

Super 8

by Terry Bisson

Look. We were all so pretty. And we knew it, shooting everything we did, and one another, turning our present into instant past, and future too, loaded into memory: Super 8. Cars, faces, clothing, places, mugging and vamping, boy-girl romps in dry leaves and on city streets, ripped off from *A Hard Day's Night* and *Jules et Jim*. How much we take from movies! Once, they say, it was the other way around. This first dim (poor light? cheap film?) jerky memory of us all together shows the playful ascent of a small mountain (big rock!) in Central Park, hand in hand up a steep trail. Laughing. The circle is small, only four of us so far, all boys but one. Two of us are "comic artists" (cartoonists), debuting in a new magazine put together by the scion of a well-known but never-mentioned-aloud family. There's Mason, regretting his slick-soled cowboy boots. There's John, who doesn't need boots to look cool. The scion, Si, leads the ascent. Our oldest, almost thirty, he unpacks the food, the grass, the wine, the rest of us laughing at his formal picnic basket until he laughs too, the shy, self-effacing laugh of the uncomfortably rich. No beard yet but already thinking about it. And Wendi, our one and only girl, long legs, small breasts, expensive shoes. (This is before BJ's long legs, big breasts, funny shoes.) It's cold and windy at the top, but it was cold and windy at the bottom too. It looks like late November, the leftover leaves fluttering around like ghosts, looking for a place to rest, hopefully together. Ghosts already! Each of us takes a turn with Si's Super 8. John mugs, thinking it's cute, and Mason broods, more careful of his dignity. And Wendi, our Wendi, already telling us our story. She talks into the camera as if it could be persuaded to record her words. Fast Forward to Park Avenue and the disapproving doorman and the dark apartment, as big as a small deserted city, where Si's grandfather, even then, is never home. The circle is small. Sitting on the Persian rug, reluctantly admitted to be a gift of the Shah, sharing a joint. Does Wendi know that John as well as Mason can see her panties? Expensive, like her shoes. We are surrounded by unwanted treasures. Rockwell Kent on the wall: it is said that he once sat in this chair. John tries on a fur coat from a dark, forgotten closet, and Si tries to mask his disapproval, unsuccessfully. FF to another, larger circle, a high meadow upstate. BJ bursts from a pile of leaves like Venus emerging from the sea, newborn, nude, and simply beautiful. Look how happy she seems. John must have taken this shot. But not this next one. FF, night, watchful shadows around the dome, silver in the moonlight, watching it burn—

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"Oh!"

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know. I had a dream."

Mason sat up in the bed. Through the big window, the moon looked in like a wondering face.

"A nightmare?" Constance rolled over. She looked old without her make-up. Funny. Mason remembered the days when he hadn't wanted her to wear make-up. Now he wished she did.

"More of a dream. It was a dream about—something."

"Something."

"It was about the old days, back in New York. It was weird. It was—"

"I'm sure. Can we go back to sleep?"

"It was in Super 8."

"Okay. Now can we go back to sleep?"

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Look! Here we are headed south, to D.C., for the big antiwar protest of '68. Si's VW bus is covered with Peter Max swirls and militant slogans. We knew how to paint it but not how to fix it, but it doesn't matter, for when we break down, a bearded VW mechanic, also headed for D.C. and the demo, pulls over and has us moving in less than twenty minutes. "These little forty-horses are hell on points." We nod as if we know what points are. Vince (his name is Vince) won't take Si's twenty, but he accepts John's fat-rolled joint with a beardy grin, and we're off again. Farewell! Where is Vince today but here, in our collective memory? Our bus is one in a caravan of crusader children, grins and peace signs in rear windows. FF to the demo itself, a swirl of pretty faces, young, angry only for show, filled with joy at our newfound power. We are the future! Tear-gassed, still laughing as we puke. Hey, hey, LBJ! When SDS runs through the crowd under red flags, we follow (who wouldn't?), whooping with happy rage. Mason, who had just last week done his first cover for Si (a Frazetta imitation), sucks on a huge joint with a huge grin. We are in free territory, among our own, for the first time. Mason passes the joint to Si, who passes it to John, who sticks his tongue out at the camera: a puppy, with all (and only) a puppy's charm. Wendi in her designer dress, spattered with mud and smelling of tear gas, passes up the camera as she takes the joint. The Super 8 with its blinking light, passed in a circle, hand to hand, is the only one of us we never see. FF and the circle grows larger, but tighter too. Now Will is one of us, face and hands, headband and all. We are standing around a small geodesic dome, all but BJ, who is in the doorway, while the flames lick at the Celotex skin, casting a yellow light on hers—

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"Damn."

Wendi sat up alone in her big bed. Through the window, the lights of Manhattan shone like stars, each inhabited.

"Second night in a row," she said to herself. She checked the clock: three A.M. Too early to get up, yet she didn't want to go back to sleep.

