



BEFORE THE FIRE

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME.

SYNOPSIS

Deep in the throes of a global pandemic, up-and-coming tv star, Ava Boone, is forced to flee the mounting chaos in Los Angeles and return to her rural hometown. But as she struggles to acclimate to a way of life she left behind long ago, her homecoming attracts a dangerous figure from her past— threatening both her and the family that serves as her only sanctuary.





Directors Statement

by Charlie Buhler

Production on "Before the Fire" didn't face challenges.

It faced impossibilities. Our female-led team battled extreme conditions over several seasons to capture this epic story, in what proved to be the most challenging and exhilarating experience of our lives.

The journey officially started when Jenna and I made the choice to longer surrender to being chosen. We were both incredibly frustrated with how impenetrable Hollywood felt, especially as female filmmakers, and we began to realize if we wanted more opportunities, we had to create our dream job ourselves. So we sat around a table and took inventory of what we had available to us. We could get an airplane, a burning house, military humvees, a working farm... Then, we reversed engineered the story around those set pieces.

"Instead of feeling paralyzed by what we didn't have. We focused on what we did, and built from there. I hope to carry that lesson with me always. "

Once we had the script, we rounded up our most wild and adventurous friends, and made the journey to South Dakota, where our local businesses, police force, and even National Guard pitched in to provide the resources and support that we needed.

It was an exercise in relentlessly pushing forward, and if I learned anything during the filming of "Before the Fire" it was this: the most important part of any production is to populate your film with your strongest supporters. Jenna and I found our tribe in each other, and once we focused on what we had available – we set the parameters and built from there. Our constraints, didn't paralyze us, they sparked our creativity in ways we couldn't have imagined. It's a lesson I hope to carry with me always.





Notes on Production

Principal photography for “Before the Fire” began in February in South Dakota, the coldest month of the year. It was the heart of winter, and each day presented a new titanic struggle against the elements: The days were long, the crew had colds, the gear snapped, essential props went missing; you name a problem, they had it. But the production forged ahead, and shot 11 days on two family farms near the small towns of Delmont and Letcher, SD. Each night, while cinematographer, Drew Bienemann, emptied cards, Charlie and Jenna poured over the next day’s script, strategizing and rewriting in anticipation of the next day’s problems. There would be no opportunity for pick-ups, so they had to walk a thin tightrope, analyzing and adjusting as they went. Once they wrapped the winter, the whole team took a few months off to regroup, and returned in July to film in the intense South Dakota summer.

Over a year after they started, they finally wrapped with the LA shoot. During the entire process the team’s mantra was to make due with what was available. They changed locations, negotiated to close roads, recruited the national guard, wrangled farm animals, and battled tornadoes. The team was small, agile, and flexible- ready to move or change schedule if the weather or light proved uncooperative. The dedicated crew and local community moved mountains to make this movie possible, and Charlie and Jenna are still in awe of what their little team was able to accomplish. They were young female filmmakers with a big dream, and somehow, with the help of their strongest supporters, they were able to climb and scrape and dig through countless obstacles together.

INTERVIEW WITH CHARLIE BUHLER

BEFORE THE FIRE IS MANY THINGS AT ONCE. A LOVE STORY, A FAMILY DRAMA, A THRILLER , A SURVIVAL STORY. IF YOU WERE TO PICK A GENRE TO BEST DESCRIBE IT WHAT WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

It's hard to choose...I love that it has a fluidity between genres, But, i think, at its core, it's a coming of age story. Ava matures into a woman during her year in South Dakota, and even though there are more heightened thriller elements, the challenge was to constantly check-in and make sure we were staying focused on Ava's "hero's journey". Jenna was great at balancing the action with vulnerability and depth, and it was important for the audience to always feel that.

You and Jenna moved from the Midwest to Los Angeles to become filmmakers, but you chose to go back home to South Dakota to make the movie. Why did you choose this route?

We came at it from a non-traditional angle out of necessity. Hollywood is a very closed system, and

it's very difficult to break in, especially for women. So we knew that if filmmaking was something we were passionate about, we'd have to figure out a way to create on our own. We made the decision to travel back to my home in South Dakota because we knew that we would have a level of support and access that would never be possible in Los Angeles; the fire alone would have doubled our budget. The unexpected byproduct of that was it gave us this invaluable freedom. The film was entirely ours, so we could play and experiment. Some things we tried worked, some didn't, but that process of discovery was really important.

