The Morning after the Morning After

A Feature

Written by
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Based on the characters and events

in the novels by Roberta M Roy:

JOLT: A RURAL NOIR

TWO CLOSE: A STORY OF SURVIVAL

HOME AGAIN 2020

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SPACE -- WEATHER SATELLITE VIEW, SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

Immense Hurricane Ida approaches a Gulf Coast landfall.

SUPER: "Hurricane Ida"

SUPER: "August 2021"

EXT. LOUISIANA - VARIOUS - DAY

Ida slams ashore with great fury.

Palms bend and break.

Wind-driven storm surge crashes on Lake Pontchartrain.

Roofs surrender to the Category Four winds and blow away.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - SUBWAYS - DAY

Torrents of water rush into tunnels and flood them.

EXT. LOUISIANA - VARIOUS - DAY

The aftermath of Ida: total devastation.

Fishing trawlers on front lawns.

Vehicles overturned and strewn.

People slog through deep standing water.

Boats navigate flooded streets.

Debris from fallen buildings everywhere.

A dead fish lies in a road.

FULL SCREEN TITLE: “Always Something New”

EXT. MATTERS PORCH - NIGHT

MARY and LOU MATTERS are heading out and down their front porch stairs. Lou is in the lead. Mary closes the door and follows.

MARY
Lou, I was thinking. Given Carlos is in such denial of climate change, could you do us all a favor and not bring it up?

Lou looks back toward Mary, gives a small nod and raises his shoulder.

INT. SOLER' HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Adults gather. CARLOS and LENORE SOLER, MARY and LOU MATTERS along with JIM and ADELE ATKINS. All in their thirties to forties. A pitcher of iced-tea and half-filled glasses adorn the area.

Masks stick out from pockets.

JIM
Why were we so surprised by Ida's force?

CARLOS
Yes. Hurricane Ida really whacked the city. Seeing the water pouring into the subways was mind blowing.

LOU
Good old climate change. Drought and fires in the west and now storms and flooding beyond the South and Midwest. Even here in the Northeast.

Carlos takes a beat, looks at Jim.

CARLOS
I think it's just a bad year.

Lou guffaws.

LOU
Well, get ready for the next one. Who knows what it'll bring?

Lenore pours some iced tea for Carlos.

CARLOS
Gracias, mi amor.

Carlos takes a drink of his tea, nods his head.

CARLOS
At the dealership we're selling more hybrids.

LOU
Electric cars will help. But producing the electricity needed remains a key question.

Carlos remains silent.

JIM
Tell me about it.

LOU
My boys have been asking if we're going to get rid of nuclear power.

JIM
What do you think?

LOU
Right now nuclear fission provides 20 percent of our power. The ITER in Southern France will be the first nuclear fusion plant. Except it won't be ready for maybe four or more years.

Carlos picks up a magazine and inspects it.

JIM
An international effort? Right? Germany, France, U-S. Even with that, as you say, won't be ready before 2025 or 26.

LOU
It'll be another 25 years before we can produce energy here with fusion. So the best we can do is to build safer nuclear fission plants.

Mary offers to fill Lou's glass. Lou nods in acceptance.

JIM
With fission they split the uranium atom. What do they fuse?

LOU
Smaller atoms -- deuterium and tritium -- to make helium.

JIM
Helium, huh?

LOU
Yup. Fusion offers four times the energy of fission. Can you imagine? Four million times the energy of coal or gas.

Lou takes a sip of tea.

JIM
Any risks?

LOU
Unlike fission, fusion produces a short-lived, minimally radioactive product.

Lou places his glass on a coaster on the coffee table.

CARLOS
So then perhaps once the plants are built, the cost of energy will be less.

Lou thinks a beat then addresses Carlos.

LOU
I suppose that's possible. But the cost of the building a fusion plant is extreme -- maybe ten billion dollars. And takes ten or more years to complete.

MARY
Enough of this heavy talk. It's Saturday night. And, hurray, we're no longer involved in distant learning. Time to celebrate.

MONTAGE - WORLD PROBLEMS

EXT. AFGHANISTAN - BORDER - DAY

Afghans cross to seek refuge.

A sprawling tent city awaits them.

EXT. GUATEMALA - FIELDS - DAY

Parched, cracked earth under extreme drought.

Crops wither from lack of water.

EXT. US-MEXICO BORDER - DAY

Thousands of immigrants push and shove to enter the US.

END MONTAGE

INT. MATTERS HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

JASON (16) and MARTY (14) prepare after school snacks.

Jason pulls out glasses from the cabinet, hands one to Marty, then helps himself to milk from the refrigerator. Sets the carton on the counter.

JASON
Any new kids in your class this year, Marty?

MARTY
Yeah. Twins. From Afghanistan. Near Kabul. Hestar and Aktar.

Jason sips his milk. Takes a beat.

JASON
Hmm. Rhyming names.

MARTY
Both names mean the same thing. Star.

JASON
We have a new kid from El Salvador. Seems nice. Doesn't speak much English.

Marty pours himself some milk.

MARTY
What's his name?

JASON
Javier Iglesias.

MARTY
Does he have family here?

JASON
Nope. Came by himself.

Marty drinks his milk. Puts the milk back in the refrigerator.

MARTY
All the way from El Salvador?

JASON
Dad died of COVID. And there was little food for his family.

Both boys sit. A box of graham crackers is on the table. Marty reaches for one.

MARTY
So he came here alone?

JASON
Yeah. It's really hot there. And there's drought. So his mom told him to leave.

Marty turns open end of box toward Jason.

MARTY
Wow! It must be pretty bad?

JASON
He came north across the Mexican border. Then in June they sent him to live with the Maduros.

MARTY
Poor kid. Lost his dad then drought. Some world.

Marty takes a bit of his cracker. Thinks.

JASON
Yeah. In a way, it's good in the plant went down.

Marty scrunches his face.

MARTY
Whaddaya mean?

JASON
Forces us to look to wind, water, and solar power.

MARTY
Yeah. On TV they talk about the future of nuclear.

Marty takes another bite of his cracker. Drinks some milk.

JASON
Given he worked at the plant before it went down, dad's got a lot to say about it. We should ask him.

Marty swallows, looks at Jason, takes a beat.

MARTY
Yeah. We're lucky the brain injury from that dirty bomb explosion at the plant didn't affect his memory.

JASON
Lots of times I even forget about his vision loss.

SERIES OF SHOT - SCHOOL UNDER COVID

- Students distance and all wear masks.

- Maskless students eat lunch at their desks.

EXT. ARIANA - MATTERS' HOME - DAY

Marty and CARL ATKINS (13) exit the school bus, remove masks as they enter their homes.

EXT. ARIANA - MATTERS' HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

Masks peek from the pockets of Jason (15)and RICKY SOLER (14) as they kick around a soccer ball.

Marty watches.

Mary carries out iced tea.

Ricky and Jason stop to join her. Marty trots over too.

MARY
You guys up for some iced tea?

JASON
Yeah. Sure, Mom. Thanks.

They down the tea.

JASON
Hey, Mom, suppose I invite Javier, the new kid, over to play soccer with us. I hear he's pretty good at it.

MARY
Sounds like a nice idea.

Ricky gives a shrug and a questioning look.

RICKY
Doesn't speak much English. Seems nice. Smiles a lot.

JASON
Have you talked with him?

Ricky laughs.

RICKY
I mimed vaccination and pointed to him. He said yes so I signed I was vaccinated. It's tough talking to him. Seems all he can say in English is, "Hello, my name is Iglesias."

JASON
Then we hand him a ball and play. What do we have to lose?

Marty looks skyward.

MARTY
Whatever.

INT. MATTERS' HOME - DINING AREA - DAY

Lou is on the phone at his computer with Harry McFee, the manager at Ariana Business Services.

LOU
Happy you like my work, Harry.
(listens)
Yes. I'd be willing to try brochures. Send me the rough info.
(pause to listen)
If I get it soon, I'll send you a mock up tomorrow. Okay? Take care.

Lou hangs up the phone and types on his computer.

LATER

The Matters over dinner.

LOU
So, guys, how was your first day of school?

MARTY
There are two Afghan refugees in our class. Aktar and Hestar Hussain.

LOU
Ak-tar and Hee-star?

Marty gives a shrug.

MARTY
Yeah. I thought maybe I'd jus' call them Art and Hester.

LOU
What's wrong with calling them Aktar and Hestar?

Marty pulls back, gives his dad a puzzled look.

MARTY
Well, nothing. Except Aktar? Hestar? Gimme a break. Each time they meet someone, they have to coach the guy on the spelling so they can say it.

Lou attends to his food.

LOU
I think I'd leave a name change up to them.

Marty shrugs.

MARTY
Come to think of it, their English is good enough, so I think I'll ask them if it's all right if I call them Art and Hester.

MARY
If anyone is up to it, it's probably you.

Mary and Jason laugh.

MARY
I think you may have something. Names that are easier to say could help them be more readily accepted.

