STRAY

By

The Thornton Brothers

Sherman / Rosa Entertainment

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A WHIPPING WIND.

FADE IN:

ON A DOG'S FACE IN A CAR WINDOW - DAY

Beady eyes, staunch General's beard. It's an Airedale Terrier named **HIGGINS.**

His bullet-shaped head hangs out of a backseat window. Highway wind FLAPPING his ears and gums.

EXT. FAMILY SEDAN - DAY

The car glides along a WOODED HIGHWAY.

Higgins' head jutting out. A KID'S HAND out the other rear window, surfing the breeze.

INT. FAMILY SEDAN - DAY

Inside. A better look at Higgins and the boy, **GARRET.** In the front seat: His parents, **TODD** and **MELINDA.**

They drive along in silence. Melinda gazes out the window.

MELINDA
Horses.

The boys look.

EXT. FOREST - PARKING LOT - DAY

The parked sedan, doors ajar. Todd leans under the rear hatch. ZIPS open a backpack, peers inside.

Day-tripper essentials: Flashlight. First-Aid kit. Matches. Bug spray. He hands the BUG SPRAY to Melinda.

She motions to Garret. The boy leads a leashed Higgins over. Raises his arms, closes his eyes.

Melinda SPRAYS him. FSSST.

MELINDA
Turn around.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Air BLASTING through nostrils as Higgins SNIFF-SNIFF-SNIFFS under a thatch of roots. He claws at the earth, digs after a scent.

A shrill WHISTLE as Todd marches by. DOG LEASH draped over his shoulders.

He SLAPS his thigh.

TODD
Heel.

EXT. FOREST - FARTHER ALONG - DAY

They're hiking a trail. The sound of a RUSHING CREEK nearby.

Melinda admires the bristling canopy of branches and pine needles overhead.

Garret carries a clipboard and pencil. Consults a book: "Flora of the North Woods."

GARRET
Mister Beauchain said coniferous areas are good places to find the, uh, the "Goblin Fern."

He studies the forest understory as they move along; the sodden earth, busy with roots. Brambles and weeds, flawless architecture of a spiderweb.

MELINDA
Yeah? What's that one look like?

Higgins catches up. Tongue wagging, lungs full of the wild.

GARRET
It's got like one tiny, kinda green, but like also little gray leaf——

EXT. FOREST - CREEK - DAY

CLEAR WHITE WATER urges over slick stones.

Higgins paws along the muddy bank, eyes a school of tadpoles in a catch of water. He lowers his head. Drinks.

And perks up. Alert, glancing across the river:

MOVEMENT. A glimpse. Something — BROWN FUR in the treeline.

Higgins issues a BARK.

MELINDA (O.S.)
Higgins. Come.

Higgins lingers. Eyes the other side, his interest piqued.

BARKS again.

MELINDA
Come here.

TODD
Higgins. Heel!

Higgins HUFFS a couple more times. Skulks to his master. Settles on his haunches and leans against Todd's leg.

Garret reaches down, scratches behind the dog's ear.

Pulls his hand away——

GARRET
Ew. Dad.

MELINDA
What is it?

GARRET
I think a tick.

Todd kneels. Parts the stiff fur behind Higgins' ear. Sure enough: a blood-bloated TICK.

EXT. FOREST - CREEK - THE OTHER SIDE - *ANIMAL CAM* - DAY

Low to the ground, we're a voyeur among the trees...

Watching from the other side of the creek as Todd unshoulders his backpack, UNZIPS it.

EXT. FOREST - CREEK - DAY

Todd takes out some tweezers and a lighter, TWEEZES the tick... and BURNS IT. POP.

EXT. FOREST - CREEK - DAY

The family hikes.

Higgins follows. Nose to the ground. SNIFF-SNIFF-SNIFFING.

EXT. FOREST - CREEK - LATER

The stream's HECTIC CURRENT.

CRINKLE of paper as Melinda empties a couple brown bag lunches, hands sandwiches to Todd and Garret.

She throws a blanket open... it settles on the ground, picnic proper. They eat.

TODD
Mm.

Melinda peels the lid off a Tupperware container. Dry pellets of DOG FOOD.

CHCKCHCKCHKA as she shakes it. Sets it on the ground.

MELINDA
Hih-ggins! Hih-ggins!

No sign of him. The TREES SHIVER in the wind.

Melinda RATTLES the food container again.

MELINDA
Higgins! Come here, come and eat!

Nothing. She turns to the boys.

MELINDA
Who saw him last?

Todd lets loose a piercing WHISTLE.

Nothing.

MELINDA
(ineffective)
Higgins! Come on, honey! Such a good boy!

Garret makes a feeble attempt at a WHISTLE.

TODD
<u>Higgins</u>! Get your ass over here!

And still nothing.

MELINDA
Where is he?

A frustrated sigh, Todd walks to the creek bed. Looks up and down the expanse.

TODD
(sotto)
God damn it.

Melinda and Garret are up and looking. Panic creeping in.

MELINDA
Hih-ggins!

EXT. FOREST - SEARCHING FOR HIGGINS - LATER

A colony of MUSHROOMS. Stinkhorns clustered on a felled oak. A CATERPILLAR moseys along a pock-marked leaf.

TODD (O.S.)
(frustrated)
Higgins!

Todd charges by.

Melinda and Garret follow.

GARRET
You can't sound mad. He won't come.

MELINDA
(to Todd, cold)
I told you we should've kept him on his leash.

EXT. FOREST - SEARCHING FOR HIGGINS - LATER

The ashen birch are legion. HORSEFLIES buzzing.

The FAMILY walks. Melinda's hand on Garret's back as the boy cries.

The forest... *empty of Higgins*.

EXT. FILLING STATION - DAY

Far off ROAD NOISE. Small, whitewashed building. Antique pumps and an American flag.

A hand-painted sign:

NORTH WOODS GAS & TACKLE
"LAST CHANCE TO FILL 'ER UP 'TIL TOMAHAWK."

The family sedan's parked in the lot.

INT. FAMILY SEDAN - DAY

Dejected, Garret sits in the back seat. Looks through the window, into the store:

Todd and Melinda talking. Old store **CLERK** on the phone. Yellow eyes, drinker's skin.

EXT. FOREST - PARKING LOT - DUSK

LIGHT RAIN falls. The family sedan, now parked at the TRAIL ENTRANCE. Bulletin board, maps and trivia. *Warnings.*

Next to the sedan is a hulking four-by-four. Mud-caked tires, FOREST RANGER decals.

EXT. FOREST - CREEK - LAST LIGHT

A ponchoed **FOREST RANGER.** Plastic rain-cover on his "Smokey the Bear" hat, MAG-LITE in hand.

FOREST RANGER
City dogs'll smell smells out here they never knew existed.

Todd and Melinda are huddled under an umbrella.

FOREST RANGER
Well.
(sniffs)
Rain's pickin' up.

The Ranger waves his flashlight, washes the trees with light.

FOREST RANGER
You folks don't want to be out here after dark.

EXT. FOREST - CREEK, DOWNSTREAM - NIGHT

Garret's in a bright orange poncho. A chewed-to-hell TENNIS SHOE in his hand.

GARRET
Higgins! Come on, boy! I got your shoe!

Upstream:

MELINDA
Garret, sweetie! Time to go.

EXT. FOREST - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The Ranger flips a small note pad shut, tucks a pen into his pocket.

FOREST RANGER
Well, we got your info, so if we hear anything, you know...

Todd extends his hand. Shakes the Ranger's, takes from him a BUSINESS CARD.

FOREST RANGER
You guys have any questions, feel free to call me direct. Day or night.

TODD
Thanks.

MELINDA
Thank you.

The Ranger nods, TIPS his hat. Gets in his truck, RUMBLES out of the lot...

INT. SEDAN - NIGHT

Seat belts CLICKED into place.

MELINDA
Put your seat belt on, honey.

Garret's in the backseat, inconsolable. The tennis shoe on his lap. He fingers a hole in the ratty leather.

Todd turns the key, the ENGINE comes alive. Melinda wipes her eyes as Todd pulls out of the lot. A somber silence.

Garret PEERS out of the rear windshield. The empty lot, ribbons of rain sweeping the asphalt.

TODD
We'll come back next weekend. Put some posters up.

The parking lot grows distant. The dark forest beyond.

TODD
We'll find him.

EXT. SEDAN - NIGHT

Through the rear windshield: Garret's longing gaze, hope fading. He turns away——

INT. SEDAN - NIGHT

——settles into his seat. Eyes teeming with TEARS.

MELINDA
(rote)
Put your seat belt on, honey.

He does so. CLICK.

FADE TO BLACK.

DARKNESS.

SMASH IN TITLE CARD:



CUT TO:

EXT. A DECREPIT WOODEN SHACK IN THE DEEP WOODS - DAY

Distant, then closer looks; obscured by SHIVERING TREES, brittle reeds and dead AUTUMN LEAVES.

OPENING CREDITS ROLL as scratchy, OMINOUS IMAGES come and go:

Suspended from chains on a DEER-GUTTING RACK, a putrid CAST IRON CAULDRON smolders over a thatch of burning lumber and branches. God only knows what's in the boiling gruel.

A jagged, gruesome mountain OF DEER ANTLERS in the weeds and brambles. HORSEFLIES BUZZ throughout the sequence, rising into an eventual CRESCENDO——

INT. WOODEN SHACK - DAY

A Man's ROUGH, CALLOUSED HANDS busy pressing and loading SHOTGUN SHELLS on a filthy workbench. FINGERNAILS caked with years of GRIME.

EXT. WOODEN SHACK - DAY

Flicker of a TATTERED MANNEQUIN now strung up on the deer-gutting rack, dark RUBBER MASK on its head we can't quite make out. Echoing, distant SNARL OF DOGS which continues to grow in VOLUME and PROXIMITY——

Hellish HOUNDS, ribs jutting against loose, scarred skin and matted fur —— HUNGRY DOGS PACING behind a chain link fence. BLOODSHOT EYES. YELLOW FANGS.

INT. WOODEN SHACK - DAY

The man's GRIMY HANDS still at work, now OILING TRAPS and SHARPENING BLADES; a chipped MACHETE. A sinister FILET KNIFE. A heavy CLEAVER.

EXT. WOODEN SHACK - DAY

The deer-gutting rack is now home to a swinging GUTTED, HEADLESS DEER CARCASS.

BUZZ OF HORSEFLIES, SNARLS AND BARKS OF DOGS reaching a bloodcurdling height——

——the SEVERED DEER'S HEAD on a wide, blood-stained tree stump. Antlers terminated in hack-sawed cuts, DOWN COMES THE HEAVY CLEAVER, cuts through the deer's head at a GRUESOME, BONE-CRACKING angle.

In reaches one of those GRIMY HANDS, scoops from the gristle a CORDED EYE. Tosses it into the SNAPPING JAWS of a hound as we——

SMASH TO:

QUIETUDE.

SINGSONG birds chirping. Wind RUSTLING LEAVES. The undulating buzz of LOCUSTS.

CLICK-CLACK of HOOVES on a——

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - DAY

A FAWN, in the middle of the road.

The fragile creature lowers its head, gnaws on a patch of weeds breaching the asphalt.

Distant: The HUM OF AN ENGINE. Drawing closer...

The deer looks up. Tenses——

A flash of silver. BRAKES SQUEAL.

WHAM!

The fawn GOES FLYING. Bones knocked loose, an arc of blood.

The animal scampers onto the shoulder... Limps into the woods.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

White-knuckle grip on the steering wheel. Chewed nails. Tag Heuer wristwatch.

DAZED by the impact: the driver **KYLE**, early-thirties Danny Ocean wannabe.

He looks down. The scattered contents of a woman's PURSE on the passenger floorboard: Keys, checkbook, bottle of PILLS. Tic-Tacs and feminine pads, PEPPER SPRAY.

Bare feet, painted nails. Manolos kicked off to the side.

This is **JASMINE.** Mid 20's, a real treat in a short skirt and designer top. But she's shaken up, crinkled FOOD & WINE magazine in her hand.

KYLE
You okay?

Jasmine nods. Finally breathes.

Kyle opens the door. CLICK. Takes off his seat belt.

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - DAY

Outside the car. Kyle kneels down, assays the damage:

A caved bumper. Shattered headlight. TUFT OF FUR crimped in metal.

PRRRR. Jasmine's window lowers.

JASMINE
Think it’s okay?

KYLE
Headlight’s busted. Bumper’s pretty jacked. Glad I got the insurance.

JASMINE
I meant the deer.

Oh. Kyle looks off to the treeline.

EXT. TREELINE - DAY

FLECKS OF BLOOD on leaves.

Kyle brushes past them, makes his way into the woods. A raspy WHEEZING up ahead. He follows the noise to...

The BROKEN FAWN. Eyes glazed, looking beyond. Kyle watches for a moment. Helpless.

BZZZZZZ. Cell phone VIBRATES in his pocket. He takes it out. Eyes the display... and puts it back.

He PUSHES through branches back toward the road.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

A COUPLE PILLS tapped into Jasmine’s palm. She downs ‘em, stashes the bottle back in her purse.

Looks in the mirror, checks her make-up... sees Kyle emerging from the treeline. ZIPS her purse shut, tosses it back on the floorboard.

Kyle climbs in. Closes the door, CLICKS his seat belt.

JASMINE
Is it...?

KYLE
I think it’s all right. It’s gone.

He puts the car in gear——

KYLE
I dunno. Must’ve just clipped it...

——gives it some gas.

EXT. FILLING STATION - DAY

The hand-painted SIGN:

NORTH WOODS GAS & TACKLE
“LAST CHANCE TO FILL ‘ER UP ‘TIL TOMAHAWK.”

Kyle pulls the rental into the lot...

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

...kills the engine.

KYLE
Gotta make a quick call to the office before we’re out of range.

JASMINE
I thought we were “getting away.”

He kisses Jasmine’s neck.

KYLE
Two minutes. Grab me some Twizzlers.

Hands her a FIFTY, kisses her. She smiles, gets out of the car and heads for the store.

INT. FILLING STATION - DAY

A home-stapled packet of LUCKY’S VENISON JERKY; local cuisine hanging on a rack. *“Three tasty flavors!”*

DING! Jasmine pushes through the door. Smiles at the sweaty-toothed Clerk hunched over his cash register.

JASMINE
Hey.

CLERK
Yup.

Wrrrrrrr. Jasmine spins a display of cheap sunglasses. Tries on a pair.

Clerk scratches his belly... scopes Jasmine’s ass as she puts the shades back, meanders down the aisles.

Heads to the counter, gives Clerk a self-conscious smile.

JASMINE
Eve Lights. Hundreds, in a box?

CLERK
Don’t carry your brand.

JASMINE
Okay then... “Anything” Lights?

Clerk searches the overhead rack for the most expensive brand. Takes down some MARLBOROS, punches keys on the antiquated register.

Through the window: Outside, Kyle pumps gas. His back to the store as he barks into his cell. He looks animated. Upset.

CLERK
Six-forty.

Jasmine looks around. She tosses a pack of Twizzlers on the counter.

JASMINE
This too? Sorry.

CLERK
Eight sixty-two with the snacks.

Something catches Jasmine’s eye.

JASMINE
Awwww. My cousins had one of those when we were kids.

Clerk raises a brow.

JASMINE
The Airedale. Higgins?

Clerk looks over his shoulder. Behind him, a MISSING DOG poster:

“Please help us find our MISSING DOG”
“LOST HIKING NEAR THE NOTCH”
“HE’S A FRIENDLY 2 YEAR-OLD AIREDALE TERRIER”
“RESPONDS TO HIGGINS”

And a picture. Our favorite beady-eyed, bearded canine. Ratty tennis shoe in his mouth.

CLERK
Suppose people ought learn to keep their pets on a leash.

Clerk bags Jasmine’s purchase.

JASMINE
(oooookay)
True. There's that.

Jasmine takes the bag.