She wished there was someone she could call.

There was always Mason, but it would be midnight in California.

There was always computer solitaire.

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Look. Autumn in New York. You can tell by the light. You can tell by the water tanks, stalking the horizon like shy wooden beasts, that we are on the roof of the loft, in what is now Soho. Then it was just the edge of Little Italy, with live chickens for sale on the corner of Broome and West Broadway. See the neon chicken, nodding, day and night. Mason must be holding the camera, for it was he who found the loft, and the chicken is his totem. Here's Si, spreading cream cheese on a bagel (Sunday morning) while John inserts a joint into his mouth. There's Wendi, talking as usual, our Wendi, telling us a story, and we can tell what story it is, for there are five of us, not four. As the camera goes around the circle, we see an extra hand with no face to go with it. Will. No face, not yet. But there's the bandaged hand, and Fast Forward and there's Will, struggling with a posthole digger, putting in the floor of the dome. See the lordly Hudson in the distance, through the trees, like a broad steel road. FF and there's the dome, almost completed, BJ opening the triangular doorway, her perfect figure outlined by the flames—

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"Are you OK?"

It was the stewardess. Rather, the flight attendant. In first class they are always attentive.

"Just a bad dream," said Si. He didn't mention that he hadn't slept in three nights. They weren't paid to be that attentive.

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Look. Wendi is in a long silk dress (\$1,400) sitting in the dusty light from West Broadway, telling us a story. The Super 8 loves her dancing, weaving hands. Wendi is a scion too. Her father was a writer for the *New Yorker*, and when he smoked himself to death, he left her with no money but a rich circle of connections. It's not hard to get a job at *Vogue* when the editor knew you as a schoolgirl. Wendi gathered stories uptown and brought them downtown to us. Listen, she says. She and Si were at a party when a well-known rock critic beckoned them into a quiet corner and asked, what do you know about the Underground Expressway? Enough, they said. It was a way out of the military for those who hated the war, and who of us didn't? Wendi scribbled an address on a matchbook (from Twenty-One, or was it The Four Seasons?), and sure enough, the next afternoon, a dark, intense, and *faceless* young man showed up at the door with his clothes in a paper bag, saying Si and Wendi had sent him. Mason and John took him in. No pictures of that, of course. FF, and he's one of us, walking with BJ up the hill, into the Upper Meadow, hand in hand, both nude, of course. This is our world, opening like a flower in the

sun. FF and Si is handing a shovel to Wendi who doesn't want it, who angrily tosses it into the leaves drifted against the pilings of the dome, narrow locust leaves, smoldering, then bursting into flame—

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"You're up already?"

"Couldn't sleep."

"Again?"

"I've been having these dreams." Will didn't tell Emma that he'd had these dreams before. Years before. And found his way from them, into her arms long and small. *And therewithal sweetly did me kiss ...*

"Why don't you stay home from work today and get some sleep?"

"Good idea. I have some calls I want to make anyway."

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Three, no four nights in a row. Mason thought about it all the way to work, in his new Audi A6.

Traffic on the Bay Bridge was brutal: normal, that is. He idled through the obligatory Monday morning meeting (the latest glitch in the OS), and at noon he retreated to his bright corner office, telling his "administrative assistant" (secretary) he would be meditating for an hour, and called a number that he hadn't called in so long that he almost had to look it up.

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"Renee, you know I don't take calls during lunch crunch."

"I told him. But he said you'd take it. Said to tell you it was Mason."

"Oh. Give it here, then. But you'll have to watch the front for me."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And quit ma'aming me. I'm not that damned old yet. Mason?"

"Wendi."

"My God. Where the hell are you?"

"At the office. San Francisco. I know you're busy, I just had to call you. I had this weird dream last night."

"I know. So did I."

"Super 8. So you're having it too."

"Four nights in a row."

"Shit."

"Weird, right? Listen, can I call you back? This is my money hour. How late can I call tonight? This coast-to-coast time thing—"

"Call tomorrow. We're going to the opera tonight. Benefit thing."

"The opera?"

"You don't want to know. Tell you what, I'll call you in the A.M. How early can I call?"

"I'm the one on the East Coast, remember?"

"I'll call you at nine. Six my time."

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Wendi's New Yorker Luncheonette was hardly a luncheonette, though it looked like one, until you opened the menu and saw the burger prices. Dinner, however, was easy and over by ten.

At her apartment, Wendi found a message on her machine: "I know this will come as a surprise. Or maybe not. Can you call me back tonight? We need to talk."

Will too? She wished now she had taken Mason's call. She wanted to talk with him first, before she dealt with Will. She wished she still drank. She didn't want to shut her eyes and go to sleep, but finally she did.

And wished she hadn't.

