

TO LOOK FOR AMERICA

Written by

Heather Magee

Inspired by a True Story

[heathermageemedia@gmail.com](mailto:heathermageemedia@gmail.com)

DAY 214

EXT. FREEWAY, AUSTIN - DAY

A woman paces next to a van parked in the shoulder. Traffic roars by as the engine begins to smoke.

The vehicle pops and backfires with a bang. Defeated, she takes a seat on the toasty asphalt.

A TRUCK pulls up next to her.

T-MINUS 46 DAYS

EXT. HOUSE, LOS ANGELES - DAY

Lush trees conceal a large house from the street. A Bernie Sanders sign hangs from the front gate. An Uber pulls up.

INT. STUDIO - SAME TIME

Meri (40s) splashes paint abstractly across a large canvas. Sketches and architectural renderings line the walls.

A framed photo of a YOUNG BOY sits on a table surrounded by candles and incense.

Someone knocks and opens the front door. Meri pops her head out of her studio.

MERI

Hi! I'm Meri. Are you Griffin?

GRIFFIN (20s), a scruffy surfer type, drops his filthy bag to the floor.

GRIFFIN

Yeah, nice to meet you. Nice digs.  
Which room is mine?

MERI

Up the stairs, first door on your right. Make yourself at home.

He catches a glimpse of Meri's work before climbing the stairs.

Another knock. The front door opens again. BRANDON (40s), Meri's estranged husband, is carrying boxes.

BRANDON  
Mer, you home?

Meri opens the door to her studio and leans up against the frame.

BRANDON (CONT'D)  
Hey. Just picking up the last few things. That should be it.

MERI  
Take all the time you need.

Brandon and Meri square off in silence. Neither of them move until Brandon breaks and looks down at his feet.

BRANDON  
I should probably go.

He leaves and pulls the door shut. Meri slides down the doorframe, pulls her knees to her chest and exhales.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME DAY

Meri is pacing, watching the news. DONALD TRUMP is announced as the Republican nominee.

MERI  
What the actual fuck is happening in this country.

EXT. GARDEN - SAME DAY, NIGHT

An eclectic mix of YOUNG GUESTS share a meal. Meri opens a bottle of wine with a pop.

LAURA (40s), Meri's best friend and fellow architect, arrives and squeezes her way in.

MERI  
Everybody, this is Laura. Don't be fooled by her conservative vibe, her bag is full of contraband.

LAURA  
Thank you for that spirited intro, Mer. Hello everyone.

Laura follows Meri inside to the kitchen.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Quite the influencer crowd you're hosting these days.

MERI

These kids are willing to shell out to stay in Venice. AirBnB is basically paying my bills. Which means more time in my studio and less time designing mid century palaces for Google execs.

LAURA

How dare you mock my livelihood.

MERI

Brandon moved the rest of his stuff out today.

LAURA

I'm sorry, Mer. You okay?

Meri pauses, holding a plate of dessert.

MERI

I'll be fine. Let's go, influencers get grumpy if their blood sugar drops.

LAURA

I thought you weren't supposed to feed them past a certain hour or they turn into terrorists.

MERI

I believe that rule only applies to Republicans.

EXT. GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

Meri and Laura rejoin the group outside.

Wine and conversation flow as Meri's guests show no signs of retiring. Griffin is chatting with a YOUNG WOMAN.

YOUNG WOMAN

So you're living in a van?

GRIFFIN

By choice. Been bombing up and down the coast surfing for the past year.

YOUNG WOMAN  
That sounds amazing.

Laura shoots Meri an eye roll.

GRIFFIN  
I'm thinking of selling my van,  
actually. Staying in LA for a bit.

YOUNG WOMAN  
Maybe you could teach me how to  
surf.

GRIFFIN  
Hey, Meri. Think I can stay for a  
few more days? A week maybe?

MERI  
Sure. That should be fine.

GRIFFIN  
I love your house, man. Good vibes.

LAURA  
That will cost you extra.

MERI  
What was that like, living out of  
your van?

GRIFFIN  
Pretty epic. I wasn't sure what I  
wanted to do right out of college.  
Felt like a good place to start.

The young woman swoons. Laura stares at her blankly.

LAURA  
Our generation would refer to that  
as finding yourself. Except, in our  
case, that meant going on a Contiki  
tour of Europe. 10 countries in 14  
days. Then coming home with an STI  
and an offer for some serious job.

GRIFFIN  
That sounds terrible.

MERI  
It is terrible. And with a lunatic  
potentially taking office, things  
could get a lot tougher for young  
people just starting out.

GRIFFIN

That dude will never get elected.

LAURA

Oh no? Are you registered to vote?

Laura stands to address the table.

LAURA (CONT'D)

How many of you have already  
registered to vote?

The group goes quiet. Laura and Meri raise their hands. Only one other person joins them.

MERI

Register to vote, you two. Now  
let's go take a look at this van.

EXT. VAN - SAME NIGHT

A VW Westfalia with flowers painted down the side is suddenly filled with people and secondhand smoke.

LAURA

I can't hang out in there, I'll get  
high.

MERI

Good, maybe you'll chill out.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

The van has been transformed into a studio apartment on wheels. Meri examines every detail, marveling over the smart design.

Griffin passes Meri a joint. She imbibes without skipping a beat. Laura frantically waves the smoke away.

Music kicks up as the group carries on smoking, drinking and chatting at a volume sure to wake up the neighbors.

Meri is in her own world. She runs her fingertips along the length of the tiny kitchen counter, stopping at a cork board filled with polaroids. Griffin surfing, rugged coastline, dancing at a festival, sitting by a bonfire with other nomads.

EXT. MERI'S HOUSE - DAY

Meri is sitting in her garden working on a budget.

MERI

(uttering to herself)

If I'm really disciplined I could make it work. Maybe pick up a few gigs along the way.

Someone is struggling to open her front gate. A LAWYER emerges and pulls a file from his bag.

LAWYER

Good morning. I'm looking for America Matthews.

MERI

I'm she.

LAWYER

Brandon Matthews asked me to deliver these for your review. My card is attached, if you have any questions.

MERI

Thank you.

Meri opens the file. Divorce papers.

T-MINUS 30 DAYS

INT. YOGA STUDIO - DAY

Meri and Laura are in an acroyoga class, surrounded by very fit people.

Meri is flat on her back, lifting Laura slowly with her legs, who is dangling precariously above her.

LAURA

(struggling)

You know this is ridiculous, right?

MERI

Just relax. Focus on your breath.

LAURA

I'm focused on your feet digging into my solar plexus.

A peppy YOGA TEACHER pipes up.

YOGA TEACHER

Great work, Meri. If your friend could flail a little less, you both wouldn't have to work so hard.

(clapping, shouting)

Find your center, people! Support your partner!

Laura fruitlessly tries to improve her form.

MERI

What are you doing? Stop moving around.

LAURA

Stop digging your toes into my uterus.

Meri breaks their pose. Everyone in the class stares.

YOGA TEACHER

Totally okay to take a break and recalibrate. This is a safe space. No one is judging you.

LAURA

(whispering)

Oh, they're judging us, alright.

MERI

(whispering)

I'm thinking about buying Griffin's van.

LAURA

(whispering)

What? Why?

MERI

(whispering)

I dunno. I might go on a little road trip.

LAURA

(whispering)

A little road trip. Where?

MERI

(whispering)

Around the states. For a year, maybe.



LAURA  
(raised voice)  
A year?!

The yoga teacher shoots Laura and Meri an icy stare.

MERI  
(whispering)  
I think that's our cue to go.

They roll up their mats. Laura bows awkwardly.

LAURA  
Namaste.

INT. CAFE - SAME DAY

Meri and Laura are sharing a piece of cake.

LAURA  
Next time let's skip the acro-  
torture and come straight here.

MERI  
You didn't really give it a chance.

LAURA  
Our bodies weren't meant to contort  
so aggressively at our age.

MERI  
Or any age.

LAURA  
So back to this van thing.

MERI  
It's pretty straight forward. I'm  
going to offer to buy it from  
Griffin.

LAURA  
And drive around the country.

MERI  
Correct.

LAURA  
For a year.

MERI  
Now you're catching on.

LAURA

And why, exactly, would you want to do that?

MERI

To look for...America.

LAURA

Do you need me to buy you an atlas? You could just look in the mirror.

MERI

Very funny. I was thinking of legally changing my name to Meri when I go back to my maiden name. Brandon's lawyer delivered divorce papers, by the way.

LAURA

So it's really happening.

MERI

It's really happening.

LAURA

He's an asshole for leaving you. What happened wasn't your fault, Mer. None of this is your fault.

MERI

He's been through a lot.

LAURA

You've both been through a lot. Is that why you want to take off for a year? Your whole support system is here in LA.

MERI

I know. I just feel like getting out of town and focusing on something else for a while. And I'm sincerely interested in unpacking who it is we share this country with.

LAURA

You want to road trip around in a van to hang out with Trumpers?

MERI

I guess I'm just curious about what's motivating them.

LAURA

Sure. It's completely conceivable why one would pack up their life and drive around for a year to confirm whether there are any sane people left in this country.

MERI

Well, it's more than that.

LAURA

I just want to make sure you're okay.

MERI

I'm not running away. I guess I'm trying to run towards something, you know?

LAURA

Can't you start with an obnoxious half-marathon or something?

MERI

I just need a change of scenery. And maybe a bit of an adventure. You're welcome to come.

LAURA

You know road trips and roughing it are my personal hell, but I appreciate the offer.

The friends share a silent pause while polishing off their post-yoga confection.

LAURA (CONT'D)

I know you. And I know once you've made up your mind, that's it. Go forth and find your America. But if I spot you on Instagram touting some kind of brand partnership, our friendship is over.

MERI

That's fair. Thank you for being supportive.

LAURA

Send me a selfie from misogynist Mount Rushmore or whatever.

T-MINUS 25 DAYS

EXT. MERI'S HOUSE - DAY

Meri arrives home to find Griffin showing his van to a YOUNG COUPLE.

MERI

Oh shit.

She drops her bag and b-lines it to the van.

GRIFFIN

Shoot me a text if you have any other questions.

The couple leaves. Meri quickly approaches.

GRIFFIN (CONT'D)

Hey Meri.

MERI

(out of breath)

Hey!

GRIFFIN

Everything okay?

MERI

Yeah, all good. Was that couple interested in buying your van?

GRIFFIN

Yeah, no offers though. Why, know someone?

MERI

Yeah. Me.

GRIFFIN

You wanna buy my van? Seriously?

MERI

I think so, yeah.

GRIFFIN

For what?

MERI

To go on a road trip.

GRIFFIN

Where to?

MERI

Cross country. You think she'd be comfortable for a year?

GRIFFIN

That depends on what you consider comfortable.

MERI

I just need somewhere to sleep and cook. And something that can go off road.

GRIFFIN

She's all wheel drive.

MERI

How much?

GRIFFIN

Thirty grand.

MERI

Twenty.

GRIFFIN

Twenty five and I'll detail it before you take off.

MERI

Twenty two five, you detail it and I get to keep the psychedelic pillows.

GRIFFIN

Sold!

Griffin shakes Meri's hand. She smiles nervously.

T-MINUS 20 DAYS

INT. BEDROOM - SAME DAY, NIGHT

Meri lights some candles and puts down cushions to meditate.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - FLASHBACK

A long, dimly lit hallway. Meri paces. The door to a nearby room cracks. She jumps.

A DOCTOR emerges, his face struck with grief. He locks eyes with Meri and moves towards her. This moment feels like forever.

Brandon appears carrying two coffees. He approaches with trepidation.

Meri wails and collapses into the doctor's arms.

A coffee slips through Brandon's fingers, exploding as it hits the floor.

INT. BEDROOM - BACK TO PRESENT

Meri opens her eyes, unable to focus.

MERI

Maybe this trip is a mistake.

She stands abruptly and stacks her cushions. Suddenly, a draft blows through an open window, extinguishing all but one candle sitting next to the photo of the young boy. Tears swell and sparkle in Meri's eyes.

She smiles and blows out the flame.

T-MINUS 17 DAYS

INT. MERI'S HOUSE - DAY

Meri is on the phone interviewing potential tenants. Griffin is sitting on a couch nearby, strumming a guitar.

MERI

That's right, about a year. No, I don't have a pool. I have three guest rooms that I'll need you to manage. And my garden will require some upkeep. You don't like gardening. Got it. Thanks for calling.

Griffin overhears Meri's conversation and puts the guitar down. Meri opens her laptop and scans her inbox.

GRIFFIN

Hey, Meri.

MERI

(distracted)

Yeah.

GRIFFIN  
I could look after your place.

                  MERI  
                  (still distracted)  
Sorry, you could what?

Griffin pulls up a chair next to Meri.

                  GRIFFIN  
I said, I could look after of your  
place. Rent out your rooms. Take  
care of the garden.

Meri leans back in her chair.

                  MERI  
You can't smoke weed in my house.  
Or host wild parties.

                  GRIFFIN  
I know we just met, but I'm very  
responsible. I'm not a wild party  
guy. I'm more into having small  
gatherings over for book club.

                  MERI  
Book club, right.

                  GRIFFIN  
You can call my parents, they'll  
vouch for me.

Meri contemplates Griffin's offer. His eyes widen in  
anticipation.

                  MERI  
How old are you?

                  GRIFFIN  
Twenty four. A very mature and  
accountable twenty four year old.

                  MERI  
I must be out of my mind.

                  GRIFFIN  
                  (excited)  
Is that a yes?

                  MERI  
If you kill my lemon trees...

GRIFFIN  
                  (hugging Meri hard)  
I won't let you down.

INT. VAN - DAY

Meri fires up the van and almost immediately the fan belt breaks. A small amount of smoke leaks from the engine.

                  MERI  
                  Fuck me.

Meri stretches out on the floor of the van.

                  MERI (CONT'D)  
                  I need a drink.

INT. BAR - SAME DAY, NIGHT

Meri and Laura are bellied up to the bar.

                  LAURA  
                  Another round please. So, how bad  
                  is it?

                  MERI  
                  Nothing that can't be fixed. Just  
                  something I didn't budget for.

                  LAURA  
                  Is it that big of a setback?

                  MERI  
                  I thought you'd be thrilled.

                  LAURA  
                  That's a very unsavory thing to say  
                  about your very supportive friend.

                  MERI  
                  Maybe this whole trip is a bad  
                  idea. What if I'm in the midst of  
                  some mid-life spiral?

