

A WORLD OF LONELY

An Original Screenplay

A WORLD OF LONELY

FADE IN:

BLACK SCREEN

Loud CHOPPING of a helicopter fills the air, coming from everywhere. ERIN KOPLEY talks through the chopping, which recedes.

ERIN (V.O.)

Imagine how I felt when my father showed me the photograph and said the young man who stared back was a son from his past, a time long before me, a brother who had died on a cold battlefield before I knew his name.

EXT. HOUSE NEAR A RIVER - DAY

In the mountains of southwest Virginia is a house near the New River. Rural. Serene.

INT. KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

On the dining room table across from a cabinet that separates the dining room from a kitchen sits an open box whose contents twenty-something Erin sorts through. She wears a surgical face mask and latex gloves. She wears her abundant brown hair in a bun. Bulky sweats are her style. Black.

Fifty-something APRIL KOPLEY, also in face mask and gloves, cooks in the kitchen. Her short blonde hair has too much color to be natural. A lifetime member of Weight Watchers, she wears new clothes because nothing ever fits. Erin helps her buy her clothes because she has no fashion sense. Today it's blue jeans with big bells and a butterscotch turtleneck. Sandstone Uggs too.

Erin examines a pair of military dog-tags.

ERIN

I don't see why did they send his crap here.

APRIL

Please don't talk like that.

ERIN
I'm serious.

APRIL
I guess he had no other address.

ERIN
This isn't his address. Never was.

Erin drops the dog-tags in the box and picks up a leather-bound Bible. Next to the Bible is a stack of four paperbacks by JOSHUA HOBBS. She drops the Bible in the box. She drops a bundle of pens and pencils into the box.

April drains off noodles. Steam rises from the sink.

APRIL
You have some real anger issues.

ERIN
Here's a title he must have stayed
up all night trying to create,
Naked.

She holds up a paperback and drops it in the box.

APRIL
Sounds like something I would read.

ERIN
No dairy, right?

April opens a jar of peanut butter and spoons it onto the noodles.

APRIL
Peanut butter. You said peanut
butter was all right.

ERIN
Peanut butter is fine. No dairy.
And those better not be egg
noodles.

APRIL
Wheat. No eggs. Check the package
if you want to dig through the
garbage.

Erin picks up a second paperback, glances at its title, Mercy, and drops the book in the box.

ERIN

Mercy. Bet he didn't even know what the word meant.

APRIL

If you can't eat dairy, how does a vegan diet supply calcium?

ERIN

Spinach.

She holds up a third paperback, Heartburn.

ERIN (CONT'D)

A real Neanderthal.

(deep voice)

Heartburn.

She grabs her stomach.

APRIL

You haven't eaten spinach in your entire life.

Erin drops Heartburn in the box.

ERIN

How did they get this address?

APRIL

I suppose it was another of your dad's secrets.

Erin waves the fourth paperback, Love.

ERIN

His masterpiece, perfect fiction, Love.

No sooner does she drop Love in the box than she throws the box at a wall.

ERIN (CONT'D)

How could he do this to us!

The helicopter's CHOPPING returns.

BLACK SCREEN

The helicopter's CHOPPING fades into the background as Erin talks.

ERIN (V.O.)

Why did he wait until life was perfect before forcing a photograph into my life? And what did he expect from an only child, or so I had been led to believe? Did he think I would fall in love with a young man in a photograph, or feel a family bond?

EXT. HOUSE NEAR A RIVER - DAY

Wearing surgical face-masks and latex gloves, Erin and April unload an SUV in the driveway next to the house. Across a highway and a field is the New River.

APRIL

Admit it, you're running away.

Watching them from the wood fence of the back yard is MACON, Erin's Great Dane, whose coloring is black and white harlequin. A horse.

ERIN

I like to think of myself as escaping.

At the SUV Erin struggles under a giant bag of dog food.

APRIL

Same thing.

ERIN

Don't cut any corners or switch brands when it comes to his food.

She lugs the food toward the garage.

APRIL

After almost three years of weekend duty, I think I know how to take care of him.

At the open back of the SUV, April ponders what to carry next.

ERIN (O.S.)

You mean three years of someone else taking care of him.

APRIL

There were times your Dad wasn't around.

Erin emerges from the garage.

ERIN

So I discovered.

APRIL

Your father was never unfaithful to me.

ERIN

He kept a secret from you. How do you know there weren't others?

APRIL

We've been through this. He had a life before our relationship.

ERIN

Which included a son. That's a pretty big life.

APRIL

I've moved on.

ERIN

As if it means nothing?

APRIL

As if I can't change it, and what I can't change, I won't let destroy me.

ERIN

Feed him twice a day, eight and six.

APRIL

At least I'm not trying to run away.

ERIN

Don't feed him table scraps.

APRIL

Only two doggie treats if he eats all his food.

ERIN
He'll only eat if you fix it the
right way.

APRIL
He'll eat if he gets hungry.

ERIN
You'd never do that to him, would
you?

APRIL
(mockingly)
Mix a can of wet food with a half
bowl of dry.

ERIN
And add a half cup of heated milk
with shredded cheddar cheese in it.

APRIL
That wasn't in your book of
instructions.

ERIN
Be creative.

APRIL
I won't treat a dog like royalty.

ERIN
Careful, he can hear you.

APRIL
He's a dog.

ERIN
My baby.

APRIL
A dog.

ERIN
Your grandson.

The helicopter's CHOPPING returns.

BLACK SCREEN

With the intensity of a throbbing migraine, the helicopter's
CHOPPING makes its presence felt. Then it fades to make room
for Erin's words.

ERIN (V.O.)
 Okay, I'm running away. I admit
 it. Because there is no
 reconciliation in sight. We were
 world's apart from the photograph
 on. The relationship that once was
 no longer exists. Not like it once
 did.

EXT. HOUSE NEAR A RIVER - DAY

In surgical face-masks and latex gloves, Erin and April
 continue to unload the SUV in the driveway.

Watching from the back yard fence is MACON.

Erin goes to the fence and scratches Macon's head.

ERIN
 You're going to miss your momma,
 aren't you?

April pulls out some hang-up clothes.

ERIN (CONT'D)
 If you even suspect he's sick,
 call the vet right away.

APRIL
 Animals are immune to the parasite.
 That's well known.

She carries the hang-ups to the garage.

ERIN
 What if he swallows something too
 big to digest?

APRIL (O.S.)
 He's not going to swallow anything
 that big.

Erin kisses Macon's nose.

ERIN
 He's always swallowing things. The
 vet says it can kill him if he
 swallows something too big.

April reappears.

APRIL

I wish you treated me that well.
Come on, let's get this done.

At the SUV, she opens the door of a small dorm refrigerator.
Mold city. She slams the door.

APRIL (CONT'D)

That's disgusting!

The helicopter's CHOPPING resumes.

INT. MILITARY HELICOPTER IN A RAIN STORM - DAY

Wearing a surgical mask, latex gloves and black sweats, Erin rides in a helicopter that has a lot of windows, baggage, a guitar case, a piano keyboard, and a box of personal effects belonging to Joshua Hobbs. Her face is pale; her eyes, closed. On the ceiling is a red cross in a white circle surrounded by military green. The windows show the helicopter in a rain storm. The cabin bounces in turbulence.

Watching her is the crew chief, ROB, in an aviator suit, helmet and surgical mask. He wears aviator gloves. He taps her.

She opens her eyes.

He removes a headset from a hook and hands it to her.

She slips it over her ears.

He shows her the TALK button.

ROB (V.O.)

How can you sleep in a storm like
this?

She pushes the TALK button.

ERIN (V.O.)

I wasn't sleeping.

ROB (V.O.)

Are you afraid of flying? Some
people close their eyes when they
are.

ERIN (V.O.)

Flying's fine. It's roller
coasters I hate.

The CHOPPING grows. The cabin tilts. Erin closes her eyes and holds onto the seat.

EXT. HOUSE NEAR A RIVER - DAY

April sets the refrigerator on the driveway, door open. She uncoils a garden hose. When she pulls the hose to Erin, she notices Erin staring at the river.

APRIL

You can't quit thinking about him, can you?

ERIN

I wasn't thinking about him.

Still staring at the river.

APRIL

I know you too well. He taught you to walk over there. Held you up by your hood.

Erin looks at her.

ERIN

I've seen the photograph. I don't remember the experience. Wow, I guess it's a good thing we keep photographs, right?

APRIL

You don't have to run away.

ERIN

I thought you'd be proud of me for volunteering at one of the quarantine camps.

APRIL

I would be if I wasn't so scared. Four months from now I'll be proud.

ERIN

Four months from now, I'll be rich.

She goes to the fence and kisses Macon's nose.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Yes, only four months. Your Momma would never abandon you, would she?

APRIL

If something were to happen to you--

Erin takes the hose April still holds and sprays the inside of the refrigerator.

ERIN

Quit worrying. I'm a highly trained professional.

APRIL

Who won't be working in any state-of-the-art hospital. They said the equipment and supplies out in the field are outdated.

Erin sprays mold down the driveway.

ERIN

Like the fresh fish at Caseys? Once it's outdated in the big city, they send it here. You never seem to mind.

APRIL

We're not talking fish. We're talking risk.

ERIN

And in return for the risks, I'll have fifty thousand dollars of education debt wiped off the books, receive a huge salary, which includes hardship and hazard duty pay.

Erin points the hose toward April's shoes, which she sprays, laughing hysterically as April runs to avoid the water.

The helicopter's CHOPPING returns.

INT. MILITARY HELICOPTER IN A RAIN STORM - DAY

The helicopter cabin levels out. Rob taps Erin.

ROB (V.O.)

You military?

She opens her eyes.

ERIN (V.O.)

I really don't feel like chit chat.

ROB (V.O.)
Come on, military or civilian?

ERIN (V.O.)
Am I in uniform?

ROB (V.O.)
You should have taken the
commission.

ERIN (V.O.)
I want to go home in four months.

ROB (V.O.)
I've been flying medical staff here
for six months, and we haven't
flown any four month contracts back
yet.

ERIN (V.O.)
The parasite kill them all?

ROB (V.O.)
No. Every once in a while I meet a
four-monther and ask what happened.
The answer's always the same. My
contract got extended.

ERIN (V.O.)
I assure you I won't be signing up
for an extended tour.

ROB
Signing up? It's called mandatory
extension.

She closes her eyes, a clear signal that she's done chit-
chatting.

ROB (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You bring this weather with you?

Her eyes remain closed, but her finger activates the
microphone.

ERIN
You're like a nightmare I can't
escape.

ROB (V.O.)
Captain says if it gets much worse
I have to start throwing your stuff
off.

Her eyes open. He has her full attention.

ERIN (V.O.)
Tell the captain he'll have to
throw me off too.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)
I heard that.

The crew chief slides open a door, letting in wind and rain. He laughs as she panics and tries to guard her luggage. The CHOPPING fades.

INT. ERIN'S SUV - NIGHT

Masked and gloved, Erin and April sit in Erin's SUV, which runs. April holds the steering wheel with both hands. The parking lights provide enough light to show that the SUV is parked near a stop sign at an intersection in a world where roads go nowhere.

Erin turns on the dome light and brings out a set of dog tags, which she begins to fool with. The back of the SUV, seats down, is nearly full with luggage and personal belongings.

APRIL
I thought you wanted no part of
him.

Erin unhooks the chain.

ERIN
I want to make sure I don't forget
what he did to our family.

She pulls off a tag and removes the plastic.

APRIL
When you hold a grudge, you hold it
forever, don't you?

Erin pulls off the second tag and removes its plastic holder.

ERIN
Hold it? I wear it.

She puts the metal tags back on the chain. They rattle as she slips the chain over her neck and stuffs the tags down her shirt.

