DEME:** Either.

**SCRUBS:** *Either way, I'm stayin' here.*

**ADAM:** If we gotta work tomorrow, then tonight...I'm going back to the party spa!

**SCRUBS:** Rock on!

**EVE:** Woohoo!

*(Adam, Eve and Scrubs take off running, along with most of the New San Franciscans. Beat.)*

**CASSIE:** I'll go.

**ANDI:** *(Not expecting this:)* What?!

**CASSIE:** I said I'm going.

**ANDI:** No.

**CASSIE:** I wasn't asking.

**ANDI:** You're too young.

**CASSIE:** I'm almost 16.

**ANDI:** There's nothing out there.

**CASSIE:** There's a man.

**ANDI:** There's no —

**CASSIE:** How do you know if you never go? For three years, it's been us all alone, this tiny little miracle, but the water's



creeping in the valley—

**ANDI:** We're damming it up.

**CASSIE:** But is that all there is? Is this all there's ever gonna be?

**ANDI:** How do you know it'll be any better out there?

**DEME:** There's hope out there.

**ANDI:** *(To Deme:)* This isn't your business.

**DEME:** *(To Cassie:)* One day real soon, we're going to get to a place that's going to make this all look like a lot of nothing.

**ROMULUS:** I don't know if I can do this again.

**DEME:** *(Beat.)* Romey?

**ANDI:** *(To Cassie:)* We're making it work here.

**ROMULUS:** I said I wanted to stay here.

**DEME:** But it's different now.

**CASSIE:** Making it work...

**DEME:** Now there's a man says the same thing.

**ROMULUS:** Is there?

**DEME:** *(Continuing her thought:)* They're real for sure.

**ANDI:** *(Responding to Cassie:)* That's right.

**ROMULUS:** This isn't a bad place.

**DEME:** I never said it was.

**CASSIE:** But for how long?

**DEME:** It's not where we need to be.

**ANDI:** Don't listen to her. It's New San Francisco—we can turn it into anything we want.

**DEME:** I'm leaving in the morning.

**CASSIE:** I'm coming with.

**ANDI:** You said so yourself. It'll be green.

**DEME:** They're not ghosts, Romey.

**ROMULUS:** First the party pool, now the party spa. Why you always want to leave the good stuff?

**ANDI:** There's work and food and plenty of water...you can stay here with Romey, and we can make it anything you want it to be.

**CASSIE:** The green I saw – it's not here.

*(Deme walks out of the scene, as all else freezes – but this time, Romulus joins her.)*

**ROMULUS:** My watch stopped.

**DEME:** Wasn't going to last forever.

**ROMULUS:** *(Beat.)* Say we find 'em – what then?

**DEME:** I don't know. But I think when we do, we'll know what to do. *(Beat – she steps into her own moment:)* The ground is white. The air is crisp, and it feels fresh on our skin and blowing through our hair, but not cold. And the water runs in a clear stream. We'll lie down to rest and the ground will be soft like fur. Like baby polar bears. And we'll sleep and wake up refreshed, ready to begin again.

*(Deme rejoins Romulus.)*

**ROMULUS:** I'm afraid without my watch.

*(Cassie joins them, as the lights fade on all but the three of them.)*

**DEME:** *(Pointing into the evening sky:)* See that star? We'll just keep walking toward it.

**CASSIE:** It looks like the tip of a bear's tail.

**ROMULUS:** What if we never get there?

**DEME:** We'll just keep walking.

*(The lights fade to black. End of Act I.)*

**ACT II: URSA MAJOR****SCENE 1**

*(North of New San Francisco. A blighted landscape in the early evening. Deme enters ahead of Romulus and Cassie. All are dressed for the road, their heads well-covered to shield them from the sun. They stop and survey their surroundings. Cassie looks back at where they came.)*

**CASSIE:** I can't see the lights.

**ROMULUS:** Maybe they didn't turn them on yet.

**CASSIE:** It's getting dark. They shoulda turned them on.

*(Romulus taps his watch, trying to get it to work.)*

Maybe something's wrong.

**DEME:** We're over a hill. Two hills. We can't see it from here.  
*(Beat.)* We'll rest now.

*(Deme pulls out food from her pack.)*

Don't eat too much.

**CASSIE:** Took all we could carry.

**DEME:** Don't know how long it's gotta last.

**CASSIE:** The fresh'll go bad if we don't eat it.

**ROMULUS:** I think I can fix this.

**DEME:** The battery's dead.

**ROMULUS:** I'm gonna fix it!

**DEME:** You can't.

**CASSIE:** *(Beat.)* Hey – guess what I brought.

**DEME:** What?

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**CASSIE:** Romey, guess what I brought. (*Beat.*) Pictures.

**ROMULUS:** The pictures from before?!

*(Cassie opens her pack and pulls out an envelope that is wrapped several times. She unwraps it carefully as Deme and Romulus gather around. She presents the first picture.)*

**CASSIE:** That's Venice.

**ROMULUS:** Where's that?

**DEME:** It was part of Los Angeles...before.

**ROMULUS:** And now?

**DEME:** Gone. (*Beat.*) There used to be this place, Muscle Beach. It was famous. All these big, big guys right by the Boardwalk, arms bigger than your legs. *Both* your legs.

**ROMULUS:** No way.

**CASSIE:** I think I heard of that.

**ROMULUS:** I never heard of —

**DEME:** Shh!

**ROMULUS:** What?

*(Deme holds up a hand for silence. Beat.)*

**DEME:** (*Quietly:*) There's someone out there.

**ROMULUS:** I don't hear any —

**DEME:** Someone's there.

**ROMULUS:** Maybe it's just a dog.

**DEME:** When's the last time you saw a dog?

**ROMULUS:** Why do you never listen to anything I say?

**DEME:** Try being right once.

**ROMULUS:** I am too—

**CASSIE:** I feel it too.

**ROMULUS:** *(Beat.)* What do we do?

**DEME:** Act normal. Keep talking.

*(Romulus starts to reach for his makeshift weapon.)*

Don't.

**ROMULUS:** But—

**DEME:** *(Forced:)* Show us another one.

*(Romulus stops himself, but his hand doesn't go too far from his weapon.)*

**ROMULUS:** We can't just sit around and—

**DEME:** *(Sotto:)* What do you want us to do? *(Louder:)* Cassie, what other ones you got?

*(Cassie pulls out a trio of picture postcards.)*

**CASSIE:** The world's biggest ball of yarn.

**DEME:** What if there's 10 of them out there?

**CASSIE:** It's weird. There's three pictures. Always thought they were the same, just shot from different sides or something.

