

OF MOOSE, WOLVES AND DAUGHTERS

by

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CHARACTERS

DAD, age 49

DAUGHTER, age 14

SETTING

Various locations between Rock Harbor and Windigo along the Greenstone Ridge at Isle Royale National Park. The time is summer.

(A single two-person dome backpacking tent is illuminated from the inside. The animated shadow of a man, DAD, sitting upright in his sleeping bag is projected on the interior tent wall.)

DAD

There is, I think, a rhythm to being in the out of doors that takes, in some cases, a lifetime of patience and experience and reflection to discover, if, in fact, one ever does reveal it. And it's rhythm, not just pace, that one must discover. I read once—I don't remember where—about an older man who had, over the years, refined his pace to his liking and when he hiked with several boys thirty or so years younger, they all started off like gunfire at four or even five, six miles per hour, while he lagged behind at his steady, unaltered pace. And in those early morning hours they propelled themselves far beyond the old man. But come early afternoon when those young muscles were cramped and screaming for rest, the old man would—as the tortoise to the hare—pass the exhausted young men at his same unwavering gait, perhaps smiling and waving at them, but continuing to move forward, ever forward. But that's pace, not rhythm. For rhythm has little to do with covering ground. Rhythm is, I think, more related to awareness, the ontology of space, moving maybe, but not necessarily, and touching—visually, aurally, spiritually—all that surrounds you within a specific distance. As such, rhythm inhabits the concentric alignment of the self and the environment one inhabits. And those opportunities for alignment are nowhere greater than in the out of doors, where the radius of awareness could be five, ten, fifty yards, or it could be miles. It's the reason one traveler feels--then sees--the fox slip over the next ridge while the companion sees only the path where he treads. It's the reason that while hiking in grizzly country one person's hackles suddenly raise when approaching a bend in the trail, while the other is blissfully ignorant of any impending presence. It's the reason, let's say, that two people can stand on a precipice overlooking the Grand Canyon, and one can snap the obligatory photo and turn away unaffected, while the other feels—heart and soul swelling--every granule of stone cut away by the ancient, raging Colorado. It's the reason—

DAUGHTER

(Bolting upright.)

It's the reason you won't let me go to sleep! I get the point, Dad! Now shut up!

(She lays back down.)

DAD

(Still in shadow. A long, long pause.)

One time I had the idea to take my fourteen year old daughter into the wilderness. This is what happened.

(Corny travelogue—canned, like something from the 1950s, and underscored with similar upbeat music.)

A montage of slide images are projected on a screen. DAUGHTER and DAD are seen in a variety of locations: standing in line waiting to board the Ranger III, waving from the deck, sitting together in the stern, pointing as Isle Royale comes into view, etc. The slide show ends and DAD is revealed with two loaded backpacks: one is well worn, the other is brand new, the tags still hanging off the straps. He slips a map into the pocket of the older pack as DAUGHTER enters.)

Hey, Dad. Where did the big boat--

DAUGHTER

Eat breakfast?

DAD

Yeah, in the restaurant. I--

DAUGHTER

Found the clothes I laid out for you?

DAD

Yeah, listen. The blue--

DAUGHTER

Boots fit?

DAD

That blue boat is gone. That one we rode over on.

DAUGHTER

And the bed was soft enough?

DAD

Yeah, yeah. Great.

DAUGHTER

Super. Fourteen year olds need their sleep, you know. It's a nice lodge.

DAD

I'm sixteen.

DAUGHTER

DAD

Not for...

(Looking at his watch.)

...twenty two weeks, six days, three hours...uh, and some minutes and seconds ...and, oh yeah, another year.

DAUGHTER

Intellectually, I'm sixteen.

DAD

Emotionally I'm twelve, but legally is what counts. Anyway, it'll be some time before you get a meal and bed like that again.

DAUGHTER

Where'd the blue boat go?

DAD

The Ranger III is a ship. You can put a boat on a ship, but you can't put a ship on a boat. And I'm guessing it left promptly at 9 am for Houghton.

DAUGHTER

Which *ship* are we taking back?

DAD

Same one.

DAUGHTER

What? We're going to swim after it?

DAD

We'll catch it on our return date.

DAUGHTER

Oh. Okay. (Pause.) But you said we were only staying in the lodge one night.

DAD

Two actually. But not consecutively.

(He hoists a backpack.)

Slip your arms through here.

DAUGHTER

What's this?

DAD

Backpack. I know you initially thought this luggage device was a fashion statement because, well, we were headed up to the island and all. Fasten that waist belt. Here, I'll boost up the bag and you tighten the belt.

DAUGHTER

God! How much does this thing weigh?

DAD

Twenty- seven pounds not counting your water. That belt snug?

DAUGHTER

Yeah.

DAD

Tighten that chest strap. Adjust here and here and here in the shoulder straps. Feel okay?

DAUGHTER

No. It's heavy and I feel like I'm gonna fall on my back and be stuck like one of those June Bugs on our porch.

DAD

Good deal.

(He props his pack on his knee then swings it on his back.)

The idea here is that you adjust your pack throughout the day. You sweat, weight shifts—maybe you want more load on your hips, then later we give the hips a rest and shift the burden to the shoulders. Got it?

DAUGHTER

So when's the return trip?

DAD

(Again checking his watch.)

Let's see. That would be fourteen days from now.

DAUGHTER

Two weeks! What are we gonna do for two weeks?

DAD

Walk.

DAUGHTER

I thought we were touring the island!

DAD

We are.

DAUGHTER

On foot? No way! Not me!

(She begins to unstrap her backpack.)

DAD

That's the only way to see the island. Just a few steps out of Rock Harbor we enter a designated wilderness area. The lonesome howl of the wolf, the bugle call of the moose, the shrill of the loons, splashing of the beaver—nature at it's best without the interference of man. Oh, sure, we traipse through this wilderness habitat—temporary visitors and observers to the natural process—but our impact on those processes is *minimal*, and--

DAUGHTER

I'm staying at the lodge.

DAD

The lodge is booked full. I do have a reservation for our last night, but that's two weeks from now.

DAUGHTER

Somebody will cancel.

DAD

It's two hundred and seventy six bucks per night.

DAUGHTER

I'll charge it to your credit card.

DAD

I paid cash.

DAUGHTER

I find—I'll do something!

DAD

Your food for the next two weeks—it's dehydrated--is in your pack, as are a change of clothes, rain gear, a cook pot, extra filters for the water pump, insect repellent, biodegradable soap, toilet paper, a scoop shovel—I'll tell you more about that later--a first aid kit, an emergency blanket,

extra plastic bags, a compass, a few toiletries including your basic feminine hygiene products—thanks to your mother--

DAUGHTER

Mom's in on this, too?

DAD

--sleeping bag and pad, and a small tarp in case we need a quick shelter.

DAUGHTER

And what are you carrying?

DAD

Everything else. Forty -eight pounds, five ounces. Not including the water.

DAUGHTER

And we're just gonna walk around this stinking rock for two weeks?

DAD

Walk and talk and camp. . . observe . . . listen . . . breathe. And there are nearly four hundred "rocks" in the archipelago.

DAUGHTER

Forget it. You go play Boy Scout; I'll just stay in one of those wooden shelters.

DAD

Having anticipated your reticence, I've spoken with the rangers and they've agreed to simply enforce park rules on your behalf. No special treatment, but no persecution unless warranted. There's a one night limit camping at the Rock Harbor. Enforced. At a minimum, you'll have to hike to the Three Mile campsite every other day, where a similar limit is in place. Then, of course, you can hike back to Rock Harbor. But as long as you're hiking three miles a day, setting up camp, breaking camp and all, you might as well come with me. And you don't want to get in trouble with the rangers because if-you know—with two arrests on your record already...well, you know what the judge said.

DAUGHTER

This is totally unfair!

