"THE HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND"

Screenplay by

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Adapted from the novel by
William Hope Hodgson

Registered WGAWest

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FADE IN:

A VAST LANDSCAPE

Stretches out before us. Pierced by craggy rock, pockets of coarse brush. Inhospitable. A wasteland.

The overcast sky mutes color, adding to the lifelessness.

No sign of civilization. Of man. Could be our world. Could be another.

Until MUSIC RISES. A classic rock SONG, growing LOUDER as

A CAR

CUTS through frame. Traveling the single ribbon of cement that braves the expanse.

IN THE CAR

A DELIVERY BOY drives, head bobbing. Seventeen, skinny. Acne refusing to give up its fight.

The car shudders under every bump and divot. The road, paved long ago, now decayed by weather and neglect. The vehicle slows as it approaches A METAL GATE that crosses the road. A property line. No fence on either side. Just the gate. Not meant to stop you, but dissuade you.

SIGNS mark the gate. "Private Property." "No Trespassing."

The Teen approaches, KEYS JINGLING. Pops the padlock. The gate swings open on rusted hinges.

The car DRIVES PAST.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Cement gives way to a GRAVEL DRIVEWAY that encircles

THE HOUSE

A tall, GOTHIC structure, made entirely of stone. Bleached by sun and weather. Blackened in spots by something else.

A STONE TOWER stands prominent at its center. Like a turret, or keep.

The home out of place in this rural landscape. As though a massive block of stone had dropped here, and everything that wasn't the house carved away.

INT. THE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

KEYS JINGLE, a deadbolt UNLOCKING. A second. And a third.

The Teen SHOULDERS his way in. Has to put his weight behind the door, STRAINING to move it. Carrying GROCERIES.

Entering, the Delivery Boy reacts with a GRIMACE. Something stinks. He puts the bags on the table. Looks over at --

A toppled GARBAGE CAN. Trash spilled across the floor.

DELIVERY BOY
Mr. Hodgson?

FLIES BUZZ, the sink overflowing with dirty cookware.

The Teen crosses. Picks up a dropped skillet. Adds it to the pile, turning on the water. Washing away rotting waste.

DELIVERY BOY (CONT'D)
Mr. Hodgson, it's Ricky. From the store. I have your order.

No verbal response, but NOISES emanate from upstairs. MOVEMENT.

The Delivery Boy returns to the bags, unpacks them. Stacks the items on the table. Canned goods. Beans, tuna, Spam. All non-perishables.

DELIVERY BOY (CONT'D)
We were out of the jerky you like, but I have everything else. I'll bring it next time.

More items. Coffee. Two bottles of Jack Daniels.

A box of SHOTGUN SHELLS. Then another. Then a third.

Upstairs, more MOVEMENT. Floorboards CREAKING under heavy feet. Something <u>CRASHES</u> to the floor - <u>SHATTERS</u>.

Startling the Teen. He looks up. Calls out:

DELIVERY BOY (CONT'D)
Mr. Hodgson, are you all right?

He listens. No response. Worried, the Teen crosses to

THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRWELL

Looks up. The 2nd floor landing dim in the day's faltering light.

The Delivery Boy waits. Calls out again.

DELIVERY BOY (CONT'D)
Mr. Hodgson?

Silence. No movement.

DELIVERY BOY (CONT'D)
Mr. Hodgson, I'm coming up. Don't shoot me, please.

The Delivery Boy grips the railing. Starts up. The wooden stairs GROANING beneath him.

The upper landing grows closer. Step by creaking step.

STARTLED MOVEMENT at the top of the landing - something DARTING PAST. Low. The heavy PATTER of FEET.

Stopping the Delivery Boy. He waits, scared. Breathless.

DELIVERY BOY (CONT'D)
Mr. Hodgson, is everything okay?

No response. He resumes his ascent. Reaches

THE SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY

Empty. Quiet. The Delivery Boy finds the RUG DISTURBED. A hallway table JARRED from the wall.

He looks down the hall.

HODGSON partially visible in the room at the end. Seated at the window.

DELIVERY BOY (CONT'D)
Mr. Hodgson?

Hodgson doesn't respond. Doesn't move.

The Teen heads towards him. Each step bringing Hodgson more and more into view.

DELIVERY BOY (CONT'D)
Mr. Hodgson, are you all right?

The Teen reaches the entrance to the room. Hodgson angled away. Still not responding. The Teen moves closer.

SCURRYING FOOTSTEPS ERUPT - like something on all fours.

The Teen WHIRLS, scared shitless --

The sounds SKITTERING down the stairs - a FRANTIC ESCAPE. The sound of the DOOR JARRED. Whatever it was exiting.

The Teen breathes again, calming.

DELIVERY BOY (CONT'D)
Jesus, Mr. Hodgson... I think something was in your house.

He turns. Hodgson hasn't reacted. Still hasn't moved.

The Teen moves closer, finds HODGSON (a rough 60's, weathered badly) dead in his chair. Eyes open.

A SHOTGUN across his lap. A HAND-WRITTEN JOURNAL open atop it. Pen still clutched in his hand.

DELIVERY BOY (CONT'D)
Oh shit!

The Delivery Boy backtracks from the room.

A FLY crawls down Hodgson's face. Across his OPEN EYEBALL, staring lifelessly. Looking out at

THE SPRAWLING GROUNDS

That surround the house. Stretching as far as we can see.

The Old Man keeping watch, even in death.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - FRONT YARD - DAY

The homemade SIGN READS "YARD SALE."

The front lawn arranged with an array of HOUSEHOLD OBJECTS.

WILL HODGSON stands at the table. Early 30's. His lean build and handsome face are currently too skinny. Almost gaunt. Something dark behind his eyes. Something broken.

Will finalizes a SALE with a CUSTOMER. Thanks them.

CHELSEA (8, adorable) sets down a box. Removes TOYS and STUFFED ANIMALS from it, arranging them on a table.

WILL
You sure you wanna sell those? You love playing with them.

CHELSEA
Yeah - when I was <u>little</u>. I'm eight now, Daddy.

Will can't help but smile.

WILL
Right. Sorry. My bad.

Chelsea finishes setting them out, heads back for more.

A BUYER approaches, maybe 70. Broad, heavyset. A polished wooden SHADOWBOX FRAME in hand.

WILL (CONT'D)
Fifteen, please.

BUYER
I'm assuming that's just for the frame.

Mounted inside the box is a MILITARY MEDAL OF HONOR.

BUYER (CONT'D)
They don't exactly just hand these things out.

WILL
You want it?

MARA (30's, pretty, trim) overhears from nearby. Approaches. Everything about her - her hair, clothing, minimal make-up - done for practicality over style, but she makes it all work.

MARA
Yes, I'm sorry - that's just for the frame.

She looks at Will. Really? She takes the item. Works at extracting the medal. They share a HUSHED conversation.

WILL
Might be worth something...

MARA
(pointed)
It already is.

WILL
We need the money.

MARA
Not that badly.

Mara pops the back, removing the MEDAL. Smiling, she hands the frame back to the Buyer before moving off.

The Buyer offers a $20. Will pulls a mess of CASH from his pocket, sifts through it for change.

BUYER
You served?

WILL
(solemn)
Three tours.

BUYER
Me, too. Korea. Though I never got lucky enough to see any action.

Will looks at him. Thrown by the choice of words.

BUYER (CONT'D)
Well, son - thank you.

WILL
For what?

BUYER
For what you did. Fighting the good fight.

WILL
Is that what we were doing?

BUYER
Damn straight. We liberated them.

WILL
I don't think they saw it that way.

BUYER
They don't appreciate what we did, that's on them.

Will suppresses the budding argument. Lets it go.

WILL
Maybe I just didn't belong there, then.

The Buyer reads Will's remorse.

BUYER
Well, you feel good knowing you did your country a great service.

WILL
I suppose this is their way of thanking me.

He motions to the FORECLOSED SIGN staking the front lawn.

The Buyer doesn't know how to respond.

Will finds the proper change. Offers it.

BUYER
Keep it. Thanks again.

He moves off, apologetic.

Will stuffs the money back into his pocket. Scans the yard. Watches the scavengers sift through their things. Notices

A FIGURE moving through the crowd. Just glimpses. A MAN. Tall. Olive complexion, dark hair.

Will loses him as another CUSTOMER steps into his view. Hands him MONEY for an item.

WILL
Thank you.

Will turns to find the FIGURE in front of him now --

A MIDDLE-EASTERN MAN, dressed in traditional garb. Face TIGHT with ANGER. He says something, speaking ARABIC.

WILL (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, I don't speak --

The Man's tone RISES and he YANKS open his jacket, revealing a VEST STRAPPED with EXPLOSIVES! DETONATOR in hand.

WILL (CONT'D)
Get down!

Will BOLTS to Chelsea, PULLS her down - SHIELDING her with his body --

The Man SHOUTS in ARABIC, PRESSES the detonator!

Will - eyes clamped - TENSES for the explosion --

It never comes. Seconds pass. Will slowly opens his eyes. Looks up.

The YARD FULL of CUSTOMERS staring at him.

Will scans with panicked confusion. He locates --

The "Suicide Bomber" - actually the MAILMAN standing at the table. Baffled by Will's reaction. The "detonator" a click PEN, extended for Will. The "vest" his mailbag.

Looks from throughout the yard. WHISPERED COMMENTS.

CHELSEA
(scared)
Daddy, what's wrong?

Will struggles to comprehend. Reality slowly sinking home.

Several spooked Customers put down items and leave.

Mara steps up to the Mailman. Takes the pen. Signs.

MARA
I'm sorry... He's been under a lot of stress.

The Mailman NODS sympathetically. Takes the signed form. Gives Will a concerned look before heading off.

Will stands. Helps Chelsea up.

WILL
I'm sorry, baby. Are you okay?

Chelsea nods. Mara crosses to Will. Tries to say something.

WILL (CONT'D)
I'm okay, I just... I...
(beat)
I'll be back in a few minutes.

Will takes the mail from her. Heads for the house, eyes still lingering on him. Mara watches him go, concerned.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

MEDICINE CABINET OPENS

A PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE snatched from the shelf. One of several. Will pops it open, shakes a PILL into his hand.

Dry-swallows. Returns the bottle. We GLIMPSE the label - "as panic-related episodes occur" - before the cabinet CLOSES.

Will stands, head bowed. A deep inhale. Collecting himself. He looks at himself in the mirror. Can't for long, exiting.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Will weaves through the BOXES that line the now-barren walls. Photos and curtains removed. Pets the head of PEPPER - a reddish Irish setter - as he passes.

Will filters through the mail. Mostly bills. Red envelopes, marked SECOND and THIRD NOTICE. Comes upon one he doesn't recognize. Off-white, high-end paper.

A LAW FIRM EMBLEM on the sender line. From Wisconsin.

Curious, Will opens it. Reads the extracted letter. His expression slackens with bewildered shock.

Mara enters, sees him with the mail.

MARA
Lemme guess - another threatening collection letter.

WILL
It's from an estate lawyer.

MARA
I wouldn't exactly call this an estate. What's he offering?

WILL
Apparently I'm the benefactor of my Uncle's will...

MARA
What'd he leave you?

WILL
(stunned)
Everything. His house, his land...

Mara STOPS what she's doing. Looks at him with shock. Will turns to her, an incredulous SMILE creasing his face.

Mara SWOOPS over. Leans in to read it. GASPS, elated.

MARA
Oh my God... is this for real?

WILL
I think so.

She SQUEALS in delight - causing Pepper to BARK. Mara hugs Will fiercely.

MARA
I can't believe it! I didn't know you had a Uncle.

WILL
Neither did I. I think I might have been named after him...

They let it sink in.

WILL (CONT'D)
There's gotta be a catch, right?

MARA
No. We deserve this. You know how hard we've had it lately? We were due for something good to happen.

WILL
Don't get too excited. It's Wisconsin.

MARA
It's a fresh start. No mortgage to worry about. We can get back on our feet, financially. A place to raise Chelsea without worrying. A place where you can get better.

Will nods, but it still stings.

MARA (CONT'D)
This is gonna be great. It's just what we need.

Will smiles, his concerns assuaged. Somewhat.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The family's small SUV tows a U-Haul TRAILER down the highway. The car packed, roof strapped with items.

The vehicle CROSSES a bridge, the receding landscape spiked with glass and steel buildings. The road ahead courses through thickening greenery that stretches to the horizon.

INT. FAMILY SUV - DAY - MOVING

Will drives, Mara beside him. The GPS displays their route. Chelsea sits in back, drawing in a notebook.

Pepper rests beside her. YAWNS from boredom.

Chelsea YAWNS, almost in response.

Mara YAWNS next. Covers it. Will looks at her.

MARA
Don't blame me. The dog started it.

Chelsea laughs. Will smiles. Focuses on driving.

ON THE ROAD AHEAD

A VEHICLE parked across the road, ENGULFED in FLAMES. A MILITARY HUMVEE. Uniformed SOLDIERS scattered across the ground. The road charred BLACK by the explosion.

Will stares at the wreck, his breath quickening. Hands tighten on the wheel as they draw closer.

MARA (CONT'D)
Will? Will?

He doesn't respond, staring. Finally SNAPS out of it, turns to her. Mara watches him, concerned.

MARA (CONT'D)
You okay?

He NODS, exhales. Collecting himself. Breathes again.

MARA (CONT'D)
I can drive for a while.

WILL
Thanks, but I got it.

He offers her a meek smile. Checks the REARVIEW MIRROR.

The fiery wreck actually a MINI-VAN, parked on the side of the road. No flames. Its DRIVER stretching his legs.

Will shifts his gaze forward, letting the image go.

The TWO-LANE HIGHWAY stretches on endlessly ahead of them. Slowly, it TRANSITIONS to That SINGLE RIBBON of cracked cement, bordered by the desolate expanse.

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

The GPS shows a BLANK MAP. Chelsea fidgets, restless.

CHELSEA
How much longer, Daddy?

MARA
(playful)
Yeah, Daddy - how much longer?

Will smiles.

MARA (CONT'D)
You sure we're not lost?

WILL
Nope. Not at all.

Mara ZOOMS OUT on the GPS, trying to locate them.

MARA
This road's not even on the map.

WILL
If we don't find it in ten minutes, we'll turn around.
(looks ahead)
Wait, there's something --

The GATE we saw in the beginning comes into view - now OPEN and awaiting their arrival.

MARA
Somebody lived out here?

WILL
We do, now.

The SUV passes through the gate.

EXT. THE HOUSE - DAY

Tires CRUNCH as the road gives way to GRAVEL and the House comes into view. Looming in its stark contrast to the landscape. The TOWER standing prominent.

Chelsea notices it first.

CHELSEA
Look, Mommy! It's like a castle!

MARA
It sure is...

Will and Mara share a look, unsure what to make of it.

They wind closer, an UPSCALE CAR parked near the house. PETER TILLMAN waits beside it. Sharply dressed. Hawkish nose. Age lines adding character.

Will steers them to a stop, Tillman approaching. The family exits the vehicle. They take in the house - more fortress than home. A foreboding sense about it.

TILLMAN
(surprised)
Will Hodgson? Sorry, I guess I expected you to be older, considering your Uncle's age.

Will's thrown by that. They shake hands.

TILLMAN (CONT'D)
I'm Peter Tillman, the lawyer in charge of the estate.

WILL
Nice to meet you. This is my wife, Mara. Our daughter, Chelsea.

Tillman shakes Mara's hand. Smiles at Chelsea. Pepper trots alongside her.

CHELSEA
And Pepper, Daddy.

Will smiles. Corrects himself.

WILL
Right. And our dog, Pepper.

TILLMAN
You found the place okay?

Will looks at Mara, neither sure how to answer.

WILL
We're here...

Tillman SMILES.

TILLMAN
That you are. This is the house.
(motions to it)
Let me show you around. As you can see, it's a bit unusual.

MARA
No kidding?

Tillman leads them to the door.

TILLMAN
The house pre-dates all of the town's records, so I can't tell you exactly how old it is. There is mention that pieces of the original structure - including the tower - were already here when the first settlers arrived. As far as we can tell, some kind of structure has always been here.

Mara and Will share a look - bewildered. Tillman reads it.

TILLMAN (CONT'D)
Though I can't imagine why. There's nothing else out here.

WILL
How'd my Uncle get it?

TILLMAN
According to the deed, he inherited it from the former owner. No relation. Truth be told, there isn't a single record of it being sold. Ever. It's always just been handed over, as it was to you.

As they near the door, the SNAPPING of GLASS stops Will. He looks down, finds --

Curved white SHARDS of GLASS littering the ground. The remnants of BROKEN LIGHTBULBS.

Will looks up, traces them back to FLOODLIGHTS, mounted on the sides of the house. The bulbs snapped away.

TILLMAN (CONT'D)
You'll find those mounted all around the house. They're motion-sensitive, so you might wanna keep the dog in at night.

Tillman unlocks ONE of the three deadbolts on the door.

TILLMAN (CONT'D)
The doors are particularly heavy, so you have to give them a good push.

He twists the handle, SHOULDERS the door open. Motions for them to enter first.

TILLMAN (CONT'D)
Please. It's your home now.

The family smiles as they enter. Tillman follows them in. Hefts the door closed behind them.

None of them noticing the lower half of the door, veined with deep, CROOKED MARKS. Like scratches.

INT. THE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

CHANDELIER SNAPS TO LIFE

Tillman manning the light switch on the wall, illuminating A LARGE LIVING ROOM. Furniture protected by sheets. A tall GRANDFATHER CLOCK TICKS AWAY against one wall. A massive STONE FIREPLACE. The wooden stairs ascend out of sight.

Chelsea leads the way, exploring. Pulling Mara by the hand.

TILLMAN
The house runs primarily on a generator. I'll show you how to work it. The electrical lines do reach this far out, but they're spotty. Same goes for the phone line. Lots of downed wires and poles. And cell reception's non-existent out here. They keep trying, but something's always interfering with the signal.

MARA
"Interfering"?

TILLMAN
Rumor is it's the high mineral content in the ground. No one seems to know for sure.

Will pulls his cell phone, checks it. No Signal.

TILLMAN (CONT'D)
Did you know your Uncle well?

