

American Fallout

by

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EXT. REMOTE DESERT - DAY

The sun rises on the pumps and mini market of a gas station by a long stretch of desert road. Above metal shutters a sign reads, "Safe Passage Fuel Mart."

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART REAR - DAY

Across from rest rooms is a solar array that powers the station, next to a 20 foot RV, and old Chevy Impala.

The RV door bursts open and loafered feet hurry out. The owner of the loafers lights a cigarette.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

The SMOKER, blue gas station shirt, waits next to the pumps. Digital prices read, "Unleaded: 5.59. Premium: 5.99. Diesel: 5.79." The smoker ashes next to his feet.

Down the road, a billboard reads "Bottled water! Cheap!"

EXT. ROAD - DAY

A cube truck drives into view.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

The smoker waves as the truck pulls up.

DRIVER and HELPER open the rear and unload a 10'x6' box onto a hand truck.

They hoist the box through the front door.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

They ease a new display refrigerator into a corner.

The smoker fills the refrigerator with 16 ounce and liter bottles of water.

MOMENTS LATER

The new refrigerator stands fully stocked with water.

CASPER CRABB (40s), sharp edged everyman in red, white and blue gas station shirt with "Casper" embossed on the breast, beams at his new refrigerator and takes a long happy drag of his cigarette.

The gas station is rustic, harkening back to the 20th century, with 21st century tech. Even with its old-timey aesthetic, the station is clean and orderly.

LATER

Casper turns the radio onto the News. As it plays, he dusts shelves, restocks candy and makes fresh coffee.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

Oil prices continue to soar as the Persian Gulf producers have stopped crude production with their latest skirmish.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper raises the metal shutters.

NEWSCASTER

The Saudis have taken Kuwait City from Iran in their bloodiest battle so far.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper cleans the front windows and mops.

NEWSCASTER

Now that the US has taken the Saudi's side, Russia has vowed to come to Iran's aid should the US step in.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Casper cleans the toilet bowl and flushes.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

(over radio)

This becomes more significant since Russia announced their expanded deployment of hypersonic missiles.

EXT. FUEL PUMPS - DAY

Casper covers the credit card swiper with a note, "CREDIT CARD OUT OF ORDER, COME INSIDE TO PREPAY."

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper turns on the "OPEN" sign.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper settles behind point-of-sale equipment. A photo of a South Asian man in gas station shirt hangs behind him. A Ruger SR1911 PISTOL is holstered under the register.

Casper checks his phone and pumps his fist as interest on \$200K "increases." A car pulls up outside. JAYCE and SANDY (40s), power couple on their way camping, enter.

CASPER

Welcome to the Safe Passage Fuel Mart.

Jayce and Sandy peruse the shelves.

CASPER

Camping up at Gila River? You'll want to stock up on water.

Jayce scrutinizes the price of bottled water, "3.99" for 16 ounce and "4.99" for liter.

JAYCE

That's highway robbery.

CASPER

It's another hundred miles to the next mini-mart. Just like the ballpark, or Great Adventure I'm your only choice. I'm like the Great Adventure of the desert.

Jayce gives Casper his credit card.

JAYCE

Fifty for gas.

Casper charges the card and notices Sandy check gummies.

CASPER

Two for one on all gummy snacks.

Sandy takes two different types of gummies.

JAYCE
He's ripping us off.

SANDY
Two for one.

Sandy pays then peruses the camping gear aisle.

CASPER
You want to make sure you don't forget
any important camping gear.

SANDY
We need itch cream?

JAYCE
No.

SANDY
Your boys chafe like crazy on long hikes.

JAYCE
(embarrassed)
Sandy, Jesus! No!

SANDY
...Okay.

A weak engine parks outside, away from the fuel pumps.
Casper deflates. WYNN COOPER (50s), African American in
worn but neat clothes, always in his head, saunters in.

WYNN
Casper! It's a good day, right? The sun
is shining. As long as you're breathing
you got a shot.

Wynn starts making coffee.

CASPER
Pay up front, Wynn, you know that.

WYNN
I get my deposit tomorrow.

CASPER
I run a gas station not a gas station
slash pay day loan.

Wynn catches Jayce and Sandy as they leave.

WYNN

Hey camping! I love camping. Don't mean to bother you, but I live out here in my car. I'm getting my disability tomorrow and I need a little cash to hold me over. Anything will help.

JAYCE

(to Sandy)

You have cash?

SANDY

You mean...give him?

JAYCE

The guy needs help.

Sandy, put-off, gives Wynn a five.

WYNN

Thank you.

Jayce and Sandy leave. Wynn puts the five on the counter.

WYNN

One of these days your heart will grow two sizes.

CASPER

Fat chance.

Wynn pours coffee. He notices the new refrigerator.

WYNN

Brand-ass new.

CASPER

Came in this morning.

Wynn checks the price of water.

WYNN

A dollar more?

CASPER

That cost me a ton.

WYNN

I don't know why a savvy entrepreneur doesn't open up a station out here to give you competition.

CASPER

The heat and the isolation. Don't mind either.

WYNN

You get to rip people off with impunity.

CASPER

I'm providing an American institution.

WYNN

You're a minimalist who lives in his RV. You could live like a king on half of what you charge.

CASPER

That money is my chance at perfect happiness. I don't see you preparing for anything.

WYNN

Money doesn't make you happy, Casper. People do.

Casper wretches.

CASPER

I almost threw up.

Patron enters.

CASPER

Welcome to the Safe Passage Fuel Mart!

LATER THAT DAY

An overweight MAN pays for several snacks and leaves.

WYNN

By the way, you're being named on his coroner's report.

CASPER

Shut up.

The sleek sound of a BMW SUV pulls up. DR. STEVEN HANOVER (mid-40s), stiff ball of rage, and his daughter, GRACE (10), sucking on a lollipop, walk in.

CASPER

Hey, Dr. Hanover. Hey, Grace.

Dr. Hanover sternly nods. Grace waves. Dr. Hanover picks out staple items as Grace goes to Casper and Wynn.

GRACE

Did you know that we developed a higher social brain just to feel safe most of the time, so we're not always in fight or flight? We do it through being nice.

DR. HANOVER

Grace, enough!

CASPER

It's okay, she's not a bother.

Grace sinks and wanders away. Dr. Hanover, bag full of groceries, hands Casper his credit card.

DR. HANOVER

Grace knows people don't care. Premium.

CASPER

Such a sweet ride.

Dr. Hanover ignores him.

CASPER

Been meaning to ask you, you still practicing? I'm looking for a primary care doctor. Discounts on gas.

DR. HANOVER

I don't think so. Come on, Grace.

Casper shrinks as Dr. Hanover exits. Grace grabs a lollipop and offers a dollar.

CASPER

Keep your dollar. Take another.

She looks up at him like, "Really?"

CASPER

I know what it's like to get yelled at.

DR. HANOVER

Grace!

Grace grabs another lollipop and hurries out. A MOTHER (40s), and her three BOYS (9, 11 and 13) enter.

MOTHER

No more than three minutes. That includes bathroom unless you have to poop.

13 YEAR OLD

Gross, mom.

The chaotic din is drowned out by the deafening roar of multiple Harleys. The kids cover their ears. The roar stops. Casper, in terror, eyes the door.

JAKE (40s), sunglasses and goatee, struts in. The mother reads his leather jacket: "Brothers of the Black Top."

SLOPPY WAYNE (30s), sleepy eyed, barely makes it in before he has to lean on something.

PISTON (30s), short, thick rimmed glasses and bandana over his head, sprints in rubbing his nose.

Finally GENGHIS (40s), football player sized mound of pasty flesh with scraggly beard stalks in. He glares at Casper, oozing with intimidation. Casper looks away.

Jake chooses snacks, Genghis goes to the beer fridge, and Piston, mile a minute, harasses Sloppy Wayne.

PISTON

Sloppy Wayne, you need to stand your ass up. These nice people don't want you puking on their good day.

As Genghis retrieves a cheap 12 pack, the three boys spot Genghis' Kimber 1911 PISTOL strapped to his waist.

BOYS

Oh cool!

Genghis smirks. The mother sees the gun and scowls.

MOTHER

All three of you over here now!

They reluctantly join her.

MOTHER

Out in the car with your father.

Jake, stoned, armful of chips, candy and soda, hands Casper a twenty and nods at Wynn.

JAKE

Hey.

The mother gets in Casper's face.

MOTHER

What are people doing here with guns?

GENGHIS
(snarling)
Buying our wares from an price gouging
ingrate...ma'am.

Casper leers up at Genghis, sweating.

CASPER
He-he has a permit, ma'am. This is an
open carry state.

MOTHER
How do you know he has a permit?

CASPER
He's shown it to me.

GENGHIS
Didn't even thank me for it.

The mother turns around. Genghis looks down at her.

GENGHIS
I can show it to you if you wish.

MOTHER
That thing doesn't make you safer.

GENGHIS
Beg to differ.

The mother charges out. Piston politely holds the door.

CASPER
That it?

Genghis, glaring, slowly hands Casper three twenties.

GENGHIS
(ominously)
Gas.

Casper rings him up.

CASPER
All set.

Genghis leans in. Casper inches back.

GENGHIS
You're welcome. Casper.

Genghis gives Casper one last terrifying stare and slowly
walks out. Casper breathes. The Harleys drive away.

CASPER

He's going to murder me. And, take my
shit!

WYNN

Maybe if you ever said thank you.

An economy car pulls up. ETHEL GOLD (60s), serious
gentlewoman, enters and bee lines for the beer.

CASPER

(still agitated)

Hey, Ethel.

WYNN

Hey, Lovebug.

She grabs a bottle from a six pack that has "E. Gold" on
a Post-it. She opens it with a keychain opener and
drinks, gazing out the window.

WYNN

What's wrong?

ETHEL

I'm terrified we're about to go to war.

CASPER

War? Where'd that come from?

ETHEL

Aren't you paying attention?

WYNN

We're not going to war. We all grew up
scared shitless it was going to happen,
and it never will.

ETHEL

The world is too hot. People don't care.

WYNN

Someone somewhere will think rationally.

ETHEL

Rationally? Those two lunatics? We're
about to have a nuclear war!

CASPER

Nuclear War!

ETHEL

Yes, Casper. Nuclear war.

WYNN

Our current leaders aren't big on vulnerability, I get it, but that's unfathomable.

ETHEL

Vulnerability when it counts? Some people are too damn wounded.

CASPER

Enough! You two are bumming me out.

He shuts down the register and cracks an American beer.

CASPER

It's time, Wynn.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

The sun sets on the horizon. Ethel sits on a BENCH just outside. Casper locks up. Wynn heads out.

ETHEL

Wynn, join us.

WYNN

I have to find a quiet place before sundown or I'm fucked. Night.

ETHEL

Night.

CASPER

Night.

Casper sits next to Ethel.

ETHEL

Why don't you let him stay the night?

CASPER

It's bad enough he hangs out all day.

ETHEL

He still begging?

CASPER

Course.

ETHEL

No one should have to struggle to survive.

CASPER

It's his own fault.

ETHEL

Casper, have some compassion. Ultimately we're all scared children who need help.

CASPER

I'm an adult. I had to work to get where I am. Not my fault Wynn didn't plan.

ETHEL

This is your plan? A gas station in the middle of nowhere?

CASPER

People love my gas station.

ETHEL

I'm not denying that, Casper, but what do you want?

CASPER

I'm saving for something better.

ETHEL

What?

Casper furrows his brow.

CASPER

Whatever it is I'll be able to afford it.

ETHEL

That money is an illusion. You're on a hamster wheel.

CASPER

I'm not on a hamster wheel!

ETHEL

You going to share it with someone?

CASPER

That's just another hamster wheel.

