

## Audition Pieces from The Last Frontier

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#### **PUMP MAN ( from page 60)**

Look. It's dark, it's damn cold, and the wind's blowing. You should probably stay here with me in the pump house. But if you gotta go, you listen to me. That's the light of the camp. There. But don't let that fool ya. The wind picks up the snow and hides that light. You lose track. Pulled a body off the ice a couple of months back. Frozen stiff. Wolves'd been chewing on it. lake. It's longer sure but it's safer.

Lose your bearings, you listen for the ice. It moves and cracks. You can hear it in the dark.

Listen for the ice.

#### **GERTIE**

I had this neighbour. Phyllistine.

Well, that's what we called her. Phyllis. She meant well but you had to use small words.

*Joanne laughs a little.*

That's the ticket.

Anyway, when Wilson died she insisted on taking care of me. The day after the funeral, she appeared at my door with a plate of raisin cookies she had baked herself. The thing is Phyllis was a bit nearsighted and salt looks a lot like sugar if you're in a hurry.

*Joanne laughs outright. Gertie sings.*

You are not the first, Joanne Laney, to know this kind of grief.

And you certainly won't be the last.

And although that fact doesn't make it any better or any easier,

It means you're not alone.

It means you're surrounded by all these people.

Hundreds, millions, a great cloud of witnesses, since the beginning of time.

Who have found a way, picked up their shattered lives and made their own unique way.

And, no, you don't really ever get over the grief. But you do learn to live again a different way.

So, I know... You will find a way.

## **RON**

I just got off the phone with Ed. Doctor Hayes. You know we're old friends from medical school. He wants to buy a practice in a small town out west. A place called Medicine Hat. He wants me to buy in with him. We have a couple of thousand saved up.

You asked me what I want. I want to start again and I want you to come with me. I want you to be my wife. I love you. I know I've been seduced by the wilderness and I've abandoned you and I am sorry. Things can't be the way they were before. I know that. It will be hard work. And you want the baby, well...

This place has changed us both. We have survived so much. I have seen deaths I couldn't have imagined and each one has stripped away some skin, some, some layer of invincibility. But I have saved lives too. And I've been chased by wolves in the dead of night. And I've traveled twenty miles in a blizzard to perform an appendectomy on a shipping crate in a frontier cabin. So, raise a child? Yes, of course I can do that. I can do that with you. If you'll have me.

## **JOANNE**

You could have been killed.

I wonder if I'm ever going to see you again, Ron. I sit here alone and think about all the ways people die out there that you are so happy to tell me about over dinner. What happens to me when you get eaten by wolves because you're too proud to wait in the pump house till morning?

I married you because you were going to be a small town doctor. A safe quiet life. But here you are, living your fantasy adventure! Was there even an emergency at the camp when you got there?

See?! And meanwhile, here I am alone and pregnant and very possibly widowed at any moment!

Yes. I'm pregnant, Ron. We're going to have a baby.

You didn't want to know, did you? I've been trying to tell you for a week but you never had time! What would that do to your precious adventure in the wilderness?!

Ooooh...

*She is so frustrated but she has run out of steam.*

...poop.

**FRANK**

That's why I never married. When a man takes a wife, he takes on a responsibility for her. Why would you bring a woman out here into this lonely man's world?

Look around you. This is God's grandeur. Beautiful and terrifying.

We choose this life. We men. The frontier. It's fast disappearing. Where a man can make his own way and challenge the natural world. I find it thrilling.

But is it for you, Ron Laney?

Be careful, young man. There are wolves in these woods. It's dangerous out there. There are a hell of a lot of ways a man can die.

*The men laugh. Frank looks out over the water. They stand silent for a few moments, only the sound of the diesel engine thumping quietly away in the background. Frank sneaks a look at Joanne.*

When I was a boy, I grew up on the cliffs of western Ireland and I roamed wild with the wind and the sea and I knew even then that I would live a lonely life.

**GERTIE**

Helloooo. Hellooo. Oh, hello there. Welcome, welcome.

*(She extends a hand to Joanne and shakes her hand vigorously. )*

I've come to welcome you to Gannon. I'm Mrs. Beattie. Gertrude. Gertie. My husband is the Indian agent. Welcome to Gannon. Welcome. There are so few women hereabouts. Well, decent women. I'm so glad to meet you.

*(Turns to the Doctor.)*

Welcome to Gannon, Doctor. We're so lucky to have you. I hope you stay longer than Dr. Schwartz. He started so well but ended up being such a disappointment.

*(She tips her fingers to mimic drinking. She turns back to Joanne.)*

Liked his schnapps. If you know what I mean.

*(She proudly brings a neatly wrapped little package out of her bag. )*

Here you are. Bit of a housewarming gift for you.

*(With enthusiasm.)* It's a fruitcake!

Everyone is so somber. Well, I see you haven't had your coffee yet. Les is like that in the morning. My husband. The Indian Agent. Don't talk to him before he's had his coffee. Ha ha.

*Still nothing from Ron and Joanne.*

Why the long faces? Did someone die?

*She laughs long at her own joke. Then realizes her terrible mistake.*

Oh, my lord! I'm so sorry! I had no idea. And here I am with my jolly jolly and my bad timing. I don't know what to say. Can we start this again? Oh lord. I'm such a fool.