                  LAURA  
                  We're all in the midst of some mid-  
                  life spiral. Seriously, though, I  
                  think it's very brave.

                  MERI  
                  You do?



LAURA

Yeah, I do. Fix the fucking van and get on with it.

They both take a shot. Meri nudges Laura, playfully.

T-MINUS 10 DAYS

Meri and Griffin are washing the van.

A MECHANIC is under the hood, fixing the broken fan belt.

Meri is cleaning the interior of the van. Laura helps.

Meri gets behind the wheel. Laura and Griffin watch in anticipation from the street. She fires up the van and the engine roars. She beams. Laura and Griffin cheer.

T-MINUS 1 DAY

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's elbow room only. Food and drinks flow as music echoes throughout the house. Meri's mom MARGARET (70s), mingles amidst the crowd. She's dressed provocatively and is preoccupied chatting up two YOUNG MEN.

MARGARET

So, tell me boys, have you tried ayahuasca?

YOUNG MAN 1

No, have you?

MARGARET

Oh yes, during a trip to Ecuador last year. You must try it, it's simply transcendent.

YOUNG MAN 2

You're wild, lady.

MARGARET

You don't know the half of it. Say, how much do you bench?

Margaret strokes the young man's bicep. Meri intervenes.

MERI

There you are!

MARGARET  
I was just telling my new  
friends...

MERI  
(interrupting)  
I need you in the kitchen.

MARGARET  
What do you mean, you need me in  
the kitchen? Excuse me, boys. My  
daughter can be a bit of a pill.

Meri pulls Margaret into the kitchen. Laura is plating  
appetizers.

LAURA  
Remind me why you didn't hire a  
caterer?

MERI  
Because I have you.

MARGARET  
Laura, will you please convince my  
daughter that this trip is a bit  
desperate and that she should stay  
in LA, meet a nice man and get on  
with her life.

Brandon appears out of nowhere. He places a bottle of wine on  
the counter.

BRANDON  
Hey, Mer.

MERI  
Hey. Thanks for coming.

Margaret pulls Laura in uncomfortably close.

MARGARET  
(whispering loudly)  
What's he doing here?

BRANDON  
Hello, Maggie.

MARGARET  
Brandon.

The vibe is tense. Griffin bursts into the kitchen.

GRIFFIN

Hey, Meri! Sorry to interrupt. Can I borrow you for a second?

Meri forces a smile and follows Griffin into the living room. The rest of the group trails behind.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Griffin hushes the party.

GRIFFIN

Okay, people. I'd like to propose a toast to Meri. Hitting the open road for a year is no easy feat. Agreeing to let me house sit for you was probably no easy feat either.

(the group laughs)

Here's to safe travels and good people along the way.

The group raises their glasses. Meri and Brandon cheers.

BRANDON

I realize trying to talk you out of this would be a fruitless endeavor.

MERI

Were you actually going to try?

Brandon shakes his head no. Meri smiles. He pulls her in for a hug and whispers in her ear.

BRANDON

Promise me you'll be safe.

MERI

I promise.

They pull apart. Brandon's eyes well up.

BRANDON

I've gotta go.

He kisses Meri on the forehead and disappears through the crowd. Margaret reemerges.

MARGARET

Who does he think he is, showing up like that?

MERI

Mom, it's fine. Brandon and I are fine.

MARGARET

Darling. Are you sure this crazy trip is really what you want?

MERI

Yes, mom.

MARGARET

Alright. Just don't come back with dreadlocks. Or a face tattoo. Or HIV.

Meri laughs and wraps her arms around Margaret. They watch the party unfold.

DAY 1

EXT. VAN - MORNING

Meri and Laura stand in front of the van, staring in silence. The sun begins to rise, casting a pinkish glow.

LAURA

I'll miss you around here.

MERI

I know.

LAURA

Don't do anything I wouldn't do.

MERI

Well that cancels out a whole lot of things, doesn't it.

LAURA

I won't miss that sass mouth.

MERI

I'll miss people who use the term sass mouth.

The friends hug - hard.

LAURA

Be safe. And call me. And leave me those irritatingly long voice notes when you're too lazy to text.

Meri hesitates.

LAURA (CONT'D)

What is it?

MERI

What if this really is a mid-life spiral?

LAURA

What? No, you're fine.

MERI

Seriously, maybe this whole thing is a mistake.

LAURA

You don't have to do this, you know. You can completely abandon the plan. Or...

MERI

Or...

LAURA

You were obviously drawn to the idea for a reason. I think you should follow that impulse. Wade in and see where the current takes you.

Meri kisses Laura on the cheek and quickly boards the van.

A photo of the same young boy from the framed photo in Meri's studio is pinned to the cork board.

She fires up the engine, locking eyes with Laura in the rear view mirror as she pulls away.

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

Meri makes her way up the Pacific Coast Highway. She stops in Big Sur to swim in the ocean, taking in the sweeping views.

A campsite surrounded by sky-scraping pine trees. Meri cooks dinner in her micro kitchen. She steps outside, looks up at the trees, and takes a deep breath.

The van cruises, slowly but surely, over the Golden Gate Bridge. Some young HIPPIES flash Meri the peace sign.

DAY 3

She passes through Redwood National Park, along the Oregon coast, eventually reaching exit signs for Portland.

MERI

Surely I've earned a beer by now.

EXT. PORTLAND - SAME DAY

Meri cruises through town. Locally sourced grub, ethical coffee and hemp shops abound.

MERI

Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein were not wrong.

EXT. RV SITE - SAME DAY, DUSK

Meri pulls in and parks the van next to a COUPLE. Their set-up seems semi-permanent.

ANNE (50s), waves politely before pouring her partner a glass of wine. Meri hops off the van.

ANNE

Welcome!

MERI

Hello.

Anne and her husband JOHN (50s) dig into dinner. They watch Meri setting up her barbecue.

JOHN

Hey, why don't you join us? There's more than enough.

MERI

That's very kind of you, but I'm almost set up here.

ANNE

We insist.

Meri puts down a bag of coals and wanders over to the couple's neatly set table.

MERI

I'm Meri.

ANNE

Anne. This is my hubby John.

MERI

Pleasure to meet you both.

ANNE

Are you on your own?

MERI

Yep. What about you two? This is quite the set up you have here.

JOHN

We stumbled upon this place during a road trip many moons ago.

Anne hands Meri a glass of wine.

ANNE

We've been coming back every year since. Usually we stay for a few months, but we're leaving early this time. Our daughter is about to have a baby.

MERI

Congratulations.

JOHN

Our first grandchild. It's a boy.

MERI

Boys are great.

JOHN

Oh, do you have kids?

Meri takes a sip of wine.

MERI

No. No kids.

JOHN

Assuming you're not married?

ANNE

John! Sorry, Meri, my husband doesn't have much of a filter.

MERI

It's fine. How long have you two been married?

ANNE

About to celebrate our 30th. Gosh,  
it sounds like a long time when I  
say it out loud.

MERI

That's amazing.

Anne squeezes John's hand.

JOHN

I'm a lucky guy.

ANNE

How long are you planning on  
staying?

MERI

Just tonight.

ANNE

Well, we're happy to have your  
company.

INT. VAN - SAME DAY, NIGHT

Meri pins some more photos to her cork board. She and Laura  
skiing. Another photo of the same young boy, at the beach  
with Margaret.

She tidy's her kitchen and discovers a bag labeled "survival  
kit."

MERI

What's this?

Meri tears open the bag to find a bottle of whiskey, an eye  
mask, ear plugs, condoms, chocolate and a can of mace.

MERI (CONT'D)

Guess I'm all set for a sleep over  
with a serial killer.

She discovers a card inside, which reads "Be safe. Have fun.  
L xx" She pins the card to the cork board.

EXT. RV SITE - MORNING

The sun is coming up over the horizon illuminating the  
towering cedar trees that surround the site. Meri loads the  
van and pulls out.



EXT. HIGHWAY - SAME DAY

Meri spots a sign for Mount Hood and exits the freeway.

She pulls into a parking lot, packs up some supplies and heads towards the trailhead.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - SAME DAY

Winding her way up the trail, snapping photos along the way, Meri passes some HIKERS before reaching a stunning vista.

She sits down near the edge of a cliff, pulls out her sketch pad and begins to draw. The views overwhelm her.

EXT. GAS STATION - SAME DAY

Meri gasses up as a group of PROTESTERS approach, fervently waving Trump Pence 2016 flags.

She carefully observes the crowd, closing in on their faces, their clothing, their red hats. Meri gets back into the van and instead of driving away, parks and steps out.

She walks towards a table of MAGA WOMEN selling t-shirts.

MERI

Business good?

MAGA WOMAN

Why, you with the fake news or somethin'?

MERI

Hell no, I'm with you. I'm voting...for Trump.

MAGA WOMAN

Sales are great. Fifteen dollars for a t-shirt, ten bucks for a hat. What'll be?

MERI

Damn, I left my wallet in my van.

Meri heads back towards the van. She stops and turns to face the women.

MERI (CONT'D)

Can I ask you something?

MAGA WOMAN

Shoot.

MERI

What is it about Trump that makes you want to vote for him?

MAGA WOMAN

I knew you was fake news!

The other women stand and set their sights on Meri.

MERI

I told you, I'm voting for Trump. I can't stand those snowflakes.

The group collectively nods and grunts in agreement.

MAGA WOMAN

Look, my husband is voting for him. And I like what he has to say about being American. He ain't afraid to be proud to be an American, you know? And neither am I!

MERI

America first!

The group of women cheer.

MAGA WOMAN

That's the spirit. You gonna buy some merch or what? All profits go towards Mr. Trump's campaign.

MERI

Be right back.

Meri walks back to the van, slowly at first, but her pace quickens. Feeling several sets of eyes on her, she hops in and peels out.

Glancing back at the women, she spots a few fists wagging.

INT. VAN - SEATTLE, DAY

Traffic builds as exit signs for Seattle appear. Meri switches on the radio, aptly tuned to a grunge station.

MERI

Yes please.

She cranks it. Traffic comes to a standstill.

MERI (CONT'D)

I wonder if Ben still lives here?

Meri searches for BEN (40s), a music editor and musician, on Instagram. She finds him. Location - Seattle.

She pulls up his number and calls.

MERI (CONT'D)

He never answers his phone.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

BEN

Mer? Is that you?

MERI

Hey Benny.

BEN

No one has called me that since...  
well, not since you left.

MERI

I didn't leave. You wanted to stay.

BEN

Alright, well. It's nice to hear  
from you. To what do I owe the  
pleasure?

MERI

I'm in town.

BEN

What? Where are you staying?

MERI

Not sure if I am. I was driving  
through town and I'm stuck on the  
I5. Thought I'd give you a shout.

BEN

What exit are you at?

MERI

I'm a mile south of exit 167.

BEN

Perfect, get off there.

INT. MUSIC VENUE - SAME DAY, NIGHT

Meri and Ben are sitting at the bar. It's dark and dingy and a bit too loud.

MERI  
(shouting)  
Does your band play here?

BEN  
(shouting)  
Sometimes. Hey, let's go outside.

EXT. STAGE DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Ben lights up and passes his cigarette to Meri.

MERI  
I quit.

BEN  
I knew moving to LA would make you soft.

MERI  
Maybe, but I make a mean fish taco.

BEN  
What brings you up this way?  
Fleeing to Canada?

MERI  
Not yet.

BEN  
You always get so worked up over politics. Hasn't the Cali weed calmed your soul?

Meri grabs Ben's cigarette and takes a drag.

MERI  
Not that calm about anything, actually.

BEN  
Look, Mer. I heard what happened. A long time after the fact. I'm so sorry I didn't reach out.

MERI  
No apologies.  
(a lengthy beat)  
(MORE)

MERI (CONT'D)  
Should we head back in? I want to  
see this band you raved about.

BEN  
Sure.

Ben guides Meri back into the bar.

INT. MUSIC VENUE - SAME NIGHT

The band kicks up and the place erupts.

MERI  
(shouting)  
They're good! Thank god kids still  
want to play actual instruments.

Ben laughs. Suddenly, the crowd swells to an uncomfortable  
size. He pulls Meri towards the exit.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

It's pouring rain. Ben wraps his coat around Meri.

BEN  
Let's get out of here.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - SAME NIGHT

Ben pours two whiskies and hands Meri a towel and a t-shirt.  
She peels off her shirt and replaces it with the dry one. Ben  
clears his throat.

BEN  
Alright, tell me about this road  
trip you're on. And the hippie van  
that's parked in my driveway.

MERI  
That hippie van is going to carry  
my ass around the country.

BEN  
What's the plan?

MERI  
No set plan. I bought the van from  
one of my Airbnb guests.

Ben chokes on his drink.

MERI (CONT'D)

Stop it! He's housesitting for me while I bomb around the country for the next year, give or take.

BEN

Sounds about as impulsive as when you ran off to LA.

MERI

I didn't run, it was more of a light jog.

BEN

We hit a wall and you skipped town, if memory serves. What compelled you to take this trip anyway?

MERI

I guess I needed to get out of LA for a bit.

BEN

Oh, the irony. Just go to Cabo like everybody else down there. Why drive around solo for a year?

MERI

I want to see for myself what's happening in this country. What motivates folks to think and feel the way they do. The things that divide us. And bring us together. All of it. I suppose I need to reconcile how I feel about being American. Until I flee to Canada.

BEN

It didn't occur to your husband to join you?

MERI

Brandon and I are separated. Divorced, actually. Just.

BEN

Ah, Mer. Sorry to hear that.

MERI

It's alright. Enough about me. How are you? Seeing anybody?

Ben sits next to Meri and brushes the wet hair out of her face.

BEN

Nope.

She pulls his face to hers. They kiss. Tentatively at first, then deeply.

DAY 15

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Meri and Ben are intertwined in bed.

BEN

You gonna stay for a bit?

MERI

Have I already worn out my welcome?

BEN

Not at all. You never did.

MERI

It wasn't easy to leave, you know.  
But we were so young.

BEN

How about now? Is it easier to  
leave now?

Ben pulls Meri in for a kiss. She slides on top of him and pulls off her t-shirt.

DAY 26

INT. BEN'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MORNING

Ben is cooking breakfast. He places a plate of eggs and the Seattle Times in front of Meri.

BEN

Coffee?

MERI

Yes please. I love that you still  
read the actual paper.

BEN

I'm old school.

MERI

My fingertips will be black by the time I get to the arts section.

