

The Other Half

Hoping to salvage their fractured relationship, a family retreats to an isolated vacation home to reconnect until a mysterious visitor exposes a secret that threatens to tear the family apart for good.

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Second Draft

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FADE IN

EXT. SHOOTING RANGE - DAY

THROUGH THE SCOPE (POV):

A set of crosshairs jitter across the terrain. It focuses on tall grass that sways in a gentle summer breeze on a dirt-and-rock-covered rise.

EXHALE.

The scope glides to a patch of earth where an ant colony bustles with movement, pebbles and grains scattered like debris.

EXHALE.

The crosshairs lurch toward a faux deer target in the distance. They steady, dancing slightly left... then right... centering on the shoulder.

VOICE (V.O.)

Once you have your shot lined up,
exhale slowly. Hold your position.
Release the safety and hug the trigger
when you're ready.

END SCOPE POV.

A boy steadies his rifle. Left eye closed. Right eye staring down the scope.

ANDREW MILLS - 12y/o. A respectful, thoughtful boy on the cusp of adolescence. He admires his father and loves his mother, caught between their impending divorce.

Andrew steadies his rifle.

He exhales slowly, releasing all tension and settles into his target.

His thumb rises to the shoulder of the rifle. A flick of the safety -

CLICK.

His thumb lowers. His closed eye tightens. His finger twitches -

BOOM.

THROUGH THE SCOPE (POV):

A puff of dust rises behind the target, dragged off by the breeze.

END SCOPE POV.

Andrew lowers the rifle, looks up.

Beside him, a pair of binoculars peer into the distance. Held steady.

TREVOR MILLS - 30'S. A calm, disciplined former military man and natural leader. Well-educated and emotionally grounded, Approaches fatherhood with the same purpose and duty as the battlefield.

TREVOR
High and to the right.

Andrew's head lowers in shame.

TREVOR (V.O.)
You're anticipating the bang. That anticipation causes you to squeeze the trigger *rather* than hug it. You have to *accept* the bang, absorb it.

Andrew listens closely. Nods in understanding.

He readies his position, settles into his seat.

Leans into his rifle. Closes his left eye. Takes aim.

The gun sways gently, then steadies.

EXHALE.

BOOM.

The target jerks with a sharp -

TUHD.

TREVOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Hit!

Andrew's head shoots up. He's elated.

He stands, bursts over to his father.

They hug, laughing and smiling. A moment of pure celebration.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - LATER

Tall field grass parts beneath their FOOTSTEPS.

Trevor and Andrew, walk side by side, rifle cases swinging at their sides in rhythm.

Up ahead, a pickup truck waits, parked alone amongst the tall grass.

The tailgate drops with a heavy -

CLUNK.

Gun cases SLIDE into the truck bed. A cooler is TUGGED forward.

Trevor and Andrew climb onto the tailgate, sitting shoulder to shoulder.

EXT. TRUCK BED - CONTINUOUS

They CRACK open Cokes. RIP into beef sticks.

ANDREW

Thanks for bringing me out here, Dad.
I really like this.

TREVOR

Me too, Bud. This is my favorite kind
of day. Just you and me, nothing else
to worry about.

Trevor smiles, genuine. A quiet satisfaction.

ANDREW

You're really good at this stuff.
Shooting, tracking... surviving.

TREVOR

I had some of the best teachers. The
Army taught me a lot, sure... but so
did your grandpa.

(beat)

It's not just about hitting targets

(MORE)

TREVOR (CONT'D)
though. It's about focus, patience...
waiting for the right moment to act.

Andrew listens, chewing thoughtfully.

ANDREW
I think that's why I like it. I get to
slow my brain down. It feels... clear
out here.

Trevor nods, pleased.

TREVOR
Exactly. Out here, everything's
simple. No noise. No clutter.

ANDREW
You ever get scared? You know... when
things weren't simple?

Trevor considers this question for a beat.

TREVOR
Yeah. I did. Anyone who says they
aren't scared sometimes is lying. But
I learned, fear's just a reminder
you're alive. What you do with it...
that's what matters.

Andrew nods in understanding, quietly impressed.

ANDREW
I wanna be brave like that.

Trevor leans over, ruffles Andrew's hair, proud.

TREVOR
You've already got it in you, son. You
just don't know it yet.

They sit in the easy quiet for a moment, sipping their Cokes,
the breeze soft through the grass.

Then-

ANDREW
Oh crap! What time is it?

Trevor checks his watch.

TREVOR

4:35, why?

ANDREW

I forgot, I got baseball practice at five!

TREVOR

And here I was, being all philosophical...

Andrew laughs.

ANDREW

I got it, I got it.

They hop down off the tailgate. It SLAMS shut with a satisfying CLUNK.

The truck doors CREAK open. They climb inside.

The engine ROARS to life, kicking up dust as they peel across the field.

INT. MILLS HOME KITCHEN- EVENING

The door from the garage opens. Andrew steps in, energized from the day. Trevor follows, arms full of gun cases and a cooler.

At the stove, Katie stirs a simmering pot.

KATIE MILLS - 30s. A loving mother strained by a crumbling marriage. Withdrawn, her words often sharp not out of anger, but fatigue.

ANDREW

Hey, Mom!

KATIE

How was practice?

Trevor lingers in the mudroom, quietly setting the gear down before entering.

ANDREW

Oh, you know... same stuff different day.

KATIE
I really don't like it when you say
things like that.

ANDREW
Sorry.

Andrew vanishes down the hall.

Trevor steps in, shrugging off the weight of the day.

TREVOR
Hey... how was your day?

KATIE
(flat)
You were late getting him to practice.
Coach called.

TREVOR
That's on me. We lost track of time.

Trevor leans in for a kiss. Katie pulls away, barely.

Trevor pauses. Registers it.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
Need any help?

KATIE
I've got it.

She stirs the sauce. Without looking, she gestures toward a
small stack of mail on the counter.

KATIE (CONT'D)
Another late notice came today.

Trevor crosses over, flips through the stack. Past due. Final
notice. His face tightens.

TREVOR
Don't they have any compassion for our
situation? I send them what we can.

KATIE
They don't care, Trevor. Sending
partial payments aren't going to keep
the lights on.

TREVOR
It's better than sending them nothing.
(beat)
I'm trying here.

Katie's frustration peeks through.

KATIE
You need to try harder. Eight months
without work. I can't keep holding the
line on my salary alone.

TREVOR
I know that. It's not my fault
unemployment ran out after six months.

KATIE
No, but I expect more effort from you.
More urgency.
(gestures toward the gear)
Going shooting in the middle of a
weekday, tinkering around in the
basement all the time. That's not
urgency.

Footsteps in the hall.

Andrew rounds the corner. He halts just short of the kitchen.
The tension is thick.

Trevor and Katie clock him.

Silence. Guilt.

Andrew stays quiet, but the concern is clear in his eyes.

ANDREW
When's dinner?

Katie forces a tired smile.

KATIE
Almost ready, sweetie.

Andrew lingers, unsure if he should say more. The air remains
heavy.

ANDREW
You guys, okay?

Trevor and Katie glance at each other. Neither eager to

answer.

Trevor forces a small smile, holding up the stack of bills with a shrug.

TREVOR
Just... life.

Andrew watches them both. He knows it's more than that, but he lets it slide.

ANDREW
Okay.

He disappears down the hall.

Trevor sets the bills down, the weight of them heavier than their value.

Katie stirs the sauce, but her mind is elsewhere, somewhere neither of them dares to speak of yet.

A quiet settles between them. Not peace, just quiet.

INT. MILLS HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

The glow of the computer screen paints Trevor's face. His eyes, strained and heavy.

MOUSE CLICK.

TYPING.

Job categories flash. Security guard, IT management, data security. Each click brings another dead-end: 'NO OPENINGS AVAILABLE' in bold red.

Frustrated, Trevor collapses his head into his hands. A quiet sigh escapes.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Katie stands just out of view, watching from the shadowed hall.

She sees his frustration. Feels it.

She starts to leave... but stops herself.

KATIE

Hey, I'm headed to bed.

INT. MILLS HOME OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Trevor peeks over the monitor, weary but grateful to hear her voice.

TREVOR

Allright, Hun. See you in the morning.

He smiles. It's small, tired, but real.

Katie lingers in the doorway, hesitant. She steps closer, barely into the room.

KATIE

I want you to know... I appreciate
your efforts with... us.

Trevor turns fully now, surprised.

TREVOR

Thank you. That really means a lot.

A shared glance. Tender and vulnerable. A small spark, still flickering.

KATIE

Don't stay up too late, okay?

TREVOR

I won't. Promise.

Katie offers a faint smile, then steps back toward the hall.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

She pauses by the family photos. Fingers trail lightly along the frames.

PAN:

- Young happy couple. Katie smiles, Trevor-silly face.

- A wedding photo - all smiles and happy faces.
- A picture of Katie & Trevor in front of their first house.
- A sonogram image of Andrew.
- The first family photo with baby Andrew.

Katie exhales deeply. Hopeful, maybe. Tired, definitely.

INT. MILLS HOME OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Trevor stares at the empty doorway. The house feels less heavy somehow.

He turns back to the screen, eyes sharper, more determined.

CLICK. CLICK.

His search continues.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Pitch black. Katie lies in bed, eyes open, staring into nothing.

The bedroom door softly CREAKS open, casting a slice of warm light across the bed.

Katie doesn't move, but her eyes shift. She knows it's Trevor.

A single tear slips down her cheek.

Trevor stands in the doorway, his silhouette heavy with guilt. He lingers, watching her for a beat longer than before.

His voice is barely a whisper.

TREVOR

I'm... sorry.

Katie's breath catches. She doesn't speak. She stays still, her eyes glistening.

Trevor lowers his head, ashamed or surrender, maybe both.

He quietly pulls the door almost closed, leaves it slightly ajar.

The shadows under the door drift away.

Katie exhales a barely audible sigh she didn't know she was holding.

INT. MILLS HOME OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Trevor steps into the dimly lit room. The computer screen still glows faintly.

He grabs a blanket from the couch, gives it a quick fluff.

Settles onto the couch, pulling the blanket up. He stares at the ceiling for a long, quiet beat.

His mind races, but there's a softness in his expression now. A sliver of resolve.

The computer screen eventually fades to black.

The room, and Trevor, sink into the dark.

INT. DR. SHAW'S OFFICE - THE NEXT DAY

Trevor and Katie sit on a couch, a visible gap between them.

Katie leans back, arms folded, her eyes distant but not quite cold.

Trevor sits upright, posture sharp, discipline ingrained.

DR. SHAW

How's the job hunt going Trevor?

TREVOR

It continues. Barely a nibble yet.

Katie shifts, a small roll of her eyes. More exhaustion than contempt.

Dr. Shaw catches it, gently redirecting.

DR. SHAW

This seems to be a recurring point of
(MORE)

DR. SHAW (CONT'D)
tension for you two.

TREVOR
All the time.
(beat)
And I get it. She's carrying the load.
I just hope she sees that I'm trying.

DR. SHAW
Katie, do you...

KATIE
(flat)
Do I what?

DR. SHAW
Do you feel that Trevor is trying?

Katie's face softens slightly. A pause, then:

KATIE
Yes... I do. But this is about more
than a job.

DR. SHAW
Absolutely it is. No one is disputing
that. But let's try and focus on one
thing at a time.

Katie shifts in her seat.

KATIE
I know you're trying. I do.
(beat)
And... I know it's not your fault the
company let you go.

She reaches over, places a hand gently on Trevor's arm. He
freezes, surprised. He looks up, meeting her gaze.

KATIE (CONT'D)
I want you to know, I appreciate all
you do around the house, with Andrew,
while I'm working. I also know... I
don't say thank you enough. Or at all,
really.

Trevor's eyes glisten just slightly. He stays quiet.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I just wish you'd let me in. Tell me
what's really going on in your head.
Instead, I get...

(imitates his voice)

"I've got this." Or "You don't need to
know all the details."

Trevor lowers his head to the floor. He knows she's right.

DR. SHAW

Trevor... I take it you agree?

Trevor nods, small but genuine.

Their hands linger touching, neither of them pulling away.

TREVOR

She's not wrong. I do tend to bottle
things up, keep things to myself.

(beat)

I just don't want to weigh her down
with all the trivial things, that I
think I should handle on my own.

Katie watches him, seeing the man she married in that
vulnerability.

KATIE

When we got married... what was it
your old Army buddy said during his
toast?

Trevor looks up, eyes meeting hers. He remembers.

KATIE (CONT'D)

(fondly)

He said; "Here's to the partners in
crime."

A quiet beat. The memory hangs between them.

KATIE

I can't be your partner in *life*... if
you don't let me in.

Trevor swallows hard, her words landing. He nods, subtle but
sincere.

DR. SHAW

Very well put Katie.

Dr. Shaw closes his notebook with a soft THUD.

DR. SHAW (CONT'D)
I think we've made some progress
today.

They both rise. Katie collects her purse. Trevor fumbles for his keys.

Dr. Shaw, halfway to the door, stops and turns.

DR. SHAW (CONT'D)
Before you go, I'd like to offer a
suggestion.

hey pause, giving him their full attention.

DR. SHAW (CONT'D)
This... might not be feasible at the
moment, given your financial
situation... But, I'd like you to
consider taking a family vacation.
Somewhere quiet. Secluded. Give
yourselves a chance to... reconnect.
Just the three of you.

Katie starts to respond, but Dr. Shaw gently holds up a hand.

DR. SHAW (CONT'D)
No pressure. You don't have to decide
now. Just... give it some thought.
Okay?

Trevor and Katie exchange a glance. Maybe a little wary, but the seed is planted.

TREVOR
Yes sir.

KATIE
We'll think about it.

DR. SHAW
Great! I'll see you both next week.

Trevor opens the door for Katie. A small courtesy, but one he hasn't done in a while. She notices. A faint smile escapes.

They exit together. Still separate... but maybe, just maybe, a little closer.

EXT. DR. SHAW'S PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Trevor and Katie walk toward their separate cars.

Their fingers twitch, on the verge of touching.