Headlights approach. April turns on the SUV's headlights.

A military-green jeep stops near the SUV. A masked soldier gets out.

ERIN (CONT'D)
Help me with my things.

Erin opens her door. The helicopter's CHOPPING enters.

INT. MILITARY HELICOPTER IN A RAIN STORM - DAY

Rob has the helicopter's door open and wind and rain blows in. Erin frantically guards her luggage.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)
Stand down, Crew Chief.

Rob closes the door, laughing.

ERIN (V.O.)
A real comedian.

He points at her keyboard.

ROB (V.O.)
What kind of music you play?

ERIN (V.O.)
It's called none ya.

ROB (V.O.)
Come on, I was having fun.

ERIN (V.O.)
I wasn't amused.

ROB (V.O.)
I sing.

ERIN (V.O.)
Karaoke?

He laughs through his microphone so she can hear.

ROB (V.O.)
Ouch. As a matter of fact, I've even been in an off-Broadway performance.

ERIN (V.O.)
Now there's a nightmare. You on stage.

ROB (V.O.)
Are you this rude to everyone?

ERIN (V.O.)
Okay, I'll humor you. Yes, I play
and I'm good. Are you good?

ROB (V.O.)
I can hold my own.

ERIN (V.O.)
Then I'll make a deal with you.

ROB (V.O.)
Go for it.

ERIN (V.O.)
Shut your pie hole the rest of the
trip and the next time you fly to
my camp, look me up. I'll let you
rehearse for my new group.

He raises an open hand.

ROB (V.O.)
Who should I ask for?

ERIN (V.O.)
It's whom. Whom should I ask for?
Most people call me bitch, but you
can ask for Erin.

Her glove humors his glove.

INT. SINK

As a helicopter's CHOPPING passes overhead, hands scrub with soap. Following a thorough rinse, the hands dry themselves and don latex gloves.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - DAY

The large military green tent glows from the exterior sunlight. Here and there, a child writhes in a cot. Medical staff in surgery-green scrubs move among the sick children. Above it all is a huge red cross in a white circle.

Erin, masked and gloved, arrives with her entourage, gloved and masked military personnel who carry her luggage.

Masked and gloved, LORESSA blocks Erin's path. Fifty-ish, she wears scrubs and a lab coat. On the lab coat lapel is the silver leaf of a lieutenant colonel.

LORESSA

No more than seventy pounds of personal belongings.

Erin gives her a mock salute.

ERIN

Sorry, sir, but I'm civilian.

LORESSA

The seventy pound rule applies to everyone.

ERIN

Then turn your back. You won't see a thing.

Loressa points at the luggage.

LORESSA

Decide which seventy you want, or we'll decide for you.

ERIN

If anything goes, I go.

LORESSA

You're here to stay. You signed a contract.

To Erin's military escort.

LORESSA (CONT'D)

Get this crap out of here.

ERIN

I want to call my senator.

SAM, short for Samantha, passes. Also in her fifties, she wears a major's gold leaf.

SAM

When did we get a phone?

The military personnel carrying Erin's property attempt to get out the door. Erin steps in their way.

ERIN

I swear to God, I'll turn around
and leave this place.

LORESSA

And I will have you arrested.
You're on government property, and
for the next four months, you
belong to the United States
government. Now step outside and
decide what you want, then get back
in here and get dressed for duty.

Stunned, Erin follows her luggage out the door.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - DAY

Erin reappears at the tent entrance with one carry-on, a box containing Joshua Hobb's personal effects, her guitar and a keyboard. She passes Loressa without a word and heads for the section marked FEMALE STAFF'S PRIVATE QUARTERS.

INT. SINK - DAY

Hands lathered with soap scrub themselves under running water. Suds go down the drain.

INT. NURSES STATION - DAY

In mask, gloves and surgery greens, a stethoscope draped around her neck, Erin fills out paperwork at the nurses station. Helicopter CHOPPING comes and goes. The nurses station is simply furnished. Aside from a desk, there is a large clock that hangs from an IV pole. A rack holds patient charts. A supply cart is replete with towels, washcloths, bedding and bedpans. There is also a RED cart with the word CRASH painted in WHITE LETTERS on the side.

Masked and gloved, Loressa sits down. In her hand is a rolled-up booklet.

LORESSA

We got off on the wrong foot.

Erin stands.

ERIN

Excuse me, but I don't care to chit-
chat.

She walks away.

Loressa rises.

LORESSA
I'm not through talking.

Erin turns to her.

ERIN
What, are you going to discipline me for doing my job and not participating in small talk?

LORESSA
I'm about to disciple you for insubordination. I said I wasn't through with you.

ERIN
Why don't you do us both a favor and transfer me to another camp?

LORESSA
We will be cordial.

ERIN
Control my luggage, but don't ever expect my loyalty.

LORESSA
I see right now, you need an attitude adjustment.

ERIN
Good luck.

Loressa slaps the rolled up booklet in Erin's gloved hand.

LORESSA
Here's a copy of the rules and regulations.

It's Loressa's turn to walk away.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - NIGHT

Night charge-nurse DAWN CAMPHOUSE, forties, short and stocky, doesn't take crap from anyone. To prove it, she has assigned Erin to the "shit" detail. Meanwhile, she sits at the nurses desk and reads a magazine.

PAUL, forties, is Erin's assistant. Wheeling a large metal barrel that rides on a four-wheel cart complete with a table, upon which sits a clear-plastic pitcher, Erin moves from cot to cot. At each cot, she pulls a bedpan out from under the cot. She empties the patient's bedpan of diarrhea into the pitcher, records the amount, and empties the pitcher into the barrel. She hands the pitcher and pan to Paul.

Paul has his own cart, a mobile sink. He rinses the pitcher and hands it back to Erin. He rinses the bedpan. He slips the bedpan back under the patient's cot.

PAUL

What did you do to win this job for a month?

ERIN

Had a run-in with Loressa Cole.

Dawn looks up from the nurses' desk.

DAWN

Hold it down or you'll have the detail for the next four months.

ERIN

Emptying bedpans doesn't bother me.

DAWN

I said hold it down.

ERIN

I'd be happy to do it for four months.

DAWN

That's it, I'm writing you up. Paul, you have anything to say?

He doesn't.

Dawn starts to work on her new report.

PAUL

(whispers)

Why in the hell did you specifically ask for me? What did I do to you?

ERIN

I heard you play the guitar.

PAUL
Everybody knows you want to start a band. Why didn't you just ask me?

ERIN
I also heard you've been here longer than anyone else.

PAUL
So let me give you some advice. You don't want this job, and you don't want to mess with Loressa, A.K.A., Lieutenant Colonel Cole.

Erin empties a bedpan. Hands it to him.

ERIN
It's a little late for that.

PAUL
She's a decent person. Don't cross her, and she'll back off.

ERIN
Is it true what they say about no one going home?

PAUL
I don't know. I've been here longer than anyone and haven't seen anyone go.

He rinses the bedpan.

ERIN
How can they do that?

PAUL
It's a small clause in the President's declaration of a national emergency. Essential jobs have been extended indefinitely.

He slides the bedpan under a cot. She hands him an empty pitcher.

ERIN
Then my goal is to make myself unessential.

PAUL
I was afraid you were going to say that.

He rinses the pitcher and returns it to her.

As she empties another bedpan, diarrhea splatters on her.

INT. FEMALE STAFF'S PRIVATE QUARTERS - DAY

The military hospital tent glows from the sunlight that leans on it. Helicopter CHOPPING passes overhead. Each cot in the female quarters section of the tent, partitioned off from the hospital, has a footlocker and an aluminum wall locker, all military green. There are two doors in the female quarters. One, a green door that has a red cross in a white circle painted on it, leads to the hospital. The other door has the word LATRINE painted in big white letters.

Exhausted, Erin drops onto her cot. From a nearby plastic window, sunlight leans on the floor beside her cot. She stares at the patch of sunlight as she pulls her keyboard from beneath her cot.

Her gloved fingers tap out a simple tune, THE WORLD OF LONELY. She sings in a low voice.

ERIN

The sun leans in, what does it
mean, a carpet stain time will
clean--

The other night shift personnel sleep soundly.

From a pants' pocket, Erin brings out a pencil and crumpled paper. She jots words on the paper that already has a lot of marks on it.

A helicopter's CHOPPING approaches and grows loud.

Erin peels off her gloves, goes to her footlocker and produces a bottle of lotion. She uses the lotion to moisten her hands.

The helicopter's engine shuts down.

Erin taps out the keys for A WORLD OF LONELY. She looks up to see Rob, in mask and gloves.

ROB

Hey, I like that. Something you've
written?

ERIN

Something I'm working on.

He sits down next to her and holds up two fingers.

ROB
They gave me two hours off for good
behavior.

ERIN
Hard to imagine.

He picks up the sheet of paper and studies the words.

ROB
Depressing lyrics.

ERIN
It's how I feel.

She takes the paper from him and scribbles words and chords as she hums the CHORUS for A WORLD OF LONELY. She sings the words she has written, pecking out the notes on the keyboard.

ERIN (CONT'D)
Which makes me lonely, so very,
very lonely, very, very lonely,
very very lonely.

ROB
You need more words before your
chorus.

She jots more words.

A body stirs in one of the cots.

MUFFLED FEMALE VOICE
Hold it down.

ROB
(singing)
But here I sit--

She accompanies him on the keyboard.

ROB (CONT'D)
--no where to go, trapped in a
world, that shouldn't be so.

ERIN
Now the chorus.

Her hands take become more animated.

ROB

Which makes me lonely, so very,
very lonely, very, very lonely,
very very lonely.

She stops playing.

ERIN

You're pretty good--

ROB

A compliment from you?

ERIN

They made me send most of my things
back home.

ROB

I know, I flew it.

ERIN

Only to discover that tons of
people have more than seventy
pounds here.

ROB

But they didn't try to get it
through the door all at once.

ERIN

A mere technicality.

ROB

Which pissed off your chief nursing
officer.

ERIN

Among others.

ROB

Including one of the most talented
guitar players around.

ERIN

Guitarist.

ROB

Sure, get technical.

ERIN

Paul? Yeah, he hates me. I
volunteered him for diarrhea duty.

ROB
 He might overcome his hatred. I
 did. And did you know there's a
 drummer in camp?

ERIN
 John K.?

ROB
 Yeah, the one who works security.
 Security run by Loressa's
 significant other, Mark.

ERIN
 She's beginning to be like you, a
 nightmare I can't escape.

ROB
 And I'm beginning to hate you
 again. We going to play or not?

She plays THE WORLD OF LONELY. He sings.

ROB (CONT'D)
 The sun leans in, what does it
 mean, a carpet stain time will
 clean--

SERIES OF SHOTS

INSERT - JOHN K., THE DRUMMER

INSERT - PAUL, THE GUITARIST

THE WORLD OF LONELY is replaced by helicopter CHOPPING, which
 grows.

INT. SINK

Multiple hands hurriedly wash under running water. Fresh
 arrivals.

INT. NURSES STATION - DAY

Masked and gloved, Sam and Loressa work at a medicine
 cabinet. Each has a tray. On Loressa's tray are plastic
 pill cups all lined up with a small card under each cup.

She drops pills in the cups according to the written instructions on the cards.

SAM

The night shift's had it with her.

LORESSA

And I've had it with her.

SAM

You could pull some strings.

LORESSA

There's no where else to send her.

SAM

Dawn says she's tired of being nice.

Sam brings her own stack of small cards out and begins to position them on her own tray.

LORESSA

Nice? Are we talking about the same Dawn?

SAM

Dawn asked me to find out how many more times she has to write her up before you do something?

LORESSA

She'll break. Don't worry.

SAM

Who Dawn?