BEN

That's all part of the charm.

Meri opens the paper, keeping one eye on Ben as he cooks. She places the paper back down.

MERI

So, it's been a few weeks. Aren't you going to kick me out?

BEN

You can stay as long as you like. You know that.

MERI

It's been a really nice time, Benny. But I should probably hit the road soon.

BEN

I knew this was coming. Just wasn't sure when.

MERI

Tomorrow, I think.

BEN

Tomorrow? Fuck, alright.

Ben makes coffee and doesn't look up. Meri moves in behind him, wrapping her arms around his waste.

BEN (CONT'D)

Will you send me postcards?

MERI

Of course.

BEN

Where are you headed, anyway?

MERI

Montana, I think.

BEN

You're kidding. My family used to spend summers there. A town called Whitefish. You should check it out.



MERI

Oh yeah? What's good in Whitefish?

Ben hands Meri her coffee.

BEN

I just remember loving it there.  
Best parts of my childhood, maybe.

MERI

Okay then. Whitefish or bust.

Ben wraps his arm around Meri and pulls her close. They kiss.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Meri is loading up the van. Ben appears with a bag of stuff.

BEN

I packed a few things for you.

MERI

Your favorite Soundgarden t-shirt?

BEN

Ha, no. Some books, weed...tools  
that may come in handy. Just a few  
things I thought you might like.

Meri takes a peek at the contents of the bag. She pulls out a  
Mariners hat and puts it on.

MERI

Thanks, Benny. For everything.

Ben pulls her in tight.

BEN

Take good care of yourself. Call me  
if you need me.

Meri kisses Ben on the cheek and hops in the van. She fires  
the engine and pulls out. Ben watches until she disappears.

INT. VAN - SAME DAY

The Seattle skyline shrinks in the rear view as Meri heads  
east.

The environment becomes progressively rural. Guns and ammo  
shops, Trump flags, pickup trucks with white nationalist  
symbols. Eventually, she crosses the state line into Idaho.

EXT. COEUR D'ALENE - SAME DAY

Meri digs into lunch alongside an expansive lake. She pulls out her sketch pad and pauses to people watch.

MERI  
So many white folks.

INT. VAN - SAME DAY

Meri heads back towards the freeway. Before reaching her exit, she drives by a large produce stand. Curious, she turns around.

EXT. PRODUCE STAND - CONTINUOUS

Signs indicate the stand is run by sustainable farming students from the Schitsu'umsh tribe.

Meri fills a basket with produce. TREVOR (20s), pulls up on a tractor.

MERI  
Hi, where do I pay?

TREVOR  
You can settle up with me.

Trevor hops off the rig and tallies up Meri's bounty.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
20 bucks. What's your name?

MERI  
Meri.

TREVOR  
Trevor. Good to meet you. Thanks  
for your support.

Meri hands him the cash as a large truck drives by. An ACTIVIST hangs out of the window shouting into a megaphone.

ACTIVIST  
Support our miners! Support your  
local economy!

The students gather and watch as the van slows, aggressively shouting protest slogans in their direction.

TREVOR

Sorry about that. Climate change deniers don't have the best manners. Need a bag?

MERI

I've got one. Thanks.

Meri collects her produce.

MERI (CONT'D)

You know, it may feel fruitless, what you're doing here. No pun intended. But keep going. It's important.

TREVOR

Thanks for saying that. Safe travels, Meri.

She nods and continues to the van.

DAY 42

EXT. WHITEFISH, MONTANA

Meri pulls into town and slowly makes her way up main street. Locals notice her.

MERI

(uttering to herself)  
Benny, where the hell am I?

Stopped at a traffic light, her phone bings.

MARGARET (TEXT)

Where have you landed? I spoke with Laura and she hasn't heard from you in days. Your being very inconsiderate.

MERI (TEXT)

You're. You're being very inconsiderate.

The typing bubble appears and disappears a few times.

MARGARET (TEXT)

What do you mean I'm being inconsiderate?

MERI (TEXT)  
 Never mind, mom. I'm in Whitefish,  
 MT. All is well.

Typing bubble.

MERI (CONT'D)  
 Come on, Mags. Spit it out.

MARGARET (TEXT)  
 Whitefish?? I'm going to have to  
 ask Google where that is. Or Siri.

MERI (TEXT)  
 Good idea. Love you.

The light changes and someone honks. An OLD WOMAN darts out  
 in front of Meri's van. She narrowly misses her. The woman  
 gives Meri a thumbs down.

MERI (CONT'D)  
 Friendly.

Meri notices the mountains and surrounding landscape.

MERI (CONT'D)  
 It's nice if you can get past the  
 unsavory town folk.

She pulls in near a park and texts Ben.

MERI (TEXT) (CONT'D)  
 Made it to Whitefish.

BEN (TEXT)  
 Nice!

MERI (TEXT)  
 The locals seem...charming.

BEN (TEXT)  
 Liar.

MERI (TEXT)  
 Okay, but the scenery is stunning.

BEN (TEXT)  
 There's a secret swimming hole. May  
 not be so secret now, but I'll send  
 you the pin. I promise, it'll make  
 you want to stay.

MERI (TEXT)  
 Thanks, Benny. xx

Meri stops at a quaint bakery and peers into the window.

INT. BAKERY - CONTINUOUS

It's busy but people move at their own pace. The BAKER behind the counter offers Meri some samples.

BAKER

Here, love. These will change your life.

MERI

What is it?

BAKER

Rugelach, right out of the oven. This recipe has been in my family for three generations.

MERI

Thank you, it's delicious. I'll take a bag of those, please.

BAKER

You visiting or passing through?

MERI

I'm going to stay for a while, I think. Just need to find a place to park my camper van.

BAKER

There's an RV park ten minutes drive from here. Should have everything you need.

The baker hands Meri the bag of baked goods.

MERI

How much do I owe you?

BAKER

On the house.

MERI

No, I couldn't.

BAKER

I insist. Just promise you'll come back while you're in town.

MERI

Deal. Thank you.

The baker winks and moves onto the next customer.

EXT. RV SITE - SAME DAY, DUSK

Meri pulls in to an empty spot. An overbearing INFLUENCER COUPLE approaches.

INFLUENCER 1  
Hey there! Did you just arrive?

MERI  
I did, just.

INFLUENCER 1  
We've been here a few weeks. Lot's of Insta-worthy spots to check out. Hashtag van life!

MERI  
(sarcastic)  
Hashtag blessed!

INFLUENCER 1  
Right?!

The other half of the insufferable couple wanders over.

INFLUENCER 2  
Settling in okay?

MERI  
Yep.

INFLUENCER 2  
Where are you from?

MERI  
LA.

INFLUENCER 1  
Noway! We were just there last month for a content collabo.

MERI  
Sounds about right.

INFLUENCER 2  
Well, if you need anything, don't hesitate to hit us up. Our sponsors keep us fully stocked.

MERI  
Appreciate it.

EXT. RV SITE - SAME DAY, NIGHT

Meri fires up her barbecue and pours a glass of wine. The influencer couple emerges and waves. She pretends not to see them. They pop over anyway.

INFLUENCER 1  
Mind if we join you?

MERI  
Uh, sure.

The couple makes themselves at home, nibbling at Meri's tortilla chips. She cringes.

INFLUENCER 2  
So what brings you to Montana?

MERI  
A friend recommended it.

INFLUENCER 1  
How are you funded?

MERI  
Funded?

INFLUENCER 1  
Yeah. Who's sponsoring you?

MERI  
That would be me.

INFLUENCER 2  
So, you're just road tripping around?

MERI  
That's correct.

INFLUENCER 1  
What's the point if you're not getting paid?

MERI  
I hope one day you discover the answer to that question.

DAY 50

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Meri is biking along a path that runs parallel to a river. A deer darts out in front of her. She stops to watch, pulling out her camera.

MERI

Hello, you.

Referencing the Google Maps pin Ben sent her, Meri stops and props her bike up against a tree.

After struggling through thick brush, she arrives at a clearing. It's just as Ben described.

MERI (CONT'D)

Bingo.

Meri makes her way to the river's edge and lays down a blanket. Digging into some lunch, she spots an OLDER COUPLE downriver.

Spotting Meri, the couple waves. NEIL (70s), is an avid fisherman and adores his wife GRETCHEN (70s), who adores him right back.

They begin to fly fish. Meri watches intently, marveling over their tenderness towards one another.

EXT. FARMER'S MARKET - DAY

Meri is loading up on produce. Her phone bings.

LAURA (TEXT)

How's Montana?

MERI (TEXT)

Beautiful, just like Ben said.

LAURA (TEXT)

Ben?! Is that why you stayed in Seattle so long?

MERI (TEXT)

There's insufferable influencers staying next to me. Need to find a new spot.

LAURA (TEXT)

Okay...but what happened with Ben??

Meri spots the older couple from the river.



MERI (TEXT)  
Gotta go, at the market.

LAURA (TEXT)  
Fine! Deflect. Bureau of Land  
Management. Try setting up shop  
there. Likely devoid of hipsters.

MERI (TEXT)  
K, call ya later.

Meri nonchalantly navigates her way towards the couple. They spot her and strike up a conversation.

NEIL  
Hello. Didn't we see you at the  
river a few days ago?

MERI  
I think so. I'm Meri.

NEIL  
Neil. And this is my wife,  
Gretchen.

GRETCHEN  
Are you just visiting the area?

MERI  
I'm thinking of staying for a  
while, actually. Are you from here?

NEIL  
We've lived in Whitefish for almost  
50 years.

GRETCHEN  
Moved here after Neil was  
discharged from the army.

Meri does some quick math.

MERI  
Vietnam?

NEIL  
Yep. Whitefish seemed like the most  
peaceful place in the world at the  
time. Still does.

Gretchen gives Neil's hand a squeeze.

MERI  
Well, it was lovely to meet you.

GRETCHEN

You too, dear.

Neil pulls out a pen and pad of paper from his shirt pocket.

NEIL

If you need anything while you're  
in town, here's our number.

MERI

That's very kind of you. Thanks.

DAY 62

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Meri is attempting to assemble a fly fishing rod while  
simultaneously watching an instructional video on her phone.  
She fails miserably.

MERI

Seriously missing sushi bars right  
now.

(determined)

Okay, Mer, you got this. How hard  
could it be?

TWO HOURS LATER

Meri jumps to her feet and attempts to cast, but immediately  
gets her line caught in a tree.

Neil and Gretchen arrive downriver and watch the disaster  
unfold.

GRETCHEN

You should go help her, dear.

Neil wanders over. Meri is struggling to free her line.

NEIL

Here's a tip for you - there's more  
fish in the river than there are in  
the trees.

MERI

Ha. Thanks. It's a lot harder than  
it looks.

NEIL

Have you fly fished before?

MERI  
What do you think.

Neil cuts Meri's line. Her lures dangle overhead.

NEIL  
Where's your tackle box?

MERI  
My what?

NEIL  
Where do you keep all your flies  
and things?

MERI  
Oh! I have a tackle bag, does that  
count?

Meri hands Neil a plastic bag full of gear.

NEIL  
First of all, you need to get  
organized. But we'll worry about  
that later.

Neil fixes Meri's line and attaches new lures and a fly.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Alright, stand over there and I'll  
show you how to cast. Then you try.

Neil casts a few times rhythmically before the line gently  
lands in the water.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
See, nothing to it. Gently reel it  
in. Here, like this.

Meri takes the rod and slowly winds the reel.

MERI  
When does the part where we catch a  
fish come into play?

NEIL  
Loses her line in the trees and  
thinks she'll hook a fish at first  
cast.

MERI  
Fair enough.

Gretchen watches and giggles. Neil takes the rod from Meri.

NEIL

Okay, you're going to cast and snap the line on the water a few times to tease the fish. Then let it sit. Just as I did.

MERI

Right, got it.

Meri casts, snapping the line aggressively, before it lands in the water with a splash.

MERI (CONT'D)

Did you see that!?

Gretchen gives a thumbs up. Neil shakes his head.

NEIL

Stop shouting, you'll scare the fish.

MERI

(whispering)

Sorry. Thanks for your help.

NEIL

You're welcome. Are you sure you have a handle on things?

MERI

Yeah, I'm good. I've got this.

NEIL

Alright. Good luck.

Meri reels in her line slowly and successfully casts again, this time with less zeal. Neil and Gretchen continue to watch.

GRETCHEN

She seems to have gotten it.

NEIL

Not sure she'll catch anything, but at least she's not destroying the vegetation.

Meri suddenly starts yelping.

MERI

I think I caught something!

NEIL

Oh dear.

Neil hurries over and helps Meri reel in a sizable trout.

MERI  
Oh my god, now what?

NEIL  
Where's your net?

MERI  
Net? I don't have a net!

NEIL  
Okay, stand back.

Neil manages to grab and unhook the fish. He smashes it's head against a log. Meri screams. Gretchen jumps to her feet.

MERI  
(horrified)  
What are you doing?!

NEIL  
Putting the poor thing out of it's misery. That's all part of the catch, I'm afraid.

MERI  
So savage.

NEIL  
It's the most humane way to do it. Looks like you've got yourself dinner.

Gretchen arrives with a net, applauding Meri.

GRETCHEN  
Well done!

Neil hands Meri her catch.

NEIL  
Here, hold it up.

MERI  
I'm sorry?

NEIL  
Stick your fingers into it's mouth, through the gills, and hold it up.

Meri gingerly follows Neil's direction. He picks up her camera and focuses the lens.

MERI  
Oh god this is disgusting.

NEIL  
Smile!

Meri does no such thing. Neil snaps a photo.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Know how to gut it and cook it?

MERI  
I'm sorry, gut it?

GRETCHEN  
Did you bring a cooler to put it  
in?

MERI  
I did! I forgot to get ice, though.  
Honestly, I didn't think I'd catch  
anything.

GRETCHEN  
Never mind, you can put it in ours.  
Why don't you come round for dinner  
tonight and we'll cook up your  
catch.

MERI  
I'd love that. Thanks for showing  
me the ropes. Either you're an  
excellent teacher or I'm a natural.

NEIL  
I'll go with the former.

INT. NEIL AND MARY'S HOUSE, SAME DAY - NIGHT

Neil fires up a grill in the backyard. Meri and Gretchen are  
in the kitchen preparing a marinade.

GRETCHEN  
So, what made you decide to drive  
around all by yourself for a year?

