

***The Alternate Possibilities of Our Past and Future History with Particular
Regard to the Identification of the Eastern Puma and the Corps of
Discovery***

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**The Alternate Possibilities of Our Past and Future History with Particular
Regard to the Identification of the Eastern Puma and the Corps of
Discovery**

By Amy Gijsbers van Wijk

"We are called upon to do something new, to confront a no man's land, to push into a forest where there are no well-worn paths and from which no one has returned to guide us." – Rollo May

Time

175 years from now

Characters

Lewis, 20s to 30s, female, a topographer

Clark, 20s to 30s, female, an ecological engineer

Dev, 20s to 30s, male, a climate and weather scientist

Meriwether Lewis, male, 20s to 40s, the historical person, referred to as Meriwether

William Clark, male, 20s to 40s, the historical person, referred to as William

On casting:

None of these roles require casting of specifically non-disabled, white bodies, and I would encourage directors and the casting team to keep this in mind when casting for a vision of the future.

Note:

A "/" indicates overlapping dialogue. When a "/" occurs, the line immediately following it is begun.

A "... " is a non-spoken action.

Scene 1

The ruins. A wide slab of foundation. Some rubble and old concrete. Shadowy. There is a small pile of rubble, dust, and sand, off to the side.

Lewis, on-stage, wearing coveralls. A backpack next to her.

Lewis begins to comb through the pile of rubble. She picks up a piece of rubble, examines it. Sets it down. Slowly, she deconstructs the pile, repeating this process.

She sees something she's never seen before.

LEWIS

Oh.

Lewis picks up the object: a small, tan statue of a puma. It is caked in dirt and sand.

Lewis dusts off the statue gently, and wraps it in one of the gloves. She places it in the metal canister, which she rapidly shoves into her bag.

Lights shift: Lewis and Clark's home.

Lewis enters. She is covered in a fine layer of dust.

A small room. It holds a cot that is their bed, and a small table with two chairs. In the corner is a bucket filled with water and a table with cups and bowls. A cupboard.

Offstage is a small pantry and shower area where they keep various goods and much of their clothes.

Off to the side is a table set up with a makeshift microscope, probably soldered

together from repurposed metal and a magnifying glass.

LEWIS

Clark? Dev?

No response.

LEWIS

Great.

Lewis removes the backpack from her back.

She clears her throat. Her demeanor changes: professional, presentational; like she's giving a museum tour.

LEWIS

I'd like to introduce you to the Museum of the Past, curated by me. Lewis. We apologize for our appearance, as I am practicing in my living room since the real museum isn't built yet. But we hope it will be soon. I guess when I say "we," I mean I.

Well, anyway — Here is what we have: Air. Water, filtered only. Sand — more than you could ever want. Walkie-talkies and radios. We have a few books — we're making a lot more of them. Out of plastic. Out of brick. Out of whatever we can find. The books hold lists. Lists of what we have, like this one. I guess when I say we — there are three of us. Me. Clark, my girlfriend, who's an eco-engineering scientist. And Dev. Lately he just makes pillows. He and Clark are pretty good friends. There are probably other communities out there, in the desert. We don't know. But right now it's just the three of us.

We have P-FANN, two n's, which stands for Powdered Food and Necessary Nutrition. That's what we eat. It's kind of flavorless. But not. You can imagine it has a flavor. I like to think that it tastes like raspberries. We don't have raspberries, not anymore. Haven't for about one-hundred and seventy-five years. But I like to think the yellow powder tastes just like them, but powdered. I don't know the difference.

The real museum will be built near the old ruins of our three-person settlement. This was the only place we could put the past, the artifacts, and not lose them to time. To the literal sands of time we have around here, in this desert.

It's beautiful to have a permanent thing.

Lewis stands over the statue. She holds it.

LEWIS

Are you a god that people believed in, hmm?
Or someone's pet, named Nancy? Or Shonda? I read those names once. In a scrap of old paper I found. I like how they sounded. Especially the name Ophelia. That was another name I saw. Are you an Ophelia?
Or were you part of some weird sport, maybe?

Were you this size, in reality? Or bigger? If you were this small, I guess you weren't very scary. But. Maybe you were. I don't want to discredit you.

Can you give me a hint? Anything?

Footsteps. As Clark enters, Lewis shoves the statue gently into the canister and drops the canister into her backpack.

LEWIS

Hi.

CLARK

Hey you.

LEWIS

Working late?

CLARK

Yeah, I . . .

Tell me two good things, one bad. About your day so far?

Clark moves to Lewis.

LEWIS

I'm all sandy.

CLARK

I don't care.

They hug.

LEWIS

Well this is pretty nice. So you, right now. And I got to map stuff this morning. You know I like mapping stuff. And the bad thing about my day. . . I don't have one, at least not yet. What about you?

CLARK

Um.

They separate.

CLARK

So my good thing is you, right now, too. And well. The bad thing and the good thing are sort of connected, so. . .

LEWIS

What's wrong?

CLARK

I didn't say anything was wrong.

LEWIS

Yeah but you have that look on your face. Or, are you hungry? Sometimes you look upset when you're hungry? If you are hungry, we've got the two options, like always, the green or yellow food powder.

CLARK

This is about the food powder.

LEWIS

Are you having those weird dreams where you get chased by mountains of powder again? Because I'm a topographer, and I've never seen those, plus they're dreams, so I don't think you have anything to worry about.

CLARK

No.

LEWIS

Are you nervous because the green powder's making your pee really green again, because I know you hate that color— or are you getting that weird diarrhea—

CLARK

That's not it, Lewis. I'm fine. My. . . waste is fine. But.

Clark takes Lewis's hand.

CLARK

We're running out of food, Lewis.

LEWIS

What do you mean?

CLARK

P-FANN. We're running out of it. I am working on making alternatives. But right now, we don't have any really good ones.

LEWIS

What happened to the stores we had?

CLARK

Well we had base formulas, and I'm not sure why, but they just aren't working anymore.

LEWIS

. . . So are we going to die?

Dev enters. Clark looks over to him. Dev approaches and sits down next to them.

DEV

Hi team. How is map-making and map-mapping going, Lewis? And engineering of eco-things, Clark? How is it all going? Are we reeling with positive feeling? Did I mention I've been working on more pillows?

LEWIS

Hey there, Dev.

CLARK

Perfect timing.

DEV

Why? Was that sarcasm, did I walk in on a romantic moment? Should I leave?

LEWIS

We're alright. What about you, are you full of romance? Because you're probably going to need it.

DEV

Well I finished making a pillow for my room. It's nice. Really adds some zest.

Anyway. Why perfect timing? What's happening that's so perfect?

LEWIS

... we're running out of food.

DEV

... What. That's the opposite of perfect. That's maybe the worst, most opposite thing you could've said.

(reassuring himself)

Okay. No. I'm going to be upbeat. I'm going to take a deep breath. Give me a second.

Dev gathers himself.

LEWIS

How much do we have, now, stored? How long do we have?

CLARK

We have enough to last us two months, three tops.

DEV

When did this happen? What happened?

CLARK

I don't know. I am trying to come up with alternative solutions, I'm making different kinds of powders right now, but the chances of that working — and being nutritionally what we need? Those chances are slim.

DEV

...

LEWIS

(to Dev)

What happened to your new mantra, "be upbeat?"

DEV

My mantra is "be upbeat." Not "be upbeat in the face of our impending starvation." But you're right. Let's not get alarmed.

Dev takes a cleansing breath.

LEWIS

So what are our options?

CLARK

Well—

DEV

Would we have to send someone out? If no alternative possibility presents itself? I think we should be. . . prepared? For that possibility.

LEWIS

The possibility that we'll run out of food, or the possibility that we'll send someone out and they'll die and we'll all starve to death.

DEV

This is what I meant about not getting alarmed.

CLARK

I have a plan. I'm going to build a greenhouse. Let me explain. I'm working on alternative powders, like I said. But, I have the foundation for a greenhouse. And I've made soil before, which I haven't put into use yet. There are reserves of it. My plan, the plan, right now, is to build a greenhouse. Grow genetically modified food. I have the seeds. I'm figuring out the design plans.