LORESSA

Our little princess.

SAM

Dawn says the next time Erin gets in her face, she's going to take her behind the tent and punch her out.

LORESSA

Dawn's just spouting off.

SAM

Dawn used to shoot and butcher hogs, if you will recall.

Sam places an empty plastic pill cup on each of her medication cards.

Loressa fills her last pill cup.

LORESSA
Tell Dawn to chill.

SAM
Okay, but one of us is going to end up doing something stupid because of our little princess, and we'll be the ones to get punished.

Sam begins to drop pills into her cups.

Tray in hand, Loressa walks away.

INT. FEMALE STAFF'S PRIVATE QUARTERS - DAY

Erin sleeps soundly in her cot in the Female Staff's Private Quarters as helicopters CHOP. Other night shift female personnel sleep in cots here and there.

Sam appears CLAPPING her hands.

SAM
Everybody up! We have a boatload of new patients. Loressa wants all nurses to report for duty.

Nurses around Erin get up and begin dressing.

Sam kicks Erin's cot. Erin's eyes open.

SAM (CONT'D)
Did you hear what I just said?

ERIN
You don't have to be so damned rude.

SAM
Get your ass out there and help with the incoming patients before I write you up.

Sam heads for the hospital ward.

Erin closes her eyes.

EXT. THE RIVER - DAY

In mask and gloves, NORM KOPLEY, fifties, follows Erin as she walks along the New River in southern Virginia. Along with a mask and gloves, Erin wears her black sweats again. The last traces of day make shadows.

ERIN

A lot of nerve you have showing back up. Does Mom know?

NORM

She's the one who called.

ERIN

Great.

NORM

We both want you to turn yourself in.

ERIN

I'm not going back. I've been written up for the last time.

NORM

They've issued a warrant for your arrest.

ERIN

I don't care.

NORM

Do you know what that means?

ERIN

What part of I don't care didn't you understand?

NORM

It means you'll end up with a criminal record, which means your nursing career is over. Besides, what about the children who are dying and you could be helping them?

He stoops to the river's bank.

ERIN

I only went there for the money.

NORM
You didn't care about the children?

ERIN
I could be like you. I could
pretend I care.

He rises and throws a flat rock at the surface of the river.
The rock skips.

NORM
I do care. I've always cared.

She motions toward the river.

ERIN
Show me how to do that.

He stoops to find another flat rock. He hands it to her.

NORM
Hold it on its side so the flat
surface is parallel to the water,
then throw it sideways.

She throws her rock. It hits the water and goes nowhere.

ERIN
Cared? By leading me to believe I
was your only child, and then
confessing that in a former life
you had a son?

Helicopter CHOPPING fills the air.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - DAY

The tent is chaotic with new patients. Among them is seven-year-old BOY-X, who clings to a picture book as Loressa and other medical personnel lower him into one of the cots. Sam reads from his wrist bracelet.

SAM
How many Boy-X-s are there in the
world?

LORESSA
(to the boy)
What's your name, sweetheart?

Boy-X doesn't answer.

She tries to take the book so she can attach a blood pressure cuff to his left arm, but he jerks the book back.

LORESSA (CONT'D)
Okay, we'll work around it.

She attaches the blood pressure cuff and begins to inflate it.

LORESSA (CONT'D)
He's warm.

With her stethoscope she listens to his heartbeat at the crook of his elbow as she releases the air in the cuff.

LORESSA (CONT'D)
Looks like a good book.

She writes the blood pressure on a scrap of paper.

Sam takes Boy-X's temperature using an ear thermometer. She shows Loressa the number. Loressa stoops to look him in the eyes.

LORESSA (CONT'D)
I've got a name. How about Xavier?

He remains quiet.

LORESSA (CONT'D)
Xavier it is.

She pats his shoulder.

INT. SINK - DAY

Loressa scrubs her hands under running water.

LORESSA
The nerve of her not to show.

MARK, chief of tent-city security, sits on an exam stool near her. He's stocky and about the same age as Loressa. He doesn't wear a mask or gloves.

MARK
How much difference would one nurse have made?

LORESSA
It's the principle.

MARK

When I was sick, I had a whole tent of nurses and couldn't get an ounce of decent care.

LORESSA

I said I wanted all nurses to report to duty.

MARK

My nurses kept saying the same thing, Elevate his feet above his head. He'll be fine.

She splashes water on him.

LORESSA

I'm trying to be serious.

MARK

John K. says she's fine once you get to know her.

LORESSA

John K.'s got a snare drum for a brain. And that's another thing, you've got to tell them to find somewhere else to practice.

MARK

I think the music is good for them.

LORESSA

It's getting so loud none of my night personnel can sleep.

MARK

We could use a little music around this place.

She holds her dripping hands up.

LORESSA

Music? They're not even in tune. Have you heard them? Throw me a towel.

He leans forward and takes a towel from a stack. He tosses the towel to her. She dries her hands.

MARK

They'll get better with practice. The two of us did.

LORESSA

God, your analogies are killing me. Talking to you is like talking to her. She pisses me off every time I try. I just want to punch her.

MARK

John K. says--

LORESSA

I don't want to hear another word about John K. unless you want to tell me how much all those drums of his really weigh.

MARK

He said forty pounds.

LORESSA

You can't be serious. The foot pedal he keeps stomping is forty pounds itself.

She tosses the used towel at him. He catches it.

MARK

What do you have against her?

She dons new gloves.

LORESSA

Nothing. She's the same bitch I once.

He raises his hands in mock surrender.

MARK

I can't go there.

Her masked lips touch the side of his face as his hands remain raised. She leaves the wash station.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT, FEMALE QUARTERS - DAY

Loressa finds Erin asleep. She kicks the cot.

LORESSA

Rise and shine.

Erin opens her eyes.

ERIN

Is my cot in the middle of the floor or what?

LORESSA

Did you get the message that I ordered all nurses for duty?

ERIN

Because I wonder why people's feet keep running into it.

LORESSA

And I'm wondering why you didn't report for duty.

ERIN

If it's going to be an ongoing problem, I want a change of cot assignments. You can do that, can't you--change my cot assignment?

LORESSA

I'm sure you think you're funny.

ERIN

I'm serious. Get me off main street.

LORESSA

All I want to know is why you didn't report for duty.

ERIN

I worked twelve hours last night. I didn't want to make a medical mistake by working when I was exhausted.

LORESSA

Exhausted? Children are out there dying.

She points toward the hospital.

Erin sits up. Her hair is a mess.

ERIN

I meant to ask about my most recent pay stub. It didn't reflect my hazard duty allowance. Now that I do care about.

LORESSA

And I'm ordering you to report for duty right now.

ERIN

What about my pay?

LORESSA

You can start with a new patient, seven-year-old Boy X, whom I've named Xavier.

Loressa walks away.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - DAY

Freshly showered, masked, gloved and with a stethoscope draped around her neck, Erin enters the patient section of the tent.

Xavier's cot is alive with activity.

LORESSA

What's his temp now?

Near Loressa is a pan of ice water. She slops ice water onto Xavier.

Sam checks his temperature again, using an ear thermometer.

SAM

One-oh-six.

LORESSA

More ice.

Other nurses help slop ice water onto Xavier, who seems unresponsive.

Erin approaches the cot.

LORESSA (CONT'D)

Where have you been?

ERIN

Getting showered and dressed.

Dawn the night supervisor pushes Erin aside. She carries towels.

DAWN

No one cares whether you smell good
when your patient's dying.

She drops the stack of towels on the foot of the cot.

LORESSA

(to Dawn)

Inappropriate.

DAWN

But true.

LORESSA

Not in front of the patient.

ERIN

I had to get ready.

Loressa gets in Erin's face and throws up her gloved hands.

LORESSA

I told you to get out here twenty
minutes ago!

ERIN

Okay, I'm here.

LORESSA

Go to the mess hall and get more
ice! Do something!

Sam checks Xavier's temperature using an ear thermometer.

Erin leaves the tent.

Helicopters CHOP over the tent. The CHOPPING fades.

INT. SINK - CONTINUOUS

Erin washes her hands.

INT. MESS HALL TENT - CONTINUOUS

The mess hall is the same size as the hospital tent, only
this tent has tables and chairs in it and a serving line that
is shut down at the moment. Masked and gloved, Erin heads
for the door, lugging a bucket of ice.

Loressa bursts through the door. She peels off her plastic
gloves and throws them on the floor, followed by her mask.

LORESSA
I've had it with you!

ERIN
I've got the ice.

She tries to raise the heavy bucket.

LORESSA
You've brought nothing but
headaches and problems since you
showed up.

ERIN
I've resigned myself to realizing I
can't please you.

LORESSA
You took so damned long we don't
need the ice!

Erin lowers the bucket to the floor.

ERIN
He died?

LORESSA
As if you care? The one who
doesn't give a damn about anyone or
anything but herself!

ERIN
I was doing what you told me.

LORESSA
Were you crawling?

ERIN
Try running with that.

She points at the bucket.

LORESSA
I sent you for ice, for God's sake.
Ten minutes ago!

ERIN
No one ever sent me for ice before.

LORESSA
Did you stop to eat a snack while
you were here!

Loressa leans over to pick up her gloves and mask.

ERIN

I'm sorry.

Loressa falters at the completely unexpected.

LORESSA

About what, losing your license?
Endangering your source of income?

Erin returns to the ice machine and dumps the ice.

Loressa watches her.

Erin's back remains to Loressa.

ERIN

I do have a heart, you know.

A gloved hand rises to Erin's eyes, but it's impossible to tell whether she's crying.

LORESSA

That's right, you do care. I
forgot you cared about your missing
hazard duty pay.

ERIN

Is there anything else you want to
cut me down about?

Loressa turns to the door. Their backs are to each other.

LORESSA

You're still on duty.

Loressa leaves without another word.

INT. SINK - CONTINUOUS

Erin washes her hands.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - CONTINUOUS

Erin enters the hospital tent. Right away her eyes find Xavier's cot. He's still there, only his eyes are open. He stares at the tent's ceiling. Erin looks at the nurses desk, where Lorraine stands, staring back with a "What now?" expression.

Erin goes straight to the nursing desk.

ERIN
That was hateful.

LORESSA
I thought you had a heart.

ERIN
As hateful as anything anyone's
ever done.

LORESSA
If you had a heart, the only thing
you should be concerned about is
that he's still alive.

Erin picks up Xavier's medical chart from a chart rack and
begins to turn pages.

ERIN
You led me to believe he had died.

LORESSA
Because I said we didn't need the
ice any longer?

Erin stops to study a page.

ERIN
I specifically asked if he was
dead.

LORESSA
And I specifically didn't answer.

Erin keeps you eyes on the chart.

ERIN
Is this another of your games?

LORESSA
It is no game. You got a temporary
reprieve.

ERIN
Speak English.

LORESSA
Temporary. He's not dead yet.

ERIN
That's right he looks fine to me.

She looks at his medical information.

LORESSA

That's right, come back when he dies and search the chart for answers.

Erin looks in the direction of Xavier, who's very much alive.

ERIN

You want to stop with the riddles?

LORESSA

I thought you knew everything.

Erin returns her attention to the chart.

ERIN

He's infected with the Anamian parasite. He's receiving the appropriate treatments and nursing care.

LORESSA

Won't make a difference.

Erin puts the medical chart back in the rack.

ERIN

What do you propose, that I sit with him around-the-clock?

She heads for Xavier's cot.

LORESSA

Look at his eyes.

Erin looks at Xavier, who stares at the tent ceiling. She glances back.

ERIN

So?

LORESSA

It's called failure to thrive. They teach you that in nursing school?

ERIN

I've heard of it.

LORESSA

Ever seen it?

If Erin has seen it, she doesn't say.

