

WHEN NORTH BECOMES SOUTH

SciFi/Dystopian

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EXT. OUR SUN

The SUN appears like a simmering cauldron with flashes of light emanating from it. Pan out to show the solar system and EARTH spinning on its axis. A single beam of light heads toward Earth, just grazing the edge of the planet, giving it a glancing blow. Earth wobbles a tiny bit and its tilt shifts.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The house is fully automated and noisy. A robotic vacuum cleaner runs in the living room, while another device mops the kitchen floor.

LAURIE (Mid 50's; White) sits at the table scrolling through her phone. Power goes out and the house is silent. A moment later, there is a knock on her door. Laurie peeks out the window and sees SOPHIA (30; Hispanic) with her son, DIEGO (7). Laurie opens the door and stands there, not welcoming them in.

SOPHIA

Did you lose power?

LAURIE

Yes, we did, just a minute ago. Must be those solar flares again.

Diego tugs at Sophia's shirt, trying to pull her away.

SOPHIA

Diego, you can live for a few minutes without your game!

DIEGO

But the battery is low! What if I can't charge it?

SOPHIA

(to Laurie)

He can't seem to occupy himself for more than a minute without his device!

LAURIE

I completely understand. My kids used to be glued to those screens.

SOPHIA

You have older children?

LAURIE

(beat)

I have two boys... They are--not children anymore, and not living here with us. My oldest son, Brendan, teaches in Africa. He's been there for about a year and a half. My younger son, Josh--

Power comes back on. Everything in the house turns on at once: lights, coffee pot, vacuum, furnace and refrigerator. Alarms beep everywhere, indicating the need to reset timers.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

Oh my goodness! We have power! I'll tell you more sometime over coffee. Right now, I need to get my house back under control. With all this technology, this house might self-destruct if I don't recalibrate everything!

SOPHIA

Actually, I came over to invite you for coffee at our house. My husband and I have something we want to share with you. Can you come in a few minutes, once you have everything up and running again?

LAURIE

I suppose so...

SOPHIA

Great! See you in a bit!

Laurie closes the door and looks at JASPER (12 y.o. Golden Retriever).

LAURIE

Neighbors! Why do they think they can just come over here anytime! They just moved in and she acts like we are already best friends!

She resets all the devices in the house, then leaves the house and crosses the street to Sophia's house.

INT. SOPHIA'S HOUSE

Sophia quickly ushers her inside. The foyer looks like a small grocery store: multiple shelves packed with paper towels, toilet paper, canned goods. Laurie stares at the shelves.

In Sophia's kitchen: No robotic or technological gadgets. Sophia prepares coffee, measuring out everything by hand.

Laurie watches in fascination.

SOPHIA
Come meet Alejandro.

ALEJANDRO (mid-30's, Hispanic) sits on a sofa in the living room. Sophia pulls him up. He smiles at Laurie and holds out his hand.

LAURIE
Nice to meet you.

SOPHIA
It's hard to believe we've been in this house almost 6 months and haven't gotten to know you. It's been so hard because of the pandemic! We're slowly meeting other neighbors. I bet you're wondering why we have no electronics in the house.

Laurie nods slowly, still gazing around.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)
We both worked for the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. We have no devices here because we don't want to be too dependent on them.

ALEJANDRO
We learned some unsettling things at work and feel others need to know these things in order to prepare.

LAURIE
What things? Prepare for what?

ALEJANDRO
We have a meeting planned for tomorrow night and would like some neighbors there. Will you come?

LAURIE
I need to check with my husband.

She reaches for her phone. Alejandro stops her.

ALEJANDRO
You can talk to your husband in person about it, but please don't text, call or email him.

Laurie flinches and puts her phone back in her pocket. Sophia hands her a slip of paper.

SOPHIA
Here's the address. It's an old
warehouse. Park in the lot in back.

INT. CLASSROOM IN WEST AFRICAN COUNTRY OF LOSCOAYA - DAY.

SUPER: LOSCOAYA, WEST AFRICA

A blackboard with PHYSICS written on it and a drawing of a compass. A classroom crowded with old-fashioned chair/desks. About 15 WEST AFRICAN TEENAGERS (16 - 19 years old) sit, talking excitedly.

Brendan (26; white) whistles to get their attention.

BRENDAN
Listen up! We're doing an
experiment today. I need you to
move all the chairs to the sides of
the room.

The students jump up and move chairs. Brendan puts a small stool in the middle of the room and places a bowl of water on it. He puts a leaf in the bowl, then picks up a needle and rubs it with an iron nail.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
Can anyone tell me what I'm doing?

IAN
You're rubbin' a needle with a
nail.

The class laughs

BRENDAN
You know why?

IAN
Um... maybe to make it magnetic?

BRENDAN
Very good! You've been paying
attention these past few days. I'm
making a compass, and by now you
all should know what that is. This
morning, did anyone determine which
way is north by using your shadow?

JANICE
I did. It's that way!

Janice points to the corner of the room. Brendan hands her a card with a large "N" on it.

BRENDAN

Put this card on the table exactly where you think north is, based on looking at your shadow.

Brendan lines up the floating leaf so the tip points south. He places the needle on top of the leaf. The students watch with rapt attention as the leaf begins to turn.

JANICE

It's moving! Look--now it's stoppin' almos' at north!

BRENDAN

But you can see that it isn't quite lining up. Remember I told you yesterday the magnetic poles and the actual north and south pole of the Earth don't line up?

IAN

Why don' they line up? It looks pretty far off to me. What's the point of having a compass point north when it's not actually north?

BRENDAN

I'm not sure why they don't line up. You're right--it's about 5 degrees off, which is pretty far. It was a lot closer when I did this yesterday. But that's a great question, Ian. I'll research it and let you know what I find out.

OTHER STUDENT 1

Wha's research? I don' know what that means.

Brendan closes his eyes for a moment and takes a breath.

BRENDAN

Research is when you look at books and what other people have done to get more information. Okay--so you have some homework today. I want each of you to make your own compass out of materials you can find at home. Bring it in on Monday and we'll see how they all work.

The students all groan.

IAN

Why we got to do homework when the other half the class that's not here gets to skip out?

BRENDAN

Because you are the ones who are going to pass this class and graduate high school, and maybe do something useful with your lives. The others... well they may end up stuck in this village with less opportunities. I'll see you all on Monday.

The students file out of the room and Brendan follows. He sees ANNA (14, Brendan's neighbor) carrying 2 empty water buckets.

ANNA

Hiya Brendan!

BRENDAN

Good morning Anna.

They walk past chickens, barking dogs, and running and squealing children. At Brendan's house, a small mud-brick structure with a wide porch, they watch the activity at the nearby hand-pump well. Two 7 year-old boys load buckets of water onto a wheelbarrel. They wheel it to Brendan's porch and deliver him 2 buckets. He thanks them, handing them each a coin.

ANNA

I see you've put Ezra and Theo to work!

BRENDAN

Yeah. It's a win-win I think. They used to laugh at me for spilling and wasting too much water.

ANNA

They work hard, eh?

BRENDAN

Yes, they do. I'm amazed at how hard the kids work--even the littlest ones. I just wish more of them would show up at school. Today, almost half of them weren't in class.

ANNA

You are a great teacher. I hear the students like you best of all the teachers at the school! I hope you're still here in two years so I can have you as a teacher!

Anna fills her 2 buckets at the well. She places one on her head and carries the other in her hand.

ANNA (CONT'D)

I need to get home soon or my Ma will be wondering what happened to me. Will you be joining us for dinner tonight?

BRENDAN

Of course! Tell your mom I appreciate her cooking for me!

Brendan picks up the two water buckets from Ezra and Theo and walks into his house.

INT. FIRE STATION - MORNING

SUPER: SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

JOSH (24) tinkers with an old radio. His dog AMIGO (age 4) sits by his side. STEVE (Fire Chief, 40) enters the room.

STEVE

What do you have there?

JOSH

It's an old ham radio I found at the junk yard. I can't believe someone was throwing this away!

STEVE

A ham radio? Why would anyone want to use that?

JOSH

It's an old hobby of mine...

STEVE

I suppose it's fine for you to work on as long as it doesn't interfere with the rest of your job. Since you and Amigo are now on our disaster relief team, I want you to come with me to a meeting tonight. It has to do with climate change, or the environment, or something like that.

JOSH

Sure, I'll go.

STEVE

Great. I'll drive you there. It's at a remote location, and they said the fewer cars, the better. This sounds like something they don't want publicized much yet.

INT./EXT.SUBURBAN TOWN IN CONNECTICUT - NIGHT

Laurie and Stan (mid-50's, Laurie's husband) drive past a dilapidated warehouse. Boarded up windows, peeling paint.

STAN

Are you positive you have the right address?

LAURIE

Yes, I'm sure.

Laurie pulls out the paper Sophia gave her earlier that day.

STAN

I don't know. This just seems strange to me.

LAURIE

Well, we're here now.

Sophia opens the door and ushers them in. Other neighbors are already there. Laurie smiles shyly at LISA (mid 40s).

LISA

Hi Laurie. Glad you decided to come. It's been a long time since we've seen each other.

LAURIE

(stiffly)

Well, you know... With the pandemic and all, it's been hard to stay in touch with people.

GEORGE (mid-70's with white hair; wire-rimmed glasses) strides up and envelopes Laurie in a big bear hug.

GEORGE

Good to see you! Are you enjoying having an empty nest these days?

LAURIE

In some ways, but I really miss having Brendan and Josh around. They're both so far away!

GEORGE

Well, yeah, but think of the great things they're doing. I know what you mean, though. I wish Josh was closer. I always enjoyed spending time with him.

SOPHIA

Well, shall we start?

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

Everyone sits facing a large T.V. screen. Sophia stands in front of them.

SOPHIA

I'm going to dive right in.
Alejandro and I worked as research
scientists for NOAA, and we both
lost our jobs a couple days ago.

Laurie gasps; Others in the room look at each other with confusion. Sophia holds her hand up.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

They told us it was because we are
here on green cards and our project
was funded by a government grant
with a small quota for green card
holders. That may be true, but we
believe it was because we were
working on something the U.S.
Government doesn't want publicized.

Stan sits back in his chair, crosses his arms and scowls; Laurie glares at him.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

We have a recording made by LEONARD
MCFAY the former director of the
Environmental Protection Agency.
Starting tonight, this is being
shown by scientists all over the
country in small groups just like
this. We ask that you watch this
with an open mind.

Laurie nods. Stan leans forward in his seat.

INT. MEETING ROOM SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA - NIGHT

Josh and Steve watch the same video.

INT. VIDEO SCREEN

LEONARD MCFAY (Mid-40'S, African American) appears on the screen. He sits with folded hands at a desk, looking directly into the camera. He speaks slowly and deliberately.

MCFAY

To my fellow Americans and anyone
else out there listening: I want to
warn you of a crisis that will soon
affect the entire earth.

(MORE)

MCFAY (CONT'D)

This has not been publicized, but it is time for you, the people, to be made aware, so you can prepare. (beat) Let me give you a bit of background.

780,000 years ago, Earth's magnetic field flipped. (beat) Magnetic north became south, and magnetic south became north. This has occurred hundreds of times over the lifetime of the Earth—averaging about 350,000 years between flips. In simple terms, what this means is that our planet is overdue for another.

McFay looks directly at the camera.

MCFAY(CONT'D)

I'm not talking science fiction, folks. This is real. Our planet is on the verge of a magnetic shift, the likes of which has not been seen since before the appearance of the Neanderthal Man. (beat) And based on recent movement of Earth's magnetic poles, many scientists believe it has already started.

Laurie glances around the room. Everyone's eyes are glued to the monitor. From his meeting room, Josh watches with rapt attention.

MCFAY (CONT'D)

Why is this such a crisis? For one thing, our magnetic field protects us from galactic radiation and other hazards. Comets, meteors, and even flares from our own sun are all deflected from Earth by this protective shield. Usually the shield is strong and capable of handling all this bombardment, but it is weakest at the magnetic poles. If the poles move, those weak spots move as well, leaving large portions of the planet vulnerable to radiation.

INT. VIDEO SCREEN - NIGHT

Show Aurora Borealis

MCFAY (VOICE OVER)

Consider this: The Aurora Borealis, commonly known as the Northern Lights, as well as the Aurora Australis, or Southern Lights, typically show up at the north and south poles. Recently, however, the Northern Lights were observed in Ohio and Indiana for a short period of time. The appearance of these lights so far south is an ominous sign of a weakening magnetic field.

Laurie shifts uncomfortably in her seat.

INT. VIDEO SCREEN

LEONARD MCFAY (CONT'D)

In other words, sometime in the future, for some number of years—perhaps decades or even centuries—the surface of our planet may become unable to sustain life as we know it.

Josh shifts uncomfortably as well...

MCFAY (CONT'D)

Tonight, I am outlining things we can do to help our species survive. We need to develop alternative power sources and build a subterranean transportation infrastructure for the entire country, so people can move around without being exposed to the dangers of Earth's surface. (beat) Every house capable of supporting solar panels should have them, and basements should be equipped with enough food and water to withstand a prolonged period of isolation for each family, possibly about a month. (beat) We also urge everyone to have some sort of backup radio-solar powered if possible. Cell phones and the internet may be unusable for extended periods of time. Consider how you will survive without your devices. If your house depends on "smart technology" make sure you still know how to operate all the things your smartphones and devices now control.

Laurie shivers involuntarily. She takes hold of Stan's hand and squeezes it tightly.

MCFAY(CONT'D)

Now, we want you to be prepared, yet we are not expecting anything to happen tomorrow. However, it is imperative we prepare now so we can ride out the storm once it hits. (beat) Get involved in your community and form action groups to help at the local level. Because when things really heat up in the stratosphere, all we may have is our towns and neighborhoods.

The screen goes blank. Neighbors pepper Alejandro and Sophia with questions. Laurie and Stan slip out quickly, unnoticed. Holding hands, they walk quickly to their car in stunned silence.

INT. MEETING ROOM SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA - NIGHT

The video ends; Josh and Steve remain in the room as people ask questions of the organizer in the background.

JOSH

(to Steve)

How much do you know about this guy, McFay? Do you believe him?

STEVE

I've heard he's a brilliant scientist. I think he's onto something big, and it can't hurt us to be prepared. After all, that's what our team is for.

JOSH

Do you think we can get a small budget for ham radio communications? I could train a few people.

STEVE

Maybe. I'll see what I can arrange. Your experience might be just the thing we need.

EXT. STREET IN SMALL TOWN - NIGHT

Laurie and Stan sit in their car in the parking lot.

STAN

Do you really believe that guy?

LAURIE

I'm not sure, but Sophia thinks very highly of him.

STAN

What do we even know about Sophia and her husband? We've barely talked to them since they moved in! All we really know is they're hoarders, and this may be some conspiracy theory.

LAURIE

You may be right, but what if this is all true? We can't deny how dependent we are on technology. What would it be like if we lost it? Maybe there are some things we can do just in case.

Laurie gets a ping on her phone. She looks at the message.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

Well, at least there is some good news tonight! It's a message from Brendan! He's made a plane reservation to fly back here for a short break!

EXT. PORCH OF HOUSE IN LOSCOAYA WEST AFRICA - EVENING

A family of eight sits around a large rectangular table on the porch. TALAH (mid-40s, Anna's mother) motions to Brendan to take a seat as he approaches.

TALAH

How's my favorite teacher doing tonight?

Brendan smiles. They squeeze in to make room for him at the table beside Anna.

BRENDAN

Thanks for including me.

TALAH

Of course! That's what neighbors are for. You're always welcome to dinner here.

BRENDAN

It's sure different from where I grew up. I barely knew my neighbors.

TALAH

Well, we appreciate the work you're doing for our village. This is our way of thanking you.

BRENDAN

But you already have such a big family to feed.

ANJALI (26, ANNA'S SISTER)

It's gonna get bigger soon, Ma. We due to have another baby in a few months' time!

There is a flurry of conversation in broken English, most of which Brendan can't follow.

ANNA

(to Brendan)

You seem quiet tonight. Is everything okay?

BRENDAN

Yeah, I was just thinking about home. I'm making plans to go back there when school's on break. It's been almost two years since I saw my mom and dad.

ANNA

Well, you won't miss much here! It'll be the height of rainy season. We'll miss you for sure, but it mus' be hard to be separated from your family for so long.

INT. KICHEN - DAY

SUPER: 1 MONTH LATER.

Brendan stands at the kitchen window and stares outside at the backyard. There is a well with a hand-pump, a small shed next to it and a large concrete bunker. Four chickens graze near the shed.

BRENDAN

What's with the backyard? Did you put in a well? And a chicken coop?

LAURIE

I'll explain after we visit our neighbors. It'll make more sense to you then. Want some breakfast? We have some waffles in the freezer.