MERI  
Seems nuts, right? This young guy  
renting a room in my house was  
selling his van. I was craving a  
change of scenery. The stars  
aligned, I guess.

GRETCHEN  
That's hardly a reason to wander  
the country solo, dear.

Neil bursts in.

NEIL  
Grill is ready! How's Meri's beast  
of a catch coming along?

GRETCHEN  
All set.

EXT. BACKYARD - SAME NIGHT

The trio digs into dinner. The glow of dusk lingers.

NEIL  
You know, Gretchen and I traveled  
around the country quite a bit  
before settling here.

MERI  
Oh yeah?

GRETCHEN  
We must have hit over 30 states  
before landing in Montana.

MERI  
And Whitefish won over your heart.

GRETCHEN  
I became pregnant with our daughter  
while we were on the road. The plan  
was to stay in Whitefish until  
after she was born, then move to a  
larger city. But we fell in love  
with it here.

MERI  
Most peaceful place in the world.

NEIL  
That's right.

MERI  
I didn't know you had a daughter.

GRETCHEN  
She passed. A few years ago now.

MERI

I'm so sorry.

NEIL

Car wreck, on her way home from  
college. Drunk driver.

Everyone takes a sip of their drink. Meri stares into her glass, tracing the rim with her fingertip. Her mind wanders.

INT. CAR - FLASHBACK

A young boy sits in the backseat, strapped into a carseat. The same boy from the photos. Meri's son OLIVER (3), is playing with his toy car.

She peers at him in the rearview mirror and smiles. He smiles back at her.

A MAN'S hand grips the steering wheel of another car. An empty bottle of whiskey rolls around on the passenger seat.

Headlights from an oncoming vehicle light up Meri and Oliver's faces. Meri's eyes widen as she cranks the wheel. Oliver's toy car falls to the floor.

Meri is slumped over the wheel, a deployed airbag cradles her bleeding face. The front end of her car is wrapped around an electrical pole. A TRUCK DRIVER stops and pulls Meri from the wreckage.

MERI

(frantic)

Put me down! I have to get my son!

The truck driver places Meri down on the side of the road.

TRUCK DRIVER

Stay here, you've lost a lot of  
blood. I'll go get him.

MERI

(desperate)

Please! Hurry!

He runs towards the car, pulls Oliver's limp little body from the wreckage and runs back towards Meri. Seconds later, the car explodes.



EXT. BACKYARD - RETURN TO PRESENT

GRETCHEN  
Meri? Are you alright?

Meri snaps out of it. She wipes a tear from her cheek.

MERI  
I'm so sorry. I had no idea.

GRETCHEN  
How could you have. It's alright.

Gretchen squeezes Meri's hand. Neil shoots to his feet.

NEIL  
I'll go fetch another bottle of  
wine.

The women pick at their food. A somber silence fills the air.

GRETCHEN  
He still has a difficult time  
talking about it.

Suddenly, the sound of glass breaking echoes. Gretchen runs towards the house. Meri follows.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)  
(shouting)  
Neil!

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Neil is hunched over the sink, shaking. His hand is bleeding. Gretchen comes to his aid, wrapping the wound with a dish cloth.

GRETCHEN  
What happened? Can you hear me?

Meri stands by, nervously pivoting from one foot to the other.

MERI  
How can I help?

GRETCHEN  
Just stay there dear. Neil, can you  
hear me?

Neil is staring into space. Eventually, Gretchen's repeated calls cause him to come to. He shakes his head.

NEIL

Sorry. I'm so sorry.

Gretchen lovingly places one hand on his face while holding Neil's bleeding hand in the other.

GRETCHEN

It's alright. Let me look at your hand. Not too bad, I'll fix you right up. Meri, can you please apply pressure while I get my first aid kit.

MERI

Of course.

Meri and Neil are alone in the kitchen. She carefully applies pressure as Gretchen instructed.

NEIL

Sorry to interrupt such a nice evening. Gretchen will patch me up and we can dig into dessert.

MERI

Are you sure? Maybe you should rest.

Gretchen arrives with reinforcements. Meri steps aside. She watches the attentive, tender exchange unfolding before her.

GRETCHEN

There. All set.

NEIL

I'll go clear the table while you two dish up dessert.

GRETCHEN

I've got it dear.

Marry kisses Neil on the forehead.

MERI

I'll help.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Gretchen and Meri stack plates and blow out candles.

GRETCHEN

That happens from time to time.

MERI

Was he triggered by talking about your daughter?

GRETCHEN

I don't think so. I mean, it's not an easy subject for either of us. But he suffers from PTSD. From the war. All these years later, it still haunts him. Sometimes I find him that way. Paralyzed by fear. A noise. A memory. I'm sure Olivia's accident has made it worse.

MERI

Your daughter's name was Olivia?

Gretchen nods yes and heads towards the house. Meri follows.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Neil and Gretchen lay flowers on a grave. Meri stands a short distance away, watching.

Meri, Neil and Gretchen follow a winding trail. Eventually, they arrive at a stunning vista.

Meri and Neil are at the river. They cast simultaneously. Meri hooks something straight away. The two holler excitedly as Meri proudly reels in her catch.

Gretchen and Neil are gardening in the backyard. Meri is curled up in a porch swing, sketching them.

DAY 82

EXT. NEIL AND MARY'S HOUSE - BACKYARD

It's Fourth of July and Gretchen and Neil are having a party. Meri mingles among the guests, engaging in small talk. Children run rampant with sparklers as fireworks kick up in the distance. Meri's phone bings.

LAURA (TEXT)

Happy Fourth! How are you?

MERI (TEXT)

Good! At a party at Neil and Gretchen's.

LAURA (TEXT)

I bet it's a rager.

MERI (TEXT)

Ha. What are you up to?

LAURA (TEXT)

At a party in Topanga. About to make a French exit.

MERI (TEXT)

How unpatriotic of you.

LAURA (TEXT)

Ask not what your country can do for you, but how you can be asleep by 10pm.

MERI (TEXT)

Have fun.

Meri wanders away from the party to a quiet corner of the yard. Staring into the sky, she becomes overwhelmed with emotion.

Gretchen moves to where Meri is standing, quietly crying. She places her arm around her.

GRETCHEN

Meri, darling. What's the matter?

Meri quickly wipes the tears from her cheeks.

MERI

Oh, I'm fine. Really.

GRETCHEN

Are you sure?

Fireworks pop and bang in the distance. Neil notices Gretchen and Meri, but remains with the other guests.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

Whatever it is, you can tell me.

Gretchen gently takes Meri's hand in hers. Meri takes a deep breath.

MERI

I lost a child too.

GRETCHEN

Oh, Meri.

MERI

My son. He was three. We were driving home one night.

(MORE)

MERI (CONT'D)

It was dark and it was raining hard. There was no one on the road, until suddenly there was.

(between sobs)

A car came speeding towards us. He crossed into our lane and I did everything I could to protect Ollie.

GRETCHEN

Of course you did. Ollie was your son's name?

MERI

Oliver. His name was Oliver.

Meri tries to wipe away a steady stream of tears.

Gretchen pulls Meri in tightly, as though her embrace is preventing Meri from breaking into a million pieces.

GRETCHEN

I'm so very sorry for your loss.

MERI

The man who hit us was drunk. When Neil shared your story the other night, I wanted to tell you. I just didn't know how to bring it up in that moment. I'm sorry I'm such a wreck. I should go, you have all these guests here to see you.

Gretchen wipes a tear from Meri's face.

GRETCHEN

The accident wasn't your fault. You know that, right?

Meri collapses into Gretchen's arms. Gretchen consoles her.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

You have to forgive yourself, dear.

Meri and Gretchen eventually return their gaze towards the fireworks. Meri's face is illuminated by light.

DAY 96

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Meri places a blanket near the river's edge, pulls out her sketch pad and begins to draw.

She pauses, taking in her surroundings.

MERI  
Benny was right. This place has  
something.

She stands and pulls off her clothes before making her way to  
a calm section of the river.

Wading in slowly at first, Meri swims around with childlike  
abandon. She turns onto her back, closing her eyes, letting  
the gentle current carry her.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Meri, Gretchen and Neil are sitting around a fire pit. Sparks  
float up into a dusky sky.

NEIL  
So I understand you're leaving us?

MERI  
I'm afraid so.

NEIL  
It wasn't something I said, was it?

MERI  
Of course not. It's just time to  
keep moving, if I'm going avoid  
winter conditions.

GRETCHEN  
It's been so wonderful having you  
here.

MERI  
It's been wonderful getting to know  
you two. And you were right, what  
you said about Whitefish. It really  
is the most peaceful place.

NEIL  
Where are you off to next?

MERI  
Not sure. Wherever the wind blows  
me, I guess.

GRETCHEN  
You're welcome back here any time.

Meri reaches her hands out to both Gretchen and Neil.

MERI

Thank you for everything.

They sit back and take in the nocturnal sounds of the evening. The fire crackles.

DAY 108

EXT. NEIL AND MARY'S HOUSE - MORNING

Meri checks the van's oil and tire pressure. Gretchen steps outside, carrying a few bags.

GRETCHEN

I packed a few provisions for you.

MERI

You didn't have to do that.

GRETCHEN

Don't be silly.

MERI

You two have been so good to me.  
Where's Neil?

Neil appears with a fishing rod and some tackle.

MERI (CONT'D)

What's all this?

NEIL

Here. To replace that shabby  
beginners rod of yours. There's  
great fishing in the Sierra  
Nevadas, not far from Los Angeles.

MERI

Are you kidding? This is too much.

NEIL

Just promise you'll make use of it.

MERI

Promise. I'll try not to catch any  
squirrels with my stellar casting  
skills either.

NEIL

Keep your line in the water, young  
lady. Do you have everything you  
need?

MERI

I think so. I'm really going to miss you two.

Meri embraces Neil, then Gretchen. She places both hands on Meri's face.

GRETCHEN

You enjoy the rest of your journey. We're here if you need us.

Meri tries to hold back tears. Gretchen too. Neil pulls a hanky from his breast pocket. Everyone giggles.

NEIL

Take good care of yourself. Call us if you run into any trouble.

MERI

I will.

Meri boards the van and fires up the engine. She blows Gretchen and Neil a kiss before closing the door and setting off.

Gretchen and Neil wave as Meri pulls away. She watches them shrink in the rear view, letting the tears flow this time.

Crossing into Wyoming, signs for Keyhole State Park come into view. Meri pulls into a lakeside spot. The moon's reflection dances across the lake.

Meri passes the state line into South Dakota. Stuck in traffic, vehicles begin to advance slowly. She passes a protest.

Slogans decry the occupation of Native American land and the development of oil pipelines. Signs read I Stand With Standing Rock.

Meri stops at Mount Rushmore to take a selfie for Laura. She sets the self timer on her camera and rips off her top as the shutter snaps a photo, waving it in the air with the former president's in the background.

Crossing the state line into Nebraska, shops selling guns and ammo are frequent. The pick-up truck in front of Meri has a gun rack mounted in the rear window. A Trump Pence 2016 flag flies from the back.

Meri follows signs towards Omaha and stops in a well lit Walmart parking lot. A woman tucks in her three young children for the night in the back of a mini van.



Meri uses the restroom at a nearby gas station before returning to the van to settle in for the night. Her phone bings.

MARGARET (TEXT)  
Are you still alive? I haven't heard from you.

MERI (TEXT)  
Yes mom.

The typing bubble appears and disappears for what seems like an eternity.

MARGARET (TEXT)  
What are your coordinates? In case you go missing and I need to file a police report.

MERI  
If you only knew.  
(texting)  
Omaha.

Again, the typing bubble, for ages.

MERI (CONT'D)  
Oh, Christ.

MARGARET (TEXT)  
Alright. Don't go to bed with any strange men. And make sure your tank is always at least half full. And get some exercise, you don't want to come back chubby.

MERI (TEXT)  
Got it. Thanks mom.

Meri closes her eyes, attempting to sleep. A baby wails in the distance.

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

Crossing the state line into Iowa, the van cruises past exit signs for Des Moines.

Meri turns off at Cedar Rapids. She hikes through Effigy Mounds, snapping photos of petroglyphs.

A campfire crackles as Meri shares a laugh with a group of fellow nomads.

Meri walks along the Cedar River at sunrise. She sets up her fly rod and throws out a few casts.

We see the Chicago skyline as the van makes it's way along Lake Michigan. Meri stops to take in the sunset at Indiana Dunes National Park.

She passes a Welcome to Toledo sign and stops for a bite to eat before getting back onto the freeway.

MERI

I am so lost. And so tired.

Meri passes a sign for Cuyahoga Valley National Park and abruptly pulls into the shoulder before making a u-turn.

DAY 115

EXT. CAMPSITE - MORNING

Meri wakes up and surveys her surroundings.

MERI

This place is really beautiful.

Emerging from the van, coffee in hand, Meri spreads out some maps, receipts and a notebook on a picnic table.

MERI (CONT'D)

Alright, let's see if I have the resources to keep me going.

She checks the date on her phone.

MERI (CONT'D)

Definitely time to head south.

Meri spots a group of FRAT BOYS at the next campsite. A beer bong surfaces.

MERI (CONT'D)

Charming.

The frat boys notice her noticing them. Meri quickly turns her attention back to planning but it's too late. They're on their way over.

MERI (CONT'D (CONT'D))

Dammit.

CHAD places a beer on top of Meri's map. Condensation drips and dampens it.

MERI (CONT'D)  
Hey, man. Watch it.

CHAD  
Sorry, you looked like you could  
use a drink.

MERI  
I have coffee, thanks.

A few more frat boys wander over. Meri closes her notebook.

MERI (CONT'D)  
Now it's a party.

CHAD  
Mind if we join you?

MERI  
I do, actually.

FRAT BOY 1  
We just graduated. Got any other  
lady friends with you?

MERI  
Um, no. No lady friends.

CHAD  
Just you?

Meri contemplates her response carefully.

MERI  
My husband is on his way. Should be  
here any minute.

CHAD  
Got it, we'll split. What's your  
name? I'm Chad.

He wipes his hand on his jeans before extending it.

MERI  
Meri.

FRAT BOY 1  
Alright, Meri. You know where to  
find us if your old man bails.

The rest of the frat boys chuckle. Chad grabs his beer and  
leads his friends back to their site.

EXT. CAMPSITE - SAME DAY, NIGHT

Meri is building a fire. The frat boys watch. Chad walks over with a bottle of wine.

CHAD  
Hey, did your husband show?

