

The New Galileos

by Amy Berryman

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TIME/PLACE

United States, near future

CHARACTERS

Nora Travers, mid twenties, marine biologist, aquarist

Elaine Tuck, forties/fifties, renowned glaciologist

Dr. Beth Whitney, forties/fifties, renowned author and edaphologist (soil scientist)

A fourth actor to play various roles:

Sarah Delaney, Nora's girlfriend

Dr. Roberta Richardson, Elaine's mentor

Audra Whitney, Beth's daughter (*only heard, not seen*)

and

Helen Matthews, an interrogator

A note on the set:

A single cell, small, compact. Light shifts indicate a change in space, but all scenes take place in the cell.

A "beat" is a short silence, a "silence" is a longer silence.

A note on casting:

These characters may be played by women of any race, and should be a diverse group.

Darkness. A door slams. A woman falls. Lights are low, for a moment we are suspended in time and space. NORA has been thrown onto the floor, is slowly getting her bearings, touching her face, she's bleeding. ELAINE and BETH can be seen in low lighting. A fourth woman, in shadows, speaks.

HELEN

You don't see it coming.
You don't see how things are changing until they've already changed.
Leaves fall, it's autumn.
Then they're gone, it's winter.
Life keeps moving
We grocery shop, get married,
scroll through our phones,
clip our fingernails
And no one pays attention to the change.
We are just a dot on a horizon
a blink in time
the trash we dump won't really affect us
we put it on the street, it goes somewhere -
it goes somewhere and goes somewhere
til it ends up on an island in the middle of the ocean
and then we're going to die someday
and we'll never see that island.
You believe it exists
But you're never going to see it
You're not going to see it shrink
and crack
The miniscule changes over time
sort of like a marriage
sort of like growing up
sort of like dying
you don't see it happen
and then you don't know the person in bed next to you anymore
you didn't realize your daughter is now a woman
you didn't think you'd ever be this old
well, here we are.
We're at the place we didn't see coming.

Lights get brighter and we are in a small cell containing NORA, BETH, and ELAINE. NORA is bleeding. She's freaking out. Breathing hard. She hasn't noticed the other women.

NORA

What

What

Where am

NORA (CONT'D)

What

HEY HEY! HEY! WHAT IS THIS? WHERE...? WHERE...?!

She is banging on the door, desperate, confused.

ELAINE

Sorry, um –

NORA almost screams in surprise.

ELAINE

They're not going to come back.

NORA

What?

ELAINE

It's no use yelling. They won't come back.

BETH

Who are you?

NORA

What?

BETH

Who are you? What's your name?

NORA

...I

BETH

Who are you?

NORA

Who are YOU? What the hell is this what the –

ELAINE

Try to be calm –

NORA

I can't – I can't be calm –

BETH

Who are you?

ELAINE
Beth. Stop.
Can you tell us? Who you are?

NORA
...I'm Nora.

BETH
Nora...?

NORA
Nora Travers?

BETH
Nora Travers. (*to ELAINE*) Do you know who that is?

ELAINE
No. No, but that doesn't mean –

NORA
Who are YOU? What the hell am I doing here?

BETH (*to ELAINE*)
Who is she if we don't know who she is?

ELAINE
She's not –she's frightened out of her mind –

BETH
We don't know that they –

NORA
What the hell are you talking about what are you talking about. Who are you?

ELAINE
Are you a scientist?

BETH
Jesus, Elaine –

NORA
Yes, I'm a marine biologist.

ELAINE
There, see –

BETH
What have you done?

NORA
Done?

BETH
I've never heard of you. What did you do to get here?

NORA
I don't even know what this is? I was on my way to – a meeting – the book I wrote – and then I was in the back of a van, I think, I don't know – and now I'm here? What is this place?

ELAINE
Well – it's a holding cell. Is what I would call it.

NORA
Holding cell for / what.

BETH
Elaine we don't know who this person IS so don't –

ELAINE
She's a scientist? She said she's a scientist -

BETH
We don't know her name –

NORA
I told you my name –

BETH
We've never heard of you. Are you a researcher?

NORA
...no, not really, I – I'm from San Francisco, I'm an aquarist there –

BETH
An AQUARIST?

NORA
But I just wrote a book – it's a bestseller – it's a children's book –

BETH
What book?

NORA
“Creatures We Used to Know – The New Ocean” – there’s illustrations, it’s –

ELAINE
It’s about climate change. You were in the Atlantic. She was in the Atlantic, Beth.

NORA
Yes. The Times wouldn’t publish the review, but –

ELAINE
That’s right!

NORA
The Atlantic did. We went – it all went viral. I dunno.

BETH
A children’s book about climate change? Okay, / yeah.

ELAINE
That’s got to be it. She’s one of us. Come on. Oh dear, you’ve got –

ELAINE notices NORA is bleeding.

NORA
I’m okay –

ELAINE
Let me help – did they hit you?

NORA
I don’t know. I might have hit my head – I still don’t...understand. Who are you? Are you...?

ELAINE
That’s Elizabeth Whitney, she’s a soil / scientist, you may have heard of

BETH
Oh my GOD / Elaine?!

NORA
Elizabeth Whitney? The Elizabeth Whitney?

ELAINE
Yes, that one.

NORA
I've read all your books. (*to ELAINE*) You look...I've seen you before.

BETH
You don't know who she is? That's Elaine Tuck –

ELAINE
I'm a glaciologist –

BETH
Nobel prize winner –

ELAINE
I was part of a *team* that won, not just me –

BETH
Do you know what the Nobel prize is?

ELAINE
Beth – stop –

BETH
She was on the cover of Time Magazine.

NORA (*remembering*)
Right!

BETH
And she just won the Galileo Award –

NORA
Oh whoa that's the –

BETH
Two million dollar award.

ELAINE (*wry*)
A lot of good it does me now...

NORA
So...we're...? What are we doing here? I didn't do anything illegal –

BETH
Ha. Legal.

NORA
You've written about climate change! All your books –

BETH
That was before this administration.

NORA
So –

BETH
Does any of this seem legal?

NORA
You're here for your books, too? Then?

BETH
No. I mean. I don't know.

ELAINE
Beth has been trying to alert the government about the super-bug in Alaska –

NORA
The what?

BETH
Exactly. No one even knows what's happening.

ELAINE
Beth spent the last several years in Barrow, Alaska, looking at soil, there's a new flu –

BETH
A super-bug. Bacterial. Permafrost is melting. And there are viruses and diseases in that ground – it's new to us, but – ancient. It's taking out the tribe I lived with. People are dying.

ELAINE
So Beth has been meeting with Congress, and the Senate –

BETH
Trying to –

ELAINE

And so all this, coupled with the woman who was previously in here with us, we've deduced –

NORA

There was someone before me?

ELAINE

Yes, uh, a climatology professor at Harvard –

NORA

And now where is she?

beat

BETH

We don't know. They called her name, took her out. She hasn't been back.

NORA

They? Who is they?

beat

ELAINE

We don't really know.

NORA

Government? Or someone else?

beat

ELAINE

We aren't sure.

NORA

How many hours ago was that? That the professor – left?

ELAINE

It was two days ago.

NORA

What?! How long have you been in here?

BETH (*pointing to a spot on the ground*)

Five days.

ELAINE (*also looking the spot on the ground*)
Seven.

NORA
SEVEN DAYS?

ELAINE
This is where we've been keeping time – here - please be careful not to touch it.
(*She kneels down and begins to move her finger through the dirt on the floor*)
I'll start to make a row for you. Nora.

NORA
...we – we need to call a lawyer, we should be able to talk to someone –

BETH laughs.

ELAINE (*still drawing on the floor*)
One.

BETH
A lawyer. That's funny.

ELAINE
Law and order seem to be, um, suspended, in our case, for the time being.

NORA
Have you tried – getting out?

BETH chuckles.

ELAINE
There is no getting out. Yolanda, the Professor, was here for two weeks. (*she indicates the ground*) We just have to wait.

NORA
Wait for what?

ELAINE
Whatever is to come.

lights shift and SARAH enters. This is NORA's girlfriend. She is dreamy, an artist. She hands NORA a computer and though we are still in the cell, we are also in NORA's apartment in San Francisco. SARAH is drinking from a plastic water bottle.

NORA
(staring at her computer)
I hate waiting.

SARAH
I know. So stop.

NORA
Waiting?

SARAH
Yeah - refreshing your email, waiting by the phone. Let's go out. Let's do something. My flight home is super early tomorrow -

NORA
I just want to know, did I get it or not?

SARAH
And you won't know until you know.

NORA
Finalists are supposed to know TODAY. By six. It's nearly six now. Do you think that means something, that I'm hearing later in the day?

SARAH
...I dunno?

NORA
I just don't want to spend another day in the goddamn aquarium.

SARAH
Okay, well even if you do get the grant, you will have to spend another day in the aquarium. How are the otters? I miss them.

NORA
They're good - oh my god you'll never guess what happened yesterday –

NORA looks up, notices the plastic water bottle.

NORA
Wow.

SARAH
What?

NORA

On one of my tours yesterday, I lectured the kids for like five minutes about not using plastic water bottles.

SARAH

Oh yeah...sorry...