JASMINE
Thanks.

CLERK
Yup.

She heads for the front door. DING!

EXT. FILLING STATION - DAY

Kyle glances over as Jasmine comes his way.

KYLE
(into phone)
——Ah, yeah, that's fine. Just leave 'em on my desk. We'll take care of it when I'm back in town.

He looks up at Jasmine. Smiles.

KYLE
(into phone)
Yeah. I'm away with my lady. So lose my number till Monday. Exactly.

Jasmine smiles.

KYLE
(into phone)
No doubt, see you when I get back... fuck the Knicks, we'll catch a Nets game. Barclay, bitches. Haha. You know it! Right on. Later, brutha man.

Kyle turns the cell phone OFF, stuffs it in his jacket.

KYLE
(scoffs)
Traders.

INT. FILLING STATION - DAY

Clerk watches through the window: Kyle tops off the gas. Jasmine feeds him a Twizzler, gets in the car.

He finishes up at the pump, gets behind the wheel.

VROOOM. Off they go.

Clerk scratches his belly.

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - DAY

Kyle's rental pulls off the asphalt and onto a wooded back road.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

He maneuvers the car off the back road and onto a long, winding gravel driveway that disappears into the trees.

Steers around a bend —— and there it is, tucked among bristling pines, red and gold-leafed oaks:

The shaded CABIN. Dolefully rustic; a "FOR SALE" sign on a post in the front yard, the grass high and unkempt.

KYLE
Here we are.
(Nicholson brows)
This is where I bring my victims.

Jasmine giggles.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

THUMP of the car door. They're outside. Stretching, working out the kinks. Kyle takes in a BREATH of fresh air.

KYLE
Man... smell that clean air.
Nice to get out of the concrete
jungle.

JASMINE
Yeah, right. You'll be dying to
order a deep dish by midnight, city
boy.

He punches a button on his key chain. POP! goes the trunk. Tosses them to Jas.

KYLE
Get the door, I'll grab the bags.

He lugs a cooler out of the trunk. Couple bags of luggage. They start towards the cabin when——

SPLAT.

Jasmine lifts her foot, checks the heel of her Manolo.

JASMINE
Shit.

Indeed. Her designer heel's caked in dog shit. Kyle SNICKERS.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - DAY

The cabin's interior's as rustic as its exterior. It's a middle-class family getaway, simple and lived in, comfort over style.

KYLE (O.S.)
(through door)
It's not much to look at, but it's "away"...

Mounted above the stone-hearth fireplace is a MUZZLELOADER RIFLE. On the mantle: A sack of ball-shot and a powderhorn.

KEYS in the lock. CLICK and the door opens, lets in LIGHT.

Jasmine kicks off her soiled shoes on the porch. Enters the cabin, FLOORBOARDS CREAKING underfoot. She wrinkles her nose:

JASMINE
Ugh. What's that smell?

Kyle lugs the bags in. And it hits him.

KYLE
(sniffs)
Whoa. Yeah, what died?

JASMINE
One of your "victims?"

She opens a window.

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - DAY

An open window. Chiffon curtain in the breeze. In the distance: A LAKE. A small ROW BOAT, tethered to a pier.

SCRAAAAPE as Kyle pulls the refrigerator back from the wall. Plugs it in. Opens it, turns a dial.

JASMINE
(peering out window)
...We could take the boat out tomorrow.

She starts to unpack the cooler. Gourmet containers, everything in its place: Cuts of steak, fresh oysters, champagne, strawberries. *The works.*

KYLE
Yeah. Maybe.

Jasmine shimmies in next to him, tucks a head of lettuce into a crisper drawer.

JASMINE
You been to Plate yet?

KYLE
Say what?

Kyle puts a six pack of imported beer in the fridge. Takes one back and opens it with a bottle opener on the side of the fridge.

JASMINE
“Plate.” Reevis Fisk’s new place. Upper East Side?

He drinks from his beer. Shakes his head.

KYLE
Nah. Been working too much. Mostly just doing the take-out thing lately.

He eyes Jasmine’s ass as she bends over and packs the fridge. Reaches down, gives it a RUB — she playfully SHAKES her tail-feather, LAUGHS.

Kyle wraps his arms around her lithe frame. Handles the goods, kisses her neck...

JASMINE
Mmmm.

...his hand SNAKES its way into her skirt. She turns to face him. Kisses him deep. Then...

JASMINE
(still kissing)
Yeah. That stench is so not hot.

INT. MONTAGE - CABIN - DAY

Kyle moves quickly from room to room, SNIFFING at the air. Highly “incentivized” to locate the smell.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CABIN - DAY

Wrinkles his nose as he enters. The FOUL SMELL is close. He SNIFFS —— WRETCHES, almost pukes. Follows the putrid scent over to the closet... Reaches for the knob... opens the door——

And looks down, visibly DISGUSTED by what he sees.

KYLE
(not)
Well aren’t you adorable.

INT. BATHROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine sits on the toilet; skirt hiked up, underwear at her knees. Her purse on the nearby sink counter, open wrapper of a SANITARY PAD.

She reaches down. Removes a USED PAD, wads it up in the wrapper of the new one and tosses it in the WASTE BIN.

Puts the new one in place.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CABIN - DAY

A LIT CANDLE, flame dancing with the breeze-blown curtains of an open window. Jasmine enters, heads over to where we last saw Kyle, at the

OPEN CLOSET DOOR

Left open to air out. Jasmine looks inside:

Up top, a shelf stacked high with BLANKETS and TOWELS. And down at the floorboards... Something there, dark and nebulous —— a BLACK STAIN and a RAGGED HOLE in the corner leading to the crawl space under the cabin. Creepy.

She leaves the room.

JASMINE
Babe...?

EXT. CABIN - BACK PORCH - TWILIGHT

MAGIC HOUR. Brilliant fall reflections on the lake, gold and red leaves lazing on its still surface. The small, floating weatherbeaten DOCK. The ROW BOAT.

Jasmine SLIDES open the glass back door, steps out to a CLANG OF METAL.

EXT. CABIN - LAKESIDE - TWILIGHT

She rounds the corner, follows the RACKET. Kyle's just put the lid down on a metal TRASH CAN.

KYLE
C'mere. Look...

She does. Kyle stands behind, wraps his arm around her and——

Pulls the lid off the can. Jasmine, hesitant, peers in to see: A maggot-ridden RACCOON CARCASS.

She GAGS, recoils —— SLAPS Kyle on the shoulder.

JASMINE
Jesus. How old are you?

KYLE
(laughing)
You hungry?

JASMINE
Yeah. Not so much.

AUDIO PRE-LAP: Start of a song, which plays over the following scene. Something moody, sexy.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - TWILIGHT

Strips of newspaper under a stack of wood. Flick of a ZIPPO.

Kyle's at the fireplace. Holds the flame to the paper, blows. The FIRE CRACKLES, comes alive.

Jasmine enters, a couple of cold beers in hand.

KYLE
Read my mind.

He flicks the lighter closed. Pockets it, takes a bottle and GUZZLES.

Jasmine warms to the fire, looks up at the MUZZLELOADER over the mantle.

JASMINE
You think it works?

KYLE
What? The muzzleloader? Oh yeah, it works.

JASMINE
How do you know?

Kyle takes a pull on his beer.

KYLE
...Roy told me about it. Said “in case we need to shoot a bear. Or a yokel.”

He moves in on Jasmine. Tries to get her engine revving again.

KYLE
I like this song.

JASMINE
It’s like some Last of the Mohicans shit. I want to shoot it.

KYLE
You serious?

JASMINE
Is it loaded?

Kyle takes the rifle down off the wall.

KYLE
I doubt it.

Kyle pulls the ramrod from the shaft, looks it over. A grease pencil mark on the end of it.

He slides the ramrod into the muzzle. The grease pencil line’s flush with the muzzle opening.

KYLE
Empty.

He pulls the ramrod out, seats it back on the barrel. Hands her the rifle...

Opens the powderhorn, pours gunpowder into a small measuring horn hanging from a leather tassel. Dumps it down the barrel.

KYLE
There's your spark. The powder ignites——

JASMINE
Where'd you learn to do this?

Her face DARKENS.

JASMINE
Oh my God. You're in the Tea Party, aren't you?

Kyle LAUGHS. Takes another swig of his beer from the mantle.

KYLE
Fuck no. My mom's brother, crazy Uncle Les. Dude was way into Civil War shit. Like, playing dress up, reenactments. All that. Showed me how to use one of these when I was a kid.

He opens the bag of shot on the mantle. Takes out a heavy, round ball and a scrap of fabric.

KYLE
This metal ball's the "shot."

He seats the round in the scrap of fabric——

KYLE
(re: fabric)
Pillow ticking, if I remember.

——and pushes them both into the muzzle. Pulls the ramrod again.

KYLE
You wanna do it?

Jasmine does. Kyle circles around behind her. Gets in close, intimate. Reaches around... places the ramrod in her hands... guides it into the muzzle.

KYLE
You got to get in there good. As deep as it will go.

Up and down. Pushing the ball of shot into the back of the muzzle, to the powder charge. Sex and Violence.

Now he's kissing her neck. She presses against him... turns into him, KISSES him hard on the mouth.

JASMINE
I hate to break it to you... It's light...
(kiss)
...but...
(kiss)
...I'm on my period.

KYLE
Hate to break it to you...
(kiss)
...but...

He leans the muzzle-loader against the hearth——

KYLE
I don't care.

——picks Jasmine up. She wraps her legs around his waist as he carries her off, leaving us alone with the CRACKLING FIRE. Curtains in the breeze...

INT. BEDROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Kyle carries Jasmine into the room. Their mouths locked; clothes TORN OFF, cast aside. He tosses her on the bed, goes in for the kill.

CUT TO:

EXT. CABIN - *ANIMAL CAM* NIGHT

Outside, looking in. Low to the ground.

Through the window, we watch Kyle and Jasmine fuck. We hear their all-too-human SOUNDS.

A SHADOW PASSES among the skeletal trees.

INT. BEDROOM - CABIN - LATER

Kyle and Jasmine laze in bed. Afterglow and cigarette smoke, open pack of Marlb Lights on the night stand.

Jasmine smiles. Kyle rolls over. Kisses her stomach. Takes a drag from her cigarette.

JASMINE
Now I'm hungry.

Kyle starts to get up. She stops him.

JASMINE
No. You stay put.

JUMP TO:

INT. BEDROOM - CABIN - LATER

Kyle lays in bed. Relaxed, still naked but his lower half's covered by the sheet.

Jasmine saunters in wearing Kyle's shirt. She carries a bottle of chilled CHAMPAGNE, platters of OYSTERS and STRAWBERRIES.

Sets them out on the bed and joins him. Kyle takes the Champagne, works it open and——

POP! Fzzzzz. He does a slug straight from the bottle, wipes his mouth with his forearm and passes it to Jasmine.

She drinks.

He slurps down an oyster.

KYLE
Mmm. Fuck yes.

She feeds him a succulent STRAWBERRY to chase it, takes another draw from the bottle. *Not a bad way to spend a weekend...*

JUMP TO:

INT. BEDROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Severed necks of strawberries and pith, empty oyster half shells. Champagne bottle on the night stand, now nearly empty.

Kyle and Jasmine in the throes of a BUBBLY BUZZ. Bare skin. Curtains in the breeze. Again, they're making out.

But kissing ain't enough for Kyle. He's a man of APPETITES. He turns up the intensity... those hands begin to roam——

JASMINE
Wait.

She reaches for the bottle.

JASMINE
Let's have some more Champagne.

She has a sip. Kyle takes the bottle from her, downs the rest. Puts it back on the night stand; his mouth goes back to the nape of her neck.

JASMINE
...Is this all we're going to do out here?

Still working on her, despite Jasmine's ROLLING EYES:

KYLE
Mm. What's wrong with that?

JASMINE
I dunno. Isn't it kind of... one-note?

He finally stops. Looks up at her.

KYLE
What? You're bored?

JASMINE
No.

LAUGHING, like it's the punchline to some joke:

JASMINE
I'm hammered!

Kyle shakes his head, can't help but laugh with her.

KYLE
Lightweight.

JASMINE
(drunk)
We always do this when you visit. I wanna do something different. Let's do something stupid.

Kyle looks down at himself.

KYLE
There is no blood in my brain right now. No matter what I do, it's gonna be stupid.

JASMINE
No, I'm serious. Let's go swimming.
(light bulb)
Ooh! Let's take out the boat! You said we could.

KYLE
What? Like, now?

JASMINE
Why not?

KYLE
Uh... because it's the middle of the night? And we're in the middle of the woods.

JASMINE
(a dare)
What are you, scared?

She's already putting on Kyle's shirt——

EXT. DOCK - CABIN - LAKE'S EDGE - NIGHT

BARE FEET across the CREAKING dock... they reach the small boat tarried at its end.

Good times: Jasmine's back into Kyle's long-sleeved shirt (and little else). He's in a bathrobe.

He helps her down into the ROW BOAT; she's on UNEASY, DRUNKEN legs but makes it. He untethers the line and steps in...

...SHOVES OFF from the safety of the dock.

EXT. ROW BOAT - LAKE - NIGHT

The night is DARK but clear...

...Only the slight RUSTLE of wind through the pines can be heard, soft RIPPLE of water as the boat puts distance between itself and the lake's edge.

Close, INTIMATE; Jasmine's sitting between Kyle's legs, his chin rests on her shoulder... but they are quiet... silently taking in the METROPOLIS OF STARS overhead.

Jasmine takes her cigarettes and a lighter from her breast pocket. Prepares to light it——

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE'S EDGE - WOODS - *ANIMAL CAM* - NIGHT

Once again... craning, low to the ground. Watching from the brush of the shoreline, always watching:

We see the boat. SMALL and DISTANT in the DARKNESS:

A FLICKERING FLAME——

CUT TO:

EXT. ROW BOAT - LAKE - NIGHT

PUFF-PUFF. Jasmine's got it lit. She SMOKES for A BEAT in silence, then:

JASMINE
When I was asking about Plate earlier... you remember?

KYLE
Asking about what?

JASMINE
You really don't listen, do you? "Plate." The rest——

KYLE
The restaurant. Upper East Side. Carlton Fisk. I listen.

JASMINE
Reevis. Reevis Fisk. But yeah.

KYLE
Okay. What about it?

She smokes.

JASMINE
He offered me a job. Sous chef.

Buzz kill. Kyle doesn't respond.

Jasmine does it for him — summons her deepest baritone and a healthy dose of sarcasm:

JASMINE
"Wow! Congratulations, Jas. We could be living in the same city, that's so awesome."

Kyle is nonplussed, to say the least. Jasmine can't see his face, but she can feel the tension in his body.

JASMINE
Say something.

KYLE
Hey, it's America. You're free to move wherever you want. It's just... not a good time. Right now, for me. I'm not going to be around much. They're really ramping up my travel schedule at work, and——

JASMINE
I can keep an eye on your place when you're gone.

Again, no answer. She turns to face him, tosses her lit cigarette into the dark waters. *Tssssss.*

JASMINE
Look. It's a great opportunity for me, and I've wanted to move out east for a while. You're not the only reason. And as far as you and me, all I'm saying is... I'm all in. We only see each other, what, six times a year now? How often do you come to Chicago on business?

KYLE
Six. Seven or eight, if we're lucky.

JASMINE
Exactly. And I'm not saying I want to invade your space. I can get my own place if you want, I'm a big girl.

Her hands go to the belt of Kyle's bathrobe.

JASMINE
But I would like to see more of you.

She opens his robe...

JASMINE
Much, much, more of you.

...Kisses her way down his chest, his stomach....

Kyle leans back, takes in the CYCLORAMA OF STARS ABOVE as Jasmine's head moves even lower.

He is defenseless...

...for he is but a Man...

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. BEDROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Kyle and Jas sleep. Their bodies entwined, tangled with the sheets. The window's still slightly ajar, curtains barely moving with a MIDNIGHT BREEZE.