LEWIS

Where's it going to go?

CLARK

The old ruins. That's the only steady foundation we have. The only one that doesn't shift when there's a sandstorm.

LEWIS

. . . I thought we talked about how things were getting better. How we'd build something new on the ruins, something beautiful.

DEV

Well, beautiful or not, I prefer a greenhouse to a graveyard.

CLARK

We have to be practical about this. I'm already working on the plans, and it should be ready to go soon.

(pause; to both Dev and Lewis)

Don't look so scared.

DEV

. . .

LEWIS

I'm not.

DEV
(playful)

Well maybe we should make good on our reproduction plans sooner, rather than later, now?

LEWIS and CLARK

...

DEV

Okay. Bad joke. Sorry. Look. Here.

Dev takes Lewis's hand and Clark's hand. He squeezes them.

DEV

If we remain positive, I'm sure we'll get through this.

CLARK

I really think we can do this. I do.

LEWIS

... Yeah. Okay.

Dev takes another cleansing breath, still holding their hands. Clark and Lewis look at each other, at Dev, doing his long, loud, cleansing breath.

DEV

Okay. That was good.

LEWIS

I have to go do some more mapping before the sun's up. I'll be back soon.

Clark reaches out to Lewis. A private moment of comfort. Dev watches.

CLARK

I love you, Lew.

LEWIS

I love you.

Lewis exits.

Clark moves to the table and sketches the blueprint. Dev sits, in a chair, to the side, watching her.

CLARK

So the pillows have been helping? The sewing and embroidery?

DEV

Yeah. I think I've found my artistic calling. Or at least it's helped with my insomnia. That and the powder you gave me that's blue. I use that when I can't sleep.

CLARK

I'm glad.

DEV

So you really think this is going to work? I take it this greenhouse isn't as easy as making me sleeping powder.

CLARK

You were totally on board two minutes ago. Besides, it has to work. That's our best option.

DEV

I understand that it needs to work, Clark. Given our circumstances. I get the stakes of our situation. But I just don't know if trying to grow some plants before we run out of food in two months — I don't know if that's our best option.

CLARK

And you have a better idea?

DEV

I think I might / but it's a little risky.

CLARK

Because you know I respect your opinion, Dev. A lot. I do. But I am the one actually engineering this thing. I'm designing it, building it. And I think it's possible. Scientifically. So that's why we're trying it. Plus, those ruins have a perfect foundation for us to build on. Don't you think so?

DEV

Well the landscape shifts too much everywhere else. Our houses crack every seven years, worse when the weather changes. We're living in tents while we fix

the houses. The ruins aren't just a good option, it's our only option of a safe place to construct anything.

I just think we should have a . . . back-up plan? Plan B? Plan Let's Not All Die Together In the Desert? That seems like a good idea to me.

CLARK

I wouldn't waste what's left of our P-FANN, the two months we have before we run out, if I didn't actually think this could work.

DEV

I understand that, that's not what I'm saying, though. Clark. Babe.

Clark looks at Dev. Dev stutters through.

DEV (cont.)

Bab— Basically, I agree with you. Sorry. *Basically*. I agree. But I still feel like we could use a back-up plan and I have an idea. I think, if in a week, or two weeks, we aren't on schedule, or ahead of schedule? I think we should send Lewis to go look for food. I think Lewis should be our back-up plan.

CLARK

You want to send Lewis out, into the desert.

DEV

That's what I said. That's the idea.

CLARK

And what are the chances she could actually find any food?

DEV

Slim. But so are the chances that we get this greenhouse up and running in time.

CLARK

Those aren't slim! They're — forty percent. Maybe thirty-five. But we don't actually know how far away any food is. And you want to send my girlfriend off to die based on the vague idea that there *might* be someone with food out there. We don't know if it's five miles, or five hundred miles.

DEV

I think she should get more credit than that. We can give her a walkie-talkie.

CLARK

We don't have enough of those to spare. We don't know when the batteries will die. We've never tested them at long range. I know that she's good at her job, Dev. But that sounds like a death trap.

DEV

She's not just good at her job, Clark. She's really good at her job. Do you remember when there was that horrible sandstorm? And all we had then was a tent. We weren't sure where anything was, and we were all camping in that one small tent. We were lost because the sandstorm had changed all the markers we used to tell where anything was — but Lewis went out and re-mapped everything. Even got back to the tent, when we all thought she might get lost. Taught us where everything was, and how to recognize the landscape. So we wouldn't get lost.

Dev touches Clark.

DEV

And I know this isn't the kind of thing we want to bring up now, but if something were to happen... We could still have a future. I know Lewis was the one who wanted to carry the child, but. I'm just saying we could still try. That's all.

CLARK

Dev.

Clark turns from Dev and keeps drawing the blueprint.

DEV

I'm sorry. I'm just planning ahead.

(pause)

Clark. Come on. Talk to me. If you could tell me more about what went wrong, with the food powder, more about what isn't working, maybe we could figure out other alternatives.

CLARK

I thought it was just a wrong ratio of ingredients, but now, it seems like all of the ingredients went bad. Just all rancid. Or that the formula just isn't working like it used to — which, why would that happen. But it is. I tried a few different formulas, but the nutritional profile was coming out different, and the taste — you wouldn't want to try it, even if we are going to all die.

Dev's anxiety settles in to his blood.

DEV

...

CLARK

We're not going to die, okay?

This greenhouse is happening. We aren't going to die. I thought you were trying to be more upbeat about things lately.

DEV

I thought this was supposed to be the problem that the generations before us dealt with. I thought we were in the clear. This shouldn't be our problem. I thought we'd build a settlement. Build a family. Maybe, one day, we'd even find other people. Somehow. And now. . .

CLARK

Hey. Hey.

DEV

Is this how you thought it was going to go? How we were going to go?

CLARK

Stop it, Dev.

Dev hugs Clark.

CLARK

It's going to be okay.

Clark lets go.

DEV

...

CLARK

I'm going to build the greenhouse on the site of the ruins. I just have to clear away some of the rubble, and I'm set to start building. And we've still got food powder to last us a little while.

DEV

Sorry I freaked out.

(upbeat)

I know we'll find a solution.

And I know you don't like it. But we have Lewis. As a back-up plan.

CLARK

. . . The future is going to be great. And we're going to be there to see it. I promise. All three of us.

Scene 2

Meriwether and William, hiking. William is still journaling. To them, the landscape is the forest. They are wandering.

MERIWETHER

William. Yo. So, how far, do you think from this stupid ass mountain?

WILLIAM

Calm down, Meriwether. You're so whiney, dude. Just ten more miles, tops. Of this leg of the trip.

MERIWETHER

I feel like we thought it was closer. . .

WILLIAM

I thought we were close by. But I can see it, from here. It just. . . it's a little farther than I thought.

MERIWETHER

Really?

WILLIAM

Really. We're not lost, okay? Chill.

MERIWETHER

Because I thought you said this would be a "pit stop."

WILLIAM

You said you'd come with me.

MERIWETHER

I said I'd come because I didn't realize this little detour was going to be so far. The guys back at camp are going to wonder why we've been gone so long.

WILLIAM

Plus, I like mountains.

MERIWETHER

I like lager, man.

WILLIAM

They fill me with a sense of purpose.

MERIWETHER

Oh shut up. I'd like to be filled with food.

WILLIAM

Are you even listening to me? The mountains — It feels like their wisdom is being sent through the air, from the mountains, straight into my brain.

MERIWETHER

All of this jerky we're eating is messing me up.
I haven't shit in five days.

WILLIAM

What is wrong with you?

MERIWETHER

Do you think we could find some fruits?

WILLIAM

. . . Sometimes, Meriwether, you're super gross.

MERIWETHER

I'm just saying, man, I'm in deep need of some fiber. Deep. Need.

WILLIAM

It's always beer or shit with you.

MERIWETHER

Will.