NORA

And my own girlfriend –

SARAH

I like sparkling water, sorry -

NORA

Do I need to give the lecture to you too? I'm not kidding, I want us to stop using single use plastics.

SARAH

Okay, I'm sorry, I will...do better, but it's...

NORA

It's what?

SARAH

Nothing.

NORA

No, tell me.

SARAH

One water bottle? Is that really going to make a difference?

NORA

OH my god...

SARAH

I just mean, we've said this before, things can only change if huge systems change, so you don't have to harp on me every time I buy sparkling water -

NORA

Huge systems can only change if everyone is educated, that's why I try to tell the kids I give tours to, I try to tell them that every action they take to help the environment makes a difference.

SARAH

It's good you're teaching that to the kids, I didn't mean that –

NORA

Whatever, it's all such bullshit, they don't even want me to say the words "climate change" anymore.

SARAH

...really?

NORA

Yeah, so yesterday, Veronica pulled me in to her office. Apparently I got several complaints from parents about trying to force my "political opinions" onto the kids. It's like this is not an opinion, okay? This is a fact. These kids aren't learning, they don't cover this in schools – whatever, I'm still going to say it, they can't censor me like that -

SARAH

Nora...

NORA

What?

SARAH

What about my children's book idea?

NORA (*sigh*)

Sarah...

SARAH (*barreling on*)

It can be about an otter! I draw such cute otters! And you can follow its story, as it sees all parts of the ocean that have changed. You know, like maybe it's migrated millions of miles from somewhere, and goes back to its home and sees how it changed...

NORA

Otters don't migrate long distances.

SARAH

Okay, well some other animal that does.

NORA

Sarah I do not want to write a fucking children's book! I want people to take all the research I've been doing for the aquarium, with basically NO money, SERIOUSLY! The research I've been doing is *actually* effective, and it's actually *changing* the way we treat octopuses, and deal with sea star wasting – I want people to recognize my work and give me a fucking grant so I can get out of this hellhole.

SARAH

...And if you get the grant, and go to Antarctica or the Great Barrier Reef, or wherever...what's going to happen with us?

NORA

I don't know...

SARAH

I'm sick of long distance. There are aquariums in LA.

NORA

They're all even more under-funded than here.

SARAH

Okay, but if you don't get this grant...

NORA

I need to at least stay another two years to finish my sea star project.

SARAH

Two years?

NORA

Yes? This is my work.

SARAH

I don't want to do two more years of this.

NORA

Why haven't you brought this up before?

SARAH

Please, you're the one who's been avoiding this conversation.

Ding. Email.

Nora frantically checks it. It's bad news. Devastating, in fact. Nora almost immediately starts crying. All the tension drops and Sarah holds her.

SARAH

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

NORA

Come on. You're relieved.

SARAH

NO I'm not. I'm really not. I want this for you. You know I want this for you so bad. I want you to get to do your work.

NORA

There's no money. This was my one shot. This was like the only government funding within my reach this year. FUCK.

SARAH sits with her. Holds her.

SARAH

Money will come. I believe.

(upbeat)

You know...we really could do it. ...We could write this book, and it could be a bestseller and we'd make a million dollars, and then you could fund your own research.

NORA laughs and then stops.

NORA

You really think we could make a million dollars?

SARAH

I dunno. But it's worth a try.

Lights shift and we are back in the cell. It's a few hours later. They have some rice. Beth sits with her back to NORA and ELAINE. ELAINE has clearly been talking for some time.

ELAINE

...But *Greek* thought, Aristotelian thought, was all about *perfection* – the perfect sphere of the moon, the perfect, smooth sphere of the Sun...but Galileo saw through his telescope that there were MOUNTAINS on the moon, and he could in fact measure them, so they were no longer these perfect spheres in the sky, it was more gritty, more real. And he was never phased by this, he just...accepted it. It was what it was. And that I think is the real difference between the school of thought at the time, and the SCIENCE that Galileo championed – one was about perfection, the other about what really was.

BETH

Why are we talking about this again?

ELAINE

My speech I'm going to give. For the Galileo / Award.

BETH

Oh, right. I feel like you've been talking for an hour.

ELAINE

Well that's why I did so much research on him when I found out I got it, I have to give an acceptance speech - I didn't know much about him, except for what I was taught in school. I am pretty fluent in Italian and can read some Latin, so I was able to read his letters in their original form, and oh he was naughty! He was such a little rebel! So daring, and cunning! Just brilliant.

NORA

He was.

ELAINE

I'm going to talk about how what he faced is similar to what we are facing right now! We're fighting wealth and power and greed –

NORA

“And yet it moves”

ELAINE

YES! I love that story. He was made to recant, which must have been devastating, declared all his research false, and *then* he uttered “and yet it moves!” He was like “doesn't matter what you say, motherfuckers! The earth still moves!”

BETH

No way he said that.

NORA
...No, he did.

ELAINE
He said that.

BETH
It's legend or whatever, but if he'd said that, if he'd actually said that in a TRIAL in front of the Church, he would have been (*makes a gesture across her neck*) – he'd have been dead, not spent his life comfy in his house.

ELAINE
COMFY? Well, he was under house arrest, he couldn't see his children again, he wasn't exactly comfy –

BETH
I'm just saying he was a politician. He knew the pope, he knew how to play the game, he RECANTED. He didn't get burned at the stake. He didn't say that shit.

ELAINE
I think –

BETH
If there's any question at all as to whether or not he did, he didn't.

beat

ELAINE
Well...I think he did.

BETH
Oh you just think he did.

ELAINE
Yes I think he did. I can choose to believe that, or not. And...it's more...hopeful. To believe it. Bring some HOPE into the room. They want us to be broken down, to be despondent.

BETH
You don't know what they want.

ELAINE
We know -

BETH
I haven't seen my daughter in five days so don't talk to me about being despondent.

beat

ELAINE
Daughter?

BETH says nothing.

ELAINE
I didn't know you have a daughter! You haven't said anything about her...

BETH
So?

ELAINE
...we've just...been in here for...god, that's awful, I had no idea.

BETH says nothing.

ELAINE
Is she – with family?

Nothing.

ELAINE
(unable to handle the silence)
Does she have...community? A good school? I'm sure at least her teachers will -

BETH
I have no idea where she is or who has her or if *they* have her or...

ELAINE
This is good! People will certainly notice that you're missing!

BETH
It's GOOD?

ELAINE
I'm not close with my family and they always think I'm off in some remote part of the world anyway, but *you* –

BETH
Shut up. SHUT UP. SHUT. UP.

ELAINE becomes quiet, backs away. BETH is shaking.

ELAINE

I'm sorry...sometimes I don't know what else to do except talk when I'm...sorry.

BETH

I don't talk about her. I try never to speak about her. I don't want THEM to KNOW.

ELAINE

Okay. Of course.

BETH

I've put her in danger. I can't – think about it. Talk about it.

LIGHTS shift and BETH is alone with her daughter, AUDRA, who is only heard, not seen. She is seven.

AUDRA

Mommy don't THROW things.

BETH

Sorry, baby, sorry. Mommy lost her temper.

AUDRA

I know, you were yelling. You always yell.

BETH

I'm sorry baby. (*referencing her phone*) Just these stupid – people. Stupid.

AUDRA

STUPID.

BETH

(*giggling*)

Okay maybe just use that word at home, not at school, okay baby?

AUDRA

Fuckin stupid.

BETH

WHAT?

AUDRA

“You are fuckin stupid government sack of shit.”

BETH

AUDRA!

AUDRA

You said it on the phone!

BETH

You NEVER repeat things mommy says on the phone, okay? Never say any of those words mommy said. Mommy just has to talk to...some bad people so she gets...worked up sometimes.

AUDRA

What's worked up?

BETH

...mad.

AUDRA

Yeah you seem mad. What happened?

BETH

I'm trying to help our friends in Barrow.

AUDRA

Our sick friends?

BETH

Yes honey.

AUDRA

With the flu.

BETH

Exactly. And no one wants to help them.

AUDRA

Why?

BETH

...it's complicated.

AUDRA

What's complicated.

BETH

Like...hard.

AUDRA

No, I know what complicated is.

BETH
Oh.

AUDRA
I was asking what is complicated.

BETH
Oh I see. Well, people either don't believe me or don't want to believe me.

AUDRA
They think you're lying?

BETH
Yes...I guess.

AUDRA
That's STUPID.

BETH
It is stupid, yeah.

AUDRA
I could tell them! I saw them! Hiti was sick.

BETH
I know, Hiti, your friend.

AUDRA
I could tell them!

BETH
...I don't know baby, I don't want you to get involved.

AUDRA
I want to help Hiti!

BETH
Thank you sweetie but I'm gonna say no.

AUDRA
Well YOU can't get them help so maybe I can!

BETH
(too sharply)
Hey – I'm trying. I'm trying.

beat

BETH

No honey. I'm not going to get you involved. No way. But – thank you.

AUDRA

I want to tell them about Hiti's dog! I miss it.

BETH

(smiles)

I know you do.

AUDRA

Can we get a dog?

BETH

No.

AUDRA

Can I write a letter to them?

BETH

To Hiti? Sure –

AUDRA

No to congressman.

BETH

Oh – no, honey I don't want you to –

AUDRA

I'll just write it. I won't send it.

BETH

Okay. Of course. Sure.