**ROMULUS:** We just gonna wait until they come?

**CASSIE:** But one says Nevada, one says Minnesota, and one says Illinois.

**DEME:** I'm not goin' out into the nowhere til I know what's what.

**CASSIE:** They can't all be the biggest.

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**ROMULUS:** *(Beat.)* You ever just wish you could walk into the postcard?

**CASSIE:** You wanna walk into the world's biggest ball of yarn?

*(Romulus steps into his own light and out of real time.)*

**ROMULUS:** I wanna sit on the green grass and feel the wind, and there's no desert dust—it's just cool and clean and it blows through my hair. And the sun is warm, but it's not hot and burning. It's soft and it's...you can feel the grass on your toes. It's soft and spongy and every blade smells green and alive. And it's like this perfect moment: me, the world's biggest ball of yarn that's in Nevada or Minnesota or Illinois, but it doesn't matter and there's this feeling that you just can't explain, only you don't ever want to leave it. Like my mom's hand on my shoulder.

*(Lights come back up.)*

Did Mom have soft hands?

**DEME:** Romey, it's been so long.

**ROMULUS:** Did she?

**DEME:** I was six.

**ROMULUS:** *(Beat.)* Deme?

**DEME:** Her face flutters in and out of my head. Can't lock it in.

**ROMULUS:** Try to remember. Please.

**DEME:** *(Beat.)* She had...elegant hands.

**ROMULUS:** Elegant.

**DEME:** They were pale.

**ROMULUS:** Were they soft?

**DEME:** They were perfect.

**ROMULUS:** I knew it.

**CASSIE:** *(Beat.)* It's only one person.

**DEME:** How do you —

**CASSIE:** Because I do. *(To Deme:)* You know the one.

**DEME:** That one?

**CASSIE:** That one.

**DEME:** *(Beat.)* You comin' out, or you gonna keep snake slinking behind us?

*(Beat. Scrubs comes out of the darkness.)*

**SCRUBS:** What you lookin' at?

**ROMULUS:** Nothin'.

**DEME:** *(Beat. To Scrubs:)* You hungry?

**SCRUBS:** Maybe.

*(Deme parcels out some food, but doesn't give it to Scrubs yet.)*

**CASSIE:** Why are you here?

**SCRUBS:** What you got?

**CASSIE:** *(To Scrubs:)* My sister send you?

**ROMULUS:** What you doin' here?

**SCRUBS:** Sittin. What you doin'?

**ROMULUS:** Eatin'.

**CASSIE:** Is my sister OK?

**SCRUBS:** Right as...how's that go? Right as...



**DEME:** Rain.

**SCRUBS:** What's that?

**DEME:** You know what rain is.

**SCRUBS:** Ain't never seen it.

**ROMULUS:** I ever seen it?

**DEME:** When you were little.

**CASSIE:** Answer my question.

**DEME:** Rain's dried up and turned to spit.

**SCRUBS:** She's right as rain.

**CASSIE:** Romey, make her —

**ROMULUS:** Scrubs, quit the riddles.

**SCRUBS:** I'm hungry.

*(Deme pulls the food away.)*

**DEME:** Tell.

*(Scrubs reaches out for the food. Deme again moves it away.)*

**ROMULUS:** You heard her.

**SCRUBS:** *(To Romulus:)* I'm not scared of you.

**CASSIE:** You will be.

*(Cassie moves toward her threateningly. Deme gets between them.)*

**ECHO:** *(Off:)* You will be.

*(The others stop their jostling.)*

**DEME:** What was that?

**ECHO:** *(Off:)* What was that?

**DEME:** You hear it?

**ECHO:** (*Off:*) You hear it?

**CASSIE:** It's an echo.

**ECHO:** (*Off:*) It's an echo.

**ROMULUS:** Echo don't sound like somebody else.

**ECHO:** (*Off:*) Echo don't sound like somebody else.

*(They pull together so that they can't be overheard.)*

**ROMULUS:** Is it one?

**SCRUBS:** I hear one.

**DEME:** Don't mean it's the only one.

**ROMULUS:** (*To Deme:*) You shouldn'ta picked here.

**DEME:** You were tired.

**ROMULUS:** Wasn't.

**SCRUBS:** (*Mocking Romulus:*) Oh, Deme, make me a bed and tuck me, I'm so tired.

**ROMULUS:** Shut it, Scrubs.

**ECHO:** (*Off:*) Shut it, Scrubs.

**DEME:** (*To Scrubs:*) One more word I will throw you back into the nowhere.

**SCRUBS:** Nah you wouldn't.

**DEME:** Try.

**SCRUBS:** Try.

**ECHO:** (*Off:*) Try.

**DEME:** Don't you start.

**ECHO:** (*Off:*) Don't you start.

**DEME:** (*Beat.*) Hello?

**ECHO:** *(Off:)* Hello?

**DEME:** Who's there?

**ECHO:** *(Off:)* Who's there?

**DEME:** What's your name?

**ECHO:** *(Off:)* What's your name?

*(Cassie and Romulus grab their weapons and start to sneak off, but Deme holds up a hand and they stop.)*

**DEME:** Are you hungry?

**ECHO:** *(Off:)* Are you hungry?

**ROMULUS:** We don't have enough—

**DEME:** We'll feed him Scrubs if she doesn't shut it. *(Putting food on the ground nearby:)* I'm putting it right here.

*(There's a long silence.)*

It's right here. Just come and get it.

*(Another long silence.)*

**CASSIE:** He stopped.

**SCRUBS:** I ain't sleepin' with a creeper out in the nowhere.

**ROMULUS:** A creeper like you?

**SCRUBS:** Was not.

**ROMULUS:** Sneakin' like half a shadow.

**SCRUBS:** You knew it was me. Can't be creepin' if you knew it was me.

**ROMULUS:** *(Beat.)* Now what?

**DEME:** Wait.

**CASSIE:** Let us go out into the—

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**DEME:** Light's fadin'.

**CASSIE:** We got time.

**DEME:** Not for a nowhere we don't know.

*(Long silence.)*

**ROMULUS:** I'm not as happy as I was.

**DEME:** *(Beat.)* 'Cause you're older.

**ROMULUS:** Older is sad?

**DEME:** Older knows more. Weighs your brain.

**SCRUBS:** Like rocks.

**ROMULUS:** I'm starting to forget the party pool. I know it was there. I know we went swimming.

**SCRUBS:** We went dancing—

**ROMULUS:** But I can't see it. *(Beat. Half-singing:)* Friday night is party night. *(Not singing:)* I sang that.

**SCRUBS:** Bad as bricks.

**ROMULUS:** *(Singing again:)* Friday night is party night. Make the work week come out right. *(Not singing:)* And then we'd get the party water and swim in the party pool—

**SCRUBS:** And then we left and Tina and Ike went goners and we went to the party spa and Adam and Eve stayed and she came with and I came back and now we're here. The end.