LORESSA (CONT'D)
We see it quite a bit. That's why
Dawn said what she said. She could
see it.

Erin continues to Xavier's cot.

Next to Xavier is his picture book, The Magic Balloon.

Erin touches Xavier's forehead with an open palm. His eyes
look at her.

ERIN
You're going to be fine.

His numb eyes move back to the ceiling.

ERIN (CONT'D)
What, you don't believe me?

She looks at Loressa, who watches for a moment, then walks
away.

ERIN (CONT'D)
You can count on it. I'm one of
the few people around here who
tells the truth.

She holds his wrist to take his pulse with her fingertips.
Her eyes fix on the clock at the nurses desk. The sweep hand
moves slowly.

ERIN (CONT'D)
I'm going to make sure beat this.

She releases his wrist and writes the pulse on a slip of
paper she produces from her pocket.

ERIN (CONT'D)
And then you'll go home.

She takes his temperature with an ear thermometer. She
writes the number on her paper.

ERIN (CONT'D)
No fever, good pulse--

She takes his blood pressure, using her stethoscope to listen
to the pulse in the crook of his elbow.

ERIN (CONT'D)
Where are you from anyway?

She takes off the blood pressure cuff, drapes her stethoscope around her neck again and writes numbers on her paper.

ERIN (CONT'D)
Good blood pressure, too. Nothing wrong with you.

Instinctively she reaches for The Magic Balloon. He moves the book beyond her reach.

ERIN (CONT'D)
That's fine. I hate picture books.

He opens the book and holds it close to his face.

ERIN (CONT'D)
When you're little, they call them story books. When you get older they call them photo albums.

She sits on his cot. He tries to move away.

ERIN (CONT'D)
You'll outgrow it.

He holds the book between them.

ERIN (CONT'D)
Fine, don't talk.

She begins to write words on her scrap paper.

ERIN (CONT'D)
I don't care if you don't talk.

She hums THE WORLD OF LONELY.

ERIN (CONT'D)
(singing)
I wish they'd speak--

She stands and walks away.

He lowers the book to watch. She doesn't look back.

INT. FEMALE STAFF'S PRIVATE QUARTERS - DAY

Erin sits on her cot in the partitioned off Female Staff's Private Quarters.

She stares at the retreating sunlight in the window near the cot. From the distance come helicopter CHOPPING.

Erin brings out her keyboard. Her gloved fingers tap out notes to THE WORLD OF LONELY. The keyboard's volume is low.

ERIN
I wish they'd speak, those specks
of dust--

From her pocket, she produces her pen and crumpled paper. The paper includes notes from her patients. She adds new words to her song.

ERIN (CONT'D)
--that hang in light a yellow rust.

SERIES OF SHOTS

INSERT - ROB

Rob sings as Erin plays.

ROB
You've been here too--

She stops playing.

ROB (CONT'D)
What's wrong? I like it.

ERIN
I don't think I can do this.

ROB
I like it. It's a good song.

ERIN
I'm talking the assignment.

ROB
You don't have a choice.

ERIN
I'm serious.

ROB
Others have made it. You will.

ERIN
It's closing in.

She randomly touches keys on her keyboard.

ROB
Play.

She begins playing again.

ROB (CONT'D)
--have breathed the air--

INSERT - PAUL, THE GUITARIST

Paul, the guitarist, accompanies Erin and Rob.

ROB
--have felt the cloud--

INSERT - JOHN K., THE DRUMMER

John K., Erin, and Paul play together as Rob sings.

ROB
--of quiet despair--

Erin stops playing. She looks at John K.

ERIN
What's the saddest thing that's
ever happened in your life?

He TAPS on the snare as he considers her question. He stops tapping.

JOHN K.
I had a girlfriend who once cheated
on me.

ERIN
I'm sorry.

He shrugs.

ERIN (CONT'D)
I want you to play like that. Play
the drums like this is the saddest
day in your life.

She plays some keys. A slow, emotional sound. John K. joins in. The percussion is perfect. Then he stops.

JOHN K.

You might as well know this. I don't know how much longer I can keep practicing with you guys.

ERIN

What happened?

JOHN K.

It's like Mark is hinting around that he doesn't think it's a good idea.

PAUL

(to Erin)

I told you not to get on her bad side.

She slams her hands down on the keyboard.

INSERT - PHOTOGRAPH OF NORM KOPLEY

Pecking keys slowly, Erin sings in a low voice as she stares at a photograph of her father, Norm Kopley.

ERIN

Tell me you weren't lonely, never once was lonely, while I sit here lonely, very, very, lonely.

THE WORLD OF LONELY is replaced by the CHOPPING of helicopters, which grows.

INT. SINK - DAY

Empty of enthusiasm, Erin washes her hands.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - CONTINUOUS

Erin steps into the patient section of the military hospital tent. She watches Xavier stare at his open picture book. Next to him is an IV pole with an upside down clear bag hanging from it. A plastic line goes from the bag to Xavier's hand.

Erin goes to the nurses desk, takes Xavier's medical chart from the chart rack and turns pages.

Sam approaches. She picks up another chart and begins to write notes in it.

SAM

Three days and he hasn't eaten.

ERIN

I call that progress.

SAM

I call it, He's not going to make it.

ERIN

He hasn't had diarrhea in two days.

SAM

And it isn't the parasite or its diarrhea that's going to kill him.

Sam closes her medical chart, puts it in the rack and walks away.

Erin heads for Xavier's cot.

At his cot, she takes his temperature, using an ear thermometer. She sniffs. Pulls back his blankets to show a cot full of diarrhea.

ERIN

Why didn't you say something?

She puts away the thermometer.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Not talking is one thing. Crapping on purpose is another.

She pulls the bedpan from under the cot.

ERIN (CONT'D)

You know what this is? It's called a bedpan.

She puts the bedpan on the floor and begins to strip his cot.

ERIN (CONT'D)

There's not a reason in the world you couldn't have used the bedpan.

She kicks the bedpan.

ERIN (CONT'D)

You did it on purpose, didn't you?

He raises his picture book, opens it and begins to turn pages. She jerks the book from his hands before he can stop her.

ERIN (CONT'D)
Enough with your games.

He tries to get the book, but she keeps it away from him as he begins to cry.

ERIN (CONT'D)
Well two people can play your games.

She jerks the blanket off the bed and drops it on the floor, all the while holding the book away from him.

ERIN (CONT'D)
Talk! Say something!

She tugs on his soiled sheet.

He tears out his IV and tries to get out of the cot to get the book.

Loressa grabs the book from her hand.

LORESSA
What are you doing?

ERIN
Changing his bed and you're interfering!

LORESSA
You're relieved.

ERIN
I'm doing my job!

Sam approaches to help. She tries to hold Xavier, who fights frantically.

Dawn appears from the medical personnel quarters.

LORESSA
(to Dawn)
Call security.

Erin tugs on the soiled sheet.

Dawn leaves the tent.

LORESSA (CONT'D)
(to Erin)
Go to your quarters immediately.

ERIN
I'm on duty.

LORESSA
You're relieved of duty.

Loressa returns the book to Xavier, who calms instantly.
Meanwhile Loressa uses her body to keep Erin at a distance.

Mark appears, following Dawn. Three military police
accompany him.

LORESSA (CONT'D)
Arrest her for assault.

ERIN
I didn't assault anyone!

MARK
(to Erin)
You're under arrest.

Before Erin can say anything else, the military police
restrain her and put handcuffs on her as she fights wildly.

The police carry Erin from the tent.

Mark stays behind, searching a shaken Loressa's face for
answers.

MARK (CONT'D)
What was that about?

Everyone's watching.

LORESSA
Let's step outside.

They head for the door.

INT. SINK - CONTINUOUS

Without her mask, Loressa scrubs her hands furiously. Mark
stands nearby, waiting.

LORESSA
She went psycho.

MARK

She hit him?

LORESSA

Tore the book right out of his hands.

MARK

Did she make direct physical contact with him?

LORESSA

She was pulling on his sheets. I got between them.

MARK

Did she hit you?

LORESSA

It wasn't me she was after.

MARK

Did she make direct physical contact with you?

She throws water into the air.

LORESSA

Why all these questions!

MARK

This is a serious allegation.

She goes back to washing her hands.

LORESSA

What happens now?

MARK

If you were hoping to get rid of her, I guess this will do it.

She shakes off her hands.

LORESSA

I didn't ask you that, I asked you, what's going to happen?

MARK

If she so much as brushed up against you as you were trying to keep her away from that boy, it's called assault--

LORESSA
--which means--

MARK
--a felony.

LORESSA
Felony?

MARK
She's going to jail.

Loressa calms. She returns her hands back to the water.

LORESSA
She didn't hit me.

MARK
But she did make physical contact.

LORESSA
Give me a towel for God's sake!

He hands her a stack of towels.

MARK
That takes matters out of my.

She uses the towels all at the same time, letting them drop on the floor randomly.

INT. TENT CITY SECURITY TENT - NIGHT

Erin sits on a cot in a portable cage within the tent. She doesn't wear a mask or gloves. All around her are wads of toilet tissue. On the cot is a near-empty roll.

A cot and a portable toilet are the only furnishings of the barred cage that has been rigged with side blankets to give her privacy. Ironically there's a camera posted above the bars.

Norm kneels at the front of the cage. He wears a mask and gloves. Inside the locked cage door a metal tray containing food sits on the floor. With it is a metal cup of milk. An oversized spoon is the only eating utensil. The food hasn't been touched.

ERIN
I told them I didn't want any visitors.

NORM

I came as soon as I heard.

ERIN

By visitors that means you too.

NORM

This is nothing to play around with. You're in serious trouble.

ERIN

I don't need your help.

He points at the food tray.

NORM

They said you haven't been eating or drinking.

ERIN

Which is none of your business.

NORM

I'm your father.

She blows out air of dismissal.

ERIN

How many other children you got out there that you want to call you father?

NORM

What do you think you're accomplishing by this?

ERIN

I'm going to get sick and die, that's what I'm accomplishing.

She unrolls some toilet paper and blows her nose. She wads the soiled tissue and drops it on the floor with the other wads.

NORM

And what will that accomplish?

He stands to stretch his legs.

ERIN

Put me out of my misery.

He kneels again. He reaches through the bars and picks up a donut from her food tray. He bites into it.

NORM

Since I'm the great imposter, I might as well make them think you're eating.

ERIN

I told you I don't want your help.

He drops what's left back on the tray.

NORM

The first thing we need to do is get you a good attorney.

ERIN

I'm pleading guilty.

He raises his hands to their surroundings.

NORM

Is this where you want to end up?

ERIN

Looks like it's a little late for that question isn't it? Now leave!

She throws her cup of milk on him and rattles the bars by running the metal cup across them. No one appears as milk drips from Norm, who remains kneeling in front of her cage.

INT. TENT CITY SECURITY TENT - DAY

In a starched uniform, Mark sticks a billy club through the bars and taps on Erin's feet. She sits up and shields her eyes from the light.

ERIN

Why didn't you come when I was screaming earlier?

MARK

You ever been diving in the ocean?

ERIN

You can't just keep me locked up on here.

MARK

You know what you don't have when you're deep under water?

ERIN

I have a right to a telephone call.

MARK

You don't have sound.

Erin lies back down.

ERIN

Fine, put me on the bottom of the ocean.

MARK

You think by not eating and drinking, you're accomplishing anything?

She drapes an arm over her eyes.

ERIN

I have nothing more to say.

MARK

When I first arrived here, someone got drunk and I locked him up.

ERIN

Good for you.

MARK

He hung himself.

ERIN

Don't blame him. You issue rope?

MARK

We could probably settle all this if you would apologize.

ERIN

Forget it. I didn't do anything wrong.