WILL
I can't say I knew him at all. All my family could tell me was that he isolated himself more and more over the years, until they lost contact.

TILLMAN
It takes a certain type of person to live out here, away from the rest of the world. Your Uncle seemed to like it that way. He was a bit of what we'd call an "odd bird."

CHELSEA
Daddy's uncle was a bird?

They LAUGH and flow across the room into

THE KITCHEN

TILLMAN
Appliances aren't new, but they all work.

Mara takes the room in. Functional appliances. Pantry shelving. A spice rack. A GUNRACK, mounted to the wall.

MARA
There's a gunrack. In the kitchen.

TILLMAN
Actually, there's one in every room. Apparently your Uncle was quite the enthusiast.

MARA
Not exactly the word I'd use...

TILLMAN
I took the liberty of moving all of the firearms into the basement. I wasn't sure what you'd want to do with them.

Will crosses to a window. Moves the curtains aside to find METAL BARS BLOCKING the window. Mounted on the inside.

Will grips them. They hold, solidly mounted.

WILL
There a lot of crime out here?

TILLMAN
None I'm aware of. You're the only people for miles. The property line stretches for almost two hundred acres.

Will and Mara share a look, impressed.

WILL
That's a lot of land.

TILLMAN
Unfortunately, none of it's farmable.

WILL
What the hell did he use it for?

Tillman shrugs. Can't answer that. Will turns back to the window. Looks out.

The EXPANSE surrounds them. Stretching to the horizon.

Chelsea JIGGLES Mara's hand impatiently.

CHELSEA
Can I see my room? And the tower!

MARA
Sure, baby.

TILLMAN
In the old days, they'd call it a keep. It was the place to go for safety when the castle got invaded.

Tillman leads them off. Will follows, moving away from the window. Tillman's VOICE FADING as they climb the stairs.

We LINGER, peering out the window. At the expanse beyond. Held at bay by the bars.

INT. THE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Will SIGNS the last of the papers. Flips back to the first page and hands them to Tillman. Tillman hands him KEYS.

TILLMAN
That does it. I'll have these notarized and a copy returned to you. Just so you're aware, a portion of your Uncle's funds go to the local hospital for the care of his ward.

WILL
His ward?

TILLMAN
A woman he took in years ago. He claimed he found her walking the grounds one day. There were rumors, as you can imagine, but she's too old to be his child.

MARA
So who is she?

TILLMAN
No one knows. They've never been able to identify her.

MARA
She doesn't know her name?

TILLMAN
I don't think she's spoken in decades.

Will and Mara share a look, mystified.

TILLMAN (CONT'D)
But the will is iron-clad when it comes to her care.

WILL
That's all right. Sounds like he did right by her.

TILLMAN
Also, he asked in his will that you read his journals.
(MORE)

TILLMAN (CONT'D)
You'll find them throughout the house. He claims they explain everything.

Will considers that. Nods. Tillman collects his coat. Moves for the door. Stops.

TILLMAN (CONT'D)
It takes a certain type of person to live out here. So far removed from everything...

Mara looks at Will, concerned.

TILLMAN (CONT'D)
I understand if you're not up for it. But the house must be donated to the next inhabitant. I can help you find someone, should it come to that.

WILL
Thanks, but we're gonna stay for a while. Try it out.

Tillman nods. Will walks him to the door. Shakes the exiting man's hand.

TILLMAN
Good luck. Maybe I'll see you in town.

Will closes the door behind Tillman. Notices the THREE DIFFERENT DEADBOLTS on the door.

Turns, taking the room in. Lands on Mara.

WILL
You thinking what I'm thinking?

MARA
Yeah. "Odd bird" doesn't begin to describe it. He's got this place locked down like a fortress.

WILL
Exactly. Why go to that level of security unless you're hiding something. Like a fortune. Cash, or gold. Shit, maybe he was D.B. Cooper.

MARA
Or maybe he was just a crazy shut-in.

WILL
Only one way to find out.

MARA
(daunted)
It's a really big house.

Will considers that. Thinks. Calls out.

WILL
Chelsea - come here, baby. We're gonna have a scavenger hunt.

A MONTAGE

As the trio searches the house:

Chelsea lifts dangling sheets to check UNDER BEDS.

Mara opens the PANTRY, finds it stocked with CANNED GOODS. Enough food to sustain oneself for weeks. Or longer.

Will opens a dresser drawer, inhabited by socks and underwear. He feels around inside. Opens the next drawer.

Filled with small WHITE BOXES. Will opens one, checking. Extracts a SHOTGUN SHELL. The drawer filled with ammunition. An arsenal's worth.

Will slides the drawer shut.

Chelsea FLIPS up RUGS, searching underneath for secret compartments. Pepper watches, amused. Dust flies.

Mara checks behind PAINTINGS for wall safes. Finds nothing.

Will opens a cabinet - a stack of JOURNALS spilling out. Dozens of them. Identical to the one in the old man's lap.

Will picks one up, flips through it. The pages covered in precise HANDWRITING. Every entry DATED.

Mara opens a closet, finds it stocked with packaged LIGHT BULBS. Row upon row of them. Floodlight bulbs.

Another drawer opens. More JOURNALS. Dozens more.

The search continues: closets and drawers opened - rugs tossed. Finding more canned goods. Ammunition. Journals.

INT. THE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Will stands in the kitchen, thinking. Cabinet doors and drawers open all around him. Searched. The table STACKED with JOURNALS. Dozens and dozens of them, piled high.

Will considers them. Looks over, at the BASEMENT DOOR.

INT. THE HOUSE - BASEMENT

A NAKED LIGHT BULB clicks to life. Showers Will in a pool of stark illumination. He scans the basement.

Homemade shelving. A wall of tools. Worktables.

Will crosses to a table. Piled high with GUNS. Dozens of them. Mostly shotguns and rifles.

WILL
And I thought I was crazy...

On the table, a metal TOOL BOX. Aged by rust. Will opens it. The box FILLED with STICKS of DYNAMITE. No fuses.

WILL (CONT'D)
Jesus...

Will closes the box, seals it. Looks around. Moves it onto a HIGH SHELF. Well out of Chelsea's reach.

Something on a lower shelf draws his attention. Will leans closer. Shocked, he holds one up for a closer look.

A JAWBONE. Long. Belonging to some kind of animal. Ridged with SMALL, SQUARE TEETH. Similar to ours.

Will finds more on the shelf. Among them A CURVED BONE, yellowed with age. Like a TUSK. Its TIP marred by lines. Filed to a keen POINT.

Will fingers the tip of the tusk, FLINCHES at its sharpness.

Disturbed, Will puts the item back. Moves on. The room quickly falling into darkness outside of the bulb's range.

Will finds a FLASHLIGHT - a shelf of them, in fact. Clicks one on. Sweeps the room with the beam.

Illuminating a row of BEAR TRAPS lining the shelves. Steel teeth clenched.

Will crosses the room, searching. His footsteps CHANGE - taking on a WOODEN, HOLLOW RESONANCE. Will looks down at A WOODEN TRAP DOOR beneath his feet. Old, thick wood. Padlocked shut.

Will smiles. Bingo.

Will crosses back for the tools. Stops when something catches his eye. A KEY, hanging from a wooden SUPPORT BEAM.

THE PADLOCK SNAPS OPEN

Will unlocking it. He slips it off, undoes the latch. Grabs the handle and PULLS.

The door rises - barely. Inches thick. Solid wood.

Will STRAINS. Can't lift the hatch. Lets it DROP.

WILL (CONT'D)
Wow.

Will sits back, thinking. Notices something out of frame.

CUT TO:

METAL WINCH CLANKS

Its PULLEY CHAIN connected to the handle on the trap door. The door YAWNING open.

Mara calls down into the basement.

MARA (O.S.)
Will? You down there?

WILL
Yup.

Will secures the crank, the trap door gaping now. He moves to the opening. Looks down into A VOID. Pitch black. The faint sound of WATER RUNNING - a distant, underground stream.

FOOTSTEPS as Mara and Chelsea descend into the basement, Pepper trailing them.

MARA
You find anything?

WILL
We're not gonna need light bulbs for a while. Or ammunition. The house is stocked with it. Oh yeah - and notebooks. Lots of 'em.

Will aims the flashlight into the opening. Finds WIDE STAIRS, carved out of the earth. Descending well past the beam's reach. Rough stone walls.

Pepper approaches, peers into the opening. Sniffs. Chelsea at his side.

CHELSEA
What's that, Daddy?

WILL
I'm not sure.

Mara leans, looks down into the opening.

MARA
Where's it go?

WILL
Down.

MARA
(under her breath)
Smart-ass.

Chelsea wonders off, exploring the basement.

WILL
Chelsea, be careful - there's a lot of dangerous stuff down here.

Mara trails the little girl. Seeing the worktable of GUNS, she steers Chelsea away.

MARA
The guy sure liked his guns.

WILL
Forget D.B. Cooper, I'm beginning to think he was the Unabomber.

CHELSEA
What's a Unabomber?

MARA
Nothing, baby. Daddy's just being silly.

Mara gives him a LOOK over Chelsea's head. Will realizes he's said too much.

WILL
He must have been a hunter. There's probably a lot of game out here.

Will leans towards the opening. Calls out:

WILL (CONT'D)
Hello!

He listens - his voice ECHOING through dark canyons. Fading.

Daunted by the room, Mara shepherds Chelsea back toward the stairs.

MARA
Okay, you - let's go. Time to get ready for dinner.

WILL
I'll be up in a few.

They ascend towards the kitchen, Will watching. Looks back at the opening. CALLS DOWN again. Listens to the echo.

A SCREECH ERUPTS from the DARKNESS. Bellowing. Animalistic.

Will STARTLES BACK. The screech almost in response to him. He stares at the opening, shocked.

Mara stops, concerned.

MARA
Will? You okay?

WILL
Yeah, I --

Will listens. The sound GONE now. Long faded.

WILL (CONT'D)
Must've just been my echo...

Mara ushers Chelsea out of the basement.

Will tries to brush it off. Can't quite, unnerved.

CUT TO:

The PADLOCK SNAPS closed, back in place over the now-closed trapdoor. Will TURNS off the bulb, plunging us to BLACK.

EXT. THE HOUSE - DUSK

The house sits. Windows like beacons in the waning daylight.

INT. THE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A FIRE CRACKLES in the fireplace.

A STACK of JOURNALS sit on a table beside Will, seated in a leather chair. One of the books open on his lap. He reads.

We catch PHRASES. Fragments. Hodgson's VOICE narrates.

HODGSON (V.O.)
"I've done what I can to slow them.
(MORE)

HODGSON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Fortified the house as best I know how. Though I was never a man of war, living here has made me one. Still, I fear my efforts are not enough... I hear them down there. Moving. Scratching. Clearing away the stone. Tunneling their way back up."

Will's chilled by the words. Keeps reading.

HODGSON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
"I only hope whoever takes residence after me can hold the line. I would ask God for help, but my time here has taught me all too well He doesn't exist. At least not any God we know..."

A HAND LANDS on Will's shoulder - STARTLING him. He finds Mara beside him, dressed in a silk babydoll nighty.

MARA
Didn't you hear me? I've been calling you for minutes.

WILL
What? No... Sorry. Guess I got wrapped up reading these...

He motions to the journals. But Mara's concerned. Face creased with worry.

MARA
Did you take your pill?

WILL
Not yet.

Not the answer she wanted. Will feels her gaze, looks up.

WILL (CONT'D)
You know what they do to me. I'm a zombie the next day.

MARA
You need to take them.

WILL
(re-assuring)
I feel good. The best I've felt in a while. If I feel like I need to, I will. Promise.

Mara lets it go. Motions to the journals.

MARA
You're actually reading those?

WILL
I've been skimming them. Least I can do. He left us his house.

MARA
What's he write about?

WILL
It's wild... I think he went a little crazy, living out here by himself for so long.

MARA
(playful)
You think?

Will smiles.

WILL
A bunch of them talk about that woman - the one the lawyer mentioned. He says her name was "Missy". But he claims he found her in the tunnels under the house.

MARA
There are tunnels under the house?

WILL
Must be where that door leads.

Mara takes his hand.

MARA
Come to bed.

WILL
In a minute.

She moves his hand to her bare thigh. Lets it linger. Will catches on, Mara offering a playful smile.

WILL (CONT'D)
Oh. Got it.

Will grins. Put the journal aside and lets her lead him from the room.

INT. THE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Will and Mara lie in bed, post-coital. She traces the edge of his face. Sparks a whispered conversation.

MARA
(concerned)
You sure you're okay with this? Moving is stressful enough. But moving here - this house. So far removed from everything. All the bars. And the guns...

WILL
And the other guns.

He's playing, but she's not as amused.

MARA
I don't want them around Chelsea.

WILL
Me neither. We'll get rid of them.

MARA
You heard the lawyer... maybe we're not the right kind of people to live here. We can go stay with my parents. Just til we get back on our feet.

WILL
Why? We have a perfectly good house, right here. Our house. Besides, I think living with your Mom would push me to re-enlist.

Mara SMACKS him playfully. But her concern lingers.

WILL (CONT'D)
We'll be fine. I'm fine. Besides, I'd feel like an intruder at your parents. Here we can make our own place. Maybe we'll love it. If not, we'll leave. Let's at least give it a try.

MARA
You'll tell me? If anything here sets you off?

WILL
I will. I feel good. I actually think being here will help. Like you said, a fresh start.

She smiles, her fears assuaged.

MARA
Okay then.

Will smiles back. They KISS, nestle in to sleep. We

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE HOUSE - VARIOUS - NIGHT

The house rests. Patch-worked with shadow.

Will and Mara sleep, coiled in one another.

Chelsea sleeps in her bed, a stuffed animal clutched in her arms. Her soft breathing fills the room.

DOWNSTAIRS

Pepper sleeps on the kitchen floor, facing the BACK DOOR. His eyes OPEN. Focus on

THE DOOR

Beyond it - outside - a SOUND. Movement on the gravel.

Pepper listens.

The sound continues. Something MOVING across the driveway. Growing louder as it nears, but still faint. As though <u>trying</u> to be quiet.

Pepper lifts his head. Nostrils FLARING as he sniffs.

INT. THE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Pepper's GROWLING stirs Will, his eyes opening. He listens. The GROWLING persists. Deepens.

Will checks the clock. 2:13 am.

WILL
Gimme a break...

Will extricates himself from Mara. She rolls away, falls still again. Will slips from the covers.

INT. THE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Will enters. Finds Pepper STANDING. GROWLING at the door.

WILL
What's the matter, buddy? Something out there?

Will moves to the door. Looks out.

The yard swallowed by the rural darkness.

Will finds the light switch, FLIPS it.

Darkness prevails. The floodlights SMASHED.

WILL (CONT'D)
Right.

Will turns on the kitchen light. Snaps back the DEADBOLT. Unlocking it. Grabs the door handle.

Pepper STEPS BACK, haunches tensing. His GROWLING intensifies. Will notices.

WILL (CONT'D)
Relax. It's just a raccoon or something.

Will OPENS the door. Steps out.

EXT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

The driveway is EMPTY.

Will scans. Can't see beyond the kitchen light's limited spill. So dark you could swear there's no world out there.

Pepper joins him, at his side. Sniffs. The duo silhouetted in the narrow band of doorway light.

WILL
Whatever it was, guess you scared it away. Good boy.

He pets the dog, leads him back inside. Re-bolts the lock.

The door's lower half now marred by more of those MARKINGS we saw when they first arrived. Fresh ones. Like SCRATCHES.

INT. THE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

A POWER SCREWDRIVER WHIRS

Extracting LONG, THICK SCREWS from the window-mounted BARS. Wood SCREECHING.

Will lifts the bars OUT. Clearing the window.

EXT. THE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Will screws new BULBS into the floodlight mounts. Climbs down the ladder.

INT. THE BARN - DAY

Will enters, sets the LADDER against the barn's stone wall. The barred window frames stacked nearby.

Will takes in the barn, a large OBJECT filling the bulk of it. Will flips the LIGHT SWITCH, illuminating

A CROP THRESHER. Its front end consumed by two GRINDER WHEELS. Rollers of SPIKED METAL.

Will moves closer. Looks up at the cab. Confused, he SCALES to it. Finds METAL GRATING mounted around the cab's windows.

Will tugs on the metal. Secure. He scoffs.

WILL
Nut case.

Something MOVES. A SCUFFING near the back of the barn.

Will turns, alerted by it. Listens.

WILL (CONT'D)
Mara? That you?

No response. Will peers. The back of the barn dark. Shadowed by the thresher's mass.

Will jumps down. Follows the sound. Down along the thresher. He reaches the back. Empty.

SHIPPING CRATES line the back wall. Will opens one. Inside, PROPANE TANKS.

Will digs deeper. Extracts an ODDLY-SHAPED NOZZLE. Will examines it closely, realizes.

It's a FLAME THROWER.

Will lays it back inside the crate. Re-seals the lid. Moves to the next. Opens it. Brushes aside the dense layer of packing excelsior to reveal

A WWII-ERA BOMB. The kind bomber planes unleashed. Cold, grey metal. Cylindrical.

WILL (CONT'D)
Jesus...

Will recovers the bomb. Closes the box, sealing it tightly.

More MOVEMENT. Will whirls. Moves --

The SOUNDS QUICKEN - SCURRYING now.

Will rounds the other side of the thresher - finds this side of the barn EMPTY. But the SOUNDS persist.

The BRUSH of movement. Something SCUFFING dirt - SCRATCHING stone. Coming from dead ahead. But there's nothing there.

Will CLOSES his eyes. Clamps them shut. Inhales deeply. Exhales. Slowly. Opens his eyes --

CHELSEA STANDING IN FRONT OF HIM.

Will STARTLES. Recovers.

WILL (CONT'D)
Jeez - honey, where'd you come from?

CHELSEA
Outside.

WILL
Was Pepper just in here?

CHELSEA
He was with me.

She motions to the dog, at her side.

Will scans the barn, unnerved. Trying to make sense of it.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
Daddy, can we go explore? Mommy won't let me go alone.

EXT. THE HOUSE - SURROUNDING GROUNDS - DAY

Will and Chelsea venture away from the house, Pepper leading.