DAD

No. It's sneaky and deceptive, I suppose, bringing you up here under false pretenses, but it's not unfair. You and I are going to spend the next two weeks enjoying each other's company. And we're going to talk for more than two minutes at a time without you running to the bathroom and SLAMMING THE DOOR! You get mad and want to kick a rock, fine! You want to stomp off

mad into the woods, then check your compass first and remember the direction from whence you came. And watch out for moose cows and their calves. And wolves. And at the end of two weeks you will understand where I'm coming from as your father, and I hope to understand at least something about why you can't do what you're told, why you argue every single point, why you keep getting arrested, and why you are compelled—without reason, I might add—at precisely two minute intervals to slam every goddamned door in the house!

DAUGHTER
(Sitting on her backpack.)

Have a nice walk, pop. I'm glued to this spot.

DAD

I can think of three other reasons you want to come with me..

DAUGHTER

I can think of a hundred why I'm not.

DAD

Number one. I have the tent—that would be the one with the mosquito netting. No question about it, this is the worst time of the year for black flies and mosquitos. You see how well those shelters keep out the bugs. Second, I have the stove, though I suppose you could rehydrate your beef stroganoff and eat it cold. I'm not sure what you'll do with the pancake and cornbread batter. Third, I have the water filter. You might be inclined to risk Giardia until you actually have it, at which point you'll wish you were dead anyway, and probably won't care. So drink away.

DAUGHTER

I wish I was dead now!

DAD

That's fine. We still can't ship your carcass back until our return tickets are valid. Which is, as I said, two weeks from today.

DAUGHTER

You can't go without me if I have the food!

DAD

You have *some* of the food. I learned a long time ago never to put all my powdered eggs in one backpack—so to speak.

DAUGHTER

I hate you!

DAD

Yes, you do. At the moment. But that's a starting point not unlike our status quo of late. And for that reason alone, I find myself genuinely optimistic that our relationship will only improve. I plan to begin each day with a clean slate. No matter what happens the day before, you and I begin each day with the opportunity to make our relationship what we will. And that begins now. Shall we?

(And with that, off he goes. The DAUGHTER stands fuming for a moment, then angrily stomps off in the same direction, dragging her backpack on the ground.

Three Mile. Slide show. A happy DAD, guidebook in hand, points to various types of fauna, wildlife. The DAUGHTER, angry and stoic, ignores him, always with the same frown and curled brow. DAD and DAUGHTER enter, both sweating, but the DAUGHTER is clearly the worse off.)

DAUGHTER

This is killing--

DAD
(Stopping quickly.)

Stop!

DAUGHTER

Huh?

DAD

Shhh. Stop. STOP.

DAUGHTER

What?

DAD
(Pointing.)

There.

DAUGHTER

What?

See? There. DAD

Huh? DAUGHTER

There! DAD

Yeah, yeah. I see. DAUGHTER

Moving, now. See? DAD

Yeah, I see. DAUGHTER

Moose. And look! There's her calf. DAD

Uh huh. DAUGHTER

And now, they're gone. Just like that. Here . . . now gone. Fleeting. DAD

Hoo wee. Just like that. DAUGHTER

Now THAT was something. DAD

Aren't there—like—a thousand of those moose things on this island? DAUGHTER

Something like that. DAD

The guy on the boat, he said there were— DAUGHTER

DAD

Somewhere around a thousand.

DAUGHTER

Yeah, so we only have—like what—nine hundred and ninety nine to go—

DAD

Please. . . .

DAUGHTER

—before we can get off this stinking rock!

DAD

Actually there are over four hundred “rocks” in the archipelago.

DAUGHTER

Stop saying that! Here. Help me get this thing off.

DAD

You shouldn’t take your pack off because—

DAUGHTER

Get it off! I just want to—

(She drops the pack to the ground.)

There. Geez.

(She begins to sit down.)

DAD

You sit down like that, you’re gonna have a tough time getting back up. Your legs—

DAUGHTER

—will stiffen up and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Please, God. Shoot me. Or hit me with lightning. Or drop a moose on me.

DAD

Okay, okay. We’ll, uh, just rest.

DAUGHTER

I’m way ahead of you.

DAD

And while we’re resting, we’ll list the trees, shrubs and flowers we’ve identified so far.

DAUGHTER

NO!

DAD

I'll start. Thimbleberry, Wood Lilly, Sugar Maple, Yellow Birch, Fir, Spruce...

DAUGHTER

If you don't stop, tonight, while you're sleeping, I'm gonna use that nature book to beat you to death.

DAD

See if you can remember what this green stuff on the rocks is called.

DAUGHTER

Alien death juice.

DAD

Lichens.

DAUGHTER

Same thing.

DAD

Remember what they're made of?

DAUGHTER

Smashed...alien...parts.

DAD

Correct! Algae and fungi. We'll find three kinds on the island. The stuff on the rocks is called Crustose. We'll also find Foliose, which is kind of loose, layered crust, and Fruticose which hangs from trees and such. Very creepy looking. You know, lichens are interesting because--

DAUGHTER

Geez! You're like having the Discovery Channel on 24/7!

DAD

--because they absorb pollutants from the air. Hence, we can measure--

DAUGHTER

You can measure....

DAD

--for example, the amount of sulphur drifting over the island from Thunder Bay or Duluth.

DAUGHTER

That is so interesting, Father. (Pause.) I'm not going to live through this, am I?

DAD

I suppose that's a possibility, but your demise is much less likely if you simply adopt a more positive attitude about the situation. Rather than fight the experience – which you've been doing for the last three miles– embrace it!

DAUGHTER

Let me tell you what I think you should "embrace."

DAD

Okay, troops! Break's over! Head 'em up, move 'em out!

(And off he marches. She sits for moment, then climbs to her feet and follows.)

Daisy Farm. Slides underscored with noise. Lots of noise: kids jumping off the pier, laughing and splashing. Mothers yell after their children; fathers echo. A CD player blares somewhere in camp. A football crashes into Dad's chest.)

DAD

So, this is Daisy Farm.

(DAUGHTER picks up the football and scouts for the source.)

DAUGHTER

So, pop, *this* is the wilderness!

DAD

Daisy Farm is a popular–

DAUGHTER

Just us, the waves gently sloshing against the shore--

DAD

–place. Most of these people won't–

DAUGHTER

--the screech or whatever of the loons, the lonesome howl of the wolf--

DAD

--go beyond this point--

DAUGHTER

--and ten or twelve thousand screaming kids! Yes sir! This is some wilderness! You want me to find a parking spot?

DAD

We have other options.

DAUGHTER

Like what?

DAD

It's another three and half miles to Moskey Basin, but that takes us off the planned route. It's a popular spot, too.

DAUGHTER

How far have we gone so far?

DAD

Seven . . . uh . . . miles.

DAUGHTER

Then I'm finished for the day.

DAD

We could hike on to East Chickenbone, though.

DAUGHTER

How far?

DAD

(Wrestling with his map.)

Umm. Eight, nine miles.

DAUGHTER

You go right ahead.

(She drops her pack.)

DAD

Then we'll have to find a campsite here.

DAUGHTER

You do that. Right now I'm gonna walk to the end of that pier and I'm gonna jump in that water and rinse this stink and sweat and dirt off me.

DAD

We have to set up camp.

DAUGHTER

And then I might play a little football.

DAD

I could use a little help here!

DAUGHTER

That's what I intend to give you, pop. As little help as possible. This is your fantasy trip, not mine.

(And with that, she's gone. DAD stands alone for a moment listening to the noise, then picking up her backpack, begins to slowly shuffle off.)

DAUGHTER

(Off, in the distance. Stopping him.)

Hey, Dad!

DAD

Yeah, sweetheart?

DAUGHTER

(Off.)

I found a door on this outdoor toilet!

DAD

Yeah? It's called--

(And so begins a series of door slams with the DAUGHTER echoing the slams with "Woo Hoo!")

--a latrine.

(He shuffles off dejectedly to the slamming of the door.)

Slideshow. The road to East Chickenbone. The DAUGHTER is happier; she's leading the way along the Greenstone. The FATHER is in obvious pain, though he tries his best to smile for the camera. We see shots of his feet, heels blistered and taped. We see shots of him massaging his calves.