MARK

The night shift said you've been having diarrhea.

She glances at the camera.

ERIN
I'm glad I'm entertaining everyone.

MARK
They took a stool sample. You have
the parasite.

ERIN
At least you care enough to have
taken a sample.

MARK
Sure I care. You wouldn't believe
the mountain of paperwork I had to
fill out for the drunk who hung
himself. I'd rather not do all
that.

ERIN
At least you're honest.

MARK
But I'll do it.

ERIN
Go for it.

MARK
I'll fill out every last form,
which will end up in a soundless
file somewhere.

He walks away.

INT. SINK - DAY

Loressa scrubs her hands while Mark sits on a stool.

MARK
She's going to be in the hospital
soon.

LORESSA
I know.

MARK
I can't keep her locked up.

LORESSA
I know!

MARK

You're not going to break her.

LORESSA

I said, I know!

She pumps more soap onto her hands.

MARK

But I do need a formal charge.

Loressa washes the fresh soap off. She stares at it as it goes down the drain.

EXT. THE RIVER - DAY

Erin walks along the New River in southern Virginia. Absent is any SOUND. Norm walks with her. His lips say he is talking.

Her lips form a VOICELESS "WHAT?"

He brings out a photograph of JOSHUA HOBBS and holds it up to her face.

She grabs the photograph and shreds it, letting the shreds fall as she makes them.

He stoops and begins to pick up the shreds. He looks up. His lips say he is talking again. He has tears in his eyes.

She stoops to him and her lips form a desperate but VOICELESS "WHAT?"

She glances in the direction of house where she grew up. Running across the field is Macon, though he suddenly jerks to a stop, as if on an invisible leash. His lips puffing out again and again show that he is barking, but the barks are SOUNDLESS.

She tries to get to him, but Norm holds her back. She fights to break loose.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - DAY

Sunlight makes the red cross glow in the ceiling of the hospital tent.

There is commotion around a cot. Loressa, Sam and Dawn give a delirious Erin an ice bath as she writhes in the cot.

Nearby, in another cot, Xavier watches, his book held before him as if he's reading.

LORESSA
Temperature?

Sam uses an ear thermometer to take Erin's temperature. Sam shows Loressa the thermometer.

LORESSA (CONT'D)
More ice.

Dawn leaves carrying the ice bucket.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - NIGHT

Erin sleeps soundly as Loressa and Dawn work the "shit" detail. Xavier still watches from his raised book.

Loressa pushes the four-wheel cart to the next cot. She pulls a bedpan out from under the cot. She and Dawn talk in low voices.

DAWN
I don't have an ounce of sympathy
toward her.

Loressa empties the bedpan of diarrhea into a clear-plastic pitcher.

LORESSA
Maybe I'm the one responsible.
That whole seventy pound rule is a
bullshit rule anyway.

She hands the bedpan to Dawn.

DAWN
If it wouldn't have been that, it
would have been something else.

Loressa records the amount of diarrhea in the pitcher as Dawn rinses the pan in her portable sink.

LORESSA
It was a power thing.

Dawn slips the bedpan back under the cot.

DAWN
Exactly.

Loressa rinses her pitcher at Dawn's sink.

LORESSA

A pure power struggle.

They roll their carts to the next cot.

DAWN

I think she was sick when she got here.

Loressa pulls a bedpan from under a cot.

LORESSA

Will that be your official statement when they have the inquiry?

She empties the new bedpan into her pitcher.

DAWN

You're damned right.

Loressa hands her the bedpan, which Dawn rinses.

LORESSA

And we both know it's not true.

Loressa records the amount of diarrhea in the pitcher. She empties the pitcher into the barrel, after which she rinses the pitcher at Dawn's sink.

DAWN

What I do know is that neither you nor anyone else did anything wrong.

Loressa waits for Dawn to finish with the pan.

Dawn puts the pan back under the cot.

DAWN (CONT'D)

And the worst part is if by some miracle she survives, she's going to wake up and be the same old arrogant, obnoxious self.

LORESSA

That's why I need to send her home.

DAWN

Don't do it.

LORESSA

But like you said, if she comes out of this, she's going to be the same person she always was.

DAWN

If you send her home, you're going to cause a mutiny.

They roll their carts to the next cot.

A helicopter's CHOPPING rises from the distance.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - DAY

Erin sits on the side of her cot, spooning in clear-liquid broth. She doesn't wear gloves or a mask. Next to her is a pile of cracker wrappings and a stack of two-packs. She stops now and then to record words on paper. She mumbles as she writes.

ERIN

This much I know, the light moves on, but the pain inside is never gone--

In gloves and mask, Loressa approaches and sits down on a cot opposite Erin.

Erin continues to spoon in broth, ignoring her.

LORESSA

You might want to go easy on that until you're sure it's going to stay in place.

Erin tears open a two-pack and devours the crackers.

ERIN

Is that an order? And if I violate it, do you throw me back in jail?

LORESSA

You were out of line.

Erin drinks the remaining broth, holding the bowl to her mouth.

ERIN

Thanks for saving my life and throwing me back in hell.

LORESSA

I've put in a request to send you home.

Erin opens another two-back and swallows one cracker in two bites.

ERIN

How about some Sprite or something?

A hard expression covered partially by her mask, Loressa gets up and walks away.

Erin catches Xavier watching her.

ERIN (CONT'D)

What are you looking at?

Xavier's eyes return to his raised book. He moves the book so she can't see his face.

ERIN (CONT'D)

I know you're smiling behind there.

He rolls on his side so his back is to her.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Don't worry. I'll have nothing to do with you from now on.

He looks back, though his book still remains propped up.

ERIN (CONT'D)

That's right, even if they told me to take care of you, I'd refuse. Violate a direct order.

His eyes return to his book.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Because I won't play your games.

She picks up her pencil and begins to record more words, mumbling them as she writes.

ERIN (CONT'D)

--my cold dark world, which closes in, whispers for my next of kin--

She pauses long enough to eat the second cracker.

ERIN (CONT'D)
I am so lonely, sick to death so
lonely, so very, very lonely, very,
very lonely--

She suddenly stands. She looks this way and that, as if trying to decide where to go. Diarrhea runs down her leg, forming a puddle even as she tries to get her bedpan. She tries to cover herself with a blanket as Loressa approaches, carrying a sprite and glass of ice.

Loressa sees the puddle.

ERIN (CONT'D)
Go away!

Tears fills Erin's eyes.

Loressa hurries to the supply cart at the nurse's station. She grabs towels.

More brown watery fluid plops on the floor at Erin's feet. She can't control herself.

Towels in hand, Loressa helps Erin back into the cot. Then she begins to clean up the mess on the floor.

Erin trembles. She gropes for blankets.

Loressa leaves the floor long enough to lay Erin back and cover her with a blanket.

Loressa hurries to the supply cart and gets two more blankets.

At Erin's cart, Loressa shakes out a blanket and covers Erin with it. Loressa shakes another blanket and covers Erin.

Loressa resumes work on cleaning up the diarrhea.

Helicopter CHOPPING fills the air.

INT. MILITARY HELICOPTER IN A RAIN STORM - DAY

Wearing a surgical mask, latex gloves and black sweats, Erin rides in a helicopter that has a lot of windows, one bag, a guitar case, a piano keyboard, and a box of personal effects belonging to Joshua Hobbs. On the ceiling is a red cross in a white circle surrounded by military green.

Watching her is the crew chief, Rob, in an aviator suit, helmet and surgical mask. He wears aviator gloves.

The windows show the helicopter in a storm. The cabin bounces in turbulence.

He removes a headset from a hook and hands it to her. She slips it over her ears.

ROB (V.O.)
You dog.

ERIN (V.O.)
(smiles)
Didn't I tell you I wouldn't do more than four months?

ROB (V.O.)
Are you suggesting I get sick and almost die?

ERIN (V.O.)
Hey, it worked.

ROB (V.O.)
Bring it on.

He stretches out an open palm.

She slaps it. She looks out at the storm. A horn plays A WORLD OF LONELY.

ROB (V.O. (CONT'D))
What are you going to do when you get home?

ERIN (V.O.)
Take some time and live off the big bucks I earned.

ROB (V.O.)
I heard they paid out your whole contract.

ERIN (V.O.)
They didn't want the grief I was going to cause for false arrest among other things.

ROB (V.O.)
Where is home? I never did ask.

ERIN (V.O.)
I'll be staying with my mother for a while. She lives on the New River where I grew up.

ROB (V.O.)
And your father?

ERIN (V.O.)
He abandoned us.

ROB (V.O.)
My parents are divorced, but I
still see them both.

ERIN (V.O.)
My father comes around now and
then, but I always let him know I
don't need him.

ROB (V.O.)
Must have been a serious breakup.

The windows darken. Flashes of lightning erupt here and there. The helicopter bounces roughly. She holds on.

ERIN (V.O.)
He dropped a bombshell on us. Told
my mom I wasn't his only child.

ROB (V.O.)
That's cold-blooded.

ERIN (V.O.)
Yeah, I had a brother and didn't
even know it.

ROB (V.O.)
Had?

ERIN (V.O.)
He was killed during a Middle East
peacekeeping mission.

ROB (V.O.)
Sorry.

ERIN (V.O.)
I never knew him.

ROB (V.O.)
Yeah, but still that's heavy duty.

ERIN (V.O.)
Not really, all he left behind is a
photograph and this box of his
personal effects.

She taps the box near her.

ROB (V.O.)
How did you end up with that?

ERIN (V.O.)
My father arranged it.

ROB (V.O.)
Your brother didn't have any other relatives?

ERIN (V.O.)
Don't bring me down. I'm going home.

CAPTAIN (V.O.)
You'll be happy to know we're over the New River now. Ten miles out.

The helicopter bounces. Rob laughs so she can hear.

ROB (V.O.)
Remember when we were taking you to camp and I opened the door to throw your things out--

He slides open the door, letting in rain and wind, and grabs the box of personal effects.

CAPTAIN (V.O.)
Stand down, Crew Chief.

She jumps up, screaming, and reaches for the box.

The helicopter shifts and she flies out the door and into the night.

BLACK SCREEN.

The helicopter's CHOPPING grows excruciatingly loud. WIND joins it, WHISTLING.

Then the CHOPPING fades.

The only sound is clothes FLAPPING in the WIND.

A huge SPLASH joins a human GASP. GURGLING, followed by a RUSHING OUT of water.

INT. THE BOWELS OF A HUGE FISH - NIGHT

WATER DRIPS as a faint BLUISH light reveals Erin's cavern like surroundings. She sets the box of personal effects down. The cavern sways ever so gently.

The walls of the cavern are decorated with small shiny objects. She draws near one and examines it closely. A FISHING LURE.

Norm steps out of the shadows, carrying a tackle box.

NORM

I guess I wasn't the only one to
lose a few lures in this river.

He extracts a lure from the cavern wall. He opens his tackle box and drops the lure in it.

ERIN

I'm dreaming.

NORM

How would you like to be this fish?

He pulls another lure loose from the wall. He drops the lure in the box.

He reaches for another lure, but a hand stops his hand. From the shadows steps STAN, a big man who wears a fishing hat with lures hanging from it, and a fishing vest with lures hanging from it.

STAN

The whole joy of catching a fish
like this is seeing all the lures.

Erin moves back in disbelief.

ERIN

Who is he, Daddy?

NORM

Someone who hunts and fishes
without a license.

STAN

I have plenty of license. Who's
going to stop me?

NORM

And he does it not for food or sport, but to maim and kill.

Norm pulls another lure out of the cavern wall.

STAN

You're the one who's maiming and killing. It's killing me to watch you maim my trophy by pulling all the metals off.

Norm drops the lure in the tackle box.

ERIN

What's going on?