MERI  
He had some car trouble, but he's on his way now.

CHAD  
That's a relief. A pretty woman like you up here all alone.

Chad inches closer. Meri's posture stiffens.

CHAD (CONT'D)  
Got a corkscrew I could borrow?

Meri exhales.

MERI  
Sure. Interesting progression, from beer bong to wine.

CHAD  
What are you drinking?

MERI  
Just some tea.

Meri's mobile rings. Ben.

MERI (CONT'D)  
I need to grab this, it's my husband.

Meri darts into the van to answer the fortuitous call. Chad quickly tears open a packet of powdery substance and pours it into her tea.

CHAD  
(shouting)  
Hey thanks, I'm going to head back.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Meri waves through the window.

MERI  
Hey, I'm glad you called. I'm fine.  
Just some annoying college kids at  
the campsite next to me.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

BEN  
How many?

MERI  
I don't know. A gaggle. All dudes.

BEN  
A gaggle of dudes. You feel safe?

MERI  
Yeah, they're just annoying.

BEN  
When are you moving on? Weather is  
going to catch up with you.

MERI  
Heading south in the morning.

BEN  
Let me know where you land.

MERI  
Will do.

BEN  
Hey, Mer.

MERI  
Yeah?

BEN  
I miss you.

Meri hesitates for a beat.

MERI  
Me too.

BEN  
Take care of yourself.

MERI  
Always. Night, Benny.

Meri steps outside and warms up by the fire. She takes a sip  
of her tea and pulls out her sketch pad.

A moment later, Meri tries to stand but is unsteady on her feet. She sits back down, narrowly missing her chair.

MERI (CONT'D)

Whoa.

She looks over towards the frat boys, who blend into a blur. Before long, Meri is out. Chad is watching.

He wanders over to Meri's campsite, drunk. Brushing the hair out of her face, he begins to unbutton her shirt.

Another frat boy interrupts.

FRAT BOY 2

Dude, these girls just pulled up.  
Leave the old chick alone.

Chad continues to tug at Meri's clothing.

FRAT BOY 2 (CONT'D)

Forget about her, man.

Chad hesitates, still leering at Meri.

CHAD

I'm gonna keep our new friend  
company. Tuck her into bed.

Meri murmurs.

FRAT BOY 2

Come on, man. She's going to wake  
up. Let's go!

Meri slowly opens her eyes and watches the two men walk back to their site. Everything is a blur. She's unable to move.

EXT. CAMPSITE - MORNING

Meri wakes, abruptly, unsure of where she is. Panic washes over her.

She feels around her clothing and body, breathes a deep sigh of relief, and quickly packs up. Chad strolls by with a YOUNG WOMAN.

CHAD

Husband still having car trouble?

Meri locks eyes with the girl before jumping into the van and pulling out.

EXT. FREEWAY - SAME DAY

Meri passes signs that read Wild, Wonderful West Virginia.  
She dials Laura and switches to handsfree.

LAURA

Hey!

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

MERI

Hey.

LAURA

Where's my intrepid road warrior  
today?

MERI

Wild and wonderful West Virginia.

LAURA

Well your timing is on point,  
there's a big Trump rally in  
Charleston today. Where are you  
headed?

MERI

Home.

LAURA

What do you mean, home? Is  
everything okay?

MERI

I was drugged last night.

LAURA

What!? What happened?

MERI

Just some stupid college bros.  
Nothing happened, could have been a  
lot worse. But clearly I have no  
business being out here, I must be  
insane.

LAURA

Okay, first of all, are you sure  
they didn't hurt you?

MERI

Yes. I'm sure.

LAURA  
Stop in Charleston, I'll get on the  
next flight.

MERI  
No, I'm okay. Really.

LAURA  
Meet me in Charleston. I'm on my  
way.

Meri hangs up and gets off at the next exit.

INT. HOTEL BAR, CHARLESTON - NIGHT

Meri and Laura are sitting at the bar. Laura motions to the  
BARTENDER.

LAURA  
Another round, please.

Red MAGA hats meander as supporters congregate outside.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
You know it's happening. You know  
they're out there. But until you  
see it up close, it's almost  
impossible to fathom it.

MERI  
What kills me is the folks who are  
most vulnerable don't realize  
they're opting for things to get a  
lot worse.

LAURA  
Well, I'm proud of you, for making  
it this far. Adventure successfully  
executed. Time to come home.

MERI  
Yeah.

Meri is contemplative. She watches a group of YOUNG WOMEN  
walk by holding signs.

LAURA  
What are you going to do with the  
van?

Meri locks eyes with one of the young women. Her sign has a  
pro life slogan written across it.



MERI

I dunno. Sell it, I guess.

Laura watches the protesters. She slams the remainder of her drink.

MERI (CONT'D)

Is it hard for you? To see this.

LAURA

No. I'm grateful I had the choice and the care when I needed it. I was way too young. What's hard is watching young women abandon the idea of having complete autonomy over their own bodies. Allowing mostly male politicians to call the shots. It's infuriating.

MERI

Do you seriously think he stands a chance?

LAURA

The Terminator served as our Governor. Nothing shocks me.

Meri retreats to her own thoughts. Laura continues to watch the protesters.

MERI

I'm not coming home.

LAURA

What?

MERI

I'm going to finish what I started. I'm not going to let some piece of shit frat boys intimidate me.

LAURA

Are you sure? You know you don't have anything to prove, right?

MERI

I do, though. To myself.

Laura puts her arm around her friend. The protesters begin to chant.

INT. VAN - DAY

Following an empty freeway, Meri's mind wanders. Thoughts of Ollie emerge.

She and her son walk through a grassy field, picking wild flowers.

Meri lays down a blanket and prepares a picnic lunch. Ollie squeals with excitement. She laughs, marveling over her boy.

Suddenly, Meri snaps to. Signs for Greensboro become visible.

MERI

Greensboro. I thought I plugged  
Charlotte into te GPS.

The GPS reads Greensboro, 2 miles. The sun begins to set.

MERI (CONT'D)

Well, this was the point, right?  
Explore places I would never have  
otherwise. This qualifies.

She takes the next exit.

EXT. MAGGIE'S DINER - SAME DAY, DUSK

Meri pulls in to a greasy spoon. Remnants of fifties-era Americana abound.

MERI

Maggie's Diner, huh. Not sure if  
this is a good omen or a bad omen.

INT. MAGGIE'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

Meri grabs a seat at the bar. MAGGIE (60s) is a feisty southern lady who runs a tight ship. She hands Meri a menu. Meri notices her name tag.

MAGGIE

Kitchen closes soon, so best get  
your order in sweetheart.

MERI

What do you recommend?

MAGGIE

The quiche lorraine is scratch-  
made.

MERI  
Sounds great.

Maggie smiles and puts in Meri's order.

MERI (CONT'D)  
This place yours?

MAGGIE  
What gave it away?

MERI  
My mother's name is also Maggie.

MAGGIE  
Oh yeah? You two close?

MERI  
Not really. Sometimes.

MAGGIE  
The mama-daughter dynamic is a  
tricky one.

MERI  
Do you have a daughter?

MAGGIE  
A son. Where are you visiting from?

MERI  
Los Angeles.

MAGGIE  
You're a long way from home. You  
traveling alone?

MERI  
Yes ma'am. You wouldn't know of any  
RV parks or campsites nearby, would  
you?

MAGGIE  
There's one about 5 miles from here  
towards Jamestown. Run by a real  
nice couple. Now that I think of  
it, that place closed down about a  
month ago. What's your rig like?

MERI  
(pointing)  
It's the Westfalia over there.

MAGGIE

Oh! Very bohemian. You're welcome to park at our place for the night. My family and I live nearby.

MERI

That's very generous, but I don't want to be a bother.

Maggie retrieves Meri's dinner from the kitchen.

MAGGIE

It's no bother. My husband and I would be happy to help out a young lady traveling solo.

MERI

Are you sure?

MAGGIE

I'm sure your mama would appreciate you having a safe place to park tonight. We always worry, you know. Even when our babies are grown. Eat up! Then we'll bust out of here.

EXT. RURAL STREET - SAME DAY, NIGHT

Meri follows Maggie's pick-up truck up a winding driveway. DANIEL (60s), a minster and Maggie's husband, meets them at the door.

DANIEL

Hello, I'm Daniel. Welcome.

He extends his hand out warmly.

MERI

Thank you so much for having me.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The walls are adorned with religious references. Meri stops to read a piece of framed scripture when Daniel and Maggie return with tea.

DANIEL

You must be wondering about some of the artwork.

MERI

Sorry, I didn't mean to be nosey.

MAGGIE

Don't be silly, make yourself at home. Daniel is a minister.

MERI

Ah, makes sense. Sorry, I haven't been to church since I was little.

DANIEL

What doctrine do you belong to?

MERI

Well, nothing, actually. But I believe it was an Anglican church.

DANIEL

Maggie tells me you're from California. What brings you to these parts?

MERI

I'm partway through a yearlong road trip.

DANIEL

All on your own?

MERI

Yes sir.

DANIEL

A woman could run into trouble driving around the country aimlessly like that.

MAGGIE

I'm sure she's thought it through.

MERI

I mean, I have a rough plan. Aside from a few bumps along the way, it's been a really enjoyable trip.

DANIEL

The Lord is here to help guide you, you know.

MAGGIE

Easy, good preacher. Meri already told you she isn't a practicing Christian.

MERI

With all due respect, I've always found organized religion to be a bit...divisive.

DANIEL

Yes, well, places like Los Angeles are luring people away from their faith. Diverting otherwise good folks towards a life of excess. Those Scientologists...

MAGGIE

(interrupting)

Darling, there are good people in LA too. Present company included.

DANIEL

I don't doubt that. Anyhow, what do you do for a living Meri?

MERI

I'm an architect by trade. But I've been renting out rooms in my home, which has allowed me to pull back on work to focus on my art. That's what I really want to be doing.

MAGGIE

What kind of art?

MERI

I sketch and paint, mostly. A bit of photography.

DANIEL

We have a few projects around here that could use someone with your expertise. What do you say you stay on with us a while. Safe place to park your van and Maggie's home cooked meals as compensation.

MERI

That's a very generous offer, but I couldn't impose like that. I should probably head south before the weather turns.

MAGGIE

Daniel's right, we could use your help with a few things. Greensboro's a lovely town, you might find that you like it here.

MERI  
 Alright if I sleep on it?

INT. VAN - SAME NIGHT

Meri turns out the light and gets into bed. Her phone bings.

MARGARET (TEXT)  
 Where have you landed now? I had a  
 premonition. A bad one.

MERI (TEXT)  
 I'm fine, mom.

The typing bubble appears and stops. Meri puts her phone down  
 and closes her eyes. It bings again.

LAURA (TEXT)  
 How's the bible belt?

MERI (TEXT)  
 Made it as far as Greensboro. Might  
 stay for a bit.

LAURA (TEXT)  
 Oh yeah? Joining a convent, or...?

MERI (TEXT)  
 Maybe just the church choir.

Laura sends a stream of devil emojis.

MERI (CONT'D)  
 Nice.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Meri knocks, then lets herself in. She wanders into the  
 kitchen. Maggie storms in and starts to cook.

MAGGIE  
 Mornin'! How do you like your eggs?

MERI  
 Poached please. Can I help?

MAGGIE  
 You're fine. Here's all the things  
 we could use your help with.

Maggie hands Meri a list.

JAMES (17), Maggie and Daniel's angsty son, sizes Meri up.

JAMES

Who's this?

MAGGIE

Meri, this is our son James. Meri is going to help out with some of the projects we've been putting off around here.

MERI

Well, I haven't decided yet. Nice to meet you, James.

JAMES

Why haven't you decided? Better offer?

Meri contemplates James' question. Maggie and James turn their attention to Meri, awaiting a response.

MERI

Alright, I'm in.

MAGGIE

I knew you'd come around. Here's your eggs. Dang it, I better jet. Honey, please answer any questions Meri might have. See you two tonight.

Maggie heads out. James hovers, nibbling on a toast point. He hoists himself onto the counter.

JAMES

So, what's your story?

MERI

My story?

JAMES

Like, what are you doing here?

James hops off the counter and grabs the list from Meri.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You know how to do all this stuff?

MERI

Most of it.



JAMES

What do you do for a job?

MERI

I'm an architect.

JAMES

Fancy. Where are you from, anyway?

MERI

LA.

JAMES

No shit, I'm dying to go there.  
What on earth are you doing in  
Greensboro?

MERI

I stopped by your mom's diner last  
night. It was too late to find a  
place to park my van for the night,  
so your parents were kind enough to  
let me park it here. Shouldn't you  
be in school?

JAMES

We're on break this week. I should  
be partying somewhere warm, having  
promiscuous sex, getting blind  
drunk. But as usual, I'm stuck  
here. Wait, you live in a van?

MERI

I'm traveling in a van for a year.

JAMES

Like those bougie hipsters all over  
my Insta feed?

MERI

Sure. Think you'd be up for helping  
me with your parents greenhouse?

JAMES

Not really. But I guess I don't  
have anything better to do.

EXT. GREENHOUSE - DAY

Meri installs a door. James lights a cigarette.

MERI

Do your parents know you smoke?

JAMES

My parents don't know a lot about me.

MERI

Oh yeah? Like what? Hey, hand me that screwdriver.

James fetches the tool. Meri slips the cigarette out of his fingers and takes a drag before butting it out.

MERI (CONT'D)

These things will kill you.

JAMES

Hey!

MERI

What's it like living in Greensboro?

JAMES

A fucking nightmare.

MERI

There must be at least one redeeming quality.

JAMES

Let me know when you find it. Are you almost done?

MERI

I would be if I had an extra set of hands.

James lights another cigarette.

JAMES

Alright, alright. What do you need?

MERI

Hold this in place while I drill.

The cigarette hangs from James' lips. Ash falls onto Meri. She drops the door.

MERI (CONT'D)

What the fuck, man?

JAMES

It was an accident! Don't let my father hear you cuss like that.

MERI  
Let's try this again.

JAMES  
On one condition. We go for a drive  
after this.

MERI  
Okay, whatever. Just hold the door  
in place. No smoking on the job.

James butts out and does as he's instructed. Meri screws the door into place.

MERI (CONT'D)  
That wasn't so hard, was it?

JAMES  
Let's roll.

MERI  
Wait, where are we going?

JAMES  
You'll see.

EXT. CEMETERY - SAME DAY

James and Meri pull into the parking lot.

