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Opening extract from **Half Wild**

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a new day

a crossbill calls

another bird replies, not a crossbill

the first bird takes over again

and again

the crossbill –

shit, it's morning

i've been asleep

it's morning, very early

shit, shit, shit

need to wake up

need to wake up

can't believe i've been asl-

chchchchchchchhchchchcchhhhhchchchhchc
chchchhhchchchhchchchcchchhcchcchchchh
chchchhcchchchchchchhchchchchhchchch
chhchhhchchchchccchchchchhchchchchhc
hchchhchchchchhchchchhchhchchchchchc

SHIT!

the noise is here. HERE!

hchchhchhhchchccchchchchhchchchhhchcch
chchchchchchhchchchcchhhhhchchchhchcch
chchhhchchchhchchchcchchhcchcchchchhc
hchchhcchchchchchchhchchchchhchchch
chhchhhchchchchccchchchchhchchchchh
chchchhchchchchhchchchhchhchchchchc
hchchchhchhhchchccchchchchhchchchhchch

that level of noise means, oh shit, someone with a mobile is close. very close. i can't believe i've been asleep with hunters on my tail. and her. the fast one. she was close last night.

chchchchchchchhchchchcchhhhhchchchhchc
chchchhhchchchhchchchcchchhchchchchh

THINK! THINK!

chchchhchchchcchchchchchchhchchchc
hhhhhchchchhchcchchchhhchchchhchchc

it's a mobile phone, for sure it's a mobile phone. the noise is in my head, not in my ears, it's to the upper right side, inside, constant, like an electrical interference, pure hiss, mobile hiss, loud, three-or-four-metres-away loud.

chhchchchchchhchchchhchchchcchchc
hchchchhchchchcchhhhhchchchhchcchchch

ok, right, lots of people have mobiles. if it's a hunter, that hunter, and she could see me, i'd be dead by now. i'm not dead. she can't see me.

hhchchhchchchchhchchchhchhchhchch
chccchchchchchchchchhchchchcchhhhhc

the noise isn't getting louder. she's not moving closer.
but she's not moving away either.
am i hidden by something?
i'm lying on my side, face pressed into the ground.
totally still. can't see anything but earth. got to move
a little.
but not yet. think first.
stay calm and work it out.

hchchhchcchchchhhchchhchchchchhchc
hchchhchhhchchchchccchchcchchchchhch
chchchhchchchhhchchchchcchchchchchhch
chchchhchhchchchchchccchchchchccchhhh

there's no breeze, no sun, just a faint light. it's early.
the sun must be behind the mountain still. the ground
is cool but dry, no dew. there's the smell of earth and
pine and . . . there's another smell.
what is that smell?
and there's a taste.
a bad taste.
it tastes like . . . oh no –

don't think about it

don't think about it

don't think about it

don't think about it

think about something else

Think about where you are.

chcchcchcchcchcchhchcchhhhchcchc
hhchcchcchcchcchcchhchcchhhchcchc
hchcchhhchcchhhchcchcchcchhchcchcchc

You're lying on the ground, in the early morning, and the air is cool. You're cold. You're cold because . . . you're naked. You're naked and the top half of you is wet. Your chest, your arms . . . your face . . . are wet. And you move the fingers of your left hand, the tiniest of movements, and they're sticky. Sticking together. Like they're coated with drying, sugary juice. But it's not juice –

don't think about it don't think about it
don't think about it don't think about it

THINK ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE!
THINK ABOUT STAYING ALIVE!

chchhchhhchcchcchccchcchhchcchcchcccc
hchcchhhchcchhhchcchhhchcchcchhhch

You've got to move. The Hunters are on your tail. That fast one was close. She was very close last night. What happened last night?

what happened?

NO! FORGET THAT.

chchchchchchchchchhchchchcchhhhhchc

THINK ABOUT STAYING ALIVE.

WORK OUT WHAT TO DO.

You can look, move your head a fraction to see more.
The ground by your face is covered with pine needles.
Brown pine needles. But the brown isn't from the
pine. It's the colour of dried blood. Your left arm is
extended. It's streaked in it. Crusted with dried
brown. But your hand isn't streaked in it, it's thick
with it.
Red.

hchhchcchchchhhchchhchchchchhchch

You can find a stream and wash. Wash it all off.

hchhhchchchchccchchcchchchchchchh

You need to go. For your own safety you have to get
out of here. You need to get moving. Get away.

chchchhhchchccchchchhchchchhhchhc

The mobile phone is close, not changing. It won't be
coming closer.
But you have to look. You have to check.

Turn your head to the other side.
You can do it.

It looks a bit like a log. Please be a log please be a log
please be a log please

It's not a log . . . It's black and red. Black boots. Black
trousers. One bent leg, one straight. Black jacket. Her
face is turned away.

She has short, light brown hair.

It's sopping with blood.

She's lying as still as a log.

Still wet.

Still oozing.

Not fast any more.

The mobile phone is hers.

hchcchchchchchchhchchchcchhhhhchc
hchhchcchchchhhchchchhchchchcchchhc
chcchchchhchchchhcchchchchchchhchch
chchchhchchchchhchhhchchchchccchchc

And as you raise your head you see the wound that is
her throat,
and it is jagged and bloody and deep and

red