

## **SPECIES OF LEAST CONCERN**

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### **SYNOPSIS**

On the historic day that entomologist WAYNE HATFIELD discovers a bumble bee widely believed to be extinct, he is run over by a reckless mountain biker high above the hills of Ashland, Oregon. The absence of proof of the bee sighting drives WAYNE back up the mountain as his frustrated wife, NANCY, a science writer, is courted by their new (and newly divorced) neighbor DAN, a young retiree and startup publisher.

Meanwhile, someone has begun laying traps along the hiking trails, injuring bikers and making WAYNE (who believes that bikers threaten bee colonies) a prime suspect. BRADY, an injured biker, and ETHAN, a local reporter eager for a big story, conspire to elicit a confession out of WAYNE.

When DAN offers to publish NANCY's next book, we learn that NANCY and WAYNE are still grieving their late daughter, whom WAYNE believes speaks to him on the mountain. As WAYNE's mental health weakens and the bikers' case against him strengthens, WAYNE retreats yet again to the mountain, where tragedy and the truth converge. SPECIES OF LEAST CONCERN tackles issues of conservation and extinction, and what it means to be among those left behind.

## CAST LIST

**DR. WAYNE HATFIELD** – Late 40s. Eyeglasses. Sunburnt. Spends more time looking through a magnifying glass than in a mirror.

**NANCY HATFIELD** – Mid 40s. Fit. Dresses and looks younger than her years. Her smiles are infrequent and often forced.

**DAN MORGAN** – Mid 40s. *Tour de France* fit. Every day is casual day.

**DR. ELAINE MARCUS** – Early 50s. Wears the weary look of a university department chair.

**ETHAN CARTER** – Late 20s. Dresses like an old-school reporter.

**BRADY LOGAN** – Early 20s. Muscular, loud in clothing and in voice.

**KATIE JENSEN** – Early 20s. Attractive, though heavy on the makeup.

**PRODUCTION NOTES:** The play requires between two and four skilled mountain bikers to ride across the stage and in formation. Ramps may be positioned offstage to enter at higher speeds, as if descending a mountain. Bikers wear motocross helmets obscuring their faces, along with full body padding.

A projection screen positioned above the stage will display Wayne's PowerPoint presentations as well as helmet-mounted mountain biking videos.

**TIME:** Early Summer.

### SETTINGS:

- Hatfield living room (a couch and a back wall hung with photos of birds and bees)
- Hills of Mt. Ashland
- College auditorium (consisting of podium and projection screen)
- A café table for two
- Hospital room

**ACT I****SCENE 1**

*(Hills of Mt. Ashland. BRADY pedals onto the stage on his mountain bike. He is suited up for a serious downhill run, wearing full body padding and a motocross helmet with a camera fastened to the top.)*

BRADY

Okay, dudes. This is Brady Logan reporting from the top of Mt. A. Check out this killer view.

*(Pauses, then removes his helmet and switches on the camera. Puts on his helmet again.)*

Okay, dudes. This is Brady Logan reporting from the top of Mt. A. Check out this killer view. How about a panorama?

*(He pans his head from left to right.)*

And how about a sneak preview of the trail?

*(He shakes his head up and down quickly.)*

Just messing with you people. Hope the motion stabilizer doesn't fry on the way down. Because we're about to drop 4,000 vertical feet at an average speed of 25 miles per hour. Brace yourself for sick ruts, gnarly jumps, and switchbacks that'll give you whiplash. Right. Time for a final run-through. The camera's recording. I've fired up the GPS app. And I've got tunes queued on the headphones.

*(Then)*

Man, there is nothing like leaving civilization behind and getting back to nature.

*(BRADY stands on his pedals and pedals off stage.)*

**ACT I****SCENE 2**

*(Hatfield living room. Evening. NANCY is pacing. Knock at the door. She opens the door to find DAN, a backpack over one shoulder.)*

NANCY

Oh. Hi, Dan.

DAN

I saw your light on. I'm not dropping by too late, am I?

NANCY

No, not at all. Come on in.

*(DAN follows.)*

DAN

Where's Wayne?

NANCY

You tell me.

DAN

He's usually home by now, right?

NANCY

Of course. You can't exactly observe bumble bees in the dark. Particularly since they tend to return to their nests when the sun goes down, something Wayne seems incapable of doing.

DAN

Did he tell you where he was headed?

NANCY

He mumbled something about the Time Warp trail when he left this morning.

DAN

We could go look for him.

NANCY

You're kidding.

DAN

I've got an extra mountain bike next door. We could go together. It would be fun.

NANCY

Fun? That's several thousand feet up a mountain.

DAN

I know the trail.

NANCY

Even in the dark?

DAN

I've just published a trail guide to Mt. Ashland. I know those twists and turns so well I don't even need a bike light. Besides, I enjoy biking in darkness. Adds a bit of drama.

NANCY

That's just what we need right now. More drama. No. No. I'm more frustrated with the man than worried. We had plans this evening. Dinner reservations. Theater tickets. I really needed to get out of this damn house.

DAN

What's the big occasion?

NANCY

Oh. Sort of an anniversary.

DAN

Wayne missed your wedding anniversary?

NANCY

Something like that.

*(Then)*

Was there a reason for stopping by?

DAN

So. I just wanted to drop off your manuscript.

*(Removes manuscript from his backpack and hands it to her.)*

I'd be happy to talk about it if you'd like.

NANCY

I appreciate you taking the time to read it. But I'm not sure I'm in the right frame of mind.

DAN

I also brought this—

*(DAN removes a bottle of white wine from his backpack.)*

NANCY

Opener's in the kitchen. Drawer next to fridge.

*(DAN takes the bottle into the kitchen.)*

It's a wonder I even notice he's missing; he spends every waking moment traipsing around those meadows. Between days up there and nights spent on a computer I'm not sure he sleeps anymore. Last week, I asked him what the big deal was, why the sudden urgency.

DAN (off)

What did he say?

NANCY

He said, "I'm running out of seasons."

DAN (off)

For him or the bees?

NANCY

Until this evening, I assumed the bees.

DAN (off)

I'm sure he just got sidetracked.

NANCY

Every time Wayne sets foot outside this house he gets sidetracked. Every lavender bush, every lupine, and he's a man hypnotized. Off in his other world. It's a wonder he makes it to his own class on time.

*(DAN enters with two well-poured glasses.)*

DAN

To the prodigal entomologist.

*(They toast.)*

Doesn't he carry a phone?

NANCY

He says that if it were to ring at the wrong time he'd risk losing a bee specimen.

DAN

Can't he just mute the phone?

NANCY

And have it buzz on him?

DAN

Oh. That's got to be the one profession where buzzing is a design flaw.

NANCY

Other entomologists carry phones. I think Wayne enjoys being out of reach.

DAN

Out of reach in general? Or out of reach of you?  
*(NANCY gives him a look.)*

I loved your book.

NANCY

I'm not sure I should believe you.

DAN

I mean it. I had no idea there were so many scientists around the world devoted to studying endangered species. Talk about a career path with little to no growth potential.

NANCY

You sound like my agent. Or, former agent.

DAN

I take it that's why it hasn't sold yet?

NANCY

Two reasons. First, my previous book, a collection of essays on birds of the Pacific Northwest, sold only a few hundred copies, which by itself can be the kiss of death. Second, this manuscript is part of a genre that publishers believe is already too crowded.

DAN

Genre?

NANCY

Extinction-lit.

DAN

Extinction-lit? That sounds ominous.

NANCY

Every generation gets the genre it deserves.

DAN

Maybe the book just needs a new title.

NANCY

Funny you mentioned that. I have been doing some brainstorming. *Endangered Species, Endangered Scientists* doesn't exactly feel mainstream.

DAN

So what do you have in mind?

NANCY

What do you think of this: *I'm Taking You With Me: Scientists and their Endangered Species*?

DAN

I like. What does Wayne think?

NANCY

Wayne hasn't even read the book. Though I already know he'll hate it, given my position on his beloved *Bombus franklini*. Between you and me, it's time he declared that bee extinct and got on with his life.

DAN

When did he last spot it?

NANCY

July 2006. In fact, he has that bee upstairs in his office, mounted in a box on his desk. He still worries that he took the last one.

DAN

Surely he's aware of the odds against finding any more?

NANCY

Of course, but he still buys the occasional lottery ticket.

DAN

Is there anyone else looking for *franklini*?

NANCY

The mountain used to be crawling with them. Post-docs, grad students, undergrads. But Wayne burned through them all, or they themselves burned out. I understand why he resists using the word extinction. It's so absolute, final. He's like one of those ER doctors who refuses to call time of death.

DAN

Are there are other endangered bees he could devote his life to?

NANCY

Plenty, sadly. *Occidentalis*, *terricola*. But *franklini* is special. And Wayne has never been good at goodbyes.



DAN

When I worked in software nobody ever shed a tear for a dying technology. Or, if you did, you were smart enough to keep it to yourself. Spend too much time looking in the rearview mirror, or use phrases like “the good old days,” and you’d risk being labeled a luddite, which is a firing offense in the Valley.

NANCY

You never told me why you left.

DAN

So. In Palo Alto, everyone’s rich and yet everyone feels poor. Because you work for billionaires and side by side with multimillionaires. And a three-bedroom house costs more than a suburb of Cleveland. And since everyone’s younger than you are, or pretends to be, there’s this feeling that you’ve already been left behind, or are about to be left behind. So you work all hours and you tell yourself and anyone who listens that you’re reinventing the future, even if all you’re really doing is reinventing new ways for people to waste their evenings. And, if you begin to question the party slogan, you remind yourself of all that unvested stock. Six months ago, I realized that I had more than enough vested stock and that I should spend time at last with my family. Which is nice in theory until you realize your family doesn’t want to spend time with *you*.

NANCY

Ashland is the perfect place to reinvent oneself.

DAN

If that’s the case, I’m most definitely still in beta. I haven’t gotten used to waking up to deer outside my window feasting on the landscaping. My kids have yet to visit because their mother believes bears roam the streets. And it’s surreal going from a job where you never thought about where the money was coming from to a job where I debate endlessly with myself whether to charge \$.99 or \$1.99 for an eBook. So I guess I would say this little reinvention project could still crash at any moment.

NANCY

From where I’m sitting, you’re doing fine. Those trails guides you’ve published are beautiful, not that I’m the right audience for them.

DAN

To be honest, the best part about Ashland so far would be my new neighbor.

NANCY

Wayne?

DAN

Very funny. Wayne hates me.

NANCY

No, no. Wayne just doesn't like anyone on a mountain bike. It's not personal.

DAN

So what's this big anniversary he missed?

NANCY

Dan, for the remainder of this evening, there will be no more looking in the rearview mirror.

DAN

To reinvention.

*(They toast.)*

*(WAYNE enters and stands at the doorway. His clothes are torn and he has bloody scratches on his arms, legs, and face.)*

WAYNE

You didn't have to wait up.

NANCY

What on earth happened to you?

WAYNE

I'm okay. A bit ruffled.

NANCY

Ruffled? You're bleeding.

WAYNE

Hard to tell in the dark.

DAN

Were you attacked?

WAYNE

In a matter of speaking, yes.

DAN

By what?

WAYNE

It's not important.

NANCY

Not important? You could have rabies.

WAYNE

This animal didn't bite me. Mostly just ran me over.

DAN

Was it a bear?

WAYNE

No.

DAN

Mountain lion?

WAYNE

You're getting close.

DAN

Mountain...goat?

WAYNE

Mountain bike.

DAN

What in the world was a mountain biker doing up there at night?

NANCY

Maybe he wanted a bit of drama.

WAYNE

It was still light out when he hit me. I didn't hear him coming until it was too late. Damn kid. Knocked me down the hill and into a bed of blackberry bushes. Hence the lacerations. When I woke he was gone.

NANCY

Woke? You were unconscious?

WAYNE

I wasn't taking a nap.

NANCY

Wayne, this is serious. We have to get you to a hospital.

WAYNE  
I'm perfectly lucid.

DAN  
You could have brain damage.

NANCY  
He may already have brain damage.

WAYNE  
You're missing the point, both of you. When that speed demon came along I was this close. This close!

NANCY  
To what?

WAYNE  
What do you think?

NANCY  
I have no idea.

WAYNE  
Guess.

NANCY  
No.

DAN  
What?

NANCY  
You're kidding.

WAYNE  
I never kid about *franklini*.

DAN  
You saw the bee?