They reach the end of the sidewalk, part ways.

BEEP BEEP. Trevor unlocks his truck. Katie rounds her sedan, unlocking hers.

Trevor lingers by his truck, watching her. Then-

TREVOR

What do you think about my brother's cabin?

Katie pauses, half-opening her door.

KATIE

In Colorado? We haven't been there in... what, since Andrew was seven?

TREVOR

It's quiet. Secluded. But still close enough to town not to feel isolated.

(beat)

And hey... it's free. Won't cost us a damn thing.

Katie hesitates, fingers drumming on her door. She exhales.

KATIE

I like the idea... I'm just not ready to commit right now.

(beat)

I promise... we *will* talk about it.

Trevor nods, accepting. Disappointed, but hopeful.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I need to get back to work.

She climbs into the car, shuts the door, starts the engine.

As she backs out, Trevor calls after her -

TREVOR

It could be good for all of us, Katie.

A reset. Time to breathe... together.

INT. KATIES CAR - CONTINUOUS

Katie hears him. She glances up, catching Trevor in her rearview mirror.

She doesn't stop. But her grip on the wheel tightens, eyes heavy with thought and worry.

As the distance grows, she keeps checking the mirror until Trevor is just a fading figure in the glass.

INT. KATIES OFFICE BREAKROOM - LATER

The COFFEE MAKER GURGLES. A vending machine drops a snack with a soft THUNK.

A man flips through the business section of a newspaper. CRINKLE.

At a table, LAUREN snacks on a granola bar, scrolling her phone.

Katie enters, Yeti mug in hand, heading straight for the coffee pot.

Lauren looks up, brightening when she sees her.

LAUREN

Hey you! How'd therapy go this morning?

KATIE

Good.

Katie pours coffee into her mug, steam rising.

KATIE (CONT'D)

We made some progress in communication... I think.

LAUREN

Hey, that's something. A step in the right direction, right?

Katie replaces the pot, contemplative.

She slides into a chair across from Lauren, letting out a

quiet sigh.

KATIE

Possibly. Our therapist suggested we take a vacation to reconnect. Now Trevor is all excited about it.

LAUREN

You don't want to?

KATIE

The vacation part... desperately.

(beat)

But right now, it... doesn't feel like the right time. With Trevor out of work, the bills. It feels... irresponsible.

LAUREN

But, do you think it'd help? You and him?

Katie stirs her coffee, gaze distant.

KATIE

(beat)

Maybe. I want to believe that.

(sighs)

Sometimes I wonder if we've just drifted too far apart. Like, what if we go... and nothing changes?

Lauren's expression softens.

LAUREN

Awwwww girl. I'm sorry. I really hope you find some direction.

Before Katie can respond...

CO-WORKER (O.S.)

Lauren! There you are. Mr. Olsen needs you right away.

LAUREN

That's my cue.

Lauren stands, her chair SQUEAKING back. She gathers her things, the granola wrapper CRINKLING in her hand.

She pauses at the door, looking back.

LAUREN (CONT'D)
Take the vacation honey. What harm
could it really do?

She exits.

Katie sits alone, quietly stirring her coffee.

Her eyes wander. Thoughtful and hopeful but still clouded
with doubt.

She takes a slow sip, gaze lingering out the window.

INT. MILLS HOME OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Trevor sits at the computer, eyes locked on the glowing
screen.

TYPING. CLICK. CLICK. He's dialed in.

His phone RINGS. He answers curt.

TREVOR
Yeah!

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Andrew strolls past, slowing as Trevor's voice catches his
ear.

TREVOR (O.S.)
I'm working on them now. It will be
ready by the time you get here.

Andrew stops, curious. He leans in, listening quietly.

TREVOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Yeah, I got it. Meet you there
tomorrow.

THUD.

The phone lands on the desk.

INT. MILLS HOME OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Andrew rounds the corner, casual.

Trevor looks up, startled. He quickly CLICKS the mouse, closing windows.

TREVOR

Hey Bud! What are you up to?

ANDREW

I was going to ask you the same thing.
Who were you talking to?

TREVOR

Huh? Oh, the call?

(beat)

I have a job interview tomorrow.

Andrew lights up.

ANDREW

Really? That's awesome. That will help
get Mom off your back.

TREVOR

Well thank you, but don't celebrate
yet.

ANDREW

What's the job?

TREVOR

Warehouse management. Nothing
glamorous.

ANDREW

Hey, it's better than nothing.

Trevor smiles. Andrew flops into a chair, watching him.

A beat.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Is therapy helping? You and Mom?

Trevor exhales.

TREVOR

I hope so. We're... working on it.

ANDREW

She's always mad. Like it's your fault or something.

Trevor shakes his head.

TREVOR

She's not mad at me... not really. She's mad at the situation. And... I can't blame her.

Andrew scowls.

ANDREW

She doesn't have to act like it's all you, though.

Trevor softens, appreciates the loyalty.

TREVOR

She's carrying more than you see, buddy. She holds this whole family together while I'm still trying to find my footing. That's not nothing.

Andrew shrugs not fully convinced.

ANDREW

Still feels like she's mad at both of us half the time.

Trevor chuckles lightly.

TREVOR

Yeah. I get it. But trust me, your mom's just trying to keep us standing. Even if it comes out... rough sometimes.

Andrew glances to the floor, looks up.

ANDREW

You think it'll get better?

Trevor smiles faintly.

TREVOR

If I have anything to say about it? Yeah. I won't stop trying.

They share a moment. Andrew wants to believe it.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
Hey... how about we work on that model
kit tonight? Just you and me.

Andrew perks up, surprised.

ANDREW
Yea, sure.

Trevor nods.

TREVOR
Deal.

Andrew rises, heading to the door.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
Hey, Bud...

Andrew looks back.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
No matter what's going on between me
and your mom... none of it is because
of you. Alright?

Andrew nods, quietly pleased to hear it. He exits.

Trevor sits back. The computer screen glows, reminders of
whatever he was working on still lurking beneath.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Andrew walks down the hall, his smile fading. Too much for a
twelve-year-old to carry.

He slows, eyes drifting to the family photos lining the wall.

Snapshots of happier times. His parents laughing, holding him
as a baby, vacations, birthdays.

Andrew slows, lingers on one picture of Trevor holding him on
his shoulders, both grinning wide.

He touches the frame gently, a small smile returning... but
it doesn't last.

His gaze shifts to another photo. Trevor and Katie, cheek to
cheek, carefree.

Andrew's face hardens just slightly. A whisper under his breath:

ANDREW

She doesn't look that happy anymore.

He keeps walking, shoulders heavy, but somewhere inside... still wishing it could go back to the way it was.

INT. MILLS HOME KITCHEN - EVENING - LATER

The family sits at the dinner table. Forks scrape plates, but no one speaks.

Trevor fidgets, glancing between Katie and Andrew. Katie senses it but stays silent.

Andrew clocks both, eyes ping-ponging between his parents.

KATIE

Spit it out. I know you've got something to say.

TREVOR

You've been busy... we don't have to talk about anything now.

KATIE

Obviously, you want to.

A beat.

TREVOR

I've been thinking about what Dr. Shaw said this morning. About the vacation.

Katie stabs a bite of food, not looking up.

KATIE

Go ahead.

TREVOR

I think it's what we need. A reset. Just us... no distractions.

Katie remains quiet, considering but guarded.

Andrew pushes his food around, muttering.

ANDREW

If you even want to be around us.

Katie's eyes snap up. Sharp.

KATIE

What was that?

Trevor cuts in, voice firm but gentle.

TREVOR

Hey. That's not fair, Andrew.

Andrew sulks, staring at his plate.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

She's trying, just like I am. This is hard on everyone.

Katie's defenses ease a fraction, Trevor's standing up for her not going unnoticed.

Katie finally speaks, quieter.

KATIE

I'll think about it. It's not a yes, but it's not a no either.

Andrew doesn't look up, but a tiny flicker of hope crosses Trevor's face.

Andrew, half listening to the conversation, almost drops his fork.

ANDREW

So... are we going on vacation or not?

Trevor shifts uneasily in his seat, eyes flicking between Katie and Andrew.

TREVOR

Maybe...

KATIE

I said I would think about it.

Andrew leans forward, curiosity sparking despite the tension.

ANDREW

Where would we be going?

Trevor exhales, running a hand through his hair.

TREVOR
My brother's place.

KATIE
Nothing has been-

Andrew cuts her off. His voice sharper than before.

ANDREW
Uncle Mike's cabin?

Katie snaps her eyes to him, defensive.

KATIE
Hey!

Trevor raises a hand, trying to calm the rising tension.

TREVOR
Yes. For a week, just the three of us.

Andrew's face brightens for a moment, a hopeful smile teasing.

ANDREW
I love hanging ou-

SLAM

Katie's hand hits the table.

The room stops. Forks freeze mid-air, mouths agape, eyes wide open.

KATIE
Will you two shut up for a second?
God... sometimes I can't even get a
word in edgewise when you two get
going.

They both remain still, quiet.

Katie takes a moment, reclaiming her space.

ANDREW
Sorry. I just thought... the cabin
sounded cool. It's been forever, and
things feel kinda... weird around
here. It might be nice to just be
(MORE)

ANDREW (CONT'D)
somewhere else.

They both glance at him.

Andrew sinks back in his seat, the tension finally hitting him.

He fidgets with his fork, uneasy, unsure if he should speak again.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
It's okay if we don't. I get it. Money stuff.

Katie reaches over, resting her hand lightly on Andrew's arm. A small gesture of comfort.

KATIE
First of all, I'm not sure I can even get PTO for the week. And... even if I can, I'm not sure I can mentally unplug right now. I'm running on fumes here.

She pauses, glancing down at her plate.

KATIE (CONT'D)
Secondly, Andrew has baseball commitments. Third, yes, your brother's place is free, but we're still talking gas, food and probably a few costs once we're up there.

Katie looks up, meeting Trevor's eyes.

KATIE (CONT'D)
So... as I said, I'm not sure this is the best time.

Trevor nods slowly, his voice steady but full of hope.

TREVOR
Honey, I hear you. You're right about all of that.

He leans forward, clasping his hands together.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
You do agree we need a reset, right?

KATIE

I guess.

Trevor smiles faintly, hopeful.

TREVOR

Okay... I tell you what. Tomorrow, you check on the PTO. The rest of this week, I'll find a way to earn some extra dough. If I can come up with...

Trevor looks upward, searching for a convincing sum.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

... five hundred bucks, will you agree?

KATIE

How in the hell are you going to find five hundred dollars?

Trevor shrugs, trying for confidence but vulnerable beneath it.

TREVOR

I'll mow yards. Wash cars. Whatever it takes.

Katie's eyes narrow, hurt cutting through.

KATIE

Where has *that* motivation been the last eight months?

Her words sting deeper than Trevor wants to admit. He lowers his gaze.

It stings more than he'd like to admit but he knows she's right.

TREVOR

Great point.

(beat)

I want to do this for our marriage. For our family. You two are everything to me.

He presses his palms to the table, head dipping as the weight of guilt settles.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

I'm willing to admit, I haven't kept up my end of the bargain. I've been distracted with... not the right things. I owe you both an apology for that.

He looks up, his eyes burn with a quiet fire.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Things are about to change around here. I promise, you're about to see a whole different side of me.

Trevor picks up his fork again, focusing on his plate, avoiding their eyes.

Katie studies him. Shes hopeful but guarded.

Andrew shifts in his seat, hesitant.

ANDREW

I know its "adult" stuff and whatever, but I miss when things were... easier for you.

(beat)

It's just... we haven't all traveled anywhere in forever. I kinda don't care where we go. I just want it to feel... normal again.

His words hang heavy. Katie's gaze drops to Andrew's plate, tracing his slow, aimless movements.

She sees the weight on his shoulders-the quiet sadness beneath the surface.

For the first time, the tension shifts; she realizes Andrew isn't just noticing the strain - he's carrying it.

Katie exhales softly, voice firmer.

KATIE

Five hundred, by Monday.

Trevor and Andrew exchange a small, triumphant smile.

Katie lets the edge of a smile crack through, then reins it in.

The three sit quietly, the room filled with a fragile, near-

tangible hope.

Dinner continues, the air lighter as close to hopeful as it's been in a long time.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY - ONE WEEK LATER

The Colorado sun beats down on endless plains as the family car cruises west.

Andrew slouches in the back seat, earbuds plugged into his iPad, half-listening to music but clearly distracted.

Trevor glances at Katie with a satisfied grin.

KATIE

What?

TREVOR

Told you I could do it.

Katie smirks, surprised.

KATIE

Sometimes... you still amaze me.

Trevor's smile broadens. It's been a while since Katie's given him a genuine compliment.

Katie's tone shifts, teasing but edged with frustration.

KATIE (CONT'D)

When we get back...

(beat)

just try to put that same motivation
into finding a job, okay?

Her smile fades as Trevor's mood shifts.

TREVOR

C'mon... don't ruin the moment.

Andrew taps his foot impatiently, eyes flicking toward his mother's clipped tone.

KATIE

What? I didn't -

Trevor raises his hand, cutting her off.

TREVOR

I don't wanna fight. That comment hurt.

Katie bites her lip, hesitant.

KATIE

I don't mean to be hurtful, but I...

Trevor raises his hand again, firm.

TREVOR

Na uh. Stop right there.

(beat)

Please... let's both try to enjoy this week without fighting. Just one week together, no arguing.

Katie exhales, forcing herself to back down.

She reaches out, fingers curling around Trevor's hand on the wheel, squeezing gently.

KATIE

You're right. This week is supposed to be about decompressing and reconnecting. I'm sorry.

She looks over her shoulder toward Andrew.

KATIE (CONT'D)

No work talk. No money talk. Just us. All of us.

Andrew's jaw tightens, his foot tapping harder.

He rips out one earbud, staring at Katie with a cold edge.

ANDREW

Yeah, well... some of us have been trying to hold this family together while the rest just talk.

Katie's eyes flash with hurt, but she says nothing.

Trevor glances in the rearview mirror, concern flickering.

They ride in silence for a beat. The tension is thick, but the fragile hope still there.