East Chickenbone campsite. The FATHER sits in front of the tent with his legs extended in front him. His back pack is off to one side. The DAUGHTER is at his feet, pushing on the ball of his foot.)

DAD

Push!

DAUGHTER

Push?

DAD

On the toes! Push the toes toward my chin!

DAUGHTER

You okay?

DAD

Keep pushing! Oh, golly! Oh, gee! Oh, ahhhh!

DAUGHTER

Are you croaking on me here or what?

DAD

Cramps. Bad cramps.

DAUGHTER

You're not getting enough chemicals or something.

DAD

No. Ahhhh! Probably not!

DAUGHTER

Sodium is one, and the other is . . . uh . . . I can't remember. But I got sodium right! I learned that in Health and First Aid.

DAD

I'm—ahhhh!—proud of you!

DAUGHTER

That any better?

DAD

Yeah, yeah. They're getting back to normal. Oh, my goodness! Whoa. That was a bad one. The second day on the trail is always the worst. Adrenalin carries one through the first day, but then the second day arrives and the muscles revolt.

(He breathes heavily for a few moments while continuing to rub his calves.)

DAUGHTER

Sodium and . . . potassium! That's it! Better stock up on the banana chips and jerky.

DAD

Yeah, sure. Whew. Thanks.

DAUGHTER

Anytime.

DAD

Listen, I get sick out here or something, you know what to do, right?

DAUGHTER

Like what? Heart attack or stroke?

DAD

I don't know. Just sick.

DAUGHTER

No, I don't know what to do.

DAD

I thought you got an "A" in Health and First Aid.

DAUGHTER

Yeah. Sometimes the grade you get depends on who you're sitting by.

DAD

You were cheating on—

DAUGHTER

Let's review the procedures for CPR, shall we?

DAD

That's just great. You review, I'll recreate..

(The DAD removes a plastic flask from his back pack.)

DAUGHTER

What's in there?

DAD

A well deserved treat at the end of the day.

DAUGHTER

Oh...so you can bring treats for you, but not for me.

DAD

Yep! When you plan the next trip, you can bring your own treats.

DAUGHTER

Glad to see you brought your drinking problem along for the ride.

DAD

I don't have a drinking problem.

DAUGHTER

Denial. The first sign of a drinking problem.

DAD

If I don't have a drinking problem, then I can't be in denial.

DAUGHTER

Ah. Double denial. Your problem is more serious than I thought.

DAD

There's no problem.

DAUGHTER

I learned all about this in Health and First Aid.

DAD

Did you now? Or did the person next to you learn it?

DAUGHTER

You probably consider yourself a social drinker.

DAD

As a matter of fact, I do.

DAUGHTER

Then you believe you have control of your drinking problem.

DAD

It's not a problem—

DAUGHTER

You can go for days—weeks even—without a drink.

DAD

Yes, I can.

DAUGHTER

So you think you're in control.

DAD

Which I am.

DAUGHTER

But if you didn't have a problem in the first place, control wouldn't be an issue. It's like this: when you walk into a store do you worry that you'll get stopped for shoplifting?

DAD

Of course not.

DAUGHTER

That's because innocent people don't walk around thinking "I'm innocent." They just are.

DAD

And so?

DAUGHTER

People who don't have a drinking problem don't think about controlling their drinking since it's not an issue. So if you're thinking about control, that means—

DAD

Excuse me. I have a date with my good friend from California. I've been hauling 8 ounces of Mr. Vino for seventeen miles now—

DAUGHTER

Your flask holds twelve ounces. Lying about the quantity of alcohol consumed is the second indicator—

DAD

—and I certainly deserve a drink.

DAUGHTER

If you're certain you don't have a problem, dump it out.

DAD

Beg pardon?

DAUGHTER

If you don't need the drink, dump it out. Prove you can go sober.

DAD

I've been sober the entire trip. It's not a matter of need. It's a matter of choice. I'm drinking responsibly, which should be a good model for you. I choose to have this drink here and now. I don't need this drink, but I do, in fact, believe I deserve this drink.

DAUGHTER

Rationalization is the third—

DAD

(Toasting.)

Here's to your Health and First Aid class.

(He takes a hearty sip, then spits it out.)

What the—

DAUGHTER

Chateau du Beaver Pond. 2003, I believe. A very good year.

DAD

You dumped out Mr. Vino?

DAUGHTER

You shouldn't leave your backpack laying around if you don't want me snooping in it.

After I hauled it for—

DAD

DAUGHTER
If you don't have a drinking problem, it shouldn't be an issue.
(Long pause.)
So. Is it an issue or not?
(Another long pause.)
I'm waiting.

DAD

I'm thinking.

DAUGHTER

Thinking about what?

DAD

Ways I can kill you in your sleep.

DAUGHTER

Good deal, Pop. Lets see who kills who first.

(Slide show. Along the Greenstone Ridge. Neither one seems particularly happy, though the vistas are amazing. The work of hiking has set in now, and their faces show it.

Hatchet Lake. The tent in the background, FATHER and DAUGHTER sit next to a small backpacking stove.)

DAUGHTER

How many miles today?

DAD

Ten.

DAUGHTER

Is that your limit?

DAD

Ten is plenty.

DAUGHTER

I could have gone farther.

DAD

I'm sure you could have.

DAUGHTER

A lot farther. See? Your plan is backfiring. You thought you could drag me out here to the wild and let the land beat me to a pulp. Then in my weakened state, you'd be able to force me to agree to all sorts of things. Stupid, idiotic things.

DAD

Like studying more? Putting yourself on a regular schedule? Getting home by ten on school nights? Obeying the law?

DAUGHTER

Yeah. Like those. But instead, I'm getting stronger and you're getting weaker. I watched you today on those hills. You could barely lift your legs to climb. By tomorrow evening you'll be crawling on your hands and knees. And when you can't move at all, I'm going to take your wallet, your water and your food, and hike back to Rock Harbor and catch the next *ship* out.

DAD

Since you're feeling so strong and have clearly made the adjustment to backpacking, perhaps we should shift some of my weight to your pack.

DAUGHTER

Perhaps in your dreams.

DAD

We'll have those opportunities to see how strong you are. Wait till we get to the Minong. (Pause.) Nice fire.

DAUGHTER

If you're into that sort of thing.

DAD

While we were up on the ridge I pointed out Mott Island. You remember?

DAUGHTER

Yeah.

DAD

Named for the Motts.

DAUGHTER

Hence, the name.

DAD

Mr. and Mrs. Mott were left on the island. A company mining ship was supposed to pick them up before winter set in, but it never came. They had to spend the winter on the island.

DAUGHTER

Oh, I get it. Flames. Campfire. Scary story. Boooo.

DAD

This story is true.

DAUGHTER

Double boooo.

DAD

So they're left alone. The few supplies were quickly expended. A canoe they used for fishing was smashed up during a storm. So there they were: winter coming on, and they with no supplies, no food. Nothing.

DAUGHTER

And they died and now we can go to bed.

DAD

Once winter set in, they dug up roots inside their cabin for food. But soon they had expended those meager resources, and then Mr. Mott, his name was Charlie, began sharpening his knife, day after day. He just sit there sharpening his knife, mad with hunger, staring at Mrs. Mott with a crazed look in his eye.

DAUGHTER

What was her first name?

DAD

I can't remember.

DAUGHTER

That doesn't seem fair. You remembered his.

DAD

Doesn't matter.

DAUGHTER

Matters to me.

DAD

Shut up, thank you. (Pause.) So, he's sharpening his knife and he's got this crazed look in his eye, kind of like Renfield in Bela Lugosi's Dracula.

DAUGHTER

Huh?

DAD

You know. Renfield.

DAUGHTER

Renfield who?

DAD

The servant guy in the Dracula movie.

DAUGHTER

Huh?

DAD

"Yes, Master."

DAUGHTER

What?

DAD

Dracula turned him into his slave.

DAUGHTER

Turned who?

DAD

Renfield.

DAUGHTER

I thought we were talking about the Motts.