*(Enter ECHO. He is no more than Scrubs' age, preferably younger if your production has access to a younger acting pool. He speaks with a stutter, except when he echoes another character.)*

**ECHO:** I-i-is th-th-that a-a-a stuh-stuh-stuh-uh-r-ry?

**SCRUBS:** A what?

**ECHO:** A what?

**DEME:** A story?

*(Echo nods. Beat as he calculates the path to the food and whether he can make it there safely. He goes for the food and eats like he hasn't eaten in forever.)*

**SCRUBS:** We gonna watch him eat?

**DEME:** He needs it more than you.

**SCRUBS:** How you know?

**DEME:** When I found you—

**SCRUBS:** *(Imitating Deme:)* You was a stick-thin carcass on the side of the road, a few hours short of a prophet to send you home. *(As herself:)* Heard you 'til the rain comes.

*(Cassie glides toward Echo.)*

**CASSIE:** It's good, isn't it?

*(Echo continues to eat, but gets jumpy as Cassie draws closer.)*

I'm not gonna hurt you.

**ECHO:** I'm not gonna hurt you.

**CASSIE:** *(Indicates herself:)* Cassie.

*(Silence.)*

Do you have a name?

**ECHO:** Do you have a name?

**CASSIE:** *(Beat.)* What if we call you...Echo? *(Points at him:)* Echo.

**ECHO:** Echo.

**CASSIE:** Do you live near here?

*(Silence. Scrubs starts to yank at his dish. He tries to hold onto it.)*

It's OK.

**ECHO:** They d-d-don't l-l-et me b-b-be i-i-n-n the stuh-stuh-ry.

**CASSIE:** Who's they?

**DEME:** Who doesn't let you? *(Slapping at Scrubs' hand:)* Scrubs!

**ROMULUS:** What story?

*(Scrubs succeeds in grabbing the dish. Echo covers his ears and rocks.)*

**CASSIE:** Hey. Hey.

**DEME:** Scrubs, I mean it!

**SCRUBS:** You said not another word.

*(Romulus chases after Scrubs.)*

**CASSIE:** Look at this. *(Showing Echo the postcards:)* World's biggest ball of yarn.

**ECHO:** World's biggest ball of yarn.

*(Romulus chases Scrubs back toward Deme, who grabs the dish back. Scrubs makes herself scarce, getting as far away as possible as Deme puts the food back in front of Echo, who eats.)*

W-w-what's ya-ya yarn?

**CASSIE:** Yarn is — it's... *(To Romulus:)* What's yarn exactly?

*(Romulus thinks, then shrugs.)*

**DEME:** It's like string.

*(That doesn't help Echo.)*

String?

**ECHO:** String?

*(Deme searches in her pack and finds some string.)*

**DEME:** *(Holding it up:)* String.

**ECHO:** *(Examining it:)* String.

**DEME:** Where do you live?

**ECHO:** S-st-string.

*(He runs off with what's left of "his" food.)*

**DEME:** Hey!

*(Cassie and Deme exit after him. Beat. Enter Cassie and Deme. )*

He's gone.

**SCRUBS:** 'Course he is. You're slower than quicksand.

**DEME:** You don't even know what quicksand is.

**SCRUBS:** I know what it ain't.

**DEME:** What's that?

**SCRUBS:** Fast.

**CASSIE:** It's dark.

**SCRUBS:** So?

**CASSIE:** It's *his* dark.

**SCRUBS:** I can find him.

**ROMULUS:** If they couldn't catch him —

**SCRUBS:** He's got feet, don't he?

**CASSIE:** How's he gonna get away without feet?

**SCRUBS:** Feet leave tracks, and I'm tops at trackin' tracks.  
*(Beat.)* I tracked you, didn't I?

**ROMULUS:** You knew we were goin' this way.

**SCRUBS:** If I leave now –

**DEME:** You won't find him in the dark. We don't live in miracle days.

**SCRUBS:** We're alive. Ain't that miracle enough?

**DEME:** Wait 'til light.

**SCRUBS:** How we gonna sleep with him out there?

**CASSIE:** He's not scary.

**DEME:** One watches, the rest sleep.

**SCRUBS:** Yeah, but –

**DEME:** He was out there before.

**CASSIE:** Truth.

**ROMULUS:** Always someone out there in the somewhere.

**SCRUBS:** But –

**DEME:** But nothing.

**ROMULUS:** Nothing to be done.

**DEME:** (*Something sparks:*) Dad said that. (*Beat.*) You remember that?

**ROMULUS:** I said it.

**DEME:** I never told you that.

**ROMULUS:** Then I must remember.

**DEME:** Nothing to be done. (*Beat.*) Mom and Dad went to this play. Do you remember Amanda, who used to watch us? I was watching TV on the couch with Amanda until I fell asleep, and then Mom and Dad are home and Dad is saying "Nothing to be done" and chasing me around the living room.



Run run run nothing to be done! And he catches me and he tickles me and I scream from the tickling and he lets me go and starts all over. Mom is yelling don't wake Romey and Dad just keeps saying nothing to be done and finally we all fall and laugh on the floor. *(Beat.)* It was the one time Dad did something funny. *(Beat.)* One watches, three sleep.

**ROMULUS:** I'm not tired.

**DEME:** Wake me before you are.

*(Cassie, Deme and Scrubs pick their spots and settle down to sleep. Romulus keeps watch. Beat. Once he's sure they're asleep, he pulls out a ratty book – not his writing notebook.)*

**ROMULUS:** I found this book. We're going through a squat like we do when we find one that's got nobody in it, which is always. Water food weapons power coin clothes fun and games, always in that order. Stick to the order—it might save your life. And this squat—no, this *house*—is so beautiful I want to live in it forever. They got windows like you wouldn't believe, and a pool that makes the party pool look like a bucket. No, like a puddle. Only the water's gone of course. And they got a giant bed and an almost giant bed and then just a really big bed—they got so many beds you could sleep in a different bed every day for a week. And if I could just get one night in even the really big bed, but Deme says the big dead is right behind and gotta keep moving. So I'm grabbin' everything I can, everything I can fit in every pocket, and I open a door and it's a library. A library. With books. Fancy books with fancy covers and gold and silver writing. *(Beat.)* Water food weapons power coin clothes fun and games. Don't jump the order. No way does a book beat a can of tuna. No way does a book beat a can of anything. I can hear Deme screamin' at me in my head. And I look at all the gold and silver books and I know they're too big and let me just leave

now before I— It's so thin and the corner of the cover is folded over, but the cover has these two tiny people and this tree that looks dead and a whole lotta empty, and I just gotta have it, cause it looks like us. *(Beat.)* I read it when Deme's gone. I've read it 17 times. Except for the end. Somebody ripped out the last three pages. So I don't know if the man comes or not. *(From the play:)* Nothing to be done. *(Beat.)* I was two when Dad came home from the play, but I still remember. And when I do the play, I feel him watching. I know it's not his face I see, but it's my make-believe dad's face, and he's smiling.

