

I KNOW THIS PLACE

Psychological Thriller

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1. EXT. FERRY -- DAY

NICOLE, 35, a fragile brunette, stands at the railing of the FERRY. Holds the metal handrail. Watches the water spreading behind the stern. A light autumn wind moves the hair that has come out from under her hat.

A little farther away -- her FRIENDS. Laughter, conversations. Fragments of phrases reach her muffled. Nicole glances at them briefly.

UNKNOWN MAN (O.S.)

The main thing is that this HOUSE
doesn't turn out to be one of those
where footsteps are heard at night.

ANOTHER UNKNOWN MAN (O.S.)

Footsteps are fine. But if Aunt
Jess decides to check how soundly I
sleep--

UNKNOWN WOMAN (O.S.)

If you shit your pants in your
sleep, don't even think about
blaming it on a ghost.

ANOTHER UNKNOWN WOMAN (O.S.)

Very nice of you to speak about my
dead relatives like that.

UNKNOWN MAN (O.S.)

Oh, sorry. We'll slaughter a sheep
on the altar in front of this house
as a sign of gratitude for the
generous inheritance.

Laughter.

ANOTHER UNKNOWN WOMAN (O.S.)

Ha. Ha. Very funny.

UNKNOWN WOMAN (O.S.)

Jess, don't listen to them. They're
acting like complete idiots.

Nicole listens to this out of the corner of her ear,
continuing to watch the water.

Her husband MARK quietly approaches from behind. Hugs her.

MARK

Are you okay?

NICOLE

Yes. Everything is fine.

Nicole turns to him.

MARK

This trip will do both of us good.

NICOLE

I hope so.

Mark gently touches her face.

MARK

Don't you want to join us?

ANNA approaches them. She is noticeably PREGNANT. Lightly pushes Mark away.

ANNA

Alright, stop squeezing her.
Sweetie, come with us.

Takes Nicole by the hand and pulls her toward the others. A slight smile appears on Nicole's face.

Mark follows.

At the bow of the ferry stand CHRIS and his girlfriend -- JESS. Next to them -- DANIEL, Anna's husband.

CHRIS

Oh, look, she finally decided to join us... Aren't you afraid of ghosts, Nicole?

Daniel moves his fingers, pretending to be a ghost.

DANIEL

Ooo... "I'm Jess's uncle." When you're sleeping at night, I'll come to tickle you.

ANNA

Daniel, shut up.

NICOLE

Looks like I missed the moment when these two grew up.

CHRIS

Nice, Nicole made a sarcastic remark.

DANIEL

I'm glad our little smartass is back with us.

JESS

Why did we even bring them with us?

NICOLE
 Maybe we should throw them
 overboard while it's not too late?

ANNA
 (to Daniel)
 If he weren't the father of my
 CHILD, I would have done it a long
 time ago.

DANIEL
 Honey, that's your mother's voice
 talking right now. My little Ann
 isn't capable of that.

Anna hugs Daniel.

ANNA
 Of course not, dear--

She jokingly grabs his jacket and shakes him.

ANNA (CONT'D)
 --but she is capable of it.

Daniel turns her with her back to him, hugs her. Gently
 strokes her stomach with his palm.

ANNA
 Better look around... It's
 incredibly beautiful here.

In the distance, a SMALL TOWN is visible at the foot of the
 HILL. Higher up -- a dense coniferous forest, in places
 shimmering with the colors of other trees.

The ferry has almost reached the shore.

DANIEL
 This town looks like nothing has
 changed in it for about forty
 years. Like it's stuck somewhere in
 the eighties.

Pause.

MARK
 Yeah... the view is a bit creepy.

ANNA
 So what? We won't be living there.
 Right, Jess?

JESS
 The house stands at the very top of
 the hill. There's no one nearby at
 all.

The ferry gently hits the DOCK. A slight jolt.

The OLD FERRYMAN opens the gate.

Everyone exits. Along with them a couple of VISITORS.

The group heads toward a small PARKING AREA BY THE DOCK.

2. EXT. PARKING AREA BY THE DOCK -- DAY

Everyone looks around. On an old two-story building, a sign reads: "Welcome to RAVENPORT."

DANIEL

I was right. Up close, this town
looks even creepier.

JESS

I think it's quite nice.

ANNA

And how do we get to the top of the
hill now?

JESS

I have the car keys.

CHRIS

Car keys? You couldn't say right
away that everything is included
for us?

ANNA

And where is it?

DANIEL

(points to the OLD PICKUP)
I think that old museum exhibit
over there is our transport.

The group approaches the pickup, standing alone in the dust.

NICOLE

What if it's not it? Can you
imagine how we'll look trying to
open someone else's car?

CHRIS

There's only one way to check.
(to Jess)
Give me the keys.

Chris takes the keys, looks around, inserts the key. Click --
the lock opens.

CHRIS
Welcome aboard.

MARK
Just because you opened this old
wreck doesn't mean it will move.

Chris sits behind the wheel. Tries to start it. The pickup
unsuccessfully doesn't start on the third attempt.

Everyone puts their bags by the trunk.

MARK
Predictable.

DANIEL
Time didn't spare it... Like
everything around.

ANNA
And now what? On foot?

A sturdy-looking OLD MAN, well over eighty, approaches them.

OLD MAN
Good afternoon. Looks like you're
having trouble with the car?

JESS
It doesn't want to start.

OLD MAN
Open the hood. I'll take a look.

Chris pulls the lever. The hood opens slightly. The old man
lifts it fully, looks inside.

OLD MAN
Try again, son.

Chris turns the key. The engine sputters, but doesn't catch.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
In all the time it's been here,
everything has worn out.

ANNA
Can you fix it?

At this time, Nicole slowly walks around the car, runs her
fingers along the body, wiping off dust.

OLD MAN
Give me a minute.
(pause)
Did you come to the Fletchers?

JESS

Yes. They're my aunt and uncle. But they died a long time ago.

OLD MAN

I know. My house is lower down the hill. And yours is at the very top. Be sure to go down a little farther past the house, there's a beautiful view there.

(beat)

My name is Fred. If you need anything -- stop by.

Nicole walks to the front of the car.

NICOLE

It looks like no one has touched it for decades.

FRED

No one really has driven it for a long time.

(looks out from under the hood, to Chris)

Go ahead, try again.

Chris turns the key. The engine sputters. Suddenly, a loud bang from the exhaust pipe. Everyone flinches. Black smoke pours from the pipe.

DANIEL

Wow... I'm glad we won't have to carry our things up the hill on foot.

Daniel approaches the trunk, loads the bags.

Fred closes the hood.

Everyone's mood is lifted.

Jess shakes Fred's hand.

JESS

Thank you very much... Could you tell us where we can buy groceries nearby?

Fred points toward the intersection.

FRED

Turn left. In about five hundred meters, on the right side, there will be a GENERAL SHOP.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

Then return to the intersection and drive straight up the hill -- you'll run right into your house.

ANNA

Thank you again.

FRED

Glad to help.

Everyone gets into the vehicle. Daniel in the passenger seat. The others in the back.

INT. PICKUP

DANIEL

Did you hear how he said "general store"? I hope there's something there besides cheap whiskey and a couple kinds of canned food.

Chris puts it in gear and sharply presses the gas. The pickup takes off from the spot.

EXT. PARKING AREA BY THE DOCK

Fred watches the pickup until it disappears around the corner at the intersection.

3. EXT. GENERAL STORE -- DAY

The pickup stops. Everyone gets out.

MARK

Girls, are you coming with us?

ANNA

No. Go yourselves. Buy everything we need... And faster, please.

The guys go inside. The girls stay by the pickup.

JESS

It looks like it's never crowded here at all.

ANNA

Well, this isn't Port Lake City.

NICOLE

But it's very peaceful... I haven't felt this kind of silence in a long time.

JESS

That's because you're like a hermit
-- home, work, home. You've
forgotten what a proper vacation
is.

Nicole walks to the shop window. Looks inside: the guys walk between the store shelves, wave goods around, laugh, loudly discuss something.

ANNA

What are they doing in there?

NICOLE

Looks like we let the "children" go
play in the supermarket alone.

ANNA

I hope the CLERK has strong nerves.

JESS

At what age do boys grow up?

ANNA

They say by forty. But that clearly
doesn't apply to ours.

JESS

That's for sure... Good thing Mark
is with us. At least one man among
us.

Nicole turns away from the shop window and accidentally bumps into a passing BOY.

He's wearing headphones, TALKING ON THE PHONE OVER VIDEO CALL, not paying attention.

NICOLE

Sorry.

The boy doesn't react and walks past.

Nicole returns to Jess and Anna.

Two ELDERLY WOMEN walk past on the sidewalk. They openly stare at them, quietly whispering. One of the women subtly points at them with her finger.

ANNA

Do they even understand that it's
rude to stare like that?

JESS

Don't pay attention. In small
towns, it's normal.

(MORE)

JESS (CONT'D)

If The Rolling Stones pulled up to your house, wouldn't you stare? That's what we are to them right now.