A THICK EXPANSE of TREES looms ahead. Heavy branches masking the forest in shadow.

Will squeezes a RUBBER CHICKEN, making it SQUEAK. Throws it - Pepper RACING to retrieve the toy.

The trio reach a low FENCE. Strung with BARBED WIRE. One section COLLAPSED. Flattened under a thick piece of TREE.

WILL
Great.

CHELSEA
What's wrong?

WILL
Nothing. Just something else for Daddy to fix.

He steps over the downed fence. LIFTS Chelsea over it. Turns for Pepper - who uses the tree to CROSS OVER the barrier. As though that's why it's there.

EXT. THE WOODS - DAY

Will and Chelsea CRUNCH across the blanket of fallen leaves. Chelsea RAMBLES, kicking up the leaves in front of her. Pepper SNIFFS everything, senses ablaze.

CHELSEA
-- but then Ashley said that 'cause she could do the monkey-bars and I couldn't, she was in charge.

WILL
(amused)
Wow. She sounds bossy.

CHELSEA
She is. That's why I'm glad we moved. Even though I miss my --

A BEAR TRAP SNAPS SHUT in front of her! She STARTLES, FALLS BACK --

Will hurries to her. Chelsea clutches him, near tears.

WILL
Are you okay, baby?

Chelsea nods, fear subsiding.

Will looks at the trap, no longer camouflaged by brush. Shocked, he scans the surrounding area for more.

CHELSEA
What is that?

WILL
It's a bear trap, I think.

CHELSEA
There's bears here?

WILL
I guess so... Pepper - stay.

The dog SITS, obeying. Will stands. Finds a long STICK.

Uses it to SWEEP the ground, brushing leaves aside. Searching for more traps. Like clearing a mine field.

CLINK. Hits another - camouflaged by leaves. Will brushes them aside. TRIGGERS the trap with his stick, steel maw CLAMPING around it. He frees the stick, resumes the search.

Comes upon another TRAP, this one already TRIPPED. Something CAUGHT in it.

A HIND LEG, once belonging to some kind of animal.

WILL (CONT'D)
Stay there, baby.

CHELSEA
What is that, Daddy?

WILL
It's some kind of animal leg...

Will kneels. Examines the limb.

The once-fleshy skin now GREENING with decay. Smattered with coarse hair. Like a BOAR'S LEG. But oversized.

WILL (CONT'D)
Looks like some kind of boar.

CHELSEA
What's a boar?

WILL
It's like a pig. A wild pig.

Will notices the upper part of the leg is GNAWED. Chewed off, to escape.

WILL (CONT'D)
Looks like it chewed its way out.

Will turns the trap for a better look The HOOF coming into view. Long <u>TOES</u> at the end of it. More human than animal. Capped by THICK, YELLOWED TOENAILS.

Will's struggles to comprehend it. He closes his EYES, Breathes deep. Opens them to look again.

The toed-limb remains. It's real.

Will's baffled. Chelsea snaps him out of it.

CHELSEA
Can we go now?

WILL
Sure. But let's use the trail from now on.

EXT. THE WOODS - DAY

The TRAIL reaches the END of the treeline, the trio's view opening to reveal

THE PIT

A deep, crater-like GORGE that stretches out before them. Scarring the earth like an unhealed wound.

WILL
Wow.

CHELSEA
Do we own this, too?

WILL
I don't know. Maybe.

Pepper slinks towards the edge, sniffing. Will advances with him, stops when he realizes Chelsea's following.

WILL (CONT'D)
Stay back, honey. We don't know how stable the ground is.

Will creeps to the EDGE. Peers over.

Can't see the bottom from this angle. The crater-like hillside lined with JAGGED ROCK and THICK SCRUB.

Pepper GROWLS down at the pit. Sensing something. BARKS.

Down the slope, a BRUSH RUSTLES - something STARTLED from its hiding place.

Pepper TAKES OFF after it, forging a PATH down the slope.

CHELSEA
Where's he going, Daddy?

WILL
He must've sensed something. An animal.

The dog DESCENDS. Slipping in and out of view. GROWLS and BARKS waning with the distance.

CHELSEA
Make him come back.

WILL
Don't worry. He'll come back on his own.

CHELSEA
What if he can't get back up? Or he gets hurt?

Will takes in the jagged rocks, the steep slope. Realizes she's right. The trip back up's a lot harder.

WILL
Okay, but you stay here.

Chelsea nods. Satisfied, Will approaches the edge. Calls.

WILL (CONT'D)
Pepper. Come here, boy!

Pepper's GONE from view now. His barking QUIET.

Will finds the clearest route down. Follows, carefully.

Chelsea watches. Tries to help.

CHELSEA
Come on, Pepper!

Will SLIPS, earth giving way beneath him. He GRABS a rock, steadying himself. Resumes his descent, testing each step.

Chelsea waits at the TOP of the slope. Anxious.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
Pepper! Come on, boy!

The BRUSH at the edge of the treeline RUSTLES. Stirred by something. Chelsea turns, tries to locate it.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
Pepper?

More RUSTLING. The thick brush masking whatever's behind it.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
He's here, Daddy. He must have found a way back up.

Will's stops, confused. But accepts it, daunted by the descent. He turns to head back when Pepper BARKS.

Coming from AHEAD of him. Further |down| the slope.

Will turns, trying to locate it.

On the ridge, the RUSTLING persists. Chelsea moves closer.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
Come on, boy. What's the matter?

Will hears another BARK - definitely coming from further down the slope. Whatever's up near Chelsea, it's not Pepper.

WILL
Chelsea...

CHELSEA
It's okay, Daddy. I think he's stuck.

Will struggles his way BACK UP, his ascent slowed by collapsing footholds. He grabs hold, pulls himself forward.

WILL
Chelsea, wait!

Chelsea reaches the brush. Which STOPS moving. Motionless. Chelsea kneels. Reaches out, to clear it aside.

CHELSEA
I'll help you, boy.

Her hands reach in. Grab the branches. Push them back --

Will SCRAMBLES to the top of the ridge behind her, winded more by fear than exertion.

WILL
Baby, stop --

Chelsea TURNS to him - the BRUSH ERUPTING with MOVEMENT as something DARTS AWAY! Chelsea SCREAMS - darts into Will's arms. He holds her.

The brush line RIPPLING as whatever was inside it RUNS OFF.

It takes a beat for Will to breathe again. Then he LAUGHS.

WILL (CONT'D)
It's okay, baby. It was just an animal. There are a lot of them out here.

Will's demeanor calms Chelsea. He scans the thick brush line, trying to see inside it. Too dark to make out anything. But he notices

Their SHADOWS, stretched LONG on the ground. The SUN, clinging low in the sky. Already descending.

WILL (CONT'D)
We should head back. It's getting dark.

CHELSEA
Already?

WILL
Sun goes down earlier this far north. But that means in the summer you'll be able to play outside til after 9 o'clock.

Chelsea BEAMS, a happy surprise.

WILL (CONT'D)
I don't wanna be in these woods when it gets dark.

CHELSEA
(reluctant)
What about Pepper?

WILL
He'll find his way home. Dog's are good at that kind of stuff.
(reads her concern)
Don't worry, he'll be okay. I promise.

CHELSEA
We should've brought bread crumbs. Then we could leave him a trail home.

WILL
Good idea. Next time.

Will takes Chelsea's hand and heads off, slipping back into

THE WOODS

They move steadily. Footsteps CRUNCHING on crisp leaves, fallen twigs. Chelsea HUMMING/SINGING softly to herself.

As they walk, Will hears other SOUNDS. Other MOVEMENT. The RUSTLE of branches and leaves.

He turns, wondering if it's their echo. Searching.

Off to the side, a BRANCH SNAPS.

Will stops, halting Chelsea with them.

WILL (CONT'D)
Hold on baby.

He listens. The MOVEMENT CONTINUES. Definitely not them. Then it STOPS. As though not wanting to be heard.

CHELSEA
What, Daddy? Is it Pepper?

WILL
I don't know. I don't think so...

Will waits, listening. The quiet lingers. A beat before:

WILL (CONT'D)
Okay. Let's go.

They resume walking. Will still alert.

The woods silent now around them. Will starting to calm when The sounds RESUME. Rustling. Movement. Coming from the same direction as before.

Will looks over. Glimpses BRANCHES SWAYING. Stirred.

Will's hand drifts to Chelsea's back. Ushering her along. Their gait quickens. Crunching faster through the leaves.

The SOUNDS QUICKEN as well. Keeping pace. Growing LOUDER in their carelessness. Running parallel.

Will tries to mask his fear. Eyes SCANNING --

More sounds. NEW ONES. Coming from the other side now. Flanking them.

Will can't see anything. Grows unnerved but hides it.

WILL (CONT'D)
Hurry up, baby. It's getting late.

Pace quickening, Will scans, GLIMPSES --

Something DART THROUGH the thick brush - barely glimpsed. Low to the ground. Some kind of animal.

Will increases his pace. Ushering Chelsea faster.

WILL (CONT'D)
Come on - I'll race you.

He starts to JOG, Chelsea running. Will right behind her. Struggling to keep watch yet not trip.

Those LOW SHAPES dart in and out of view. Masked by the waning daylight. Whatever they are, they're moving FASTER.

One RISES UP - from four legs to TWO. Running UPRIGHT.

Will stares, shocked. Unsure what he saw --

WILL (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Faster, baby. Run!

Chelsea struggles, stumbling on the uneven earth.

The SHAPES TRAMPLE through the bushes. Emitting ANIMALISTIC, GRUNTING BREATHS.

Chelsea TRIPS, snared on something. Will SCOOPS her up --

CHELSEA
No fair, Daddy!

Clutching her to him, he RUNS - FULL TILT. Struggling to maintain footing. Fighting his way forward -- branches SNARING HIM - GRABBING hold --

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
What's the matter, Daddy?

WILL
Hold onto me.

Will RACES thru the woods - sweating, straining - the forest seemingly never-ending -- fueled by The PURSUIT SOUNDS, louder still. GRUNTING BREATHES clearer.

WILL (CONT'D)
Don't look, baby! Don't look!

Chelsea CLINGS to him, eyes clamped shut. Crying. Scared.

They finally BURST out of the treeline. Will SPRINTS across the open expanse towards the House.

Chelsea CRIES openly now, eyes sealed.

Will checks behind them --

Doesn't see anything emerging from the forest. Keeps running.

AT THE HOUSE

Mara works at the kitchen window. Sees them RUNNING. Concerned, she exits.

Meets the duo as they arrive outside the house. She reads Chelsea's hysterical state.

Will sets her down, the girl DIVING into her mother's consoling arms.

MARA
What happened? What's wrong?

WILL
(winded)
Something... something was chasing us...

Chelsea cries harder, scared.

MARA
What?

WILL
In the woods... There was something... it was following us.

MARA
What was it?

WILL
I don't know... Some kind of animal. It was big...

Mara remains uncertain. Pets Chelsea, consoling her tears.

MARA
It's okay, baby. Everything's okay now. Did you see what it was?

Chelsea shakes her head, still sucking big breaths.

CHELSEA
Just Daddy. But I heard it.

MARA
What'd you hear?

CHELSEA
Noises. In the woods.

Mara looks at Will for more clarification.

WILL
I saw it.

Mara looks at him. Dubious. Will reads it.

WILL (CONT'D)
(whispered)
This has nothing to do with that. I saw it. Something was chas--

MARA
(hushed)
Stop it! Can't you see you're scaring her?!

Will tries to respond. Can't. Opts not to, considering Chelsea's condition.

Mara glares at him. Escorts Chelsea inside.

Will stings. Turns, looks back across the expanse. At the dense treeline. Motionless in the dying sunlight.

No sign of anything. Will no longer sure what to believe...

EXT. THE HOUSE - DUSK

The sky BURNS orange, the sun fighting its descent.

Will exits the house, Pepper's BOWL in hand. He trips the floodlights, which BLOSSOM to life. Intensely bright.

Will WHISTLES. Calls out towards the TREELINE.

WILL
Pepper! Come on, boy! Pepper!

No response. No movement.

Concerned, Will places the bowl on the ground, near the back door. Steps inside. LOCKS the door behind him.

INT. CHELSEA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Will tucks the girl in. She's sad. Worried.

CHELSEA
I miss Pepper.

WILL
I know. Me, too, baby.

CHELSEA
What if he's hurt? Or lost? He's probably scared...

WILL
He's fine, honey. He's a brave dog. He's just out exploring.

CHELSEA
What if he can't find his way home?

WILL
He will. When I was a kid, every Fourth of July my dog would get scared by the fireworks and run away. Sometimes he'd be gone for weeks. Just when we thought for sure he was de-- not coming back, he'd show up at the door. Filthy and hungry, but acting like he'd only been gone a few hours.

CHELSEA
Where'd he go?

WILL
I don't know. I guess sometimes dogs just need a vacation from their owners.

Chelsea smiles at that.

CHELSEA
I bet all the dogs meet there.

WILL
I bet they do. That's probably where Pepper is right now. I'm sure he'll find his way home in the morning.

Chelsea CHEERS a bit, fears assuaged.

EXT. THE HOUSE - BACK DOOR - MORNING

Pepper's bowl lies SMASHED to pieces in the driveway. Contents scattered. Uneaten.

Will examines it, worried. Looks out at --

The treeline. Looming. Thick with shadow, even in daylight.

Will begins collecting the shattered pieces.

EXT. TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

A typical Main Street. The store fronts that aren't VACANT are well-maintained. The family's SUV parks.

The family climbs out, Mara helping Chelsea. Will heads to the back, retrieves a weighted DUFFEL BAG. The familiar SNAP of CLOTH catches Will's attention. He turns

An AMERICAN FLAG hangs outside a store, catching the breeze.

Below it, two SOLDIERS carry something past, lie it down. A MILITARY BODY-BAG. One of several, lined beside one another.

Will stares, face tensing at the image.

MARA (O.S.)
Will --

He turns to her. Mara and Chelsea wait on the sidewalk.

MARA (CONT'D)
You coming?

Will SLAMS the hatch closed. Follows them.

The "Soldiers" revealed to be two MEN laying down SEED BAGS.

INT. LOCAL STORE - DAY

A BELL over the door JINGLES as the family enters. Will carries a weighted DUFFEL BAG over one shoulder. Mara and Chelsea hand in hand.

The store essentially a local CATCH-ALL. Rows of canned goods and food. Coolers in the back. Hunting and camping supplies. Knick-knacks. Two spinning racks of paperbacks.

The CLERK (50's, huge belly) looks up from behind the counter. The wall behind him racked with GUNS.

CLERK
New faces. You must be the folks who moved into the Hodgson place.

He rises to meet them, metal stool CREAKING under the easing pressure. Will nods. Offers his hand.

WILL
Will Hodgson. This is my wife, Mara. Our daughter, Chelsea.

The Clerk offers Chelsea a friendly smile.

CLERK
Hello there, little missy.

Chelsea tucks protectively behind Mara's leg.

CLERK (CONT'D)
Smart girl. Don't talk to strangers.

MARA
(to Chelsea)
Come on, baby. Help Mommy do some shopping.

She leads Chelsea off, lets her hold the BASKET.

CLERK
You his grandson?

WILL
Nephew.

CLERK
Big age gap.

WILL
(confused)
Not really...

The Clerk looks at Will, shrugs it off.

CLERK
If you say so. What can I do for ya?

WILL
Your sign in the window - "We buy your stuff." I was wondering what I could get for these.

Will lays the duffel bag on the counter. Unzips it to reveal the stock of RIFLES from the house.

CLERK
You're not gonna need 'em?

WILL
I don't hunt.

CLERK
Hell, neither did your Uncle.

Will's thrown by the announcement.

WILL
Then what the hell did he have them for?

CLERK
(shrugs)
Hell if I know. People out this way like their guns. Sometimes lots of 'em. Long as they keep to themselves, I got no problem with that. Your Uncle did that with the best of 'em.

Will considers the new information.

The Clerk examines the guns. Checks the sites, the breaches.

Will notices the TAXIDERMIED ANIMAL HEADS mounted to the walls, over the gun racks. Moose, deer, mountain lion.

WILL
You lived here long?

CLERK
Only my whole life.

WILL
What do you know about the wildlife in the area? Up near the house...

CLERK
Name it. You got it all. Fox, pheasants, raccoons, mountain lion, timber wolf. Hell, even a bear'll pop its head up now and then.

Will nods. Still not the answer he's looking for.

WILL
What about pigs? Wild ones. Like a boar, maybe.

CLERK
Not that I've heard. That don't mean they're not out there.

WILL
(uncertain)
Do you know if they ever... stand up? On two legs. When they're running.

The Clerk looks up from the guns. Giving Will a look.

CLERK
Can't say I've heard that they do. But next time you see that, try to get a picture. Better yet, capture one. Bet the circus'd pay good money for that.

Will SMILES with him, laughing it off.

EXT. EDGE OF THE FOREST - DAY

The forest LOOMS. Will stands before it. Staring in. A TIRE IRON and HATCHET in hand.

He scans the treeline, searching. Listening. Just the normal CAWS and CALLS of wildlife.

Will advances. Heading into the woods.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

Will moves through the woods, a steady, unhurried pace. Keeping a vigilant watch around him. Senses tuned.

He stops, coming upon a triggered BEAR TRAP from the other day. Notes where he is and VEERS in one direction.

Comes upon the trap with the animal LIMB in it.

It's EMPTY. The limb gone.

Will kneels for a closer look. The steel teeth stained red. Crusted with fragments of flesh.

Will searches the surroundings. Sifts the leaves, tosses branches. No sign of it. Will looks back at the trap.

CUT TO:

THE TRAP

As its jaws LOCK BACK into place with a metallic SNAP.

Will - sweaty from exertion - masks the trap with leaves. Checks around him. ALL the traps re-set now.

EXT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Blanketed in rural darkness.

INT. THE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Will lies in bed, sleepless. Mara's RESTFUL BREATHING the only sound. Will slips out of the covers. Exits.

INT. THE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Will sits by the fire, reading another JOURNAL. This one OLDER. Pages YELLOWED by time. The stack reduced by half.

HODGSON (V.O.)
"My body already grows old. The years here different than we know them. Faster somehow."

