

DENALI

By
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CAST

DOUG
FINN
ABBY

Secondary parts are doubled in this fashion:

PRODUCER played by DOUG
PARK SERVICE RANGER played by FINN
KAREN DUNN/THE CLIMBER played by ABBY

SETTINGS

the push:

A living room. A table, a chair, an arm-chair.

the cave:

An ice cave at 17,300 feet, on the West Buttress of Mount McKinley.

the base:

A set of a television interview program.

TIME

The present.

"It's like looking out the windows of heaven."

- American climber Brad Wasburn on the view from the summit
of Alaska's Mt. McKinley

"'Steven,' I half joked, 'you're not going to be famous
unless you get down alive.'"

- American climber Ed Webster, from *Snow in the Kingdom*.

For Josh.

the push

ACT I

SPOTLIGHT UP on FINN.

He sits on a stool with a copy of a hardcover book in his hand.

A glass of water. A book reading.

FINN

Thank you all for coming this evening. And for the college for inviting me. It's good to be home. (opening book, reading) "Talkeetna Alaska has a population of 900 people on parade days. Nestled in the upper Susitna Valley, the town is surrounded by sheer walls of spruce, alder, and boggy muskeg."

Behind him, LIGHTS HALF-RISE on DOUG, who enters with beer. He also has a hardcover book in his hands. He wears a quilted vest, Carhartt pants, a trucker cap. He reads the book at a small table. They share the stage, but not the same space.

FINN (CONT'D)

"Paradise for black flies and mosquitoes. In a souvenir shop, on one of town's half-dozen dirt streets, Maggie Archer sells ice-cubes with black flies frozen inside. The tag reads, "Alaskan Revenge -- \$2.99 each".

DOUG pops open his beer.

FINN (CONT'D)

"Nobody comes to Talkeetna to stay here. The reason to come this far is to go much, much farther."

Doug RIPS the page out of the book. He crumples it. Throws it to the ground.

FINN (CONT'D)

"Sam Gearing is one of the flyboys of Talkeetna. He's a glacier pilot. For three hundred dollars, no questions asked, Gearing will fly you in his Cessna six-seater up 8,000 feet to the Kahiltna glacier, at the base of the mountain. On approach, the summit ridge looked like a giant mandible."

DOUG

Mandible?

FINN (CONT'D)

"I couldn't take my eyes off of it. In under an hour, Gearing ferried Josh, Doug and me through dizzying banks and dives to land on a plank of ice two miles across."

DOUG

That was nuts.

FINN (CONT'D)

"Trash bags and tomato stakes marked the landing strip. In the shadow of the mountain, dozens of climbers poked out from their tents, faces purple from a month waiting for the weather for a summit push. Josh stepped out first, into the chill, and started taking pictures. Gearing snapped us a salute and said, 'Welcome to Denali boys. Try not to die.'"

DOUG

For the record:

(ripping another page out)

Sam Gearing was a dick.

LIGHTS FADE on Finn. ABBY enters, heavily dressed for outdoors, in puffy overcoat. She carries a grocery bag.

ABBY

What's all this?

DOUG

Guess.

ABBY

Clean it up. He'll be here any minute.

Doug kicks paper about, kinda cleaning. Abby sets the bag down, takes off coat. She's dressed nicely: blouse, earrings, scarf.

ABBY (CONT'D)

It's negative six outside. I thought global warming meant everywhere'd be Miami by now.

DOUG

What's a mandible.

ABBY

So you're finally reading it.

DOUG

Course I'm going to read it. He shoulda sent it to me a long time ago.

Abby takes beer from the bag. Snacks.

ABBY

He did. You threw it away.

DOUG

Oh right. (beat) You read it though.

ABBY

He sent me a copy too.

DOUG

How much you think he got? I mean, how much do they give? I went into the bookstore and they had it a pile, up front. Local Author!

ABBY

It doesn't matter. He's got money now.

DOUG

He looks like he's been sucking dick in this author picture.

ABBY

Doug.

DOUG

Seriously. His mouth looks all rashy.

ABBY

When was the last time you saw a photograph of you that looked like you? Nothing looks like it's supposed to.

Doug opens the chips and snacks.

DOUG

I saw you. During the show?

ABBY

The *reading*.

DOUG

Finn with his perfect glass of water. His bullshit post-it notes on the pages. You were wondering what his life's like now. In New York.