*(Romulus continues to keep watch as the lights dim.)*

## SCENE 2

*(The next morning, Deme shakes Romulus awake. There is no sign of Scrubs or Cassie.)*

**ROMULUS:** I was having the best dream.

**DEME:** Daylight's burnin'.

**ROMULUS:** Let it burn.

**DEME:** Gonna burn you with it. *(Beat.)* It's dustin' those tracks by the second.

**ROMULUS:** Tracks to the nowhere.

**DEME:** Gotta be goin' somewhere. Too small to be alone.

**ROMULUS:** Lotta stuff shouldn't be but is. *(Beat.)* Just five more minutes.

**DEME:** How you gonna know five minutes?

**ROMULUS:** I'll count sheep.

**DEME:** How you gonna count sheep if you're asleep?

**ROMULUS:** It's a secret.

**DEME:** You don't even know what a sheep is.

**ROMULUS:** I read about 'em in one of those big empty houses. *(Brief pause.)* They looked so soft. This doesn't count in my sheep time.

**DEME:** There's no time to—

**ROMULUS:** Shhh... I'm sheeeping.

*(Beat. The lights come up elsewhere on stage. Scrubs, nearby but not close enough to be visible, looks at tracks when Cassie comes up on her.)*

**CASSIE:** Deme said don't wander.

**SCRUBS:** Nobody's the boss of me but me.

**CASSIE:** And while you're bossin', they're gonna ambush your pretty little face.

**SCRUBS:** My face is not pretty.

**CASSIE:** Yeah you got that right.

**SCRUBS:** Shut up. Ain't no ambush gonna ambush me.

**CASSIE:** Better check your memory.

**SCRUBS:** You're the one gonna bring 'em down on us. *(Beat.)* Why don't you go back to Romey. *(Mocking:)* Oh, Romey. Romey.

**CASSIE:** Least I got somebody.

**SCRUBS:** You got him?

**CASSIE:** Yeah. And he's got me.

**SCRUBS:** And Deme *(Snaps her fingers:)* and he'll be gone.

**CASSIE:** Maybe we'll all be gone and you'll be all alone in the nowhere.

**SCRUBS:** Suits me. *(Beat. Pointing at tracks:)* This is him.

**CASSIE:** You sure?

**SCRUBS:** Sure as sure it ain't gonna rain today.

*(Pause.)*

**CASSIE:** So now what?

**SCRUBS:** Well, you think she's gonna be more mad I ran off or more glad I found what needs finding?

**CASSIE:** If I had a coin, I'd flip it.

**SCRUBS:** Then you better tell her. Tell her and Romey. *(Indicating the tracks:)* I'll keep 'em fresh.

*(Scrubs makes as if to take cover, while Cassie walks back to camp. She stops.)*

**CASSIE:** I like Romey. How messed up is that? *(Beat.)* Maybe it's 'cause he's here and nobody else is. Maybe if I had more choices he wouldn't even be in my top 10. Maybe he wouldn't even be on the list. But he's the only boy I've seen in a long time, and I don't know yet if he's a great one, but I'm pretty sure he's at least a good one. *(Beat.)* I found this old video of my mom and dad, from before. My mom, she's all smiling and giggling and she says my dad's "the one" for her. The one. Maybe that's all there needs to be: one. And in 50 years, I'll be in my video, telling our kids that Romey was the one. The only man I ever loved. Love. The whole idea of loving someone right now seems like the most absurd thing in the world. Maybe that's why we have to do it.

*(The lights dim, then come up full, as Deme, Scrubs, Romey and Cassie are at the tracks.)*

They go off that way.

**ROMULUS:** Maybe they do, but...

*(Beat as they realize that they're standing on the edge of a deserted campsite.)*

**SCRUBS:** Trackpot.

*(Scrubs starts to move toward the camp.)*

**DEME:** Wait.

**ROMULUS:** Empty now.

**DEME:** Empty and gone don't always travel together.

**SCRUBS:** Can't stand here 'til we're dead!

**DEME:** I don't like this.

**ROMULUS:** Empty is empty. (*Starting to go toward the camp:*)  
Maybe they left some cans.

**DEME:** Romey, stay.

**ROMULUS:** I'm not a dog.

**SCRUBS:** Ruff. Ruff. Here, boy!

*(Romulus chases after Scrubs.)*

Runs like a dog to me!

*(He barks at her. She barks back.)*

**DEME:** Stop.

*(They keep up the barking and chasing. It's degenerated into a game.)*

We don't know what's out there.

**CASSIE:** Deme's right.

*(Romulus stops by Cassie and nuzzles against her like a dog.)*

Stop it.

*(He doesn't stop.)*

Stop.

*(He wins her over. Beat. She pets him.)*

**ROMULUS:** (*Playful:*) Ruff.

*(There's the SOUND OF BARKING DOGS. Beat.)*

What's that?

**CASSIE:** Scrubs, stop it!

**SCRUBS:** I ain't 10 dogs at once!

**DEME:** It's all 'round.

**NOAH:** (*Off:*) Don't move.

**DEME:** Who are you?

**NOAH:** *(Off:)* Our dogs are hungry. We'll ask the questions.

*(Deme and the others form a defensive circle. The "dogs" bark in such a way as to pan around them.)*

Why did you come here?

**CASSIE:** Those aren't dogs.

**DEME:** Followed some tracks.

**SCRUBS:** When you ever heard a dog?

**DEME:** We thought there might be people.

**CASSIE:** We had one for a while. Back when there were boys.

**SCRUBS:** What happened to it?

**NOAH:** *(Off:)* If you have weapons, toss them out.

**CASSIE:** What do you think?

**DEME:** Dogs or no, there's a whole lotta something out there.  
*(To Noah:)* We're not lookin' for trouble.

**NOAH:** *(Off:)* Then drop your weapons.

**DEME:** *(Beat.)* We got cans.

**SCRUBS:** Those are ours!

**ROMULUS:** *(To Scrubs:)* How many of them *you* find?

**NOAH:** *(Off:)* What makes you think we can't just take them?

**DEME:** *(Pulls a knife and holds it to a can like it's a hostage:)* I think we can turn 'em in to trash on the ground before you get three steps.