Through it, distant but audible: *An animal HOWLS.*

Jasmine's in a deep slumber, safe and secure in Kyle's arms. Off the HOWLING, Kyle STIRS but does not wake. Then——

Another piercing CANINE HOWL. *Much closer this time.*

Kyle BOLTS upright, waking Jasmine.

JASMINE
Huh! Wha——

KYLE
Shhh.

She's quiet now... but so is the world. The howling has ceased.

KYLE
Something was out there. Howling.

JASMINE
Howling? Like, what, like a wolf?

KYLE
Yeah, basically.

JASMINE
That's fucking creepy. How close was it?

KYLE
Close.

He gets up, SHUTS the window. Walks over to the door.

KYLE
We didn't leave any other windows open did we?

JASMINE
No. I don't think so.
(yawns)
(MORE)

JASMINE (CONT'D)
I guess they'll have to just huff and puff if they want in.

Kyle returns to the bed. Jasmine settles back into his arms.

We linger... stay on them and watch as they both drift back to the very edge of sleep, when——

KDJNGDHGDHNGGLLNG!! A loud HELLISH, METALLIC RACKET. And it is *close*——

Kyle's immediately on his feet.

KYLE
Dude, what the fuck?!

JASMINE
(stricken)
What is that?!

Jasmine clutches at the covers, pulls them in as if they might protect her. They won't.

EXT. CABIN - LAKE SIDE - NIGHT

Kyle, pensive, looking out the glass of the back door. He gently slides it open——

Something BOLTS in the darkness! CRASHES into the foliage of the tree-line!

KYLE
Hey!

He steps out into the night, armed with the MUZZLELOADER. We follow him along the side of the cabin to find, as he does:

The metal TRASH CANS, both overturned. Ratty, putrid RACCOON CARCASS pulled out and MANGLED.

Kyle grimaces at the sight. Uses the long musket to push the remains back into the can. Stands it upright and puts the lid on it.

JASMINE (O.S.)
What was it?

She's at the door. Wrapped in the blanket, SHIVERING.

KYLE
I don't know. Whatever it was, it was pretty big. I scared it off.

JASMINE
Come back to bed, fearless protector.

He heads back inside, slides the door shut. Sound of the LOCK SECURED.

We linger in the night, watching. Always watching. There is light bleeding from around the corner of the house, from the bedroom window.

It finally goes out. All is DARK.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. CABIN - LAKE SIDE - DAY

TSHSSSS. Delmonico strips on a HOT GRILL.

Kyle flips the steaks with a set of tongs. Takes a deep breath, basks in the smell of cooking flesh and autumn air.

He sets down a BLOODY PLATE, heads back to the cabin.

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - DAY

CHOPCHOPCHOP. A KNIFE DICES veggies. Jasmine's hooking up a salad.

JASMINE
Just seven minutes each side.

Kyle CRACKS a beer.

KYLE
Dude. I know.

He sips his beer, looks out the window. Sees something:

KYLE
Holy shit. Check this guy out...
Dude looks like Robert E. Lee.

Jasmine peers out the window:

<u>It's a DOG</u>. Jutting beard. Matted fur, one with the wild. He's nosing around the grill.

Jasmine recognizes him from the "Missing" poster earlier:

JASMINE
No way! Higgins!

EXT. CABIN - LAKESIDE - DAY

Front paws up on the pit, Higgins LAPS BLOOD off the empty meat plate. His back to the house.

Kyle SLIDES the back door open. He and Jasmine cautiously descend the steps.

KYLE
You know him??

Jasmine moves in on the dog.

JASMINE
Oh yeah, me and Higgins go way back.
(beat)
There was a “missing” poster for him back at the gas station.

Kyle stands back, wary of the blood-hungry mutt. Tongs at the ready.

KYLE
Hey, be careful...

JASMINE
Higgins! C’mere, boy. Come on.

KYLE
Baby, cool it. He might——

JASMINE
He’s okay. Look.

She reaches out... Higgins drops to the ground. Turns...

RARGHK! He SNAPS at Jasmine’s outstretched hand! She recoils——

A closer look at the animal: Red-rimmed eyes. Blood-slick beard. Bared teeth.

KYLE
Little shit!

Kyle steps in, WHACKS Higgins on the snout with the tongs. He YELPS. Backs off and SNARLS.

Kyle brandishes the tongs. KICKS up some leaves.

KYLE
Step, bitch!

Higgins tucks tail, scurries off around the side of the cabin.

Kyle turns to Jasmine.

KYLE
You okay?

JASMINE
I'm fine.

KYLE
Lemme see.

Jasmine shows him her hand. A small BITE. Bloody tooth marks.

JASMINE
It's not too bad. I've cut myself worse in the kitchen. I think I saw peroxide and Band-aids in the bathroom.

KYLE
Peroxide? That little shit could have rabies for all we know. We should to town, get it checked.

The disappointment's clear... she starts towards the cabin.

JASMINE
It's fine. I'll just dress it.

KYLE
You need a hand?

JASMINE
I'm good, thanks. Just watch the steaks.
(checks her watch)
It's been seven minutes.

She heads inside.

KYLE
I know!

He drinks his beer. Wipes the tongs on his shirt, FLIPS the steaks. Looks over his shoulder and eyes the tree-line.

INT. BATHROOM - CABIN - DAY

JASMINE'S HANDS in the sink. Water RUSHES over the wound, flushes pink with blood.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - DAY

They eat their steaks in silence. The mood a bit gloomier. Then:

JASMINE
He did look pretty crazy. Higgins.

KYLE
Devil dog. Totally.

JASMINE
Maybe we should get it looked at. After we eat.

KYLE
I think it's a smart move. Better safe than... rabid.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Higgins noses around the front porch of the cabin, SNIFFING at Jasmine's soiled designer heels.

THUMP. Someone on the other side of the door. The handle TURNS.

Higgins SNATCHES up a shoe in his blood-caked maw... turns and jaunts off into the woods.

The front door opens. Out comes Kyle.

KYLE
(into cabin)
Get the lights, couldja?

Kyle heads for the car. Punches a button on his keychain, the locks SNAP open.

EXT. WOODS - *ANIMAL CAM* - DAY

We sniff. We pant.

We are low to the ground, where we belong.

We watch The Man and Woman, hear them make noises.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Kyle opens the passenger door.

As Jasmine gets in, Kyle takes her wounded hand. Kisses it "better." She smiles, eases —— but still shaken, clutching her purse tight.

JASMINE
Can we get the phone number from that poster? Let them know we saw him?

KYLE
'Course, baby. Let's get you looked at first though.

He shuts her door, rounds the car. Stressed; he wipes his forehead, tugs at his collar.

EXT. WOODS - *ANIMAL CAM* - DAY

Heart beats with thunder. THA-THOOM THA-THOOM THA-THOOM.

We watch The Man wipe the sweat from his brow, neck pulsing, opening the car door.

He is leaving.

But we want to PLAY.

We CHARGE!

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

Kyle climbs into the driver's seat.

JASMINE
His mouth wasn't frothing or anything, at least. That I saw. So, you know, as far as rabies...

VROOM. He starts the engine.

KYLE
Yeah. Bet the poor guy's just starving. Maybe he got a little... untamed out here.

JASMINE
Yeah.

Jasmine looks up, catches Kyle's eyes. Her's SHIFT FOCUS, look past him——

Her face blooms with HORROR.

JASMINE
Ohmygod! Baby!!

THAPTHAPTHAPTHAPTHAP, something closing on them...

Kyle turns as——

BOOM!

A stout, snarling hellhound LAUNCHES himself at Kyle. *Flies into the car.*

Meet **ANIMAL**. A scarred American bulldog, BURN MARKS on his vicious face. *FROTHING, lethal.*

Jasmine SCREAMS. Fumbles for the door handle and YANKS. She SPILLS out into the yard, purse in hand —— SHRIEKING with PURE TERROR.

Animal ATTACKS, dominates Kyle. CLAMPS DOWN on his forearm. THRASHES violently.

KYLE
Close the door!!

Jasmine KICKS the door shut. Watches in shock through the windows:

Kyle and Animal. This is a fight. Life or death, Kyle's fingers bloodied as he PUSHES TEETH from his jugular.

And the ANIMAL'S EYES: One clear and hungry. The other a milky glaze, scar running through it.

KYLE
(freaked)
Get it off!

Kyle gnashes his teeth——

——PLUNGES a thumb into Animal's good eye.

The dog HOWLS in pain.

He SMASHES Animal in the face with a FIST. Hurls him into the back seat——

——falls out of the car, KICKS the door shut. Scrambles to his feet. Panting. Arm a bloody, foamy mess.

BOOM! Animal's face in the window. SNARLING. BARKING. He's trapped inside. *Let me at 'em!*

Adrenaline pumping, Kyle SCREAMS!! A primitive caveman victory call.

KYLE
Yeah, motherfucker!!!
(postures)
What!

Kyle catches his breath as Jasmine runs around to him, sees the carnage that is Kyle's forearm.

JASMINE
Your arm.

Kyle looks down at his ravaged arm, realizes how bad it is. Winces:

KYLE
Fuuuuck.

He peels his shirt off, SHIVERS as he wraps the wound with it. The frenzied captive Animal BARKING all the while.

Kyle looks around... spies the darkened woods.

KYLE
There might be more. C'mon!

He ushers a DISTRAUGHT Jasmine towards the cabin. The car's engine still RUNNING...

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - DAY

TSSSSSSHH. Water runs from the kitchen faucet.

JASMINE (O.S.)
Let me see it.

Bottle of ANTISEPTIC on the counter. Open first-aid kit. Kyle peels his bloody shirt off his forearm: a grisly GASH.

JASMINE
This is ugly.

Jasmine blots at Kyle's bloody wound. Kyle winces.

KYLE
(it hurts)
You're ugly.

He looks up at Jasmine as she nurses him. Her CONCERNED EYES. *The girl's a keeper.*

She dresses his ravaged arm with a BANDAGE, wraps it with GAUZE. Washes her hands in the sink. Kyle flexes his arm, opens and closes his hand.

JASMINE
We need to get Animal Control out here, for realz. This is insane.

KYLE
No doubt. Where's Michael Vick when you need him?

Kyle hands Jasmine a dish towel. She dries her hands.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - DAY

Kyle, cell phone to his ear. He gives up, turns the phone off.

KYLE
Nothing. Of course.

Shakes his head, frustrated. Rubs his bandaged arm, winces.

JASMINE
Me neither.

Jasmine flips her phone shut.

JASMINE
(defeat)
What now?

KYLE
I don't know. Let's think about it, put our heads together. There's a reason you don't see dogs walking people, right? We're smarter.

He walks over to the fireplace, picks up the MUZZLELOADER.

KYLE
We got tools.

Jasmine makes a face. Not into killing.

JASMINE
Isn't that a little extreme?

KYLE
As someone who didn't have to fight the fucker for their mortal life... sure, yeah, you could call it that.

Jas rolls her eyes.

KYLE
What about those pills?

JASMINE
Pills? What pills?

KYLE
The pills that fell out of your purse. After the deer. Yeah, I notice shit.

A BEAT.

KYLE
What are they?

She doesn't answer. Kyle starts to prep the MUZZLELOADER.

KYLE
"Plan A" it is.

JASMINE
(confesses)
Xanax.

KYLE
Perfect. What, was that some big secret? They chill you out, right? Like for anxiety?

JASMINE
Yes. And no, you can't have them.

KYLE
I'm not asking for me.

Goes to the kitchen, opens the fridge. Light spills into the room.

KYLE
I'm asking for the mutt.

KICKS the fridge shut. Raw bone-in PORK CHOPS in hand.

KYLE
(mouthful)
So, how many do you have left?

JASMINE
I don't know. Like, six?

KYLE
Grab 'em.

JASMINE
You think it'll work?

KYLE
Worth a shot.

Jasmine walks off.

JASMINE (O.S.)
...Where's my purse?

Kyle looks out the window.

KYLE
(sotto)
How the fuck should I know?

KYLE's POV: Through the window, the yard is still. No sign of Animal in the rental car.

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - DAY

Kyle CUBES pork with a knife. Six pieces. Cuts a small slit in each.

JASMINE (O.S.)
I got the pills.

Jasmine's back. PILLS in one hand——

JASMINE
And that's not all.

——PEPPER SPRAY in the other.

KYLE
Shit yes. Good call.

He takes the pills. Opens the bottle and starts jamming them into the slots he cut into the cubed pork.

JASMINE
And you were going to shoot him.

KYLE
I still might.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Kyle steps out onto the porch. Armed with the Muzzleloader.

KYLE
(to Jasmine)
It's okay! It's cool, come on out!

Jasmine comes out of the house. Nervous. Dosed CUBES OF PORK in one hand, pepper spray in the other.

She peers through the slime and blood-sheeted rear windshield...

RAWRLCK!! Animal blasts into view, his head THUMPS the glass——

Jasmine stumbles back. Gets her first up-close and personal look at the cyclopean, GROWLING fucker. Kyle's dried blood coats his maw.

KYLE
Yeah, he's a prince. You ready?

Jasmine positions herself on the passenger side of the still-running car. Loops the pepper spray strap around her wrist.

JASMINE
No. But let's get it over with.

Kyle moves to the driver's side door. Gets in position.

KYLE
Okay. Here we go.

JASMINE
Be careful.

Kyle TAP-TAP-TAPS on the rear window with the rifle.

RRAWRCK!! Animal goes for him. BANGS against the saliva-coated glass, SNARLING like an old two-stroke engine.

Jasmine quickly opens the other door. Tosses in the dosed pork——

Animal turns, LUNGES at Jasmine. Powerful jaws SNAPPING.

BOOM! She SLAMS the door in the nick of time. RAWRCK! Animal's in the window, BARKING at her. Pure menace in his eyes.

Jasmine recoils —— her t-shirt's snagged in the car door! She TUGS at it. It won't come free.

JASMINE
Are you fucking kidding me?! Help!

Animal's SALIVA smeared all over the window, his teeth CLACKING glass.

KYLE
Just rip it!

In the trees, a RUSTLE OF LEAVES. Growing louder. Closer.

JASMINE
It won't——

Jasmine glances back at Kyle... then double-takes. She SHIFTS FOCUS past him and... SCREAMS BLOODY MURDER!!

Kyle turns. Eyes go WIDE with terror as——

A motley PACK OF DOGS THUNDERS out of the woods.

SMILEY, a big and lean Chessie, leads the pack. Confident stride. Drooling **SNARLERS** follow close, hungry for blood.

Behind them: a couple **ANKLE-BITERS**, eyes beady and lustful.

And pulling up the rear: Ferocious **GONZO**, a battle-scarred Rottweiler. *Hellfire disposition.*

Sheer PANIC. Jasmine tries to WRIGGLE out of the shirt as the dogs bound closer. Kyle takes hold of the shirt——

——RIPS it off her.

KYLE
Run!!

They BLAST towards the cabin.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - DAY

SLAM of the door. Kyle and Jasmine collapse against it; she breathlessly CLINGS to him, bare-skinned from the waist up.

DOGS BARKING up a storm outside. They're at the windows. CLAWING at the door.

Jasmine scrambles away. Arm over her breasts. She's crying, hysterical.

JASMINE
Why is this happening?!

KYLE
I don't know. I don't know!!

Puts his arms around her. Pulls her in, comforts her.

KYLE
We'll turn all the lights out. Stay quiet. Maybe they'll go away.

CLA-BANG! A RACKET outside.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

The dogs nose around the cabin's perimeter. Looking for ways in.

Two of the canines —— Pit Bull **MISS PIGGY** and mangy Doberman mix **THE COUNT** —— have knocked over the TRASH CANS, spilling their contents.

The dogs GO TO TEETH over the raccoon's RANCID CARCASS.

ERNIE, a pit bull terrier pup, tries to nose his way in. But the others CROWD the proverbial teat. Poor little runt...

