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THE KIDS FROM NOWHERE

Based on a true story

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INT. GUTHRIDGE KITCHEN - NIGHT

A BLACK SCREEN

A match strikes and a hand lights a candle. A watch ticks on the wrist.

SUPER: "1983 -- Portland, Oregon. Based on a true story."

The face of MARY GUTHRIDGE (33) emerges on one side of the candle. Her hand is over her eyes. A pretty, wholesome face that hints of emotional pain.

The face of GEORGE GUTHRIDGE (34) emerges opposite. He looks troubled, ingenuous, hopeful. A Snoopy-on-his-doghouse is engraved in his glasses, which glint in the candlelight.

GEORGE

Okay -- now.

Mary uncovers her eyes. She is delighted yet suspicious to see spaghetti, French bread, and salad.

George serves up root beer in wine goblets.

MARY

You sell another novel?

He pushes an envelope forward.

Within she finds a section of newspaper classified ads.

A circled ad changes her mien to loving dismay.

MARY (CONT'D)

When I said you switch careers
every time you see a classified ad,
I was being metaphorical.

GEORGE

I miss the classroom.

Fighting rising frustration, she puts a tender hand on his while holding up the classified section.

MARY

But teaching Eskimos on a Bering
Sea island? You're kidding --
right? Get another college job.
Or teach high school. Here.

GEORGE

I need a change.

MARY

Well, buy yourself some new jeans.
The college loved you, George. But
you quit to be a magazine editor.
Then -- a janitor. Now, a writer.
Except you hardly write anymore.

GEORGE

I can't concentrate. We're broke.
Look at what they pay.

Mary rereads, whistles softly, her anger expended. Beginning
to reconsider.

MARY

And what about the girls?

Now more confident, George takes off his glasses, huffs on
the lenses, cleans them on his shirt, puts them back on.

GEORGE

(calls)
Meredith? Gretchen?

The kitchen door bursts open and an overhead light snaps on.
MEREDITH (14), lithe, resilient, and GRETCHEN (6), blond,
pony-tailed, spill from the stairs, obviously having been
listening. Gretchen, in pajamas, holds a Cabbage Patch Doll.

GRETCHEN

Can we go, Mom? Can we?

MARY

(smiling in exasperation)
Looks like someone appealed to the
troops before asking the general.
(to Meredith)
Even you, Miss Fashion and Friends?

MEREDITH

Dad said it'll only be for five
years. It'll get us out of debt.

GRETCHEN

And then we'll live like princes.

MEREDITH

Princesses.

Mary rolls her eyes. Here we go again.

INT. GUTHRIDGE BEDROOM - LATER

GEORGE

It'll be great for the kids.
Growing up as an army brat in
Europe was the best education I
could ask for.

MARY

Europe isn't exactly Eskimo
-- land.

George takes pills, his hand shaking.

MARY

And what about your health?

GEORGE

I'm tired of doctors poking me.
Maybe the change'll help. Less
stress. We both love teaching.

He slides into bed and turns off the light.

GEORGE

Teaching Eskimos will be romantic.

MARY

Mr. Adventurous.

GEORGE

(animated)
"George, George, George of the
Jungle --"

GEORGE AND MARY

"Look out for that tree! Wham!"

They giggle. Then RUSTLING -- and MURMURS.

MARY

Okay. Apply. See what happens.

GEORGE

(snapping on the light)
You mean it?

She nods, resigned to her fate of having such a husband.

GEORGE

I thought you'd say no. I really
just wanted some new jeans.

She laughs, puts her arms around him, turns off the lamp.

EXT. BERING SEA - DAY

Six aluminum skiffs and two skin boats emerge through mists: Siberian Yupik Eskimos out hunting.

Wearing a traditional Eskimo sealskin rain jacket, MERLE APASSINGOK (17), adept, alert, scans the horizon with binoculars held in thin, time-worn fall-hunting mitts.

He spots a pod of ribbon seals swimming desperately toward the shallows.

ALVIN ANINGAYOU (14), in a modern jacket, listens to MUSIC THROUGH A HEADSET and doodles in the air.

He turns off his headset and cuts the skiff's idling motor.

Conversation is in Yupik; subtitled.

MERLE

Something's got 'em spooked.

A killer whale surfaces in an explosion of spray.

ALVIN

Looks like the big boy's here.