BRENDAN

I'd LOVE some waffles.

Takes a waffle from the freezer and puts it in the toaster. He points to the freezer and the toaster.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

How'd I live without this for the past two years?

(with his mouth full)

Tell me about these neighbors.

LAURIE

Well... They moved in over 6 months ago but I didn't really meet them until recently. They're both physicists. They have an eight-year-old boy and a baby due shortly.

BRENDAN

Did I tell you my neighbors also have a baby due? Their oldest daughter, Anjali, is pregnant. I don't know how they are going to manage—they already have seven people in their house and it's not much bigger than my house. But I guess they'll figure it out.

LAURIE

It's good you found people there to connect with. It's taken us a while to get to know Sophia and Alejandro, but we've gotten to be good friends. Let's go over now. They're expecting us.

INT. SOPHIA'S HOUSE

Brendan stares at the shelves overflowing with supplies.

BRENDAN

Are they preparing for the end of the world?

Laurie shrugs and looks toward the basement. Sophia appears in the doorway.

SOPHIA

So nice to meet you, Brendan! Your mom has told us so much about you.

BRENDAN

What are all these things doing here?

SOPHIA

I can explain. But first come downstairs and meet Alejandro and see our lab.

The basement is a high-tech physics lab. Brendan stares at all the equipment.

ALEJANDRO

I'm sure you are wondering what we're doing here. The best way to explain is to show you a recording made a few months ago. Your parents and other neighbors saw it when it first came out. Since then, we have gathered even more information that I can share with you.

Alejandro sets up DVD of Leonard McFay. Brendan gazes around the room, studying all the instruments.

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)

Please, have a seat.

Show brief clips of video as Brendan watches. He gets increasingly agitated. As the presentation ends, anxiety overwhelms him. He jumps up, dashes up the stairs and races back to his house.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Brendan gasps for air. He looks around his room, then claws through all his belongings, making four distinct piles. He makes four signs:

THROW AWAY, GIVE AWAY, BRING BACK TO AFRICA FOR NEIGHBORS TO SELL, KEEP

He sorts all his things into the piles. When he's done, the "keep" pile is miniscule compared to the other three piles.

Visibly calmer, he goes downstairs.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

BRENDAN

I want to go to the grocery store to see my friends. Can I take the car?

LAURIE

Sure but drive carefully! Remember, you haven't driven in two years!

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Brendan walks in and gazes around. Spellbound, he watches customers stroll through the aisles filling their carts to the brim with goods. Another panic attack hits. He backs out of the store and tries to slow his breath.

Slowly, he drives home, pulls into his driveway and sits, hunched over the steering wheel.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Laurie opens the car door gently and jumps back at Brendan's angry outburst.

BRENDAN

They've got it all wrong!

LAURIE

Who?

BRENDAN

Everyone! Your neighbors, the grocery store. Everyone! Why does everyone need so much stuff?

He looks pleadingly at Laurie. Continues in a quieter voice.

BRENDAN(CONT'D)

Mom... how much toilet paper can you possibly save up? How much food? For how long? Across the street, they probably have enough food to last them for a few months at best, but if things unfold the way this guy McFay is predicting, you could be years here without power. *Years!* And during those years, you can either barely get by and survive, or you can adapt. People here need to look at strategies to live with less, not hoard more! The idea that you can save up all this stuff for when you lose power for several years is crazy. It won't work!

Laurie stares at him.

LAURIE

What do you mean, it won't work? How else can we prepare?

BRENDAN

I don't know, but hoarding isn't the answer. Somehow people need to recognize they don't need as much. That they can get by without filling their shopping carts to overflowing. People here will suffer unless they learn to live completely differently.

Crying, Brendan gets out of the car, slams the door and runs inside. Laurie starts to follow him, then stops.

INT. BRENDAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Brendan sits on his bed next to Jasper. He opens his laptop.

BRENDAN
(to Jasper)
The world is crazy, Jasper. I need to do a little research into this magnetic field stuff. At least I don't have to explain what research is to anyone here.

He scrolls through several websites, then turns to Jasper again.

BRENDAN(CONT'D)
I don't get it. There is no information out there about the things that guy McFay talked about.

INT. ALEJANDRO AND SOPHIA'S BASEMENT - DAY

BRENDAN
Sorry I ran out like that. I just felt overwhelmed. Why isn't there anything on the internet about this?

ALEJANDRO
McFay recorded this a month ago and we've been waiting for him to tell us to make it more public. So far haven't heard anything. There are rumors he's gone to West Africa to visit some distant relatives, but no one knows for sure. In the meantime, we're keeping up with our research here.

BRENDAN
Show me what you've been working on.

Alejandro shows him several of the instruments.

EXT. SOPHIA'S PORCH - DAY

Brendan, Sophia and Alejandro sit on a bench. Diego sits nearby, immersed in his phone.

BRENDAN

Realistically, how long do you think we have before this is a crisis?

ALEJANDRO

MacFay thought about 20 to 30 years, and unless there is a cataclysmic event, that's probably a good estimate.

BRENDAN

What do you mean by a cataclysmic event?

SOPHIA

Any unusual disruption of the magnetic field, like from a major solar flare.

ALEJANDRO

That could make the poles shift faster. In that case, parts of Earth might experience a much-weakened magnetic field sooner, although the area around the equator might remain protected. Loscoaya might be one of the safer places to live. (beat) I want to give you something to take back with you.

He hands Brendan a small hand-held magnetometer.

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)

This measures the strength of the magnetic field at any given location. You can monitor that in Loscoaya. This will be a fun project for your students as well.

DIEGO

That doesn't sound like a fun project to me.

ALEJANDRO

What do you mean?

DIEGO

It just seems boring and lame. Who really cares?

Diego shrugs; continues staring at his phone.

BRENDAN

If it wasn't for the magnetic field, you wouldn't be able to use your phone.

DIEGO

Ya, right. As if you know. You're just saying that 'cause you're a teacher and you think you know everything.

SOPHIA

Diego, that's no way to speak! That's rude!

BRENDAN

I don't know everything, but I do know a little about phones and magnetic fields. So does your dad. You may want to ask him sometime about how it works.

Diego looks up momentarily. Then stands and stomps off with a loud sigh.

SOPHIA

I'm sorry. We simply can't control his screen time these days. He's only allowed to use the phone in his room and outside, but it still doesn't stop him.

BRENDAN

Yeah, well, he'll grow out of it eventually. At least I did.

EXT. LAURIE'S STREET - DAY

Laurie walks with Jasper. Sees George outside in his driveway.

GEORGE

Hi Laurie! It's good to see you!

LAURIE

Good to see you as well, George.

GEORGE

You look a little down today. Everything okay?

LAURIE

Well... not exactly. I mean, I shouldn't be bothered by this, but some of our neighbors have been posting nasty comments on Facebook about our backyard. Making fun of us, you know? Maybe I should just stop using those sites altogether.

GEORGE

I don't do any of that social media stuff. The whole internet could disappear as far as I'm concerned.

LAURIE

What about your ham radio? You used to be deeply involved in that.

GEORGE

Yeah, well, when cell phones came along, ham radios kind of dried up, though lately I've been thinking about dusting off all my equipment and getting it up and running again. I might even try to resurrect the local ham radio club.

LAURIE

That sounds like a great project! It's good to know at least a few people are taking this threat seriously.

Jasper tugs on his leash. Laurie waves at George.

LAURIE(CONT'D)

Jasper wants to keep walking. I'll catch up with you later!

Laurie and Jasper approach Sophia's house. Sophia is outside gardening. Lisa is with her as well.

SOPHIA

You must be so happy to have Brendan home.

LAURIE

I am! I wish he could stay longer though. He's leaving in a couple days.

LISA

I bet you are so proud of him. I can't imagine my son Kevin doing something like that!

LAURIE

Just wait. Kevin is only 12 years old. I'm sure he'll surprise you in many ways!

LISA

I just want him to stay healthy! He just got diagnosed with asthma, you know.

SOPHIA

I'm sorry to hear that.

She rubs her belly and gets a faraway look in her eyes.

LAURIE

What's wrong Sophia? Are you worried about the baby?

SOPHIA

I used to think this country was safe and my children would have a better life if they were born here. But now, I'm not so sure. Look at Diego! Sometimes I feel he's been taken over by the devil. He can't survive without his device nearby. I never thought parenting would be this hard!

LAURIE

Our kids experience so many influences beyond our control. When Brendan and Josh were teenagers, I wasn't sure I'd survive. We'd try to set limits on what they could do, especially around screen time, but ultimately, we had to let them make mistakes and learn things for themselves. Somehow, you have to trust Diego will find his way, and soon you will have a beautiful new child to hug and treasure.

INT. MEETING ROOM AT FIREHOUSE - NIGHT

A meeting of the local ham radio club. Five firefighters are there, along with Steve and his sister, MARGUERITTE (late 20's). Amigo sits quietly in the corner.

JOSH

Listen up. By now, you should all have a working radio at home. Next meeting, we'll do some mock drills. Bring your hand-held radios with you. If there are no questions, I'll see you all next week.

The meeting ends and Josh turns to his old radio on the desk. Marguerite and Steve approach him.

MARGUERITE

That's quite a setup you have there. It looks like an antique!

JOSH

That's just the outside. I've replaced just about every part. It reminds me of the first radio I built, so I wanted to keep that look.

STEVE

As long as you're sure it'll work! I see you've met my sister, Margueritte. She's visiting for a few days from Colorado.

Margueritte smiles at Josh.

JOSH

I have now! Pleased to meet you.

MARGUERITE

Steve's told me a lot about you. He says this work may be critically important if the Apocalypse hits.

JOSH

Well, I don't know about that...

MARGUERITE

He says you've been working on this round the clock. How worried should I be?

JOSH

I don't think anything's going to happen soon. It's just good to be prepared. We don't want to go back to the dark ages.

STEVE

We should get going now. Josh, you're working too hard. How about you come over for dinner tomorrow night? My boys would love to see Amigo.

JOSH

Sure. And since you brought it up, my mom's been saying the same thing, pressuring me to take a few days off. I haven't seen my family in a long time. I'm going in two weeks and will only be gone a couple days. Would you watch Amigo for me?

STEVE

Of course! He's welcome any time!

INT. BRENDAN'S ROOM - DAY.

The room is almost empty. Jasper lies on the bed. Brendan packs to return to Loscoaya. He carefully packs the magnetometer Alejandro gave him along with 15 small compasses. Laurie pokes her head in.

LAURIE

I can't believe how fast the time has gone!

BRENDAN

I know, but I'll be back again in a year.

LAURIE

Or on to the next thing...

BRENDAN

Cheer up Mom. You'll be seeing Josh next week.

Brendan closes his suitcase.

INT. AIRPLANE - LATER

Brendan boards a crowded plane to Loscoaya. Leonard McFay sits by the window in the seat next to him. Brendan does a double-take; recognizes him but doesn't let on at first. McFay stares out the window.

BRENDAN

Do you live in Loscoaya?

MCFAY

No, but I have some distant relatives there.

BRENDAN

I've lived there for the past two years. It's a beautiful place.

MCFAY

Two years is a long time. What have you been doing there?

BRENDAN

I'm a high school physics teacher. I work for TeachAfrica in a tiny village.

MCFAY

I will be working at the University for a while. I'm trying to set up a research facility there.

BRENDAN

By any chance, are you Leonard
McFay?

MCFAY

How do you know me?

BRENDAN

I saw your recording.

MCFAY

What did you think of it?

BRENDAN

I believe you, but it's hard to
worry about something that's not an
immediate threat, especially with
all the deniers out there. A few
neighbors think my parents are
crazy. In fact, several take great
pleasure in poking fun at them.

MCFAY

I know. That's why I'm leaving.

He looks out the window for a moment, then turns back to
Brendan.

MCFAY(CONT'D)

My grandfather dreamt of traveling
to Loscoaya someday, but that
wasn't meant to be. (shrugs). Who
knows? Maybe a year from now I'll
still be at the University, and can
give your students some guidance if
they go to the University.

BRENDAN

I hope you can!

INT. BRENDAN'S CLASSROOM - DAY

SUPER: 1 WEEK LATER

Brendan's students cluster around Brendan's desk with all
their new compasses laid out. There is a large chart on the
wall: **Daily Location of Magnetic North Pole**. Cyrus writes
the location on the chart. They now have a week of data.

CYRUS

It shifted almos' two degrees last
night. That's alot! What do you
think it means?

JANICE

The whole world is turnin' upside
down!

CYRUS

Nah, it jus' means the North Star will have to be re-named the South Star.

IAN

My dog will be really confused.

BRENDAN

Your dog would be confused? Why?

IAN

Ever since we made that compass last year, I been watching him closely. When he pees, he always, *always* lines up facin' magnetic north. Every time.

CYRUS

If it keeps shiftin', will cars still be able to drive? Will we be able to get to Troeburg?

JANICE

If you have enough gas, maybe. But gas might run out and then we might be stuck here for always...

Brendan stares at the students.

INT. SOPHIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

A LARGE CHART of PREPARATION TASKS is posted on Sophia's refrigerator.

LAURIE

I saw George earlier today when I was walking Jasper. He looks about 10 years younger since the neighborhood voted to make him our local emergency communications liason.

SOPHIA

We all need to feel useful, I think.

She places her hands on her large pregnant belly

LAURIE

Are you feeling okay?

SOPHIA

I'm not sure I want to go to the hospital when this baby comes.

(MORE)

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

What if I'm there and the power goes out? That's been happening a lot lately. It would be chaos. I'll be one of hundreds of patients stuck there in the dark. How could they possibly take care of everyone?

LAURIE

I'm sure they have emergency generators. You'd probably be better off in a hospital for this exact reason.

SOPHIA

I'm not comfortable with it. I've hired a midwife but I need backup support. Will you do that along with Lisa?

LAURIE

I know nothing about delivering babies!

SOPHIA

You've done it twice! You must know something.

LAURIE

But that was a long time ago in a hospital!

She throws her hands up in exasperation

LAURIE (CONT'D)

Oh, hell, I'll be backup support, but I still feel this is a big mistake!

INT. LAURIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A pounding on the door wakes Laurie. She shakes Stan and glances at her phone: 3:00 am.

LAURIE

Stan, wake up!

They turn on their phone flashlights and creep down the darkened stairs.

STAN

3:00 am, eh? Josh should be taking off about now...

Laurie peeks through the window.

LAURIE
I think it's Alejandro!

She yanks open the door. Alejandro looks panicked.

ALEJANDRO
The baby's coming!

LAURIE
It's too soon! We haven't even met
with the midwife yet!

ALEJANDRO
Please, we need your help!

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Josh settles into his seat. He glances at his phone -- smiles at a new text from Marguerite: *Enjoyed our time last night! Can't wait to do it again...*

Josh responds with: *Feel the same.* He looks up.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A candle-lit romantic dinner scene. Josh and Marguerite sit across from each other, laughing. They are clearly enjoying each other's company. Josh takes her hands; they lock eyes.

END FLASHBACK

INT. AIRPLANE - BACK TO PRESENT

Josh puts on his headphones and listens to the pilots talking with air traffic control.

(Back and forth chatter
between flight deck and
air traffic control -- off
camera)

The plane rises into the air. Josh gazes down at the city lights twinkling below. On the headset, he hears the pilot talking with air traffic control.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER (OFF CAMERA)
Flight 432 turn - [static on
headphones]

The plane jolts slightly. The lights of the city below go out. Completely.

PILOT (OFF CAMERA)
Damn! We lost radio contact!
[switch to music on headphones]

Josh looks around. Other passengers appear nervous.

INT. AIRPLANE FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

The PILOT and CO-PILOT check instruments.

CO-PILOT
What the hell's going on?

PILOT
Power's out on the ground. It may
be a pulse from a solar flare.

CO-PILOT
We need to land. Those lights on
the ground ahead are runway lights.
That must be El Paso airport on
generator power. It's the only
major airport around for miles.

PILOT
I'm nervous about descending
without radio communication. There
might be other planes in the area.

The senior flight attendant pokes her head in.

SENIOR FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Captain, we need to do something
soon to calm the passengers. They
see the darkness below and are
starting to panic.

CO-PILOT
We can't stay up here forever. If
we circle, we still run the risk of
air traffic. Let's get on the
ground.

PILOT
Okay - we'll do this visually and
manually. Tell them to prepare for
landing.

INT. SOPHIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Small, battery-operated candles cast an eerie glow. Sophia
reclines in her bed, pale as a ghost.

LAURIE
Did you call the midwife?

ALEJANDRO

The phone doesn't work.

STAN

That's odd. During other power outages the past few months, phones always worked. Why would they fail now?

ALEJANDRO

A solar flare may have knocked out communication satellites. The midwife lives far. It'll take me about two hours to get her back here--assuming she can come right away and I can find the house without GPS.

