

THE LAST OFFERING

Written by  
Jason Green

Copyright (c) 2026

v.2

green.jason.a@gmail.com  
(732) 330-3553

FADE IN:

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN — VIRGINIA COAST — NIGHT

The hull.

Close on oak planking driving through black water, the bow cutting swells that have been building across three thousand miles of open ocean. The ship listed and massive, the rigging straining in the dark. A storm behind them — not receding, following. Lightning illuminating the vessel in silhouette against the sky, the masts whipping, the bell on the foredeck swinging without being rung, the clapper finding the iron on its own.

The bell rings.

Then again. The rhythm of it wrong — not a watch change, not a signal. The rhythm of something that cannot be stopped.

Then — through the storm, through the dark —

The coast.

Forest. Dense. Unbroken. The land offering nothing.

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN — SHORELINE — DAWN

The longboat through the surf. Six men at the oars, the water fighting them, the shore getting closer by degrees. The storm behind them still present — the sky the color of something that has not decided yet.

The keel finds sand.

People wade to shore through the shallows. Exhausted in a way that has moved past the body — the specific exhaustion of people who have been afraid for a very long time and have not yet been given permission to stop. They carry what they have left. It is almost nothing.

They stand on the beach. The ocean behind them. The forest in front.

The forest receives them.

EXT. SETTLEMENT — CONSTRUCTION — DAY

Time passing in cuts.

A town being built from nothing. Hands on timber. The sound of axes. Children underfoot – running between the legs of working adults, small enough to move through spaces the adults cannot. The work of survival has its own rhythm. They have found it.

Men in the field, breaking ground. Women at a fire, the specific industry of people who understand that stopping means dying. A service outside – the congregation gathered in the clearing, heads bowed, the minister's voice carrying in the stillness. Children chasing something at the forest's edge. A hunting party returning with enough. Not plenty. Enough.

It looks like hope. For a moment it looks exactly like hope.

EXT. SETTLEMENT – FAILING – VARIOUS

The season changing.

The garden first. Shoots that came up wrong, or didn't come up. The specific arithmetic of mouths against yield, running the numbers, not liking the answer. Portions smaller. The faces across cuts – the same faces, changed. Ribs showing beneath fabric. Children quieter than children should be.

Then the hurricane. One night – the structures holding or not holding, the work of months tested in hours. The sound of it. The specific sound of a storm that does not care what is in its path.

Then the sickness. Moving through the settlement with the patience of something that has nowhere else to be. A body carried. A bed that stays empty. Another. The community at the edge of its own continuation, looking over.

The drums have been silent since the first frame.

EXT. SETTLEMENT – SHORE – DAY

John White at the water's edge.

He looks at the settlement behind him. At the people – fewer now, thinner, the specific look of people who have started calculating how much longer. He looks at the ship in the harbor. At the small crew assembled to make the crossing.

He looks for a long moment at the faces watching him go.

He gets in the longboat.

The oars find the water. The shore receding. The faces on the beach getting smaller. A child's hand raised – not waving, holding. The distance making it impossible to tell which.

He does not look back again.

The ship takes the horizon.

EXT. SETTLEMENT – FAILING – LATER

Without him.

The cold deepening. The portions gone past small into nothing. The hunting parties returning with less each time, then not returning. Fresh graves at the forest's edge – not one or two, many, the specific accumulation of a community being subtracted from itself one body at a time.

Then the stillness. No axes. No voices. The fire in the center of the settlement burning lower, untended. The smoldering of something that was kept alive by attention and is now being left to itself.

Structures standing.

Possessions in place – cups on tables, tools leaning against walls, the ordinary objects of a life still arranged as if the life will return for them.

The settlement is full of everything except people. No evidence of violence. No indication of where they went or why. Just – gone. Completely. As if the air accepted them.

A door moves slightly in the wind.

EXT. TREE LINE – CARVED POST – DAY

A post at the edge of the clearing.

Someone has carved a word into the wood. Deep cuts. Deliberate. The hand of a man working carefully, not desperately – a man who has time, now, because his problem has been solved.

CROATOAN.

The letters are even. Practiced. But the A –

The A is shaped with specific, deliberate precision. A triangle inside the letter. Not the A of a desperate man leaving a message. The A of a man leaving a mark.

The fog from the forest moving across the clearing.  
Swallowing the post. Swallowing the graves. The smoldering  
fire at the settlement's center finding its last breath and  
going out.

CUT TO BLACK.

#### THE LAST OFFERING

EXT. POLICE PRECINCT — PARKING LOT — DAY

A box.

Cardboard. The kind that holds reams of paper and now holds  
twenty years. It sits on the hood of a car while ABE  
NATHANIEL, 48, locks the trunk. He is the kind of man who  
takes up the right amount of space — not more, not less. The  
kind of man who has spent two decades making himself  
readable to people in crisis. Steady. Present. The  
steadiness has a cost and the cost is visible if you know  
where to look.

He picks up the box and goes inside.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT — ABE'S DESK — DAY

The desk already mostly cleared. He sets the box down.

What remains on the surface: a coffee mug. A framed  
photograph of Mary — not face down, facing him, the way it  
has faced him every day for twenty years. Beside it a  
smaller frame — Isaac, maybe five, holding something up for  
the camera with the specific pride of a child who has made  
something and needs a witness. Beside that, taped to the  
partition, a drawing in crayon. A house. Two figures in  
front of it, one large, one small. The large one has a  
badge. The small one is holding the large one's hand.

Abe looks at the drawing for a moment.

He takes it down carefully. Not pulling — peeling, the tape  
releasing from the partition slowly so the paper doesn't  
tear. He holds it for a moment. Sets it in the box first.

Then the photographs. Mary. Isaac. Each one turned to face  
him one last time before it goes in.

A single file folder on the corner of the desk — he opens  
it, reads the top page, closes it. Into the box.

He looks at the empty desk. Twenty years into a cardboard container. The box is lighter than it should be. But he is not.

He picks it up.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT — BULLPEN — CONTINUOUS

Walking out. Colleagues marking the moment in the way of people who don't know how to mark moments — a nod, a hand raised, someone saying his name once. He receives it without breaking stride.

He passes the wanted and missing board.

He doesn't stop.

Faces pinned to corkboard. Adults at the top. Lower down, smaller. Some of the photographs old enough that the people in them have either been found or stopped being looked for. Some of them recent. Some of them small.

He has looked at this board every day for twenty years. He has taken some of them down himself — the found ones, the closed ones. Not enough of them. Never enough of them.

Today is the last day.

He doesn't stop.

But —

He keeps moving.

The door closes behind him.

EXT. POLICE PRECINCT — PARKING LOT — CONTINUOUS

He puts the box in the trunk. The drawing on top — Isaac's house, the two figures, the hand hold between them.

He closes the trunk.

Gets in.

He looks at his hands on the wheel.

He drives.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING

The sound of the door. Mary at the counter - she turns before he's fully in the room.

He sets the box down.

She looks at it. At him. At his hands - the ordinary hands of a man who has just carried twenty years out of a building and set them on her kitchen floor.

A beat.

Then she crosses the kitchen and puts her arms around him.

He holds her.

MARY

That's it then.

ABE

That's it.

She pulls back. Looks at him. Her hands on his face. Looking.

MARY

How do you feel.

He thinks about it. Genuinely. Not performing the consideration - actually taking inventory.

ABE

I don't know yet.

She smiles. The real one.

MARY

That's the most honest thing you've said in twenty years.

ABE

Don't push it.

She goes back to the stove. But differently than before - something lighter in it.

MARY

I'm making the good stuff. We're celebrating.

ABE

You knew I needed to do it.

MARY

I knew you were going to do it when you told me you weren't sure you were going to do it.

ABE

I got a message this afternoon. PI work. First case already.

MARY

See? Told you. Smooth transition. You're too good at this for the phone to stay quiet.

ABE

It's simple. One day out. Back by dinner.

MARY

Which dinner.

ABE

Tomorrow's.

MARY

(back to the stove)  
I'll believe it when I'm eating it with you.

ABE

I'll be here.

She looks at him over her shoulder. Then she goes back to the stove.

MARY

Isaac's going to lose his mind when he sees you're actually home.

ABE

Where is he.

MARY

Upstairs. Go. Dinner's twenty minutes.

He doesn't move toward the stairs immediately. He stands in the kitchen for a moment. His kitchen.

He looks at the box on the floor.

He leaves it there.

He goes upstairs.

Mary at the stove.

Cooking the good stuff.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — ISAAC'S ROOM — NIGHT

Late. Past Isaac's bedtime technically but Abe is home and the rules bend when Abe is home because Isaac has learned to take the time when it's available.

They are on the floor.

Some game — not a board game, something invented, the specific private game of a father and son who have been playing a version of it since Isaac was small enough to sit in Abe's lap and has evolved as Isaac has evolved and belongs entirely to the two of them. The rules known only here. The logic of it opaque to anyone watching.

Abe on the floor with his back against the bed. Isaac beside him, close — the specific proximity of a child who has recalibrated the safe distance downward because tonight the safe distance can be shorter.

They play.

ABE

That doesn't count.

ISAAC

It does count. I invented that rule.

ABE

You invented it thirty seconds ago.

ISAAC

Rules can be new if both people agree.

ABE

That's not how agreeing works.

Isaac looks at him with the expression of a child who is losing the argument and knows it and is going to lose it on his own terms.

ISAAC

Fine. Your turn.

Abe makes his move. Isaac watches it with the careful attention he applies to everything — reading it, assessing it, running the calculation that is too large for him and doing it anyway.

ISAAC (cont'd)

Dad.

ABE

Yeah.

ISAAC

Are you going to be home tomorrow?

The question landing the way it lands when a child has been wanting to ask it all evening and has waited until the game made it easier.

ABE

Out of town. Back by dinner.

ISAAC

You said that last time.

ABE

I know, bud.

ISAAC

(looks at the game,  
moves something)

Mom says you mean it every time.

ABE

I do mean it every time.

ISAAC

But it doesn't happen every time.

Abe looks at his son.

ABE

No. It doesn't. This time is different – I'm done with the other job. This is the first case of the new one. Simple. One day out.

Isaac holds his gaze. The look of a child running a calculation – weighing the promise against the pattern, trying to determine which one is more true.

He reaches over and picks up Abe's hand.

Not holding it – just picking it up. Turning it over. Looking at the palm the way children look at things they are trying to understand through examination.

ISAAC

When you're lying they do this.

He traces something on Abe's palm. A gesture too small and too specific to be named.

ABE  
I'm not lying.

ISAAC  
I know. They're not doing it.

He sets the hand down.

ISAAC (cont'd)  
Okay. I believe you.

ABE  
Thank you.

ISAAC  
Don't make me wrong.

ABE  
I won't.

They play. The burned hands not yet burned. The ordinary hands of a father on a floor with his son, examined by small fingers and found to be telling the truth.

MARY (O.S.)  
(from the hallway)  
Isaac. Ten more minutes.

ISAAC  
(without looking up)  
Twenty.

MARY (O.S.)  
Fifteen and that's the ceiling.

Isaac looks at Abe. The negotiation completed on his behalf without his input and correctly.

ISAAC  
She does that.

ABE  
I know. I've seen it.

ISAAC  
It works though.

ABE  
It really does.

They play.

ISAAC  
Dad.

ABE  
Yeah.

ISAAC  
I'm glad you're home. Like, really home. Not just in the house.

ABE  
(quiet)  
Yeah. Me too, bud.

ISAAC  
There's a difference.

ABE  
I know there's a difference.

Isaac nods. Files it in the place where he keeps the things that are true and good and might not last and are worth having anyway.

He makes his move.

ABE (cont'd)  
That definitely doesn't count.

ISAAC  
New rule.

ABE  
You can't -

ISAAC  
Already invented it.

Mary appears in the doorway. The fifteen minutes clearly expired. She leans against the doorframe and says nothing for a moment - just looks at her husband on the floor with their son, really home, the difference visible from the hallway.

She doesn't interrupt it.

MARY  
Five more minutes.

She goes.

Abe and Isaac on the floor.

Five more minutes.

INT. NEUTRAL MEETING LOCATION - DAY

A diner. Not a memorable one. The kind of place designed to be passed through rather than stayed in - vinyl booths, laminate tables, the particular light of a room that hasn't been reconsidered since it was built. The kind of place two people can talk without being the most interesting thing in it.

Abe is already in the booth when the INTERMEDIARY sits down across from him.

The Intermediary is unremarkable in the specific way of someone who has worked at being unremarkable. Fifties. Clean. The language of a man who has done this handoff before and knows the value of sounding like he hasn't.

INTERMEDIARY

We represent a family. Their son - eight years old - was taken two years ago. No ransom. No contact. They assumed the worst.

He sets a photograph on the table. A boy. Eight years old. Small for it.

INTERMEDIARY (cont'd)

Six weeks ago the mother was at Saint Augustine's orphanage with her husband. Looking into adoption. She saw him. Their son. Alive. In the common room.

He says it the way people say things they know sound impossible.

INTERMEDIARY (cont'd)

They left without approaching him. Smart. If whoever took him has connections to that facility - staff, administration, the church that runs it - they didn't want to trigger anything. They came to us instead.

He slides a folder across the table.

INTERMEDIARY (cont'd)

We've developed a contact on the inside. The contact has confirmed the identification. The boy is there. The contact will ensure access - unlocked doors, a clear route, timing. Your job is to go in, confirm the ID yourself, and bring him out quietly.

He folds his hands on the table.

INTERMEDIARY (cont'd)  
Local authorities have been notified.  
The family doesn't want a spectacle.  
The boy has been through enough. They  
want him home without a circus that  
tells whoever took him exactly where  
to find him again.

A beat.

ABE  
Why not just have the contact bring  
him out.

INTERMEDIARY  
The contact's position is sensitive.  
Any direct involvement ends their  
access, potentially exposes them. We  
need someone who can make a clean  
extraction look like it didn't  
happen.

Abe looks at the photograph. At the file.

ABE  
The family.

INTERMEDIARY  
Waiting. They've been waiting two  
years.

The file slides fully across the table. Abe opens it. Reads.  
The family's documentation. The boy's intake records at the  
orphanage. A floor plan of the building. Timing notes in  
clean handwriting.

His face does what it does when he's working — still, taking  
it in, not performing skepticism or trust. Just reading.

He closes the file.

INTERMEDIARY (cont'd)  
Blessed is he who delivers the child  
to our father. Your work begins.

He takes the case.

EXT. ORPHANAGE — DAY

A residential street. Institutional building set back from the sidewalk — brick, maintained, the specific neutrality of a place that has learned to present correctly. It looks exactly like it's supposed to look.

Abe's car parked down the block. Coffee going cold in the cup-holder. Eyes on the entrance. The file open on the passenger seat — the floor plan, the timing notes, the photograph of the boy.

People moving in and out at the expected intervals. Staff. A delivery. Two children briefly visible through a ground floor window before someone moves them back from the glass.

Nothing wrong. Everything correct.

He picks up the floor plan. Looks at the building. Looks at the plan. The contact's notes precise — second floor, east corridor, third door. Unlocked from 11pm. Staff rotation leaves the east stairwell clear from 11:15 to 11:45.

Thirty minutes. Clean in, clean out.

He sets the plan down.

EXT. ORPHANAGE — LATER

Something on the orphanage door. He notices it the way you notice something that doesn't belong — not alarm, registration. A mark on the door frame. Chalked. Small. A triangle, precise, the kind of thing that could be a child's drawing or a surveyor's mark or nothing at all.

He looks at it.

Files it.

Looks back at the entrance.

The irregularities surface slowly as he reads. A discrepancy in the intake records. A name that appears twice with different dates. A staff member who signed three documents on a day the facility log shows she wasn't present. Small things. The kind of small things that accumulate into a pattern if you're the kind of man who notices small things.

Finding them feels like good detective work.

A boy's room. A doorway. The specific stillness of a room that has become a crime scene — a case that never closed right, the system moving on before Abe was ready to let it.

A child nobody came looking for. The nobody-came-looking quality that stayed with him the way certain cases stay, not in the details but in the weight.

Then others. Doors opened on things that couldn't be unseen. The specific weight of arriving too late – not once, a pattern, a career-long accumulation of the same moment in different rooms. The face of a man who has spent twenty years being the person who comes after.

A child visible again briefly through the ground floor window.

Gone.

Abe looks at the door frame. At the chalked triangle.

The case is clean. The boy is real. The family wants him back.

He picks up his phone.

INT./EXT. CAR – CONTINUOUS

MARY (V.O.)

Hey.

ABE

Hey. I'm going to head out in the morning. Should have him back to the family by afternoon.

MARY (V.O.)

Home by dinner?

ABE

Home by dinner. We're still going.

A beat.

MARY (V.O.)

Okay.

ABE

I mean it.

MARY (V.O.)