ETHEL

The rest of your life alone?

CASPER

Without a second thought.

ETHEL

Did you get your heart broken?

CASPER

I don't want to talk about this, Ethel.

ETHEL

You're the only person I see on a regular basis, give a yenta a break.

CASPER

Other way around. Got hot for a woman named Jill. Met her at a conference in El Paso. Thought I liked her. Told her I loved her. Then we did it. Couldn't care less after that. Should have known. Wasn't the first time.

ETHEL

Then what?

Casper freezes, haunted by a painful memory.

CASPER

Burned down my last station. Lost absolutely everything.

ETHEL

I'm so sorry. You probably were an asshole, but you didn't deserve that.

CASPER

Thanks. I guess. Bought this out here to get away from all the Jills, and it's working out. Almost completely recovered.

ETHEL

You're a hard case.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - NIGHT

Ethel waves at Casper as she heads to her car.

ETHEL

Goodnight, Casper.

CASPER

Night.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - NIGHT

Casper unholsters his firearm and tucks it in his belt.

EXT. FUEL PUMPS - NIGHT

Casper takes the "out of order" sign off the card swipe.

INT. RV - NIGHT

Casper enters. The decor is minimal. He rests his firearm in a holster under his bed.

He draws a line in green pen on a thermometer printout. Instead of degrees, he gets closer to the \$500,000 mark.

INT. RV DINING TABLE - NIGHT

Casper eats a cheap instant meal while streaming a video of a young, hip GUY hyping his investment strategy.

INT. RV BED - NIGHT

Casper lays down. He reads a headline, "Middle East on Fire While U.S. and Russia Stand By Their Allies."

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

The sun rises on the pumps and station.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper enters, about to turn on the radio when his phone buzzes. It reads: "BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL." Casper blanches, looks out the front window then turns on the radio.

RECORDING (V.O.)

(over radio)

The U.S. Northern Command has detected a missile threat. They may impact within minutes. This is not a drill. If you are indoors, stay indoors. If you are outdoors, seek immediate shelter.

Casper rushes out.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper peers at the cloudy sky for hints of an incoming missile. Thunder and lightening. Casper races inside.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper enters to the radio broadcasting the News.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

(over radio)

--Disregard the emergency recording. It was a false alarm. There are no incoming missiles to the United States.

Casper collapses on the floor in relief.

NEWSCASTER

Officials claim the alert was a technical error brought on by confusion amidst the rising tension in the Gulf of Orman, where Russian destroyers have trapped a fleet of U.S. Carriers aiding Saudi Arabia. President Turner drew a line in the sand minutes after the Russian fleet arrived. The Russian leader is not budging and vows full retaliation should the U.S. make good on their threats.

Casper is about to turn off the radio.

NEWSCASTER

In financial news, the markets are taking a major tumble.

Casper freezes. Terror crosses his face.

NEWSCASTER

The threat of a global conflict has roiled the markets, with the Dow, Nasdaq and S&P 500 contracting by over two thousand points.

Casper gasps. He whips out his phone and checks his stocks. His total is \$120k and shrinking. Casper shrieks, clicks off the radio and hyperventilates.

He frantically takes a marker from his register, races to the closest price tag and raises it by a dollar. He runs to each price tag doing the same. Wynn enters.

WYNN

That false alarm nearly gave me a heart attack!

Casper runs around in a panic raising prices.

WYNN

What's going on?

CASPER

My money!

WYNN

Right. The markets.

CASPER

I'm losing it all!

WYNN

Breathe. It'll level out.

CASPER

When I'm a fucking pauper?

He checks his stocks again which keep shrinking.

CASPER

I'll be running a gas station until I'm eighty.

WYNN

Once all the posturing ends, the markets will return to normal.

A car pulls up. GORDON (40s), broad and in charge, and DYLAN (20s), former athlete, hint of femininity, enter. Casper, still freaked, gets behind the register.

CASPER

Welcome to the Safe Passage Fuel Mart.
Low, low prices on everything.

Gordon checks energy drinks. Dylan gives his credit card.

DYLAN

Forty.

CASPER

(to Gordon)

We have a special on energy drinks. A dollar off any 24 ounce can. The third one is free.

GORDON

(to Dylan)

You want one?

DYLAN

God no.

Gordon pulls out three 24 ounce cans.

DYLAN

You're not fucking having a heart attack.

GORDON

I won't have them all at once. I barely drink these.

Casper catches Gordon eyeing the chips.

CASPER

Special on salty snacks too. Second one is half off.

Gordon picks out two bags and brings everything up.

DYLAN

You're worse than my father.

A pickup truck pulls up. A steady gate approaches. PENNY BRINKMAN (30s/40s), cool as ice, mirror shades, survivalist garb, swings the door open. She scans like a gunfighter and lands on the new fridge with the water.

Casper and Penny lock eyes. He feels something, but isn't sure what. He tenses and widens his eyes as she marches up to him. Dylan notices the Nighthawk Agent 2 PISTOL strapped to her waist.

DYLAN

That's a Nighthawk Agent 2.

Casper notices the firearm.

CASPER

Ma'am, you're going to have to show me a permit.

Penny, watched, hands Casper her permit. He checks, suspicious, and hands it back.

DYLAN

You look hot with that.

Casper glances at her, kind of agreeing. Gordon tuts.

GORDON

You and your guns. Come on.

He leaves.

DYLAN

(to Penny)

Seriously.

Realizing that he's not coming onto her, Penny smiles.

PENNY

Thank you.

Dylan leaves. Penny faces Casper.

PENNY

Are you Casper?

CASPER

I am.

PENNY

You advertise water on this road?

CASPER

I do.

PENNY

I was hoping not to buy from you since you charge too much for gas, but your distributor, Pete, refused to send directly to me. He's especially rock-ribbed about selling to businesses.

CASPER

You can't buy online?

PENNY

It would take too long. Pete said he could get it here by next week.

CASPER

How much do you need?

PENNY

A pallet of sixteen ounce and 2 pallets of one liter.

With a greedy grin, Casper punches up his calculator.

CASPER

That's one thousand seven hundred and twenty eight bottles of 16 ounces at two ninety nine each.

Penny's eyebrows raise.

CASPER

And one thousand six hundred eighty liter bottles at three ninety nine.

Penny's mouth drops.

CASPER

Eleven thousand eight hundred sixty nine dollars and ninety two cents.

PENNY

What?!

CASPER

That's a dollar off my shelf price.

PENNY

Are you fucking kidding me?

CASPER

I need to make a profit.

PENNY

You get those sixteen ounce bottles at twelve cents.

CASPER

You could too if you owned a business.

PENNY

You're insane.

CASPER

I'll give you another dollar off. That's one ninety nine and two ninety nine.

Casper calculates.

CASPER

Eight thousand four hundred sixty one dollars and ninety two cents.

PENNY

Forget it. Where's your bathroom?

CASPER

Out back.

Penny leans in.

PENNY

You are the greediest asshole I've ever met.

CASPER

Go buy it online then.

PENNY

I will!

Penny storms out.

WYNN

Something's better than nothing.

CASPER

I'm not giving her a discount cause she thinks she's pretty. I need to recoup.

WYNN

You didn't even find out who this woman is. She could be your meet cute.

EXT. BATHROOMS - DAY

Penny exits the ladies room, notices Casper's RV, then his solar array and shrugs, mildly impressed.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Penny returns and makes herself a cup of coffee. Wynn nudges Casper with his eyes.

CASPER

I'd be willing to go down another twenty cents per bottle.

Penny lays a couple of dollars on the counter.

PENNY

I'm impressed by your array. I didn't peg you as an off the grid kind of guy.

CASPER

I like everything to be mine.

PENNY

Then you should have this placed prepped for when the S.H.T.F..

CASPER

What?

WYNN

Shit hits the fan.

CASPER

Doomsday?

PENNY

Yeah, doomsday. Probably next week.

CASPER
That was a false alarm.

PENNY
It was a harbinger. We're going to war.
Nuclear war. If you had everything you
need here, you might last a few months.
But, if you're not prepared...You have a
good day, Casper.

Penny marches out.

CASPER
If she's so sure about the shit hitting
the fan, why doesn't she spend the money?

WYNN
She probably can't afford it.

CASPER
Not my problem.

WYNN
You'd charge people for water after they
nuked everything, wouldn't you?

CASPER
I'd be doing my civic duty by maintaining
commerce. And I would charge full price!!

Wynn waves him off and leaves. Through the nearest
window, Casper stares at Penny drive away.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART BENCH - NIGHT

Ethel watches the sunset. Casper, frazzled, drinks.

ETHEL
What's wrong, Casper?

CASPER
I lost all my money today.

ETHEL
All?

CASPER
Almost half. I'm down to nothing. Again.
I don't know what I'm going to do.

ETHEL
As long as we don't go to war it should
go back to normal.

Casper buries his head in his hands and groans.

ETHEL

Look at the bright side. If it happens you should be safe out here.

CASPER

There was a woman here today said I should be prepped for it.

ETHEL

She's right. You don't carry extra stock?

He shakes his head.

ETHEL

Solid structure in the middle of nowhere. You're off the grid. You should be prepared. She cute?

CASPER

...I didn't notice.

ETHEL

Uh huh.

CASPER

She was looking for water. Three pallets. Came in packing heat like that gorilla.

ETHEL

Did you sell her the water?

CASPER

She refused to deal with me.

ETHEL

How much did you charge?

CASPER

One seventy nine and two seventy nine for each bottle.

Ethel backhands his shoulder. He recoils.

ETHEL

You fucking idiot. She could have helped you prep.

CASPER

Ethel, Jesus.

ETHEL

Better hope we don't go to war, Casper.

Casper sits back, his mind racing.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

The sun comes up.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper plays the radio and mops the floor.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

The U.S. and Russia are not budging, as close to war as these two super powers have come since the Cold War.

Casper, distracted by the report, restocks the shelves.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Casper cleans the toilet.

NEWSCASTER

The world is on edge as the leaders of the E.U., Japan and Korea implore restraint.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper hunches over the radio.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

Experts say this time could be real, giving us a 25% chance of starting another world war, with the ever looming specter of nuclear annihilation.

CASPER

Twenty five percent?

NEWSCASTER

The doomsday clock has even been moved to thirty seconds to midnight

Casper whelps and clicks off the radio. Wynn enters.

WYNN

Good morning!

CASPER

I've got to prepare for nuclear war!

WYNN

That woman got into your head.

CASPER

She's right!! I need food! Water! For years to come! I should have done a deal with her to help me prep.

WYNN

Can't you get help online.

CASPER

I do my best work with a mentor.

WYNN

Really? I think I know where she is.

CASPER

Where?

WYNN

What's it worth to you?

CASPER

A week's worth of coffee.

WYNN

A week's worth of coffee and breakfast.

CASPER

Sure!

WYNN

I saw her turn off Michigan road.

CASPER

Michigan road?

WYNN

Michigan road.

Casper dials a number.

CASPER

(on phone)

Pete! Hey! I want to put in an extra order of water. One pallet sixteen, two pallet liter...Six days is perfect.

(off phone)

I'm closing down.

WYNN

Can I get my coffee?

CASPER

Now.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Wynn sits on the bench as Casper locks up.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART ROAD - DAY

Casper pulls his Impala up to the road and it stalls.

CASPER

Shit!

Casper exits, opens his hood and stares at it.

CASPER

(to Wynn)

You know a cheap mechanic?

Wynn fidgets, uncomfortable with this question.

WYNN

No...

CASPER

Where do you get your car fixed?

WYNN

He went out of business.

CASPER

Shit.

Casper closes the hood, gets back in and turns the ignition. It starts. He exhales and pulls onto the road.