Behind Will, a WINDOW BRIGHTENS. Floodlight awakened.

Will doesn't notice. Too wrapped up in the writing.

Something THUDS against the house.

Will stops. Listens. Did he hear that? He waits. Silence prolongs itself.

Another THUD.

WILL
What the he--

GLASS SHATTERS - JOLTING Will - he DROPS the journal --

The window PLUNGES BLACK.

Will turns in the direction of the sound. Rises, noticing PHOTOS spilling from the journal. He stops, picks them up.

Stark black and white images of the HOUSE and its former OCCUPANTS. Their faces grim. Strained.

The house behind them in various stages of RECONSTRUCTION. Rebuilt, time and again. The TOWER standing firm in each.

A more recent photo: Will's UNCLE. Around Will's age. Posing with his PREDECESSOR - an aged MAN. The house behind them under repair. Grounds and foundation BLACKENED by fire.

Another photo: his UNCLE alone in front of the house. Considerably OLDER. Like the man we saw in the opening.

The photo dated: 2008. Will moves to the previous photo. Finds it dated 1993.

Will studies the photos, baffled. A fifteen year difference - but Will's uncle looks like he's aged at least 30.

ANOTHER THUDDING IMPACT draws Will's attention. He finds a KITCHEN WINDOW lit from outside. He tucks the photos back into the journal, sets it aside. Follows the SOUND into

THE KITCHEN

Its windows and door backlit.

Will approaches. Another THUD. Louder. More insistent. He PEERS out from a distance.

The DRIVEWAY revealed in the constrained pool of floodlight. Beyond it, darkness reigns. The void.

Will moves to the door for a better view --

Another SHATTER of GLASS STARTLING him - the driveway FALLS DARK. The floodlight SHATTERED.

Scared now, Will listens. Outside, the sound of MOVEMENT. Gravel displaced. Footsteps. Approaching.

BREATHING. Heavy. Animalistic. Something just on the other side of the door. SNIFFING.

Will listens, trying to place the animal. Moves closer.

A new sound. Scritch. The SCRAPE of WOOD. Something SCRATCHING at the other side of the door.

More breathy GRUNTS. Overlapping. Whatever's out there, there's more than one now.

Will creeps closer. Listening.

One of the VOICES takes prominence. Grunted EXHALES, stopping and starting. An unmistakable cadence to it.

Like sentences. The 2nd animal GRUNTS BACK. A response. As though they're communicating in some grunted language.

Will PALES with disbelief. The voices QUIET. Will drifts closer. Strains to hear better, ear towards the door.

He listens. Waits.

The DOORKNOB TURNS. Slowly, but unmistakably.

Will goes WIDE-EYED. Whatever's out there, it's trying to open the door like a man would.

Will notices the DEADBOLT is UNLOCKED.

The doorhandle turns more, nearly at full rotation.

Will reaches up - TWISTS the deadbolt into place.

The DOORKNOB STOPS. Alerted to the noise. Then it SNAPS BACK - released. Will STARTLING.

More SNIFFING. Exploring. The SCRATCHING resumes. Grows louder. More insistent. Will follows it down to

THE BOTTOM OF THE DOOR

Wooden filings sift through. Larger shards. Something digging at the wood. A THICK, FLESHY FINGER JUTS UNDER THE GAP - REACHING IN -- capped by a JAGGED, YELLOWED FINGERNAIL!

Nearly identical to the one Will found in the trap.

Will SCREAMS in shock, STARTLES BACK -- his CRY causing the finger to WITHDRAW --

A GRUNT as whatever's outside RUNS OFF - windows further down the house BRIGHTENING as another motion light is activated.

Will SCANS for a weapon. Lands on the GUN RACK - EMPTY.

He rifles a drawer - emerges with a LARGE KNIFE and a MEAT TENDERIZER. Wields them.

In the next room, another WINDOW BRIGHTENS. Sensor awakened.

Will moves towards the lit windows. Creeps closer. As quietly as possible.

Will steels himself. Nears the window. He EXTENDS the knife. Uses it to DRAW the edge of the curtain ASIDE.

A PAIR OF BLACK EYES STARE IN AT HIM! Beady. Glinting with a malevolent intelligence.

Will SCREAMS and STUMBLES BACK -- his CRY DRIVING the thing away with a SCREECH! Floodlights ACTIVATING down the house as it STREAKS PAST. Low. Running on all fours.

Will stares, shocked -- heart pounding --

Panicked, Will SEARCHES - finds more EMPTY gun racks.

He FLIPS on the lights. All of them. Brightening the room. Races to the IPod DOCK and turns it on. DIALS the volume up.

MUSIC BLASTS, to repel whatever is outside.

Will waits in the center of the rooms, weapons poised. Listens -- sighting from window to window -- breathing quick with fear.

MARA (O.S.)
Will?

Will WHIRLS -- finds Mara and Chelsea in the doorway. Mara stares with shocked concern.

WILL
There's something out there!

MARA
What is it?

WILL
I don't know! Some kind of animal.

CHELSEA
Maybe it's Pepper!

The girl goes ignored. Mara crosses, turns off the IPod.

MARA
Are you sure? Did you see it?

WILL
Yes -- part of it. It was the same thing from the woods. It was right outside the window - looking in!

Mara moves to check - Will CUTTING her off. Arms coming up.

WILL (CONT'D)
Don't!

The INTENSITY in his voice STARTLES Mara. But not as much as the WEAPONS in his raised hands. Mara eyes them nervously.

Will realizes. Lowers them.

WILL (CONT'D)
I'm sorry... they might still be out there.

MARA
"They"?

WILL
There was more than one.

MARA
More than one what?

WILL
I don't -- I'm not sure... But it tried to open the door. It had fingers - like ours. And they were grunting, back and forth. Like they were talking...

Now Mara's definitely dubious.

CHELSEA
Maybe it was Pepper.

WILL
(snapping)
It wasn't Pepper!

Chelsea's STARTLED by his sharp response. Scared to near-tears. Will reads her reaction. Feels like shit about it.

WILL (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, baby. I didn't...

Mara stares at him, thrown by his outburst. Lingers before:

MARA
Did you take your pills?

WILL
Mara...

MARA
Did you?

WILL
This wasn't... that. This was real.

They're both couching their language, for Chelsea. But Mara clearly doesn't believe him.

WILL (CONT'D)
The lights are on outside. Did I imagine that?

Mara sees the floodlight-lit windows.

MARA
So an animal came by and set them off. There're dozens of them out there. But that's all. We're just not used to it.

WILL
It turned the doorhandle. It was trying to get in.

Chelsea PALES, fearful TEARS BRIMMING. Clutches her stuffed animal tighter.

Mara shoots Will a "see what you've done" look. Crosses to Chelsea. Takes her in her arms.

MARA
It's okay, baby. Daddy just had another bad dream. That's all.
(pointed - to Will)
Right?

Will open his mouth to DEFEND himself - Mara's GLARE silencing him. He reads Chelsea's terror. Acquiesces.

WILL
Mom's right. I'm sorry, baby. I guess I'm not used to living here yet. Lots of new noises.

Mara scoops Chelsea up, the girl CLINGING to her. Mara crosses, stopping beside Will to whisper:

MARA
If she has nightmares, you're getting up with her.

Mara exits the room. Will watches them go. Looks down at the weapons in his hands.

Around him, the WINDOWS FALL DARK. Time expended.

Will stands alone in the darkened room.

INT. THE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Will eases the door open. Mara lies in bed, on her side. Turned away. Eyes open.

Will crosses to the bed. Finds his PILL BOTTLE set on the night table. A PILL already extracted. Waiting.

Will pops it into his mouth. Dry swallows. Lies down, facing away from Mara.

EXT. THE HOUSE - MORNING

A good-sized ROCK lies on the gravel driveway. Out of place.

Will picks it up. Hefts it. Finds GLASS littering the driveway. The remains of the floodlight bulbs.

The STEMS still mounted in the fixtures. Bulbs shattered.

Will HURLS the rock back at the woods.

INT. LOCAL STORE - DAY

The BELL JINGLES as Will enters. Stalks to the counter.

WILL
The guns I sold you the other day - I need to buy 'em back.

CLERK
How many you want?

WILL
All of 'em.

The Clerk reacts, surprised. Nods.

CLERK
Okay then.

The Clerk moves to collect them. Stops, remembering something.

CLERK (CONT'D)
You got some mail.

He retrieves a small BUNDLE of MAIL from behind the counter. Places it in front of Will. Moves off.

Will sifts through the items. A few BILLS, addressed to him. Hunting-style catalogs, to his Uncle. And a LETTER.

Will examines it. Notices the SENDER in the upper corner: Willowbrook Psychiatric Sanctuary. With an address.

WILL
Excuse me - how far is this?

EXT. WILLOWBROOK PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - DAY

An old, stone building on sprawling grounds, contained behind high WALLS.

INT. WILLOWBROOK PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - DAY

Will moves down the hall with SISTER MARGARET (60's, petite.) Standard institutional hallways. The cheerful paint and bright lights fail to dissuade the unnerving pall.

SISTER MARGARET
I'm unclear exactly what you're hoping to learn from her.

WILL
I just have some questions... about the property.

SISTER MARGARET
I don't expect Missy will be much help. She doesn't speak. At least not to any of us. She did, briefly, when she first arrived. I'm told they made real progress for a while.

WILL
What changed?

SISTER MARGARET
She stopped talking when we refused to believe her stories.

WILL
Her stories?

SISTER MARGARET
She claims she visited another world.

Will's thrown by that. And also CHILLED. They weave past ORDERLIES who help other PATIENTS about.

SISTER MARGARET (CONT'D)
Since then, the only one she'd speak to was your Uncle. He was her only visitor. Missy will be crushed when I tell her of his passing.
(beat)
You have no idea who she is to him?

WILL
I don't. His journals state exactly what he told you - he found her wandering the property.

SISTER MARGARET
She must mean something. He made sure she's been taken care of.

They reach a DOOR. Sister Margaret KNOCKS. Uses her KEY to unlock it.

SISTER MARGARET (CONT'D)
Missy prefers to keep her door locked. Normally, we only allow that at night, but she's proven she can be trusted not to hurt herself.

WILL
All the years she's been here, and you have no idea what happened to her?

SISTER MARGARET
The Doctors diagnosed her as suffering from paranoid psychosis, triggered by a repressed trauma.

Will commiserates, understanding all too well.

SISTER MARGARET (CONT'D)
We don't even know her real name. If she knows it, she's never said. Whatever she experienced, it was either traumatic enough that she <u>can't</u> remember -- or she doesn't want to.

Her statement hangs there as she OPENS THE DOOR.

INT. MISSY'S ROOM - DAY

Will enters, finds a FIGURE seated across the room, facing away. A long shock of GREY-WHITE HAIR. Writing in a book.

Her words etched in simple, block lettering. Child-like.

SISTER MARGARET
Missy, you have a visitor.

Missy turns, eagerly. Her kindly face aged beyond its 50 years. A hard life etched upon it. Faded scars and marks.

Seeing Will, Missy's face FLUSHES with SHOCK - then JOY. Eyes BRIMMING with tears.

WILL
Missy, my name is --

She RUNS at him - Will unable to react before she HUGS him tightly. Clutching him to her.

Will's stunned - unsure what to do. The Sister as well.

WILL (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, I --

TEARS stream down Missy's face. Joyful.

MISSY
I've missed you! I missed you so much!

Will gives her a gentle HUG back. Looks at Sister Margaret, both confused.

WILL
I'm sorry... I don't --

MISSY
I knew you'd find me! I knew. You always find me...

SISTER MARGARET
You know her?

WILL
No... I've never seen her before.

Will's statement UPSETS Missy, her tears becoming sorrowful.

MISSY
No! You know me! You do! Look again! Look close!

WILL
I'm sorry, I --

Missy grows despondent, TEARS INTENSIFYING. Sister Margaret sense her growing agitation.

SISTER MARGARET
She must have you confused for your Uncle.

WILL
I guess...

SISTER MARGARET
I think you should come back another time. When Missy's in a better state.

Will nods. Tries to remove her grasp. Can't.

MISSY
No! Don't go! STAY! Please!

WILL
It's okay - I'll come back.

MISSY
Don't go - don't go - don't go --

Sister Margaret tries to extricate Will. Will pulls, Missy CLINGING to him. Refusing to let go.

Will pries himself loose, notices THREE THICK SCARS across Missy's forearm. Long-healed. Running parallel.

WILL
I'll come back.

MISSY
Soon?

Her request heart-breaking in its desperation.

WILL
Yes. Soon.

MISSY
Promise?

WILL
... I promise.

Satisfied, Missy RELEASES him. No longer struggling.

MISSY
Okay. I trust you. You always keep your word.

Will looks at her, wondering how she knows that. He retreats into the hall, Sister Margaret following.

Looks back at Missy - watching him. Smiling.

MISSY (CONT'D)
I love you.

Will doesn't know how to respond. Her DOOR CLOSES, taking her from view. Will left stunned by the encounter. Plagued by even more questions...

EXT. THE HOUSE - DUSK

The day grows old. Sunlight withering.

Will carries the LADDER from the barn. SCREWS new lightbulbs into place.

IN THE BARN - Will POWER-SAWS a thick piece of WOOD. Sawdust flying.

INSIDE THE KITCHEN - Will HAMMERS the wooden panel into place at the bottom of the kitchen door. Blocking the GAP.

INT. THE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Will restocks the GUN RACK. Filling each row with a rifle.

Mara enters. Sees what he's doing.

MARA
I thought you sold these.

WILL
I bought them back.

Mara's surprised. Sees the DUFFLE BAG of weapons on the table. Filled. The boxes of SHELLS.

MARA
Jesus, Will. You know we're trying to pay off our bills...

WILL
We need them.

MARA
For what?

WILL
Protection.

MARA
Protection from what?

Will looks at her. Doesn't answer. Snatches the duffle bag off the table and carries it into

THE NEXT ROOM

He begins restocking the next rack. Mara follows.

MARA (CONT'D)
We've talked about this. You know I don't want Chelsea growing up around guns.

WILL
She needs to learn how to use them.

MARA
Why?

WILL
So she can defend herself.

MARA
"Defend herself"? You mean from these <u>things</u> you think you're seeing? The ones that tried to get into the house.

WILL
You think I just imagined the lights on last night? Or Pepper's bowl, smashed to bits?

MARA
No. I think an animal did that. A fox, or a raccoon. Maybe a wolf.

WILL
It wasn't any of those!

Mara's concern deepens.

MARA
You need to talk to somebody. Call Dr. Jacobs. You haven't been sleeping.
(Will reacts - guilty)
You think I wouldn't notice, you not in bed in the middle of the night? Now you're acting all paranoid. Have you been taking your pills? Have you?

Will ANSWERS by SLAMMING a gun into the rack.

WILL
I'm not imagining this!

MARA
Then why has no one seen them but you?

Will tries to answer - can't.

MARA (CONT'D)
Call Dr. Jacobs and see if he can refer you to someone local.

WILL
Why? So he can prescribe me something that'll turn me into a zombie? Then I can't protect you.

MARA
We don't need you to protect us. We need you to be healthy.

Mara takes his hands. Pleading with him.

MARA (CONT'D)
Please, Will...

WILL
I saw it.

MARA
I know. I know you think you did. But we've been through this before. The Guy at the mall, carrying packages you thought were explosives. Or the woman with a machine gun that was really an umbrella.

Will tenses. Turns away. She's hitting a nerve.

MARA (CONT'D)
It's okay, baby. It's not your fault. But you need to get some help. If you don't, I'll take Chelsea and I'll leave.

Will looks at her, shocked.

MARA (CONT'D)
You're not leaving me a choice. I can't do this anymore. Not alone. It's too hard. I don't have it in me anymore.

Will reads the defeat in her. Unwavering.

MARA (CONT'D)
Do it for me. For Chelsea.

Will NODS, acquiescing.

CUT TO:

A PILL BOTTLE

Dispenses a PILL into Will's hand. He turns, Mara handing him a glass of WATER. Will looks at the pill, debating.

MARA (CONT'D)
Take it. For us. Please.

Will SHOOTS the pill into his mouth. Washes it down.

MARA (CONT'D)
Thank you.

Will smiles. She kisses his cheek, moves off.

Will watches her go. Once she's gone, he opens his HAND -

The PILL still clutched inside it. He tosses it into the FIREPLACE. Watches it BURN.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

The house quiet. Dark. Will and Mara lie sleeping.

Will's eyes OPEN. Wide awake. Feigning sleep. He checks on Mara. Finds her out cold.

Will turns away from her. Slowly. Careful not to wake her. Lies there in the dark.

In the quiet, a SOUND. Faint. A DOG BARKING.

Will listens, wondering if he heard that. It repeats, with a WHIMPER. Distant, but unmistakable.

WILL
Pepper.

Will slips from the bed.

INT. THE HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS - NIGHT

Will arrives at the bottom of the stairs, listens. Trying to locate the source of the barking.

Another WHIMPERING BARK. Still faint, but louder. Closer. Will follows the sounds through the dark rooms. Into the

Kitchen. The sounds coming from beyond the BASEMENT DOOR.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

A PULL-STRING BULB CLICKS to life, scattering the darkness. Will stand beneath it. Shotgun in hand. He listens. Tracks the BARKING TO The TRAP DOOR in the floor.

CUT TO:

The WINCH CRANKS, YAWNING the heavy wooden portal OPEN. Blackness beyond.

Will secures the winch. Grabs a FLASHLIGHT off the shelf. Checks it's working. Crosses to the opening.

Kneels. SHINES the light down, its reach tapers into darkness. Will leans closer. Calls out:

WILL
Pepper?

His voice ECHOES through the dark. Fades.

A WHIMPERING BARK responds.

WILL (CONT'D)
Pepper, come here, boy!

His command ECHOES down. Will waits.

A series of WHIMPERS respond. Whining. Needy.

Will debates. Then DESCENDS into the void.

INT. TUNNELS UNDER THE HOUSE - NIGHT

The flashlight lances the dark. Will ventures forward, free hand guiding along the wall.