WAYNE  
At 7:37 pm, just north of the Time Warp trail. A worker bee, by the size of her, obsessing over a lupine. *Bombus franklini*.

NANCY

Did you see others?

WAYNE

Just the one. But I was losing light. Most were probably back at the nest.

NANCY

Did you capture her?

WAYNE

No.

NANCY

Pictures?

WAYNE

Did I mention the mountain biker? I was bent over studying this bee when I got intimately acquainted with a bicycle tire.

NANCY

And you're sure the biker hit you *after* you identified the bee?

WAYNE

I know what I saw. And war has officially been declared. Up there, somewhere along the ground, in an abandoned rodent hole more than likely, could be the last *franklini* colony on this planet. I'll be damned if I'm letting it get run over by some deathwish manchild on a bike that cost more than our car.

DAN

Wayne, speaking on behalf of all mountain bikers, we don't all drive like that.

WAYNE

True. Normally you people shout at me right before you run me over.

DAN

You know, it's late. I'd better be going.

NANCY

Dan, thank you so much for stopping by. Sorry for all the—

DAN

I had a lovely evening, of reinvention.

*(DAN exits.)*

NANCY

You have some nerve treating him like that.

WAYNE

Hey, he's a mountain biker. He can take a little abuse.

NANCY

Dan was kind enough to read my book. Which is far more than you've accomplished.

WAYNE

Does finding *franklini* count for anything? *Bombus* fucking *franklini*! Can you imagine the news this is going to generate? Think of all the people who've been mourning the loss of this bee all these years.

NANCY

All two dozen of them.

WAYNE

Don't mock me, Nance. This is big news. It's going to throw a wrench in the plans of all those people who had declared *franklini* dead and gone.

NANCY

You can say that again.

*(NANCY exits.)*

WAYNE

Nance? Where you going?

NANCY (off)

Looking for the Neosporin.

WAYNE

I'll be fine without it.

NANCY (off)

You need to be more careful up there.

WAYNE

They need to be more careful up there.

*(Sounds of items dropping)*

NANCY (off)

Dammit!

WAYNE

Everything okay?

*(Then)*

Are you upset with me?

*(NANCY pokes her head back in.)*

NANCY

Upset? Up until a few minutes ago I was prepared to tear you limb from limb, but it appears as if you did a pretty good job of that yourself.

WAYNE

What's wrong? I don't understand.

NANCY

Of course you don't. Because you forgot what day it was. Because you're obsessed with a bumble bee. And now I find myself wishing you *had* sustained brain damage because then you'd actually have a legitimate excuse.

WAYNE

Anniversary.

NANCY

Yes, that.

WAYNE

Jesus, Nance. You know this day is important to me, just as much as you.

NANCY

You have a funny way of showing it.

WAYNE

*(Gestures at wine glasses)*

Well. Looks like you did just fine without me.

*(NANCY exits.)*

WAYNE

Nance, I'm trying to explain. I was so close. *B. franklini*. Can you blame me for getting a little distracted? This bee. Back from the dead. Lazarus with wings.

*(Cautiously approaches the kitchen doorway)*

I am sorry. What can I do to make it up to you?

*(NANCY enters.)*

NANCY

Here's your Neosporin. You know where to stick it.

*(NANCY throws it at him, then exits. WAYNE begins to follow, then thinks better of it.)*

WAYNE

*Franklini.*

## ACT I

### SCENE 3

*(Hills of Mt. Ashland. A MOUNTAIN BIKER darts back and forth across stage in choreographed precision, as if descending switchbacks on a mountain.)*

*Back and forth, relying on the offstage ramps to maintain momentum, the BIKER creates a rhythm of leaving and entering the stage until at one point BIKER exits the stage and, instead of re-entering, is followed by a loud collision between the bike and stationary object. )*

## ACT I

### SCENE 4

*(College auditorium. WAYNE stands at the podium with projection screen behind him.)*

WAYNE

When I say the word bee, what comes to mind? This?

*(Screen displays photo of a jar of honey)*

Understandable. The honey bee produces more than 150 million pounds of honey every year. The honey bee also pollinates crops such as cucumber, walnut, watermelon, and grapes, to name just a few. The environmentalist Aldo Leopold once wrote: *We grieve only for what we know.* We would grieve deeply if we lost



## WAYNE (CONT.)

honey bees. But would we grieve for bumble bees? Do we even know the difference?

*(Screen displays a series of close-up photos of bumble bees)*

These are bumble bees. They do not produce honey. Their colonies are smaller than honey bee colonies. And they have far shorter lifespans. But look at them. They're beautiful. There are 46 species of bumble bee native to North America, each with a unique look, variations of black, yellow, red and white. And though they may not give us honey, they are ferocious pollinators, responsible for this.

*(Photos of flowers)*

And this.

*(Photos of tomatoes)*

Tomato plants require a form of pollination known as buzz pollination, in which the bee grips the flower and vibrates its flight muscles to cause the flower to release its pollen. *Bombus*, which is Latin for the buzzing sound these bees make, is the genus name for bumble bees. Roughly 8% of the world's flowers require buzz pollination. Honey bees do not offer this type of service.

*(Screen displays a terrain map of Southern Oregon/Northern California)*

We live in one of the most diverse ecological regions in the country. And, as such, we have been blessed with a wide range of bumble bee species and one species in particular that is native to this region and no other: *Bombus franklini*.

*(Photo of Bombus franklini)*

This is the last known photo of a *franklini* in the wild. I took it nine years ago. Bees tend to return to the same flowers, so I do as well. For nine years. We know so little about this bee. I had only just begun to study it when its number began to fall. And if the bee were indeed extinct, would anyone know? Would anyone, with the exception of yours truly, grieve?

*(WAYNE steps out from behind podium and becomes more animated.)*

Two days ago, I saw *franklini* in the wild. Sometimes I wonder what it would have been like to be alive during the last days the passenger pigeon, the Tasmanian tiger, the dodo bird. Would I have appreciated the significance of the moment? Would I have done something—anything—to change the course of history? And so I ask you. Are you willing to help change history? I need volunteers to assist on Mt. Ashland. The season will be over soon, the colony gone, and we need to cover a lot of ground before that happens. We need to find the colony. We need to find the colony so we can protect it. After class I'm heading back up there, and anyone who wishes to join me is welcome.

*(Glances at watch)*

So let's cut things short today, shall we? Oh, and a number of you asked about midterms, which I believe are next week. I realize I've provided no guidance, no clues on how to study and, to be honest, I haven't even prepared the test yet!

*(Forces a laugh)*

WAYNE (CONT.)

Anyway, just do your reading and you'll be fine. Volunteers to the front, please. No pushing.

*(WAYNE steps away from the podium and watches as ETHAN and KATIE approach. He waits a few more moments as nobody new joins them; he appears disappointed but not surprised.)*

Many are called, but few are chosen.

ETHAN

Professor Hatfield.

WAYNE

Yes?

ETHAN

Were you aware that a mountain biker was injured on the Time Warp trail two days ago?

WAYNE

Why should that concern me?

ETHAN

Because you were doing your fieldwork not far from there. Perhaps you saw something or someone unusual.

WAYNE

Does *B. franklini* count?

ETHAN

Somebody dragged branches across the Time Warp trail, as if to trip up a mountain biker, which is what happened.

WAYNE

Branches, on occasion, have been known to fall on their own.

ETHAN

Those branches were clearly dragged.

WAYNE

Be that as it may, that bicyclist was on a trail in a national forest. It's not a Disneyland ride.

ETHAN

Any idea who would do such a thing?

WAYNE

I can think of any number of people who might do such a thing. Bikers are an invasive species on that mountain. I've even labeled them as such. *Pompus Daredevili*.

(Then)

I was joking.

ETHAN

I wasn't.

WAYNE

What's your name, son?

ETHAN

Ethan.

WAYNE

Well, Ethan, let me put it to you this way. Anyone who intentionally plunges headfirst at a high rate of speed down a steep, winding, narrow, rock strewn, silt-laden trail assumes a fair amount of risk. Wouldn't you agree?

ETHAN

The biker, Kyle Marshall, broke his left leg in two places.

WAYNE

I don't wish suffering on anyone. But if you understood the degree to which those bikers abuse the trails, terrorize wildlife, not to mention hikers and researchers such as myself, you might appreciate *my* perspective.

(ETHAN scribbles on his notepad.)

You're not a student of mine, are you?

ETHAN

How'd you guess?

WAYNE

You're actually taking notes.

ETHAN

I'm a reporter for the *Southern Oregon Tribune*.

WAYNE

You like ambushing your subjects, do you?

ETHAN

I like getting at the truth.

WAYNE

The truth? Then you'll be eager to write up the story about my sighting of *franklini*.

ETHAN

Sorry, professor. I'm on deadline.

*(ETHAN exits.)*

WAYNE

You here for a quote too?

KATIE

No. I'm here to volunteer.

WAYNE

How come I don't recognize you?

KATIE

Maybe because I sit in the back. Don't raise my hand. And, like, I probably shouldn't tell you this, but I haven't attended too many classes.

WAYNE

Now *you* sound like one of my students.

*(WAYNE and KATIE exit.)*

## **ACT I**

### **SCENE 5**

*(Café. DAN is seated. He stands when NANCY enters.)*

NANCY

Sorry I'm late.

DAN

I'm early. Have you been here before?

NANCY

I didn't even realize it had opened—and that it would be so fancy. We could have just met at the coffee shop.

DAN

It's a business expense. This is what publishers do, take their authors to lunch.

NANCY

You mean, this is what publishers *used* to do. The last time a publisher took me out to lunch, I found it deducted from my next royalty statement. And then there's the fact that I'm not your author.

DAN

Not yet.

NANCY

I'm beginning to wonder how much of my manuscript you read. You do realize there are no trail maps in it.

DAN

I read your manuscript. Twice. After our conversation the other night it hit me that this little publishing venture of mine doesn't have to be limited to trail guides. Maybe I should think bigger, as in mainstream nonfiction. As in extinction-lit.

NANCY

Be careful. That's a crowded genre.

DAN

So I've heard. Except that your book will stand apart from the rest.

NANCY

How so?

DAN

It will be the only book of its kind to have a companion mobile app.

NANCY

App?

DAN

So imagine this. The reader buys your book, downloads the app, and can view pictures of all the endangered species you've written about. Watch videos of interviews with the researchers, maybe even follow them into the field.

NANCY

It sounds exciting, Dan. But I don't actually have many photos, and I have no videos to contribute to this so-called app.

DAN

Details. All of which can be rectified with a little investment on behalf of your publisher. There's no reason I can't reinvent publishing while I'm reinventing myself, is there?

NANCY

I suppose not.

DAN

I've got the money to hire the right designers, the right devs—

NANCY

Devs?

DAN

Developers. And the right publicists. Didn't you say that publishers now expect authors to do all their own promotion?

NANCY

Publishers expect authors to do everything short of printing the books.

DAN

Not this publisher.

*(DAN places a file folder in front of NANCY.)*

NANCY

What's this?

DAN

A contract. Take your time. Think it over. Hire a lawyer. Whatever.

NANCY

Dan, I want you to be honest with me. You're not just doing all this, I don't know, to cheer me up?

DAN

Nancy, Random House can swing and miss on any number of books it acquires. But I publish four books a year. I have to choose wisely. This isn't charity. This is business.

NANCY

And this is a very interesting offer.

*(KATIE enters carrying a tray of champagne and glasses.)*

NANCY  
Champagne?

KATIE  
And strawberries.

DAN  
They're organic. And local.

NANCY  
Wait a second. Is this my advance?

DAN  
Don't be silly. This is the wining and dining portion of the negotiation.

NANCY  
I see. You're just trying to get me drunk so you can squeeze me.

DAN  
What?

NANCY  
On the contract.

DAN  
Oh, right. Yes. The contract.

NANCY  
To *I'm Taking You With Me*.

DAN  
*I'm Taking You With Me*.

*(They toast.)*

## **ACT I**

### **SCENE 6**

*(Hatfield living room. WAYNE is reading from a laptop when NANCY enters.)*

NANCY

I've got news.

WAYNE

Damn reporter!

NANCY

What's wrong?

WAYNE

He misquoted me.

*(Reading)*

“When asked about Kyle Marshall, the biker who broke his leg on the Time Warp trail, Professor Hatfield called him an invasive species.”

NANCY

You said that?

WAYNE

No. I said all mountain bikers are invasive species. There's a difference. This just makes me sound callous.

NANCY

You are callous.