I know you do. Isaac wants to know if you'll be home to do the thing.

ABE Tell him yes.

MARY (V.O.) (cont'd)  
He's going to hold you to that.

ABE  
Good.

He sets the phone down. Looks at the orphanage entrance one more time. The door frame. The chalked triangle still there, barely visible from this distance.

He looks at it for a moment.

Starts the car.

INT. ORPHANAGE — LATE AFTERNOON

Abe at the side entrance. His hand on the door. The contact said unlocked — and it is. Not forced, not picked. Simply open. Waiting for him.

He goes in.

The east corridor. Third door.

It feels like good planning.

Along the corridor wall — he passes it without stopping, registering it peripherally — a chalk mark. Small. A triangle. At eye level on the baseboard, the kind of place you'd only put something if you wanted someone moving quickly to be able to find it.

He doesn't stop.

He finds ISHMAEL in a room on the second floor.

Eight years old. Small for it. Sitting on the edge of a bed in the dark, awake, in the specific way of a child who has learned not to be surprised by what the night brings.

Not frightened. Something else. The specific stillness of a child who has been waiting — not for rescue, not for danger. Just waiting. The way you wait when you have stopped expecting the night to bring anything other than what it brings.

He looks at Abe in the doorway.

He doesn't make a sound.

Abe comes down to his level. Slow. No sudden movements. The voice he uses for scared kids — low, unhurried, no agenda behind it.

ABE

My name's Abe. I'm going to take you  
somewhere safe. You're going to be  
okay.

Ishmael looks at him.

At the doorway behind him.

At Abe again.

He says nothing.

Abe extends his hand. Waits.

After a moment Ishmael stands. He doesn't take the hand. He  
moves to the door on his own and waits there for Abe to  
lead.

They go.

EXT. ORPHANAGE — CONTINUOUS

The side exit. The door already unlocked — the contact  
again, the infrastructure of it, every friction point  
removed in advance.

Out into the yard. Into the car. The street behind them  
quiet and unchanged.

At the orphanage entrance — the chalk triangle on the door  
frame catching the streetlight for just a moment as Abe  
pulls away.

Gone in the mirror.

INT. CAR — HIGHWAY — EVENING

Abe drives. Ishmael in the backseat, seat-belted, hands in  
his lap. Looking out the window at the dark moving past. Not  
frightened — something else. Taking it in. Filing it.

Abe talks to him the way he talked to every scared kid he  
ever pulled out of something bad. Low. Unhurried. No  
destination to the conversation, just the presence of a  
voice that isn't asking anything.

ABE

We've got a few hours. You can sleep  
if you want. There's water in the bag  
there. You don't have to talk.

Ishmael doesn't respond. Doesn't look at him. Keeps watching the dark outside the window.

Abe keeps talking anyway. Where they're going. What the family is like — what the intermediary told him, which is enough to work with. That it's going to be okay. He says it the way he said it to the other kids, the true ones, the ones he meant it for.

Somewhere in the first hour —

INT. CAR — HIGHWAY — CONTINUOUS (MEMORY)

The murdered boy. The room. The nobody-came-looking quality. The case that never closed right because there was no one on the other end of it to close it for.

He looks at Ishmael in the rear-view mirror.

The same invisible child. The same quality of a kid the system has quietly stopped seeing. He looks at what Isaac would look like if nobody had ever chosen him.

He finds himself meaning it when he says it's going to be okay.

He means it differently than he meant it an hour ago.

INT. CAR — HIGHWAY — LATER

Ishmael has shifted slightly. Not toward Abe — not that far — but no longer quite so precisely away. The window still has his attention. His hands still in his lap. But something in the set of him has changed by a degree.

Abe notices. Doesn't remark on it.

ABE

Almost there.

EXT. CANAAN, VIRGINIA — STREET — DAWN

The town arriving out of the dark as the light comes up. Small. Colonial. Maintained with the specific pride of a place that knows what it is and intends to stay that way. Beautiful, in the way of things that have been preserved carefully for a long time.

The streets empty at this hour. The church visible at the end of the main street – white clapboard, steeple, the most photographed building in town. It looks exactly like it's supposed to look.

Abe pulls up to the address.

EXT. CANAAN – RECEIVING HOUSE – DAWN

The RECEIVING PARTY comes out before Abe has fully stopped the car. Three of them. Warm – the careful warmth of people who know how to present it. The right smiles. The right body language. The right amount of relief at exactly the right volume.

Something about the texture is wrong in a way Abe can't name yet.

RECEIVING PARTY MEMBER  
Blessed is the child delivered to our  
father. Your work is done.

Word for word.

Like they've said it many times before.

Ishmael climbs out of the car. Stands on the sidewalk.

The receiving party moves toward him with that careful warmth and Ishmael stands among them like a stranger. Not a child being received by people who care about him. Not a child coming home. A package that has arrived at its destination and knows it and has known it for a long time.

He doesn't flinch. He doesn't reach for anyone. He stands in the middle of them completely still, looking at nothing, and lets them arrange themselves around him.

Abe watches.

The receiving party guides Ishmael toward the front door. One of them looks back at Abe – the smile still correct, the warmth still in place.

The door closes.

INT./EXT. CAR – CONTINUOUS

Abe gets back in. Puts his hand on the key.

Doesn't turn it.

No reason to stay.

He stays.

EXT./INT. CAR — CANAAN STREET — MORNING

He works it out loud the way detectives do when they're alone — not talking to himself, exactly, talking through it. The same voice he used on Ishmael on the drive. Low. Unhurried.

ABE

The language was identical. Word for word. Nobody talks like that by accident. You don't memorize a greeting. You memorize a liturgy.

He watches the house. Nothing moving behind the windows.

ABE (cont'd)

And the boy — he stood among them like he knew exactly what was about to happen. Like he'd known for a long time. Like he'd stopped expecting anyone to stop it.

A beat.

ABE One hour. Just to see the lights come on. See a normal evening through a window. See a kid get fed and put to bed. One hour and I drive home.

He settles back. Eyes on the house.

EXT. CANAAN — CHURCH EXTERIOR — LATE AFTERNOON

Abe parked across the street. The church in front of him — white clapboard, steeple, the most photographed building in town. He's been sitting here since the delivery. Since the receiving party took Ishmael inside and the door closed and something didn't sit right and he gave it an hour and the hour didn't fix it.

He looks at the church.

Gets out of the car.

EXT. CANAAN — CHURCH EXTERIOR — CONTINUOUS

He crosses the street. Not toward the entrance — around the perimeter. Reading the building the way he reads buildings.

The foundation. The windows. The age of the stone underneath the clapboard – older than the clapboard, older than the colonial facade, the building beneath the building visible if you know where to look.

He stops at the side window.

The stained glass catching the late afternoon light from inside – biblical scenes, fire in them, more than the scenes require. Children in them. The proportions of the robed figures slightly wrong. He looks at it for a long moment.

In the corner of one pane, almost at the edge where the leading meets the stone –

A bull. Small. Deliberate. Not decorative. Placed.

He looks at it.

Takes out his phone. Photographs it.

Then the other windows. The foundation. The side entrance. A utility marking on the curb – a triangle, small, precise, the kind of thing you don't see unless you know the shape. He photographs that too.

Goes back to the car.

INT./EXT. CAR – CONTINUOUS

Laptop open on the passenger seat. He pulls up the property records for the church – county database, public records, twenty years of knowing how to find things in documents that weren't meant to be found.

The church registered to the Order of the Tophet. Founding date – 1623. The same year the White-Howe land grant was signed. He doesn't know that yet. He notes the date. Notes the name.

He pulls the photos from the receiving house. The property records. The family in Canaan that wanted Ishmael back through proper channels. He reads the documents the intermediary gave him.

Then he reads them again.

The language. Not standard. Not the language of a family trying to recover a child through proper channels. The language of a transaction. Of a delivery. Of something being transferred from one party to another with the formality of a commercial exchange.

He photographs the documents. Sends them to a contact.

He looks at the church.

His phone goes off. Mary.

MARY

(TEXT)

Still running late?

He looks at the text. Looks at the church. Looks at the receiving house down the street where the door is still closed.

ABE

(TEXT)

Yeah. Sorry. Won't be long. What are you wearing?

He sends it before he's fully decided to send it. One foot in the life he promised, the other already somewhere else.

Three dots. Then -

MARY

(TEXT)

😬 you're terrible. Come home.

ABE

(TEXT)

Soon. Kiss.

He sets the phone down.

Looks at the church.

People moving toward the church.

Not a few. Many. The whole town, or what looks like the whole town - coming from every direction, converging on the church entrance with the purposefulness of people who know where they are going and what they are going to do there. Unhurried. Deliberate. Not speaking to each other. No one checking their phone.

Abe watches.

He counts them. Stops counting.

He watches the last of them disappear through the front doors.

The street empty.

The church full.

He sits with his hand on the key.

Doesn't turn it.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — KITCHEN — SAME TIME

Mary at the stove. Isaac at the table — homework spread out, pencil in hand, the focused inattention of a child doing homework while also tracking the room for information. She checks her phone. No response to the kiss text. She puts it face down.

ISAAC

Is Dad coming home for dinner?

MARY

He's running a little late.

ISAAC

He said he'd be home early.

MARY

He's working. You know how it is.

ISAAC

Yeah.

He says it the way he says things he has filed under things that are true and not going to change. Goes back to his homework.

She pours a glass. Looks at the clock. Looks at her phone. Puts the phone face down again.

MARY

Finish your homework and you can watch something before bed.

ISAAC

What about dinner?

MARY

We'll eat. Come on.

She texts —

MARY (cont'd)

(TEXT)

Are you ok?

Sends it. Watches the screen. Three dots appear. Then stop. Then nothing.

She puts the phone face down. Pours more wine.

MARY (cont'd)  
(to Isaac)  
Come eat.

EXT. CANAAN – CHURCH EXTERIOR – EVENING

Abe across the street. The church full – every window lit from within, the stained glass glowing, the bull in the corner of the side window visible from here as a dark shape against the light.

No sound from inside. The silence of a building that contains a large number of people making no noise.

He checks his phone. Mary's text – are you ok – sitting there. The three dots he started and stopped. He puts the phone in his pocket.

Gets out of the car.

EXT. CANAAN – CHURCH EXTERIOR – CONTINUOUS

He tries the front door.

Locked. Not just latched – locked, the resistance of a mechanism engaged from the inside.

He moves around the perimeter. The side entrance – the same. He reads the lock. Old hardware, the kind that was built when security meant keeping weather out not people. His hand on it. Twenty years of knowing which doors yield to which pressure.

Six seconds.

It yields.

INT. CHURCH – NARTHEX – CONTINUOUS

Dark. The interior lit only from somewhere below – a faint glow at the edges of the floorboards, the light of something underground reaching up through the gaps in the wood.

The smell of old stone. Candle wax. Something underneath both – older than the building, older than the wood, the smell of a space that has been used for the same purpose for a very long time.

He stands in the narthex and listens.

The church is empty.

He counted thirty, forty people entering through that front door. The church seats two hundred. It is completely empty. The pews untouched. The hymnals in their racks. The altar undisturbed.

He looks at the floor.

The glow at the edges of the floorboards. Faint. Orange. Moving the way fire moves.

And the sound – reaching him now that he's inside, now that the door is closed behind him and the ambient noise of the street is gone. Not from the nave. From below. A melody. Period instruments – something old enough that the word melody almost doesn't fit it, more like a recurrence, a pattern returning to itself. Underneath it something that might be drums. Underneath the drums something that might be voices.

He follows the sound.

INT. CHURCH – NAVE – CONTINUOUS

Through the nave. Past the pews. The stained glass dark now from the inside, the biblical scenes reversed, the figures in them looking inward. The bull in the corner watching.

Through the door at the back of the sanctuary. A storage room. Chairs stacked. Tables against the wall.

At the far end – a staircase going down.

The sound louder here. The melody resolving into something specific – the pattern of it, the recurrence, the quality of music that has been played in the same space so many times that the space has learned its shape. The drums underneath it, steady, interlocked. The orange glow from below throwing moving light up the staircase walls.

He stands at the top.

The sound coming up at him. The heat from below – not the warmth of a heated space, the heat of open fire contained in stone.

His hand on the wall.

He goes down.

INT. CHAMBER — THRESHOLD — CONTINUOUS

He emerges.

He stops.

The space stops him the way certain spaces stop people — not through obstruction but through what they are. The room larger than the building above it should allow. The floor plan —

Triangular. Not incidentally. Precisely. The three walls meeting at three points with geometric intention, the shape constructed rather than arrived at. He stands at one point of the triangle and the other two points recede into the fire-lit dark.

The walls.

What lines the walls.

Small. White. Arranged with the devotional precision of objects that have been placed by people who understood that placement was a form of reverence. Rows of them. Floor to ceiling along every surface. Oriented the same direction, each one, the same height, the same spacing.

He understands what they are before he lets himself understand what they are.

Every one small.

Not one of them the skull of an adult.

He stops counting.

The bronze calf.

Massive. Ancient in a way that has nothing to do with its size — the ancientness of an object that came from somewhere else, across an ocean, across centuries, the age of it in the metal itself, in the patina, in the proportions that belong to a different culture's understanding of what a sacred object looks like. Fire building inside it, visible through the grating in its belly, the light moving, the heat radiating outward.

The congregation arranged around it.

Robed. White robes with black triangular hoods – the triangle motif on each hood precise and identical, the same triangle as the A in CROATOAN, the same triangle as the mark on the curb, the same triangle as the floor plan of this room. They move in the chamber with geometric precision. Their positions not random – arranged, the spacing between them intentional, the shape they form from above the same shape the room makes.

Statues along the walls between the skulls. Old stone figures – not Christian, not the iconography of the church above. Something older. Canaanite proportions, Phoenician features, the religious art of a tradition that predates the building above it by three thousand years.

And at the far point of the triangle, in the deepest shadow, half-visible behind the congregation and the smoke and the firelight –

A figure.

Massive. Horned. The proportions wrong in the way of something that was never meant to exist in three dimensions – too large, the geometry of it slightly off, the way it occupies space not quite the way physical objects occupy space. It might be a statue. It might be something they have built or carved or assembled as the focal point of the ceremony.

It might not be a statue.

Abe at the threshold.

He watches.

The Bosch melody building from the ceremonial drums. The congregation moving. Ishmael being brought forward through the robed figures, past the walls, toward the calf.

Abe watches Ishmael walk past the skulls without flinching.

He understands.

Not everything. Not yet. But the shape of it – the shape of what this is and what Ishmael is to it and what he has done by bringing him here – the shape of it assembles in the way things assemble for a man who has spent twenty years reading rooms.

He reads this room.

Not just what it is. What he is to it.

He brought the boy here. He was the mechanism – the clean extraction, the trusted man, the detective who asks the right questions and finds the right doors. Every element of the path was built for him specifically. The marked child needed a particular kind of man to carry him and Abe was that man and he carried him.

He chose not to finish it.

He looks at his burned hands.

He looks at Ishmael being brought toward the calf.

He moves.

INT. CHAMBER – UPPER LEVEL – NIGHT

Abe moving along the upper rim of the chamber.

The space larger than he understood from the threshold – the triangular floor plan extending down as well as out, the chamber built into the earth in levels, the congregation below him now, the ceremony visible from above. From up here the shape is undeniable. The robed figures arranged across the triangular floor form the triangle itself – the symbol made animate, the ceremony made flesh, thirty or forty people who are the shape of the thing they are worshiping.

He moves low. Along the stone shelf at the top of the chamber wall. The heat from below rising – the calf at the center point, the fire in its belly throwing orange across everything, the shadows of the robed figures long and moving on the walls.

He finds a position at the far corner. The apex of the triangle visible from here – the calf directly below him, the congregation between him and it. He presses flat against the stone.

Watches.

At the center of the floor a ROBED FIGURE – taller than the others, the bearing of a man who has been the center of this room for a long time. He raises his hands. The melody from the drums drops in volume. The congregation stills.

THOMAS I

Today we give tribute to Baal.

Provider of all. Requester of little.

His voice carrying in the triangular acoustics – every surface returning it, the geometry of the room designed for exactly this, the words finding every corner.

THOMAS I (cont'd)

It is our pleasure to provide for he  
who watches over us so dearly.

Abe watches.

Two robed figures bringing Ishmael forward through the congregation. The boy not struggling – walking, the compliance of a child who has been told what is going to happen and has stopped expecting anyone to stop it. Past the rows. Past the walls.

Past the skulls.

He doesn't flinch.

Abe watches Ishmael reach the calf. Watches the figures work the lock. Watches the belly of the calf open.

Watches Ishmael put inside.

ABE

(barely audible)

No fucking way.

He presses flatter against the stone. Checks his pockets. His personal phone – Mary's text, the read message indicator he hasn't opened. His work phone – older, the backup, the one he keeps for situations that require a number that can't be traced back to him.