EXT. DESERT DIRT ROAD - DAY

Casper's Impala winds down a gravel road and crawls to a stop at a rock formation dozens of feet high. He exits.

CASPER

Hello!

Casper wanders in a few steps. Piercing feedback blares.

PENNY (O.S.)

(over booming loudspeakers)

Stop!! There!!

He freezes and frantically looks around.

PENNY

Do not move another inch!!

Casper spots speakers.

PENNY

You're about to walk through a trip wire.

He peeks at his shin, inches from a TRIP WIRE.

PENNY

It's attached to an IED that will shred your midsection, including your privates.

His eyes dart.

PENNY

Slowly, deliberately step back with your left foot.

Casper steps back from the wire.

PENNY

Now take another step back.

He follows her orders.

PENNY

Now, get the fuck out of here!

He spots Penny in a camouflage crow's nest. The muzzle of a SNIPER RIFLE pokes through the shoot-hole.

CASPER

I'll come down on price if you help me prep!

Penny cocks her rifle and shoots. The bullet skips off the dirt a yard from Casper.

CASPER

What the fuck?! You're shooting at me.

PENNY

I never want to see you again!

CASPER

I already ordered the water. It's coming in six days. I'll come down to forty nine for the sixteen ounce and sixty nine for the liters. That's two thousand five dollars and ninety two cents. In those six days I want you to show me how to outfit my station and RV for nuclear war.

PENNY

You're serious.

Penny climbs down and approaches him.

PENNY

Why should I give you a cent? If war is coming it should be a straight barter.

CASPER

Handler's fee. Thirty nine, fifty nine?

PENNY

You want to be prepared?

CASPER

You want your water?

They squint at each other.

PENNY

Thirty four, fifty four.

Casper does the calculation in his head.

CASPER

Deal.

He puts his hand out. Penny hesitates then shakes.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Penny's truck is parked outside.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper watches Penny survey the interior, taking notes on a spiral pad. Wynn enters and points at her.

WYNN

Did you guys cut a deal?

CASPER

I gave her the water at an aggressively lowered price and she agreed to be my prepping mentor.

PENNY

No, no, no, no, no. I am not your mentor.

CASPER

But, that's what you are.

PENNY

Like we're at a corporate retreat? No.

CASPER

Like Manjur Uddin.

He points to the photo of the South Asian man.

CASPER

He mentored me through the purchase of both gas stations. He's the reason I'm a success.

PENNY

Call me a mentor again and I'll...

CASPER

You don't want your water?

PENNY

I'll make your life a living hell.

CASPER

(to Wynn)

She's helping me for when the S.H.T.F..

PENNY

You can't say that either.

Casper shudders.

CASPER

Can't believe it might actually happen.

WYNN

Good to see you again. I'm Wynn.

PENNY

Penny. Same.

They shake.

WYNN

Respectfully, I don't think it will happen. Someone will back down.

PENNY

It's happening. Mark my words.

CASPER

See? It's happening.

WYNN

The end of the world? Aren't you terrified?

CASPER

I am.

PENNY

I'm prepared.

Wynn looks at Casper like she's crazy.

WYNN

How long have you been prepping?

PENNY

My father was a prepper. He's the reason I'm so prepared.

WYNN

Have you always been prepping for World War III?

PENNY

That's what my father was prepping for.

WYNN

Do you have a plan?

PENNY

Hunker down, by myself. Make a clean break with the world as it ends. Then when the fallout has subsided, emerge and help rebuild.

(to Casper)

You said you have a storage closet?

INT. STORAGE CLOSET - DAY

Penny turns on the light. It's barely filled with sports drinks, sodas and snacks. She makes a note.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Penny exits the closet.

PENNY
I need into your RV.

CASPER
I'm going to have to close down then.

PENNY
Why do you need to be there?

CASPER
I don't like people in my things. Wynn,
you're on the bench.

PENNY
Why don't you have Wynn mind the store?

CASPER
(scoffing)
No.

WYNN
It's a thing.

INT. CASPER'S RV - DAY

Casper sits on his bed. Penny take notes.

CASPER
Think I'd last a couple months?

PENNY
You wouldn't last a week.

CASPER
What? Why?

PENNY
You'll have to wait for my assessment.

Penny exits the RV.

CASPER
Come on!

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper enters followed by Penny and Wynn.

CASPER

Snacks and sodas are full of nutrients.

Dr. Hanover's SUV pulls up. Penny gets out of their way as Dr. Hanover and Grace hurry in.

DR. HANOVER

Get the groceries.

Dr. Hanover notices Penny's pistol as he pays.

DR. HANOVER

Is that woman armed?

CASPER

She has a permit.

Penny catches Grace staring at her. Grace looks away.

DR. HANOVER

Why do you need to be armed in public?

PENNY

I'm not normally in public.

CASPER

She's helping me prep.

DR. HANOVER

Lot of good that's going to do. We're all fucked.

Grace brings the groceries up and reaches for a lollipop.

DR. HANOVER

No lollipops! Come on!

Dr. Hanover marches out with Grace.

PENNY

Is he her father?

CASPER

That's Dr. Hanover and Grace. From what I get, Grace's mother left them for a younger man.

PENNY

He's taking it out on Grace. Have you said anything?

CASPER

He spends quite a bit here.

PENNY

God forbid.

The blast of Harleys approach and power down. Penny notices Casper shifting anxiously.

Genghis, Jake, Sloppy Wayne and Piston file in. Genghis and Penny eye each other as Genghis gets his twelve pack and brings it to Casper. Penny notices Genghis' pistol.

PENNY

Kimber 1911. That's a good gun.

GENGHIS

Who are you?

PENNY

Your friendly neighborhood desert dweller.

GENGHIS

What do you have?

Penny proudly unholsters and presents her handgun.

PENNY

Nighthawk Agent 2.

GENGHIS

Shit. Best handgun in the world.

PISTON

Genghis, man, you finished at the register?

GENGHIS

You can chill.

PENNY

Genghis. Like the Mongolian?

GHENGIS

You know it. I would have preferred Temujin, but nobody knows that's his real name, and I want it to instill awe.

PENNY

You're committed, I like that. You ride these parts or just passing through?

GHENGIS

This is our territory. Wish we had another gas option than this skinflint.

She knowingly smiles at Casper.

PENNY

So do I.
 (to Casper)
 Tomorrow. My place.
 (to the Brothers)
 You gentlemen take care now.

GHENGIS

You too.

Penny exits.

GENGHIS

Who's the gun chick?

CASPER

C-customer.

GENGHIS

Customer? You do deliveries now?

CASPER

...Yeah.

GENGHIS

Then next time I'll have you deliver me
 and the boy's shit to "go" and "fuck
 yourself."

Genghis and the Brothers guffaw. Casper shrinks.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

The sun rises on the station.

EXT. PENNY'S BUNKER - DAY

Casper exits his Impala.

CASPER

Penny!

The hatch door to her bunker is open.

CASPER

Penny!

No response. He approaches, stepping over the trip wire.

CASPER

I'm here for my assessment!

He almost walks into another TRIP WIRE and cautiously steps over that.

CASPER

Hope I don't trip any booby traps.

He pokes his head into the bunker.

CASPER

Penny?

INT. PENNY'S BUNKER ENTRANCE - DAY

A metal ladder descends.

CASPER

Hello?

Casper climbs down.

INT. PENNY'S BUNKER - DAY

He turns around to a fully decked out doomsday bunker made from shipping containers with a garden, chicken coup, rabbit pens, fish tanks, a water well pump, and bullet making equipment.

The other side is food storage with an empty space that reads, "water." A flat screen TV and couch are tucked into a corner, with a curtained-off area just beyond.

Casper, in awe, steps in. A device on the wall beeps and sprays BEAR REPELLENT squarely in his face. He screams and fumbles for the ladder.

EXT. PENNY'S BUNKER - DAY

Casper crawls from the bunker, screaming. Penny stops him from crawling across the trip wires.

PENNY

Whoa, whoa, whoa!

Casper rolls around clutching at his face.

CASPER

My eyes!!

PENNY

What the fuck were you doing in my bunker!

CASPER

You said to meet you here!

PENNY

Here! Up here!

CASPER

Please, help!

PENNY

You need milk.

CASPER

Milk! Please!

PENNY

I don't have milk, Casper. I'm lactose intolerant.

CASPER

I have milk. I have milk at my store. Please, drive me there.

PENNY

You suck, come on.

Penny gets him to his feet.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Penny's truck pulls up. Wynn sits on the bench. Casper races out, slams into the door, fumbles for his keys, barely unlocks it and rushes in.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper pulls a quart of milk from a refrigerator and pours it on his face, groaning in relief. Wynn gives Penny a confused look. She points at her face.

PENNY

Bear spray.

Wynn nods, still confused.

INT. CASPER'S RV - DAY

Casper wipes his face. Penny sits with her pad.

PENNY

Fill the closet with rice, beans, canned goods and bottled water. Here, stock several months of MREs, lots and lots of first aid supplies, and at least a years worth of Potassium Iodide. That solar array is great, but you need a backup diesel generator. You also need better security and more firearms.

CASPER

Security?

PENNY

Motion sensors. Cameras. So you know when people are sneaking up on you.

CASPER

What's all that going to cost?

PENNY

Bare minimum, thirty to fifty thousand.

Casper checks his investments, at "\$70K," and whimpers.

PENNY

That doesn't include food redundancies, like chickens for eggs, or protection from radiation.

CASPER

That's what the potassium iodide is for.

PENNY

That's a band-aid. You need an NBC proof bug-out bunker.

CASPER

Like the peacock?

PENNY

Nuclear, chemical, biological.

CASPER

Just like yours?

Penny nods.

PENNY

Go get your sidearm. I want to see if you can shoot.

EXT. DESERT PLOT - DAY

Penny shoots several rounds into an abandoned hubcap, bunching the bullets in a tight circle. Her speed and accuracy indicate a lifetime of marksmanship.

PENNY

Your turn.

Casper steps up and aims his pistol.

CASPER

How long did your bunker take you?

PENNY

Several months.

CASPER

It could happen any time.

Casper shoots. He's not as quick or accurate, but he still bunches the bullets adeptly.

PENNY

Not bad. You could buy a prefab bunker, get it shipped priority and hire contractors to put it in the ground by next week. That will cost you...a lot.

CASPER

How much?

PENNY

More than a hundred thousand.

CASPER

I don't have that.

PENNY

My father always said whatever you can't afford, you need to improvise.

CASPER

You said you father was a prepper?

PENNY

He was. Crouch more.

Penny shows Casper proper shooting form.

CASPER

Wish my father showed me stuff like this.
He was a custodian for a candy company.
Best thing he did for me was get candy
wholesale so I could sell it at school.
He's the reason I went into convenience.
Does your daddy have his own bunker?

PENNY

He died when I was in college.

CASPER

Got you beat, mine died when I was
thirteen.

PENNY

Didn't know it was a competition.

Casper shoots several rounds.

PENNY

Better.

CASPER

It hasn't been several months since shit
started hitting the fan in the Middle
East. What made you start?

PENNY

I had an bad breakup. Spent time in the
hospital. Hadn't prepped since my father
died. When I got out it kept me centered.

CASPER

Good timing.

PENNY

You bet.

CASPER

Your boyfriend make you sick?

PENNY

It wasn't that kind of a hospital.

CASPER

You don't seem crazy.

PENNY

Should have known better than to get involved in the first place. Concentrate, I don't have all day. Shoot again.

Casper gets in position.

CASPER

What if it doesn't happen? I mean, I'm spending all my money.

PENNY

Either way you'll have a tricked out doomsday compound. When it happens, the money you have left will be worthless.

Casper prepares to shoot.

CASPER

Would you ever share your bunker?