“Working like that was really freeing. We could experiment in ways that wouldn't have been possible on a bigger set. Some of the things we tried worked, some didn't, but that process of discovery was really important. “





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LET'S TALK ABOUT THE CLIMACTIC FIRE. HOW DID YOU ACHIEVE SUCH AN INTENSE SCENE ON A LOW BUDGET?

That was one of the most fun –and stressful– nights of my life. The house had been on my grandpa's farm for over 100 years and it had deteriorated to the point that it needed to be demolished. So when I heard my grandpa was going to burn it down, I asked him to wait so we could incorporate it into the movie.

We shot the scene with only one camera, and only the most essential crew. I kept playing different scenarios in my mind the night before, because I knew that once the fire started, it would be an intense race against the clock. I don't think I slept at all.

WAS THE FIRE THE MOST TECHNICALLY CHALLENGING ASPECT OF THE SHOOT?

We had a small crew, and we were working in a harsh environment with no real infrastructure, so there were a number of technical problems we had to overcome, but the primary question was always, how do we pull this off, while keeping our crew safe? No individual shot was worth anyone getting hurt, so safety was always at the forefront

of our minds, whether it was shooting the fire, preventing frost bite, or anything else.

Ultimately, I think my key role as a director is to be a barometer for authenticity. You're obviously choosing your shots based upon what you can and can't pull off – so there is a technical aspect to it, but the most challenging thing is making sure there is a beating heart in every scene. And to be open to adjusting and moving in a different direction, if something feels false.

HOW WAS WORKING WITH DREW BIENEMANN, THE CINEMATOGRAPHER?

Drew and I had worked on a short film together, so I knew that he understood what we were going for aesthetically. We shot the entire movie hand held, and I was constantly impressed by his ability to capture seemingly impossible shots so beautifully.

I also love working with Drew, because I trust him immensely. Our budget forced us to be very intentional in our coverage, and we were constantly challenging each other to be creative in our shot choices. We always asked : What are we looking at? How does this push the story forward? How can we collapse these three shots into one?