*(Romulus, Cassie and Scrubs all pull their knives.)*

**SCRUBS:** *(Sotto to Deme:)* Can't we just eat 'em real fast?

*(Beat.)*

**DEME:** I'm putting a can out.

*(The barking continues.)*

**NOAH:** *(Off:)* Put your weapons down. Now.

**DEME:** It's peas.

*(She opens the can and places it in front of her, then slowly puts her knife away. She gestures for Romulus, Cassie and Scrubs to put theirs away. Beat. They do, not necessarily happily. Beat. Enter a TEEN, one of the "Dogs." The Teen, eyeing Deme and the others, moves toward the can. Two steps forward, one step back, one to the side, constantly keeping an eye on Deme. The Teen gets to the can, still cautious, but then it all breaks down: enter the other DOGS, three or four to a dozen or more in number, just older than Romulus and looking like something out of Lord of the Flies, their clothing in tatters, not enough skill to keep it mended. They race madly for the can. It's chaos fueled by raw hunger. One of them, MERCURY, limps and lags behind the others. Before Mercury can even get close, the peas are gone. Even Scrubs looks a little taken aback. Beat. As one of the Dogs taps on the can of peas, looking for any last scraps, enter NOAH. He's 19 – a year older than Deme. He has an air of authority, and his clothes were once very nice. Beat. Deme goes into her bag for a can of corn.)*

**SCRUBS:** C'mon – not the corn!

*(Deme walks slowly toward Noah, as Romulus keeps an eye on the Dogs, his weapon almost out in case of trouble. Deme holds out the can of corn.)*

What's he done for you?

**ROMULUS:** *(To Scrubs:)* What you ever done for anyone?

**SCRUBS:** Shut it.



*(Noah takes the can of corn with a nod and examines it. Beat. He produces a spoon from his back pocket, then a ratty napkin. All of the Dogs' eyes are on him as he tucks the napkin into his shirt. He takes a spoonful and chews slowly, while his entire crew watches him and stares at the can with lust. Beat. He dabs at his mouth with his napkin, then folds it carefully and puts it and the spoon away. Beat. He puts the can on the ground. The Dogs start for it, but Noah's hand goes up. They stop. He looks at Mercury, who slowly and painfully heads toward the can. Mercury has one bite, two bites, then backs away. Noah nods, and the Dogs move in and obliterate the contents of the can.)*

**NOAH:** If you wanted to poison us, you'd have done it on the first can.

*(With the corn gone, the Dogs look to Deme.)*

**SCRUBS:** Don't you dare.

**ROMULUS:** Shut it, Scrubs. *(Sotto to Deme:)* C'mon, Deme— didn't you give 'em enough?

**DEME:** *(To Noah:)* When's the last time you ate?

**NOAH:** Wednesday.

**SCRUBS:** When was that?

**NOAH:** Thirty-eight hours ago.

**ROMULUS:** How you know 38?

**NOAH:** I looked at my watch.

*(Beat. Romulus is interested.)*

**ROMULUS:** You have a—

*(Noah indicates that the sun is his "watch.")*

**NOAH:** If you're planning to rob us you'll die...of disappointment.

*(Beat. Noah starts to laugh. The Dogs pick up his laughter. It's unnerving.)*

**SCRUBS:** Stop that!

**CASSIE:** Deme?

**ROMULUS:** If it makes Scrubs crazy, I'm in.

*(Romulus starts laughing. The Dogs abruptly stop laughing.)*

What?

**NOAH:** We thought you might be someone else.

**DEME:** We're headed north.

**DOGS:** *(Part echo, part whisper:)* North...north...north...

**SCRUBS:** Stop that.

**NOAH:** With everything you can carry.

**ROMULUS:** *(At Scrubs:)* North...north...north...

**DEME:** Something like that.

**SCRUBS:** You'll be sorry.

**NOAH:** You've come to the right place.

**DEME:** Why's that?

**NOAH:** You've come from the south. You're walking in the right direction.

**ROMULUS:** North, north, north...

*(Scrubs runs off.)*

**DEME:** She'll be back.

**ROMULUS:** Like a roach.

**CASSIE:** You should be nicer to her.

**ROMULUS:** Why?

**CASSIE:** Because...

**ROMULUS:** Why?

**CASSIE:** What's she done?

**ROMULUS:** Why?

**CASSIE:** Stop.

**ROMULUS:** Why?

*(She hits him. He covers himself.)*

Wait. *(To Noah:)* You said you ate Wednesday.

**NOAH:** And...?

**ROMULUS:** And that was 38 hours ago.

**NOAH:** And...?

**ROMULUS:** That means it's Friday. *(Singing to Deme:)* Friday night is party night. Make the work week come out right!

**DEME:** There's no party pool here. *(To Noah:)* You said you thought we might be someone else.

**ROMULUS:** They gotta have something, right?

**DEME:** Who?

**NOAH:** Rumors.

**DEME:** Rumors of what?

**ROMULUS:** Fun? Party?

**NOAH:** Whispers on the wind.

**ROMULUS:** Anyone?

**DEME:** Whispering what?

**ROMULUS:** *(In slo-mo:)* Parr-tyyy.

**NOAH:** That they came up from the far south or maybe the east and they burn anything in the way – and what they don't burn wishes it did.

**ROMULUS:** C'mon.

**DEME:** That the is or the maybe?

**NOAH:** The maybe may not be far away.

*(Beat. Echo appears on the ridge. The others look restive. Noah gestures to a couple of the Dogs, who chase Echo off.)*

You've seen him before.