AUDRA

(spinning her mom around)

DEAR CONGRESSMAN

PLEASE HELP HITIIII!

They spin and laugh.

BETH

Mommy loves you to the moon

AUDRA
And to the ground

BETH
And to the sky

AUDRA
And back again!

back in the cell

BETH is asleep. NORA keeps shifting.

ELAINE
Can't sleep?

NORA
Is it time to sleep?

ELAINE
I think it's roughly twenty-two hundred hours.

NORA
There are no windows.

ELAINE
I time it by when I hear the guards change over. That's how we've been keeping track. It could be a bit off, but...yes, I think day seven for me, twenty-two hundred hours, roughly.

NORA
I have to pee again.

ELAINE
Okay.

NORA
Fuck.

ELAINE
It's okay.

NORA
I don't want to wake her.

ELAINE
Do what you have to do.

NORA knocks three times on the door.

NORA
(Kind of trying to be quiet)
Bathroom? Bathroom?

The door opens and she leaves. BETH stirs.

BETH
Ahh, shit. I was actually out.

ELAINE
She had to go. Poor thing.

BETH
Where's the water?

ELAINE passes her a plastic cup of water.

ELAINE
So what does this mean, her story? The Times won't publish anything about climate change now. So is the Times pushing government crap?

BETH
That's what I'm thinking.

ELAINE
Should we tell her?

BETH
No. What good would it do. Just panic her for no reason.

ELAINE
I always say knowledge is power.

BETH
They might not want the same things from her. She's just an aquarist.

ELAINE
Oh come on.

BETH
What? She is. You and I have been at this for years. Of course they want us to make a statement. What good would her statement do? Who would it influence? She's clearly nobody.

ELAINE
She's a best selling author?

BETH
A best selling *children's* author? For one week? It doesn't make a lot of sense.

beat

BETH
Are you going to do it?

ELAINE
I'm going to try to buy time, come back here and give you more information. We can go from there.

BETH
What if they don't let you come back? Yolanda isn't *back*.

ELAINE
Well –

BETH
If they give you an option to get out, you should take it.

ELAINE
But –

BETH
Get out, tell reporters what's going on.

NORA enters. They become silent.

ELAINE
Everything okay?

NORA
It was gross.

NORA can feel the tension.

NORA
Did I miss anything?

ELAINE
(*making a decision*)
Yes, Nora, we were discussing what we –

BETH
Galileo. We were discussing Galileo.
We were saying it's interesting what he's remembered for. His brilliance. Not for recanting. Not for saving himself.

NORA
Uh, yeah...

BETH
You don't have any family, right, Elaine?

ELAINE
Well I -

BETH
Maybe that's why you can't quite understand. He had daughters. Did you know that?

ELAINE
I have family -

BETH
You said / you didn't.

ELAINE
I may not have, be close to any *real* - but I chose my family. I have family.

lights shift. a bell rings. DR. ROBERTA RICHARDS, or BERTA, enters - it is after class, ELAINE's sophomore year of undergrad.

BERTA
Elaine Tuck? Can I see you after class for just a moment?

ELAINE
Sure...

BERTA
This is your paper?

ELAINE
(*looking*)
Which is that?

BERTA
The effects of superstorms on east coast beaches.

ELAINE
Yes. That's mine. Is...there a problem? Did I mess up the margins?

BERTA
You did the margins correctly.

ELAINE

(a little too defensively)

I didn't plagiarize it, if that's what this is about.

BERTA

...I wasn't going to ask you if...do your other professors accuse you of plagiarism?

ELAINE

Yes....some have been known to.

BERTA

Who?

ELAINE

Dr. Richter...

BERTA

He couldn't tell good writing if it hit him in the face. I'm gonna talk to him.

ELAINE

O...kay / thanks

BERTA

It's probably because when you write an academic paper, which is supposed to be like reading the phone book, it's beautiful. It's exciting. Thrilling, even.

ELAINE

Oh.

BERTA

It *is* ten pages longer than the seven-page paper I asked for.

ELAINE

I just couldn't fit in all my research – there was too much on algae. I had to add in a few extra pages -

BERTA

What are you doing next fall?

ELAINE

What?

BERTA

Next fall. Are you studying abroad, or...?

ELAINE

No, I...I mean, I'll be here. My junior year.

BERTA

Would you like to come to Antarctica with me?

ELAINE

...what?

BERTA

Let me back up. I've been keeping an eye on your work all semester. I've talked with your other professors – forget Richter - we all agree you have an extraordinary talent, for writing, and especially research. You leave no stone unturned. Your hypotheses are outside the box, you take initiative, you're creative within this field, which can be so dry, as you know. What do you want to specialize in?

ELAINE

Well...I'm having a really hard time narrowing it down, but I know I want to be a researcher –

BERTA

Good –

ELAINE

I go through phases where I'm obsessed with coastal ecology, as you can probably guess, and sometimes I go down geology rabbit holes, but genetics fascinate me, and people say there's a LOT of work in that field, so –

BERTA

And what about climate science.

ELAINE

Oh, well yeah your class is wonderful, I've been learning so much, but...I'm not sure.

BERTA

Why not?

ELAINE

Oh I just don't think that's something I can devote my LIFE to.

BERTA

...why is that.

ELAINE

Uh. Um. It feels like...a losing battle?

BERTA

Sure, I can see how that but -

ELAINE

I'm not trying to be disrespectful -

BERTA

You, you aren't -

ELAINE

It's just if I am calculating everything correctly, we are getting extremely close to two degrees Celcius...and I don't see a way out. A way forward. It seems like anything I can try to contribute will just fail. I'd just be part of...failure.

BERTA

And if all of us felt as you do, and we all just gave up? What would happen then?

ELAINE

I'm not trying to suggest that your work isn't crucial and vital, I'm glad someone is doing it, I'm glad someone as brilliant as you is doing it -

BERTA

(matter of fact)

But you think we'll fail. Sure.

ELAINE

There's no...I'm sorry, but I just think we are cruising at high speed off a cliff and we can't slow down or back up. I just don't think that's how I want to spend my time.

BERTA a tiny bit offended, or maybe sad.

BERTA

I know. I know. You're right. We are. It is. But...I can't live in that - with that thinking. I look at it because it's fascinating. It's fascinating to see something changing so rapidly, so close to you. The work is good, even if it seems impossible.

ELAINE

I'm not saying it's not good.

BERTA

You don't have to decide anything today, but I'd like for you to come on my sabbatical with me.

ELAINE

...to *Antarctica*?

BERTA

Yes. We're going to look at ice cores.

ELAINE

Why?

BERTA

Why? Do you know what a glacier is?

ELAINE

(*goes into recitation mode*)

Yes, it's a large moving body of ice that's been packed down for centuries –

BERTA

No, do you know what a glacier *is*? What ice...is?

ELAINE

...?

BERTA

Glaciers are time-tellers. Clocks. Like tree rings. We can pull out a huge cylinder from the glacier – and read the air that has been trapped in the ice for hundreds of thousands of years. Ice keeps everything. It has memories. It is both fragile and powerful. You live in that tension. You feel the ice moving far below you even as you stand on it. When you're down there, you can feel it under your feet, creaking, swaying, pushing against itself. There is movement. It's dynamic. It's shifting – and it's melting. It's...going towards that cliff you were talking about.

ELAINE

You've been before.

BERTA

It's where I spend every sabbatical, and before my position here, it's where I spent most of my time working on my doctorate. And I think (*she touches the paper*) I think...I have a hunch, that you'll like it. You're right. You're right that what we're doing is nearly impossible. It is at times deeply depressing. Deeply...frustrating. Infuriating, even. But if it's all going to melt and life is going to become unbearable for our species, I won't look back on my life and wonder if I could've done more. What good is the work you'd do in another field if you don't have a planet to do it on? If your children don't have a planet to live on.

ELAINE

Oh I don't have children.

BERTA

Well, you're young, if you do / have children.

ELAINE

No, I'm not going to have children.

BERTA

...Understood. I never wanted children, either.

ELAINE

I understand what you're saying. It's not that I haven't thought about it that way -

BERTA

I want you to come learn about ice. Just come and see. It's just a semester. It doesn't have to become your whole life. See what you think.

ELAINE

(she smiles)

Antarctica...

(then, stops smiling)

but – so...does it cost money? My family doesn't pay my tuition –

BERTA

No, no. I'll be paying you.

ELAINE

Oh!

BERTA

Yes – it won't be much. But you're going to be my assistant.

ELAINE

I see.

BERTA

I'll send you an email with all the information, forms, all that. You can think about it.

ELAINE

No. I'll go. I'll go.

BERTA

Oh!

ELAINE

Why wouldn't I go? This...seems like something I should do. I should go.

BERTA
Wonderful.

ELAINE
Thank you, Dr. Richards.

BERTA
Berta.

ELAINE
I can't call you Berta.

BERTA
Why not.

ELAINE
I wasn't brought up that way.

BERTA
Where are you from?

ELAINE
Iowa.

BERTA
Okay Iowa. I'm gonna call you Iowa til you call me Berta. Understood?

ELAINE
Yes Dr. Richards.

BERTA
You pay your tuition, I presume?

ELAINE
Me and a bit of academic scholarship, yeah.