WILLIAM

What?

MERIWETHER

What do you think it'll be like, when we get to the ocean?

WILLIAM

It'll be great.

MERIWETHER

. . .

That's it? It'll. . . be great?

WILLIAM

Yeah. It'll be great. We'll have made history. We'll have done something no one else ever has. That's awesome.

MERIWETHER

The Native people, though, right? They already made these discoveries. . . theoretically—

WILLIAM

That's not the same, though.

MERIWETHER

Why not?

WILLIAM

Well, they're *native*. We aren't, right? We see this land with different eyes. With better eyes.

MERIWETHER

How are our eyes better?

WILLIAM

Technologically, economically — we're basically the future for them, Meriwether.

It'll be great.

William sees something on the ground. His attention is with it. He scribbles a note in his notebook.

Then, he takes out a small knife. He begins to sharpen his pencil.

MERIWETHER

It's always pencil sharpening and mountains with you. Nerd.

William kneels down to examine the thing more closely.

WILLIAM

Wait a minute, Meriwether.

What is it?
MERIWETHER

Do you see this?
WILLIAM
Meriwether wipes his glasses on his shirt.

I can't see much of anything.
MERIWETHER

These are tracks. Mountain lion tracks.
WILLIAM

Wow.
MERIWETHER

Do you know what that means?
WILLIAM

That there are mountain lions on vacay around. . . ?
MERIWETHER

Let's just explore this area a bit more. Maybe we'll find some more footprints — we don't know how many there are.
WILLIAM

As long as we're back in time for dinner.
MERIWETHER

Scene 3

The ruins. Lewis enters.

Hello?
Anyone else here?
LEWIS

No response.

The sound of voices from far off. We can barely hear them, but we do. The voices get louder.

LEWIS

Hello?
I can hear you! Who's there?

The voices grow louder, nearer.

LEWIS
(listening, shouting)

Clark? Hello? Dev?

*Meriwether Lewis, and William Clark appear.
They have backpacks. William journals
furiously as he walks.*

*Lewis watches them, amazed at what is
happening. Maybe this is all in her head. She
isn't sure.*

MERIWETHER

Oh my god where did you lead us, Will. Bro. What is this. Where are we.

William stops journaling. He looks around.

LEWIS

You're a mirage. This is a mirage. . .

WILLIAM

Don't put this on me! This isn't on me. You're the navigator.

MERIWETHER

And you're a douchebag. You haven't looked up from your journal since mile four. Do you remember that the rest of our team made camp a mile back? Let's keep going, you said. I have more shit to journal about, you said. So now here we are. We're lost, and neither of us actually know where we are. We. Are. Lost.

WILLIAM

Ok, I get that you're repeating the same thing over and over again? But that's not doing anything. That's not like a magic wizard spell, or actually useful.

Meriwether takes out a map.

MERIWETHER

You wouldn't know what's useful if it kicked you in the balls.

LEWIS

You're a mirage. A mirage of the ruins.

William sees Lewis.

WILLIAM

Look, it's Sacajawea. She can help us.

MERIWETHER

(re: Lewis)

That girl?

WILLIAM

Isn't she Sacajawea?

MERIWETHER

Oh. Yeah?

WILLIAM

(like: duh, I just forgot for a second)

Yea. She's Sacajawea.

*William motions at her, gently. Lewis backs-up.
They look at her, but she doesn't move more.*

MERIWETHER

Maybe she needs a second to adjust.

*Meriwether goes back to looking at the map.
He looks up, comparing the landscape around
him to the map.*

MERIWETHER

(to William)

There isn't a desert here.

WILLIAM

Are you sure you're not holding it upside down?

MERIWETHER

I'm sure. Jesus.

WILLIAM

Sorry. But it did happen. That one time.

MERIWETHER

That was *once*! Plus I was drunk, okay?

WILLIAM

You're drunk a lot.

MERIWETHER

The map is not upside down. —And I was drunk because all we had left was wine, okay? We were low on rations.

Meriwether thrusts the map at William.

MERIWETHER

Here. You take a look if you're so smart.

William snatches the map from Meriwether.

They are not sure how they got here, or what to do next. They look around.

WILLIAM

Huh. Okay. You were right. Not good.

Lewis steps closer. She looks at the map.

MERIWETHER

Sacajawea. Sacajawea. Wanna help two lost losers out?

WILLIAM

I'm a good communicator. Let me try.

William goes to Lewis. He shows her the map.

WILLIAM

Sacajawea. Where are we? Have you seen any cats? Big cats? Paw prints?

William motions to the area around them.

WILLIAM

This. Not. On. Map. Desert.
This. Not. Here. . . Different.

He looks at Lewis expectantly.

LEWIS

You. . . You should go. . . That way.

Meriwether gazes at her. He's trying to figure out what she said.

LEWIS

I feel like we're having trouble understanding each other.

WILLIAM

What the hell is she saying?

MERIWETHER

No clue.

Lewis points to the opposite way from which they came.

WILLIAM

Oh. Okay. That way. Let me just — let me take notes of this area first.

MERIWETHER

Fine.

LEWIS

Who are you guys?

William and Meriwether don't hear her. William starts to journal. Meriwether looks around. He keeps looking at the map.

LEWIS

Have you ever seen a small brown statue? I think that's what I just found. Does that ring any bells?

Lewis takes out the puma statue and shows it to Meriwether.

LEWIS

No? Hey. You can hear me, right? I just found this statue.

William sketches a picture of their surroundings. Meriwether watches Lewis, entranced. He gazes at the statue.

MERIWETHER

(to William)

It's kind of beautiful. Whatever she's saying. It sounds like that. . . you know when your eyes are closed, and you're underwater, and the light from the sun, even though there are layers between you — it shines through your eyelids, right into you.

LEWIS

Before today, I was going to build a museum. Right here. We've never had one. I've been collecting things. I found some bags. You want to see? I found them this morning while I was wandering, for my job. They're pretty common. But I love them. They're just so nice. Floating color and light.

*Lewis pulls a plastic bag from her backpack.
Meriwether is a bit startled.*

LEWIS

Isn't it fantastic?

Lewis plays with the plastic bag. She blows it up in the air. She puts it over her face and breathes in and out and in and out. She says something but we can't really understand her through the bag.

Then, she takes off the bag.

LEWIS

There are probably more gorgeous magic things just under here, if we could excavate it. It would mean ruining the smoothness of the foundation, but it would also mean discovery. I was hoping we could excavate it soon. Clark was saying that in a few months, things were going to get better. It had been raining a little bit more. Once every three months. Sometimes more often, if we were lucky. But that all dried up. And now we are running out of food powder. And we might all die. And my museum — well. They're going to build a greenhouse here.

Ever since I learned, this morning, that they'd build on these ruins. My ruins. I keep telling myself it's not a big deal. But. It feels like someone poured sand inside of me, till I'm just all filled up.

Like the thing I love most in the world is getting buried under the sand.
And any moment I could shatter. Just crumble.
Because it's going to be gone so soon.

I'll be fine. I guess. I keep thinking that.
Dev says it helps to be upbeat. So I'm trying.
Even if it feels like the opposite inside of me.

*Meriwether and Lewis gaze at each other. Like
a moment of recognition in an airport full of
foreign sounds.*

LEWIS

What's a Sacajawea?
What is it?

MERIWETHER

Sacajawea. . .

William's pencil breaks.

WILLIAM

My pencil broke! Ugh! That's the worst.

Meriwether rolls his eyes. Big.

MERIWETHER

That's the worst.

Meriwether puts the map in his backpack.

LEWIS

Unless I stop them.
Unless I build my museum.
Save what's important.
Show them the alternate possibilities.

Lewis puts on her backpack.

LEWIS

I know we'll figure out a plan. If I can just — buy the ruins some time. Buy myself
some time.

She hurries off. William shouts after her.

WILLIAM

Come on now, Sacajawea. Be a team player. Stick with us! Where are you
going?

(to Meriwether)

Where is she going?

MERIWETHER

I don't know.