DAD

We are.

The Motts were in the Dracula movie?
DAUGHTER

Forget it.
DAD

Oh! Dracula came to this island!
DAUGHTER

I said forget it.
DAD

Did he come over on the Ranger III?
DAUGHTER

Go to bed.
DAD

Is that the end of the story?
DAUGHTER

Yes.
DAD

Not very scary.
DAUGHTER

Yes, it is. Now go to bed.
DAD

“Yes, Master.”
DAUGHTER
(She crawls in the tent.)

She lived, you know. Mrs. Mott.
DAD

I’m happy for her.
DAUGHTER
(Off.)

DAD

She wrestled that knife from him and he died and she built another cabin for herself so she wouldn't be tempted to eat him.

DAUGHTER
(Off.)

Uh-huh. Sure she did.

DAD

Later in her life she won a bet that she couldn't carry a barrel on her shoulders all the way up to the top of some hill somewhere.

DAUGHTER
(Off.)

What was in the barrel?

DAD

I don't know. Teenagers, I hope.

DAUGHTER
(Off.)

Now you're scaring me. Really scaring me.

(The campsite at night. Shots of northern lights interspersed with the sounds of night. Dawn arrives.)

The DAUGHTER sits outside of the tent as the DAD crawls out. She's catching mosquitos in her hand, shaking them, and then swatting them against her leg.)

DAD

Good morning! Woo wee! It's a bit chilly out here! Have you had breakfast?

DAUGHTER

No.

DAD

I wonder what sort of adventures we'll have today.

(She doesn't respond.)

Make any coffee, yet?

No. DAUGHTER

Okay. I give up. What are you doing? DAD

Catching the mosquitos before I smash 'em. DAUGHTER

Why not just swat them? DAD

I'm naming them first. DAUGHTER

Naming them? Why? DAD

I want to make it personal. That's how much I hate 'em, and that's what they're doing to me. DAUGHTER

Makes you wonder what they do the rest of the time you're not on the island. DAD

Har, har. DAUGHTER

You know, we used to be the best of friends. DAD

That was before you started sticking your nose in all my business. DAUGHTER

Are we going to begin the day like this? DAD

Yes. DAUGHTER

We can't just make a truce? DAD

DAUGHTER

You wanted to slug this thing out, then let's do it. You want me to understand you, then you better try understanding me.

DAD

Fine. I started sticking my nose in all of your business. Just out of the blue, right?

DAUGHTER

Yes.

DAD

Really? Changing diapers, brushing your hair, helping you with your school work, taking you to the zoo, reading to you at night, swimming lessons, piano lessons, YMCA camp, Brownies, Girl Scouts, 4-H, soccer camp, basketball campnone of that was your business?

DAUGHTER

See? No wonder I'm screwed up. You over-booked me.

DAD

Ah, so you had an unhappy childhood because of the pressure to achieve that we imposed on you.

DAUGHTER

I guess my former self had an okay childhood, but that wasn't the me that I am now.

DAD

So that was some other kid I was raising?

DAUGHTER

Yes. That was the me before me.

DAD

The me before the me that is the current me?

DAUGHTER

Go ahead. Make fun of me again and I'll stop talking for the rest of the trip.

DAD

Lets talk about your earlier me. I was under the impression that by keeping you active and engaged, your mother and I were fostering your development.

DAUGHTER

When you decide to have a kid, you have a job taking care of that kid until a certain point. And that was your job, you know, before the cut off point.

DAD

And when is that point? Most states designate eighteen years of age.

DAUGHTER

The cut off point is when the kid can make up her own mind about what's what. Now that I'm sixteen—

DAD

Fourteen...

DAUGHTER

Mentally sixteen, I'm at that age where I can make my own decisions. Responsible decisions.

DAD

Which is why you've ended up in court twice now. Because selling pot and shoplifting are responsible decisions.

DAUGHTER

First off, I wasn't selling pot. I was holding it for a friend.

DAD

Oh, shoot! That makes it all okay, then!

DAUGHTER

Leave me alone!

DAD

You had two bags of weed in your school locker!

DAUGHTER

Which I took from a friend who was intending to sell it so she wouldn't get caught!

DAD

Oh, bologna! Aren't you the righteous one!

DAUGHTER

I was trying to do the right thing!

DAD

You think I'm stupid? You think I don't understand adolescent curiosity? You wanted a smoke, get stoned, see what that was like. You wanted to feel like a druggie for a day, a week, but not really be a druggie. You wanted to be safe, but break the rules.

DAUGHTER

Now you're full of it.

DAD

Fine. If I'm wrong, I'm wrong. What about the shoplifting? Let me see. You didn't really steal the CD. You just slipped it under your coat for a friend--

DAUGHTER

I didn't even want the stupid CD.

DAD

--even though you had enough cash to buy it.

DAUGHTER

I didn't want to buy it! I wanted to steal it! It didn't make any difference which CD it was--it didn't have to be a CD! I wanted to steal something! *Anything!* Just to do something different, you know.

DAD

And that is responsible decision making?

DAUGHTER

No, it's not. It's wrong. I knew it was wrong at the time. I knew if I did it and got caught, then I'd be in trouble--

DAD

You're in trouble, all right--

DAUGHTER

But I didn't care. It's like sometimes there's a regular me, and then sometimes there are these other "me's."

DAD

Back to the multiple me thing. I'm not buying wardrobes for all these me's you have hanging around.

DAUGHTER

Don't make fun of me when I'm being honest. I can't stand it. You act like you're so perfect all the time, like you never did anything wrong in your whole life.

DAD

I was far from perfect, but I had some sense about right and--

DAUGHTER

You stole a car when you were fifteen.

DAD

No, I didn't.

DAUGHTER

Twenty dollars if I catch you in a lie. That's our deal.

DAD

Some topics are off limits.

DAUGHTER

No way. You kidnap me to some creepy remote island--

DAD

Four hundred islands--

DAUGHTER

--so we can play kumba ya or something, and get in touch with each other's *feelings*, then the rules say we can talk about *anything*.

DAD

Some issues aren't open for discussion!

DAUGHTER

Then you'll need to inform me which subjects are off limits! Sex?

DAD

Let's not go there.

DAUGHTER

Why not?

DAD

My assumption is that--

DAUGHTER

Let's talk about my tatoo.

DAD

What tatoo?

The one you don't know about. DAUGHTER

Yes, lets talk about your tatoos. DAD

I want one. DAUGHTER

Next subject. DAD

Stealing cars. DAUGHTER

Prohibited. DAD

I'm talking about you. DAUGHTER

Never happened. DAD

You and Gary Ramey stole a car from the Chrysler plant parking lot when you were fifteen years old-- DAUGHTER

Nonsense-- DAD

-- and took it to a Doors' concert. Don't lie or you owe me twenty bucks. DAUGHTER

Where on earth would you-- DAD

Dr. John opened for The Doors. DAUGHTER

Who told? DAD
(After a pause.)

DAUGHTER

Mom. And you felt bad so after the concert, you took the car back to the parking lot.

DAD

Why would she tell you all that?

DAUGHTER

Because she was trying to convince me you were human. I had this idea you were a robot since every other word out your mouth was no. Dad, can I—NO. There's a thing at the—NO! Will you—NO! I want to—NO! God, I hate that. Why don't just listen to my side once in a while instead of shooting me down?

DAD

So mom came into your room and tried to make me seem. . . you know...human. Did it work?

DAUGHTER

No. It made you seem like a thief. And I tried to call the cops on you only Mom said the statute of limitations had expired.

DAD

We didn't really steal a car. It was Gary's brother's car and he was at work. We took the extra key from home and . . . uh . . . borrowed it.

DAUGHTER

Then why'd you tell Mom you stole it?

DAD

I was probably trying to impress her. Make her think there was more to the package than just a sociology degree and the beginnings of a beer gut.

DAUGHTER

That stinks.

DAD

And we could only stay for the first three songs of The Doors anyway because we knew Gary had to get the car back before his brother's shift ended.