JASON
Yeah, Dad. Marty tells me that their father was an interpreter for the Americans in Afghanistan so the whole family speaks English well.

Lou takes a beat. Looks at Jason.

LOU
From Afghanistan? Glad they made it out.

JASON
Art calls the Arabic he speaks Pashto. He said there's lots of languages in Afghanistan but they all use the same alphabet.

MARTY
Hester wears a hijab. Some of the kids said they thought she was trying to look like a saint.

Marty harrumphs. Looks at his plate.

MARTY (CONT'D)
I hate it when they talk like that.

MARY
How are the girls with her?

Marty nods approvingly.

MARTY
Pretty good. I noticed that she sat and talked with them at lunch.

LOU
How is masking and distancing going?

JASON
Lots of kids aren't vaccinated. Not like they're too young. Like Steven. I mean those over 12. So everyone is being careful. Even the teachers wore masks. Didn't matter that most of them are vaccinated.

MONTAGE - FACES OF COVID

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Adults wait in line to be vaccinated.

INT. DRUG STORE - DAY

Scores of teens and adults wait for vaccinations.

INT. HOSPITAL - ICU - DAY

Intubated Patients isolated in a COVID ward.

END MONTAGE

EXT. ARIANA - MATTERS' HOME - FRONT PORCH - DAY

JASON
Say, Dad, I asked Mom and she says it'd be okay if I invite the new boy from El Salvador over to play soccer.

LOU
What's his name?

JASON
Javier. He lives with the Maduros.

Lou takes a beat.

LOU
Nice family, the Maduros.

JASON
Javier left El Salvador because of drought and heat.

LOU
Terrible. And that's fine. Invite him.

JASON
Thanks, Dad.

Jason takes a beat then wrinkles his forehead.

JASON
Dad, the other night this guy on TV was talking about how important the use of nuclear power is to combat climate change.

MARTY
We already had a meltdown. Wouldn't it be better to stop using nuclear power?

Lou thinks, then addresses Marty.

LOU
The nuclear power of the future will be different from nuclear power of the past.

JASON
How so?

LOU
The nuclear power that was used in our plant was nuclear fission. The power of the future will be nuclear fusion.

MARTY
What's the difference?

LOU
Nuclear fission splits atoms. Nuclear fusion fuses smaller atoms into larger ones.

Marty scrunches his face in disbelief.

MARTY
They can do that?

LOU
To an extent. Maybe by 2050 we'll be able to do it.
(then)
Tell ya what. We can talk about this another time. Right now, let's just enjoy the evening.

EXT. ARIANA - MATTERS' HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

A cookout underway.

Adele and Jim, Lenore and Carlos at a picnic table.

Lou mans the grill.

Mary carries out sides.

Carl and Marty kick around a soccer ball. STEVEN SOLER (10) tries to keep up.

Jason arrives with Javier.

Jim rises to welcome him.

Marty and Carl gather round.

Jim offers Javier his hand.

JIM
Hello, Javier. I'm Jim. I understand you're pretty good at soccer.

JAVIER
Si. Yes. Yes. Soccer good. Bien.

Jim mimes all present are vaccinated, and asks about Javier.

JIM
Vaccinated, Javier?

Javier mimes vaccination, nods his head: yes.

JIM
All vaccinated. Steven, no. Comprendi? Bueno. Welcome.

Carlos extends his hand to Javier.

Note: in Spanish subtitled in English

CARLOS
Hola Javier. Bienvenido. Escuché que eres bueno en el fútbol. Bueno.
(Hello, Javier. Welcome. I heard you're great at soccer.)

JAVIER
Lo intento. Gracias.
(I try. Thank you.}

Carlos
Escuché que hiciste el equipo de fútbol.
(I heard you made the soccer team.}

JAVIER
Sí. Gracias.
(Yes. Thank you.)

Lou calls from the grill.

LOU
Bienvenido a nuestra casa, Javier.
(Welcome to our home, Javier.)
I'm Lou. Papa to Jason. Papa to Marty.

Javier smiles, waves.

JAVIER
Nice to meetya.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

A female Classmate purposely bumps HESTAR (14) who wears a hijab. Another girl pushes Hestar's books to the floor.

Hestar picks up her notebook and papers.

It shocks Hestar when another Female Student lifts a book and hands it to her.

Male Classmates gang up on Hestar's twin, AKTAR. They back off when he remains cool and speaks with confidence.

INT. MATTERS' HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Lou is with Marty who has just returned from school. His books are on the counter, topped by his mask.

LOU
Ya done good, Marty. So now they're Art and Hester?

MARTY
Yeah, Art and I are kinda friends. He just laughed when I told him no one would notice if I also called his sister Hester instead of Hestar.

Lou laughs, shakes his head.

MARTY
Hate it how some of the kids say nasty things to them.

LOU
Like what?

MARTY
Get this, Dad. One boy asked Art if he knew any of the terrorists that took down the Twin Towers.

LOU
How did Art handle that?

Marty gives a nod.

MARTY
He was cool. Just said his father was an interpreter for the American troops in Afghanistan and was just a kid when the towers came down. He said he'll ask his dad if he knew anything. Art said he wasn't even born then.

LOU
And the boy?

Marty laughs.

MARTY
It shut him up. So another boy asked him if his father had taught him English. Art told him yes. His mom and sister, too.

LOU
Sounds like he can handle himself.

EXT. ARIANA - MATTERS' HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

No masks but social distancing in practice.

A jam with The Upbeats, Marty's band.

Marty strums guitar. Carl on drums and bells. Lead singer, Ricky. Jason operates the mixing board and recorder.

Jason's friend, CANDI CORLESS (14) listens.

MARTY
What do you think, guys? Cool?

CANDI
I think you all sound great.

MARTY
Been working on it all summer. You like Carl's new bells and drums?

CANDI
Very nice, Carl.

FULL SCREEN TITLE: “Settling In”

INT. SOLER' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Unmasked, Mary and Lenore sip tea.

LENORE
How's your district handling COVID, Mary?

MARY
Pretty much following the mandate. Most of the staff are vaccinated. Those who aren't are tested weekly.

LENORE
How about the students?

MARY
Fewer are vaccinated. But as we know, all over 12 need to be by October 15 or they will return to distant learning.

LENORE
Our district, the same. Plus everyone is masked.

Lenore takes a sip of tea.

MARY
Us, too. The kids seem pretty comfortable with it. And happy to be back to in-person learning. Yours?

LENORE
Same. My class makeup hasn't changed much. Still one to 12 to one. Same teaching assistant. One new boy. Seems sweet.

MARY
Yeah. Some changes in my caseload. One boy left at the end of last year. Three new students.

LENORE
How about their disabilities?

Mary takes a beat. Sips her tea.

MARY
One from Guatemala has English as a second language. Has relatives here. He comes from what they call the Dry Corridor that runs through Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.

LENORE
I heard about it. Severe heat and drought impoverish the area. Families are fleeing to survive.

MARY
The others are from nearby counties. One is dysfluent. The other has a learning disability.

LENORE
Still a lot on the autism spectrum?

MARY
Some.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Both masked, Marty passes Hestar.

MARTY
Say, Hester. How are you?

HESTAR
I'm okay.

Marty
Do you mind if I ask you a question?

HESTAR
No. What?

Marty takes a beat. Waves his hand by the side of his face.

MARTY
Well, I was thinking. Do you have to wear the hijab?

HESTAR
No. I like to wear it.

Marty evidences surprise.

MARTY
You don't have to? If you didn't, your mother and father wouldn't mind?

HESTAR
No. In fact my father thinks I shouldn't wear it.

Marty takes a beat.

MARTY
But you like to.

HESTAR
Yes. It makes me feel modest. My mom wears one.

MARTY
But you don't have to.

HESTAR
No. I don't have to.

INT. SCHOOL - MARY'S OFFICE - DAY

Both masked, Mary reads a picture book with Guatemalan immigrant RODRIGO GARCIA (9) who evidences heavy Spanish accent.

MARY
She is a girl. Can you say that? She is a girl.

RODRIGO
She is a girl.

MARY
He's a boy.

Mary points to Rodrigo and repeats.

MARY
He's a boy.

RODRIGO
He's a boy.

MARY
She's a girl and he's a boy.

RODRIGO
She's a girl n' he's a boy.

Done, she closes the book, smiles at Rodrigo.

She taps her watch and stands.

MARY
Time to go back to class. I'll see you tomorrow, Rodrigo.

Rodrigo stands.

They leave Mary's office together.

MONTAGE - POWER SOURCES

EXT. SOUTHERN FRANCE - DAY

The ITER facility and power plant.

EXT. UNITED STATES - VARIOUS - DAY

SOLAR FARMS

collect the sun's rays.

WIND TURBINES

swoop on vast, wind-driven plains.

A NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

gleams as water vapor curls from the containment.

END MONTAGE

INT. MATTERS' HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Mary prepares lunch.

Marty pours himself milk.