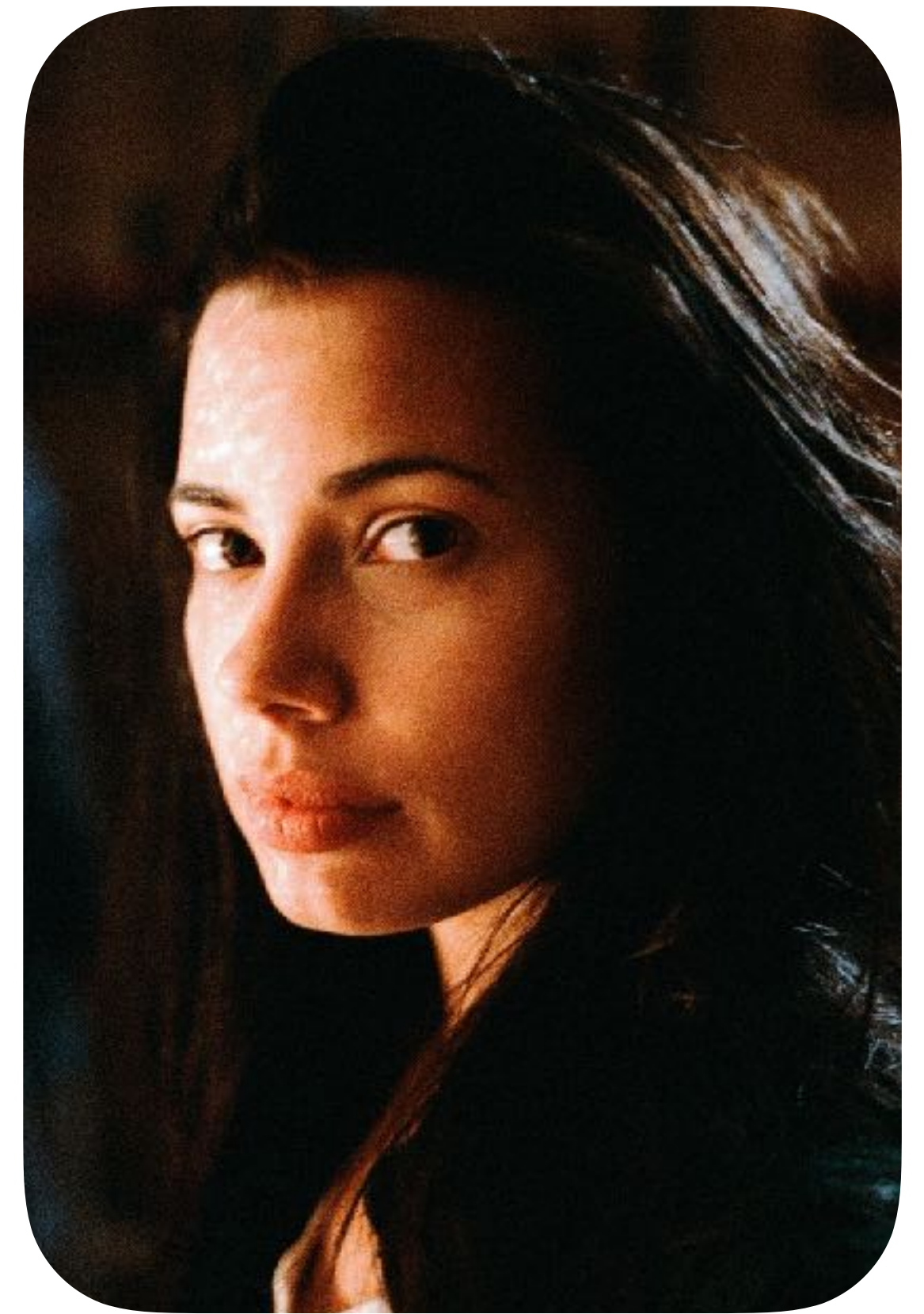
Notes on the Script

by JENNA LYNG ADAMS

The story of "Before the Fire" began when Charlie and I asked ourselves: what resources do we have access to? We have talented friends and big-hearted families willing to dig in and get their hands dirty. We have acres and acres of beautiful farmland, private planes, National Guard humvees, and a house condemned to burn. The story was then reverse engineered to fit these epic set pieces, and I began weaving characters into the potential storyline. Growing up in Minnesota, I've always been drawn to stories about remote communities and places. The rural Midwest is already isolated in ways, but a global emergency could push it even moreso. Our protagonist, Ava, is forced to go home to rural South Dakota as a means of survival, but what if the last place you wanted to go was the only place you could go? I wanted to make a story about a woman reinventing herself over and over again to survive. Ava did everything in the book to become another person.

"I wanted Ava to find her strength by facing the darkest parts of her life in the darkest hours of the world"

Growing up, she lived a traumatic childhood as Amanda. After leaving home, she reinvented herself as Ava Boone and became an actress – a career in which you never have to be yourself. In "Before the Fire", I wanted Ava to find her strength by facing the darkest parts of her life in the darkest hours of the world. Throughout the film, Ava would be brought to the brink of her sanity and, in the end, she would face her trauma and burn it alive. Serving as both a writer and actress, I had to not only maintain the emotional headspace of my own character, but of all of them. And after a sixteen hour day in negative degree weather, production would still need script changes for the following day's scenes. Yet despite the lack of sleep and harsh shooting environment, it was an altogether exhilarating experience. As we battled the seasonal changes, I found myself slipping more and more easily into Ava's reality. The adrenaline rush of making the movie fed into the adrenaline rush of surviving the apocalypse.





INTERVIEW WITH Jenna Lyng Adams

YOU WROTE BEFORE THE FIRE, AND YOU ALSO STAR IN IT. HOW DO YOU APPROACH CREATING A CHARACTER DIFFERENTLY ON PAPER WHEN YOU KNOW YOU’RE GOING TO BE THE ONE PLAYING HER?