WAYNE

You'd think by the level of news coverage this is getting there was a serial killer roaming the hills. What this reporter fails to mention are the number of bikers who hurt themselves all on their own simply because they were going too damn fast.

NANCY

Why did this reporter interview you?

WAYNE

I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. In retrospect, perhaps I shouldn't have been so vivid about my views on mountain bikers.

NANCY

If you keep talking like that, especially to reporters, people might come to the conclusion that you're behind this trail sabotage.

WAYNE

I don't care what people think.



NANCY

Are you going to make me ask?

WAYNE

Ask what?

*(NANCY gives him a look.)*

You mean, did I drag those branches across the trail? Is that what you're asking?

NANCY

That's what I'm trying *not* to ask.

WAYNE

What do you think?

NANCY

I'd like to believe that you wouldn't even entertain the idea of doing something so pathologically stupid. Then I remember the time you flipped the signs on that bike race and had everyone going down the opposite side of the mountain.

WAYNE

I didn't want them running through my meadows, Nance. Besides, with a name like Epic Mountain Odyssey, I merely helped the race live up to its billing.

NANCY

I used to know what was going on inside that head of yours. Now I feel like I'm staring into the eyes of one of your bees.

WAYNE

If I told you I did it, would you think less of me?

NANCY

Yes. I probably would.

WAYNE

Then I didn't do it.

NANCY

This isn't funny, Wayne. This is a crime.

WAYNE

Technically, yes. But so is chaining yourself to an old growth tree to save it from being chopped down. Or breaking into a mink farm to free the animals. Occasionally the ends do justify the means.

NANCY

But you're not an activist. You're a scientist.

WAYNE

What's the difference anymore? Everywhere I look, species are dead or dying. Is my job now simply to count the bodies? Identify cause of death? What's the point of publishing research that says such and such species is on the fast lane to extinction when you're not prepared to do everything you can to save it?

NANCY

Scientists aren't supposed to hurt other people.

WAYNE

I know that. But sometimes inaction can be more dangerous than direct action.

NANCY

You're beginning to sound like Alex.

WAYNE

I am, aren't I? Now that girl was an activist. Remember when she was nine and declared at dinner that she would never again eat animals?

NANCY

Remember how you reacted when she threw out all the meat in the fridge?

WAYNE

She could have given me a few days' head start. I would have cleaned it out for her.

NANCY

I think that was her point.

WAYNE

She always did go all the way. And look at us now. A pair of converts.

NANCY

She was stubborn. Like her father.

WAYNE

Nance, suppose there's only one bee colony left. And the opening to that nest is on the edge of one of these trails. And every time a biker passes, a few bees are killed and the entrance covered with dirt? What would you do?

NANCY

I would petition the city, the forest service, whoever is in charge of that trail to close it.

WAYNE

Okay. And six months later, after you've filed all your paperwork, lobbied all the constituents, and you've finally, possibly, gotten your way, the colony would be gone.

NANCY

Then I'd call up that reporter of yours. Try to get the word out immediately. Maybe I'd post a caution sign along the trail. Do whatever I can, ethically and legally, to protect those bees. But I wouldn't set out to injure bikers!

WAYNE

Easy. I haven't even found the nest yet. I'm speaking hypothetically.

NANCY

Well, I'm not speaking hypothetically. If those mountain bikers think you're behind this, they're going to be looking for you. The next time you find yourself in a blackberry bush, it may not be by accident.

WAYNE

Then come with me. Like old times. You can be my spotter.

NANCY

I don't think so.

WAYNE

When's the last time you were up there?

NANCY

Not that long.

WAYNE

I know the last time *we* were up there together.

NANCY

And you wonder why I don't want to return?

WAYNE

Alex loved it, Nance. Why is that such a bad thing?

NANCY

Because I said goodbye to her. Which you seem unable or unwilling to do. Sometimes I think it's not a bee you're looking for up there, but her.

WAYNE

Alex speaks to me.

NANCY

Don't joke about her.

WAYNE

I'm not. I'm serious, Nance. I can hear her voice in my head. It's as if she's guiding me. I'll be going from wildflower to wildflower and then I'll hear her voice, telling me to turn left, and so I turn. Reminds me of the days she joined me up there. We never did find *franklini*, all those summers we looked.

NANCY

You led her to believe she would.

WAYNE

And that's just it, Nance, she did find *franklini*. Last week!

NANCY

I don't understand.

WAYNE

It was Alex who guided me. On the anniversary of her death, she was up there. With me.

NANCY

Why didn't you say anything?

WAYNE

Because you'd think I'd lost my mind.

NANCY

I think you're exhausted.

WAYNE

Remember the song we all used to sing up there?

NANCY

We? It was just you two.

WAYNE

*She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes...*

NANCY

Wayne, please. Now I'll never get that out of my head.

WAYNE

You should go up there. Maybe she'll speak to you too.

NANCY

She knows where to find me.

WAYNE

Now who's the stubborn one?

*(He reaches out, then pulls her to him until she relents and hugs him back.)*

NANCY

Please tell me you'll take a break today, after class.

WAYNE

*(Looks at his watch over her shoulder)*

Class. Oh, damn!

NANCY

Wait! Wait. I have news.

WAYNE

What?

NANCY

I found a publisher for my book.

*(WAYNE is frantically gathering books into his bag, working toward the door.)*

WAYNE

Really? That's awesome! I knew that agent would come through eventually.

NANCY

I didn't use the agent.

WAYNE

Oh? Well, I am impressed. You found the publisher all on your own?

NANCY

In a manner of speaking.

WAYNE

Who is it?

NANCY

Siskiyou Publishing.

WAYNE

*(Freezes)*

Siskiyou? That's Dan's press.

NANCY

Yes. So?

WAYNE

He publishes books for mountain bikers.

NANCY

He says he wants to expand into environmental nonfiction.

WAYNE

That's not the only thing he wants to expand into.

NANCY

What's that supposed to mean?

WAYNE

I may spend all my days squinting at bees, but I know when I see a man hot for my wife.

NANCY

That's not true. He's just lonely. You'd be too if you were newly divorced and living in a new town.

WAYNE

Couldn't he be lonely with someone else's wife?

NANCY

He's a bit of a lost soul, that's all. Imagine spending twenty years making all this money in software, then burning out and leaving the job, only to have your wife burn out on you and leave the marriage.

WAYNE

I have a hard time feeling sorry for young, retired multimillionaires who like to dabble in publishing.

NANCY

Trust me. Publishing needs all the retired multimillionaires it can get.

WAYNE

Maybe you're right. And maybe the feudal system wasn't so bad after all.

NANCY

You're just jealous of his car.

WAYNE

I do not want a Tesla. The town is thick enough with those overpriced batteries. And who are they fooling, really? Am I supposed to believe that our neighbor cares more about our planet than how he looks behind the wheel?

NANCY

Okay, Wayne, I get your point.

WAYNE

Who says you can't be an environmentalist and narcissist at the same time?

NANCY

Wayne?

WAYNE

What?

NANCY

Aren't you late for class?

WAYNE

Class? Oh, no.

*(WAYNE exits.)*

## **ACT I**

### **SCENE 7**

*(Classroom auditorium. ELAINE stands at the podium. She appears uncomfortable.)*

ELAINE

Little known fact. Nabokov rented a house here in Ashland while he was writing *Lolita*. How many of you knew that?

*(Then)*

How many of you know who Nabokov is?

*(Then)*

ELAINE (CONT.)

Any idea why was he was enamored with this area? And, no, Mr. Murphy, it was not because of the co-eds.

*(Then)*

Butterflies. He was a renowned researcher and collector. And this region sees more than a hundred species of butterflies, species such as *mourning cloak*, *speyeria hesperis*, *woodland skippers*—

*(Checks watch)*

*Mormon metalmark*, *Sternitzky's parnassians*, *Nymphalis antiopa*, *Kelson's blue*, *pine white*, *Pacific orangetip*—

*(Checks watch again)*

Where has the time gone? That is it until next class. And as for the exam that was scheduled for today, judging by your complete lack of awareness of Lepidoptera, I'd say you should consider yourselves fortunate.

*(ELAINE steps away from the podium. WAYNE enters, breathing heavily.)*

WAYNE

Thank you for covering.

ELAINE

What should I be more concerned about—your absence today or your students' absence of knowledge about butterflies?

WAYNE

That's because I haven't begun that section. Hymenoptera is running long.

ELAINE

That tends to happen when the instructor misses class.

WAYNE

I can explain—

ELAINE

I was in a budget meeting with the provost when I received a text message from one of your students. He was wondering where his teacher was.

WAYNE

It was Murphy, wasn't it?

ELAINE

The name of the student is irrelevant.

WAYNE

I probably should start carrying a phone.



ELAINE

Wayne, I wasn't planning on having this conversation now, but you've forced my hand.

WAYNE

That doesn't sound good.

ELAINE

It's not.

WAYNE

If this is about the faculty meeting, I have a very good reason why I wasn't there.

ELAINE

And what was your reason for missing class two weeks ago?

WAYNE

Which one?

ELAINE

Thursday.

WAYNE

There was no class. I took them on a field trip.

ELAINE

I was told you sent an email out twenty minutes before class instructing your students to meet you halfway up Mt. Ashland.

WAYNE

Precisely. That was the field trip.

ELAINE

And how many students showed up for this impromptu field trip?

WAYNE

Elaine, I can't help it if they're not committed to learning.

ELAINE

Don't bullshit me, Wayne. I know perfectly well what you were doing up there. But need I remind you yet again that you're teaching Entomology 201, not Bombus 401? They registered for your class to get a broad understanding of insects, satisfy their science requirements, and achieve a grade of B or above, which I know you dispense liberally.

WAYNE

I'm a tough tester.

ELAINE

When you remember to administer them. Your students expected a midterm today. They have other classes. Other exams. They can't play hooky with you in the middle of a national forest.

WAYNE

Like I said, I had a very good reason for going up there.

ELAINE

And I've collected a growing number of complaints, in writing.

*(Holds up sheaf of papers)*

I had a student in my office yesterday who said you've not been advising him.

WAYNE

Murphy? His idea of fieldwork is a Wikipedia search.

ELAINE

You're missing the point.

WAYNE

Elaine, I can't hold their hands.

ELAINE

You're a teacher and an advisor, Wayne. You haven't made your office hours in two months, and when they actually can find you, you're distracted, dismissive, or both. Your student asked to be assigned another advisor, and I'm going to approve it.

WAYNE

In that case, please tell me it's Murphy.

ELAINE

We are perilously close to having a discussion that involves representatives from HR and legal. This is difficult for me, Wayne. We go back a long way. If it weren't for your recommendations, I wouldn't even be at this school, let alone the department chair.

WAYNE

I'd be happy to provide another recommendation if you're looking for a job elsewhere.

ELAINE

How are you and Nancy doing?

WAYNE

What does that have to do with anything?

ELAINE

It's been a year now, hasn't it?

WAYNE

We're fine.

ELAINE

I bumped into her at the co-op. She looks great. Smiling again. And her book sounds fascinating. You haven't read it yet, have you?

WAYNE

I've been busy.

ELAINE

Perhaps a sabbatical is in order. You could rent a house along the coast for a few months. Forget about the university, the town, everything. Maybe write another book yourself.

WAYNE

Before you pack my bags, Elaine, you should know why I've been so busy.

ELAINE

Let me guess, a bee?

WAYNE

Not just any bee.

ELAINE

Wayne, I don't have time to argue. I just need you to begin supporting all of your students, regardless of what invertebrate they're focused on. Is that understood?

WAYNE

I saw *Bombus franklini*.

ELAINE

Of course you did.

WAYNE

I'm not kidding.

ELAINE

Where?

WAYNE

Up on Mt. A. That's why I've been practically living up there.

ELAINE

You're positive about this?

WAYNE

Of course I'm positive.

ELAINE

Who have you told?

WAYNE

My students. But you know them; they're never listening.

ELAINE

We'll need to schedule a press conference.

WAYNE

I know.

ELAINE

I'll let the dean know. She's going to be thrilled. We've got a half dozen state and federal grant applications pending. This could give us a major boost, not only in publicity but in funding.

WAYNE

And it's also gratifying to know that a species is no longer extinct.

ELAINE

Did you get a specimen?

WAYNE

You know my position on this.

ELAINE

Which means your answer is no?

WAYNE

My answer is that this is a species on the brink. I can scrape a DNA sample from the bee's leg. That along with photos should be sufficient, wouldn't you agree?

