

Uncommonwealth

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TEASER

EXT. FERN CHARTERS - MORNING

Fern Charters, not much more than a plywood office and a stretch of dock, sticks out into Lake Superior. It's a pink and blue morning.

SUPER: St. Thérèse du Lac, Ontario

MICHAEL FERN (70s) dressed in a worn lumberjack's plaid jacket, totes a coffee thermos as he makes his way down the pier. He's scruffy, red faced and vital.

He smiles at something we can't see -- and then we do:

Tied to the dock, A 1950s DeHavilland Beaver gleams in the sun, liveried in candy red, vivid gold, and creamy white.

An 8-person capacity single prop float plane, is in pristine condition. It bobs gently on its pontoons, pulling at its tie-down line like an eager horse as Michael approaches.

Michael reaches out a hand, gives it an affectionate pat.

He opens the pilot's side door and chucks in his coffee, and a little silver lunch-box. He unties the line, and puts one foot on the strut as he kicks off the dock with the other.

The plane drifts off slightly as he climbs in, and shuts the door. The propeller begins to growl, then accelerates, revving up to a smooth purr.

INT. FLOAT PLANE - DAY

Michael slips on a pair of large headphones. He adjusts the mic, pulls the yoke over, and noses the aircraft westward.

He reaches down, and flips on a custom car radio above the aviation radio and turns it on a local FM station. He slides on a pair of aviators.

Michael pushes the propeller, which fires into a ROAR LIKE AN ENTIRE ARMY OF HELLS ANGELS. The plane surges forward, and the nose starts to lift.

EXT. FLOAT PLANE - DAY

The Beaver surges into the sky.

EXT. CANADA - US BORDER CROSSING - CONTINUOUS

The plane skirts US airspace over the heads of Canadian Border Services Officer LUKE TRAN (40s) and napping crew-cut sporting US Border Patrol Agent KYLE FLYNN (60s) in their respective booths at the boom crossing --

EXT. GOD'S LAND GOLF COURSE - CONTINUOUS

-- just close enough to the mega golf course's SUV-stuffed parking lot. Right on cue - the ALARMS on 20 or so shiny gas guzzlers SQUEAL LIKE AN AMBULANCE CONVENTION.

INT. CANADA CROSSING BOOTH

Luke glances up from his crossword over at Kyle, who struggles into wakefulness in the midst of the cacophony. Luke tries not to grin.

Kyle gazes into his Styrofoam cup of coffee -- cold.

KYLE

Hey, Officer Tran. Question for you.

LUKE

Good morning to you too, Agent Flynn.

KYLE

You got that fancy universal health care up there, right?

LUKE

It's pretty fancy.

KYLE

Does it cover Viagra?

Luke hoists an eyebrow.

LUKE

Well, I can't say I've ever --

KYLE

Not for me, smartass.

Kyle nods his chin upward to indicate the float plane above.

Luke grins. Kyle covers his face with his dark glasses, trying to shut out the still BLARING ALARMS.

EXT. FLOAT PLANE - DAY

The Beaver surfs the clouds.

INT. FLOAT PLANE - DAY

Michael juggles a map, the yoke and his coffee. He speaks into his headset, depressing and releasing the transmit button. He has a broad Canadian accent.

MICHAEL

(With full stops)

Yeah, Sky Fin Lodge, looks like about 82 clicks west, bearing south. About an hour. Nah, she's topped off. See you, over and out.

He tosses back his coffee, then shoves the map and the cup over to the co-pilot's seat. He turns the music back up and sings along.

SOUND OVER: "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)" - The Proclaimers

Michael's yellow Roots brand boot taps along.

He sings along as he balances the yoke, then reaches for the little silver lunchbox. He glances inside - papers, premium ganja... but no pre-rolled.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

Shit.

He grabs a paper and some of the weed, and begins to roll one, glancing up at the windshield... glancing up again...

The MUSIC drops down.

EXT./INT. FLOAT PLANE - DAY

The Beaver coasts along effortlessly. In the near distance, a V of Canada geese wings its way north.

The distance, however, shortens quickly, because the plane and the birds are on a collision course.

Michael glances up -- he sees the geese, but doesn't seem to notice they're getting closer, or that they're heading straight towards him. He's almost got his joint rolled.

The geese, now directly in the path of the Beaver, HONK in distress, but being Canada Geese, genetically programmed to expect the right-of-way, stay the course.