**DEME:** On the road.

**NOAH:** He's a thief.

*(Lights up on Scrubs, elsewhere on stage, away from the others – just over the ridge somewhere. Enter Echo.)*

**SCRUBS:** Not you.

**ECHO:** Not you.

**SCRUBS:** Stop that.

**ECHO:** Stop that.

**SCRUBS:** I'll hurt you.

**ECHO:** I'll –

*(Scrubs makes as if to strike Echo, who dodges out of the way. Scrubs chases after him. He's like the fly she can't swat. Their chase takes them offstage. Back in the main camp, Cassie and Romulus have wandered off together.)*

**CASSIE:** I don't like this place.

**ROMULUS:** You'd like it more if we had some fun.

**CASSIE:** Look at them.

**ROMULUS:** Can I look at you?

**CASSIE:** Stop.

**ROMULUS:** Why?

**CASSIE:** Don't start.

**ROMULUS:** No. For real. Why?

**CASSIE:** Your sister, all of them...

**ROMULUS:** So if it was just you and me...

**CASSIE:** *(Beat.)* Sure.

**ROMULUS:** *(Checking around:)* Deme's talk talk talking, they're off in spaceland, and I'm gonna look at you.

*(He stares at her. Beat.)*

**CASSIE:** Romey.

**ROMULUS:** Do you want me to stop?

**CASSIE:** No.

*(They continue to sit and look at each other. Deme talks to Noah:)*

**DEME:** If there's no food here...you can't stay where there's no food.

**NOAH:** There used to be the most beautiful apple trees. Gala apples, they call them. For two whole months it rained apples. And the deer loved apples—I can cook venison with apples in 17 different ways. But the trees died and the deer left and we've ripped apart everything within three days' walk. *(Beat.)* Amazing the trees survived as long as they did.

**DEME:** You have to leave.

**NOAH:** And go where?

**DEME:** (*Beat.*) Come north — with us.

**NOAH:** We're not like you. When I found them, they were huddling in what was left of their classroom, still in their uniforms. They'd been living off the vending machines, but they were out of change and somehow even after the Nevada National Guard 41st Air Wing destroyed everything we'd ever known in the space of 23 minutes, it didn't occur to them that nobody'd care if they stole some stale pretzels.

**DEME:** That was a long time ago.

**NOAH:** Was it? (*Beat.*) It's like every one of them is Peter Pan pinned to that moment.

**DEME:** I know that story. (*Beat.*) Is there water?

**NOAH:** Not much.

**DEME:** Then how can you stay? (*Beat.*) It's not like you weren't somewhere else before you came here, right? You just do what you always do. What we always do. We move on.

**NOAH:** It's not that easy.

**DEME:** Left foot, right foot. (*Beat.*) Come north.

**NOAH:** We wouldn't make it.

**DEME:** No choice.

**NOAH:** (*To all:*) Did I hear someone mention fun? We can have fun here, can't we?

**DEME:** You have to do it.

**NOAH:** (*Beat. To the Dogs:*) Time for the pageant!

*(The Dogs are suddenly a whirl of activity, going into their tents and pulling out masks and costumes. Depending on cast size, the number of animals could vary: deer, rabbits, mountain lions, snakes, bears.)*

**DEME:** You can't keep going while it all turns to nothing.

**NOAH:** I can't do much, as you can see. But that's one thing I'm good at. I've had the very best practice of all. (*Beat.*) I was playing piano. I used to take lessons three times a week from a woman with the whitest hair you've ever seen and a hand that would shake just a tiny bit, but in another life she'd played Carnegie Hall and been a soloist with every orchestra between Portland and Paris, and when she touched the piano the shake would vanish. I loved my lessons, and unlike almost any other seven-year-old on the planet, I loved to practice. I'd make my parents sit in the easy chairs by the window and play "concerts" for them. (*Beat.*) One time my mother got up in the middle of a movement of Tchaikovsky. I stopped and started banging on the keys like a maniac until she sat back down. And thus I trained my parents to stay until I played the very last note, and got up from my little booster bench. (*Beat.*) And on a beautiful April day, they are sitting there as I regale them with Mozart's Piano Concerto Number 15 in B-flat major, which would be extremely challenging at any age. They're still sitting there as we hear this far away thunder, and I look up from my Mozart and see the hint of a plume of distant dust through the window, but I don't stop playing, so they don't stop sitting, and they are still in their chairs when the entire side of the room by the windows falls away into nothing. I don't know what to do. A seven-year-old brain cannot process houses and parents winking into never agains, so I finish the 15th, but I am troubled by the middle C, which has gone terribly flat. (*Beat.*) I cry for half an hour—32 minutes, actually—but when it becomes clear that my piano is irrevocably broken, and that neither my parents nor the woman with the white hair will be coming back to listen to me play or for any other reason, I stop crying, close the cover, and two days later, I find (*Indicating the others:*) them. And we keep

going. *(Beat.)* They're ready. *(Turning master of ceremonies:)* Mrs. Middleton's Former Pre-Kindergarten Drama Class Presents the Pageant of the Animals.

*(The Dogs turned Animals form a procession, each stepping up awkwardly to deliver their line. It's as if they are frozen in time in pre-kindergarten. As they step up, they act out the motions and make sound effects.)*

**ANIMALS:** The rabbit hops.

And the squirrel scampers.

The deer runs.

Chased by the mountain lion, which sprints and snarls.

And on the ground, the snake slithers.

The crow caws,

And the big brown bear lumbers, big and slow.

*(Beat.)*

March of the animals.

Parade of the animals.

Exodus of the animals.

**ANIMAL 1:** Away from the hot hot hot...

**THE OTHER ANIMALS:** *(Like an echo:)* To the north.

**ANIMAL 2:** Away from the dead and the brown.

**THE OTHER ANIMALS:** *(Echoing:)* To the north.

**ANIMAL 3:** Away from the fire in the sky.

**VARIOUS ANIMALS:** To a place where they could rest on living land.

North...north...north...

Drink the clear and clean.

North...north...north...

*(The distant sky turns red. The pageant halts.)*

**ANIMAL 1:** Fire in the sky!



**NOAH:** They've come.

**CASSIE:** It's New San Francisco.

**ROMULUS:** No, it's —

**CASSIE:** Those are the flares. Those are the flares they fire for the gatherers.

**ROMULUS:** It's just a red sky.

**CASSIE:** Warning flares.

**DEME:** We have to go.

**NOAH:** We can't outrun them.

**DEME:** That's three days away. We move smart, three days is like months in all this nowhere. Tonight we plan, tomorrow first light we go.