There’s a lot of talking to yourself when writing dialogue! In some ways it’s easier to tackle a character you’re playing because you know your own voice. In other ways, it’s more difficult – especially in a gritty drama where a lot of scenes are painful, uncomfortable, or emotional. I’ll write something that excites Writer-Jenna yet simultaneously terrifies Actor-Jenna.

YOU DID A LOT OF REALLY IMPOSSIBLE THINGS FOR VERY LITTLE MONEY! HOW DID YOU PULL IT OFF? AND DID THE LOW BUDGET AFFECT HOW YOU WROTE THE SCRIPT?

Very little sleep and our secret weapons – our mothers! My mom, Lori Lyng, was our on-set caterer. She cooked three meals a day for our entire cast and crew over the course of five weeks of filming. And honestly, I’ve never eaten better on-set. We called Charlie’s mom, Darlene Buhler, the “Queen of Mitchell”. Darlene could pick up the phone and call-in favors like nobody I’ve ever seen.



She can get anything done! They kept both this film (and its filmmakers) alive. In terms of writing, the low-budget affected the script constantly. At times I had to scramble to rewrite a scene the night before – or even the day of – because something fell through or we ran out of time. When you don’t have money to throw at problems, you have to find creative ways to make it work. Fortunately, our cast and crew were very adaptable and up for the challenge, and solving problems became a group effort.

THE COSTUMING SEEMS TO CHANGE AS AVA'S ARC PROGRESSES, YOU GET A REALLY SOLID SENSE OF THE LAYERS COMING OFF, BOTH EMOTIONALLY AND PHYSICALLY. DID YOU HAVE A HAND IN DESIGNING HER WARDROBE, AND HOW DID YOU MAKE THOSE DECISIONS?

Yes, I worked closely with our costume department to create the looks. Charlie and I pulled a lot of clothing for the entire cast from local thrift stores ourselves because we wanted everyone to feel very authentic to the area. At the beginning of the film, Ava wears a lot of clothes from my personal closet, and we shift into the thrifted finds as she settles into farm life. In the winter, we go even further into survival mode, and she's almost unrecognizable from her LA self. The jacket I wear for most of the winter portion actually came from our sound mixer, Jacob. It had the perfect look, and he gave it to me off his back!

IT'S A VERY PHYSICAL ROLE, AND THE SEASONS CHANGE DRASTICALLY. WHAT WAS IT LIKE SHOOTING IN SUCH A HARSH ENVIRONMENT?

The winter shoot, especially, was physically draining in a way I've never experienced as an actor. But Ava was fighting to survive, and it helped me get into her mind and body. I've had some stunt experience and am a fairly athletic person, so fortunately I was able to do all of my own stunts on this project. Shooting in and around a burning house took a lot of planning and oversight from the local fire department (and by department, I mean Charlie's firefighter cousin), and nobody was allowed in the house while it was burning except for me, Charlie, and Drew. We got as many shots as we could before it was physically impossible to get close, but when I singed part of my eyebrow off I thought that was a good indicator I should step back a bit.



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FILMMAKER BIOS



CHARLIE BUHLER // Director

Born in South Dakota to an African American mother and caucasian father, director/ photographer Charlie Buhler strives to infuse her inherently multicultural point of view into all of her work. She is especially interested in using her unique perspective to normalize and bring nuance to experiences and narratives that rarely make it on screen: particularly those of women and people of color. Charlie is currently in post production on her new documentary, “Rosebud”, which follows the lives of 3 Native American hip-hop artists on the reservation in South Dakota. Her clients include: Target, Google, Calvin Klein, The New York Times and more. She is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame



JENNA LYNNG ADAMS // Writer, “Ava Boone”

Twice SAG award nominated, Jenna Lyng Adams works both in front and behind the camera as an actor and producer in Los Angeles. She has produced music videos for major artists and digital content for a long list of big brands garnering millions of views online. Her most notable acting roles include the Golden Globe winning Netflix comedy THE KOMINSKY METHOD by Chuck Lorre with Michael Douglas and Alan Arkin and indie film UNCLE JOHN (official SXSW selection) with John Ashton and Alex Moffat. Jenna is currently penning a dark comedy TV pilot for HBO Max called SO MUCH She is a graduate of Emerson College in Boston.



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