MERI  
A cemetery?

Meri tentatively gets out of the car. James leads her to the top of a hill. A solitary gravestone comes into view.

MERI (CONT'D)  
Where are we going?

JAMES  
To visit a friend.

They arrive at the grave. The gravestone reads Christopher Miller 1999-2014. James pulls out a folded piece of paper with Chris written across it. He lights it on fire.

MERI  
What are you doing?

The paper burns down and out. James sits down next to the grave. Meri sits beside him.

MERI (CONT'D)  
Was he a close friend?

JAMES  
You could say that.

MERI  
Why is he buried up here?

JAMES  
(sarcastic)  
He's not permitted to be buried  
among god's children.

MERI  
What does that mean?

JAMES  
It means he killed himself. God  
doesn't forgive you for that.

James lights a cigarette.

MERI  
I'm so sorry.

JAMES  
He didn't stand a chance in this  
town.

James wipes a tear away. Meri wraps her arm around him.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Meri helps herself to coffee. Daniel appears out of nowhere.  
She jumps.

DANIEL  
Didn't mean to startle you.

MERI  
Good morning.

DANIEL  
You should join us for my Sunday  
sermon.

MERI  
Thanks for the invite, but...

James bursts into the room and opens the fridge.

JAMES

You can come with me.

MERI

(reluctant)

Great.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Meri follows James into a pew next to Maggie and they take their seats. Daniel emerges to address his congregation.

DANIEL

Good morning. I'd like to begin by talking a bit about acceptance. How many of you long to belong somewhere? At work, in your community, in society. At home. Come on, show of hands please.

Several people raise their hands, slowly. James is among them. Meri soon follows.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

That's it, don't be shy. There's nothing to be ashamed of. Acceptance is a perfectly normal emotion. As human beings, as god's children, we desire to belong. Despite our differences or our feelings of inadequacy. Take our guest Meri here, for example.

The entire room turns their attention to Meri. Her face goes flush as she sinks into her seat.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Meri is with us all the way from Los Angeles. And I'm sure there are folks within these walls who may look at her and think she's different. Because she leads a nomadic lifestyle. Because she's divorced from her husband.

Meri leans into James.

MERI

(whispering)

How does he know that?

JAMES  
(whispering)  
Is it true? Maybe Jesus told him.

DANIEL  
Because she may or may not be a  
woman of loose morals.

The audience gasps. Maggie pats Meri on the lap.

DANIEL (CONT'D)  
It doesn't really matter, though,  
does it? She's still a good person.  
She still has an opportunity to ask  
Jesus for guidance. Which is why we  
shouldn't turn our back on her.

A few cheers erupt from the crowd. Meri nods in  
acknowledgement, smiling awkwardly.

JAMES  
I'm definitely turning my back on  
you.

MERI  
Very funny.

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME DAY, NIGHT

Meri joins the family for dinner.

MERI  
Everything looks amazing, Maggie.

MAGGIE  
Thank you, sweetheart. What did you  
think of Daniel's sermon today?

Meri takes a sip of water and clears her throat.

MERI  
Well...it was eye opening.

DANIEL  
Eye opening. How so?

MERI  
It's not the subject matter I  
expected, I guess.

DANIEL  
And what did you expect, exactly?

MERI

I guess I expected you to be a bit more directive. Defining what's right and wrong. But, I found your sermon to be surprisingly objective.

JAMES

Oh, yes. Extremely objective. Like the part where you called Meri a woman of loose morals.

MAGGIE

James, please.

DANIEL

That's not what I said. It was more of a hypothetical.

Awkward silence.

MERI

Having not attended church for a very long time, I think it was different than I remembered. More open, maybe.

DANIEL

I'm pleased you think so.

MERI

Circling back to the topic of acceptance. Does that extend to everyone in your congregation?

DANIEL

Of course, why wouldn't it?

MERI

For example, if someone you knew came out as gay, what would your position be? Would you still advocate for acceptance in that case?

Maggie abruptly begins clearing plates. James' posture stiffens.

DANIEL

In that case, I suppose I'd look to support that person in any way that I could.

James' eyes widen in surprise.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

There are therapies and support groups. Resources to help with that sort of thing.

James drops his fork onto his plate with a searing crack. He storms out of the dining room. Maggie continues to clear plates without skipping a beat.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

James, come back here and help your mother with the dishes. Sorry, he can be a moody kid sometimes.

MERI

I'll help clear the dishes.

EXT. VAN - SAME DAY, NIGHT

Meri approaches the van and discovers the light is on.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

She opens the door slowly. James is surveying the van's contents. A mariner's hat hangs on the wall. Polaroids of Neil and Gretchen. Photos of Laura, Ollie and Margaret. A can of mace by the bedside. Dried wildflowers hang in the kitchen. A map of the US with Meri's journey thus far marked in red.

MERI

Breaking and entering is a felony in this state, young man.

JAMES

Misdemeanor.

MERI

You alright?

JAMES

Oh, I don't know. Aside from you trying to out me in front of my fucked up family, I'm good.

MERI

I didn't mean to insinuate anything. And I'm sorry I upset you. Sometimes I forget where I am.



JAMES

Greensboro is not LA. It's a conservative, white-washed town full of dirty little secrets.

MERI

What secrets?

JAMES

Who's the little boy in the photo?

Meri stays silent. She fidgets, tidying up the kitchen.

MERI

What secrets, James?

JAMES

Things the good preacher would rather I not say.

MERI

I'm listening.

James takes a deep breath.

JAMES

This happened a few years ago. I was fourteen. Do you have any cigarettes?

MERI

I do not.

JAMES

That's fine, I'd rather smoke one of these.

James holds up a small jar of joints.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You've been holding out on me.

He lights up and takes a long drag.

MERI

Hey! Your parents will kill me. Have you smoked marijuana before?

JAMES

I have my sources. Have you ever thought about having kids?

MERI

Uh, sure.

JAMES

You'd make a really cool mom.

Meri swipes the joint out of James' hand, takes a drag and butts out.

MERI

(exhaling)

Oh man, I'm going to hell for this.

JAMES

Dive on in, the water's warm.

Meri picks up her sketch pad.

MERI

Mind if I sketch you while you tell me this salacious story?

JAMES

Sure. Get my good side. So, I'm fourteen. And this guy is staying with us. Let's call him Brian, he's nineteen maybe. And he's studying under my father.

Meri's pencil moves fast across the page.

JAMES (CONT'D)

He was also from California. Not LA - somewhere else. I can't remember. But he had this surfer dude vibe about him. Seemed kind of exotic. I'd never met anyone like him before.

Meri puts her sketch pad down. She listens intently.

JAMES (CONT'D)

One night, I was in my room, and I saw him walk by. He had just come in from a run in the rain. Soaked to the bone. I followed him to his room and watched him undress. Until he caught me.

MERI

Was he angry?

JAMES

No. He seemed pleased. Like, he planned on it happening. He pushed the door open and asked me if I liked what I saw.

MERI

What did you do?

JAMES

I told him yes, that I liked it very much. He closed the door behind me and asked me to take off my clothes. And then he touched me. First with his hand. Then with his mouth. I exploded in two seconds. Oh god, I was so embarrassed.

MERI

James, he was the adult. He took advantage of you.

JAMES

I wanted him to. I so badly wanted him to. I was sure I was in love with him. As in love as one can be at that age. Until he betrayed me.

James picks up the jar of joints but Meri grabs it back.

MERI

That's enough. How did he betray you? Aside from violating you.

JAMES

After that night, nothing happened between us. He practically ignored me. I confronted him once, asked if I had done something wrong. But he pretended like nothing happened. I was devastated.

MERI

How long did he stay with you after this happened?

JAMES

Well, after walking in on him with my father a few days later, I guess he felt it was time to move on.

MERI

I'm sorry, what?

JAMES

Yep. Caught a glimpse of my father fucking him against the dryer in our laundry room. Brian locked eyes with me and smiled. To this day, my father has no idea what I saw.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

That we shared the same man. I don't know what would be more disappointing to him - the fact that I'm gay or that I fucked around with his alter boy.

MERI

Jesus christ.

JAMES

Precisely.

Meri sits down in front of James, taking his hands in hers.

MERI

I'm so sorry this happened to you. You were way too young to process any of this. I can't imagine how that must have felt.

JAMES

I felt numb. That's how I feel towards my father now. And every time I watch him deliver a sermon, I take great pleasure in knowing that I had Brian too. Sometimes I fantasize about telling him. About that smug, judgmental look turning to embarrassment and shame. But I could never do that to my mother.

MERI

Children aren't supposed to deal with this stuff. You should never have been placed in a position where you felt like you had to protect your parents. They should have been protecting you. Are you seeing anyone about this?

JAMES

You mean a shrink? Sure, my parents have sent me to a bunch. But I've never opened up about this to anybody. Besides Chris, you're the only one who knows.

MERI

Was Chris your boyfriend?

James stands up and takes a peek at Meri's sketch.

JAMES

He was my only friend. Thanks for listening.

Meri watches him walk back to the house.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

A mess of materials are spread across the floor. Meri is preparing to install cabinetry. James walks in.

JAMES

About last night.

Maggie flies into the kitchen, flustered.

MAGGIE

Has anyone seen my keys? What happened last night?

Meri looks at James, her eyes widen.

JAMES

Nothing, just a silly saying. Here you go.

James hands Maggie her keys and kisses her on the cheek.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Gotta run, late for school.

MAGGIE

Have a good day, dear.

Maggie waits until she hears the front door close.

MERI

I'll have the kitchen put back together before you get home tonight.

MAGGIE

Not worried one bit. It's looking great. Say, did James take you to the cemetery? A friend thought she may have spotted you two there.

MERI

He did, yeah.

MAGGIE

That's a strange place to hang out, isn't it?

MERI

He wanted to visit a friend. And needed the company, I think.

MAGGIE

Ah yes. Chris. Very tragic story.

MERI

James mentioned he committed suicide.

MAGGIE

He was a very troubled boy. Caught him in the barn with James one night. Both of them stark naked.

Meri drops her wrench.

MERI

Sorry. What happened after that?

MAGGIE

We had to tell his parents, of course. All very embarrassing for everyone involved. They found his body a week later, washed up on Buffalo Lake. The coroner figured he must have jumped from the Elm Street bridge. Such a selfish act, his parents were devastated.

MERI

So very sad.

MAGGIE

Indeed. You know, sweetheart, people like to talk in this town.

MERI

Um...okay.

MAGGIE

I may be the preacher's wife, but that doesn't mean I don't have eyes and ears. I know things. Things that would make my husband very uncomfortable. I pray James isn't tempted by the same impulses.

Meri stays still. Words elude her.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Anyway, I better run. Have a good day.

Maggie leaves. Meri let's out a big sigh. A bird lands on the window sill. Meri watches until it flies away.

INT. VAN - DAY

Meri is sketching. Someone knocks on the window - James. She waves him in.

JAMES

Hey! Whatcha working on? Is that my portrait?

MERI

Get away, it's not ready. Trying to finish it up before I hit the road.

JAMES

Wait, you're leaving?

MERI

Pretty soon, yeah.

JAMES

Why? You just got here.

MERI

Gotta keep moving if I'm going to avoid winter weather. Besides, I never meant to stay this long.

JAMES

What if I need you here?

MERI

I'm only a phone call away.

JAMES

I'll come with you! We could definitely pull off a Thelma and Louise vibe. I'll pack snacks, make playlists...

MERI

(interrupting)

I can't let you do that. You need to finish senior year. With good grades too so you can get into a good college.

James turns away and stares out the window.

MERI (CONT'D)

Don't be like that. It's your  
ticket to anywhere you want to go.

James turns to face Meri. A tear stains his flush cheek. She gently brushes it away.

JAMES

Can I come visit you in LA?

MERI

Finish high school, get into  
college and the world is yours for  
the taking. And yes, you're welcome  
any time.

James pulls Meri in for a hug. She wraps her arms around him with all the maternal warmth in the world.

DAY 186

EXT. VAN - DAY

Meri is packing up. James helps.

JAMES

You're really leaving, huh?

MERI

I need to finish what I started.

JAMES

I know, I know. I'll miss you. Even  
though you did a shitty job  
installing the kitchen cabinets.

MERI

And I'll miss you. Even though  
you're a smart ass.

James pins a photo booth strip of he and Meri next to the photo of Oliver. He goes quiet. Pensive.

MERI (CONT'D)

You're going to be okay, you know.  
Better than okay. You're going to  
do something great. This isn't  
goodbye. Just...see you somewhere  
down the road. Oh! I almost forgot,  
I have something for you.

Meri pulls out a tube and hands it to James.



JAMES  
What is it?

MERI  
Open it later. I'll be embarrassed.

EXT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Maggie knocks on the window.

MAGGIE  
Do you need any help packing up?

MERI  
Nah, I'm all set.

Meri and James step out of the van. Maggie hands Meri a package.

MAGGIE  
Just a few goodies from the cafe  
and some other odds and ends.

Meri hugs Maggie hard. Daniel strolls over to join them.

DANIEL  
So, where are you off to next?

MERI  
Not sure. Austin, maybe.

DANIEL  
That's a pretty rough route between  
here and there. You sure you're up  
for it?

MAGGIE  
She's gonna be just fine.

Daniel hands Meri a small statue of the Virgin Mary.

DANIEL  
Well, may God guide you and look  
over you during your travels.

Meri pulls him in close, hugging him with one arm.

MERI  
(whispering)  
And you.

Daniel pulls away and surveys Meri's face. Uncomfortable, he backs away.

MAGGIE

We'll let you two say your goodbyes. Call us if you need us, sweetheart.

MERI

Thanks for everything.

Maggie and Daniel walk back towards the house.

JAMES

He's your son, isn't he?

MERI

What?

JAMES

The boy in the photo.

Meri freezes. James pulls her in for a hug.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I figure you'll tell me when you're ready. Maybe when we meet again...somewhere down the road.

James kisses her on the cheek, turns and walks towards the house. He doesn't look back.

Meri hops back into the van and places the Virgin Mary down next to the can of mace.

Maggie and Daniel watch from the front porch and wave as Meri fires up the engine. She slowly rolls out.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME TIME

James opens the tube Meri gave him and pulls out his portrait. He sits down on the bed and surveys the details of his face. Delighted, he smiles.

DAY 192

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

Meri is cruising. Music blares as she sings at the top of her lungs. Passing cars notice and gawk. A SMALL CHILD waves.