WILLIAM

Do you remember what I told you earlier? About the cat. The big cat.

MERIWETHER

The Eastern Puma?

WILLIAM

Right. What I am calling in my journal, The Identification of the Eastern Puma or mountain lion.

MERIWETHER

So are you just going to read to me from your diary? "Dear diary, today Meriwether was so amazing. . ."

WILLIAM

This is a big deal!

MERIWETHER

Sorry, sorry. The cat. What about it?

WILLIAM

The discovery of a new species!

MERIWETHER

Yes.

WILLIAM

A cat that most of the modern world has never seen.

MERIWETHER

This deserves a toast! So let's go back to camp and grab a drink!

WILLIAM

We need to capture it, Meriwether.

MERIWETHER

Wait. I thought I was following. But now I definitely feel like I'm not following.

WILLIAM

We need to show what we've found to the world.

MERIWETHER

So why don't you draw a picture in that journal of yours and we'll call it a day?

WILLIAM

We could utilize it.

Fur. Maybe even meat. Maybe it's better than that dry meat you've been bitching about the past two hours.

MERIWETHER

You'd want to eat the animal we've only just discovered?

WILLIAM

We eat cows. We eat pigs. We could change the future! We'd come back from our journey, we'd say, "Look! A cub of the newly discovered species!" We can at least breed them, or negotiate with some businesses! Make some money! Maybe even train them! Maybe we'd be revolutionizing some industry, huh?

MERIWETHER

You sound ridiculous. Training them for what — a cat circus? I knew you were kind of a loser, Will, but let's be adults for a moment.

WILLIAM

We don't know, do we! We don't know what could happen!

MERIWETHER

No! We don't! So what are you rambling about like a crazy person!

WILLIAM

We'd be — opening up our options. Maybe the mountain lion could be trained to protect farms! We don't know!

MERIWETHER

You're talking about domesticating a large cat.

WILLIAM

I'm just saying we don't know what's possible! And I have this feeling — this strong, unrelenting feeling that if we don't take one back with us, we're going to be missing some major opportunities! We could be changing things, Meri! We could be doing the world a favor!

William starts to scribble furiously, making sketches and notes in his journal.

MERIWETHER

Okay. We really need to get you some water, or something. You must be hallucinating. Because what you're suggesting is that we *change* our entire course of travel so you can try and capture a cat twice the size of you in the name of the future. I knew that when they hired you they called you a "visionary," but I thought that meant, like, smart, as opposed to like, "imagines crazy future plans that involve trapping wild cats, no big deal, in the woods."

William stops journaling. He takes a few deep breaths. He puts his hand on Meriwether's shoulder.

WILLIAM

How are you doing?

MERIWETHER

What?

WILLIAM

How are you. Feeling?

MERIWETHER

What is wrong with you?

WILLIAM

What?

MERIWETHER

What's wrong with you?

WILLIAM

Nothing.

MERIWETHER

You never ask me how I'm doing.

WILLIAM

Well. I'm. . . making more of an effort. I care about you. You're my. . . buddy.

MERIWETHER

. . . Okay. I'm going to find our camp.

WILLIAM

No, don't. I mean. I just want to check in. You know. We're a team.

MERIWETHER

I'm fine. Are you dying? Or is this that moment where you tell me we are actually chasing this cat because you have a deep deviance inside that compels you to have sex with a large wild animal?

WILLIAM

Meriwether. Be serious.

MERIWETHER

I knew it.

WILLIAM

We need to stay a couple of days.

Meriwether swigs heavily from his flask.

MERIWETHER

Uh-huh. And why?

WILLIAM

Not because I want to have sex.

I mean, I do.

Not with that animal. With a woman. A human woman.

But.

Okay.

What I'm trying to say is that we need to stay because I've been talking with one of our crew and they are going to help me set traps. But we have to wait until it rains. It'll be easier then.

MERIWETHER

Okay.

WILLIAM

That's it? Okay?

MERIWETHER

I mean. I'm pissed off. I think this idea is stupid. I do. But what do you want me to do? I mean, though the idea of abandoning you in the woods, to hopefully get eaten, while that's very comforting to imagine right now — I can't do that. You know I can't do that. You know that you've effectively made me change course against my will because, even though we are "a team," you have superiority over me right now.

WILLIAM

Meriwether. . .

MERIWETHER

You know what, maybe I should just leave you here! Fend for yourself! Go and make progress on our actual reason for being here! The whole reason we are risking pneumonia, and death, and why we are alone in the wilderness with a small group of men and too many backpacks!

WILLIAM

Meriwether, it's for the good. It's for the future. It's for experience and discovery and potential!

MERIWETHER

Well when you can tell me what that potential is actually going towards, that's great. Let me know.

WILLIAM

Meriwether. Wait! I already have an idea for a trap! And Stephens can help us! I know! He's the perfect man for the job.

*Meriwether storms off. He has left his flask.
William sighs. William sees the flask. William
goes and picks it up. He sniffs it. He drinks. He
drinks some more. Then, Meriwether enters.*

MERIWETHER

I left my flask.

Meriwether sees William holding the flask.

William sees Meriwether see him.

WILLIAM

. . .

*Meriwether strides over to William and
snatches the flask back.*

*Meriwether exits again. William throws his
journal in anger.*

Scene 4

Lewis and Clark's house. Lewis is sitting at the table. She gets a cup from the cupboard, and two small canisters. She fills the cup with water from the bucket.

At the other end of the table is a bag of dark powder, and a microscope.

Clark enters.

Hi.

LEWIS

Hey.

CLARK

Hungry?

LEWIS

CLARK
Oh man. I don't even want to think about food.
But yeah.

LEWIS
Green or yellow powder?

CLARK
The question is, do I want slightly more green or more yellow pee.

LEWIS
Your pee gets *more* yellow?

CLARK
Anyway. Uh, green.

LEWIS
Okay.

*Lewis gets another cup. She fills it with water.
She checks for the green powder canister.*

Using a scoop (that is in the canister), she scoops powder into the cup and stirs it with the scoop.

CLARK

I've been up all night. I finished the plans so I can start building on schedule, which, great, because now maybe I can sleep.

She does this with the second cup. Clark takes her cup.

LEWIS

Is that what you were working on?

CLARK

Yeah.

LEWIS

(re: workspace)

You left the microscope out. And. What's the black stuff in the bag? Is it a new kind of powder?

CLARK

I have been trying new powder – there's some in the pantry. It's no good. It's flammable. I was testing it today. It's actually explosive. So. Don't eat it. It's not safe.

(re: black stuff in bag)

That's soil for the greenhouse. The black stuff.

I'm really confident that this greenhouse can help us. Can save us. Dev is nervous. I'm not oblivious to the risks involved. To the potential outcomes.

Clark goes to a bag. She pulls out a scroll of paper: the plans. She sits back at the table and inspects them. Lewis leans over and looks at the drawings.

LEWIS

So you do have a back-up plan.

CLARK

You mean. . . ?

LEWIS

Trying new combinations of powder. It's possible that will work, right? And then we'll be fine. So. That might be the answer. We might not even need the greenhouse after all.

CLARK

Well. Uh.

That's not totally how it works.

I mean — yes, we're trying other combinations. But a lot of what we had went rancid. And what we lost, we need alternatives, and not all of the ingredients have easy alternatives.

Worst case scenario. I mean, absolutely worst-case, we could survive of what is edible for a while. The base ingredients. We wouldn't be nutritionally supplemented the way we are now. And I don't know what that would do, long-term. But it could stretch out things for a few weeks.

LEWIS

But that doesn't mean you won't figure out something. You're the smartest person I know.

CLARK

I'm one of two people that you know. . . But I'll take the compliment.

You're the smartest person I know. I mean, not at food engineering. But. In all the other ways.

LEWIS

Now you're just being romantic.

CLARK

What's wrong with that?

LEWIS

(playful)

Nothing. I just think your claims are influenced by our relationship.

CLARK

You've got me there.

Lewis and Clark kiss. Lewis pulls away.