He takes the work phone out. Opens a text thread. Types a single character. Sends it to himself.

Watches the screen.

The text arrives on the work phone. Sound on. Full volume.

ABE (cont'd)

(barely audible)

Come on.

He opens the settings. Volume to maximum. Locks the screen. Sets the work phone down on the stone shelf at the upper rim – gently, precisely, the placement of a man who needs it to stay exactly where he puts it. He marks the spot in his mind.

Moves.

Low and fast along the upper rim, back the way he came, to the opposite side of the chamber. The apex. Directly above the calf.

Below him – the ceremony continuing. A SECOND ROBED FIGURE moving to the center position as Thomas I steps back. This one different – the bearing of someone younger in the role but no less certain of it.

THOMAS II

Thank you Baal. We make this pact  
with you –

He begins speaking in a tongue that is not English and is not any modern language. The same syllables Enoch will read from the manuscript later – the words older than the building, older than the country, the sound of a language designed for a different kind of mouth.

From inside the calf –

Ishmael screaming.

The sound of it in the triangular chamber – amplified, carried to every surface and returned, the acoustics that were designed to drown out exactly this sound doing the opposite of drowning it out from up here. Abe hears every register of it.

He looks at the phone in his hand.

ABE

(barely audible)  
Come on come on come on.

Thomas II continuing in tongues. The drums building underneath. The congregation swaying in their positions.

THOMAS II

Arbua –

Abe hits send.

From across the chamber – the work phone.

RING. RING. RING.

The entire congregation looks up simultaneously. Forty robed figures, forty triangular hoods, forty masked faces orienting toward the sound with the collective precision of an organism that has been one thing for four centuries.

Thomas II stops mid-word.

Abe is already moving. Down the stairs on his side – the stairs he identified when he moved along the upper rim, the descent on the opposite side of the chamber from the phone. Low. Fast.

THOMAS II (cont'd)  
(pointing toward the  
sound)

There -

The congregation moving in the direction of the phone.  
Thomas II watching them go. Then -

He resumes. The tongues. The invocation continuing even as  
the congregation disperses toward the distraction. He will  
not stop. The ceremony will not stop.

The phone rings again across the chamber.

The cult searching the upper rim. One of them finds it -  
picks it up from the stone shelf where Abe placed it. Holds  
it up. The others gathering. They stand and observe it the  
way people observe an object that should not be in the place  
where they found it.

RING. RING. RING.

Abe at the base of the stairs. The calf directly in front of  
him. The fire in its belly visible through the grating, the  
heat radiating outward in waves that change the air around  
it. Thomas II at the center position continuing the  
invocation, his back partly to Abe, the ceremony his only  
focus.

From inside the calf - Ishmael screaming.

Abe moves to the lock.

Both hands.

The brass - not warm, not hot. The temperature of metal that  
has been conducting fire for four hundred years, calibrated  
to the ceremony, built to be worked by hands in ceremonial  
gloves during a ceremony that has never been interrupted.

His hands sizzle against it.

He works it anyway. The mechanism designed for ceremony not  
speed - the frustration of a lock that requires patience and  
he does not have patience, he has a boy screaming inside  
this thing and his hands cooking against the brass and the  
invocation continuing behind him and the congregation across  
the chamber about to turn around.

The lock yields.

The belly of the calf opens.

Ishmael – eight years old, the mark on his skin, the fire in the cavity below him not yet at temperature. He has stopped screaming. His eyes open. He looks at Abe.

He doesn't say anything.

Abe reaches in with both burned hands and pulls him out.

From across the chamber – Abe's personal phone.

RING. RING. RING.

Every head turns.

Every masked face. Thomas II mid-invocation. The congregation that found the work phone. All of them simultaneously orienting toward the second sound – the second phone, on the other side of the chamber, in the hands of the man who just opened the calf.

Abe looks at his phone.

MARY calling.

He looks at Ishmael in his arms.

ABE

Fuck it.

He runs.

The staircase on his side – up, Ishmael against his chest, the burned hands holding him, the boy's weight real and present and alive. A ROBED FIGURE at the top of the stairs – already there, already blocking, the Order's knowledge of its own geometry, the positioning of someone who has been in this chamber enough times to know which way a man with a boy in his arms would run.

Abe doesn't stop.

He doesn't go around him.

He lowers his shoulder and drives it into the figure's center mass – the full weight of a man who has been running on adrenaline for the last twenty minutes and has his son in one arm and is not stopping for anything. The figure goes backward over the upper rim.

The drop to the chamber floor.

Abe doesn't hear him land. He's already through the door.

INT. CHURCH – BACK ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Through the storage room. Past the stacked chairs. He sets Ishmael down for three seconds – just long enough to wedge a chair under the staircase door handle, the improvised security of a man who knows exactly how long a wedged chair buys him and needs every second of it.

He picks Ishmael up.

Keeps moving.

INT. CHAMBER – SIMULTANEOUSLY

The ceremony broken.

The congregation in disarray – half at the phone, half at the calf, the geometric precision of their positions dissolved into the chaos of an interrupted ritual. Thomas II has stopped mid-word. The invocation incomplete. The circuit open.

The fire in the calf burning without its purpose.

The drums stopped.

The silence in the chamber – a ceremony that has been running for four hundred years interrupted for the first time.

Then –

The shadows in the chamber change.

Not the ambient attending quality that has been in the stone since Thomas White placed it. Something else. Something arriving rather than emerging – something vast being pulled into a dimension too small for it by the incomplete transaction, the open circuit, the debt half-initiated and suddenly suspended.

The torches gutter simultaneously.

The temperature in the chamber drops.

Baal.

Not the partial presence. Not the density in the corners. The full intrusion of something ancient into the material world – the room bending around the fact of him, the triangular floor plan contracting slightly as the geometry accommodates something that exists outside geometry.

The shadows coalescing into a shape that has mass and presence and the displeasure of something that has been dragged out of its own dimension mid-transaction by the actions of a man with a work phone and a code.

The congregation freezes.

Two robed figures nearest the calf – they don't move toward Baal. They don't move away. They simply stop, the way objects stop, the way things stop when something removes the animation from them. They go down. Not falling – placed. Something removing an obstacle without acknowledging it as an obstacle.

The decapitation – unhurried. The slowest possible version of something catastrophic. Not rage. Not punishment in the human sense. Something vast correcting an imbalance in the most direct way available to it. The other figure. The same unhurried precision. The chamber carrying the sound of it to every surface and back.

The remaining congregation not moving. Not running. Standing in the geometric positions that are the only thing they know how to stand in and watching what they have summoned watch them back.

Baal turns toward Thomas I and Thomas II.

The voice – low. Calm. Sub-bass register felt in the sternum before it registers as sound. The voice of something that does not raise itself because raising itself is not a concept that applies to it.

BAAL

Return him.

Not a threat. Not a command in the human sense. A statement of the only acceptable outcome. The debt is open. The transaction is incomplete. The marked child has been removed from the mechanism. The mechanism must be restored.

Thomas I and Thomas II standing in the center of the chamber. The full weight of the covenant around them – the skulls in the walls, the calf, the four centuries of transactions that built this room and everything above it. They look at each other.

They look at Baal.

THOMAS I

(quiet)

Find the boy.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — KITCHEN — SAME TIME

Mary at the table.

The dinner on the stove. Cold now. The wine glass empty. Isaac somewhere upstairs — she can hear him moving through his room, the sound of a child who has been told he can do what he wants and is doing it with the restless energy of a kid who knows the evening has gone sideways without knowing why.

She looks at her phone.

The text she sent — I can't do this anymore — sitting there. Read indicator. Nothing.

She looks at it for a long moment.

She looks at the clock.

She looks at the dinner on the stove.

She sets the phone face down.

MARY  
(calling up the  
stairs)

Isaac!

His footsteps. The pattern of them — the landing, the pause, his head appearing at the top of the stairs.

MARY (cont'd)  
Pack a bag. We're going on an  
adventure.

ISAAC  
Now?

MARY  
Now. Enough for a few days. Don't  
forget your charger.

He disappears back into his room. She can hear him moving — the drawers, the closet, the industry of a child who has been given a task and is executing it without questioning it because his mother's voice had the quality it has when questioning isn't the right move.

She goes upstairs.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — BEDROOM — CONTINUOUS

She opens the closet. Her bag on the top shelf — already half-packed from the last time she did this, the last time she got to this point, the last time she stood in this closet and decided not to go through with it. She takes it down.

She looks at what she's wearing. The dress she put on for the date that isn't happening. The garment of an evening that had a different plan.

She changes. Sweats. Travel clothes. Quick. Dressed for the decision, not the evening she planned.

Outside the window — rain beginning. No buildup, no front. One moment dry, the next the rain against the glass, steady and purposeful.

She doesn't look at the rain.

She packs.

EXT. CANAAN — CHURCH EXTERIOR — NIGHT

Abe out of the church with Ishmael against his chest.

The air has changed.

Not weather-changed — the sky was clear when he went in. What has happened to the sky since is not a front moving through. No pressure change, no temperature drop, no buildup. One moment clear. The next —

The clouds are already there. Already formed. Already full. As if the sky completed the work between one breath and the next, as if the atmosphere received a signal and responded before any human instrument could measure the cause.

The rain starts as he reaches the car.

Not building. Present. The purposeful rain of a sky that has just accommodated something vast being dragged into the wrong dimension and is reacting the only way a sky can react — by coming down.

He gets Ishmael into the car.

The rain on the roof. On the windshield. The church behind them, the light from below still visible at the edges of the foundation, orange against the wet pavement.

ABE

Hold on buddy. I got you.

He opens the passenger door. Gets in with Ishmael still in his arms. Doesn't put him down. Doesn't reach for the seatbelt. Ishmael on his lap, the steering wheel against the boy's back, Abe's burned hands on the wheel.

He starts the car.

ABE (cont'd)

Hold on.

He pulls out.

Abe drives.

ABE (cont'd)

(low, to Ishmael)

I got you. Hold on buddy. I got you.

The rain.

The church gone behind them.

Patient.

For now.

FADE OUT.

INT./EXT. CAR — HIGHWAY — NIGHT

The rain following them.

Not the rain of a system passing through — the rain of a system that has found them. Every mile out of Canaan the same rain, the same clouds, the sky above them moving with them the way the sky does not move. Abe checks the mirrors. The road behind them. The road ahead. The same storm in both directions.

Ishmael in the passenger seat. Watching the rain on the windshield. His hands in his lap.

ABE

We're going to the police. You understand? We're going to tell someone what happened and they're going to help us.

Ishmael looks at him.

He looks at the rain.

He looks back at his hands.

Abe drives.

INT. POLICE STATION – NIGHT

Fluorescent light. A desk officer. The institutional neutrality of a building that processes bad news all night and has learned not to react to it.

Abe at the counter with Ishmael beside him. The burned hands wrapped in a shirt from his bag – functional, bleeding through at the knuckles, the brass's work visible through the improvised dressing. He tells it. The church. The chamber. The boy. The skulls in the walls. The calf.

The desk officer listens.

He makes a call.

Abe watches him make it. Watches his face during the call. Watches the moment the face changes – the subtle shift of a man who has just been told something by the person on the other end of the line that reorganizes the conversation he is currently having.

The desk officer hangs up.

DESK OFFICER  
Someone's coming to take your  
statement. If you want to have a  
seat –

ABE  
Who did you call.

DESK OFFICER  
The duty sergeant. Standard procedure  
for –

ABE  
What did they say.

Abe looks at the door.

At the window beside it – the parking lot, the rain, the street beyond. A car he didn't see when he came in. Parked at the lot's edge, away from the lights. Engine running. The exhaust visible in the rain.

He looks at Ishmael.

Ishmael is already looking at the door.

ABE (cont'd)

(low)

We're leaving.

He takes Ishmael's hand – the burned hand around the small hand – and moves.

EXT. POLICE STATION – CONTINUOUS

Out into the rain. Fast. Not running – the controlled speed of a man who knows that running changes what he looks like to the people who are watching.

The car at the lot's edge. Still there. Nobody getting out. Waiting.

He gets to his car. Gets Ishmael in. Gets in himself.

Pulls out the back of the lot.

In the mirror – the waiting car's lights coming on.

He drives harder.

INT./EXT. CAR – MOVING – NIGHT

The rain. The mirrors. The city moving past in the wet.

His phone – Mary. He stares at it. Calls back.

MARY (V.O.)

Where are you. It's been –

ABE

I need you to listen to me. Don't ask questions yet. Pack a bag for you and Isaac. Enough for a few days. Pay attention to the street when you leave – if there's a car parked that wasn't there this morning, if anything looks wrong, you call me immediately. You go to a hotel off the highway. Cash. Don't use the credit card. Don't use your phone to navigate – you know the way.

A beat.

MARY (V.O.)

Abe. What happened.

ABE

I'll tell you everything. Pack the bag first.

He hangs up.

The rain on the windshield. The wipers working. The storm that started in the moment of the interruption and has followed him every mile since.

He looks at Ishmael.

Ishmael is watching the road ahead.

ABE (cont'd)

It's not going to stop, is it.

Ishmael doesn't answer.

He watches the road.

EXT. NATHANIEL HOME - STREET - LATER

It stops.

A CULT MEMBER gets out. Checks the address. Looks at the house. Takes his time.

He tries the front door. It opens without difficulty - not forced, not picked. The kind of entry made by people who have been making entries for a very long time and know that resistance is a variable to be removed in advance.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME - VARIOUS - CONTINUOUS

He moves through the rooms without hurrying.

Bedroom. Drawers open. Closet partially cleared.

Kitchen. Table still set. Food still on the stove - still faintly warm. Within the hour.

Isaac's room. One small shoe under the bed, too far back to have been grabbed in the dark.

He stands in Isaac's room and looks at the shoe.

He takes out a phone.

CULT MEMBER

(quiet, factual)

The family is in play. Both children.  
She took them within the hour. No  
indication of direction.

He listens. Hangs up.

Back through the house. Out the front door. Into the car.

The hunt expands.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — FRONT DOOR — NIGHT

Abe with Ishmael.

The door already breached — not broken, worked. Abe clocks it immediately. Stands in the doorway reading the house the way he has read rooms for twenty years before he steps fully inside.

He steps inside.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — VARIOUS — CONTINUOUS

Room to room. Fast. Systematic.

Bedroom. Drawers open. Her side of the closet partially cleared. His still full.

Kitchen. Table set. Food on the stove — cold now. He puts his hand near it without touching it. Registers the time that represents.

He comes back to the kitchen. Stands with his burned hands at his sides and runs the logic.

ABE

(low, to Ishmael)

She took him. Within the hour of when  
I stopped answering. They were here  
within the hour of when she left.

Ishmael watching him from the hallway. Taking it in. Filing it. Saying nothing.

ABE (cont'd)

They're already looking for them.

He moves.

INT./EXT. CAR — MOVING — NIGHT

Driving. Ishmael in the passenger seat now — not the backseat, the front, because Abe needs eyes on him and the burned hands need to be on the wheel.

ABE

Not the phone. She knows I can track it. Off a highway. Cash. Somewhere she passed through once and remembered because it had the right quality. She thinks like that.

He takes an exit.

INT. HOTEL — HIGHWAY — NIGHT

Mary's phone face-down on the nightstand. The stack of Abe's calls sitting in it unread — a man looking in the wrong direction, transmitting into a room she's not in.

She left it here the same way she left the food on the stove. Not negligence. Decision.

A room off a highway exit. One queen bed. A cot pulled out for Isaac. Door locked and chained.

Mary at the window. The parking lot below — a gas station across the highway, a few cars scattered at the other units, a semi idling at the far end. She has assessed it. She knows what belongs here and what doesn't.

Isaac on the cot. Shoes still on. Watching her.

She tries Abe one more time.

MARY

(to the voicemail)

This is the last time I'm going to call. I need you to understand that.

She means it. She turns the phone off.

ISAAC

Is Dad okay?

MARY

Because your father is very hard to stop.

Isaac considers this. Accepts it the way he accepts things — filing it, not fully believing it, keeping it available.

MARY (cont'd)

Lie down.

He lies down. Keeps his shoes on.

Mary in the chair by the window. The parking lot still correct. She is composed. Furious underneath the composure in the way of a woman who has made a decision and executed it and is now on the other side of the execution where all the feeling lives.

She watches the parking lot.

She watches Isaac.

Isaac on the cot. Eyes closed. Almost asleep –

Then not asleep.

His eyes open. He turns his head toward the corner of the room – the far corner, away from the window, away from the door. He looks at the corner the way children look at things adults can't see – not frightened, exactly. Present. Attending to something that is there.

Mary watches him watch nothing.

MARY (cont'd)

Isaac. What are you looking at?

ISAAC

Nothing.