SOPHIA

I know you didn't want to be put in this position, but if you can stay until the midwife comes, that will be enough.

LAURIE

(to Alejandro)

Go wake up Lisa! I can't do this alone.

ALEJANDRO

Diego's there now. She should be here in a few minutes.

LAURIE

You and Stan go together. He knows the area better than you. And take Diego!

(to Stan)

Can you wake up George? Ask him to contact the police station. He told me no matter what happens with the grid, he would always have a direct line to police and fire dispatch. None of us know how to do this without help.

Alejandro and Stan leave. Sophia has another contraction.

LAURIE

Squeeze my hand and breathe!

INT. AIPLANE FLIGHT DECK

Plane approaches the runway. It's completely dark outside except for a string of lights along the runway. Both pilot and co-pilot are white-knuckled.

PILOT

Looks like there might be another plane ahead of us. Do you see that?

CO-PILOT

Pull up! We're too close behind it!

They abort the approach and the plane rises up to circle around. They both breath a sigh of relief.

PILOT

I can't believe we have no radio contact with anyone!

CO-PILOT

I don't see any other lights around. Let's do a tight circle and give it one more try.

The plane approaches the runway again, and this time lands smoothly. The pilot peers ahead. An emergency generator provides limited outdoor lighting. He parks the plane near the terminal.

INT. AIRPLANE MAIN CABIN

Passengers cheer as the plane shuts down. They exit the plane via an outdoor stairway, cross the tarmac, and enter the terminal. The FLIGHT ATTENDANT hands them each a bottle of water and some trail mix; tells each passenger to wait at the gate inside for more information. All shops, kiosks and restaraunts are closed.

Josh glances at his phone: 12:00 AM. He pulls out his hand-held ham radio. Turns it on: static.

INT. SOPHIA'S BEDROOM

Laurie and Lisa sit quietly with Sophia. George knocks on the door and pokes his head in.

GEORGE

There's a problem! There was an explosion at a power substation and a bunch of workers were injured. It's gonna be a while before any help can get here. You're all on your own until the midwife gets here.

George leaves.

LAURIE

I wish we had met with the midwife.

LISA

At least we watched the video.

SOPHIA

I'll be okay.

Sophia has a strong contraction. Her water breaks.

LAURIE

Shit! She's going into active labor!

CHAOTIC CHILDBIRTH SCENE unfolds.

LISA

I think she's bleeding much more than normal. We need the midwife here!

Sophia screams with each contraction, as Laurie and Lisa struggle to keep her calm. They hold her hands, massage her back and coach her to breathe.

LAURIE

Breathe through it! You can do this, Sophia. I know you can.

SOPHIA

I can't! It's too much! It wasn't like this with Diego. I don't remember it being this hard!

She tenses up, then falls back against her pillows sobbing.

LISA

I'm worried. The video said nothing about so much bleeding. What do we do?

The MIDWIFE rushes in. Sophia lets out a gut-wrenching scream.

LAURIE

The baby's coming now!

Laurie and Lisa back away. The Midwife takes charge as the baby is born. She wraps her in a towel and everyone holds thier breath until she emits a small cough, then takes a gulp of air. Gently, she places her on Sophia's chest.

LAURIE

You have a beautiful baby girl!

SOPHIA

(whispers)
Hello, my dear Dawn.

LISA
What a beautiful name!

The MIDWIFE cuts the umbilical cord.

LISA
She's bleeding a lot. We didn't
know how to stop it.

MIDWIFE
She needs to get to a hospital!
They can give her a blood
transfusion there.

LAURIE
We haven't been able to reach the
EMTs.

The EMTs burst in. They take control and within minutes wheel Sophia into a waiting ambulance. Stunned, Alejandro goes with them, carrying the new baby. Laurie, Stan and Diego follow in their car.

INT. AIRPORT, EL PASO TEXAS - NIGHT.

Josh walks through the darkened airport, he sees a sign: POLICE DISPATCH OFFICE. A DISPATCHER (early 20s) sits with his feet on the desk.

DISPATCHER
What do you need?

JOSH
Do you have a working radio here?

AIRPORT DISPATCHER
Are you kidding? We have nothing. No communication at all. It's taken the last hour to get all critical things switched to generator power. You'd think that would be automatic, but of course, nothing worked as planned. Cars are still stuck in the parking garage because the electronic gates are locked in the closed position. I just got back from helping some people trapped in an elevator. This is the first minute I've had to sit since power went out.

JOSH
So... I guess you guys don't have
any ham radio operators on staff...

The man looks at Josh blankly.

AIRPORT DISPATCHER

Staff is just me right now, and I wouldn't know a ham radio from a hole in the ground.

Josh leaves the office and walks out of the airport. He looks up as a blood-red sun rises above the city.

EXT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Anna pounds on Brendan's his door. When he doesn't answer, she goes around the house and knocks on his window.

ANNA

Brendan, come quickly! You don't want to miss this!

Brendan opens the door and steps outside, still rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He stares at the SUN, which hangs like a huge orange fireball on the horizon with streaks of blood-red flames emanating out in all directions. MANY VILLAGERS gather to witness it.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Aren' ya glad I gotcha up? You would've slept through this.

BRENDAN

*"Red sky at night, sailors delight;
Red sky in the morn, sailors be warned."*

ANNA

What's it mean?

BRENDAN

It's just an old saying. Superstitious sailors thought a red sunrise meant a storm was coming.

ANNA

Well, no storm is coming today. There's not a cloud in the sky! But this wasn't the reason I got you up. I have something more important to show you.

They walk to Anna's house. Several village women are gathered. One of them holds a tiny baby.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Look what Anjali brought into the world!

BRENDAN

They just pass him from person to person? Don't they worry he will get sick?

ANNA

Of course not! Many people will hold him today. That is how we all get to know him and he will know us. This gives Anjali time to recover as well.

ANNA

They are naming him 'Debrak' for the morning sunrise. In English I think you would spell it: D-a-y-b-r-e-a-k. It's a good name, don't you think?

Brendan nods and stares at the new baby.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Chaos on the maternity floor. Laurie, Stan, Alejandro and Diego wait in the waiting room. An overworked, harried doctor walks in, shaking his head. Everyone stands.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry...

ALEJANDRO

Please, I don't understand!

DOCTOR

We did all we could. Your wife lost a large amount of blood. She needed a transfusion, but with no internet, we couldn't access the blood bank database. We couldn't save her.

LAURIE

You mean, she's...

DOCTOR

She's gone. We couldn't save her.

Alejandro is rooted to the ground, unable to speak. Diego stands by numbly. Laurie and Stan stare at one another in disbelief.

LAURIE

Can we at least see the baby?

ALEJANDRO

Dawn!

STAN

What?

ALEJANDRO

Dawn! Our baby's name is Dawn!

NURSE

Come with me. I'll take you to see her right now.

The nurse guides them down the hall to a window, where they can look in at the nursery through glass windows.

NURSE

Immediate family only is allowed in. The rest of you can watch from here.

Alejandro and Diego go in. The nurse hands Dawn to Alejandro.

LAURIE

I can't believe this! He can't take care of a newborn baby by himself! And Diego! Who will take care of him? How do we move on from this?

STAN

I'm not sure how, but I know we have to... If not for us, then for the sake of Sophia's children.

LAURIE

Diego will need a mother now more than ever, and baby Dawn...

Laurie sobs on Stan's shoulder.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

I'm going to do everything I can to make sure that child has the life Sophia wished for her.

STAN

Somehow, we'll get through this.

Laurie sobs and buries her face in Stan's shoulder.

INT. BRENDAN'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Brendan arrives late to his classroom. Before entering, he takes a moment to stare at the sun. It still blazes red, though it is less dramatic. Students are already there, standing around all the compasses in the center of the room and talking excitedly over one another. They go silent when he walks in.

JANICE

It's happening! All the compasses agree. Magnetic north has migrated ten degrees since Friday.

BRENDAN

That's not possible.

CYRUS

Take a look.

He points to the chart.

CYRUS

I been checkin' it regularly to make sure everyone's puttin' the information in right.

Brendan stares at the compasses and the chart. He takes out his magnetometer along with the chart he's been keeping and shows it to the class.

BRENDAN

Today, we're going to talk about magnetic field strength.

Anna bursts into the classroom. She is in tears.

ANNA

It's Anjali! We thought she was okay, but she kept bleeding. The midwife may not be able to save her!

EXT. ANNA'S HOUSE - DAY

Brendan races with Anna to her house. Many neighbors gather round, offering condolences. Baby Debrak is being nursed by one of the village women. Brendan sees Talah.

BRENDAN

What happened?

Talah falls against him as he wraps his arms around her.

TALAH

She lost too much blood. The midwife couldn't stop it. She is gone!

BRENDAN

How is this possible?

TALAH

Something went wrong with the delivery.

Brendan is stunned. He stares at the weeping women as they pass baby Debra around.

INT. LAURIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Bright sunlight outside; Laurie lies in bed and hears voices coming from downstairs. Glances at her bedside clock. It is off.

LAURIE
(mumbles)
Guess that part wasn't a dream.

Gets out of bed and starts downstairs.

GEORGE (OFF CAMERA)
I'm telling you, Stan, no airplanes are flying today. With communications as screwed up as they are, there is no way a plane can land here.

LAURIE
I was hoping all this was a dream, but it's not, is it?

Stan shakes his head forlornly.

STAN
No. It's worse. We're living through a nightmare. Power is still out everywhere and we don't know where Josh is.

LAURIE
So, you're saying we shouldn't try to pick him up at the airport?

GEORGE
That's exactly what I'm saying! The airport will be chaos and confusion, and your presence will simply add to the mess.

LAURIE
But how will he get in touch with us if he needs a ride?

GEORGE
He's a smart, resourceful young man. He'll get here soon enough. Trust him, Laurie. He may even be able to get in touch with me if he can get access to a ham radio.

Laurie and Stan glance at each other. Stan shrugs.

STAN

I suppose George is right. No sense in adding to the craziness in the city today.

EXT. STREETS OF EL PASO - DAY

Josh walks through the city, stopping at numerous fire and police stations. At each station, he pulls out his radio and is met with the same response--an officer shaking his head. At the fifth fire station:

FIRE DISPATCHER

El Paso has a very limited ham radio network. It's not tied to any police or fire dispatch systems. But I have a friend who dabbles in it a bit. He may be able to help you. Here's his address.

Josh goes to the man's house. An ELDERLY WOMAN answers the door.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh... He passed away about six months ago. I got rid of all his radio equipment...

Josh hails a taxi.

TAXI DRIVER

Cash only! You got cash on you?

Josh nods

TAXI DRIVER (CONT'D)

Where you heading to?

JOSH

Airport.

TAXI DRIVER

The entire city's in gridlock. Airport's about a mile further down this road. You'd be better off walking from here.

He shakes his head and drives off.

Josh wanders through the city and finds himself at the Mexican border wall. He sits on a rock and stares up at the wall. PABLO (early 30's, Hispanic) stands nearby, muttering to himself.

PABLO

This wall will be our downfall.

JOSH

What do you mean?

PABLO

Sorry... I was mumbling to myself. My name's Pablo.

JOSH

I'm Josh.

PABLO

What brings you here Josh?

JOSH

Nothing. I mean, I was traveling from San Diego to Connecticut when the power went out and our plane landed in El Paso. I'm trying to find some way to communicate with my family and friends to let them know I'm still alive.

PABLO

I guess we have something in common. I am separated from my family as well. They were deported to Ecuador a few days ago. I should have gone with them but thought it better to stay here for a short while. Now I'm not so sure.

JOSH

Why didn't you go?

PABLO

I have a job here and we needed the money. I teach Physics at the local university and have a lot of connections here--friends who told me they could help us. But it's been difficult. Most of my fellow science teachers are worried about other things right now. Climate change and the movement of -

JOSH

Earth's magnetic poles.

Pablo looks at him with surprise.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I know about that. We've been following it in San Diego, trying to get local people involved in preparations.

(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)

I'm not a scientist, but I've been helping the San Diego Fire Department set up emergency communications. I have some experience with ham radios.

PABLO

Ham radios, eh? I wonder if one of my colleagues at the university could use your help. I know a few people who have dabbled with them. Maybe I can introduce you to them.

Josh breaks into a big smile

JOSH

That would be great! With a working ham radio, I might be able to get in touch with my family.

PABLO

I don't know how long it will take me to reach my friends. Where are you staying?

JOSH

(looks away, embarrassed)
Nowhere, right now. Like I said, I don't have a plan.

PABLO

My friend, you can't stay on the streets in this city. People are already starting to panic and there will be looting on the streets. My wife and daughter are gone and I have extra room in my apartment. Why don't you stay with me until power gets restored?

JOSH

Really? Are you sure? I mean, we just met...

PABLO

Yes, I'm sure. You need a place to stay and I could use the company. It will get my mind off the worry about my family. I live in a small apartment above a bakery with the best scones in town.

JOSH

Scones sound amazing! I almost forgot how hungry I was!

PABLO

Oh... don't get your hopes up! Unfortunately, the shop is closed now. They briefly opened early this morning to sell off all the baked goods from yesterday and it's pretty much cleaned out by now. Luckily, though, my wife and I have been stocking up for a while in case something like this were to happen. We have quite a bit of food in the house. Come. We will help each other for the next few days.

He starts walking and motions for Josh to follow him. All shops are closed. A few open gas stations run on generator power. Lines of cars stretch as far as the eye can see. Several of these stations have convenience stores and inside; all the shelves are bare.

JOSH

I appreciate it. This really is spooky.

EXT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Brendan sits on his porch, watching the morning rituals at the well. Anna joins him. She is carrying Debrak.

ANNA

Hiya Brendan.

BRENDAN

Hi Anna. How are you holding up?

ANNA

Is hard, but we're managin'. At least we have this little one to keep us busy.

BRENDAN

How do you do it? I mean, look at everything here. Life just goes on here, like nothing bad has happened.

He points to all the activity at the well.

ANNA

What else are we gonna do? We still have to get our water, and cook and clean and do laundry. We all still have lives to live. We can't stop livin' jus' cause one person is no longer with us.

BRENDAN

But what about grieving? I know how close you were to your sister.

ANNA

I still am close to her. For us, death is a part of livin', that's all. We see it all the time. Remember... Our country got through a horrible war a few years back. We are used to buryin' people. We're grateful for what we have.

Brendan shakes his head.

BRENDAN

Well, I'm grateful for one thing at least. Since that solar flare, my students have been attending class in record numbers. They are all interested in the compasses and measuring Earth's magnetic field. I just wish I could tell them what it means.

Debrak starts crying. Anna stands up. A white van with a TEACHAFRICA logo comes up the dirt road toward Brendan's house.

ANNA

Looks like you have company.

BRENDAN

It's the TeachAfrica liasons. I wonder what they're doing here. They usually only come once a month to check up on things.

Anna stands aside; SAM (30's) and and MARIA (30's) get out of the van.

SAM

G' mornin' Brendan!

Brendan rises to greet them.

BRENDAN

Hi. What are you doing here?

Sam and Maria exchange a look.

SAM

I guess you don' know what's going on in the world, eh?

BRENDAN

What do you mean?

MARIA

There's been a big power disruption all over. Phones aren't workin' so we're visitin' all the villages to make sure you have everythin' you need for a while.

BRENDAN

How big of a power disruption?

MARIA

We're not sure, but it seems like it may be world-wide. Everythin's shut down right now. The TeachAfrica office sent us to tell you to stay in place, in your village, for the next few weeks until things get sorted out.

BRENDAN

But I was planning to go into the city this weekend to get money.

Sam hands Brendan a large wad of cash.

SAM

This should keep you in decent shape for a little while. Banks are closed, so even if you were to go to Troeburg, you wouldn't be able to get money out. Nothin's workin', and the city is a li'l bit of a powder keg. You need to stay away from there. You are safest here. We talked to your landlord, and your rent is all set for a while.

BRENDAN

Banks are shut down?

MARIA

Everythin' is shut down. It may get ugly soon if power stays out much longer. Right now, no one knows what the problem is. Jus' stay here, okay?

BRENDAN

How can I communicate with you?
What if I need something?

MARIA

We're driving north to check on all the workers in villages there and we'll be comin' back through here in a couple weeks. That's the other thing.

(MORE)

MARIA (CONT'D)

We may relocate some of them and since you have a two-bedroom house and you're closer to the capital, we may pull someone out of a more remote village and bring them here to stay with you for a bit. If we do that, we'll drop them off here on our way back.

SAM

It shouldn't be too long. You have good neighbors who can help you in an emergency, right?

Brendan nods, gesturing to Anna.

MARIA

In the meantime, stay here, in your village until further notice, okay?

Maria flashes him a quick smile and gives him a thumbs up as they drive away.

ANNA

We need to tell my family!