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Look. Our hair is longer, and here we are in Si's grandfather's big, empty Park Avenue apartment. Wendi is dressed to kill, as always; she has just come from the *New Yorker* Christmas party, to which she has a standing invitation. Si is cooking, as always. Mason and John are lighting a joint. The circle grows: there's Nelson, Si's brother, who is always sour but wants to be part of the gang (but isn't) and his latest, a young (eighteen, or so she said) California girl who came to New York to be a model. He

continually puts her down and everybody minds but her. BJ seems eager not to notice. FF to the Persian rug, littered with money, like leaves. We have decided to buy a farm upstate. Everyone is throwing in, but of course it is Si who will actually put up the money to buy the land. His family owns land upstate, but this is to be a new start. Mason has a couple of grand from his last FlashKomix contract. Wendi tosses in her father's silver lighter, which she tells us we can sell, since it was given to him by Robert Benchley. We don't; it is still in her purse today. BJ startles us with a ten. And a shy wave. Part of our circle now, she takes up the Super 8, and we get our first look at Will's face, for which BJ is scolded, gently, and only later told why. FF to the building of the dome. There's Mason on the scaffold, clowning. BJ tosses him a hammer, and he leans out to catch it and almost falls. No sound, but we can read his laughing lips. "A brush with death." Ah, death. FF to Wendi, weeping, holding a shovel, her tears as bright as jewelry in the orange light of the flames—

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"God damn."

John sat up. Through the filthy window of the trailer, he could see the dome in the moonlight, like a saucer that had landed in the meadow and never taken off again.

Fire. Five nights in a row. He almost wished he had a phone.

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"Fuck."

Wendi couldn't go back to sleep. She pulled on a long tee shirt, one of a drawerful given to her by a liquor supplier, and padded around the apartment, not drinking, waiting for the sun to rise, always a long process in midtown Manhattan.

Having friends on the West Coast was good, at night. In the morning it was a drag. At seven-thirty it was still four-thirty out there. Wendi lay back on the couch and folded her hands over her neat, small breasts, looking straight up; closed her eyes and went to sleep, deliberately; she could do that sometimes. It was like a little, a practice death.

Not always.

The phone rang. She opened her eyes. It was eight fifty-five.

Finally! "Mason?"

But no. "Wendi. It's Will. Did you get my message?"

"Will. How many years has it been. You too, huh?"

"Super 8," he said. "Five nights in a row. So we're all having the same dream again."

"But different. It always ends with fire. It always ends with BJ."

"I'd rather not talk about all this on the phone," said Will. "Have you heard from any of the others?"

"Mason."

"And Si? Aren't you in touch with Si?"

"Of course. But he's flying to Alaska, taking pictures of the pipeline for the *Times*. Won't be back until the fourteenth. That's a week from yesterday."

"Must be nice being rich."

"It's a job, Will. You have a job too."

"Let's don't fight, Wendi. I'm thinking of coming down, into the city tonight. Can I meet you?"

"You know where to find me. Gotta go. I have another call."

It was gone, but she knew who it was. She dialed Mason's home number.

Big mistake. "Hello?" It was Constance. "Hello! Who is this, damn it?"

Wendi hung up without saying anything. She and Constance had never gotten along. The phone rang immediately.

"Mason?"

"Wendi? I called at six, but your line was busy."

"I was talking to Will." No need to mention Constance. "Where are you?"

"In the car, on the Bay Bridge. Will too, huh? That means we're all having the same dream again. After all these years."

"Seems so. He sounds worried."

"What else is new?"

"Tell me your not worried."

"Have you heard from Si?"

"He's in Alaska." Wendi put out her cigarette in the ashtray that had held her father's butts at the *New Yorker* for forty-one years. It had been given to her by Tina Brown.

"What does Will want to do? Will always has a plan."

"I don't know. He's coming down here tonight. We're meeting after work."

"Where?"

"At the restaurant, I guess, why?"

"Because I'm going to be there too."

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The traffic on the West Side Highway was terrible, as usual. Four-wheel drive was no help. Will got to the restaurant at nine forty-five, and saw Mason at the bar, nursing a Kirin. "Well, I'll be goddamned," he said. "Where'd you come from?"

They hugged stiffly: old friends. Old rivals. The two somehow the same.

"I flew in this afternoon," said Mason. "Jet Blue. I talked to Wendi this morning."

"Me too. You too?"

"Super 8. Four nights in a row. We're all having the same dream again."

"Nightmare," said Will.

"Well, that's the thing, isn't it? A dream brought us together. A nightmare brings us back."

Wendi approached from behind and put one hand on each.

"Just like old times," she said. "Give me another half an hour, then Renee can close. What are you drinking?"

"Kirin," said Will. "So this is your new place."

But she was gone already. He looked around at the tables, still half filled with yuppies, all in couples. All untroubled by dreams. Or nightmares.

"I hear you got married," said Mason.

"Eleven years ago next week" said Will. "Emma and I are both practicing law in Albany. Death penalty appeals."

"I heard. Good for you."

"And I hear you're a millionaire."