ANNA

What, stars?

JESS

No. Just a rare sight.

Nicole looks around. In the window of the second floor of one of the houses -- a WOMAN, having opened the window wide, is literally leaning outside and staring at them. On the other side -- an ELDERLY MAN stands on the corner of the street and also watches. Suddenly, he waves at Nicole in a friendly way. She weakly waves back.

NICOLE

Strange... They're looking as if they've seen us before.

Nicole notices: only the elderly are looking at them. The YOUNG PEOPLE passing by don't even raise their eyes.

The guys come out of the shop with bags.

ANNA

Finally.

DANIEL

What happened, baby?

ANNA

I'm already tired of catching their judgmental looks.

Anna lightly nods toward the people around them.

Daniel quickly looks around and notices that several locals are indeed watching them.

DANIEL

Here, catch another one from me.

Daniel kisses Anna on the lips.

CHRIS

I have to admit, for a general store, the selection there is decent. We even found five-dollar wine. Looks like it's been lying there since it opened.

JESS
 (to Chris)
 Oh, screw you... Wasn't there
 anything more decent?

MARK
 There was... Us.

CHRIS
 Everyone load up and let's go.

Mark puts the bags in the trunk. Walks up to Nicole, hugs her.

Over his shoulder, Nicole notices from the PHARMACY window a PHARMACIST -- a young woman, about 25 -- looking at her. Their eyes meet. The pharmacist hurriedly disappears from view.

Everyone gets into the vehicle. Nicole turns around once more, there's no one in the pharmacy window anymore.

The pickup slowly pulls away.

4. EXT. DIRT ROAD -- DAY

The old pickup slowly drives up the narrow winding dirt road to the top of the hill. On both sides -- a dense coniferous forest. The vehicle disappears around another turn.

5. INT. PICKUP -- DAY

Everyone looks ahead. Dense forest outside the windows.

Off the side of the road stands an OLD CROOKED LOG HOUSE. They slowly drive past it.

Nicole follows it with her eyes through the side window, slightly turning, trying to see better. At this moment, her PHONE quietly slips out of her jacket pocket onto the seat. No one notices.

JESS
 That must be the house of that old
 man who helped us.

DANIEL
 Looks "cozy." Like on a postcard.

CHRIS
 Then ours must be somewhere very
 close already.

JESS

Isn't he afraid to live alone in
the middle of the forest?

DANIEL

What makes you think he's alone?
Maybe he lives with Maleficent.

ANNA

Daniel, please, don't start.

Daniel turns to Anna and makes a gesture as if zipping his
mouth shut.

CHRIS

Listen, Jess, if your house turns
out to be as decrepit as this one,
I'll sleep in the pickup.

JESS

Don't dramatize.

Through the forest, the silhouette of a house begins to
appear. The pickup drives closer and stops in front of it.

6. EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

The day is nearing sunset. Everyone gets out of the vehicle.
Their eyes are fixed on the house. In front of them -- a
large two-story LOG HOUSE. A massive staircase leads to the
entrance. Wide windows. For its age, the house looks
surprisingly well preserved. Solid, well maintained, as if it
had been looked after all this time. Everyone looks at it.

CHRIS

Alright. I definitely won't be
sleeping in the pickup.

ANNA

It's preserved just beautifully.

JESS

Honestly, I expected to see
something like an old cursed
house... But this is actually a
very decent inheritance.

DANIEL

Let's all thank your dead relatives
together for such a great place
that they so kindly provided for
our party.

(beat)

Chris, bring a sheep.

CHRIS
Yeah, sure, I'm bringing it
already.

ANNA
These idiots just won't calm down.

MARK
Maybe we should go in after all?..
Or are we going to just stare from
the outside?

JESS
Exactly, screw listening to them,
let's go inside instead.

CHRIS
Take the bags.

Jess is the first to quickly and happily go up to the door.
Turns the key, opens the door.

JESS
Welcome to my new house.

Enters inside.

Anna and Nicole go up the steps.

As she goes up the stairs, Nicole runs her hand along the
HANDRAIL. Looks at it.

MEMORY FRAGMENT

Bright sunny daylight. A hand slides along the handrail.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(slightly distant)
Nicole, how do you like the new
house?

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE

The light is slightly dimmer, softer, muted. The lamps are on
in the house, the light on the porch is on as well.

Nicole turns her head. Anna walks beside her, looks at her.

ANNA
Well? What do you say?

NICOLE
Yes. It's impressive.

The guys take the bags out of the trunk.

7. INT. HOUSE HALL -- DAY

The girls enter inside. A cozy setting in an old style. Everything is pedantically arranged in its places. In the center -- a massive wooden table. To the side, the hall smoothly transitions into a small KITCHEN.

NICOLE

Why did you turn on the light? It's not dark yet.

JESS

I want the first impression of it to remain bright.

ANNA

Wow... It looks cool inside too. The spirit of the fifties. It feels like stepping into the past.

JESS

I like this place more and more.

Jess happily drops onto the couch, placing a pillow under her head.

Nicole slowly walks through the hall of the house, curiously looking at it.

Anna runs her finger along the table.

ANNA

Only one thing is strange... For a house that no one has lived in for so many years, it's too clean here.

Looks at her finger, it's clean.

ANNA (CONT'D)

There's not even dust here.

NICOLE

And who was here to stir up the air?

The guys enter the house. Put the bags on the floor.

Jess gets up and joins Nicole.

DANIEL

I don't understand something. Where are the cobwebs stretched across the whole house? Why aren't you already being gnawed by an army of hungry spiders?

MARK

It feels like someone cleaned up before we arrived.

CHRIS

Honestly, I'm already tired of all these strange things. Let's just have a normal rest.

JESS

Agreed. Stop badmouthing my house.

Nicole and Jess finish looking around at an old BOOKCASE.

NICOLE

Where should Mark and I settle in?

JESS

All the bedrooms are upstairs. Choose any.

Nicole walks up to Mark.

NICOLE

I'll change and come down.

MARK

Let me help with the bags.

Mark picks up the bag from the floor.

NICOLE

No need. I'll do it myself.

Nicole takes the bag from his hands. Goes up the stairs to the SECOND FLOOR.

DANIEL

Nicole, baby, when you change, don't show all your charms to Jess's uncle. Wouldn't want him to start misbehaving here from overexcitement.

Nicole shows him the middle finger.

Anna walks up and hits Daniel on the shoulder.

ANNA

Leave her alone.

INT. CORRIDOR

On the second floor, along the corridor, four doors.

Nicole slowly walks down the corridor, opening each one in turn and looking inside. Stops at the THIRD door. Enters.

INT. THIRD ROOM

Nicole enters the room and stops in the middle. Two nightstands on both sides of the bed. An old dresser by the wall and a cabinet by the entrance. She throws the bag onto the bed. Walks up to the dresser. Opens the top drawer -- empty. Closes it. From below, muffled voices and laughter are heard from the hall.

JESS (O.S.)

Good thing that old man helped us.
Otherwise we'd still be walking on
foot.

She unzips the bag. Takes out pants and a sweater. Takes off her sneakers. Changes clothes.

MARK (O.S.)

The world isn't made up of only
assholes after all.

Anna bursts into loud laughter.

JESS (O.S.)

What is it?

ANNA (O.S.)

(through laughter)
Remember how we went to the zoo as
kids? When Nicole wore those puffy
panties that were sticking out of
her jeans.

JESS (O.S.)

(through laughter)
Yes! And that goat from the
enclosure grabbed them and tried to
pull her inside.

NICOLE

(quietly, to herself)
They're so damn annoying with this
story, like there's nothing else to
remember.
(loudly)
I hear everything!
(quietly, to herself)
Dorks.

Nicole puts on her sneakers.

ANNA (O.S.)

Damn, we barely got her away back
then.

Everyone laughs loudly.

DANIEL (O.S.)
 (through laughter)
 Now I understand why she--

Daniel's dialogue and the laughter suddenly stop. Silence.

NICOLE
 (loudly)
 Hey, why did you go quiet?

No answer. She walks up to the door. Slightly opens it, listens. Silence.

NICOLE
 (into the open door)
 Guys, are you here?
 (pause)
 Mark!

She exits the room.

INT. HOUSE HALL

Nicole quickly goes down the stairs. Looks around the hall -- no one. Looks out the windows -- outside is empty too. She walks to the door, opens it, and goes outside.

8. EXT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

The sun has almost disappeared beyond the horizon. It's getting dark quickly. The forest around becomes dense and silent. Nicole quickly goes down the steps. The vehicle stands in place. No one around. She freezes, confused, looking around, not understanding where to go.

NICOLE
 Mark!

The silence presses in. Nicole begins to visibly panic. Runs around the house on one side, quickly looks around. Between the house and her there is only the dark forest.

NICOLE
 Anna!.. Jess!.. Where are you all?!

Her voice breaks. She runs out onto a SMALL CLEARING behind the house.