MARTY
Hey, Mom, the teacher was teaching Javier the colors in English. Someone asked Javier to use green, pink and yellow in a sentence.

MARY
And...?

MARTY
He said the phone went green-green and he pink it up and say 'Yellow'.

Mary shakes her head, smiles.

MARY
I thought you didn't like it when people made fun of immigrants, Marty.

Marty shrugs.

MARTY
Javier laughed when I told it to him.

INT. MATTERS' HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY

Lou puts on headphones and reads as he follows along on the page with his finger.

When Jason enters, Lou removes the headphones.

LOU
Morning, Jason. Listening as I read. Figure hearing it read helps compensate for any misreading I might have.

JASON
That's a good idea.

Lou pushes back one headphone.

LOU
Thanks, Jason. How was your day?

JASON
Okay. School's going well. Everyone seems comfortable with masking and social distancing.

LOU
And your classes?

JASON
So much better in person. Somehow it seems to make learning easier. Plus, I get to see my friends.

EXT. ARIANA - MATTERS' HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

The Matters at the picnic table.

LOU
You know, Mary, I've been thinking that in my spare time I might develop a website on climate change and the use of clean energy. What do you think?

Mary takes a beat. Nods.

MARY
Sounds interesting. How would you organize it?

LOU
First of all, I'd keep it simple. I'd define climate change and explain why and how it affects us.

MARY
Sounds good.

LOU
I'd put up links to ideas about how we might reduce its effects.

Marty is interested.

MARTY
Things like clean energy sources?

LOU
Yeah, and reforestation, reduction on reliance on grazing animals for meat and the like.

MARY
Interesting.

LOU
A person could sign in, read just the first page, and if they felt like it, look further by clicking on the links.

MARTY
I think that would be great, Dad.

Jason sits forward.

JASON
Me, too. And you could include a timeline of the future of clean energy and explain the difference between nuclear fission and nuclear fusion.

MARTY
(laughs)
I get it. Just a lesson to lessen the con-fusion from going fission in the lake.

Jason pokes Marty in the shoulder but he goes on.

MARTY
What about fracking? Would you write about its effects?

Lou looks at Marty. Thinks.

LOU
It wouldn't be the first thing I'd address. It's banned in our state. But, yes, fracking would be a good topic to include in the links.

JASON
Yeah, Dad. A site with simple explanations on ways to reduce climate change is a great idea.

LOU
Glad you like the idea.

JASON
I saw a site for P-S-R, Physicians for Social Responsibility. It's helpful for someone who's already informed and wants to take action, but for someone like me, I need a simple site to inform me.

LOU
Well, that's my plan!

FULL SCREEN TITLE: “Moving On”

EXT. MATTERS' HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

Distanced and without masks, The Upbeats -- Jason, Marty, Carl and Ricky -- perform.

Masked Candi looks on as Marty leads the group.

INT. MATTERS' HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY

Lou on a telephone interview with Carsten Wright.

LOU
Carsten, your resume suggests you're exactly the assistant I'm seeking. It's important to me that in addition to knowledge of web design you're an English major.
(listens)
How are you as a member of a team?
(listens)
Excellent. I need someone who can not only work independently but proof my English. I don't always recognize my errors.
(listens)
I have left side hemianopsia. It means I can't see the left half of my field of vision. Although I'm a bit slow, I can read. I just want to be sure that whatever I prepare is in proper English. Does it sound like something you'd be willing to do?
(listens)
Very good. We're in agreement. I need you to sign the independent contractor agreement and I'll send you the first assignment.
(listens)
Very good. I'll look for it. Talk to you soon.

INT. SOLER' HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mary, Lenore and Adele clean up after a neighborhood dinner.

No one wears a mask.

MARY
Looks like more of the immigrants coming over the Mexican border are reaching us. There's a new boy on my caseload from Guatemala. Speaks next to no English. Pleasant child, though. Smiles a lot.

LENORE
We met Javier, the Salvadorian boy in Ricky's class. Pretty good at soccer.

ADELE
I saw. Soccer, which they call football, is the national sport of El Salvador.

Mary rinses dishes, talks over her shoulder.

MARY
Marty says there are twins -- a boy and girl -- from Afghanistan in his class.

ADELE
Carl tells me they speak English well.

MARY
Their father was an interpreter for the American Forces. They're here on S-I-Vs; Special Immigrant Visas.

Lenore stops what she is doing. Looks at Adele and then at Mary.

LENORE
I don't dare talk about this in front of Carlos. He's so conservative.

They all take a beat.

MARY
Have been keeping up with the news out of California?

LENORE
Yes. I'm interested in how the California recall vote against Newsom will go.

ADELE
It started over things like Newsom being against the death penalty and requiring masking and listening to the teacher's unions. I think it will come down to the question of how he's handling COVID.

Mary is finished rinsing. Turns.

MARY
The President, Vice President and some Democratic Congresswomen are going to speak in his support.

ADELE
Whatever happens, I think it'll suggest which way the 2022 midterm elections will lean.

LENORE
Scary.

LIVING ROOM

Jim, Lou and Carlos socialize. Unmasked.

Jim laughs.

JIM
Seems like all Carl wants to do in his spare time is play the drums. I can see why. The Upbeats were over yesterday and they definitely are developing style.

Lou laughs.

LOU
What's nice about it is we always know where they are. Either by the sound of a soccer game or their music.

JIM
Marty seems to be the key event planner. Gets 'em all over for practice at your house on Tuesday afternoons.

LOU
And for soccer on Thursdays. Except now with Jason and Ricky having soccer practice, it's more catch-as-catch-can for them.

JIM
Still, Carl is perfectly happy to just kick the ball around with Marty.

Carlos, proudly.

CARLOS
Now that Steven is older, he's big enough to join them. And leave it to Marty. He never forgets to remind him when it's Thursday.

JIM
We're lucky to have such a nice crew of boys. No girls yet. But it'll come.

The three Men smile and nod in agreement.

LOU
Did either of you get to watch the hearing with Secretary Blinken about the way the war in Afghanistan ended?

JIM
Guess they didn't plan enough for contingencies.

LOU
Who thought the Afghan government would collapse so quickly. Or for that matter the military?

Carlos shows discontent.

CARLOS
My concern is all the Americans and Afghans with S-I-Vs we left there.

They all take a beat.

JIM
For me, the main thing is we're out of there. Twenty years is about 19 too many for me.

Lou. Changing the focus.

LOU
Marty tells me there are a pair of S-I-V Afghan twins in his class. Their father was an interpreter.

JIM
Seems the kids tease the girl because she wears a hijab. Call her Holy Star 'cause her name means star. Carl says they seem nice. Likes the brother.

LOU
We know Javier. The boys hope he will join their soccer team.

Jim gives a thumbs up.

JIM
From what I saw of him last week in your backyard, I can see why.

INT. SCHOOL - MARY'S OFFICE - DAY

Both masked, Mary works with autistic FINN (12).

MARY
So, Finn. How was your summer? Is it good to be back in school?

Finn looks straight ahead, avoids eye contact with Mary.

FINN
I have the same teacher as I did last year. Barbara is still in my class. But I just don't talk to her. And when she is rude to me, I ignore her.

MARY
Great! Sounds like you are maturing.

Finn continues to face the wall.

FINN
Yes, I am maturing. This summer I learned a lot of grown up things to do.

MARY
Really. Very interesting. But Finn, would you mind looking at me as we talk?

He turns to look at Mary.

FINN
Yeah, I worked with my Dad. We finished the shed for our horse and built a fence around it.

MARY
Pretty heavy work?

FINN
Yes. It was tiring. But my dad said Splatters really needed the shed finished before the cold weather came and he said it was a big job and he really needed my help.

Finn breaks eye contact, again looks straight ahead.

MARY
How's your mother? Still working in the nursing home?

FINN
She's okay.

MARY
Did you do anything with her?

FINN
Yes. I cooked.

Finn establishes eye contact, speaks with seriousness.

FINN
I made a custard pie. And stew. And tomato sauce and spaghetti.

MARY
Really!? Wow! Maybe you could come and make supper for me sometime.

She laughs.

Finn takes Mary seriously and looks away again.

FINN
Well, I'd have to ask my mother.

MARY
Just kidding, Finn. You have enough to do. I do believe you're becoming a good cook.

Finn pauses then a serious look at Mary.

FINN
May I leave now? I think its time to start social studies.

MARY
Of course, Finn. So nice seeing you. Please tell your mother I said hello. And your dad.

Mary rises when Finn does.

They head for the door.

He hurries without looking back.

MARY
Let me walk you back to class...

Finn, gone. Well ahead of Mary.

INT. MATTERS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

All unmasked, Jason, Ricky and Lou on the couch.

LOU
The Senate voted 69 to 30 to give overwhelming bipartisan support to the president's infrastructure bill, but now the Democrats want to tie it to the passage of a social safety net for health care, child and elder care and education. It lessens the chances of the infrastructure bill being passed.

