

FGFR3

written by

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EXT. SUTTER FARM - POTATO FIELD - DAY

A modest farmstead in the California East Bay: farmhouse, barn, several medium-sized fields, some chicken coops, pens for pigs, goats and sheep.

SOLAR PANELS are installed on all roofs, with some more set up in a nearby field, all hooked to a makeshift-looking CONVERTER and BATTERY ARRAY near the house.

Mid-morning on a clear day.

MASON SUTTER (68, grizzled in farmer's gear) stands, looking over a small POTATO PLANT FIELD (a quarter-acre or so).

NOTE: For these opening images, we don't see any full-body shots of Mason. Just close-ups on facial expressions, long shots, feet walking, etc. We don't see him fully yet.

He looks at the potato plants with disappointment.

MASON

Dammit.

He kneels down near a plant, running his fingers through its leaves, which mostly obscure his hands from us.

MASON (CONT'D)

At least a month away.

He SIGHS and pulls out a PLASTIC SPRAY BOTTLE full of a clear liquid. He begins carefully spraying it onto the first plant's leaves.

The bottle slips from his grasp as he pulls the trigger. He picks the bottle back up and we now see that his hands have SMALL, EXTRA-STUBBY FINGERS. The bottle's trigger mechanism is too big for them.

MASON (CONT'D)

Fucking thing.

He uses his other hand to close the trigger gap, then continues spraying the plant.

A long SHADOW falls across him as he works, but he stays focused, being careful not to waste a drop on overspray.

SEAN (O.S)

What're you doing, Grandpa?

Mason finishes with the first plant and stands up. We now see that he is a Little Person -- he has the form of dwarfism caused by a condition known as Achondroplasia -- and stands only about four feet tall.

SEAN WILLIAMS, a lanky, awkward, average-height 14-year-old at just over five-and-a-half feet, towers over his grandfather.

MASON

Trying to get these damn potatoes to be ready for the pot before we run out of the current batch.

SEAN

(mock enthusiasm)
Great. More potatoes.

MASON

I know. There's gonna be a gap, though, so we'll probably have to dip into some of our cans for at least a few days.

Sean brightens.

SEAN

Oooh! Chili?

MASON

If you're good. Did you collect the eggs yet?

SEAN

Yep. About 15 or so. But Gladys still isn't laying.

Mason shakes his head, gazing with concern at the chicken coops across the field. Then he kneels back down and starts carefully spraying the second plant in the row.

Sean watches with curiosity.

SEAN (CONT'D)

So what is that stuff?

MASON

Hell if I know. Some kind of hormone. But it should make the potatoes grow a lot faster.

SEAN

Didn't you tell me a few weeks ago that you can't mess with Nature?

Mason CHUCKLES.

MASON

Yeah, well... Nature's kind of slow. Sometimes she just needs a little push.

Sean NODS while watching his grandfather work.

MASON (CONT'D)

Can't imagine what we'd do without Rick. Damn lucky having a plant biologist right down the street.

Sean shifts uncomfortably, almost starts to say something, then stops himself. Then starts again:

SEAN

Hey, uh...

He trails off awkwardly.

Mason stops his work and looks up at the boy. Long BEAT.
Then:

MASON

Well, what's eatin' you, kid? Spit it out. I've got 150 of these to do before lunch.

Sean looks down at the dirt. After a moment:

SEAN

In the Before Times, did you ever get, I dunno, picked on by the Bigs?

The teen kicks the dirt, avoiding eye contact.

SEAN (CONT'D)

You know, back when almost everyone was more my size, and they called folks like you and Mom "little people"?

Mason GUFFAWS slightly.

MASON

You mean when they were being polite. Yeah, sure. I heard a lot of it: midget, pygmy, shrimp, dwarf...

(beat)

(MORE)

MASON (CONT'D)

We used to be a joke to them, like
in those movies we've watched.
Willy Wonka, Time Bandits, Snow
White and the... well, you know.

Mason looks more closely at the boy, now noticing slight
BRUISING on his forearms.

MASON (CONT'D)

You catching some flack at school?

Sean SHRUGS noncommittally, still avoiding eye contact.