9. EXT. CLEARING BEHIND THE HOUSE -- NIGHT

She quickly, almost convulsively, looks around in a circle. Growing tension on her face. Her breathing quickens. Real anxiety appears in her eyes.

Suddenly, silhouettes appear from the low ground. One by one, everyone steps out onto the clearing. Mark walks in front. The others behind.

Nicole sharply exhales and runs to Mark. Wraps her arms tightly around his neck, hanging on him.

MARK

What happened?

NICOLE

You could have said you were leaving?

Daniel walks past without stopping.

DANIEL

Did you lose someone?

Chris walks past after Daniel.

CHRIS

Don't worry. There's nowhere to get lost here. One road down, that's it.

Anna and Jess stop nearby.

ANNA

We decided to look around while you were changing. Didn't think you'd be so fast.

JESS

The old man was right. There's an amazing view from the hill... The sunset is incredibly beautiful. You definitely need to see it next time.

MARK

We'll watch the sunset together tomorrow.

Anna and Jess continue toward the house. Anna turns around with a smile:

ANNA

I don't think that kind of view will end with just watching.

Mark and Nicole, holding each other, walk after everyone toward the house.

10. INT. HOUSE HALL -- NIGHT

The girls in the kitchen prepare appetizers. A piece of meat is baking in the old oven.

Mark sets the table.

Chris lights the fireplace.

Daniel walks around the room with a glass of wine, carefully examines the interior, looks at the shelves.

DANIEL

Listen, Jess. Do you have some kind of family phobia of cameras? I don't see a single photo in this house.

JESS

I told you, I didn't know them.

Jess, cutting salad, accidentally cuts her finger on her left hand. Blood runs down her finger and drips onto the table.

JESS

Damn it!..

Anna and Nicole are distracted.

Anna walks up, takes Jess's hand, examines the cut.

ANNA

Jess, how did you manage that?
(hands her a kitchen towel)
Press hard... There's probably not even a first aid kit here?

NICOLE

Take it from the second cabinet from the top, on the right.

Jess and Anna freeze for a moment, exchange glances, and look at Nicole.

Nicole calmly sets the knife aside, walks up to the cabinet, opens it, and takes out the first aid kit.

MARK

What happened there?

NICOLE

Jess cut her finger.

CHRIS

Looks like the house decided to start its revenge with Jess.

Nicole walks up to Anna and Jess.

ANNA

How did you know it was there?

NICOLE

I didn't know. Just--

Nicole takes Jess's hand.

JESS

Ow... It hurts.

NICOLE

Come on, I'll help.

Nicole leads Jess to the sink. Takes everything necessary from the first aid kit and begins to treat the cut. She doesn't notice Jess watching her carefully.

JESS

Still... how did you know it was in that cabinet?

NICOLE

Probably when we were looking around the house, I accidentally looked into it.

JESS

But we were together and didn't go into the kitchen.

Nicole only shrugs, continuing to bandage the finger.

ANNA

Mark, did you know Nicole has psychic abilities?

MARK

No, I didn't know.

(beat)

Honey, maybe we should start buying lottery tickets?

JESS

Stop it. It's just a coincidence.

DANIEL

Are you going to be much longer? My stomach has already started digesting itself.

ANNA

If you were helping instead of walking around the house with a glass of wine like a damn aristocrat, it would be faster.

Chris walks up to Jess, looks at her finger. He grabs his head, jokingly imitating horror.

CHRIS

Oh my God. Daniel, call an ambulance immediately.

DANIEL

What, is it that serious?

CHRIS

A Band-Aid needs to be put on here.

Laughter is heard in the hall. Jess jokingly hits Chris on the shoulder.

JESS

Idiot.

Chris walks up to the table, watches Anna dressing the salads.

CHRIS

Need help?

ANNA

Yes. Take the appetizers and bring them to the table.

Chris takes the plates and carries them away.

Nicole finishes treating the finger. Leaves the first aid kit by the sink, washes her hands. Takes the prepared salads and also carries them to the table.

Anna takes the meat out of the oven.

ANNA

Everyone, please come to the table.

Everyone sits down.

Jess happily shows her bandaged finger.

DANIEL

What a relief, we already thought we lost you.

Anna walks up to the table, places the baked meat. A murmur of approval is heard.

DANIEL

You're a miracle, my dear. You cook like Gordon Ramsay on his best day.

ANNA

Even better.

Anna sits down. Everyone serves themselves salads. Mark cuts the meat. Daniel pours the wine.

Chris carefully takes the knife and fork from Jess, hands her a spoon.

JESS

What is this supposed to mean?

CHRIS

I care about you. I want you to return home whole.

Jess sharply snatches the utensils back.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Now I'm not sure we'll return in the same lineup.

Laughter at the table. Everyone eats, talks. Even Nicole noticeably livens up, smiles more often.

DANIEL

Nicole, maybe you'll tell us what you and the goat didn't share back in childhood?

ANNA

Don't start. The moment you find something out and you--

DANIEL

I wasn't there! I'm trying to restore historical justice.

NICOLE

After that story, I have a lifelong allergy to all goats, including you, Daniel. Will that kind of historical justice satisfy you?

DANIEL

That's a stone thrown into my garden.

ANNA

Better tell them how we went to Thailand last time.

Jess bursts into laughter.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Those two went to meet "local"
girls just to spite us...

DANIEL

Mark, buddy, if you're there and
want to meet a girl, first check if
anything is sticking out from under
her skirt.

MARK

I doubt your advice will be useful
to me. But I'll remember the
information.

CHRIS

This paradise place definitely
isn't for people like us. This
island of love is purely for
bisexuals: a "two in one" format --
for one amount of money, you sleep
with both a woman and a man.

Laughter at the table.

Music. Then -- without words: the clinking of glasses,
laughter, animated gestures, lightness in the atmosphere.

LATER

Nicole lies on the couch. Jess sits in an armchair, having
turned it from the fireplace toward the couch.

The others get up from the table and begin to disperse.

ANNA

It was a wonderful evening...
(strokes her stomach)
But it's time for us to rest.

Chris heads to the stairs first. Stops.

CHRIS

(to Jess)
Don't stay up too late, my wounded
girl.

Chris goes upstairs. After him, Anna and Daniel walk up,
holding each other. Daniel, turning around:

DANIEL

Jess, ask your aunt to make me
coffee in the morning.

They laugh quietly and go upstairs.

Mark walks up to Nicole. Sits next to her.

MARK

Aren't you coming?

NICOLE

Give me another half hour. I want to talk to Jess.

Mark gently runs his hand across her forehead, adjusts her hair.

MARK

Okay.

Mark goes upstairs last.

NICOLE

How's your finger?

JESS

It's fine. It hardly hurts anymore.

(pause)

I'm glad you and Mark came. We really missed you.

NICOLE

Thank you for inviting us. We really needed to relax a long time ago.

JESS

It doesn't matter how much time has passed. The main thing is that you're with us again.

NICOLE

It's so nice and peaceful here, I think I would like to stay here.

JESS

Yes, the place is great and the house too. But I probably wouldn't be able to live in the middle of nowhere for long. Not to mention Chris, you'll see, he'll start whining already tomorrow that there's nothing to do here.

(pause)

My glass is empty. Do you want me to pour you more wine?

NICOLE

Yes, just a little.

JESS

I think I'll manage another glass.

Jess stands up, takes Nicole's glass and goes to the kitchen.

OFF SCREEN -- the sound of a cork being pulled out, wine being poured.

JESS (O.S.)
I hope Chris won't mind that I
allow myself a little--

Silence. Pause.

Nicole lies listening. Slightly raises herself, turns her head toward the kitchen. Jess is not visible.

NICOLE
Jess?.. Jess, where are you?

Nicole gets up from the couch, looks around. No one in the hall. She heads to the stairs, goes upstairs.

INT. CORRIDOR

Nicole walks down the corridor. In the second room, the door is slightly open. She stops, carefully looks inside. The room is dark, only two silhouettes are visible, a man lies on his back, a woman on top, leaning down kissing him. Nicole quietly closes the door.

NICOLE
(quietly, to herself)
Now it's clear where you ran off to
so quickly...

Nicole stops in front of her door. Looks toward the second door.

NICOLE
Chris definitely won't mind.

She enters her room and quietly closes the door behind her.

11. INT. THIRD ROOM -- DAY

Nicole wakes up alone in bed. Takes her phone from the nightstand. On the screen: 10:15 AM. She presses her temples with her fingers, ruffles her hair. A slight heaviness in her head after yesterday's wine. Hugs the pillow, turns onto her side and silently looks out the window. Listens -- silence.

NICOLE
They left somewhere again without
me.

Gets up, gets dressed. Quickly fixes her hair with her hands. Leaves the room.

INT. STAIRS

She goes down the stairs. Stops, listening to a quiet conversation.

DANIEL (O.S.)

I knew I should've brought normal alcohol with me. What was I even thinking, buying that cheap wine.

ANNA (O.S.)