KYLE (V.O.)
We'll just sit tight...

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - DAY

Darkness. The lights are off. Kyle holds Jasmine close, kisses her hair.

KYLE
Someone'll come looking for us eventually.

JASMINE
(panicking)
When? How do you know that? What if they get in?

KYLE
Look. We need to just keep cool, okay? We've got food. And, you know, like, doorknobs. They can't get in. As long as we stay in here, we'll be okay.

But his eyes say he's not so sure.

KYLE
Someone will come for us.

EXT. FILLING STATION - DAY

FLICKERING fluorescent lights over the antique pumps and hand-painted sign:

"Last chance to fill 'er up 'til Tomahawk."

A MINIVAN pulls into the lot.

INT. MINIVAN - DAY

Distraught **DAPHNE**, early-thirties, puts the minivan in park. Tear-streaked cheeks, hair a mess, disheveled sweatshirt and jeans.

She reaches into the backseat. Small fingerprints on the rear windows, a Nintendo DS. Daphne's hand finds a SNOOPY BLANKET. Uses it to cover a bottle of VODKA.

Looks in the rear-view. Dabs at her eyes with a tissue.

INT. FILLING STATION - DAY

Higgins' missing poster, now "Deviled" up. Hand-drawn goatee and mustache. Tubby horns.

Clerk chomps down on a piece of LUCKY'S VENISON JERKY. Open pack by the register.

DING! Daphne enters. Throws Clerk a sideways glance.

DAPHNE
Hi.

Clerk wipes his mouth.

CLERK
Ayup.

Daphne heads to the back of the store. Pours herself a steaming cup of joe. Sugar and cream.

CLERK
Long time no see. Headed up to yer folks' place?

DAPHNE
Nope. Just drove all the way up from Rockford for your coffee.

Clerk SOURS. Daphne heads to the register.

DAPHNE
How much?

CLERK
Buck-twenty.

She fishes the money out of her purse.

DAPHNE
You seen my husband come through? He drove up ahead of me. Might've been with someone...

Clerk thinks. Shakes his head.

CLERK
Uh-uh. Maybe he filled up in Irma?

He punches it in on the register. CH-CHING. Takes the cash.

DAPHNE
Yeah, maybe. Thanks.

DING. She exits.

CLERK
Yup.

Clerk sinks his teeth back into some jerky.

EXT. WOODS - TWILIGHT

Cold blue sunlight peeks through the trees, sets the twilight fog aglow.

Higgins RUNS. Jasmine's SOILED SHOE in his jaws.

EXT. CABIN - TWILIGHT

The sun slips behind the cabin, casts a long SHADOW over the dog pack.

Inside, Kyle's closing curtains. One by one.

The dogs fall back. Losing interest... for now. Milling about. Sniffing. Territorial pissings.

Little Ernie ROLLS in the grass.

Smiley paces in circles, finds a choice spot. Lays down, settles in.

The other dogs soon follow suit. Each staking a claim. Keeping vigil on the cabin.

Except Gonzo.

The brooding beast paces on the perimeter. Eyeing Smiley...

Smiley looks over his subjects with heavy-lidded eyes. BARKS. Lowers his head.

Gonzo paces behind him. Eyes on the prize. He closes in...

And mounts Smiley. A FLARE of animal anger; bared fangs, guttural GROWLS.

Gonzo trots back out the perimeter. Tongue dangling. His point made. Till next time...

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

The lights are off. Fire's burning low.

Kyle and Jasmine spooning on the cold floor. At the foot of the hearth, wrapped in a blanket.

JASMINE
I would kill for a Big Mac right now...

She rolls over, sees Kyle is passed out.

Outside: SNARLS of a brief skirmish among the canines.

Jasmine draws her knees up, sits. Spots Kyle's things on the floor —— wallet, keys.

She picks up the wallet, flips it open.

Photos. Kyle's pet CORKIE. His KIDS, two cute little girls. And, last but not least:

Daphne.

CUT TO:

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Daphne's minivan takes a wide drunken right off the asphalt...

Turns onto the same wooded back road Kyle took earlier.

INT. RENTAL CAR - NIGHT

CRUNCH. The rotty Gonzo climbs onto the hood of the rental car.

He STOMPS around on the hood, buckling metal. Inside the car, a drugged Animal lets loose a volley of slurred, UNHOLY BARKS. Yellow fangs.

Gonzo eyes Animal through the blood-speckled windshield, gloating.

Then he looks up, into the distance. The sound of an APPROACHING ENGINE. Blinking through the trees: HEADLIGHTS.

Gonzo leaps off the hood and bounds into the woods. The other dogs follow.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Kyle's eyes FLASH open, waking from troubled sleep. He's in a sheen of sweat, lying on his back.

KYLE
Holy shit. Please tell me that was all some fucked-up nightmare.

Feels his ravaged arm, WINCES. Nope. It's all too real. He reaches out a hand. But Jasmine's not there.

Panic.

KYLE
Jas——?!

From behind, her voice:

JASMINE (O.S.)
If you're still married, so help me God...

Sitting on the couch: Jasmine in the firelight.

KYLE
(still groggy)
What are you talking about?

She TOSSES something at him. It hits his chest, tumbles to his lap. Kyle picks up the WALLET.

JASMINE
Who carries a picture of their ex-wife?

KYLE
Jesus... she's the mother of my children. Maybe when you have kids some day you'll understand.

She SCOFFS.

KYLE
You seriously want to get into this now? With this shit going on outside, we're gonna fight about how I didn't clean my wallet out after my divorce?

She's upset. It's been a long day:

JASMINE
Maybe.

KYLE
Gimme a break, Jas. I thought you were above this kind of shit.

INT. MINIVAN - NIGHT

Daphne swerves onto the winding driveway. She kills the lights.

Soft CRUNCH of the tires on gravel as the minivan rolls along.

EXT. BACK ROAD - NIGHT

The minivan creeps down the back road. Lights out. Tires CRUNCHING gravel.

In the treeline:

A SHADOW. Moving with the minivan.

And another.

The dogs are stalking.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Kyle looks Jasmine in the eye:

KYLE
She means nothing to me. Here.

He slips Daphne's photo from his wallet. Tosses it in the fire.

KYLE
Now, please tell me this means we never have to——

JASMINE
Shut up.

KYLE
Don't tell me to——

JASMINE
No, seriously.

Kyle cocks his head. Listens.

INT. MINIVAN - NIGHT

Daphne squints, barely makes out the cabin in the SLIVER MOONLIGHT.

CRUNK! She rear-ends Kyle's sedan.

DAPHNE
Shit!

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Kyle SPRINGS UP.

KYLE
——the fuck?!

He DASHES to the window, Jasmine on his heels.

Kyle TEARS OPEN the curtains. The white minivan. Daphne stepping out.

KYLE
Oh my god.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Daphne peers into the rental car, not believing. Animal's bobbing head inside, the face of horror... his drugged eyes fighting to stay open.

She backs away in disbelief.

From the cabin: CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! Muffled yelling.

Daphne looks toward the commotion, sees Kyle SLAMMING his palms against the window. Inaudible screams.

Daphne goes toward him.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Kyle SHOVES the window open, yells to her:

KYLE
Get back in the car!

DAPHNE
Fuck you!

KYLE
(stern)
Listen to me. It's not safe!
There's dogs——

She makes a face. Confused, drunk.

And here they come, stalking quietly behind Daphne: The canines. All of them.

KYLE
Oh, Jesus. No!

Kyle lumbers across the room——

——SNATCHES up the muzzleloader——

——and storms for the door. Out for blood. Jasmine GRABS hold of him.

JASMINE
(please)
You can't go out there!

Kyle pushes her off, SWINGS the door open. Rushes outside——

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

——the dogs BREAK toward them.

Daphne's PARALYZED. Deer in the headlights. The dogs are ON THEM——

Kyle grabs Daphne's arm, PUSHES her towards the door.

KYLE
GET INSIDE!!

She RUNS for it, hysterical. Legs rubbery, disobedient.

Kyle raises the muzzleloader, aims it at the dogs——

BLAM!! FIRES into their ranks; Smiley flies backwards in the air —— dead on impact.

Their leader down, some of the dogs back off. Others don't. Gonzo and a few Snarlers POUNCE towards Kyle.

Daphne and Jasmine at the door. They watch in terror, SCREAMING. Kyle stumbles back, SWINGS the emptied muzzleloader at the dogs——

CL-CRACK as one of the Snarlers SNATCHES the gun in its teeth.

BOOM! Gonzo SMASHES into Kyle like a god damn locomotive. Teeth TEAR into flesh——

And the pack DESCENDS on him. Like puppies crowding the teat, fighting for space. SHREDDING poor Kyle to ribbons.

Gonzo trains his eyes on Daphne and Jasmine at the door——

And BOUNDS toward them. Closes the distance in just a few powerful strides——

THWAM! Jasmine SLAMS the door in Gonzo's face.

KRA-BOOM! Gonzo CRASHES into the door, SHUDDERS the cabin.

The Rottweiler gets up, woozy. RATTLES his meaty head.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Daphne and Jasmine face off on the other side of the door.

Daphne SNARLS, grabs a fistful of Jasmine's hair. PULLS it with all her might.

JASMINE
You crazy b——
(screams)
Let go of me!!

Jasmine raises the pepper spray over her shoulder. SPRAYS.

FSSSSssss! Daphne HOWLS, lets go. Raises her hands to her eyes. Jasmine SHOVES her to the ground. BOLTS the door, SLIDES the chain.

DAPHNE
(searing pain)
Stupid fucking WHORE!!

Pepper sprayed, eyes burning: Daphne FUMBLES her way into the kitchen.

Jasmine grabs a FLASHLIGHT. Reluctantly heads over to the window, PULLS the curtains aside...

Clicks the light on... pans the front yard.... Looks on in horror as the dogs dismantle Kyle.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

SNARLING, GROWLING, SNAPPING as the dogs work apart what's left of him:

Tendons POPPING, guts drawn thin. Teeth CLACKING on bones. The dogs reveling in gore. Diggin' in. This is what happens when dog eats man...

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine takes a step back. The flashlight FALLS from her hand —— hits the floor, SCATTERING LIGHT.

She leans over the couch. DRY-HEAVES; her stomach CHURNING.

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

WATER BLASTS out of a faucet.

Daphne's hunched over the sink, FLUSHING her eyes out.

DAPHNE
Jesus! This shit burns!

Jasmine appears at the door.

She wipes bile from her mouth. Reaches for the paper towels, RIPS off a clump. Runs water over them——

JASMINE
Sit still.

——DABS at Daphne's eyes.

Daphne snatches the towels, buries her face in them. She slides down the fridge to the floor.

DAPHNE
(through towels)
What's GOING ON out there? Whose dogs are those?

JASMINE
I don't know.

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT

Higgins — JASMINE'S SHOE still firmly in his teeth — SCAMPERS over roots, under branches.

JASMINE (V.O.)
They just came out of nowhere, from out of——

Underfoot, signs of man: Chicken-wire. A tire in the mud. Doused campfire, crushed beer cans and SHOTGUN SHELLS.

JASMINE (V.O.)
——the woods. We think they might be sick.

And through the trees: is that a lonely SHACK in these deep, dark woods——?

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine turns off the faucet. Watches the water SWIRL into the drain, unsure of what to do.

JASMINE
Are you okay?

DAPHNE
(barely audible)
No.

Jasmine crouches down. Fights off her own emotions... puts her hand on Daphne's shoulder.

DAPHNE
(through towel)
Don't touch me.

JASMINE
I didn't know. I swear I didn't. He said you were div——

DAHPNE
(through towels)
Shut up. Just shut up.

Jasmine does. A moment passes, then a hoarse croak from:

DAPHNE
...he's dead, isn't he?

Jasmine looks away. Says nothing.

Daphne processes the silence. Feels the immediate, stabbing PAIN of loss and guilt and hopelessness.

She begins to SOB through calcined eyes; a heart-wrenching, terrible sound.

Jasmine's own eyes well up with tears. Not for herself, as dire as her situation is... but for this woman whom she has just met, who will have to now raise her children alone... *if she's lucky.*

She tries to help Daphne up, but pulls back when——

DAPHNE
(hyperventilating)
I said don't touch me!! Don't touch me! Don't touch me, don't touch me, don't touch me!! Don't——

And Daphne STOPS —— the screaming, the crying. Breathing. Everything. Just like that, she SNAPS into another realm; her eyes go distant. Her mouth agape.

Jasmine rises... backs away, out of the kitchen and into the——

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

She goes back to the window. Spies the DOGS——

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

GROWLS and SNAPS. The Snarlers and Lapdogs clean Kyle's bones of meat. Envious Animal watches from inside the rental car.

Gonzo paces. Eyes the snacking dogs. *In a mood.*

No warning, Gonzo POUNCES. CRACK! His powerful jaws break a YELPING Lapdog's spine. It's a dog eat dog world out there.

His victim's limp body in his maw, Gonzo raises a hind leg...

...and PISSES on Kyle's corpse. Marks his territory.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine's beyond tears... the grief and anger give way to creeping, dawning terror as her predicament sinks in.

Through the window, she watches: Snarlers Miss Piggy and The Count scurry off, frightened by Gonzo. A strip of bloody cloth in Piggy's mouth.

JASMINE
(sotto, resigned)
...I'm going to die out here.

Her lip trembles. Another round of TEARS verging on the corner of her eye, when——

No. *Fuck that noise.*

She SLAPS herself in the face. Hard. Steels herself. Now is not the time for tears, or pity, or fear.

Now is the time for ACTION——

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine CHARGES back into the kitchen.

JASMINE
(to Daphne)
Did you bring a cell? Ours weren't getting any recept——

She stops short when she sets eyes on Daphne——

The poor woman is CATATONIC. Her face a PALE, clammy, blank slate. Body completely motionless, save her SHAKING HANDS.

JASMINE
Daphne?

No answer.

She heads over, reaches down and feels Daphne's forehead, the pulse at her neck. She does not resist; she makes not even the slightest acknowledgement of Jasmine's presence.

JASMINE
...I think you're in shock.

She heads back out of the kitchen——

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Opens the closet door, takes down some BLANKETS and hurries back out of the room...

...leaving the closet door OPEN. *The JAGGED HOLE in the floorboards exposed...*

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

Daphne's shrouded in heavy WOOL BLANKETS. Jasmine feels her CLAMMY FOREHEAD again.

JASMINE
You're still cold.

INT. BATHROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine PLUGS the bathtub drain. TURNS THE FAUCET, begins to fill the tub with hot water. Tests it with a hand to make sure it's not scalding.

She exits the room, leaves us in the RISING STEAM.

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine helps Daphne to her feet. Walks her out of the room——

INT. BATHROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

It's not easy, Daphne is DEAD WEIGHT in her arms... but Jas hauls her into the STEAMY bathroom. Helps her shed the heavy blankets.

Daphne SLUMPS to the floor once more. Jasmine turns off the water.

JASMINE
Can you get undressed, or do you need help?

Still, no answer. Jasmine shakes her head, PULLS Daphne's shirt over her head. Unbuttons her jeans and shimmies them off——

She can't help but steal a glance at Daphne's body as she uncovers it. It's nothing to be ashamed of... but not as tight as Jasmine's. Stretch marks. *Kyle, you pig.*

Daphne's down to her underwear... Jasmine helps her into the tub.

Daphne shows her first signs of life——

An audible GASP as she's slipped into the hot water. A bit of CLARITY returns to her eyes.

JASMINE
You're not going to drown if I leave you alone, are you?

Barely perceptible, but it's there — Daphne shakes her head "no."

JASMINE
Good. Okay. Call me if you need something.

Jasmine exits, leaves the door open a crack.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Outside: the dogs LAZE. Settled in, digesting Kyle.

BRANCHES CRACK in the woods. An animal——

A couple dogs spring up, BOUND after it.