He says it the way children say it when it isn't nothing and they know it isn't nothing and they have decided that nothing is the right answer.

He keeps watching the corner.

Mary looks at the corner. Sees nothing. Looks back at Isaac.

She turns the phone back on.

It lights up all at once. She finds the most recent call. Calls back.

It rings once.

ABE

Mary –

MARY

Where are you.

ABE  
I need you to look out your window  
right now and tell me what's in the  
parking lot.

She is already at the window.

MARY  
Why.

ABE  
Just tell me what's in the parking  
lot.

She looks. The gas station. The highway. The scattered  
cars —

One she didn't register before. Parked at the edge of the  
lot, away from the units, away from the light. Nobody in it.

Or nobody visible in it.

MARY  
There's a car.

ABE  
Just one?

While she's looking another pulls in. Slow. No urgency.  
Parks on the other side of the lot, engine running.

MARY  
There are two.

ABE  
Don't move. Don't open the door. I'm  
twelve minutes out.

A third car arrives. Parks. Engine cuts. Nobody gets out.  
Three cars at the edges of the lot, patient in the way of  
people who have done this before and know that patience is  
the mechanism.

She watches them not moving and understands something she  
didn't understand twelve minutes ago.

ABE (V.O.)  
Mary.

MARY  
I see them.

INT./EXT. HOTEL — TWELVE MINUTES LATER

Abe pulls in from the back. The exit she didn't know existed because she arrived from the front and didn't look. He knows it because he mapped the building when he identified the hotel — old habit, twenty years of knowing the second way out.

He calls her.

ABE  
Back stairs. Now. Don't use the  
elevator.

She has Isaac off the cot before the call ends. The bag. The chain off the door. Into the hallway.

EXT. HOTEL — BACK — CONTINUOUS

Abe at the back exit. Ishmael beside him. Mary coming through the door with Isaac — and stopping for a half-second when she sees Ishmael, the boy from the case, the boy this started with, standing in a hotel parking lot at midnight next to her husband.

She takes it in. Files it. Keeps moving.

She doesn't need Abe to explain it. Reality has just explained it in a parking lot with three cars and a child watching a corner.

MARY  
(to Isaac)  
Get in the car.

Isaac gets in the car. He looks at Ishmael. Ishmael looks at him.

Something passes between them in the way things pass between children — without language, without decision, below the level of what adults can observe or name.

Isaac moves over to make room.

EXT./INT. CAR — HIGHWAY — NIGHT

The rain found them before they reached the highway.

Not building — present. The purposeful rain that started the moment Abe pulled Ishmael from the calf and has not stopped since. The wipers working.

The scanner on the dash cycling through frequencies – and beneath the static, a weather report, a meteorologist's voice with the careful neutrality of someone describing something they don't have an explanation for.

SCANNER (V.O.)

...the system continues to stall over the Virginia coast... no projected movement... conditions expected to persist...

Abe turns it down. Doesn't turn it off.

The highway empty at this hour. Headlights coming the other way – too fast, the spray catching the light. An accident in the median. A sedan on its roof, the wheels still turning, the emergency lights of the two cruisers already there throwing blue and red across the wet asphalt, across the rain, across the faces of the family in the car as they pass through it.

Nobody looks away. Nobody looks directly.

In the back – Isaac asleep against the window, finally, the boneless sleep of a child whose body overruled the decision to stay awake. Ishmael not asleep. Watching the accident recede in the mirror. Watching until the lights are gone and the highway is dark again behind them.

He watches the mirror anyway.

Mary in the passenger seat. Looking straight ahead. She has been doing the accounting since the parking lot – the hotel, the three cars, the corner Isaac was watching, the boy in the backseat who is the reason for all of it. She has been getting there without Abe having to take her there.

She gets there.

MARY

(quiet)

What did you do.

ABE

I'll tell you everything.

MARY

Tell me now.

He tells her. The drive. The delivery. The language word for word. The congregation filing into the church. The chamber. The skulls. The calf. What he burned his hands on and why.

She listens without interrupting. Her face doing what it does when she is receiving information she will need to act on – still, taking it in, not performing anything.

When he finishes she is quiet for a moment.

MARY (cont'd)

And Isaac.

ABE

I don't know, because I took Ish,  
they want Isaac, maybe just Ish...  
They're dangerous. They're insane.

She looks at him for a long moment. Then she looks at the road.

Then she looks in the back. Isaac asleep against the window. Ishmael awake, watching the dark outside, hands in his lap.

She looks at Ishmael. Something moves across her face – the calculation beginning, the arithmetic assembling below the surface. Just for a moment. Then it's gone.

She turns back to the road.

MARY

What do we do.

ABE

We find someone who knows what this  
is. And we figure out how to end it.

Abe reaches forward. Turns the scanner back up.

SCANNER (V.O.)

...the National Weather Service has  
issued an extended advisory... the  
system shows no signs of weakening...  
residents along the coast are  
advised...

He turns it back down.

The highway. The rain. The dark.

In the trunk behind the back seat – the surveillance kit,  
the long lens camera, the portable recorder. And behind the  
kit, wrapped in a moving blanket, Both legal. Both there.

He drives.

INT./EXT. CAR — HIGHWAY — LATER

The exit ramp. A highway motel visible from the off-ramp — the sign missing letters, the parking lot half-full, the ice machine running in the dark.

Abe pulls in. Cuts the engine.

Nobody moves.

The rain on the roof. On the windshield. The storm that has been following them for two hours and has arrived at the same destination without being invited.

He gets out. Trunk open — he pulls the moving blanket tighter around the weapons without looking at them. Gets the surveillance bag. Closes the trunk.

Gets one room. Cash. Double queens. The desk clerk doesn't look up.

He comes back to the car. Opens the back door. Isaac stirs but doesn't wake. Ishmael is already upright, already watching, the attending quality present even at this hour.

ABE  
(quiet)  
Come on.

INT. MOTEL — ROOM — NIGHT

Except —

The corner diagonally opposite the door. The shadow there has a density that the overhead light doesn't account for. Not dramatic. Not moving. Just present in a way that corners are not usually present. The weight of a space that is not entirely empty of something.

Ishmael sees it when he walks in. He doesn't stop. He notes it the way he notes everything — filing it, protocol running — and moves to the far bed without being told.

Mary gets the boys settled. Isaac and Ishmael side by side. She smooths the cover over them. Looks at them — both looking back at her with the careful attention of children who have been through something they don't have full language for and are waiting for an adult to tell them what it means.

She doesn't tell them what it means.

MARY

Goodnight.

ISAAC

Is it over?

MARY

Not yet. But you're safe right now.  
Both of you.

Isaac reaches for Ishmael's hand under the cover. Ishmael lets him take it.

The hand hold. Unguarded. The purest version of it – no decision, no agenda, just two eight year old boys who have chosen each other completely and are holding on in the dark.

ABE

(from the door)

Get some sleep. Both of you.

Isaac looks at his father. The look from the bedroom floor – the one that checked the hands for truth and found it. Checking now from across the room. Finding something. Deciding to accept it.

ISAAC

Okay.

He closes his eyes. Ishmael's are already closed.

Mary turns off the lamp.

Abe on the near side of the second bed. Facing the window. His burned hands in his lap, the new dressing bleeding through at the knuckles. Watching the storm.

Mary on the far side. Back to him. Facing the boys. The hand hold at the edge of the cover, the orange parking lot light catching it.

She watches Ishmael sleep.

The first time was the car – Abe telling her Isaac was the target and she looked at Ishmael in the backseat and the cold logic assembled before she could stop it. She stopped it then. She is stopping it now. She watches Ishmael's chest rise and fall and feels the calculation running and pushes it down and keeps the warmth because the warmth is also real and she cannot make either of them stop being real.

She looks at Isaac.

Just Isaac.

The rain against the window.

MARY  
You promised.

ABE  
I did.

MARY  
You said simple. Home by dinner. The date. You said it like you meant it.

ABE  
I did mean it.

MARY  
You always mean it.

The rain.

ABE  
Something was wrong. When I delivered him. The language – word for word, a recitation. And the boy just stood there like a package that arrived. I couldn't leave a kid with strangers when something felt that wrong.

MARY  
You're not a cop anymore, Abe. You did the job.

ABE  
It didn't feel right.

MARY  
It never feels right. That's not new. You've been doing this for twenty years and it has never once felt right and you have never once been able to leave it alone.

Abe watches it.

In the glass – the reflection of the room behind him. The boys in the far bed. Mary's profile. His own face.

And behind his own face in the reflection –

The corner of the room that had the wrong density when they arrived has changed. The shadow there has depth now that the room's geometry does not allow. And in that depth – barely present, visible only in the glass, gone the moment the eye tries to find it directly –

Something vast. Something that fills the space between his reflection and the wall the way a fact fills a room. The horns first – curved, dark, the geometry of something that grew for a purpose nothing in this dimension was meant for. Then the eyes. Red. Not glowing. Not theatrical. The red of something that has been burning since before the first human named fire. They do not move the way eyes move. They orient.

He looks at it.

Gone.

He looks back at the rain.

MARY (cont'd)

You can't save everyone, Abe.

ABE

I know that.

MARY

Do you? Because from where I'm sitting you can't let go. You couldn't save anyone on the board. You couldn't leave this one in Canaan because of all the ones you couldn't save before him. And now our son –

She stops. Looks at Isaac. At the hand hold. At Ishmael.

The arithmetic.

She pulls back.

MARY (cont'd)

You are losing everyone, Abe.  
Everything.

The room holds that.

The rain.

She says it without cruelty. The true version of it, finally. Quiet and precise and even, the weight of it distributed across every word.

The hum – barely there. Not the voice yet. Not words. Just the awareness of being found.

Abe feels it.

He looks at the storm. At the reflection. At the corner. At his burned hands.

ABE

I know.

Neither of them speaks for a long time.

Then —

ABE (cont'd)

Tomorrow we run. We go farther. We figure it out. Together.

MARY

Together.

He reaches across the space between them on the bed. His burned hand finding hers. She looks at the hand — at the burns, at what the hands paid for. Then she takes it.

ABE

I'll start looking tonight. You should rest.

MARY

(quiet)

You're the worst.

ABE

I know. I love you.

MARY

I love you too.

She lies down. Still dressed. She turns toward the boys and watches them until her eyes close.

Abe sits on the edge of the bed. Opens the laptop. The screen lighting his face in the dark — the burned hands on the keys, the search beginning.

The storm growing against the window.

In the corner of the room — the shadow. The extra density. The horns just visible at the threshold of perception, the red eyes oriented toward the sleeping woman and the sleeping boys and the man at the laptop who has not looked up and will not look up because looking up is not available to him right now. He searches. He has to search. The vigil requires it.

The hum. Low. Patient.

He searches. Academic forums. Antiquities dealers. The corners of the internet where people who know things they shouldn't publish carefully, just enough to demonstrate the knowledge without explaining its source.

A username surfaces. Forum posts about Semitic antiquities – Canaanite ritual architecture, Phoenician religious iconography, Bronze Age child sacrifice practices. The specificity academic on the surface and underneath it personal. Not the specificity of a scholar. The specificity of someone who has handled the objects. Who has been in the rooms.

The right obsession. The right gaps.

He reads.

Mary closes her eyes.

The hum beneath the storm, beneath Abe's typing. Not sound. Pressure. The pressure of something that has been waiting for her defenses to go down.

They're down.

She is in the dream before she knows she's in the dream.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME – KITCHEN – DREAM

The kitchen. Her kitchen. The geography of the room she has spent twenty years of mornings in – the counter, the window over the sink, the table with its four chairs. Lit from inside the way the house is lit from inside when everyone is home.

But the fourth chair is empty.

Isaac's chair.

She looks at it. At the empty chair that has always been Abe's chair and is now – Isaac's.

BAAL  
(not in the room, in the room, the  
voice that exists before sound)  
You already know.

She looks at the chair.

MARY  
No.

BAAL

You ran the calculation before he finished his sentence. In the car. Before the hotel. Before any of this. The mathematics arrived complete and you have been fighting it since.

She looks at the window over the sink. Outside – the storm. The same storm. The dream carrying the storm with it.

MARY

He's a child.

BAAL

They are both children. That is the calculation. One for one. You know which one has a family. You know which one has a name people will look for. You know which one has a father who would burn his hands for him. You know which one was chosen specifically because no one would look.

MARY

Stop.

BAAL

One night. That is all it requires. One night and one decision and the debt closes and your son comes home and the chair is not empty. The boy goes back to what he was before your husband made a choice that was not his to make. He was always going where he was going. Your husband interrupted a process. He did not stop it.

She looks at the chair for a long time.

BAAL (cont'd)

Isaac comes home.

She looks at the chair.

At the window.

At the storm outside.

She looks at it.

And she sees – in the dream's window, in the rain, not a reflection but a presence –

Ishmael.

Eight years old, standing in the rain outside her kitchen window, looking in. The attending quality. The checking. The look of a child who has always been watching for something that might stop it and has never stopped watching.

Looking at her.

She looks at him for a long time.

And then – behind Ishmael, in the dream's rain, in the dream's dark –

Baal.

Not partial. Not the density in a corner. Present in the way he was present in the chamber – the scale of him wrong, the horns against the dream sky, the red eyes finding her through the glass. Not threatening. Not reaching. Simply there. The weight of what is owed existing in the same frame as the boy who owes it.

She looks at Ishmael in the foreground. At what is behind him.

At what has always been behind him.

MARY  
(to the room, not to  
Baal)

No.

The kitchen. The empty chair.

MARY (cont'd)  
No.

INT. MOTEL – ROOM – CONTINUOUS

She wakes.

Not gasping – the silent waking of a woman who has arrived at a decision and the decision woke her. The room. The storm against the window. Abe at the table, his back to her, the laptop light on his face.

She looks at the boys. Isaac. Ishmael. The hand hold at the edge of the cover.

She looks at Ishmael.

He is awake. Has been awake. Looking at her with the attending quality – not alarmed, not asking. Just present. Just watching.

He saw.

Not the dream. The room. He was awake in the room while the room did what it did to her and he watched it happen and is looking at her now with the look of a child who has been watching this shape his whole life and is waiting to see which way she goes.

She holds his gaze. Does not look away.

MARY  
(barely audible)  
Go to sleep.

He looks at her for one more moment.

Then he closes his eyes.

She lies back. The storm against the window. Abe typing. The hum different now – the quality of something that made its case and received an answer and is registering the answer in the ledger and moving on.

She stares at the ceiling.

The corner of the room Isaac watched earlier. The shadow still there. Patient. The density of it unchanged. The eyes – if she looks directly, nothing. If she doesn't look directly, the red at the edge of what the eye can hold.

She doesn't look directly.

Isaac asleep. His defenses exactly as down as a child's defenses go at the bottom of the deepest sleep.

The dream arrives without announcement.

INT. SOMEWHERE WITHOUT GEOGRAPHY – DREAM

Not a place. The quality of a place – the feeling of standing somewhere vast, somewhere without a ceiling, somewhere the ground extends in every direction without arriving at anything.

Isaac standing in it.

Then the light.

Orange. The orange of the fire in the calf's belly, wrong-colored, wrong-sourced, coming from below the ground rather than above it. It throws shadows that go up instead of down.

And in those shadows –

The children.

Not threatening. Not reaching for him. Standing in the space the way they stand in the chamber walls – arranged, oriented, the same direction, the same height, the same spacing. Every one small. Children who were eight years old once and will not be older.

They look at him.

He looks at them.

One of them – nearest to him, at the edge of the orange light – turns its face toward him. The face of a child who was eight years old once and was delivered to this place and has been here since and knows the boy looking at it is not here yet.

Not yet.

It looks at him with the attending quality.

Then it looks at Ishmael – standing beside Isaac in the dream, appearing without transition, just there, the way dream-logic places people – and something passes between them. Not language. The communication of two children who know the same thing and are meeting at the edge of what knowing it costs.

Isaac wakes.

He looks at the corner.

The shadow there. Present. Patient. The density of it wrong in the way of a room that contains something it was not built to contain.

He looks at Ishmael.

Ishmael is awake. Has been awake. Looking at Isaac.

They look at each other across the dark room.

Neither of them speaks.

Neither of them has to.

INT. MOTEL — ROOM — PRE-DAWN

The gray light beginning at the edge of the curtains. The storm outside has not stopped. The scanner on the dash of the car in the lot below — Abe left it running, the volume low, the weather report cycling through on the hour.

Abe closes the laptop.

Sits in the pre-dawn with the burned hands in his lap. He has found the username. The forum posts. The shape of a man who has been living with this material long enough that the gaps in what he publishes are as visible as what he publishes. The right obsession. The right gaps. He has found the person.

He looks at the window. At the parking lot beyond it — wet, still. At the tree line at the far edge of the lot. The shadows there denser than the pre-dawn warrants. Not moving. Not advancing. Patient. Found what it was looking for. In no hurry.