If you didn't drink like it was the last time, you wouldn't be whining now that a symphony orchestra is warming up in your head.

MARK (O.S.)

You'd better write the notes down. Great composers are born at moments like this. "Daniel's Great Symphony. Part One: Pain from Cheap Wine."

DANIEL (O.S.)

At least someone sees a suffering artist in me, not a pathetic hangover.

ANNA (O.S.)

Please suffer silently. My great one.

INT. HOUSE HALL

Nicole comes out.

Mark, Anna, and Daniel sit on the couch.

Mark gets up to meet her.

MARK

Good morning. I didn't wake you.

NICOLE

You were talking so quietly that I thought you left me alone again.

MARK

No, we're all here... Want coffee?

NICOLE

Coffee right now is the best thing that could happen to me.

Mark goes to the kitchen.

ANNA

Good morning, sleepyhead. You don't look very good, of course. Did Mark really let you get enough sleep last night, or?..

NICOLE

I think I overdid it a little yesterday. From that wine, there's nothing but noise in my head.

DANIEL

You can tell right away Nicole and I are on the same wavelength.

NICOLE

Damn, Jess and I stayed up a little too late yesterday.

Nicole doesn't notice how all the attention in the hall turns to her.

Mark, not having started making coffee yet, puts the coffee pot on the table.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

By the way, Jess and Chris haven't woken up yet?.. Damn, I hope they didn't notice how I accidentally saw them yesterday... at the most inappropriate moment.

DANIEL

Well... then my concert isn't the worst option.

Anna throws a pillow at Daniel, he catches it, turns away from Nicole and looks out the window.

ANNA

But, sweetheart... They're not with us.

NICOLE

What do you mean "not with us?"

Mark walks closer.

MARK

We came here as four, Nicole.

Nicole looks at everyone.

Daniel whistles a melody, tossing the pillow.

NICOLE

Are you kidding me?.. Is this how you decided to joke with me?

ANNA

Chris's mother was taken to the hospital, so they couldn't come with us.

Nicole's expression changes.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Let me call Jess on video call and they'll confirm it themselves.

Anna calls Jess on video call. Nicole stands in astonishment, not moving, occasionally glancing at Mark.

ANNA

Hi, Jess. How are you? Is Chris's mother okay?

JESS (V.O.)

Hi. Everything's fine now. The night, of course, was difficult.

ANNA

And Chris?

JESS (V.O.)

He's fine too... He stepped away a couple of minutes ago to talk to the doctor.

Nicole walks up to Anna and, without asking, takes the phone from her hands.

JESS

Hi, Nicole! Sorry again that we didn't go. We were really looking forward to this trip, wanted to relax together with you. But you understand--

NICOLE

What does this mean, Jess?

Jess freezes for a moment, not understanding the question.

JESS

I'm not sure I understand your question.

NICOLE

You're saying you weren't with us yesterday?

JESS

But we couldn't be with you. We spent the whole night at the hospital.

NICOLE

You were here yesterday. I was drinking wine with you all evening.
(beat)
Did Daniel put you all up to this?

JESS

But--

NICOLE

If you're in on this with them and trying to play a joke on me, this is a very bad joke.

JESS

Nicole, baby, calm down. I don't understand what you're talking about.

Jess shows Nicole the hospital in the background.

JESS (CONT'D)

Look... You see. I'm in the hospital right now. I couldn't be in two places at the same time.

NICOLE

What kind of nonsense is this!

JESS

I just don't know what to tell you... Are you okay?

NICOLE

Show me your left hand.

JESS

Nicole, what's going on?

NICOLE

Please, just show me your left hand, damn it!

Jess turns the camera to her hand, there is no cut.

JESS

Are you satisfied?

Chris walks up, now they are both on the phone screen.

CHRIS

Hi, Nicole. What are you so satisfied about there?

JESS

Can you explain what happened?

Nicole throws the phone onto the couch next to Anna.

CHRIS (V.O.)

What's going on there?

Nicole walks up to Mark.

NICOLE

I need to talk to you.

They step aside a little, deeper into the hall.

JESS (V.O.)

Anna, is everything okay there?

ANNA (O.S.)

Not the time for explanations. I'll call you back later. Bye.

NICOLE

They were with us, I remember it exactly. Jess cut her finger, I helped her bandage it. Then we all had dinner together, and later she went to Chris.

MARK

Honey, they weren't with us, you knew that from the very beginning. They warned everyone before the trip.

NICOLE

(raising her voice)

You think I've gone crazy? You think I'm not capable of remembering what happened yesterday?

Anna and Daniel look at Nicole with cautious confusion, exchanging glances with each other.

MARK

(almost whispering)

Nicole, please, calm down. I don't think anything like that. Maybe it's stress?.. or a dream? I don't know what to tell you, but they weren't with us.

Nicole turns around, walks to the second floor.

INT. CORRIDOR

She quickly walks up to the second room. Abruptly opens the door. Enters inside.

INT. SECOND ROOM

She quickly looks around the room, there are no belongings. Checks the cabinet, it's empty. Looks around, the bed is made, any presence that someone stayed there is completely absent. She is completely confused.

Mark and Anna enter the room. Daniel stops in the doorway.

Nicole lowers her head, looks at the floor, thinking.

Mark takes her hands.

MARK

Nicole--

NICOLE

That can't be. I...

MARK

But it is.

DANIEL

That happens when you overdo it with cheap alcohol. One time I confused Anna with her mother and--

ANNA

What!?

NICOLE

(sharply, pointing at him with her finger)

Daniel!

DANIEL

Come on, that didn't happen.

(quietly)

I was just trying to lighten the mood.

Nicole walks up to the window, looks outside.

Mark walks up from behind, places his hands on her shoulders. Pause.

NICOLE

That's it, I need... I need to get some fresh air, take a walk a little.

She turns to Mark.

MARK
I'll go with you.

NICOLE
No.

MARK
Listen--

Nicole raises her hands, letting him know she will go alone. Walks past him and heads to the exit.

ANNA
If you want, I can go with you?

NICOLE
Thank you, but I want to be alone.
To gather my thoughts.

ANNA
Okay, just don't go far, so I don't
worry about you, you know I'm not
allowed to.

Nicole smiles sweetly at Anna, without answering, shifts her gaze to Daniel's worried face, walks past him and leaves.

12. EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

Nicole walks outside. Turns back toward the house. In one of the second floor windows stands Mark. He watches her. Raises his hand, waves. She briefly responds with the same gesture and walks away down the road.

13. EXT. FOREST -- DAY

Nicole walks down the dirt road, down the hill. Notices a narrow path leading into the forest. Turns onto it. From above, a beautiful view of the town and the lake opens up. Nicole walks slowly. Clear tension on her face. She rubs her palms together. The path leads deeper. Ahead -- a fallen tree. Nicole sits on its trunk, leans her back against the part sticking out of the ground. Looks at the landscape. Slowly closes her eyes.

BLACK

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST

A VOICE FROM THE DARKNESS

VOICE (O.S.)
Good afternoon.

Nicole flinches, abruptly opens her eyes. Fred stands in front of her.

FRED
Sorry. I didn't mean to scare you.

NICOLE
No, it's okay. I just closed my eyes for a second.

FRED
How was the drive? The vehicle didn't let you down?

NICOLE
No. Thank you again for your help.

Fred looks around.

FRED
It's beautiful here, isn't it? And the air is clean, makes you want to breathe deeply... You don't get that in big cities, right?

NICOLE
Yes, you're right. It really is very beautiful here... and the air is clean.

Pause. Fred looks at her carefully.

FRED
Your face shows a little tension. Is everything okay?

Nicole looks at him a little longer than usual, but doesn't answer. She looks away.

FRED (CONT'D)
May I sit next to you?

NICOLE
Yes. Sit down.

She shifts slightly.

Fred sits beside her.

FRED
Just call me Fred.

He holds out his hand to her and smiles kindly.

FRED (CONT'D)
 When people switch to "you," it
 becomes easier to talk.

Nicole shakes his hand in return.

NICOLE
 Nicole.

FRED
 A beautiful name.

NICOLE
 Thank you.

FRED
 Don't you find it surprising that
 people live thousands of kilometers
 apart, and then meet just like
 this, in the middle of the forest?

Nicole smiles slightly.

NICOLE
 Yes, a little... and at the same
 time, maybe that's exactly how it
 was supposed to happen.

FRED
 Are you implying that fate brings
 people together in certain places?

NICOLE
 I don't know.

A brief pause. They quietly look into the distance.

FRED
 How is the house you're staying in?

Nicole covers her face with her palms, resting her arms on
 her knees.

FRED (CONT'D)
 It stands in a truly amazing place,
 doesn't it?

NICOLE
 Yes, but... This old house... It's
 strange.

FRED
 Believe me, it's just an old house.
 There's nothing mysterious or
 mystical about it.

NICOLE

But my friends... they were with us yesterday, and today they're not.