Suddenly-

BUZZ BUZZ

Trevor's phone vibrates in his pocket.

He pulls his hand away from Katie's and checks the screen.

His smile fades slightly as he reads the message.

He quickly locks the screen and tucks the phone away.

Katie eyes him suspiciously.

KATIE

Who was that?

Trevor gives a small, guilty shrug.

TREVOR

I thought you said no work talk.

Katie shoots him a pointed look. Andrew glares out the window, earbuds back in, retreating again.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Job listing notification. I'll apply later.

Trevor's eyes flick up to the rearview mirror.

A car follows behind them, distant but oddly familiar.

His smile falters for a heartbeat. Uncertainty flashing across his face.

He blinks it away, forcing the grin back on.

EXT. HIGHWAY GAS STATION - AFTERNOON

The family car rolls up and eases next to a pump.

Trevor's door swings open in a flash.

TREVOR

Will you pump the gas, Honey? I gotta go.

He jumps out, sprinting across the lot without a backward glance. Almost too fast.

Katie opens her door more casually, steps out, and rounds the car to the pump.

Andrew slips inside the station, the CHIME of the door trailing behind him.

Katie swipes her credit card with practiced ease.

The pump CLUNKS as she lifts the handle.

She clicks the nozzle into the tank, squeezing the handle into place.

Leaning against the car, she scrolls idly through headlines on her phone. No urgency, just passing time.

Suddenly-

A paper map FLAPS onto the pump, startling Katie. She nearly drops her phone but catches it just in time.

A man steps from behind the pump.

CARL

Apologies. Didn't mean to startle you.
I'm a bit turned around. Would you
mind helping me figure out where in
the world I am?

CARL SHIPPLEY - 30s. There's a flicker of something haunted in his eyes. And an unsettling tremor in his voice.

Katie recollects her breath.

KATIE

No worries. I spend too much time on
this thing as it is.

She gestures with her phone.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Nobody uses these anymore. Maps I
mean.

(beat)

Where are you headed?

Carl shrugs, a wry smile.

CARL

I'm still trying to figure that out.
I'm on one of those... *insta-getaways*.

Katie smiles politely.

KATIE

Sounds fun. If you pull out your phone, I can help you set a location ping on your GPS.

Carl shakes his head.

CARL

I don't bother with that technology mumbo-jumbo. I prefer to do things the classic way. Off the grid... know what I mean?

Katie chuckles, intrigued despite herself.

KATIE

Old-school man, I like that.

She steps closer, peering down at the paper map.

The pump CLICKS off.

INT. GAS STATION BATHROOM STALL - CONTINUOUS

Trevor sits on the toilet, elbows resting heavily on his knees.

His jaw clenches; the weight of something unseen presses down on him.

He pulls his phone from his pocket, fingers trembling slightly.

He dials a number, bringing the phone slowly to his ear.

PHONE RINGS (O.S.)

His eyes dart toward the cracked stall door, as if expecting to be overheard.

PHONE RINGS (O.S.)

His brow furrows. The call goes unanswered.

He lowers the phone a fraction, staring at the screen. No voicemail, just silence.

PHONE RINGS (O.S.)

His grip tightens, knuckles whitening.

PHONE RINGS (O.S.)

Finally, he ends the call, the quiet click loud in the cramped stall.

He lets the phone rest in his lap.

Trevor inhales deeply, eyes closing briefly as tension coils in his chest.

EXT. HIGHWAY GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Katie points confidently at the map.

KATIE

Right here. Just outside of Alamosa.

Carl studies the map, a shadow crossing his face.

CARL

Alamosa... I'm not anywhere near
Denver.

(beat)

Ain't that like a man without a plan?

Katie shrugs, a half-smile.

KATIE

You are living in the moment.

Over Katie's shoulder, Carl's gaze flickers to Trevor stepping out of the bathroom.

His eyes lock on Trevor, following his every move with quiet calculation.

Trevor meets Andrew as he exits the store, the door's CHIME trailing behind him.

With a sudden playful move, Trevor sneaks up behind Andrew, slipping an arm around his neck in a light headlock.

Andrew pushes him away, laughing.

Carl's gaze snaps back to Katie.

He folds the map with smooth precision, his movements measured.

CARL

I appreciate your help ma'am. I'll see you again sometime soon.

Without another word, he quickly spins on his heel and hustles to his car.

Katie waves casually as he rushes off.

KATIE

Have a safe getaway.

Carl's car doors SLAM shut.

The engine RUMBLES to life.

The car pulls out, speeding away down the road just as Trevor and Andrew round the corner.

Trevor sneaks up behind Katie, wrapping his arms gently around her waist, leaning his head into her shoulder.

Katie exhales, relaxing into the touch, lightly hugging his arms in return.

TREVOR

(softly)

Who were you talking to?

Katie glances over her shoulder, her eyes steady.

KATIE

Some guy, asking for directions.

(beat)

Seemed nice enough.

Katie turns, pulling the gas pump from the car.

She slides it into the pump housing with a sharp SNAP.

The family climbs back in.

Each door closes with a solid THUD.

The engine REVS, headlights flick on, and wheels spin.

The car pulls away from the station, merging onto the highway.

TREVOR (O.S.)
Next stop... vacation!

EXT. FORRESTED HIGHWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

The car rolls slowly along a winding road framed by towering pines.

Golden light filters through the branches, casting long shadows across the asphalt.

Inside the car, the calm and silence broken only by the hum of tires on pavement.

Trevor glances over at Katie, who stares out the window, lost in thought.

He clears his throat softly.

TREVOR
Remember that trip we took to the lake? Adnrew was four, maybe five.

Katie smiles, eyes still distant.

KATIE
Yeah. The one where Andrew wouldn't stop chasing those dragonflies?

Trevor chuckles, the memory warm in his mind.

TREVOR
You were so mad at me for insisting we camped by the water instead of the cabins. We got eaten by all those damn skeeters.

Katie turns toward him, a spark of softness in her eyes.

KATIE
I was mad... at first. Turned out... it was one of the best weekends of my life.

A beat.

She exhales, the smile fading just a little.

KATIE (CONT'D)
Feels like a lifetime ago.

Trevor reaches over, hesitates, then gently brushes a stray hair from her face.

TREVOR
When we can get back there?
(beat)
We have to.

Katie meets his gaze, a fragile hope flickering.

Andrew watches Trevor from the backseat, eyes narrowing slightly.

He sees the pride in his father's face remembering happier times. But Katie's subdued reaction rubs him the wrong way.

Something tightens in Andrew's chest, his quiet resentment grows.

The car rounds a bend, the fading sun illuminating the road ahead.

EXT. FRONT GATE - LATER

The car snakes up a narrow, shadowed forest road.

They round a bend and come to a halt.

An imposing iron gate stands before them. Tall, ornate, and unfamiliar.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

All three stare at the gate.

Andrew leans forward between the front seats, brows furrowed.

KATIE
I don't remember this.

ANDREW
Me either. Is this the right place,
Dad?

Trevor shrugs, cautious but hopeful.

TREVOR

Mike said he's been remodeling. Gave
me a code.

He kills the engine, rolls down the window, and eyes the
keypad with a mix of anticipation and doubt.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Let's if this works.

Trevor punches in the code.

BEEPS

A tense silence fills the air.

Nothing.

Then-

EXT. FRONT GATE - CONTINUOUS

CLANK.

A grinding GRUMBLE echoes.

The gate jerks violently, then slowly begins to rise.
Creaking and protesting with every inch.

The car inches forward beneath it, barely clearing as the
gate looms overhead.

FADE TO:

INT. UNKNOWN LOCATION - CONTINUOUS

A dim, cramped room bathed in cold, flickering light.

Walls lined with monitors display live feeds. One shows the
car slipping under the gate.

A pair of grime covered boots rest casually on a cluttered
table.

A hand reaches out, tapping a screen with deliberate intent.

EXT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Inside the backseat, Andrew watches the gate through the rear window.

The heavy gate slams shut behind them with a low, final CLUNK, echoing in the trees.

EXT. CABIN PROPERTY - LATER

The car CRUNCHES over dirt and loose stone, winding along a narrow forest road.

It pulls to a stop in a clearing surrounded by towering trees.

The engine cuts, silence settling.

Down the slope, nestled between split pines, sits a modern mountain cabin.

Its sleek lines contrast with the wildness of the forest.

The family steps out, doors closing with solid THUDS.

EXT. CABIN PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

Katie walks over to Trevor, who's taking in the sweeping mountain view.

KATIE

I had forgotten how nice it is up here.

Trevor inhales deeply, savoring the crisp mountain air.

TREVOR

Oh, how I have missed that smell.

Andrew joins them. Trevor claps him on the back, then slides his hand up to tug his shoulder playfully.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

What do you think Bud?

ANDREW

Looks like Uncle Mike has been busy. I remember this place being a bit more... rustic.

TREVOR

Well, a home is an investment. Even a vacation home. The more you put into it, the more it gives back.

Katie eyes the cabin, curious and a bit skeptical.

KATIE

How in the world does your brother afford a place like this?

Trevor shrugs, casual but proud.

TREVOR

Come on. Mike's one of the top minds in his field. People practically throw money at him.

KATIE

People *throw* money at him?

Trevor shrugs again, a hint of a smile.

TREVOR

That's what he says.

(beat)

Let's get our stuff inside, huh?

EXT. CABIN FRONT DOOR - LATER

Keys JINGLE.

The deadbolt SNAPS back.

The door swings open.

INT. UNKNOWN LOCATION - CONTINUOUS

A monitor displays live footage of the family entering the cabin.

The pair of boots from before are gone.

INT. CABIN KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Andrew steps inside, arms full of a suitcase, I-Pad, and backpack slung over one shoulder.

He pauses, eyes scanning the room, impressed.

ANDREW

Uncle Mike *has* been busy. This is
nicer than last time.

Katie follows, balancing a pillow and blanket in one arm, a duffel bag over the other.

Trevor brings up the rear, juggling the most weight. Cooler in one hand, duffel in the other, and a small carry-on dangling from his teeth.

Andrew darts down the hall, eager to explore.

Outside, through the doorframe, a vehicle creeps slowly past the cabin.

The same car from the rearview mirror.

Moving far too slow to be casual.

It doesn't stop. Just drifts by. Swallowed by the shadow of the trees.

INT. TREVOR'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Trevor clears the baggage from his arms and mouth, tossing them roughly onto the bed.

He snaps his head toward the bathroom doorway.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Trevor eases inside, glancing over his shoulder as if expecting to be followed.

He gently closes the door, his movements deliberate, cautious.

He spins, scanning the room with sharp eyes.

Opening the medicine cabinet, he finds it empty.

He moves down to the cabinet under the sink-also bare.

Finally, he approaches a double-door closet stacked with towels and sheets.

His fingers thumb through the contents slowly, searching.

INT. ANDREWS BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A suitcase PLOPS onto the bed.

Andrew slings his backpack off and lets it fall beside the suitcase.

He sits, fiddling with his iPad, battery blinking low.

ZIP

He unzips the backpack, pulls out a charging cord.

He stands and scans the room, spotting an outlet near the bed.

CLICK

He plugs the charger in.

From the doorway, a shadow lingers, lurking. Just out of clear sight.

Andrew's gaze flickers up, sensing something.

His eyes widen.

ANDREW

Oh my God!

Trevor's voice breaks the tension.

TREVOR

Hey Bud, help me with the rest of the stuff?

Andrew exhales, relief washing over him.

ANDREW

Yea, sure.

EXT. CAR - LATER

CLICK.

The trunk pops open and rises.

Trevor and Andrew step forward, arms digging into the remaining bags.

Andrew grabs one, then spots an unfamiliar duffel bag tucked beneath it.

Trevor's too busy juggling his own load to notice.

Andrew grips the duffel's handles and lifts. His face tightening with effort.

He GRUNTS under the unexpected weight.

Trevor's head snaps up, and he instantly drops everything.

TREVOR

No, no, no! Don't touch that!

Andrew flinches at the sudden sharpness.

He quickly drops the bag handles.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

That one stays... for now. I'll take care of it later. Sorry, should have told you.

Andrew stares, confused, maybe a little spooked.

That wasn't like his dad.

Trevor moves fast, tossing a car-washing towel over the duffel, hiding it from view.

Noticing Andrew's uneasy glance, Trevor softens slightly.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Sorry to snap at you there. Just didn't want you to hurt yourself trying to lift that.

ANDREW

It's heavy. What did you put in that
(MORE)

ANDREW (CONT'D)

one?

Trevor forces a light smile.

TREVOR

Just some stuff for a project I'm finishing up. It's a surprise for your mom. Don't ruin it, okay?

ANDREW

O-kay.

They gather the rest of the bags.

SLAM.

The trunk closes.

Together, they head downhill toward the cabin, the weight of unspoken things hanging in the air.

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Tree tops sway gently in the summer breeze, shadows flickering rhythmically across the forest floor.

The sound is hypnotic, almost like a pulse.

A shadowed figure moves through the trees. Slow, deliberate, watching.

It stops at the edge of a clearing, lingering.

Downhill, about two hundred yards away, the cabin comes into view.

The shadow watches as the boys vanish through the front door.

The door shuts with a soft, distant THUD.

A long beat.

The figure steps back into the shadows of the trees. Gone.

EXT. CABIN BACK PORCH - DUSK

The Colorado sky burns in streaks of orange, purple, and pale gold.

Katie lounges in a chair, feet propped on the railing, a book open in her lap.

She flips a page, absorbed.

Suddenly-

A shadowed figure emerges behind her.

A wine chalice lowers onto her shoulder, resting lightly against her chest.

Katie flinches, her feet slipping off the railing.

KATIE

OH!

She spins around.

Trevor stands there, holding two glasses and a bottle of wine.

Katie exhales, a soft laugh escaping her lips.

She accepts the glass.

Trevor settles into the chair beside her.

He sets the bottle down with a gentle CLUNK and begins working the cork.

Ater a beat, the cork frees with a soft pop.

Katie raises her glass toward him.

He pours, then lifts his own.