Playful GRUNTS and GROWLS by the cabin. Miss Piggy and The Count circle one another in a game of grisly tug-of-war, the shred of Kyle's bloody shirt locked in their teeth.

The Count's ears PERK UP. He's spotted something: a FIELD MOUSE at the base of the cabin.

He lets go of the shred, sends Miss Piggy flying. DASHES after the mouse——

——which SLIPS into the safety of a dark HOLE at the cabin's latticed foundation.

The Count muzzles into the hole. SNIFFS around, pushes deeper... and disappears into the darkness.

He's found a way in.

Miss Piggy follows him into the crawl space. It's a tight fit, but she SQUEEZES through...

<u>And they're INSIDE</u>. Under the floorboards.

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

The FIRE POKER. Kitchen KNIVES. Bag of SHOT and horn of GUNPOWDER. A CLAW HAMMER, ELECTRIC IRON, PEPPER SPRAY.

A LIGHTER. And Jasmine's pack of CIGARETTES, all set out on the kitchen counter.

She's assembled the tools of war.

INT. CRAWL SPACE - BENEATH CABIN - NIGHT

Noses ROOTING around in the darkness, SNIFFING out the dank air's mysteries... The Count and Miss Piggy are in hog heaven.

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

She takes out a smoke, next to last in the pack. Lights it with the lighter. Savors it, now knowing that nothing is promised and it could be her last.

She opens drawers, finds a roll of ALUMINUM FOIL. Takes out her CELL PHONE. Tears off some foil, rolls it up and CRIMPS it over the top of her phone...

She's trying to form a makeshift auxiliary antenna.

INT. CRAWL SPACE - BENEATH CABIN - NIGHT

GROAN of pipes above their heads, the HISS of running water.

Miss Piggy SNORTS. Curious, she follows the sound... to a SPRUNG LEAK in one of the pipes.

Just above it: ROTTING FLOORBOARDS. A hint of LIGHT.

And an inviting HOLE...

INT. CLOSET - MASTER BEDROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

The Count CLAMBERS his way up through the rotting hole.

The closet door's still wide open, just as Jasmine left it when gathering blankets for Daphne.

The room is dark, but there are STEAM and light from down the hall. The SOFT WHIMPER of Daphne's grief. *The Count investigates...*

INT. CRAWL SPACE - BENEATH CABIN - NIGHT

Plump Piggy's not having the best of luck getting through the hole. She SNORTS, WHINES as she struggles to climb out.

A plank of wood gives, SNAPS under her paws... creates a splintered ramp.

She gleefully SCAMPERS up, waddles down the——

HALL

——where tendrils of STEAM beckon from the slightly-ajar bathroom door, framing The Count.

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine uses a HAIR TIE to secure her makeshift, “MacGyvered” aluminum foil antenna to the top of her smart phone...

...She dials 9-1-1. Holds her breath...

But alas: Still no signal.

JASMINE
Mother——

CUT TO:

INT. HALL - CABIN - NIGHT

Miss Piggy stops in her tracks, COCKS her head at Jasmine’s LOUD CURSE from the kitchen:

JASMINE (O.S.)
——fucker!!

BACK TO:

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine tears the foil off, SLAMS the phone down on the counter. *Epic fail.*

She sulks and SMOKES, tries to think of new ways to improve the situation. Meanwhile...

INT. BATHROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

...Daphne’s TREMBLING in the tub, knees drawn up to her chest. Skin pale. Her eyes lost in the water, her mind turning:

They ate him oh god they ate him, the father of my babies...

And then she hears it——

——the CRINKLE of paper and plastic——

She looks over and sees:

The Count. Digging in the waste bin. He's found Jasmine's bloody, used pad *(the sick fuck)*. Kyle's CRUSTED BLOOD still coating his chin whiskers——

Daphne SCREAMS. Bad idea——

The Count LUNGES at her!

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine STARTS, drops her cigarette at the sound of Daphne's SHRIEKING. She looks around, eyes racing the counter——

The LIGHTER.

The IRON.

THE FIRE POKER. She snatches it up, heads out of the kitchen and into the——

INT. LIVING ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

RWAWRK!! Jasmine CRIES OUT in pain, looks down——

——at the horrid sight of blood-gorged Miss Piggy. Her jaw CLAMPED around Jasmine's ankle. Head starting to GROWL and WHIP.

INT. BATHROOM - CABIN - NIGH

Water SPLASHES. Daphne FLAILS in PANIC. Naked, defenseless——

——she FIGHTS OFF The Count in the bathtub.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine WILDLY STABS at Piggy's blood-smeared SNORTING face with the fire poker, tries to pry the savage off her ankle. Catches the dumb beast's absurd GAZE as they wrestle.

Its hide is THICK, the poker DRAWS BLOOD on her back, but Piggy only WHIPS her head more ferociously.

Jasmine SCREAMS BLOODY MURDER, lifts the poker and STABS down into Piggy's marred face——

Finally the dog relents. Jasmine clambers up, stands on the couch. Piggy YAPS in circles below.

INT. BATHROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Arms scratched all to hell, breasts torn raw, Daphne BATTLES for a hold. With a HOWL she digs her nails into The Count's ribs —— shifts her weight and ROLLS atop him —— FORCES him under the water.

The Count FRENZIES, drowning. Sounds of Piggy BARKING MANIACALLY down the hall.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The dogs go NUTS at the sound of Piggy BARKING inside. Pacing the yard, the porch. BARKING, SCRATCHING at the door.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Piggy's sick of running circles. The animal keeps her distance, times Jasmine's swings... looks for an opening, and FINDS IT:

She sinks her teeth into a seat cushion, TEARS IT OFF the couch. Sends Jasmine TUMBLING——

INT. BATHROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

IN THE TUB: Daphne's got a death grip on The Count, eyes locked. Foamy BUBBLES escape the dog's muted mouth——

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Piggy BARKS, CAVORTS, menacingly SNAPS at Jasmine's POKER——

Jasmine rears back, LOADS UP and SWINGS with all her might. CRACKS Piggy in her side, sends her ROLLING. The dog SQUEALS, scrambles to get to her feet.

But Jasmine gives her no chance —— she BRINGS the poker down HARD on Piggy's spine. THACK! Again, again, again... THACK... THACK... THACK...

INTERCUT:

——Jasmine THRASHES Piggy while Daphne DROWNS The Count——

UNTIL:

INT. BATHROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

IN THE TUB: The Count's limbs grow weak, Daphne BEARS DOWN... the dog stops flailing——

Life seeps from its eyes...

...and...

He's "down for the count."

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine finally stops. The dog is ravaged, beaten and still. Jasmine lets go of the POKER, it CLATTERS to the floor.

She is spent, and SICKENED by what just transpired...

INT. BATHROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Absolutely traumatized, bloodied all over from the crazed animal's attack, Daphne SPLASHES out of the water. Backs away from the tub and the floating, lifeless Count.

Grabs up the wool blanket, wraps herself. On trembling legs she paces into the——

HALL

——to see Piggy's dirty trail. All is quiet now. She peers around the corner with FEAR, hesitation——

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Sees Jasmine standing over the bloody pulp that was once Miss Piggy, stray FLECKS OF BLOOD stippled all over her face and clothes.

Their eyes meet.

They run to one another. These two women, linked only by the mauled liar in the yard. Where once was rage, now there is only the human need to console and be consoled.

Daphne looks into the fire through her tears. Piggy's bludgeoned corpse FLICKERING in the light. Looks to the door, sees it's intact.

DAPHNE
...How did they get in?

JASMINE
I don't know.

She wipes her eyes. They part.

JASMINE
Oh, shit——

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

The abyssal HOLE in the closet floor is blocked from view as Jasmine CLOSES the closet door.

She and Daphne SLIDE the dresser across the floor and SHOVE it against the door.

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine looks down into her pack of Marlb Lights. Only one left. She SHAKES it out, solemnly LIGHTS it.

Back in her clothes, Daphne looks over all of the "tools" and "weapons" Jasmine left strewn about the counter top.

JASMINE
I was trying to make a better antenna. Out of foil, for my cell phone.
(smokes)
No reception.

DAPHNE
My phone has reception up here. That's why I bought it.

Jasmine's eyes go WIDE. She grabs Daphne by her shoulders——

JASMINE
OhmyGod. I could kiss you, why didn't you say so?!

Daphne cocks her head. Uh...

JASMINE
Yeah. Right. Okay! Where is it?!

Daphne feels her pockets, then...

DAPHNE
The car.

Motherfucker.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine and Daphne are at the window, looking out on——

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

——a hellish scene: The dogs STIR, black shadows in the black night. The rental car, windows covered in blood and drool. Daphne's minivan. And Kyle's RAVAGED CORPSE.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Daphne tries not to look, but she can't help it. *She sees.*

Jasmine notices that Daphne's visibly shaken. Puts an arm around her —— which Daphne promptly shrugs off. Wipes her eyes:

DAPHNE
...Did you love him?

A beat, and then:

JASMINE
(staring out window)
Who cares? We're here now, and those dogs are out there, and whether I loved your husband or not based on his mountain of lies doesn't really matter at this point, does it? So maybe we can put our minds off your fucked-up, sham of a marriage for a minute and try to figure out how to make our way to the "family" van. I don't know about you, but I'd rather not end up like him.

Daphne's taken aback. This is no wilting flower before her. It's been a long, fucked up day and Jasmine is taking on a STEELINESS.

But she's FRUSTRATED. Stricken with fatigue and heartache. She opens the pack of Marlb Lights, remembers she smoked the last one.

JASMINE
Fuck!

She CRUMPLES the cardboard and cellophane. Tosses it to the floor, dejected.

Daphne walks off. Heads down the hall.

JASMINE
Yeah, real mature. Just walk away. No wonder your husband——

And Daphne returns, the sweatshirt she wore up here in one hand. And in the other:

A pack of CIGARETTES. Eve Lights. 100's.

DAPHNE
This is how I knew. I found them in his shirt pocket. After a "business retreat to the Catskills." Is that where you live? New York?

JASMINE
No. Chicago. He told me he lived in Manhattan, but that was obviously another lie. I was going to move there.

Daphne sneers, shakes her head.

DAPHNE
Rockford.

JASMINE
"Rockford?" Rockford, Illinois?

DAPHNE
Rockford, Illinois.

Jasmine SCOFFS. *The bastard lived only an hour and a half away.*

JASMINE
(re: smokes)
So. Can I have those, or not?

A BEAT, as Daphne realizes she has something the other wants... and considers what to do about it.

Finally, she offers them up. Jasmine reaches and——

Daphne YANKS them back.

Jasmine's TEMPER FLARES. She stabs out, GRABS Daphne's wrist. White knuckles. LOCKED EYES. Daphne's DART to the——

FIREPLACE.

She tries to throw them into the fire. Jasmine won't have it——

——An AWKWARD HAND FIGHT ensues——

Daphne wins. She tears her hands free, still holding the pack. The pettiest of victories.

And she knows it. She relents...

Once again offers the pack. Jasmine doesn't bite. Daphne insists. Jasmine reaches out...

And takes it.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

The closet door. DRESSER pressed firmly against it. The room is dark. Still. Quiet.

INT. BATHROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Both DEAD DOGS are now floating in the tub. The Count. Miss Piggy partially wrapped in the wool blanket. The water RED with her blood.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The MINIVAN. Through the dirty windshield, on the dash:

DAPHNE'S CELL PHONE. BLINKING text message on its screen from a "CHLOE" reads:

"ok girls in bed did the pig confess? is she their?"

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Daphne and Jasmine are back at the window. Eyeing the van. Passing a wrinkled, bent CIGARETTE between them.

JASMINE
...It's not that far from the roof, is it?
(smokes)
Maybe one of us could, I don't know, like jump off of the roof. Land on it, then get in the van before... you know...

DAPHNE
It’s pointless.

JASMINE
Look, I know neither of us is fucking Jackie Chan, but——

DAPHNE
No. I helped my dad fix the shingles. You can only get up there with a ladder, which is in the shed. So, even if the rest of your plan were brilliant...

She takes the smoke back from Jasmine.

DAPHNE
...which it isn’t.

JASMINE
Yeah, well, I don’t see you coming up with a better idea. You could be a little more constructive.

DAPHNE
There is no better idea. Look, don’t you think I want to call my daughters? And to call for help?

She hands the cigarette back to Jas.

DAPHNE
I want out of here just as bad as you do, believe me.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The rental car. Animal SCRATCHING at its windows——

INT. RENTAL CAR - NIGHT

——GNAWING at the seat cushions and molded door handles.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Gonzo looking over what is now his flock, since he dispensed of Smiley.

The dogs nose about. One of the Snarlers still PICKS at Kyle’s remains. Another CHEWS on the broken wooden lattice that Piggy and The Count slipped past to get under the house.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

The fire's burned low. Jasmine sits on the hearth. Smokes another cigarette.

JASMINE
This is the last pack I'm ever going to smoke, one way or the other. If I get out of here, I want to live as long as possible...

She looks over at Daphne, who's seated on the floor at the coffee table and SCRAWLING on a note pad. TEARS in her eyes.

We can make out the occasional word or phrase:

" Daddy and I..." "...love you, more than life itself..." "...Goodbye," "...do as Aunt Chloe says..."

JASMINE
You said you helped your dad. So, this is like your family cabin?

DAPHNE
There should be a picture of all of us right there, above the mantle.

Jasmine stands. Looks... sure enough, we can see a DUSTY OUTLINE of where a frame long rested.

Daphne's scrawled note takes a cynical turn: ***"...men will tell you things... don't believe them..."***

Too much... the girls don't deserve that. She TEARS the page out. Crumples it and tosses it in the fire. Starts anew.

A QUIET BEAT, then——

Jasmine's head turns. Barely-there, from outside:

A distant HUM.

Daphne looks up at Jasmine. *What is that?*

They rush to a window.

JASMINE
A plane, maybe?

They peer up at the dark sky. No light save the moon's. DARK SHAPES OF THE DOGS in the darkened yard...

...the HUM grows LOUDER...

DAPHNE
Look!

LIGHTS in the trees. Headlights. A savior?!

Jasmine frantically unlatches the lock. They SHOVE the window open, YELL.

JASMINE
Help!

DAPHNE
Please, save us!!

The lights grow BRIGHTER... CLOSER. The HUMMING ENGINE picks up, REVS. The dogs HOWL at its coming.

Into the clearing bucks a worn All-Terrain-Vehicle. On its back: A backwoods **SURVIVALIST TYPE** decked out in woodland camo. All kinds of gear clinging to his ride.

The women are ECSTATIC. But what about——

DAPHNE
The dogs!

JASMINE
Yeah! Be careful! Those dogs are sick!!

Either the man doesn't hear or doesn't care: He confidently steers the ATV into the clearing, right into the midst of the pack.

JASMINE
Dude, watch out!

The dogs run in circles, excited, HOWLING.

<u>But they do NOT attack</u>.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The man stops his ATV. Kills the engine but leaves on the LIGHTS. Dogs FLIT in and out of the beams, tails wagging, postures of submission. Ernie the runt ROLLS in glee.

This is no mere prepper-on-patrol:

This is **THE HOUNDSMAN.** A gangly backwoods Satyr, long banished to the Sticks.

He steps out in front of the lights; more details come into view: the CAMO TRUCKER CAP pulled low over his eyes... the frowning, RAGGED BEARD...

A MASON JAR dangles from his hip by a line of twine, now a poor man's canteen SLOSHING with an ochre liquid... and, last but not least... there's a DOUBLE-BARRELLED SHOTGUN slung over his shoulder.

He whips out an ANGLE-HEAD FLASHLIGHT, inspects the yard...

First on the collided vehicles...

...then to the ground below, the messy swath of KYLE'S REMAINS.

The Houndsman GRUMBLES, PRODS the slick skull with his boot. From the side: *a low, menacing GROWL.*

He looks over: it's Gonzo. Protecting "his" kill.