ELAINE

No. I would not agree. I'm not asking for the queen, Wayne. Any old worker will suffice. I know perfectly well that taking one bee will not jeopardize the colony. And I know you've seen the research that backs this up.

WAYNE

You lepidopterists. You're all alike. If you can't pin it to the wall, it doesn't count.

ELAINE

This is not up for debate. You want a press conference. You want to prove that all your time spent away from class was for just cause, I need proof.

WAYNE

Okay, fine. I'll get you a specimen. How soon do you need it?

ELAINE

Have it by Monday. I'll assign a grad student to assist.

WAYNE

I've already got an assistant.

ELAINE

Who?

WAYNE

Katie Jensen.

ELAINE

Name doesn't ring a bell.

WAYNE

She works hard and she doesn't complain, which alone makes her more valuable than any grad student you could assign.

ELAINE

Very well.

WAYNE

I knew I'd find him.

**ACT I****SCENE 8**

*(NANCY and DAN hiking. NANCY is in front, DAN carrying a camera. A BIKER enters at high speed, headed towards them.)*

DAN

Heads up.

*(NANCY jumps out of the way to let the BIKER pass.)*

NANCY

That was close.

DAN

This is one of the faster stretches. We'll be out of it shortly. I'm glad you came along.

NANCY

It's the least I could do, with this being my book and all. How many photos will you need?

DAN

A few dozen or so, just enough footage to give the designer something to work with. And I want video too. Maybe an interview with you?

NANCY

I'm hardly dressed for video. Look at me, I'm a slob.

DAN

I think you look amazing.

NANCY

You have a thing for Spandex, do you?

DAN

Do I have to answer that?

NANCY

Fine, I'll do an interview. And point out all the relevant bees. And, who knows, if everything works out, maybe you'll get lucky.

DAN

Lucky?

NANCY

Find *franklini*. I may be a bit rusty, but I know what to look for. Though I make no promises.

DAN

Do you believe Wayne saw it?

NANCY

Yes. I think.

DAN

Not quite a vote of confidence.

NANCY

Wayne can identify *franklini*. I don't doubt that. But day after day spent up in the sun, at this altitude, can play tricks with the eyes.

DAN

I must have biked this trail a hundred times, and yet this is the first time I've actually hiked it.

NANCY

And isn't this more civilized? In the past twenty minutes you've seen two turkey vultures, a raven, a cedar waxwing.

DAN

It helps to have an expert pointing them out to you. You know, I was thinking that sometime later this week you might join me for a bike ride. Give me a chance to show you around for once.

NANCY

Wayne would love that.

DAN

Not a mountain bike. Just a basic road bike. We'll stay on pavement all the way. Wayne should be okay with that.

NANCY

Wayne says that if you give someone a bike they'll inevitably want to take it off road. He says road bikes are the gateway drug to mountain bikes.

DAN

That's crazy.

NANCY

So you began mountain biking *before* road biking?

DAN

Well, no.

NANCY

I honestly think he'd rather catch me in bed with another man than on a bike. You okay?

DAN

Just catching my breath.

NANCY

You have to understand that Wayne and I have been hiking this mountain for twenty years. When we first moved here, there were only a handful of trails, and nobody took bikes on them. Once the bikes arrived, everything changed. The trails started widening, growing steep curving banks like a NASCAR track. No plants can survive on these trails anymore, what with the dirt and silt and the relentless assault of knobby tires. People will step over a budding tree but bikes move too quickly. It wasn't that long ago you could stop on a trail and just stand there for an hour watching wildlife pass you by. Now, you can't stand here ten minutes before making way for bikes to pass.

DAN

I think part of it is that people come here from the cities, where everyone moves more quickly, where everything's a race.

NANCY

Wayne likes to say that smaller towns have slower beating hearts.  
(*Another BIKER zips by, dangerously close.*)  
Though this one might be getting a bit congested.

DAN

Here we are.

NANCY

Rainbow Meadow.

DAN

So is that the official name?



NANCY

It's what Alex used to call it. Because of all the wildflowers. You see this one. It's a Mt. Ashland Lupine. Extremely rare. Has a range of less than 50 acres. On the entire planet.

DAN

Who's Alex?

NANCY

*(Looking down)*

This trail didn't exist a year ago.

DAN

It's a shortcut. They're cutting over from one trail to another.

NANCY

You sound like you've taken it.

DAN

I didn't realize it wasn't an official trail.

NANCY

That's the problem. Isn't it? One person takes a shortcut and others follow. And before long a pristine wilderness is sliced and diced into another pile of dirt. Who's more at fault? The leader or the followers? Tell me you'll never bike on this trail again.

DAN

I promise.

NANCY

Good.

DAN

Who's Alex?

NANCY

*(Ignoring DAN, looking down)*

I don't see *franklini*. There's a *vandykei*. And this one, I'm not sure what this one is—

*(A BIKER approaches and DAN pulls NANCY out of the way and into his arms.)*

DAN

Who's Alex?

NANCY  
*(Pulls back)*

Alex was our daughter.

DAN

Daughter?

NANCY  
She died in a car accident. Drunk driver. He mistook the off ramp for the on ramp. Never turned his headlights on and, according to the police, never touched the brakes.

DAN

I'm sorry. I didn't know.

NANCY  
How could you? You weren't here a year ago.

DAN

The anniversary.

NANCY  
Doesn't feel like a year. I was sitting on the couch when the phone rang. Wayne was out at some library function. I thought it was Alex calling to say she would be late. She had spent the whole damn day up here with Wayne and by the time she got down the mountain it was already dark. She forgot a book from school. European History. So she drove to her friend's house. Before she left I told her she had to turn right around. No sleepovers. Which was silly because she was just four months removed from college, the rest of her life sleeping somewhere else. So she gets on the highway and heads home. The call was from the police.

DAN

She couldn't have seen that driver.

NANCY  
And you tell me you mountain bike in the dark. Adds a bit of drama, does it?

DAN

I didn't mean it that way.

NANCY  
I'm a writer. I deal in the currency of words, and I've yet to find the right words to describe what happened to my baby girl. When does an act of man become an act of God? At the point of impact?

DAN

Maybe we should head back down.

NANCY

No. You don't have your footage.

DAN

If there's anything I can do, Nancy, I'll do it.

NANCY

Just do me one favor.

DAN

Anything.

NANCY

Don't look at me differently, like I'm wounded or sick or special. Too many people in this town still do that, and I could wring their necks right about now. Look at me the way you looked at me at the bottom of this mountain.

DAN

So, you were right.

NANCY

What?

DAN

I have a thing for Spandex.

*(NANCY smiles, then turns back to the flowers.)*

NANCY

*Vosnesenskii* over here.

*(DAN leans over and attempts a photo.)*

DAN

They don't hold still, do they?

NANCY

This is where we said goodbye to her. This is where we spread her ashes. I thought she'd have peace up here. She deserves peace. Not a thoroughfare. She deserves better.

*(Another BIKER passes and NANCY looks up.)*

Did you hear that?

DAN

Hear what? The bike?

NANCY

A voice.

*(NANCY takes a few steps and puts a hand to her face, then leans over.)*

DAN

Nancy, is everything okay?

NANCY

*Bombus mixtus*. Take a picture.

*(DAN snaps a photo.)*

## ACT I

### SCENE 9

*(Classroom auditorium. WAYNE stands at the podium. Displayed on the screen are diagrams of a dozen bumble bee species.)*

WAYNE

*Occidentalis. Vosnesenskii. Mixtus*. It's like I'm up here speaking Latin.

*(Laughs)*

Carl Linnaeus, back in the 1700s, had his heart in the right place when he used Latin to name the world's living creatures, but I often wonder if he did more harm than good. This taxonomy that we scientists speak isolates us from those we now wish to communicate with. If I were to say to you, help us save *Ursus maritimus*, would you know that I'm talking about—

*(Screen displays a photo of a polar bear.)*

It is hard enough to tell two bumble bees apart, let alone pronounce their scientific names correctly. So let's do away with formalities, shall we?

*(Screen displays photos of three bees along with their common names as they are mentioned.)*

*Occidentalis*? Meet the Western bumble bee. *Vosnesenskii*? The yellow-faced bumble bee. And *mixtus*? Try the fuzzy-horned bumble bee. Why am I telling you this? Because we scientists need your help. There are simply not enough of us to conduct a proper census of bee species across North America.

## WAYNE (CONT.)

And yet, a few thousand or, better yet, a few hundred thousand citizen scientists, by simply wandering through their own yards, most definitely can make a difference.

*(Screen displays a diagram of mixtus.)*

So where do we begin? As you can see above me, we rely on diagrams to highlight distinctive marks and colors. We begin with the most visible clues—the head, the thorax, the abdomen and tail. Here we have *mixtus*. Notice the faded yellow head and the red tail. We divide the abdomen into numbered segments; *mixtus* has red hair in segments four through six.

*(Screen displays male and female bees.)*

How do you tell a male from a female? The female carries pollen back to the nest, storing it in the scopa shown here, a feature that males do not have. The male isn't too concerned with the colony, just mating with queens, which illustrates just how similar the human species and the *Bombus* species are.

*(Screen displays Bumble Bee Watch website home page: [www.bumblebeewatch.org](http://www.bumblebeewatch.org).)*

Once you spot a bumble bee, take its picture, try to identify it. Then upload it to our website, Bumble Bee Watch. We have volunteers who will verify the identification. We just need more pictures. You don't need to speak Latin—you just need a camera and open eyes. Trust me, you will start to see them, not so much as a buzzing collective but as individuals, member of tribes and families. And maybe one of you, if we're all very lucky, will soon find *Bombus franklini*. Better known as Franklin's bumble bee.

**ACT I****SCENE 10**

*(Mt. Ashland. BRADY rides onto the stage on his mountain bike. Like before, he is prepped for a downhill run.)*

BRADY

Okay, dudes. This is Brady Logan reporting from the top of Mt. A. Check out this killer view.

*(Pauses, then removes helmet and fiddles with the camera. Puts on his helmet again.)*

Okay, dudes. This is Brady Logan reporting from the top of Mt. A. Check out this killer view. How about a panorama?

*(He pans his head from left to right.)*

And how about a sneak preview of the trail?

*(He slams his helmet against the handlebars.)*

BRADY (CONT.)

Just messing. Got a text from Adam in Eugene; says he made the run in a record 14 minutes 22 seconds. Adam, look out bro, I'm gunning for you. Right. Run-through. Camera on. GPS app loaded. Tunes queued.

*(He stands up on his pedals and starts pedaling.)*

Let's get our gravity on.

*(BRADY drives off stage, then reenters at a higher speed, as if he's taking switchbacks down the mountain. He goes back and forth across the stage, hollering along the way. Until he exits the stage and just as we expect to see him return we hear a collision. A bent bike tire rolls unevenly onto the stage.)*

BRADY (off)

Oh, dude. My arm. My video camera. My bike!

## ACT I

### SCENE 11

*(Café. WAYNE and NANCY enter.)*

NANCY

What's all this about?

WAYNE

Can't a husband take his wife out for a fancy meal?

NANCY

A husband perhaps. My husband is another story.

WAYNE

As of today, Nance, I'm rewriting that story. From tragedy to romance. One that no longer ends with the wife hurling tubes of healing ointment at her husband. Rather, ending with a more soothing, more hands-on form of healing.

NANCY

That's an ambitious rewrite you have in mind.

WAYNE

Indeed. Which is why I thought our story should begin with a romantic dinner.

(KATIE enters.)

KATIE

Hi, Professor Hatfield.

WAYNE

And this is Mrs. Hatfield.

NANCY

Hello.

KATIE

Have we met before?

NANCY

I don't believe so.

WAYNE

Nance, this is Katie. She's been assisting me in the field with *franklini*.

KATIE

And I'll be assisting you this evening as well. Let me show you your table.

(KATIE seats them.)

NANCY

Wayne, perhaps you should give Katie a day off.

KATIE

This is just my part-time gig, Mrs. Hatfield. Saves me from taking out a loan to buy books. I'll be right back with your drinks.

WAYNE

Thank you, Katie.

(KATIE exits.)

NANCY

Drinks?

WAYNE

I might have splurged on a bottle of champagne.

NANCY

You did not.

WAYNE

Granted, I didn't splurge as much as I could have. They sell a three hundred dollar bottle of champagne here.

NANCY

Really?

WAYNE

But the one I ordered, I'm told, holds its own quite admirably.

*(KATIE enters carrying champagne and two glasses.)*

KATIE

Here's your sparkling wine.

WAYNE

Sonoma, at least?