In the distance, a faint CRUNCH of twigs breaks the quiet from the tree line. They don't hear it.

Trevor sets the bottle down again.

He raises his glass.

She meets it.

TREVOR
Here's to vacation. Been a long time
coming, and here we are.

KATIE
Here here.

CLINK

They sip to complete the toast.

Trevor leans back, savoring his wine.

Katie dips back into her book.

TREVOR
What're you reading?

KATIE
A love story... sort of.

TREVOR
Sort of?

KATIE
The guy's charming, mysterious... and
secretly a killer.

Trevor raises an eyebrow, amused.

TREVOR
Sounds like my kind of bedtime story.

KATIE
Don't get any ideas.

Trevor's smile lingers a beat too long. There's warmth in the
smile, but it doesn't quite reach his eyes.

INT. ANDREWS BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Andrew lies on his bed, gaming on his iPad.

His avatar dies.

ANDREW
(softly)
Crap.

He scrolls through game options.

A pop-up flashes: "UNLIMITED LIVES - 5 DAYS - ONLY \$29.95"

A lightbulb flickers in his eyes.

He sets the iPad down.

Moves to the window and peers out.

His parents laugh softly on the porch, wine in hand, relaxed and distracted.

Andrew hesitates. Should he?

INT. TREVOR'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The door creeps open. Andrew slips inside silently.

His eyes land on Trevor's wallet lying on the dresser.

He opens it slowly.

His eyes widen.

ANDREW
(whispers)
Whoa!

Hundred-dollar bills fill the wallet. Easily thousands.

More than he's ever seen at once.

More than his dad promised mom.

Andrew glances out the window again. Still safe.

He quietly slips one of Trevor's credit cards out.

Closes the wallet carefully.

Returns it exactly as it was.

And slips out, unseen.

INT. UNKNOWN LOCATION - CONTINUOUS

The cold glow of a monitor fills the frame.

The camera zooms slowly, sharpening the image.

A close-up of Trevor and Katie sitting on the cabin's back porch appears on screen.

The image DISSOLVES seamlessly into:

DISSOLVE

EXT. CABIN BACK PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Trevor and Katie sit quietly as the vibrant sunset fades to twilight.

Trevor gazes thoughtfully at the horizon, the weight of the last eight months lingering.

TREVOR

The last 8 months aside... We've been pretty happy together overall, haven't we?

Katie closes her book. Takes a deep breath, exhales.

KATIE

No... but also, some yes.

Trevor stares. Not the answer he was expecting.

He stays silent. She turns to face him. Seriousness fills her eyes.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I love you. I always have. But sometimes, I don't feel love from you.

Trevor starts to speak.

Katie holds up a hand, halting him gently

He nods, sinks back into his chair. His gaze doesn't leave her.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Let me get this out.

(beat)

You're an amazing father. An incredible role model. A strong provider. But... I don't feel like you see *me* anymore.

Her eyes search his.

KATIE (CONT'D)

You're right there for Andrew. You jump on every problem around the house. You're the first to help a neighbor, a friend, anyone. And those are all great things, Trevor. They are.

Her voice softens, but the pain lingers.

KATIE (CONT'D)

But where's my husband? Where's my rock? Where's my shoulder to cry on?

She swallows hard, fighting tears.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I'm not trying to sound selfish here Trevor, I'm really not. You... have your list of priorities, and I don't feel like I am anywhere on it. We're supposed to be partners in this life. That's what marriage is. A partnership. But you keep doing your own thing... like you always have. And you just expect me to... roll with it.

(beat)

I need you to be *with* me. Spiritually. Emotionally. Physically. All of it... or none of it.

(beat)

You need to decide which one.

She exhales, the weight of years lifting with the words.

Trevor sits silently, absorbing every word.

A long, reflective pause.

TREVOR

(humble)

Thank you.

(long beat)

Thank you for telling me your honest thoughts.

He softens, vulnerability breaking through.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

I'm at a loss for words right now.
So... if it's alright with you, I'm
going to take some time, absorb
everything you just said and respond
when I have the right words. Words you
deserve.

Katie leans over, her hand resting gently on his arm. A quiet gesture of connection and hope.

She doesn't speak. She said enough.

She rises slowly, collecting the wine glasses.

As she reaches for the door-

CLICK.

A distant shutter snaps.

She freezes, eyes flickering toward the dark woods.

Darkness. Stillness. Nothing.

She glances back at Trevor.

He hasn't moved.

Katie steps inside, gently closing the door behind her.

INT. KATIE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Katie slips inside quietly.

The door closes softly behind her. The lock CLICKs into place.

She leans back against the door, the weight of everything crashing down.

Her breath falters. Shoulders rise with a trembling inhale.

Tears spill slowly at first, then flow steady and unstoppable.

The wine glasses slip from her fingers.

They CLINK against the floor. Unbroken, forgotten.

She clamps a trembling hand over her mouth, trying to hold it in.

But the sobs break free. Deep, ragged, raw.

Her body shakes uncontrollably.

She slides down the wall, curling into herself, knees pulled tight to chest.

And finally, she lets go. Every fear, every hurt pouring out.

PAN THROUGH WINDOW:

EXT. CABIN BACK PORCH - CONTINUOUS

The black sky above is studded with stars.

Trevor stands alone, gazing upward.

His face is etched with quiet desperation. Searching for answers in the vastness of the night.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

THROUGH THE SCOPE (POV):

The rifle scope glides across a misty clearing to a pond in the distance down slope.

A buck drinks from the water's edge.

EXHALE

The scope sways slightly left, then right.

It steadies.

CLICK

BOOM

The scope steadies.

A burst of water explodes just over the buck's back.

It bolts into the trees.

END SCOPE POV.

Andrew lifts his head from the scope, watching the buck disappear.

TREVOR
You're still anticipating the bang.

Andrew's shoulders slump, frustration tightening his jaw.

ANDREW
I know... I know. I'm never going to
get this, Dad.

Trevor senses the frustration bubbling beneath Andrew's words.

TREVOR
Hey... relax Bud. That's why we
practice.

Andrew sets down the rifle, sits up stiffly.

Trevor rises alongside him.

ANDREW
How did you get so good at this stuff?

TREVOR
The United States Army son. The best
of the best taught me.

ANDREW
They wouldn't take me if I keep
shooting like that.

Trevor smirks, shaking his head.

TREVOR
Believe it or not... I was worse than
you at your age. Your grandfather gave
up trying to teach me.

ANDREW
Maybe you should do the same.

Trevor's eyes sharpen, but his voice stays calm, steady.

TREVOR
Never.
(beat)
(MORE)

TREVOR (CONT'D)
I will never give up on you.

They share a look. Tension mixed with something warmer.

Trevor pulls Andrew into a brief, firm embrace.

ANDREW
This is a really nice spot. I like the
vantage point here.

TREVOR
Mike and I use to hunt this spot.

Trevor points into the distant rocks downslope.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
See those boulders down there? That's
where I got my first buck.

A soft smile crosses Trevor's face as he remembers.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
We found a cave tucked back in there.
Might still be there. Mike swore it
was something the Indians used a long
time ago... food storage or something
like that.

ANDREW
Cool... can we go check it out?

TREVOR
Maybe another time. We need to start
heading back.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Trevor and Andrew hike back toward the cabin, the forest
quiet except for their footsteps.

Andrew's mind churns, breaking the silence.

ANDREW
Dad... is mom, okay? I heard her
crying last night in her room.

Trevor glances over, voice calm but hopeful.

TREVOR

I'm sure she's better now.

Andrew's jaw tightens, frustration creeping into his tone.

ANDREW

Did you say something to upset her?

Trevor shakes his head.

TREVOR

No... quite the opposite, actually.
It's all the things I haven't said
that upset her.

ANDREW

What do you mean?

Trevor sighs, choosing his words carefully.

TREVOR

Your mom and I had a talk last night
and... she said a lot of things she's
been needing to say for a long time.
That can be hard for anyone.
Especially on someone who carries a
lot inside.

Andrew's voice hardens, a hint of blame.

ANDREW

Was she mad at you?

Trevor nods slowly.

TREVOR

In a way. She shared with me how she
really felt. Now I can make some
changes, so she doesn't feel that way
anymore.

ANDREW

Like what?

Trevor stops walking and turns to face him.

He places his hands firmly on Andrew's shoulders, meeting his
gaze.

TREVOR

Your mother is the best thing in my
(MORE)

TREVOR (CONT'D)
life... besides you. I had forgotten
that. She reminded me.

Andrew's arms cross defensively.

ANDREW
I just don't get why she has to be so
mad all the time.

Trevor's voice softens, steady.

TREVOR
Marriage isn't easy. It's a lot of
give and take. Compromise. Mostly
patience.

He squeezes Andrew's shoulders.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
Patience with each other is key. If
you abuse it, it runs out.
(beat)
Your mom's patience ran out on me. Now
I'm trying to rebuild it.
(beat)
Someday, you'll be married. We want to
set an example you'd be proud to
follow.

Andrew's eyes glisten, emotion breaking through.

ANDREW
I don't want y'all to split up.

Trevor pulls him into a strong, quiet embrace.

TREVOR
I don't want that either, Bud. Not for
a second.

INT. UNKNOWN LOCATION - CONTINUOUS

The monitor displays live footage of Andrew and Trevor's
quiet and intimate moment.

Soft CLANKING and KNOCKING echo faintly in the background.

A small red light blinks steadily on a box beneath the
monitor, pulsing like a heartbeat.

INT. CABIN KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Morning sunlight filters warmly through the curtains, bathing the room in gold.

COFFEE GURGLING

Steam curls from the coffee maker.

Katie pulls down a mug from the cabinet.

A gentle KNOCK sounds at the door.

POURING

Coffee fills the mug.

EXT. CABIN FRONT STOOP - CONTINUOUS

Katie steps outside into the crisp morning air, mug in hand.

Steam swirls upward from the warm cup.

She takes a slow sip, eyes scanning the quiet horizon.

Her gaze catches a flicker of motion on the ridge.

From the tree line, a man emerges.

Details are obscured by distance and shadow.

He strolls with purpose before disappearing into the woods.

Katie watches silently, sipping again.

Without a second glance, she turns and slips back inside.

INT. CABIN KITCHEN - LATER

Katie sits at the table, coffee in hand, scrolling through headlines on her phone.

Suddenly, WOOSH. The door swings open.

Andrew stomps in, arms full of rifle cases.

ANDREW
Morning, Mom.

Katie looks up, voice gentle but curious.

KATIE
Morning. How'd it go? Yall get
anything?

Andrew drops the rifles in the corner and heads straight to the fridge, grabbing a drink.

ANDREW
Nothing.

Takes a swig.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Saw a beautiful buck. Dad said 6-
point. I missed and he ran off.

Katie offers a soft smile, trying to encourage.

KATIE
Oh baby, you'll get yours soon.

Her eyes flick toward the doorway. Trevor still hasn't come in.

KATIE (CONT'D)
Speaking of your father... where is
he?

Andrew shrugs, frustration flickering in his voice.

ANDREW
He's taking a walk. Said something
about finding the right words for
you... or something.

Andrew turns and stomps down the hall toward his room.

Katie watches him go, alone now.

A small glimmer lights in her eyes.

A quiet, hopeful smile creeps across her lips.

She sips her coffee, eyes returning to the headlines.

EXT. RIVERBANK - CONTINUOUS

Water RUSHES over smooth stones, a constant, tranquil hum masking nearly every other sound.

Trevor walks along the river's edge, his gait easy, almost casual.

But beneath the surface, his mind races.

INT. UNKNOWN LOCATION

A flickering monitor displays a live feed of Trevor's slow stroll through the woods.

In the foreground, a pair of legs and boots rest on a cluttered table.

Suddenly, the boots drop to the floor with a soft THUD.

Muted FOOTSTEPS echo up a CREAKING staircase.

A door slowly CREAKS open.

Then a quiet CLICK as it closes.

The monitor glows softly, alone in the dark, silent room.

EXT. RIVERBANK - CONTINUOUS

Trevor stops, squats, fingers curling around a few smooth stones from the damp earth.

He tosses a stone through the air and plunges into the rushing water.

PLOP

START POV CARL:

(Camera is Carl. Carl not shown)

From a distance, hidden, Carl watches Trevor.

Silent. Still.

END POV CARL:

Trevor straightens, senses something off.

His head jerks sharply.

START POV CARL:

(Camera is Carl. Carl not shown)

Carl slides behind a tree. Silent and deliberate.

END POV CARL:

Trevor's gaze lingers, then returns to the river.

He starts walking upstream, cautious.

START POV CARL:

(Camera is Carl. Carl not shown)

Carl peeks from behind the tree, eyes locked on Trevor.

Trevor disappears behind a large rock formation.

END POV CARL:

(Show Carl)

Carl waits, tense.

Trevor doesn't reappear.

Carl scans the area, eyes sharp.

He steps around the tree, shifting for a clearer view.

Suddenly, face to face with Trevor.

A charged beat.

Trevor moves fast.

THWACK

He grabs Carl by the throat.

In one fluid motion, SLAMS him to the ground with a muted THUD.

Lightning-quick, Trevor's on top of him. A Bowie knife pointed to Carl's throat.

Trevor's open palm hovers over the hilt, ready to strike.

Their eyes lock. Glowing dangerous, unflinching.

TREVOR
(forceful, quiet)
What the fuck are you doing here?

Carl freezes. His brow twitches. Something's... off.

CARL
Hey there partner.

A raging fire burns in Trevor's eyes. Something raw and unfamiliar.

It's not just controlled anger. It's cold, sharp intent.

CARL (CONT'D)
What... you gonna kill me? That's not
in your nature.

The blade trembles tightly in Trevor's grip, muscles taut beneath his skin.

TREVOR
I said... what are you doing here?

CARL
Hadn't heard from you since our last
rendezvous.

TREVOR
That was the plan. We lay low. We stay
apart.

CARL
Partner, you're not playing fair. I
didn't get my cut.

Trevor's gaze sharpens, his grip tightening.

TREVOR
You'll get your half when I'm sure
it's safe.