Jason sits forward.

JASON
Don't they think it's important to rebuild roads and bridges that are falling apart? And to help slow climate change?

Ricky looks at Jason.

RICKY
I heard the second bill talks about climate change.

Jason addresses Lou.

JASON
Dad. Are you going to talk about passing both these bills on the climate change website? Or do you think we should settle for just the first one? Or not talk about them in any way?

Ricky evidences skepticism.

RICKY
The problem is that if the site becomes political, people like my dad won't read it. He doesn't even believe in climate change. If you mention using taxes to fight it, he'll just stop reading.

Lou nods in agreement.

LOU
Ricky's got a point, Jason. Suppose I do this. I write about climate change and how we can counter its effects and then I provide links to discussions of the bills so that if someone is interested can follow them. I'll include links to both pro and con articles.

RICKY
And articles that talk about different parts of climate change. Like drought. Or flooding.

JASON
After Ida it looked like Amtrak needed upgrading. There were some bridges that went down. And roads that need to be upgraded or fixed.

RICKY
Articles both for and against the bills would be good.

Jason laughs.

JASON
Just not too many against.

INT. MATTERS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

All unmasked, Lou sits at his computer with Jim and Carlos on either side of him.

LOU
You gotta see this.
(types)
I just type in 'climate change causes NASA'.

JIM
Looks like a pretty complex website.

LOU
If you click 'causes', it's very clear and easy to read.

Even Carlos is interested.

CARLOS
Couldya show me the video on the greenhouse effect.

LOU
Sure. See, pretty easy to understand.

Jim points and reads from the screen.

JIM
"Most of the heat is absorbed by greenhouse gases and then radiated in all directions, warming the Earth."

Lou points with his chin.

LOU
Here it lists gases that contribute to the greenhouse effect.

Jim reads.

JIM
Water, nitrous oxide, methane, and carbon dioxide.

Carlos evidences disbelief.

CARLOS
Even water in the air is a problem?

JIM
Well, we need some there. But the hotter the air, the more water it holds.

Carlos sits back.

CARLOS
Never took chemistry.

Lou looks at Carlos.

LOU
I read over quite a bit of the site. You don't have to understand chemistry to get the explanations.

JIM
You just have to trust the explanations.

Lou returns his attention to the screen.

LOU
Well, seems to me if we can't trust the scientists at NASA, who are we gonna trust?

Carlos shrugs.

CARLOS
They did land a man on the moon.

LOU
And put a space station in orbit.

JIM
The helicopter on Mars.

Lou stands and laughs.

LOU
Well, this turned out to be a lot easier than I thought it would be. Can't do better than NASA.

JIM
When I get around to it, I'll pull that NASA site up. Probably more than just climate change of interest on it.

Carlos crosses arms and remains silent.

INT. MATTERS' HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY

Lou on the phone at his computer.

LOU
So, Henry, you like the brochures? Happy to hear that. And happy you are the go-to for volunteer organizations and small businesses.

EXT. SCHOOL - SOCCER FIELD - DAY

Jason, Javier, and Ricky hustle in the soccer match.

SCOREBOARD:
Ariana 2
Mayfield 2

Javier breaks away and drives the ball past the goalkeeper to break the tie and win the game.

The ARIANA PLAYERS gather around Javier and congratulate him.

Good sportsmen, the Ariana team lines up to shake hands with their opponents.

INT. MATTERS' HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY

Lou at his computer.

Unmasked, Jason and Ricky do homework on the dining room table, laptops open before them.

JASON
Dad, my class is studying climate change. We all have to make a presentation, so I'm going to talk about the future of nuclear fusion.

RICKY
Mine, too. I'm going to talk about the need for nuclear fission and how it's being upgraded for safety.

LOU
Sounds good. Let me know if I can help in any way.

INT. SCHOOL - CORRIDOR - DAY

Mary walks with autistic girl, MIRIAM (10).

In her hand, a soft toy Miriam squeezes as she walks.

Mary leads Miriam to her --

OFFICE

Miriam sits at her desk and lays the toy on it.

She looks at Mary, ready to engage.

MARY
Nice to see you so calm and ready, Miriam. What would you like to do today?

MIRIAM
I would like to read a Jo-Jo book. I left mine at home.

MARY
I'm sorry, Miriam. I don't have one. Would you like to read another one? Or would you prefer to write about Jo-Jo?

MIRIAM
I think I would rather read.

Miriam squeezes the toy, keeps it in hand.

MARY
Jo-Jo is white, but I have a story about a girl who is part Black and part White. Like you. Would you like to read that one?

MIRIAM
We could do that.

Mary finds the book on her desk.

MIRIAM
You know my momma's momma is Black.

MARY
You mean your Grandmother, Letty. Yes. I know.

MIRIAM
But my mom was not.

MARY
You remember your mom?

MIRIAM
Yes, I do. And she was not.

INT. SCHOOL - MARTY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Students file in past a TEACHER who greets them. Hestar enters just in front of Marty.

As Hestar passes, SHIRLEY (14) mutters to her.

SHIRLEY
How's the Virgin Mary doing today?

Hestar ignores the crack, moves on to her desk where she rests her backpack.

Shirley bumps into Hestar, knocks her against the desk.

SHIRLEY
So sorry, Mary. Mary, Mary, quite contrary.

Marty moves between Shirley and Hestar.

MARTY
So, Shirley. You go to church?

Shirley tilts her head, puzzled.

MARTY
Do you go to church?

SHIRLEY
Yeah. Sometimes.

MARTY
Anybody ever try to get you to go to a different church?

Shirley grimaces questioningly.

SHIRLEY
No. Why?

MARTY
So your religion is the one you choose.

Shirley shrugs.

SHIRLEY
Yeah. I 'spose.

MARTY
You believe in religious freedom?

Shirley takes a beat.

SHIRLEY
Yeah. You?

MARTY
I do. I do for me. And I do for you. But I also do for Hester.

Questioningly.

SHIRLEY
Now we're talking about Hester?

MARTY
Yes, we're talking about Hester.

SHIRLEY
Why?

Marty looks off then back at Shirley.

MARTY
Seems you don't like that she wears a hijab. Did you know she doesn't have to wear it? Just chooses to.

SHIRLEY
(laughs)
Guess she wants to look like the Virgin Mary,

Marty shrugs.

MARTY
Turns out she does it because in her religion being modest is important. Wearing a hijab helps her with that.

SHIRLEY
Shy Mary.

Marty takes a beat and then looks at Shirley in confrontation.

MARTY
Her name is Hester. You need to treat her with some respect.

Shirley steps back.

SHIRLEY
You're on her side?

MARTY
No, I'm on all our sides. I'm on the side of religious freedom. And I thought you were, too.

INT. SCHOOL - MARY'S OFFICE - DAY

Masked, RODRIGO (10) and Mary look at a First Pictionary.

MARY
Let's look at the animal page. I will point to each animal's name and say it.

Mary does so.

Rodrigo repeats the animal names.

Mary indicates pictures on the page

MARY
What are these, Rodrigo?

RODRIGO
They are animalth.

Mary mimes closed front teeth.

MARY
Rodrigo, can you say animalzzz?

RODRIGO
Animalz.

MARY
Yes! Animals. They are animals.

Mary encourages Rodrigo to try it again.

RODRIGO
They are animals.

EXT. HUSSAIN HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

En route to school, Hestar and Aktar heft books.

Hestar's mother wears a hijab. Today, Hestar does not.

She kisses her mother goodbye.

INT. SCHOOL - MARTY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

All masked, the students again file in.

Ricky takes a book from his backpack and seats himself.

Hestar and Aktar enter. Hestar's long black hair hangs free.

She seats herself at the desk next to Ricky.

RICKY
Good morning, Hester.

Hestar shoots him a quick look, busies with her backpack.

HESTAR
Good morning, Ricky.

MARTY
You look very nice, Hester.

HESTAR
Thank you.

INT. SCHOOL - JASON'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Masks on all.

Jason stands before the class, finishes a presentation.

The TEACHER (40s) watches with great interest.

JASON
One way or another, nuclear power is here to stay.

TEACHER
Thank you, Jason. Well done. And yes. Nuclear power is here to stay although its form will change.

INT. SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY

All masked and socially distant at lunchtime.

Marty at the end of a table, three feet from Hestar. No one else joins them.

Aktar at another table.

MARTY
Hester. Just wondering. How's Shirley been treating you?

Hestar smiles.

HESTAR
All right. Even said hello to me once or twice.

MARTY
That's good to hear.

Hestar takes a beat.

HESTAR
Marty, I never did thank you for standing up for me that morning.

MARTY
Well, either you believe in religious freedom or you don't believe in religious freedom.

HESTAR
I don't think she ever thought of that before you reminded her.

MARTY
Well, maybe it did help.

Hestar gives Marty a shy smile.

HESTAR
Even helped me.

MARTY
Whaddaya mean?