KATIE

San Diego.

NANCY

I hear that's an emerging viticultural region.

KATIE

I think Professor Hatfield made an excellent choice. The expensive champagnes are all style and no substance.

WAYNE

You're too kind.

KATIE

Enjoy.

*(KATIE exits.)*

WAYNE

Now. I want to take a moment to tell you how sorry I was for not being fully supportive of your book and your publisher. I never meant to imply you weren't an amazing writer. You deserve publication. You deserve success.

NANCY

Thank you. So do you.



WAYNE

To success.

*(They toast. DAN enters.)*

DAN

Fancy meeting you here.

NANCY

Hi, Dan.

WAYNE

Here on a date?

DAN

Me? No. I come to sit at the bar and read. It's nice to get out of the house sometimes, to be among other people. Hear voices. Feel like you're not so alone in the world.

WAYNE

Well, enjoy.

*(NANCY gives WAYNE a look.)*

Dan, would you like to join us?

DAN

I don't know. I couldn't impose on you two.

WAYNE

It's no imposition.

DAN

Since you offered.

*(DAN pulls up a chair.)*

So, this is great timing because I have a few new ideas to run by Nancy.

WAYNE

Speaking of great timing, I have to use the restroom.

*(WAYNE walks away and is flagged down by KATIE. They look back at Dan and Nancy.)*

WAYNE

Like a *Halyomorpha halys*, that man.

KATIE

English, please.

WAYNE

Brown marmorated stink bug.

KATIE

I don't know if I should tell you this.

WAYNE

What?

KATIE

I recognize your wife. She was here a few days ago. For lunch. With him.

WAYNE

Are you sure?

KATIE

I may suck at identifying bees, but I never forget a human face.

WAYNE

Dan's her publisher. I'm sure it was just a business meeting.

KATIE

He ordered champagne.

WAYNE

You mean sparkling wine.

*(KATIE shakes her head.)*

The three hundred dollar bottle?

*(KATIE nods.)*

WAYNE

I was wrong. He's not an invertebrate. He's an apex predator.

## **ACT I**

### **SCENE 12**

*(Hospital room. BRADY is in a wheelchair with a bandaged head (covered by baseball cap) and arm in a sling. ETHAN enters.)*

ETHAN

How are you feeling?

BRADY

Like someone whipped me with my own bike chain.

ETHAN

They say you suffered a concussion. How's the arm?

BRADY

Got a scar running from my elbow up to my shoulder, straight through my Blood, Sweat, and Gears tattoo. Totally ruined it. Wanna see?

ETHAN

Is that why you called?

BRADY

I got a lead on the trail terrorist.

ETHAN

Trail terrorist?

BRADY

That's what me and the boys are calling him.

ETHAN

How do we even know it's one person?

BRADY

I hope it's one person. Can you imagine the terror a team of these freaks would cause?

ETHAN

The first two bikers hit branches. Yet there were no branches in front of you.

BRADY

Yeah. I got clotheslined by a rope. Lucky me.

ETHAN

If it's one person, why didn't he just use branches again?

BRADY

Because the terrorist is getting more sophisticated. I was all geared up for branches on that trail, so this guy changes tactics, and I end up taking a soil sample with my teeth. Now you can't be sure where to look; you gotta be ready to slam the brakes at any moment.

ETHAN

Isn't that what you're supposed to do?

BRADY

You're missing the point, dude. You get a picture of my bike?

ETHAN

Yes, I did. It looks like some sort of modern art exhibit.

BRADY

That frame was made by hand in Sweden. Nine thousand bucks. Total effin loss. Someone's going to pay for it.

ETHAN

What's this lead you have?

BRADY

I don't have a name, but I have a picture.

*(Holds up iPad.)*

ETHAN

This is from your helmet camera?

BRADY

Yep.

ETHAN

I thought it broke in the crash.

BRADY

Completely smoked. But I found this computer geek who knows how to rescue data. Saved everything but the audio.

*(ETHAN views the iPad.)*

ETHAN

That is one nasty crash. Is that your arm bent back like that?

BRADY

Back up. It's before the crash that matters. Slow down. Slower. Stop. There. Somebody lurking right above the clothesline. See?

ETHAN

Hard to make out.

BRADY

Got his back to the camera. He's hiding his face.

ETHAN

Or he's staring at something.

BRADY

Terrorists like to hang around to view their own work.

ETHAN

The outfit looks familiar.

BRADY

You recognize him?

ETHAN

I think so. He spends a lot of time up there.

BRADY

Who is he?

ETHAN

Someone who doesn't like mountain bikers.

BRADY

I could turn this over to the cops, but this ain't going to prove he did it. And without proof I can't get my bike replaced. So I'm taking this into my own hands, detective style. I want a confession.

ETHAN

I want an exclusive.

BRADY

You find a way to get this joker talking and you've got it.

## ACT I

### SCENE 13

*(Mt. Ashland meadow. KATIE is kneeling over a wildflower with a small glass jar while WAYNE observes.)*

WAYNE

Put the glass over her, then slide on the lid.

KATIE

Won't she sting me?

WAYNE

Not if you do it quickly. The thing I love about bees is how focused they are when they're perched on a flower. You can get in as close as you want, and they don't care. They're too busy working.

KATIE

Got her.

*(KATIE stands and looks into the jar.)*

WAYNE

What do you see?

KATIE

One royally pissed off bumble bee.

WAYNE

What species?

KATIE

Oh, *Californicus*?

WAYNE

Look more closely.

KATIE

At what exactly? The head is black and there is a yellow stripe of hair on the abdomen, I think segment four.

WAYNE

Is the head really black? Or has the hair been worn down with age?

KATIE

How do I tell the difference?

WAYNE

Squinting. Magnifying glasses. And practice. Over time you start to recognize them in all their varieties. This is a worker, but even workers of the same species will vary greatly depending on geography.

KATIE  
Is she going to suffocate in there?

WAYNE  
Name the species.

KATIE  
*Vandykei*?

WAYNE  
Was that a guess?

KATIE  
Maybe.

WAYNE  
You guessed right. Now you can let her go.

*(KATIE opens the jar.)*

KATIE  
Bye-bye, *Vandykei*.

WAYNE  
Katie, you stay here and I'll canvas that area. We've got a lot of ground to cover today.

*(WAYNE moves across the stage, and they talk as they both move from flower to flower, studying bees.)*

KATIE  
What's the hurry?

WAYNE  
I'm announcing the *franklini* sighting tomorrow. But we don't have a specimen.

KATIE  
You mean, a dead bee?

WAYNE  
That is the euphemism. Yes.

KATIE  
How do you kill them?

WAYNE

You catch them in that jar and place the jar in the freezer. The bees fall asleep.

KATIE

It doesn't seem right. Aren't they, like, endangered?

WAYNE

Technically, they're critically endangered.

KATIE

What's the difference?

WAYNE

It's complicated. There's an organization, the IUCN. Years ago they created something called the Red List. An unfortunate honor roll of the most endangered species. Over the past ten years they've expanded the list with the goal of assessing every species on the planet, assigning a label anywhere between species of least concern and—

*(WAYNE loses himself studying a bee.)*

KATIE

And?

WAYNE

Between least concern and extinct.

KATIE

What's the label for humans?

WAYNE

What do you think?

KATIE

Least concern?

WAYNE

In more ways than one.

*(A lengthy pause as WAYNE and KATIE work, then WAYNE begins to hum "Coming 'round the mountain.")*

*(A BIKE zips past. WAYNE jumps out of the way, falling down.)*



Hey!

KATIE

*(KATIE rushes over and helps him up. WAYNE is in apparent pain.)*

Did he hit you?

KATIE

No. I just—my back.

WAYNE

What were you humming?

KATIE

What? Oh, nothing.

WAYNE

Why'd you choose bees?

KATIE

WAYNE

When I was your age I wanted to study the Monarch butterfly. As invertebrates go, it's our polar bear. There were research dollars flowing, and I figured this would be a practical way to go—you need to think about these things when you're thinking about the future. Then my professor received a small grant to do some fieldwork on *franklini*. He was lazy, so he had me do all the fieldwork. I came up here off and on for several months and documented more than a hundred bees. I didn't think anything of it. Relatively speaking, the bee was less dominant than other species, but that's not unusual necessarily. Yet we had no historical data. This was year one. So year two comes along, and I volunteer to do another round of fieldwork, and I notice a slight decrease in numbers. Year three, and I've graduated and am looking for post-doc work around the country. But I come up here out of habit, and the bee numbers have dropped yet again. I remember thinking how I could be witnessing something big, something that might go unnoticed if I didn't see it through. So I managed to finagle an adjunct position. I thought it would be temporary. Obsession has a funny way of sneaking up on you.

*(KATIE and WAYNE have wandered far apart. KATIE sees something.)*

Oh my God. Oh my God!

KATIE

What?

WAYNE

KATIE

I found her. Or him. Or her.

*(WAYNE rushes over.)*

WAYNE

Where?

KATIE

Here! Look.

*(KATIE hugs him but he is focused on the bee.)*

WAYNE

Where's the inverted, the inverted—

KATIE

Sorry?

WAYNE

The inverted U?

KATIE

Right—*franklini*'s yellow hair has a black cutout in it. Inverted U. I'm such an idiot. I'm sorry, professor. It's overwhelming, how many details I have to keep track of. I'm not sure I'll ever get the hang of this.

*(Another BIKER forces KATIE and WAYNE back a step.)*

KATIE

Slow the hell down, asshole!

WAYNE

You'll do just fine.

**ACT I****SCENE 14**

*(Classroom auditorium. The podium is empty. Standing to the left is ELAINE, pacing. A photo of B. franklini is displayed on the projection screen below the words "Special Announcement." WAYNE enters in a rush.)*

ELAINE

Where the hell have you been?

WAYNE

On the mountain.

ELAINE

Right before a major press conference? Where is your brain? More important, where is the specimen?

WAYNE

Here you go.

*(WAYNE hands over a boxed specimen. ELAINE examines it suspiciously.)*

ELAINE

This looks old. And dusty.

WAYNE

He was elderly.

*(ETHAN and BRADY enter from the opposite side. As WAYNE and ELAINE talk, BRADY slinks behind the podium and toys with something before slinking away.)*

ELAINE

Wayne, how old is this specimen?

WAYNE

Ten years, but I can explain.

ELAINE

Where is the *new* specimen?

WAYNE

I don't have it. Which is why I was up on the mountain this morning. But what we have here is a perfect substitute.

ELAINE

You can't be serious. We have a dozen scientists in the audience. How are you going to respond when they ask to view the evidence?

WAYNE

I'll say I saw it with my own two eyes and that's all the evidence they need.

ELAINE

They'll want proof. Hell, I want proof. Photos. Please tell me you have photos we can use?

WAYNE

Absolutely.

ELAINE

Thank God.

WAYNE

They're a bit dated.

ELAINE

That's it. I'm cancelling.

WAYNE

Why?

ELAINE

You're going to look like a fool. You're going to embarrass yourself and this university beyond repair.

WAYNE

Not if I don't overpromise.

ELAINE

Overpromise? You're going to tell them that a bee they assumed extinct is still alive. But you're not going to them anything tangible to prove that claim.

WAYNE

Elaine, I know this isn't ideal. But if they believe that *franklini* is alive—or at least believe *franklini* might be alive—maybe, just maybe, we can get those damn

trails closed, get some money for research. We don't have many more seasons. For all we know, this could be our last season.

ELAINE

If I let you go up there, you're all on your own.

WAYNE

I'll be fine.

*(WAYNE takes the podium. BRADY and ETHAN stand in the audience.)*

WAYNE

Ladies and gentlemen. Members of the university. Distinguished colleagues. I want to thank you for attending this hastily assembled event. You were told to expect a major announcement today, and that's what I'm here to deliver. Behind me is a photo of *Bombus franklini*, a bee that is widely considered to be extinct.

*(The screen changes from a picture of a bee to a video shot from Brady's camera of his run down the mountain, beginning seconds before the crash and ending at the crash.)*

That's odd. What's going on with the video? That looks painful.

BRADY

It was painful.

*(Then the video rewinds and freezes on what appears to be Wayne standing to the side of the trail.)*

WAYNE

I don't understand.

BRADY

Is that you, professor? On the trail?

WAYNE

Yes, I believe so. But what's this about?

BRADY

Little louder, professor. So everyone can hear. Is that you on the trail?

WAYNE

Yes, but my remote. It's not working. Where are my bees? Elaine?