**NOAH:** You have to go now.

**DEME:** First light.

**NOAH:** The whisper on the wind is that they are not on foot.

*(Beat. Echo appears on the ridge. He is dressed in a polar bear costume.)*

**DEME:** *(To everyone:)* Take what you can carry.

**SCRUBS:** Gotta make us disappear into the nothing or it won't do no good.

**DEME:** Then make us disappear.

*(The Animals spot Echo on the ridge. They look to Noah.)*

**NOAH:** Leave him. It's all going to burn anyway.

*(The Animals await further instructions from Noah, who seems unable to give them.)*

**DEME:** All of you. You have five minutes. *(Beat.)* Now!

*(The Animals spring into action, packing their things. Scrubs might grab some of them during the ensuing scene and get them to help her in obliterating their tracks. Echo too could help after he speaks.)*

**CASSIE:** We have to go back.

**DEME:** We can't go back.

**CASSIE:** My sister —

**DEME:** She can take care of herself.

**MERCURY:** *(To Noah:)* I'm not fast anymore.

**CASSIE:** *(To Romulus:)* Tell her we have to —

**NOAH:** I know.

**MERCURY:** It's bad.

**CASSIE:** Whether she comes or not.

*(Cassie goes to grab her pack.)*

**NOAH:** I know.

**ROMULUS:** We can't just leave them.

**DEME:** Do you think there's a choice?

**ROMULUS:** If it was you, wouldn't you want me to come back?

**DEME:** I'd want you to be safe.

**ROMULUS:** You see anywhere safe?

**DEME:** There's safe and there's suicide.

**ROMULUS:** And what about Adam and Eve?

**DEME:** They made a choice.

**ROMULUS:** What if it was me?

**DEME:** It's not.

**ECHO:** And the bears turned white.

**ROMULUS:** Would you leave me too?

**ECHO:** As they marched into the north, the north of the blue sky and the crisp, clean water, the bears turned white.

**CASSIE:** We have to go back.

**ECHO:** The white bears live forever in the land of 60 degrees north, 135 degrees west, and the Aurora Borealis dances with joy above their heads.

**NOAH:** *(To Mercury:)* I've always wanted to see the ocean again. Want to come with?

**DEME:** *(To Noah, indicating Echo:)* What is he talking about?

**NOAH:** He finished the story.

**DEME:** Is it true?

**NOAH:** It's a story.

**DEME:** Where did it come from?

*(Beat. Noah produces a makeshift "book." It's an illustrated series of pictures bound precariously together.)*

**NOAH:** We found it in some house or a shack or by the side of the road—I don't remember. It was years ago, and it's become this story we always tell.

**ROMULUS:** It's just a book. Not even a book.

**DEME:** Not a book. A map.

**CASSIE:** *(Returning with her pack:)* Romey, it's time.

**ROMULUS:** It's just a story.

**DEME:** We have to believe.

**CASSIE:** My sister is real. *(Beat.)* I'm real.

**SCRUBS:** *(Returning:)* I got it all rigged.

**CASSIE:** Romey, we have to go.

**SCRUBS:** Ain't nobody gonna know we were ever.

**DEME:** Nothing to be done, Romulus.

*(Romulus picks up his pack. Beat.)*

**ROMULUS:** Deme, please.

**DEME:** We can hide in the mountains if we can get there before it's day.

**NOAH:** Mercury and I, we'll think of you fondly as we take in the ocean view.

**DEME:** *(Beat.)* I hear it's beautiful still.

**NOAH:** If only we could drink it. *(Beat.)* Mrs. Middleton's Former Pre-K Drama Class, the show must go on, and it's for you to make sure that it does.

**ANIMALS:** No, no, no, no...

**NOAH:** There comes a time when the director's job is done.

**ANIMALS:** No, no, no...

**NOAH:** You are going on a wonderful new tour. *(Beat.)* At long last, you are going to play the north.

**CASSIE:** We have to go now. You and me. *(Beat.)* I see us. I see us together on the road back to New San Francisco and we get there in time.

**ROMULUS:** *(Beat.)* I can't.

**CASSIE:** *(Beat.)* Coward.

**ROMULUS:** I am not afraid.

**CASSIE:** Yes. You are. Of her.

*(Echo, still dressed as the polar bear, grabs a pack and goes up to Cassie.)*

**ECHO:** I am not afraid.

**NOAH:** *(To the Animals:)* Go with the stage manager. She will keep you safe. *(To Mercury:)* The ocean plays a very special kind of music.

**MERCURY:** Is it far?

**NOAH:** Just over that hill, and the one after that.

*(Noah and Mercury exit at Mercury's snail's pace.)*

**ROMULUS:** Cassie.

**CASSIE:** Goodbye, Romulus. *(To Echo:)* Let's go.

*(She exits with Echo.)*

**ROMULUS:** Cassie!

**ANIMALS:** Cassie, Cassie, Cassie...

**ROMULUS:** You and your stupid, stupid polar bears.

**DEME:** I don't care if you hate me.

**ROMULUS:** Good. Because maybe I do.

**DEME:** Gotta be alive to hate.

**SCRUBS:** *(Beat.)* So...we goin'?

**ROMULUS:** You think I won't leave you.

**DEME:** We're goin'.

**ROMULUS:** You're wrong.

**DEME:** We go north.

*(Everyone left on stage exits with Deme except Romulus. Beat. He follows them. The lights begin a slow fade. There's the distant sound of MOTORCYCLES, getting gradually closer. End of Act II.)*

*(If your production plans to have an intermission, it should be here.)*

## ACT III: NORTHERN LIGHTS

### SCENE 1

*(A month after the end of Ursa Major. PAN, fka Melinda, late teens, female and with something of a postmodern Hell's Angels look, stands alone in a spotlight.)*

**PAN:** The thing about rules is they're made for the people making them. Do this. Don't do that. Do what we say. Do it now. Do it now, Melinda, or we'll beat your scrawny ass until it don't work no more. But then something happens, something that makes the rules go away. The rules that say wear your clothes right side out and go to school, that say don't take this sign, 'cause it's the only one left standing in 200 miles *(Brandishing what's left of a 65 mph speed limit sign:)* and you just gotta have it, are gone. And you're free. Air and sunshine free. Do anything you want free. Do everything you want free. *(Beat.)* But then all that chaos and take take taking gets old. And it hits you like a backhand: you need rules. You been missing 'em and you didn't even realize it. Only this time, you're the one that gets to make them. I'm the one that gets to make them. I'm the Pan, and this is the new Neverland.

*(Pan disappears into the darkness, and lights up on Deme, Scrubs and Romulus, all dirtier than before, chained up in a windowless room. They are doing their best to sleep. Romulus stirs.)*

**DEME:** *(To Romulus:)* You awake? *(Beat.)* You gotta talk to me sometime. *(Pause.)* Scrubs, you awake?

**SCRUBS:** I'm dreamin' about water.

**ROMULUS:** How's that goin'?

**SCRUBS:** Great— 'til I wake up. *(Beat.)* Foot's asleep.

**ROMULUS:** My whole body's asleep.

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**SCRUBS:** Hope they come soon.