BERTA
Good on you. You're going to spend the rest of your life trying to figure out how to fund your research, so get used to it.

Transition back to the cell. Beth is trying to sleep again.

NORA

So you've been to Antarctica? I think I read that, in the Time magazine article?

ELAINE

Yes, I've spent a lot of time there. About five years of my life, in all.

NORA (*full of longing*)

Wow. Was it incredible?

ELAINE (*nods*)

Otherworldly. So – quiet. So quiet it was loud. The quiet wouldn't let me go to sleep at night. No white noise, nothing...you can hear the ice under your feet. It's like all of nature is speaking to you.

NORA

That's all I want to do – what you do. Be a researcher. But I can't get a grant to save my life.

ELAINE nods understandingly

NORA

And a male colleague of mine from college just got a grant I applied for, and I'm sorry – he's a shit researcher. I was like HIM? Seriously?!

ELAINE laughs.

NORA

This is like the guy who's worked I always double-checked, and he was always off.

ELAINE

It's always the men.

NORA

It's always the men.

beat, moment of camaraderie between them

NORA

His proposal was strange too, the title was something about geo-engineering and ocean de-acidification? Which I don't really know much about.

ELAINE

Geo-engineering? Really.

NORA

Yeah. He just told me the title, I didn't read it or anything.

ELAINE

And he got – what grant was this?

NORA

It was an NSF grant.

ELAINE

What? A federal grant.

NORA

Yeah.

ELAINE

Huh, that's – a bit unheard of.

NORA

Why?

ELAINE

Well...that's a bit of a dangerous road to take.

NORA

What is?

ELAINE

Geo-engineering.

NORA looks lost, embarrassed, tries to recover.

NORA

Oh, oh sure...

ELAINE

Because geo-engineering – you know what it is, right?

NORA

Um....not really, I know it's like – creating weather?

ELAINE

It's – my mentor always described it as climate intervention – it's been, you know, murmured about for decades as a possible solution, a large scale, deliberate intervention into our climate system...geo-engineer our way back to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

NORA

How...would we do that?

ELAINE

Well it's fascinating, really, there's so many different ways to go about it, SRM, of course being the one that's talked about most –

NORA

SRM?

ELAINE

Solar radiation management – the idea is based on the natural effect of a volcanic eruption, when sulfur is dispersed into the air and there's a general cooling effect on the planet, right? The thought is that we can mimic this, spray sulfur dioxide high into the stratosphere, which would then of course be converted into aerosol and reflect the sun's radiation back into space, and cool the planet.

NORA

Huh. So what are the risks?

BETH (*getting up*)

Many. Innumerable. Endless.

ELAINE

Look she woke up!

BETH

I didn't want to wake up.

ELAINE

Sorry, Beth –

BETH

It's fine, I feel like I haven't really slept in... I don't know. (*beat*) Why are we talking about geo-engineering bullshit?

ELAINE

Nora said a grant she wanted went to a colleague of hers whose proposal was on geo-engineering

BETH

So?

ELAINE

A *federal* grant.

This gets BETH's attention.

BETH

Wow. Could they be any stupider?

NORA

Who?

BETH

I dunno, whatever quacks they have on these grant panels. Geo-engineering – we have no idea the kind of impact any large scale...manipulation would have on villages, like Barrow, like small villages in Alaska – so yeah, we spray a bunch of aerosols into the air, the planet cools, what happens when we stop? How long are we going to keep that up? And then when it stops – who knows what could happen – superstorms, floods –

ELAINE

Droughts –

BETH

It would warm back up like that (*snaps her fingers*) and it would harm the smallest communities on the planet, and probably us, too, but *they're* the ones who'd be sacrificed. Not that anyone cares.

NORA

...right.

somber silence.

ELAINE hesitates, then decides.

ELAINE

Nora...Beth and I believe that they're going to ask us –

knock on the door

VOICE

Elaine Tuck.

Everyone jumps. Fear and panic floods the room. ELAINE rises, alarmed. Beth wakes up.

NORA

Elaine, what? What are they -

BETH

Shut up.

ELAINE steals a glance and both the women, nodding to them, then goes through the open door.

Silence

NORA
Where - where is she going?

BETH
(lays back down)
Hell if I know.

NORA
You seem like you do know.

BETH
I really don't.

NORA
What was she about to say.

BETH
I don't think it applies to you.

NORA
What does that mean?

BETH
It means shut up? I'm going to fucking sleep.

BETH turns over, lights shift, AUDRA's voice.

AUDRA
(whispering)
Mommy?

she tries to wake BETH, who struggles to remain asleep.

AUDRA
Mommy? Mommy.

BETH
Baby, I'm sleeping -

AUDRA
I have to tell you something. I have to confess.

BETH
Hm? Okay. What? Are you alright?

AUDRA
I sent it.

BETH
What?

AUDRA
At school. I got my teacher to help me. And I sent it.

BETH
Sent what honey?

AUDRA
The letter. To my congressman.

BETH
...the letter, the letter about...

AUDRA
About Hiti. About Barrow.

BETH is now sitting fully upright. Puts her head in her hands.

BETH
Shit. Shit.

AUDRA
I'm sorry.

BETH
Shit. What did the letter say?

AUDRA
What did it...

BETH
Can you remember exactly what you said?

AUDRA
I said...I said that Hiti was sick –

BETH
Did you write your last name?

AUDRA
Whitney. Yes.

BETH lets out a groan.

AUDRA
Is something bad going to happen?

BETH
No, no. Nothing will happen. It's all right. I just didn't – things are a little scary right now, and I didn't want you to get involved. I didn't want your name anywhere. Most people don't even know I have a daughter.

AUDRA
Why not?

BETH
Because, I don't...just sometimes Mommy does some dangerous work.

AUDRA
I'm scared.

BETH
Don't be scared.

AUDRA
Can I go live with my dad if something bad happens?

BETH
...Audra.

AUDRA
Can I?

BETH
You don't have a dad, you know this. If something happens, you can stay with Grandma and Grandpa.

AUDRA
How can I not have a dad.

BETH (*angry*)
You just don't.

AUDRA
I'm scared.

BETH
Audra. Everything is fine. Nothing bad is going to happen, you aren't going to have to leave me, it's okay that you wrote the letter, everything is fine. Nothing bad is going to happen. Okay?

AUDRA
Okay.

BETH
Now let's go to sleep.

AUDRA
Can I sleep with you?

BETH
Of course, baby. Here.

ELAINE sits across from HELEN, an interrogator. She's in a suit. She is crisp, energetic, a bit saccharine, with potential to be downright terrifying. She is looking at paperwork.

HELEN

Elaine Elizabeth Tuck.

silence

HELEN

That's you. Yes?

ELAINE nods.

HELEN

Glaciologist...winner of the Galileo Award, Nobel winner, UNESCO Medal, uhh (*she could go one with listing the awards, but she doesn't*) - Yale graduate, PhD candidate...unmarried...no children...*Iowa.*

That all sound right?

The way HELEN says "Iowa" sounds a lot like the way BERTA says Iowa. ELAINE looks up, alarmed and confused.

beat

HELEN

I said does that sound right?

ELAINE

...Yes.

HELEN

Can you expand a bit on the kind of work you do?

beat

ELAINE

...why do you need to know this?

HELEN

I'm just asking you a few questions. There's a lot to get through.

beat

ELAINE

...you're just asking me a few questions? I've been held for seven days.

HELEN

I understand. Would you like water?

ELAINE

No. I do not want water.

beat

HELEN goes back to her paperwork.

HELEN

I'm interested in where your research went from research to your more...political...participation. Where this demonstration you did came from and the interview –

ELAINE

In Time Magazine.

HELEN

Yes, I'm wondering when that started and what your intention behind that was?

ELAINE

...if you've read the interview, I think you'll know my intention.

HELEN

I'm asking you. I want to hear it from you. I know how reporters can twist one's words.

ELAINE

He didn't...*twist* anything, those are my words, all of it is exactly what I said. I wanted to educate the public on what's really happening, that it's not some hoax, it's really happening, I've seen it with my own eyes. I've seen it in the ice...it's all there in that interview – we lifted huge masses of ice from a glacier in Montana and shipped it across the country in the back of a refrigerated truck to DC. And we put it right in front of the Capitol Building for Congresspeople to pass by it. I had a permit, I just wanted to talk to people about ice. That's all. I just do my work and publish my work, and you can just hope it's going to do some good and influence some people. I wasn't aware that it would garner me so much attention. It all happened so fast. I didn't even know I was going to be on the COVER. That was quite a day. The day you see your face on the cover of a magazine that so many people are going to see...I didn't hate the picture, either, which is a miracle. My hair always does this swoopy thing, where it sort of goes off in one direction, like it's magnetic, and searching for its source. Ha ha. I don't know why I'm talking about that.

HELEN

(maybe a small shrug)

ELAINE

I tend to talk a lot. When I'm.

HELEN

What?

ELAINE

Nothing.

HELEN

Scared?

ELAINE

No.

HELEN

I talk a lot when I'm scared.

ELAINE

(thrown by that)

...

I was going to say nervous. Which is different.

HELEN

How is it different?

ELAINE

I'm nervous I'll say something wrong. But I'm not afraid. Of you.

HELEN

No?