LEWIS

What are the chances, you think. Of. Our. Of us. . .

Forty percent.
Maybe forty-five.

CLARK

Those seem like pretty good odds.

LEWIS

. . . You're being weirdly positive.

CLARK

I'm a positive person.

LEWIS

I know you can be positive. But. You just. Seem. Determined to look on the bright side right now.

CLARK

Well there are a lot of things worth saving, aren't there?

LEWIS

Well there's you.

CLARK

And there's you.

LEWIS

I'll do whatever I can not to lose you.

CLARK

You're *such* a romantic.

LEWIS

You always say that.

CLARK

Well it's always true.

LEWIS

I'm just passionate.

CLARK

About everything.

LEWIS

CLARK

Not about everything. About you. About the greenhouse. About the idea of getting to die old with you, of natural causes. That sounds pretty good right about now.

Sorry.

We'll be fine. We'll figure it out.

LEWIS

It's okay.

It'll be okay.

CLARK

I start construction tomorrow, if we're lucky.

LEWIS

. . . That soon?

CLARK

Yeah.

LEWIS

Oh. Wow.

CLARK

Yep. Just gotta finish sketching these plans and go through the stock materials.

LEWIS

You're still going ahead and building on the ruins?

CLARK

Yep. Clearing it out, building it on the foundation.

It was a museum, huh? I always forget. A museum.

LEWIS

. . .

CLARK

You okay, Lew?

LEWIS

. . .

Clark stands and begins to clear the table.

LEWIS
What if it doesn't work?

CLARK
The greenhouse?

LEWIS
I'm just asking.

CLARK
You've supported my idea so far. What other option do we have?

LEWIS
You said your are still playing around with powder recipes, right?

CLARK
Yeah, but not — not seriously. Not as a solution. *This* is our solution, Lewis. The greenhouse. Why are you suddenly being. . . apprehensive?

LEWIS
. . . Remember when we thought things were getting better?

CLARK
Things were getting better. Before all of this.

LEWIS
And you said maybe we could do something beautiful there. Maybe we could build something on the ruins. Something. For us. All three of us.

CLARK
Well. Things change.
I'm sorry if you're disappointed. I think maybe the greenhouse will be nice. Maybe not the way you think of beautiful or nice things. But.
(soft)
I think a greenhouse can be a beautiful wonderful thing.

LEWIS
. . .

CLARK
We should both get some rest.

Clark turns off the lights. Just a small light source – a candle. She takes off her pants and

folds them, setting them on a chair. She crawls into bed.

CLARK

You coming to bed?

LEWIS

Sure. I have to go rinse off, change. I'll be back.

Lewis exits.

We hear the sloshing of water, Lewis bathing. This take a little time.

Lewis re-enters in pajamas. Clark is already asleep. Lewis walks over to Clark.

LEWIS
(softly)

Clark?

No response.

Lewis looks around. She is thinking about all of the things that are about to happen. She knows what she wants to do, but this all feels a little out of control.

Her attention lands on the plans. She walks to the table, examining them.

Lewis tears a strip of paper off the plans. She watches Clark, who doesn't move. Lewis sets the strip down. Then, she looks at it.

LEWIS

...

Lewis eats the strip of paper.

Piece by piece, Lewis eats the plans. Sometimes it's hard to get down. It's not a pleasant texture.

At one point, Lewis thinks she is going to throw up.

She recovers.

She keeps eating the plans. She finishes them.

Scene 5

The wilderness. The sound of crickets. William stands, journaling. Slowly, he begins to cry. Crickets, and crying. . . Then, Meriwether enters.

MERIWETHER

I've been looking for you, bro.

WILLIAM

Stop saying "bro," okay? It's not catching on. Just let it go.

MERIWETHER

Okay. Sorry.

WILLIAM

...

MERIWETHER

Did I interrupt your journaling sesh?

WILLIAM

Leave me alone.

What're you looking at me like that for?

I'm fine.

Meriwether looks at William hard. The way you look at your best friend when you know they're pretending.

WILLIAM

Go fall off a cliff.

MERIWETHER

Oh. Were you crying?

WILLIAM

You're drunk.
Leave me alone, okay?

MERIWETHER

Hey. Hey.

Meriwether takes out a handkerchief, holding it out to William.

WILLIAM

...

Meriwether watches William. William stares him down. William takes the handkerchief.

MERIWETHER

I was trying to be nice to you, okay? Even though that's the last thing I want to be doing right now. This is going to make me sound insensitive. But. You know what, on second thought. Never mind.

William leans over to Meriwether and shoves him. Meriwether shoves him back. William shoves him back, real anger in it. Meriwether grabs William, and he snatches his journal out of William's hands.

He thinks about shredding it to pieces with his bare hands.

William grabs for it and can't. He squirms. Meriwether looks at the journal, at William.

Meriwether throws the journal to the ground.

MERIWETHER

No. It's too easy.

WILLIAM

(re: the death)

I should have been prepared for this.

MERIWETHER

You could have prevented this, William! If you hadn't enlisted Stephens to help you with your *insane* plan, we would be on our way to the ocean. And Stephens would be with us, instead of. . . He would be alive.

I think you're a horrible person.

WILLIAM

I didn't want it to happen!

MERIWETHER

I don't care if you wanted it to happen or not. I care that a man is dead because of you.

Don't you think I'm sad too?

WILLIAM

I don't know.

MERIWETHER

I'm so busy being angry I can't even cry!

WILLIAM

I —
...

*Meriwether moves to William and hugs him.
It's brotherly but a little cold.*

MERIWETHER

I think I can't do this anymore.

WILLIAM

... What?

MERIWETHER

I know I'm drunk. And I know we're talking now, for the first time in a few days. But I really don't know if I can do this anymore. Your stupid puma plan killed crew member Stephens.

WILLIAM

You can't just leave.

MERIWETHER

Why not?

WILLIAM

You're co-captain.

MERIWETHER

Oh now you call me co-captain.

WILLIAM

You're right, Meriwether. It was a stupid plan. I was an idiot. I was delusional. I don't know what I was. I am sorry. Really.

MERIWETHER

You have his blood on your hands.

WILLIAM

But you don't! You don't!

I know you're mad at me. I know. You can hate me. I don't like it, but I'll take it.

But if you leave, I can't do this. I don't mean emotionally — I'm a wasteland emotionally, yes, but I mean I literally cannot lead this without you. And if you go, if you abandon this, then his death happened why? For what purpose? Because I was stupid? If you stay. If you help me finish this. Maybe that's a small way we can honor him. I know it's not — It'll never be enough. But it's something.

MERIWETHER

...

WILLIAM

What do you say?

MERIWETHER

I don't know what to say.
— I can't even look at you.

WILLIAM

... I'm sorry. You know I mean it. If I could do anything, anything other than say that over, and over again, I would, if it would matter, if it could change even a moment of what happened — I'm sorry, Meriwether. I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry.

MERIWETHER

Well maybe that isn't enough!

WILLIAM

No, wait. Please. Wait.

Meriwether moves to exit.

WILLIAM

Meri! Wait!

William gazes after him. Meriwether exits.

WILLIAM

(pause)

Sacajawea! Meriwether! You can't just leave me here, alone! I can't do this alone! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

scene 6

*Lewis and Clark's house. Clark sits at the table.
Lewis enters.*

LEWIS

Good morning.

CLARK

Hey. . .

LEWIS

What is it?

CLARK

Have you seen them anywhere?

LEWIS

What?

CLARK

The plans. Did you put them somewhere?

LEWIS

I don't know what you're talking about.

CLARK

Of course you do, Lewis. You're a terrible liar and you've never been very good at practical jokes.

LEWIS

Ouch.

CLARK

I love those things about you. But right now I'd really like those plans.

LEWIS

I don't know.

Clark becomes a little manic.

CLARK

I need to start compiling the supplies to begin building, today. This could delay my building, by a day or two, and that's not good, because I don't know exactly how long the peppers need to be ripe.