"Only on paper," Mason said. "One good thing about owning your own company, you can get away whenever you want to."

"Or need to," Will said as the bartender set two Kirins on the bar. "Have you talked to Si? Or John?"

"John? I haven't talked to John in years."

"Me neither," said a voice from behind. They both turned and saw a bearded man in an orange parka, out of place in the black-on-black of lower Manhattan.

"Si!" they both said at once.

"I've been having them too," Si said as the bartender brought another Kirin.

"In Alaska?"

"On the way. I caught a plane back. Just got in an hour ago. I thought I might find you all, us all, here."

"Si!" said Wendi, hugging him from behind. "Thank God. Let's get the fuck out of here. Renee can close."

She was already pulling on her coat: an oversized black motorcycle jacket. *Does that mean she has a boyfriend?* Mason wondered, as glad for her as he was sad for himself.

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They took Will's SUV uptown to 34 Park Avenue. No one had anything to say until they were upstairs and inside. The old apartment looked the same.

"Here, where it all began," said Will, while Si opened the drapes to let in the starlight from the street. But those weren't stars. They were windows, all looking out.

"This place was in the dreams," said Mason. "Broome Street too."

"It started for me here," said Will. "That night you decided to buy the Meadow, last night's dream—we all had it, right?"

They had all had it.

"That was when I realized I belonged with you guys. That I didn't have to run away to Canada after all."

"Did you ever have to do any time?" Mason asked.

"Six months' probation. And an undesirable discharge. Thanks to Jimmy Carter."

"So we needn't have worried?" Wendi asked. Trying not to sound accusatory.

"That was years later. After the war was over. At the time—"

"At the time it was all serious," said Si. He was carrying little coffee cups out of the kitchen on a silver tray. Always the host.

"Coffee?" said Wendi. "It's midnight, Si."

"Do we really want to sleep?" asked Mason, taking his cup.

"It started up on the Meadow," said Wendi, declining hers. "The dreams, anyway. They began when we started building the dome. The first night, after we put in the pilings for the floor."

"Circles," said Si. "I remember that morning. We all looked at each other, and John—it was John, I believe, who said, "Hey, am I crazy or did we all have the same dream?"

"And he wasn't crazy," said Wendi. "Not then anyway."

"I don't even remember what the dream was," said Will.

"I do," said Mason. "We all dreamed we were standing in a circle around the dome, watching it build itself."

"It was spooky," said Si. "That was where I got the idea for the hubs. Making them out of PVC pipe."

"It seems spooky now," said Wendi. "We didn't think it was spooky then."

"I did," said Will. "Still do."

"I didn't," said Mason. "I thought it was fucking wonderful."

"Magical," said Wendi. "And logical too. We were living the same dream in the day and having the same dream every night. It seemed right."

"It was right, for a while," said Si. "Until it turned into a nightmare."

"In Super 8. It brought us together, then it tore us apart," said Wendi. "Then back together again. What now?"

"To sleep, perchance to dream," said Mason.

They all fell silent. Had it really been thirty-five years?

"Maybe it was the mushrooms," said Si. "Remember Shroom, the first time he brought them up the road? We all thought he was the cops. Because we had blasted the postholes. A scare."

"Shroom," said Will. "He *is* a cop now, I think. John told me he was still around. The eternal townie."

"You see John?" Wendi was surprised.

"Once, a few years ago," said Will. "And the dreams were long gone. Why are they back? That's the question. Why are we all here, having the same dream again?"

"Maybe we're here to end it," said Wendi. "Besides, it wasn't the mushrooms. It was the dome. The postholes. The circle. Completing a circle."

"It's BJ," said Si. "She's in every dream."

"We're all in every dream," said Mason.

"It's not the same," said Will. "Look, we all know it's not the same. And every dream ends in fire. What's that all about?"

Wendi was pulling off her jeans. Mason was trying not to notice. "Let's don't go there," she said. "Not yet. Maybe the dreams are telling us a story."

"Anybody got any dope?" said Mason. "I came on a plane."

"Don't smoke much anymore," said Si.

It was two in the morning. They slept in a star, heads together, on the musty Persian rug in the big living room. Mason was still on West Coast time, and he stood at the window as the others went to sleep, looking down on the cabs on Park Avenue, trolling for stragglers.

Perchance to dream, he thought.

Finally, fearfully, he too lay down and closed his eyes. And wished he hadn't.

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Look. Here we are, where we always wanted to be, on a high meadow on the side of a mountain, overlooking the Hudson. It must have been John who shot this sequence, showing the dome going up, in stop time. First just a circular platform, then the struts, all numbered, attached with PVC hubs and strap. We were all so pretty. BJ especially. No longer looking over her shoulder, west. Here comes a Jeep, psychedelic colors. Shroom. Si is brewing tea, looking stage-evil, like a witch in Shakespeare. The dome is the center of it all. The circle. FF to BJ again, framed in light, like an angel. But no, it's fire, fire again. Her outstretched hands are black.