**DEME:** Do you?

**ROMULUS:** How long you think we been down here?

**DEME:** Been tryin' to count the count.

**ROMULUS:** I asked Scrubs.

**SCRUBS:** This is bad as bad can be, but you two gotta bury it. Wish I was deaf.

**ROMULUS:** *(Beat. To Deme:)* How long you reckon?

**DEME:** Thirty if I didn't lose it.

**ROMULUS:** *(Not forgiving:)* Don't think we're good.

**DEME:** Fine.

**ROMULUS:** *(Beat.)* Las Vegas.

**SCRUBS:** What's that?

**DEME:** A place. *(Beat.)* How you know about Las Vegas?

**ROMULUS:** Ike was from Vegas.

**SCRUBS:** Vegas.

**DEME:** He was?

**SCRUBS:** I like that.

**ROMULUS:** Yeah.

**SCRUBS:** Ike from Vegas. Ike from Vegas that made it past the boom-boom-boom and then zzzap, a bug takes you out.

**ROMULUS:** He said they lived in the MGM Grand for a month.

**SCRUBS:** MGM?

**ROMULUS:** Hotel. He said inside they had no windows.



**SCRUBS:** No day, no night.

**ROMULUS:** His dad lost everything right before it was all goners.

**DEME:** How'd he even remember that?

**ROMULUS:** How do any of us remember anything? But we do. *(Beat. An out of time moment:)* Funny story. Not ha funny, but weird horrible unlucky lucky funny. Ike's dad, he loses all the money, the house, all three cars, all the all. So he goes into Ike's room, 'cause Ike's computer has a cam, and he records his goodbye, world see ya later and then he takes his .357 Magnum and splatters all over Ike's pillow. Hell's bells gonna ring before Ike sleeps in his dad's blood, so he's safe in the basement when wave one hits.

*(Romulus rejoins the scene. Enter Pan with KALI, her lieutenant, and a couple of FOOT SOLDIERS.)*

**PAN:** Good morning.

*(There's no reply from Deme or the others.)*

I said good morning.

**SCRUBS:** Ain't no sun.

**PAN:** Don't mean it's not morning.

**DEME:** Where are the others?

**PAN:** Here we go again. *(Beat.)* Don't you have any other questions?

**DEME:** When will you let us go?

**PAN:** Any *other* questions. *(Beat.)* Tell you what—if you ask me a new question, I might just answer it.

**SCRUBS:** Got anything good to eat?

**PAN:** Yes.

**SCRUBS:** (*Beat.*) And...?

**PAN:** What?

**SCRUBS:** Can we have it?

**PAN:** I love this asking and answering. Let's do it again soon.

**SCRUBS:** (*Beat.*) That's it?

**PAN:** This is the bold one, but not the smart one. (*Beat.*) Who's the smart one? (*To Romulus:*) Is that you? (*Pawing him with her stick:*) We have apples and oranges—fresh ones, not from cans—and rabbit and deer and even a fish. Or two.

**DEME:** What do you want?

**PAN:** I'm talking to the smart one, not the one who asks the same boring questions every day. (*To Romulus:*) Where were you going, and who's there? (*Beat.*) Think of that rabbit, roasted on a spit, with a pinch of... (*To Kali:*) What we got?

**KALI:** Thyme.

**PAN:** A pinch of thyme.

**DEME:** He doesn't know.

**PAN:** I don't like her voice.

*(The Foot Soldiers gag Deme so that she can't talk.)*

**ROMULUS:** If I tell you, I get the rabbit?

**PAN:** With carrots and potatoes and a pinch of thyme.

**SCRUBS:** What about me?

**ROMULUS:** Rabbit gets in my tummy, words might get in my head.

**PAN:** He *is* the smart one. (*Seductive:*) Give me a few words now, and I'll give you a nice big bite.

**ROMULUS:** North.

**PAN:** Give me a word I don't know.

**ROMULUS:** *(Making it up on the fly:)* There's a man.

**PAN:** Who is this man?

**ROMULUS:** A man. With a well.

**PAN:** There's no wells for 300 miles, maybe 5.

**ROMULUS:** He's a thousand, up in the mountains. *(Beat.)*  
C'mon, that's gotta be a bite.

**PAN:** A man with a mountain well a thousand miles away.

**ROMULUS:** Yeah. It goes really deep, so there's water for years.

**PAN:** You're not the smart one.

*(She turns to leave.)*

**ROMULUS:** But— Wait!

**PAN:** Do I look like I'm sleepy?

**ROMULUS:** No.

**PAN:** *(Leaving again:)* Then don't tell me bedtime stories.

**SCRUBS:** They don't know nothing.

**PAN:** And you do?

**SCRUBS:** We're goin' north 'cause she got it in her fool head  
we find the polar bears we're safe.

**ROMULUS:** Scrubs.

**PAN:** Polar bears.

**SCRUBS:** Yep.

**ROMULUS:** Shut up, Scrubs. *(To Pan:)* She just wants the

rabbit.

**PAN:** Everybody wants the rabbit. *(To Scrubs:)* There are no polar bears here.

**SCRUBS:** Not here, but maybe there.

**PAN:** Farther than far. *(To Kali:)* How far?

**KALI:** Fifteen hundred miles as the crow flies, and that was before. Probably just ghosts now.

**PAN:** You gonna chase 1500 miles after ghosts? *(Beat.)* So who's the bigger fool: the fool who leads or the fool who follows?

*(Scrubs and Romulus are silent.)*

*(To Kali:)* What do you think?

**KALI:** The fool who follows.

**PAN:** Reason?

**KALI:** The fool who follows ought to know better.

**PAN:** Good. *(To Romulus:)* Don't you worry your pretty face. Tomorrow you'll be 300 miles closer to your polar bear man with a well, and you might even see the sun once a week.

*(Pan exits with her entourage. Kali looks back. Beat. She exits. Beat. Deme says something, but we can't understand her through the gag.)*

**SCRUBS:** You know, I kinda like you like this.

*(Deme looks viciously at Scrubs, but her words are unintelligible. Romulus looks at the door, then tries to scoot his way toward Deme. While he's doing so:)*

What was that thing we found that time? That cartoon. *(Sounding like the teacher in Peanuts:)* Wa-wa-wa-wa-wa-wa. *(Beat.)* That was funny.

*(It's going to be an awkward operation, undoing Deme's gag with his own hands that are tied behind his back. There's a SOUND from the door area. Romulus sits where he is, just in time for Kali to return.)*

**KALI:** Don't talk.

*(She rips the gag off Deme.)*

I only got a couple minutes.

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