The red at the edge of the tree line. Just for a moment. Gone.

He watches it until it is just trees.

He has what he needs.

INT. DINER — DAY

A booth. Rain against the windows — the same rain, the same sky, the stalled system that the radio has been noting every hour with increasing uncertainty. The boys at the table. Isaac eating. Ishmael watching the window.

The orphanage doorframe. A chalked mark — a triangle, small, precise. He registered it. Filed it as nothing.

His own street. The curb in front of his house. The same mark. He registered it. Filed it as nothing.

The diner where he met the intermediary. The utility pole across the street. The same mark. He was sitting at this kind of table when he first saw it and didn't see it.

He was selected before the intermediary sat down across from him. The marks were placed before the contact. The contact who cleared his path through the orphanage — the unlocked doors, the cleared route, the precise timing notes in clean handwriting — was never working for a grieving family.

There is no grieving family.

He puts it on the table in front of Mary without speaking. She looks at it. Looks at him.

MARY

How long.

ABE

Before I was ever contacted.

The weight of that landing between them.

She looks at Ishmael. He is looking back at her now. The quality of a child who has always been at the end of this kind of arithmetic and knows it and has stopped expecting anyone to name it out loud.

She looks away first.

MARY

(back to the laptop)

There's no one coming for him.

ABE

No.

MARY

There never was.

ABE

No.

She looks at him. At the burned hands on the table. At what the hands paid for a child who was always going to be delivered regardless — the only question was whether Abe would be the man who did it or the man who stopped it.

She opens the laptop.

MARY

Then we find someone who already knows what this is.

She types. A username surfaces.

MARY (cont'd)

There.

Abe reads over her shoulder.

ABE

How do we find him.

MARY

I thought you were a detective.

She shows him. Embedded in the forum posts – locations mentioned offhand, the kind of casual geographic references that accumulate into an address if you know how to read the pattern. Someone who lives alone, who doesn't think about being found because he has never had reason to think about being found.

Until now.

ABE

How far.

MARY

Few hours from the cabin.

He looks at the boys. Ishmael watching the window. Isaac watching Ishmael.

Outside the diner window – the rain. And on the glass, at the edge of the frame, barely visible against the wet street beyond –

A chalked triangle. Small. Precise.

Already here.

Abe looks at it for a moment.

ABE

Let's go.

They move.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD – DAY

The rain following them into the trees. The canopy breaking it into something more diffuse, gray-green light, the day dimming without the sun having moved.

Mary navigating from her phone. Abe driving.

MARY

Left here. Then about a mile.

He watches it until there is no road visible in the mirror.

He watches the mirror anyway.

The scanner cycling on the dash.

SCANNER (V.O.)  
...still no movement from the  
system... meteorologists are calling  
it unprecedented... the Virginia  
coast remains under advisory...

EXT. CABIN — DAY

The cabin at the end of the track.

The clearing first. The car coming through the tree line into the open space and — wrong. Not the cabin. The clearing. The quality of a space that has been occupied recently by something that left no physical evidence of itself. The grass at the far edge of the clearing bent in a direction the wind isn't blowing. The tree line on the north side darker than the tree line on the other sides.

Abe stops the car. Engine running. Looking at the clearing.

MARY

What.

He cuts the engine.

ABE

Nobody knows this place.

MARY

I haven't been here in fifteen years.

She goes to the door. The key on her ring — carried fifteen years without thinking about it. The lock stiff but yielding.

She goes in.

INT. CABIN — MAIN ROOM — CONTINUOUS

The family moving in. Bags down. Isaac assessing — corners, shelves, the window that looks into the trees. Ishmael moving through the rooms slowly, one at a time.

He checks every corner.

He gets to the main room corner — the one diagonally opposite the door — and stops.

He looks at it for a long time.

ABE  
(to the boys)  
Pick a room. Make it yours.

Ishmael looks at the corner once more. Then he follows Isaac down the hall.

Abe looks at the corner.

At the ordinary plaster. At the shadow there that is just geometry and afternoon light.

He looks at it for a moment longer than he should need to.

He picks up his bag.

INT. CABIN — BOYS' ROOM — LATE AFTERNOON

Isaac and Ishmael.

Two beds, narrow, iron frames, a window between them looking into the trees. The gray-green light through the glass.

Ishmael moving through the space — checking. The corners. The floor. The ceiling. The protocol running.

He goes to the window. Stands with his forehead almost against the glass and looks out into the trees.

ISAAC  
What are you looking for?

Ishmael doesn't answer.

ISAAC (cont'd)  
I do that too sometimes. Look for something and not find it.

Ishmael turns from the window. Goes to his bed. Reaches under the mattress. Then under the bed. Lies flat and looks for a long moment.

He stands.

He looks at the corner diagonally opposite the door.

ISAAC (cont'd)  
Is something there?

Ishmael looks at him. Back at the corner.

ISAAC (cont'd)  
(quiet, not afraid)  
There's something there, isn't there.

He looks at his hands.

He doesn't answer.

But he doesn't say no.

INT. CABIN — MAIN ROOM — NIGHT

The table cleared. The boys in their room. Abe and Mary at the table with the laptop between them, the screen the main light now. The rain against the windows — the same rain, the same system, the scanner on Abe's phone cycling through the weather advisory on the hour.

She goes down the hall. He hears the door. Then the quiet of the cabin at night — the sound of leaves, the sound of nothing, the sound underneath both that has been here since they arrived and is not leaves and is not nothing.

The hum. Low. Audible now — not felt, heard.

He opens the laptop.

He researches more.

INT. CABIN — BOYS' ROOM — NIGHT

Dark. The cloud-filtered light through the window between the beds.

Isaac and Ishmael asleep. The hand hold — not arranged, not decided. The distance between the beds crossed sometime in the dark, the two of them close enough now that the gesture happened the way such gestures happen in sleep.

Isaac's hand. Ishmael's hand. Between them.

The room holds them.

The corners hold something else.

And at the edge of the shadow — barely present, visible only if you're not looking directly —

The eyes.

Red. Patient. Oriented toward the two boys in the two beds with the hand hold between them. Learning.

Something vast identifying which wounds are largest and which doors those wounds open onto.

Not yet.

Just the breath. Just the dark. Just the hand hold.

The eyes watching.

INT. CABIN — BOYS' ROOM — CONTINUOUS

Ishmael asleep.

The protocol he ran before sleeping: the corner diagonally opposite the door, then the corner beside the window, then the ceiling above the bed, then under the bed, then the space between the mattress and the wall. He has been running this protocol since before he had language for why.

Tonight the corner opposite the door passed the check.

In his sleep it does not pass.

INT. THE CORRIDOR — DREAM

A corridor.

Too long. The walls too close. The ceiling descending by degrees — lower than it was, the walls closer, the corridor going to what it has always been going to.

Ishmael walking it.

He is not afraid. He has walked this corridor before. The same destination he has never quite reached because he has always woken before the end.

Tonight he does not wake before the end.

The end of the corridor is a door.

Old wood. Iron hardware shaped into the sign — the triangle with the horizontal bar, the circle above, the mark that has been on every surface of every room that wanted him since before he knew to look for it.

He puts his hand on the door.

It opens.

The chamber.

Empty. The calf at the center, cold, the belly open and waiting.

He walks to it. Puts his hand on the bronze.

Cold. Not the cold of an object that has lost its heat. The cold of an object that has been waiting a very long time for the right temperature to return.

He looks inside.

He sees himself inside.

Not a reflection. Himself – eight years old, smaller, the version of him that arrived at the orphanage. That version, inside the calf, looking back at him with the attending quality.

The version inside opens its mouth.

It does not speak.

It shows him what comes after.

He wakes.

Sits on the edge of the bed. The cabin room. Isaac breathing. The cloud-filtered light.

He looks at the corner opposite the door.

The shadow there. The attending quality. The red at its edge – present, patient, oriented.

It has been watching him dream.

He looks at it for a long time. He does not run. He does not wake Isaac. He does not make a sound.

He lies back down. Looks at the ceiling.

The hand hold still there between the beds. Isaac breathing.

He looks at Isaac's hand.

He closes his eyes.

He does not sleep again.

EXT. CABIN – TREE LINE – NIGHT

Abe at the window. Ishmael is already outside.

Not at the edge of the porch. At the edge of the clearing – where the grass ends and the dark begins. Standing still, facing the tree line. Not running. Not afraid. Presenting himself.

Abe watches him.

The tree line. The dark there – receiving him. Whatever lives in it looking back.

After a long moment Ishmael turns. Walks back toward the cabin.

He doesn't look up at Abe's window.

Abe watches him come inside. Hears the door. Hears the floor.

He stands at the window a while longer.

He knows he should go to him. He knows what he would say. He knows Ishmael would listen and understand and it wouldn't change anything.

He stays at the window.

The tree line. The dark. The space where the boy was standing.

He doesn't have words for what he knows.

INT. CABIN – BEDROOM – SAME TIME

Mary asleep.

The hum – audible. Heard.

The dream does not return as a dream.

It returns as instruction.

Her eyes open. Not waking – the eyes of someone whose body has been given a direction while the mind is still elsewhere. She sits up. Stands. Moves to the door. Purposeful. Not decided.

Down the hall.

Past Isaac's door.

She stops at it. Her hand on the frame. Something else using her face for the purpose.

She opens the boys' door.

INT. CABIN — BOYS' ROOM — CONTINUOUS

She comes in. Moves to Ishmael's bed. He is awake — has been awake, watching the corner, watching the door. He watches her cross the room toward him.

She reaches for his hand.

He looks at her face.

He does not take her hand. He does not pull away.

He watches her.

EXT. CABIN — NIGHT

The clearing. The tree line.

Mary coming out the front door with Ishmael beside her — not led, not dragged. Walking. The compliance of a child who has always gone where he was going and is going there now.

Toward the tree line.

The shadow there — not at the edge of perception now. Present. The full weight of it at the boundary between the clearing and the forest. The horns against the tree line. The red eyes finding them across the wet grass. Patient. The debt that does not need roads finding its own geometry through the body of a sleeping woman and the resignation of a boy who has stopped expecting anyone to stop it.

ABE (O.S.)

Mary.

She keeps walking.

ABE (O.S.) (cont'd)

Mary —

Abe through the front door. Something pulled him up — the awareness of a man who has been monitoring a room's sounds without knowing he was monitoring them, and now one of the sounds is wrong.

He crosses the clearing in six strides.

ABE

Mary. Hey.

His hand on her arm. She stops. Doesn't turn. Her eyes on the tree line – on what is standing there, visible now to anyone in this clearing at this hour. The full presence of it. The scale. The wrongness of something that large existing in the material world.

He steps in front of her. Between her and it.

Her eyes find his face. The return of a person who was not in her body and is now back in it and does not yet know what her body was doing.

She looks at the tree line. At what is standing there.

She looks at Ishmael beside her.

She looks at her own hand – extended toward him, not holding anything.

ABE (cont'd)  
(low, steady)  
What are you doing?

MARY  
(barely audible)  
I don't know.

She looks at Ishmael. He is looking at the tree line. At the presence there – beginning to recede now, pulling back into the forest, the debt registering the interruption and withdrawing to the patience it has maintained for four centuries.

As it withdraws – the eyes last. The red, at the tree line, oriented. Then gone.

She pulls Ishmael against her. Both arms. The full weight of what her body was doing without her – what she was about to deliver, what she was about to become.

She holds him.

He lets her.

Abe watching the tree line. At the place where it was standing. At his wife on her knees in the wet grass holding a boy she almost walked into the trees.

He puts his hand on her shoulder.

The three of them in the clearing. The cabin behind them. The forest in front. The rain.

Then they go inside.

INT. CABIN — MAIN ROOM — CONTINUOUS

She sits at the table. Both hands flat on the surface.  
Ishmael sits across from her.

She looks at him.

MARY  
I'm sorry.

He looks at her. He does not say it's okay. It is not okay  
and he knows it and so does she.

He looks at her for a long moment.

Then he nods. Once.

Abe at the window. The clearing empty. The tree line  
ordinary in the dark. The rain.

He goes back to the laptop.

ABE  
(quiet)  
Four hours.

EXT. CABIN — MORNING

Mary on the porch with coffee. Abe comes out. She hands him  
the other mug without looking at him.

ABE  
I found him.

MARY  
How far.

ABE  
Four hours.

INT. CABIN — KITCHEN — MORNING

Grey light. The rain stopped sometime in the night — not  
gone, paused. The clearing outside the kitchen window wet  
and still. The tree line on the north side. The darkness  
there in the morning light less pronounced but present.  
Still present.

Mary at the counter. Coffee. The boys not up yet.

Abe comes in from the main room. He has been up all night and it is on him – not exhaustion. Something cleaner on the other side of it.

He pours a cup.

Stands at the window.

The tree line. The north side.

MARY

It was in my dream.

He looks at her.

MARY (cont'd)

(cont'd)

Not threatening. Just – present. The same way it's present here. I was somewhere else in the dream and it was there. In the corner of wherever I was.

ABE

What were you doing.

MARY

Something ordinary. I don't remember what. Something domestic. Something that felt like –

She stops.

ABE

Like what.

MARY

Like things were okay. Like we were past all of this.

A beat.

ABE

Mary –

MARY

Ishmael wasn't in it.

She says it flat. Not confessing. Not accusing herself. Stating a fact she has decided to state rather than carry alone.

The coffee. The window. The tree line.

ABE

Mary.

MARY

I know what it means. I know what it was doing. I'm telling you because you should know and because if I don't say it out loud it just sits there and gets heavier.

ABE

Okay.

MARY

Okay.

ABE

You pulled back.

MARY

I woke up.

ABE

Same thing.

She looks at her coffee.

MARY

Is it.

He doesn't answer because the answer is complicated and she knows it's complicated and neither of them has time for complicated this morning.

ABE

He saw you calculate it. In the hotel. Before I got there.

She looks at him.

ABE (cont'd)

(cont'd)

Ishmael. He saw you running the math and he didn't tell me. He's been protecting you since the hotel.

The weight of that landing in the kitchen. Mary looking at the window. At the tree line.

MARY

He's eight years old.

ABE

I know.

MARY

He's been protecting me from myself  
since -

ABE

I know.

She sets the coffee down.

MARY

Then we go find this man. Today. We  
find out what this is and what it  
wants and how to end it and we end  
it.

ABE

Yes.

MARY

Because whatever it is it got into my  
dream and it knows what's in my head  
and I am done being somewhere it can  
do that.

ABE

Yes.

She picks the coffee back up.

The tree line.

The north side.

The darkness there - still present. Patient.

MARY

Go get the boys.

He goes.

FADE OUT.

She looks at the clearing. At the tree line - ordinary in  
the gray morning light. The night's geometry returned to  
just trees.

MARY (cont'd)

It was in me last night.

ABE

I know.

MARY

It knows the way I think. It used my own arithmetic against me.

ABE

Yes.

MARY

I said no. In the dream I said no. It moved me anyway.

She looks at him.

MARY (cont'd)

What do we do when saying no isn't enough.

He doesn't answer. The only answer he has is the church, the fire, the plan that isn't a plan so much as a refusal, and she already knows it.

She goes inside.

INT. CABIN — VARIOUS — MORNING

Breaking it down. Bags repacked. Mary moving through the rooms with the efficiency of a decision already made. The boys eating at the table — Isaac watching her move, Ishmael watching the corners one more time, the final check.

He looks at the corner of the main room.

He looks at Abe.

Abe looks at the corner. At the ordinary plaster. At the shadow there that is just geometry and morning light.

He looks at Ishmael.

Ishmael holds his gaze. Looks at the corner once more. Then down at his hands.

It was here. It is still here. It is in the geometry of every room they will occupy from here forward, patient in the corners, learning the family it is waiting on.

He picks up his bag.

EXT. CABIN — CONTINUOUS

The car loaded. Abe at the driver's door looks back at the cabin once.

The door slightly ajar. He didn't close it fully. He starts toward it.

Stops.

He opens the trunk. The surveillance kit. The moving blanket. The shotgun and the rifle underneath it, present, accounted for.

He closes the trunk.

Gets in the car.

The track closing behind them, the trees taking the cabin back, the mirror showing the clearing getting smaller and then the tree line and then just the road.

INT./EXT. CAR – MOVING – DAY

The boys in the back. Isaac watching the trees. Ishmael watching the mirror.

The road behind them. Empty. Nothing there that anyone could name.

Ishmael watches the mirror anyway.

The scanner cycling.

SCANNER (V.O.)

...the system remains stalled... no explanation for the continued intensification over inland areas... authorities are asking residents to...

Abe turns it down.

His eyes go to the rear-view mirror – the road behind them, the rain, the gray sky.

And at the edge of the frame, where the mirror catches the horizon –

The eyes.