HESTAR
Well, it reminded me that I have the freedom to wear or not wear my hijab.

Marty looks at her. Considers.

MARTY
Hester, I was wondering...

HESTAR
About what?

MARTY
Do you think you and your brother would visit me and my neighbors after school? Like on Tuesday? There are four or five of us who get together in my backyard for a jam session.

Hestar takes a beat.

HESTAR
Sounds like fun. Maybe it'd be best if you asked my brother. What do you think?

MARTY
Will do.

Other students join their table...at a distance.

EXT. ARIANA - MATTERS' HOME - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Seated side-by-side, Mary is close to Lou who has an arm around her. He gives his wife a squeeze.

LOU
Luv' ya, hon.

She smiles and looks up into his eyes.

MARY
Luv 'ya, too.

LOU
Nice to see the boys doing well. Despite the COVID restrictions.

MARY
Having nice friends helps.

LOU
And The Upbeats.

MARY
Too sweet for words.

They sit for a time to enjoy the company and quiet.

LOU
Their boosting both the Moderna and the Johnson and Johnson shots now.

MARY
The Pfizer vaccine can now be used for children five to 11. So even Steven can be protected.

LOU
Slowly. Slowly. All we need now is a treatment.

Mary sits a moment. Thinks.

MARY
You know, Lou, I can't remember what it was like to spend a day without mentioning COVID. You?

LOU
Not really.

INT. SCHOOL - MARY'S OFFICE - DAY

Finn at a desk. He faces Mary at her desk.

Both are masked. With the hope of leaving soon, Finn makes an obvious effort to look at Mary.

FINN
My mom says we are lucky we live where we do.

MARY
Oh, really?

FINN
You know my mom works at the hospital.

MARY
Yes. I do.

FINN
She says people there stay away from each other, wear masks and wash their hands more.

MARY
I think so, too.

Finn takes a beat.

FINN
Can we read and talk about a book?

MARY
Sure. We could. Which one would you like to talk about?

INT. SCHOOL - MARTY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

School's over.

All masked, Students prep to bolt for their buses.

Marty approaches Aktar.

MARTY
Say, Art. I was wondering. Would you like to come over after school tomorrow? You could get a note to ride home on the bus with me. My mom could take you home later.

AKTAR
You don't live far from us. Maybe I can just walk over.

MARTY
Oh, sure. Hester, too. If she wants. Tuesdays we jam. Candi Corless usually comes over to listen. I think you'd both enjoy it.

ART
I'll ask her. But me, I'll be there.

EXT. ARIANA - MATTERS' HOME - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Lou and Carlos sit distant and maskless.

CARLOS
How are you doing with the website design?

LOU
Doing well. Ariana Business Services is using me on a daily basis now. The Cassie's Corner website is expanding and drawing more traffic.

CARLOS
Is she actually selling things?

Lou nods. Explains.

LOU
Mostly masks. And she now offers both home sewn masks with P-M two point five filters and ready made N-95 masks.

CARLOS
I'll have to check it out.

Lou takes a beat.

LOU
I have two more website design requests so I hired an assistant who happens to also be an English major.

CARLOS
Does he help with the Ariana Business Services work?

LOU
Yes. We're also doing brochures. In addition to designing his own, he proofs mine for any errors I may have missed.

CARLOS
Well, Lou, gotta give it to you. Coming back like a tiger.

Lou laughs.

LOU
Thank you. I also asked him to take the lead on the design of one website.

EXT. ARIANA - MATTERS' HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

COVID distancing protocols in place, The Upbeats perform for Candi, Aktar and Hestar.

They finish a tune to APPLAUSE.

Marty takes the break time to pay attention to the bare-headed Hestar.

FULL SCREEN TITLE: "Happy New Year, 2022"

MONTAGE - NEW YEAR, NEW CHALLENGES

INT. WASHINGTON - CANON HOUSE - MEETING ROOM - DAY

The January Sixth Select Committee convenes. Behind the Members, a large TV displays an image of President Trump.

EXT. SOUTHWEST - FARMLAND - DAY

Arid soil swirls in a dust devil.

NOAA METEOROLOGIST (V.O.)
The continuing drought in the Southwest is the most severe in 1,200 years.

Cattle roam parched land.

INT. COMMERCIAL AIRLINERS - DAY

In flight:

> Two Male Passengers in a heated fight over masking.

A Flight Attendant struggles to separate them.

> A Female Passenger punches a Flight Attendant.

END MONTAGE

FULL SCREEN TITLE: "Winter"

INT. MATTERS' HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Breakfast.

LOU MATTERS (40s) greets Son MARTY (15) who bops in.

LOU
Morning, Marty.

Marty hangs backpack and COVID mask on a chair.

MARTY
Morning.

He reaches for OJ.

JASON (17) shuffles in, hangs backpack and mask.

JASON
Morning, Dad.

LOU
Morning, Jay.

Jason pours OJ.

LOU
Best take warm jackets. Gonna drop from high sixties to high thirties.

Marty's look: quizzical.

MARTY
Thirty degrees? A whole 30 degrees?

Lou nods.

Marty LAUGHS.

MARTY
Time for my fleece-lined jacket.
(With mischievous look)
So, Dad. Where are those fur lined gloves?

Lou shoves Marty. Playful.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

The usual: a Teacher lectures and writes on a whiteboard; Students take notes.

Everyone wears a mask.

DOOR PLACARD:
"Mary Matters
Speech Language Pathologist"

INT. MARY'S OFFICE - DAY

MARY MATTERS (40s) works with MIRIAM (12), an African American who grips a book with a platinum blonde girl on the cover.

MIRIAM
But I like her.

Mary entices her with another book.

MARY
I like her, too. Still, it'd be nice to read books about other girls too.

Miriam ponders.

MIRIAM
I could write about her.

MARY
Could you write about how she meets a new girl?

Miriam brightens.

MIRIAM
I could do that.

MARY
Okay. Let's pretend she meets the girl in this story.

MIRIAM
Okay.

MARY
We can take turns.

Mary opens the book.

Miriam engages her.

MARY
Would you like to read first?

MIRIAM
Okay. Then you read a page?

Mary nods, done deal.

Mary rotates the book to Miriam and listens as Miriam reads.

MONTAGE - SEVERE WINTER STORM

EXT. RURAL OHIO - DAY

Wind HOWLS.

A farmhouse obscured by a whiteout.

LOCAL METEOROLOGIST (V.O.)
The affected areas received eight to 12 inches of snow with isolated higher amounts in snowbelt counties where 12 to 16 inches fell.

EXT. OHIO - CITY - DAY

Deserted. Cars buried. Streets impassable.

LOCAL METEOROLOGIST (V.O.)
Southern counties experienced mixed freezing rain and/or sleet with snow accumulations of six to 11 inches.

A gust whips up snow. Trees sway. Snow-heavy branches CREAK.

END MONTAGE

INT. MATTERS' HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Mary on the phone.

MARY
Sounds terrible, Nora.

INT. OHIO - STYKES' FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Over coffee, Mary's Sister-In-Law, NORA (30s), on the phone.

NORA
Thank God we have a fireplace.

INTERCUT - MATTERS AND STYKES' HOMES

MARY
They shoveled all night?!

NORA
Took a few breaks. They finally made it to the barn then crashed. Both sound asleep now.

MARY
Oh, Nora. I'm so sorry. My thoughts are with you. Give Bob and Cal my love.

END INTERCUT

INT. MATTERS' HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Breakfast dishes yet to be cleared.

Lou and Mary linger over coffee.

MARY
Looks like the January Sixth Committee is beginning to move.

LOU
They're issuing subpoenas to people involved in the events before the attack on the Capitol.

MARY
Some are saying it was necessary. And deny there was violence.

Lou throws up his hands.

LOU
What's to deny? What they need to determine is how it was set off. And by who exactly.

MARY
It's gonna be a slow process. They issued three subpoenas but there were thousands at the Capitol.

Lou shakes his head.

LOU
Nobody ever said democracy was simple. Or easy. It's messy.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Marty noodles at a piano.

Muslim HESTER (15) does not wear a hijab. She stands a bit apart from Marty.

Both in masks.

MARTY
A black key can be sharp or flat.

HESTER
So it depends on if it's up or down from the key?

MARTY
Yes. B, C, E and F keys have half notes between them.

Marty plays each pair.

MARTY
B - C. E - F. All the other white keys have whole notes between them.

Marty plays C, D, E then F, G, A.

MARTY
This key can be a C sharp or D flat. This, F sharp or G flat.

HESTER
Thank you, Marty. Would you play me the scale in half notes?

Hester lowers forehead, looks up with a shy smile.

HESTER
Please.

Marty does. Shaky yet serviceable.

HESTER
And in full notes?

Marty plays the scale in full notes then smiles at Hester.

MARTY
Please, don't ask me to play a melody.
(chuckle)
I don't have my guitar with me.