MASON (CONT'D)

Look, you're already taller than
they are, and getting bigger by the
day. Don't be afraid to really put
one of 'em into their place. The
others will back off.

ERIN (O.S.)

And what nonsense are you putting
into my son's head now?

ERIN WILLIAMS (42, tan and a bit weathered, also a Little
Person) approaches the two from the farmhouse, mock anger on
her face.

Mason SIGHS.

MASON

Just some important life skills, as
usual.

ERIN

(skeptical)

Uh-huh.

(to Sean)

C'mon, it's almost time to go.

MASON

Wait, where?

ERIN

(tired of repeating
herself)

To the clinic, Dad. I've been
telling you for weeks--

MASON

Aaah, shit. That's today?

She tilts her head at him.

ERIN

You sure you won't come?

He motions to the potato field.

MASON

Got a lot to do.

(beat)

Besides, you know what I think of that whole operation.

ERIN

Yeah, I know. But I'm a bit nervous about driving down there alone. Heard it's been extra dicey in the Dead Zone lately.

Mason looks at his field again, then down at the spray bottle still in his hand. Finally he sags in defeat, begins stomping back toward the house.

MASON

Well, shit, go make sure the car's charged up properly. And I'll get my gun.

EXT. EAST BAY CLEAN ZONE GATE - DAY

A dirty-looking ELECTRIC SMALL SUV driven by Mason pulls up to a large wooden gate, ten feet high with a GUARD TOWER on one side.

A ten-foot-tall wooden FENCE extends in both directions. The gate is currently open, and several LITTLE PEOPLE mill around. In fact everyone we see (except for Sean) is a Little Person with Achondroplasia.

A GUARD (late 40s, male little person) armed with a SMALL PISTOL in a HOLSTER motions for Mason to stop at the threshold of the open gate.

The guard seems to recognize Mason and Erin, steps out of their way, to the driver's side. Mason pulls up to him with his window open, stops.

GUARD

Hey, Mason. Where ya headed?

MASON

(spitting the word)

San Jose. That damn clinic again.

The guard narrows his eyes a bit, then nods neutrally.

GUARD

Long way. Get there safe.

He waves them on, and Mason pulls the vehicle through the gate and onto the open road. A makeshift SIGN on the outside of the gate denotes this as an entrance to the EAST BAY CLEAN ZONE.

EXT. INTERSTATE 680 - DAY

The SUV makes its way down a four-lane highway coursing through the rolling Northern California hills. Early summer wild grasses are just starting to dry out from green to their signature golden color.

The highway is cracked in many places, with grass having gained a firm foothold in the numerous crevices. Abandoned CARS and CAR PARTS along with other random DETRITUS are scattered on the sides of the road and, in some places right in the lanes.

The car veers around debris, turning this way and that while passing beaten-up signs reading INTERSTATE 680 SOUTH and SPEED LIMIT 65 MPH, traveling at barely half that pace.

INT. SUV - DAY

Mason drives using metal frame EXTENDERS which make it possible for him to reach the foot pedals. Erin rides shotgun while Sean sits in the back, watching the scenery go by.

Erin notices with concern Mason wiggling his foot on the accelerator extender, which is coming loose.

ERIN

Is that going to make it?

MASON

Think so. I'll tighten it once we get there.

ERIN

Shouldn't we just stop and do it here?

MASON

(indicating Sean)

Better not. If the repair went bad, we'd be looking at letting him drive us the rest of the way.

Sean perks up eagerly in the back seat.

MASON (CONT'D)

And none of us want that.

Sean deflates a bit.

EXT. INTERSTATE 680 - DAY

They start slowing down when they see a DUMP TRUCK flipped on its side in the breakdown lane ahead, with some light-colored objects spilling out of it and laying in a messy line running diagonally across all four driving lanes.

As they get closer, they see that the objects are HUMAN SKULLS and BONES.

INT. SUV - DAY

Mason pulls their car to a stop a hundred feet short of the mess, scanning the area suspiciously.

MASON

It's either an accident or a trap.

Erin and Sean look equally concerned.

ERIN

See anyone?

Mason and Sean both shake their heads, as they continue to scan the area.