STAN

Yes, I'd like to hear you explain.

NORM

(to Erin)

Do you love me?

She sits down.

Stan laughs. His laughter echoes.

STAN

Here we go again.

ERIN

(to Norm)

You want to know how I really feel about you?

STAN

Tell her another of your lies by saying yes, Norm.

Erin keeps her eyes on Norm.

ERIN

(to her father)

I have a bunch of your lures in me.

Again Stan laughs.

STAN

Wow, that's good.

ERIN

They hurt.

STAN

I hear you.

From the cavern wall near her, she gently removes one of the lures and tries to drop it in the tackle box. Stan takes hold of her hand.

Norm pries Stan's fingers loose.

Erin drops the lure in the tackle box.

She jumps up.

ERIN

I refuse to believe this!

The cavern shifts and she has to hold the wall to keep from losing her balance.

Norm takes another lure from the wall of the cavern and drops it in the box. Stan steps in his way.

STAN

Enough.

Erin gets in Stan's face.

ERIN

You don't talk to my father that way!

Stan GROWLS. The cavern shifts abruptly, knocking her off balance. Stan and Norm hold the wall.

Stan picks up the box of personal effects.

STAN

(to Norm)

Was this to be the final nail in the coffin?

Erin looks at Norm.

STAN (CONT'D)

(to Erin)

That's right, dear, he wanted to prove that he had produced something worthwhile--

Norm takes the box by force.

NORM

That's a lie!

STAN

How many books have you written,
Erin?

Erin continues to look at her father. He sets the box at her feet.

NORM

There, I'm not going to hide it any longer. I have a son whom I love and whom I'm very proud of, just like I love you and am very proud of you.

ERIN

Why did you hide it at all?

STAN

Precisely.

NORM

I told you when I thought you might understand.

ERIN

I wish I'd have never known.

NORM

I'm sorry you feel that way.

Norm returns to the cavern wall and removes a lure, which he drops in the tackle box.

Stan kicks the tackle box, sending everything flying.

STAN

This is my fish!

Norm begins to pick up the lures and put them back in the box.

Erin grabs his arm.

ERIN

Would you forget about this fish and talk to me!

STAN

He can't. He'll never be able to explain. Not all the time in the world would be enough for him to explain.

Stan closes the tackle box and sits down on it. The cavern sways gently. Helicopters THUMP in the distance.

ERIN

(to her father)

I hate to say it, but I'm afraid he's right. They're searching for me now. I'm running out of time.

NORM

What more do you want me to say?

ERIN

Did you hear what I said earlier?
I wish I had never known.

NORM

A little late for that.

ERIN

Why did you tell me at all? Why did you show me his photograph and say he belonged to you?

She tries to extract a lure from the cavern wall, but the lure is deeply embedded. When she tugs on it, the cavern sways, almost knocking her off balance. There is a SLOSHING of water. She looks down. She's standing in water.

STAN

Oops, we've sprung a leak.

He doesn't seem to care. He sits on the tackle box, more interested in the conversation between Erin and Norm.

NORM

(to Erin)

Okay, I told you about him and showed you his photograph because I knew I loved you, but I had to know whether you loved me.

STAN

I'm even impressed with that response. Put it on her.

He claps his hands together, causing erratic movement in the cavern. Erin is throw into the water. She refuses to take Norm's extended hand. She gets up on her own.

ERIN

To know whether I loved you? Don't even try that.

STAN

Chalk one up for the home team.

Stan tries to impale a lure back in the wall of the cavern, but Erin SLOSHES through the water to get to his hand, which she grabs. The water is halfway to her knees.

ERIN

Don't do that.

NORM

It's true, I figured if I told you the truth when you were old enough to accept it or reject it, and you were able to come to terms with it, then you would love me for who I am.

Stan gets up. The tackle box floats away from him.

STAN

It doesn't make any difference, we're all perishing.

The helicopter THUMPING returns.

ERIN

They're going to rescue us.

She extracts another lure. Norm lifts the tackle box from the water, props it on a raised knee and opens it.

She drops the lure in the box.

STAN

You think any of this is going to make a difference?

Norm looks at him.

NORM

I don't know.
(to Erin)
Is it?

Water GUSHES in.

BLACK SCREEN

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - NIGHT

Medical personnel work furiously at Xavier's cot. They work around the IV pole to help the boy who is obviously in cardiac arrest.

Dawn wheels the red CRASH cart to the cot as Loressa and Sam administer CPR. Sam uses the palm of her right hand to do chest compressions. She counts as she does so.

SAM

One-go, two-go, three-go, four-go,
five-breath--

Loressa breathes into Xavier's mouth.

Sam resumes her compressions.

SAM (CONT'D)

One-go, two-go, three-go, four-go,
five-breath--

Loressa breathes into Xavier's mouth.

A NURSE ANESTHETIST shoves her way in as Sam does more compressions. The anesthetist tilts Xavier's head back and uses a mouth wedge to run a clear plastic tube down his throat.

Dawn hooks monitor patches to Xavier's bare chest. On the crash cart, Dawn runs a strip.

Sam does compressions.

SAM (CONT'D)

One-go, two-go, three-go, four-go,
five--

The rare DOCTOR arrives. He looks at the heart strip Dawn holds out.

DOCTOR

Give me point two milligrams of
epinephrine--

Loressa tears open a syringe package and brings out a small bottle from a drawer of the crash cart. Holding the bottle upside down and into a patch of light, she aspirates from of the fluid from the bottle.

Erin watches from her cot. Hanging over her is an IV pole. A urine bag hangs from the side of her cot.

EXT. HOUSE NEAR THE NEW RIVER - DAY

In the mountains of southwest Virginia, the home where Erin grew up looks as serene as ever.

INT. DINING ROOM

At the dining room table, April writes a letter. Her voice replaces the words she puts on paper. On the floor beside her chair, Macon sleeps.

APRIL (V.O.)

Every week I write, but have yet to hear from you. I guess you're busy all the time now that the President has declared martial law. I can't believe the riots, shooting and killing they show on TV. Thank goodness, things are about the same here, though we have to use vouchers to get food like everybody else does. Mildred is the administrator of the food voucher office, if you can believe it, so I never have any trouble getting what I want. In fact, she's always asking if I need extra coupons. She also always asks about you. I tell her I'm worried sick about you, but she says that no news is good news. I guess so. Macon is fine, though he's ruined my carpet with his muddy paws. Love, Mom.

She does the unthinkable and scratches Macon's head.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - NIGHT

Erin uses her IV pole on wheels to give her support. In her other hand, she holds her urine bag. She rises from her cot and she takes careful steps to Xavier's cot. The boy remains unresponsive. He has an oxygen mask on his face. Near his cot stands an oxygen canister.

She sits on his cot, sets down her urine bag and picks up his picture book, which he no longer holds or guards. She turns pages.

ERIN

The Wizard of Oz had a magic balloon in it. You ever see that movie?

She might as well be talking to herself.

ERIN (CONT'D)

All Dorothy wanted in that movie was to get back home.

She stares at the title page, The Magic Balloon, that has a red balloon with a basket underneath. A boy and his stuffed animals fill the basket.

ERIN (CONT'D)

I'd love nothing more than get back home myself. Wouldn't you? I'm sure you have relatives somewhere.

She closes the book upon a finger that she leaves in it to keep her place.

ERIN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry for being mean to you.

Xavier sleeps soundly behind his oxygen mask.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Is it all right if I read to you?

She opens his picture book and begins to read.

ERIN (CONT'D)

A long time ago there were twin brothers--

She turns back to the title page that has only one boy in the magic balloon's basket. She returns to her place in the story.

ERIN (CONT'D)

One was named John Caleb, and the other, Samuel Isaiah--

Xavier MUMBLES. His eyes are open, but he doesn't try to take the book away. Instead, he moves his oxygen mask.

XAVIER

Don't read.

She closes the book.

ERIN

I'm sorry.

She holds out the book, but he doesn't take it.

XAVIER

I don't want to learn to read.

ERIN

Why not?

XAVIER

Then I have to leave the world of pictures and enter the world of words.

ERIN

Think of all the things you could learn.

XAVIER

I don't want to leave the world of pictures. Tell me the story in the pictures.

He replaces his oxygen mask.

She opens and book and makes up a story without reading the words.

ERIN

John Caleb was little. Samuel
Isaiah was big.

She shows him the picture of the two brothers side by side.

ERIN (CONT'D)

John Caleb was always sick.

She shows him the picture of the boy in bed, a thermometer in his mouth. He is surrounded by stuffed animals.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Samuel Isaiah was healthy.

She shows him the picture of the bigger brother running across a field.

ERIN (CONT'D)

One day John Caleb went away.
Samuel Isaiah couldn't find him.

She shows him the picture of the neatly made bed, though the stuffed animals remain.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Samuel Isaiah prayed every day that his brother would come back.

She shows him the picture of the bigger boy on his knees next to John Caleb's empty bed, his raised hands folded in prayer.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Then one day Samuel Isaiah looked out his bedroom window and saw a big red balloon that had a basket attached.

She shows him the picture of the red balloon.

ERIN (CONT'D)

So Samuel Isaiah packed all John Caleb's stuffed animals in the basket, climbed in himself, and went off in search of his twin brother.

She shows him the picture of the balloon with Samuel Isaiah and the stuffed animals in the basket, flying through the blue sky.

Xavier MUMBLES in his oxygen mask. She lifts the mask slightly so she can hear.

XAVIER

Would you take me on a walk outside?

She lowers the mask.

ERIN

I'm not even supposed to be talking to you.

He raises the mask.

XAVIER

Please--

ERIN

You wouldn't be able to see anything. It's dark. It's night.

XAVIER

Tomorrow--

ERIN

We'll see. Get some sleep.

She hands him his book.

Using her IV pole for support, she picks up her urine bag, stands and walks toward her cot, coming face-to-face with Loressa.

LORESSA

That was nice what you did.

ERIN

He wants me to take him for a walk outside.

LORESSA

I heard. I think that'd be all right.

ERIN

You, the stickler for regulations?

LORESSA

I'm not completely insensitive.

ERIN

You've finally learned to turn a blind eye?

LORESSA

I wish life were so simple.

Erin pushes past her.

INT. FEMALE STAFF'S PRIVATE QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Erin sits on her cot and pulls out the box of Joshua Hobbs' personal effects. She examines his photograph.

With nothing to write on, she uses the box as paper. She slides loose one of the pens from a rubber band held bundle. She hums A WORLD OF LONELY.

ERIN

Is it my fault, am I to blame--

She jots the words down on the cardboard box.

ERIN (CONT'D)

--the one who made this world of pain?

And keeps adding words.

ERIN (CONT'D)
If that's the case, I'm horrified--

She looks into the box.

ERIN (CONT'D)
--for the huge mess where all
reside.

She records the words on the box. HUMS the chorus.

ERIN (CONT'D)
I make the lonely, a whole world of
lonely, evermore so lonely, very,
very lonely.

A SSSSSSHHHH fills the air as someone in a cot dives under a pillow.

EXT. TRAIL IN A FOREST - DAY

Erin pushes the wheelchair that Xavier sits in. In his lap is a portable oxygen tank that feeds his oxygen mask. They follow a trail in a hilly forest.

ERIN
I can't believe they bent the rules
and let us do this.

Xavier raises his mask.

XAVIER
They did it because they know I'm
dying.

ERIN
If they thought you were dying,
they wouldn't have let you out of
bed.

XAVIER
You know it too.

ERIN
You're quite a little depresso
today, aren't you?

XAVIER
Why did you say you were sorry last
night?

ERIN
When I was sick myself I realized
some things.

XAVIER
You saw death, didn't you?

ERIN
I was close.

XAVIER
And you couldn't stop it.