Penny grabs Casper by the shirt collar.

PENNY

Nothing is happening between us. Got that?

CASPER

I didn't mean it like that.

PENNY

I'm not sharing anything with you!

She storms off.

CASPER

Wait!

CASPER

I need my car.

JENNY

Shit, your car.

INT. PENNY'S PICKUP - DAY

Penny drives the two of them in awkward silence.

CASPER

Where are you from?

Penny takes her time to answer.

PENNY

Redding, California.

Casper nods, expecting more.

CASPER
I'm from Tucson.

PENNY
What a shit hole.

CASPER
It's a college town with a ton of charm.

PENNY
My ass.

CASPER
You're just being contrary.

They sit in awkward silence again.

EXT. PENNY'S BUNKER - DAY

Penny and Casper exit her truck.

PENNY
Casper, I'm going to check on you when
you don't expect it, so if you want a
mentor you need to be ready.

CASPER
I'm all in.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART BENCH - NIGHT

Casper and Ethel watch the sunset.

CASPER
I'm getting my place prepped.

ETHEL
That woman showing you?

Casper nods.

ETHEL
Good for you.

CASPER
You should see her bunker. While I'm
freaked about prepping for the end of the
fucking world, she's like a cold beer.
She's prepared.

ETHEL
No one is prepared, Casper.

CASPER
I don't know.

ETHEL
Anyone who says they're prepared for
nuclear war is in serious denial.

CASPER
Penny's different.

He smiles, thinking about her. Ethel notices.

ETHEL
You're not talking about her prepping.

CASPER
What?

ETHEL
I know a crush when I see one.

CASPER
She's totally not my type.

ETHEL
Crushing Casper.

CASPER
I don't have a crush on her!

ETHEL
Okay, fine. When do you see her again?

CASPER
She said she's going to check on me when
I least expect it.

ETHEL
You're not going to do to her what you
did to that Jill?

CASPER
Ethel, there is nothing between us.

ETHEL
I hope she likes you too.

INT. CASPER'S RV - NIGHT

Casper holsters his gun under his bed.

INT. RV DINING TABLE - NIGHT

Casper eats the same food.

INT. RV BED - NIGHT

Casper gets into bed and shuts off the light.

MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

A digitally disguised voice breaks the silence.

VOICE (O.S.)

Get up.

Casper wakes to the muzzle of an assault rifle in his face. Panicked, he looks up at the ASSAILANT in ski mask and dark goggles.

CASPER

Wha--

ASSAILANT

(digitally disguised)

Shut up. Out of bed.

He reaches for his gun. It's gone.

ASSAILANT

Your pistol's in my belt. Get up. Slowly.

Casper slowly rises. The assailant opens the door and kicks him out.

EXT. CASPER'S RV - NIGHT

Casper lands on the ground, face first.

ASSAILANT

Put your hands behind your back.

Casper complies. The assailant binds Casper's hands with a zip tie and covers his head with a canvas hood.

INT. PENNY'S BUNKER (PITCH BLACK) - NIGHT

A flashlight shines on the canvas hood. A gloved hand yanks the hood off, revealing a sweaty, terrified Casper. The masked assailant enters the light across from him.

CASPER
Please don't kill me.

ASSAILANT
(digitally disguised)
You ordered extra food you don't sell.
You prepping for war?

CASPER
No.

ASSAILANT
Liar! We're taking your stores. Where
else are you keeping them?

CASPER
Nowhere.

ASSAILANT
Where does your girlfriend keep hers?

CASPER
You work for Pete?

ASSAILANT
Tell us or we eat you both.

CASPER
I don't know anything about her!

ASSAILANT
You've seen her repeatedly.

CASPER
She doesn't tell me shit.

The assailant grabs his hair with a pistol in his face.

ASSAILANT
I'll blow your balls off!

CASPER
Okay! Okay! She has a bunker on the
second dirt road off Cholla Lane.

ASSAILANT
If you're lying I'm going to eat your arm
in front of you.

Casper gets hysterical.

CASPER
I swear!!

The assailant takes off the mask to reveal Penny.

PENNY

It's okay. You did well.

Penny turns on the lights. Casper sits in her bunker with his hands bound. She cuts him loose.

CASPER

You scared the shit out of me!

PENNY

Good job on lying about my address.
Thanks for not giving me up.

CASPER

You're welcome.

In his face.

PENNY

Don't get cocky. I still got in and got
to your weapon too easily.

She gets close. Sparks. They both feel it.

CASPER

No motion sensors.

PENNY

Exactly. Bad job.

Penny backs up, cooling down.

PENNY

You've already been down here, uninvited.
I'm taking a huge chance by showing you
the heart of my operations. I hope you
appreciate that.

CASPER

I do.

PENNY

And, it doesn't mean there's anything
between us.

CASPER

Course not.

Casper squirms, still freaked.

CASPER

You really scared me.

Penny can't help but smile.

PENNY

You should be scared. This is serious.

CASPER

I am serious!

She gives him a moment.

PENNY

It's built out of two forty foot shipping containers. One was too claustrophobic.

CASPER

No prefab?

PENNY

Containers were cheaper. I poured concrete to take the weight of the earth.

CASPER

You buy this land?

PENNY

I did. There's an aquifer right beneath here. I chose a location along its path that had the best strategic rock formation.

CASPER

Jackpot.

Casper smiles. Penny feels his childish exuberance.

PENNY

Jackpot, yeah. An indoor garden is the only way to grow in nuclear winter. Chickens for eggs. The fish and the plants sustain each other.

CASPER

The rabbits for meat?

Penny takes out a rabbit and cuddles it.

PENNY

(offended)

The rabbits are for me.

Casper shrugs.

PENNY

Stored food to last a year. I thought the aquifer would give more water which is why I need yours.

CASPER

Gotcha.

PENNY

Food and water. Redundancy, redundancy, redundancy. Just like dad taught me.

She points to a device on the ceiling.

PENNY

Geiger counter. That was my father's. Cameras topside and PA system to scare people off. Solar array. Diesel generator.

CASPER

Where's your array?

PENNY

The top of the rocks.

CASPER

You kept a lot of your father's stuff. My father couldn't even stand up to my mother worth a damn.

PENNY

My mother was a saint.

CASPER

Mine wasn't.

Casper loses himself in memories. Penny pulls out a Mossberg 12 Gauge SHOTGUN and changes the subject.

PENNY

This is a Mossberg 930 12 gauge. That pistol of yours is nice, but you need another weapon. This is it. If anybody comes up on you like I did tonight, the motion sensors will trip, and you can come out blasting. Blam!

Casper jumps.

PENNY

Tag two or three at once.

CASPER

You had an assault rifle. Can I see it?

PENNY

That should never be brought out, Casper.

CASPER

You used it on me.

PENNY

It wasn't loaded and I was trying to scare you.

CASPER

Then if it's not loaded.

PENNY

If radioactive cannibals come here to eat my brain, then the AR-15 is appropriate.

CASPER

Can I hold the shotgun?

He holds out his hand.

PENNY

No.

CASPER

Why?

PENNY

Get your own.

CASPER

Can't I handle it?

PENNY

This isn't a toy.

CASPER

I've shot a 12 gauge before.

PENNY

I don't trust you.

CASPER

You're armed like you're about to fight your own private Alamo. I'd be an idiot to tussle with you.

He gives her puppy dog eyes. Penny hands it over.

PENNY
Jesus, what a baby.

He grins, cradling it in his hands.

PENNY
Don't cock it.

He nods obediently.

PENNY
I have a year's worth of cannabis to keep
me from being bored to death.

CASPER
You smoke that now?

PENNY
Only after the shit hits the fan.

She points to a composting toilet.

PENNY
This toilet is rigged to drain directly
into the garden.

Casper looks around, in awe.

CASPER
Wow. If the shit hits--

PENNY
When the shit hits the fan.

CASPER
When? God. Still can't believe it. You
really are prepared.

PENNY
That's right. I'm prepared. And you will
too. You won't have to worry.

Casper smiles. She smiles back, making him feel safe.

PENNY
Please turn around and stand in the
corner.

Casper points to the corner, confused.

PENNY
I need to water my garden.

Penny points to the toilet. Casper gets it and turns to the corner with the flat screen TV.

PENNY

No peeking.

CASPER

What's the viewing selection like for the end of the world?

PENNY (O.S.)

Mostly romance. Romantic comedies.

Casper raises his eyebrows a little shocked. He glances over and pulls the curtain aside.

INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Behind the curtain is a sleeping nook with a soft mattress and swirls of colorful fabric. Photos of Penny, at all ages, with her cheerful MOTHER spot the wall. A lone photo of her as a tween with her square-jawed FATHER wearing a rural, mesh-cap sits next to her pillow.

Her father's same beat-up mesh ball cap hangs above.

PENNY (O.S.)

Hey!!

INT. PENNY'S BUNKER - NIGHT

Casper turns around to Penny who is now decent.

PENNY

Get the fuck out of there! No one ever goes in there but me. Ever!

CASPER

I, uh, didn't mean...

PENNY

Don't even think about sex!

CASPER

What? Who said anything about--

PENNY

Sorry. It's four. I'll drive you back.

INT. PENNY'S TRUCK - NIGHT

They drive.

PENNY

Decide on a network of people you want to give walkie talkies to. Useful people. Mechanics, doctors.

CASPER

Thank you. For showing me all this.

PENNY

It's what mentors do, right?

CASPER

You called yourself my mentor.

Penny glances at Casper's meek expression.

PENNY

You've been a serious mentee. It's the least I could do.

He smiles as she pulls over.

PENNY

I'll be by Saturday. Have a bug-out bag ready.

CASPER

Where are we going?

PENNY

The desert.

CASPER

Over night?

PENNY

Don't get any ideas.

CASPER

That was a yes or no question.

PENNY

We are going camping.

CASPER

Sweet. I'll see you Saturday.

He dashes out of the truck.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper, on edge, listens to the radio.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

(over radio)

The world continues to worry as the
standoff between the U.S. and Russia
enters its sixth day.

Wynn enters.

WYNN

Happy Saturday!

CASPER

Won't be happy when we're all engulfed by
a mushroom cloud.

WYNN

Perfect happy thought. Is your "mentor"
coming around today?

CASPER

She's taking me bugging out.

WYNN

Like going crazy or running away?

CASPER

The latter.

Casper hears Penny's truck and perks up. Penny enters.

PENNY

Hey, Wynn.

WYNN

Happy Saturday.

PENNY

Happy Saturday.

CASPER

I'll get my gear.

PENNY

Progress report first.

INT. STORAGE CLOSET - DAY

Casper shows Penny stocked beans, rice and canned goods.

CASPER
Everything else should be here early next
week. Oh, and here.

Casper pulls his phone and shows her a diesel generator.

CASPER
That's the generator.

PENNY
Not the one I recommended.

CASPER
It's less expensive. Got good ratings.

PENNY
Casper, if you're stuck with inferior
equipment you're dead.

Casper grimaces.

PENNY
Return this, get the one I told you to
and have it here next week.

CASPER
Yes, ma'am.

PENNY
Go get your bug-out bag.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Penny waits in her truck. Casper runs up with a backpack
stuffed to the brim.

PENNY
(skeptical)
Is that ten percent of your body weight?

CASPER
(totally not sure)
Yes.

PENNY
Throw it in back.

EXT. DESERT TRAIL - DAY

Penny and Casper exit the truck. Casper stares up at the
dauntingly steep trail.

CASPER

It's been a minute since I hiked.

Penny starts up, ignoring him. Casper follows.

EXT. DESERT TRAIL - DAY

Penny gracefully bounds up the trail. Casper lags with his too-heavy pack, out of breath.

LATER

Penny continues. Casper barely catches up.