INT. TOWN HALL MEETING ROOM - DAY

A jam-packed room; a restless crowd. Laurie and Stan find seats, though many others stand around the edges of the room. The TOWN MANAGER is using a megaphone.

TOWN MANAGER

It's been a tough couple days!

Nods of agreement around the room.

TOWN MANAGER (CONT'D)

Here's what we know so far. Several days ago, solar flares caused damage and disruption to every power substation and power grid on Earth.

There is a collective gasp from the crowd. Laurie squeezes her eyes tightly closed.

TOWN MANAGER (CONT'D)

Since this is so widespread, we have no idea how long power will be out. Yet the last thing we want is for people to panic.

More rustling from the crowd.

TOWN MANAGER (CONT'D)

Right now we must apportion our supplies town-wide. That includes food, gasoline, and other necessities. We've set up an emergency system with several local grocery stores. Every family will be assigned a time to get what you need and given a voucher for rationed supplies based on the size of your household. As for gasoline, we ask you to drive only if absolutely necessary. I encourage you to stay calm and keep your wits about you. Together, we will get through this.

The crowd is silent. The Town Manager steps down and the POLICE CHIEF stands up.

POLICE CHIEF

We'll give you a few minutes to ask questions. Please do this in an orderly way, like at town meetings, and use the megaphone if you want to speak.

A line begins to form at the megaphone. An UNRULY CITIZEN stands on a chair.

UNRULY CITIZEN

You didn't tell us a thing! How are we supposed to survive with no running water and no power? What are our taxes paying for anyway? We elected you to govern us, and it looks like you're all just passing the buck. What are you all doing to help us?

POLICE CHIEF

Sir, if you will get in line, we'll address your question in order.

UNRULY CITIZEN

Screw that, I ain't waiting in another line! I waited in line two hours for gas yesterday, and when I got up there, they said I could only get two gallons! How're you going to fix that?

Mumblings of agreement come from the crowd. Police officers surround the man, pulling him off the chair. The mood of the crowd shifts from one of quiet listening to one of anger. Someone overturns a chair, and soon, several others do the same. The atmosphere in the room starts to turn ugly.

POLICE CHIEF
STOP NOW!

The crowd quiets down.

POLICE CHIEF (CONT'D)
This is exactly what we need to avoid! Our town is better than this! Where is your common sense? We know you're all stressed—believe me, we are too! But rioting here won't fix things. Go home and be with your families. Organize your neighbors! Use your head!

Laurie and Stan leave the meeting.

LAURIE
A few weeks ago, Brendan saw us stocking up on supplies. He asked me point blank: *For how long?* I didn't really understand what he meant then, but I'm beginning to now. We really don't have a strategy for long term survival, do we?

INT. ALEJANDRO'S HOUSE - DAY

Laurie and Stan deliver baby clothes to Alejandro. They hear Diego upstairs in his room sobbing. Alejandro hands baby Dawn to Laurie and she cradles Dawn in her arms as they follow Alejandro to his basement.

ALEJANDRO
I have some things to show you. This helps take my mind off everything else. These instruments are functioning on solar power and we only have an hour of daylight left to look at them.

He points to a bank of instruments along the wall.

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)
That solar flare a few days ago caused magnetic north to jump ten degrees. That's huge! Earth's magnetic field is weakening, especially over the north and south poles, and those weak zones are expanding.

STAN
How long before it gets weaker here?

ALEJANDRO

We don't know. Right now, the magnetic field strength here is stable. But there might come a time when we will either have to move south or live underground for a while.

Laurie stares at the maps...

INT. PABLO'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Josh stares out the window of Pablo's second-floor apartment.

JOSH

Pablo, wake up!

Pablo opens his bedroom door a crack.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Looters. On the street. They broke into the bakery.

PABLO

I'm not surprised.

JOSH

Shouldn't we--

PABLO

I told you there would be looting and the streets would be unsafe.

JOSH

(glancing out the window)
How secure is this apartment? Does anyone know of your stockpile of supplies?

PABLO

We are safe here. I have food and lots of jugs of clean water stored up. It won't last us forever though. If things don't calm down in a few days, we may have to scavenge a bit.

JOSH

Scavenge for clean water? How?

PABLO

We should be able to get water. The University put in a well recently. It's driven by a generator, and it has a manual backup. We may have to scavenge for food, though. I don't know how long my supply will last.

JOSH

I wonder how much damage was done to the grid....

PABLO

It's not about how much damage, Josh. Think about it. Who's in charge? All the utility workers who should be out there fixing this are in survival mode, caring for their families, making sure their own basic needs are met. There's no organized workforce.

Josh stares at him.

JOSH

Just how massive do you think this is?

PABLO

It's big, Josh. You told me you saw the lights go out in San Diego. I imagine it extends at least that far. And probably just as far east as well...

A sound of breaking glass in the distance, followed by several gunshots and a police siren. They look out the window.

JOSH

It feels like we're living in a war zone. Guess we do need to stay in today.

INT. DIEGO'S BEDROOM DAY

Diego sits on his bed, crying. He stands, walks to the window and peeks outside. Across the street, KEVIN (Diego's neighbor and Lisa's son, age 12) is in his driveway with a sketch pad.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Diego stands outside and kicks dirt around as he watches Kevin from a distance.

KEVIN

Sorry about your mom.

DIEGO

Whatcha doing?

KEVIN

Nothing really. I'm just doodling.
I like to draw the characters from
my favorite games, since I can't
play th games right now.

DIEGO

Can I try?

The boys create several pages of cartoons.

KEVIN

Wow! Those are really good! You are
an amazing sketcher. Your
characters look like they could
jump off the page.

Diego shrugs and keeps drawing. Three older teenage
NEIGHBORHOOD BOYS walk by. They glance at the drawings.

NEIGHBORHOOD BOY

These are so lame!

He snickers and points at Diego's sketches. The other boys
laugh in agreement as they stroll off.

KEVIN

Don't listen to them. Your drawings
are fabulous!

DIEGO

You can keep them if you want.

Diego stands up, shrugs, and walks home.

EXT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE, LOSCOAYA WEST AFRICA -DAY

Brendan sits on his porch. The Teach Africa Van drives up.
Sam and Maria get out of the car, along with GRACE (mid-20's)
and her dog FLAMINGO (a medium-sized mutt).

SAM

Hiya Brendan! We brought you a new
housemate! This here's Grace, and
we're movin' her up here to be a
little closer to the capital. She's
gonna be teaching little kids at
the school here.

Brendan stares at Grace. She shyly raises her hand to wave.
Flamingo runs off to sniff around the house.

BRENDAN

Um... Okay. Uh... welcome.

SAM

We'll best be getting Grace's stuff inside and then moving on. We got to go find some gas, or we won't be able to drive anymore.

Sam and Maria carry Grace's bag and few belongings into the house, leaving Brendan and Grace staring at one-another.

BRENDAN

Well, this is awkward...

GRACE

I think it's temporary, until power gets restored again.

BRENDAN

I have a feeling power won't be restored for a long time. But, who knows? Come on in and I'll show you the house. It's not much, but at least there's a bed in the guest room.

GRACE

In my village, we've gotten no information about what's going on in the world. How big is this problem?

Brendan stares at her.

BRENDAN

It's far bigger than you can imagine....

INT. LAURIE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

SUPER: 6 MONTHS LATER

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Show passage of time in some clips of winter weather. Laurie and Stan huddle in their living room by the fire. Outside, first snow builds up, then a torrential rainstorm. As the rain lets up, a bolt of lightning hits George's house, sparking a small fire.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. GEORGE'S HOUSE

Laurie, Stan and George survey the damage as firefighters clean up.

STAN

You're lucky, George. This could've been a lot worse.

GEORGE

I don't feel so lucky. All my radio equipment is destroyed. We were finally starting to ramp up some longer-distance communication. I'm not sure what to do with myself now.

FIREFIGHTER

Well, at least you still have your house. Past few days, we've had fires all over town. Plenty of people are homeless now. Count your blessings.

EXT./INT. LAURIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Dressed in a heavy sweatshirt, Laurie feeds the chickens and collects water from the well. She carries a bucket of water inside, stokes the fire in the fireplace and puts a pot of water in the fireplace to boil. There is a knock on her door. Lisa stands outside.

LAURIE

Come on in! I just put some water to boil in the fireplace. Want some tea?

LISA

I'd love some but I can't stay long. I just wanted to let you know we've made a decision to move in a couple weeks.

LAURIE

Oh my goodness! Where are you going?

LISA

We're not sure yet, but we're going south. This winter was tough, especially for Kevin. His asthma has gotten a lot worse, and we've run out of medication. We're hoping a warmer southern climate will be better for him.

LAURIE

(turns away to hide her tears)

I wish you didn't have to go! Who am I going to commiserate with?

LISA

(gives Laurie a hug)
 You're a survivor, Laurie. Mark my words, with your resilience and Stan's resourcefulness, out of all of us in this neighborhood, you and Stan will be the last ones standing.

Laurie looks out the window and sees Kevin with Diego.

LAURIE

How does Kevin feel about moving?

LISA

He's sad, but he understands. He and Diego have bonded. They have a mutual love of video game characters.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

DIEGO

I wish you weren't going.

KEVIN

Same here. But maybe it'll be better. At least it'll be warmer, and we won't have to spend all our days working on that farm.

DIEGO

Yeah, lucky you. I hate that place! Seems like all we do around here is haul water, then go to the farm to plant the garden. I wish I could go someplace far away.

KEVIN

Well, maybe you can imagine faraway places with this.

He pulls a blank sketch pad and a pack of colored pencils from his backpack. Diego stares at the pad.

DIEGO

You're giving me this? Why?

KEVIN

You should draw more. The sketches you did a while ago were amazing. I know those other kids made fun of them, but you can draw for yourself and never show them to anyone else. Because it's something you're good at.

(MORE)

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Who knows? Someday, someone might appreciate your drawings enough to want to buy them.

Diego takes the pad from Kevin with a mumbled thanks.

EXT. FARM IN EL PASO - AFTERNOON

Josh and Pablo work at a farm: planting, weeding, harvesting. They fill their backpacks at the end of the day and walk back to town. As they near Pablo's apartment, they realize they are being followed by a teenage boy.

PABLO

Come Josh, we need to move quickly!

They sprint to the alley next to the bakery. Josh feels a tug from behind. He twists around, falling backwards as the boy grabs his backpack and runs off. Josh stands and gingerly checks himself over. He has a bleeding gash on his arm. He stumbles to the doorway and crawls up the stairs.

PABLO

Are you okay?

JOSH

Yeah, just a small cut. Could've been a lot worse. But he got my backpack.

PABLO

Guess we need to be even more vigilant. People will do anything for food these days.

JOSH

How much longer can we do this, Pablo? It's been six months, and the only way we can get food is to do back-breaking work at this farm once a week. What kind of existence is this?

PABLO

I wish I had an answer. Your right... El Paso is a living hell. But at least we're getting food once a week. Many people don't even have that.

JOSH

I wonder how my family is coping. I wonder if Brendan is still in Africa. I hate not knowing what's going on with all of them!

PABLO

Well... I may have a way to help you... Remember I told you I had a contact at the University who had a ham radio? (beat) I saw him yesterday when we were getting water. He has a system set up and said we could try to do a relay connection.

JOSH

That's great!

PABLO

He's willing to help for a fee. He wants to be paid in food every time we send a message and he made it clear that if a reply ever comes back, payment will be expected for that as well.

JOSH

I'm on it! I'll draft up messages to my friend Steve in San Diego and my ham radio mentor, George, in Connecticut as well. Maybe one of these will pan out.

EXT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Brendan, Grace and Flamingo sit on the porch. Ezra runs around from the back of the house waving an envelope.

EZRA

Letter for you!

Ezra eagerly hands him the letter; waits patiently while Brendan fishes a few coins from his pocket.

BRENDAN

It's from Leonard McFay in Troeburg! I sent him a letter by bicycle courier a few weeks ago.

GRACE

What's he say?

Brendan scans the letter.

BRENDAN

Listen to this: *When the solar flares hit 6 months ago, the new hydroelectric power grid here in Troeburg wasn't yet connected and so damage was minimal.*

(MORE)

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Officials here think our grid will be fully operational within the next month. This is one of the few cities in the world that can do this! Everywhere else, people are dealing with massive destruction as they try to adapt to a completely new lifestyle.

Brendan pauses and looks at Grace.

GRACE

Go on...

BRENDAN

It seems no place on Earth has yet fully recovered. Plus, the magnetic poles are migrating much faster than anticipated, and the magnetic field is weakening over Earth's far northern and southern hemispheres. Radiation sickness is already forcing people to migrate toward the equator. I apologize for the lack of better news and will try to update you if I hear anything more.

I look forward to working with your three graduating students next year, and wish you all the best -

Leonard McFay

Brendan looks up. He and Grace stare at one-another.

INT./EXT. LAURIE'S HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: 3 1/2 YEARS LATER

Laurie peers into a nearly empty freezer in the bunker in her backyard. She collects eggs and walks into her house. She looks at Stan with despair.

LAURIE

The last of our freezers is empty. We should have left years ago, like all our friends.

STAN

They may be no better off than us. With no access to news, we have no way of finding out.

LAURIE

Wherever they are can't be much worse than here. Yes, we have chickens, so we have eggs. And we have a hydroponic garden. But now, we have no more stored food and yesterday I heard the only farm stand around for miles is closing. The farmer and his family are leaving. With all the families with small children gone, Dawn and Diego are now the only children in the neighborhood.

STAN

I know it's been hard but think of how much you've done for both Dawn and Diego.

LAURIE

Dawn, yes, but I'm not sure about Diego. That boy is trouble...

There is a knock on their door. Stan opens the door and DAWN (now 4 years old) walks in carrying a stuffed bear.

DAWN

Hi, Auntie Laurie! Can you read to me?

LAURIE

Sure!

Stan squeezes Laurie's hand as he goes to tend to the well. Laurie and Dawn settle in together by the fireplace.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

Remember last night when we saw those beautiful lights in the sky? What your dad called the northern lights?

Dawn nods.

DAWN

You said the sky lit up in honor of my birthday.

LAURIE

Well, I found a book about that. It's called "Legends of the Lights."

She opens the book.

LAURIE

Let's see... people have all sorts of ideas about what those lights might be. Some Indian tribes believe the lights are torches used by friendly giants allowing them to see when they fish at night. Others think the lights came from a mystical fox who threw sparks into the sky with its tail. And still others say the lights are dancing human and animal spirits.

DAWN

What do you think the lights are?

LAURIE

I think they are a way of communicating with people who aren't here with us right now.

DAWN

You mean dead people? Like my mom?

LAURIE

Maybe, and others as well. Maybe people we love who are still alive but too far away to talk to.

DAWN

Can people on the other side of the Earth see the lights, too?

LAURIE

I don't know. That might be a question to ask your dad. But I do know one thing. People on the other side of Earth can see the moon at night. And it's the same moon we see.

EXT. LOSCOAYA WEST AFRICA - NIGHT

A full moon. Brendan and Grace walk to Anna's house.

BRENDAN

It feels strange to be going to a party today. It's Debrak's birthday, but it's also the anniversary of the day power went out worldwide. People here think of that bloody sunrise as some sort of fabulous event. Every year, they have a bigger celebration!

GRACE

Four years and we still can't communicate with our families. How is that possible?

BRENDAN

Back home, one of our neighbors operated a ham radio. My brother spent a lot of time learning about it, and I teased him for it. Now, I wish I could tell him I'm sorry. Maybe if I'd studied that, I'd be able to communicate with him now.

GRACE

I miss my brother, too, and hate that I don't know where he is. Last I knew he was somewhere in Ecuador, but now, I don't even know if he's alive.

BRENDAN

Anna said my three former students who are working with McFay in Troeburg should be there. Maybe we can get more information from them.

Outdoor party scene: African music, food being cooked on coal stoves. Children running around. Debrak (now 4 years old) races to them as they approach the house. He jumps into Brendan's arms.

BRENDAN

Happy Birthday big boy!

DEBRAK

Hi Uncle Brendan! I'm four today! Everyone says the sun rose blood-red the day I was born!

BRENDAN

I know! That makes you very special!

He puts Debrak down and turns to his former students.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Good to see you all! How are things going at the University?

CYRUS

We're all doing well, though we've missed this village.

BRENDAN

We have little contact with the outside world. Can you tell me what's happening?

CYRUS

We don't know much more than you. The magnetic poles keep shifting and the magnetic field is getting weaker, especially in the northern and southern hemispheres. Though here it seems okay.

BRENDAN

How much weaker is it?

IAN

We don't know. We still can't communicate long distance with anyone. It's like the outside world has disappeared.

Grace and Brendan exchange a look of worry.