ERIN
True, I had no control over it.
Were it not for others, I wouldn't
have made it.

XAVIER
Stop pushing!

She stops the wheelchair. He bends forward and picks up a
rock. He shows her.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
Isn't it pretty?

ERIN
Yes, it is.

XAVIER
I'm not afraid, you know.

After taking off his mask and laying it aside, he climbs out
of the chair and stoops to examine other rocks.

ERIN
You have no reason to be afraid,
but you're not supposed to get out
of the wheelchair.

XAVIER
Why, are you afraid?

ERIN
I don't want you to have another
setback.

He stands, stretches his hands into the air and twists this
way and that.

XAVIER
Could someone sick do that?

ERIN

Please get in the chair.

He stoops to play in the dirt and rocks.

XAVIER

In the place where I grew up,
there's a man who has to have
another man push him around in a
chair.

Xavier uses a finger to draw a line across his right leg,
above the knee.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

He doesn't have a leg from here
down. I'd never want to live like
that.

ERIN

When I was little, I always thought
that if I lost an arm, I wouldn't
want to live either.

XAVIER

And now?

ERIN

I guess I still wouldn't want to
lose one, but I could go on with
life if I did.

XAVIER

I came from a big city where
everybody died. Now it's empty.
There's nothing to go back to.

ERIN

I'm sure they wouldn't send you
back to such a place.

XAVIER

Maybe I could go home with you.

She laughs.

ERIN

I'm the last person you'd want to
end up living with.

She holds up his mask, which HISSES.

ERIN (CONT'D)

You need to put this back on.

XAVIER

You're right, I wouldn't want to live with you.

ERIN

That's not nice.

XAVIER

You live in the world of words. I live in the world of pictures. Did you know I could skip?

He skips down the path.

She chases after him, pushing the wheelchair.

ERIN

Xavier, this isn't funny!

He laughs and keeps going.

XAVIER

I'm sure your world is boring.

She's nowhere near catching him.

ERIN

Xavier, you're making me mad!

XAVIER

Boring, boring, boring!

He giggles.

She abandons the wheelchair and runs awkwardly, out of shape.

ERIN

I swear I'm going to beat your butt when I catch you!

She gains on him.

He abandons the path and scrambles up the side of the hill.

XAVIER

You'll never catch me!

She stands at the bottom of the hill, panting, and points a finger at the ground.

ERIN
You get down here this instant!

XAVIER
And go back to your boring world?

He crosses over the top of the hill. His LAUGHTER can still be heard, along with his RUNNING feet.

ERIN
(to herself)
This really pisses me off.

She starts up the side of the hill, struggling with each step. Her feet give out from under her and she slides back down.

ERIN (CONT'D)
Xavier, I'm angry!

Filthy, she gets up and starts back up the hill, crying as she does so.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - DAY

Out of breath, Erin bursts into the hospital tent.

ERIN
He ran off!

Loressa zigzags between patient cots to get to her.

LORESSA
What do you mean he ran off!

Sam approaches also.

SAM
I knew something like this would happen.

LORESSA
(to Sam)
Go get Mark.

Sam passes Erin and goes out the door.

LORESSA (CONT'D)
(to Erin)
Ran off where?

ERIN

He climbed a hill and vanished.

Erin starts to cry.

ERIN (CONT'D)

I tried to stop him. I couldn't.

She wails.

ERIN (CONT'D)

I swear to God I tried!

Loressa grabs her arm.

LORESSA

Pull yourself together and show me!

Loressa pulls at distraught Erin.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Flashlights beams jump this way and that, piercing the forest.

ERIN

Xavier!

Loressa and Mark each carry a flashlight.

MARK

If he passed out, we'll never find him out here in the dark.

LORESSA

And if we don't find him, he's dead.

Erin points her flashlight at an embankment.

ERIN

There's more footprints!

She starts up the hill, but slips and falls. Mark and Loressa help her up.

MARK

Okay, I'm making a command decision. I'm calling off the search.

LORESSA
Like hell you are.

Mark holds on to Erin, not letting her move.

MARK
What if one of us falls off a
damned cliff or something out here
in the dark.

Erin tries to pull away.

ERIN
I don't care.

Mark shines his light in Loressa's face.

MARK
Tell her something. Are we
together on this or not?

Loressa slaps his flashlight out of her face.

LORESSA
Mark's right. All that's going to
happen is one of us is going to get
hurt, maybe even kill ourselves.

MARK
We'll go back out first thing in
the morning.

Erin continues to pull.

ERIN
He'll be dead by morning, and we
both know it.

Loressa takes hold of Erin also.

LORESSA
I won't have two dead people on my
conscience.

Mark blows a WHISTLE.

Light beams stop jumping around and point in the direction of
the whistle.

Erin gives in and walks with them as they head in the
direction from which they came.

LORESSA (CONT'D)

Can you contact another camp and ask for help in the search?

MARK

I've got a friend who's got a tracking dog. As soon as we get back I'll call him and arrange to have him and his dog flown in.

Sam joins them.

SAM

He was faking failure to thrive.

Dawn falls in too.

DAWN

You were wrong? You were the one who first told me to look at his eyes.

SAM

At least I didn't say he was going to die in front of him.

DAWN

I never said such a thing.

SAM

She did, didn't she, Loressa?

DAWN

When I say something, I admit it.

SAM

You said he was dying.

DAWN

I said, she'd smell good when he was dying.

SAM

After Erin had just taken a shower.

DAWN

Meaning if he was dying, she'd be the kind of person who'd be off taking a shower at the time.

SAM

Even Loressa said the comment was inappropriate.

LORESSA
Would you two knock it off?

The walk turns silent as LIGHTS from flashlights bob around.
Helicopters CHOP overhead.

LORESSA (CONT'D)
Great, all we need to top off the
night.

ERIN
I've got to pee.

She breaks from the group, carrying her lighted flashlight.

DAWN
I'm not going to stand out here all
night while she pees.

Dawn continues on, as does Sam.

Erin climbs an embankment and steps behind a tree. She
extinguishes her LIGHT after shining it up the incline to
orient herself.

She climbs in the near-dark. Her heavy BREATHS are audible
as are her FOOTSTEPS in SOGGY ground.

The blackness turns into a MOONLIT darkness.

In the distance come calls for her.

LORESSA (O.S.)
Erin! Don't do this!

Twigs SNAP and leaves RUSTLE.

MARK
Damn it, I've had about all the B-S
I can take!

The voices fade.

Erin turns on her flashlight. She's in a dense forest.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The gray of morning enters the forest as Erin wanders
aimlessly. She still carries her flashlight, which is of no
value to her now.

She comes to a cliff and looks down. Far below on the rocks near a stream is the broken body of Xavier.

HILL - CONTINUOUS

Erin runs down a hill. Part of the way she manages to keep her balance.

Her feet fly out from under her and she slides the remaining way down.

STREAM - CONTINUOUS

Panting, Erin gets up and runs. She hits and misses the water as she follows the stream.

She stops to catch her breath.

ERIN
(to herself)
He's dead. No, he isn't!

She continues running. He SLASHES through the water.

ROCKS NEXT TO THE STREAM - CONTINUOUS

Erin crawls out on the rocks and touches Xavier, who is bruised and bloody. He responds with a WINCE.

She draws closer.

ERIN
I'm so sorry.

She takes one of his hands in her cupped hands and blows into it.

ERIN (CONT'D)
It's all my fault.

She takes his other hand in her cupped hands and blows into it.

ERIN (CONT'D)
It won't take long for them to find us. They're sending out search teams this morning.

His eyes open. He stares at the sky.

ERIN (CONT'D)
You can come home with me, I've
decided.

He looks at her.

XAVIER
Isn't it pretty out here?

She looks around.

ERIN
Sure.

XAVIER
A world of pictures.

ERIN
(desperate)
It's pretty where I live too.

XAVIER
My father's a painter.

ERIN
He paints houses?

XAVIER
Pictures.

ERIN
An artist?

XAVIER
Except sometimes he paints sad
things.

Instinctively she uses water from the stream to clean his
wounds.

ERIN
The world sometimes has sad things
in it.

XAVIER
My first dog had a little puppy
that we had to give away.

ERIN
That's sad.

XAVIER

My daddy painted a picture of the mother's face resting on a box that her baby was locked in.

ERIN

I have a dog. A Great Dane. He's Harlequin. Black and white. Almost looks like a Dalmatian.

XAVIER

My dog was black and white. So was her baby.

Erin pets Xavier's head, pushing her hand back into his hair.

ERIN

Why was she locked in a box?

XAVIER

Daddy sent her somewhere.

ERIN

But you don't know where?

XAVIER

No.

ERIN

I'm sure it was to a new home.

XAVIER

It was a place they send you when they put a pink tag on your box.

ERIN

A tag for a name and address.

XAVIER

A pink tag with scribbles, not words.

ERIN

Or words you couldn't read, which is why there's nothing wrong with learning to read.

XAVIER

If that's what reading teaches you to do, give away a mother's baby, I don't want to learn.

ERIN

You're saying that now, but later
you'll discover that learning to
read opens all kinds of new worlds.

XAVIER

All I want is to go to that place
that takes babies and children away
from their mothers and fathers and
rescue all the babies and children.

He closes his eyes.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - NIGHT

Loressa taps Erin, who struggles in the sheets of her cot.
Erin opens her eyes with a lost look.

ERIN

I was in an awful dream.

Loressa doesn't sit down. She stands over the cot, all
business.

LORESSA

You might want to say goodbye.

Erin's eyes move to Xavier's cot, from which medical
personnel move away. Erin sits up.

ERIN

What's wrong?

LORESSA

The doctor's discontinued the Code.

Erin comes to her feet and grabs her IV pole.

ERIN

Code? You can't stop a Code.

Erin picks up her urine bag. Loressa gets in her way.

LORESSA

Don't start trouble. It's over.

Erin tries to push her out of the way. Loressa stands her
ground.

ERIN

He's a child.

LORESSA

There was nothing we could do.

Erin struggles to break through Loressa. Sam and Dawn help restrain Erin.

ERIN

You wrote him off the books from the beginning!

LORESSA

Do you want to say goodbye or not?

Erin calms.

Sam and Dawn release her.

Pushing her IV pole and carrying her urine bag, Erin makes her way to Xavier's cot. From all appearances he seems to sleep peacefully. Only his chest doesn't rise and fall. He has no oxygen mask on. The oxygen tank and IV lines have been taken away.

Erin kneels on the floor next to his cot. She takes his hand and plays with his fingers.

ERIN

If you get a chance--

She picks up his book, The Magic Balloon, and turns pages.

ERIN (CONT'D)

--and you get to that place--

She tears out a page.

ERIN (CONT'D)

--let the babies and children go--

She tears out another page.

ERIN (CONT'D)

--let them all go--

And another.

Other children watch.

Loressa, Sam and Dawn try to get Erin up and pull her back.

Erin shreds pages.

Loressa, Sam and Dawn drag her away.

EXT. HOUSE NEAR A RIVER - DAY

In the mountains of southwest Virginia sits the house where Erin grew up. Nearby is the New River.

INT. ERIN'S FORMER BEDROOM - DAY

Erin lies in her twin bed, which seems much too small, and stares at the gray light in the only window. Making the bed even smaller is Macon, her Great Dane, who lies with her.

April enters, carrying a steaming cup.

APRIL
Get that dog off the bed.

Erin sits up and takes the cup.

ERIN
Be nice to him.

APRIL
This is my house. I don't want him tearing up my house.

Erin pats Macon.

ERIN
He's just a little baby. Leave him alone.

APRIL
Drink your Jello water.

ERIN
Your cure for everything.

APRIL
It'll calm your stomach.

Erin sips the Jello water.