DAUGHTER

See? This is why things aren't fair. At fifteen you're stealing cars and going to concerts and I can't even go to the mall!

DAD

I wasn't selling pot and shoplifting, either.

DAUGHTER

No, cause you were doing a bunch of stuff that was lots worse.

DAD

I wasn't an angel, but I didn't--

DAUGHTER

I have a whole list of stuff. Mom put this in my bag.

(She hands him an envelope.)

DAD

(Reading.)

"Ammo. Open only in case of emergency. Love, Mom." *Traitor.*

DAUGHTER

You and a pal beat on a guy's car with pipes until it was totaled.

DAD

Not exactly.

DAUGHTER

You total the car?

DAD

Yes, but--

DAUGHTER

You used to steal tires for your friends at the auto parts place you worked at in high school.

DAD

I gave discounts--

DAUGHTER

Five finger discounts. Let's see here. You tried to blow up the biology pond pier with nitro glycerin.

DAD

It wasn't pure nitro. It had a petroleum base to keep the molecules from colliding.

DAUGHTER

And where did you get nitro?

DAD

A few friends were working at a fiberglass shop on weekends. They used the stuff in production, and we swiped a bottle--

DAUGHTER

You blackmailed a student teacher in your auto maintenance class into changing all your grades to "A's" and buying you beer.

DAD

That wasn't blackmail! That was a negotiated settlement. I did some drawing for his display project that he claimed was his own work.

DAUGHTER

The list goes on. Here's the thing: compared to you, I'm like a nun and you're like a friggin' terrorist!

DAD

All those things your mother provided are being taken out of context.

DAUGHTER

Oh! My bad! Under what context is blowing up a biology pond pier okay? Or extortion?

DAD

And remember, all that was thirty years ago.

DAUGHTER

And I suppose thirty years from now we can all sit around and yuck it up over my shoplifting conviction! Let me ask you this: when you were doing this stuff, did you know it was wrong?

DAD

Yes.

DAUGHTER

But you did it anyway.

DAD

Yes.

DAUGHTER

Why?

DAD

I don't know. Because I was young and—no, that's not it. Because the. . . shoot. I don't have an answer for that.

DAUGHTER

The only difference between you and me is this: I got caught and you didn't.

DAD

I did not get caught. That is correct.

DAUGHTER

And if you had gotten caught?

DAD

I don't know. Depends on what--

DAUGHTER

Oh, and one other difference. I only did one thing. I swiped a CD.

DAD

And had two ounces of pot tucked in your locker.

DAUGHTER

Which wasn't mine.

DAD

And you continue to deny--

DAUGHTER

What reason would I have to lie about it? Especially now? I paid the fine. I've done half of my ten million hours of community service. I went through the stupid Drug Education program. Why lie about it now?

DAD

I don't know.

DAUGHTER

I was protecting a friend from doing something stupid. And I would do it again because I'm smart enough and I'm strong enough to survive the consequences and I'm not sure she is. And I don't care if you believe me or not. All that hot shot talk about encouraging development and blah, blah, blah. You preach about me being a thinker and being responsible for my decisions. Well I thought and I decided and I paid for it. And that's what I was supposed to do.

DAD

Okay, fine. I believe you.

DAUGHTER

So for one thing, I get caught and I'm labeled forever. You do a whole bunch of things and don't get caught, and suddenly you're Mr. Morality. I do one thing and I'm expelled from school—

DAD

That was for the pot.

DAUGHTER

Okay, fine. Legally, I do two things. But I'm expelled from school and now I'm the school slut.

DAD

Huh? How do you move from stoner to harlot?

DAUGHTER

I don't know, but if you get kicked out of school, you're the school slut.

DAD

I had no idea.

DAUGHTER

Yep. This whole zero tolerance thing is way out of control.

DAD

That slut thing goes on your permanent record?

DAUGHTER

Far as I know.

DAD

Things *have* changed in the last thirty years.

DAUGHTER

It's worse than you think. You ever get pulled over by the cops when you had beer in the car?

DAD

It was a van, but yes. Once or twice.

DAUGHTER

(Checking the list.)

How about twelve to fifteen?

DAD

Somewhere in that neighborhood.

DAUGHTER

They haul you in?

DAD

No, the cops just yelled at us, made sure one of us was sober enough to drive, and they confiscated all the beer.

DAUGHTER

You know what they do now? They throw you up against the car, spin you around and boom! They put a bullet in the back of your head. Blown away on the spot.

DAD

Wow. Seems like I should have read something about these roadside trials and executions.

DAUGHTER

Nope. It's all part of a secret right wing network controlling the media, politicians, kids. It's nationwide.

DAD

Learn that in Health and First Aid?

DAUGHTER

Nope. Checkout line at the grocery store. Tabloid city.

DAD

I should have known.

DAUGHTER

Now that we agree on something, lets go home.

DAD

Not for eleven more days.

DAUGHTER

I stink.

DAD

Yes, you do.

DAUGHTER

You're no bouquet of flowers yourself.

DAD

You should see your hair.

DAUGHTER

You should see your neck.

DAD

A little grime never hurt anybody. Besides, I earned this dirt. (Pause.) You'll get a shower at Windigo.

DAUGHTER

How far is that?

DAD

Two days of walking, so we'll be there tomorrow night.

DAUGHTER

If you live that long.

DAD

So where are we at?

DAUGHTER

Isle Royale.

DAD

No, you and I.

DAUGHTER

We understand that as a kid, you were worse than I'll ever be, but because you're a boy, you got away with it. We understand that I'm the victim of bad timing. We understand that's there's a little thief in both of us. And we understand that you need to give me more space. Now get up and get going. It's better to get all this stupid walking done in the morning while it's still cool out.

(Slide show. Both hike along the Greenstone, rest at the tower at Ishpeming Point, filter water at Lake Desor, then stand at the crest of Mount Desor and pause at the sights around them.

Island Mine. That night. They lean against a log as the DAUGHTER draws in the dirt with a stick.)

DAUGHTER

I think I figured it out.

DAD

Really? Figured what out?

DAUGHTER

You brought me out here because I'm a lichen.

DAD

A what?

DAUGHTER

A lichen. Crustose, foliose, fruticose. That's me. I absorb the pollutants you give off, so my misbehavior—all the trouble I'm in-- is a direct reflection of your influence on me. What I've absorbed from you. And you're embarrassed by how I've turned out.

DAD

I'm not embarrassed by anything.

DAUGHTER

You hope to turn me into something I'm not--*Nature Girl*--which will be a more positive reflection of you. It'll be much easier for you to introduce me to your cronies. You can say this is my daughter--*Nature Girl*--instead of this is my daughter, the convicted felon.

DAD

I'm not trying to turn you into--

DAUGHTER

Really! Then dragging me up to the stinking north woods is just for fun? If you're not trying to turn me into you, then I don't know what you call it.

DAD

I brought you up here because....well....

DAUGHTER

What? Can't think of a reason fast enough?

DAD

I told you why when we first began this hike. I want you to see where I'm coming from and I want to see where you're coming from.

DAUGHTER

You didn't have to kidnap me off to some remote island for that. Threaten me with starvation and bug bites if I don't submit. . . .

DAD

This island is a special place for me, just as it is for many, many people. I had an experience here when I was younger that—let's say—opened my eyes.

DAUGHTER

That's a super reason for dragging me up here.

DAD

My concern is this: I see you looking inward. I see you doing that a lot. Shutting us, shutting me out. Believe me, I understand it. I understand introspection as a necessity. You think those three or four times I year I pack up my gear in the truck and disappear into the woods alone for a few days is because I like to *fish*? Self-inquiry can be a calming process, both relieving and revealing. Looking inward can also be risky; you might find things about yourself that terrify you. But when it becomes a permanent form of escape—when those eyes glaze over to avoid those of us on your outside, then I begin to worry. Then I think it's time to intervene.

DAUGHTER

My eyes might glaze over, but I don't stop thinking.

DAD

I understand that you're going through changes—you know—and that . . . well . . . these changes affect—well, there are processes in place—natural processes—and social pressures. . . .