Just for a moment. Red. Oriented. Not in the road. In the air above the road. In the place where the storm is thickest and the light is worst.

He looks directly at the mirror.

Gone.

He looks back at the road.

Ishmael, in the back seat, is looking at the mirror too. He met it before Abe did. He has already looked away.

Isaac, watching the trees, touches Ishmael's arm. Not asking anything. The gesture of a child who has noticed that another child is watching something and wants to share the watch without knowing what he's watching for.

Ishmael lets him.

They both watch the mirror.

The road behind them. The forest. The rain. Nothing there that anyone could name.

ABE  
(to Mary, low)  
About four hours.

She nods. Her hand in her lap. He takes it.

She lets him.

The car moving. The trees moving past. Somewhere ahead in the gray distance – not yet visible, not yet real – the thing they are moving toward. The only person who might know what this is. The only door left open.

He drives.

EXT. ENOCH'S PROPERTY – NIGHT

Rain.

The property at the end of an unmaintained road, the house set back behind a tree line, the barn with its padlocked doors and blacked windows barely visible in the dark. The isolation of a place that was chosen rather than arrived at – a man who wanted the distance and found it and has been maintaining it ever since.

Abe pulls up to the house. Cuts the engine.

Mary looks at the house. At the lights in the windows.

MARY  
This is him.

ABE  
This is him.

They get out into the rain. Abe with Isaac beside him. Mary with her hand on Ishmael's shoulder.

Abe knocks.

A beat.

The door opens.

ENOCH, 60s. Thin in the way of someone who forgets to eat. Reading glasses pushed up on his head. A book in one hand – not put down, held, the grip of a man interrupted mid-thought who has not yet decided whether the interruption is worth the thought.

He looks at Abe.

ENOCH

Abe?

Not a question. Not alarm. The warmth of a man recognizing someone he has been expecting without knowing he was expecting them – the man-shaped hole in his theory standing on his doorstep in the rain.

ENOCH (cont'd)

Welcome. Come in, come in –

He steps back. Holds the door. Looks at the family filing past him – Mary, Isaac, Ishmael. His eyes stop on Ishmael for a half-second. The scholar's recognition of a variable he has been working with theoretically suddenly made physical.

He closes the door.

INT. ENOCH'S LOCATION – INTERIOR – CONTINUOUS

The house is the inside of a mind. Every surface occupied – bookshelves floor to ceiling, artifacts in cases, photographs pinned to a corkboard the size of a wall, maps overlaid with annotations in three colors. The organized chaos of a man whose system makes sense only if you know the argument it's making.

Warm. Lit. The rain against the windows.

Enoch already moving – clearing space, finding chairs, the hospitality of a man who doesn't receive visitors often and is compensating with efficiency.

ENOCH  
 Sit, sit. I'll put something on. You  
 drove through that -

He gestures at the rain-streaked windows.

ENOCH (cont'd)  
 Nasty night. Came out of nowhere.

He goes to the kitchen. The sound of water running, the  
 kettle.

Abe looks at the room. At the corkboard. At the artifacts in  
 the cases - bronze, stone, ceramic, objects that belong in  
 institutions.

Mary gets the boys settled on a cleared section of floor.  
 Isaac cataloguing the space the way his father catalogues  
 spaces. Ishmael checking the corners - each one,  
 methodically. The attending quality. It is present in this  
 room. He looks at Abe. Says nothing.

Enoch comes back with two mugs. Pulls his chair around so  
 he's facing Abe across the spread of documents and  
 photographs that constitutes his life's work. He picks up  
 the book he was holding when he answered the door. Finds his  
 page.

ENOCH (cont'd)  
 So. How did you stumble upon this.

ABE  
 I don't even know. But now it has my  
 curiosity.

Enoch looks at him. At the burned hands. At the family  
 behind him. At Ishmael.

ENOCH  
 Curious isn't it.

ENOCH (cont'd)  
 Where do I start. The beginning I  
 suppose. Though with this the  
 beginning is - well. Further back  
 than most beginnings.

He turns to a page. Sets it on the table between them.

ENOCH (cont'd)  
 Moloch. Baal Hammon. The names  
 change - Canaanite, Phoenician,  
 Carthaginian. The practice doesn't.  
 (MORE)

ENOCH (cont'd)  
 Child sacrifice as the mechanism of  
 cosmic debt payment. The offering  
 burned alive in a bronze vessel. The  
 Tophet.

He points to a photograph – an archaeological site. Stone  
 structures. Very old.

ENOCH (cont'd)  
 This is not mythology. This is  
 archaeology. Documented. Peer  
 reviewed. Published in journals  
 nobody reads because the implications  
 are –

He finds the word.

ENOCH (cont'd)  
 Uncomfortable.

ABE  
 What kind of implications.

ENOCH  
 That it worked. You don't burn  
 children for a thousand years if  
 nothing happens. Carthage maintained  
 it for six centuries. Six centuries.  
 The tangible returns of a  
 civilization that has made a deal and  
 is collecting on it.

He closes the book. Opens the manuscript. Handles it the way  
 you handle something irreplaceable.

ENOCH (cont'd)  
 This manuscript came out of England  
 in 1587. The margin annotations –  
 I've spent years trying to identify  
 the hand.

He sets a photograph on the table. The carved post.  
 CROATOAN.

ENOCH (cont'd)  
 The Roanoke colony. 1587. One hundred  
 and fifteen people. Disappeared  
 completely. The colony's manifest  
 lists a priest – Thomas White. Cousin  
 to the governor. Not the kind of man  
 you look for.

He pulls the Roanoke manifest. Places it beside the  
 manuscript.

Looks at both of them.

He goes still.

The stillness of a man who has just seen something he has been about to see for years and has finally seen it. Not dramatic. The stillness of a calculation completing.

Enoch looks at the manuscript. At years of his life's work assembling into a shape he didn't know it was making.

ENOCH (cont'd)

The colony didn't disappear. The colony made a deal. White left CROATOAN carved as a triangle – the first signal of the covenant – to tell anyone who knew how to read it that the deal had been made.

He points to the A in the photograph.

ENOCH (cont'd)

John White reports a mystery. Thomas White disappears from the historical record because nobody was looking for him.

He pulls the property records. The corkboard photographs in sequence.

ENOCH (cont'd)

The White-Howe network. Re-entering the census as descendants. Land grants. Canaan, Virginia. This is not ancient history. The covenant is not a historical artifact. It is a living institution. The pipeline has been running for four centuries.

He looks at Abe.

ABE

How do I stop it.

Enoch holds his gaze.

ENOCH

I don't know.

He says it without apology. The honest answer of a man who has spent his career studying a thing and never once thought the question would be asked of him directly.

ENOCH (cont'd)  
 I'm a historian. I know what it is. I know what it has done. I have never needed to know how to end it.

The rain harder now against the windows. Heavier.

ABE  
 Then what do you know.

ENOCH  
 The ritual requires all elements simultaneously. The marked child. The words of invocation. The fire. The ceremony. Remove any single element and the circuit doesn't close. That's in the text. That much I have read.

He says it the way a scientist explains why the experiment is safe. Because he is certain it is safe.

He looks at the page. Reads a line silently. Then another.

ENOCH (cont'd)  
 The words aren't the power. They're the address. Without the conductor -

He looks up.

At Ishmael.

Ishmael looks back at him.

The marked child is in the room. The manuscript is open. The words are on the page.

ABE  
 Enoch. Enoch. Don't. Do not read from that -

Enoch reads.

One line. Low. The words not English, not any modern language - something older, the sound of it wrong in the way of language designed for a different kind of mouth. The syllables landing in the room the way objects land when dropped from a height.

Abe moving toward him - Stop already forming, his hand reaching for the manuscript -

Too late.

The room changes.

Not gradually. Not the slow coalescing of something building from the ambient. Immediate. The way a circuit closes – one moment open, the next complete. Baal in the room.

Not partial. Not the density in the corners. Not the weight in the air.

Present.

The full intrusion of something vast into a dimension too small for it – the room bending around the fact of him, the walls contracting slightly, the geometry of the space accommodating something that exists outside geometry. The temperature dropping ten degrees in the span of a breath. The artifacts in their cases vibrating – the bronze, the stone, the ceramic, the objects that know what they are in the presence of what made them.

The lamps guttering simultaneously as if there are torches. As if the room has been a torch-lit room all along and has simply been pretending otherwise.

Baal.

Enoch drops the manuscript.

His chair goes back – not pushed, the body making the decision before the mind has caught up. He is against the far wall with no memory of crossing the room to get there. His hands on the wall behind him.

He is terrified.

Not the academic terror of implication. Not the intellectual horror of understanding. The animal terror of proximity – the thing that happens to the human body when it is in the same room as something that should not be in a room. Every system in him oriented toward the door simultaneously.

This is not what he thought would happen because he did not think anything would happen. He was certain.

Isaac –

Both hands around Ishmael's one hand. Hard. The grip of a child holding something in a current. Not crying. Not screaming. The silence of a child who has moved past the register of noise into something older and quieter.

Ishmael –

Does not move. Does not flinch.

He looks at the presence the way he has been looking at corners since the film began – the attending quality, the regard of a child who is checking something rather than experiencing something. Recognition not shock. He has felt this weight his entire life. In the orphanage the night before Abe came. In the receiving house in Canaan. In the chamber.

He is the only person in the room who is not surprised.

He looks at Abe.

Mary –

Both boys behind her before she has decided to put them there. The animal response. Something older than calculation moving her body between the presence and her children while her mind is still processing what her body already knows.

Abe –

Between his family and the presence. Not armed against it. Not moving toward it. Standing between. The posture of a man whose code requires him to stand between his family and the thing in the room regardless of what the thing is.

He looks at it.

It looks at him.

The hum now undeniable – in the floor, in the walls, in the space behind the eyes. The breath of something that predates every religion that tried to name it, existing in the material world and deeply, cosmically inconvenienced by the fact.

It is not here because it wants to be here.

It is here because the circuit was interrupted and it cannot leave until the circuit closes and the man standing between it and his family is the reason the circuit was interrupted and the reason it is still open and the reason it is still here.

The presence holds.

Then –

The presence recedes. Not leaving – pulling back to the ambient register the way a wave pulls back. Still the ocean. Still coming.

The room returning to something that resembles itself. The temperature rising. The hum dropping.

Nobody speaks.

The silence after is the loudest thing that has ever been in this room.

Enoch slides down the wall. Not fainting – sitting. Back against the wall, legs gone, hands on the floor on either side of him. Looking at the space where the presence was.

Looking at Ishmael.

ENOCH  
(barely audible)  
It's real.

Not to Abe. To Ishmael.

Ishmael looks at him.

He doesn't answer. He doesn't need to answer. The answer was in the room a moment ago and it has receded but it hasn't left and Enoch can still feel it in the floor beneath his hands.

Outside – headlights sweeping across the window. A car on the road. Moving slowly. The grid pattern of people who know the general area and are narrowing it.

Not stopping yet. Moving.

Abe looks at the window. At Enoch on the floor. At the manuscript where it fell.

ABE  
Can you walk.

ENOCH  
(getting up)  
Yes.

He gets up. Goes to the manuscript. Picks it up. His hands are shaking but they close around it correctly – the grip of a man who will not drop this again.

He goes to the cases. Opens them. Objects selected with the hands of someone who now understands what the evidence is evidence of. The folder. Two more books. A photograph from the corkboard – the carved post, the CROATOAN, the A shaped as a triangle.

ABE  
(to Mary)  
Time to go.

MARY  
 (already moving)  
 Agreed.

She has both boys. Isaac's hand. Her other hand on Ishmael's shoulder – the reflex, the warmth she cannot stop and underneath the warmth the arithmetic she cannot stop either and underneath the arithmetic the terror of a mother who just watched something vast look at her family and then look specifically at the boy her hand is on.

She is not running the arithmetic right now.

Right now she is running.

EXT. ENOCH'S PROPERTY – CONTINUOUS

Out the back. Through the rain. The tree line – through it, fast and quiet. Enoch keeping pace, older but moving, the manuscript and folder and books against his chest.

Through the gap in the trees – headlights visible on the road now, the car slowing, the grid narrowing.

The family reaching the car.

INT./EXT. CAR – MOVING – CONTINUOUS

Enoch looks at the manuscript in his lap. His hands have stopped shaking – the over-correction of a body that has been vibrating and has forced itself to stop.

He opens it. Looks at the handwriting.

He closes it again.

ENOCH  
 It did not stop being practiced.

ABE  
 No.

ABE (cont'd)  
 Then we burn it.

Enoch looks at him. The face of a man who spent his life studying a thing and is now being asked to destroy it – without knowing if destroying it accomplishes anything at all.

ENOCH  
 I don't know if that ends it.

ABE

I know it ends the child sacrifice.

The car. The rain. The highway.

Enoch looks at the manuscript.

ENOCH

Yes.

INT. MOTEL — ROOM — NIGHT

Off Route 11. A room Enoch knew to use — the knowledge of a man who has spent years being careful about his work in ways that have just become relevant for the first time. Different name on the register. Cash. Two rooms side by side, the adjoining door unlocked, the family able to move between them without going outside.

The plan room: Abe's room. The table pulled to the center, the lamp from the dresser added to the overhead, the light better now, the manuscript and folder and Enoch's books spread across the surface alongside Abe's laptop and the notes he has been building since the chamber.

Enoch at one end of the table. Abe at the other. Between them the material — the corkboard photograph, the property records, the manuscript open to the architectural marginalia, the chamber diagram Abe drew from memory on a piece of motel stationery, the proportions as accurate as twenty years of reading rooms and one night at the top of those stairs can make them.

Mary in the chair by the window. The boys in the adjoining room — she can hear them through the door, Isaac and Ishmael on their respective beds, the acoustic signature of two children who are not asleep and know better than to say so.

Enoch looks at the diagram.

ENOCH

The south wall. Where the floor plan terminates at the upper apex. The stone there is the oldest — it predates the colonial structure by at least a century. Possibly two. The mortar between those courses has been repainted but the original stone hasn't been touched. The integrity there is compromised by age in ways the rest of the chamber isn't.

ABE

How long to sustain it.

ENOCH

Long enough. The wood in the nave above will help. The church burns down, the chamber underneath receives the heat. You need both burning simultaneously.

ABE

It burns.

MARY

What happens to the debt.

Enoch looks at her. The question he has been sitting with since the car.

ENOCH

It doesn't close. The debt doesn't live in the mechanism — the mechanism is the instrument. Destroy the instrument and the transaction cannot complete in the original form. They would need to acquire new material, develop a new instrument, re-consecrate a new site.

MARY

That isn't the same as it going away.

ENOCH

No. It isn't. But it buys time. And what you do with it is your business.

The room holds that.

ABE

Our family.

ENOCH

Not the primary target. They just need A child, not YOUR child.

Not reassurance. Operational assessment. Abe reads it correctly.

ABE

What do we need to end it.

ENOCH

Fuel. The right kind – something that sustains at high temperature, doesn't extinguish itself when it hits stone. I don't know, I'm not a fucking arsonist, I'm a geek! I like books and history.

ABE

You knew more than us.

ENOCH

I know a lot of things I've never needed.

ABE

We go at first light.

He looks at the diagram. At the south wall. At the calf position. At the path from the staircase to the calf and from the calf to the south wall and from the south wall to the stairs and out.

Mary watches him draw it.

MARY

The boys.

ABE

(without looking up)  
Stay in the car.

MARY

No.

ABE

Mary –

MARY

We don't split up. We don't leave them in a car in Canaan Virginia while you go into that church. We stay together until we can't and then we figure it out.

He looks at her.

She looks back.

ABE

To the perimeter. Not past it.

MARY

To the perimeter.

He goes back to the diagram.

She looks at the adjoining door. At the strip of light under it – the boys still awake, still quiet, giving them the room.

She gets up. Goes to the door. Opens it.

INT. MOTEL – ADJOINING ROOM – CONTINUOUS

The boys on their beds. Isaac on his back, looking at the ceiling with the expression of a child who has been listening through a wall and processing what listening through walls produces. Ishmael on his side, facing the adjoining door, which he has been watching since Mary closed it behind her forty minutes ago.

Mary comes in. Sits on the edge of Isaac's bed. He moves to give her room without being asked.

She looks at both of them.

MARY

We have a plan.

ISAAC

What is it.

MARY

Tomorrow we go back to Canaan and we end it.

ISAAC

You and Dad?

MARY

Yes. And Enoch.

ISAAC

And us?

MARY

You and Ishmael stay close. You do exactly what I say exactly when I say it.

He turns his head and looks at her.

ISAAC

Like at the hotel.

MARY

Exactly like at the hotel.

He nods. Files it.

ISAAC

Mom.

MARY

Yeah.

ISAAC

Dad's hands. They're going to be okay?

She looks at him. At the question of a boy who checked his father's hands for truth and found it and has been watching those hands wrapped in gas station bandaging for three days.