ELAINE

No.

beat

HELEN

Good. I'm here to help you. I just want to talk. I want to talk to you.

lights shift, ELAINE is knocking on a door. Over and over.

ELAINE

Dr. Richards? Dr. Richards, I know you're in there. I just want to talk. *(beat)* BERTA?

BERTA comes out onto her porch.

BERTA

In all my years, Iowa, I never thought I'd actually hear you call me Berta.

ELAINE

Desperate times.

They look at each other.

ELAINE

Where have you been? Where the hell have you been?

BERTA

I was away.

ELAINE

Doing what? You stopped responding to my calls? You never called about the Galileo Award?

BERTA

Congratulations. I'm sorry, I've just been -

ELAINE

What's this?

She shakes a magazine in BERTA's face. BERTA just looks her.

ELAINE

The New Climate Science? What is this bullshit Berta? What is it? It doesn't make any sense.

BERTA

Yes. Yes, that is something I...it's good to see you Elaine, I'm sorry I can't really talk -

ELAINE

When I first saw it online I thought, this must be a different Dr. Roberta Richards, this can't be my Dr. Roberta Richards. There's no way. My Dr. Richards would never publish anything so anti-science, so backwards, so full of shit. It's not even well written. It's dry. It's clinical. It's - it's everything you hate!

beat

BERTA looks nervously around.

ELAINE

Did someone make you do this? Is someone...are you okay?

BERTA gets closer to ELAINE

BERTA

Get in your car, and go.

ELAINE

I'm not going anywhere. Can I come in? Can we talk?

BERTA

(extremely panicked)

You can't come in. You can't. No.

ELAINE

I don't understand this. I don't understand it at all.

BERTA

I'm sorry I can't say more.

ELAINE

Then can I just ask – do you believe this? Do you believe what you wrote? You really think that *(reading)* “carbon emissions caused by human activity are now on the decline. Any doomsday, alarmist rhetoric is old science and old thought.” Do you believe this, Dr. Richards?

BERTA *(pained, speaking weirdly loud)*

Yes.

lights shift, and we are back in the interrogation room.

ELAINE

I – I'm sorry, but I don't want to talk to you. I don't need to talk to you to make a decision.

HELEN

A decision?

ELAINE

There's nothing you can offer that will make me stop my work. That is all I do. I do my research, I write about it, I publish it. That is what I do. I don't even think of myself as particularly active, politically, I am just publishing my findings. That is my job. It's what I have done and what I will continue to do.

HELEN

It's not all you've done.

ELAINE

I made one statement, yes, I did one political act, that was just meant to educate, that's all, and...I mean, can I promise to...not do something like that...again? But continue to do my research?

HELEN

We would like for you to stop publishing your work. So, no.

beat

ELAINE

Then, no, I'm sorry, but I cannot comply with your request.

HELEN

I see.

ELAINE

I *am* sorry.

HELEN

What about ten million.

ELAINE

I'm...sorry?

HELEN

Ten million dollars. What would that do?

ELAINE

It would...

You aren't really going to give me ten million dollars.

HELEN

Yes. We will. Stop your work, stop publishing, stop working, retire.

ELAINE

Ten million, to not publish my work. You aren't – that's it? I would just have to stop...working.

HELEN

Yes, and we'd need you to make a statement, we'd monitor your whereabouts, but for the most part, you'd be free to do as you please. You could retire, comfortably.

ELAINE

Make a statement.

HELEN
Yes.

silence

ELAINE
Something to do with a new climate science? Something like that?

silence

HELEN
So you agree?

ELAINE
No. Did not say I agree.

HELEN
...I see.

ELAINE
I would disappear, essentially.

silence

HELEN
I wouldn't call it that, no.

silence

HELEN
Thirteen million?

ELAINE
What?

HELEN
An additional three million?

ELAINE
Thirteen million.

She kind of laughs. She thinks about it. Then she realizes.

ELAINE
So that's what you offered Dr. Richards. Is thirteen million dollars and she took it.

silence

HELEN

I'm not sure what you're talking about.

ELAINE

Yes, you are. You know exactly what I'm talking about.

HELEN

No, I don't.

ELAINE

If I can figure out that this is what you're doing, buying off scientists, silencing us, making the whole field go quiet, if I can figure it out, you'd better know that others are going to figure it out, too. This isn't going to work.

beat

HELEN

I really don't know what you're talking about. I have nothing to do with whomever you're talking about. Although, I assume, if I was, it'd be pretty bad for them that they spoke with you about it.

ELAINE

No, no she didn't speak to me, I said I figured it out.

HELEN

Okay.

silence

HELEN

So the money.

ELAINE

She didn't talk to me. She didn't – she didn't say anything.

HELEN

Okay.

silence

HELEN

Let's get back to the matter at hand. Will you accept this offer?

silence

HELEN

Do you feel that it isn't generous?

ELAINE

No, it's – obviously it is generous.

HELEN

I don't know where else you'd get money like this.

ELAINE

Of course, but it's not about the money.

HELEN

What is it about?

ELAINE (*beginning to get angry, helpless*)

The work. It's about what I do. You don't understand, you don't do what I do, you don't know how hard and how long I have worked to get to where I am. You have no idea how few and far between the opportunities I have are. You have no idea.

silence

HELEN

Well, I do actually. My background is in chemistry. Which you'd think there'd be research opportunities, bombs and war and whatnot. But – it got too frustrating. A year out of undergrad I gave all that up and went into management and then politics –

ELAINE

Who / are you?

HELEN

But what I'm trying to say is that I understand where you're coming from. I understand that it is a loss. But I need to move on so I need a decision from you.

silence

ELAINE

I'm trying to imagine a life without my work. I can't imagine it. I can't take it. No. I can't do it.

HELEN (*exasperated, exhausted, laughs*)

You won't take THIRTEEN MILLION DOLLARS? Really?

ELAINE

....really.

HELEN

What is it with you people? Is your work SO important do you think SO highly of yourself that if YOU, you a single individual stop doing your work, that it's all going to fall apart, no one will ever go look at a glacier again? Really?

ELAINE

You know what it is? Everything you've done here, hold us hostage and try to force this *offer*, or whatever you want to call it, on me? Everything you are for is everything I am against. So no, I won't accept your money and I am not going to cave to the bullshit you are trying here, whatever the hell this place is. No. NO.

beat

HELEN

That's your answer?

ELAINE

Yes.

HELEN kind of rolls her eyes and sighs. She closes up her paper work, moves a new sheet of paper to the top of her stack.

HELEN

Then, unfortunately I am no longer here to help you.

She stands and starts to exit.

ELAINE

Wait!

HELEN stops

HELEN

Yes?

ELAINE

...

where are you going?

HELEN

Have you changed your mind?

ELAINE

No, no I'm just...where are you...

HELEN

You haven't changed your mind?

ELAINE

Am I just going to be kept here?

HELEN looks at ELAINE almost pityingly, and then exits, leaving ELAINE very alone in the fluorescent light. She is very scared. It is quiet for a long time. Blackout, footsteps are heard, a scream that is quickly silenced.

Back in the cell. They are both silent.

NORA
What the hell do you think is happening?

BETH
I told you, I don't know.

NORA
I don't believe you.

BETH
Yeah, I know you don't.

NORA
You're just sitting there, you're clearly thinking – about something – and I want to know.
I think I have the right to KNOW.

NORA huffs, is silent. There's a long silence.

BETH
...you wanna know what I was thinking about?

NORA
Yes.

BETH
...honestly, I was thinking about pop tarts.

beat
They both laugh very hard

NORA
(between gasps of laughter)
Pop tarts?!

BETH
(also gasping)
Yes!

NORA
Now I'm hungry –

laughing

BETH

Audra loves them. And I eat them a lot too. She gets mad at me when I have too many.

NORA

Audra, is that your daughter?

BETH

Yeah.

NORA

What else does she like?

BETH

Audra?

NORA

Yeah. Or, what's...she like.

beat

NORA

or, you know, we don't have to-

BETH

She's getting tall. I think she's going to be taller than me. She likes music. You know this old song "Love Shack" – by -

NORA

The B-52s?? / Wow...

BETH

Yes. Oh my god. She sings it constantly. At the top of her lungs – (*high little voice*) Love Shack! Baby Love Shack!

They are laughing again.

NORA

She's got some retro taste.

BETH

She does...

NORA

Sarah likes old music like that.

BETH
Sarah, that's...?

NORA
My girlfriend.

BETH
How long have you been together?

NORA
About three years now. Long distance, but...

BETH nods.

NORA
(*unsure of how to ask*)
Does...are you...does Audra...

BETH
No. I'm. No. Not married. Or anything.

NORA nods.

NORA
Must be tough. Especially with your work.

BETH
Better than the alternative.

NORA
...being?

BETH
Married to him.

NORA
Oh.

BETH
Way better.

NORA
I see.

Nora wants to ask more.

NORA
What does that mean?

BETH
I'm not about to tell you my life story, okay?

NORA
No, sure, I was just. I was. Curious...I'm just bored, honestly. I'm kind of bored.

BETH
Want me to remind you of the scary situation we're in, scare the shit out of you so you aren't so bored?

NORA
No, no. Yeah. Sorry.

BETH
...I'm fuckin bored, too.

They laugh. Laugh and laugh.

NORA maybe cries a little.