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"Shit."

"You too?"

"Of course. We all had it, the same, right?"

They were all sitting up, nodding.

"It's not going to go away," said Si. "We're being called. Summoned."

"We might as well get going," said Wendi, pulling on her jeans. She had slept in her tee shirt and underpants. Mason tried not to stare at the little white triangle, once so familiar, so dear.

Will pulled his car keys from his pocket. "I have to move it anyway," he said. "You can't park on Park after seven. And it's six thirty."

"I should call Constance."

"I have a cell phone," said Wendi. "You can call her from the highway."

"Everybody has a cell phone," said Will.

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The West Side Highway. The Henry Hudson. The Saw Mill, the Taconic. They were silent, more or less, until they reached the first ridge of the little mountains that marched across the Hudson from New Jersey north toward New England.

New means old, thought Mason. He leaned up over the seat and popped in a CD.

"All Along the Watchtower." *Two riders were approaching ...*

"There's got to be a logical explanation for all this," said Will.

"Logical?" Si said. "Dreams are not logical. Neither is memory. It's memory we share. We created a group memory, and it exists independent of each of us. Even when the group is gone."

"A hive mind," said Mason.

"A what?"

"A hive mind. Made out of all of us, but independent. We off-loaded all our memories into the Super 8. And then the memories started accessing us. They only existed when we were together. And we are only together when we sleep."

"Thank you, Professor," said Will.

"What about the time zones?" asked Wendi.

"No time in dreams," said Si. "Asleep we are in the same time zone, maybe."

"Maybe," said Mason. "Anyway, it went away and now it's back. What has changed?"

The leaves had changed, or were changing. *That's the only thing I miss about the East*, thought Mason. *That and the little triangle.*

"It's calling us back," said Wendi. "It's BJ calling us back," said Wendi.

"Unlikely," said Will. He was an expert, a businesslike driver. "Let's talk about what's real."

"The dreams aren't real?" Si asked.

"What's real is that the dreams are back, after thirty-five years. What's real is that we're all having them. Again. After we thought we had managed to get rid of them."

"We couldn't get out of there fast enough," said Si.

"To get rid of them, we had to separate," said Wendi. "Go our separate ways. And it worked. At least for a while."

"Thirty years," said Mason. "That's quite a while."

"Thirty-five." Will pressed on. "Secondly, they have a theme. They all end at the same place. With fire."

"And BJ," said Wendi. "Fire and BJ."

"Third, we are all responding. Here we are. We're all here because we are scared."

"Maybe it's guilt," said Wendi. "Remember guilt?"

"Fourth, we all know what to do."

"We do?" Mason asked Will.

"We're here, on the Taconic, aren't we? Heading north. After all those thirty-five years."

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Will took the Route 55 exit off the Taconic.

"You remember the way," said Mason.

"I've been back, once, six or eight years ago. To check on John. To make sure he wasn't bringing the pigs down on the place. He wasn't particularly glad to see me. He was growing dope, living here alone. Looked like a mountain man."

"That was always his dream," said Wendi.

"That was then," said Si. "This is now."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean none of our dreams are our own anymore. Or haven't you noticed?"

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"Finally get to use this four-wheel drive," Will muttered. They were all silent as the big Pathfinder rocked and lurched up the dirt track, through the narrow gate.

Somebody, it could have been anybody, stepped out of the woods with a shotgun in his hand.

"John!" said Wendi. He looked so old. They were all as shocked as she was. He had been the youngest, the puppy.

"Welcome home," John said with a grim sort of grin.

"What happened to your hand?"

"Fire," said John, opening the shotgun to show it wasn't loaded before getting into the Pathfinder. Wendi slid over to the middle of the front seat to let him in.

"Fire?" Si asked.

"Of course," said Will. "We all saw it in the dreams, didn't we?"

"You should know better than to stick your hands into a dream," Si said to John.

"Yeah, well—"

"How'd you know we were coming?" said Wendi. "I mean, right now, up the road."

"Alarm," said John. "That box on the gate is a laser, sets off a dinger up by the trailer. But I've been expecting you all, since the dreams started up again. Or some of you. I didn't expect the whole crew. Cool. Wendi."

She accepted a kiss on the cheek. "What fire?"

Then, as the SUV pulled up the last steep stretch, through the little grove of locusts, into the clearing, she saw.

They all saw.

"My God," said Si.

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The dome had burned. It was a circle of charred boards with the blackened two-by-four struts still standing. The PVC had melted, but the straps still held the struts together.

They stood and looked in silence, then walked around it.

"Happened last night," said John. "Went up like a bomb. Luckily it was raining, and it didn't spread. I burned my hand trying to get stuff out."

It was starting to rain again, a little.