CARL
That's not how this works amigo.

Trevor leans in, voice low, venomous.

TREVOR
You stay the hell away from here.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

(beat)

You stay the *fuck* away from my family.

CARL

The other half of the money... and I'm gone.

Trevor leans in, nice and close.

TREVOR

Soon.

Trevor doesn't move, eyes burning into Carl's.

Then he rises slowly, knife still in hand.

He backs away, never taking his eyes off Carl.

Then vanishes into the trees like a shadow.

Carl lies there, breathing hard.

He pushes himself onto his elbows, eyes darting left and right.

He's alone.

INT. CABIN LIVING ROOM - LATER

Katie sits curled on the couch, arms wrapped around a pillow, eyes distant.

Andrew stands nearby, shifting from foot to foot, unsure how to start.

ANDREW

Do you think things with you and Dad
will ever get better?

Katie looks up, surprised by his softness.

KATIE

(sighs)

I want to believe that, Andrew. I
really do.

Andrew moves a little closer, voice trembling with uncertainty.

ANDREW

It just feels... like you're both so far apart. Like we're not really a family right now. I mean... don't you love Dad?

Katie swallows hard, fighting the ache in her chest.

KATIE

Of course I do. But, love isn't enough on its own sometimes.

Andrew's shoulders tense, frustration bubbling beneath his words.

ANDREW

Then what is?

Katie's gaze softens but remains steady.

KATIE

Patience. Hope. And trying, even when it's hard.

Andrew looks down, then back up, eyes searching.

ANDREW

I want us all to be okay.

Katie reaches out, placing a tentative hand on his arm.

KATIE

I do too, sweetheart. We're going to figure it out. Him and I... together.

Andrew nods slowly, but tension still lingers in his stance.

ANDREW

I hope so.

He turns sharply and heads for his room.

The door closes softly behind him.

Katie exhales, eyes closing as she leans back.

INT. CABIN - AFTERNOON

KNOCK KNOCK

Andrew's bedroom door swings open with a soft CREAK.
He lies on the bed, I-pad resting on his lap, turned off.
The weight of his talk with Katie heavy on his shoulders.
He notices the door opening and discreetly wipes at his eyes.

TREVOR

Hey Bud. We're gonna go into town for
a bit. There's a nice little fishing
spot there. You wanna see if we can
catch some trout?

ANDREW

Sure.

Andrew swings his legs over the side of the bed, dropping his
I-Pad onto the mattress with a soft THUD.

INT. CAR - LATER

The car rattles and shakes over the bumpy dirt road leading
away from the cabin.

Inside, the family rides in silence.

Katie stares out the window, lost in thought.

Andrew watches his parents closely, concern still lingering
in his eyes.

No words are spoken. Enough was said last night.

Trevor senses Katie's distance.

He reaches over, gently takes her hand.

Leans down, pressing a soft kiss to the top of her hand.

He squeezes it gently.

Katie turns her head, flashes him a tentative smile.

It's enough for Trevor.

He releases her hand, letting it rest on her leg.

The car hums along the road.

EXT. TOWN FISHING POND - LATER

A bobber drops into the glassy, calm pond.

PLOP

Families and fishermen dot the banks, the air filled with soft chatter and gentle ripples.

Trevor sits alone on a bench at the end of a wooden pier.

Still. Quiet. Watching the water.

Andrew fishes casually down the shore, casting and reeling with ease.

Trevor's eyes drift, searching the horizon and himself.

START KATIE POV:

(Camera is Katie. Katie not shown)

Katie slowly approaches from behind.

He doesn't notice.

She reaches out her hand, placing it on his shoulder.

END KATIE POV:

Trevor doesn't startle.

Just turns, smiles softly.

KATIE

Any luck?

TREVOR

Haven't even baited the hook.

(beat)

I'm not really fishing for trout.

Katie sits beside him. Facing away from the water but her eyes are on him. She's unsure what to say.

A beat.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

I think... I know what I want to say.

She shifts, just slightly. Listening.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
Are you ready to hear it?

Katie hesitates, then nods.

Trevor turns to face the pond. Unsure he wants to see her reaction.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
All my life, I followed routines. My father was strict. School, chores, even our damn meals were on a schedule. Add the military into that mix.

Katie listens.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
When we got married, we were so happy and so in love, I thought it would always be that way. I put us on routine thinking, once a routine is set, it stays.

Trevor turns to her, vulnerability clear.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
You've always been the other half of my life.

Katie's eyes well up. She breathes deeply.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
Worst part is, that's the half I took for granted while chasing everything else I wanted in life. I treated you like a teammate in a game I didn't realize I was playing.
(beat)
But this...our marriage... isn't a game.
(beat)
You've carried more than your share. You covered for me and you waited and waited and waited. I left you alone in all of it.
(beat)
I regret that.

Katie wipes tears from her eyes.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Thanks to your words last night, I see it now. I see you again.

(beat)

You're worn down, your beat. I don't blame you. I should've been there. I will be from now on.

(with resolve)

I choose us. I choose you.

(beat)

Thank you... for not giving up on me.

(beat)

I have always loved you. If you let me, I promise to prove I will always love you.

Katie trembles. Her shoulders rise, then fall.

She wipes her eyes again. This time slower.

Trevor stays still. Turns his gaze back to the pond.

Lets her feel it. Lets her breathe.

After a long beat, Katie rises.

Words fail her now.

She pulls a tissue from her purse and gently dabs her eyes.

Without another glance, she walks away.

Trevor doesn't look back.

He gives her space.

EXT. PARK BENCH - CONTINUOUS

A magazine lowers slowly, revealing a pair of watchful eyes.

They track Katie as she walks off the pier.

Then shift toward Andrew, moving to his father.

The magazine closes with a soft RUSTLE.

Carl rises silently.

He walks away without a word.

EXT. TOWN FISHING POND - CONTINUOUS

Trevor sits at the edge of the pier, still wrapped in the quiet aftermath of his vulnerability.

Andrew approaches from behind, fishing gear slung over one shoulder.

ANDREW

Dad...

Trevor turns toward him, softening.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

When we parked, I saw this store I
wanna check out. Is it cool if I go
look around?

TREVOR

Sure.

Andrew drops his gear. Turns to go.

Trevor calls after him.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Hey Bud... you need some dough?

Andrew stops in his tracks. He turns and nods.

ANDREW

Yea.

Trevor pulls his wallet from his pocket.

He flips it open. A flash of green catches Andrew's eye.

He peels off a hundred-dollar bill.

Andrew's eyes flicker, narrowing slightly as he clocks the sizable stash inside.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Geez Dad... where did you get all
those bills?

Trevor flinches subtly, snapping the wallet closed a little

too fast.

He shoves it back into his pocket, avoiding Andrew's gaze.

TREVOR

From before we left, remember?

(beat)

Here... I hope they can break that.

Andrew takes the bill. Brand new, crisp, clean. A little too clean.

ANDREW

Thanks.

He starts walking off but throws one last sharp glance over his shoulder.

Trevor turns back to the pond, eyes distant.

Andrew watches him closely, suspicion simmering just beneath the surface.

Then he turns and walks away.

EXT. CAFE - LATER

The town square hums with life. People chatting, footsteps echoing, the scent of fresh coffee in the air.

Katie sits alone beneath a shade umbrella, cradling a warm cup of tea.

Her fingers gently TAP the glass's rim, lost in thought.

She glances up, eyes catching movement.

In the distance, Trevor and Andrew approach together.

Katie swallows hard, finishing the last of her tea in one smooth sip.

She rises slowly, determination softening her features.

Dropping a few dollars on the table, she quietly stands and walks away from the cafe.

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Katie rounds the small wooden gate and catches up with Trevor and Andrew.

Together, the family moves toward their car.

Suddenly, the bustling crowd parts.

A familiar figure steps through.

KATIE
Hey... Old-school.

The family stops in their tracks.

Carl raises his head, eyes locking onto them.

A thoughtful beat passes.

CARL
Gas station lady... yeah, how you
doing today?

Trevor glances warily at Carl, muscles tensing.

KATIE
What are you doing here?

CARL
Passed through the other day. I liked
the vibe... figured I'd stay a bit.

KATIE
You really do live by the moment,
don't you.

Carl's gaze slowly shifts to Trevor.

CARL
Yea... you never know who you will
meet.

KATIE
Oh, sorry. This is my husband Trevor
and our son Andrew.

Carl's eyes flicker. Just a micro-expression, a flash of surprise or recognition.

His grin tightens subtly.

He reaches out, shaking Trevor's hand.

CARL
Trevor... that's your name?
Interesting.

His tone holds a hint of intrigue as if the name alone carries weight.

He repeats it quietly, savoring the sound.

Trevor offers a reluctant but polite, neutral nod, eyes sharp and locked on Carl.

TREVOR
(cautious)
Hi.

An unnervingly long pause stretches.

Andrew's eyes dart between Carl and Trevor, sensing the tension.

CARL
Well... I don't want to keep you from
your family time. Need to see a guy
about some money he owes me.

Carl starts to walk away, eyes briefly flicking back toward Trevor.

CARL (CONT'D)
(menacing)
Have a good one... Trevor.

KATIE
Bye.

Trevor watches Carl's retreat, then turns to Katie, frowning.

TREVOR
How the hell do you know him?

KATIE
Met him at the gas station asking for
directions. Never did catch his name.

Trevor's gaze tightens, voice low.

TREVOR
Something about him feels... off.

KATIE

He's harmless. Just a drifter passing through.

Trevor scans the crowd, quietly alert.

TREVOR

Maybe. But stay clear of him.

ANDREW

He sure seemed to know you, Dad.

Trevor forces a half-smile, shaking his head.

TREVOR

Nope. Just a stranger.

KATIE

Come on. I want to get back to the house. My dogs are barking.

The family moves forward down the sidewalk toward the car.

Trevor glances back over his shoulder.

In the distance, Carl has stopped.

He stands still; eyes locked on Trevor. Unblinking.

EXT. CABIN PROPERTY - NIGHT

The night is thick and still. Darkness swallows the forest.

Crickets chirp softly. A gentle breeze rustles the leaves.

All is calm.

Then-

HONK! HONK! HONK!

Piercing car horns shatter the silence, lights stabbing through the darkness.

The Mill's vehicle alarm bursts into a relentless, screaming wail.

Lights flick on in a cascade of windows down the slope.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The door swings open.

Trevor appears wearing only his boxers, gun gripped tightly in one hand.

His breath is shallow, eyes wide with sudden adrenaline.

He bolts toward the front door.

His fingers fumble nervously at the lock, urgency mounting.

The car alarm wails relentlessly, bleeding through the windows.

He yanks the door open, snapping his hand to a nearby shelf.

Grabbing a flashlight, Trevor steps into the night and clicks it on.

EXT. CABIN PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

The beam cuts a narrow path into the dark woods.

Behind him, the cabin settles into uneasy silence again.

Rustling from the trees. A faint footstep, too soft to be certain.

Trevor's breath hitches.

He moves forward, flashlight sweeping.

Katie steps up into the doorframe behind him.

BEEP BEEP

She clicks the key fob, disabling the alarm.

TREVOR

Thanks, Honey.

Quiet now, Trevor inches toward the vehicle.

The flashlight beam sweeps left to right, each step deliberate.

Flashlight in his left hand, gun at low ready in his right.
Through the car windows, the beam glows like a searching eye.
Trevor arrives, finding the vehicle untouched.
He scans every inch-no damage, no sign of forced entry.
One last sweep of the surroundings. All clear.
Trevor exhales, lowers his shoulders, and turns back toward the cabin.

KATIE
Anything?

TREVOR
Nothing. All good.

Trevor slips inside; the door closes behind him with a distant THUD.

The cabin lights flick off one by one.

Twigs SNAP - (O.S.) - Distant and sharp.

FOOTSTEPS - (O.S.) - Slow, deliberate, fading into the night.

EXT. CABIN PROPERTY - MORNING

The sun washes the scene in warm orange light.

Trevor moves cautiously around the vehicle.

Each step soft, meticulous.

He rounds the trunk, moves along the passenger side.

TREVOR
Bingo!

Faint shoe prints trace the soil near the front door.

Trevor kneels, studying the unfamiliar pattern.

He pulls out his phone and snaps a photo.

He slowly turns his gaze to the right, following the trail into thickening brush.

The prints vanish.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Damn.

He rises, squints into the wilderness.

The morning is deceptively calm.

Trevor glances around.

He's alone.

His foot scrapes the soil, brushing dirt over the prints.

He hesitates a moment, then retreats inside.

INT. UNKNOWN LOCATION - CONTINUOUS

A monitor displays Trevor stepping back into the cabin.

A coffee mug slowly rises, blocking the screen.

Hands shift, gripping the mug.

A spoon drops into the cup and begins stirring. Slow, deliberate.

CLINK CLINK.

INT. CABIN KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

SCRAPE SCRAPE

TAP TAP TAP

Katie stirs eggs gently, tapping the pan's edge with the spoon in a steady rhythm.

Trevor settles at the kitchen table, shoulders slumped, looking drained.

KATIE

Did you find anything?

TREVOR

Not a thing. Completely clean around
(MORE)

TREVOR (CONT'D)

the car.

(beat)

Maybe a deer or something brushed it
enough to set off the alarm. Got
scared and ran off.

KATIE

We are in the wilderness after all.

Trevor shifts uneasily, his fingers tightening around his
cup.

Katie watches him carefully, sensing his unrest.

KATIE (CONT'D)

What's on your mind?

Trevor looks up, hesitant, unsure how to say it.

TREVOR

Should we really be here?

Katie freezes, eyes locking onto his.

KATIE

What do you mean?

Trevor's gaze drifts to the window, searching the dark
beyond.

TREVOR

Here... right now. I feel like...
somethings off.

Katie breathes deeply, steadying herself.

KATIE

I think we've made progress here.

(beat)

I think... we still have a long way to
go. But overall... yes. I'm happy
here, relaxed. This is just what I
needed. What we needed.

Trevor's lips lift in a small, hopeful smile. A flicker of
light.

TREVOR

I'm glad to hear you say that.