HESTER
Next time bring it. I like to hear you play.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH - MARY'S OFFICE - DAY

An informal meet between Mary and curriculum coordinator, ANGELINA SANCHEZ (40s), a sophisticated Ph.D. candidate who stands in the doorway.

ANGELINA
So many staff members left due to COVID. Luckily, you and Janice are still here so there's no need to increase caseloads.

Mary gestures at her small office.

MARY
More than one student and we'd need a shoehorn.

ANGELINA
Since most of your caseload evidences autism, they're more likely to have individual therapy prescribed.

Mary considers the problem.

MARY
Two at a time might work, but we need space for physical action to increase the flexibility of their expectations.

ANGELINA
How does that work?

Angelina sits.

MARY
Those with Autism have predictive expectations. It can be upsetting for a child with Autism if they don't observe what's expected.

ANGELINA
So you aim to increase their flexibility in what they expect?

MARY
Yeah. Maybe game playing or role switching. I hand you a block, then you hand Sammy the block, then Sammy hands you the block who then hands it to me.

ANGELINA
Glad you've got a firm handle on it.

MONTAGE - RUSSIA INVADES UKRAINE

EXT. UKRAINE - COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Infantry divisions and armor clog the barely two land road.

Air support flies overhead.

EXT. UKRAINE - CITY - DAY

Missiles slam an apartment building. A school. Hospital.

EXT. UKRAINE - TRAIN STATION - DAY

Chaos. A bustle of bodies jammed wall-to-wall.

Refugees exit buses then line up for trains.

Women, Seniors and Children kiss Young Men goodbye. Many for the last time.

END MONTAGE

INT. MATTERS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - WORK AREA - NIGHT

Lou types away on a computer keyboard as Jason looks on.

JASON
Dad? What's next?

LOU
Hard to say. Watch and wait.

JASON
How can Ukraine hold them back?
It's so small compared to Russia.

LOU
The West will send weapons.

JASON
What about troops?

LOU
Can't get directly involved. It'd
be like the U-S declaring war on
Russia. Too much at stake.

Jason digests.

JASON
Russia has a lot of nukes.

LOU
So do we. Two of the best reasons
for the U-S to stay out of it.

INT. MATTERS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jason tunes the TV to the weather channel.

Lou slides in beside his Son.

LOU
Patterns are really changing. A lot
different than when I was a kid.

Jason, a serious look.

JASON
Drought in the southwest. Tornadoes
in the Midwest. Floods near us in
Aesopolis. The planet is roasting.

LOU
Too much carbon in the atmosphere.

JASON
It's overwhelming and scary but at the same time really interesting.

Lou pats his son on the back.

LOU
Sometimes I think the weather channel is your favorite.

JASON
It interests me, Dad.
(corrects)
It interests me a lot.

EXT. MATTERS' HOME - DAY

Before Lou crosses the street, he scans left and right several times. He makes his way to --

EXT. ATKINS' HOME - CONTINUOUS

Lou dons a mask before he rings the doorbell.

JIM ATKINS (30s) answers.

JIM
Come in, Lou. Glad you feel confident enough in looking left so you can cross the street.

LOU
(Raises eyebrows)
Graduated to first grade; look both ways before you cross.

Lou walks on Jim's left into --

INT. ATKINS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jim sits to accommodate Lou's loss of left field of vision.

JIM
How's Matters' Website Design doing?

LOU
Just got a new job from B-J's Lawn Services. Started work on it this morning. Nothing too complex.

Jim glances out the window.

LOU
Whaddaya think about the Ukraine?

JIM
I dunno. That Putin...

LOU
He orders ten days of phony military maneuvers.

JIM
Then pretends he has the right to send troops into Ukraine like he owns the place.

LOU
Scary. Could be a drumbeat to a larger East-West conflict.

JIM
At least NATO countries are imposing sanctions.

LOU
Surprised they moved so fast. Putin moves, sanctions come down the very next day.

JIM
Let's pray it stops there.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH - MARY'S OFFICE - DAY

Mary busy at her computer when Angelina enters.

ANGELINA
Morning. Have some bad news.

MARY
Good morning. What is it?

ANGELINA
Janice's husband has COVID.

MARY
Oh no! How bad?

ANGELINA
It seems manageable. He's at home with the whole family. Quarantined for ten to 14 days.

MARY
Oh my! Anything I can do?

ANGELINA
Pick up some of her caseload.

MARY
I could double up my cases.

ANGELINA
Could you let me know how many openings you have so I can schedule her most pressing cases.

MARY
Certainly.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY

Socially Distant and maskless, Jason eats lunch with CASSIE (17). They sit at right angles to each other.

JASON
I've been wondering what it would take to become a meteorologist.

CASSIE
Like a T-V weatherman? Maybe a new face to start.

Cassie LAUGHS.

JASON
Ha-ha. Very funny. For N-O-A-A, maybe.

CASSIE
You'd have to know geography.

JASON
Yeah, but think about studying air. How it moves. Its temperature. How much water it holds.

CASSIE
Air is a gas. You'd have to study gases.

Jason sips milk. Thinks.

JASON
Did you know the earth's atmosphere is 65 to 75 miles thick?

CASSIE
Really?

JASON
Except greenhouse gases are shrinking it.

CASSIE
Yeah. Ozone layer.

Cassie gives Jason's question thought.

CASSIE
I think you'd have to be good at advanced math.

JASON
Probably physics.

CASSIE
Why physics?

JASON
My chem teacher said physics is the study of fundamental mathematical relationships that govern natural phenomenon.

Cassie opens her mouth in mock amazement, pats Jason's arm.

CASSIE
Ya' done good, man.

For a moment, Jason becomes lost in possibilities.

He and Cassie clean their mess and leave the table.

AT ANOTHER TABLE

Marty and Hester finish lunch. The cafeteria near empty.

MARTY
Hester. I've been thinking.

Hester LAUGHS, flirty.

HESTER
That's always a good thing.

She notes Marty's seriousness, listens.

MARTY
The school prom is coming up.

HESTER
I heard about it.

MARTY
Any chance you'd like to go with me?

Hester, a tad shocked.

HESTER
You're asking me to go to the prom with you?

MARTY
I am. Will you?

HESTER
You mean with a gown? And dance with you?

MARTY
You wear the gown.

Hester snickers.

MARTY
But yes. And dancing with me.

HESTER
I'll have to ask my parents.

MARTY
If they say yes...?

She considers then grins.

HESTER
If they say yes, then, yes. I'll go to the prom with you.

Marty and Hester 'high five'.

FULL SCREEN TITLE: "Spring and Summer"

MONTAGE - THE NEW NOW

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Students pass taped up NOTICES: "Masks are no longer required. Social Distancing is still highly recommended."

CLASSROOM

Students maintain distance but move around unmasked.

INT./EXT. ARIANA - STREET - DAY

Unmasked, boisterous Students ride a school bus.

EXT. OHIO - CLARK COUNTY - DAY

Uprooted trees. Damaged outbuildings.

REPORTER (V.O.)
Clark County residents began clean up after a suspected tornado tore through the area. We spoke to local residents about the storm.

LOCAL RESIDENT (V.O.)
“Sure was a twister. Seen 'em before. I looked at my wife and said, ‘Let’s git to the basement.’”

Residents take chain saws to downed trees and clean up.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

An Angry Driver fills their SUV. The numbers roll too fast.

Station's PRICE SIGN: "Regular $5.01"

END MONTAGE

INT. MATTERS' HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Mary on the phone.

MARY
Is everyone okay, Nora.

INT. OHIO - STYKES' FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Nora leans a phone against her ear.

NORA
Yes. It hit just north of us. Near Springfield. Uprooted hundreds of trees and damaged outbuildings.

INTERCUT - MARY AND NORA'S HOMES

MARY
First a ton of snow gets dumped on you then a tornado, no less.

NORA
Climate change is hitting us hard.

Nora chuckles.

NORA
The report was the winds were 'weak'. That we lucked out.

MARY
So what are they calling weak?

NORA
E-F one; 80 to 110 miles per hour. Weak my great aunt Gertie!

MARY
Horrible!

NORA
Crossed the country club a few miles away but only took down trees and caused minor damage to one house. I guess we were lucky.

END INTERCUT

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM - NIGHT

Prom night.

The decorating committee has transformed the gym: round tables with white tablecloths; colored lights. Kinda magical.

A DJ spins tunes.

Hester, gorgeous in a handmade gown. Marty, dapper in tux.

At a table, Cassie, Jason, Hester and Marty.

MARTY
What do you say? Care to cut a rug?

The slang is lost on Hester.

MARTY
Dance. Would you like to dance?

Hester averts eyes for a tick then smiles up at Marty.

HESTER
Yes. Let's.

Marty offers a gentleman's hand to Hester.

She follows him to the dance floor where they hold each other and sway to a slow dance.

JASON
Look at him. My little brother...

CASSIE
Not so little.
(laughs)
Get used to it.

Jason leads Cassie to the dance floor.

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP - SERVICE BAY - DAY

Mary pulls to a stop.