"Stuff," said Will, sniffing the charred wreckage. The dome was twenty feet across, ten feet high. The Celotex covering had burned away completely, and only the charred struts were left, like a dream of a dome.

A bad dream, thought Mason.

"Meth!" said Will, angrily.

"Huh?"

"A fucking meth lab. Are you crazy, John? You've gone from growing dope to cooking crystal meth? You turned the dome into a meth lab?"

"A guy's got to live," said John, heading toward his trailer, trailing his shotgun. "You guys want some coffee? I'll put a pot on."

The trailer was an ancient plywood Windwalker; it stank of mold and socks and cigarettes. They all slipped out of their shoes, even though the floor was gritty with old mud, and found places to sit while John fired up the woodstove and stirred grounds into a coffee pot.

"Cowboy coffee," said Wendi with a comic grimace.

The meth lab didn't bother her. She sipped her coffee and studied John. It was hard to believe that this narrow-eyed old man had once been the beautiful boy who had come between herself and Mason. And then herself and Will.

"Have you seen a doctor?" Si asked, taking John's arm and peeling back the bandage.

"It'll heal," John said, rewrapping it. "Besides, it was just last night."

He went from wrapping his arm to rolling a joint. John always rolled the best joints.

"I was getting out of the business anyway," he said. Nobody believed him.

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But it was okay. The sun had come out and the Meadow had the old magic, completing the circle. They all drifted out of the trailer into the sun.

"Hard to believe we were once so young," said Wendi. She and Mason walked up the hill to the spot where they had once planned to build their cabin.

"Maybe you're right," Mason said. "Maybe the dream is just a signal, to bring us back together one more time. A summons."

"From who? BJ?"

"That makes it a ghost story."

"Maybe it always was a ghost story, all along."

"What do you think would have happened if it hadn't been for BJ?" He reached for her hand.

She let him take it. "Do you mean, would we have all stayed here and lived happily ever after? I doubt it, Mase. But it's nice to think so, isn't it?"

"Having the same dreams."

"It wasn't so bad. It wouldn't have been so bad, would it?"

Mason sat on the grass, and Wendi lay down beside him, at ninety degrees, with her head on his lap. Just like old times. It felt weirdly, irreversibly, irretrievably right.

She closed her eyes. And wished she hadn't.

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Look. It's dark outside, but there's a light in the dome. One of us, it's Wendi, pulls open the heavy door, and there, in the light of three candles on the floor, is BJ, twirling slowly, hanging by the neck from a rope tied to the high center hub. How did she get it up there? Now we see the ladder, kicked over on the floor, amid the boxes and junk that fill the dome. BJ spins around and we see her face. She is mouthing words, silently, but we can all read lips, in memory at least. "Help. Help me." Then she spins away, into the gathering fire.

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"Whoa!"

"What's wrong?"

"I fell asleep."

"I know. Just like the old days." Mason was smiling. Wendi wasn't.

"I had the dream." She scrambled to her feet, tucking her skirt up under her knees.

"By yourself? Just now?"

"We were all in it. Let's go."

"Where?"

"Back down. To the trailer. The others."

Always the others, Mason thought, following.

They were halfway down the hill when they heard John's warning bell: *ding ding ding*.

Then again: *ding ding ding*.

.....

A Jeep Cherokee was pulling up the last part of the hill, slipping in the mud. On the side it said *Orange County Deputy Sheriff*. A portly man got out and started up the hill toward Si and Will. John came out of the trailer with his shotgun. Mason and Wendi joined them from the hill above.

"Shroom!" said Wendi.

"God damn, John!" said Shroom, touching the brim of his deputy hat as if for luck. "Put the fucking gun away. You're running a meth lab here? I told you, man!"

"Not loaded," said John. He opened the gun to show him then set it down beside the trailer steps. "Accidental fire."

"Bull shit," said Shroom. "Is that you, Will? I'll be damned. And Si. Remember me?"

Of course. They all shook hands.

"And Wendi too. And Mason. Man! Everybody but BJ. What ever happened to her?"

"You don't want to know," said Wendi.

"Probably not," said Shroom. "I always had a crush on her."

"You had a crush on us all," said Wendi. Our townie.

"Somebody saw the fire from the river last night," said Shroom, accepting a cup of tea brought from the trailer by Si. He took a drink then spat, politely. "I had to investigate. Now you've compromised my ass, John. A little grass is one thing, but a meth lab—"

"There's no meth lab here." John spread his hands. "Just some ashes of an old hippie dome."

"No meth lab," said Will. "Just an accidental fire. Civil stuff. No need for you to take note."

"Well, you're all full of shit, and I'm glad to see you all," said Shroom. "And believe me, I don't want trouble for anybody." As he spoke, he was unsnapping a leather case, one of several on his belt.

A *gun*? Wendi wondered, curious but curiously unconcerned. Whatever would be would be.

It was a roll of bright yellow tape.