MARY

They're going to be fine.

ISAAC

How do you know.

MARY

Because your father has had worse and kept going.

He considers this.

ISAAC

Yeah.

She looks at Ishmael.

She holds his gaze.

The warmth and underneath the warmth the arithmetic and underneath the arithmetic the thing that has been true since the car outside the hotel — she is going to keep this boy alive, she is going to mother him by reflex, she cannot make either of those things stop being true and she cannot make the arithmetic stop running and all three of those things are simultaneously real and she is going to have to live with all three of them for the rest of her life and she knows it.

She reaches over and smooths the cover on his bed. The same gesture she made for Isaac. The same hands.

MARY

Get some sleep. Both of you.

She gets up.

ISHMAEL  
 (barely audible, the  
 first word, or close  
 to it)

Okay.

She turns. Looks at him.

He has already closed his eyes.

She stands in the doorway for a moment. Then she goes back through.

INT. MOTEL — ROOM — CONTINUOUS

She closes the adjoining door behind her. Stands with her hand on the frame.

Abe looks up from the diagram.

She shakes her head. Not in negation — at what just happened, at the word from the boy who has not spoken, at the weight of it.

ABE  
 (quiet)

Yeah.

She sits back down in the chair.

The plan on the table between them. The route. The timing. The sequence.

ABE (cont'd)  
 I need to go over this with Enoch.  
 The structural specifics. It'll take  
 an hour.

MARY  
 I'll sit with the boys.

He gets up. Goes to the door between his room and Enoch's — the one on the outside, not the adjoining. He knocks.

Opens it.

INT. MOTEL — ENOCH'S ROOM — CONTINUOUS

Enoch at the desk. The manuscript open. The lamp close to the page, the light very direct, the posture of a man reading with total attention.

He doesn't look up when Abe comes in.

Abe sits on the edge of the bed. Looks at the manuscript. At Enoch's face in the lamp light – doing something Abe has not seen it do yet. Not the enthusiasm of the four movements, not the terror of the manifestation, not the operational steadiness of the plan room. Something else. Something working its way through the man from the inside and not yet finished.

ABE

We need to go through the approach.  
The entry points, the south wall  
access, the sequence.

ENOCH

Yes.

He doesn't close the manuscript.

ABE

Enoch.

ENOCH

One moment.

He reads. Whatever he is looking at – deep in the margins, the annotated material, the notation that has been in Thomas White's handwriting for four hundred and thirty-six years – his face in the moving lamp light doing the thing it has been doing since the car, the thing that is not scholarship and is not terror.

He finds the line he is looking for.

He reads it.

Abe watches him read it.

He doesn't ask. He waits. He has interrogated enough people to know the difference between a person who needs time and a person who needs a question, and Enoch right now needs time.

Enoch puts his finger on the line. Holds it there.

Then he closes the manuscript.

He looks up at Abe. His face doing what it does now – the resolution of a man who has been given information he did not choose to be given and has not yet decided what to do with it.

ENOCH (cont'd)

I need to tell you something. I'm going to tell you now, before tomorrow, so that you can make the decision with the full information.

ABE

Tell me.

ENOCH

What Baal showed me in the room – the full convergence, the traditions pointing at the same source – it wasn't an argument. It was a demonstration. The difference matters. An argument can be wrong. A demonstration is just the thing itself.

ABE

What did it demonstrate.

ENOCH

That the debt is real. That the mechanism is real. That the transaction – the marked child, the instrument, the ceremony, the completion – is not superstition or religious practice or the ritual behavior of a pre-rational culture. It is a law. The same way gravity is a law. The same way the debt accrues interest is a law. You cannot repeal a law by refusing to obey it. Refusing costs the people around you. The law continues regardless.

ABE

I know what it is.

ENOCH

You know what it does. You've experienced what it does. What it showed me was what it is. What it has always been. Before Carthage. Before Canaan. Before the first name anyone gave it. The original transaction – the unedited version, before every religion that came afterward tried to refine it into something more palatable. It is not malicious. It is not good.

(MORE)

ENOCH (cont'd)

It is a mechanism for balancing a ledger that has been open since before the first human being looked at the sky and tried to name what they owed it.

ABE

And the argument.

ENOCH

There is no argument. That's what I'm telling you. There is no position from which destroying the mechanism closes the debt. The debt does not live in the mechanism. The mechanism is a tool. A very old, very specific tool, and destroying it costs the Order time and costs the debt a vector, but the debt is not in the tool. The debt is in the ledger. And the ledger -

He stops.

ABE

The ledger is still open.

ENOCH

The ledger is still open.

The room with that.

ABE

Then why are we going to Canaan.

ENOCH

Because it buys time. Because a generation of time is a generation of time, and what you do with a generation of time is your business, not mine.

ABE

That's not why you're telling me this.

Enoch looks at him. The face of a man who has made a decision and is executing it with the resolution of someone who understands the decision is irreversible.

ENOCH

I'm telling you because that is what I am choosing to do with it. The information. What it showed me.

(MORE)

ENOCH (cont'd)  
 I am choosing to tell you rather  
 than — rather than something else I  
 could do with it.

He says it evenly. Not performing the weight of it. The weight is just there, visible in the economy of the sentence, in what is not being said directly.

Abe reads him.

He reads him the way he has read people for twenty years — the space around the words, the thing the economy of language is trying to contain, the quality of a man who is still in the middle of something and knows it and is choosing to stay in the room with you anyway.

He is still in the middle of it.

ABE  
 Okay.

ENOCH  
 I wanted you to know.

ABE  
 I know.

A beat.

ABE (cont'd)  
 Now walk me through the south wall.

Enoch nods. Opens the manuscript back to the structural survey. Sets it on the bed between them. They bend over it together — the two men, the lamp between them, the annotated marginalia of a priest who made a deal in 1587 open on the motel bedspread, the approach to Canaan laid out in four-hundred-year-old handwriting.

They work.

INT. MOTEL — ROOM — PRE-DAWN

The plan room dark now. Mary asleep in the chair — she didn't mean to, her head against the window frame, the sleep of a woman whose body took the decision out of her hands.

The boys asleep through the adjoining door.

Abe at the table. The diagram in front of him. The notes. The route through the chamber, the timing, the sequence.

All of it reduced to a single page in his handwriting – the invisible architecture of a plan that will work until it doesn't and then will require him to improvise from the position of a man who knows the room.

He looks at the burned hands. At the dressing. At what the hands paid for and what they are going to be asked to pay for tomorrow.

He folds the page. Puts it in his jacket pocket.

He knocks on Enoch's door.

It opens immediately – Enoch has not been sleeping either. He is dressed. The manuscript case closed and latched, the books in his bag, the objects from the cases wrapped carefully, the room behind him already returned to what it was. A man who has been packed and waiting since he closed the structural conversation an hour ago.

ENOCH

Supply opens in forty minutes.

ABE

I'll drive.

He looks at Enoch. At the face that has been doing something since the car, since the margins, since the decision. Still doing it. The resolution that is not peace – something more specific than peace, the quality of a man who has made an irreversible decision and is standing on the other side of it.

ABE (cont'd)

You could stay here. With the boys and Mary.

ENOCH

(already moving past him into the parking lot)

I know what we're buying. And I know the south wall.

ABE

Enoch.

Enoch stops. Turns.

ABE (cont'd)

Whatever it showed you. Whatever the full convergence is. We're going to Canaan today and we're going to burn that church to the ground and drive away.

ENOCH

I know.

ABE

That's the plan.

ENOCH

(quiet)

That's your plan.

He turns. Gets in the car.

Abe stands in the parking lot for a moment. The pre-dawn air. The gray light beginning. The highway beyond the lot empty at this hour.

He gets in.

EXT./INT. CAR — PRE-DAWN — MOVING

The supply run and back. The trunk loaded — fuel in canisters, the tools, what a man buys when he intends to start a fire that will not go out.

Back to the motel. The room for twenty minutes — the final brief, the positions, the sequence, the contingencies. Mary receiving it the way she receives everything operational: still, taking it in, the questions specific and the acceptance immediate.

The boys eating at the table. Isaac watching the adults with the attending quality he has had since the hotel. Ishmael watching the window.

Then the car.

EXT. ORPHANAGE — PRE-DAWN

The building dark. The same brick, the same maintained institutional neutrality, the same correct presentation of a place that has learned to look exactly like what it's supposed to look like.

Abe parked across the street. Engine off. Watching it.

Enoch in the passenger seat.

ABE

How many children in there right now.

ENOCH

The intake records I found — seven. Possibly eight. The irregularity in the paperwork suggests one of them is already flagged.

ABE

Already marked.

ENOCH

Potentially. The Order maintains a pipeline. This facility is a node. It has been a node since —

ABE

Since before I was contacted.

ENOCH

Since the seventies at least. Possibly longer.

Abe looks at the building.

ABE

If we leave it standing it flags another one. Next month. Next year. However long it takes them to rebuild.

ENOCH

Yes.

ABE

And the children inside.

ENOCH

Are asleep. At this hour.

Abe gets out of the car.

He goes.

EXT. ORPHANAGE — EAST WALL — CONTINUOUS

Enoch at the call box. He stands in front of it for a moment — the face of a man who spent years thinking this was history and is now pulling a fire alarm at four in the morning outside a building that feeds children to an ancient debt.

He pulls it.

The alarm. Loud, immediate, the sound of institutional emergency breaking a residential street's silence.

Lights coming on in the building. Movement.

Enoch goes back to the car.

He watches through the windshield as the children come out – staff first, then children in varying states of waking, some carried, some walking, the controlled chaos of an emergency evacuation done by people who have practiced it. Seven children. Eight. They assemble on the sidewalk across the street.

He counts them.

From the side of the building – the orange.

He looks at it.

The fire moving the way fire moves when it has been given what it needs and knows what to do with it. Not slow. Not tentative. The commitment of a fire that has been started by a man who knows how to start fires that do not go out.

ENOCH  
(to himself)  
God.

He watches the building begin.

The children on the sidewalk, staff around them, nobody looking at the car across the street, everyone looking at the building.

Abe gets in.

He starts the car.

He pulls out.

In the mirror – the orphanage. The fire at the roofline now. The children on the sidewalk, safe, accounted for, watching their building become something else.

Enoch does not look at the mirror.

ABE  
The pipeline nodes. How many more  
facilities.

ENOCH  
(very quiet)  
Four that I know of.

ABE  
 Today we get one.

He drives.

EXT./INT. CAR — MOVING — MORNING

The highway. South. The landscape moving past.

In the back: the boys. The hand hold, still there. Mary watching it in the mirror with the two things running simultaneously — the warmth and the arithmetic — and neither of them stopping and both of them true.

Enoch in the front passenger seat. The manuscript case on his lap. He is not reading — the case is closed, the manuscript inside it, his hands on the clasps. He is looking at the road ahead.

He is still in the middle of it.

ABE  
 (to the road, low)  
 An hour out.

Nobody answers.

The highway. The landscape. The gray sky following them.

Then — through the treeline at the curve of the road ahead, for just a moment as the car takes the bend —

A steeple.

Nobody says anything.

The hand hold in the backseat.

The hum underneath the road noise.

Abe's burned hands on the wheel.

An hour.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CANAAN — HIGHWAY APPROACH — DAY

The town resolving out of the gray the same way it resolved the first time — out of the dark then, out of the overcast now. The same steeple. The same colonial geometry. The same careful preservation of a place that knows what it is.

Abe pulls off the highway two miles out. Cuts the engine.

ABE

Mary and the boys stay on the perimeter. Enoch and I go to the church. We follow the plan to the wall, the calf, and out. If we're not back in forty minutes -

MARY

We'll be back in forty minutes.

ABE

If we're not -

MARY

Then we deal with what that is.

Not dismissive. Operational.

She turns to the backseat.

MARY (cont'd)

You two stay in the car. Doors locked. You don't get out for anything.

ISAAC

Anything.

MARY

I don't care what you see. I don't care what you hear. You stay in this car.

Isaac nods. Looks at Ishmael. Something passes between them - the negotiation below language.

Ishmael looks at Mary.

He nods.

She holds both of them for a moment.

Then she gets out.

EXT. CANAAN - PERIMETER - DAY

Mary beside Abe. Looking at the steeple. Low, only to him.

MARY

The arithmetic.

ABE

I know.

MARY

I need you to know that I ran it and came back from it. Every time. I need you to know that Ishmael is ours. Whatever the math says. He is ours and I am not going to let the math win.

ABE

I know.

MARY

Go save our family.

She goes back to the car.

Abe watches her go. Then he looks at Enoch beside him.

Enoch is looking at the town with the face he has had since the margins – the resolution that is not peace. He has the manuscript case against his chest. Abe noted this at the motel and says nothing now.

ABE

You don't need the manuscript in there.

ENOCH

I know.

He doesn't put it down.

They go.

EXT. CANAAN – PERIMETER – DAY

The car at the pull-off. Doors locked. Mary in the driver's seat, engine running, phone in her hand. The boys in the backseat.

Mary watching the two figures moving down the road toward the steeple.

She watches them until they are gone around the bend. She does not check the mirror. She does not look at the tree line behind the car. She is watching the wrong direction and she will not know this until it is too late to matter.

ISAAC

Mom.

MARY

Yeah.

ISAAC

The hum is louder.

She looks at him in the mirror. He is looking at the window. Not out of it – at it. At the glass.

She looks at the glass.

The rain on it. The drops running down. Normal rain running normally.

Then –

One drop running up.

She watches it reach the top of the window and stop.

The hum. Present. In the car.

The temperature drops. Mary's breath fogs.

ISHMAEL makes a sound – not a word. Voluntary. The first.

He is looking at the air above the center console.

Isaac looks.

The hum in the metal of the car. In the seats. In the glass. In the chest, in the teeth.

ISAAC (cont'd)

Mom –

MARY

Don't –

MARY (cont'd)

Don't open the –

Isaac opens the door.

Pure child panic – not a decision, the body overriding everything.

He runs.

MARY (cont'd)

Isaac –

She is out of the car. Ishmael behind her – she has him, her hand on his arm, but Isaac is already twenty yards away and running toward the tree line.

MARY (cont'd)

ISAAC.

He hears her. He turns. He starts back.

The figures at the tree line. They were there before the car pulled off. The Order having run this geometry before – they were in the tree line when Mary was watching the steeple. Patient. Waiting for the debt to move for them.

It moved.

They close the distance. The gap between Isaac and Mary too large. The two figures between them before Mary can cover it.

Isaac sees them.

He stops.

He looks at Mary.

ISAAC

Mom –

They have him. Not violently – efficiently.

They move toward the tree line.

MARY

ISAAC –

She runs. She has Ishmael still – she cannot let go of Ishmael, she cannot leave Ishmael, and she cannot reach Isaac. The arithmetic resolves in the worst way.

She watches him go.

She stands at the tree line with Ishmael's arm in her hand and watches the trees take her son.

She calls Abe.

EXT. CANAAN – STREETS – DAY

The town quiet. Emptied – not abandoned, the people inside and the streets given over to the rain.

Abe moving through it the way he moved through it the first time. Twenty years of this. The body doing it before the mind has finished the instruction.

A cult member at the corner. Abe sees him first. Takes him off the corner.

The man goes down. Abe keeps moving.

A second. The side street between the receiving house and the church. More prepared than the first – Abe takes a different angle. The second man goes down.

He gets to the church exterior.

His phone.

MARY (V.O.)

(tight, immediate)

They have Isaac. He went around the back of the car. There were two of them and they had him before I could –

ABE

How long ago.

MARY (V.O.)

Thirty seconds. He's gone. They're moving toward the church. Abe –

ABE

Stay with Ishmael. Lock the doors. Do not move from that car.

He hangs up.

He looks at the church.

He goes.

INT. CHURCH – NARTHEX – CONTINUOUS

The narthex dark. The glow from below. The smell of the space – old stone, wax, the thing beneath both.

He stops.

Enoch is at the bottom of the stairs.

Not waiting for him. Arrived before him through a different entrance – the building's geometry from four centuries of architectural surveys. He knows this place.

He is standing at the bottom of the stairs looking up.

Calm. Complete. The resolution that is not peace.

ABE  
Isaac is in there.

ENOCH  
I know.

ABE  
Then move.

ENOCH  
I need you to stop.

The space between them. The staircase. The orange glow from below and somewhere inside that sound a child.

ABE  
Get out of my way, Enoch.

ENOCH  
I can't do that.

He says it without drama. Without performance. A limitation he has discovered, not chosen.

ABE  
My son is in that chamber.

ENOCH  
I know. I know what every second costs. I know what is in that room and what it is doing and I know what you are going to do when you get to it. And I am telling you that I cannot let you do it.

ABE  
What did it show you.

ENOCH  
The truth.

ABE  
Its version.