A SERVICE ADVISOR (30s) approaches her car as she exits with mask in hand.

SERVICE ADVISOR
Ma'am. We're asking people to please wait in their cars.

As Mary reenters the car,

MARY
Is there a problem?

SERVICE ADVISOR
Due to COVID, we're asking customers to stay with their car until they're called.

MARY
(smiles)
I understand. Makes sense.

SERVICE ADVISOR
So nice to see a smile.

Mary tilts her head, confused.

SERVICE ADVISOR
You wouldn't believe how angry it makes people. Especially younger ones.

MARY
COVID effect.

SERVICE ADVISOR
Suppose so. Doesn't make my job easy to be a COVID cop.

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP - SERVICE WAITING AREA - DAY

Chairs. TV. Free bad coffee and stale doughnuts.

The only one masked, Mary waits with an AUNT (30s), her 12 year old NEPHEW and an ELDERLY WOMAN (70s).

Mary checks the time on her phone: 9:45.

The Nephew buries head in a phone, rides low in the chair.

Not truly interested, the Women stare at a TV cooking show.

The Elderly Woman smiles at Mary who points at the TV.

MARY
Have you been watching the January Sixth hearings?

ELDERLY WOMAN
Wouldn't miss them.

MARY
Pretty informative.

ELDERLY WOMAN
They are -- not in a good way.

MARY
Looking forward to what they "inform" us about today.

The Elderly Woman agrees in a nod.

The Service Advisor pages the Elderly Woman. A small wave to Mary and she disappears.

The Aunt stays with the television but glances at Mary.

MARY
I read that talking to strangers is uplifting.

AUNT
You mean it makes you feel better?

MARY
I decided to try it out. We don't get out like we did. Wandering around in stores, I wind up talking to someone.

AUNT
Sometimes it's easier to talk to a stranger. Like you might tell them something you wouldn't tell a friend.

MARY
I talked a bit to the Service Advisor. He was happy to see someone pleasant. He said so many that come in are angry.

The Aunt hikes a thumb in the direction of her Nephew.

MARY
Especially younger people.

AUNT
I worry most about the kids.
(re: Nephew)
Lives in a kinda shell.

MARY
COVID splintered us. There's social media isolation within age groups. That's on top of isolation at home. Especially those who live alone.

AUNT
If you suggest it'd help to go to church a half hour each morning -- they're not gonna do it.

Mary points to the TV.

MARY
Do you mind watching the January Sixth hearing? It starts at ten.

YOUNGER WOMAN
I don't know what it's about?

Mary stifles her shock.

MARY
Trump's 'Stop the Steal' and the -- I don't know what to call it -- insurrection. It's on all channels. Except Fox.

YOUNGER WOMAN
I watch Fox. They say it's nonsense and not to watch it. We need more channels like Fox.

A polite nod from Mary.

EXT. MATTERS' HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Lunch with the whole family.

MARY
At the dealership yesterday, I was talking with a woman. We both agreed COVID separated us in ways we could never have imagined.

MARTY
Some still mask inside.

JASON
During distant learning, we were separated from our friends.

LOU
I'm always online. Texting. Zooming. Occasionally on the phone. I mean, if I didn't have real people -- you, friends, neighbors -- I'd be lost.

MARY
The woman was concerned about how much time her nephew spends on his phone.

MARTY
Video games. There's a lot that're really violent.

JASON
We like balance. We have *The Upbeats*. We play sports. Have friends I-R-L. You know, touch grass.

LOU
Don't know the lingo, Jay. I-R-L? Touch grass?

JASON
In real life, Dad. Touch grass; get offline.

MARTY
(chuckle)
Whatsa matter, Dad? Don't you speak English?

Lou squints at Marty.

LOU
Bite me!

MARTY/JASON
Huh?

Lou and Mary LAUGH.

LOU
Here endeth the slang lesson.

MARY
Not every family eats their meals together like us. None of us is on a special diet; one meal for all.

LOU
Mary, what if you only ate gluten free and avoid milk products. Jason, you were a vegan. Marty, you ate eggs and fish, but not meat. And me, I were on a Mediterranean diet. You'd need an air traffic controller to land a meal.

MARTY
(laughs)
We'd have to cook for ourselves.

MARY
That's reality in some families. Kids up all night playing online games with other kids. Meals split by differences in diet. COVID keeping people isolated. No money for a family vacation.

Jason toasts with his iced tea.

JASON
To the Matters. All talking. Different ages. Different genders. All eating chicken sandwiches on whole wheat and drinking milk.

Marty toasts Jason with his tea.

MARTY
To what matters... to the Matters.

LOU
Radical!

EXT. MATTERS' HOME - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Lou, Jim and friend, CARLOS SOLERS (30s), chew the fat.

CARLOS
I think we need unity on this.

LOU
You bet. Bipartisan support and international unity.

JIM
The only way we'll be able to get anything passed in Congress is for them to work across the aisle.

Jim looks from Lou to Carlos.

JIM
Unified in support of Ukraine.

CARLOS
Do we send soldiers? Or only weapons?

JIM
Sending troops is the kickoff to World War Three -- and the end of everything.

CARLOS
We need to slow Putin down. How do we do that?

LOU
Embargoes. Sanctions. Stopping the purchase of Russian oil. Stop Russians from traveling to the West. Freeze Western bank accounts.

JIM
NATO and the European Union working together.

LOU
And supplying weapons.

CARLOS
Yes. Weapons.

Lou raises an eyebrow.

LOU
No nukes though.

INT. MATTERS' HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY

Jason and Marty deep in homework.

Lou joins them with a cup of coffee in hand.

JASON
Smells good.

LOU
Want some?

JASON
No. Doing my chemistry. Don't want any C-12, H-22, O-11.

LOU
Sugar?

JASON
You got it, Dad.

MARTY
Show off.

Jason rolls his eyes.

LOU
You like the sciences.

JASON
Math first. Then science.

LOU
Physics?

JASON
Something to do with climate. A field that counters climate change.

LOU
Interesting. Never thought about climate as an academic area. Environmental Sciences. Maybe meteorology.

EXT. MATTERS' HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

A summer block party underway.

Mask free, *The Upbeats* - Marty, CARL ATKINS (15), Jason and their new singer Hester prepare to perform.

Marty tunes his electric guitar. Carl plays quietly on the drum. Jason manages the sound system.

Hester holds a mike but focuses on Marty.

Two picnic tables make room for all the Matters' neighbors.

Jim, Lou and Carlos barbecue over a fire pit.

Mary, LENORE (30s), Jim's wife, and ADELE (30s), Carlos' wife, maintain distance on the picnic table benches.

MARY
Pretty international group. American, Cuban, Salvadorian, Afghani.

LENORE
I get a kick out of how nicely Marty and Hester get along.

ADELE
How did he convince her to sing with *The Upbeats*?

EXT. SOLERS' HOME - FRONT LAWN - DAY

Junior entrepreneurs Marty and Carl sweat mowing lawns for cash. Marty mows, Carl rakes.

Break time: off with work gloves for a rest under a Maple.

MARTY
Have you thought about your future? What you wanna do?

CARL
I don't know. Maybe a lawyer.

MARTY
Well, you write well. That's important. How'd ya come up it?

CARL
It's important to keep the Rule of Law alive.

MARTY
Wow, man. You've been watching too much news.

CARL
You asked me, and there it is. What about you?

MARTY
Music says it all.

CARL
You're good at it.

Carl slaps Marty's shoulder.

CARL
Look at how far *The Upbeats* have come along.

MARTY
I especially like piano. I mean, now that I'm studying it.

CARL
And you can read music.
(indicates)
Ear only.

Both quiet to bask in the glorious summer day.

FULL SCREEN TITLE: "Fall"

MONTAGE - INFLATION-BUSTING

INT. WASHINGTON - HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CHAMBER - DAY

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)
By a vote of 220 to 207, the landmark Inflation Reduction Act passed the House today.
(MORE)

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The law aims to curb inflation by reducing the budget deficit, lowering prescription drug prices, and investing in domestic energy production while promoting clean energy.

Representatives mill and shake hands.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Now calm, Angry Driver tops off. The numbers roll slower.

Station's PRICE SIGN: "Regular $4.38"

END MONTAGE

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - SOCCER FIELD - DAY

A game about to start.

Hester, Marty and Carl file into the bleachers.

MARTY
Don't ya think our Varsity'll make division finals this year?

Carl hitches his shoulders. Not willing to commit.

African-American siblings, JUSTIN (16) and YASMINE (14) join the Group.

MARTY
Hey there, Justin. Yasmine.

YASMINE
Hi, y'all. Nice day.

HESTER
Glad you both made it.

JUSTIN
Wanted to see with my own eyes how good they are.

MARTY
I think Rodrigo has it.

JUSTIN
Jason and Art are right their with him.

CARL
Yup. Definitely a winning team.

The team runs onto the field.