He scans the rough stone walls. The tunnels crudely carved. Finds thick SUPPORT BEAMS erected here and there. Small piles of RUBBLE. Signs of previous collapses.

A MARKING on the wall. Chalk. An ARROW, pointing back.

Will moves along, his hand FEELING SOMETHING on the wall. He stops to examine it. Finds SMALL HOLES bored into the walls. Quarter-sized. Perfectly circular. Man-made.

Will scans, finds them all around.

Something JUTTING from one. Will fingers the object free.

A STICK of DYNAMITE. Crusted black with age.

WILL
Jesus...

Will pans the light, finds many more holes FILLED with dynamite. Fuses tonguing out.

Blast holes. Yet the tunnel stretches on ahead of him...

Will carefully slips the dynamite back into place. Unnerved, he continues on.

INT. FURTHER IN THE TUNNELS

The blackness BRIGHTENS as Will emerges around a corner, Pepper's WHIMPERED BARKS growing louder.

Will progresses. Step by step.

A RATTLE SHATTERS the quiet - startling Will. He stops, looks down. Sees an EMPTY CAN. Covered in rust.

More of them. All rusted. Old.

Further on, Will finds IMAGES PAINTED on the walls. Old. Faded. Indian figures hunting animals. Deer. Bear. Something else.

Will leans in. Brings the light closer.

These animals BOAR-LIKE. Stout, low bodies. Thick limbs. Some running on all fours. Others STANDING.

Will studies them. Recognizing the familiar shapes. Moves on. Finds

PETROGLYPHS. Primitive images carved into the rock wall.

A CRUDE SEMBLANCE of a jagged PIT in the earth. Beyond that image he finds carvings of STONE STRUCTURES. Like buildings.

And FIGURES. Hard to make out. Eroded by time.

Will leans closer.

The same stout figures. Standing on two legs. Upright. Holding BLUNT WEAPONS. Wearing what looks like ARMOR.

Will BLOWS away the dust, brushes it clear. Peers in.

The figure's face - marked by exaggerated TUSKS.

Pepper's BARK RUPTURES the quiet. Draws Will away, down the tunnel. Around a BEND --

The tunnel coming to an ABRUPT END. Walled off.

Will sweeps the beam over the mismatched wall. Newer bricks added to old stone. The wall repaired. More than once.

At the bottom, an OPENING. The floor littered with displaced stones.

A BARK. Still muffled, but louder. Echoing. Definitely coming from beyond the wall.

WILL
Pepper?

Will KNEELS at the opening. Peers through.

Darkness beyond. Thick and impenetrable.

Will aims the light in, SPEARING the darkness. The beam providing little help. Will WHISTLES. Calls out:

WILL (CONT'D)
Pepper - come here, boy.

A WHIMPERED response. Weak. Almost WHINING. Echoing.

Will crouches lower. Pokes his head through the opening. Listens. PANS the flashlight, trying to fix on the dog.

The beam a mere SLASH in the void.

Will tries to SQUEEZE through. Can't fit. Turns, tries a different angle. Still can't get through.

WILL (CONT'D)
Hold on, boy. I'm coming.

He retreats from the opening. Sets down the gun. Grabs a STONE that's in the way. Pulls, ROCKING the stone until the ancient mortar gives away. Rips the stone from the wall.

Will squirms back into the opening. Crawls through, one shoulder at a time.

WILL (CONT'D)
Hang on, Pepper.

Will CRAWLS forward. JARS to a halt. Stuck at the hips.

<u>Something SCURRIES</u> through the darkness. A quick BURST of MOVEMENT. Will looks up.

WILL (CONT'D)
Pepper? That you?

No response. The cavern still again. Will listens.

SCANS the beam. Illuminates a swatch of tunnel WALL. PANS --

Something DARTING CLEAR OF THE BEAM'S PATH! Evading it.

Will JOLTS, startled. Too big to be Pepper.

WILL (CONT'D)
Pepper...?

A GRUNTING BREATH in the darkness. Heavy. Not Pepper.

Scared, Will RETREATS. Back-crawling out of the opening. Gets STUCK. Strains, reaching for the shotgun. Too far.

Movement again. Scurrying. Dirt and rock DISPLACED. Growing LOUDER as it nears.

Will STRUGGLES, can't get free. Discards the flashlight, needing both hands --

The flashlight ROLLS, BEAM SPIRALING --

Spotlights the darkness. The rock tunnel wall. A FACE, TWISTED - BEADY, GLINTING EYES --

Will SCREAMS! STRAINS to get free - frantic. He TWISTS, POPPING CLEAR of the OPENING --

SPILLING BACK onto the other side of the wall. He SCAMPERS BACK, gaining distance. Snatches up the GUN and AIMS --

Nothing emerges from the opening. Just darkness beyond. Quiet again.

Will breathes again. LEANS, looking through the opening --

The jettisoned FLASHLIGHT coming into view. Still now. The slash of light revealing nothing.

Calming, Will starts to his feet

SOMETHING LUNGES THROUGH THE OPENING! KNOCKING WILL BACK --

Pepper now atop him, delivering grateful licks to his face.

WILL (CONT'D)
Jesus - Pepper... There you are.
You had us worried, buddy.

Pepper hovers. Will notices the dog's FILTHY COAT. Its famished demeanor. Will pets it, the dog YELPING.

Will looks down its flank. A STICK JUTTING from Pepper's side. Will PULLS - the stick not coming free.

WILL (CONT'D)
You got something stuck on you.

Will pulls. It still won't come free. Will TUGS - Pepper YELPING from the extraction. Will holds the object up.

An ARROW. Primitively carved, but unmistakable.

WILL (CONT'D)
Jesus... Where the hell'd you go?

INT. THE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Pepper lies on the floor near his empty bowl, RESTING. Chelsea sits by his side, beaming as she pets him.

Will and Mara watch from across the kitchen, clearing away breakfast. She's disturbed by their conversation.

MARA
Under the basement? How'd the hell
(catching herself)
-- heck did he get down there?

WILL
The tunnels go for miles. They must connect to the gorge.

They look over at Chelsea, thrilled to have her dog back.

CHELSEA
No running away anymore, okay, Pepper? That wasn't very nice.

Chelsea GRABS the dog's BALL, waves it.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
Wanna play, boy?

Pepper looks at the toy. Lies back down. Uninterested.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
Is he okay, Daddy? He's not acting like himself. Pepper never doesn't want to play.

WILL
He's probably just tired. He'll be fine. Give him a few days to rest.

Chelsea puts the ball down, disappointed. Resumes petting.

CHELSEA
He looks different.

MARA
What do you mean?

CHELSEA
I don't know. He just looks different.

Will looks over, takes in the dog. Even though he's now bathed and clean, there is something different about him...

Will comes closer. Studies the dog. Finds a patch of GREY in its fur, behind its ears. More GREY along his snout.

Pepper looks up at him - the animal's eyes WATERY and DULL. No longer sparking with youth.

WILL
Maybe we'll take him to the Vet.
Just to be sure.

INT. VETERINARIANS OFFICE - EXAM ROOM - DAY

Pepper lies on the exam table, a FEMALE VET looking him over.

VET
The dehydration and malnutrition will pass in a few days, just keep doing what you're doing. Aside from the few bumps and bruises, he's fine. His behavior is perfectly normal for a dog his age.

WILL
(confused)
"His age?" Pepper's only three. He's a young dog.

VET
That's not possible. His hair's already beginning to grey.

She highlights the GREY on Pepper's FACE and coat.

VET (CONT'D)
And here - his eyes are clouding. Those are his lenses hardening. That doesn't occur until the dog's advanced in years.

Will's stunned.

WILL
I don't understand... How's that possible? We've had him since he was a puppy.

VET
I don't know what to tell you. Whoever you bought him from must've lied about his age. Happens all the time. But the facts don't lie. This dog is at least seven. Maybe older.

Will looks at the dog, looking tired on the table. Definitely older. Will struggles to grasp how...

EXT. THE HOUSE - DUSK

Will CLAMPS a METAL GRATE over the floodlights. Secures it.

He descends the ladder. Looks off at The TREELINE. Its shadows fingering towards the house.

Will carries the ladder towards the barn.

INT. THE HOUSE - VARIOUS - NIGHT

SERIES OF SHOT:

Will RE-INSTALLS the METAL BARS over the interior windows. The long screws disappearing into the frames.

Will SLIDES the wooden SHUTTERS into place over the windows. Secures them in their grooves. Tugs. They barely give.

The SLITS in the shutters at eye level. Realizing what the openings are for, Will leans forward. Looks out.

Deadbolts are TURNED, SNAPPING into place.

Will turns, finds Mara watching him. Face creased with concern. Chelsea - in pajamas - at her side.

MARA
Come on, baby. Time for bed.

She leads Chelsea away.

Will's PILL lands in the fireplace. Burns.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE HOUSE - VARIOUS - NIGHT

A CLOCK TICKS softly. The fire casts a dying glow around the living room. The house made all the more dark by the shuttered windows.

Pepper sleeps on the floor near Will and Mara's bed.

Mara sleeps. Will lies besides her. Eyes open. Awake.

Across the room, a window BRIGHTENS. Outside lights awakened.

Will senses the brightened room. Turns. Finds the window stained with light.

THUD. An IMPACT against the house. Another. Attempting to shatter the bulbs. The sound of it IMPACTING on METAL.

Mara STIRS at the sounds, rolls over.

The light remains ILLUMINATED. Will smiles. Waits.

GLASS SHATTERS. Coming from downstairs. INSIDE the house.

Will whirls, WIDE-EYED. Locks eyes with Pepper. The animal's raised head confirming the noise.

WILL
They got in...

Will slips out of bed. Moves for the door.

Pepper starts to rise, until Will extends a HAND. Stay.

Will reaches the bedroom door. Inches it open. Peers

DOWN THE HALL

Towards the stairwell to the first floor.

He listens. Sounds of GLASS, scraping the floor. Moved.

Will looks back at Mara, still asleep. Debates. Decides -- slipping out the door.

Will edges down the hall. Taking careful steps. Reaches

CHELSEA'S ROOM

Opens the door, peers in. A LUMP visible in the covers. Will turns back down the hall. Closes the door and MOVES to

The TOP of the STAIRS. Looks down.

The lower landing dark. A CABINET THUDS closed.

Will descends. Step by step. Listening.

A CHAIR SCREECHES along the floor. Bumped.

He reaches the bottom of the stairs. Looks over. The DOORWAY to the kitchen ANGLED from here. No good view.

Will locks onto the GUN RACK along the wall. DARTS for it.

Will gently LIFTS a SHOTGUN off its cradle. Eyes on

THE KITCHEN. Scuffling FEET across the tile floor.

Will fingers open a box of SHELLS. Extracts THREE.

The RATTLE of the fridge door OPENING. The kitchen BRIGHTENS. Light SPILLING across the room. Casting A SHADOW. Low. Stout.

Will loads the gun. Quietly inserting shells into the breach.

From the kitchen, the sounds of RUMMAGING. Glass SNAPS. JINGLES as it's swept aside.

Will moves towards the kitchen doorway. His angle IMPROVING. The FLOOR coming into view.

MILK - SPLASHED on the floor. The puddle teethed with glass.

Will INHALES, steeling himself. WHIRLS through the doorway, YELLING as he PUMPS and AIMS the SHOTGUN --

A startled Chelsea SCREAMING - dropping the cereal BOWL in her hands! It SHATTERS on the floor, spoon CLATTERING.

Will STARES, eyes wide with SHOCK and pumping adrenaline.

Chelsea WAILS, hysterical. Between the tears:

CHELSEA
I'm sorry Daddy! I just wanted some Fruity Puffs!

Will looks over, sees the OPEN CEREAL BOX on the table. The UPPER cabinet OPEN. A CHAIR dragged beneath it.

Will's shocked. Realizing what he almost did...

Mara plunges into the other doorway. Sees Will STANDING there. SHOTGUN AIMED at their daughter. The girl in tears.

Stunned, Mara PULLS Chelsea to her. Away from Will.

Will lowers the gun. Struggles to find the words.

WILL
I heard -- I checked... she was in bed.

Mara GLARES at Will. Face tight with fear. And resolve.

EXT. THE HOUSE - MORNING

Mara CLOSES the car door, Chelsea already inside the vehicle. Moves to the driver's door. Locks eyes with WILL, in the doorway. Face apologetic.

WILL
Mara...

Mara climbs in. SLAMS the car door. Drives off.

Will can only watch them go.

INT. WILLOWBROOK HOSPITAL - DAY

Chelsea sits on a bench, fussing with her DOLL. Legs SWAYING. Mara stands a few yards off, chatting with DR. PATEL - 40's, Hindi. Voices HUSHED.

DR. PATEL
Dr. Jacobs forwarded me Will's file. I think it'd be best if you brought him.

MARA
I can't. He won't...

DR. PATEL
Based on what you've told me, it sounds like his condition is deteriorating.

MARA
I know. I just...

Mara checks, making sure Chelsea can't hear them.

MARA (CONT'D)
I'm not going to have him locked up. I won't do that. He's been through enough already.

MISSY

Moving down the intersecting hallway, sees Chelsea. She stops, eyes FLARING with recognition. And CONCERN. She moves towards the girl.

MISSY
You're still here... You gotta run. Run far away...

MARA AND DR. PATEL

Continue their conversation.

DR. PATEL
Then I'm not sure what you'd like me to do.

MARA
Just come to the house and talk to him. The meds aren't helping like they used to... Maybe he needs something strong. Please.

Mara's eyes well with tears, her family's future at stake. Dr. Patel considers it, sympathizing.

Missy's VOICE RISES above the din. Turning heads. Including Mara's. She sees the old woman approaching Chelsea.

MISSY
You gotta go! You gotta run! RUN!

Chelsea looks up, scared by Missy - LOOMING in, REACHING.

Mara intercepts, tucks Chelsea behind her protectively.

MISSY (CONT'D)
You gotta keep her safe! They're gonna take her.

MARA
What?

MISSY
They're gonna take her! Don't go back to that house! Don't go back!

CHELSEA
(scared)
Mommy, what's wrong with that lady?

MARA
It's okay, baby --

ORDERLIES move in to subdue Missy, her agitation building.

MISSY
You gotta take her away! Don't go back to the house! Don't go back! They're gonna take her! THEY'RE GONNA TAKE HER!

Her CRIES BUILD - SCREECHES now as she fights the restraining hands. Orderlies removing her.

Mara stares, haunted by the warning. The sound of HAMMERING PRE-LAPS...

EXT. THE EXPANSE/THE HOUSE - DAY

A HAMMER POUNDS THICK NAILS into wood.

Will stands at the edge of the property, repairing the downed portion of the fence. HAMMERS away. Firm, determined blows.

Will RE-THREADS the posts with BARBED WIRE. Metal spires catch on his gloves. He frees himself, continues working.

Will coils NEW WIRE around the barbed wire. Criss-crossing up and down, around each thread. Moving with purpose.

Will BACKS towards the house, the wire FEEDING off a large SPOOL. His shirt soaked with sweat.

INT. THE BARN - DAY

Will works atop the combine, a WELDER'S MASK protecting him from the BLUE FLARE of the BLOWTORCH. Sparks fly.

A JOURNAL open beside him, with a DRAWING of the COMBINE.

Will stops. Raises the welding mask. Checks his work.

A NOISE. Soft, but distinctive enough. Something SCRATCHING against stone.

Will looks across the barn.

The space empty. Slashed by leaking sunlight.

Again, it repeats. Soft SCRAPING.

Will sets the helmet aside. Claims a HAMMER from beside him as he CLIMBS down. Moves to locate the noise. Wooden floorboards CREAKING under his steps.

The SCRAPING continues. Like something being CLEARED away.

WILL
Pepper? That you, boy?

Will scans for the dog. Finds him --

INSIDE A WINDOW OF THE HOUSE. Looking out, in Will's direction. <u>BARKING</u>. A warning. The sound MUFFLED by glass and distance.

Will realizes - something's wrong. He heads back --

<u>CRACK!</u> His foot PLUNGES through the floor! Will SINKS to his knee -- grabs a panicked hold. BREATHES as he realizes it was a rotten floorboard.

Will withdraws his leg. It's suddenly YANKED BACK IN! Will struggles - can't free it. Grabs for a handhold --

In the window, Pepper BARKS FURIOUSLY.

Will's DRAGGED into the opening! Desperate, he POUNDS AWAY with the hammer! Braces his other leg and KICKS FREE --

A CRUDE METAL AXE EMERGES from the HOLE, HACKING INTO THE BARN FLOOR!

The weapon gripped by a DIRTIED HAND - thick, fleshy FINGERS.

Will SCURRIES to his feet as a SHAPE BIRTHS ITSELF from the hole. Rusted ARMOR briefly visible before

Will RUNS. To the tool wall. Discards the hammer for... a SCYTHE. Wields it, RACING BACK --

The HOLE empty. No sign of the Attacker.

Will SCANS, searching. Inches towards the opening. Weapon raised. The CHOP MARK from the axe gouged in the floor.

Will LEANS FORWARD. Peers into the hole. Discovers

A TUNNEL. Crude, but effective. Trailing off.

From somewhere in the barn, floorboards GROAN under HEAVY MOVEMENT.

Will WHIRLS. Whatever was in the tunnel now in the barn.

Will scans. The combine blocking his view. Taking up most of the space. Will stalks around the machinery.

Grunting BREATHING fills the barn. Will trying to locate it.

A SNORTING SQUEAL DRAWS HIS ATTENTION UP -- the Attacker LEAPING from atop the combine! AXE SWINGING --

Will DODGES, the axe CLEAVING into a wooden post! Stuck. Will's scythe SPARKS off the armor chestplate!

The Attacker SLAMS Will into the wall! The impact JARRING the scythe free -- sends it CLATTERING under the combine.

The Attacker SLAMS Will back and forth - our view of it limited by the TIGHT, CLOSE-QUARTER BATTLE --

Its HEAVY BREATHES EXHALING into Will's face! Will STRAINS, barely holding his own --

The Attacker's FLESHY HAND grabs the AXE, PRYING it free --

Will struggles harder. Can't free himself. Wood WAILS as the axe rips free - SWINGS DOWN --

Will DODGING -- the axe HACKS through the wood behind his head -- SUNLIGHT FLOODING IN --

Straight into the Attacker's FACE! It SQUEALS, BLINDED -- RETREATS --

Will sees an opening, CHARGES --

IMPALING the Attacker on the COMBINE'S SPIKED CUTTERS! Metal SPIRES PIERCE ARMOR - the Thing emitting a horrific SCREECH!