Mason reaches down and pulls back his shirt to expose the .380 RUGER POCKET PISTOL tucked in his pants.

SEAN

All those bodies...

MASON

Skeletons.

SEAN

Why are there still so many? After what, almost 20 years?

MASON

Well, the Bigs outnumbered us at least ten thousand to one.

He glances over his shoulder at Sean, motions to the three of them in the car.

MASON (CONT'D)

Think about that. Ten thousand bodies for each one of us to deal with. Thirty thousand between just the three of us.

(beat)

Who knows how long it'll take to get all of 'em underground or cremated.

Erin's eyes bulge and she tenses as she looks out the windshield. There's movement, a shadow.

ERIN

Dad.

Mason's eyes snap back forward and his hand instinctively goes to his pistol grip.

After a moment, a single emaciated COYOTE emerges from behind the truck, sniffing desperately at the bones. It licks what looks like a HUMAN FEMUR, and then, apparently finding nothing worth scavenging, trots off.

All three in the car sag slightly, and Mason's hand returns to the wheel.

MASON

Don't think it's a trap... coyote would've been spooked.

He puts the car back in Drive. Erin looks dubious.

ERIN

We're going through that?

MASON

Well, we're not getting out of this car.

EXT. SUV - INTERSTATE 680 - CONTINUOUS

Mason pulls the car to the section with the least amount of bones and skulls blocking it. He slowly drives over them, snapping tibias, ribs, vertebrae.

An upright SKULL stubbornly refuses to be crushed, causing the SUV to rock slightly as it rolls over it.

All the bones are from normal-height people.

INT. SUV - INTERSTATE 680 - CONTINUOUS

As they get clear of the bones and start picking up speed again, Erin looks back at Sean with concern. He looks shaken.

ERIN

(to Sean)

It's still much better than it used to be, you know. Those first few years... so many bodies... the smell...

(beat)

Felt like it took forever to carve out the Clean Zones.

MASON

And just finding anyone else who was even still alive in those early days... we were so spread out.

SEAN

Is this supposed to be making me feel better?

Erin tightens her lips with a look of regret.

ERIN

Not working, huh?

Sean looks out the window at the rolling hills.

SEAN

I wish I could have seen the Before Times.

She turns back to face front.

ERIN

(wistfully)

It was a different world...

Mason keeps his eyes on the road, but they go a bit out of focus as he remembers...

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. HIGH-RISE OFFICE - RECEPTION - DAY

MATCHING SHOT to Mason's face, only now he's much younger (32), dressed in a full business suit. And pissed.

We slowly PULL BACK to reveal he's in the RECEPTION AREA of a company on the 20th floor of a San Francisco high-rise, looking out over the city, circa 2030, pre-Apocalyptic Event.

NOTE: Besides Mason, everyone in this flashback is what we would today consider "average height".

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

Ughhh, this isn't working.

A RECEPTIONIST (female, late 30s, too-small business suit) is trying to take an ID photo of Mason, who's standing in front of a small GREEN SCREEN BACKDROP. But the CAMERA is fixed on a TRIPOD, and we can see it's only catching the top of his head.

Several OFFICE WORKERS pass by, and we hear a few stifled GUFFAWS at Mason's expense. The receptionist looks around.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

Does anyone have a footstool we can borrow?

IN THE HALLWAY

Mason, carrying a LEATHER BRIEFCASE, is being led by an OFFICE WORKER (male, late 20s, business drone) down the hall, along the side of an open office plan.

Dangling from the LANYARD around Mason's neck we see his BADGE marked "VISITOR" along with his headshot. His head is at the bottom of the frame, cut off just below the nose.

Mason clocks the DOUBLE-TAKES and WHISPERING from some of the workers in the office as they notice him.

They approach an open BREAK/COFFEE AREA, and SEVERAL WORKERS sitting at tables crane their necks to get a better look at Mason. The escorting worker makes a pit stop at the COFFEE MAKER.

ESCORTING OFFICE WORKER

(to Mason)

Want some coffee?

Mason shakes his head, standing awkwardly there while people continue to steal glances, some more subtle about it than others. The escort worker starts pouring himself a cup.

Across the break area, CHAD WESTON (45, business suit, ex-jock) sits with a couple of CO-WORKERS, smirking at the sight of Mason.