DAUGHTER

Let's not go there, Dad. I'm too tired.

DAD

Thank you.

DAUGHTER

You're welcome. (Pause.) So . . . what was your big revelation?

DAD

The thing that happened to me wasn't a—a revelation or an epiphany necessarily. God didn't jump out of the clouds and point his finger at me or, you know, that sort of thing. The thing that

happened to me was old knowledge—old knowledge unfolded. It was something I already knew, sort of. It was a thing that I . . . I saw that ...let's see...that created—or rather—had an impact on me. I was impacted. Impacted, deeply. That's it.

DAUGHTER

Like a tooth?

DAD

Not like a tooth, smart ass. I was in Tobin Harbor. It's a small – maybe half the size, or less, I suppose, of Rock Harbor—they're separated by a peninsula some four miles or so long. We hiked that out of Rock Harbor. I was canoeing then—trolling, lazy, not really expecting to catch anything, you know that water is so cold—well, I had one line out with a plug...a thing...looks like a minnow with a blade, a spoon like thing, on the front to make it run deep. Never mind. Anyway, the day has been hot and now, gradually, the water has calmed around every island, along the main shore. No waves at all. Smooth, like glass, all the way out past Blake Point. I've never seen...for such a big, big lake...water so smooth, so unmoving.. Like it's pausing, catching it's breath, before the next—you know, whatever, happens. And there aren't any other boats or people to be seen. I mean, no rentals, cruisers...the visitors, the park employees—nobody. I've been alone for days, you see, but now I'm beginning to feel alone. That my awareness was somehow heightened. Does that make sense? The cabins along the shore, empty. Windows boarded up on some, others falling apart – the eaves fallen away intact, but fallen. Other cabins, shacks are just dark. Boats are beached. Some new boats in tarps, old boats rotting in the brush, uh, like the woods, nature or something, is reclaiming them. Slowly—a rotted hull here has a tree sprouting through a crack in the bulkhead. An old dock leans into the harbor, the lake taking it back, piece by piece. Slowly, like I said, but relentlessly. Finally, in the distance I see a tanker threading the needle this side of Passage Island and I can hear it's diesels chugging along—I'm five miles away at least and I can hear every piston firing, it seems. And all this is underscored every thirty seconds or so by the wail of the foghorn from Passage Island, pulsating through the air like a...like a mantra. To me it sounds not like a warning, but like an imperative. Like it's moaning “here . . . now.” (He attempts to mimic the sound.)

DAUGHTER

Dad....please....

DAD

The point I'm trying to make here is that on this evening, something is different. Like I said, I've been canoeing and hiking for days and now, at this time and at this moment, something is different. I'm what? I'm more aware. That's it. I'm much more aware. And that awareness is unfiltered. Unfiltered. So I'm paddling along making little double whirl pools in the water every ten, twelve feet, and I can see the bottom now, clearly—it's maybe, maybe eight feet deep—the rocks and the sunken logs and white slivers of birch bark that I think are fish—every time I'm fooled into thinking “Oh, there's a fish. Nope, birch bark.” Then I see the large trunk of a tree, worn tan and smooth like drift wood, with the roots kind of coming out on one side and it's

higher off the bottom, you know, than the other debris in the water. In my mind I register that I need to adjust my heading so that the plug I'm dragging behind me doesn't get caught on the stump. And so I rudder just a little to the starboard side—that means right if you're facing the bow—

DAUGHTER

You're such a sailor.

DAD

--and I make one last casual glance back at the stump when I notice that one of the roots has, at its very tip, a hoof.

DAUGHTER

Oh, shit.

DAD

Then I notice three other hooves. And from that moment on, it's like I've paused, I'm holding my breath, along with the lake. I scan the figure with my eyes to make sense of it and finally there's the head. I realize that I'm looking at a submerged moose.

DAUGHTER

You're giving me shivers.

DAD

So I reel in my line quick. I'm afraid I'll snag the thing, you know, or . . . no, that's not it. Not that I'd get my hook in it or anything, but that...fear, I guess, by connection. Me to the pole to the line to the water to the carcass. Maybe that's it. Fear that I was connected. I don't know. Anyway, once my line is in, I begin to circle the animal with the canoe. Now, here's the thing. The moose isn't laying on its side. It's—this is kind of hard to describe without it sounding like I'm making it up—but the moose is sitting upright. The back legs are spread; the hooves partially dug into the sand. The body is leaning slightly forward, but the front legs aren't touching the bottom of the lake; they're—"suspended," I guess is the right word, over and between the hind legs, only higher in the water. The head is laying over the left front shoulder, flat, like when a dog tries to bite its hind—no, it's more graceful than that. It's like a ballet dancer when she bends sideways at the waist, extending both hands to her ankle, her head resting, not forced, against her side. And this animal—this moose—is frozen in this position. Perfectly preserved. Even in July the water temperature is only forty, forty five degrees, and so the animal sits—preserved, intact—on the bottom.

DAUGHTER

(She yawns and rests her head on her shoulder.)

You are so creeping me out. I'm gonna have nightmares.

DAD

And I haven't gotten to the important part.

DAUGHTER

You were staring at the face and the animal opened it's eyes.

DAD

No, no. I started wondering how it died. Why it was there. And then I began to see it, the whole thing.

DAUGHTER

Like a vision?

DAD

No. I quit having visions when I stopped dropping acid.

DAUGHTER

You dropped acid?

DAD

No, I'm teasing. I thought every kid with a parent over the age of forty five believed mom and dad were one time druggies.

DAUGHTER

Believe me, Dad, I never, ever, EVER, thought that about you. So how'd the moose get there?

DAD

It fell through the ice earlier in the Spring. Maybe it fled there to escape the wolves—they'll do that, you know. Keep a moose on the ice, not let her back on the shore where she can use the trees and the deep snow to her advantage. The wolves will line the banks, and as the moose moves parallel to the shore, they follow. And they wait.

DAUGHTER

Were there really wolves?

DAD

I don't know. Doesn't really make a difference. What's important to me is that this moose broke through the ice, but in only eight feet of water. So her hind legs were on the bottom holding her up. The front legs were on the surface ice, but even though she tried, she couldn't pull herself out of the hole. She couldn't muster enough strength and propulsion to get her hind legs up on the ice so that she could get a foot hold to kick and scramble and thrust herself out of that hole. Or maybe the surface ice just kept breaking away. I think about that—that image of the moose struggling—but what shakes me, consumes me, in my mind, are those moments of waiting that

exist in between the hope for escape—the conscious flexing of a muscle and feeling it respond, that hope, that optimism contained in that tension, the extension of the limb on command—that, and the resignation that follows when the will can no longer muster a physical response—an effort, any movement—and then, resigned, looks back in toward itself, instead of to the shoreline. It's in that seam, that fissure between the two extremes where I found myself then, where I have continued to place my thoughts, my mind for years, but more importantly, where I find myself now with you. Uncertainty coupled with risk. Stasis, temporarily, but no surrender. I was in that place as a twenty four -year old paddling on a big lake without care, without direction. Physically, mentally exhausted. And when that moose came to me from an icy, shallow sleep, I was jolted into an awareness of what this wilderness is, and what it means. What it means to place yourself in a situation where you're forced to live in your own skin instead of in front of a mirror. What it means to face the absence of compromise and negotiation because they don't exist out here. At least not in a form we recognize. What it means to pass through a place where life and death exist without the interference of sentiment—the very thing that separates us from the wilderness and makes us human. And what it means to hang on, to keep the will directed forward, here and now, because the alternative, though inevitable, is unthinkable. (Pause.) I brought you out here because I don't want to lose you. I brought you out here to see the place that exists in my mind. Can you understand that? I will not give up on you. I will not. (Pause.) In my mind I return to that moose day after day. Twenty five years go by and I'm still here.

(He pauses, then notices that his daughter has fallen asleep.)