The Houndsman GROWLS back, KICKS up some gravel.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

The girls watch from the window as Gonzo SNAPS in retaliation at the Houndsman. It's becoming obvious:

DAPHNE
(to The Houndsman)
Are these your dogs?!
(voice cracking with fury)
Those god damn animals mauled my husband!

But Jasmine can tell this is no man to raise the ire of.

JASMINE
(sotto)
Daphne, don't——

DAPHNE
And they attacked us! We're hurt, you stupid redneck fuck! We need help!

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Deaf to Daphne's pleas, The Houndsman keeps his eyes on Gonzo... who's edged in closer to Kyle's corpse; SNARLING, teeth bared.

The Houndsman takes the MASON JAR from his hip. UNSCREWS the lid, pulls a slug of MOONSHINE as he fishes something out of his pocket...

FLICKS a lighter at his lips and breathes a LICK OF HOT FIRE at Gonzo's scarred face——

CUT TO:

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

——the girls recoil at the sudden sight of FLAME——

BACK TO:

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

——Gonzo YELPS, leaps back and skulks off; SINGED, defeated... *for now.*

The Houndsman takes another proud slug. Wipes his mouth with his sleeve and screws the cap on the jar, sends it back dangling at his hip.

He notices the rental car ROCKING, its smeared sticky windows. The Houndsman walks over, peers through the grime——

——*RAWRK!!* Animal's NASTY MAW, teeth CLACKING the glass——

But the Houndsman doesn't even flinch.

SPAK!! He SMACKS the window hard, SCARES the dog, sends him reeling into the back seat.

...A BEAT...

And he opens the door, out BOUNDS a gleeful Animal, stoked to see his Master. The seats and steering wheel all GNAWED to shit.

The Hounsdman kneels down, scratches behind Animal's ear, then...

He reaches into the car and KILLS THE ENGINE. Removes the keys. And throws them into the woods.

CUT TO:

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

The girls REACT. It's now evident: *This is no savior. This is the dog's MASTER.*

BACK TO:

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Walks over to the minivan, reaches in and takes its keys. Throws them into the woods as well.

Then...

He notices something. Walks over... leans down and picks up:

The MUZZLELOADER.

He sees SMILEY dead in the grass. Bullet-hole in his chest. The Houndsman somberly scratches his beard... emits a LOW, LETHAL GROWL...

And turns his attention to the girls.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine SHOVES the window shut, LOCKS it tight. The women DUCK, hide below.

OUTSIDE: Gravelly FOOTSTEPS of the Houndsman drawing closer. Dogs clamoring at his heels.

THUMP. THUMP. The boots land outside the front door. The Big Bad Wolf. The doorknob CLICKS and JIGGLES. LOCKED, thank god.

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP as the Houndsman comes closer now, stopping right outside their window. The women COWER below, unseen. The stranger just outside, PEERING IN.

He RAPS his fingers on the glass. A beat. Then: THUMP-THUMP as he walks off...

...and THUMPS over to another window. His OGREISH FACE appears, looks around.

Out comes the Mason jar. Another sweaty SWIG. He puts the LIGHTER to his lips and——*flick*——BLOWS FIREWATER onto the window's glass!

A soft SQUEAL from Daphne. Jasmine stays quiet, keeps low... lest the Dragon hear.

Finally the Houndsman steps away from the window, folds back into the DARKNESS...

And unleashes a high, ragged HOWL.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

His pack of hellhounds join in, SING together at the moon with their Master. *The eeriest, hair-raising of sights.*

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Through the WINDOW cuts the light of the ATV. Under the pane, Daphne and Jas hold one another. *Scared. To. Hell.*

CUT TO:

EXT. FILLING STATION - NIGHT

The Forest Ranger's 4x4 TRUCK's parked outside. Light from a rack of HALOGEN LAMPS splits the thick fog.

The engine cuts off. The lights go dark.

INT. FILLING STATION - NIGHT

A TINNY RADIO softly plays. Oldies, pure and sweet and in stark contrast to the Gothic fog and horrors at the cabin.

The Clerk flips through a GAME & FISH magazine. Checks out the rods and reels.

DING! goes the door as the Forest Ranger steps in. Takes off his hat as he crosses the threshold.

FOREST RANGER
Some thick fog out there tonight.

CLERK
Pea soup.

Ranger heads to the coffee machine. Fills a styrofoam cup.

FOREST RANGER
So what's this about Missus Galardi?

CLERK
Well, she come through here.

FOREST RANGER
Yeah.

CLERK
Seemed... real upset, like I said. Wasn't herself.
(MORE)

CLERK (CONT'D)
Smelled like a Russian soldier,
what with the vodka on her breath.

The Ranger approaches the counter with the coffee. Looks down at the rack of LUCKY'S VENISON, grabs a pack. Takes out his wallet but Clerk waves him off.

CLERK
Asked if her husband come
through... looked like she was on
the war path.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

The howling has come to a stop. Cautiously, Jasmine and Daphne peek over the windowsill.

CLERK (V.O.)
You might wanna pay 'em a visit.

The dogs are still there, milling about. As is the ATV.

But the Houndsman is gone.

DAPHNE
I don't see him.

JASMINE
Me neither.

DAPHNE
...Where did he go?

Jasmine goes to the back door, peers through the sliding glass. Dogs there too, but no Houndsman.

JASMINE
Where the do they keep coming from?
They're multiplying like fucking
Michael Keaton.

Jasmine checks the LOCKS one more time. They're secure.

DAPHNE
They must've followed him.

JASMINE
We need to get out of here. Like,
now. We should make a break for
your van.

DAPHNE
It's impossible. You saw what, what they did to Kyle.

JASMINE
Maybe we can draw the dogs around back?

DAPHNE
But what about their owner? He's still out there...

EXT. DEEP WOODS - NIGHT

CLICK-CLACK-CLUNK of a set of makeshift WOODEN WINDCHIMES high in the trees.

DAPHNE (V.O.)
...somewhere.

Below, The Houndsman enters a clearing, using the long-barreled MUZZLELOADER as a walking stick. A couple loyal dogs at his heels, Higgins and Animal among them.

The Houndsman stops. Looks up at the CHIMES, takes a pull from his MASON JAR.

He starts POKING AROUND in the dead leaves with the muzzleloader. Animal playfully bites at the end of the gun.

The Houndsman KICKS the dog away, goes back to poking around in the blanket of dead leaves when——

A SOUND; rusty and strong —— SHWLACK!

He's found whatever it is he's been looking for...

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

CAR KEYS in Daphne's grip. Jasmine hands her the PEPPER SPRAY... picks up the bloodied FIRE POKER.

Armed and dangerous, Daphne goes to the front door. Jasmine to the back.

JASMINE
Okay now. Wait until I draw them all out back.

DAPHNE
Ya think?

Jasmine FLIPS her "the bird."

JASMINE
You ready?

DAPHNE
As ready as I'll ever be.

JASMINE
Okay. Okay. We can do this.

She quietly UNLOCKS THE SLIDING GLASS DOOR. Slowly pulls the handle... a FIRM GRIP on the poker...

EXT. CABIN - LAKE SIDE - NIGHT

A SNARLER perks up, sees the door gently SLIDING OPEN——

SPRINGS to its feet and unleashes a volley of RASPING BARKS.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The dogs in front respond, TEAR around the corner——

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Through the window by the front door, Daphne sees the dogs RIP through the yard and disappear from sight. She UNLOCKS the front door just as——

Jasmine SLAMS the REAR DOOR. Locks it.

JASMINE
Go!!

Daphne CROSSES HERSELF; turns the knob and——

JASMINE (O.S.)
Wait!! No, don't——

EXT. CABIN - LAKE SIDE - NIGHT

The DOGS all TEAR back out of the back yard——

EXT. CABIN - SIDE - CONTINUOUS

——around the side——

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

——but they do not return to the front. They bomb straight into the woods in front of the house——

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Daphne and Jasmine are both back at the front window, eyes glued to the unfolding scene. They watch the last of the dogs slip into the DARK WOODS, leaving the yard eerily empty.

DAPHNE
What do you think——

JASMINE
I don't know.

DAPHNE
Maybe he has a dog whistle or something. Maybe he's controlling them.

JASMINE
He's toying with us.

But no... the BARKING DOGS are back, and with them——

Bright HEADLIGHTS. Washing over the yard, tires ROLL on gravel.

DAPHNE
Is he back?

CUT TO:

EXT. CABIN - LAKE SIDE - NIGHT

Indeed, he is... The Houndsman's in the treeline by the shore of the lake, WATCHING this vehicle pull into the front of the house, the MANIC DOGS BARKING.

JASMINE (V.O.)
I don't know.

On his back, slung over his shoulder by RUSTED CHAINS: a gnarly METAL CONTRAPTION.

CUT TO:

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Through the window, the women watch: A vehicle's approaching from the wooded road, pulling up behind the van.

JASMINE
(shudders)
Maybe he brought friends?

The dogs are at it again, BARKING, running about, CLAWING at the sides of——

The Forest Ranger's TRUCK. Faint figure of the Ranger past the headlights.

Flush of hope on Daphne's face:

DAPHNE
Oh God, yes. It's a Park Ranger!

A subtle SCRAPE and THUMP near the back door. One of the dogs back there? The women pay it no mind, focused on hopes of rescue.

INT. RANGER'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Ranger peers through his windshield, tries to make sense of the strange scene before him. *The collided vehicles. The DOGS.*

He takes the wired MIC from his radio, talks into it; the words BLARE through a loudspeaker:

FOREST RANGER
(into mic)
Park Services! Anyone here?

He ROLLS his window down a crack, listens for an answer. HOT BREATH, YELLOWED teeth of the dogs too close for comfort.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

The girls are overjoyed, but they're not out of the woods yet.

FOREST RANGER (O.S.)
(on loudspeaker)
Mister and Missus Gagliardi?
Daphne, right?

DAPHNE
(recognizing voice)
I know him.

Daphne SHOVES the window open a crack. SHOUTS:

DAPHNE
Yes! I'm here! We're trapped, they won't let us out!

JASMINE
The dogs!

INT. RANGER'S TRUCK - NIGHT

The Ranger scans the yard. Notices debris on the ground. Are those shredded clothes? And blood?

FOREST RANGER
(into mic)
All right, just stay put. I'll try to get Animal Services out here. You girls all right? Did someone get hurt? Where's Mister Gagliardi?

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Voices CRACKING, in unison:

DAPHNE
They killed him!

JASMINE
The dogs killed him!

We see only their STRICKEN FACES, not their view through the window.

DAPHNE
And there's a man!

JASMINE
They're his dogs, we think!!

And then——

——*those FACES register with HORROR*——

For, through the window we can see as they do: <u>The Houndsman has appeared next to the Ranger's truck</u>.

INT. RANGER'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Ranger's SQUINTING, focused on the girls and trying to hear them over the BARKING DOGS when——

TAP-TAP-TAP. Against the driver-side window, METAL on GLASS——

He turns to find the TWIN BARRELS of the Houndsman's SHOTGUN LOOMING——

——Ranger's EYES GO WIDE, raises the MIC to his mouth and——

BLAM!! The Ranger's face catches a comet of ROCK SALT —— SCATTERS across the dashboard in a rain of BLOOD and mineral.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

The girls SCREAM at the shotgun's DISCHARGE, cling to one another in abject TERROR.

INT. RANGER'S TRUCK - NIGHT

The Houndsman brushes aside BROKEN GLASS. Reaches into the truck, OPENS the door——

SHOVES the Ranger's decimated corpse over into the passenger seat and leans inside.

The dogs gather at his feet, SNIFFING; the smell of blood is strong.

The Houndsman rifles through the truck, checks out the goods. Puts the salt-pelted MIC to his mouth, his phlegm-caked voice CROAKS for the first time:

THE HOUNDSMAN
(into mic)
You come on out now.

INT. CABIN - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The women hang on his words:

THE HOUNDSMAN (O.S.)
(on loudspeaker)
Come out easy and we won't bite.

DAPHNE
GodohGodohGod.
(breaking down)
He's coming in here, isn't he? He's coming in, he's coming in he's——

Jasmine PUSHES off, SMACKS Daphne hard across the face.

JASMINE
Yeah. He is... and we need to be ready. Come on.

She takes Daphne's hand, CRAWLS under the window and into the——

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine's assembled tools and weapons LITTER the counter. Pots, pans, knives, the IRON. She sets down the FIRE POKER, throws a POT under the sink——

The head chef, taking charge:

JASMINE
Close all the curtains.

——fills it with a half-inch of HOT WATER, puts it on the stove. Turns on the BURNER. *FWOOF! goes the flame.*

Daphne DASHES over, starts with the KITCHEN CURTAINS as Jasmine plugs in the STEAM IRON.

INT. RANGER'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Evident they're not coming out... the Houndsman PICKS some of the Ranger's skull out of the dashboard as he speaks:

THE HOUNDSMAN
(into mic)
You got to the count of ten.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The dogs MILL ABOUT the truck. FEEDING off their Master's menace.

THE HOUNDSMAN (O.S.)
(into mic)
Ten.

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine TAPS her foot, tries to WILL the water to boil faster.

THE HOUNDSMAN (V.O.)
(into mic)
Nine.

She turns on the FAUCET. Wets her hand, FLICKS water at the bottom of the HOT IRON. *Tsss!*

THE HOUNDSMAN (V.O.)
(into mic)
Eight.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Daphne checks the window's LOCK.

THE HOUNDSMAN (V.O.)
(into mic)
Seven.

SNATCHES SHUT the curtains; *FLSHHT!*

INT. RANGER'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Houndsman leans over Ranger's horrific corpse, UNLOCKS the passenger door.

THE HOUNDSMAN
(into mic)
Six.

He PUSHES Ranger's limp, half-headed body. It FALLS out of the truck, SLUMPS onto the ground——

THE HOUNDSMAN
(into mic)
Five.

——the DOGS DESCEND on it. Except Gonzo... the Rotty keeps his distance, wary of his mean-streak master.

THE HOUNDSMAN (V.O.)
(into mic)
Four.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

FLSHHT! Daphne YANKS shut the curtains to the SLIDING GLASS BACK DOOR.

THE HOUNDSMAN (V.O.)
(into mic)
Three.

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine WORRIES over the pot of water. This is "*Catastrophe*," the moment just before water turns——

THE HOUNDSMAN (V.O.)
(into mic)
Two.

——CLOSE ON THE WATER: *The first ERUPTIONS OF AIR as it starts to BOIL*——

INT. LIVING ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Daphne's at the window, looking out on the BLINDING LIGHT of the Ranger's headlights. She grabs the curtains to draw them shut——

CUT TO:

INT. RANGER'S TRUCK - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: The Houndsman's MEALY MOUTH:

THE HOUNDSMAN
(into mic)
One.

SMASH TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - CABIN - NIGHT

Daphne GASPS as——

Through the window: *THOOM!!* The headlights suddenly SHUT OFF, the YARD'S plunged into DARKNESS——

FUCK.

ME.

She SNAPS SHUT the curtains. *FLSHHT!*

INT. KITCHEN - CABIN - NIGHT

Daphne steps in. STEAM RISING from the boiling water.

They NOD. *It's time.*

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

In the darkness, the Houndsman hauls a heavy GAS CAN out of the back of the Ranger's truck. Pulls out some wool BLANKETS, puts them under his arm.

Walks toward the cabin, the can's contents SLOSHING. GRAVEL CRUNCHING underfoot.

INT. CABIN - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The women stand on each side of the door——

Jasmine has the STEAMING POT of water in her hands. POKER within reach.

Daphne with the HOT IRON in one hand. PEPPER SPRAY in the other.

They wait. Holding their breath... and NOTHING. All is quiet. Still... Even the DOGS sound settled.