GRACE

We'll get through this Brendan. We have each other, and a place to live in, and the townspeople here accept us. I believe our families are surviving and one day we'll see them again.

INT. PABLO'S APARTMENT - MORNING

A brutally hot day. Josh and Pablo stare at their collection of food: corn, lettuce, strawberries, tomatoes and potatoes.

JOSH

(wipes his brow)

An ice cream cone sure would be nice right now. I can't remember the last time I had one of those!

PABLO

I fear ice cream is a thing of the past. This has to last us the rest of the week.

Josh looks out the window. A gang of boy mills about in the streets, scavenging for food.

JOSH

I'm glad they didn't see us bring this food in last night. But I'm tired of just surviving. We need a plan to get away from here! If we could only get some response from the radio messages we've sent.

There is a knock on Pablo's door and Pablo peeks through the peephole in the door.

PABLO

You may have just gotten your wish,
Josh. It's the son of the ham radio
operator.

They open the door to a wafer-thin boy who holds a piece of
paper in one hand and puts his other hand out palm up.

DELIVERY BOY

My Pa says this is for you, but you
need to give us some food first.

Josh hands the boy two potatoes, and the boy drops the note
and runs. Pablo hands the note to Josh, who stares at it.

JOSH

From Steve! Finally! After four
years!

He scans the letter.

STEVE (VOICE OVER)

*Josh,
I was amazed to get your letter. I
thought you were gone from our
lives forever. Judging from the
date on your letter, it took about
a month for your message to reach
me. You said you had tried before,
but this was the first one to come
through. With our improved
communications network hopefully we
can keep this channel open. I have
some important news for you.
Remember my sister, Marguerite?*

Josh pauses for a moment and looks up.

STEVE (VOICE OVER CONT'D)

*Three years ago, she had a baby
girl. I never saw photos of you as
a kid, but I would be willing to
bet that little Jessica is an exact
replica of what you looked like.
I don't know if you can get to San
Diego, but since communication has
opened up, maybe it will be
possible. I know this is a lot for
you to digest but write back to me
if you can - Steve*

Josh hands the letter to Pablo and sinks down onto the sofa.

JOSH

I'm going to San Diego. I have
nothing here, and things aren't
getting any better.

PABLO

I feel trapped here too, Josh. My home is in Ecuador with my family. But the solid wall here keeps us from even getting into Mexico. (beat) My daughter would now be 11 years old now. I don't even know what she looks like. The worst part is not knowing if they are okay. I would give anything to go there, but I don't know how we can do it.

JOSH

If we can get to San Diego, you could get to Mexico and then to Ecuador more easily. There's no wall there. I bet people are crossing the border there more freely.

Josh looks down at the street below; notices a lone biker in the distance.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I have an idea. What if we do some day-long forays and supply campsites along the route? If we can stock 3 or 4 overnight stops, maybe Steve could stash some food for the second half of our trip. It's a longshot, but worth a try...

EXT. ALEJANDRO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The AURORA BOREALIS is in full view. Alejandro, Dawn, Laurie, Stan and George view the lights. Dawn shivers.

LAURIE

The lights are dancing again in honor of your birthday today!

DAWN

I don't like them! They make me feel itchy.

ALEJANDRO

Itchy? In what way?

DAWN

I just feel... strange. Like I'm being tickled all the time. And my head hurts. Can I go to bed now?

ALEJANDRO

Of course! You don't have to stay up and watch them. I'll bring you up to bed now.

LAURIE

LAURIE
Happy Birthday Dawn!

STAN
Happy Birthday

DAWN
(yawns)
Thank you!

Alejandro puts Dawn to bed and returns.

ALEJANDRO
Dawn told me about the stories you read her today. She liked them alot.

LAURIE
Yes. She is so quick and eager to learn new things.

ALEJANDRO
I'm worried about her. She's been complaining about a bad headache and feeling itchy for days. I've been thinking about some other legends you may not know about. Did you know 'Aurora Borealis' actually means 'Dawn of the North'?

Laurie, Stan and George all shake their heads.

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)
Aurora was the Roman goddess of the dawn. In medieval times, the lights were thought to foretell of war and famine. As beautiful as they are, this is a bad sign. (beat) I'm worried. The magnetic field around here is weakening. That's why we see the lights. I wonder if Dawn is super-sensitive to that. Pretty soon, we all may feel it, and it may be unsafe to travel outside at all.

STAN
You mean, we may have to stay indoors or go underground? How soon is 'pretty soon'?

ALEJANDRO
Given how Dawn's feeling, I think we have less than a year before we will feel the full effects here.

LAURIE

Everyone else has left. The few reports we've gotten have been of chaos and confusion in the south.

GEORGE

I'll second that. From the limited radio contact I've had, it seems we have it pretty good here. Where would we go?

ALEJANDRO

I don't know, but Sophia once told me she didn't want our children to grow up underground. She wanted them to feel the grass under their feet and the sun on their faces. To know the rain and the wind. If we stay here, we may never see daylight again.

STAN

It sounds like you've already made up your mind.

ALEJANDRO

I'm seriously considering it. Honestly, I am worried about Diego as well. There's nothing here for him.

LAURIE

I'm not sure living anywhere else would help either. All he wants is to go back in time to the virtual reality he used to enjoy. For a while, he bonded with Kevin, but since Kevin left he's had no one to hang out with.

ALEJANDRO

Well, he's sobbing in his bedroom now. I poked my head in and he said if he could wish upon a star, he would wish to go far, far away to somewhere completely new and different.

LAURIE

I wonder if he's jealous of all the attention Dawn is getting for her birthday.

ALEJANDRO

Maybe, but I think a change would be good for him. I've thought about going to South America.

(MORE)

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)

Sophia and I both had family there, but I don't even know where they are any more, and South America hasn't been very welcoming to Americans, so you might have a harder time there. Africa has a more open border policy, though, and Leonard McFay set up a research facility in Loscoaya. And Brendan is there, right? Maybe we could all try to go there instead. What do you think?

STAN

I've been thinking about this, too. Before the power outage, we sent some packages to Brendan by boat. At that time, boats departed for Loscoaya about the 15th every month. I wonder if those boat are still sailing. They might be able to take passengers as well.

LAURIE

You can't be serious! I understand maybe it is time to consider leaving. But... to Africa?

She gazes at the northern lights.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

These lights... there are so many different interpretations of them.

(to Alejandro)

Do you really think they could be an omen of bad things to come if we stay in one place?

ALEJANDRO

I don't know... Maybe they are dancing across the sky to show movement is necessary for survival in this world.

STAN

Should we bike to the port to see if there is still a cargo ship going each month?

GEORGE

You're all crazy! No one in their right mind would even consider going to Africa. I'd rather take my chances and travel south along the coast to Florida. Maybe from there, I could catch a boat across the Gulf of Mexico.

STAN

I know it's insane George. But we might have a better chance of being accepted in Loscoaya, especially if we can somehow get in touch with Brendan. We need to at least explore this option.

GEORGE

Well, good luck to you all. It's a damn shame we have to split up, but I can't see going to Africa.

EXT. PORT CITY - DAY

A ghost town. Rubble everywhere. Deserted houses; roofs caved in; windows boarded up or broken; siding and paint peeling. Abandoned cars with flat tires and multiple dents litter the streets as if a massive tidal wave had swept them up from one of the beachside parking lots. RICARDO (ship's Captain; burly African man) eyes them suspiciously.

RICARDO

Why you want to travel to Loscoaya?

STAN

My son lives there. We want to go south for warmer weather.

RICARDO

This is a cargo ship. My nex' shipment is solar panels, and there won' be much room. But I may be able to squeeze you in the cargo hold. How you want to pay me?

STAN

We can give you our bicycles once we get there. And maybe we can bring you a few solar batteries, if they aren't too heavy and we can get them here.

The captain's eyes light up. He scratches his chin.

RICARDO

Extra batteries would be good. This ship runs on solar and wind power. but batteries are always helpful. I'll let you on as long as you bring me some. But I'm warning you, the trip will be hard and uncomf'table. I don' want anyone complainin' I didn' warn you ahead of time.

INT. LAURIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Laurie surveys the bedroom.

LAURIE

I have no idea what to take!

STAN

Just remember... We can only take what we can carry on our bikes. At least we have each other, and Alejandro and Dawn and...

LAURIE

(finishes his sentence)

Diego... how are we supposed to travel with *him*? If he isn't talking about the electronic games he used to play, he's complaining about how difficult life is here and trying to get away with doing less. I know Alejandro thinks moving away might change him, but I have my doubts.

EXT. LAURIE'S HOUSE - THE NEXT DAY

Laurie and Stan's bikes are packed. Stan's bike has a trailer loaded with batteries scavenged from a local hardware store. Across the street, Alejandro puts Dawn in a child's bike trailer. Dawn has lost weight and is listless and lacking energy. Diego storms out of the house.

DIEGO

I'm not going!

He hops on his bike and rides down the street.

ALEJANDRO

I'm sure he'll follow us and catch up if we get moving.

LAURIE

We have to stop off at George's and say goodbye!

STAN

I don't think that's necessary. Here he is now.

George rides a fully packed bike with a trailer full of his belongings.

GEORGE

One advantage of being the last in the neighborhood to leave is you can scavenge quite a bit from former neighbors' houses. This is a pretty good bike, don't you think?

STAN

I thought you were waiting a few more days before heading to Florida.

STAN

Well, changed my mind. I'm going with you. I just couldn't see being all alone.

He turns and gives a final wave to his house. They all mount their bikes. Diego returns and joins them.

EXT. EMPTY FREEWAY

No gas = no cars on the roads. They travel on abandoned roads, passing through multiple empty towns; many abandoned buildings and houses and disrepair. The only signs of life are some birds and an occasional rabbit.

EXT. PORT CITY

The boat is loaded with solar panels which take up most of the deck space, leaving a tiny area for the passengers to be aboveboard.

RICARDO

I tol' you it'd be difficult. There's only room for half of you on the deck at any one time. Down below, there's a couple mattresses for you to lie on.

They peer down into the ship's hold. It is dank, dark and musty with no windows.

EXT. BOAT - DAY

As the boat sails, Laurie, Stan, Alejandro and Diego emerge from the cargo hold and vomit over the side of the boat, then return below. They are seasick for the entire trip. Dawn and George remain healthy and stay above board.

EXT. CAPTAIN'S DECK - NIGHT

DAWN

There's no lights in the sky here!
I feel better without them.

GEORGE

Without those lights, we can see a
lot more constellations. See the
big dipper and Orion the hunter?

Dawn nods.

RICARDO

How'd you learn so much about the
stars?

GEORGE

I spent a bunch of years in the
Navy and got to be pretty good at
navigating. I can get us anywhere
no problem, as long as it's not
cloudy at night.

DAWN

Is that the North Star?

GEORGE

It sure is!

RICARDO

(sighs)

It looks like we are way off course
again. I can't trust the ship's
compasses at all.

INT. CARGO HOLD OF SHIP - MORNING

Laurie, Stan, Alejandro and Diego struggle mightily. They
take turns getting fresh air and force themselves to drink
water. They hear Ricardo's voice from above deck.

RICARDO (OFF SCREEN)

Land ho! We are approaching the
port city of Troeburg in Loscoaya!

EXT. DOCK IN LOSCOAYA - DAY

The passengers emerge from the ship's hold--haggard, sick and
barely able to move. They collapse on the dock, while George
and Dawn gather up their meager supplies.

RICARDO

I tol' you it would be rough. I wish it could have been a little better ride for y'all. But at least you made it here and yer all still alive... (beat) Tell you what. Your batteries worked great and this guy here help me so much with navigating that I'll let you keep your bicycles. You'll need 'em to travel. And I'll give you some other help here.

He hands Stan a piece of paper.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

This is the name of a place you can stay nearby 'til you get your strength back. Is my cousin's guesthouse. He'll put you up for a night or two if you tell him I sent you.

EXT. TROEBURG, LOSCOAYA WEST AFRICA - DAY

Troeburg is a vibrant city with a working power grid. Everyone is on foot or bicycle--no cars due to world-wide gas shortage. They bike to the guest house through the central marketplace. Show various booths at the marketplace:

Clothing: colorful print dresses and shirts, brightly colored cloth; costume jewelry, transistor radios blaring African music. All sorts of food: smoked fish, barbecued chicken.

STAN

I have an address for the Teach Africa Headquarters. If this map is correct, it's not far from here.

They bike to the building. A large sign on building reads: LOSCOAYA STORAGE COMPANY. A lone SECURITY GUARD stands by the door.

STAN

We're looking for the TeachAfrica headquarters. They used to be at this address.

He shows the guard a paper with the address on it.

STORAGE COMPANY SECURITY GUARD

They all lef'. Years ago. I na' no where they gone. Maybe try talkin' to Manuel, the owner of Loscoayan Storage. He lives across town - pro'bly several hours bike ride.

He scribbles an address on a scrap of paper and hands it to Stan.

LAURIE

We've come this far. We may as well get on with our search.

They get on their bikes again and begin the trek. People stare at them as they pass stalls and street vendors selling African food and clothing. Women and children carry buckets of goods on their heads. They leave the market behind and the road becomes pot-hole filled and buildings become increasingly run-down.

DIEGO

This is stupid! I can't believe we are doing this!

ALEJANDRO

Stop it, Diego! We have no choice right now!

Stan stops and holds up his hand. He points to a rickety house.

DIEGO

This whole neighborhood smells like rotten fish!

Stan motions for him to be quiet as he knocks on the door.

MANUEL (OFF CAMERA)

Who's there?

The door opens a crack and RICHARD (black, 50's). He immediately turns away to shut the door. Stan puts his hand on the door.

STAN

No, wait! We need to speak with you. It's about the building you own—the Loscoayan Storage Company building.

MANUEL

Wha' about it?

STAN

We're looking for someone who may have worked there before, someone from TeachAfrica who owned the building several years ago.

MANUEL

Oh... you looking for TeachAfrica people? They all lef', years ago.

LAURIE

Do you know where any of them went?
We're looking for our son and
they're the only ones who can tell
us where he might be.

The man opens the door a little more.

MANUEL

Your son work fo' TeachAfrica?

Laurie and Stan nod.

MANUEL (CONT'D)

They used to do good work here.
They help our country a lot. My
cousin tol' me they were very
helpful in his village. 'Til the
collapse.

Laurie and Stan nod again. The man opens the door a little more.

MANUEL

I na' no where any TeachAfrica
people ended up, but do you know
the name o' the village?

Laurie hands him a slip of paper. He nods.

MANUEL (CONT'D)

This village is not too far from
this city. Maybe only abou' 40
miles. Too far for you to go today,
and it's dangerous for you to be
out on the streets at night.

He rubs his hands together.

MANUEL (CONT'D)

If you have anything to pay me, I
can let you stay here tonigh' and
give you directions to get there in
the morning. It'll prob'ly take you
most o' the day.

Laurie reaches into her backpack and pulls out some jewelry and three small solar-powered flashlights. The man beams and opens the door to his home, a spartan two-bedroom apartment.

LAURIE

We are getting closer to Brendan.
Maybe, tomorrow, we will find him.

EXT. PABLO'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Bikes loaded, Josh and Pablo look back at Josh's apartment. They climb on their bikes, nod to each other and start off.

EXT. HIGHWAY THROUGH DESERTED COUNTRYSIDE

They bike on a highway with no motor traffic. Many abandoned buildings, barns in disrepair. What was once farmland is now fields of weeds. They pass a few other cyclists and pedestrians who keep heads down.

INT OLD BARN - NIGHT

They sleep in an old barn and awaken to torrential rain. Josh peeks outside.

JOSH

Guess we'll have to wait a day before going on. There's no way we can ride through this.

PABLO

I'm happy for the extra day of rest. These full days of riding have taken a toll on my legs! I wish we had stashed a little extra food here, though.

JOSH

Well, the next campsite is the last one we've prepped and we put enough food there to last us three days. After that, we have to hope Steve got our messages and stocked some places from his end.

They awaken to a next day to a bright and sunny day.

EXT. HIGHWAY THROUGH DESERTED COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

They bike on very hilly terrain. Slow going. At the top of a hill, Josh gets off his bike and looks around. There is a copse of trees with a flat area to pitch a tent, and a large boulder with an overhang small enough to hide things under. Lots of trash is littered around it. Boxes of old cereal, stale crackers, nuts and seeds. One intact jug of clean water.

JOSH

This was to be our last campsite. Coyotes or wild dogs did this. So much for our few days of rest here.

They quickly set up a tent.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

They collapse onto their sleeping rolls and each fall into a fitful sleep. They are awakened by coyotes howling in the distance. The symphony gets closer, until the animals are prowling around just outside their tent, growling and occasionally scratching at it. Josh and Pablo jump up.

JOSH

Get out of here! Scram!

PABLO

Vete!