Michael finally lights up his joint, and takes a long satisfying drag with his eyes closed. Just as he opens them -- THE LEAD GOOSE COLLIDES WITH THE PROPELLER.

THE PROP SQUEALS AS GOOSE GUTS AND FEATHERS SPLATTER ALL OVER THE WINDSHIELD.

MICHAEL
(North Carolina
accent)
CHRIST ALMIGHTY.

DISTRESSED HONKING. Several geese domino into the front of the Beaver, buffeted into back ass-ward tumbles. The tangled prop struggles, SPUTTERS, and fails.

The good news: the sudden drop in airspeed has lowered the plane out of the way of the surviving geese, who wing away in a chorus of indignant HONKING.

The bad news: the Beaver's nose has dipped under the horizon. Lake Superior now fills Michael Fern's vision. The joint still smokes in his fingers.

The Beaver pitches forward. Michael's coffee and stash box fly past him into the dash. The radio hovers in the air, fully extended on its coil, bouncing on the windshield.

MICHAEL (cont'd)
AW, HELL NO.

He pulls on the yoke, but he can't get out of the dive. The water RUSHES TOWARDS HIM.

EXT. FLOAT PLANE - FLOAT PLANE BITS - DAY

Lake Superior creams the plane.

The pontoons tear off.

The wings shred into fragments.

The tail, propeller and body break apart and skip over the water, disintegrating with each impact.

There is silence, except for the gentle waves.

ANGLE ON

A debris field, half a mile long.

In that field, a plaid jacket floats, blown off Michael's back. The only other sign that remains of him is the joint, floating serenely among the fragments.

The cherry end burns on for an instant... then snuffs out.

SOUND OVER: Tail End of "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)" - The Proclaimers

END TEASER.

OPENING TITLES

EXT. LAURA SECORD HERITAGE CENTRE - DAY

The Laura Secord Heritage Centre: an overgrown family fun has-been. The log cabins are mossy, roofs sagging. Weeds have overgrown the "Town Common" -- marked by a rusty sign.

The grounds, bounded by tall old growth cedars, are quite beautiful, but the Heritage Centre is a depressing blight of the worst kind: a quaint corpse.

The only sign of human care is a large wood cabin and garage situated at the edge -- clearly a functioning home.

INT. ELLIE'S CABIN - KITCHEN - DAY

ELLIE FERN (40s) cradles her mobile phone in one ear as she looks through her kitchen window at the sad sight. A little rawboned with some extra gray hairs, she's a striking woman.

Around her are many hand-thrown pieces of pottery, all functional, rustic and beautiful. Her old sweater has a few clay stains on it.

On the cluttered window-sill, family photos feature Michael Fern among the various configuration of adult children and grandchildren.

Ellie sniffs, red-eyed, too tired to cry another tear.

ELLIE
(into the phone)
When will you get here?

INT. DREW'S TORONTO TOWNHOUSE - DAY

DREW FERN (40s) sits at the wet bar in his fancy open plan kitchen/living room. He's totally gray, currently massaging his eyes behind his glasses, phone to his ear.

DREW

I don't know, Sunday? I have to call
in some favours to get my patients
covered.

He goes over to the fridge to look at a schedule.

In the background, his son VIJAY (16) and wife ANITA (40s)
move through the hall. They are engaging in a screaming
fight in a mix of Hindi and English.

DREW (cont'd)

(into phone)

Ellie, can you hang on for--

The noise cuts in, and Drew can only watch like a rabbit in
the headlights.

VIJAY

You don't understand! He did it in
front of everyone. I can't go back.
You can't make me go back.

ANITA

(Hinglish)

Stop being a child. You are going
back tomorrow. Your grades are in the
toilet.

VIJAY

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO ME?

ANITA

You are not going to change schools
just because your one month boyfriend
dumped you.

Reminded of this, Vijay WAILS, breaks and runs for his room,
SLAMMING the door.

INT. ELLIE'S HOUSE - DAY

INTERCUT ELLIE/DREW

ELLIE

What the hell was that?

DREW

Vijay, uh. Boy trouble, I guess.

ELLIE

Maybe some time away will help?

DREW
Depends. You got wifi?

ELLIE
Nope.

DREW
Then yeah, might help.