Sweetheart? (No response.) The epilogue is this: And so the moose waited, back hooves buried in the sand, front hooves on the ice. Her head out of the water—does she see the wolves lining the shore? Does she see the snow-covered fir and spruce only thirty feet away? She sees none of that because she's turned inward now. Her heartbeat slows, her muscles numb, ice particles form down and around her muzzle, her neck, and then she waits. One moment she's breathing, her eyes open, but unseeing. Then slowly and quietly, she expires without struggle and sinks into the water. Not the dark, unimaginable depths. But in just eight feet of water, her head's final repose only four feet below the water line. And there she rests where we can see her, just below the surface.

(He puts his arm around her, then listens.

Slides of the Greenstone Ridge at dawn. The hikers making breakfast, then breaking camp. The slides end and the DAUGHTER rushes on.)

DAUGHTER

Here! I saw it here!

DAD

Could have been anything, honey.

Not just *anything*! Too big!
 DAUGHTER
 Let's get back on the trail.
 DAD
 Not until. . .I'm telling you I saw--
 DAUGHTER
 Yes, of course. I believe you, now lets--
 DAD
 Look! In the mud here! Look! Look at that paw print!
 DAUGHTER
 Oh, my goodness! OH, MY GOODNESS! You were--
 DAD
 I told you I saw a wolf! And you didn't believe me! See how it's filling up--
 DAUGHTER
 Just now filling with water. A print couldn't be any fresher--
 DAD
 Ten seconds ago, I swear. It was right here.
 DAUGHTER
 (She puts her hand in the mud next to the paw print and makes a depression.)
 DAD
 Kindred spirits?
 DAUGHTER
 It was here, and now I'm here!
 DAD
 You saw a wolf in the wild. Up close! Few people ever--
 DAUGHTER
 I mean, I was like--what?--thirty feet from it?
 DAD
 Sure. Thirty, thirty five--

DAUGHTER

And it looked at me for a second then—

DAD

A fleeting moment; a rare opportunity to view that which is wild up close. Few people—

DAUGHTER

Shut up a second, will you? I'm thinking about this!

DAD

Yes, I'm sorry. Yes.

DAUGHTER

You're always going on and on.

DAD

You have the floor, or the ground as the case may be.

DAUGHTER

See how the paw print is nearly full of water and my hand print is just slightly behind in filling up?

DAD

Yes.

DAUGHTER

God, that is so cool. Just thinking that it was here, and then it sees me and we're looking at each other. I mean, first I saw something out of the corner of my eye—some movement-- and first I thought, "Naw," but then I looked back and I did see it. And it looked right back at me. Eye to eye, you know. The hairs on the back of my neck—they're still standing straight up! Geez!

DAD

Let me get the camera out and I'll take a picture of you and the print.

DAUGHTER

No, no. I just want to live this for a minute.

DAD

Yes.

DAUGHTER

It's like "whoa!" you know?

DAD

Whoa. Yes. I've been there.

DAUGHTER

It's like it all makes sense.

DAD

Really?

DAUGHTER

The wolf and me. It was like when we looked at each other, it was trying to tell me something with it's eyes.

DAD

A secret?

DAUGHTER

I don't know. It was like we can't be, you know, we can't be in the same place at the same time. Like we cross paths, or share them, and we know each other is out there, but we can't be--be together. We see the same sights, the same trees and rocks, and we hear the same sounds, but we can't see and hear them the same way.

DAD

Like you and I.

DAUGHTER

Huh?

DAD

Nothing. Why can't we see and hear the same way?

DAUGHTER

Because we don't live here-- we don't live *in* here. People. Humans. Even though we might have come from here. You know what I mean? We are separated--separated from the thing--and we can't go back. Yeah, that's it! We're separated even though we belonged once. That's the feeling and it happens all at once. We belong, but we can't belong.

DAD

We're separated from the thing?

DAUGHTER

The thing. That feeling.

DAD

Okay.

DAUGHTER

It's like this. Let's say you have a crush on somebody—a really huge crush-

DAD

Don't tell you mother.

DAUGHTER

(Racing.)

—a crush so big you can't even speak to the person without blubbing and drooling all over yourself. And then all of a sudden you find yourself sitting right next to them in the gym or somewhere, where you're touching—like at the hip or your knees—but you're not really touching. And you want to explode. That's the feeling, the thing I'm talking about. You want to hold and embrace, hug, but you can't. And once you figure out that you can't do anything about it, it stops being torture, and you begin to enjoy it for what it is. This mud with the paw print and my hand print will dry up and turn to dust and there won't be any trace of either of us a month from now. And anybody else who crosses this spot will never know that the wolf stood here. But I know it. Because I stood here, too. Just seconds after the wolf. We can't be it. We can touch, but not touch. We can get close, but not get close. It's like the real touching—the real contact--can only happen with our feelings, our hearts and our souls. And that makes us want to burst.

DAD

Whoa!

DAUGHTER

And one more thing happens, like it's happening to me right now, right this moment. You have that feeling that you belong, but don't belong—you know, all that stuff—and it just fills you and your skin buzz, and it's just so intense, and then it starts to fade. It's all clear for that moment, but then it becomes less clear and more fuzzy. Like I had it for a moment, and then it began to slip away. And now I want it. I want it again. (Pause.) Oh my God. I'm starting to talk crazy like you.

DAD

That's not crazy talk. I know exactly where you're coming from.

DAUGHTER

And that is a scary thing.

DAD

Ready for a picture of you and your paw print?

DAUGHTER

(Pointing to her head.)

I already have one. That's my print, that's my wolf.

(She begins to move away, then stops.)

Maybe just one to show mom.

DAD

Get your face down there next to it. Smile.

(He clicks. The picture appears on the screen for a few moments, then slowly fades.

Slide show. The two hikers arrive in Windego. Shots of the sign, the buildings, the pier, and shelter #15 where DAD sits at the picnic table taking pictures of his feet. The DAUGHTER enters, her hair wrapped in a small towel.)

DAUGHTER

I put my clothes in the wash. Yours are still on the floor since you seem to be into this whole dirt thing.

DAD

Fine with me.

DAUGHTER

When my first load is done, I can wash what I'm wearing now and it'll be clean city for me.

DAD

Good.

DAUGHTER

And I checked on the ice cream for you and that's a negative; however, they did have this sports drink stuff which will replace important electrolytes in your system.

DAD

Learn about that in Health and First Aid?

DAUGHTER

Read the label.

DAD

Any chance they sell beer or wine?

DAUGHTER

Nope. But, but they do sell wine and/or beer with dinner at the restaurant clear back at-

DAD

Rock Harbor.

DAUGHTER

A mere forty eight miles by trail! Though there is an alternative....

DAD

Temptress!

DAUGHTER

It just so happens that tomorrow at 11am a boat called the Voyageur II will show up that could have us back at Rock Harbor by mid afternoon. . . .

DAD

Satan!

DAUGHTER

Unless, of course, you want to *hike* all the way back on the Minnion, or Minnow or whatever you called it--

DAD

The Minong.. And did you know--

DAUGHTER

--a trail that's much, much harder than the pud one we just did.

DAD

Minong was the original name of the island.

DAUGHTER

Yeah, yeah. And given the condition of your feet....

DAD

A condition I anticipated, and therefore budgeted two extra days to rehab here at Windego. So we're right on schedule. I was just thinking about the significance of hiking from one end of the island to the other. We passed, at one point or another, within just a few miles of every single wolf and moose on the island.

DAUGHTER

And every mosquito and blackfly.

Those, too.

DAD

There's a story about you on the wall of the john.

DAUGHTER

Does it mention me by name?

DAD

Close enough. It's the story of Blister Boy who hiked from one end of the island to the other.

DAUGHTER

Really?

DAD

Yes. Blister Boy does a bunch of dumb stuff and ends up with all sorts of blisters on his feet.

DAUGHTER

Happens to the best of us.

DAD

Then he tried to keep hiking and the blisters became infected and he died.

DAUGHTER

Poor Blister Boy.

DAD

Dead because he didn't know when to quit.

DAUGHTER

From my perspective—and understand that we're talking about a perspective tempered by age and experience, expectations met and expectations lost—not knowing when to quit is the *preferred* way to make an exit.