NORA
Laughing feels good.

BETH
...yeah.

silence

NORA
I miss Elaine.

BETH
You know what? Me, too.

they laugh, but sadly.

BETH
Her stupid voice. On and on.

NORA
She made it less boring.

BETH
I know. I'm boring.

NORA
No, no I don't mean that -

BETH (*fiercely*)
Well, you're boring, too.

beat
they laugh and laugh

NORA
It's been a whole day. Right? Twenty-four hours?

BETH says nothing.

NORA
This is insane. People are going to know we're missing. People will be looking for us. People are going to find out.

BETH says nothing.

NORA
You're sure you can't tell me? Anything? Elaine said she knew something, and you won't tell me -

BETH
Look. Elaine told me a story. Her mentor went missing. For months. Elaine had reached out to her and didn't hear back. Finally did, saying she'd gone away on a research trip. Which made sense, but then she had no communication whatsoever – no one could tell Elaine anything about where she was, what the research trip was even about. Then she saw a piece she published, reversing her position on climate change. Her name is Roberta Richards – she's a prestigious researcher, and very outspoken, politically active. Dr. Richards published this paper. It just makes NO sense. Unless – something like this happened to her. We think that's what they're going to make us do.

NORA
Reverse our position? You would do that?

BETH
I don't know.

NORA
YOU? Elizabeth Whitney? Would reverse her position on climate change?

BETH doesn't respond.

NORA

I'm sorry but that's crazy.

BETH

If I agreed, if I did, maybe I could flee the country, rally the troops somewhere else to fight this.

NORA

You think they'll let us leave the country after this? You're the one who said none of this seems legal. Nothing seems to be operating under rule of law.

BETH

I just mean – Elaine got out. The professor before her got out –

NORA

We don't know what happened to either of them –

BETH

What else could have happened?

NORA

(knowing, but not wanting to say it)

I don't know!

they are silent for a moment

NORA

Can we like...jump on the guard? When we go to the bathroom?

BETH

No –

NORA

Come on, we can do it together! Let's think about this –

BETH

Elaine didn't tell you about our grand scheme to get out? After they took Yolanda, the professor, before you, we *(she laughs)* hatched this stupid plan – Elaine was going to try to talk to the guard, you know how she can talk, and I snuck out behind him, running to look for an exit...she was essentially sacrificing herself. *(beat)* There are three more guards down the hall. There are more rooms. I didn't see an exit. This isn't a movie. We aren't going to get out.

NORA

So then what happened when it didn't work?

BETH

Uh – hopefully I don't have a concussion? (*she gestures to a fading bruise on her head*)
I've had a concussion before, I don't think it's as bad as that. No slurred speech...I feel
fatigued but of course that's probably just from...being here.

NORA

So – they hit you?

BETH

Yeah.

NORA

With – their hands, or?

BETH

Jesus –

NORA

Sorry, I just want to know. What...they...you know.

BETH

They hit me on the head with a baton, I blacked out and next thing I knew I was back in
here, but I had bruises on my legs too.

NORA

Okay.

BETH

Elaine was hit in the stomach. While I was out. But – she's pretty tough. She never
complained. She just told me about all the bones she'd broken while on research trips.
Naming each and every one, Jesus it went on forever...

a moment as they think about Elaine

BETH

Anyway, it isn't worth it. It won't work. We just have to wait.

NORA

I don't want to wait.

BETH

I don't want you to get me beat up again. Just stay put. You haven't even done anything,
they don't have anything on you.

NORA
Except publish this book, I guess.

BETH
It's hardly on the same level.

NORA
On the same level as your work?

BETH
Me, and Elaine, and...yeah.

NORA
That's...shitty of you to say.

BETH
What? You should be relieved. If you'd done more, you'd be worse off.

NORA
If there were any grant money available, any research money at all, I would already be doing groundbreaking work, I've done a lot of work just within the confines of my aquarium –

BETH (*scoffing*)
Oh really?

NORA
Like, sea star wasting. Do you know what that is?

BETH
Why would I know anything about marine biology?

NORA
Sea stars are dying. They are turning white, losing control of their water vascular systems and deflating - their arms literally rip off and walk away from their body – no one knows why – we lost 95 percent on the coast last year. I figured the answer is probably in their blood, but no one has ever looked at sea stars' blood, because no one cares about invertebrates, so no one knows what to look for. So I begged and begged for a little money from the research center in the aquarium to just run some blood samples on healthy ones so we have some to compare them to, you know? So now, when an animal wastes on our watch, we can compare the blood and learn from it for next time. I did that. I made that happen.
Okay well, it sounds sort of pathetic now that I'm saying it out loud.

BETH
It's not pathetic –

NORA
I mean compared to what you –

BETH
No –

NORA
I was making the most of what I had. It was small, but I was trying. I was trying so fucking hard.

BETH
You're doing great. I was – too harsh before. I didn't mean to say you aren't doing great. (*shaking her head*) I don't know what's happening to me. If I'd met you...at a conference or somewhere in the real world, and you'd told me that story, I would have said do you know anything about soil and hired you on the spot. Seriously.

NORA
I would have said I'm a fast learner.

BETH
You're doing good.

beat. connection.

NORA
Thanks

VOICE (*overlapping NORA*)
Elizabeth Whitney.

Both jump. BETH looks at her. They both want to hug each other.

BETH
Be good.

NORA
I'll find you.

BETH
Can I –

They reach for a fast embrace at the same time. BANG on the door.

BETH
Bye.

NORA
See you soon.

In the interrogation room. HELEN has more energy, is at the full height of her sharpness, no nonsense, dismissive at times.

HELEN

Alright. Elizabeth Whitney.

BETH

Doctor.

HELEN

..yes. Dr Whitney. Alright. I want to start off getting the list of names of who you've spoken to.

BETH

About what?

HELEN

Your work.

BETH

About the super-bug?

HELEN

Yes exactly.

BETH

I have been in the office of every member of Congress and I met with the board of environmental issues in the Senate, which was no help at all. I believe you have all those names so I'm not sure why I'd need to list them.

HELEN

And I see here you tried to have a meeting with the vice president?

BETH

I did. I was not successful.

HELEN

Right. Good.

So. Someone you spoke to tried to send reporters and medical help to Barrow, Alaska.

BETH

Who?! Who was it?

HELEN

Your alarmist rhetoric is creating panic that is unnecessary –

BETH

You should be panicked. It's real. It's happening –

HELEN

It's only affecting a small area of the world, it'll die down, there's no need –

BETH

Die down? What are you fucking talking about?

HELEN

It's a remote area, that small tribe are the only humans within a hundred miles of the area.

BETH

So you'll let them die. That's your idea of containing the disease.

HELEN flips paperwork.

HELEN

I didn't say that.

BETH

So what's your plan? Also, there are thirty-five different species of mosquito in Alaska – we don't know much about it yet, but I'm almost certain it will travel.

HELEN

Believe me when I say that it is being contained.

BETH

Oh, believe the person who has taken me hostage?

HELEN

Let me get back to my point.

BETH

I know the only thing you care about is your precious oil drilling. Drilling, oil, *money*, that's all you people care about.

HELEN

Alarmist rhetoric. Inciting chaos. This is what you're doing. This is what needs to stop.

BETH

You know what – go ahead. Go ahead and drill away. Release carbon into the atmosphere, release methane, let more permafrost melt, kill an environment that's trying to heal itself but can't, let your people die – go ahead!

HELEN

LISTEN. Quiet. Here is our proposal. We will send you away for six months on a research trip. You'll come back from this research trip and publish a paper. Your findings have been wrong. Carbon emissions are on the decline. Human activity is not causing climate change. You just have to publish these findings and stop your work.

BETH (*aghast, maybe laughing, can barely wrap her head around it*)

There - are - so many things wrong with this. You think six months is all it would take to disprove human involvement in climate change? You think this seems believable? And you really think people won't find it suspicious that *I've* published this?

HELEN

That's up to you to. To be as convincing as possible.

BETH

And if I don't?

HELEN

(*silent*)

BETH

(*silent*)

BETH

What happened to Elaine?

HELEN

Who?

BETH

Elaine Tuck. Is she alive?

HELEN

She might be. She might have taken our offer and no longer be here.

BETH

Or –

HELEN

Or she may have refused our offer and so was shot behind the compound. Her family may think she died falling into a crevice near the Arctic Circle.

BETH

So that's what you'll do if I say no? Shoot me?

HELEN

Why do you think I would tell you what happened to her?

BETH

Is this the same offer you made her? The same offer you made Roberta Richards?

HELEN (*sighs, rubs her head*)

Roberta Richards?

BETH

shrug

HELEN

You think it's good for Roberta Richards that you just mentioned her name to me? Do you think, if Elaine were alive, it would be good for *her* that you just mentioned Roberta Richards to me?

BETH

silent

HELEN (*goes in and out of AUDRA's voice in this*)

You may think I'm *stupid*. You may think I'm just a *fuckin' stupid government sack of shit*. But you might want to think before you speak.

BETH is shaken by this.

HELEN

Remind me, how many lawmakers did Audra speak to?

BETH

What?

HELEN (*going in an out of AUDRA's voice*)

About her friend...Hiti? Her Inuit friend? Hiti was sick!