The Thing THRASHES, the impaling SPIKES withdrawing into the armor. The Thing working its way OFF the spikes.

Will scrambles for his weapon, can't find it. Locks onto something -- moves for it --

The Thing ROCKS forward, freeing itself. Inch by bloody inch.

The combine ENGINE GRUMBLES to life - Will at its helm. He glares down as he GEARS the cutters into motion --

DRAWING the Thing in! SPIKES CHEW ARMOR --

The Thing's PAINED ROAR ERUPTING ANEW with a SPRAY of BLOOD! Combine engine WHINING as metal RENDS metal --

Will holds the cutters in gear until the SCREECHING dies. The thrashing falls still. He eases back the throttle.

The cutters ROLL BACK. Fall still. Spikes dripping.

Will climbs from the cab. Lands beside the AXE. He picks it up, examines it.

The handle thick and club-like. The blade unevenly forged. Chipped from use. Stained dark with rust and blood.

Wielding it, Will moves around the thresher. The impaled Thing coming into view. The battered HELMET masking its face.

Will reaches out with the axe. Uses it to LIFT the head.

Thick TUSKS coming into view under the helmet.

Will can't believe it. He reaches for the headgear. Hand almost on it when

The SOUNDS of a CAR PULLING UP. Rolling across the gravel.

Will turns, sees the family SUV SWEEP PAST the barn. Followed by another vehicle.

EXT. THE HOUSE - DAY

Mara emerges from the family car, helps Chelsea out.

Dr. Patel emerges from the second vehicle, approaches.

Will hurries from the barn to meet them. Seeing him, Mara addresses Chelsea.

MARA
Baby, go play in your room. Mommy will be up soon.

Chelsea hurries into the house. Will approaches, excited.

WILL
Mara, come quick!

MARA
Will, this is Dr. Patel. He's here to help.

Will turns to the man. Shakes his offered hand.

DR. PATEL
Will, Dr. Jacobs contacted me. He thought it would be a good idea if we talked.

WILL
Thank you, but I'm fine.

MARA
You're not fine, Will. You're worse. The noises - the things you think you're seeing. Last night.

WILL
I'm not seeing things, Mara. They're real!

MARA
They're not, Will.

DR. PATEL
Let's step inside and talk --

WILL
I killed one!

That silences them. Will grins - almost maniacal. Mara's almost afraid to ask...

WILL (CONT'D)
One of those things... The creatures I told you about. Come see.

Off Mara's reluctant look we CUT TO:

INT. BARN - DAY

Will leads the duo in. Hurried, excited steps.

WILL
It came up from under the floorboards! There are tunnels. That must be how they get around. I don't think they like the sun.

Mara and Dr. Patel share a look.

WILL (CONT'D)
It's right here --

Will leads them straight to the combine's METAL CUTTERS.

Now empty. The thing's body GONE.

Will stares, stunned. Mara's not. But it brings tears to her eyes.

WILL (CONT'D)
No... It was here! It was <u>right here</u>!

Will scans, looking around. Growing frantic. Checks under the combine. Nothing. A blood puddle staining the wood.

MARA
Will...

WILL
It was RIGHT HERE! It was dead! I killed it!

MARA
Then where is it?

Will struggles to answer, searching. The blood SMEARING off in a trail across the floor. Will follows it.

The trail arcing back to the HOLE.

WILL
They dragged it away...

Behind him, Mara shakes her head. Disgusted. Depleted.

DR. PATEL
I think we should go inside and talk.

WILL
I didn't imagine this!

MARA
You did, baby. But it's not your fault. None of it is.

Will SWIPES the trail - JUTS his bloodied HAND at her.

WILL
Am I imagining this? Am I?!

DR. PATEL
Obviously, you caught something in the gears, some sort of animal --

WILL
It wasn't an animal! It had fingers - like us! It attacked me! It was wearing some kind of armor! And it was holding this!

He holds up the axe. WIELDING it almost threateningly.

Mara and Dr. Patel grow concerned.

MARA
Will, put that down...

WILL
Does this look like something an animal could make?! Where did this come from? Or am I making this up, too?!

MARA
Will, put down the axe.

WILL
Why won't you LISTEN to me?!

Will WHIRLS and SWINGS the axe - CHOPPING deeply into the worktable. WHAM!

Mara FLINCHING at the impact.

Will reads the FEAR in Mara's face. He realizes what he just did -- how it looks. Tries to say something - to apologize.

Off his defeated look we CUT TO:

INT. THE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Dr. Patel removes a bottle of PILLS from his jacket.

Will sits at the table, withdrawn. Mara stands across the room, on edge. Keeping distance between them.

WILL
I saw it. I smelled it - felt its breath in my face...

MARA
I know. I know you think you did.

DR. PATEL
I'm sure it seemed very real at the time.

WILL
What about the blood? You saw that!

DR. PATEL
Clearly, whatever animal you caught in the thresher wasn't dead and crawled off.

WILL
And the tunnel?

DR. PATEL
There are a lot of animals out here that burrow. Moles, gophers, hedgehogs. Some of significant size.

WILL
It wasn't any of those things. It had fingers -- just like the one we found in the trap, out in the woods.

MARA
Okay. Let's go. Show us.

WILL
(defeated)
... I can't. It's not there anymore.

Mara nods. Gives him the benefit of the doubt.

MARA
Did Chelsea see it?

Will recalls. Shakes his head.

WILL
I didn't think she should see something like that... That makes me a good father, not a crazy one.

MARA
I didn't say you were crazy.

But her point's been proven. Will stews.

WILL
And the axe? Where'd that come from?

DR. PATEL
Possibly the former owner. Something he found on the grounds, crafted by the Indians who once lived here. It's quite primitive.

Will struggles to absorb it all. What's real, what's not...

Mara sees his turmoil. Moves to him. Takes his hands.

MARA
I know it seems real. But the things you're describing... they're not possible. And no one else has seen them but you. Not me, not Chelsea. Just you.

Her words torment Will. But it's evident even <u>he's</u> doubting it now. He looks up at the Doctor, pained.

DR. PATEL
Think about what you're imagining, Will. An invading force that occupies an unfamiliar land. Faceless. Wearing primitive, home made armor. Threatening your security, your family. The feeling of being constantly unsafe. Does any of that sound familiar?

Will tenses. Won't admit it aloud, but knows it does.

DR. PATEL (CONT'D)
What you're experiencing is fairly common for those who served overseas.

WILL
Then why have I never imagined these things before?

DR. PATEL
Moving is one of life's major stressors. Couple that with this new location; its unfamiliar wildlife conjured new ideas from your subconscious.

WILL
These were so much more real...

DR. PATEL
How long have you been off your medication?

WILL
(hesitant)
...A week. Maybe more.

Mara's shocked. The extent of things coming clear. But there's relief in it, too - understanding why now.

DR. PATEL
Your condition has been known to worsen the longer it goes untreated. These should help.

He opens the BOTTLE in his hands. Shakes two pills out. Hands them to Will.

DR. PATEL (CONT'D)
We'll double the dose today. After that, one a day. A second, if the visions flare up. Understood?

Will looks at the pills, debating.

MARA
Please, baby. This will help make you better. I promise.

WILL
Will it knock me out?

DR. PATEL
The rest will be good for you. From what I understand, you haven't been sleeping.

Will doesn't argue.

MARA
Take them. For us. For Chelsea.

Will POPS the meds into his mouth. Washes them down.

Mara offers a tight smile, concern still evident.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Will lies on the bed, out cold. Still in his clothes.

A bedside light TURNS OFF, darkening the room. Mara moves to exit. Lingers in the doorway, looking back at Will. Her face etched with worry. She exits.

INT. MARA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mara pulls the covers up around Chelsea, tucking her in.

CHELSEA
Is Daddy gonna be okay?

MARA
Yes, baby. He'll be fine. He just needed a different medicine. That's why the Doctor was here.

There's no conviction behind it. Said to convince herself as much as her daughter.

CHELSEA
That day in the woods... I didn't see anything. But I heard it.

MARA
What'd you hear?

CHELSEA
Like footsteps. Something was in the woods. It was following us.

MARA
I'm sure it was just an animal, baby. There's a lot of them out here. This isn't like where we used to live.

CHELSEA
If I saw them too, would Daddy still have to take his medicine?

Mara smiles, knows where she's going with this.

MARA
Go to sleep. It's late.

Mara tucks the blankets in. Kisses Chelsea. Clicks off her bedside lamp.

EXT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Shrouded in darkness. Motion-lights off. Undisturbed.

INT. THE HOUSE - VARIOUS - NIGHT

DOWNSTAIRS - the grandfather clock TICKS softly.

THE KITCHEN - all is quiet.

THE MASTER BEDROOM - Will and Mara sleep. He hasn't moved. Sedated by the meds. From deep in the house, a THUD. Heavy and dull. It REPEATS.

Pepper - lying on the floor at the end of the bed - lifts his head. Alerted to the noise.

INT. CHELSEA'S ROOM - NIGHT

The little girl sleeps. The THUDDING continues. Stirs her awake. Not part of her dream.

The sound like HEAVY HAMMERING. It becomes steady. A pulse.

Chelsea looks around the room.

CHELSEA
Mom?

Only the THUDS answer. Pounding. Insistent.

INT. THE HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Chelsea moves down the darkened hall. The THUDS louder here. Coming from DOWNSTAIRS.

Chelsea reaches her parents room, the door AJAR. As she nears it, Pepper EMERGES. Looks down the hall.

CHELSEA
You hear that, boy?

He heads down the STAIRS. Chelsea FOLLOWS.

INT. THE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Pepper ENTERS the room, the POUNDING LOUDER here. Closer. He crosses the room. Stands before the DOOR to the basement.

GROWLS at it. Chelsea follows. Sees what has his attention.

THUD. Another IMPACT. Louder. Coming from beyond the door.

We PUSH IN on the door - until the screen goes BLACK.

The DARKNESS CLEARS to reveal we're ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR NOW. Drifting down the basement stairs.

The IMPACTS even LOUDER. Sharper. Definitely emanating from here. We DRIFT across the room, lit by shards of moonlight.

To the TRAP DOOR. Which JOLTS - WHAM! Impacted from below. The chain and lock STRAINING. The impact REPEATS, harder. More determined. The door bouncing HIGHER.

Something breaking through.

INT. THE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Chelsea's SCREAMING JOLTS Mara awake! Half-awake, eyes panicked, Mara tries to focus --

MARA
Chelsea...?

The SCREAMS persist -- terrified, crying. Pepper BARKING FEROCIOUSLY.

Mara SNAPS into consciousness. Pushes on Will.

MARA (CONT'D)
Will, something's wrong!

He elicits a faint MOAN, nowhere near conscious. Mara races -

INTO THE HALL

For Chelsea's room. The Girl's SCREAMS from DOWNSTAIRS stopping her. With them, Pepper's GROWLING and BARKING - and something ELSE, emitting SNARLING GRUNTS.

MARA (CONT'D)
Chelsea?!

CHELSEA (O.S.)
<u>MOMMY</u>!

Mara PALES at the sheer terror in the cry. She BOLTS for the stairs, descends --

Halfway down when <u>SOMETHING DARTS PAST AT THE BOTTOM</u> - STOUT, FOOTSTEPS THUNDERING. Too heavy to be Chelsea.

Mara's eyes FLARE with PANICKED SHOCK... Another CRY SPURS her back into motion --

From the kitchen, CHAIRS CLATTER. Mara follows the sound --

MARA
Chelsea?!

The KITCHEN a shambles - chairs TOPPLED, floor SMEARED with dirt --

The door to the BASEMENT HANGS OPEN. Frame SPLINTERED. Forced from inside. Chelsea's SCREAMS ECHO up from the GAPING DOOR.

MARA (CONT'D)
WILL!

IN THE BEDROOM - the cry STIRS Will. Medicated eyelids FLICKERING...

INT. THE HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Dark. Filled with Chelsea's TERRIFIED CRYING and SCREAMS - Pepper's GROWLING - those SNORTING BREATHS.

Mara's FOOTSTEPS POUND down the stairs - the naked LIGHT BULB CLICKS ON, dispelling the dark to reveal --

CHELSEA BEING DRAGGED into the open trap door! Her eyes BRIMMING with terror, face streaked with tears --

CHELSEA
MOMMY!

Mara RACES for her, sending the bulb SWAYING. She GRABS the girl's outstretched hands --

MARA
I got you baby! Hold on!

Mara STRAINS, can't free Chelsea - the Girl drawn in DEEPER.

Pepper BARKS INTO THE PIT, trying to drive the Things away.

Mara braces for leverage, pulls with everything she's got --

A THICK-FINGERED HAND REACHES UP and GRABS CHELSEA'S ARM!

Mara goes WIDE-EYED with disbelief!

MARA (CONT'D)
Let GO!

The CLAW PRIES - YELLOWED FINGERNAILS RAKING DEEP SCRATCHES across Chelsea's FOREARM - peeling her free --

Chelsea DISAPPEARING into the darkness. Her CRY ECHOING.

MARA (CONT'D)
CHELSEA!

INT. THE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Will is JOSTLED awake by a frantic, hysterical Mara --

MARA
THEY TOOK HER! They took our baby!

Will JOLTS up, eyes blurry with medication. Struggles to retain the seeping consciousness.

WILL
What -- what??

MARA
They took her! Those... <u>things</u>!
They took Chelsea!

Will snaps to attention. Springs out of bed - SWAYS. The medications still in effect. Reflexes slowed.

Mara helps him stay on his feet.

MARA (CONT'D)
We have to go after her! We have to get her back!

WILL
We will.

Mara breaks down. Deep, regretful SOBS.

MARA
I'm sorry... I'm so sorry I didn't believe you...

WILL
We'll get her back. I promise.

INT. THE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

SHELLS SNAP into a shotgun breach. Will COCKS the weapon, lays it down beside another, already loaded. Grabs a third. Moving with military efficiency.

WILL
They shouldn't have gotten too far.

MARA
We have to call the Police! Get them to send help --

WILL
And tell them what?

MARA
That someone took her - that she's lost in the tunnels - anything! They'll get a search-party --

WILL
It'll take at least an hour for them to get someone out here. We can't wait. We need to go. Now.

Will pulls on his jacket. Stuffs the pockets with SHELLS.

SOUNDS from outside - CRUNCHING across the gravel. The duo share a look. Will grabs a shotgun, MOVES for the door --

HEADLIGHTS SWEEP THROUGH a window. A car arriving.

EXT. THE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The car pulls to a stop, the WILLOWBROOK EMBLEM on its side. Missy climbs out, frantic. Still in her hospital robe.

Will emerges from the house, gun SWEEPING the landscape.

WILL
You... What are you doing here?

MISSY
Where is she? Where's your daughter?

She reads their grim reactions. Knows.

MISSY (CONT'D)
I'm too late...

Missy BREAKS DOWN into sobs - buries her palms in her eyes. An EMOTIONAL OUTBURST.

MISSY (CONT'D)
No-no-no!

Will's thrown by her response.

MARA
(recalling)
You knew... You knew they were gonna take her.

WILL
What?

Missy's face TIGHTENS in anguish, doesn't answer.

MARA
You said it. Today at the hospital. How did you know? HOW?!

MISSY
Because they took me, too. When I was a little girl.

It hangs there. The horror of it.

MARA
Took you where?

MISSY
Across. To their world.

And on that daunting piece of information we CUT TO:

INT. UNDERGROUND TUNNELS/BENEATH TRAP DOOR

Mara LANDS in the trickling water with a SPLASH. Flashlight in hand. Will and Missy already down. Each equipped with a FLASHLIGHT. Will heavy with GEAR.

Missy turns down the tunnel - and FREEZES. Face creasing with fear. The tunnels bringing memories. Bad ones.

Will touches her arm, drawing her from it. He NODS, reassuring her. Missy collects herself. Will leads, ensuring tunnels are clear before they advance.

They wind DOWN, deeper and deeper into the earth. Flashlight beams SLICE the darkness. Dangling plant ROOTS give way to solid rock. Until they reach

THE STONE WALL

Now COLLAPSED. Stones litter the tunnel. Broken through from the other side.

Will SCANS with the shotgun, on alert. Advances over the debris. He KICKS something, looks down, finds

THE FLASHLIGHT

The one he dropped days earlier. Now discolored by RUST.

Will picks it up - the casing CRUMBLING in his hand. Metal flaking away. Eroded. As though it's been here for years.

Missy leads them on. The tunnels narrow. They reach an intersection. Missy stops, scans the walls with her light.

Finds a MARK, etched into the wall.

MISSY
This way.

MARA
What is that?

MISSY
A trail. Breadcrumbs.

Will looks at her - the word ringing eerily familiar.

They forge on - a dizzying labyrinth of tunnels and turns. Missy using her MARKERS to guide them.

Until the tunnels slope UPWARD.

Mara SWAYS, grabs the wall for support. Will helps her.

WILL
You okay?

MARA
I just got dizzy for a second...

MISSY
We just passed through.

WILL
Passed through what?

MISSY
The border.

They look at her, expecting more of an explanation.

MISSY (CONT'D)
It's easier if you see for yourself.

She tries to move, Will STOPPING here. Wanting answers.

WILL
Where the hell are we going?

MISSY
There are places where the fabric of our world is thin. Worn through. Like when two radio stations get their signals mixed, and you can hear both at the same time... That's how your Uncle described it. When that happens, sometimes things poke a hole. Come through.

WILL
So how do we close the hole?

Missy doesn't answer. Doesn't have an answer. She slips free of him. Leads them onward.

Ahead, the tunnel ENDS at a STONE STAIRCASE. Carved into the earth. Spiraling upwards. The trio ascends, Will leading.

THE TOP OF THE STAIRS

Ends at a SQUARE OPENING. The NIGHT SKY visible beyond.

Will creeps up the stairs, gun ready. Scans. Nods, stepping through. The others follow.