And I know I keep saying we can do this. And it'll be okay.
But we are also trying to survive.
And the possibility that we might not. . .

LEWIS

Okay. Okay. It'll be okay. Lemme see.

Lewis tries to look for the plans. It's not convincing that she's looking very hard.

CLARK

You know where they are.

LEWIS

I don't.

CLARK

Stop lying, Lewis.
This isn't funny. I'm sorry if you meant it to be funny.
But my heart is beating really fast right now

Lewis holds Clark. She breathes deeply.

CLARK (cont.)

And it isn't funny — You know I hate secrets.

LEWIS

Take deep breaths.

CLARK

I don't want to take deep breaths; I want you to tell me where the plans are.

LEWIS
(breathing)

One. Two. Three.
Please, Clark.

Clark breathes deeply.

CLARK

Are you calming me down because what you're going to say is going to be really upsetting?

And why would you do this? This is for me and for you, this greenhouse. For us. For everyone. So we don't die. Do you want us to die?

LEWIS

...

They look at each other. Each of them flashing through the one hundred directions this could go in. Maybe after this, it'll feel like no big deal. Maybe after this, they'll make out. Maybe after this, they'll hate each other.

LEWIS
(lying)

You know how I sleep walk sometimes?

CLARK

You don't.

LEWIS

Yes I do.

CLARK

You don't. That's never happened.

LEWIS

Well. I. I ate the plans.

CLARK

. . . And the sleep-walking?

LEWIS

Fine I didn't sleepwalk I just ate them.

Okay?

Okay?

I'm. Uh.

CLARK

You ate the plans.

Which. That's a separate thing to consider.

But the plans were destroyed because. . . ?

I need some hint of a reason, Lewis.

Because right now I'm really mad at you.

And I don't know the you that would do that.

It feels like a surprise.

But in a bad way.

LEWIS

I'm sorry.

But I had to.

I think.

I want you to understand that.

It's important and.

I have to save it.

I love you and I —

I also just really have to save it.

CLARK

What are you talking about?

What's going on with you, Lewis?

You actually ate them.

You ate them?

I'm going to have to redraw the plans.

Lewis moves to exit.

LEWIS

I'm going to be sick.

*Lewis grabs her backpack and exits.
Clark is flabbergasted.*

*Lights shift: Dev's house. It looks just like
Lewis and Clark's, save for a blindingly bright
(homemade) decorative pillow. The pillow says
"BE UPBEAT" on it.*

Dev and Clark stand. Clark has just entered.

CLARK

Hi.

DEV

Hey. Everything okay?
You're breathing really fast.
What's going on?

CLARK

I don't know what to do.
Lewis hasn't come by here, has she?

DEV

No. Should she?

CLARK

She's being really weird right now.

DEV

I love Lewis, but we both know she can be a bit /obsessive.

CLARK
(simultaneous)

/Obsessive. Yeah.

DEV

So do you want to tell me what happened?

CLARK

Okay. Yeah. Uh. I think I need to sit down.

Clark sits. Dev sits.

CLARK

Lewis and I had a fight. Sort of. I think it was a fight.

DEV

Okay.

CLARK

She ate the plans, for the greenhouse? Just — at least that's what she said. I couldn't even understand. Did she mean *literally*? I guess so, but — . . . And then she just ran away. Like I don't have enough on my mind, like impending death if I screw up this stupid greenhouse, now maybe my girlfriend is gunning for some weird group death because now she's eating paper? I don't.

DEV

There's a lot of pressure on you right now. I think you need to take a step back. Try to take a breath.

CLARK

I can't think right now. Or. I can't not think? I don't even know. I keep having this horrible dream, Dev.

DEV

What's it about?

CLARK

In the dream, I've just finished building the greenhouse. Some things almost went wrong, but they don't. We are so excited. I got it done: the first *actual* greenhouse in almost two hundred years. We're fine. We're safe.

We have a ceremony, and you two decide to give me this award. This trophy. You start chanting, shouting, wanting me to make a speech. And so I say:

The future always stands before us. Beckoning. For the last fifty years, we have struggled to gain some stability. To know if we were moving forward in any real way. But today, we have done it. We have the first greenhouse. The first opportunity to grow real, genetically modified food in recent history. And it is thanks to the future. If it was not for what stood before us — the uncertainty, the strangeness, the desire to push forward, and the knowledge that things will be better than they have ever been. . . I would not be here.

Then, the three of us all raise our glasses, and I say, "To the future!" and even Lewis shouts back, "To the future!"

DEV

That sounds like a great dream.

CLARK

But then time passes. A month. The seeds get planted. The temperature gets regulated. The sun shines. Sprouts grow. We have some peppers. And the peppers get bigger, and bigger. They're gigantic. And they're this green. This shade that's like, what I imagine heat on forest leaves looks like.

DEV

(softly, reassuring)

Sounds pretty.

CLARK

Then we harvest them. Ten peppers. And they're so gorgeous. And we keep saying, "This is the first real food we've ever had. We're making history. We're changing the quality of life. The future as we know it will be altered." And I hear myself say, "It's already altered."

I pluck a pepper from a stem.
I slice the top off. It's this crispness that I've never felt before.
I look at it. This strange green cap of a living thing.

The inside is filled with sand.
The peppers are filled with sand.
And the insides are —
Rotten and gritty.

The sand pours out, all over my hands, over my clothes.
The promise of everything we're doing just—
Disintegrates in my hands.

Dev gets up and grabs the throw pillow.

DEV

Here.

Dev hands Clark the throw pillow.

CLARK

Uh. And I do what with this.

DEV

Give it a squeeze. It'll relax you.

Clark holds the throw pillow. She looks at Dev.

DEV

Is it helping?

CLARK

I don't know.

DEV

You've gotta really grip it.
Like you're trying to murder it.

CLARK

. . . It says "be upbeat."

DEV

I know. It'll help, I promise.

CLARK

This feels embarrassing.

DEV

Just try it.

Clark really squeezes it. She keeps squeezing it.

DEV

Do you still have the pillow I made you?

CLARK

You mean the one you gave me and Lewis last year for the New Year?

DEV

Yeah.

CLARK

I – Uh. I think so.
Honestly. . .
I don't know.
I'll ask Lewis.

(remembering)

If I ever find her.

DEV

Don't think about that right now. Just try to relax. Okay?

Dev gets a glass of water for Clark. He hands it to her. Dev rubs her shoulders. Clark tenses up.

DEV

Is this okay?

CLARK

...I don't know.

DEV

It's just a shoulder rub, Clark. You can relax.

CLARK

Right. I. It's just.

DEV

Is it at least helping?

CLARK

Yes.

DEV

Then just try to actually relax, okay?

CLARK

Alright.

Slowly, Clark relaxes. Dev sits down next to her. He stops rubbing her shoulders. Dev touches her arm.

Clark stands up.

Dev reaches for the pillow. Their hands connect. Dev leans toward Clark, slipping a hand around her. Clark doesn't move. Dev takes a step closer. Clark gazes at him.

Then, Clark pulls back.

Clark shoves the pillow at Dev.

Clark exits.

scene 7

Lewis stands, in the middle of the ruins. She holds what look like some homemade explosives: plastic, and powder. Her empty backpack is discarded to the side.

LEWIS

...

Lewis sets the explosives in the middle of the ruin. She moves them a little. She moves away. She sets the detonator down. She holds her foot over it like it's a pedal. She stares at the button. Lifts up her foot.

Meriwether enters.

LEWIS

I thought you'd disappeared.

MERIWETHER

I was hoping you could help me. Tell me where to go, to go back.

Meriwether moves towards Lewis and the explosive device, slowly.

LEWIS

Get away from me! These are explosives, don't you see that!
Hey! Back off!
I don't want to hurt you!

Meriwether begins to hum. Slowly, it turns into a song he sings.

MERIWETHER

The tracks we lay
We hike for days
Every mile, my shoes wear thinner

The tracks we make

We lead for days
Every morning, never surer

Here, Lewis joins in. She isn't sure how she knows the words, but she does. It feels almost like a folk-song, or something in the history between them or before them.