Katie approaches him, leans in slightly, probing gently.

KATIE

What's really on your mind.

Trevor's eyes linger on the window again, troubled.

TREVOR

Weird things have been happening. The car last night, that strange guy in town.

(beat)

I can't help but shake this feeling that we're being watched.

KATIE

I've felt it too. Like there's something lurking just out of sight.

(beat)

But running won't fix it, Trevor. We need to face this... together.

Trevor's eyes meet hers, searching for reassurance.

KATIE (CONT'D)

This place... it's not just where we are. It's where we start.

(beat)

Where we find each other again.

Trevor exhales slowly, conflicted.

KATIE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Maybe it's just the stress catching up with you. We've both been through a lot lately.

Trevor shakes his head. Voice low.

TREVOR

No, it's more than that. I can't explain it. It's like there's a shadow just outside the light.

Katie squeezes his hand.

KATIE

Hey... we've been through hard times before. We will get through this to. Together.

Trevor's eyes soften, he's vulnerable.

TREVOR
I want to believe that. I really do.

Katie smiles softly.

KATIE
Then let's keep moving forward, keep
fighting for us.

TREVOR
Okay... for us.

Trevor rises, pulls Katie into a tender embrace.

She melts into his arms. They hold each other, long and quiet.

The kitchen door CREAKS.

Andrew steps inside, pausing to watch.

ANDREW
Ewww. Get a room you two.

They pull apart, a slight chuckle escaping both of them.

They both wipe their eyes.

TREVOR
Mornin' Bud. How you sleep?

ANDREW
Good, until the car decided to play a
symphony at 2am. What the heck was all
that?

Katie rises and continues making breakfast.

TREVOR
Undetermined.

ANDREW
Do we have any plans today?

He leans against the counter, looking hopeful.

TREVOR
Not officially, you got anything in
mind?

ANDREW
I'm kinda bored with my I-pad. Can I
just go walk around... explore the
wilderness?

He glances out the window, eyes brightening.

TREVOR
I love that! Absolutely.
(beat)
You want some company?

ANDREW
Kinda just want to be alone. No
offense.

Andrew shrugs, avoiding eye contact.

TREVOR
None taken. You do you, son.
(beat)
That ok with you, Hun?

Katie pauses, then nods slowly, a faint smile.

KATIE
Just be careful. Since there's not
much for cell service around here,
take the hiking whistle with you.

ANDREW
Alright.

KATIE
Breakfast is ready. Grab a plate and
dig in.

She gestures toward the kitchen table.

EXT. WOODS - AFTERNOON

CAW

Crows call overhead as a gentle wind stirs the treetops in a
soothing sway.

The mountains hold a quiet, almost meditative stillness
today.

A hand appears, tightens around a cluster of rocks.

Andrew hauls himself up over the ledge, collapsing briefly on the ground.

He catches his breath, then pushes himself upright.

He looks down at the steep climb behind him, then ahead to the path still rising.

Though the slope isn't steep, his breath hitches as he presses forward.

After several labored steps, he reaches the summit.

He stands tall, surveying the valley spread below.

His gaze settles on a large flat rock near the edge. A perfect spot to rest.

He lowers himself, pulls a water bottle from his cargo pocket, and takes a slow drink.

Suddenly-

CRACK!

Andrew whirls around.

CARL

Hey there young man. Beautiful view up here, isn't it?

Andrew's wariness softens at the familiar voice. It's that friendly man from town.

ANDREW

Old school... I think my mom called you that.

CARL

Steven actually.

Carl steps closer, extending a hand.

Andrew hesitates, then shakes it.

CARL (CONT'D)

Mind if I sit with you a moment?

ANDREW

It's a free country.

CARL
That it is my boy.

Carl settles beside Andrew.

CARL (CONT'D)
Men paid for that freedom with blood,
some with their lives.

ANDREW
My Dad served.

CARL
Trevor, is his name... right?

ANDREW
Yes sir.

CARL
Marines?

ANDREW
Army actually.

CARL
Huh... I figured Marine. They tend to
stand apart. A special kind of
soldier.

Carl leans in, voice lowering slightly.

CARL (CONT'D)
Trevor's different though, isn't he?
Quiet. Guarded. Not the kind to share
much with his own blood, huh?

Confusion clouds Andrew's face.

ANDREW
Do you know my dad or something?
Because he swears he doesn't know you.

Carl shifts slightly, offended.

CARL
I bet your dad tells you and your mom
just enough to keep you calm. Just
enough to clear any confusion.
(beat)
Men like that... they carry things
they won't ever say out loud. Secrets
(MORE)

CARL (CONT'D)
that poison what they care about most.

Andrew's jaw tightens. That doesn't sound like Trevor... but then again, maybe it does. Doubt creeps in.

CARL (CONT'D)
Your dad's hiding more than you know.
More than he lets on.

ANDREW
Why would he do that?

CARL
Because sometimes, the truth... is too damn dangerous. Sometimes it's easier to wear a mask. Even in front of the people you love.

Carl's eyes narrow, almost sad.

CARL (CONT'D)
Maybe your dad's the type who tinkers away in the basement or garage late at night. Leaves the house at odd hours without saying why.
(beat)
I've seen what happens when those masks slip.

ANDREW
What do you mean?

Carl's gaze sharpens, leaning in.

CARL
Ask your dad what he does when you and your mom aren't around. Ask him about the money? Where he gets it.

ANDREW
My dad's been out of work for months... they're broke.

Carl's smile twists, dark and knowing.

CARL
That's the mask, son. That man you think you know; he's been fighting battles you can't imagine. Fears and enemies just don't vanish.

Andrew looks away, swallowing hard.

CARL (CONT'D)

And those fears? They're coming for him. Faster than he thinks.

(beat)

Unless he gives me what's mine.

ANDREW

Why are you telling me all this?

Carl's grin twists. Less friendly, more predatory.

CARL

Because, I think, you're the only one he'll listen to. And... very soon, you're going to have to decide what side you're on.

Carl stands, dusting his hands off.

CARL (CONT'D)

Tell your dad I said hello. And tell him... I'm watching.

Andrew sits frozen, the weight of those words crushing him.

His image of his father fractures but not yet broken.

INT. CABIN LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Katie sits in a chair, engrossed in her book.

Across the room Trevor is half-asleep on the couch.

Katie closes her book. Places fingers onto the bridge of her nose.

She sets her book down.

Trevor notices her discomfort. Looks toward her.

TREVOR

You okay, Hun?

KATIE

Got a headache.

Katie rises, moving quietly toward the other room.

FOOTSTEPS fade softly as she exits.

Trevor sinks deeper into the couch, closing his eyes.

After a few moments, Katie's voice drifts in from the other room.

KATIE (O.S.)

Do you have any Tylenol?

In response, Trevor yells-

TREVOR

Yea. Let me get it for you.

KATIE (O.S.)

Don't get up, I'll get it.

TREVOR

Look in my travel bag in the bathroom.

KATIE (O.S.)

Okay.

Trevor closes his eyes again, exhaustion evident.

A long silence.

Trevor senses movement nearby.

He opens his eyes slowly, alert now.

Katie stands over Trevor, holding a thick stack of cash like a loaded question.

KATIE

What the hell is this?

Caught off guard, Trevor shifts uneasily.

TREVOR

Uh. That's the money I earned before we left.

KATIE

You told me you made just over five hundred. There's like five thousand here.

Trevor snaps upright on the couch, defensive.

TREVOR
What are you doing going through my
wallet?

KATIE
I didn't go through it; it was just
sitting out in the open.

Trevor points at the cash clenched in her hand.

TREVOR
Clearly you did.

Katie snaps her fingers sharply.

KATIE
Don't change the subject! Where did
you get all this money?

Trevor straightens, jaw tight.

TREVOR
I don't have to explain myself.

Katie steps in closer, eyes blazing.

KATIE
Goddamn it, Trevor! This is exactly
what we've been talking about. It's
stuff like this. Secrets, half-truths
that pushes me away.

She takes a breath, voice cracking.

KATIE (CONT'D)
Just be honest with me!

Trevor exhales slowly, the fight draining out.

TREVOR
You're right.
(beat)
I'm sorry.

He hangs his head.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
The truth is-

Suddenly-

ANDREW bursts through the front door.

Both Katie and Trevor snap their heads toward him.

Andrew rounds the corner, urgency in his eyes.

ANDREW
Dad! Steven says hi.

TREVOR
Steven? Who is Steven?

ANDREW
You know... Old School.

What? TREVOR What? KATIE

ANDREW
That guy we talked to in town
yesterday. His name is Steven.
Apparently, you two use to work
together.

What? KATIE TREVOR

What? No, we haven't. I don't even know that guy. Your mom knew him.

KATIE
You worked with him?

Trevor snaps his head to Katie. Breathing intensifies.

No!

TREVOR

ANDREW
He says you owe him money.

Trevor whips his head back to Andrew.

Katie raises the stack of bills.

Trevor jerks his head to Katie.

KATIE
This money? Is this to pay him off?

ANDREW
(to Katie)
Oh, you found it too?

Trevor's pulse quickens, his gaze flicks between them.

TREVOR
No. What?

KATIE
(to Andrew)
How did you know about this?

Overloaded, Trevor takes a giant step back. Panic sets in, Trevor snaps.

TREVOR
What the hell is going on here? I
don't know what either of you are
talking about!

KATIE
Trust!

ANDREW
You're lying!

TREVOR
Time out!

Everything freezes.

Trevor breathes heavily, pulse pounding.

Dizziness swells behind his eyes.

He stumbles back and sinks onto the coffee table.

Katie and Andrew move closer, their faces a mix of hurt and demand.

Trevor's eyes dart wildly between them.

His breath quickens, mind racing. He's trapped.

KATIE
Well?

Trevor tries to steady his breathing.

TREVOR
Give me a minute here.

Trevor takes another deep breath. Sinks his shoulders.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Ok. The money came from my brother.

KATIE

Mike?

TREVOR

Who else? Yes... Mike. He left that
for me here. As a surprise... for us.

KATIE

Why would Mike leave you almost five
thousand dollars?

Katie's eyes narrow, skeptical.

TREVOR

I can't even begin to know why Mike
does what he does.

Her voice sharpens.

KATIE

So, Mike will leave you five grand in
cash but won't help us with the
financial rut you put us in?

TREVOR

He offered... many times. I said no.

Andrew leans forward, searching Trevor's face.

ANDREW

What about Steven?

Trevor's gaze turns to Andrew.

TREVOR

What about him? I... do... not...
know... him.

ANDREW

He sure knows you. He knows about your
military service, secrets you keep.
Sounded like you two were best
friends.

(beat)

He told me to ask you about the money.

Katie lifts the stack of cash again, unwavering.

TREVOR

Oh my god! How many times do I need to say it?

Something clicks for Trevor.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Wait a minute? When did you talk to... Steven, or whatever the hell his name is?

ANDREW

I ran into him on my hike. He's really a nice guy. We had a nice talk.

TREVOR

I told you to stay away from him.

Katie steps back, arms folding tight across her chest.

KATIE

So, you do know him?

Trevor turns sharply to Katie.

TREVOR

No!

Katie's skepticism deepens.

KATIE

Then why do we need to stay away from him?

TREVOR

I just... have a feeling about him. Something's off with him.
(beat)
Trust me.

ANDREW

I can't, Dad. That's the point. I can't trust you anymore.

Andrew steps toward Katie.

She wraps her arm around his shoulder, pulling him close.

Trevor's heart visibly breaks. He sinks low, defeated.

Katie steps in, her voice firm and unwavering.

KATIE

I don't know what is going on with
you... or what you're into, but if you
don't come clean about everything...
and I mean everything... we're done!

Trevor rises slowly, shoulders heavy with the weight of their
distrust.

He looks at Katie and Andrew, knowing nothing he says will
fix this.

Without another word, almost cowardly, Trevor turns and
exits.

Andrew watches him go, anger flashing.

ANDREW

So much for facing your fears and
accepting responsibility, huh, Dad?

INTERCUT BETWEEN:

EXT. CABIN PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

Trevor exits the cabin; his steps are hurried but heavy.

He moves swiftly toward the car.

The door SLAMS shut behind him.

He starts the engine, backing out quickly.

INT. UNKNOWN LOCATION - CONTINUOUS

A monitor flickers, showing the vehicle speeding away.

Soft background sounds echo faintly:

CLANK.

THUNK.

ZIP.

FOOTSTEPS - ascend stairs.

CREAK.

DOOR - Closes with a THUD.

INT. CABIN KITCHEN - EVENING

Katie and Andrew sit at the table, silence thick between them.

A freshly cooked meal steams untouched.

Katie's eyes drift to the window.

The sun dips low behind the trees, casting long shadows.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Trevor grips the wheel tightly.

His left-hand rests against the open window.

His face is a storm of hurt, betrayal, and exhaustion.

INT. CABIN KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Katie scrapes the food into the trash, her movements mechanical.

She gathers the remaining dishes.

Andrew enters.

They exchange a glance - a quiet, mutual reassurance.

Andrew moves to the sink, scrubbing the dishes with steady hands.

EXT. PARK BENCH - CONTINUOUS

Trevor sits alone, watching the sky's colors bleed from orange to deep purple.

Worry and defeat etch his face.

A tear traces a path down his cheek.

He lowers his head into his hand, shoulders shaking.

He lets the grief flow freely.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CABIN KITCHEN - NIGHT

Katie sits alone at the kitchen table, one leg pulled up into her chest.

She bites her nails nervously, eyes flickering to the window.

Her worry grows with each passing moment. After every fight, Trevor always sends her something. A sign he's okay.

She pulls out her cell phone.

NO SIGNAL.

Frustrated, she rises, holding the phone high in the air. Still nothing.

She sits back down, lost in thought.

Her fingers tighten around the phone.

She hopes, maybe desperately, that this isn't the end of their marriage.

One by one, memories of better times flood her mind.

Tears well up, but she keeps scrolling. Emotions swell.

Suddenly - faint FOOTSTEPS.

She freezes, listening intently.

The footsteps grow louder, drawing closer.

KATIE

Trevor?