They're in the RUINS of an old STRUCTURE. Crumbling walls made of thick stone. A TOWER stands beside it. Identical to the one in their home.

MARA
It's just like the house...

WILL
(realizing)
They're check gates. For a border-crossing. That's why the house is locked like that. He wasn't hiding something. He was guarding it.

MARA
Guarding what?

MISSY
Us. Our world.

They emerge through the shattered doorway. Mara and Will shocked as they stare out upon

THE OTHER WORLD

A vast LANDSCAPE stretching out ahead them. Shards of rock. Gnarled trees and plant life.

Colored LIGHT writhes across the night sky. An otherworldly Aurora Borealis. MOONS hang. Several of them, at varying distances. The starfield unfamiliar.

MARA
My God...

MISSY
God doesn't know this place. At least not the one we pray to.

WILL
How long do we have? Before the sun comes up.

MISSY
It doesn't. It's always dark here.

WILL
That's why they use the tunnels. The sun holds them back. Why they haven't come across...

MARA
Where did they take her?

Missy points - to a collection of STONE STRUCTURES. An ancient city. Like the PETROGLYPHS. They head towards it.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF ANCIENT CITY - NIGHT

The trio approach, the crumbled tower far behind them now.

STONE COLUMNS mark the city limits. Towering overhead. Capped by GIANT STONE FIGURES. Roughly-carved, so we can't get a definitive look. Still...

Stout, humanoid bodies. TUSKED faces. Dressed in armor. Brandishing primitive weapons. A warrior race.

The trio weave past TOPPLED CARVINGS. Shattered, but still discernible. Figures. Humanoid, but not. Long, thin limbs. Three-fingered. Oversized EYES.

MARA
What are these?

MISSY
Monuments. Of those who lived here before.

WILL
Before?

MISSY
Before they were conquered.

They advance. Hear CRYING - Chelsea. Coming from the buildings ahead.

MARA
(pained)
Chelsea...

They move - pace quickening. At a near run when --

Something EMERGES from a nearby structure. Will PULLS the others down, ducking behind rubble. They wait, breathless.

The Thing passing by when it suddenly STOPS. Turns in their direction. Features masked in shadow, it SNIFFS - filthy NOSTRILS FLARING. Smelling them.

Will draws a KNIFE. Grips it.

It moves closer. Heavy, GRUNTING breaths. Scanning. Mere feet from discovering them. Finding nothing, it moves off.

Will listens. Peeks out, watches it go. He rises, turns --

ANOTHER CREATURE STANDING NEAR, in full view. Seeing Will, it SCREECHES - an ALARM.

Will FIRES - BLASTING the Thing dead. Too late.

Movement STIRS all around them. Alerted. SHAPES emerging.

The trio moves FASTER - Will BLASTING away. Each one a killing shot. Not wasting ammo.

WILL
Which way?

Missy points. They head that direction - more Things emerging. Will CUTTING a path.

His shotgun CLICKS empty. He hands it to Mara, UNSLINGS another. BLASTS a charging Thing only FEET AWAY!

Mara RELOADS the shotgun, unaware of a SHAPE CLOSING IN behind her. She SNAPS shells into the breach.

Mara turns - SCREAMS and FIRES -- the Thing DROPPING.

Will continues firing, but their advance has stopped - blocked by the emergence of more Creatures. Now ARMED. Weapons both blunt and bladed.

WILL (CONT'D)
Fall back!

MARA
What? No!

WILL
There are too many of them! We have to fall back!

MARA
I'm not leaving her!

Will FIRES AGAIN and AGAIN - more Things DROPPING. Still they come. An onslaught. Coming from all directions.

Missy starts back, tormented by it.

Will RETREATS, pulling Mara with her. She RIPS her arm free.

MARA (CONT'D)
NO!

Will pulls her to him. Locks eyes.

WILL
We're no good to her dead! We'll come back with reinforcements. I promise.

Will FIRES AGAIN - BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! The horde closing in.

Mara SCANS for a route through - can't find one. The Things seemingly EVERYWHERE. Teary, she lets Will GUIDE HER AWAY.

The trio retreat across the landscape.

RUNNING FULL TILT

Will reloading as they go. Shells dropping.

A DEAFENING SOUND behind them. Will checks --

The Creatures PURSUE, leaving a WAKE of DUST. Some on two legs, others on four. SNORTING, GRUNTING BATTLE CRIES.

AT THE CRUMBLED TOWER

Mara climbs down through the opening. Mara follows. Will draws two STICKS of DYNAMITE. Lights them and THROWS. Scrambles down the opening --

INT. THE TUNNELS

The trio navigate the narrow pathway as fast as they can. The tunnel ROCKS - EXPLOSIVES DETONATING above. DEBRIS RAINS, the tunnel CLOUDING --

Behind them, FOOTSTEPS POUND. Descending the stairs. Deafening in the enclosed space.

Missy slows to find her MARKERS at intersections - valuable seconds slipping away. She leads them on.

The tunnels SLOPE UP again. The trio re-crossing the border.

Will looks back - the tunnel CHOKED with SHAPES.

AT THE COLLAPSED WALL

They step through. Will stops at the FUSE MARKER. Draws his lighter. Mara sees. Traces it to the imbedded DYNAMITE.

Shocked, she LUNGES - SLAPS the lighter away.

MARA
What are you doing?!

WILL
We have to close the tunnel!

MARA
NO! It's our only way to her!

WILL
We can use the Pit --

MARA
No! We can't leave her!

WILL
We can't let them through!

MARA
NO!

FOOTSTEPS POUND CLOSER. Snorting SNARLS. A STAMPEDE.

Will reclaims the lighter. Crosses back to the FUSE. Mara FIGHTS him from lighting it - HITTING, CLAWING --

WILL
We don't have a CHOICE!

Will fends her off enough to LIGHT the fuse -- Mara CLAWING it. Will CARRIES her away -- Mara CRYING OUT as she's pulled from the shriveling fuse --

MARA
My BABY!

The TOED HOOVES POUND. We catch GLIMPSES - TUSKED SNOUTS, WEAPONS gripped by meaty hands, battle-scarred armor.

The FUSE dwindles. Nearing the DYNAMITE.

Missy waits for the duo, slowed by Mara's resistance.

KABOOM! The EXPLOSION DEMOLISHES THE TUNNEL - DUST and SMOKE PLUMING!

Mara SCREAMS in anguish as the pathway COLLAPSES in their wake. She CRUMBLES into hopeless sobs.

Will picks her up, carries her down the tunnel.

WILL
We'll use the Pit. We'll get her back. I promise.

Mara SOBS, inconsolable. His words meaningless. Pepper's distant BARKS RISE above the din --

INT. THE HOUSE - BASEMENT/TRAP DOOR - NIGHT

Pepper backs away from the trap door as Missy EMERGES, dirtied and winded. Mara next. She moves off, distancing herself from an ascending Will.

He SLAMS the door shut. Padlocks it. Crosses to Mara, who JERKS away from his touch.

WILL
We'll regroup and go back --

MARA
Don't TOUCH ME!

She GLARES - eyes FLARING with hate. Will tries to respond - can't. There's nothing he can say. Missy watches, teary eyed. Affected as well.

Determined, Will MOVES.

INT. THE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Will turns on the lights. Starts RELOADING a shotgun.

WILL
Mara, take the car. The both of you - get to town. Get help.

MARA
And tell them WHAT?

WILL
ANYTHING! Just GET THEM HERE!

He presses KEYS into her hand. Closes her hand around them.

WILL (CONT'D)
I need you to do this. I'll hold them off. As long as I can...

The finality of his statement hits Mara. Brings TEARS.

EXT. THE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The backdoor opens, Will EMERGING. Shotgun aimed. Motion-lights SNAP to life. He scans. Nods to the others.

The women exit the house, move for the SUV when they notice

THE TREELINE

Beyond which, multi-colored LIGHTS FINGER the night sky. The same colors as that other-worldly Aurora Borealis. Coming from the direction of the Pit.

Will stares, unsure what to make of it.

The TREES SWAY. Something MOVING them. The sound of BRANCHES SNAPPING.

MISSY
They're coming...

SPARKS FLARE in the distant darkness. The CRACKLE of ELECTRICITY. Coupled with ANIMALISTIC SCREECHES.

WILL
They're at the fence.

The LIGHTS throughout the house FLICKER - fighting to stay lit. External floodlights WANING.

WILL (CONT'D)
You've gotta go - now.

The POWER DIES. Generator overloading. Plunging the house into darkness. Floodlights DYING LAST. A silent beat before

The <u>ROAR of COUNTLESS Things SHATTERS THE NIGHT</u>. Calling out in unison. A battle cry. Victorious.

A POUNDING rises. FOOTFALLS. A STAMPEDE of them. Charging.

Mara decides. Turns to Will. Shakes her head.

MARA
I'm not leaving you.

WILL
Go! I'll hold the line.

MARA
No. Not alone.

The trio RETREAT back into the house.

INT. THE HOUSE - VARIOUS - NIGHT

The trio secure the house. Barricade SHUTTERS secured into place. Shotguns LOADED, laid out. GASOLINE CANS lined up.

The POUNDING grows LOUDER. Nearing. Items throughout the house RATTLING from the vibration.

Mara fights a BARRICADE BAR into place over the shutters. Nearby, their WEDDING PICTURE FRAME vibrates on the mantle. She stops it. Lays it flat.

Will PEERS out through a slat in the shutters --

HIS POV - THE TREELINE

The invading light spreading higher now. Expanding. One giant tree SWAYING. Shaking.

The Horde shapes in the darkness. MASKED in the dust and dirt they're kicking up.

From OUTSIDE, the sound of SHATTERING GLASS. METAL BATTERED.

WILL
They've reached the car.

EXT. THE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Weapons PUMMEL the car - glass and metal SHATTERING and TWISTING. Tires POP, ruptured.

Will FIRES through the slats - DROPPING Creatures. Other shots SPARK off ARMOR PLATING.

Mara fires from another window - targets impossible to miss. But as one falls, another takes its place.

The Things SWARM towards the house - the car DEMOLISHED.

Stripped pieces of it now BLUNT TOOLS against the HOUSE - pounding away -- every DOOR and WINDOW UNDER SIEGE --

The noise THUNDEROUS - Pepper's FRANTIC BARKING adding to the melee. Over it all, those ANIMALISTIC, SNORTING CRIES.

Will EMPTIES a shotgun, discards it. Snatches up another.

Barricades SPLINTER as BLADES JUT and CHOP THROUGH --

The POUNDING suddenly STOPS. The onslaught ceasing.

The gunfire TAPERS, Will and Mara realizing. The house falling eerily, unnervingly silent.

Will RELOADS. Hurried, precise movements.

MARA
Why'd they stop?

Will PEERS out the window.

The Horde stands motionless. Waiting. A sea of them, surrounding the house. Weapons in hand. Heavy, GRUNTING breaths visible in the cold air.

Mara peers out with him. They wait, fearing what's to come.

FROM THE BACK OF THE HORDE

They part. Allowing ONE of their own to come forward. A CHILD-SIZED BUNDLE in its arms. Wrapped in dirty cloth.

MARA (CONT'D)
Chelsea...

WILL
Mara, wait --

They watch. The Bundle-Carrying THING stops near the front of the horde. Others stepping back. It waits.

MARA
They're giving her back.

WILL
We don't know that...

MARA
It's her!

She BOLTS for the door. Will GRABS HER, pulls her back.

WILL
You can't go out there!

MARA
They have our little girl! Let me <u>GO</u>!

She grabs the tea pot, WHIRLS - CRACKS Will on the side of the head! Sends him STAGGERING --

Mara races to the door - throws back the locks. Races out --

STOPS short at the sight of the horde. Silhouetted. Their GRUNTING BREATHS all we hear.

Mara approaches. Hands raised in acquiescence.

MARA (CONT'D)
Please don't hurt her... please.
Just give her back. We'll leave...

IN THE HOUSE

Will rises from the blow. Scans - sees the OPEN DOOR.

WILL
Mara...!

He struggles to get up, DIZZY.

OUTSIDE

Mara moves towards the horde. Slow, fearful steps. She enters the mass. The figures turning as she passes.

Mara nears the Bundle-Holding Thing. Extends her arms to receive it. Teary.

MARA
Please... just give me my baby back.

The Thing STARES back. Still in shadow. Exhaling GRUNTING plumes into the cold night air.

MARA (CONT'D)
Please.

Will BRACES in the open doorway, SHOTGUN AIMED. Trying to cover the entire horde at once.

IN THE HORDE

Mara waits, tears streaming her face.

The Thing EXTENDS the bundle. Places it into Mara's hands.

MARA (CONT'D)
Thank you.

Mara CLUTCHES the bundle to her. Tears spilling.

Will WATCHES from the doorway, hopeful.

Mara lifts the tattered WRAPPING away from Chelsea's face.

<u>A GROTESQUE, SWINE-LIKE FACE SNARLING BACK AT HER</u>.

Mara SCREAMS - the HORDE SURGING IN AROUND HER! Weapons COMING DOWN as they ROAR - horrific, animalistic NOISES that nearly drown out Mara's SCREAMING. Nearly.

WILL
MARA!

Will OPENS FIRE - UNLOADING into the mass! BLASTING away.

Missy - watching from a window - CRIES OUT at the attack. Turns away, covering her eyes.

The horde HACKS AWAY - weapons wet now - the animalistic CRIES filled with VICTORY - Mara's CRIES absent.

Will SCREAMS, FIRING as fast as the gun allows -- RIPPING into stout bodies until the gun CLICKS EMPTY.

The horde TURNS, facing him.

Will wields the gun like a BAT, ready -- the horde CHARGING --

Forcing Will back. He retreats into the house --

INT. THE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

He SLAMS the door - TWISTS the locks. WHAM! The door IMPACTS from the other side, KNOCKING Will off it --

The door RATTLING under the blows but holding.

THE POUNDING RESUMES - DEAFENING. The house sounding like it's coming down around them.

Will races to a SLAT in the windows - peers out.

Mara a dark pile on the ground. Motionless. Gone.

Will SLUMPS down the wall. CLENCHES his eyes shut and SCREAMS! An anguished BELLOW.

Missy watches from close by, unsure how to help...

Will SLAMS his head back, tears spilling. He SNAPS a round into the gun. TUCKS the barrel under his chin. Finger finding the trigger --

MISSY
No... please.

Will STRAINS, finger tensing. Opens his eyes, looks at her.

Missy scared - eyes PLEADING with him. Beyond her, on the wall - a photo of Chelsea.

Making Will PAUSE. Steeling him. Pain giving way to RAGE.

He moves the gun away. Stands. Reloads. Shell after shell.

WILL
I'm gonna kill you... I'm gonna kill ALL OF YOU!

Outside, the Things ROAR BACK. Defiant.

A MASSIVE CRACKING NOISE draws Will to the window --

HIS POV - THE TREELINE

Where the SHAKING TREE TOPPLES - CRASHING to the earth.

The assault INTENSIFIES - weapons CARVING through SHUTTERS. In the widening gaps, we catch GLIMPSES --

Beady, animalistic EYES glinting with dark intelligence - Tusked MOUTHS -- YELLOW-CLAWED FINGERS GOUGING openings --

Will FIRES away, a man possessed.

WHAM! The house SHUDDERS under a MASSIVE IMPACT. Will and Missy JARRED off-balance. Silence, allowing them to share a CONFUSED LOOK before --

WHAM! Another impact. Will reaches a window, PEERS OUT --

The toppled TREE TRUNK now wielded as a BATTERING RAM against the door! WHAM! Its POINTED END SPLINTERS through.

Will races to the kitchen. Braces against the old fridge and - STRAINING - TIPS IT, barricading the door.

Another IMPACT - less invasive. The barricade helping.

The battering stops. Will grabs another rifle off the rack.

The BATTERING RAM PIERCES THROUGH a shuttered WINDOW! Its jagged end SPEARING the air in front of Will!

The house breached. Will realizes.

WILL (CONT'D)
The tower... Go!

Missy leads the way, takes a barking Pepper with her.

The tree trunk SCRAPES back. Withdrawing to allow entrance.

Will backs to the gas cans. Uncaps ONE, KICKS it over. Liquid GUSHES, spreading across the floor.

Will throws a HANDFUL of SHELLS across the room. Tosses several into the burning FIREPLACE.

The trunk clears the window. Fingers grab hold. Things CLIMB through.

Will carries the other two cans with him as he exits. He stops, finding something. Snatches their WEDDING PHOTO off the mantle. Retreats into the bowels of the house --

TO THE TOWER DOOR

Where Missy and Pepper wait. He grabs the handle, PULLS. STRAINING. The thick door SCRAPING open. Will pulls again.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

The gas can EMPTIES, contents seeping towards the invading Things.

The SHELLS in the fireplace BLACKEN under the heat.

AT THE TOWER DOOR

Missy slips through. Then Pepper. Climb the spiral stairs.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Toed hooves step through the spilled gas.

The shells in the FIREPLACE EXPLODE - SPARKS SHOWERING OUT and IGNITING the gas! WHOOSH! FIRE CONSUMES the Things!

AT THE DOOR

Will PULLS the door shut behind him just as FLAMES FLARE PAST, SINGEING THE DOOR!

The living room ENGULFED. Things SCREECH and THRASH, try to escape --

Journals burn. Aged pages BLACKENING and curling.

Will's PILL BOTTLE WARPS and MELTS.

The old photos BUBBLE and BURN. Images searing.

EXT. ROOF OF TOWER - NIGHT

Will emerges. Sets down the gas cans. Winded. SMOKE BILLOWS around the tower, clouding the night sky.

Missy rests against the wall, knees balled tight. Hugging Pepper to her. Will reads her fear. Crosses to her.

WILL
We'll be okay.
(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)
Someone will see the fire. We just have to hold out til the sun comes up... Just a little while, okay?

Missy NODS. Wanting to believe.

WILL (CONT'D)
It'll be up soon. Any time.

He checks his watch. 5:43 a.m.

Will crosses to the edge. Checks across the expanse. His face pales. He checks his watch again. Something's wrong...

No sign of our SUN. Not even a lightening of the horizon.

WILL (CONT'D)
The sun... It's not coming up.