CHAD
 (too-loud whisper)
 Where do you think he got the suit?
 Kids 'R' Us?

He and his co-workers barely manage to stifle their LAUGHS.

Mason turns to face them.

MASON
 Yeah, but I had to go to a tailor
 afterward. Not enough room in the
 crotch.

And he grabs his crotch for emphasis.

Chad and his friends' eyebrows shoot up (Ooooh), but they're still chuckling.

MASON (CONT'D)
 (whispering, directly to
 Chad)
Asshole.

CHAD
 Hey, no offense, little guy.

MASON
 (through gritted teeth)
 None taken.

The escorting worker, uncomfortable to say the least, leads Mason away.

IN THE WAITING AREA

Mason sits on a leathery chair outside a closed-door office, his feet dangling. A SECRETARY (nonbinary, early 40s, thin) calls to him from her nearby desk.

SECRETARY
 I'm sure he'll be right with you,
 Mr. Sutter. Meeting running long.

Mason nods. Then he sees Chad walking toward him. His eyes narrow.

The secretary gets up and intercepts Chad, handing him some paperwork.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)
 (indicating Mason)
 Your interview candidate is here,
 Mr. Weston.

Chad and Mason lock eyes. Chad with embarrassed surprise,
 Mason with tired resignation.

MASON
 Shit.

Mason gets up, grabs his briefcase and begins striding down
 the hall, back toward the reception area.

CHAD
 Dude, come on... don't...

Mason ignores him. Then Chad SHRUGS in amused resignation.

CHAD (CONT'D)
 (calling after him)
 Well, that sure was a short
 interview!

Mason gives him the FINGER without breaking stride or turning
 around.

IN RECEPTION

Mason marches into an open, empty elevator car, violently
 pokes the "L" button. The doors close.

After a moment, he PUNCHES the button panel with a YELL.

He sags against the wall, holding his hand in pain, his face
 curling into a grimace as he chokes back tears.

END FLASHBACK

INT. SUV - DAY

Back to present day: Mason driving the car. And remembering.

EXT. MEDICAL CLINIC - DAY

The car pulls into a parking spot in front of a modest
 MEDICAL CLINIC. A SIGN out front simply displays the CADUCEUS
 MEDICAL SYMBOL (rod entwined by two snakes with wings on
 top).

There are 20 or so PROTESTERS in front of the building (all Little People with Achondroplasia) carrying signs with slogans such as "NO GOING BACK", "IT'S OUR WORLD NOW", "NO MORE BIGS", "BIG = TROUBLE", and so forth.

Mason, Erin and Sean get out of their SUV and are almost immediately spotted by one of the protesters, who points them out -- specifically Sean, who sticks out like a sore thumb -- to the others.

PROTESTER
(angrily)
Look, there's another one!

The protesters begin awkwardly but angrily surging toward the threesome, blocking their path to the clinic's front doors and quickly starting up a CHANT.

PROTESTERS
(repeating)
Big, go home! Big, go home!

As they get within a few feet, Mason lifts his shirt to reveal the gun tucked in his pants.

MASON
Back the fuck off!

Seeing the gun, the crowd parts, but keeps chanting while glaring at Sean. He looks scared.

They make their way past the protesters, toward the front doors.

ERIN
Looks like word's getting out
what's going on in there.

Mason nods, keeping his hand near his gun.

MASON
Can't say I disagree with 'em.

INT. MEDICAL CLINIC - RECEPTION - DAY

Mason, Erin and Sean are just finishing up with the RECEPTIONIST (43, Latina Little Person with Achondroplasia). Other Little People are waiting in the seating area, while still others, including some in LAB COATS, walk the nearby hallway.

The receptionist hands Erin a few sheets of paperwork.

RECEPTIONIST

All set. Just wait out here, and we'll call you when Dr. Brock is ready to see Sean.

As they head for some open seats, Sean is suddenly transfixed by the sight of a NORMAL-HEIGHT TEENAGED GIRL (15) down the hall. He cranes his neck, almost tripping over Mason while distracted.

Mason starts to grumble at him but then sees the girl as well. He smirks at his grandson, gives him a friendly nudge as they sit down.