She bolts to the door.

Swings it open in a flash.

It's CARL.

Katie's face drains of color instantly.

CARL

I'm aware this is a -

Katie waves him off sharply.

KATIE
Steven, this isn't the best time for a visit.

CARL
Trevor... asked me to stop by.

Katie's attention is captured.

Andrew enters quietly, drawn by the rising tension.

Carl spots him.

CARL (CONT'D)
Hey Andrew.

ANDREW
Hey.

KATIE
I'm sorry, you... talked to Trevor?

CARL
Yes. He's very disheartened by all that's happening. He won't admit this, but... he's ashamed and afraid to face you. I offered to stop by... maybe explain a few things to you both. See if we can't clear up some of the confusion.

Katie and Andrew exchange a look.

Andrew shrugs, uncertain.

KATIE
O... ok. Please come in.

Katie steps aside, letting Carl enter.

Carl unslings a backpack and lays it deliberately on the table.

EXT. CABIN FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Carl's arm pushes the cabin door closed from the inside.

A shadow moves past the window, fleeting and indistinct.

EXT. CABIN PROPERTY - NIGHT

A full moon bathes the land in cold, numbing silver.

In the distance, headlights cut through the darkness.

They grow brighter, rolling steadily closer.

The car comes to a stop.

The engine shuts off.

The door opens.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Trevor pauses inside the vehicle.

The dome light flicks on, casting a pale glow on his worn, tired face.

He sits quietly, eyes closed, gathering his thoughts.

Slowly, he sinks his head onto the steering wheel.

Breathes in deep. Then again. And again.

He lifts his head, as if mustering strength.

Rises from the seat.

SLAM.

The door shuts behind him.

The dome light flickers off.

INT. CABIN KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The doorknob CREAKS as it slowly turns.

The door swings open with a hesitant GROAN.

Trevor steps inside, pauses mid-step, listening.

His eyes flick around the dimly lit room.

He reaches back and gently shuts the door behind him.

THUNK.

TREVOR

Katie?

(beat)

Andrew?

KATIE (O.S.)

Living room.

Trevor barely registers the nervous, shaky quality in her voice.

He moves forward through the kitchen.

The living room comes into view through the doorway.

Katie and Andrew huddle close on the couch, their faces etched with fear and uncertainty.

Trevor's gaze lingers elsewhere, still caught up in his own storm, he doesn't notice their distress.

INT. CABIN LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The CAMERA starts tight on the doorway frame leading to the kitchen.

Trevor stands FRAMED in the doorway, his voice breaking the silence.

TREVOR

I owe you both an apology.

As Trevor slowly steps forward, the CAMERA slowly PULLS BACK, matching his pace.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

It's past time I'm honest with you.

The frame widens, revealing CARL lurking just behind the doorway. Motionless, watching, waiting.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

You both deserve more than that.

Trevor moves toward the living room, unaware.

He steps fully into the living room.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
I need to come clean ab-
(cut off)

Suddenly -

BAM!

Carl pistol whips Trevor.

KATIE	ANDREW
(overlap)	(overlap)
AAAH!	AAAH!

Trevor collapses to the floor. Unconscious.

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

Katie's and Andrews scream echo. Slowly fading out.

A long beat.

INT. CABIN LIVING ROOM - DAWN

START TREVOR POV:

View slowly FADES in. Everything is fuzzy.

View FADES out.

INHALE

EXHALE

View FADES in. Getting clearer now. Carl rises from a chair across the room.

View FADES out.

MOAN

GROAN

View FADES in. Now crystal clear.

Early morning sun light bleeds in from the windows.

Carl stands over Trevor, looming, face inches from his.

END TREVOR POV:

CARL

Hey there partner. Good morning.

Trevor lies on his side, neck craning to scan the room.

In the center, Katie and Andrew sit back-to-back, tied up, mouths gagged.

Tears streak their faces, eyes wide with raw fear.

Trevor turns his head back to Carl.

He tries to move his arms to rise.

He can't. His hands are bound behind his back.

He tries to speak.

He can't. Gagged.

CARL (CONT'D)

Here ya go amigo. Let me help you up.
We got lots to discuss.

Carl grabs Trevor by the shoulders, hauling him into a seated position.

Once settled, Carl leans in, faces almost touching. Eyes locked.

CARL (CONT'D)

Now, I'm gonna talk for a minute...
and your gonna sit here and listen.
Okay?

Trevor nods, eyes darting between Carl and his family.

Carl rises, knees cracking as he moves.

He circles Katie and Andrew.

Trevor's eyes follow every step.

Katie and Andrew's eyes meet Trevor's, filled with terror and pleading.

Carl settles down on the coffee table behind them.

The barrel points dangerously close to Katie and Andrew.

They flinch, their terror palpable.

CARL (CONT'D)

Comfy?

Trevor's eyes lift off Katie and Andrew, locking on Carl.

CARL (CONT'D)

Years ago, when I took this job... the agreement was a fifty/fifty split. Everything... right down the middle. After expenses, of course.

Trevor stares, worry etched across his face.

CARL (CONT'D)

Each job went smooth.

Carl's gun bounces slightly around with his approval.

CARL (CONT'D)

You... you're a smart guy. You planned each one very well.

Trevor's eyes dart to Katie. Hers are glued to him, reflecting disappointment and heartbreak. She was right all along.

Trevor widens his eyes in denial.

CARL (CONT'D)

This last job... no different. Executed flawlessly.

Carl leans forward onto his knees, the gun resting menacingly between Katie and Andrew.

They flinch again, avoiding the aim of the barrel.

CARL (CONT'D)

Then, you go and change the hand off... the split. Why?

Trevor shakes his head, eyes wide.

Carl rises, starts slowly circling the room.

CARL (CONT'D)

You see, Trevor... changing the deal? That's not just a slap in the face. It's a declaration. A challenge.

Carl stops, lowering the gun and pointing directly at Katie.

Trevor and Katie share a muted SCREAM.

Her eyes cinch shut tight.

CARL (CONT'D)
You're playing with fire... and you're
gonna get burned.

Carl pulls the gun back, continues slowly circling.

CARL (CONT'D)
I'm a patient man... but my patience
only goes so far. You crossed a line.

Carl rounds behind Trevor.

Trevor swallows hard, breathing intensifying.

His head whips around to keep tracking Carl as he passes
behind him.

CARL (CONT'D)
And now... you've changed the rules.
You're not just protecting your family
anymore... you're fighting for *their*
life.

Carl stops and points the gun at Andrew's head.

Andrew cinches his eyes shut tight.

Trevor and Katie share a louder, muted SCREAM.

Carl squats beside Andrew, pressing the barrel closer.

Trevor and Katie's muted screams continue.

CARL (CONT'D)
(louder)
You want to fix this?

Trevor nods aggressively.

CARL (CONT'D)
You'll do as I say?

Trevor aggressively nods.

CARL (CONT'D)
Because if you don't... I'll make damn
sure you regret it!

Carl shoots up, arm stiff, finger on the trigger, gun shaking.

Trevor thrashes and bounces, SCREAMING through the gag, pleading desperately.

Katie lowers her head, tears slipping down her cheeks.

She can't bear to watch.

CARL (CONT'D)
No more secrets!

He reaches over, aggressively yanks down Trevor's gag.

TREVOR
Alright! You win! The money is yours.

Trevor lowers his head in submission, weeping with fear.

Carl rubs his hand down Andrew's face, cupping his chin gently.

CARL
Well, see how easy that was? All this
mess could have been avoided.

TREVOR
You're right. I'm sorry.

Head down, Trevor's eyes lift slowly to the sloppy knot binding Andrew's hands.

He swallows hard, then meets Andrew's gaze.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

He shifts his gaze to Katie.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry.

Carl watches the shock and disappointment in their faces with a smirk.

CARL

They really had no idea did they? Did I say you were good? I might have undersold it. Keeping this whole other side of you from your wife... and son. Now *that's* impressive.

TREVOR

Enough. You want the money? It's all yours... on the condition you leave them alone. Do what you want with me, but they stay here.

Carl rises, eyes narrowing with distrust.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

I've got the money in a secure place. I was waiting till the coast was clear. That last job... it was close. I needed to be sure we were clean.

CARL

Where is it?

TREVOR

I have a spot just down the hill. It's where I store all the equipment and supplies. Hidden, secure. The money's in there.

Carl studies Trevor, suspicion sharpening in his eyes.

CARL

You understand, if it ain't there, I'll kill you. March right back up here and kill these two.

TREVOR

This family is the most precious thing I have on this earth. Why would I risk their lives with something as trivial as this?

Carl's gaze flicks to Katie, then Andrew.

After a beat, his eyes lock back on Trevor.

Eyes don't lie.

CARL

Alright, let's see how this plays out.

Carl steps behind Trevor and grabs him firmly under the arms.

Trevor and Andrew lock eyes.

Trevor winks subtly.

Andrew's eyes narrow, confusion mixing with distrust.

Just as Carl begins to pull Trevor upright-

TREVOR
(silently mouths)
The knot.

His fingers twist and twirl, searching the knot.

Andrew's eyes widen.

They found a weakness.

Andrew winks back, understanding.

CARL
Let's go.

Trevor, now standing, is led toward the door by Carl.

As the door opens, Carl turns back.

CARL (CONT'D)
Sit tight, you two. If Trevor here
really is as smart as he thinks, he'll
give me what I want and be back to
release you.

Carl pulls Trevor outside.

The door SLAMS shut behind them.

Katie and Andrew listen intently as muted THUNKS echo across the back porch, fading with distance.

Andrew's hands frantically work at the knot.

EXT. CABIN PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

Carl follows Trevor off the porch, gun trained on Trevor's back the entire way.

They move in tense silence, footsteps crunching softly on the uneven ground.

INT. CABIN LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Katie notices Andrew fumbling anxiously at the knot binding his hands.

She turns her head slightly, lips moving silently beneath the gag.

KATIE

(muted)

What are you doing?

Andrew turns his head toward her, nodding downward.

A muffled grunt escapes under the gag.

ANDREW

(muted)

The knot.

EXT. CABIN PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

Trevor and Carl continue down the slope toward the hidden stash.

CARL

I really hope this isn't some
desperate attempt to wiggle out of
this. I'm not a killer, but I sure
will enjoy putting a bullet in your
head if you try anything.

Trevor stays silent, eyes forward.

With Carl's attention distracted by the rough terrain, Trevor slowly, carefully works his knot.

They maintain a steady, deliberate pace as tension simmers beneath every step.

INT. CABIN LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The knot behind Andrew loosens.

He wrestles his hands free.

He rises to his knees, reaches up and pulls down his gag.

Swiftly turns around, pulls down Katie's gag.

KATIE

Wow. Good job.

Andrew swiftly works Katie's knot.

ANDREW

We gotta save Dad. I know where
they're going.

KATIE

What? No... we're staying here and
calling the cops.

Katie rubs her wrists as her knots come undone.

ANDREW

There's no time... and no signal!

Andrew shoots up, bolts out of the room to the other end of
the cabin.

Katie rises slowly. Yells after him.

KATIE

Andrew, no! It's too dangerous.
Besides, your father made his bed. Now
he gets to lie in it.

Andrew enters back into the room with haste. His rifle
tightly bound to his chest.

Katie's eyes widen when she notices the gun.

KATIE (CONT'D)

No! Absolutely not!

ANDREW

We have to save Dad!

KATIE

Your Dad is in his own trouble.

ANDREW
(urgently pleading)
Don't you see... he's sacrificing
himself... for us!

Katie's eyes flicker with doubt, her breath catching. She wants to believe, but the fear and doubt holds her back.

KATIE
We'll take the car, get to where
there's signal, and call for help.
Let's go.

ANDREW
There's no time!

Like lightening, Andrew shoots out the room and heads outside.

KATIE
Andrew!

EXT. CABIN PROPERTY - CONTINUOUS

Andrew sprints full tilt into the woods.

Rifle gripped tight, he tears downhill, leaves and twigs snapping underfoot

INT. CABIN LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Katie stands alone; anxiety etched across her face.

The silence is thick, heavy.

Suddenly-

The front door CREAKS open.

Urgent footsteps approach. They're deliberate, measured. Not Carl's heavy march.

Katie whirls toward the sound, heart pounding.

The footsteps stop just inside the threshold.

Her eyes snap wide.

KATIE
What the hell are you doing here?

(Beat. Hold the tension before cutting away or shifting scenes)

EXT. VANTAGE POINT - CONTINUOUS

A gentle fog rises off the small pond nestled in the valley below, swirling in harmony with the soft glow of the rising morning sun.

Below, Trevor and Carl carefully make their way onto the jagged rocks.

EXT. ROCK FORMATION - CONTINUOUS

Trevor's hands remain bound tightly behind his back.

He works the knot subtly every chance he gets, fingers moving with quiet determination.

Carl trails close behind, gun unwaveringly aimed at Trevor.

As they reach a flat, stable surface, Trevor halts.

CARL
This it?

TREVOR
Right in there.

Trevor nods, gesturing toward a shadowy cave entrance tucked between the rocks.

Carl turns his gaze to the cave.

In a flash, Trevor works his hands free from the rope.

He throws a sharp punch as Carl's head turns back.

The blow knocks the gun from Carl's hand.

It skids across the rocks, dangerously close to a soft drop.

Carl reels back, lunging for Trevor.

He grabs Trevor's shoulders tight.

Trevor drives a brutal punch into Carl's ribs.

Carl WINCES.

As he recovers, Carl drives an elbow into Trevor's gut.

Trevor doubles over, gasping for air.

Carl SLAMS another elbow into Trevor's back.

Trevor crashes hard to the ground.

Carl's eyes flick quickly, spotting the gun.

He lunges toward it.

Trevor pushes himself up on his knees, launching at Carl.

He wraps his arms around Carl's waist and throws him backward.

Carl barely falls, catches himself with a grunt.

Trevor rises, muscles coiled.

Their eyes lock. A fierce challenge.

They charge at each other, colliding with BRUTAL FORCE.

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Andrew sprints toward the vantage point where he and Trevor hunted earlier.