They drift, intent on the scene.

INT. ABOARD NAVAJO AIRPLANE ABOVE BERING SEA - SAME TIME

The PLANE shakes and RATTLES through turbulence.

George is in the copilot seat. Mary is behind him. Next to her, Gretchen holds her doll.

Behind them, Meredith is glued to the window. She motions excitedly as two whales spout below.

PILOT

Greys heading south. Where you'll wish you were, come winter.

GRETCHEN

Is this the end of the earth, Mom?

MARY

Just about.

PILOT

Storm coming in. Big one. Here they hit like a freight train. Hold on!

The storm slams the plane. It bucks wildly.

Mary leans forward and grabs George's hand.

MARY

This isn't feeling very romantic,
George.

Beside Meredith, TENDRA (80s), an Eskimo in a traditional kuspuk, her chin striped with tattoos, calmly skin-sews a sealskin boot. She spits tobacco into a can.

EXT. BERING SEA - SAME TIME

The seals scatter as the killer whale tries to herd them.

Pelted by rain, Merle scans the waters.

Conversation is in Yupik; subtitled.

MERLE

Steady.

ALVIN

Which way'd the seals go?

MERLE

Not sure.

ALVIN

Try listening the ancient way.

Merle leans over the boat, puts a paddle straight down in the water, an ear against the paddle's end.

ALVIN

Hear them?

MERLE

Going south-southeast. Fast.

A DRONING PLANE nears. Merle raises a hand in frustration and sets the paddle back in the boat.

Both boys eye the increasing storm.

ALVIN

Getting snottier. Better get home.

He starts the motor and heads toward the treeless shore.

EXT. GAMBELL LAKE - SAME TIME

Three laughing Eskimo girls paddle on a foamboard raft: ROMIE (14), ALLANA (17) and PUFFIN (16). Puffin drops the paddle.

Rising wind steals it away. The girls giggle and paddle with their hands to catch it.

A blast of air pushes them further from shore.

Amid sudden whitecaps, the WIND muffles their cries for help.

INT. ABOARD NAVAJO AIRPLANE ABOVE GAMBELL - MINUTES LATER

The village, Gambell Lake, and Siberia come into view.

The pilot fights the controls of the rocking plane.

PILOT

There's Siberia, thirty-six miles
away. And ...

(a la Ed McMahon)

... h-eee-re's Gambell, population
five hundred fifty say-cred souls.

EXT. GAMBELL LAKE/SHORE/AIRSTRIP - SAME TIME

SERIES OF SHOTS

--The three girls cry, clinging to each other.

--Along the shore, A YUPIK WOMAN IN ESKIMO DRESS sees the three stranded girls. She runs.

--The Navajo makes a rough, SCREECHING LANDING. As rain sheets down, it taxis past the rusted wreckage of a plane.

--By the airstrip, BOYS ON THREE-WHEEL ATVs REV ENGINES.

--The woman leads yelling VILLAGERS and MEN WITH A SKIFF.

--The boys see the villagers running and roar off.

BOONE APANGALOOK (16), strikingly handsome, athletic, stays behind. He hops off his ATV to help Tendra with her bags.

BOONE

(in Yupik; subtitled)

Welcome home, Grandma.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

JONES (40s) the broken-toothed, heavy-set school janitor, chugs up on his three-wheeler with a cart.

JONES
Welcome to Gambell, three-wheeler
capital of world.

GEORGE
(acknowledging commotion)
Shouldn't we help?

JONES
We go your house.

Hummocky tundra fans before them, one area littered in white.

GRETCHEN
Dinosaurs?

JONES
Five thousand years of whale bones.

The bags are now loaded up. As the Guthridges climb on the mounded cart, Meredith looks around, mouths a silent "wow."

Boone eyes her as Jones and the Guthridges drive off.

EXT. GAMBELL LAKE - SAME TIME

The stranded girls watch as the six men in the skiff futilely struggle against the elements.

Waves crash over the foamboard raft.

The girls yell over the WIND; in Yupik, subtitled.

ALLANA
Open your coats!

Romie and Allana raise their coats like sails in the wind.

ROMIE
It's not working! Get on your
knees, Allana! Puffin, up!

They make a pyramid, Puffin opening her coat overhead.

Villagers watch as wind pushes the girls toward the skiff.