BETH, feeling like she heard AUDRA, flips around, searching the room, confused, panicked.

HELEN

Dr. Whitney?

BETH collects herself.

BETH

No no no she didn't speak to anyone –

HELEN

Her accounts are in this report –

BETH

That's – I WROTE ANY REPORT YOU ARE READING, she didn't write anything – she's seven for God's sake – she doesn't know anything -

HELEN

But she knows all about your work. There's a letter here. Dear Congressman.

BETH

She was just trying to do something good, to save her friends, she knows I am trying to SAVE LIVES, SO?

HELEN

Who is Vincent Collins to you?

BETH

Vince Collins that's – he's...

HELEN

Is he the father of your daughter?

BETH

Why are you asking me this?

HELEN

I'm just confirming who Audra's legal guardian would be if not you.

BETH

What? Are you fucking kidding me? Are you fucking kidding me?! She should be with my parents. If she's not with me, then my parents!

BETH is processing this.

HELEN

I have the police reports here. Eight years ago, domestic disturbance reported by a neighbor, screaming, says here a bloody chin and a broken hand.

BETH (*clutching her right hand*)

He slammed my hand in a door.

HELEN

Six years ago, a report from yourself, similar. But I don't see anything like a restraining order?

BETH

I tried. (*breath*) I tried, and the judge dismissed the case. Vince is a lawyer, he's a very successful...convincing...he has more MONEY than me. I couldn't – I didn't – but she is not supposed to know him. She can't know him. He will hurt her.

HELEN

I understand that, I'm just saying from everything I see here he would still be her legal guardian. A judge would likely award him custody.

BETH

A judge. *A judge?* You are talking to me about law? And justice? You make me sick.

HELEN

I'm just explaining what will happen if you aren't around for her.

BETH

My parents could fight that. Like you said, the police reports –

HELEN

And you think they'd win? (*beat*)

Well, you can risk that. You've got a choice. You take our offer, get out, she's back with you, she'll be with you on the research trip, of course, if you'd like.

BETH

This is – insane.

HELEN

I'm just trying to help you see the circumstances of the situation. If you aren't there for her, that's what will happen. Think about it.

beat

HELEN

I think this is a small price to pay for such an extraordinary daughter. You lose some work, you give up on a goal, yes. We all have to give up on our dreams sometimes. I recognize that it is a painful thing. But.

BETH

It's not just about my *dreams*, and what I *do*, it is about peoples' lives.

HELEN (*moving right along*)

There are so many other things you can study. We can help you find new work.

BETH

Things are melting. People are dying. Right now.

HELEN

I think we are being very generous with you. I can't believe this is even a difficult decision for you. You can boil the decision down to your daughter, or your work?

BETH is in shock.

BETH says nothing.

HELEN

Are you the kind of mother that will not in this moment say "my daughter?"

BETH

I don't want her to be anywhere near him. I don't want him to touch her. Can't you –can't you do whatever you want with me, can't you threaten me with MY life, can't you leave her out of this, leave her alone?

beat

HELEN

Your daughter, or your work?

beat

beat

beat

BETH

My daughter.

My daughter.

My daughter.

*back in the cell. NORA is alone. She's weaker, tired.
She sits and breathes.
She lays down.
She thinks.
She touches her hair.
She thinks.
She thinks about touching herself.
She stops.
She turns over.
She turns back over.
She thinks she hears something. It freaks her out.
She is scared.
She calms down.
All this goes on for an uncomfortably long time.
She sits up and goes to the spot on the ground where Elaine kept time.
She traces her finger along the ground*

NORA

(all quietly, all mindless, all to herself, all to no one)

E

One two three four five six seven

B

One two three four five six seven

N

One two three four five six seven

and yet it moves

and yet it moves

and yet it moves

and yet it moves

...

he said it.

I think he said it.

You think he said it?

We hear SARAH's voice, but don't see her.

SARAH'S VOICE

Yeah. I really do.

NORA

Beth didn't think so

she's smart...

SARAH'S VOICE

You okay?

NORA
I don't know.

SARAH'S VOICE
You're okay.

NORA
Not everything has to be okay.

SARAH'S VOICE
I know

NORA
Some things are not okay.

SARAH'S VOICE
I know that.

NORA
It's not okay. It's not okay. This.

SARAH'S VOICE
I know. It's not.

NORA
(upset)
I miss you.

all is quiet.

NORA
Beth hasn't come back.

long silence.

NORA
Nobody's come. I thought someone would come.

long silence

NORA
What do they even want with me? I'm nobody.

SARAH'S VOICE, like a memory
You aren't a nobody. You're my lobster.

NORA

Sarah...lobsters don't mate for life.

long silence.

SARAH'S VOICE, like a memory

Yes, they do, right?

NORA

No, I don't really know why that idea has so permeated all modern thought, but lobsters only mate once in their life – they mate, and then never see each other again after about a week. And that's the only time in their lives they do it. Ever. So. I do not want to be your lobster, I'm sorry.

silence

NORA

Penguins though. Penguins mate for life.

But they – they spend most of the year apart. Only about thirty days out of the year together. So. That doesn't sound so great either.

I might die in here.

I might die.

I might die.

long silence

SARAH'S VOICE, like a memory

Don't be so dramatic.

NORA

Maybe Beth is dead. Dead.

SARAH'S VOICE, like a memory

Use your imagination. If you could be anywhere in the world right now where would you be?

silence

SARAH'S VOICE, like a memory

...okay, I'll help. We're on the beach near the Great Barrier Reef. You're wearing a wetsuit as usual. You're about to go out for a dive. You're going to see all the sea stars and blowfish and algae –

NORA

I just want to be in bed. With you. I just want to be home. I just want to go to the aquarium and clean stupid tanks. I want to see the otters. I want to feed the octopuses. I

want to drive home and talk to you about work...Fuck. Fuck. Why did..? Why? Why?
This isn't worth - If I lose everything – what is the point...?

SARAH'S VOICE, like a memory
Imagination! Remember when we met?

NORA
(*laughs, maybe cries*)
mm hmm.

Tap tap tap. Tap tap. We are suddenly in the aquarium where NORA works. SARAH is very real.

NORA
Sorry, sorry, um?

SARAH turns.

NORA
You're not supposed to touch the glass?

SARAH
OH my god I'm so sorry, I'm being one of those people aren't I? Oh my god I apologize–

NORA
It's fine, just –

SARAH
I didn't even know I was doing it, really, ohmigod, like I was just looking at it and my hand was on the glass, like really, I was mesmerized, I'm sorry.

NORA
Her.

SARAH
What?

NORA
Her. You were looking at her. That's Esmerelda.

SARAH
Esmerelda? That is a *name*.

NORA
She's my favorite.

SARAH

Do you work with her?

NORA

I'm a senior biologist here, I oversee this wing, so yeah, I'm always in her exhibit.

SARAH

Wow. Senior biologist, that sounds important.

NORA

Eh, sure, I mean here yes I'm important. A lot of animals depend on me.

SARAH

You say "here" like it's...

NORA

What?

SARAH

it sounds like there's a "but" there. "I like it, but."

NORA

You're very perceptive.

SARAH

You're easy to read.

They look at each other.

SARAH

Sorry I don't know why I said that.

NORA

No, uh, you're right.

SARAH

I'm sorry.

NORA

Don't apologize.

SARAH

I'm Sarah.

NORA

I'm Nora. Are you here with...?

SARAH

I'm by myself. I live in LA, I'm here visiting my sister and my niece...I was supposed to take her? Here? But she got a cold, so we cancelled but I dunno, I just wanted to come. I just came anyway. I keep wanting to pitch a series about ocean animals. I love drawing them.

NORA

Oh are you like, a...?

SARAH

I'm an animator. At Disney. (*she grins*) HA sorry, it's a really new job, I still can't believe it.

NORA

Oh wow, that's amazing.

SARAH

Yeah, I have a lot of followers online, I post my drawings...and they found me and hired me...it's been crazy.

NORA

Congratulations.

SARAH

...thanks!

beat

SARAH

She's beautiful. Esmerelda.

NORA

Not everyone can see how beautiful they are. Octopuses.

SARAH

It's not octopi?

NORA

...No.

SARAH

Octopuses.

They are silent as they watch Esmerelda.

NORA

They each have such different personalities. Esmerelda doesn't really trust anyone. It took a long time for her to warm up to me. I had to figure out the perfect approach, had to let her come to me, instead of me go to her. Instead of offering her food, I just sort of stand at the edge of her tank, my hands open, and I let her see me and take her time, and she'll slowly come up to the edge and look at me for a while and swim away and then swim back and she'll finally reach up and touch the food for a while...and then she'll take it and act like that whole trust issue thing never happened, she'll be all like offering her head to me, that's the big middle part (*she points*), she'll hold onto my arm and taste me, acting all like we're best friends.

beat

But she's my favorite. I guess I like complicated women.

SARAH

Me, too.

beat

SARAH (*surprised as she's saying it*)

I want to meet her.

NORA

Yeah?

SARAH

Yes.

NORA

Okay. I maybe can arrange that.

something changes in NORA as she says the previous line. Lights change, too. We start to find ourselves back in the cell and NORA is alone, but SARAH is still there. They hold each other's gaze.

NORA

That was the best day of my life.