MASON

(sotto voce)

Ah, you like seeing someone more your own size, huh?

(conspiratorially)

Especially a girl.

Sean SHRUGS, averting his eyes and attempting nonchalance.

SEAN

Just not used to it.

But Mason notices him starting to blush.

MASON

Yeah, well, if this shit works, you might start seeing a lot more of it before too long.

Sean goes back to staring at the girl. She catches his gaze and smiles at him. He manages an awkward smile back, now blushing furiously.

INT. MEDICAL CLINIC - EXAM ROOM - DAY

DR. LILLIAN BROCK (62, female Little Person, Black, impressive salt-and-pepper Afro, white lab coat) is stepping up onto a FOOT STOOL in order to measure Sean's height. Mason and Erin stand nearby.

DR. BROCK

Everything's looking great, Sean.

She takes the measurement with a little bit of difficulty, then steps down and marks the reading on her CLIPBOARD.

DR. BROCK (CONT'D)
Five foot eight! You must be the
tallest person in your community by
now.

He SHRUGS.

SEAN
I'm the only Big there.

She nods, while Mason shuffles impatiently.

MASON
How long is this going to take? We
need to get back before dark.

The doctor continues to mark and check her chart.

DR. BROCK
Just an hour or so. Blood, saliva,
hair... and he's at the age where
we can get some data on the
viability and any disease-proof
attributes of his sperm.

At that last word, all three of the visitors react with
varying degrees of discomfort.

MASON
Aw, man, really? In front of his
mother?

The doctor finally looks up from her chart.

DR. BROCK
I'm sorry. I guess I'm just too
used to working with other
technicians. But that is the
technical term.

Mason crosses his arms and shakes his head, annoyed.

MASON
And this is how you're gonna
repopulate. With Bigs again.

She puts down her clipboard and focuses on Mason.

DR. BROCK
We're finally getting some reliable
data on how rare it is for someone
like Sean to survive like he has.

ERIN

I heard it's around one in a thousand.

DR. BROCK

Less than half that, actually.

(beat)

Combine that with the inherent 25% infant mortality rate for us average-height people, then double it to account for the disease in the air that kills almost all of our Big infants--

MASON

So, fifty percent, right? That's not so bad.

She shakes her head sadly.

DR. BROCK

With only about a million people probably left alive on the whole planet, it's actually very bad. At that rate, we'll never climb out of this.

Unmoved, Mason motions to everyone in the room.

MASON

Doc, there's nothing wrong with us. We're the survivors. That mutation in our DNA...

(trying to remember it)

FGR...

DR. BROCK

(automatically)

FGFR3.

MASON

Yeah. That mutation of ours is what saved humanity, right?

DR. BROCK

Yes, but we're still coasting on the infrastructure that was already here. We're already running out of medicines, medical equipment, canned food, heating fuel...

(beat, then very serious)

We're not on an upward trajectory, Mr. Sutter.

(MORE)

DR. BROCK (CONT'D)
Without a faster repopulation effort, including an infant mortality rate of less than ten percent, we'll never make it.

MASON
Then you should be focusing your research efforts on medicine, how we can make more of it. And improving our infant survival rate.

She SIGHS, moving the stool over to the counter and stepping back onto it so she can wash her hands in the sink.

DR. BROCK
(admitting)
We're having to make tough choices as to where to focus our research efforts.

There's a pause while she seems to debate whether to continue. Then:

DR. BROCK (CONT'D)
While we still have time.

ERIN
Time?

The doctor finishes washing and begins drying her hands.

DR. BROCK
We only had a few genetic research scientists like us in the country before the Event. And we're not getting any younger.

ERIN
(concerned)
What are you getting at?

She steps down, throws the paper towel away, and turns to face Erin.

DR. BROCK
Don't spread this around, but... in a couple of generations there might not be any legitimate medical researchers, or pharmaceuticals, or even doctors, because of the lack of infrastructure and proper education.

(beat)

(MORE)

DR. BROCK (CONT'D)
 And once that happens, it truly
 will be game over.

ERIN
 Oh my God.

But Mason remains unconvinced.