BOTH

The tracks we trace
We follow for days
Every sunset, there is less dinner

The tracks we find
We crawl behind
Every night, hope grows dimmer

And I am never surer of
Where I can find you
And I am never surer of
What it is that binds you to me

And I am never surer of
What you remind me of
Is it in You, Is it in Me
But I've been looking
For you
I haven't stopped looking
For you

The tracks we make
We hike for days
Every mile, my smile grows grimmer

Even as I grow surer
That I'll never find you
Maybe I never could
I won't stop looking for you

The song ends. Meriwether reaches his arms out to Lewis. A fluid series of movements, almost like a dance: their bodies get closer. Their foreheads touch. They look at each other. They pull away. They look at each other.

LEWIS

How come I can understand what you were singing?

MERIWETHER

I'm not sure.

LEWIS

What are you looking for? What will you never find?

MERIWETHER

Sacajawea, I don't know if I can do this anymore. I think I want to abandon the expedition but. . .

We lost a man a few days ago. William, he's been trying to catch the Eastern Puma. That's a big cat we've found on our journey. A new species. He's obsessed with it. Or was, now. Honestly, the puma is my favorite thing we've discovered so far. I didn't want to admit that to him. But we handle our passion differently. He clings to it. He wants to own it. He wants to be responsible for its very existence.

Right now it feels as if I could leave this behind me and forget who I've been out here, in the wilderness.

And I just want it to live. I want to live.

When I was young, I was very afraid of dying. I have a sister — I should say, I had one. She died several years ago. But the past tense is hard for me. She got very sick. It was, at a certain point, inevitable. In more than the normal way that death can be inevitable. It was impending. And she was my futurity. My family has never been terribly hardy.

It's not very American, I know. It's not very patriotic. Or brave. It's not very selfless. But I've always been afraid of it, my whole life, dying. And that's never really gone away.

I've lost so much weight I've had to keep tightening my belt. I had to cut a notch into it. I got food poisoning, a few weeks ago. Felt like the animals were trying to crawl *out* of me, actually — sorry, gross.

...

When William told me about what happened to Stephens, our crew member. It was like a mechanism inside of me snapped. If I left, I could finally fall asleep without wondering if these would be the last few hours I had.

Could you tell me where else I could go? How I could go home? I just want to get away from this. Put distance between that part of me and. . . the part of me that isn't ready to die.

LEWIS

Why did you go on this journey, in the first place?

MERIWETHER

William asked me. We knew each other, from the army. He's like a brother to me. I thought. . . this chance to see what the world before us really is, to really know the land, the smells, the leaves, the rivers. It felt important. More important than my little body full of little fears about my little life.

But I don't know if anything is worth losing a life that didn't need to be lost.

LEWIS

He's important to you, William is?

MERIWETHER

I hate him. I could tear him to pieces.

LEWIS

But before? And when you don't hate him?

MERIWETHER

He's important. More important than I wish he was, right now.

LEWIS

I think that matters.

Right now, I don't know what's the most important. Or if anything is. Right now, death doesn't seem like a bad alternative to losing these ruins. To losing my museum.

MERIWETHER

Is it important?

LEWIS

Clark is building a greenhouse. She wants to build it here, on this ruin. Do you know what a greenhouse is? It's like a garden. But inside a home. Or, the garden is its own home. Clark calls it a sustainable, nutrition-based ecosystem. These ruins are the only solid, stable foundation we have. The only building that hasn't shifted with the sand.

I don't want them to destroy the only thing I really love in this empty world.

I love the people. I love Clark.
But this. It's the only thing I love.
And if I can't save it.
Maybe it should just be destroyed. Completely.

We might all die.
We might.
And I don't know.
I just keep thinking, I should feel more concerned. I should feel more scared. But
what I keep thinking is — I want to save the ruins. I want to save the ruins from
being lost. Or. I want to lose them.

Meriwether looks at the explosives.

LEWIS

...
I don't want to be rude, but I think you should leave. I don't want you to get hurt.
And I'm about to do something dangerous.

MERIWETHER

So you're going to blow it all up?

LEWIS

If it can't exist as it was meant to, it shouldn't exist.
Otherwise. It'll be a greenhouse.
With thousands of mysteries I'll never know
All trapped underneath.
It'll be like suffocating.

MERIWETHER

And if you do this.
Will you die with it?

LEWIS

Go. I need you to go.
I don't want to hurt you.
I can't do this with you here.
It's dangerous. I don't know what'll happen.
Go.

MERIWETHER

I want to help you.
But I also want to live.

LEWIS

You should go back to your friend.
Anything around here, anywhere else for you to go to—
It doesn't exist anymore.

MERIWETHER

...

You're afraid of what the world will be like without your museum.
Maybe. If there is no museum in the world. It can be within you. Maybe you
don't have to die.

I'm sorry. I'm scared of dying.
But I think there is a place in the world where we can both live.
We can try to survive. At least a little longer.

LEWIS

...

MERIWETHER

Be careful.

Meriwether exits.

*Lewis looks at the explosives. She lifts her foot
toward the button.*

Dev enters.

DEV

What's going on?

LEWIS

You should get away from here, Dev.

DEV

Are you really going to go through with that?

LEWIS

I'm going to lose it.

DEV

The ruin?

LEWIS

The museum.

DEV

Lewis. Hey.

Dev approaches Lewis. He holds his hand out to her.

DEV

Is this what you want?

LEWIS

I'm going to lose what I want.

DEV

. . . Sometimes we can't have what we want. Sometimes that destruction is selfish. Sometimes we have to let go. For others. Even if it means we are unhappy.

LEWIS

What do you want, Dev?

DEV

. . . I want you and Clark to be happy.
Come on, Lewis.

LEWIS

Me and Clark, huh.

Lewis thinks about Clark. The moment they fell in love. The moment they made love for the first time. The idea that maybe they could grow old and die together, of natural causes.

LEWIS

Clark.

*She gazes at the ruins.
She pulls her foot away.
She sinks to the ground. She lays down.
She gazes up at the ruins.*

*Dev pushes the detonator away.
He lays down next to Lewis.
He puts his hand over hers.*

LEWIS

I made the explosives from that new powder Clark tried to make. The stuff she said was dangerous. She left it in our house.

DEV

...

LEWIS

Later, I can take this into the desert. Set it off there. Fifty miles out or something. Where it won't hurt anyone. Destroy anything at all. Just blow sand into the air.

DEV

I'm sorry, Lewis.
I'm glad you're alright.
Clark will be glad you're alright.

LEWIS

Well I'm alive.

scene 8

William Clark and Meriwether Lewis are walking the final stretch of their journey.

WILLIAM

You've been really quiet.

MERIWETHER

I drank too much.
And I occasionally still hate you.

WILLIAM

What happened, while you were gone?

MERIWETHER

...

WILLIAM

I was really worried about you.

MERIWETHER

I came back, didn't I.

WILLIAM
And you're staying?

MERIWETHER
I'm here. Stop asking questions.

WILLIAM
(pause)
Let's play a game.

MERIWETHER
I spy, with my little eye. . . someone who is a really awful human being.

WILLIAM
No, not that game.

MERIWETHER
Which one?

WILLIAM
When we get there. . . I will. . .

MERIWETHER
When we get there, you'll:
Get an incurable disease or,
Fall off a cliff and die, or
Drink yourself into a perpetual blackness.

WILLIAM
You're so cheerful.

MERIWETHER
Well it's a game, isn't it?

Here, the air changes. It gets more humid.

WILLIAM
Do you smell that?

MERIWETHER
Salt water.

WILLIAM
Are we really that close?

The faint sound of gulls.

MERIWETHER

You'd be lost right now without me, you know that, right? Your sense of direction totally sucks.

WILLIAM

Shut up.