ENOCH  
There is only one version. That's what it showed me. There is not Baal's version and Abe's version. There is the ledger. Destroy the mechanism and the debt remains.

(MORE)

ENOCH (cont'd)  
The boy in that room is marked. The ceremony is the only way this ends.

ABE  
I know. And I'm going down those stairs.

ENOCH  
I believe you.

He doesn't move.

The ceremony below them. Isaac screaming. Both men in the stairwell.

Enoch closes his eyes.

Not surrender. Not peace.

ENOCH (cont'd)  
(barely audible)  
I hope it's enough.

He opens them.

Something else behind them now – using the scholar's voice with the scholar's precision.

ENOCH (cont'd)  
Give them the boy, Abe. Let it close the way it was meant to close. Everything you've lost comes back.

ABE  
Enoch. Come back. Right now. Same as Mary in the clearing – you hear me? Come back.

The ceremony below them. Isaac screaming.

Abe levels the gun.

ABE (cont'd)  
Enoch. I don't want to do this. Move.

Enoch looks at the gun. At Abe's face. At the burned hands on the grip.

He doesn't move.

Abe shoots him once.

Fast. Certain. Not rage. The cold arithmetic of a man who has run the numbers and found that the numbers leave him here.

Enoch goes down.

The manuscript case hitting the floor beside him. The clasp coming open. A page of Thomas White's handwriting visible in the orange light from below.

Abe steps past him.

INT. CHAMBER – CONTINUOUS

The full ceremony. The congregation arranged in the geometric positions. The drums. The Bosch melody. The calf at the center point, the fire in its belly.

Isaac inside it.

Abe takes it in for exactly one second. The room. The positions. The path from here to the calf and from the calf to the south wall and from the south wall to the stairs.

He moves.

Not efficiently. Sufficiently. A man moving through a room full of people who are trying to stop him and is not stopping.

He gets to the calf.

The lock. The brass. The burned hands against it – the same agony, the damaged tissue less sensitive than the first time.

He works it.

The lock yields.

The belly opens.

Isaac inside – eight years old, the fire below him building but not yet at temperature –

Abe reaches in and pulls him out.

Isaac in his arms. Breathing. Present.

ABE

I got you. Hold on buddy. I got you.

He has to move.

A ROBED FIGURE cuts him off. Positioned. Already there.

Abe doesn't stop.

The figure drives him back into the side of the calf – the impact ringing the bronze, Isaac pressed between his father and the metal.

Abe gets Isaac clear. Sets him down.

ABE (cont'd)  
(to Isaac)  
Don't move. Eyes down.

Isaac presses against the chamber wall. Eyes down.

Abe turns.

The figure. No weapon. No technique. Just commitment. They go to the ground. Stone floor. Close ugly work. Abe taking damage. Taking it anyway.

He gets on top. Gets the figure to the calf. Opens the belly. Puts him inside. Closes it. Locks it.

He steps back. Gets Isaac. Gets the accelerant.

He moves to the south wall.

From inside the calf – a sound. Not the sound of a man.

A hand reaches through the bars. Pulls the hood off from the inside.

Sixteen.

A boy. His face in the firelight – born into belief, never given the option of not having it, and none of it abstract anymore.

He looks at Abe.

Abe looks at him.

He still has the accelerant. The south wall is six feet away. Isaac behind him, eyes down.

He doesn't move.

The fire below the boy building. Not at temperature yet. But the direction is not a question.

Abe looks at the lock. He knows this lock. He has worked it twice tonight.

He looks at Isaac.

He looks at the boy.

From the congregation – two figures breaking formation.  
Running toward the calf. Hoods coming off – the faces of  
parents.

Thomas II steps into their path.

THOMAS II  
(low, absolute)  
Stop.

The father against him. Thomas II holds him. The mother  
stops just short – hands up, not surrender. Paralysis.

BOY  
(through the bars)  
Mom –

The mother moves. Past Thomas II. Her hands finding the  
bars. Her son's hands finding hers through the iron.

She looks at her boy.

At what she has made him into. What she has let this room  
make him into since before he had language to refuse it.

Her face doing something older than the covenant.

BOY (cont'd)  
(small, certain it  
won't happen)  
Mom.

She reaches up. Her thumb on his cheek. One second.

Then his forehead. The mark placed. Her hand steady.

She steps back.

BOY (cont'd)  
(the register of a  
child, not a  
believer)  
MOM –

Abe turns.

He pours the south wall.

He lights it.

He picks up Isaac.

He runs.

The boy screaming behind them – the sound filling the triangular chamber, finding every surface, every skull in every row.

Abe runs and he does not look back.

He will hear that sound for the rest of his life.

INT. CHURCH – STAIRWELL – CONTINUOUS

Up the stairs. Isaac against his chest. Past Enoch on the floor – the manuscript open beside him, Thomas White's handwriting face up in the orange light from below, four hundred and thirty-six years of one man's certainty open to the air for the last time.

Abe doesn't stop.

One floor up – Mary.

She came in. She said she wouldn't and she came in and she is at the top of the stairwell with Ishmael beside her. Her eyes find Abe on the stairs. Then find what is on the floor below. One second. Then she moves.

Ishmael looks at Enoch. Looks at Abe. Files it. He reaches for Mary's hand. She takes it.

They go.

EXT. CANAAN – STREET – CONTINUOUS

They come out into the rain.

Abe with Isaac. Mary with Ishmael. The smoke beginning at the eaves above them. The steeple against the gray sky.

Mary reads it in Abe's face – what he left on the floor. She doesn't ask. Not here. Not yet.

They get to the car.

ABE  
(to Isaac)  
Are you –

ISAAC  
I'm okay.

Abe hears both things in it. He pulls his son against him. One moment. Then he lets go.

He looks at Ishmael.

Ishmael is looking at the church. At the smoke. At the steeple. The attending quality – the same one he has had since the hotel, since the drive to Canaan the first time.

He is not surprised.

He has never been surprised by any of this.

He looks at Abe.

ABE

Let's go.

Ishmael looks at the church one more time.

Then he gets in the car.

INT./EXT. CAR – MOVING – CONTINUOUS

Abe driving. Mary in the passenger seat. The boys in the back. The church receding in the mirror, the smoke at the roof-line.

The rain.

ISAAC

Is it over?

Nobody answers immediately.

MARY

It's over.

Isaac files it – the best available version of the truth from an adult who loves him.

He looks at Ishmael.

Ishmael is watching the rear window. The church getting smaller. The steeple. The smoke.

ISAAC

(quiet, only to  
Ishmael)

We're okay.

Ishmael looks at him.

He takes Isaac's hand.

The hand hold. The same gesture, going the other direction now, away from Canaan.

The hum – present. Underneath the road noise. Underneath the rain. Not gone.

Not gone.

Abe drives.

INT./EXT. CAR – MOVING – VARIOUS

INT. NATHANIEL HOME – VARIOUS – DAY INTO EVENING

The house put back together. Not cleaned – inhabited. Bags unpacked. Shoes off at the door.

Isaac in his room. The drawer, the closet, the creak of his chair. A boy who has come home.

Ishmael standing in the hallway outside Isaac's door. Looking at the room. At Isaac inside it.

Isaac looks up and sees him in the doorway.

ISAAC

You can come in.

Ishmael comes in. He looks at the room the way he looks at every room – checking. The corners. The ceiling. The window.

Then he looks at Isaac.

ISAAC (cont'd)

It's okay here.

Ishmael holds his gaze. He looks at the corner. At the ordinary plaster.

He sits on the edge of the bed.

The room. The two boys. The ordinary late-afternoon light.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME – KITCHEN – EVENING

Mary at the stove.

Four plates on the counter. She counts them without counting them. Four.

She looks at the plates.

She keeps cooking.

Abe comes in. Looks at the four plates. Gets the silverware. Sets the table.

His burned hands setting the table. The damage real. Something he will carry. He sets it anyway. The silverware the way Mary has always arranged it.

He is present. He is here. The quality of it – not the performance of presence, the thing itself.

MARY  
 (without turning  
 from the stove)  
 Isaac said Ishmael checked the  
 corners.

ABE  
 He checks every room.

MARY  
 I know.

A beat.

MARY (cont'd)  
 Ours too?

ABE  
 Probably.

She stirs something.

MARY  
 Good.

He goes to the window. The boys in the yard – the yard they have never shared before and are sharing now.

EXT. NATHANIEL HOME – YARD – EVENING

Isaac showing Ishmael the tree. A branch. The geography of a yard offered without agenda. Here is the thing. It is yours now too if you want it.

Ishmael looks at the branch. Tests it. Looks up into the tree.

Isaac grins.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — HALLWAY — LATER

The boys coming in from the yard. Down the hall.

The hand hold between them as they walk. Without decision.  
Isaac's hand. Ishmael's hand.

Mary watching from the kitchen doorway.

The warmth. Full. Unqualified. The arithmetic not running.  
Just the two boys walking down the hallway holding hands.

Abe watching from the other end of the hall.

They let themselves believe it. The luxury of belief after  
everything. Not naivety — the choice.

The boys go upstairs.

Abe and Mary in the hallway.

She takes his burned hand. Just holding it.

ABE

I'm home.

MARY

(quiet)

I know.

She goes back to the kitchen.

He stands in the hall. The house around him. The sounds of  
it.

He goes to help with dinner.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — KITCHEN — EVENING

The four plates. The four glasses. The meal. Isaac across  
from Ishmael. Ishmael with his hands in his lap, checking  
the table. Finding it clear.

He looks up.

ISHMAEL

Pass the salt, Dad.

He says it the way you say a thing you've been holding and  
have just decided to put down.

The table receives it.

Nobody speaks. Nobody makes it large. Abe reaches for the salt and passes it. Mary finds his burned hand under the table. Isaac looks at Ishmael with the delight of a child who knows exactly what just happened.

Ishmael takes the salt.

They eat.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — STAIRWELL — NIGHT

The dinner done. The boys upstairs. Mary finishing in the kitchen — water running, a dish.

Abe calls up.

ABE  
Boys. Fifteen minutes.

Nothing.

He checks the bathroom. Empty.

The stillness of a house with one less sound in it. Twenty years of homicide. He knows what an empty room means before he opens the door.

He knows.

He goes to the boys' room anyway. Opens it.

The beds made. The room still.

Two sets of shoes on the floor. Placed neatly. Not kicked off — placed.

A book open on Isaac's pillow.

Abe looks at it.

He picks it up.

He closes it.

He sets it back on the pillow. Exactly where it was.

He doesn't move.

The room. The two beds. The shoes. The window with the tree — the branch still visible in the dark outside.

Mary in the doorway. She has been there for some of this.

The sound she makes is not a scream. Something quieter and worse.

He turns.

She is in the room now. Taking inventory the way people do when they are trying to find the thing that will make it not be true.

There is no such thing.

They stand in the room their boys are not in.

He takes her hand. The burned hand finding hers.

They stand.

The branch outside moving in the wind.

INTERCUT WITH -

INT. CANAAN - ORDER GATHERING SPACE - NIGHT

Thomas I.

Not dying dramatically. Simply - ending. The oldest thing in the room that wasn't stone.

Becoming something that is not.

A breath. Then the absence of the next breath.

Thomas I is gone.

INTERCUT WITH -

INT. HOSPITAL - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Thomas III arriving.

The moment the oldest breath stopped - this breath starts. The triangle rotating. The covenant is in the blood, and the blood continues.

Thomas II in the corner of the delivery room. Watching the new Thomas arrive. Looking older - not the aging of time, the aging of withdrawal. He looks at his own hands.

INT. THOMAS HOME - NURSERY - LATER

Thomas II brings Thomas III home. Sets him in the crib.

The child. The debt.

He is more afraid than he has ever been.

INTERCUT WITH -

EXT. NATHANIEL STREET - NIGHT

A car at the curb. The pipeline continuing. Patient.

Watching the Nathaniel house.

BACK TO -

INT. NATHANIEL HOME - BOYS' ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Abe and Mary still in the room. Still standing. Still holding.

The corner diagonally opposite the door - the corner Ishmael checked on the first night. The shadows there have coalesced. Patient. Low. Calm.

BAAL

Hello Abe.

The whispers rushing in - Baal's voice laid over every quiet moment the audience thought was recovery. The hand hold in the hallway. The hand hold in the yard. The footage they already watched with the sound they couldn't hear.

The burned hands reaching for boys who aren't there.

CUT TO -

INT. THOMAS NURSERY - NIGHT

Thomas II over the crib. The shadows coalescing.

BAAL

Hello Thomas.

Thomas II looks at the corner. He looks at the child.

CUT TO -

INT. NATHANIEL HOME - BOYS' ROOM - NIGHT (EARLIER)

Back.

Before the empty beds. Before the shoes. Before the book.  
Back to the room when the boys were in it.

The boys asleep. The hand hold between them. The same  
unguarded gesture – two children who chose each other,  
holding on in the dark.

The room dark. The streetlight through the curtain. The  
ordinary night sounds of a residential street.

And beneath them –

The hum.

Directed. Arriving at this address, entering this room,  
finding these two boys – asleep, defenses down, wounds  
present and available.

The shadows coalescing. With the patience of something that  
has been waiting four hundred years and has all night.

To Ishmael –

A life. Not persuasion – presentation. A world with a place  
for him. Not as a vector. Not as a marked child. As a person  
who belongs somewhere, who is not a package that has arrived  
at its destination, who is seen. For the price of the boy  
beside him.

To Isaac –

The wound the presence has been learning since the hotel  
room corner. The quiet jealousy. The boy who brought all of  
this. The reason the father's hands are burned. The reason  
the chair was empty. Delivered not as accusation but as  
arithmetic. Return. The family whole. The chair not empty.  
The burned hands healed. The father on the floor of the  
bedroom playing the game with the rules only they know.

For the price of the boy in the next bed.

The boys asleep. The room holding them.

We don't see a deal made. We see the whisper. We see the  
dark. We see the hand hold – the same two hands, and we do  
not know if what we are looking at is love or delivery.

Both look the same from the outside.

INTERCUT WITH –

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — HALLWAY — EVENING (THE FOOTAGE WE ALREADY WATCHED)

The hand hold in the hallway. Mary watching from the kitchen doorway. Abe watching from the other end of the hall. Both of them letting themselves believe it.

But now —

The sound underneath. The register of a voice that was present in every moment of that sequence and is only audible now. Under the ordinary sound of two boys walking down a hallway. Under the creak of the floorboards. Under Mary's breath.

The hum. The directed hum. The voice that has been speaking to these boys across every moment that looked like healing.

The same frames. The hallway. The hand hold.

Different now.

EXT. NATHANIEL HOME — YARD (THE FOOTAGE WE ALREADY WATCHED)

The boys in the yard. Isaac showing Ishmael the branch. The tree.

Now — the sound underneath. The hum in the evening air. The voice in the frequency that children hear before adults do and adults hear after it's too late.

The same yard. The same boys. The same failing light.

Not the same.

EXT. NATHANIEL HOME — STREET — NIGHT

Two boys walking hand in hand down the sidewalk toward the car at the curb.

The streetlight catching them. The hand hold, the same gesture, indistinguishable from every time it meant something pure.

Walking toward the car.

The car's door opens.

They get in.

INTERCUT WITH —

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — STAIRWELL — NIGHT

Abe going to get the boys. Calling up. The sound of a house with one less sound in it.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — BOYS' ROOM — NIGHT

He opens the door.

The empty beds.

The shoes placed neatly on the floor.

The book on the pillow. Open to the page he chose.

Abe looks at it.

He picks it up.

He closes it.

He sets it back on the pillow. Exactly where it was.

Mary in the doorway behind him. The sound she makes.

The empty room. The shoes. The book.

INT. NATHANIEL HOME — BOYS' ROOM — CONTINUOUS

Abe turns from the empty beds.

The burned hands at his sides.

The corner.

BAAL

Hello Abe.

Not gloating. Not threatening. Terminal. The protection gone. The transaction completing. The debt being paid in the currency of what Abe loves most.

The burned hands.

Mary steps into the room beside him. She takes his burned hand. He looks at her. She looks at the corner.

They stand together in the room their boys are not in.

The burned hands reaching for boys who aren't there.

CUT TO —

EXT. NATHANIEL HOME - EXTERIOR - NIGHT

The house. The street. The streetlight. The car at the curb - still there, patient.

The house lit from inside. The sound Mary made still in the air.

Then silence.

Then beneath the silence the hum. The debt still open. The machine still running.

Then beneath the hum - barely there, at the edge of audibility -

The Bosch melody.

Period instruments. The music of a ceremony that has been running for four thousand years, present in this frame, on this ordinary residential street, under this ordinary streetlight, coming from nowhere and everywhere.

It has always been here.

The house. The street. The car at the curb.

The Bosch melody rising.

Then -

It cuts mid-phrase.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE LAST OFFERING