CASPER

(weakly)

Wait!

Penny turns, in a power stance.

CASPER

I need to rest. Please.

He sits on a nearby rock.

CASPER

Tha--thanks.

He reflexively pulls out a cigarette.

PENNY

Light that and I'm leaving you up here.

Casper withdraws the cigarette.

PENNY

Give them to me.

CASPER

What?

PENNY

If you run out of steam cause you're a smoker...out here...

Casper, freaked, tosses them over.

PENNY

Good job.

She stuffs them in her pack and continues. Casper collects himself and follows.

EXT. CAMP GROUND - DAY

Penny arrives at the top of a plateau and gazes at the view. Soon Casper arrives, winded. A beautiful and vast desert vista spans with a spectacular sunset.

CASPER

That's beautiful. I think I'm going to take a rest over here.

Casper unravels his sleeping bag, barely gets his feet in, and falls asleep. Penny chuckles.

EXT. CAMP GROUND - DAY

The sun rises. Casper wakes, stiff, his sleeping bag wrapped around him. He struggles to his feet, unzips and pees. Halfway through he realizes he can't see Penny.

CASPER

Penny.

He spins about, searching.

CASPER

Penny!

He looks down into the valley below.

CASPER

(terrified)

Penny!!

Penny jerks awake, feet away in camouflage bedroll and bed covering, perfectly hidden by foliage.

PENNY

Casper, what? What's wrong?

CASPER

I thought you left me here.

She shakes her head, amused.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - DAY

Penny traverses a desert trail, bouncing across rock and sand. Casper follows, step-for-step.

PENNY

My father always said everything that will help you survive, can also hurt you. Might even kill you. You'll learn that in abundance out here.

EXT. FARTHER DOWN THE TRAIL - DAY

Casper and Penny kneel over an ANT HILL.

PENNY

Ants are high in calories and protein.

Penny digs in and pulls out her hands covered in ants.

PENNY

Make sure you bite down on them or they'll attack your tongue.

Penny inhales a few and crunches before swallowing.

PENNY

If you want to go full ant apocalypse you'd probably take in two to three hundred calories. Try it.

CASPER

Eating ants?

PENNY

You're starving Casper. This is all you have. What do you do?

Casper grimaces and pantomimes digging into the hill. Penny stoically nods. Casper steels himself, digs in and pulls out a fistful of ants. Disturbed, he inhales a few.

PENNY

Bite down quick.

He wales as the ants bite his tongue. Penny giggles.

EXT. FARTHER DOWN THE TRAIL - DAY

Casper and Penny hunker over a spiny cactus. Casper's wounded tongue rests on his lip. Penny unsheathes her footlong Frontiersman KNIFE.

PENNY

Out here water scarcity is a thing, obviously. Quickest way to get water is with this cactus. Cut off the top.

Penny deftly cuts off the top of a stem.

PENNY

Then cut off the sides, careful not to prick yourself.

She cuts down all four sides, exposing the fleshy center.

PENNY

Then cut the fleshy part out.

She cuts and lifts out the light green innards.

PENNY

You can eat this. Tastes like cucumber.

She takes a bite and hands it to Casper.

CASPER

It's slimy.

PENNY

Doesn't mean it won't save your life.

Casper, grossed out, takes a bite, it's not bad.

PENNY

To really hydrate, you need to wrap a handkerchief around it.

She plops the stem in a handkerchief and starts twisting.

PENNY

As we twist the water comes out so we can suck it up.

The liquid seeping out is viscose and milky, resembling several types of bodily fluids. Casper's face twists.

CASPER

You want me to suck on that?

Penny draws it closer.

CASPER

You suck on it.

Penny inspects the gross, slimy handkerchief.

PENNY

Fair enough, but if you were dying of thirst--

CASPER
I'd totally suck on it.

EXT. FARTHER DOWN THE TRAIL - DAY

Penny and Casper watch a patch of rocks.

PENNY
Remember, if you see one, there are two.

She takes a foot long rod from her pack and unfolds it into a yard long pincer tool. She lifts the top rock.

PENNY
They like the shade.

Penny pokes the pincer tool inside, roots around, and pulls out a RATTLESNAKE. Casper jumps back.

PENNY
I've got him. Don't get too close.

Penny puts the snake's head under her boot and chops it off with her knife.

PENNY
The head can still bite.

Penny hands Casper the pincer tool.

PENNY
I'm going to lift up that big rock and you're going to do the same.

CASPER
Me? Catch a rattler?

Penny pushes the tool closer. He hesitates and grabs it.

CASPER
Let's do it.

Casper readies himself. Penny lifts a heavy rock onto its side revealing another RATTLESNAKE. Casper strikes, roots around, and pulls the snake out.

CASPER
That's eight feet long!

PENNY
More like four. Still big. Get its head.

Casper pins its head with the pincer. Penny hands him her knife and he lobs it off.

PENNY

Nice!

Penny puts up her hand. Casper, ecstatic, high fives.

EXT. CAMP SITE - NIGHT

Penny cooks rattler meat on a skillet. Casper sits. She offers Casper a piece of meat. He skewers it with his fork and takes a bite.

CASPER

Mm, well seasoned.

PENNY

I like to pack salt.

Casper pulls out two 24 ounce cans of beer from his pack.

CASPER

I was actually hiking with a little extra weight, so...I got more of a workout.

PENNY

(scornful)

Domestic beer?

CASPER

This is a good, solid beer. You can't even dispute that.

PENNY

Yes I can.

CASPER

Then I guess you don't want yours.

PENNY

Give it here.

Casper coquettishly hands Penny a beer and sits as they crack them open.

CASPER

I still can't wrap my head around us preparing for the end of the world. It's so horrifying.

PENNY

Yeah. It is.

CASPER

How do you stay...together.

PENNY

When dread starts creeping in, I tell myself, "I'm prepared."

CASPER

That works?

PENNY

Yep.

CASPER

(to himself)

I'm prepared.

PENNY

Have you figured out who you're going to give walkies to?

CASPER

The only person I know of any worth is Dr. Hanover. My friend Ethel too.

PENNY

What about Wynn?

CASPER

He just lives in his car and begs.

PENNY

He had to have done something before?

Casper shrugs, uninterested.

PENNY

You need people to make this work.

CASPER

What if I join your network?

PENNY

You own a gas station.

CASPER

(hurt)

Thanks.

PENNY

Once the shit hits the fan your inability to connect will get you killed.

CASPER

I thought doomsday prepping was all about being a rugged individual.

PENNY

That's a myth.

CASPER

What about the mother with the starving baby? She might be out to kill you.

PENNY

My father always used that to make the same argument. If a mother and child are starving, they're going to be really thankful that you helped them.

CASPER

What about the next starving mother?

PENNY

We have no evidence that if civilization collapsed, everybody would just forget that we need each other.

CASPER

That motorcycle gang. The leader wants to tear off my legs. What's to prevent them from taking all my shit?

PENNY

You might have to shoot to kill, I'm not denying that, but what if they agreed to protect you for some food, just to feel normal again?

CASPER

Not sure about that.

PENNY

Pushing through fear to be kind is maybe the most important lesson I can teach.

CASPER

If you're wrong, then you're dead.

PENNY

It takes a little elbow grease to figure that out, but it can be done.

Casper stares into space, lost in bad memories.

CASPER

Some people are broken.

Penny leans in.

PENNY

Who?

Casper looks into her eyes, making sure it's safe. She looks right back with warmth and understanding.

CASPER

Mother.

PENNY

Right.

CASPER

I was the youngest of four. Treated me like the runt.

PENNY

That sucks. You said your dad helped you.

CASPER

He was all right. Better than all right. The money I made because of him made me feel okay. Like my mother or brothers couldn't touch me. Had over a thousand dollars in the bank when he died.

PENNY

Wow. Most kids wouldn't have had the discipline to save like that.

CASPER

After he died, Mom...Every time I thought, oh, she's turned into a real mother. Nope. She said she only needed thirty bucks to get Kev, the oldest, a pair of reading glasses. As my parent she was allowed access to my account. She drained the whole fucking thing. Bought herself a new purse, shoes, got Kev a new baseball uniform. Gushed all over him like she wanted to fuck him. I turned around and burned it all. She had them beat on me every day for a month. Like a pack of fucking werewolves.

PENNY

That's when you started liking everything to be yours?

Casper nods.

CASPER

Still want to make her pay.

Casper holds back tears. Penny gazes at him.

PENNY

Your mother and brother are shit people.

CASPER

I'll drink to that.

They tink cans and drink. Penny drinks a little too long. They put their beers down and sit in silence.

PENNY

Your father would be proud.

CASPER

Guess he would.

PENNY

(tenderly)

Out here, when people need you, you could be a werewolf hunter.

They gaze into each other's eyes. Buzzed. Casper leans in and kisses Penny. She kisses back with increasing passion until it feels too good and she pulls away.

PENNY

Casper! I told you...

She wants to slap him and kiss him. Tears well up.

PENNY

I'm going to bed.

Penny walks into the darkness.

PENNY

Make sure you put out the fire.

Casper sits.

EXT. DESERT TRAIL - DAY

Casper, a few steps behind, watches Penny as they hike down in silence.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Penny's truck pulls up.

INT. PENNY'S TRUCK - DAY

Casper and Penny sit.

CASPER

Thanks. That was great. Caught a rattler.

Casper chuckles.

PENNY

I'll be by tomorrow.

CASPER

More stuff will have come by then.

Penny ignores him.

CASPER

Okay.

After an awkward moment, Casper steps out.

CASPER

Do you think it was the beer, when we--

Penny turns on loud music.

PENNY

You going to close the door?

Casper, dejected, closes the door.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper sits at the register and turns on the radio.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

(over radio)

With both the U.S. and Russia continuing to saber rattle, President Turner gave Russia an ultimatum. Move their ships from the Gulf of Orman within two days or there will be consequences.

Casper breathes.

CASPER

I'm prepared.

A delivery truck pulls up outside.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART REAR - DAY

Casper cuts open a large box revealing dozens and dozens of packages of "Meal, Ready-to-Eat (MREs)." Happy, he sends Penny a text: "MREs are here!"

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper sits at the register with Wynn. A truck pulls up and a delivery guy enters with a medium sized box.

CASPER

Sweet.

Casper signs. He opens to find smaller white boxes that read "Potassium Iodide."

WYNN

Preparing for fallout?

CASPER

It's just a bandaid, but I don't have a bunker so...

Casper puts half the boxes in the storage closet.

CASPER

I don't need to shut down, do I?

WYNN

You'd hear any car and hurry back.

Casper rushes out. Wynn sits alone, agape.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART REAR - DAY

Casper carries the rest of the iOsat back to his RV. He checks his texts. Penny has not answered. He furrows his brow and sends another text: "Got the iOsat!"

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART BENCH - DAY

Casper sits by himself, gazing in Penny's direction. He texts her: "I thought you said you were coming today." A courier van drives up.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART REAR - DAY

The driver delivers soil, pots, grow lights, and a small box. Casper opens the box to find packets of seed. Wynn comes out of the bathroom.

WYNN

You opening a vegetable stand?

CASPER

It's for my indoor garden, it's the only way I can grow in nuclear winter.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper and Wynn enter and settle at the register. Casper hears Penny's truck coming and pops up like a puppy dog. He coolly leans against the counter as she enters.

PENNY

Hey, Wynn. How you doing?

WYNN

I'm awesome.

PENNY

So, greenhorn, what have you got for me?

CASPER

I've got things. Wynn, I need to go out back. You okay here?

WYNN

I'll yell if someone comes.

CASPER

(to Penny)

Come on.

She gives Wynn a bewildered look. Wynn shrugs like "I know, he's changed."