EXT. GAMBELL VILLAGE - SAME TIME

Shacks and HUD homes protrude from a black gravel landscape.

Disabled three-wheelers and snowmobiles lie abandoned.
 Skins and seal meat sway on driftwood racks in the wind.
 BARKING SLED DOGS yank on their chains.

EXT. GUTHRIDGE SHACK - CONTINUOUS

The principal, MR. DAN (30s), a slightly built self-assured Eskimo, steps from a weatherbeaten shack's arctic entry.

JONES
 (to the family)
 We Eskimos don't live in no igloos.

Mr. Dan and George shake hands.

Mr. DAN
 I'm Daniel Dan.

JONES
 He first principal here that ever
 our own people.

MR. DAN
 Welcome to the island on the edge
 of forever.

INT. GUTHRIDGE SHACK - CONTINUOUS

The patchwork linoleum floor is stacked with duct-taped boxes and canned goods.

Two small windows, a card table, and one folding chair furnish the house. A curtain divides a second bedroom from the main room, the bed almost touching all the walls.

Mr. Dan pulls back a shower curtain, reveals a honey bucket.

Mr. DAN
 Make sure you double-bag. Once
 it's full, let it freeze in the
 arctic entry, then haul it to the
 dump. You'll shower at school.

George puts a palm on the low ceiling, the two naked light bulbs at forehead-height. Mary examines the old oil stove.

MR. DAN (CONT'D)
 There's a potlatch tonight. The
 mayor says "Come at seven, maybe
 six." Try nine. You'll be early.

He heads toward the door.

MR. DAN (CONT'D)
 Welcome to Eskimo time.
 (light-hearted teasing)
 I've seen your résumé, Professor
 Guthridge. You came to Gambell?

He exits, one brow lifted.

MEREDITH
 Gretch, let's go meet some Eskimo
 kids.

Mary zips up Gretchen's jacket. George huffs on his glasses and cleans them, looking around, secure in his decision.

MARY
 No talking about life in Portland.
 They might take it for bragging.

GRETCHEN
 (by rote)
 They're non-comp-pel-ative.

MARY
 Non-competitive. That's what last
 year's principal said at the
 interview.

GEORGE
 Don't forget -- eyebrows up is yes,
 down means no or "I'm angry."

Meredith ushers Gretchen outside with a flourish.

EXT. GAMBELL VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Meredith and Gretchen are drawn to Tendra hanging seal meat strips by her shack and singing softly in Yupik.

She spits tobacco and hands a meat strip to Meredith.

TENDRA
 (toothless grin)
 Quyagiwo. Taste walrus?

Meredith nibbles it reluctantly.

Her eyes light up and she hands a piece to Gretchen.

Pleased, Tendra gives them three more strips.

TENDRA (CONT'D)
For family.

The girls nod thanks and continue walking amid the shacks.
Skin boats rest upside-down on driftwood racks.
From behind one, TWO BOYS pelt the girls with rocks.

TWO BOYS
White trash! White trash!

Meredith tries to shield Gretchen.

INT. GUTHRIDGE SHACK - CONTINUOUS

Mary and George unpack.

The girls rush in, Gretchen sobbing and reaching for her mom.
Fighting tears, Meredith throws the dried seal meat onto the table, retreats to their bedroom and pulls the curtain shut.
Mary comforts Gretchen as George hands Gretchen her doll.

GEORGE
Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

MARY
Well, we're here.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - EVENING

Men sing in Yupik, beating DRUMS.

Girls in kuspuks dance.

Villagers and the white teachers are on opposite sides.

GERALD HANSEN(30s), a white teacher with a lineman's build, eyes George disdainfully.

Mr. Dan dances with Eskimo women. He dances well and motions George to join.

George shakes his head but pushes the girls forward.

Meredith and Gretchen awkwardly mimic the movements.

Tendra comes forward. She gives the girls a smile.

A hush pervades the room.

The DRUMS RESUME. Tendra dances, her movements subtle, precise, sensual.

Mary leans into George, and they share a moment.

INT. GEORGE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

A DOZEN STUDENTS are crammed in a small, cluttered room. Rain drums on the window and seeps under the door as students play with electric typewriters, their feet in puddles.

At a secretary's desk, behind a wall of bookshelves, Allana reads while she pets an ermine in her jacket.

A phone rings.

ALLANA
Waqaa? Hello?