The animals pause a beat. Josh and Pablo stamp their feet. Finally, the coyotes depart, though they continue howling in the distance.

EXT. CAMPSITE - MORNING

They survey the area and clean up as much as they can, leaving most of the food scraps for other animals.

EXT. HIGHWAY THROUGH DESERTED COUNTRYSIDE -DAY

On their bikes again. In the distance, they see a collapsed farm house. As they approach it they can see the barn behind it has entirely caved in. The siding of the house is torn and the roof is sagging down.

PABLO

Looks like tornadoes went through here. Any people who survived fled to the cities...

JOSH

...that weren't equipped to handle them.

Josh points to a road sign up ahead.

JOSH

Look! There's a sign Steve told me to look for! We must be close to one of his food stash sites!

Hidden under a bush near the sign, they find some food and water. They hug each other.

JOSH

We camp here tonight. Just another couple days and we'll be there!

EXT. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, DESERT - LATE AFTERNOON

A blazing hot sun. Josh gets off his bike and looks around.

JOSH

I recognize this place. I used to come out here with my dog. We're close. Steve said he'd leave our final stash near here.

They wander around in the heat. Josh's eyes are parched from the sun... He squints at the blurry landscape.

JOSH

I don't get it. This should be the right spot, but there's nothing here.

He and Pablo sink to the ground. They both collapse, unable to muster the energy to pitch their tent.

EXT. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, DESERT - NIGHT

It's dark. Josh wakes up. Pablo lies nearby, sound asleep. Josh eats a few crackers and starts to set up the tent, but abandons that idea after a couple minutes. He looks at the full moon. In the distance, he sees the glowing aurora. He falls back asleep under the stars.

EXT. LOSCOYA WEST AFRICA - RURAL ROAD - DAY

Laurie, Stan, George, Alejandro, Diego and Dawn bike along the road. They come to a cross-road with a lone gas station.

STAN

This must be the road to Brendan's village. Manuel said to go up this road and turn again at the large football field.

They bike a bit further and come to the field. They stop and stare at the scene in front of them.

EXT. LOSCOYA WEST AFRICA - LARGE FIELD - DAY

An African Wedding scene. From a distance, they can see the bride and groom clad in matching colorful African clothing. The town is abuzz with activity. Charcoal cooking fires abound filled with food. Children kick a football around.

STAN

Maybe we should wait here a bit. We don't want to interrupt a wedding.

LAURIE

I can't wait any more! I have to
find out if Brendan is really here!

She starts to bike toward the people in the field, then suddenly stops. She puts her hand to her mouth, then turns back to Stan and the group.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

Oh my God! It's Brendan! I see him
there!

Brendan and Grace stand holding hands in the middle of a huge circle of townspeople. Laurie jumps off her bike and begins running toward the townspeople. As the circle parts, Brendan looks up and blinks. He squints at the ragged group of people running toward them.

BRENDAN

(under his breath)
I must be dreaming...

He blinks again, then runs towards his mom and grabs her in a giant bear hug, tears rolling down his cheeks.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

How...?

LAURIE

It doesn't matter! Let me look at
you!

She steps back and gazes at Brendan, then turns to look at Grace dressed in a stunning African gown.

BRENDAN

My parents are here!

He hugs Stan, pulling Grace along as well.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

This is Grace.

STAN

Welcome to the family, Grace.

Stan takes Grace's hands and Grace smiles.

BRENDAN

I never thought I'd see you again!
The best wedding present ever!

LAURIE

I'm not sure what we expected, but
it definitely wasn't this!

Everyone (villagers included) starts talking at once.

STAN
 (to Brendan)
 Maybe you should get on with the ceremony. Then you can properly introduce us to all your friends.

The village elder holds up his hand to silence the gathering. All the townspeople look at Brendan and Grace expectantly. With a huge smile on his face, Brendan takes Grace's hand, and together they move back to the center of the circle.

EXT. LOSCOAYA WEST AFRICA (CONTINUOUS)

A party scene; African music plays loudly on boom boxes; Palm wine flows liberally. Everyone wants to meet the newcomers and the exhausted little group is showered with all the affection the townspeople can muster.

EXT. BRENDAN'S PORCH - EVENING

Brendan sits with Stan, George and Alejandro. Flamingo curls up in the corner, then gets up to sit by George, who quietly scratches his ears. Dawn and Diego huddle in another corner of the porch.

BRENDAN
 I am so sorry to hear about Sophia. I really liked her. I wish I could have gotten to know her better.

ALEJANDRO
 Thank you. It's been hard, but your parents have been a big help.

Dawn and Diego are eye Flamingo with great interest. Brendan kneels in front of Dawn.

BRENDAN
 My mom tells me she was there when you were born. There is a boy in this village who was born on that same day. I think that's pretty cool.

Dawn stands, twisting back and forth, hugging a stuffed bear. Diego looks around with disgust.

DIEGO
 Where are we going to stay? We can't possibly all fit here!

ALEJANDRO
 Diego, watch yourself! Brendan hasn't even invited us to stay here. But if he does, at least we will have a roof over our heads!

Grace and Laurie join them on the porch.

GRACE

We're trying to figure out where to fit everyone. If we empty the storage room, Dawn and Diego could sleep in there. Then we'd have a bedroom for your mom and dad, and George and Alejandro can sleep in the front room. It'll be a squeeze, but we can make it work.

Brendan takes Grace's hand and smiles. Flamingo sidles over to the two children. Cautiously, Diego reaches out a hand to pet him. Flamingo inches closer.

GRACE

If you rub the top of his nose, he'll do anything for you. Watch.

Grace rubs Flamingo's nose and he goes into a trance.

DAWN

(giggling)
Can I try?

Soon, both Dawn and Diego are curled up with Flamingo, the three of them fast asleep. Talah and Anna arrive carrying bundles of clothing.

TALAH

We thought you might want some clean clothing after your long journey. We don't want to bother you now, but you should plan to come to dinner at our house tomorrow night.

As they leave, Laurie stares with tears in her eyes at the pile of clothing, most of it hand-sewn.

EXT. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, DESERT - MORNING

Josh and Pablo lie on a sand dune, asleep. Josh rolls over and squeezes his eyes shut to shield them from the blazing sun. Amigo bounds up and jumps on him, licking his face. Josh sits bolt upright and throws his arms around the dog.

JOSH

Amigo! You found us! I wasn't sure I'd ever see you again!

Pablo groans and opens his eyes.

PABLO

What's all the racket? Is that a dog on your lap?

JOSH

It's my pal, Amigo! He has the best sense of smell of any dog in the world. He must have tracked us here.

Steve appears over a hill.

STEVE

We came up here yesterday to greet you, and when we saw no sign of you, we camped at the site we left for you. It's just over that hill. If you'd gone another few hundred yards, you would have found it.

Josh tries to stand but is too weak to move. He remains sitting, holding tight to Amigo.

JOSH

Am I glad to see you! I thought this was the end. We couldn't find the campsite and finally gave up looking. I don't think either of us could have made it another hundred yards.

PABLO

And I'm not sure we can now if we don't get something to eat.

STEVE

I can take care of that.

He pulls a meager supply of food from his backpack.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Amigo must have smelled you. He took off before I had time to gather more. It isn't much, but hopefully it'll give you enough strength so you can make it to our tent. Marguerite's with me and we have a lot more food and water there. You can rest there before we head back to my house.

Josh looks up quickly at the mention of Marguerite.

JOSH

Marguerite is here with you?

STEVE

Yes, she wanted to see you before you meet Jessica. We left Jessica back at my house with my wife and two boys.

Josh and Pablo gratefully accept the food. They gobble down several hard-boiled eggs each.

PABLO

I can't remember the last time I had one of these.

STEVE

We have chickens at the house, so eggs are a major staple for us. It's been challenging to find things to feed everyone—especially my two growing boys. We've worked out some surprisingly good systems with local farmers, though. At least we have enough to subsist on. Now that you've eaten, do you think you can make it over that hill to our campsite? We can walk the bikes over the hill.

JOSH

As long as we take it slow.

At the top of the hill, they look down at Steve's campsite. Marguerite stands outside the tent as they approach. She and Josh lock eyes. Josh is tongue-tied. He hobbles up to her and stops a few feet away.

JOSH

Hey...

MARGUERITE

Hey back.

JOSH

I'm so sorry! I never meant for things to turn out this way...

Marguerite steps forward and takes his hand. She looks into his eyes.

MARGUERITE

There's no need to apologize. I never blamed you.

JOSH

I should have written to you. But I didn't know what to say.

MARGUERITE

Well, that makes two of us. I thought of writing to you as well but didn't want to pressure you. I wasn't even sure I wanted Steve to tell you about... anything. I didn't know what to say either.

They stand, hands clasped for a moment. Josh takes a deep breath.

JOSH

I thought of you, just before the lights went out.

MARGUERITE

I thought of you as well, especially that next day. We had no idea what happened to you and feared the worst.

JOSH

I was lucky I suppose. My friend Pablo saved me. I don't think I would have made it through without him.

Margueritte turns to Pablo and smiles.

MARGUERITE

Pleased to meet you, Pablo.

PABLO

Likewise. I had my doubts we'd make it here alive, but Josh was determined to see you.

He winks at Josh.

EXT. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA - LATER

Evening approaches. Josh and Marguerite stroll off together.

JOSH

Tell me about Jessica.

MARGUERITE

Well, she's almost 4 years old now, and talks up a storm. She loves to read, and we're all trying to stay a step ahead of her. Her curiosity is insatiable.

JOSH

What does she know about me?

MARGUERITE

(hesitates)

You have to understand she hasn't had a normal childhood. San Diego's still mostly in the dark ages.

(MORE)

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

There are no organized schools, and the only kids she knows are her cousins, Hale and Joey, who are a lot older. The idea of every family having a mom and a dad isn't something she understands. She probably picks that up a little from books we read, but I don't think she misses having a dad around. Does that make sense?

Josh nods.

JOSH

How will you introduce me to her?

MARGUERITE

Honestly, I'm not sure. I need to sort out my own feelings about you first before bringing you into the mix that way.

Josh turns to face her. He grabs her shoulders.

JOSH

I have to see her. I came all this way, and I need to meet my daughter.

MARGUERITE

Of course, you can see her. All I'm saying is I don't want to tell her right away that you're her father. Get to know her a little first. We can say you're a close friend of Uncle Steve's and you're visiting for a while.

JOSH

You're right. I don't mean to be pushy. It's just been so overwhelming for me.

MARGUERITE

It's been overwhelming for me as well...

He hugs her close and inhales her scent.

EXT. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA DESERT - THE NEXT DAY

They bike the final few miles to Steve's house. As they top a hill, they see the house in the distance. Two boys (Hale, 11, and Joey, 9) and a girl (JESSICA, 4) come running out. Amigo races ahead to greet them. Josh stares at Jessica.

EXT. BRENDAN'S PORCH - DAY

SUPER: 3 YEARS LATER

Brendan and Grace sit on the porch. Grace is eight months pregnant. Nearby, George and Stan tinker with radio parts in a ramshackle shed.

GRACE

Do you really think your dad and George will get that ham radio built and be able to contact others around the world?

BRENDAN

It may be a pipe dream, but at least they have something to keep them busy. Right now, though, I'm wondering how we're going to squeeze another person into our house once the baby comes.

GRACE

We'll make it work. People here have done this for hundreds of years. Besides, Alejandro is in Troeburg for the next couple months working with McFay, so that's one less person in the house.

BRENDAN

I hope Dawn and Diego will be okay with him being away for that long.

GRACE

Don't worry, Brendan. Alejandro wouldn't have left if he didn't feel confident we could handle them.

Diego stumbles across the field toward the house. He lurches onto the porch.

BRENDAN

I'm not so sure...

DIEGO

(mumbling)

I'm not feeling well. Going to bed.

GRACE

He's looks drunk!

BRENDAN

Let him sleep it off. I'll try to talk to him tomorrow.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

DAWN

Diego, wake up! We need to get to school!

Diego pulls the sheet over his head.

DIEGO

Shut up! Go away and leave me alone!

Dawn leaves; Diego rolls out of bed, runs through the sitting room, where Laurie, Stan and George are talking, goes outside and throws up in the bushes. He stumbles back inside.

DIEGO

I'm not going to school today.

He goes to his room and falls back into bed.

INT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - DAY

GEORGE

Hungover, most likely. Probably palm wine... That boy is trouble.

STAN

He's so unhappy here, but from what I remember, he was never happy.

LAURIE

You're right he's never been happy. But I think the problem is deeper. He barely talked to me before... (beat) before Dawn was born. His head was always buried in his phone. He lost more than his mother when the power went out. The loss of technology was hard enough for us adults, but at least we had some memory of what it was like to live before the digital age. Diego never had that. Aside from his brief friendship with Kevin, he's been alone. I wish he had some friends.

Brendan enters the room.

BRENDAN

Be careful what you wish for. Grace saw him playing cards with a few guys in town who never do much of anything except drink, play cards and occasionally cause trouble. They're not the best role models for him.

LAURIE

What can we do? He's sixteen years old, and we have absolutely no control over him. Do you think you can talk to him, Brendan?

Brendan blows out a breath.

BRENDAN

I'm not sure I can say anything that will really make a difference.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Diego lies in bed. From outside, Brendan knocks lightly on the door and peeks in the room.

BRENDAN

Can we talk?

Diego pulls the sheet over his head. Brendan enters and sits on the lone chair.

DIEGO

What do you want?

BRENDAN

Grace saw you yesterday, down by the river, with Carl and Michael.

Diego pulls the sheet off his head. He stares at Brendan.

DIEGO

So?

BRENDAN

I know them. They're not very trustworthy.

DIEGO

They're my friends. They're the only people in this stupid village who will talk to me.

BRENDAN

Are they really your friends? Or are they looking to get something from you?

DIEGO

What do you mean? What would they want from me?

BRENDAN

Maybe they think can boss you around and get you to do their dirty work for them--things that might be dangerous or that they don't want to do.

DIEGO

I don't know what you're talking about. They haven't asked me to do anything.

BRENDAN

Not yet, maybe. But they will. Look, I don't want you to get into trouble. Those guys are only out for themselves. If they think you can somehow help them improve their way of life, they're going to grab at that. You need to be careful.

DIEGO

Why should I believe you? You're always talking about how important education is and how everyone needs to learn more. Well, I don't agree. I think it's a waste of time. What's it going to get me, anyway? Education won't get me out of this hellhole.

BRENDAN

Is that what this is about, Diego? Getting out of here?

DIEGO

Do you think I want to stay here for the rest of my life?

Brendan shakes his head, sadly.

BRENDAN

You can certainly leave here, Diego. No one's holding you prisoner. But I doubt you'll find much else beyond this village. I know you have memories of life before, but the world has changed. It's up to you whether to change with it or not.

Diego stares at him.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

I had a smartphone. I played games on it constantly.

(MORE)

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

At some point though, I recognized it wasn't real. My uncle died in a car crash and I realized people didn't simply come back to life after driving their cars off a cliff or being shot at. I gave up the games shortly after that and started living my life. Now I can see the games were simply a way to fill up some empty holes. I had to find a different way to fill those holes.

DIEGO

Carl and Michael fill those holes. They understand me.

BRENDAN

Do they really? Or do you think they do because you so desperately want friends? Just be careful. They may not have your best interests at heart.

Brendan gets up and leaves. Diego sits up, throws the sheet aside and gets out of bed. He quickly dresses and peeks outside his door. The living room is empty.

EXT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Diego quietly slips out of the house, grabs his bike and rides down the dirt path.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

CARL and MICHAEL wait for him, along with two younger men, DEVON, and CHARLES, who he had met the day before. They greet him heartily.

CARL

We got a big plan to make lots o' money... We all gonna be rich!

MICHAEL

Whaddya think, Diego? You in? Wanna help us with this?

DIEGO

Maybe... What do I have to do?

CARL

Is simple. There's a lone house between here and the nex' village.

(MORE)

CARL (CONT'D)

Is far from the road and far from any other people. I been checkin' it out over the pas' two weeks. There's two brothers an' I know their schedule. I seen them around town boastin' about how they scored a great deal in Troeburg las' week.

MICHAEL

Yest'day, their booth at the market was suddenly filled with all sorts o' stuff. They mus' have a big stash in their house, and we gonna take some of it. We can't sell it near here, so we got to travel 'round for the next few weeks to distribute it.

CARL

All we need to do is get into the house, get the goods, and get out quick as possible. Diego, you're our getaway man since you have the best bike.

MICHAEL

We go in, and you wait for us to throw the stuff out the window. It'll be in this one backpack and these two side duffle bags.

He holds up the empty bags.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You just take the bags, strap 'em to your bike and hightail it out of there. There's an abandoned house down the road. We'll meet there to sort everything out after.

Carl turns around, and Diego glances at him.