INT. CASPER'S RV - DAY

Casper shows Penny a side panel filled with MREs and iOsat boxes. Penny nods in approval.

PENNY

Nice. How much iOsat is that?

CASPER

About a years worth.

PENNY

And the diesel generator?

CASPER

Be here tomorrow.

PENNY

Motion sensors? Surveillance system?

CASPER

Tomorrow. I'll be ready.

PENNY

Too bad about the fallout shelter. I'd be worried about radiation sickness.

CASPER

What happened, in the desert?

Penny is not prepared for this question.

PENNY

...We were drunk.

CASPER

I want to be honest, I felt something.

PENNY

No, you didn't.

CASPER

I did.

PENNY

You're not getting in my pants.

CASPER

I didn't say anything about pants.

WYNN (O.S.)

Casper! Customers!

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper and Penny enter to three middle-aged, GIRLS' WEEKENDERS. One gets a fountain soda, the other potato chips, and the last looks at wine labels.

CASPER

Welcome to the Safe Passage Fuel Mart.

Casper addresses the woman reading labels.

CASPER

If I were you I'd wait till you get to a proper wine store.

The wine label reader puts the bottle back. Penny and Wynn look at each other, shocked.

CASPER

(to Penny)

I got heirloom seeds.

He pulls seed packets from the box.

PENNY

I didn't tell you about heirloom seeds.

CASPER

I found it online. I got equipment to build a hothouse in here.

Penny gazes at him, enchanted by his initiative.

PENNY

That's a great idea.

They linger and smile at each other, sparks fly. The chip picker with chips, gummies and diet soda interrupts them.

Penny watches Wynn ask the wine woman for a handout outside. He reenters and lays money down.

WYNN

Ham Sandwich.

PENNY

Wynn, what did you do before you kept Casper company?

WYNN

I moved to the desert five years ago after my divorce. Living in my car was the best option. I'm under the most beautiful skies in the world.

PENNY

Do you ever stay with that community who lives on the road?

CASPER

No. Every time I ask him he says two weeks. That was a year ago.

WYNN

I have trouble with crowds.

PENNY

You're great with people.

WYNN

One on one, but not in little clicks.

PENNY

What did you do before?

Wynn freezes.

WYNN

I...was...a...school bus mechanic.

CASPER

Mechanic?

WYNN

It was awesome. Then I tore up my knee.
Now I collect disability.

PENNY

Why do you ask for hand outs?

WYNN

Most of my check is spent on pain meds.

PENNY

That community could definitely use a
mechanic. You'd never have to beg.

WYNN

I'm okay where I am.

Wynn self-consciously looks at the time.

WYNN

It's getting late. If I don't find a
place to park before sundown I'm fucked.

CASPER

It's not that late.

Wynn walks out, in his head.

CASPER

Fuck. What's he begging for? He knows I
need car help. Fuck.

PENNY

Maybe if you asked a question or two.
Now, you can put him in your network.

Dr. Hanover's SUV drives up outside. He and Grace enter.

DR. HANOVER

One lollipop.

GRACE

You said I could have a soda too.

DR. HANOVER

Either or.

GRACE

Dad.

DR. HANOVER

Do you want anything?!

Grace gets groceries as Dr. Hanover pays for gas. He recognizes Penny and nods. Penny, unmoved, nods back.

DR. HANOVER

Come on, quickly. I'll be outside.

Dr. Hanover exits. Grace picks out a lollipop.

PENNY

What's your name?

GRACE

Grace.

PENNY

Grace, you want to learn something cool?

Grace nods. Penny kneels and takes another lollipop.

PENNY

I'm going to show you how to defend yourself using this.

Penny shows her the lollipop.

PENNY

First you put the hard candy in the palm of your hand, then fit this plastic stick between your middle and ring fingers.

Penny shows Grace, who does it herself. Penny indicates the lollipop stick protruding from her fist.

PENNY

This stick is stronger than it seems, and you can use it to help you punch.

Penny shows Grace how to use the stick as a jabbing weapon when punching.

PENNY

Then if you aim for the soft parts of your attacker, like his eyes, throat, or the soft part of his groin, right here.

Penny points to Casper's lower stomach and he flinches.

PENNY

You can do real damage.

Grace punches the air with it.

PENNY

Perfect!

DR. HANOVER (O.S.)

What the fuck are you doing with my daughter?!

Penny stands.

DR. HANOVER

Stay away or I'm calling the cops!

CASPER

No need to call the police.

PENNY

I was helping her.

DR. HANOVER

You were teaching her how to fight.

(to Grace)

No lollipops, now.

GRACE

But, dad.

DR. HANOVER

No!!

Dr. Hanover ushers Grace out.

PENNY

I could call C.P.S. and that would be okay.

CASPER

He's a giant asshole and Grace deserves better, but it's not worth it?

PENNY

Cause he spends a lot, right?

CASPER

Denying his child lollipops isn't enough to make a call and you were teaching her how to fight.

PENNY

If he's your only doctor, you need to confront him about how he treats her.

CASPER

Once the S.H.T.F. will that matter?

PENNY

It'll matter more.

Ethel drives up.

CASPER

It's Ethel. You haven't met her yet.

Ethel enters.

CASPER

Hey, Ethel.

Ethel goes right to her six pack.

PENNY

I was wondering who E. Gold was. Penny Brinkman.

Penny offers her hand. Ethel shakes.

ETHEL

Ethel Gold. Nice to meet you. Casper has talked a lot about you.

Penny looks back at Casper who's red faced.

PENNY

A lot?

CASPER

Ethel and I watch the sunset together.

ETHEL

You should join us.

PENNY

I have a chicken coop to clean. Tomorrow it will be my pleasure to join you.

ETHEL

I look forward to it.

Penny and Casper leave.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

They stand at Penny's truck.

PENNY

Good job on the MREs and iOSat.

CASPER

Thanks.

PENNY

And the heirloom seeds. Your hothouse idea is awesome.

CASPER

Thanks.

PENNY

Guess after tomorrow that'll be it.

CASPER

Oh?

PENNY

The water was the final step. I'm going under until it happens.

CASPER

What if it doesn't happen?

PENNY

It will.

CASPER

Can I give you a walkie?

PENNY

No.

CASPER

Is it about the kiss?

PENNY

I don't want things to be complicated when the S.H.T.F.

CASPER

What happened with your last boyfriend?

Penny looks away.

PENNY

He told me he loved me, then we had sex.

Casper's face drops, knowing his own history.

CASPER

I'm not like that. I'll stick around.

PENNY

I don't know.

They stand there for a long moment.

PENNY

See you tomorrow.

She gets into her truck and drives away.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

The sun rises on the station.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper sweeps the floor.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

(over the radio)

With the world begging Presidents Turner and Kuznetsov to back down, Russia pulled their ships away from the Gulf today as tensions seem to be subsiding.

He stops sweeping and breathes in relief.

Sitting back at the register, Casper scrolls through a florist's site on his phone and picks a bouquet. The horn of a delivery truck blares.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper signs for two boxes, one medium and one long.

INT. CASPER'S RV - DAY

Casper opens the medium box and finds six WALKIE-TALKIES. He then excitedly opens the long box and pulls out a Mossberg 12 gauge SHOTGUN. He feels it in his hands, cocks it, and smiles. Wynn's car pulls up.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper greets Wynn with a slap on the back.

CASPER
Howdy, Wynn.

WYNN
The door was unlocked. You have a fever?

CASPER
Figured I'd hear a car if it pulled up.

They both go inside.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper pays for the bouquet online. Wynn catches this.

WYNN
Who are those for?

CASPER
...Penny.

WYNN
Did Manjur get such a lavish bouquet?

Casper smiles amorously.

CASPER
No.

Penny pulls up and enters. Casper hides his phone.

CASPER
Wasn't expecting you so early.

PENNY
Today's the last day of our mentorship. I wanted to make sure you were totally prepared.

She winks at Casper.

PENNY
Hey, Wynn. Casper has a question for you.

CASPER
Huh?

PENNY
I think it's about his car.

CASPER

Oh...Yeah. Wynn...can you check out my car? I want someone who I can...trust. Free food and drink.

Wynn is stunned and scared.

WYNN

Sure. Sure. Um. Okay. Keys.

Casper tosses Wynn his car keys. Wynn breathes and exits.

PENNY

Nice job. I know that was hard.

CASPER

Wasn't that hard.

Casper watches Wynn open his hood, singing to himself.

The deafening roar of Harleys pull up. Casper stiffens. Penny relaxes. Genghis, Jake, Piston and Sloppy Wayne enter. Genghis gets a twelve pack and puts it on the counter. He nods at Penny.

GENGHIS

You again.

PENNY

I'm everywhere. How are you gentlemen?

GENGHIS

We keep riding.

Casper sweats, his hand close to his pistol.

CASPER

Do all four of you need gas?

GENGHIS

You always ask that. What's the answer?

CASPER

Y-yes.

GENGHIS

Then why don't you remember, you stingy bastard?

PENNY

Casper was telling me how much he appreciates your patronage.

Genghis glares at Casper.

CASPER
(on the spot)
You four spend a lot here. Always
appreciate that.

GENGHIS
Then why doesn't he show it?

CASPER
...Didn't think you were the types to
bargain in niceties.

Genghis looms over Casper.

GENGHIS
Every time we've come in here he's never
thanked us for our business, asked us
when we'd be back, or even let loose with
a friendly "howdy." I think Casper is a
cheap, disrespectful piece of dog turd
and if it didn't mean we'd have to go a
hundred miles out of our way for gas, I'd
rip his skull out of his head.

Casper whimpers.

PENNY
I have an idea. Why don't you two have a
shooting contest?

CASPER
What?

PENNY
Seriously. It'll be fun. Casper, if
Genghis wins you have to make sure to be
as friendly as you can be and give him
and his crew discounts on gas for...well
as long as money is relevant, or a month
whichever comes first.

Genghis smiles, liking this idea.

PENNY
If Casper wins, you need to just accept
him as the greedy S.O.B. that he is.

CASPER
(to Casper)
Nothing out of pocket?

PENNY
(to Casper)
Don't press your luck.

GENGHIS
I'd be down for that.

PENNY
Gentlemen, bring your sidearms.

Casper pulls his pistol from under the register.

GENGHIS
Sneaky bastard.

EXT. DESERT PLOT - DAY

Genghis shoots several rounds into an abandoned hubcap, bunching the bullets in a loose grouping. Piston, Jake, and Sloppy Wayne cheer. Genghis invites Casper.

Casper, vexed, looks to Penny who gives him a nod of encouragement. He takes aim and shoots several rounds. He bunches the bullets with equal accuracy.

GENGHIS
I think I won.

PENNY
I don't know. Looks pretty even.

GENGHIS
His gun's known to be more accurate. This one's all about power.

PENNY
Let's make it fair.

Penny unholsters her Nighthawk Agent 2 and hands it to Genghis. Genghis' jaw drops.

CASPER
Penny.

Casper takes her aside.

CASPER
You made a big deal out of me holding your shotgun.

PENNY
Because it was a big deal.
(to Genghis)
Ignore Casper. Here. You each have the same chance from the same weapon.

Penny presents her pistol to Genghis again. Genghis, with the look of a kid in a candy store, takes the pistol. He nods, indicating how good it feels.

PENNY

If Casper wins you buy two twelve packs for a month. I'm sure you could put those away in short order.

GENGHIS

You're on.

Genghis aims and shoots several rounds. He bunches the bullets with more accuracy.

GENGHIS

(to Casper)

Beat that shit, son.

Penny reloads the Nighthawk and hands it to Casper. She whispers to him.

CASPER

Remember your crouch.

Casper gets in his stance, crouching lower, fires, and bunches the bullets in a tighter group.