She passes signs for Atlanta and Birmingham, eventually crossing the state line into Mississippi.

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER - DUSK

Meri parks the van and surveys the people parked around her. Dodgy looking characters - mostly TRUCKERS - abound.

MERI

Just gonna have a quick bite, pound  
some coffee and power through to  
New Orleans.

She hops out and walks towards the diner. A group of truckers monitor her every move. Her pace quickens.

INT. ROADSIDE DINER - CONTINUOUS

Meri sits at the bar. A WAITRESS slams down a menu.

MERI

I'll have the shrimp and grits. And  
a coffee, please.

The waitress nods and picks up the menu. Meri is the only woman in the diner. A ROUGH MAN sits next to her. She shifts in her seat.

ROUGH MAN

Where you from, darlin'?

MERI

Just passing through.

ROUGH MAN

Aren't we all. What's a pretty  
little thing like you doing all  
alone out here?

The waitress brings out Meri's order. She digs in, ignoring her unsavory neighbor.

ROUGH MAN (CONT'D)

Don't gotta be rude, ya know.

MERI

I'm kind of in a hurry.

The rough man relocates to a table. Meri sighs, relieved.

INT. ROADSIDE DINER - BATHROOM, SAME NIGHT

Meri is washing her hands. The rough man is suddenly standing behind her. Feeling his presence, she raises her head to meet his gaze in the mirror. Meri spins around.

MERI

All yours.

The rough man grabs both of Meri's wrists and pins her against the wall, burying his face in her hair.

ROUGH MAN

You smell damn good, girl.

She tries to scream, but he wraps one hand across her mouth, holding both wrists with the other.

ROUGH MAN (CONT'D)

You think you can tease me and take off like that? Bend over.

Meri bites his hand. He smacks her hard across the face.

MERI

(pleading)

Please, let me go and I won't tell anyone. I'll just get in my van and go. Please!

The rough man forces Meri against the sink and unzips his jeans. Meri sobs.

MERI (CONT'D)

Stop! Let me go!

Suddenly, a loud knock. The door swings open and the waitress has a gun pointed at the rough man. She cocks the pistol and wraps her finger around the trigger.

WAITRESS

Let her go. Now!

The rough man releases his grip and raises his hands.

ROUGH MAN

You wouldn't dare.

WAITRESS

Oh no? Try me. Get the fuck out of my diner.

He quickly pushes past the waitress. We hear the front door open and close. The waitress checks that he's gone and lowers the gun. Meri crumbles to the floor.

WAITRESS (CONT'D)

You alright? He hurt you?

MERI  
 (trembling)  
 Not really, I'm okay. Thank you.

The waitress helps Meri to her feet.

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER - SAME NIGHT

Meri fires up the van and peels out. She looks at her reflection in the rear view mirror. Her lip is bleeding.

Flying down the freeway, Meri dials Laura. Her hands begin to shake.

LAURA  
 (groggy)  
 Mer? What time is it?

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

MERI  
 It's late.

LAURA  
 Where are you, I can barely hear you?

MERI  
 I decided to drive through the night to get to New Orleans by morning.

Meri's voice cracks. Cell service cuts in and out.

MERI (CONT'D)  
 I stopped at a roadside diner, and this man...

LAURA  
 Mer! Can you hear me? Tell me what happened!

MERI  
 (unraveling)  
 Nothing, the waitress had a gun and scared him and I got away and now I'm somewhere outside of Jackson I think and as soon as the sun comes up I'm going to buy a gun.

LAURA  
 You're scaring me.

Meri wipes away tears and takes a swing of her coffee.

MERI

I'm okay, it's okay. I just need to focus. I'll call you in a few hours.

LAURA

Mer! Don't hang up.

Meri hangs up, cranks the music and keeps going.

EXT. GUN SHOP - DAY

Meri steps out of the van and staggers her way to the shop. A truck with Trump Pence 2016 flags is parked next to her.

INT. GUN SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Meri scans the display case. Fire arms range from tiny purse pistols and Glock 19s to AK47s. A SHOP OWNER emerges.

SHOP OWNER

Can I help you ma'am?

MERI

Just looking, thanks.

SHOP OWNER

Have you owned a gun before?

MERI

Yes. Oh yes, several.

Two BIKERS burst into the shop. Meri jumps.

BIKER

I'll take five rounds of Lugers.

The shop keeper fetches the ammunition. Meri's phone bings. All eyes turn to her.

MERI

(nervously)

Sorry.

She tucks into a corner of the store and pulls out her phone. Amidst several texts and missed calls from Laura, a NEWS ALERT populates the screen. Mass shooting in a nightclub in Orlando. Meri quickly scans the headlines. Close to 50 casualties and dozens more injured.

She rubs her eyes, tucks her phone away and leaves the shop.

EXT. GUN SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Meri runs back to the van. Out of breath, she hops in and tries to compose herself. Her phone rings - Laura.

MERI

Hey.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

LAURA

Are you trying to give me a heart attack? Where are you? Are you safe? What the fuck is happening?!

MERI

I'm okay, I'm okay. Sorry. I didn't mean to scare you.

LAURA

Too late.

MERI

I'm safe. I had a scary incident with this dude in a diner. And then I tried to buy a gun.

LAURA

A gun?!

MERI

I can't believe how easy it is. I didn't end up getting one.

LAURA

Did you see the news?

MERI

Literally as I was staring at a display case full of ammo. I need to get the hell out of here. I'll call you when I get to New Orleans.

LAURA

Drive safe. Call the minute you arrive. Love you.

MERI

I will. Love you too.

Meri hangs up and pulls out.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - DAY

Cruising through the GARDEN DISTRICT, Meri passes several sprawling historical mansions before arriving at a charming bed and breakfast.

MERI (TEXT)

Made it to NOLA. Treating myself to a B&B. Call ya in the morning.

LAURA (TEXT)

Good. Get some rest.

INT. BED AND BREAKFAST, GUEST ROOM - SAME DAY

Meri draws a bath and soaks her weary bones. She draws the blinds and crawls into bed.

EXT. FRENCH QUARTER - DAY

Meri wanders the streets, lined with elaborate rod iron terraces and teeming with revelers. Music seeps from every crack and crevice.

She buys beignets from a street vendor and pops in and out of voodoo shops.

Accidentally joining a second line procession, Meri joyously dances her way down Bourbon Street.

DAY 214

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

Meri crosses the state line into Texas and passes exit signs for Houston, eventually reaching Austin's city limits. Suddenly, the van stalls.

MERI

Oh, no. Come on mama. Don't die on me now.

Meri slows down and pulls into the shoulder. Cars honk as they blow by her.

MERI (CONT'D)

Alright, alright.

She gets out and props up the hood. Smoke billows.



MERI (CONT'D)

Great. Just great.

The vehicle pops and backfires with a bang. Defeated, Meri takes a seat on the toasty asphalt.

MERI (CONT'D)

Hey Siri, show me a mechanic that won't drain my bank account.

A truck pulls up next to the van. COWBOY BOOTS strut their way along the road. ALEX (40s), a rustic type with rock star swagger, crouches down next to Meri.

ALEX

You need some help?

MERI

What gave it away?

ALEX

This probably isn't the safest place to lounge around.

MERI

Is that what you think I'm doing here? Lounging around?

Alex stands and extends his hand.

ALEX

Get up. I know a pretty good mechanic who can help you out.

Meri reluctantly takes his hand. He pulls her to her feet.

MERI

How do I know you're not a psycho killer?

ALEX

Well, I do like the Talking Heads.

Meri is expressionless. Annoyed.

ALEX (CONT'D)

My buddy Ty can get you back on the road in no time. I'll text him your coordinates and tell him to look for an ungrateful blond by the name of...what was your name?

MERI

Meri. Are you always this charming?

ALEX

Yep.

Suddenly a loud bang. Meri and Alex jump. Smoke swirls and accumulates.

MERI

No!

Meri panics, hopping onto the van. Choking on smoke, she frantically fills a bag - her art portfolio, camera, Seattle Mariners cap, fly fishing tackle, the Virgin Mary statue. Alex tries to pull her from the vehicle.

MERI (CONT'D)

Stop! Let me go!

She tries to grab the photos of Ollie and James but Alex pulls her out of the van and towards his truck.

ALEX

Get in! Now!

Meri hops in. Alex peels out, backing up along the shoulder. The van bursts into flames in spectacular fashion.

They watch in silence, taking in the monstrous inferno, as fire ravages the van's rusty frame. The photos of Ollie and James tinge and curl.

Meri stares in shock. Alex wraps his arm around her and she let's him console her for a second. HIGHWAY PATROL arrives.

INT. BAR - SAME DAY

The place has the charm of a cherished dive - lived in but not falling apart at the seams. Meri and Alex belly up to the bar. They both take a shot.

MERI

So you own this place?

ALEX

Yep, for better or worse.

MERI

What's that mean?

ALEX

Business has been tough. But we'll bounce back, we always do.

TYLER (20s), a chirpy red neck and faithful regular pulls up a stool.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Hey! Ty, this is Meri.

TYLER  
Good to meet you. Sorry about your van, I heard it was quite the scene.

MERI  
You could say that.

ALEX  
It looked like a real nice hipster van. Shame it blew to pieces.

MERI  
It was more than a hipster van.

ALEX  
Easy, LA, I was just giving you the gears.

MERI  
Giving me the what?

ALEX  
Canadian saying. Just means giving you a hard time.

MERI  
Oh, so you're Canadian?

ALEX  
I grew up in Montreal, but been here a long time.

MERI  
How ironic, in a time where most Americans are trying to flee to Canada. Why would you stay?

TYLER  
Cuz Texas is awesome.

Meri clears her throat.

MERI  
How do you two know each other?

ALEX  
Ty helps out with security.

MERI  
Ah, the hired gun.

TYLER  
Part-time hired gun. Mechanic  
otherwise. Too bad we didn't meet  
earlier.

Tyler spots some FRIENDS on the other side of the bar.

TYLER (CONT'D)  
Be right back.

ALEX  
He's a good kid. Had a rough go of  
it. His father passed a few years  
back so he moved in to take care of  
his mom and the family business.  
She's not well.

MERI  
That's really hard.

ALEX  
I do love it here, you know. I get  
why that may seem strange to a  
liberal chick from LA given the  
political climate in this country.

MERI  
If I've learned anything over the  
past 8 months, it's that there are  
good people all over. I don't think  
the red vs. blue distinction should  
be taken so literally. But I  
suppose I had to see that for  
myself.

ALEX  
You've been on the road for 8  
months?

MERI  
Yep.

ALEX  
In that van?

MERI  
Yes sir.

ALEX  
That must have been terrible to  
watch it burn to the ground.

MERI  
I've had better days.

Meri nudges Alex and they laugh. Tyler watches from the other side of the bar and smiles.

INT. HOTEL - SAME DAY, NIGHT

Meri scans all the missed calls, texts and various notifications on her phone. She dials Laura.

MERI  
Hey.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

LAURA  
Well thank god, where are you?  
Maggie is frantic.

MERI  
Austin. And I'm fine. Actually, I  
did encounter a minor hiccup.

LAURA  
I'm listening.

MERI  
The van blew up.

LAURA  
What are you saying here? Like, you  
overheated, or...?

MERI  
No, the van blew up. Engulfed in  
flames. Burnt to a crisp. Gone.

LAURA  
I have so many questions.

MERI  
Allegedly a can of mace fueled the  
explosion.

LAURA  
Oh no, Mer. The mace I bought you?

MERI  
I just wish I had it with me in the  
diner. I'm gonna come home soon I  
think.

LAURA

You think? Were you planning to hitchhike the rest of the way?

MERI

Too soon.

Meri texts a photo of the van. Flames raging. Alex is partially in frame.

LAURA

Holy shit! I'm so glad you're okay. When are you coming home?

MERI

Not sure, I need to get some sleep. I'll text Maggie proof of life.

LAURA

Who's the dude in the pic?

MERI

Oh, this guy Alex. He stopped to help me. I'll keep you posted on where I go from here.

LAURA

Be safe. Trust no one. Not even the cowboy who helped you. Especially the cowboy who helped you.

MERI

He's fine. I'll call you later.

Meri hangs up and falls into bed.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Meri is back at Alex's bar. A band is about to play. Alex arrives with a case of whiskey and drops it onto the bar.

ALEX

Hey, LA.

MERI

Please don't call me that.

ALEX

You decided to stay, huh?

MERI

For a minute. It's my first time in Austin. May as well make the most of it.

Alex's gaze burns into Meri like a branding iron. She downs her drink.

ALEX

What were you doing driving around the states in that van anyway?

MERI

Are you interrogating me?

ALEX

Sincerely intrigued.

MERI

I guess I craved exposure to life outside of the LA bubble.

ALEX

I think I get that.

Awkward silence.

ALEX (CONT'D)

May I join you?

MERI

Sure.

Meri and Alex are deep in conversation, oblivious to the crowd, the drunks, the band and any activity that surrounds them.

HOURS LATER

Meri stands and immediately steadies herself.

ALEX

Easy, you alright?

MERI

Yeah, I just need to eat something.

ALEX

I got you.

EXT. FOOD TRUCK - SAME NIGHT

Alex and Meri hit up a taco truck outside of the bar.

ALEX  
We'll get four barbacoa please. You  
eat meat, right?

MERI  
I'll eat anything right now.

Alex laughs. Meri blushes, stuffing a taco into her mouth.

MERI (CONT'D)  
This is so damn good.

ALEX  
Right? So, what's your plan?

MERI  
What do you mean?

ALEX  
How long you staying in Austin?

MERI  
(stuffing her face)  
Not sure. Trying to get rid of me?

ALEX  
Now why would I want to do that?

Meri has an unsightly glob of guacamole in the corner of her mouth. Alex stares.

MERI  
What?

He reaches over to gently wipe the avocado from Meri's lip, lingering a beat too long.

MERI (CONT'D)  
Oh. Thanks.

ALEX  
We should get you to your hotel.

EXT. HOTEL - SAME NIGHT

Alex and Meri pull up. He double parks.

MERI  
That was a really fun night. Thanks  
for the tacos.

ALEX  
Should mitigate your hangover.



Meri lingers a bit too long and eventually settles on a fist bump. Alex laughs.

MERI  
Goodnight.

ALEX  
Sleep tight, LA.

EXT. BAR - DAY

Meri is sitting on the patio sketching. Tyler pulls up.

TYLER  
Hey! Haven't we scared you off yet?