*(ELAINE shakes her head.)*

Who are you?

BRADY

Brady Logan. The biker you nearly killed on the Time Warp trail.

WAYNE

I did no such thing.

BRADY

Are you denying you set the trap?

WAYNE

Of course I'm denying it.

BRADY

Tell everyone what were you doing on the trail.

WAYNE

I was looking for *Bombus franklini*, a sighting of which was the intended topic of this press conference.

BRADY

Why were you hiding your face from the camera as I passed by?

WAYNE

Would you rather I'd waved?

BRADY

I'd rather you stop lying and man up to your crimes.

WAYNE

Man up? And I suppose you know all about manning up? Is that why you're covered in body armor every time you and your ilk descend that mountain?

BRADY

It's a good thing, or I wouldn't be standing here right now.

WAYNE

And wouldn't that be a travesty.

BRADY

So you admit that you hate mountain bikers.

WAYNE

I don't hate you, I just—what is it with you people? Don't San Francisco and Portland have enough hills for you to climb? You have to travel here and ruin it for the rest of us?

BRADY

You said all mountain bikers are an invasive species.

WAYNE

Yes. I did. And you know why? Because you exhibit all the requisite signs of an invasive species. Every time I go up that mountain, there's more of you—you're multiplying faster than kudzu. You crowd out everything else in your way, humans and animals alike. You're not content to stay on your designated trails. And look, you've even invaded my press conference. But you want to know the one great thing about an invasive species, Mr. Logan? Nobody, and I mean nobody, is going to miss you when you're gone.

*(WAYNE looks behind to see that the screen now displays*

*B. Franklini again.)*

Oh, good, my bee is back. Now, where was I?

**ACT II****SCENE 1**

*(Mt. Ashland trail. ETHAN enters, camera in hand. There is a length of rope on the ground. He takes a picture. BRADY enters, his arm free of sling, yet bandaged.)*

ETHAN

Who got hurt this time?

BRADY

My boy Jason. Did a superman over the handlebars. Got a little dinged up but nothing major. It's a good thing he was riding his brakes all the way down. You see what the terrorist has done to us? We're riding our brakes, man!

ETHAN

Maybe that's not such a bad thing.

BRADY

Excuse me?

ETHAN

In the past week I've been flooded with emails from hikers who tell me this terrorist of yours has become a hero of theirs.

BRADY

Whose side are you on, dude?

ETHAN

I'm just saying that this is not a simple issue.

BRADY

*(Picks up the rope and holds it taut)*

It becomes simple enough when you hit this. Notice how yellowed it is. It's old. It matches the rope used before. And I bet if you looked in the professor's house, you'd find the rest of it.

ETHAN

I think we need to ease up on the professor. Let the police do their job.

BRADY

Some job they're doing. You know the rope is in there somewhere. Maybe I should pay the professor a visit.



ETHAN

Brady, I think he's seen enough of you at this point. You just focus on the trails and let me focus on the professor.

*(Fully armored, faceless BIKERS enter from both sides of the stage and take position on either side of ETHAN and BRADY.)*

What's going on here?

BRADY

Meet my crew. The Mt. Ashland Trail Defenders. That terrorist declared war on us; it's time we struck back.

ETHAN

Tell me you're not planning anything stupid.

BRADY

Define stupid.

ETHAN

Nothing violent?

BRADY

We're not packing heat, if that's what you mean. Our mission is simple: Monitor the trails 24/7, night and day. If anything goes down, we've got a rapid response team on call at the top of the mountain. The next time the professor—or whoever—thinks he can clothesline us, he's going to be in for a world of pain. Right, boys?

*(BIKERS raise tire pumps above their heads and start driving in a coordinated circle.)*

United we ride. Divided we fall!

*(To ETHAN)*

You writing that down?

*(ETHAN shakes his head and exits.)*

Dude, that's a killer slogan. Don't you want a group photo?

*(BRADY and the BIKERS follow ETHAN offstage.)*

*(From the other side of the stage, KATIE enters, moving slowly, lost in her world, studying wildflowers. She stops, then kneels.)*

KATIE

Can this be? No. This can't be. This has to be something else. Look closer. *Vandykei*? No. I don't think so. No. It's not *vandykei*. Think, Katie, think. *Flavifrons*? No. It's not *flavifrons*. Then that would mean it has to be, it has to be. Oh my God. Oh my God!

KATIE (CONT.)

*(Stands and circles)*

Wayne? Wayne! Come over here. I think I've found him. I think I've found him.  
And for real this time!

*(WAYNE enters, running.)*

WAYNE

Where? Where?

KATIE

Right here. Look, the inverted U. Wayne, the inverted fucking U!  
*(KATIE is ecstatic as WAYNE kneels over the wildflower.  
Then he straightens, steps away and bends over, clearly  
winded from his run.)*

Are you okay?

WAYNE

I'm—I'm fine.

KATIE

Well? It's *franklini*, right?

*(WAYNE shakes head)*

But it's got the inverted U. No other bee has that. You said so yourself!

WAYNE

Look closer. At the inverted—the inverted U.

KATIE

Look for what?

WAYNE

The yellow hair.

KATIE

What about it?

WAYNE

The hair isn't there because it's been partially rubbed off, creating the impression  
of an inverted U. This can happen as they age. I call it *franklini* fool's good.

KATIE

And I'm the fool.

WAYNE

So what is it then?

KATIE  
*Flavifrons.*

WAYNE  
 That's right.

KATIE  
 I royally suck at this.

WAYNE  
 On the contrary. You've identified more than a dozen species correctly, and that's no trivial feat, given their similarities. And this false alarm with *franklini* is something that we all have to experience at least once.

KATIE  
 I won't make that mistake again.

WAYNE  
 The next time you think you see *franklini*, I have a feeling you'll be right.

*(WAYNE sits.)*

KATIE  
 You sure you're okay? You're all pale.

WAYNE  
 I'm fine, Alex.

KATIE  
 Katie.

WAYNE  
 What?

KATIE  
 You called me Alex.

WAYNE  
 Did I?

KATIE  
 Yes.

WAYNE  
 Let's call it a day, shall we?

KATIE

Are you sure everything's okay?

WAYNE

I'm fine. Really. I just need some time alone to think.

KATIE

If you want to talk about it I won't tell anyone.

WAYNE

Talk about what?

KATIE

I don't know. The trail sabotage?

WAYNE

Don't believe everything you read in the news.

KATIE

I would understand if you did it. Like, I'm tempted to do it myself.

WAYNE

I'll see you tomorrow, Katie.

*(KATIE exits.)*

*(WAYNE looks around, then his eyes lock on a flower. He pulls himself to his feet and captures the bee in a jar.)*

WAYNE

*Franklini?* Could this be you? I think it could be, I think it—

*(Then, blinking)*

You're not *franklini*. You're *occidentalis*.

*(WAYNE releases the bee, turns and walks unsteadily off stage.)*

**ACT II****SCENE 2**

*(Hatfield home. Knock on door. NANCY appears and answers door.)*

ETHAN

Mrs. Hatfield, it's Ethan Carter. Reporter with the *Southern Oregon Tribune*. I interviewed your husband after the mountain biking accident.

NANCY

I know who you are. Wayne's not here.

ETHAN

I was actually hoping to speak with you.

NANCY

Concerning?

ETHAN

If you let me in I'll tell you. It will only take a minute.

NANCY

Mr. Carter, Wayne told me about the press conference.

ETHAN

Please, call me Ethan.

NANCY

Ethan. My husband is on disciplinary probation because of that stunt you and your biker friend pulled. He could lose his job.

ETHAN

That wasn't our intention.

NANCY

What on earth was your intention?

ETHAN

A confession. The truth.

NANCY

The truth, you say. And you never entertained the possibility that he was innocent?

ETHAN

Of course I did. But everywhere I turned, the evidence that said otherwise kept accumulating. First, I discovered that your husband had been run over by a mountain biker. Then I learned about this nearly extinct bee and his mission to protect it. And it just happens to be near the trail that keeps getting sabotaged? And he's been missing classes. Students say he's distracted, irritable. And then there was your daughter's accident.

NANCY

I knew it was only a matter of time before you dredged that up.

ETHAN

I'm sorry to do that, but his colleagues tell me that he hasn't been the same since.

NANCY

Nobody has been the same since. Am I a suspect as well?

ETHAN

Of course not.

NANCY

While we're strolling down memory lane, it would have been nice if someone on your staff had reported on that man's first or second or third DUI. Clearly he needed help, wouldn't you say? Yet nobody bothered to check to see if he was drinking again or to talk to any of those barflies who went on the record, well after the fact, that a car accident like that was inevitable. Or how about calling up the ex-wife after she took her daughter to Missouri three years ago, sending him on his downward spiral, instead of phoning her after his body was buried? If you had put half as much energy into being concerned about that man's potential to do harm, then maybe you wouldn't be here right now. So tell me, Ethan, what brings you here right now?

ETHAN

Another man's potential to do harm.

NANCY

Come in.

*(NANCY leads him into the living room.)*

ETHAN

Brady Logan, one of the injured mountain bikers, has organized a sort of mobile hit squad. They're patrolling the trails. They'll be looking for Wayne. And it doesn't matter at this point if Wayne is innocent or guilty because they think he's guilty and he's going to be up there all alone.

NANCY

Now you're concerned about his welfare?

ETHAN

Try to look at this from my perspective. Up until recently, the only story I ever wrote that went national was a Bigfoot sighting. This is the biggest story of my career and, yes, I might have been overly aggressive in my reporting. I'm still not convinced your husband is innocent. But I also don't want to see any more people get hurt.

NANCY

Take a look at these photos, Ethan. These are rare bumble bees, all taken up on Mt. Ashland. You know what Wayne did the morning after he was run over by the mountain biker?

ETHAN

What?

NANCY

He went right back up. Didn't hesitate. Didn't listen to all my warnings. I've tried to keep him off that mountain. But I've learned that if I want to protect him I have to be more creative, and so do you.

ETHAN

What do you mean?

NANCY

The way to protect Wayne is to protect the species he's studying. That's the point everyone is missing. You write about bikers vs. hikers, and it makes for compelling news. But who is writing about the animals caught in the crosshairs? Who is on their side?

*(points to photo on the wall)*

You see this? I took that photo on the trail that circles the Ashland golf course, another popular biking route. This is a killdeer. Much like bumble bees, these birds nest on the ground, which makes them highly vulnerable to predation.

ETHAN

That doesn't seem too smart. Nesting on the ground.

NANCY

Perhaps, but they've developed an interesting technique for protecting their young. If a predator approaches the nest, the parent will fake an injury, a broken wing, to divert attention away from the young.

ETHAN

And it works?

NANCY

They're not endangered. At least not yet.

ETHAN

Makes you wonder how smart the predators are.

NANCY

Sometimes the best way to evade a predator is not to outrun it but to create a distraction. Just enough of one to buy some time, create ambiguity. There is much we can learn from animals, but only if they're still around to teach us.

ETHAN

If I were to even suggest closing those trails to bikes, can you imagine the blowback I would get?

NANCY

I'm not asking you to suggest anything. Just report the truth. Write about all the victims, not just those on two wheels or two legs.

## ACT II

### SCENE 3

*(Mt. Ashland trail. KATIE enters wearing backpack. She is singing.)*

KATIE

She'll be buzzing like a queen bee when she comes (when she comes).

She'll be buzzing like a queen bee when she comes (when she comes).

*(A BIKER approaches and she has to jump out of the way.)*

She'll be cursing all the bikers when they come (when they come).

She'll be cursing all the bikers when they come (when they come).

*(Another BIKER forces her off trail yet again.)*

She'll be wishing they were crashing, she'll be wishing they were crashing, she'll be wishing they were crashing (when they come).

*(KATIE stops and listens. We hear a BIKER crash. KATIE smiles and exits.)*



**ACT II****SCENE 4**

*(Hatfield home. Morning. WAYNE is staring at his laptop. NANCY enters.)*

NANCY

When did you get up?

WAYNE

What? Oh, I never went to bed.

NANCY

But you've got class in a few hours. You don't want to fall asleep on your students.

WAYNE

Serves them right. They've been falling asleep on me all semester.

NANCY

When are you meeting with Elaine?

WAYNE

Right after.

NANCY

Did she give you a clue what to expect?

WAYNE

She asked if I had any luck finding *franklini*. She said a specimen would significantly help my case. Translation: save my ass.

NANCY

*(Looking over his shoulder)*

Bumble Bee Watch?