ABBY

San Francisco. It says it right on the back, Doug.

DOUG

You see his shoes? Robin Hood shoes.

ABBY

They were suede. They were nice. He looked handsome.

DOUG

No treads.

ABBY

He sits all day now probably.

DOUG

You see his hair?

Abby kneels, begins to clean-up the pages.

DOUG

What are you doing?

ABBY

You want this to work? We can't have him walk in here and walk out.

Doug grabs the grocery bag. Stuffs the crumpled pages into it. Abby pauses on the ground, nauseated. Head in hands.

DOUG

What's the matter?

ABBY

Nothing.

DOUG

You want some chips? The body likes fried foods.

ABBY

I couldn't eat all day.

DOUG

Soup? I'll pop a can.

ABBY

You saw the way people were looking at us tonight.

DOUG

Like a high-school reunion clusterfuck. Mrs. Phillips was there, did you see?
And Carmine Toto. You dated Carmine Toto.

ABBY

Not dated.

DOUG

You had sex.

ABBY

This is not where I wanted to go with this.

DOUG

In the cemetery.

ABBY

I should never tell you anything.

DOUG

That's because I never forget. And I never forget because I care.

ABBY

I could feel everybody staring at us, like a heat.

DOUG

Fuck 'em. Vultures.

ABBY

They know everything.

DOUG

They don't.

ABBY

It's in the damn book.

DOUG

Nobody's read this piece of shit.

ABBY

They want to crack open my head and see the ghost.

DOUG

That's why we got there late and left early.

ABBY

Felt just like after. With the flowers. Cards addressed to Josh. Who did they think was going to read them?

(beat)

I read them.

(beat)

People give you things so you'll open the door. So they can see inside.

Doug kneels next to her.

DOUG

Don't go back there. Don't let yourself go back.

ABBY

I don't get to leave.

DOUG

Yeah you do. You close the door. You toss the door into the trash. I'm going to get you the hell out of here.

FINN enters. Suede shoes, nice overcoat. He looks urban, sharp. He has dutifully scrubbed Pennsylvania out of himself. He wears gloves. He has a wine bottle.

FINN

Abby.

Doug stands, pushes grocery bag of crumpled paper under the desk. Doug embraces Finn.

DOUG

Langford: you made it alive.

FINN

Doug. Hey. What are you doing here?

DOUG

I live here.

FINN

You do

Finn, hey. ABBY

Abby: you all right? FINN

Yeah just long night. ABBY

You can imagine. Stuff. Surfacing. DOUG

I forget sometimes. I've been living with this thing for years now // FINN

// Yeah me too. DOUG

The book I mean. FINN

Me too. DOUG

Abby stands. She hugs Finn weakly.

I'm just feeling light-headed. ABBY

I was happy to see you guys there, honestly. FINN

Well, you didn't tell us about it. Had to see it in the paper. DOUG

You didn't know? (Off his no.) Shit, I'm sorry. Goddamn, my PR agent. I gave her your info. To send you an invite. But she's Assberger-y. FINN
(beat, takes out his Blackberry)

Watch this.

You're firing her? ABBY

Done. FINN

DOUG

(Abby and Doug exchange a look)

You brought...wine.

FINN

It's French. I brought it for you Abby.

Finn takes off his jacket.

DOUG

How much did you pay for this? The label's all fancy font.

ABBY

Doug.

FINN

I don't know. Fifty.

DOUG

Dollars?

FINN

Special occasion.

ABBY

(To Doug) Get us some glasses?

DOUG

We have wine glasses? (Abby gives him a look.)

FINN

I'm not picky. Just not the Garfield mug.

DOUG

Still have that thing.

ABBY

It's mine. I was twelve. I'm allowed.

FINN

I remember laying my head on the toilet in the hallway right there, losing my face on your father's vodka from that very mug. I was like: Please God//

ABBY

//Please GARFIELD//.

FINN

Let me die.

DOUG

How many times did we get stupid in this exact spot.

ABBY

I've seen the photos. Josh took photos.

DOUG

There's like puke dripping out of your mouth! It's awesome!

FINN

There's a photo? Jesus burn it.

Doug exits.

ABBY

Hell no. They might be, you know, useful. If you get too famous.

FINN

(intense whisper)

Abby. Come with me. Tonight.

ABBY

What?

FINN

I came back for you.