Breathing heavy, winded, he pushes through the underbrush.

EXT. ROCK FORMATION - CONTINUOUS

Trevor drives Carl back with a hard right hook.

Carl counters with a sharp left to Trevor's side.

Trevor bends over in pain.

Carl seizes the moment, drops a crushing right fist onto Trevor's face.

Trevor collapses to his knees.

Trevor fires back with an uppercut to Carl's abdomen.

The blow sends Carl sprawling backward from the force.

Trevor dives for the gun.

EXT. VANTAGE POINT - CONTINUOUS

Andrew bursts onto the vantage point, winded but determined.

He spots his dad and Carl locked in brutal combat on the rocks below.

Without hesitation, Andrew sets up his rifle, eyes narrowing with focus.

EXT. ROCK FORMATION - CONTINUOUS

Trevor snatches the gun.

He rolls over, raising it with shaky hands.

Carl reacts fast, kicking at Trevor's hand.

The gun flies free, tumbling down the rocky slope.

On the descent, Trevor grabs Carl's foot.

He twists sharply to the left.

Carl's knee buckles; he crashes hard to the ground.

Trevor rises, chest heaving, ready to press the fight.

Carl groans, slowly pushing himself up, breathing ragged.

He slips a fist-sized rock from the ground behind his back, hiding it carefully.

Both men gasp for breath, sweat glistening, muscles taut.

CARL
Having fun partner?

TREVOR
I'm just getting started.

CARL
(menacing)
Oh... me too.

Trevor's eyes subtly glaze onto the rocks behind Carl.

EXT. VANTAGE POINT - CONTINUOUS

START SCOPE POV:

The rifle scope sweeps across the rocky terrain, quickly locking onto the two men.

The crosshairs narrow in on Carl.

Focus sharpens.

The scope picks out the fist-sized rock hidden behind Carl's back.

It lifts to frame Carl's back. Right behind his heart.

EXT. ROCK FORMATION - CONTINUOUS

TREVOR
You still haven't figured it out yet... have you?

EXT. VANTAGE POINT - CONTINUOUS

SCOPE POV:

The scope zeroes sharply on Carl's heart.

A slow, steady EXHALE fills the silence.

EXT. ROCK FORMATION - CONTINUOUS

CARL
What's that?

EXT. VANTAGE POINT - CONTINUOUS

SCOPE POV:

The crosshairs lock in tight on Carl's heart.

CLICK.

EXT. ROCK FORMATION - CONTINUOUS

VOICE (O.S.)

You've got the wrong guy.

EXT. VANTAGE POINT - CONTINUOUS

SCOPE POV:

Crosshairs steady, locked tight.

BOOM.

The scope settles.

Pink mist sprays from Carl's back.

He collapses, crumpling onto the rocks.

EXT. ROCK FORMATION - CONTINUOUS

Trevor jerks his head toward the sound of the shot.

A slow, proud smile spreads across his face.

EXT. VANTAGE POINT - CONTINUOUS

START SCOPE POV:

The scope catches Trevor's satisfied smile in its reflection.

It sways right, searching.

Finds another figure standing on the rocks behind Carl.

Zooms in sharply, focusing with precision.

END SCOPE POV:

The rifle lowers.

Andrew's head raises.

ANDREW
Uncle Mike?

EXT. ROCK FORMATION - CONTINUOUS

Carl lies sprawled on the rocks, blood pooling beneath him.

He slowly turns his head to the right.

Mike descends carefully from the rocks, his steps deliberate.

Carl's eyes follow him, wary and alert.

Mike stops beside Trevor, standing tall as the morning sun washes over his face.

A mirror image of Trevor.

Carl's eyes sharpen on Mike.

CARL
There you are, Falcon.

His gaze widens, darts rapidly between Trevor and Mike.

CARL (CONT'D)
There's two of you?

MIKE
There's always been two of us,
Stingray. That one just never got
involved.

EXT. VANTAGE POINT - CONTINUOUS

Andrew stands triumphant, rifle lowered, chest heaving.

Katie arrives by his side, winded.

ANDREW

Mom... what's Uncle Mike doing here?

EXT. ROCK FORMATION - CONTINUOUS

Carl lays his head back against the cold rocks.

His eyes drift upward toward the sky as life slips away.

His chest rises and falls one last time... then stills.

Trevor and Mike watch silently as Carl fades.

A solemn beat lingers between them.

MIKE

Hey, Bro.

TREVOR

Don't "Hey Bro" me, you asshole. Do you realize all the trouble you've caused me this week?

MIKE

I'm sorry brother. I didn't think Stingray was going to come after me so soon.

TREVOR

What is all this? What are you into?

MIKE

Best you don't know. Plausible Deniability.

The conversation quickly shifts as Andrew and Katie approach, breathless and wide-eyed.

Trevor's face lights up, and he darts toward Andrew, pulling him into a tight hug.

TREVOR

Hey Bud! Great shot! I'm so proud of you.

ANDREW

I just did like you taught me.

Katie steps forward as Trevor and Andrew separate.

They face each other, emotions raw.

TREVOR
Honey... I -

Katie breaks, diving into his arms. Tears stream down her face.

KATIE
I'm sorry.
(beat)
Forgive me.

Trevor exhales deeply, pulling her in tighter.

TREVOR
Done.

Andrew turns to Mike.

ANDREW
Uncle Mike... I don't believe it.

They share a heartfelt hug.

Katie lifts her head from Trevor's chest, wiping tears from her cheek.

She looks to Mike, searching for answers.

KATIE
All this time?

MIKE
Yea. Watching, waiting, protecting.

The family's eyes lock onto him, sharp and questioning.

MIKE (CONT'D)
I couldn't blow my cover earlier. Had to wait for the perfect moment to reveal myself.

KATIE
Why didn't you say anything... warn us?

MIKE
The less people know, the safer they
(MORE)

MIKE (CONT'D)

are.

Andrew narrows his eyes, looking at Trevor.

ANDREW

So... you're the reason Dad has been so sketchy lately?

TREVOR

Honestly... I had no clue Mike was around or what he was doing. This is all news to me too.

A beat. He looks at each of them with quiet resolve.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Let's get back to the house. I... and apparently Mike, have some explaining to do.

The family begins to walk away together.

Andrew pauses, looking back toward the rocks.

ANDREW

What are we going to do about him?

Katie and Trevor exchange a glance, then look to Mike.

Mike's eyes drop to the fallen Carl.

MIKE

Well... if the wildlife doesn't get him first, I'll deal with him later.

Looks back up at the family.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Stingray lived completely off the grid. Trust me... no one's going to miss him.

Katie cracks a small smile, shaking her head in disbelief.

KATIE

Wow. He really was Old School.

DISSOLVE

INT. CABIN BACK PORCH - LATER

The family is gathered on the back porch.

Katie sits on Trevor's lap.

She lovingly applies an icepack to his head.

Andrew sits on the railing watching his parents. Smiles.

KATIE

Ok mister... talk. Start with the money?

Trevor smirks, a playful glint in his eye.

TREVOR

There really is an innocent explanation for that.

DISSOLVE

INT. CAR - FLASHBACK (NEW PERSPECTIVE)

Suddenly-

BUZZ BUZZ

Trevor's phone vibrates in his pocket.

He pulls his hand away from Katie's and checks the screen.

START NEW CONEXT:

TEXT SCROLL - "Left you a surprise in the bathroom. Don't tell Katie. Mike"

END NEW CONTEXT.

His smile fades slightly as he reads the message.

He quickly locks the screen and tucks the phone away.

Katie eyes him suspiciously.

KATIE

Who was that?

TREVOR

I thought you said no work talk.

DISSOLVE

INT. BATHROOM - FLASHBACK (NEW PERSPECTIVE)

Opening the medicine cabinet, he finds it empty.

He moves down to the cabinet under the sink, also bare.

Finally, he approaches a double-door closet stacked with towels and sheets.

His fingers thumb through the contents slowly, searching.

START NEW CONTEXT:

He finds a manilla envelope hidden under the towels.

His name written on the front.

He opens it, revealing a note.

The note reads - "Give your family a vacation they will NEVER forget. Love you. Mike"

Trevor turns over the envelope and a large, banded stack of hundred-dollar bills falls into his hand.

Trevor's eyes grow wide. He smiles.

END NEW CONTEXT:

DISSOLVE

EXT. CABIN BACK PORCH - CURRENT

The back door CREAKS open.

Mike steps onto the porch.

TREVOR

(sarcastic)

So really guys... you have Uncle Mike
to thank for this *unforgettable*
vacation.

MIKE

Hindsight and... all that. Whatever.

TREVOR

You're still an asshole.

Mike flashes a smirk, shrugs lightly.

MIKE

Guilty.

Mike hands Trevor an I-Pad like device.

Katie carefully rises and sits beside Trevor.

Trevor takes the device, studies the screen.

Multiple monitors display surveillance angles covering the property.

MIKE (CONT'D)

This is everything you've been working
on this last year.

Katie moves behind Trevor, leaning in to see the screen.

Andrew hops down from the railing and joins them.

TREVOR

Oh my God, Mike. This is great! Does
the remote control work?

MIKE

Yea. Try it out.

Trevor taps an icon.

The screen shifts to a camera view with remote control
interface.

He manipulates the camera angle smoothly.

Trevor's fingers glide across the screen, shifting views
seamlessly to different parts of the property.

He leans in closer, eyes widening in amazement.

TREVOR

This is awesome!

(beat)

Wait... this is your front gate
camera? That's like two miles away.
How did you get the remote range to
reach that far?

Mike nods confidently, a hint of pride in his eyes.

MIKE

That's the breakthrough. That's what's going to sell these systems.

Trevor's jaw drops slightly, disbelief turning to excitement.

TREVOR

Holy shit!

Katie peers over his shoulder, intrigued.

KATIE

What is this?

TREVOR

Mike and I developed a security monitoring system that's completely off grid. It's wireless and unhackable. Mike's been field testing it.

MIKE

I put up 30 camouflaged cameras all over my property.

(pointing)

And... I dug out an underground surveillance bunker about three hundred yards over there.

(beat)

That's how I kept track of Stingray's activities.

DISSOLVE

INT. SURVEILLANCE BUNKER - FLASHBACK (NEW PROSPECTIVE)

A monitor displays a live feed of Trevor casually strolling the woods.

In front, feet are resting on the table.

Suddenly, the feet drop to the floor.

START NEW CONTEXT:

Mike rises.

He turns and ascends the stairs.

Opens the door and exits the bunker.

END NEW CONTEXT:

DISSOLVE

EXT. CABIN BACK PORCH - CURRENT

MIKE

Due to the surveillance, I had to step
in sooner than I had hoped.

DISSOLVE

EXT. RIVERBANK - FLASHBACK (NEW PROSPECTIVE)

Trevor vanishes behind a rock formation.

Carl scans the shoreline, eyes sharp.

He steps around the tree, shifting for a clearer view.

START NEW CONTEXT:

Suddenly, face to face with Mike.

THWACK!

He grabs Carl by the throat.

In one fluid motion, SLAMS him to the ground with a muted
THUD.

Lightning-quick, Mike's on top of him. A knife pointed to
Carl's throat.

Mike's open palm hovers over the hilt, ready to strike.

Their eyes lock. Glowing dangerous, unflinching.

MIKE

(forceful, quiet)

What the fuck are you doing here?

Carl freezes.

His brow twitches. Something's... off.

CARL

Hey there partner.

A raging fire burns in Mike's eyes. Something raw and
unfamiliar.

It's not just controlled anger. It's cold, sharp intent.

CARL (CONT'D)

What... you gonna kill me? That's not
in your nature.

The blade trembles tightly in Mike's grip, muscles taut
beneath his skin.

END NEW CONTEXT:

DISSOLVE

EXT. CABIN BACK PORCH - CURRENT

MIKE

You're welcome.

Katie leans forward, curiosity and hope in her eyes.

KATIE

When did all this start?

Trevor shifts slightly, glancing at Mike before answering.

TREVOR

Right before I got laid off from Hyden
Security Systems.

MIKE

This is all Trevor's design. I just
provided resources and raw materials.

Mike steps closer, proud but humble.

MIKE (CONT'D)

This is the future or the Mills
family.

(beat)

It's gonna make us millions.

Andrew folds his arms, intrigued.

ANDREW

So... that "job interview" for the
warehouse you had before we left
was... this?

Trevor nods, a small smile breaking through.

TREVOR

Yeah. Mike met me in town that week so we could file the patents.

Katie reaches out, lightly slapping Trevor's shoulder with a mix of affection and relief.

KATIE

Why didn't you say anything?

Trevor looks to her, sincere.

TREVOR

I wanted it to be a surprise.

Andrew's eyes flick toward the car, suspicion mixed with anticipation.

ANDREW

Speaking of surprises, what's with that awfully heavy bag in the trunk? You know... Mom's surprise.

Trevor chuckles, then turns to Mike.

TREVOR

Oh yea... the next batch of 20 cameras are in the trunk.

Katie turns her head toward Trevor, interest piqued.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

All my tinkering in the basement is about pay off.

Trevor holds up the control device with a proud grin.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Surprise!

Katie and Andrew settle beside him. Katie snuggles in close, resting her head gently on Trevor's shoulder.

The family sits cuddled together, relaxed but reflective.

The sun sets gently behind them, casting warm, golden hues that bathe the porch in soft light.

Mike casually rises from his chair and walks off the porch, disappearing into the whispering woods.

Trevor, Katie, and Andrew share a quiet moment. No words needed, just the comforting presence of each other.

Trevor glances at Katie and Andrew, a large, confident smile escapes his lips.

Katie squeezes him and leans into his chest, her smile radiant with renewed faith.

Andrew rests his head on Trevor's shoulder, content.

They sit lovingly nestled together, a family finding its way back.

IMAGE DISSOLVE SEAMLESSLY INTO:

INT. SURVEILLANCE BUNKER - CONTINUOUS

A monitor displays the live feed of the family's tender moment on the porch.

A brief pause.

Mike's hand reaches into frame and gently turns the monitor off.

CLICK!

BLACKOUT

THE END