MERI  
Not yet.

TYLER  
What are you working on?

Meri pushes her sketchbook across the table. Tyler turns the pages, thoughtfully inspecting each piece.

TYLER (CONT'D)  
These are really good. Who is this?

It's a portrait of Ollie. Meri hesitates.

MERI  
Just a kid who lives on my street  
in LA.

Alex suddenly appears.

ALEX  
Hey you two. What's that?

MERI  
Nothing, just a few sketches.

TYLER  
No, dude, these are really good.  
Take a look.

Meri pulls the book towards her, closing it. She deflects.

MERI  
I hear there's a pretty big band  
playing tonight.

ALEX  
You coming?

MERI  
I'll consider it.

Alex smiles before making his way inside. Tyler fetches two beers and sits back down with Meri.

TYLER  
Okay, kiddo, what's your story? Why were you really traveling around in that fire trap? You runnin'?

MERI  
Not running. Kiddo? Remind me how old you are?

TYLER  
Twenty four.

MERI  
You first. What's your story?

Tyler takes a swig of his beer.

TYLER  
Well...I've lived in Austin my whole life.

MERI  
Have you traveled much outside of Texas?

TYLER  
I've barely traveled outside of this county! I took over the family business after my dad passed a few years ago. And moved back home to care for my mom.

MERI  
That's a lot to take on at your age. At any age.

TYLER  
She's all I got.

MERI  
No siblings?

TYLER

No sibs. Mom says they couldn't have created anything more perfect after I came into the world so they best not push their luck.

MERI

She sounds like a good mom. Are you dating anybody?

TYLER

I was engaged.

MERI

Was engaged? What happened?

TYLER

She wanted to travel around Europe. See the world before we settled down. I couldn't leave my mom on her own. So she left without me.

MERI

That must have been really tough.

TYLER

I'm better off without her. Family first, right?

MERI

Right.

Alex watches Tyler and Meri. Meri catches his gaze and he looks away.

MERI (CONT'D)

What about him?

TYLER

Who, Alex?

MERI

Yeah.

TYLER

I know he moved around quite a bit before settling in Austin.

MERI

What made him land here. The bar?

TYLER

He met his wife here. She passed about two years ago.

(MORE)

TYLER (CONT'D)  
Horrible car wreck. Pretty close to  
where your van blew up, actually.

Tyler's words stun Meri.

MERI  
That's terrible.

TYLER  
He was in a pretty bad way for a  
while. Hit the bottle hard. But he  
cleaned up. He's been throwing  
himself into building the bar back  
up ever since. Alright, your turn.

Meri takes a swig of her beer.

MERI  
Well, as you know, I'm from LA. I  
rent my extra rooms out to folks  
traveling through. One such  
traveler happened to be selling the  
van. So I scooped it up. And here I  
am. The end.

TYLER  
Not so fast. How were you able to  
just up and leave so easily? You  
mentioned you were an architect.

MERI  
I work for myself. So I gave myself  
a year off.

TYLER  
Nice. Were you ever married? Kids?

Meri contemplates her response carefully.

MERI  
I was married. No kids.

Alex stops by their table.

ALEX  
Hey Ty - sorry to interrupt - it's  
going to be a full house tonight  
and I'm down one guy. Mind keeping  
an eye on things?

TYLER  
You got it.

Meri watches Alex walk away. Tyler notices.

TYLER (CONT'D)

Was married? What happened? If you don't mind me asking.

MERI

We just...he and I didn't see eye to eye on a few things.

TYLER

That's it? Nothing left to salvage?

MERI

It's complicated.

TYLER

Understood. I've learned when not to press a lady.

MERI

Smart man.

INT. BAR - SAME DAY, NIGHT

The room is packed. Meri is sitting near the stage.

Alex squeezes her shoulder as he walks by to introduce the band and winks. She blushes. Her phone vibrates.

BEN (TEXT)

Hey, it's been a while. You good?

MERI (TEXT)

I'm good! Long story, but my van stalled and caught fire. I'm in Austin now.

BEN (TEXT)

Fire?! Jesus. What's the plan??

MERI (TEXT)

Just at a show, I'll call when I get back to my hotel. Thanks for checking in, Benny.

Meri tucks her phone away. Alex hops off the stage and abruptly grabs the seat next to her.

ALEX

Drink?

MERI

Whiskey please.

He returns a moment later. They watch the band perform, inching closer to one another. Alex places his hand on Meri's thigh and she gently brushes her fingers across his hand.

Loud noises come from the corner of the bar. A fight ensues. BOUNCERS try to break it up. Tyler steps in to help only to be clocked in the jaw by one of the BRAWLERS.

Alex runs towards the fight. Meri runs towards Tyler.

MERI (CONT'D)

Hey, are you alright?

TYLER

I'm fine. That fucker got me good.

MERI

Should we take you to the hospital?

TYLER

Nah. Nothin' a little ice and bourbon can't cure.

POLICE arrive. The crowd begins to disperse.

Alex greets the police before moving towards Meri and Tyler. Meri is holding a bag of ice to Tyler's face.

ALEX

You okay, Ty?

TYLER

I'll live. Nurse Meri is taking good care of me.

ALEX

Sorry about all this. I'll bet you don't see a lot of red necks brawling in Venice Beach.

MERI

You'd be surprised.

ALEX

I need to file a report. Shouldn't take long.

MERI

I'm good to hang for a bit.

Alex heads back towards the police.

TYLER

What's going on with you two?

MERI  
What? Nothing.

Tyler laughs. Meri swats his arm, playfully.

INT. BAR - SAME NIGHT

The place is empty. Meri sits at the bar. Alex comes up behind her.

ALEX  
Let me drive you home.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Meri and Alex are a mound of limbs and sheets. Slowly, Meri opens her eyes. Alex is wide awake.

MERI  
Good morning.

ALEX  
Morning.

MERI  
How long have you been awake?

ALEX  
A while. I'm always up early.

Alex traces his fingers up and down Meri's spine.

MERI  
I had a good time last night.

ALEX  
Me too.

MERI  
Should I order us some breakfast?

ALEX  
You look really good first thing in the morning.

MERI  
Oh yeah?

ALEX  
Yeah. Come here.

HOURS LATER

Meri and Alex are laying in bed watching the news. Highlights from a REPUBLICAN DEBATE. Room service plates surround them. They're on their own private island.

MERI  
Are you a citizen?

ALEX  
Dual. Canada and the US.

MERI  
That sounds like a super power.

ALEX  
It kind of is at the moment.

MERI  
Can I ask you something?

ALEX  
You can ask me anything.

Meri contemplates her words, carefully.

MERI  
Ty told me what happened. Your wife's accident. I'm so sorry.

Alex rolls onto his back and lets out a deep sigh.

MERI (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...

ALEX  
(interrupting)  
It's fine. It's unreal how quickly your life can change, you know? Just like that. In an instant.

Meri listens intently.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
I kept trying to work out in my head how it all happened. What I could have done to change the course of history. Like, done something to make her two minutes late. Or two minutes early.

MERI  
I think I get that. It's like you never saw it coming.  
(MORE)



MERI (CONT'D)

So you play it over and over again  
in your mind, trying to work out a  
way to turn back the clock.

ALEX

Life just doesn't work that way.

Alex turns to face Meri.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Wait, what are you saying?

MERI

My son and I were in an accident.  
He died a few days later in  
hospital. He was only three. His  
name was Oliver. Ollie.

Meri begins to cry. Alex wipes the tears from her cheeks.

MERI (CONT'D)

My ex and I drifted apart after  
that. And here I am.

ALEX

God, Meri. I'm sorry. Is that what  
this road trip is all about?

MERI

No, not at first. I suppose I set  
out to find America...but instead I  
found me.

Alex pulls Meri in close. They lay in an embrace.

MERI (CONT'D)

This is probably a good time to  
tell you my real name.

He pulls away and examines her face. She cringes.

MERI (CONT'D)

It's America. Meri is short for  
America.

ALEX

A Canadian in bed with America. Now  
that's what I call effective  
foreign relations. Come here.

Alex pulls Meri in tight. She closes her eyes, contentedly.

INT. BBQ JOINT - DAY

Meri digs into lunch. She texts a photo of her food to Laura.

LAURA (TEXT)

Gross. When are you coming home?

MERI (TEXT)

Dunno. Having a nice time with the Canadian cowboy.

LAURA (TEXT)

The cowboy is Canadian? I guess we can trust him then.

MERI (TEXT)

I haven't felt this way in ages.

LAURA (TEXT)

Go with it. I mean, don't you dare move to Texas FFS. But have fun. You deserve it.

MERI

\*cowboy emoji\*

EXT. LINE DANCING BAR - NIGHT

Alex and Meri are line dancing. Meri gets tripped up, throwing the group coordination off. They laugh hysterically.

A love song comes on. Alex pulls Meri in and holds her hand to his chest as they sway slowly, lost in the moment.

INT. BAR - DAY

Meri is sitting at the bar, sketching. Her phone bings.

BEN (TEXT)

Hey, I'm at your hotel.

She sees the message pop up on her phone and freezes. Alex brings her a coffee and kisses her forehead.

MERI

Thanks. Hey, I need to head back to my hotel for a bit.

ALEX

Okay. Call me later?

Meri nods, kisses Alex on the cheek and heads for the door.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - SAME DAY

Ben is waiting in the lobby bar. He spots Meri and shoots to his feet.

BEN

Hey!

MERI

What are you doing here?

They hug. Laura is suddenly strutting her way towards them.

MERI (CONT'D)

Wait. What's going on?

Laura looks at Ben, shocked. She hugs Meri.

LAURA

What are you doing here?

BEN

Nice to see you too, Laura.

LAURA

Are both of your ex husbands here,  
or just him?

MERI

What are you both doing here?!

BEN

I came to take you home.

MERI

To Seattle?!

BEN

If you like. Or LA. Whatever, it  
doesn't matter. It felt like you  
needed somebody. And, as usual, you  
won't admit when you need help.

MERI

I don't need either of you showing  
up to save me. Unbelievable.

Meri storms off towards the elevator. Laura follows, leaving her phone on the bar. Ben sits down and Alex arrives, grabbing the seat next to him. Their eyes meet. Shock.

ALEX

Ben?

BEN  
 Hey, man! Wow, it's been ages. How  
 are you?

Ben and Alex bro hug it out.

ALEX  
 I'm doing alright. How about you?  
 Still in Seattle?

BEN  
 Yep. You still running that bar on  
 the edge of town?

ALEX  
 Yeah, you should come check out  
 some of the bands we have coming  
 through now.

Laura comes back for her phone.

LAURA  
 Hey - sorry to interrupt - I'm  
 going to take Meri to get some  
 food. We'll call you later.

BEN  
 Laura, this is Alex.

LAURA  
 Good to meet you...  
 (freezes, recalls the  
 photo Meri sent her)  
 ...Alex.

ALEX  
 We're not talking about the same  
 Meri...are we?

Laura and Ben stare at each other.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - SAME DAY

Laura bangs on the door.

MERI (O.S.)  
 I'm not going back to LA!

LAURA  
 Can I come in?

Meri opens the door and moves aside.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Ben left.

MERI

What? Why?

LAURA

Turns out he and Alex are good buds from back in the day.

MERI

You're going to have to do a much better job of explaining to me what's going on.

LAURA

Alex is here. I went back to get my phone and found them sitting at the bar chatting. They're friends! Ben put two and two together and left.

MERI

God dammit.

Meri runs out of the room.

INT. HOTEL BAR - CONTINUOUS

Meri finds Alex sitting at the bar.

MERI

Hey.

ALEX

Hey. Just had a nice visit with my old pal Ben. Your first husband.

MERI

I heard. I can't believe you two know each other.

ALEX

So that makes two ex-husbands. Any others I should know about?

Alex stands and puts on his coat.

MERI

Wait, don't go.

ALEX

I guess there's a lot I don't know about you.

MERI

To be fair, we haven't known each other that long.

ALEX

This was all moving a bit too fast for me anyway.

Meri grabs his arm.

MERI

So that's it? You're just going to leave?

ALEX

I think I need a bit of time. Alone. Take good care of yourself.

Alex kisses Meri on the forehead and disappears through the lobby. She's the only person left sitting at the bar.

DAY 315

EXT. FREEWAY, ARIZONA - DAY

A camper van putts along an interstate. Laura is at the wheel and Meri in the passenger seat.

INT. CAMPER VAN - SAME TIME

Meri cranks the volume on a classic rock song. Laura immediately turns it down.

MERI

Hey! I love this song.

LAURA

Can we listen to something soothing like NPR?

Meri flips to a news station. "Hillary Clinton's ongoing struggle to deal with the revelation that she used a private email server during her time as secretary of state dominated the conversation..."

MERI

Real soothing.

Meri turns off the radio and takes a photo of Laura.

LAURA

Stop, that's not even my good side.

MERI

Thanks for doing this.

LAURA

Doing what? An outstanding job navigating this thing?

MERI

For taking a month off to finish the trip with me.

Laura reaches over and squeezes Meri's hand.

LAURA

Is this the point of the trip where we rob a gas station?

MERI

There's an Arco coming up in 5 miles.

The friends laugh and cruise as the sun begins to set.

6 MONTHS LATER

EXT. GALLERY, LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

James steps out of an Uber and checks the address. He takes a deep breath and approaches the entrance.

INT. GALLERY - SAME TIME

Sketches and photographs adorn the walls. A SIGN displays the name of an exhibit. To Look for America: A Retrospective by Meri Kallis. The space begins to fill with people.

Margaret is dressed in an over-the-top frock and hat to match. She's chatting with a MAN half her age.

Meri and Laura watch from the corner of the room.

LAURA

I'll admit, I didn't think it was a good idea. At first. But I'm proud of you, Mer. I'm really proud.

Meri throws her arm around Laura and pulls her in. They watch the crowd accumulate.

Guests move through the exhibit. Sketches and photographs of Anne and John. Seattle. Ben. Whitefish.

The magical swimming hole. Neil and Gretchen. Maggie's diner.  
James. Daniel and Maggie. New Orleans. Tyler. Alex's bar.  
Laura. Alex.

A sign dedicates the exhibit to Oliver Matthews.

Cowboy boots make their way up the stairs and into the  
gallery.

LAURA (CONT'D)

How do you feel?

Alex walks into the room. He and Meri lock eyes and he  
smiles. James appears right behind him.

MERI

Better.

FADE TO BLACK.