Jasmine looks to the back door. *Is he going around?*

Finally she BREATHES when——

——*KTSHSHSHSHS!!* A ROCK CRASHES through the front window, followed by——

——AN ARC OF FIRE. A FLAMING gasoline-doused BLANKET lands on the couch.

THWOOM!! as the cushions CATCH and BURN.

Jasmine ACTS FAST —— throws the water on the fire.

Bad idea. The water only serves to WORSEN the gas fire, sends flames SPRAYING out across the room, IGNITING curtains.

Through the broken window: the CACOPHONY of dogs... HOWLING, SNARLING, BARKING. Pandemonium——

BOOM! The Houndsman KICKS the front door open.

The women SCREAM, bring their arms to bear. The poker SWINGS, the IRON comes down.

But the blows don't land on the Houndsman —— no, it's Kyle's mangled CORPSE that flies through the door, FOLDS to the floor like a grisly rag doll.

DAPHNE loses it, SCREAMS BLOODY MURDER.

Then the Houndsman appears in the doorway, shotgun in hand.

He steps over Kyle's body and into the room. Jasmine sees the BOUNDING DOGS are about to RUSH in behind him——

She SLAMS the door shut, puts her weight against it. But it doesn't fully close; it CRUSHES an ENCROACHING MUZZLE, the sick crack of broken bone and a CANINE HOWL of pain——

Daphne lunges, PRESSES the iron's hot soleplate into his cheek. HISSING STEAM as his beard SINGES, skin MELTS——

——he SNARLS in pain——

——WRESTS the iron from Daphne's hands, DRIVES its front end into her shoulder.

She SHRIEKS, raises the PEPPER SPRAY——

FIRES it point-blank into the Houndsman's eyes!

THE HOUNDSMAN
Reeaaargh——!!

Jasmine's hold weakens; the combined strength of the dogs is too much... SNAPPING TEETH crowd the open crack!

She WEDGES the poker between the door and the floorboards.

The dogs' PUSH, the poker DIGS IN, holding. *But not for long...* she DUCKS under The Houndsman's arm, SHOVES Daphne toward the back door.

JASMINE
Run!

Daphne JETS for the door, FUMBLES for the handle; the Houndsman SLINGS the iron at her——

——SHATTERS the glass of the back door——

——GRABS Jasmine by her hair. Still brandishing the shotgun in his other hand.

THE HOUNDSMAN
(to Daphne)
I'll kill her.

The FIRE RAGES around them.

Daphne moves, half way out the door, framed by BROKEN GLASS. She looks back, <u>sees Jasmine in the Houndsman's grip</u>. Looks out the door:

Freedom. That solitary boat on the lake's shore.

One last glance at Jasmine. The Houndsman, holding Jasmine close, SMILES at Daphne with ROTTING TEETH... *what does he know?*

Daphne turns and BOLTS out the door, then——

SCNAK! The SCREAMS come——

——Daphne's foot's TRAPPED in a gruesome, rusted ANIMAL TRAP set just outside the back door. She's STUCK; *dead meat.*

The next instant, another SNAP inside; the Houndsman KICKS the poker wedging the door closed! The front door FLIES OPEN, the dogs pile in——

THE HOUNDSMAN
Sic 'er! We only need one! *Sic!*

——they STREAM around the Houndsman and Jasmine, YELP as they storm over shards of glass and head straight for the SOBBING, pinned Daphne. Easy prey...

Her SCREAMS will haunt us.

The Houndsman watches on through STINGING eyes as his dogs DISASSEMBLE her. *Gets off on it.*

The fire's now BLAZING in the cabin. Heat almost unbearable. Jasmine's hair CAUGHT in the Houndsman's VISE-LIKE GRIP.

Through the SMOKE: She sees his MASON JAR of firewater dangling at his side... shards of GLASS from the shattered front window at his feet.

She takes up a jagged piece of glass, cuts her hand as she SAWS THROUGH TWINE and TEARS the jar away from his body——

——HURLS it past the Houndsman and into the flames——

FLWOOSH!! A SPIKE OF FIRE leaps up, SINGES the Houndsman's side. He SNARLS, recoils——

——and Jasmine SLIPS FREE!

The fight lost, all that remains is *FLIGHT*. She SCRAMBLES through the front door——

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

——STUMBLES down the front steps of the porch and lands HARD, eats gravel.

The Houndsman appears at the door, face BLEARY from the pepper spray, iron-print BRANDED on his cheek. Backed by LICKING FLAMES, he's a dire sight.

Bleeding, exhausted —— Jasmine STAGGERS around the side of the house, toward the lake... *the BOAT*...

The Houndsman GIVES CHASE. Lurching, half-blind and FURIOUS——

EXT. CABIN - SIDE - NIGHT

——*Jas rounds the corner of the house, the murderous Houndsman HOT ON HER HEELS*——

EXT. CABIN - LAKE SIDE - NIGHT

The pack of dogs gathered around Daphne, FEEDING——

——Gonzo looks up, SEES Jasmine BOMBING around the corner of the house——

——heading towards the BOAT at the end of the dock.

He lowers his massive head and CHARGES to cut her off——

THE HOUNDSMAN
Gonzo!! HEEL!

The DOG looks back but does not stop, legs POUNDING the earth, TEETH at Jasmine's heels.

THE HOUNDSMAN
Gonzo! Mine!!

He RAISES his shotgun——

BOOM! He fires, sends a BLAST OF ROCK SALT into Gonzo's ribs. The dog YELPS, barrel-rolls off track.

Jasmine STUMBLES onto the dock, causes it to SWAY in the water. She FALLS, hits the dock hard. Moves forward on hand and knee...

...LOSING BLOOD, in a HAZE... the BOAT BECKONS, lapping in the easy waves.

Crawls along the wooden planks, hand outstretched for the TETHER until——

It's STAMPED ON by the Houndsman's BOOT. She COLLAPSES. With her free hand, Jasmine gropes his pantleg, delirious, CRYING... *begging for mercy with her eyes if not words.*

But there is none to be found. The Houndsman GRUMBLES, and——

CRACK! SLAMS the butt of his shotgun into her head.

SMASH TO BLACK:

DARKNESS.

The sound of DUCT TAPE, pulled and stretched. Jasmine's MUFFLED PROTESTATIONS...

FADE IN:

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Jasmine's eyes are red and raw. Her mouth is DUCT TAPED, hands bound behind her back. She's seated on the Houndsman's ATV, watching as——

The cabin BURNS. Daphne's VAN, Kyle's RENTAL lined up in the driveway. The Ranger's TRUCK has been moved... it now faces the cabin.

The Ranger's CORPSE back in the driver's seat. The Houndsman outside the door, muzzleloader in hand.

He reaches over, turns the keys. The ignition FIRES, the engine RUMBLES.

He PUSHES the rifle down on the GAS PEDAL and steps back. The truck LURCHES forward, PILES into the side of the cabin and through the wall. CRASH! The roof CAVES, FIRE ENGULFS the truck.

The Houndsman kneels down next to Smiley's body. DRAGS the dog's corpse towards the house until the heat is too much.

Jasmine watches as he grips its lifeless body by the ankles, HURLS it into the inferno. Cleaning up his mess...

...disposing of evidence.

FADE TO:

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT - JASMINE'S POV

BLEEDING IN AND OUT OF CONSCIOUSNESS: We're being CARRIED through the woods on the Houndsman's back in the pre-dawn light.

The DOGS underfoot, the parked ATV behind us.

And before us: a hulking STRUCTURE in the midst of the woods. Grimy glow from its windows.

The husk of an OLD PICKUP, front hood ripped off. Engine block CHOKED with the wild.

Coils of chicken wire, cinder blocks. A horseshoe pit. Heap of scrapped TIRES gnawed all to hell.

A bristling pile of bleach-white DEER ANTLERS.

Welcome to:

EXT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - DAWN

Ramshackle patchwork of plywood and sheet metal. Peeling paint, exposed pipes, natty clumps of insulation.

Higgins runs ahead, approaches a back door. He slips through a DOG DOOR at its base and into the Lair.

Jasmine SLUNG over his shoulder, the Houndsman goes inside. The rest of the pack follows.

INT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - KITCHEN - DAWN

DEAD FLIES on the windowsill. Moldy mac'n cheese in a pot on the counter, heap of DIRTY DISHES in the sink.

A blackened stove top. Kitchen table with a lone chair. A massive steel freezer HUMS. More deer ANTLERS scattered about the dark, dank room.

CLACKCLACKCLACK. Higgins scampers ahead.

The Houndsman GRUNTS, drops Jasmine to the grimy floor. DRAGS her across uneven tiles, past a long row of crusty DOG FOOD BOWLS. Names scrawled in marker on their sides: GONZO, KURMIT, ANIMAL, GUY SMILY, THE GROUCH... all Muppet names, many botched.

Finally, he TEARS the DUCT TAPE away from her mouth, leaving her skin raw and ravaged.

Jasmine immediately BITES into her captor's arm. He GRUNTS, SMACKS her. DRAGS her into the next room.

INT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - WORKSHOP - DAWN

SMILEY'S VENISON JERKY piled high on a workbench. Bags by the dozen. *"Three tasty flavors."*

A industrial-sized food DEHYDRATOR in a corner. Packaging tools: a heavy-duty STAPLER, stencils with the SMILEY'S logo, black markers.

And more ominously: A shotgun shell RELOADING PRESS next to a pile of empty SHELLS, CANS of ROCK SALT and GUNPOWDER.

IN THE CORNER: a BLOATED, pregnant Pit Bull mix in a rusted cage. **HILDA.** Could give birth at any minute by the look of her.

Antlers here, too. *Everywhere*. And, sitting on a workbench:

Jasmine's missing SHOE, the high heel stolen by Higgins and brought to his Master.

The Houndsman picks up the shoe. Tosses it to Higgins, who SNATCHES it and runs off.

Finally, Jasmine works up her voice:

JASMINE
Please... let me go. They'll come looking for me...
(pit of her stomach)
Please.

The Houndsman picks up the industrial STAPLER, holds it menacingly close to her face.

THE HOUNDSMAN
You don't talk. Understand?

Jasmine PALES, clams up.

THE HOUNDSMAN
Not unless I say.

They continue through a BACK DOOR——

EXT. HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - BACK YARD - DAWN

The Houndsman winds through a backwoods labyrinth of tents, shacks, and sheds. Clotheslines draped with piss-stained sheets. A jumbled heap of car-junk and old radios. A MOONSHINE STILL...

And a propped-up female MANNEQUIN, mauled all to hell, outfitted with a shredded POLICE UNIFORM. The crowning touch: a tattered OBAMA mask, its torn cheek dangling.

At the maze's end is a CHAIN LINK CAGE. Door jacketed with PADLOCKS.

The Houndsman opens the cage's door——

JASMINE
No, please. No!
(desperate)
What do you want? You want money? I have money, it's all yours. Please, just don't put me in there——

——and SHOVES Jasmine in.

THE HOUNDSMAN
Money's dead. None of that's gonna matter soon. Not when it all goes down.

CLANG! He SLAMS the door SHUT. LOCKS it tight. Clack, clack, clack...

THE HOUNDSMAN
Yer safer with me than out there... you'll see.

FADE TO:

EXT. CABIN - DAY

The cabin SMOLDERS. Black husk of the Ranger's truck atop the heap. SEARCHERS pick through the ashes. **FIREFIGHTERS... COPS... FORENSICS** and Crime Scene **PHOTOGRAPHERS.**

Their emblazoned CARS and TRUCKS surround the building.

One **DETECTIVE GARY** surveys the puzzling scene:

He studies Kyle's rental car, smashed in the rear by Daphne's van. Empty now with the driver's door ajar. Jasmine's TORN SHIRT still hangs from the window, SWAYING in the breeze.

The far-off BOAT on the lake shore. The Detective takes a step forward. SPLAT.

He's stepped in a hulking pile of DOG SHIT. Checks his shoe.

DETECTIVE GARY
Beautiful.

Then realizes it's everywhere... pile upon pile of shit. All over the yard. His brow furrows. *Strange days...*

From the cabin:

SEARCHER (O.S.)
Detective! You oughtta see this...

Gary SCRAPES his heel with a stick. Heads over, grinds his shoe on the grass as he goes...

FADE TO BLACK:

HARD ROCK MUSIC BLARES——

SMASH TO:

INT. HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - BACK YARD, CAGE - DUSK

JASMINE'S POV, through the CHAIN-LINK CAGE:

Party-time at the Lair. The Houndsman sits on a stool, dogs STIRRING all around him.

He SWILLS from his moonshine jar. BELLOWS, URGES the animals to rip the mannequin to SHREDS.

THE HOUNDSMAN
Get 'im! Shit-eatin' socialist scum! Un-American, pinko traitor filth! Sic 'im!

Tosses the dogs STRIPS OF JERKY as rewards. Training them to kill.

THE HOUNDSMAN
Gut that lyin' piece of Kenyan shit!

Gonzo LETS LOOSE, DIGS his teeth into the dummy's side. TOPPLES it, PULLS it down from the stand.

The dogs savagely DISMEMBER the thing. Two SNARLERS play tug-of-war with Obama's mangled face... we look back over to find——

The Houndsman's gaze has fallen on US.

INT. HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - BACK YARD, CAGE - DUSK

Jasmine's huddled in a back corner. Peering over her knees, unable to look away.

He reaches down into a bowl, TOSSES something into the air. A Snarler takes a LEAP for it —— SNAP! —— but its teeth catch air.

The scrap lands on the dirty floor of Jasmine's cage: a strip of VENISON JERKY.

She LUNGES for it. TEARS out a chunk like an animal.

The Houndsman sips his ‘shine. Watches her eat.

FADE TO:

INT. FORENSICS LAB - MORNING

A BURNT CORPSE. Dismembered PIECES laid out on an autopsy table.

Detective Gary and a **CORONER** look over Kyle’s remains.

ON OTHER TABLES: Daphne’s and Ranger’s BODIES. Also reduced to little more than CHARRED SKELETONS, agony stamped into their skulls.

ON THE WALLS: nightmare X-RAY images.

The Coroner POINTS with a laser pen; the RED DOT DANCES over the sawtooth edge of Daphne’s SNAPPED ANKLE...

...BITE MARKS gouged all over her and Kyle’s RAGGED BONES...

FADE TO BLACK:

...THE RAGGED BREATH of an unhealthy HOUND...

FADE IN ON:

GONZO’S YELLOWED EYES

Thick with MUCUS, red with VEINS.

EXT. HOUNDSMAN’S LAIR - BACK YARD - NIGHT

The Rotty SNIFFS at the edge of Jasmine’s prison, PROBES for a way in. He stands, front paws on the cage. *Lustful*.

THE HOUNDMAN (O.S.)
Down.

A SHADOW looms over him. CRACK! A BELT comes down, LASHES Gonzo on the back. The dog YELPS, drops down from the cage. Paces with ANIMAL ANGST.

THE HOUNDSMAN (O.S.)
Ain’t gonna tell you twice, dog.

CRACK! Another stinging LASH. Gonzo turns on——

The Houndsman. Belt in one hand, ‘shine jar in the other. Gonzo stands his ground, GROWLS——

The Houndsman WHIPS the dog in the ribs, still wounded from the rock salt blast. Gonzo GROWLS AGAIN, but pads off.

CLACK, CLACK. The Houndsman unbolts the locks on the cage door. Jasmine WHIMPERS, backs into a corner.

CREEEAAAK. The door opens. He steps forward, stands over her.

Jasmine PLEADS:

JASMINE
(cracked, dry)
Water... please.

A BEAT, then...

The Houndsman begins to UNBUCKLE his dirty camo pants. Jasmine shakes her head, SHRINKS away.

JASMINE
No... no... please, don’t... sir...
I’m pregnant... please...

The Houndsman PISSES all over her. *Marks his “territory.”*

Jasmine puts up her hands, keeps her face down. Done, the Houndsman shakes, tucks. As he buttons:

THE HOUNDSMAN
He won’t bother you no more. Now he knows you’re mine.