WAYNE

I've re-reviewed everything submitted over the past six months in the off-chance someone might have uploaded a *franklini* photo.

NANCY

Any luck?

WAYNE

None.

*(Then)*

Nance, if I was wrong. About *franklini*. Would you think less of me?

NANCY

What's that supposed to mean?

WAYNE

Yesterday, I confused *franklini* with an *occidentalis*.

NANCY

So. They look alike.

WAYNE

But I know better. I should know better. What if my original sighting was a false positive?

NANCY

I know you, Wayne. You saw *franklini*.

WAYNE

I hope you're right.

NANCY

I am. Now promise me that after class you'll come home and rest?

WAYNE

I have to go back up.

NANCY

When's the last time you had more than five hours of sleep?

WAYNE

I don't have the luxury of time, Nance. You know that. In a matter of weeks, days even, *franklini*'s season will be over. Queens will be looking to hibernate. And if I don't spot one in time, my career could be headed for a similar fate.

NANCY

If that happens, and I pray it doesn't, but if it does, maybe you can use this as an opportunity to start over. Find something else that you're passionate about. Like the Mt. Ashland lupine.

WAYNE

And forget about *franklini*?

NANCY

If this is going to make you miserable.

WAYNE

I'm not miserable.

NANCY

Then what are you, exactly? Because you sure look miserable to me.

WAYNE

I don't know. I'm intense.

NANCY

I just want you to be happy.

WAYNE

Happy? Do bees consider whether they're happy?

NANCY

You tell me.

WAYNE

They're too busy working to be bothered with questions like that.

NANCY

So are you, apparently.

WAYNE

In a sense I think, for bees, the work itself is happiness. Providing for a nest, keeping the larva fed, the queen safe. Isn't that analogous to any human definition of happiness? Since when did happiness exist as this separate entity? As something to be achieved or measured or, worse, shared via video?

NANCY

It's just a question.

WAYNE

I know, I'm sorry. I just—these people are moving too fast to see what's being lost. Too fast to stop. And after it's all gone, then what? What's the joy of being the last species standing?

*(WAYNE exits.)*

**ACT II****SCENE 5**

*(Café. DAN is seated at the table. He stands when NANCY enters.)*

DAN

Our usual table.

NANCY

I hope you've reserved some of the budget for actually publishing the book.

DAN

That's why I asked you out—I mean here. I was thinking we should accelerate the publishing schedule. Have the book launch this fall.

NANCY

This fall? Isn't that rushing things?

DAN

I thought you'd be excited. Most authors complain about long lead times.

NANCY

I am eager to publish the book, but it just feels a bit aggressive.

DAN

The manuscript is mostly complete. I could have it edited in a few weeks along with a cover. The review copies could go out as early as three weeks from now.

NANCY

Okay. But why so fast?

DAN

So. Hold onto your seat because I am planning a book tour beginning in New England and traveling down the Atlantic coast. Providence. New York. Baltimore. DC. And I'm not just talking bookstores. I'm talking network television. I'm talking the Outdoor Channel. I'm talking NPR.

NANCY

I don't know what to say.

DAN

Just say yes. We are going to have one heck of an adventure.

NANCY

We?

DAN

Nancy, you need a driver. You need someone to coordinate everything. I realize this may seem over the top, but I want you to have the support you need for this book. What with Wayne on the ropes, this book has taken on greater importance, wouldn't you say?

NANCY

He's on probation. That's all.

DAN

That could change quickly.

NANCY

I'm not convinced the book is complete at this point. What if *franklini* isn't extinct?

DAN

It's extinct.

NANCY

How can you be so certain?

DAN

Ever since that sighting Wayne's been up there around the clock. If there was a colony nearby, you said yourself there'd be other bees to be seen. Are you sure that concussion he suffered isn't having residual effects?

NANCY

I should have taken him to the hospital. But he's so damn stubborn.

DAN

And so are you.

NANCY

How?

DAN

Timing is everything in publishing.

NANCY

This is a book about extinction. The animals aren't going to get any less extinct.

DAN

Fine. I'll cancel the tour. Push back the pub date.

NANCY

Thank you.

DAN

I just hate to see you sacrifice so much of your career for him.

NANCY

What if I don't view it as a sacrifice?

DAN

You deserve more. You deserve a husband who isn't the prime suspect for trail vandalism. You deserve a husband who can hold down a job. You deserve a husband who carries a cell phone.

NANCY

Maybe you're right. Or maybe every wife gets the husband she deserves.

DAN

I don't believe that. I believe you can always reinvent yourself. You said as much yourself. We could reinvent ourselves together. You just need to let go of all those memories that hold you back.

NANCY

Memories don't hold me back. They hold me together.

DAN

Even the painful ones?

NANCY

Especially the painful ones.

**ACT II****SCENE 6**

*(Classroom auditorium. WAYNE stands at the podium.)*

WAYNE

When I was a child, I called them bugs. In college, I called them insects. But when I became a scientist, I called them animals, because that is what they are. Animals. Humans and animals—we share the same kingdom in classification, in place. One big, not-so-happy family. But a family nonetheless. My daughter viewed bees as animals from day one. Probably because I gave her no reason not to. I didn't step on spiders, spray for wasps, swat at flies. I didn't tell her that animals don't feel pain. I didn't lie to her. How does one gain empathy for a bumble bee? A creature that stings, that lives such a brief life? Do we associate brevity with a lesser form of life? And how do you justify a life spent in protection of a bee when there are so many other animals in need of protection? The spotted owl. The penguins. The wolf. I don't have an answer. I know only that every species deserves at least one protector.

*(ELAINE enters, carrying paperwork. WAYNE notices her.)*

My daughter was a high school senior. And she trekked with me up the mountain to look for *franklini*. We began this particular day at 8 a.m. and it was now 6 p.m. And we had not seen the bee. And I felt bad for her. I told her that maybe we should call it a day and head back home. She looked at me with incredulous eyes and she said as long as the bees were out working, so would we. Bees do not give up. Humans, I've come to believe, are pessimists, particularly now. We see little good coming from changing weather patterns. We see wars on the horizon. Food shortages. Viral epidemics. And we craft dystopian books and movies so we can imagine, to the very detail, how our world will end. This is a pessimistic age, I'll grant you that. But if you look at a bee, you will see optimism. Nature is inherently optimistic. If you are to find optimism again in your life, you'll find it clinging to the lavender outside your window.

*(Then)*

Class dismissed.

*(WAYNE steps away from the podium and approaches ELAINE. She hands him paperwork.)*

ELAINE

It's a generous package.

WAYNE

I don't care about retirement.

ELAINE

You will. Trust me, you will.

WAYNE

And if I refuse to sign?

ELAINE

Then the next step is a vote by the board of trustees. And they will vote to terminate.

WAYNE

I saw *franklini*, Elaine.

ELAINE

I'm sure you did.

WAYNE

No, you aren't. I may no longer be a teacher, but I'm still a scientist.

ELAINE

Without proof, there is no science. You of all people should know that.

WAYNE

And a dead bee is the only way to prove there are live bees up there?

ELAINE

I'll admit, the irony is cruel.

WAYNE

So are you.

*(WAYNE begins walking away.)*

ELAINE

Wait. There's one more thing. That assistant of yours. Katie Jensen?

WAYNE

She's going to need a new advisor.

ELAINE

Actually, no. She's not a student here. Never was, as far as I can tell. We have no record of her whatsoever.

WAYNE

I guess she was just another one of my illusions.



*(WAYNE exits)*

## **ACT II**

### **SCENE 7**

*(One BIKER rolls onto the stage and stops, removes his helmet to reveal DAN. Another BIKER enters and pulls up alongside, removes helmet to reveal BRADY.)*

BRADY

Awesome ride, dude.

DAN

Not too bad for an old timer. I thought you going to pass me up there.

BRADY

I'm taking it easy; got an arm on the mend. I didn't even know that trail existed.

DAN

Not too many people know about it.

*(DAN displays his phone.)*

But I have this app, see?

BRADY

Don't let the tree huggers find out or they'll try to shut it down.

DAN

I know what you mean. I've got one living next door. Though I guess you'd call this guy a bee hugger.

BRADY

Hold on a sec. You talking about the professor? Hatfield?

DAN

Yes. He's my neighbor.

BRADY

What I wouldn't give for five minutes in that old man's house.

DAN

Why's that?

BRADY

He's the trail terrorist. Cops won't do anything because they say we don't have enough evidence. But I know the evidence is in there.

DAN

Evidence?

BRADY

The rope. Connects him to the traps.

DAN

So, then what? If you find the rope, you'll have him arrested?

BRADY

Dude's a criminal. Menace to society.

DAN

Dangerous?

BRADY

Dude's a few sprockets short of a ten-speed. I could've died up there. Today it's rope, tomorrow it's barbed wire. You're not, like, friends with him, are you?

DAN

Me? Well, I'm friends with his wife.

BRADY

You should warn her, dude. She could be in danger too.

DAN

I doubt that.

BRADY

It's like with serial killers—the neighbor's always the last to know.

DAN

He did suffer a concussion recently.

BRADY

That's why I got to get in there. He needs help.

DAN  
I don't know if I should be telling you this.

BRADY  
What?

DAN  
He loses his house keys a lot.

BRADY  
So?

DAN  
So his wife told me they stopped locking the back door.  
*(Then)*  
You're not going to hurt him, are you?

BRADY  
I'm a biker not a fighter.

*(They pedal offstage.)*

## ACT II

### SCENE 8

*(Mountain. KATIE is doing fieldwork. Checks her watch and looks up now and then. WAYNE enters; he walks without purpose. His clothes dirty and torn.)*

KATIE  
There you are. Where have you been all morning? I've already counted five *vandykei* and one *fervidus*. Really starting to get the hang of this.

WAYNE  
Who are you?

KATIE  
What?

WAYNE

There is no Katie Jensen enrolled in my class. There is no Katie Jensen enrolled the university.

KATIE

With tuition these days, can you blame me for skipping the entire registration process?

WAYNE

Do not lie to me.

KATIE

Okay. You're right. I'm not a student. I was never a student. I'm just a waitress.

WAYNE

A waitress with a burning desire to study bumble bees?

KATIE

Hearing it like that does sound a bit odd.

WAYNE

You're working for them, aren't you?

KATIE

Who?

WAYNE

The mountain bikers.

KATIE

That's crazy.

WAYNE

You've been keeping an eye on me all this time. That's why you volunteered. Hoping to catch me stringing rope across one of the trails.

KATIE

No.

WAYNE

And when you started getting impatient, you came right out and asked if I did it.

KATIE

No. That's not true. I was just curious, that's all. I'm on your side.

WAYNE

I'd like to believe you, but I can't, not anymore. It's time you left.

KATIE

Professor, please.

WAYNE

Goodbye, Katie.

*(KATIE starts offstage, then stops and turns around.)*

KATIE

My real name is Katie Lassetter. My father was Mark Lassetter. Ring a bell?

WAYNE

Your father.

KATIE

Yes. My father.

WAYNE

Strange. I don't remember a daughter.

KATIE

That's because I wasn't here when it happened. My mom left him two years before. We moved to Georgia.

WAYNE

And now you're here? Why? To see the damage he left in his wake?

KATIE

No. Like I said, I came here to help. And I mean that. I read about you and Alex, how she was working with you. My life hasn't exactly been, like, a life of purpose, you know? What's the difference if I wait tables in Atlanta or in Ashland?

WAYNE

Your father killed my daughter.

KATIE

He also killed himself.

WAYNE

And you think this will make it all better? Finding this bee?

KATIE

Better? What's better? They're both dead. My life is a mess. Yours too by the looks of it. Why can't something good come from this?

WAYNE

Katie, go home.

KATIE

You can't order me around. I'm not your student, remember?

WAYNE

I'm asking. Please, go home.

KATIE

This is my home.

WAYNE

Excuse me?

KATIE

It's the only place I've actually felt welcome, you know. I like it up here. I know this is all strange and I probably remind you of everything you lost. But for the record, you remind me of what I lost too. So just let me stick around a bit longer. You could always use another pair of eyes, right?

WAYNE

Another pair of ears would be better.

KATIE

I don't understand.

WAYNE

Alex. She doesn't speak to me anymore. And now I know why.

*(WAYNE exits as KATIE watches.)*

**ACT II****SCENE 9**

*(Hatfield house. NANCY enters through the front door dressed in hiking gear, carrying a backpack. She is about to stash her backpack away when WAYNE enters from the kitchen carrying a manuscript, and she jumps.)*

WAYNE

Where have you been all day?