(pause)

I could have mixed something up, but I remember exactly that they were with us and I didn't--

FRED

That happens. Sometimes memory plays cruel tricks on us... The brain pulls out new images and tries them on old places.

Nicole looks at Fred, puzzled.

NICOLE

These aren't images, but rather--

FRED

Listen. Sometimes a place waits for people. Sometimes people search for it, without even realizing it.

(pause)

In our world, there are such places that attract those who need to catch their breath, those who are tired of fighting the emotional weight inside themselves.

Nicole listens carefully.

FRED (CONT'D)

There's too much pain in your eyes, Nicole. That look only comes from losing a loved one, that state cannot be hidden behind any mask.

(beat)

Forgive me if I'm overstepping.

NICOLE

You speak as if you've been through something similar yourself.

FRED

Everyone who has lived to my age has left something behind.

(smiles)

Some pretend they forget quickly, and others learn to live with it. My wife, FRANCINE, died many years ago. We had no children... I loved her so much that afterward, I couldn't imagine another woman beside me. Since then, I've lived alone.

NICOLE

I'm sorry, Fred. I didn't mean to upset you. I'm very sorry.

FRED

It's alright... I just gave the worst example of how a person can live life, holding on to the past so tightly that there's no room left for the future.

Nicole shifts her gaze from Fred to the landscape.

FRED (CONT'D)

I think landscapes like this help survive old stories.

NICOLE

I'd like to believe that.

(exhales heavily)

But it seems no matter where you go and no matter how hard you try not to think about something... You still can't hide from those thoughts.

FRED

The past can't be erased, but you must not give it the rest of your life.

Nicole looks at Fred with warmth and relief. Moves closer and hugs him.

NICOLE

Thank you for your support.

Fred lightly hugs her back with one arm, gently patting her shoulder.

NICOLE

I allowed myself too much.

FRED

It's nothing. It was pleasant for me. No one has hugged me in many years.

(pause)

If you want to talk again, stop by anytime. I'll treat you to herbal tea from Francine's recipe.

NICOLE

Is that the log house that stands by the road?

FRED

That's the one. You and I, you could say, are the only forest neighbors on this hill... If you decide to come, take this path -- it will be shorter.

Nicole glances at her watch: 16:20. Jumps to her feet.

NICOLE

I need to go back.

FRED

Be careful on the slope. Don't hurry, or you might injure yourself.

Nicole quickly goes up the path. For a second, she turns around: sees Fred calmly walking down his path. She turns away, stumbles, and falls to her knees.

NICOLE

Damn it.

She gets up and quickly walks away.

14. EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

Nicole walks up to the house. Slows her pace. The place where the pickup stood is empty. She goes up the porch steps and quickly enters the house.

15. INT. HOUSE HALL -- DAY

Nicole enters the house.

Mark sits at the table, abruptly gets up, quickly walks up to Nicole and hugs her tightly.

MARK

Where have you been for so long? I couldn't find a place for myself.

NICOLE

I'm sorry. I turned off the road, sat down... it seemed to me that I closed my eyes for just a second. And then Fred came up. We talked a little.

MARK

Who is Fred?

NICOLE

The old man who helped us with the vehicle yesterday.

(beat)

I'm sorry, Mark.

MARK

I almost went crazy. I ran across this damn hill back and forth.

NICOLE

Why didn't you call?

MARK

I did call. You dropped your phone in the vehicle... You were gone for a long time. Anna and Daniel went to the town -- they decided you might have gone there.

NICOLE

I'm really sorry.

Mark notices the dirt on her knees.

MARK

What happened to your pants? Did you fall?

NICOLE

I accidentally caught on a snag and fell to my knees... Nothing serious. I'm fine.

MARK

I won't let you go anywhere alone again.

NICOLE

Deal.

Nicole gently kisses Mark, runs her palm along his cheek.

NICOLE

I need to change. Give me a couple of minutes.

She goes up the stairs to the second floor.

INT. THIRD ROOM

Nicole takes off her sneakers one by one, pulls off her dirty pants, takes clean ones out of the bag and pulls them on.

Mark enters, closing the door behind him.

He immediately walks up close, hugs her and begins to kiss her. Speaks through the kisses.

MARK

I love you so much... You don't even realize how much.

NICOLE

I love you too.

He runs his hands over her body -- gently, but insistently.

MARK

I want you.

NICOLE

Mark, wait--

MARK

I want you, Nicole. Right now.

Nicole responds to his kisses, gives in, presses against him.

He carefully lowers her onto the bed, kisses her neck, lips, slowly moves lower with kisses, to her waist.

She enjoys the moment, closes her eyes. Places her hands on his head.

OFF SCREEN -- A VEHICLE APPROACHES. DOORS SLAM

Nicole abruptly opens her eyes.

NICOLE

Mark, that's it. Stop... Enough. They're back.

Mark, not reacting immediately, moves back up to her face with kisses.

MARK

Damn, how badly timed.

He lifts his head to her gaze. It's NOT MARK. A DIFFERENT FACE. A STRANGER looks at her.

Nicole, as if struck by electricity, forcefully pushes him away. He falls off the bed, flies back toward the window.

STRANGER

What the hell?!

Nicole doesn't answer. Frantically pulls on her sneakers, fastens her pants on the move and rushes out of the room.

INT. HOUSE HALL

Nicole rushes down the stairs, without slowing down runs toward the front door.

Behind her, the footsteps of the running Stranger.

STRANGER (O.S.)
Nicole, wait!

Nicole quickly runs through the hall, throws the door open.

16. EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

The door suddenly bursts open. Nicole rushes outside, nearly knocking over a BLONDE GIRL and a GUY in the doorway. She glances at them. THEIR FACES ARE NOT FAMILIAR TO HER. She freezes for a fraction of a second.

GUY
What the--

The Stranger rushes out after her.

Nicole is already at the pickup. Pulls the door handle. It doesn't open.

The Stranger tries to hug her, hold her, but Nicole sharply pushes him away.

NICOLE
Don't touch me! Don't come near me!

STRANGER
What's wrong with you?

Nicole's eyes fill with tears. She covers her face with her hands.

The Stranger takes her by the shoulders, slightly shakes her.

NICOLE
Who are you?

The Blonde Girl and the Guy go down the steps. Carefully, not understanding what's happening.

STRANGER
Look at me, Nicole... Look at my face. It's me... I'm your husband.

Nicole lowers her hands from her face, looks through her tears -- Mark stands before her. HIS REAL FACE. Her breathing falters. For a second, she seems to come to her senses.

NICOLE

Who was in the room instead of you?

MARK

It was me, Nicole.

NICOLE

No... it wasn't you. He had a different face!

GUY

(irritated)

Mark, what the hell is going on here?

Nicole shifts her gaze to the Blonde Girl and the Guy. Panic again.

NICOLE

Who are these people, Mark? Who are they?!

The Blonde Girl covers her mouth with her hand. The Guy freezes in place. Shock and confusion are visible on their faces.

MARK

This is Anna and Daniel. They were looking for you. I told you about it.

The Blonde Girl takes a couple of steps forward. Holds out her hand to Nicole.

BLONDE GIRL

Nicole, sweetheart--

NICOLE

Don't come close to me!

Nicole steps backward.

Mark gestures with his hand to the Blonde Girl for her not to come closer.

NICOLE

I know what Anna and Daniel look like. That's not them... that's not them, damn it!

MARK

It's okay. Calm down. I'm right here with you... listen to me... I'm asking you, listen to me--

NICOLE
I want to leave. Take me away from
here... I'm asking you, Mark!

Nicole walks around the vehicle, not lifting her gaze from the ground. Opens the door, sits in the passenger seat, looks toward the forest.

Mark, confused, runs his hands over his face. Turns to the Blonde Girl and the Guy.

MARK
I'm sorry. I have to take her away.

ANNA
What's happening to her?

Mark jumps into the driver's seat, starts the vehicle. The pickup sharply turns around and drives away down the dirt road.

17. INT. PICKUP -- DAY

For some time, they drive in silence. Nicole looks out the window at the forest. Tears quietly run down her cheeks.

Mark occasionally glances at her.

MARK
What came over you?

NICOLE
I don't know... Something is wrong
with this place. In the room, it
wasn't you. First you, and then--
(pause)
--I don't understand what's
happening to me, Mark.

Mark takes her hand.

MARK
Let's just talk calmly.

NICOLE
First the story with Chris and
Jess... then Anna and Daniel... I
haven't gone crazy... That wasn't
them.

Mark notices her hands shaking. He stops the pickup. Gets out, walks around the vehicle, opens the passenger door and hugs Nicole.

MARK

You need to calm down. You know I love you very much. I'm ready to do anything for you.

NICOLE

(through tears)

I love you too.

MARK

We'll get home and talk about everything... I believe you, but right now you need to calm down. Do you hear me? You're shaking all over.

NICOLE

I'm scared, Mark.

MARK

Honey, you have nothing to be afraid of, I'm with you. I will always be on your side, no matter what happens... Everything will be fine. We're going home.

NICOLE

Okay.