MASON
 (growing frustration)
 Do you even remember how they used
 to treat us? You want to go back to
 that?!

The doctor starts to look a little annoyed herself.

DR. BROCK
 We have to fact facts, Mr. Sutter,
 whether we like them or not. Folks
 like Sean here, with a disease-
 resistant, normal FGFR3 gene are
 now the only way we see
 repopulation happening.

MASON
 (bitter)
 "Normal". This is some self-hating,
 genetic cleansing bullshit.

Erin takes Mason by the arm.

ERIN
 Dad, maybe you and I should go to
 the waiting room, so the doctor can
 get this done and we can head home.

She tries to lead him toward the door, but his feet are
 planted, eyes locked with the doctor's. Finally, without
 taking his eyes off her:

MASON
 Fine. One hour.

He moves to the door and grabs the handle.

IN THE WAITING ROOM

A while later. Mason and Erin are in seats facing the
 hallway. Mason checks his watch impatiently. Erin notices
 Sean emerging from a door far down the hall, then walking
 toward them.

Another hallway door opens and he almost bumps into the FULL-HEIGHT TEEN GIRL we saw earlier, as she emerges from the doorway. From Erin's POV we can see them embarrassingly talking with each other but can't hear what they're saying.

Mason now clocks this, too. His gruff expression softens a bit.

Sean awkwardly smiles as the girl grabs a PEN and PAPER PAD from a nearby nurse's station. She scribbles a note down and presses it into his hand, before she's whisked away by another TECHNICIAN in a lab coat.

Sean returns to the waiting room with a beaming grin. Erin and Mason stand up as he approaches them.

MASON

Well, well. Pulled her number, huh?

SEAN

I guess.

As they walk toward the exit, Sean shows Mason the piece of paper. It says:

BECKY
KB1MR
1.8 mHz

Mason nods, impressed.

MASON

Not what that looked like in my day, but it should work.

(beat)

Or at least it would work, if our radio wasn't fucked.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - GARAGE - DAY

A couple of days later. Mason and Sean are working together at a WORKBENCH in a very messy garage. Sunlight beams angling in, illuminated by dust in the air.

Mason has a HAM RADIO opened on the workbench and is tinkering with it.

MASON

Hand me that pliers, will ya? No, the needle-nose, right there.

Sean hands him the pliers, and Mason zeroes in on an ORANGE WIRE tangled inside the box.

He carefully pulls it free of the tangle and shines a FLASHLIGHT on its exposed metallic tip. It's rusted.

MASON (CONT'D)
Goddamn, I hate these old-ass ham
radios.

He points across the bench, at a WIRE-STRIPPER. Sean dutifully hands it to him.

MASON (CONT'D)
I miss phones.

SEAN
Like in the movies. You just picked
one up and you could talk to almost
anyone, anytime, right?

Mason cuts off the end of the wire, then begins stripping the plastic sheath about an inch from the tip.

MASON
Yep, or you could text them.

He pulls off the plastic sheath, inspects the wire's shiny new terminal.

There's a long, pregnant PAUSE as Mason switches back to his pliers and begins threading the wire back into the radio's guts.

Sean finally musters up the courage to say:

SEAN
Grandpa, do you not want there to
be more Bigs like me around?

Mason winces slightly, stops his work.

MASON
It's not that, it's just... well,
they weren't all like you.

Sean nods, but still looks unsettled.

Mason curls the end of the wire and manages to hook it around a tiny terminal on the radio's circuit board. Then he pauses his work again.

MASON (CONT'D)
I... look, I know you never really
lived in that world.
(MORE)

MASON (CONT'D)

But as tough as it might be for you being the only Big around, being the only "Little Person" around was a lot worse.

A long BEAT.

MASON (CONT'D)

I do want you to be happy, though.
(beat, then with a hint of smile)

I mean, why the hell do you think I'm elbow deep in this shit right now?

Sean smiles and nods, then after a few moments:

SEAN

So whatever happened to all the phones?

Mason resumes his work on the radio.

MASON

Ah. Well, they worked for a year or so after the Event, but bit by bit, the whole system broke down. So we fell back to this ancient shit.

SEAN

But it works. Sometimes, anyway.