PENNY

Woo!

Casper and Penny high five. Genghis shakes his head.

GENGHIS

Shit balls.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Genghis fist bumps Penny.

GENGHIS

You're stand up.

PENNY

Likewise.

CASPER

Even though I won, I promise to always thank you for your business. No discounts on gas though.

GENGHIS

I won't mind the extra brew.

CASPER

Sorry for not letting you gentlemen know how much I appreciate your patronage.

GENGHIS

No problem. Now that I know you can shoot, I won't think you're a pushover.

Penny nudges Casper. He reluctantly puts his fist out. Genghis smiles a little and bumps it. Penny waves to Piston, Jake and Sloppy Wayne.

PENNY

Bye guys!

They all wave.

PISTON, JAKE AND SLOPPY
WAYNE

Bye! See ya!

GENGHIS

(to Casper)

You take care of this one. Anything happens to her, it's on you.

Penny and Casper glance at each other. Flush.

GENGHIS

Adios.

Genghis and the Brothers drive off.

PENNY

That was sweet.

Casper looks at her like she's crazy. A delivery truck pulls up and the DRIVER exits.

DRIVER

Two packages. One from Everlast Security--

CASPER

Nice, the cameras and motion sensors.

DRIVER

And one from Wainright Industrial.

CASPER

And my diesel generator. Score.

PENNY

Today's a good day.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper and Penny settle back at the register.

CASPER
The water should be here soon.

PENNY
You trying to get rid of me?

CASPER
Of course not.

The air is broken by a BMW SUV. They break apart. Dr. Hanover enters with Grace.

DR. HANOVER
Pick up your feet!

Grace, hangdog, mopes down the grocery isle.

DR. HANOVER
I didn't think I was raising such a lazy little girl.

Penny shoots Casper a look like she's had it.

DR. HANOVER
You get it from your mother. She's a lazy shit too.

Dr. Hanover pays for the groceries.

DR. HANOVER
(to Penny)
Waiting to corrupt more children?

CASPER
Dr. Hanover, I don't appreciate you speaking to my friend like that. Please, take it back.

DR. HANOVER
What?

Penny's eyebrows go up.

CASPER
You heard me.

DR. HANOVER
I'm not taking anything back.

CASPER

I also don't like how you treat Grace.

DR. HANOVER

That's none of your business.

CASPER

This is my station. If you treat her like garbage in here that is my business.

DR. HANOVER

Then you can forget us ever coming back.

CASPER

I know you live out near the basin. The next market is over a hundred miles away.

DR. HANOVER

How dare you tell me how to treat my child.

CASPER

All I'm asking is that when you're here you treat her with a little respect.

Dr. Hanover points at Penny.

DR. HANOVER

Did she put you up to this?

CASPER

No, sir. I've watched you behave poorly for a while now and I'm sick of it.

DR. HANOVER

Keep your nose out of my shit. Grace, I paid so go to the car when you're done. No lollipops. You get nothing.

Dr. Hanover exits and heads to the rear.

CASPER

Grace, you doing okay?

Grace shrugs. Penny puts her hand on Casper's cheek.

PENNY

I'm proud of you. I need to pee too.

CASPER

Penny, you're not going to beat him up?

PENNY
No, of course not.
(to Grace)
I promise I'm not.

She nods to a nearby walkie, indicates Grace, then exits.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART REAR - DAY

Dr. Hanover exits the men's room.

PENNY (O.S.)
Dr. Hanover.

Dr. Hanover turns. Penny leans with her hand on her gun.

PENNY
Just a quick talk.

Penny saunters towards him.

DR. HANOVER
What the fuck?

Penny gets in his face, her hand still on her pistol.

DR. HANOVER
Are you threatening me?

PENNY
I'm not about to orphan your daughter. I
just want you to listen.

DR. HANOVER
How I treat my daughter is--

PENNY
Abusive as shit. When the world ends I
will have no problem killing you and
raising Grace myself.

DR. HANOVER
Get away from me, you fucking psycho.

PENNY
This is about your wife, not Grace.

DR. HANOVER
Fuck off! If I see you again I'm calling
the police.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Grace meekly waits at the register.

CASPER

Grace, can I give you something?

Grace looks at him quizzically.

CASPER

Nothing bad. Here.

He pulls out one of the WALKIES.

CASPER

This will allow us to stay in contact if we can't call each other on our phones.

Grace takes the walkie. He shows her the channel.

CASPER

Keep it on this channel and listen for my voice, then press that button to talk.

Grace presses the button.

CASPER

Don't tell your dad, okay?

GRACE

He'll get mad.

CASPER

Blame me. Even if he takes it away I want to make sure I can talk to you and your dad no matter what.

Grace puts the walkie in the bottom of the grocery bag just as Dr. Hanover enters.

DR. HANOVER

(to Grace)

Are you ready?

Grace nods. About to exit, Dr. Hanover stops.

DR. HANOVER

Do you want a lollipop?

Grace looks up at him, confused.

DR. HANOVER

I changed my mind. Dad's been stressed.

Grace gets a lollipop and gives Casper a knowing look as he winks back. She and Dr. Hanover leave as Penny enters.

PENNY

Did you give her the walkie?

CASPER

Yeah. What did you say to him?

PENNY

Some back alley therapy.

CASPER

I think you actually made a dent.

Wynn enters.

WYNN

You're all set, Casper. You just needed a new spark plug. I had a spare.

CASPER

Sweet. Thanks. Take whatever you want.

WYNN

It's on me. It felt good.

CASPER

I owe you then, and here.

Casper hands Wynn a WALKIE.

WYNN

I can give you my number.

CASPER

It's in case our phones don't work.

WYNN

Ah. Got ya.

A cube truck arrives outside.

CASPER

(to Penny)

That's your water.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

The DRIVER opens the back, revealing three pallets.

DRIVER

Three pallets water.

PENNY

Unload them by that truck over there.

EXT. PENNY'S TRUCK - DAY

Casper and Penny load the pallets onto the bed of Penny's truck. Wynn drives up.

WYNN

(to Penny)

I sincerely hope you keep coming around.

Penny waves goodbye as he drives off. Ethel parks.

ETHEL

Hey, you two. Penny, you still joining us?

PENNY

I said I would.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART BENCH - DUSK

Casper, Penny and Ethel sit on the bench drinking beer.

ETHEL

Am I sure happy Russia backed out.

CASPER

God, yes.

PENNY

There's still going to be war.

Ethel looks at her side eyed.

PENNY

The ships are still deployed.

ETHEL

You're awfully calm.

PENNY

I'm prepared.

ETHEL

I'd be a basket case if I thought there'd be nuclear war.

CASPER

Penny taught me to tell myself that "I'm prepared" every time I felt that way.

ETHEL
Does it work?

CASPER
I just started.

PENNY
It does for me.

Ethel nods, incredulous. They drink.

ETHEL
Casper tells me you're from Redding.

PENNY
Yep. How about you?

ETHEL
San Antonio. Moved to Galveston.

PENNY
Are you retired?

ETHEL
Sort of. I quit. Made most of my
retirement money online.

PENNY
What did you do?

ETHEL
I was a rabbi. Second largest synagogue
on the island.

PENNY
What happened?

Ethel takes a moment.

ETHEL
Haven't talked about this in a long time.

Casper gets uncomfortable with Ethel's distress.

CASPER
Maybe we can talk about something else.

ETHEL

It's okay, Casper. My husband would bring our teenage son and daughter to Friday evening Shabbat. They'd show up right as the service started. One Friday on their way they flipped on the highway. None of them made it. I didn't find out until after service ended. That was the last Shabbat I ever presided over.

PENNY

I'm deeply sorry.

ETHEL

Thank you.

CASPER

Me too.

ETHEL

Thanks, Casper. Sorry I never told you.

CASPER

I get it.

They watch the sunset.

ETHEL

Do you have family?

PENNY

My mom is still alive. No husband or kids.

ETHEL

How did your father pass?

PENNY

Cancer. He's the reason I'm so prepared. He'd have every base covered with at least ten redundancies each.

ETHEL

Does the apple fall far from the tree?

PENNY

I'm not as paranoid. Guess I got that from my mother.

ETHEL

You still talk to her?

PENNY

She didn't approve of my father's prepping and doesn't approve of mine. She says that if it's that time then she'll be in heaven with everybody else. Are you prepared, Ethel Gold?

ETHEL

I've got my stores and my firearm. Shit, I'm from Texas. What do they say? Hope for the best, expect the worst?

PENNY

Hope for the best, prepare for the worst. Expecting the worst will make you crazy.

ETHEL

Were you close with your dad?

Penny ponders.

PENNY

When I was little we were inseparable. We went camping every summer. Just the two of us. Right before my seventh birthday, we went and had the best time. Then, on the last night he decided it was time. Around the campfire he sat me on his lap and told me that nuclear war would destroy everything I loved. I asked him what he was talking about and he told me all of it, in detail. I insisted he take it back. He became more matter of fact. I could never get what he said out of my head. I had the worst nightmares.

ETHEL

I've counseled my share of scared kids about the bomb. Six is awfully young.

PENNY

We stopped being inseparable after that. All I got was coldness and spite. Like he was teaching me a lesson. A few years later I started prepping with him. It was the only way he'd open up.

Ethel watches Penny grapple with old feelings, wary of how prepared she really is. Casper breaks the discomfort.

CASPER

Ethel, do you miss being a rabbi?

Penny snaps out of her reverie and looks at Ethel, eager for her response. Ethel thinks.

ETHEL

...Yes.

CASPER

I never told you how much I appreciate your advice.

ETHEL

Thanks, Casper.

CASPER

I'd convert.

PENNY

So would I.

Ethel cries. Penny puts her hand on Ethel's shoulder. They all watch the sunset.

EXT. PENNY'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Casper gives Ethel a WALKIE.

CASPER

This is in case we can't use our phones.

Ethel snatches it out of his hand.

ETHEL

Where are you going now?

CASPER

Back to Penny's to help her with the water. We have to use pulleys to get it down. It's pretty cool.

ETHEL

And?

CASPER

What do you mean?

ETHEL

Take it slow, Casper.

CASPER

I didn't know I was taking it fast.

ETHEL

She's a sensitive girl and she's heavily armed.

CASPER

You think she's going to shoot me?

ETHEL

When she says she's prepared, I don't buy it. She's still that scared little girl. I remember what you told me. About Jill. If you break her heart...Take it slow.

Casper looks Ethel in her eyes.

CASPER

I swear. This time is different.

Ethel eyes him skeptically. Penny returns.

PENNY

Did you tell her about the pulleys?

CASPER

Yeah.

Ethel and Penny hug.

ETHEL

This was amazing.

PENNY

It was so great to get to know you. Did Casper give you a walkie?

Ethel gestures with it. Penny gives her the thumbs up.

ETHEL

Good night, you two.

Ethel walks off. Penny pulls out a fat joint.

PENNY

It's the last night of our mentorship. I thought we'd celebrate.

Casper beams.

PENNY

Where's your lighter?

INT. PENNY'S TRUCK - DAY (MUSIC MONTAGE)

Casper and Penny smoke the joint and have a great time.

INT. PENNY'S BUNKER - DAY (MUSIC MONTAGE)

Using a pulley, Casper lowers a case of water down to Penny at the bottom of the ladder.

LATER (MUSIC MONTAGE)

Casper and Penny stack water. Casper cracks a joke and they laugh hysterically. Casper trips and breaks a liter all over himself. Penny laughs harder. He gets up, triggers the device and it bear sprays his face again.

MUSIC MONTAGE STOPS

Casper flails and screams.

PENNY

It's okay, it's okay. Stay still.

CASPER

We need to go back to the station!

PENNY

I have milk.