He closes the door, sits behind the wheel. They drive on.

After some time, Nicole begins to look around anxiously.

MARK

What is it?

NICOLE

I didn't see us pass Fred's house.

MARK

Whose?

NICOLE

That crooked log house, remember it?

MARK

We passed it recently.

NICOLE

How could I not notice it?

MARK

I don't know. It was on your side.

NICOLE

What?

Nicole looks at him with confusion.

The pickup drives up to the house. Mark brakes. He already opens the door, about to get out.

Nicole suddenly grabs his shirt.

NICOLE

Why did we come back?.. Why did you bring me here again?

MARK

Come back?.. Nicole, we're here for the first time.

Anna and Jess run out of the house happily. Daniel comes out after them. A little meaning later -- Chris.

JESS

Hey!

Mark gets out of the vehicle to meet them.

EXT. HOUSE

Anna and Jess happily hug him.

ANNA

It's so great that you were finally able to come!

Anna waves to Nicole.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Nicole, come to us!

CHRIS

Looks like she's already anticipating all the horror from the party we're throwing tonight.

Daniel spreads his arms to the sides, showing that he wants to hug.

DANIEL

Nicooole! Come hug me, my little smartass!

INT. PICKUP

Nicole sits motionless. Tears run down her face. Her gaze is empty.

Jess walks up to the open driver's door.

JESS

Babe, aren't you happy to see us?

She sees that Nicole is sitting in tears. Turns to Mark.

JESS

Mark!

MARK

Yes!

JESS

(angrily)

What did you do to Nicole?

MARK

(confused)

What?..

Mark walks to the vehicle.

At this moment, Nicole quickly moves into the driver's seat, pushes Jess away, slams the door.

Mark tries to stop her.

MARK

Nicole, baby, wait. What are you doing?.. Stop!

Nicole sharply turns the vehicle around, nearly knocking Mark and Jess off their feet, and drives away. Looks in the rearview mirror -- no one near the house. She stops the vehicle, turns around, everyone is near the house. Nicole presses the gas and drives away.

18. INT. PICKUP -- DAY

The sun is nearing sunset. The pickup slowly moves along the dirt road. Only the hum of the engine inside. Suddenly, a phone ringtone sounds from the glove compartment. Nicole opens the glove compartment, takes out the mobile phone. On the screen -- "Mark." She declines the call. The phone rings again. She doesn't answer. Then incoming calls from Anna. Message notifications appear. Nicole switches the phone to silent mode and throws it onto the dashboard.

19. EXT. RAVENPORT -- BY THE DOCK -- NIGHT

The pickup drives up to the ferry crossing. Rare dim lanterns illuminate the dock and the old sign: "Welcome to Ravenport." Nicole gets out of the vehicle. Looks around -- no one around. Walks up to a wooden booth with the sign "Tickets." It's closed. She returns to the pickup.

20. INT. PICKUP -- NIGHT

The pickup slowly drives through the town. The streets are empty. On the road from the crossing to the general store, Nicole notices only one elderly man. He sits by the house across from the store and smokes. The pickup stops. Nicole gets out of the vehicle.

21. EXT. GENERAL STORE -- NIGHT

Walking around the pickup from the front, Nicole quickly scans the dark, deserted town. In a few windows, dim lights are on. Without hesitation, she enters the general store.

22. INT. GENERAL STORE -- NIGHT

The bell on the door rings. Nicole stops at the entrance, looks around. The shop is empty. She slowly walks to the counter. No one behind it.

NICOLE
Is anyone here?

A soft voice comes from the open door of the back room behind the counter.

SOFT VOICE (O.S.)
One minute, please.

Nicole looks around the store floor, then looks back at the counter.

The Clerk comes out of the back room -- a young girl, about 19 years old.

CLERK
Good evening. How can I help?

NICOLE
Good evening... I wanted to ask about the ferry crossing. Is it still operating?

CLERK
Unfortunately, no. The crossing is closed until morning.

NICOLE
Is there any way to leave Ravenport today?

CLERK
I'm afraid not. The next ferry will be at six in the morning.

The Clerk notices Nicole lowering her gaze with regret.

CLERK (CONT'D)

It used to be possible to arrange it with the fishermen. But a couple of years ago, Mr. Mulligan was transporting tourists on a boat and didn't return. Since then, no one has taken it on.

NICOLE

Do tourists come here?

CLERK

Yes, but they're very rare guests. I don't even know what brings them here.

NICOLE

What happened to Mr. Mulligan?

CLERK

I think... most likely the lake took him. That happens here sometimes. But you know, people talk...

NICOLE

I see.

Pause.

CLERK

Do you have somewhere to stay for the night? If not, you can stay with Mrs. Peterson. She's the only one who takes guests. She lives a couple of houses from here -- a dark green house with a blue roof.

NICOLE

No, thank you. I think I'll stay in the vehicle.

CLERK

As you wish. Anything else?

Nicole takes a bottle of water from the shelf.

NICOLE

This, please.

CLERK

That will be one dollar.

Nicole places the money on the counter. They exchange polite smiles. Nicole takes the water and exits.

23. EXT. GENERAL STORE -- NIGHT

Nicole stops by the pickup. Looks around. The elderly man who was smoking by the house is no longer there. She pretends to try to open the bottle, but her gaze shifts toward the pharmacy. A brief pause. Nicole crosses the road and enters the pharmacy.

24. INT. PHARMACY -- NIGHT

Nicole slowly walks through the store floor. Takes a package from the shelf, reads it, returns it to its place. Slowly looks over the displays.

The Pharmacist comes out of the back room.

Nicole notices how, at the sight of her, she awkwardly adjusts the boxes in her hands, almost dropping them.

The Pharmacist looks away -- it's clear she was about to turn and leave, but freezes in place at Nicole's first words.

NICOLE

Good evening.

Nicole slowly walks closer.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

It seemed to me that my presence put you in an awkward position.

PHARMACIST

No. I was just thinking and almost dropped the medicine.

The Pharmacist quickly places the boxes on the shelf and heads to the register.

Nicole follows her.

NICOLE

Yesterday, when you looked at me, it felt like you knew me... And now you almost dropped the medicine just seeing me.

The Pharmacist, without turning around, only slightly turns her head.

PHARMACIST

I was looking at everyone, not only at you. I became curious who visited our God-forgotten town.

The Pharmacist stands behind the counter.

Nicole slowly walks up to it.

PHARMACIST (CONT'D)

Today your face seemed familiar to me for a moment. But I was mistaken.

Nicole notices how the Pharmacist avoids direct eye contact in every way.

NICOLE

Yes. That happens.

PHARMACIST

Can I help you with anything?

NICOLE

I wanted to ask you about the house at the top of the hill.

PHARMACIST

Is something wrong with it?

NICOLE

No, everything is fine. I wanted to know... maybe you've heard that something strange happened there?

PHARMACIST

Why are you asking me? I have nothing to do with that house.

NICOLE

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to bother you. I thought maybe you knew something... It's just curiosity.

The Pharmacist looks Nicole directly in the eyes for the first time.

PHARMACIST

I haven't heard anything like that. The Fletcher family used to live there, but that was before I was born. And since then, as far as I know, no one has lived there.

NICOLE

Maybe something happened there before you were born? Or older people told something?

PHARMACIST

No... If something had happened, I would know. Here, any strange incident becomes a local legend.

Nicole sees how the Pharmacist visibly begins to get nervous.

NICOLE
May I ask you a couple more questions?

PHARMACIST
Listen, miss--

NICOLE
Nicole.

PHARMACIST
I know.

NICOLE
What do you--

PHARMACIST
I know that it's time for me to close. I don't have the time or the desire to answer your questions.

NICOLE
No... you said that you know what my name is. And why did you call me "miss"?

PHARMACIST
There's no wedding ring on your finger.

Nicole looks at her finger. The ring really isn't there. Not even a mark from it. Her fingers slowly run over her ring finger. She freezes.

PHARMACIST (CONT'D)
If you're not going to buy anything, then leave.

An awkward silence. The Pharmacist's nervous gaze makes Nicole step back.

NICOLE
I'm sorry again. Give me a sedative... Something stronger.

The Pharmacist opens the shelf, takes out a package, places it on the counter.

PHARMACIST
Take this. It should help you...
Take one at a time.

Nicole places the money on the counter. Takes the medicine, puts it in her pocket and walks to the exit. At the exit, she turns around for a second:

the Pharmacist is not looking at her -- quickly typing something on her phone. Nicole exits.

25. EXT. GENERAL STORE -- NIGHT

Nicole walks up to the pickup. Turns toward the pharmacy -- the light inside is already off. She looks at her ring finger. Runs her fingertips over it. Takes the package of pills out of her pocket. Pushes two into her palm. Throws them into her mouth. Washes them down with water. Remains standing, leaning her back against the pickup. Looks at the starry sky. Inside the vehicle, the phone suddenly begins to vibrate. The faint light of the screen flashes inside. Nicole slowly opens the door, takes the phone. On the screen -- "Mark." She exhales heavily. Answers.