CARL

Wha' you lookin' a' me for?

He turns back, and Diego sees him pocket a gun. Diego shakes his head.

CARL (CONT'D)

Don't worry 'bout it man! I na' gonna use it. Is jus' for show.

Diego looks from Carl to Michael.

DIEGO

I... I'm not sure I want to go through with this.

He starts to turn away, but Michael blocks his way.

MICHAEL

You think we can let you go now?
Now, when we jus' tol' you the
whole plan? We been workin' on this
for weeks-weeks! We ain't about to
stop now. You leave now and the
plan is ruined.

Michael turns to Carl.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

C'mon, let's go. It'll be dark
soon.

EXT. MANGO FOREST - SAME TIME

Laurie and Brendan stroll through a mango forest on the edge of town. They follow a dirt path, skirting numerous fields of cultivated eggplant, bitterball, and cassava.

BRENDAN

Do you miss it, Mom? What you used
to have?

LAURIE

I don't know. It's all such a blur
in my mind now. We've lived through
three separate lifetimes. There was
the time before, then the five
years after when we stayed in our
house, and now our life here. If
you had asked me this ten years
ago, I would have laughed. Of
course, I would have preferred
everything we had then. Yet now... I
see how little we had then and how
much we have now. (beat) How about
you? Do you miss anything from back
home?

BRENDAN

I miss being able to get in a car
and drive anywhere. But there's no
place I feel like I need to get to
here. I suppose I miss watching TV
and movies. And frozen waffles.
Being able to take a waffle from
the freezer, pop it in the toaster,
and eat it within in minutes. I
definitely miss that!

Laurie laughs and plucks an overripe mango off a tree as they walk.

LAURIE

Yes, cooking is hard here. But I remember buying frozen mangos at the grocery store and keeping them for months in our freezer, then pulling them out to make a smoothie and gulping it down without even tasting it.

BRENDAN

Dad told me he didn't think you'd survive that first year.

LAURIE

He never shared that with me...

BRENDAN

He was so worried. Where would you get food, and clean water, and heat in the winter? Would the well work and provide enough for your needs? You had done a little preparation, but when it became real and everything changed overnight, he was terrified.

LAURIE

It was a scary time. Watching buildings collapse from lack of upkeep. Seeing those massive fires in town that couldn't be controlled because no one was left at the Fire Department. I remember biking to the site of the library after it burned. That was the one and only time I saw your dad break down. He was usually so positive things would work out, and he always had a plan in mind. But when he saw those books burned to ashes, it was like a part of him burned up as well.

BRENDAN

Well, I glad you salvaged a small collection of children's books and brought them here.

LAURIE

I wish we could have brought so many more books so kids here could know what it was like.

BRENDAN

I love that you're writing children's stories. They enjoy reading them. And our new baby will love it as well.

They start back and Brendan's house comes into view. Stan runs toward them.

STAN
Come quickly! Diego's hurt.

INT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Diego lies on the floor, writhing in pain. His face is bloodied. Anna is tending to him, cleaning his face off.

LAURIE
What happened?

STAN
Someone attacked him.

Brendan walks in. Diego whispers to him.

DIEGO
You were right. They were not my friends.

He closes his eyes and goes quiet.

ANNA
I gave him an herbal sedative. He should sleep for a while now...

LAURIE
What did he mean? Who did this?

BRENDAN
I know a few of them... Let me do a little digging.

EXT. BRENDAN'S PORCH - DAY

Brendan, Grace, Laurie, Stan and George sit on the porch. Anna joins them from inside the house.

ANNA
Diego is improving.

LAURIE
Your nursing training has come in handy! Thank you so much for taking care of him.

ANNA
I'm glad I can help. He seems better now. He wants to talk to you Brendan.

Brendan sighs and stands up.

BRENDAN

Wish me luck!

He knocks softly on Diego's door. No answer.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Diego sits up in bed, drawing on a sketch pad. He has a black eye and his face is swollen. Brendan opens the door a crack and peeks in.

BRENDAN

You look much better.

Diego looks away.

DIEGO

You were right. I was stupid to think they were my friends.

He hesitates, then turns toward Brendan.

DIEGO (CONT'D)

They were so nice at first, then they started talking about a robbery, and when I told them I wasn't sure about things, they said I knew too much. When I tried to go, Carl hit me. The others pulled him away and I ran. I'm scared, Brendan. Carl's right... I know too much. There's no way to hide from them. I have to leave. If I stay here, they'll come after me.

BRENDAN

You're not going anywhere for a while. Except maybe to the local police. They want these robberies solved and they'll protect you.

DIEGO

I don't know if going to the police is a good idea. I don't want them to get into trouble because of me. I wish there were another way.

A tear falls from his eyes. He looks down at his sketch pad. Brendan glances at the sketch pad and does a double-take.

BRENDAN

What do you have there? Did you draw that?

DIEGO

(embarrassed)

I'm just doodling.

He quickly flips the pad over.

BRENDAN
Come on, I want to see. It looked
amazing!

Diego slowly turns over the book. Brendan stares at it.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
Are there more?

Diego nods and turns the pages.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
Diego, these are incredible. I had
no idea you could draw like this!

DIEGO
(shrugs)
It's just something I do to pass
the time.

BRENDAN
I wonder if you could sell these at
the market. I bet the kids in this
village would love them!

DIEGO
Really? You think people would
actually pay for these?

BRENDAN
These characters are all in fashion
here. Look at all the old t-shirts
that are sold at the marketplace.
Those images are everywhere. People
would buy them for sure!

There is a sudden commotion from the other room.

LAURIE
Brendan, come quickly! Grace is
going into labor!

Brendan dashes out, looking back at Diego.

BRENDAN
We'll talk more about this later!

Diego leafs through his sketch pad.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Diego's friend Kevin gives Diego a sketch pad.

DIEGO

Why are you giving this to me?

KEVIN

I think you should draw more, Diego. The sketches you did a while ago were amazing... Who knows... Someday, someone may appreciate your drawings enough to want to buy them.

END FLASHBACK

INT. DIEGO'S BEDROOM - BACK TO PRESENT

Diego gets up, tucks some of his sketches under his arm and quietly sneaks out of the house. No one sees him leave as the family is all gathered in Grace and Brendan's bedroom.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Diego parks his bike against a tree. Then he steps into a clearing and comes face to face with Carl.

There are four men there: Carl, Michael, Devon and Charles.

CARL

Well, look here. If it ain't our li'l snitch.

DIEGO

I'm not a snitch, Carl. If I was, you'd all have been arrested by now.

MICHAEL

What are you doing here? Did anyone follow you?

Diego shakes his head.

DIEGO

No one followed me. I have an idea and I want your help. It's a business idea—a way to make some money. But if you agree to help me, you have to agree to stop stealing.

CARL

Why would we do that? We been makin' some good money lately.

DIEGO

Because with my idea, you'll make more money and it'll be legal.

(MORE)

DIEGO (CONT'D)

You won't have to worry about being arrested.

The four men look at each other.

DEVON

Go ahead, what's your plan?

Diego closes his eyes for a moment. He hears Brendan's voice in his head.

BRENDAN (VOICE OVER)

These are incredible!

He slowly opens his sketch pad. The men gather around to look at it.

DIEGO

I have these drawings. I'm thinking of selling them, but I need a sales team.

MICHAEL

Where'd you get these? They look like original drawings of the things we see on our t-shirts!

DIEGO

They are original drawings. My drawings.

DEVON

You did these? They are amazin'!

All four men nod vigorously.

CHARLES

How much you want to sell them for?

DIEGO

That's where I need you. You see, I can draw these—lots of them, but I know nothing about how to sell them or even how much to sell them for. I need help. If you all help me sell these, I'll give you a percentage of whatever they sell for, but you have to first promise me, no more stealing.

MICHAEL

These are worth a fortune. I bet we could sell these for big bucks!

DIEGO

That's what I'm hoping. Will you help me? We can set up a legitimate booth at the market. If we do that, and you promise me no more stealing, I promise not to go to the police. What do you think?

He looks at the men expectantly.

EXT. STEVE'S HOUSE - DAY

Josh and Marguerite sit on the porch with Amigo between them. Jessica (now 7 years old) sits on Josh's lap.

JOSH

I wonder how much longer we can stay here.

MARGUERITE

Steve thinks it's only a matter of months before we will feel the effects of the weakening magnetic field here in San Diego. Pretty soon, we'll have to head south.

JOSH

Pablo's itching to go to Ecuador. He wants us to go with him, but it's such a risky trip.

Pablo approaches.

PABLO

It's riskier to stay here. I've already waited too long. Ever since I heard from my cousin that my wife died and my daughter's alone, I've been looking for a way to get there. Yesterday, I found a boat with an Ecuadorian Captain who is willing to take a few passengers. He seemed to like me, especially when I told him of my daughter.

MARGUERITE

Maybe we should consider it. I don't want to live underground for the rest of our lives. Jessica deserves better.

PABLO

The thing is, he can only take four passengers. The four of us could go, but Steve and his family wouldn't be able to come with us.

JOSH
I'll talk to Steve... This may be
our best option.

EXT. BOATYARD - DAY

Josh and Pablo barter with the ECUADORIAN CAPTAIN (long, greasy black hair, beady eyes and an unkempt mustache). He points to Amigo.

ECUADORIAN CAPTAIN
Is he coming too?

Amigo lets out a low growl.

JOSH
Yes, if you'll take him.

ECUADORIAN CAPTAIN
(grins broadly)
Sure, I'll take him! So... we have a
deal?

The men shake hands. The captain walks off and calls after them.

ECUADORIAN CAPTAIN
One week from today. Be here on the
dock at 5:00 a.m. sharp!

MARGUERITE
I don't know, Josh. I have a bad
feeling about this. That man is
trouble. Maybe we shouldn't bring
Amigo with us.

JOSH
It'll be fine. Amigo can take care
of himself. I actually feel better
having him with us for security.
He's super-protective of Jessica.

EXT. BOATYARD - MORNING

Josh tears up as he and Steve hug goodbye.

STEVE
Stay well. We will meet again
somewhere! And take good care of my
sister and niece!

Josh holds up a hand in salute.

JOSH
I promise.

EXT. BOAT - DAY

The group settles in as the boat cruises along the coast then breaks out into the open ocean. Margueritte, Jessica and Amigo stand on deck watching the water.

JESSICA

Dolphins!

She points in delight at the water. Marguerite and Amigo stand near her. Amigo growls. The Captain strolls toward them, leering at her. He brushes against her, snaking his hand around her waist. Amigo growls again. The captan walks off, giving Amigo a menacing look.

Josh approaches.

JOSH

You okay? You look a bit pale.

MARGUERITE

I'm fine. I just wish we could get off this boat and away from that dreadful man.

JOSH

Just one more night. We should be in Ecuador tomorrow.

EXT. BOAT - NIGHT

JESSICA

Tell me the story of Orion again, Daddy.

JOSH

Orion was a great hunter. And once, he had to fight against Taurus, the bull. Every once in a while, when the stars line up right, you can see him pointing his arrow right at Taurus.

MARGUERITE

Where'd you get all these stories from?

JOSH

My mom was a teacher and she had a large collection of children's books about all sorts of things.

MARGUERITE

Well, I'm glad Jessica is seeing all this. I certainly hope the open air, sun and stars won't become just a memory.

EXT. BOATYARD IN ECUADOR - THE NEXT DAY

Marguerite stands with Jessica and Amigo at the bow of the boat, watching the crew lower the gangplank. The Captain sidles up behind her and slides his hand under her shirt and up her back.

Amigo lunges at him, nipping his arm, as Margueritte scoops up Jessica and runs down the gangway. Amigo follows closely behind. The captain tries to stop Josh and Pablo, but they push past him and race to shore. The captain pulls out a gun and shoots at them, muttering in Spanish. They manage to escape around the side of a building

EXT. LOSCOYA WEST AFRICA

SUPER: 2 YEARS LATER

Dawn (now almost 9 years old) lies on the grass reading. Debrak walks up.

DEBRAK

Whatcha readin'?

She shows him the book: Legends of the Lights. He sits down beside her and reads the title slowly.

DEBRAK

Legends... of the... Lights. (beat)
Wha's it about?

DAWN

You really interested?

Debrak nods.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Well... There are these lights, and they show up in the sky and they dance. They are sooooo beautiful. But a long time ago, I saw them, and I didn't feel very good. I'm trying to figure out why.

DEBRAK

Wait a second. You saw them? For real? This isn't jus' a make-believe thing?

DAWN

It was a couple years ago, on my birthday, before we came here. In fact, it may have been the reason we came here.

DEBRAK

Hey... Your birthday's the same as mine, right? The day of that bloody sunrise...

DAWN

I never heard of the bloody sunrise, but everyone says everything changed that day.

DEBRAK

Everyone here say the day I was born, the sun rose blood red. They all thought it was a sign from the gods and maybe it was my mama's blood.

DAWN

Maybe it was the blood of both our mamas...

DEBRAK

Tell me more about those lights.

DAWN

When we first saw them Aunt Laurie said they danced in honor of my birthday. But I didn't like them. I felt itchy--like there were all these little pellets in the air hitting me at once. And I got really weak. The stronger the lights got, the weaker I felt. Then we left home, and the lights disappeared at night, and I started to feel better. But now, my birthday's coming up soon and I'm nervous they're gonna come back.

Debrak stares at her.

DEBRAK

Do you feel that itchy feelin' now? Cuz you're describing exactly how I felt a day or two ago. I can't explain it, but I jus' felt strange.

Dawn sits up.

DAWN

I haven't felt that way for a long time. I'd almost forgotten that feeling until two days ago, when it started to come back a little. That's when I started to worry.

DEBRAK

Do you think it has anything to do with our birthdays comin' up?

DAWN

I don't know, but I wish my dad was here to ask. He's working in Troeburg. I think he'd have some answers for me.

DEBRAK

You should talk to your Uncle Brendan about it. He knows a lot about this stuff.

EXT. BRENDAN'S PORCH - SAME TIME

Laurie, Grace and Brendan watch BENJAMIN (now 2 years old) chase a lizard along the porch railing. Diego (now 18 years old) draws on his sketchpad. In the background, George and Stan mutter to each other as they tinker with their radio.

LAURIE

I can't believe he'll be two years old soon. He's growing up so fast!

DIEGO

Here's something to remind you of him at this age. Or maybe... an idea for a new story? How about: "Benny and the Disappearing Lizard"?

He tears off the top sheet from his sketch pad and hands it to Laurie. It's a cartoon sketch of Benjamin chasing the lizard. Benjamin looks at the sketch and giggles.

LAURIE

This is amazing! It's so realistic. And you did it so fast! No wonder your sketches are selling like hotcakes!

DIEGO

I still can't believe people pay for these.

Dawn walks up from the field, looking dejected. She ignores them all and goes inside.

LAURIE

I wonder what's bothering her.

DIEGO

She didn't sleep much last night. She kept waking up and thrashing around.

GRACE

Well, her birthday's coming up.
That could be part of it.

Laurie looks around and everyone nods to her. Sighing, she gets up and knocks on Dawn's door.

LAURIE

Can I come in?

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Dawn lies in bed, crying softly. Laurie opens the door a crack and peeks in.

LAURIE

What's wrong, honey?

DAWN

I'm scared.

LAURIE

What are you afraid of?

DAWN

I just have a bad feeling. The way I used to feel before we came here. Like I'm itchy all the time, and tired. And my head hurts. This feeling just won't go away.

LAURIE

Maybe you're coming down with something.... Do you know if any other kids around have been sick?

Dawn shakes her head. Starts to cry more.

DAWN

I wish my dad was here!

Laurie cradles her for a moment.

LAURIE

I'll get a message to him to come back here soon. There are bike couriers going to Troeburg every day. In the meantime, we're all here with you. Rest up for now and I'll check in on you a little later. You can come to me any time, okay?

Dawn nods her head, still sniffing.

INT. DIEGO AND DAWN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Midnight. Dawn wakes up. She shivers, then gets out of bed and slips outside. She looks up at the sky and gasps.

The Aurora Borealis glows on the horizon... faint, but clearly there.

DAWN

The lights! They are chasing me!

She runs inside, crawls back into bed and yanks the sheet over her head.

EXT. SCHOOL FIELD - THE NEXT DAY

Dawn sees Debrak as she is walking to school. He pulls her aside.

DEBRAK

I need to talk to you. Last night, I had this itchy feeling, like what you said you sometimes felt. It woke me up.

DAWN

Did you see the lights?

DEBRAK

What lights?

DAWN

Come to my house tonight after sunset. Brendan says we can stay up late tonight and watch for them. He thinks we may all be able to see them.

EXT. BRENDAN'S PORCH - NIGHT

Brendan, Dawn, Debrak, Laurie, Stan, George, Diego, Talah and Anna gather outside to see if the lights are visible.