MASON

(sighing)
Yeah, true. Better than going all the way back to the Pony Express... or goddamn smoke signals.

Sean looks baffled.

SEAN

What signals? Did you say "smoke"?

Mason smirks.

EXT. SUTTER FARM - POTATO FIELD - DAY

A week later. Mason is in his potato field again. The plants are much bigger than before, but look brown, dry, dead.

He dusts off a POTATO and drops it into a nearly-full WAGON, then kneels down and starts digging around in the soil with his hand.

Sean walks up, pulling an EMPTY WAGON.

SEAN

You were right about that hormone stuff, huh?

MASON

Yep. Shaved at least three weeks off this grow time. Good ol' Rick knows his shit.

Sean points at the wagon full of potatoes.

SEAN

You want me to take those now?

Mason pulls another sizable potato from the dirt.

MASON

Nah, we're almost done. But you can grab all those dead leaves and stuff over there, bring it to the compost pile.

SEAN

Got it.

Still kneeling and holding the potato, Mason sees Erin coming out the back door of the house. She calls to him:

ERIN

Dad? We've got a visitor.

Dr. Brock emerges behind her, in her street clothes and carrying a SMALL MEDICAL CASE of some kind.

DR. BROCK

Good afternoon!

MASON

(muttering to self)
It was.

On their approach, he gets off his knees, still holding the dirty potato.

MASON (CONT'D)

What brings you all the way up here?

DR. BROCK

I tried reaching you, but there was no reply. I guess your radio's down?

MASON

Yeah, been trying to find a part.
Over a week now.

(indicating Sean)

Not a day goes by that Romeo over
there doesn't remind me.

(beat)

You got some news, I guess?

DR. BROCK

Yes, some promising findings. But
we need a bit more genetic
information to complete the puzzle.

Mason glances over at Sean, who's nearby loading up dead
potato plant leaves onto his wagon.

MASON

Jesus, haven't you poked and
prodded the boy enough?

The doctor shakes her head.

DR. BROCK

Not Sean. We need you.

He blinks.

MASON

The hell are you talking about?

Sean, overhearing, now stops his work and begins slowly
walking toward them with curiosity.

DR. BROCK

We're trying to isolate the traits
that make Sean and others like him
immune.

MASON

What does that have to do with me?

DR. BROCK

It turns out the key trait might be
inherited on the mother's side —
specifically, from the mother's
father. Like male pattern baldness.

MASON

What the fuck? Me?

She opens the medical case, roots around in it.

DR. BROCK

Yes. We need to sequence your DNA to confirm our theory.

She pulls out a PACKAGED SWAB.

DR. BROCK (CONT'D)

It's painless, just a swab run along the inside of your cheek.

MASON

No fucking way.

Brock finally loses her patience with him.

DR. BROCK

(angrily)

You know, today I've already given a couple the bad news that their fetus is double-dominant and will need an abortion. But that's the kind of shit I dealt with in the Before Times as well. A quarter of the time when it came to people like us. That's just how we're built.

(beat)

But you know what the worse news is? The news I now get to give folks just as often? That their fetus is a Big. That they should carry the pregnancy to term, on the one-in-two-thousand chance their baby won't die painfully within a month of being born.

MASON

So this is my problem now. It's on me all of a sudden.

DR. BROCK

(softening)

This could be the break we've been hoping for.

She holds the swab out to him.

DR. BROCK (CONT'D)

Please.

He looks at her for a moment, then glances at Erin and Sean, seeming to waver.

MASON

Dammit, you know how I feel about this shit. And now you want me to be a part of it?

He shakes his head.

MASON (CONT'D)

I told you, we're the survivors. Nature has spoken. And you don't mess with Nature.

There's a long silence. Finally:

SEAN

Uh, Grandpa?

Mason looks at the boy, who nods with significance toward the POTATO Mason is holding.

Mason looks down at the potato. Ready to eat, weeks before its time.

After a few moments, he looks over at Sean again.

Mason's weathered, grizzled facade softens ever so slightly.

MASON

(you got me)
God dammit.

He tosses the potato into the wagon and dusts off his hands.

MASON (CONT'D)

Fine, gimme the fucking swab.

END