MARK (V.O.)

Nicole, are you okay? Where are you, honey?

NICOLE

I... I'm in Ravenport.

MARK (V.O.)

I called you. We all called you. Why didn't you answer for so long?

NICOLE

I want to leave, Mark.

MARK (V.O.)

But why? We just arrived.

NICOLE

I can't explain it to you. You'll think I've gone crazy.

MARK (V.O.)

Why would I think that? I don't understand.

Pause.

MARK (CONT'D)

Nicole...

NICOLE

(quietly)

We've been here for two days.

Pause.

MARK (V.O.)

Okay. I'm not trying to prove anything. Let's just talk.

NICOLE
 (quietly)
 Okay.

MARK (V.O.)
 Take my jacket from the back seat.
 The ferry tickets are in the
 pocket.

NICOLE
 But, Mark...

MARK (V.O.)
 I'm not forcing you. I'm just
 asking.

Nicole takes the jacket. Takes out the tickets. CLOSE UP:
 date -- 27.09.25. Departure -- 14:00. Arrival -- 15:00.

MARK (CONT'D)
 Did you look at the tickets?

NICOLE
 Yes.

MARK (V.O.)
 Good... Now open the trunk. Our
 things and the groceries we were
 asked to buy are there.

Nicole walks around the vehicle. Opens the trunk. Inside are
 bags and grocery bags.

MARK (CONT'D)
 Do you see them?

NICOLE
 Yes, I see them... But you don't
 understand. We didn't get here
 today. I just... I don't know how
 to explain it.

MARK (V.O.)
 Nicole, don't explain anything.
 Just take a breath and think about
 it. If you don't come back in half
 an hour -- I'll understand. We'll
 all understand. I'll come down to
 Ravenport myself. You--

NICOLE
 No, Mark...

MARK (V.O.)
 Listen. I'll come down to you, and
 we'll leave home together.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

If you don't come up... We'll leave. Agreed?

NICOLE

Yes.

MARK (V.O.)

I love you, Nicole. That's it, I'm hanging up.

NICOLE

I love you too.

The call ends. Nicole remains standing by the vehicle. Holds her head. Tears run down her cheeks.

FRED (O.S.)

What a beautiful evening, isn't it Nicole?

Nicole quickly wipes her eyes, turns toward Fred's voice. Tries to smile.

NICOLE

Oh, it's you... I didn't expect to see you here.

FRED

I was walking home and saw you.

NICOLE

I was about to leave--

FRED

How good that you're still here.

NICOLE

(surprised)

No, I was actually about to leave... but... Do you walk home on foot?

FRED

(with a slight smile)

Oh no. The vehicle won't start, so I decided to walk. Maybe you could help me -- give me a ride home.

Nicole silently looks at him, glances around for a second.

FRED (CONT'D)

Did you come for groceries?

NICOLE

No... I needed something from the pharmacy.

(pause)

Get in. I'll gladly give you a ride.

They get into the pickup.

26. INT. PICKUP -- NIGHT

The pickup slowly drives along the dirt road.

FRED

A rare stroke of luck that I met you. At my age, such walks aren't easy.

NICOLE

And no one would agree to give you a ride?

FRED

Did you see many vehicles here?

Nicole only shrugs.

FRED (CONT'D)

And I don't have many acquaintances. Only one NIECE -- and I didn't want to disturb her because of an old man's problems.

NICOLE

You have a niece? I thought you were completely alone.

FRED

Not completely. Since her parents died, I've been looking after her.

(pause)

She lives and works in Ravenport... at the pharmacy.

NICOLE

At the pharmacy?... Did you tell her about me?

FRED

I told her that I met a visiting dark-haired girl in the forest. I said your name.

A slight smile appears on Nicole's face for the first time.

NICOLE
So that's how she knows my name?

Nicole absentmindedly rubs her ring finger. Fred notices this.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
Give her my apologies. It seems I
upset her with my intrusive
questions.

FRED
Locals don't like being asked about
Ravenport. There's simply nothing
to tell here.
(beat)
I'll give her your apologies. She's
a good girl -- she'll understand.

Fred's house appears ahead.

NICOLE
That's your house.

They turn off the road, drive up to the house.

FRED
Since it turned out this way...
would you like to come in for a cup
of herbal tea?

She smiles. Turns off the engine. They open the doors, about to get out.

FRED
It looks like one of your friends
is coming down the road.

Nicole turns around. In the moonlight, a figure is visible walking down the slope.

NICOLE
That's Mark. My husband.

Nicole quickly gets out of the vehicle.

EXT. DIRT ROAD

Nicole walks quickly toward Mark.

NICOLE
Mark!

He turns around and quickens his pace toward her.

Nicole literally hangs on his neck. They hug tightly.

NICOLE
You came after me?

MARK
That's what we agreed on.

Nicole pulls away, runs her palms along his arms.

NICOLE
You're all cold.

MARK
Yeah. My jacket is in the vehicle.

NICOLE
Come on.

She takes his hand and leads him to the pickup.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
I want to introduce you to Fred.

EXT. BY THE PICKUP

They walk up to the pickup. It's empty inside.

NICOLE
He left.

MARK
Is this the house of the man you
were talking about?

NICOLE
Yes. His vehicle wouldn't start and
I gave him a ride.

MARK
You weren't afraid to give a ride
to a stranger through the forest at
night?

NICOLE
He's not dangerous. Just a lonely
old man.

MARK
Nicole, let's go to the others.

Nicole freezes for a moment, thinking.

NICOLE
There by the house, when we
arrived--

MARK

Nicole, honey, I don't want to hear your excuses. Don't think that your emotional state is indifferent to me. I just don't want you to go through that again. The main thing is that you're okay now.

NICOLE

Promise me that you will always be on my side. No matter what happens.

MARK

You already know that. But if you need to hear it -- I promise.

He kisses her and hugs. They get into the pickup: Mark in the driver's seat, Nicole in the passenger seat.

INT. PICKUP

She smiles softly at him. Runs her hand through his hair.

NICOLE

I'm sorry, Mark. I left you without your jacket.

MARK

It's nothing. That worried me the least.

NICOLE

I also think I lost my wedding ring.

MARK

(with a slight smile)
You've lost it many times. Check your things, I think it's somewhere there.

Mark starts the vehicle. The pickup moves.

For a second, Nicole turns around and looks toward Fred's house. The light has turned on inside.

27. EXT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

They get out of the vehicle. Nicole takes a couple of steps and stops.

Mark, not noticing, walks ahead.

NICOLE

Mark, wait.

Mark comes back to her.

MARK

What is it?

NICOLE

I don't know what to tell them...
From the outside, it probably
looked wild.

MARK

Don't think about it. You don't
need to explain anything to them...
Come on.

Mark takes her hand. They walk into the house.

28. INT. HOUSE HALL -- NIGHT

Mark enters first. Nicole right after him. All attention is
on them. It's quiet in the hall.

Anna and Jess sit on the couch. Daniel in the armchair. Chris
at the table. Slight tension is visible on their faces.
Everyone holds glasses of wine, except Anna.

Mark places his palm on Nicole's lower back -- gently,
supportively.

NICOLE

Forgive me.

Anna immediately gets up, walks up and hugs her tightly.

Nicole doesn't respond. Her arms hang at her sides.

ANNA

Honey, what scared you so much? We
were all worried about you.

NICOLE

I don't know what's happening to
me. These past days I haven't been
myself.

Nicole shifts her gaze to Jess. She looks straight ahead,
without clear emotion. Nicole walks up, sits beside her and
gently hugs her.

NICOLE

I'm sorry, Jess.

Jess hugs her back, exhaling slightly.

JESS

I don't hold a grudge. We're friends.

(beat)

Just next time, push Mark, not me.

The tension in the room eases.

CHRIS

Nicole, don't wind yourself up. If there are problems or something is bothering you -- just say it. Don't keep it inside, we'll figure it out together.

Jess gently fixes a loose strand of Nicole's hair.

Anna sits on the other side of Nicole.

JESS

(to Nicole)

Want me to pour you some wine?

NICOLE

No, thank you. I took pills.

Mark tenses slightly.

MARK

Pills?

NICOLE

I went to the pharmacy. Took a sedative.

Daniel leans forward.

DANIEL

(with a slight smile)

You know, Nicole--

ANNA

(angrily)

Just try it...

Pause. Daniel looks at Nicole seriously now.

DANIEL

You can always rely on me. I'm not great with advice, of course... but I'll definitely improve your mood.

A faint, genuine smile appears on Nicole's face.

NICOLE

Thank you, Daniel.

ANNA
 (to Daniel)
 After your support, people usually
 need a course of rehabilitation
 with a psychotherapist.

Light laughter passes through the room.

CHRIS
 Let's pretend nothing happened
 today. Just continue the evening as
 we planned.

Anna gets up, takes Nicole's hand.

ANNA
 Come to the table.

