

THE CALIFORNIANS

By

Highly Derivative

"I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought,
but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones."
- Albert Einstein

FADE IN:

EXT. WASTELAND - DAY

Barren, scorched earth stretches out to distant mountains.

A shoe presses into dry, crumbling dirt. Then another shoe.
Odd shoes. Dusty and worn. A second pair follow moments
later. Just as worn, but matching at least.

NOAH, 10, and RUTH, 12, walk under an oppressive sun.
Tattered clothing. Knotted hair. Noah is struggling with a
backpack that's as long as his torso is short, Ruth carries a
bundle over her shoulder.

NOAH
Can we stop?

RUTH
No. Not yet.

NOAH
I'm so tired, I need--

RUTH
I said no. Soon. We'll rest soon.

They march silently on.

EXT. WASTELAND - EVENING

Noah reaches into his rucksack, pulls out what looks like
beef jerky and shows it to Ruth.

NOAH
It's all that's left.

Ruth looks at the mountains, now a little nearer, sees a
light flickering. A vehicle light perhaps? Smiles to herself.

RUTH
We'll hunt tomorrow.

Noah nods "okay" and unrolls a sleeping bag.

EXT. WASTELAND - MORNING

The sun hangs low on the horizon.

Noah and Ruth are huddled in the sleeping bag.

Ruth's eyes open. She wakes Noah with a nudge.

NOAH

Huh?

Ruth climbs to her feet, looks at the smoking embers of a dying campfire.

RUTH

C'mon, let's go.

Noah rubs away sleep from his eyes.

NOAH

Already?

She ignores him as she studies the mountains.

RUTH

That way.

NOAH

North? Closer to the Trumpists?

RUTH

We've got no choice. Can't go south, not back to the virus lands. East and west aren't an option now. Has to be north.

NOAH

But--

RUTH

But nothing. We go north.

Noah rolls up the sleeping bag.

EXT. WASTELAND/MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

Noah and Ruth stand at the opening of a mountain pass.

RUTH

Remember California?

NOAH

Yeah, I remember.

(CONTINUED)

Ruth takes a step forwards, Noah follows, hesitant.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

They tread carefully, one behind the other, their eyes wide.

Ruth pauses, raises a hand for Noah to stop.

RUTH

Look.

She points to an empty baked beans tin on the ground.

Noah goes to pick it up.

RUTH

(whispering)

Wait, you hear that? Up ahead.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - MOMENTS LATER

Noah and Ruth look down at a fox caught in a bear trap.

NOAH

It's still alive.

RUTH

Barely.

NOAH

Think it's been here long?

RUTH

A few days maybe, but the trap
might have--what's that?

Noah shakes his head, unsure what to say.

Ruth picks up a cigarette butt, smells it, rolls it between
her fingers.

RUTH

It's recent.

Ruth looks over her shoulder, then;

RUTH (CONT'D)

Maybe we're being watched already.

They hold eye contact for a few seconds. Not a word is said,
but something is shared.

(CONTINUED)

Noah crouches, watches as the fox takes its last breath.

NOAH

What now?

Ruth bends down.

RUTH

Help me get it open. But watch yourself. These traps can be--

NOAH

I know I know. Don't worry, I'll be fine, we've done this enough times already.

Ruth starts to open the trap as Noah reaches in.

RUTH

Wait, I'm not--

She loses her grip and the trap slams shut on Noah's arm.

He lets out a blood-curdling scream.

RUTH

FUCK!

Ruth pries open the trap and Noah pulls his arm free.

Noah clutches at his forearm as Ruth pulls some cloth from her bindle and wraps his arm tightly.

EXT. MOUNTAIN OPENING - LATER

Ruth drags Noah out into the opening, sees smoke coming from the chimney of a small log cabin up ahead.

EXT. LOG CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Ruth sits Noah down by a step, looks at the cabin. Its windows have all been boarded up.

She sees a *Ring video Doorbell Pro* and tries it. Silence. It's off grid now. She sees an old bell nearby and rings it.

Moments pass then a peephole in the door slides open, revealing a man's eyes. Piercing. Cold.

RUTH

My brother, he's hurt. Hurt bad.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

Take a step back, lemme look at ya!

Ruth steps back, waits. Nervous.

The eyes look her up and down, holding on her body, then at Noah.

The peephole slams shut and the door swings open.

JOHN, 40s, a hunter, steps out armed with what looks like a shotgun that's been repurposed as a crossbow.

He sizes them up, then gestures for them to enter.

INT. LOG CABIN - NIGHT

Sparsely furnished. Survival gear scattered around.

Noah is asleep on the couch, Ruth is at a table.

John slides a can of baked beans in front of Ruth.

RUTH

No, thank you.

JOHN

Suit ya'self... I heard there's nothing much left out there. Well, that was a while back now.

John goes to a cupboard and takes out a portable morse-code machine that looks like a touchscreen smartphone from the 2020s, places it on table. Demonstrates how it operates.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I don't hear from anyone nowadays. Maybe it's the virus, or the Trumpists. Hell, one person even said people out west got so hungry they turned on each other. I don't know; maybe God has left us to the Devil.

(thinks)

Where d'ya say you came from?

Ruth notices Noah watching them. John follows her line of sight, Noah closes his eyes, pretends to sleep.

RUTH

I didn't. East. Before the bomb.

John looks at Ruth, unsure if he believes her.

INT. LOG CABIN. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ruth leans over a small basin to wash her hair. A candle is all that lights the room until...

Light creeps in as the door creaks opens. John is holding a lantern at the doorway, his eyes pressing into her.

Ruth turns, stiffens up, she knows what he wants.

John steps into the room. Sweat glistens on his forehead.

Something behind John catches her eye and she stumbles to the floor.

RUTH
I... I... Wait.

Ruth starts to unbutton her shirt.

John moves closer. Too close. He unbuckles his belt and--

--FWOOTCH!

The tip of an arrow juts out from his mouth. His body shudders. He tries to look at the arrow, his eyes crossing, then slumps to the floor.

Noah is at the door, side on, lowers the shotgun-crossbow.

Ruth looks at Noah, a smile creeps across her face.

Noah stands square on, revealing he only has one arm.

NOAH
What now?

They look at the body on the floor.

RUTH
We eat.

NOAH
Like California?

RUTH
Like California.

Ruth climbs to her feet and they drag the body out of the room.

FADE OUT.