George yanks electric cords, grabs a mop, mops the puddles.

A disheveled Romie sizes up George as he picks up a pointer and pulls down a chart of the solar system.

ROMIE
You're the new teacher.

GEORGE
What's your name?

ROMIE
Romie. Yours?

GEORGE
George. Okay, everyone, we'll start with the solar system. How many planets are there?

Boone, in a tank top, strolls in, basketball in hand.

ROMIE
You staying all year? Or quitting early.

Boone spins the ball on a finger and plops down, feet on the desk. He THUDS THE BALL on the floor.

GEORGE
I plan to stay five years.

BOONE
Bet he leaves before Christmas.

GEORGE
So, how many planets?

Alvin, bored, draws a breaching killer whale.

Puffin tips up her math text and reads, so tiny she looks waif-like behind the book.

LOBERT (16), straggly haired, fondles a nipple under his dirty T-shirt, belches and grins hideously.

LOBERT
Last year's teacher left in March.
But he was bigger'n you.

ALVIN
He gave us all straight A's so we
wouldn't beat him up.

LOBERT
I get a B. Cuz I punch him good.

The class laughs.

GEORGE
(poker-faced; to Boone)
Put the ball away.

Boone DRIBBLES the ball LOUDLY, then puts it down.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
(to everyone)
Earth is ninety-three million miles
from the sun. How far are we from
the sun?

LOBERT
(belching)
Ninety-three million.

GEORGE
The distance from Earth to the sun
is an astronomical unit. So how
long is an astronomical unit?

LOBERT
Wednesday? February?

As the class sniggers. Lobert looks around, grinning proudly.

ROMIE
Does the earth really go around the
sun?

BOONE

That's bull. The sun comes up
behind the mountain and goes down
in the sea. Everyone knows that.

George places a globe on the front desk.

GEORGE

You know where you live?

Lobert's eyebrows go "down."

Boone X's the globe with a permanent marker.

BOONE

Right there, man.

George unsuccessfully tries to rub off the X.

GEORGE

Must you destroy school property?

BOONE

Just white man's stuff.

Puffin saunters from the classroom.

GEORGE

(hurrying out)
Everyone stay put.

Meredith, taking notes from the board, smiles at the others.

Romie eases behind her, knocks Meredith's books to the floor.

Meredith frowns at Romie but fights for self control. She
bends to pick up the books.

ROMIE

Stupid white girl.

A BOY WEARING BIG GLASSES spits onto the back of Meredith's
neck and hawks deep in his throat as if to repeat it.

Boone eyes the student and he retreats.

A GIRL IN A CHICAGO BULLS T-SHIRT punches Meredith's arm --
hard. Meredith lurches up. The girl pantomimes a cat fight.

Alvin draws, oblivious. Boone THUMPS HIS BASKETBALL LOUDER.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME TIME

George turns the hall corner, following Puffin. He looks back to see Lobert and ANOTHER GIRL behind him.

Puffin enters the bathroom, shuts the door in his face.

GEORGE
(to the door)
You can't just walk out of class.

LOBERT
We gotta ask to pee?

GIRL
We gotta ask to fart?

The THUMPING FROM THE CLASSROOM alarms George.

INT. GEORGE'S CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Boone THWACKS THE BASKETBALL AGAINST A POSTER ON THE WALL.

GEORGE
(rushing in)
Put the typewriters under your desks. Read chapter one.

BOONE
This isn't about basketball - or about us. What good is it.

GEORGE
It's reading. That's what.

Boone climbs on his desk and stands there defiantly.

BOONE
I'll read up here. Try to stop me, I'll throw you through the fucking window.

GEORGE
Just so you're reading.
(passes out worksheets)
Here's Europe's products, religions, and governments. You'll be tested on them tomorrow.

Kids moan and catcall.

A SCUFFLE breaks out behind the bookshelves.

PUFFIN (O.S.)
Stop it!

George finds Lobert with his hand up Puffin's T-shirt.

GEORGE
(pulling him off her)
Go to the principal's office.

LOBERT
I think I'll kill you, man.

The school BELL RINGS.

Lobert ambles off, giving George the finger.

GEORGE
(to Puffin)
You okay?

PUFFIN
What do you care.

She grabs the homework, glances at it, sticks it in her jeans pocket and strides out the door.

BOONE
(to George)
Five years? You won't last five days.