SERIES OF SHOTS - THE GAME

> Jason -- score
> Art -- razzle-dazzle footwork that fakes out the Goalie
> Rodrigo -- goal for the win

Hester and Marty cheer.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

At a large table, the Matters, Atkins, and Solers adults.

They enjoy the dinner spread before them. No masks.

MARY
Pinch me! Out for actual dinner. In an actual restaurant.

JIM
(caveman grunt)
Can't beat charring meat over an open fire!

Carlos gestures.

CARLOS
Except, no kids. That's been a long time coming.

Lenore smiles, nods.

LENORE
True. Just thankful they all get along so well with each other.

ADELE
We've been lucky. No feeling of isolation that's been the rule for... well, across the country.

LOU
Even me. Confined to the house. Never felt alone. So nice to be among friends. I can't tell you how important you've all been to my rehabilitation.

MARY
And during the time the boys were on the road. Especially before I learned to where Lou had disappeared.

Lou raises his drink,

LOU
To our good friends. Thank you.

They all CLINK glasses.

INT. MATTERS' HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY

The Family enjoys dinner.

JASON
What if we keep on using oil?

LOU
The planet keeps getting warmer.

Marty puts his hands in the air and snaps his fingers.

MARTY
"There'll be a hot time in the ol' town tonight!"

MARY
The thing is, Marty, it's not funny. We're really in a fix.

MARTY
Sorry. So we cut back on oil. Go to wind and solar power.

LOU
And nuclear fusion. Like we've discussed.

Jason, exasperated.

JASON
There's more we can do. Planting trees. Recycling. Using geothermal.

MARY
Jay, I do appreciate your passion, but this isn't going to get fixed overnight. Let's enjoy our meal. Tomorrow is another day.

Jason gets the hint.

Dinner continues in a lighter vein.

EXT. FARM - FIELD - DAY

In protective gear and gloves, Jason helps a BEEKEEPER (50s).

Jason brushes bees from the lid. They use a Smoker to keep the bees docile.

JASON
Happy to work with bees. They're more important than most people think. Without them we'd have less produce. Nutrition would suffer. In a way, we're saving the planet.

BEEKEEPER
Ya think so?

JASON
Did I tell you I've decided to study meteorology and become a climatologist.

BEEKEEPER
Climatologist, eh?

JASON
Maybe help architects plan structures that withstand heat, rain and drought better.

BEEKEEPER
Ya don't say.

Jason steps back as the Beekeeper replaces the hive cover.

JASON
Or help factories establish environmentally friendly practices. Especially to decrease carbon emissions.

BEEKEEPER
Working to make the world bee more friendly, huh.

Jason LAUGHS.

JASON
Never thought of it that way.

INT. OHIO - STYKES' FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Nora and Bob's Son, CAL (20s) on the phone.

CAL
You got stung by beekeeping, eh?

JASON (V.O.)
Helping to keep the world green.

CAL
Pollination is so important. Like supporting the soil's richness.

INT. MATTERS' HOME - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

At the table, Jason sips milk.

JASON
Like fertilizing?

INTERCUT - STYKES AND MATTERS' HOME

CAL
There's also crop rotation. And planting summer crops. That way we don't have to dig deep and disturb the soil with weeding.

JASON
That helps sustainability?

CAL
Preserves the soil's richness.

JASON
And probably reduces the chance of drought.

CAL
In one rotation we plant crimson clover. It's a legume, so it adds nitrogen to the soil.

JASON
We have to preserve what we have. Helps slow climate change.

CAL
We're on the same page, bro.

END INTERCUT

FULL SCREEN TITLE: "Winter"

MONTAGE - STORMS

INT. WASHINGTON - CANON HOUSE MEETING ROOM - DAY

The January Sixth Select Committee delivers their verdict.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)
The House select committee investigating January six, 2021, laid out a damning case that former President Donald Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election led to the violence at the US Capitol. In its report, the committee recommends barring Trump from holding office again.

As Chair, Congressman Bennie Thompson bangs the final gavel.

EXT. OHIO - VARIOUS - DAY

A Bomb Cyclone goes off.

LOCAL METEOROLOGIST (V.O.)
A bomb cyclone is expected to bring heavy rain and wind gusts of 45 to 65 miles per hour and a 50 degree drop in temperatures by midnight.

People shelter. Little movement on this raw, raw day.

END MONTAGE

INT. JUNIOR HIGH - GYM - DAY

Mary works with Miriam and FINN (12). She arranges three mats on the floor.

She lays a doll, a toy train engine and a book her mat.

MARY
Miriam, you sit on that mat. Finn, you sit on this one.

Miriam kneels on one as asked.

Finn doesn't move.

MARY
Thank you, Miriam.

Mary addresses Finn.

MARY
So, Finn. Please join us.

FINN
I wanna sit on a chair.

MARY
Well... okay. Get yourself a chair.

Finn picks a chair and drags it to the edge of the mat.

Mary seats herself cross-legged near the items on the mat.

MARY
We're going to play delivery person.

Mary hands the train engine to Miriam.

MARY
Miriam, please deliver this to Finn.

On all fours, Miriam delivers the train to Finn who places it across his knees.

Miriam returns to her spot and copies Mary's crossed legs.

MARY
Now, Finn. You're the delivery person. Deliver the train to me and deliver the doll to Miriam.

Finn walks to the edge of Mary's mat, reaches to hand the train to her. She hands the doll to Finn.

He grips the doll around its neck and walks just close enough to hand it to Miriam.

Miriam accepts and places it across her knees. She studies it then straightens its dress.

Finn plops on his chair.

MARY
Nice delivery, Finn. But you had to walk so far. Suppose you pull your chair near Miriam. On the mat.

Finn thinks a beat, rises, bends down, and pulls the mat away from the others. He moves near Miriam then sits on it.

MARY
Great, Finn. Back to delivering.

Mary holds out the book to Miriam.

MARY
Please deliver this book to Finn, Miriam.

Miriam delivers to Finn who accepts it.

MARY
Here's the train, Miriam.

She accepts it.

MARY
Finn, may I have the book?

Finn remains seated. He reaches to pass the book to Mary.

MARY
Miriam, perhaps you'd prefer to share with Finn. Which would you prefer to keep? Train or the doll.

MIRIAM
I like the doll.

MARY
Finn, perhaps you could ask Miriam for the train.

FINN
(formally)
May I have the train?

Miriam hands Finn the train. He studies it with intensity.

EXT. ATKINS' HOME - FRONT DOOR - DAY

A cold, icy day. Carlos and Lou are ready for it in heavy winter coats, hats and gloves.

They knock. Jim answers and invites them into --

INT. ATKINS' HOME - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Jim shuttles them into the warmth.

JIM
Come in. Come in. Ain't fit for man nor beast out there.

Carlos rubs his arms to warm up.

CARLOS
'Say that again.

LOU
Bone-chilling cold.

LIVING ROOM

Jim and Carlos settle in with Jim.

JIM
Weather's whacked.

CARLOS
Temps went down like crazy last night.

LOU
That's not all that's gone down.

CARLOS
Yeah? Like what?

LOU
Inflation dropped from a high of eight percent to five point seven.

JIM
Sure didn't feel like it when we went Christmas shopping!

Jim rises to head for the kitchen.

JIM
Coffee anyone?

Nods of 'You bet!' from Carlos and Lou.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Jason and Cassie wait for the class to start.

CASSIE
As a climatologist you can predict the climate next year?

JASON
Or five years. Or ten.

CASSIE
Really?

JASON
Sure. You use math, latitude and longitude to predict whether or not it's going to snow, hail or rain.

CASSIE
How about a T-V weatherman? You have to have a cool name though.
(thinks)
Dusty Storm!

Jason shakes his head and LAUGHS.

JASON
I'd be able to figure out how much thermal energy we might get from the sun at a location. For solar energy.

The teacher enters. Jason and Cassie face forward.

INT. OHIO - STYKES' FARMHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Christmas.

A tall, fully decorated live pine the focal point in a room of cheery Holiday decorations.

BOB (40s), Nora's husband, joins her and Cal on a Skype.

THE STYKES
Merry Christmas!

INT. MATTERS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Mary, Lou, Jason, and Marty around a laptop.

Also cheery decorations but a small artificial tree.

THE MATTERS
Merry Christmas!

INTERCUT - SKYPE: STYKES AND MATTERS' HOMES

The two families sing *We Wish You A Merry Christmas*.

CLAPS and lots of LAUGHS at the end.

NORA
So nice to see you all!

MARY
And you!

LOU
Heard you've been having some weather.

BOB
Broke all records.

CAL
Rain changed to snow with once-in-a-generation cold. Wind chills were minus 30 to 35.

BOB
A spring day now. Up above zero this morning. Even with no wind chill, we're at minus 12.

Quiet descends for a moment.

LOU
I'm grateful we all pulled through. Here we are on the cusp of a new year. I wish the best for each and every one of us in '23.

CHEERS and WHISTLES from the rest.

FADE OUT.