DAWN

(points to the horizon)
I see them!

TALAH

They're beautiful!

BRENDAN

They may be beautiful, but it's not good. It means the magnetic field around us is weakening.

LAURIE

But I thought the field around the equator was stronger.

BRENDAN

It was at first. But the poles have been migrating for 9 years now. The North and South poles are lining up over us, and the magnetic field here is weakening.

LAURIE

How long until they cross the equator?

BRENDAN

No one knows. It could be years or decades, or it could be instantaneous. But soon, we may have to move underground to avoid damaging radiation.

They all stare at one another.

STAN

We have no place else to run to. This may well be the end of the line.

EXT. MOUNTAIN VILLAGE IN ECUADOR - DAY

Josh tinkers with a homemade radio. In the background, Marguerite reads to a small group of townspeople. Pablo approaches.

PABLO

Have you gotten any signals yet?

JOSH

I'm making progress. I've done a few short-range tests and it can transmit, but so far I can't receive anything.

PABLO

It would be a miracle if you could. But don't get your hopes up.

JOSH

I have this crazy idea that my friend, George, is still out there transmitting and somehow we can reconnect. I know it sounds insane, but I have to keep trying.

PABLO

Remember our conversations when we were biking to San Diego, and we wondered if places like this existed? Places which had defied progress for eons?

JOSH

Yeah - we talked about how the places that would survive were ones without all our modern day conveniences. We're lucky we found this place and lucky you could reunite with Elena.

Show Elena, sitting and listening to Marguerite with rapt attention.

PABLO

Yes, it is good. Yet she has been through so much and is so fragile still. (beat) She got spooked last night when people saw those lights in the sky and started talking about angry spirits.

JOSH

Are you sure those lights were the Aurora Borealis? I mean, we're here in Ecuador - about as close to the equator as we could be! You can't get any further away from the North Pole or the South Pole here!

PABLO

It was either the Northern or Southern Lights. I'm sure of it. I didn't want to frighten everyone, but I'm worried. The magnetic field is getting weaker, exposing us all to more radiation. At some point, we may need to move into that small group of caves in the mountainside. There's no place else to run to.

INT. RESEARCH LAB, TROEBURG - DAY

Alejandro is with Leonard McFay and Brendan's former students: Ian, Janice and Cyrus.

MCFAY

Magnetic north and south poles have migrated almost 90 degrees. Our instruments show the magnetic field here is now weakening.

ALEJANDRO

I'm worried about my daughter, Dawn. This morning, a messenger from my village told me she's had a constant headache and feeling itchy all the time. Years ago, when we first saw the Northern Lights, she had these same symptoms. They went away as soon as we moved south.

IAN

Many animals sense the Earth's magnetic field much more than most people. I heard Debrak hasn't been feelin' great lately. Maybe the two of them feel the field weakening somehow.

JANICE

Could they both be sensitive to radiation in general? It's invisible, but maybe they have a lower threshold. Maybe they're feeling things we can't feel yet.

MCFAY

If that's the case, they should be in a safe room to shield them from increased exposure.

IAN

We built a bunker, but we haven't fully tested it yet.

ALEJANDRO

Well, here's your chance to test it out. I'm going to the village tomorrow to collect both of them.

EXT. FIELD IN BRENDAN'S VILLAGE - THE NEXT DAY

Dawn sees Alejandro on a bicycle coming across the field. She races to greet him. He grabs her in a big bear hug, lifts her off the ground and spins her around, then peers at her anxiously.

ALEJANDRO

How light you are! Have you been eating enough?

DAWN

What are you doing here? I thought you'd be gone all month.

ALEJANDRO

I'm only here for a short time. I came to pick something up and bring it back with me. Two things, actually. Would you and Debrak like to come to Troeburg for a few weeks? They have some people there who may be able to help you feel stronger again.

DAWN

Debrak, too? Both of us?

ALEJANDRO

Yes, we want both of you to come. What do you think?

They embark on a slow bike ride to Troeburg. Both children are weak, and can only ride for short distances before resting. When they arrive in the city. Dawn and Debrak collapse into deep sleep.

INT. SAFE ROOM - DAY

The two children are carried down to a newly-constructed basement safe room and left to rest.

INT. RESEARCH LAB, TROEBURG - DAY

ALEJANDRO

It's been three days, and they are starting to sit up a little. The bunker is helping, but even if they fully recover, what will happen if they leave there?

MCFAY

I wish we knew. The magnetic field is continuing to weaken. Dawn and Debrak may be unique in their sensitivity to this, but we will all soon feel the effects. What's the tipping point? How long before all of us have to live underground? For how long? I have no answers.

Ian rushes in.

IAN

We are seeing something very unusual in our lab. Come quickly.

They run to Ian's lab. Cyrus and Janice hover over one of the instruments.

CYRUS

Our sun is pushing out a massive solar flare! As big as the one ten years ago that got the poles moving faster...

MCFAY

Let me see that...

He and Alejandro stare at the instruments.

EXT. OUR SUN

Show image similar to opening of the SUN with flashes of light emanating from it. Once again, a single beam of light heads directly toward Earth, which is now tilted at 90 degrees from how it started.

ALEJANDRO (VOICE OVER)

Could the energy of this solar flare push the poles to do a full flip around the equator?

MCFAY (VOICE OVER)

I suppose anything is possible. The solar flare ten years ago was a trigger, but everything would have to be aligned just right. In the meantime, we may be due for quite a light show tonight. We should warn people to stay inside in case a fresh barrage of electromagnetic radiation hits the earth.

INT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - EVENING (SUNSET)

Brendan paces back and forth, occasionally peeking through a window.

BRENDAN

I can't believe so many people are outside! I know the lights are beautiful, but it's damned dangerous out there right now.

TALAH

Brendan, you can't talk sense into these people. Today marks the 9th anniversary of that bloody sunrise, and they've been planning this celebration for a long time.

ANNA

Every night, the lights are brighter. There are so many rumors about them now.

EXT. FIELD - EVENING

Many villagers are gathered outside Brendan's house. As the sun sets, everyone looks away from it, to the opposite horizon where it is darker and the lights would soon be visible.

A small VILLAGE CHILD points west, toward the setting sun.

VILLAGE CHILD

It's bleeding!

The setting sun suddenly GLOWS ORANGE, THEN RED, just as the rising sun did nine years earlier. FLASHES OF FIRE emanate from it.

Day turns to night and the AURORA on the opposite horizon from the sun begins to dance. The lights get brighter as the sky darkens. Soon, a shimmering, moving light show is in full view. The Aurora lights up the sky with a dazzling display. The villages stand in the field, watching, rooted in place.

INT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - EVENING

BRENDAN

I wish we could get them all inside. Every minute they're out there increases their chances of radiation sickness. They may not feel it now, but it will haunt them for years to come.

GEORGE

Sonny, if this continues, none of us will likely be here days from now, let alone years. And honestly, I'm not even sure our flimsy metal roof is giving us much protection. I say, let 'em have their fun. You tried your best to warn them the past few days and those who are out there didn't listen. You can't save the world.

They listen to the townspeople singing, dancing and beating on drums as the lights brighten. Laurie holds tightly to Stan's hand.

Suddenly there is silence. Brendan pulls aside a curtain and peeks outside. It is pitch dark. The lights have disappeared, plunging the village into complete darkness.

EXT. ECUADOR - A CAVE - EVENING

Josh, Marguerite, Jessica, Pablo and Elena watch the setting sun from a cave.

They hear the townspeople in the distance outside.

JESSICA

Look! The sun is bleeding!

JOSH

It must be another solar flare. I remember the sun looked like that the first morning when I was in El Paso!

PABLO

All those people should seek shelter. They're getting exposed to so much radiation right now.

JOSH

You can't force people to listen, Pablo. They've been out there every night for the past week.

Pablo turns to Elena, curled into a ball and cowering in the corner of the cave.

PABLO

This is not because of evil spirits, Elena. The sun is just giving off a lot of energy.

ELENA

Then how do you explain the lights? They are dancing out of control every night. Surely that is the spirits!

PABLO

(to Josh)

I can't teach her science in a day. And I can't undo all the teaching she's had for the past ten years.

JOSH

At least she's with us now and willing to stay in the cave, even though so many others won't listen.

The sky darkens. The lights SHIMMER and DANCE and dance on the horizon.

JOSH

They almost look like a city.... Or at least the way cities used to look at night.

Suddenly, without warning, the sparkling lights go out. Darkness envelopes them.

INT. SAFE ROOM - NIGHT.

Dawn and Debrak sit in the safe room. There is electric lighting in there which amazes them.

DEBRAK

These lights are so strange... I jus' can' get used to them.

DAWN

I know. My dad says it's cuz they have a working power grid here in Troeburg. He says all over the world, lights used to work like this. That is, until...

DEBRAK

Until the day we were both born. Then everything changed. Maybe we're both a curse.

The electric lights go out, plunging the room into complete darkness.

DEBRAK

What do you think happened?

DAWN

I don't know but I hope my dad, or someone, comes quickly to get us. It's creepy down here.

DEBRAK

We need to get out of here. Take hold of my arm.

They make their way to the stairway and creep up the stone stairs. They reach the landing at the top of the stairs.

DAWN

I feel okay so far. How about you?

DEBRAK

I feel good, too. Whadya think will happen if we push this door open?

DAWN

I don't know, but we have to try. It's the only way we can know what happened.

DEBRAK

Okay—here goes. On count of three. Ready? One... Two... Three...

They lean against the door. It swings open, revealing a large sparsely furnished room. It is dark, but they can make out the shapes of a few chairs. They stand in the doorway.

DAWN

I feel okay.

DEBRAK

Me too.

Alejandro bursts into the room.

EXT. BRENDAN'S PORCH - MORNING

SUPER: 6 MONTHS LATER.

Laurie sits on the porch with a notepad in hand. It is just after sunrise. Flamingo lies at her feet.

LAURIE

So much has changed in the last 10 years, Flamingo.

Flamingo lifts his head and gazes at her.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

Some people might say we lost everything, and in a way, they're right. We lost our house, our way of living, and so many other comforts we used to enjoy. Our entire life was turned upside down. Life has been hard, but we survived! More than that, we adapted, and in some ways, maybe we're better off. Look at the wonderful people we've met!

Flamingo thumps his tail.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

Okay... And animals too. I'll tell you one thing... I will never again look at strangers the same way I used to.

Flamingo nuzzles her hand. She shakes her head and wipes away a tear.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

I just wish we knew what happened to Josh.

There is a loud shout from the shed next to the house.

GEORGE (OFF CAMERA)

I've done it! I may have reached South America! People are speaking a different language! I'm not sure who I'm talking to, but I think it's across the ocean!

Brendan: George, slow down! You're making me dizzy. George: In the

Brendan, Grace, Stan and Laurie rush to join George in the shed.

BRENDAN

Are you sure? Even the more powerful radios in Troeburg haven't been able to do that.

GEORGE

I'm sure. It must be there's been a shift in the ionosphere. This is huge!

BRENDAN

Can you figure out who you're talking to and where they are?

GEORGE

I'm not sure yet. I don't know what language they're speaking!

The radio cackles. A voice comes across in clear English.

FERNANDO (O.S.)

Hello, is anybody there?

GEORGE

Yes! Where are you located?

Fernando remains off screen for entire conversation

FERNANDO

I am in Brazil. My name is Fernando. What about you?

GEORGE

Africa, the country of Loscoaya.

FERNANDO

Africa! You are the first people across the ocean I've been able to communicate with.

GEORGE

Same here. Are you able to talk to others nearby by radio?

FERNANDO

I am, but usually only short distances. Only now it seems to be expanded. Yesterday, I communicated with someone in Ecuador as well.

GRACE

(whispers to George)

My brother lived in Ecuador. I wonder if he's still alive. Is there any way of finding out?

GEORGE

There might be, if radio operators managed to organize themselves.

He turns back to the radio.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I'm here with a woman whose brother used to live in Ecuador. I know it's a longshot, but do you think you could try to relay a message to him? I have his last known physical address.

FERNANDO

I don't know... Relaying messages like you suggest was always tough, and now with the way things have changed, it may be next to impossible. But give me the information. I will ask my new friend in Ecuador and maybe he'll have a suggestion. We can talk again tomorrow at the same time if our connection works.

EXT. MOUNTAIN VILLAGE IN ECUADOR - MORNING

Josh rises with the sun and checks his radio. A call comes in.

JOSH

Hello Fernando! Right on schedule!

FERNANDO (O.S.)

I have some big news for you Josh. Yesterday, I communicated with someone in Africa!

JOSH

Across the ocean to Africa? That's crazy!

FERNANDO

The solar flare a few months ago sparked some changes in the ionosphere, so radio waves can travel more freely. This guy is in a tiny country I never even heard of before. I think he said it was called Lo...um... Losacooyo or something like that.

Josh stares at the radio.

JOSH

Do you mean Loscoaya?

FERNANDO

Yes! Exactly. That's what it is. I had never heard of that country before.

JOSH

My brother lives there. Or at least he did ten years ago. I don't even know if he's still there, but if he is, can you get a message to him?

FERNANDO

I can try. The guy I talked to told me of a relay system he used a long time ago, and we were thinking of using it to find a relative of someone he lives with. So, sure, I can give him your message and see if he can locate your brother.

Josh again stares at the radio.

JOSH

Fernando, what was the call sign of the guy you spoke with in Loscoaya?

FERNANDO

Xxxxxxxx Note: insert fake call sign here

Josh sinks to the ground.

EXT. SHED NEXT TO BRENDAN'S HOUSE - THE NEXT DAY

George's ham radio crackles to life.

FERNANDO (O.S.)

Hello, George! I have some information for you!

GEORGE

I'm all ears.

FERNANDO

Remember yesterday, when I told you I had been talking to someone in Ecuador?

GEORGE

Certainly. That's why we thought you might be able to locate Grace's brother.

FERNANDO

Well, I think you may know this person I connected with.

(MORE)

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

His call sign is: xxxxxxxx **Note:**
insert fake call sign here

Does that mean anything to you?"

George is stunned into silence.

BRENDAN AND LAURIE (TOGETHER)

What is it?

George turns his full attention to the radio.

GEORGE

(whispers)

It does...

FERNANDO

That's the person I've been
communicating with. He lives in the
mountains of Ecuador.

EXT. BRENDAN'S PORCH - MORNING

SUPER: 1 YEAR LATER.

Laurie and Stan watch the early morning activity at the well
in front of the house. Laurie wipes a tear from her eyes.

LAURIE

George was such a trooper. I can't
believe he went so fast. It was
just two months ago that he told me
he was sick...

FLASHBACK TO:

GEORGE

I have cancer. (beat) Now don't go
getting all teary on me! I've lived
a great life. I survived the
biggest existential threat ever to
hit mankind and I'm proud of how we
all made it through.

LAURIE

Shouldn't you see a doctor?

GEORGE

Nah... I don't need some fancy doctor
telling me I have a short time left
to live. I know. It's my time to
go, and it's okay.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Back in the day, maybe I would have seen a doctor and been treated with all sorts of poisons to keep me going a few extra months. But I don't need that now. My time is up and I'm ready.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. BRENDAN'S PORCH - BACK TO PRESENT

STAN

He was right. We survived the apocalypse.

LAURIE

I know that, and I know we're all going to die eventually, but it doesn't lessen the pain of losing him. George was family. If it weren't for him, we would never have reconnected with Josh.

STAN

He and Josh were certainly close. Remember when Josh was a teenager-- how much time he spent at George's house?

A door opens behind them. Laurie turns to see Benjamin and Flamingo standing together. Benjamin (now 3 years old) runs to Laurie. She pulls him onto her lap.

LAURIE

Good morning my love!

BENJAMIN

Morning Gammy. Can you read to me?

LAURIE

I can! In fact, I have a brand-new book I wrote. Diego even did some drawings for it. It's about your cousin, Jessica.

She picks up her notebook along with the sketch Diego had made and reads:

LAURIE (CONT'D)

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there lived a little girl with straight blond hair and big brown eyes named Jessica...

Benjamin interrupts her, pointing to his eyes.

BENJAMIN

My eyes blue.

LAURIE

(laughing)

Yes, they are... blue like your
dad's.

He places a finger on her forehead.

BENJAMIN

Your eyes brown.

LAURIE

Yes! Like Jessica's! She lives far
away from here in a tiny mountain
village near some beautiful caves.
She hopes that one day she can
travel to the place where her daddy
grew up and her grandma and grandpa
once lived. She has a cousin,
Benjamin, and she dreams of meeting
him sometime in the future.

Benjamin's eyes widen.

BENJAMIN

She want to meet me?

LAURIE

Yes, she does. And who knows? Maybe
some day, that might happen...

She closes her eyes and gives Benjamin a tight squeeze.