ERIN
It's watered down. Did you pour the whole box in?

APRIL
An entire big box.

ERIN
It's weak.

APRIL

Good to have the old Erin back.

ERIN

The old Erin will never be back.

APRIL

She'll be back. Believe me, I'm
your mother. I know.

Erin lowers her feet over the side of the bed and stands.
She picks up a pink robe and slips into it. Macon watches.

APRIL (CONT'D)

Please, stay in bed.

ERIN

Has Dad called?

APRIL

Every day several times a day.

Holding her cup as a chalice, Erin passes her mother and
leaves the room. Macon comes off the bed and follows.

CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Erin walks along the corridor, sipping her Jello water.
Macon follows.

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the living room, Erin looks out the picture windows at the
New River. Macon stands next to her.

April appears, carrying the sheets to the twin bed.

APRIL

Don't go back in just yet. I'm
going to change the sheets.

ERIN

Why did he die and I live?

April stops to look out the window as if seeing something.

APRIL

Remember when you got hit by a car
out there?

ERIN

That I do remember. I remember waking up in the back seat of the car, Dad holding me and you driving.

APRIL

I thought you were going to die.

ERIN

He didn't have any socks on--

APRIL

I prayed all the way to the doctor's office.

ERIN

--and he was in his undershirt.

APRIL

When the doctor was sewing you up, your Dad couldn't watch.

Erin looks at her.

ERIN

Strange you should mention that.

APRIL

He thought you were going to die too, and he couldn't watch it. He stayed in the waiting room.

ERIN

You're right. I remember you and I remember the doctor, but this is the first time I realized that Dad wasn't there.

She reaches into a pocket of her robe and brings out the shreds of Xavier's book.

APRIL

He was there, he just couldn't watch you die.

Erin looks at the fragments of paper in her hand. She holds one piece against another, trying to figure out some pattern.

Helicopter CHOPPING comes into the air.

INT. FEMALE STAFF'S PRIVATE QUARTERS - DAY

Sunlight bathes the tent. Sam walks through the female quarters, clapping her hands.

SAM

Everybody up! We've got incoming!

She kicks cots and claps, but passes Erin's cot without acknowledging Erin, who lies there eyes open.

Other women get out of their cots. Begin to dress.

Erin sits up. Wearing a pink bathrobe, she looks rough. Her hair is a mess.

Women move about, ignoring her.

One by one, dressed women leave the female quarters, entering the hospital tent as the CHOPPING grows in intensity.

Erin gets up, opens her wall locker. On the inside of the door is the photograph of Joshua Hobbs. Someone has added a black moustache and beard to his youthful face. Erin brings out a towel, bar of soap, bottle of shampoo and fresh set of scrubs. She SLAMS the metal door.

She heads for the latrine.

ERIN RETURNS - CONTINUOUS

Her hair wet, a towel wrapped around her neck, Erin returns to the female quarters, freshly showered and in scrubs.

INSERT - A GIRL'S SCREAM - CONTINUOUS

Putting her towel, bar of soap, shampoo and bathrobe in her wall locker, Erin glances in the direction of the green hospital door, upon which is painted a red cross in a white circle.

INSERT - ANOTHER GIRL'S SCREAM - CONTINUOUS

Erin stares at the green door that has a red cross in a white circle painted on it. Trying to decide.

GIRL (O.S.)

Please help, I'm dying!

From her bathrobe pocket, she brings out a handful of paper scraps from Xavier's book. For a moment, she looks at Joshua's photograph, stained by a moustache and beard.

GIRL (O.S.) (CONT'D)

It hurts!

Erin takes a deep breath. Let's it out slowly. She shoves the paper scraps in a pocket of her scrubs. Drapes a stethoscope around her neck.

She closes the door of her wall locker.

INT. SINK - CONTINUOUS

Erin washes her hands at the hand washing station. The water GUSHING knocks out other sounds. She takes her time scrubbing.

The water goes off.

Erin dries on a hand towel.

She ties on a face mask.

Puts on gloves.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - CONTINUOUS

Erin stands on the threshold of the tent hospital. She's still trying to make up her mind.

One girl in particular gets a lot of attention. She's still on a stretcher that orderlies have carried in. Loressa is trying to start an IV. Dawn and two male orderlies try to hold the girl who thrashes about on the stretcher.

Sam shakes open a sheet that floats onto the empty cot where Xavier once lay.

Erin catches the bottom of the sheet and guides it into place.

For an instant, everyone but the thrashing girl looks at Erin. Then Sam shakes open a second sheet and Erin catches it.

The activity resumes.

INT. NURSES STATION - NIGHT

Erin sits under a lamp at the nurses desk and pulls a strip of scotch tape from a dispenser. With gloved hands, she carefully tapes together two torn pieces of Xavier's book. Next to those scraps are other pages crudely taped together.

Loressa pulls a patient chart from the rack. She sits down on a stool near Erin, opens the chart and begins to write notes.

LORESSA

You're still angry, aren't you?

She continues to write.

ERIN

Until the day I die.

Erin continues to tape.

LORESSA

You didn't kill him. The parasite killed him.

ERIN

What do you want me to say, I should have listened to you when you said he wasn't going to make it?

LORESSA

He was already dead when he got here.

ERIN

He looked alive to me.

LORESSA

Alive but needed to live.

ERIN

I never was good with riddles, and you always speak in them.

She collects her taped pages.

LORESSA

You got through to him. You persuaded him to live.

ERIN
What, for a few hours?

LORESSA
Long enough to let him know that
his life hadn't been a complete
waste of time.

Erin stands, pages in hand.

ERIN
Funny, I look at him and all I can
think is, what a waste.

LORESSA
And I look at him and say, none of
the rest of us could get through to
you and he did.

Loressa closes her chart and puts it away.

ERIN
For what it's worth.

She heads for the female quarters.

LORESSA
I haven't finished saying what I
have to say.

Erin turns to her from the shadows.

ERIN
I thought I made it clear from the
beginning that you'd never have my
loyalty.

LORESSA
Then what I have to say won't make
our relationship any worse.

ERIN
What, I'm never going home?

LORESSA
I was the one who requested that
you be sent here.

Erin returns to the light of the nurses station.

ERIN
I told you I'm no good with
riddles.

LORESSA
Your father and I once had a
relationship.

Erin's eyes have filled with tears.

ERIN
Oh, God--

She runs into the darkness, heading for the female quarters.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT, FEMALE QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

In the poorly lit female quarters, Erin jerks open her wall locker, snatches out the photograph of Joshua Hobbs and SLAMS the door.

ANGRY VOICE (O.S.)
Knock if off!

Erin hurries for the latrine.

INT. LATRINE - CONTINUOUS

Erin yanks a piece of toilet paper off a roll. She wads the paper and goes to a sink, whose water she turns on. She moistens the wad of toilet paper. With it, she tries to wipe off the inked-on mustache and beard from Joshua Hobbs' photograph.

Loressa appears, startling Erin.

ERIN
Leave me alone!

LORESSA
Your father--

ERIN
This was some grand conspiracy to
shove a brother down my throat?

LORESSA
It had nothing to do with that.

ERIN
God, this is a nightmare that no
matter how hard I try, I can't
escape.

LORESSA

He was worried about you and wanted to make sure someone was there to look after you.

ERIN

And you've done a fine job of that!

LORESSA

No, I failed, just like I failed with him--

ERIN

I'm glad--

LORESSA

And my son--

ERIN

If you're hoping I feel sorry for you, I won't--

LORESSA

No, I don't expect that--

ERIN

Good.

LORESSA

I only wanted you to know the truth.

ERIN

People sure have a hard time telling the truth up front!

Erin turns her back to Loressa.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Please, leave me alone.

A door OPENS and SHUTS.

Erin looks back. Loressa is gone.

Erin shreds the photograph she holds, goes to a toilet and drops the shreds in the bowl. She flushes the toilet. Several shreds don't go down. They float in the bowl.

She goes to the sink and touches the lit bulb above it. Her hand flinches from the heat.

She pulls a couple of towels from the paper towel dispenser and uses them as a makeshift glove to take the bulb out.

She holds the bulb above the sink and lets it drop. POP. She picks up a shard of glass, stands in indecision for a moment, then drops the shard.

She goes to the toilet and fishes out the strips of photograph that didn't go down.

INT. FEMALE STAFF'S PRIVATE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Erin sits on her cot in the dimly lit female quarters. On one side of her is the box containing Joshua Hobbs' personal effects. On the other side is Joshua's Bible, closed. On its cover, strips of his photograph dry.

She hums A WORLD OF LONELY as she stares at the strips of photograph. The hums turn into soft words.

ERIN

With no defense--

She removes a pen from the box and begins to add the words to the other words on the box.

ERIN (CONT'D)

--except my heart--

She adds the words.

ERIN (CONT'D)

I call to you, a world apart--

Xavier steps out of the shadows. She sees him, but makes no acknowledgement except that of her eyes.

ERIN (CONT'D)

--seeking help since you've been here--

She lowers her eyes long enough to add the new words to the box.

ERIN (CONT'D)

--in this cold life that's drawn by fear--

She looks up at Xavier. She sings the refrain.

XAVIER

There's nothing to be afraid of.

ERIN
Let's break the lonely--

XAVIER
Okay.

ERIN
--the whole world of lonely--

She adds new words.

XAVIER
Yeah.

ERIN
--stop making lonely--

XAVIER
--right now--

ERIN
--evermore so lonely--

XAVIER
--I'm all for it--

THE WORLD OF LONELY evolves into a full scale performance.

INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL TENT - DAY

In the hospital tent that glows from sunlight, Erin and her musician friends perform THE WORLD OF LONELY for the children. Those children who are able, sit up and watch the musicians perform. Others watch in awe while lying in their cots.

INT. LORESSA'S OFFICE, A PARTITIONED OFF CUBICLE IN A MILITARY TENT - DAY

THE WORLD OF LONELY fades.

Erin stands in front of Loressa's desk in a military tent that could be any military tent.

LORESSA
So you're going home.

ERIN
Finally.

Loressa looks up from her paperwork. She wears bifocals that ride on the bridge of her nose.

LORESSA
Is there a problem?

ERIN
Sure, there's a lot of problems.

LORESSA
I'm fairly certain you'll make a complete list of them once you get back home.

ERIN
No.

LORESSA
But you would like to share a few of them with me before you leave.

ERIN
No.

Loressa takes off her bifocals.

LORESSA
Then what?

ERIN
Was Joshua a good son?

Loressa stares at her.

LORESSA
The best.

ERIN
With a heart?

LORESSA
Like none you've ever met.

ERIN
Was he perfect?

LORESSA
Are any of us who wear this?

She pinches the loose skin on the back of her own hand.

ERIN
Did you ever give up on him?

LORESSA
Never.

ERIN
Why?

Loressa shrugs.

LORESSA
I don't know. I guess because
someone never gave up on me.

ERIN
I hear you. Thanks.

LORESSA
Thanks?

ERIN
For never giving up. And--

Loressa waits.

ERIN (CONT'D)
--for making me feel alive in a
real way.

LORESSA
I'd expect you to hate me for that.

ERIN
No.

Loressa stands and reaches out a professional hand.

LORESSA
Well, the best of luck to you.

Erin takes Loressa's hand, and pulls her close. The two
women embrace.

THE WORLD OF LONELY returns.

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

Erin looks out a window as THE WORLD OF LONELY plays in the
background. She smiles.

Rob, the crew chief, raises a gloved hand.

Erin slaps it.

EXT. THE NEW RIVER - DAY

In a field, Erin and her musicians play THE WORLD OF LONELY for Norm, Joshua, Xavier, April and Macon.

Then there is only April and Macon.

THE WORLD OF LONELY continues to play.

FADE OUT.

THE END.