DAD

Translate, please.

DAUGHTER

We're hiking back to Rock Harbor, via the Minong Ridge, even if it kills me.

DAD

Why do you always get to say what we're doing? Why can't I have a say?

DAUGHTER

DAD

You do. Think of us like as a sportscasting team. I'm doing the play by play and you're doing the color commentary.

DAUGHTER

That sucks.

DAD

Good job!

DAUGHTER

Not funny.

DAD

Okay. What would you like to do?

DAUGHTER

Take the boat back and hang out at the lodge.

DAD

Nope.

DAUGHTER

You know, this relationship thing has to be two ways. You can't just tell me what the deal is and expect me to, you know, go along. I need a say so in what gives.

DAD

Listen. And I'm being serious now. I have to hike back. I can't take the boat. I have to hike.

DAUGHTER

I don't.

DAD

No, you don't. You want to take the Voyageur II back, then I suppose. . . .

DAUGHTER

Then you hike back? What am I supposed to do in Rock Harbor without you?

DAD

Hang out?

DAUGHTER

And you just hike back alone?

Sure.

DAD

Yeah, right. Like you could make it on your own.

DAUGHTER

So you're with me?

DAD

I don't like it.

DAUGHTER

I do. So let's think beyond the island and beyond the wilderness. I propose a truce.

DAD

A truce for what?

DAUGHTER

You and I. A life truce. Our relationship from here on out.

DAD

Fine.

DAUGHTER

Get something to write on.

DAD

You get something.

DAUGHTER

I can't walk.

DAD

Use the back page of that stupid nature book you've been carrying.

DAUGHTER

Can't. Pages are already filled in. I've been sort of keeping a journal.

DAD

I don't know what to write on then.

DAUGHTER

There must be something—

DAD

Here. Use this junk here. This bark stuff.

DAUGHTER
(Picking up a piece of birch bark.)

Birch bark.

DAD

Whatever.

DAUGHTER

Here's the pen. Now you start.

DAD

Start what?

DAUGHTER

The conditions of our truce. You tell me what you want.

DAD

To take the boat back to Rock Harbor.

DAUGHTER

We're past that. Beyond the island now. What do you want?

DAD

You go first.

DAUGHTER

I want—let's see—I want you to stop slamming doors.

DAD

I thought we were thinking bigger?

DAUGHTER

Stop slamming doors for the rest of your life. Around me, at least.

DAD

That's not gonna happen.

DAUGHTER

DAD

I want honesty from you. All the time. No holds barred.

DAUGHTER

How about honesty half the time, and everything else goes through mom first?

DAD

How about agreeing that honesty is the best policy?

DAUGHTER

Honesty is the best policy some of the time.

DAD

All.

DAUGHTER

No way. I already got a list of stuff you're not going to hear about until I'm like thirty.

DAD

How about when we ask for honesty—your mother or I—we get it? One hundred percent of the time.

DAUGHTER

Okay. But you have to treat it like you only have three wishes, okay? No wasting wishes. And no wishing for more wishes.

DAD

Agreed.

(Writing.)

Honesty when we ask. Restraint and discretion guaranteed. There. What else?

DAUGHTER

You finish your list.

DAD

That's it. I just want your honesty.

DAUGHTER

(She writes it down on the birch bark.)

Well, heck. Seems like a lot of hiking torture if that's all you want.

DAD

That's it. How about you?

DAUGHTER

I need to think about it first. (Pause.) I fell asleep before the end of your moose story. What happened?

DAD

The moose and I shared a secret.

DAUGHTER

Yeah, right. What really happened?

DAD

You keep your secret with your wolf; I'll keep my secret with my moose.

DAUGHTER

Listen. The wolf was cool. But it didn't change my life. I'm not a better or changed person or anything. I'm not even different other than—okay—I saw a wolf in the wild which doesn't happen to most people. I insert that bit of information into my brain which is always going about a million miles an hour and it can hang with all the other stuff I'm dealing with and that's fine. I still have the shoplifting conviction and the other thing—the drug thing. So don't go thinking you won or anything. Don't go thinking you turned me into Nature Girl.

DAD

But it was cool. You said so yourself.

DAUGHTER

Yeah.

DAD

That you saw it is enough. My guess is that any meaning you assign will come later.

DAUGHTER

Okay.

DAD

When we get back to Rock Harbor, I've arranged for us to take a tour on the Sandy.

DAUGHTER

A tour boat?

DAD

Yes.

DAUGHTER

Oh, god. We'll have to sit in assigned seats with people we don't know and wear life jackets, won't we?

DAD

I suppose so. What's the--

DAUGHTER

I'm gonna look like a dork! That's the absolute worst!

DAD

At any rate, we'll travel over to Tobin Harbor and we'll see cabins and well kept homes that still have people living in them, and we'll see abandoned cabins in disrepair where the woods seem to have closed in on the structures and overtaken them.

DAUGHTER

And the point is....

DAD

On one hand we continue to beat nature away from our doors; on the other, once resistance ceases, nature reclaims. Look at the campsites. They're maintained. But a season or two without the crews coming through, without night after night of folks bedding down, then they'd soon be overtaken.

DAUGHTER

Earth to Dad.

DAD

I'm sorry. I was having a moment. I was thinking how I might be mistaking aggressive reclamation--like on the houses and cabins--for something else. What if, for example, natural process isn't the assault we imagine; rather, it's an embrace. The invocation of a relationship. And then I thought about what you're--what we're going through, physically and emotionally, and--

DAUGHTER

I am way lost. And I've decided what I want.

DAD

Sorry. Continue.

DAUGHTER

I want you to speak English to me. And when I need you to shut-up, then shut-up. And when I need you to listen without yelling at me or judging me or any of that stuff, then do it. And I need to know that no matter what I do, you're there.

DAD

My goodness, don't you already know that?

DAUGHTER

No.

DAD

Really?

DAUGHTER

No, I'm lying because if I don't understand you, you'll make me hike back to Rock Harbor on the Minnow Trail—

DAD

The Minong.

DAUGHTER

—and that's secretly what I really want. (Pause.) I need to know you trust me.

DAD

I trust you.

DAUGHTER

Really?

DAD

Really.

DAUGHTER

No, you don't. You need to work on trusting me.

DAD

That I will do.

DAUGHTER

Okay. I write it down, and you sign the truce.

Okay. DAD

I sign here. You sign there. DAUGHTER
(She picks up the bark.)

Where are you going? DAD

I'm going to throw this in Lake Superior. DAUGHTER

Why? DAD

So we can't change our minds. So this doesn't end up in a scrapbook someplace and you can use it to embarrass me when I bring a date home. DAUGHTER

Okay. (Pause.) Wait. I thought of a couple of other things. DAD

What? DAUGHTER

I want my clothes washed. DAD

Fine. DAUGHTER

And I want you to find a park employee—not a ranger type—and offer them twenty bucks for two beers. DAD

Dad.... DAUGHTER

One's for you. DAD

DAUGHTER

I hate beer.

DAD

Oh, really? When did you—

DAUGHTER

I hate *all* alcohol. I learned that in my Health and—

DAD

Yeah, yeah. Then I'll just have to drink yours, too. Listen. One other thing. This is serious. When I die—

DAUGHTER

Here it comes.

DAD

—and I don't anticipate that happening for some time—but when I die the family will have to fill out an obituary form for the paper. There are questions you answer like “Was he a loving father?” and who bequeathed who and who survives and yada, yada, yada. Then they'll ask about military service and where I worked and all that. Pretty standard. Under the “accomplishments” category here's what I want you to do. I want you to put in my obituary that at the age of 49, I hiked the length of Isle Royale. I hiked the length of that island with my fourteen year old daughter. Parents will understand.

DAUGHTER

Oh, yeah? If I die on the way back on the Mildrew Trail, I want you to put that I was murdered by my father's mid-life crisis. Kids will understand.

DAD

Deal.

DAUGHTER

Deal.

(Blackout.)

THE END