NANCY

I was—I went for a hike. Aren't you supposed to be at class?

WAYNE

Not anymore. I've been retired. Put out to pasture. Decamped. Dry docked.

*(Laughs)*

Made extinct.

NANCY

Are you okay?

WAYNE

Never been better. Relieved actually. No more classes. No more politics.

NANCY

No more salary.

WAYNE

Science isn't about salary, Nance. It's about seeking the truth. So what if I don't have a job. Now there's one less obstacle between me and *franklini*.

NANCY

Maybe you should rest before heading back up there.

WAYNE

I'll rest when I'm dead.

NANCY

Don't say that.

WAYNE

I realized something, standing behind that podium, looking out at all those bleary, apathetic faces. I used to view apathy as this virus, and every year it seemed to spread, infecting more and more students, until the entire room just stared at me with these vacant eyes. But now I think that apathy isn't so much a virus but a reaction to a virus. The body's natural reaction to all the doomsday scenarios we throw at them every day. They need optimism and fearlessness and what do we give them? Debts. Theirs and ours. And regrets. That we didn't do more when had an opportunity to do more. That I didn't do more. I don't want any more regrets, Nance. I've collected too many of them already.

NANCY

Speaking of regrets, is that my book you've been reading?

WAYNE

Oh? This, yes. I just finished reading it.

NANCY

And?

WAYNE

You really believe *franklini* is extinct?

NANCY

I did when I wrote it.

WAYNE

The funny thing is, I'm not upset. You may be right. Maybe he is gone. Maybe I am clinging to the past.

NANCY

So I take it you didn't like the book.

WAYNE

Quite the opposite. You're right. I am endangered. All of us are—those who devote their lives to the thinning herd. You hitch your wagon to a dying species, and you can't act surprised when there's nowhere left to go. But if I had it to do again, I would have still spent twenty years with that bee. I may not have done much to save them, but I did my best to know them. And that's got to count for something.

NANCY

Thank you.



WAYNE

And as for Dan, he'll be a great publisher. So what if he drives a Tesla? He's got money, and he's going to spend it on your book. You could do a lot worse.

NANCY

It's just a publisher. Not a marriage.

WAYNE

Is there a difference?

NANCY

Will you give me a blurb?

WAYNE

You sure my name won't deter sales?

NANCY

I might keep it on the inside cover.

*(WAYNE walks over to NANCY and they hug.)*

WAYNE

You realize this means that those who write books about endangered scientists are themselves similarly endangered.

NANCY

We won't go down without a fight, will we?

WAYNE

I want you to know something. The truth about what happened up there.

NANCY

You don't need to—

WAYNE

Yes, I do.

NANCY

Wayne—

WAYNE

I dragged the branches. I know it wasn't right, but you have to believe me that I didn't do anything more than that. As for the rope—

NANCY

Wayne, stop.

WAYNE

Stop?

NANCY

What happens on Mt. Ashland stays on Mt. Ashland. Isn't that what Alex always used to say?

WAYNE

Indeed. Let's go out tonight. I want to treat you to champagne. The three hundred dollar bottle.

NANCY

Don't be silly.

WAYNE

I'm not silly. I'm serious. We'll drink to Alex.

NANCY

We'll drink to *franklini*.

WAYNE

And may the last species standing please turn out the lights.

NANCY

Just give me a minute to change.

*(NANCY exits. KNOCK on door. WAYNE answers to find BRADY.)*

WAYNE

What do you want?

BRADY

We need to talk, professor.

*(BRADY pushes his way in.)*

WAYNE

I didn't hurt you, Brady. I've been very clear about that all along.

BRADY  
*(Displays the rope)*

How do you explain this?

WAYNE

Explain what?

BRADY

This rope matches the rope used up on the trails.

WAYNE

So?

BRADY

So how come I found it in your bedroom closet?

WAYNE

What were you doing in there?

BRADY

Doesn't matter. All that matters is that you've been lying to me, lying to everyone. And now you're going to pay.

*(ETHAN enters the open door, breathing heavily.)*

ETHAN

Brady, what are you doing?

BRADY

About time you showed up? Get your notepad out.

ETHAN

Another biker hit a trap.

BRADY

When?

ETHAN

An hour ago. South end of the Time Warp trail.

BRADY

You sure get around, professor.

WAYNE

If you came here to intimidate some sort of confession out of me, you're wasting your time.

BRADY

If I walk out of here, I walk straight to the police and hand them this.

WAYNE

Maybe you can explain to them how I managed to lay a trap an hour ago when I've been here all day.

ETHAN

Can your wife corroborate that?

WAYNE

My wife? Of course. I mean, actually, she was out—

BRADY

Figures. Your own wife won't vouch for you.

ETHAN

Brady, let's get out of here.

BRADY

I'm not going anywhere.

ETHAN

Wayne, you don't have to say anything.

BRADY

What are you doing? Let him talk.

WAYNE

I did it. I sabotaged the trails. All of them. It was me. I'm the trail terrorist.

BRADY

Whoa. Dude snapped like a titanium frame.

ETHAN

I can pretend I didn't just hear that.

BRADY

I sure as hell heard that.

WAYNE

Ethan, I know what you're trying to do. But I did it. Call the cops. Good Morning America. The Holy See. Whoever. I'll tell them what I told you.

ETHAN

Are you absolutely sure about this?

WAYNE

What will you do with yourself now, Brady?

BRADY

What do you mean?

WAYNE

With no more crashes to promote to your fans, whatever will they watch?

BRADY

Well, I—I hadn't thought that far ahead.

WAYNE

Mountain bikers never do. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to put on a clean shirt. If I'm going to have a mug shot taken I might as well look respectable.

*(WAYNE exits.)*

ETHAN

This doesn't feel right. That was too easy.

BRADY

It was the element of surprise, just like you said.

ETHAN

That's not it.

*(NANCY enters, dressed for a night out.)*

NANCY

What's going on out here?

BRADY

Your husband just confessed.

NANCY

Confessed? To what?

ETHAN

To everything.

NANCY

Everything? Even the trap set today?

BRADY

That's right.

NANCY

He's been here all day reading my manuscript. Why didn't anyone ask *me*?

BRADY

Your husband's back there. Why don't you ask him?

NANCY

No, he's not.

*(Turns and calls)*

Wayne?

*(NANCY exits. ETHAN returns to the bird photo on the wall.)*

ETHAN

Killdeer.

*(Then)*

Deception through distraction.

BRADY

What are you talking about?

ETHAN

How did Nancy know about the new trap? I only just found out about it.

BRADY

Doesn't matter. He confessed.

*(NANCY enters.)*

NANCY

What in the world did you two do to him? Wayne's gone.

ETHAN

Where to?

NANCY

I have a pretty good idea.

ETHAN

The mountain. And it's getting dark out.

*(BRADY pulls out his phone and dials.)*

NANCY

I'm going after him.

ETHAN

No. You should stay here in case he comes home. We'll go.

NANCY

I'll call Katie. She might still be up there.

*(NANCY reaches for her phone while BRADY talks quietly into his.)*

ETHAN

I'm sure he'll be back soon.

NANCY

Are you?

*(BRADY hangs up. He and ETHAN head for the door.)*

BRADY

Let's roll.

ETHAN

Who was that?

BRADY

Doesn't concern you.

**ACT II****SCENE 10**

*(Mt. Ashland meadow at night. KATIE enters, slowly, feeling her way through the darkness.)*

KATIE

Wayne!

*(Then)*

Nancy's worried about you. We all are.

*(WAYNE enters from other side, singing)*

WAYNE

*She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes (when she comes)*  
*She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes (when she comes)*

KATIE

Wayne?

WAYNE

Alex?

KATIE

What? No, it's—

WAYNE

Alex, is that you?

KATIE

Yes.

WAYNE

I thought you left me.

KATIE

I'm still here.

WAYNE

I'm so happy to hear your voice again. I thought you were upset with me.

KATIE

No, not at all. I was just, busy.



WAYNE

I miss you.

KATIE

I miss you too. Dad. I wish I was there. I could have driven you home.

WAYNE

I bought you that car. Your mother thought you were too young. She thought you weren't ready. I should have listened to her.

KATIE

I was ready.

WAYNE

You didn't see him coming. It was too dark. There were no lights.

KATIE

It's okay. I'm here now. Please, Dad. Come home.

WAYNE

This is my home.

*(BIKERS with headlights begin criss-crossing the stage, the lights illuminating WAYNE like strobes, capturing him mid-motion.)*

WAYNE

*(A BIKER knocks WAYNE back a step.)*

You again.

*(A second BIKER passes, knocking WAYNE in a different direction.)*

You want to hit me. Come and hit me. I'm not going down without a fight!

KATIE

Leave him alone!

*(WAYNE has picked up a branch, swinging it at bikers as they pass. He is swinging and missing, flailing, and eventually he drops the branch and leans over, catching his breath. The bikers circle him, like vultures, preventing KATIE from getting to him. WAYNE falls to his knees, then sits.)*

WAYNE

Will the last species standing please turn out the lights.

*(WAYNE leans back as if going to sleep. KATIE rushes to him.)*

KATIE

Stop! Wayne! Please, Wayne? No. No. No.

*(The BIKERS have left the stage, leaving everything in darkness.)*

## **ACT II**

### **SCENE 11**

*(Mt. Ashland meadow. KATIE and NANCY enter. NANCY carries a small plastic baggie filled with ash.)*

KATIE

This is the spot.

NANCY

I'm glad you were with him. In the end.

KATIE

A lot of good it did.

NANCY

This is where Wayne would have wanted to be. Where he was always most comfortable. He spoke highly of you. Said you were his best student.

KATIE

I wouldn't go that far.

NANCY

He seemed to think you had a knack for bees. And he didn't say that about many students.

KATIE

Mrs. Hatfield, I haven't been completely honest with you about who I am.

NANCY

Yes?

KATIE

I'm not—I'm not a very good student. I'll probably be leaving soon.

NANCY

That would be a shame. You know, you remind me of my daughter, Alex. Did Wayne ever mention her?

KATIE

All the time.

NANCY

Alex would have been in college now. I always wanted to have a daughter in college, someone to dish about boys with, complain about professors. Silly, I know.

KATIE

It's not silly. It's been a dream of mine as well. College.

NANCY

Then consider staying.

*(A BIKE passed between them, forcing them to take a step back.)*

KATIE

Murderers.

NANCY

I want to blame them. But Wayne was not well. The examiner said he suffered a concussion after that first accident. Wasn't sleeping. Wasn't able to let go. And I don't want to make the same mistake. My husband lived his life the way he wanted. So did Alex. My job now is to accept it and move on. Focus on the future. On publishing this book.

*(holds up the baggie and opens it)*

Do want to say anything to him?

KATIE

I think—I think I'll stick around a little longer, professor. Keep looking for *franklini*. Maybe expand my range, try another mountain, someplace where there are no mountain bikers.

NANCY

Wayne. Alex. It's been a long time since we've been together in one place. I never gave you a good excuse for why. I guess I'm never been good at goodbyes.

*(Then)*

I can hear the two of you now, singing that song. Someday I too will be coming around this mountain. Someday.

*(NANCY tilts the bags, releasing the ashes. She bows her head. KATIE puts an arm around her.)*

KATIE

I saw the reporter at the café this morning. He told me to tell you that he's going to write that Wayne is not the trail terrorist. He was nowhere near the scene of the trap. He said he thinks this is all better off as a mystery.

NANCY

Like Bigfoot.

KATIE

He mentioned something about looking for a bird. Deer bird?

NANCY

Killdeer. It's a bird that nests on the ground.

KATIE

Is it endangered?

NANCY

Not yet.

*(KATIE and NANCY exit.)*

*(BRADY rides onto the stage on his mountain bike. As before, he is prepped for a downhill run.)*

BRADY

Okay, dudes. This is Brady Logan reporting from Mt. A. Fully recovered and about to descend the Time Warp trail. Hold onto your seats.

*(Pauses, then removes his helmet and switches on his camera. Puts on his helmet again.)*

Okay, dudes. This is Brady Logan reporting from Mt. A. Fully recovered and about to descend the Time Warp trail. Hold onto your seats.

*(BRADY stands up on his pedals and exits stage. Then enters at a higher speed, as if he's taking switchbacks down*

*the mountain. He goes back and forth across stage,  
hollering along the way. Until he exits the stage and just as  
we expect to see him return we hear a collision, followed by  
a bent bike wheel rolling onto the stage.)*

END