Penny pulls out a half gallon of milk and pours it on Casper's face. He moans.

CASPER

Thank you.

Penny pours until the spray washes away. She towels him off then removes it so they are face to face. They kiss.

They are hesitant at first, then passionate. As they make their way to Penny's bed, Penny rips off Casper's work shirt and he takes off her T-shirt. Their romantic interlock continues through the curtain and into her bed.

INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Casper's pants come off, then Penny's.

FADE TO:

They make out in their underwear. Penny's bra comes off.

FADE TO:

Casper and Penny make love.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Casper and Penny lie, post coitus. Casper looks at Penny's photo with her father.

CASPER

You miss your father?

PENNY

...Yes.

Penny edges closer.

PENNY

I never asked you, what made you open a station in the middle of nowhere?

CASPER

Less complicated out here.

She puts her head on Casper's shoulder to fall asleep.

PENNY

I agree.

Casper stares at the ceiling.

INT. PENNY'S BUNKER - DAY

The next morning, Casper puts on his shoes with his back to Penny who feeds rabbits. She glances at him, worried about how distant he is.

CASPER

Thanks for driving me back. I guess you're going to hunker down now.

PENNY

That's the idea.

INT. PENNY'S PICKUP - DAY

Penny drives. Casper looks out of the window.

CASPER
Have you checked the news yet?

PENNY
No.

CASPER
Neither have I.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Penny pulls up.

INT. PENNY'S TRUCK - DAY

Casper gets out and stands at the door.

CASPER
I guess this is it.

PENNY
(on the verge of tears)
Yeah. Going under. Thanks for the water.

CASPER
Thanks for everything. I hope we survive.
She waits for him to say something about last night.

PENNY
Yeah, I hope we do too.

CASPER
The last few days were great.

PENNY
I guess they have been.

She stares at him, waiting in vain. He stands there.

PENNY
Goodbye, Casper.

He awkwardly closes the door and she drives off.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper sweeps the floor, stocks the shelves, and cleans the windows, in silence. A delivery truck pulls up. The DRIVER delivers the bouquet of flowers he purchased online. Casper furrows his brow and signs for them.

Casper stares at the bouquet, arms folded.

INT. STORAGE CLOSET - DAY

He puts the bouquet on the floor and closes the door.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper checks his phone. Stocks tick up as his investments rebound. The quiet is broken by Penny's truck. From his window, he watches her march in.

PENNY

Why didn't you ask to stay with me?

CASPER

(caught)

--I...you said you weren't going to share your bunker.

PENNY

What happened?

CASPER

I mean...when?

PENNY

Last night was one of the most amazing nights of my life. You said you liked me. You said you'd stick around.

CASPER

I know. I'm sorry.

PENNY

Were you just looking for sex?

CASPER

...No. I...It's complicated.

PENNY

You didn't even give me a walkie.

She points at him.

PENNY

You'll be sorry when it happens.

CASPER

It's not going to happen, Penny. We're going to be okay. I don't want to be with anybody right now. I know what I said. I'm sorry. I can imagine it's the last thing you want to hear. I thought I meant it. You've got your water and I'm prepared for...everything.

PENNY

You really are a greedy asshole.
(like saying "I love you")
Fuck you, Casper.

Casper's phone buzzes and Penny's phone chimes. They check. His phone reads: "BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL." They look at each other. Casper turns on the radio.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

(shaken)

...This is real, ladies and gentlemen. This is not a false alarm. The president announced that he has launched a full retaliation to Russia's nuclear launch against the U.S.. If you can find shelter, do it now. Impact may be moments away. I will be staying on the air until the end...God help us all.

Casper turns it off. They gaze at each other, frozen with the reality that nuclear war is occurring right now.

A brilliant flash pierces the sky through the window followed by a booming blast in the distance. A few moments later the station, and everything in it, trembles from the shock wave. Casper and Penny exit.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper and Penny step outside. In the extreme distance, a MUSHROOM CLOUD fills the horizon, roiling beneath a black, smoldering sky. Casper drops to the bench. Penny crumples to the ground. They watch in horror.

CASPER

Are you going back to your bunker?

Penny gets to her feet.

PENNY

(to herself)
I'm not prepared.

CASPER
I'm sorry things went how they did.

PENNY
I'm not prepared.

CASPER
What do you mean? You're the most
prepared person I know.

Penny steadies herself, in a daze.

PENNY
I'm not prepared.

CASPER
Penny? You okay?

Casper gets an idea.

CASPER
I'll give you my last walkie.

He goes inside.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper scours the area around the register.

CASPER
It was right here.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Penny staggers towards her truck.

PENNY
I'm not prepared.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper more agitated starts turning his store over.

CASPER
Where is it?

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Penny wanders past her truck.

PENNY
I'm not prepared.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper twitches about, not finding it.

CASPER
Penny, you're scaring me.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Penny wanders to the outskirts of Casper's property.

PENNY
I'm not prepared.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper spots the WALKIE under the box of heirloom seeds.

CASPER
Here!

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Penny stops, her eyes welling with tears.

PENNY
I'm...not prepared.

She sobs, unholsters her gun and raises it to her temple.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper picks up the walkie and turns to see Penny in the distance through the window.

CASPER
Penny, I've got it--

He watches her pull the trigger. A shot rings out.
Penny's brains burst out the other side as the bullet
tears through her skull.

CASPER
No!!!

Penny collapses.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper races to Penny's body. Blood pours from her head. Weeping, he cradles her to his chest.

CASPER

No, no, no, no, no. Don't leave me. Don't leave me. I'm not prepared either. I'm not prepared. I'm not prepared.

He collapses on her, overcome.

CASPER

I love you, Penny.

FADE TO:

Casper digs a grave by Penny's body.

FADE TO:

Casper lays her in the shallow grave.

FADE TO:

Casper buries her.

EXT. PENNY'S GRAVE - DAY

Casper lays Penny's flowers on the grave and sits. The skies turn black and red. He looks up, raw to the bone.

The nuclear fallout descends, like snow. His tears fall. The ash is eerily beautiful against the angry sky. Casper opens his heart to the anguish; truly vulnerable for the first time in his life. This residue of destruction gives him a fleeting moment of peace.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART BENCH - DAY

Casper watches the sun set over the smoldering horizon.

INT. CASPER'S RV - DAY

Casper wakes. It takes him a moment to remember that he's in this all too real nightmare.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper, pistol on his hip and shotgun in his hands, patrols the road. He looks one way then the other.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper, walkie in hand, stands at the front window.

CASPER
(into walkie)
Wynn. Wynn, my man, are you alive?

He waits for a response, nothing.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART BENCH - DAY

Casper sits with his shotgun cradled in his arms. He looks down the road in either direction.

FADE TO:

Casper continues to watch the road. He slumps back. He then sees something in the distance in the direction of the blast. His eyes widen.

He sprints down the road until a MAN stumbles towards him, frail, covered in ash, barely able to make out where he is. Casper catches the man as he collapses.

CASPER
You're okay. You're alive.

The man lets out a whimper.

CASPER
What do you need?

The man points at Casper's roadside billboard for "Water." Casper understands what he must do.

Casper runs back to the station and races in.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper pulls a 16 ounce water from his new refrigerator.

EXT. ROAD SIDE - DAY

Casper runs to the man and helps him imbibe the water.

CASPER
Just a little. Let's get inside.

Casper helps the man up and walks him to the station.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper helps the man inside and lays him down. He opens luncheon meat and the man gorges himself.

CASPER
Where are you coming from?

MAN
(barely audible)
Las Cruces.

CASPER
It's that bad?

The man gravely nods.

CASPER
You're safe now.

WOMAN (O.S.)
(from outside)
Please help!

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

A WOMAN strains to hold onto her DAUGHTER who has just passed out. The daughter's shirt is stained with blood.

WOMAN
Please! Help my daughter!

CASPER
Yes, ma'am.

Casper picks up the daughter and takes her inside.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper lays the daughter down, her mother by her side.

MOTHER
She needs stitches.

Casper grabs a rag and hands it to the mother.

CASPER

Put direct pressure. I'm going to try to get a doctor.

He gets on his walkie.

CASPER

Grace, come in.

He listens.

CASPER

Grace, Grace, come in.

No response.

CASPER

Grace, if you and your dad are alive we really need you.

GRACE (V.O.)

(over walkie)

Casper. We're here.

CASPER

Grace, thank God. We need your dad to come to my station? A little girl's bleeding badly.

GRACE

Okay. I'll tell my dad.

CASPER

Please hurry.

WOMAN

Is he coming?

CASPER

I hope so.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

More survivors, barely alive, approach the station. They follow Casper's billboards. Casper emerges and sees them.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART REFRIGERATOR - DAY

Casper pulls three more bottles of water.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Casper gives the water to the three ash covered survivors and helps them inside.

FADE TO:

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Dr. Hanover, pistol and trauma kit, and Grace enter.

CASPER

She's here.

He urgently beckons Hanover to the girl. Dr. Hanover checks her pulse, opens his kit and tends to her wound.

CASPER

Grace, can you help make sure these people have food and water?

Grace nods. The deafening sound of Harleys ride up.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

As Genghis, Jake and Piston power down, Casper bursts out aiming his shotgun. Genghis raises his hands.

GENGHIS

Hey, brother. We're not here to make trouble. We just want to help.

CASPER

Maybe you can keep an eye out here for more survivors.

GENGHIS

Will do.

CASPER

Where's Sloppy Wayne?

GENGHIS

Once the thing happened, Wayne took his last dose and never woke up.

CASPER

I'm sorry.

GENGHIS

Yeah.

INT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Dr. Hanover takes Casper off to the side.

CASPER

How's the girl?

DR. HANOVER

She'll make it. None of us are going to last unless we protect from radiation.

CASPER

I've got potassium iodide for everybody.

DR. HANOVER

Distribute them. We really need to go underground.

Casper remembers Penny's bunker.

CASPER

I know a place. There's room, food, water, and it's deep enough to protect us from fallout.

DR. HANOVER

Where is it?

CASPER

Off Michigan.

DR. HANOVER

Then we need to start making plans now. What about them?

He points to Genghis and the Brothers outside.

CASPER

They should be there too.

Dr. Hanover frowns, not liking that idea.

CASPER

I'll watch them.

Dr. Hanover is pulled away. Casper's walkie pops.

WYNN (V.O.)

(over walkie)

Casper!

CASPER

(into walkie)

Hey, Wynn. Where are you?

WYNN

I'm with the RV-people. We're traveling into the desert to wait it out.

CASPER

Good luck, my friend.

WYNN

Good luck to you. Is Penny there?

CASPER

No, she's...she's in her bunker.

WYNN

Tell her to keep surviving.

CASPER

I will...Wynn, I'm sorry for making you beg. I should have been better.

WYNN

I made myself beg. You take care.

The bleeding daughter stirs awake, moaning.

DAUGHTER

...Mom.

Casper kneels over her.

CASPER

You're okay. We patched you up.

DAUGHTER

Where's my mom?

The daughter starts to get up.

CASPER

Careful. Keep resting.

DAUGHTER

(crying)

I want my mom.

CASPER

She's here. She couldn't stay awake.

DAUGHTER

Can you stay with me? Please?

Casper's first instinct had been to close off when someone got that close. He hesitates, pushes through the discomfort and leans in.

CASPER

Of course.

The daughter takes Casper's hand. He holds it tight.

DAUGHTER

I'm scared.

CASPER

You're safe here.

Casper holds the daughter's hand, keeping her safe. Ethel arrives and immediately starts to help.

EXT. SAFE PASSAGE FUEL MART - DAY

Bulbs for the last two words of the "Safe Passage Fuel Mart" sign are out. The sign now reads "Safe Passage."

THE END