Missy looks up at that. Worry flushing her face.

Will sees only that alien light. Higher now. Seeping across our sky.

WILL (CONT'D)
They're invading... Coming across the borderland.

The light stemming from beyond the trees. From the Pit.

WILL (CONT'D)
The Pit... We have to close it.

Will races to his duffle bag. Slings several rifles over his shoulders. Pockets more shells.

WILL (CONT'D)
That's where it's coming from... Stop them from coming through.

Will pulls a coil of ROPE from the bag. Works on a KNOT.

WILL (CONT'D)
I'll go down. Collapse it.

MISSY
No... Don't go.

WILL
Once it's closed, the sun'll come up again... Drive them back.

MISSY
Please don't go...

Will's not listening. Lost in his determination. He LOOPS the rope around him. Cinches it tight.

WILL
You stay here. Til I get back.

There's no conviction in his statement.

MISSY
Please -- don't leave me!

Will secures the rope's other end to the tower. Tests it.

WILL
It's the only way.

MISSY
DON'T GO, DADDY!

Will FREEZES, stunned. The cadence unmistakable. He turns, faces Missy. Stares, struggling to comprehend.

MISSY (CONT'D)
Don't leave me again...

Will studies her features. Recognizes them.

WILL
Chelsea...?

"Missy" NODS, fresh tears sprouting.

WILL (CONT'D)
(baffled)
What... Why didn't you...?

MISSY
I wanted to... I just... You wouldn't have believed me. No one did...

Will tries to answer - can't. He PULLS her to him - a TIGHT HUG. "Missy" reciprocates.

WILL
How?

MISSY/CHELSEA
I don't know... Time moves different there. Faster, and not the same as here... I was there for so long. By the time I found my way back, you weren't here. But he was - the old man. I missed you so much...

Will CLUTCHES her to him, fighting tears. The joy of having her back. The loss of all those years.

Will SQUEEZES her hands. Notices the THREE SCARS across her forearm. Scars she got tonight. Now long healed.

MISSY/CHELSEA (CONT'D)
Promise you won't leave me again...

WILL
We have to stop them. We have to close the Pit. Do you understand?

MISSY/CHELSEA
Promise me you'll come back.

Will tries to answer - can't.

MISSY/CHELSEA (CONT'D)
Promise me. You always keep your promise. That's what Daddy's do.

The words hit home. Will NODS, determined.

WILL
I'll come back.

"Missy" smiles, believing him. Will tests the other end of the rope, ensuring its grip. Places a SHOTGUN in her hands.

WILL (CONT'D)
You shoot anything that comes over that wall. Can you do that? For Daddy?

Missy NODS. A proud child still inside her.

WILL (CONT'D)
Good girl.

He kisses her forehead. Pulls her to him. A tight hug.

WILL (CONT'D)
We're gonna be okay.

He crosses to the edge. Looks down.

SMOKE BLINDS his view, hellishly backlit by the fire. Flames lick out from the windows. Wood CRACKING.

Will draws a FLARE GUN from the duffel bag. Load a SHELL. RAISES and FIRES. It ARCS across the sky - ERUPTS, BURNING BRIGHT as it DROPS --

Illuminating the expanse - FILLED with Things. Hundreds of them, TURNING AWAY - SQUEALING at the glare.

Will PALES at the sight. Daunted. Scared.

WILL (CONT'D)
Oh my God...

The FLARE LANDS, burning bright - creatures SCURRYING away.

Will snaps out of it. Precious seconds slipping away. He CLIMBS over the tower edge. Starts to lower down when

MISSY/CHELSEA
Be careful, Daddy. I love you.

Will stops. Looks at her. The old woman's eyes brim with childish eagerness and affection. Unbridled.

WILL
I love you, too, baby.

Will DESCENDS, hand over hand. Feet braced against the tower wall. The ground below obscured by PLUMING SMOKE.

Missy watches from the top of the tower. Will receding. Finally DISAPPEARING in the cloud.

Will lowers further, the smoke ENVELOPING him. Choking, he pulls his T-SHIRT over his NOSE. Descends.

Something SCRAPES the stone.

Will stops, looks down. The smoke obscuring everything.

Another SCRATCH. Then another, from a slightly different direction. Will SCANS to locate it.

AT THE TOWER ROOFTOP

Missy waits, anxious. The rope JOSTLING from Will's descent.

From within the cloud, Will CRIES OUT - PAINED. Then GUNFIRE. STROBING FLASHES in the cloud.

MISSY/CHELSEA
Daddy? DADDY?!

The ROPE goes SLACK.

No answer. Just the CRACKLING of the fire.

Missy grows frantic. Grabs the rope, PULLS. It comes up easily. No weight on it.

Until it YANKS TAUT - pulling Missy forward. Something CLIMBING it now. The rope MOVING again under the weight.

MISSY/CHELSEA (CONT'D)
Daddy?

Will doesn't respond. The rope CREAKS. Strained to its limit. Something HEAVY climbing it. Heavier than Will.

Missy's face flushes with fear. She scrambles, finds a KNIFE in the duffle bag. Unsheathes it and SLICES at the rope.

Fast, frantic movement - cutting through. FRAYING it --

IN THE SMOKE, DARK SHAPES congeal. Growing larger.

Missy keeps SAWING - a desperate race now -- the rope finally SNAPPING -- YANKED out of sight --

Missy looks down. The smoke writhes. Ethereal. Silence. Until - the faint SCRAPE against stone.

And another. And another. Growing louder. Closer.

Missy grabs a flashlight, AIMS down --

SPOTLIGHTING the THING AS IT EMERGES FROM THE SMOKE -- its TWISTED, SWINE-LIKE FACE SEEN CLEARLY FOR THE FIRST TIME! Gnarled TUSKS and a SNOUT - beady, malevolent eyes --

Missy SCREAMS, backing away. Reclaims her shotgun.

A FLESHY HAND reaches the top of the tower, yellowed NAILS GOUGING stone as it PULLS itself UP --

Missy FIRES - BLASTING it off the tower! It plummets --

Its falling form WAFTING away the smoke to reveal the TOWER IS COVERED by the CLIMBING THINGS! DOZENS OF THEM.

More reach the tower roof - Missy BLASTING away -- SHOOTING them off -- until her gun CLICKS EMPTY.

Another Swine-Thing reaches the rooftop, CHARGES --

Missy SWINGS the weapon -- CRACKING it across the face! BLUDGEONS IT with the weapon, ENRAGED!

Around her, more Swine-Things breach the tower roof. Missy backs to the duffle bag, grabs another SHOTGUN --

Below, an ENGINE ROARS TO LIFE --

THE CROP THRESHER CRASHING THROUGH THE BARN DOORS! A BLOODIED WILL AT ITS CAGED HELM. MOUNTED HIGH-BEAMS FLARING -

BLINDING the Things so they DON'T RUN --

Will STEERING DIRECTLY INTO THEM -- the THRESHER BLADES CHEWING AWAY! BLOOD SPRAYS!

Swine-Things RACE TOWARDS Will, WEAPONS RAISED - the spinning blades SHREDDING THROUGH THEM!

Will INSANE behind the controls, SCREAMING. WIPERS clearing the blood-soaked windshield --

The thresher ROCKS as it PLOWS through the mass, Will STEERING straight for the tower --

ATOP THE TOWER

Pepper FIGHTS off another Thing, evading its WEAPON. Both SNARLING --

Missy reloads, shells dropping in panic --

The thresher SLAMS the tower wall --

Jarring the Swine-Things standing on the edge LOOSE! They TOPPLE backwards --

Some impacting the ground, others the thresher ROOF - others STRAIGHT into the WHIRRING GRINDERS!

The gears GRINDING METAL and BONE -- CLOGGING with them --

Will reverses the GRINDERS to clear them - armor pieces spitting out. The machine crimson now.

Will turns and fires the side-mounted FLAME-THROWER!

An ARC of FLAME BURNING the creatures off the tower wall!

Others FLEE the burning light! SQUEALING in pain.

Swine-Things LEAP atop the vehicle, BASHING at its roof - metal grating DENTING -- the impacts THUNDEROUS --

Will FIRES out of the grating, BLOWING a Thing off! Another takes its place. Only a matter of time before they get in.

Will turns the thresher, STEERING it through their MASS --

Some Swine-Things getting clear, others not as lucky - chewed by the blades or crushed under its tires --

The Swing-Things PURSUE the thresher, Will LEADING THEM off - away from the house. Around the treeline. Towards the Pit.

The WWII BOMB mounted to the thresher's ROOF.

EXT. THE EXPANSE NEAR THE PIT - NIGHT

The thresher RUMBLES across the expanse, MANGLED and DENTED. Engine WHINING and SMOKING from abuse.

The horde pursues. Running alongside. A few LEAPING onto the thresher to get Will. BATTERING away.

Will steers, the dashboard FLARING RED. Engine failing.

WILL
Come on, baby... Just a little further.

Dead ahead, the Pit lies. Illuminated by the alien lights.

Will rumbles closer. Fifty yards. Thirty. Metal grating BUCKLING on both side under the impacts.

The thresher STALLS. Engine dying.

WILL (CONT'D)
No - no -- not yet! Please.

Will twists the key, desperate. The engine COMPLAINS, refusing to start.

<u>WHAM</u>! The horde SLAMS the thresher from behind - Will HURLED into the steering wheel!

The front end of the thresher PLOWS FORWARD - <u>PUSHED</u> by the mass. Towards the edge of the Pit.

Will sees what's coming. Tries to get the grinders turning --

They SPIN, CHEW AWAY - then JAM again.

Swine-Things leap atop the vehicle, BATTERING AWAY. Several BANGING on the BOMB, unaware what it is.

Grating BUCKLES around Will. He gives up on the thresher, grabs his shotgun - it's WEDGED. He struggles to free it --

The thresher SLIDES forward, wheels CARVING earth --

The Pit's edge looming closer.

The grating GIVES WAY above Will, a Thing SQUEEZING IN --

Will still can't get the shotgun free - but it's AIMED UPWARDS. He reaches down, FIRES --

BLASTING the invading Thing OFF! YANKS the gun free. FIRES, SHOOTING the Swine-Things that block the grating --

Toed HOOVES DIG into the earth, straining -- PUSHING --

The thresher reaches the Pit's edge. Slides FORWARD --

Nothing but OPEN SKY in front of Will now - he FIRES - THROWS OPEN the cab grating to exit --

A SWINE-THING DIVING IN! Landing atop Will! They struggle - neither able to get much mobility in the close quarters!

The thresher's front wheels SLIP OVER the edge of the Pit --

The front end TIPS -- for Will, the SKY WIPING AWAY - the DARK CHASM of the Pit replacing it!

Fueling Will, who BASHES the Swine-Thing repeatedly. He gets out from under it, SCRAMBLES to the exit --

The thresher TEETERS and GOES OVER --

Will CRAWLING OUT as it FALLS - JUMPING CLEAR a second before the thresher PLUMMETS --

TUMBLING end over end -- DISAPPEARING into the darkness of the Pit! The horde ROARS in victory!

Will lands hard - a tight ball. Waiting for the EXPLOSION.

The night filled with metal CRUNCHING and SMASHING.

But the explosion never comes. Will opens his eyes. Looks at the Pit, bewildered.

WILL (CONT'D)
No...

He faces the HORDE. A SWARM of dark bodies, encircling him. Heavy, grunting breaths plume.

Will rises to his feet. Defiant. He throws his shotgun to the earth. UNZIPS his coat --

Revealing a VEST beneath it. Lined with DYNAMITE. A fuse. A homemade I.E.D.

WILL (CONT'D)
This world is ours. OURS! You can't have it!

Grips TIGHTEN on blunt weapons.

WILL (CONT'D)
You hear me? YOU CAN'T HAVE IT!

The Horde ROARS BACK - deafening in the quiet night.

Will draws a LIGHTER. FLICKS it. It won't catch.

IN THE PIT

The WWII BOMB LIES pinned under the twisted thresher. GAS LEAKS, trickling down the wreckage towards small FLAMES.

WILL'S LIGHTER

Another flick - it CATCHES. He brings the flame to the FUSE.

IN THE PIT

Gas meets flame. WHOOSH! The bomb's metal shell BLACKENS under the fiery heat.

THE HORDE

Closes in around Will. Weapons rising.

Will's LIGHTER almost at the fuse when KABOOM! The thresher's exploding GAS TANK IGNITES THE BOMB!

A MASSIVE FIREBALL RISES UP FROM THE PIT BEHIND WILL!

The Swine-Things ROAR, BLINDED - driven back!

The blast sends Will SPRAWLING - lighter THROWN free! He lands hard - dizzied. Looks up as

Several Swine-Things CHARGE HIM, weapons COMING DOWN! The EARTH COLLAPSES BENEATH THEM, the Things PLUNGING from view!

A RUMBLE fills the air - the ground CRUMBLING around Will. He SCRAMBLES to his feet --

SPRINTING away as the earth GIVES WAY behind him! The blast creating a SPREADING SINK HOLE!

Will races across the expanse - Swine-Things DARTING around him, on two legs and four - TUMBLING out of view as the ground vanishes under their feet!

Will BOLTS, barely ahead of the collapse - a great MOUTH YAWNING OPEN to devour the earth --

Creatures FLEE - FALL -- their CRIES overtaken by the ROAR of the collapse --

Will RUNS, SCREAMING as the sinkhole OVERTAKES HIM - Will PLUNGING from view --

The collapse STOPS, the night falling quiet.

A GRUNT. The SKITTER of falling rock.

INSIDE THE COLLAPSE

Will CLINGS to the newly-born wall. Straining. He CLAWS his way up - reaches the top, fingers digging for purchase. The earth GIVES WAY under him -- Will SLIPS - FALLING --

A HAND CLAMPS DOWN ON HIS, stopping him!

Missy/Chelsea stands before him, Pepper at her side. She grabs Will with both hands, PULLS. Together, they get Will to safety.

He collapses on the ground, exhausted. Looks up --

Across the Pit. The alien lights FADE. The opening blocked. Night reclaiming the sky. Our night.

Beyond the Pit, the SUN RISES. Brightening the world. Revealing the Pit. Expanded. A fresh wound upon the earth.

Will and Missy watch, sunlight warming their bodies. We

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

The barren expanse looms before us. Tillman's UPSCALE CAR approaches, its RADIO becoming audible. Playing the NEWS.

NEWS RADIO
(staticy)
-- top scientists around the world remain at a loss to explain what caused a delay in the earth's rotation three weeks ago, which resulted in a prolonged period night in the western hemisphere. Though no nation has claimed responsibility, the terror alert level remains at an elevated status. Clocks around the world continue to be reset --

The car passes, heading on towards

EXT. THE HOUSE - DAY

Eaten away by the fire. Stone foundation blackened anew. CONSTRUCTION WORKERS already busy rebuilding.

The tower remains, charred but intact. The sight hauntingly similar to the one on the other side of the border.

The car stops, Tillman exiting. He heads for Will, among the workers.

Will crosses to meet him. His face OLDER. Age lines. Temples greying. Pepper at his side. Moving slower.

TILLMAN
Good morning. The insurance company agreed to the claim. It's a good thing your Uncle had so much insurance. This is the third time it's burned down since it's been in his name.

Will nods. Offers nothing more. Tillman removes a PACKET from his briefcase. Hands it to Will to sign.

TILLMAN (CONT'D)
They even agreed to the additions you asked for. If I didn't know better, I'd say you're installing a moat.

Will signs. Doesn't answer at first.

WILL
(coy)
Irrigation. To prevent this from happening again.

TILLMAN
Smart man. You can never be too prepared, right?

WILL
Exactly.

Tillman notices MISSY, playing with several YOUNG DOGS. A youthfulness to her that belies her years.

TILLMAN
You let her stay?

WILL
The hospital transferred her to my care.

TILLMAN
That's very kind of you.

Will looks at Missy. His eyes brimming with affection.

WILL
(bittersweet)
She's at home here. We both are.

TILLMAN
I have to be honest - I'm shocked you'd want to stay. After everything that's happened... losing both your wife and daughter in the fire.

That's a lot for one man to handle... You could sell.

Will considers that. Looks off. Towards the treeline, and what lies beyond. He shakes his head. Determined.

WILL
I belong here.

Will's words hang between them. Unnerving Tillman.

CUT TO:

TILLMAN DRIVES OFF

Will watching him go. He heads back to the construction. Stops, finding something in the wreckage. He picks it up. Rubs the soot away.

His MEDAL OF HONOR. Cloth ribbons burned away. The metal singed. Warped a bit by the heat, but otherwise INTACT.

Will looks at it. A sense of acceptance washing his face. He pockets it. Heads TOWARDS the House, and we DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE HOUSE - DAY

Rebuilt. Construction vehicles gone. Almost like new, with some new fortifications. Will NARRATES as we DRIFT CLOSER.

WILL (V.O.)
The days grow longer now, giving me more time to prepare. To ready the house.

We PASS INTO --

INT. THE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Where the DELIVERY BOY unpacks familiar supplies. Canned goods, water, ammunition. DOG FOOD now among them.

WILL (V.O.)
And already I hear them. Scratching. Tunneling their way back up.

We DRIFT DEEPER into the house --

Missy sits on the living room floor, surrounded by the DOGS. Warming by the fire. She DRAWS on a PAPER with crayons.

WILL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I let them. Let them open me a path back to Chelsea...

The drawing a MAP. Depicting the land across the border. Done with child-like simplicity. But it's clear enough.

We DRIFT OFF. Pass Will's MEDAL - framed on the mantle. Move PAST IT. Up the stairs --

Where Will sits at the window. The same seat his Uncle was found in. Will's face creased with AGE LINES. Movements a little bit stiffer.

Shotgun across his lap. A JOURNAL atop it. Will WRITING, his words our narration. He stops. Releases the pen and makes a fist. Muscles and joints stiff.

WILL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
My training has prepared me better than those who preceded me. This fight has been passed on to me, and I welcome it. I will defend our home. Keep it safe.

Will looks out the window. Across the sprawling grounds. Keeping watch.

WILL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Safe from the things that dwell beyond the borderland.

And on this nearly identical image we

FADE OUT.

END CREDITS ROLL.