SARAH

It will always be my very favorite day.

beat

We hear far away a voice say NORA TRAVERS, and the cell is turning into the interrogation room. In this transition, we land with HELEN across from NORA. NORA is a mess. Sweaty, upset, exhausted, hungry. She's in worse shape than anyone before her.

Lights shift, Interrogation room.

HELEN is very warm with NORA.

HELEN
Welcome.

NORA
...

HELEN (*reviewing files*)
Nora Travers. Of San Francisco.

NORA
...

HELEN
That's you, yes?

NORA
I'm not going to do it.

HELEN
Do what?

NORA
Reverse my position on climate change.

HELEN
What?

NORA
I'm not going to make any statement, sign any paper. I'm not going to do it. So.

HELEN
...
Really. Alright. And why is that?

NORA
Why is what?

HELEN
Why wouldn't you want to do it? If, it were, say, going to get you out of here?

NORA
Because. It's not the truth. I'm not going to. It's not going to happen.

HELEN

Really.

(beat)

Well, lucky for you, that's not why you're here.

NORA

What?

HELEN

You aren't here to reverse your position, really.

NORA

I'm...okay. Why am I here?

HELEN

Well, you wrote a piece of propaganda, your children's book, which is why we initially wanted to bring you in, question you, but...the more we started looking into your work and what you've done, there doesn't seem to be much. Not much at all. An aquarist. I have all your grant proposals here...and the more I read, the more interested I became. You're a very smart writer.

NORA

You have my grant proposals?

HELEN

Here, one requesting funding to research how iron deficiency is killing plankton in the ocean? And, another asking for funding to look at deep sea coral off the coast of California.

NORA

How...why do you have those?

HELEN

The other appealing thing is that you're suddenly this viral sensation because of the book.

NORA

Yeah.

HELEN

Five million followers. That's quite something.

NORA

...

HELEN
I'm Helen Matthews.

NORA
...

HELEN
I'm going to be announced soon as the head of the Environmental Issues Agency, a new government program that's going to be dealing with climate issues in a new way. What used to be the EPA. It's a new program. We are about to begin, really already have begun, a new initiative that's a solution to reducing carbon emissions. One that's been very controversial for some time, but we're finding it's going to be the best way to tackle this issue without hurting our economy, in fact we think the technology will help boost our economy. That is, a new initiative on geo-engineering.

NORA
...

HELEN
I assume you are familiar with the concept of geo-engineering?

NORA
Yes.

HELEN
Using technology to impact the climate, take carbon out of the air, for example.

NORA
Hasn't this been – sort of taboo? For...decades?

HELEN
And what technological advancement has not been, to use your word, taboo, at first, because people were afraid?

NORA
Well –

HELEN
Robotics? Social media? The telephone? Even the act of putting pen to paper terrified people – Plato said “Writing is a step backward for truth,” no?

NORA
You are one to talk about a step backward for truth.

HELEN
Let's talk about this. The industrial revolution. Could we have reversed it?

beat

HELEN
I'm asking.

NORA
I don't know. No?

HELEN
Right. We couldn't have. We were never going to. We have to push forward. It's too late. Look, I was a scientist, I'd still consider myself one. I used to feel just like you do. But when you start to accept that there's no going back, that we've screwed it all up, we have to find a solution. I'm trying to find a solution. That's what I'm trying to do. And the only solution I see is the one where we can build upon what we already have.

NORA
Reversing emissions could still be the solution. You could change things, reverse emissions, lawmakers could change things.

HELEN
But lawmakers will not. It's not going to happen. So, what can we do? This is a way to keep going without giving up.

NORA shakes her head.

NORA
We can't geo-engineer away human impact.

HELEN
Our scientists on our committee think otherwise.

NORA
Maybe because you locked them in a cell for seven days.

HELEN
We're interested in offering you a position on the committee.

NORA
You're offering me...?

HELEN
You'll be given all the research money you need. You'll be working with other bright minds. You'll also be the face of the committee. You can help us connect with the millions who are misinformed about what we are doing. We're *helping* the environment –

NORA

You've been holding me hostage only to offer me a JOB?

HELEN

Yes.

NORA

Absolutely not.

beat

HELEN

By we'd like you to, I mean this is your only option.

NORA

So if I don't, then...what?

beat

HELEN just looks at her.

NORA

There are people who care about me. People who will know I am missing.

HELEN

They don't know you're missing. We have covered every base. Sarah thinks you're on a special climate science panel. That you were a last minute addition. She's very excited for you. Not worried.

NORA

You've been talking to Sarah?

HELEN

You've been. We're simulating your texts to her. We have your phone.

beat

NORA

You can't keep me here forever.

HELEN

We could. People disappear all the time, to start over, start a new life. It wouldn't be inconceivable for you to leave Sarah. Would it?

NORA (*panicking, to her herself*)

How did this happen?

Snow begins to fall lightly.

HELEN

I need to move on shortly. What is your decision?

Lights and sound shifts. HELEN becomes SARAH. NORA and SARAH are in New York. It's snowing. Sarah's phone is bright on her face.

SARAH

Five million followers. Oh my god. Look at this. Everyone is talking about it.

NORA

How...? How did this happen?

SARAH

Meghan's texting me...she says after the Times refused to publish the review, she sold those emails with the Times to the Atlantic, which published them, and now the Internet's doing...what...the Internet does.

They are both looking at Sarah's phone. It lights up and lights up.

NORA

This is crazy.

SARAH

It's a political statement, look, people are buying it and taking pictures with it, look at all these, you just click on the hashtag and look –

They scroll.

NORA

What's that comment?

SARAH

Oh – people are just nuts –

NORA

“We will find you and kill you, you stupid –“

She stops herself from finishing the sentence.

NORA

I think we need to get out of here. We should go home.

SARAH

Are you serious? We have all those meetings tomorrow, and interviews.

NORA

Are you hearing me? Are you seeing these?

NORA's phone lights up.

NORA

The Press Secretary just tweeted about it. Oh my god. Calling it "propaganda."

SARAH

So? We have our First Amendment rights, they can't do anything -

NORA

This is insane.

SARAH

I think you're just scared because you got what you wanted. You're changing minds and hearts. And it's scaring you, I get it -

NORA

Well, I'm going to change my flight. I think we shouldn't do the interviews.

SARAH

No. You aren't actually going to leave without me.

NORA

These are *death threats*. I think we should take this seriously. Look, we've published it, we've made our statement. Maybe this is as far as we need to go.

SARAH

The Nora Travers I know is not willing to compromise. She fights. She is not willing to back down. You're the one who's always saying we can only change the world a little bit at a time, and if everyone changes just a little bit, a small bit of their life, to help better the planet, it can all change. It can all shift. Right?

NORA

Yes, yeah, I've said that, but...if we're just going to get hurt, or get in trouble, I don't think this is worth it.

SARAH

We have to stick with this. Don't leave. Don't leave.

NORA hesitates.

SARAH

We can do more – we can write more books, we can do talks, tours, we can change the world and be *together*, don't you want that?

NORA

Look, I am SCARED. I am terrified FOR YOU. I want to leave because I LOVE YOU. I CARE about YOU.

lights shift back to the interrogation room

HELEN

You care about me?

NORA

What? What? Uh -

HELEN

You were yelling.

NORA

No I'm – Sarah – I think I'm... I think I need water.

HELEN

I can get you water.

NORA

Okay –

HELEN

I just need your decision.

lights shift and NORA is back with SARAH

SARAH

What else do you care about?

NORA

What?

SARAH

Well, what do you really care about? The ocean?

NORA

What? Yes?

SARAH

Not enough I guess. Is this how it will be with me? You care just enough to get to the very edge, and then when it gets scary you run?

NORA

This isn't fair. This is a serious situation.

SARAH

Well I am not going to leave. I'm going to take every interview. And what do you want me to say? Nora got scared. Nora didn't really believe what she said. Nora didn't think what we are doing is important enough.

NORA

You're being so – black and white. It's either this or that. Stay or go. Sometimes...sometimes you have to make compromises.

SARAH

In a relationship?

NORA

In life. In everything. I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

I don't want to leave you.

I'm not going to leave you.

I love you more than I ever imagined loving somebody.

They hold hands across the table. The lights grow brighter and brighter. ELAINE and BETH are suddenly near NORA.

NORA

But

Is it worth it?

Is it worth all this?

I mean what's it really going to do?

What is all this effort really going to do?

I don't think we can really change the world?

What can I really do? What can we *really* do?

SARAH

I don't know if we can really change anything! I don't know! But what else are we gonna do – let them win? You always say this isn't something anybody can escape from – not us, not them, not our children, not our grandchildren...come on! I know you! *I know you.* Don't you want to be able to say you stood and fought?

NORA

Yes – yes.

HELEN
I'm sorry?

The lights change and there is only the interrogation room, and only Helen.

NORA
I want to be able to say that I stood and fought.

HELEN
And how do we fight? What is the best way to fight?

NORA (almost asking herself)
How do we fight?

HELEN
Because I am fighting too. You can join us and fight.

NORA
You aren't fighting the way I want to.

HELEN
But if you say no, you won't be able to fight at all.

NORA
I...I...

HELEN
What is your decision?
(beat)
What will you do?

silence

Nora looks like she might speak.

blackout

END OF PLAY