"But you guys have put me in a spot. The sheriff sent me up here, and if he doesn't like my report he will come up here himself with the fire marshall. Insurance and all."

"We don't have insurance," Si pointed out.

"I have to cover my ass, just in case," said Shroom. He was wrapping a long piece of crime-scene tape around the burned dome. It took the entire roll.

"This is *not* a crime scene," said Will. The others were silent, letting him talk. He who had been their outlaw was now their lawyer.

"It's the only tape I have," said Shroom. "I can't help it if anybody goes in and removes any incriminating stuff, especially if I don't know about it, especially if they don't fuck with the tape. I would hate to see anybody get in trouble, but I have to cover my ass."

"Understood," said Si.

"Then we're square," said Shroom. He shook hands all around and headed back down to his Jeep. "By the way, the sheriff's an asshole," he called out the window as he backed down the hill, not bothering to turn around. "And John, you're an asshole too!"

"Well, now we know," said Mason, watching the Jeep back down the hill toward the gate, like Fate rewinding.

As if Fate could rewind.

"Know what?" Will asked. "Know John's an asshole?"

"Know why we're here. Don't you see? We have to move BJ. Before they start poking around."

"Shit," said Wendi. "That's it. He's right."

.....

"This is some spooky shit," said Mason. It was raining again outside. "Here we all are, after thirty-five years."

The rain beat on the trailer like a drum.

"BJ was calling us," said Si. "Protecting us. Warning us. She doesn't want us to get into trouble."

"Please. If she didn't want us to get into trouble, she wouldn't have killed herself," said Will.

"She wasn't thinking that far ahead," said Wendi. "She never did." She looked at John.

He stared back. "What?"

"You found her," Wendi said. "I remember the night. You were hollering from inside the dome. We all came running."

"So?"

"So. What did you find?"

"What do you mean?" John asked.

"Was she dead when you found her?"

.....

Si made tea. Coffee seemed inappropriate. John sat on the stained, the broken, the filthy couch, either trying to cry or trying not to cry. It was hard to tell.

"BJ was so crazy," he said. "She was spinning, still kicking."

"Why didn't you cut her down?" said Mason. "You had a knife. A fucking handmade knife."

Wendi had given John the knife for his twenty-first birthday.

"I still don't know why," said John, his voice small. "I just didn't."

"She was pregnant, wasn't she," said Wendi. It was a statement, not a question. None of the men would look her in the eye.

"It's too late to lay blame," said Si. He was the only one who hadn't slept with her.

"Poor BJ," said Wendi. "Poor Betty Jean." A moment of silence followed. They all knew BJ's story. Raised in a trailer park (Mission Oaks) in Riverside, her first boy friend was her uncle Roy. Her *Playboy* figure was her ticket out. Away. East.

"It never felt right to leave," said John.

"You did leave though," said Wendi.

"I kept coming back," said John. "Then I just sort of stayed. It was like it was my job to watch her grave."

"You even fucked that up," Will pointed out.

"Doesn't matter," said Mason. "We still have the same job, why we're here. We have to move her."

.....

As soon as the rain let up, they hauled the blackened remnants of the meth apparatus up the hill and buried it under a pile of old trash; John's trash. The dome floor was charred but not burned through. The floorboards would have to be pulled up, and it was raining again, halfheartedly. They returned to the trailer for spaghetti from cans. Si's suggestion that he drive to town for food was vetoed.

"We have until morning," Will said. "It's getting dark anyway. And are we planning to sleep?"

Nobody wanted to sleep.

"It's like we've been dreaming BJ's dreams," said Wendi.

"But BJ was in the dreams," said Will.

"So? I'm always in my own dreams."

"From the outside?"

"We've been dreaming our collective memory," said Si. "Watch out what you wish for. That was once our wish, to be as one. It was what we got."

"Only in our dreams," said John. Was it supposed to be a joke? No one could tell. He had finished crying, that was for sure.

"Except one of us is dead," said Mason.

"Murdered," said Wendi. If she wanted John to wince, and she did, she was disappointed.

"We're all murderers," said Will. "Accessories to murder."

"You made us that," said Wendi.

"We had no choice," said Will. "I wasn't just AWOL. I was a deserter. Plus, I had burned that bus. That was probably treason."

"They never got you for that anyway," said Mason.

"They had lost interest. They would have been interested if they had caught me in 1970, believe me."

"It's done," said Wendi. "We all agreed not to call the cops, or anybody. What could it have done for her anyway? We were her people. There was no one else."

"The rain," said Mason, at the window. "It's quit again."

.....

"We need a crowbar," said Will. The floorboards were charred but still intact.

"There's one in my truck," said John. He got it and pulled up the boards while the others watched. The old nails squealed. Soon the boards were laid aside. The dirt under the dome was bare and clean, as if there had been no fire, no intervening thirty-five years.

"An unmarked grave," said Wendi.