He CLOSES the cage door, locks it back up. CLACK, CLACK, CLACK.

Jasmine cries. Broken, humiliated.

FADE TO:

EXT. WOODS - TIME-LAPSE

The lonely BOAT floats in the lake. The BLACKENED REMAINS of the cabin through trees.

The sun RISES... SETS...

Again and again. Time dissolves, loses meaning...

FADE TO:

EXT. HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - BACK YARD - DAY

The dogs mill about.

Jasmine watches them, studies them. More time's passed. Her weight dwindling, hope fading...

OUTSIDE JASMINE'S CAGE: Fat mama-dog Hilda lies in the dirt, clutch of mean PUPS now crowding her teat. The new brood, nasty as hell. *A glimpse of Jasmine's own future?*

Pit bull Ernie TROTS around with the mannequin's bleach-white HAND in its jaws.

Higgins is here, too. GNAWING on Jasmine's SHOE, which is now ratty with his teeth marks.

A SNARLER rises... lopes over to the back to the Houndsman's Lair, enters through the swinging DOG DOOR.

No sign of the Houndsman, just a HAMMERING from within. *Sounds of work...*

She takes her chance.

JASMINE
(hushed)
Higgins! Psst!

At the sound of his name, Higgins turns his head. Yes! *He still remembers.*

JASMINE
(dessicated)
Higgins! Here boy! C'mon!

She holds out a gnarly shred of JERKY. Higgins cocks his head again.

A LOUD THUMP from the Lair's depths.

Eyes on that door:

JASMINE
How 'bout a treat? C'mon...

...Higgins wavers...

JASMINE
(nervous, voice cracking)
Hig-giiins!

Finally: Higgins DROPS the shoe and RUNS over.

JASMINE
(hushed)
Good boy...

She FEEDS the jerky through the fence. Higgins tears it up. Jasmine feeds him another... reaches her other fingers through, STROKES the unruly, matted fur of his neck.

JASMINE
That's a good b——

SNEEEARGH! Higgins SNAPS at her. Jolted, she draws her hand back.

Higgins runs off with the meat. Lays down and DIGS IN. Watches Jasmine, DISTRUST in his canine eyes.

Jasmine looks back at the door.

And the fucking Houndsman's there. Watching, dour. *Disappointed.*

A DREADFUL BEAT...

...and then he steps back into the SHACK. Sounds of junk CRASHING around.

He blasts back out in a HUFF, something LEATHERY in his grip. *Something with STRAPS.*

He UNLOCKS the door.

JASMINE
Wait, no——

And he's in. GRABS her hair, stuffs a RAG in her mouth, puts the thing over her mouth and it becomes clear——

It's a MUZZLE.

She STRUGGLES, but it's no use. He TIGHTENS the straps.

FADE TO:

EXT. FILLING STATION - DAY

Through the station's window:

Detective Gary CHATS with the Clerk. Jots down notes...

FADE TO:

EXT. HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - BACK YARD - DAY

Jasmine sleeps in the dirt. SNORING through her muzzle.

A COMMOTION outside. Dogs going BALLISTIC in the near distance. Her eyes OPEN; she sits up, comes to.

No dogs in the back yard. Whatever's happening, it's out in the perimeter.

INT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - KITCHEN - DAY

The Houndsman at the window. He PULLS the curtain, looks outside. GRUMBLES low.

He opens a drawer, takes out an old, greased REVOLVER. Stuffs it in the back of his pants...

And opens the door.

EXT. HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - FRONT YARD - DAY

Windows up, TWO MEN inside; a POLICE CRUISER sits out front, an island in a sea of motley canines. Paws up on the windows, SNIFFING the bumper, CHEWING on tires.

INT. POLICE CRUISER - DAY

Detective Gary's in the passenger seat, plainclothes. The **DRIVER's** in uniform. Both with eyes on the dilapidated structure.

DETECTIVE GARY
There.

The screen door opens. Out steps the Houndsman. The Detective ROLLS DOWN his window.

DETECTIVE GARY
Afternoon, sir. Got a spare minute?

THE HOUNDSMAN
Fer what.

DETECTIVE GARY
Just have a few general questions we'd like to ask you. Mind calling these dogs off?

A beat. The Houndsman WHISTLES, CLAPS his hands.

The dogs circle him, tails wagging. The Houndsman stays in the yard, stands near the ominous pile of ANTLERS. PISTOL tucked into the rear of his trousers.

DETECTIVE GARY
(to Driver)
I'm gonna step out. Stay alert.

DRIVER
Yes sir... I got your six.

Detective nods, opens the door. Cautiously steps out. Takes a couple steps forward.

DETECTIVE GARY
You live here, do you?

THE HOUNDSMAN
That's right.

DETECTIVE GARY
Uh-huh. And all these dogs, all these dogs yours?

THE HOUNDSMAN
I don't suppose one living thing can "own" another. Or ought to.

DETECTIVE GARY
So they wouldn't be licensed in your name?

THE HOUNDSMAN
They're free to come and go as they see fit. Them dog's are wild. Strays. I feed 'em; they come 'round... but they ain't mine no more'n I'm yours.

The Houndsman PICKS at his gnarly, unkept teeth. Gary gives the compound a once-over.

DETECTIVE GARY
What about the dwelling? You realize this is an illegal residence?

THE HOUNDSMAN
Horseshit.
(spits)
You don't know your homesteader laws, brother. 'Sides, I got papers.

DETECTIVE GARY
Yeah?

THE HOUNDSMAN
(points)
Inside. Now, what's this about again? Them dogs got into something, I ain't responsible.

DETECTIVE GARY
Okay. Listen, you know about what went down at that cabin up the road?

The Houndsman looks off.

THE HOUNDSMAN
Naw. What cabin?

DETECTIVE GARY
West side of the lake. It was in the papers. Place was torched, three people found inside. Dead.

The Houndsman SCOFFS.

THE HOUNDSMAN
You sure as hell can't trust them papers. Or the TV neither. Mainstream media in this country's a joke.

DETECTIVE GARY
Well, we're just out canvasing. Checking to see if anyone's seen anything strange lately. Heard anything maybe...

THE HOUNDSMAN
Maybe. I guess we smelled burnin' a while back. Saw a bit of smoke, I suppose.

DETECTIVE GARY
Who's "we?"

THE HOUNDSMAN
Pardon?

DETECTIVE GARY
You said "we" smelled. Who's "we?"

THE HOUNDSMAN
Just me and the dogs. Ain't no one else here.

The Houndsman is TENSE. He looks around, keenly surveys the forest, eyes peeled for more cops. This does not go undetected by:

DETECTIVE GARY
Didn't wanna go check it out? The source of the fire?

The Houndsman shrugs. Thrusts his hands in his pockets.

THE HOUNDSMAN
Ain't no business of mine who burns what. Figured someone was just burnin' leaves. Or do you need a fuckin' permit for that too?

DETECTIVE GARY
Mind keeping your hands where I can see them?

The Houndsman hesitates. Looks over at the Driver. SNIFFS, takes his hands back out.

DETECTIVE GARY
Listen, I'd like you to come down to the station with us. You're not in any trouble, and this isn't an arrest. We just wanna talk. We think your dogs might've been involved in all this somehow.

THE HOUNDSMAN
They AIN'T MINE, I said. Now, just hang on a second; let me run in and get them papers, straighten all this out... this is my land, God dammit. You got no cause to hassle me.

DETECTIVE GARY
Sir, I'm not concerned with that.

The Houndsman starts to back away. Detective Gary steps forward——

DETECTIVE GARY
Sir. Forget the papers for now... I need you to stay put.

——and is confronted by GROWLS and BARED TEETH.

THE HOUNDSMAN
They're just inside.

And with that he SLIPS back into the shack.

DETECTIVE GARY
(sotto)
Fuck.

Detective Gary backs away from the dogs. Motions to the Driver with his hand, pantomimes "call it in".

The Driver reaches down, GRABS his radio. Gary maneuvers around to the car's back. POPS the trunk, takes out a pump-action SHOTGUN.

INT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - DAY

Inside the air CRACKLES with energy. Pulse quickened, GIDDY with anticipation... this is the moment the Houndsman's been PREPARING for. *They're here.*

He SWIFTLY moves through the junky rooms, but he is losing his cool a bit. Overtaken by the moment, the soon-to-be fulfilled glory.

He straps on a KEVLAR VEST as he stalks through the space, SNATCHES something hanging on a set of ANTLERS——

EXT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - BACK YARD - DAY

Jasmine has her fingers through the chain-link cage.

The Houndsman appears in the back door. GAS MASK on his face, KEVLAR VEST. *Shit just got real.*

Muffled SCREAM through Jasmine's muzzle——

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - FRONT YARD - DAY

——heard only by the DOGS. They grow restless. Detective Gary UNNERVED, starts to move back to the passenger door when——

GRRRRRRRRR. Animal ain't havin' it. He raises the SHOTGUN, tries to shoo the dog off.

DETECTIVE GARY
Beat it.

The DOGS BEGIN TO BARK——

BACK TO:

EXT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - BACK YARD - DAY

The Houndsman's UNLOCKING the gate, hears the BARKING DOGS out front. He FLINGS it open, HUFFING through his mask. Reaches in——

EXT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - FRONT YARD - DAY

Animal's not backing down. He's low to the ground, ATTACK POSTURE. Blocking Detective Gary from the car door.

DETECTIVE GARY
Shoo. Move out.

Animal SPRINGS! TEETH BARED——

——*K-KLAM!!* Detective Gary BLASTS the dog out of the air——

SMASH TO:

THE HOUNDSMAN

EYES WIDE behind the LENSED MASK. He GRABS Jasmine, VIOLENTLY DRAGS her into the lair——

INT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - DAY

——HAULS her through the kitchen.

PUSHES her to the window, YANKS the curtain. PRESSES her face against the grimy glass.

EXT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - FRONT YARD

Detective Gary's ducking back into the cruiser. DOGS MANIACAL in the yard, surrounding the car. Animal's blasted corpse.

Through the grimy window, JASMINE'S FACE pressed against glass. His revolver to her head, behind her:

THE HOUNDSMAN
(through window)
I got a hostage!

He WHISTLES. The DOGS TURN, start running back inside the——

INT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - DAY

——via the front DOG DOOR. Higgins, Gonzo and other dogs CRASH into the room. Underfoot. *On edge...*

KTTSSCH! Houndsman BREAKS a window pane with his pistol, WHISTLES again——

EXT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - FRONT YARD - DAY

A few dogs still in the yard; BARKING, untrained stragglers still focused on the POLICE CRUISER. Gary and Driver inside.

His voice BLARES on the car's loudspeaker.

DETECTIVE GARY
(into mic)
Sir, we have backup on the way! There's no way you're gonna escape this! But you control the situation. Your best option is to end this now, peacefully. Release your hostage!

INT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - DAY

The Houndsman puts his gun through the window. Fires. *BLAM! BLAM!*

His DOUBLE-BARRELED SHOTGUN leans on the workbench, near at hand.

EXT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - FRONT YARD - DAY

The officers DUCK. The shots ring out. Distantly, the sound of SIRENS.

DETECTIVE GARY
Down!

DRIVER
Oh, shit!

BANG! BANG! More shots from the Lair.

INT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - DAY

The dogs are more AGITATED than ever——

DETECTIVE GARY (O.S.)
(filtered, P.A.)
Cease fire! Cease Fire!

——Gonzo RILED UP most of all. The GUNSHOTS, the sirens, the strangers, the Master SHOUTING... all working him into a LETHAL MOOD.

RED AND BLUE LIGHTS NOW STROBING on him through the window:

THE HOUNDSMAN
I got the place rigged!! You come in, we all blow! You think I wasn't ready for this?!

Jasmine scans the kitchen for a weapon——

A KNIFE RACK, out of reach... ANTLERS on the table.

THE HOUNDSMAN
(to dogs)
This is it, boys! What we been waitin' for!

He fires off a couple more shots. BANG! BANG!

CLICK. Empty, the chambers spent. He GRUMBLES, TOSSES the pistol... reaches over for the SHOTGUN...

Gonzo sees him grasping for it.

He remembers that gun.

He's had ENOUGH of that gun——

——he LUNGES——

——LATCHES onto the shotgun, YANKS the Houndsman around by it. Knocks him to the floor. Jasmine takes her chance, SLIPS away——

——but not fast enough; The Houndsman GRABS a fistful of her hair, PULLS her to the floor.

She KICKS at him to get free, hair TEARING from her scalp. TERROR in her eyes behind that gruesome MUZZLE still strapped to her face.

With his other hand, the Houndsman reaches for his shotgun... again——

Gonzo LEAPS onto his chest, KNOCKS him back. Rips off the gas mask, RATTLES it like a velociraptor and tosses it across the room.

The Houndsman reaches into a boot, pulls a knife. SHANKS Gonzo in the ribs——

Enraged, Gonzo SINKS HIS JAWS INTO THE HOUNDSMAN'S THROAT. Jasmine falls back, more hair TORN OUT——

But she's free.

She SCRAMBLES for the back door, past the THRONG of vicious BARKING dogs —— their order upset by the impending fall of the Houndsman, the power display of Gonzo.

She grabs an ANTLER, JABS at the dogs as she CRAWLS forward. She SCAMPERS to the DOGGIE DOOR, looks back:

Gonzo LORDS OVER the Houndsman. The man's beard BLEEDING RED as he chokes on his own blood. Gonzo TEARS into the Houndsman's FACE, ripping skin away——

SCREAMING BLOODY MURDER, the Houndsman finally gets his hands on that SHOTGUN——

——plants it under Gonzo's sternum and PULLS the trigger——

CLICK. *BOOM!!* Sends Gonzo off to DOG HELL. The Rottweiler's body SLUMPS, his full weight on the GROANING, GROWLING Houndsman...

...they BLEED TO DEATH together...

The Houndsman and mighty Gonzo both fallen, the dogs have forgotten Jasmine. They HOWL at their dead Master's side——

Except Higgins, who greedily LAPS at their pool of MINGLING BLOOD.

Jasmine CRAWLS through the doggie door. Voice of a backup OFFICER outside:

OFFICER (O.S.)
The door! Someone's coming through! Hold your fire, hold your fire!

She's PULLED THROUGH. The door SWINGS on its hinges.

FADE TO BLACK:

A gruff FEMALE VOICE:

COP (V.O.)
Medical will be here soon. Hold tight.

EXT. THE HOUNDSMAN'S LAIR - FRONT YARD - DAY

Jasmine's WRAPPED in a shock blanket, sitting on the tailgate of a POLICE TRUCK. The muzzle removed.

Cop cars and people teeming. The female **COP** hands her a STEAMING cup of coffee.

COP
Can I get you anything else, ma'am?

JASMINE
A cigarette?

Cop SHAKES her head. Pats her pockets as if to say "I don't smoke."

COP
Hey, Harold... you still smoking?

A male **OFFICER** approaches. Shakes a smoke out of a pack at the Cop's request.

Jasmine takes it. Officer lights it, NODS, walks off.

Jasmine SMOKES...

...huddled in the blanket, she WATCHES as ANIMAL CONTROL experts lead the dogs into cages, load them in the back of a VAN. To include...

Higgins. SNARLING and YAPPING, changed by the Houndsman's whip... no longer the sweet dog known by Garret and Todd and Melinda.

Perhaps he can get back there. Only time will tell.

Higgins is ushered into his own cage. Jasmine watches as it's tucked among the others. The ANIMAL CONTROL VAN's doors are closed...

...We RISE as the van DRIVES OFF...

Up high in the clearing... and HIGHER, among the treetops, as the van turns onto the road...

...the SPRAWLING LAIR complex rambles into the woods. Surrounded by cop cars, TV trucks, park vehicles...

...we RISE further still...

...the blackened CABIN, not far off...

The lake GLEAMS in the distance, its water reflecting hills of pristine beauty.

FADE OUT.

THE END