Ellie's son THEO FERN (17) comes in, also toting some groceries. He gives his mother a side hug, and then unpacks the groceries.

Ellie puts her phone on speaker and holds it up.

ELLIE
Say hi to Uncle Drew.

THEO
Hi to Uncle Drew.

DREW
(filtered)
Hey, Theo. Doing okay?

ELLIE
(into phone)
Listen, I gotta go. Don't forget, the ferry only runs twice on Sunday, so --

DREW
We'll leave early, don't worry. Love you.

ELLIE
Love you too.

She ends the call and sets her phone down. Theo gives her a look -- and she loses it for a moment. He hugs her as she cries it out. Then she pulls herself together.

ELLIE (cont'd)
I'm sorry.

THEO
You want me to go by the station again?

ELLIE
No. They say it'll be some time before anything... surfaces. It's a big lake.

She takes a breath.

ELLIE (cont'd)
I need to go pick up your sister. Can
you --?

Theo holds up a rotisserie chicken: he's got it.

ELLIE (cont'd)
Thank god.

She goes towards the door, then pauses, smiling at her son.

ELLIE (cont'd)
It's gonna be hard. Thanks for
stepping up.

THEO
Yeah.

EXT. LAURA SECORD HERITAGE CENTRE - EVENING

Theo wanders through the dilapidated park, holding out his phone as he searches for signal. He finds a good spot, overlooking the lake, and sets down.

He sets his phone to speaker and initiates a call. Meanwhile, he rolls a joint -- just the same way Michael did, but with better results.

INSERT: PHONE - CALLING BETHANY

EXT. MEGACHURCH SANCTUARY - EVENING

The brightly lit glass monstrosity looms, encompassed by golf course.

SUPER: Lake Bluffs, Michigan

RAYNE (PRE-LAP)
And God, that great investor, said
unto us, fill the earth and subdue
it.

INT. SANCTUARY - EVENING

Two hundred white people sway with the spirit. Reverend RAYNE RICHARDS (50s) preaches with his whole body evidently describing God's own land development pyramid scheme to the rapture of the congregation.

BETHANY RICHARDS (18) a pretty, clean cut girl in jeans, listens to the monitor speakers. With a sour smile she mouths along to the words, long since memorized.

RAYNE

(filtered)

He meant not just an investment in today, but an investment for all time, glory hallelujah! This is a blessing you can share with your descendants, glory hallelujah! Will you help me develop paradise?

CROWD

Glory hallelujah!

Bethany rolls her eyes, disgusted. She turns away, digging through her purse.

EXT. SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Bethany weaves through large American Flag-stickered cars to get to the edge of the parking lot. She surveys the golf course on the other side, watches the sprinklers turning.

She lights a cigarette, just as her phone VIBRATES. She answers the call, checking around for eavesdroppers.

BETHANY

Hey. Kim and Logan have the boat, but I don't want to go without you.

EXT. LAURA SECORD HERITAGE CENTRE - EVENING

Theo, phone against his ear, contemplates the joint, then stares off at the watery horizon.

THEO

The memorial's tomorrow. My uncle and cousin and stuff are gonna be here. I can't bail on them.

INTERCUT THEO/BETHANY

BETHANY

I don't want you to bail on them.

THEO

Yeah, I know.

BETHANY

It must be awful. I know Michael was like your real dad. It was really nice to him to fly us around all the time.

THEO

Yeah.

Theo takes a drag off the joint, and now he really is tearing up -- but he's damned if he's gonna let her hear it.

THEO (cont'd)

(forced casual)

When are you leaving for Ann Arbor?

Bethany glances over her shoulder. Faint POP MUSIC emits from the church. She checks the area for witnesses, drags on the smoke.

BETHANY

When are we leaving for Ann Arbor. Soon. I just wish it was farther away from here.

THEO

If I get in. My GPA is a joke.

BETHANY

You'll get in. International student revenue, remember?

THEO

(bitter laugh)

Thanks.

Theo sees car lights through the trees. He picks himself up.

BETHANY

Theo?

THEO

Dinnertime. I'll talk to you later.

He puts down the phone, turns to the house - but a RUSTLING catches his eye. He turns around, and - is that A PERSON walking through the woods?

EXT. SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Bethany looks around again, ashes her cigarette. She spots the congregation now exiting the building, tosses down the cigarette, kicks gravel over it.