They see the ocean. Whatever they imagined this moment to be, they are really here with it. There is the dissonance of it not being the perfect thing in their heads, and maybe they're even a little disappointed, but it is so much realer than anything in their heads — that makes it kind of overwhelming. They aren't sure if they've succeeded or failed but they've definitely done something and it's coming to an end. They are looking at something they never thought they'd ever see, so this is wonderful. And also really scary, because how do they possibly live past this moment? They aren't sure.

WILLIAM

Do you see it?

MERIWETHER

Yes.

WILLIAM

Do you hear it?

MERIWETHER

I think so.
It's that rushing in your ears.
It's the pit of your stomach dropping.

WILLIAM

It's the ocean, Meriwether.

MERIWETHER

What does someone do once they've reached the ocean?

WILLIAM

Become the champions.

MERIWETHER

Turn back?

WILLIAM

Dive in.

MERIWETHER

See how long you can hold your breath for?

WILLIAM

Want to race down to the shoreline?

MERIWETHER

We should find a bar.

WILLIAM

Is this what you thought it would be like?

MERIWETHER

No.

WILLIAM

Me neither.

I never thought we'd get to the end of the journey and I'd be as sorry as I am. I never thought we'd get to the end and I'd feel as awful as I still feel for what happened.

Was it all better or worse for you than it was for me, huh?

MERIWETHER

It's fine.

WILLIAM

That's all?

MERIWETHER

I guess stranger than I planned.

Drunker too.

I never thought I'd come so close to leaving you in the middle of nowhere as I did. Can't say I regret that though.

WILLIAM

Yeah. I get it. I would've wanted to abandon me too.

They stare out.

WILLIAM

We've just made history, Meri.

Meriwether takes off his backpack. He rummages through.

WILLIAM

What're you doing?

Meriwether takes out his flask. He raises his flask in a toast.

MERIWETHER

I know you'll say it's too early but — I guess /

William finds his own flask.

WILLIAM

Early is a state of mind.

They hold them up.

MERIWETHER

To us.

WILLIAM

To us.

They link arms and drink from their flasks. William looks at Meriwether to stop, but Meriwether is emptying his flask. William tries his best but it ends up spilling down his face.

MERIWETHER

Very smooth, very classy.

WILLIAM

Shut up.

MERIWETHER

All this time with me, and you're still not a very good drinker.

WILLIAM

All this time with me, and you're still not a very good person.

MERIWETHER

Fair point.

WILLIAM

Though if we're keeping score, I'm obviously terrible.

MERIWETHER

...

WILLIAM

I am so sorry, Meriwether. I can't say it enough.

MERIWETHER

You have. You've said it enough.

(kind)

You can stop saying it. Please.

I can't say I forgive you completely. That would be lying. But I am starting to. I am trying to. I mean it.

William smiles at Meriwether. Meriwether grimaces, then looks away.

WILLIAM

What do you think they'll call us?

MERIWETHER

Call us?

WILLIAM

Our expedition.

MERIWETHER

The Meriwether Lewis and William Clark Journey?

WILLIAM

That sounds stupid.

MERIWETHER

I like it.

WILLIAM

How about the Expedition Across the Continent?

MERIWETHER

You have bad taste, I guess.
How about. . .

WILLIAM

How about the Corps of Discovery?

MERIWETHER

. . . I like that.

WILLIAM

I like that too.

MERIWETHER

. . . You think we'll still hang out?

WILLIAM

You're so clingy.

MERIWETHER

It'll be nice not to stand next to someone while they journal obsessively.

WILLIAM

Those journals are important.

When I fill out my report and they ask what *you* contributed, I'll say you lightened our load by eating all our food and drinking all our alcohol.

MERIWETHER

I got the damn map figured out.

WILLIAM

You were drunk whenever you had the map.

MERIWETHER

And therein lies my prowess, dude.

WILLIAM

Meriwether.

MERIWETHER

William.

WILLIAM

What if no one remembers us?

MERIWETHER

You're having doubts now? As we're staring at the ocean? After everything that has happened?

William looks at Meriwether. Then back at the shoreline.

WILLIAM

. . . No. Not anymore.

scene 9

Lewis and Clark's house. Lewis watches Clark sleep, upright, against the table. She wakes up, and looks at Lewis.

CLARK

You're back.

LEWIS

I was only gone half a day. Dev found me.

CLARK

If you mean two halves of two different days, that sounds more true.

LEWIS

I have something I want to show you.

CLARK

Will this help me make sense of the last two days? I've been looking for you like crazy. If it wasn't for Dev, I don't know that I'd have survived to even see you right now.

Lewis finds the metal canister, hidden in a cupboard. She takes the puma statue out of the canister. She sets the canister on the table, upside down.

LEWIS

For the museum I would have had.

CLARK

And. What's it do? What's it for?

LEWIS

Well. If this was my museum, I would talk about it. . .

CLARK

You want to talk about it?

Lewis places the statue on top of the canister.

LEWIS

This is a statue of the Eastern Puma. I believe it to be made in the early 20th century, in honor of a then-native big cat, the eastern puma or mountain lion.

The cat was officially declared extinct in 2015 when the last one known to exist in the wild ceased to appear.

It is made of sandstone. Sandstone is made when sediment is packed near the Earth's crust. It takes thousands of years to make this.

This statue makes me feel — there is just so much to discover in the past, and much to remember. To honor. When we learn about the puma, on display here, it becomes a part of us, doesn't it? In that way, it's *not* extinct. It exists in the air. In the spaces between us. In all the open space. All the desert.

It feels so important.

CLARK

. . . I still don't understand why you ate the plans, Lewis. I'm sorry. That presentation — I don't know what it was supposed to mean to me. It was nice. But I'm having trouble getting over this other thing.

LEWIS

I'm really good at it.

I love it.

Museums. The history.

I wanted to use the ruin as a museum, because that's the only permanent place we had. Everywhere else shifts and changes.

When everything shifts that way, the past doesn't survive. I wanted it to survive.
I wanted the museum to survive for that. For me.

Lewis waits for Clark to respond. She doesn't.

LEWIS

I know it's weird. Or. I get that it's not something as useful as a greenhouse.
I didn't always understand that.
I ate your plans.
I'm sorry.
I thought I could stop you from building the greenhouse.

CLARK

How could you have done that to us / when you knew it could have killed us. It
would have killed us.

LEWIS

I don't expect you to forgive me.

CLARK

So you wanted to keep these ruins more than you wanted us to be alive?

LEWIS

. . . Have you ever wanted anything more than you can even comprehend? Like
it's a part of you? Like it's pieces of yourself that, if you lost, you'd just fall apart,
because they hold you together.

CLARK

Not if it hurt other people.

LEWIS

If I could have saved those ruins without hurting other people, I would have
done that. Believe me. Besides, I didn't go through with it anyway.

CLARK

You almost did.

LEWIS

Maybe it doesn't matter. Maybe I can forget it. Leave it behind. Detonate the
statue in the desert fifty miles out. Is that what you want me to do?

CLARK

I want Lewis back. I want to know where you are. I want to not keep secrets.
I want to feel like you're not fighting against me.

And how do I know that you won't burn the greenhouse to the ground?

LEWIS

Because we need the peppers. And I need you. And Dev. You two are more important. Survival is more important. I know that now.

And all I want is some history. Somewhere. That we can see. That I can have.

CLARK

. . . I don't know, Lewis. There isn't room for the museum, not right now. As much as you want it. As much as I want you to be happy. I've started building the greenhouse.

LEWIS

I have an idea.

Lights shift as time moves forward:

The greenhouse. We see it. The chrome and glass. A small patch of dirt, surrounded by peppers. It is lucent and green, bright and vivid. A thrumming, a vibrancy, emits from the space.

Where the desert is sallow and grit this is smooth and energetic.

Clark and Lewis. Dev stands off to the side.

Lewis places the canister, upside down, in the mound of dirt. Dev steps towards the mound of dirt. He inserts a plaque in front of the statue.

On top of the canister, Lewis places the statue of the Eastern Puma.

All three look at the statue, surrounded by the peppers. Clark puts his arm around Lewis, and Lewis takes Dev's hand.

END OF PLAY.