"Quite otherwise," said Si. "Marked with the dome itself. Our dreams for the future."

"Now gone," said Mason. "Give me the shovel. I'll do the honors since nobody else seems to want to."

They all stood in a circle and watched as Mason dug. The shovel cut into the damp earth like a knife into flesh, and Wendi flinched with every slice.

Mason felt it too. *Careful.*

Only two feet down, he hit the sleeping bag. It was gray, no longer green. He didn't want to touch it.

"Let me," said Si. He pushed the dirt back with his hands until the zipper was uncovered. It was brass, still bright. He didn't want to touch it.

"Let me," said Wendi. She knelt between the standing Mason and the kneeling Si while John and Will looked on. "Rolling away the stone," Mason said, as she pulled the zipper down.

Then wished he hadn't.

The sleeping bag was empty.

.....

"Look. She's gone," said John.

"Impossible," said Wendi. She pulled the sleeping bag out of the long, shallow hole and held it up and shook it.

"She's gone," said Mason. "Maybe that's the point."

Something lay in the bottom of the grave. "My camera," said Si. "I thought it was lost."

"I thought so too," said John.

"I put it in the sleeping bag with her," said Wendi. "I didn't put it in the grave."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Si picked it up. It was corroded into a lump of brushed aluminum, caked with mud.

"Because I knew you would want it back. I thought it would put an end to the dreams."

"Well, it didn't," said Will. "What about the film?"

"I kept the film," said Si. "All transferred to video long ago."

"Our collective memory," said Mason. "Maybe that explains the fast forward."

"Where's BJ?" Wendi asked, looking for the first time as if she were about to cry. "Poor BJ. Who called us here?"

"I say we split," said Mason. "It's not even midnight yet."

"And leave me here to deal with the sheriff alone?"

"Then come with us," said Wendi.

"You're all going to different places," said John. "Different worlds."

Wendi rolled up the sleeping bag and started back toward the trailer. "I'm cold," she said.

"This is impossible," said Will.

"Poor BJ," said Mason. "Did we dream it all?"

"Huh?"

"There's no body. She's as gone as ever. More gone. Maybe it never happened. Maybe it was like the dreams."

No one believed that. They shared a glass of tea, with whiskey from John's half-empty plastic jug of Jim Beam.

At midnight they went to sleep. All on the floor. Mason and Wendi slept side by side for the second time in thirty years. "I'll call Constance tomorrow," Mason said. "Meanwhile, it's kind of nice to all be together here. Back home."

"The crime scene, you mean," said Will.

"Our only crime," said Wendi, yawning, "was dreaming of a better world."

"And not cutting her down," amended Will. The last to close his eyes.

.....

Look. It is always sunny, Super 8. Our collective memory. Perhaps that's just because no one made films in bad weather. Or perhaps memory has become imagination. Imagine if it had all worked! Our collective mind imagines what our individual memories couldn't, didn't dare, even then. Here we are, older, wiser perhaps, walking around the ruins of the dome that was our first collective project. Our first and last. Our only. It's in ruins, but we are still standing.

There are Mason and Wendi, hand in hand, in old age. Will, free at last. Si, still holding things together, still making tea. Even John, having survived heroin and meth, abashed as always, but with a grin. With a knife and a gun and a circle of friends, his oldest unacknowledged, irretrievable, impossible dream. We all look worried, but less worried than the young, who are afraid of losing their youth, as if it is a country to which they will never return.

We got over that one.

"I thought it was dead," says John, cleaning the camera with a toothbrush. "But there's a light on the side."

"That's just the sun."

"Blinking?"

The rain is gone. We are sitting in the sun, on boards and stumps, since the inside of the trailer was cold.

"No sheriff, anyway." John seems pleased.

"It's only ten," says Will, consulting his watch. "Ten- ten."

Mason opens the door of the Pathfinder, so we can all enjoy the music floating across the long brown autumn grass. "All Along the Watchtower."

Look. Wendi is hanging the sleeping bag on a line. It looks brighter, greener in the sun than it did in a hole in the earth.

Ding ding ding.

Mason looks up. "Two riders are approaching."

Ding ding ding.

"Shit," says Will. "Shit," says John.

We all stand and peer down the road to where the sheriff's car will appear between the knotty, ash-gray locust trees.

Si and Will hurry to make sure that the crime-scene tape is still secure. The dome is a circle of ash, a pile of boards around a hole. Maybe we should have nailed the boards back. Or scattered them over the hole.

"Should've been here by now."

"Maybe he got stuck. Road's still pretty wet."

"Someone's coming." Wendi points.

Look. There is no car. A woman is walking up the road. Short gray hair, tall, wearing coveralls and funny shoes. A little boy walks beside her, holding one hand.

She waves with the other. A little shyly.

"Look, Mase." Wendi reaches for and finds his hand. It feels right in her own.

After a moment's hesitation we all wave back. And wait.

The End

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