NICOLE
 (gently)
 No. I'm very tired. I want to rest.

DANIEL
 You went to the wrong pharmacist
 for pills.

Anna, with anger on her face, shows Daniel her fist.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
 I'm quiet.

MARK
 I'll walk you to our room.

Nicole slowly goes up the stairs, head lowered.

Mark follows.

INT. CORRIDOR

Mark walks past Nicole, opens the door to the second room for her.

MARK
 Here is our room.

INT. SECOND ROOM

Nicole enters first. Mark behind her, not closing the door. She calmly takes off her jacket, takes off her shoes. Lies down on the edge of the bed.

Mark walks up, lowers himself beside her on one knee.

MARK
 How are you?

NICOLE

I'm fine.

Mark gently moves the hair from her forehead.

MARK

Do you want me to stay with you?

NICOLE

No. Stay with them. They were waiting so much for us to come.

MARK

Okay.

He kisses her. Walks to the door.

NICOLE

Turn off the light.

MARK

I'll leave the door slightly open.
If anything, I'll come back immediately.

Nicole smiles tiredly.

Mark blows her a kiss, pulls the door almost closed and leaves.

OFF SCREEN: the sound of him quickly going down the stairs is heard. Muffled voices come from below.

ANNA (O.S.)

How is she?

MARK (O.S.)

She'll be fine. She just needs to rest.

JESS (O.S.)

Has anything like this happened to her before?

MARK (O.S.)

No. This is the first time.

Nicole closes her eyes.

DANIEL (O.S.)

Let's drink to our little--

BLACK

CUT TO:

29. INT. SECOND ROOM -- DAY

Nicole wakes up. The time is nearing noon. The bags with belongings are neatly standing by the wall. Quiet laughter is heard from outside. She gets up, walks to the window. Looks outside. In the yard, everyone except Jess is calmly talking about something. Nicole takes clothes from the bag, changes. Puts on her shoes and leaves the room.

INT. HOUSE HALL

Nicole walks to the kitchen. Pours water into a glass. Takes out the pills. Freezes, holding them in her palm. Looks ahead, gathering her thoughts.

Mark enters the hall, not noticing her.

NICOLE

Hi.

Mark flinches.

MARK

Damn... You scared me.

NICOLE

Do I look that scary?

Mark walks up to her.

MARK

I just didn't notice you. I wanted to check on you.

Nicole swallows the pills, washes them down with water. Puts the glass down.

MARK (CONT'D)

You're taking them again?

NICOLE

Yes.

MARK

I'm not sure you need it.

Nicole shrugs.

MARK (CONT'D)

How do you feel?

NICOLE

A little weakness. Nothing serious.

MARK

You look a little pale. Let's go outside. Fresh air will do you good.

They walk to the exit.

30. EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

The atmosphere is calm and relaxed. No one draws attention to Nicole.

Chris sits on the steps of the staircase.

Daniel stands with his hands in his pockets, squinting at the sun.

Anna walks across the grass, lazily kicking it.

Nicole slowly walks down the stairs. Mark follows her.

NICOLE

Good morning.

CHRIS

Hi.

Chris holds out his hand, Nicole slaps his palm.

Daniel quietly waves his hand.

ANNA

Hi.

NICOLE

Where is Jess?

DANIEL

Went to check the borders of the kingdom.

CHRIS

The Queen of Ravenport Hill. Her Majesty is inspecting her new possessions... Will anyone offer at least one option of what we can do in this wilderness?

ANNA

We can kick the grass.

MARK

No options.

DANIEL
Let's collect hedgehogs and play
cricket.

Light laughter.

Chris looks at Nicole. She shrugs, spreads her hands -- no options.

CHRIS
It's hopelessly boring here.

Jess appears from the side. Walks up to them.

JESS
If you're so bored, maybe you
should have stayed home?
(beat)
Hi, Nicole.

NICOLE
Hi.

CHRIS
If I had known we were going to the
most remote ass of the world, I
would have done that.

JESS
Why does everything have to be
crazy? Can't you just relax calmly
-- breathe the air, enjoy nature?

DANIEL
Because going crazy is more fun.

CHRIS
And who likes dying of boredom?

JESS
You know what? I'll never invite
you two here again.

DANIEL AND CHRIS
(loudly, in unison)
Thank you, Jess.

Light laughter. A pause hangs.

DANIEL
No wonder everyone here looks so
gloomy. Maybe we should show
generosity to the locals and give
them a bowling lane? At least it
would brighten this long-standing
festival of gloom.

JESS

Why are you all so boring? Let's play something?

CHRIS

Let's do it. Nicole, you're our psychic. Will you hold a séance? We'll summon Jess's relatives, maybe they'll tell us how not to die of boredom here for these couple of days.

JESS

You're really pissing me off.

Jess picks up a couple of pine cones and throws them at Chris. The first -- misses, the second -- hits his face.

JESS (CONT'D)

Next time you'll think before opening your mouth.

CHRIS

It was a joke, damn it!

ANNA

By the way, Mark, I forgot to ask you yesterday, how is your mother? Is she okay?

MARK

Everything is fine. As it turned out, it wasn't that serious.

Nicole looks at Mark in surprise.

NICOLE

You didn't tell me that something happened to your mother?

Mark looks at her in confusion.

JESS

(to Nicole)

That's why you arrived a day later.

A strange pause hangs in the air. From the second floor, the quiet crying of a child is heard.

ANNA

Damn it...

She quickly runs into the house.

CHRIS

At least someone will have something to do.

DANIEL
Lately, little Liam hasn't been
himself.

Nicole's expression changes. She instinctively begins to
nervously rub her palms.

NICOLE
Little Liam?

DANIEL
Why are you so surprised?

NICOLE
But Anna... She was only in her
fourth month yesterday.

Anna comes out of the house holding a two-year-old child in
her arms. The boy calmly looks at everyone, sucking the
fingers of his hand.

Chris gets up, walks up to them, plays with the child.

CHRIS
Hi, little one.

DANIEL
(to Anna)
Listen, baby, you should be put in
the Guinness Book of Records. From
four months, overnight--

Nicole steps backward. At first, she laughs quietly.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
--to two years.

NICOLE
(through laughter)
No... Something is wrong with this
place. It will drive me insane.

JESS
Nicole...

NICOLE
(through laughter)
I can't take this anymore.

Nicole's laughter grows louder. Unnatural. Too long, turning
hysterical. Suddenly it breaks -- a short, wild scream.

Everyone freezes. The baby starts crying.

Nicole turns around and quickly walks away down the road.

31. EXT. DIRT ROAD -- DAY

She walks down the road. Her gaze is unfocused. The image seems to drift. She looks around, but as if she doesn't understand where she is. She hears nothing around her except her uneven breathing.

FLASH OF DARKNESS

The dirt road again.

She walks faster. Her breathing is heavy.

NEXT FLASH OF DARKNESS: for a moment, only the sound of her breathing.

The road returns. In the distance, the silhouette of A PERSON WALKING TOWARD HER.

BRIEF FLASH OF DARKNESS

Fred is in front of her. He supports her.

FRED
(muffled, as if through
water)
What's wrong with you, Nicole?

BLACK

CUT TO:

32. INT. FRED'S HOUSE -- DAY

Nicole opens her eyes. Her gaze is cloudy. She sits in an armchair, her legs drawn up, wrapped in a blanket.

Fred prepares something at the table. Hearing movement, he turns around.

NICOLE
Where am I?

FRED
You're a guest in my house.
(with a slight smile)
Honestly, I expected that you would
come here under different
circumstances.

He returns to the table.

FRED (CONT'D)
I don't know what happened to you,
but you were very distressed...
(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

I had to carry you here. It's good that you're so petite.

NICOLE

Was I asleep?

FRED

Yes, but not for long.

NICOLE

What are you doing?

FRED

Preparing herbal tea for you. It calms... Remember, I told you?

NICOLE

Yes. Francine's recipe.

Fred brings the cup, places it on the coffee table beside her.

FRED

Let it steep for a minute and then you can drink it. The taste will be much more pleasant that way.

He sits in the armchair opposite.

NICOLE

It's cozy here. Only the interior reminds me of the eighties.

FRED

(smiling)

I have no need to chase fashion. Francine arranged everything. Since then, I haven't touched anything.

Nicole smiles faintly.

FRED (CONT'D)

Will you tell me what happened?

NICOLE

I don't understand what's happening. It seems to me, that place... that house, something is wrong with it... There--

She covers her face with her hands. Begins to cry.

Fred takes the cup and holds it out to her.

FRED

You need to calm down.

(pause)

Drink the tea. Francine always brewed it when it seemed that everything was going to hell.

Nicole takes the cup. Takes a sip.

NICOLE

Very tasty. Thank you.

FRED

Drink while it's hot.

She takes a second sip. Looks at the cup.

NICOLE

(surprised)

A familiar taste... It seems to me, I've had this before.

FRED

Only if you knew Francine.

Nicole smiles. She shakes her head no.

FRED (CONT'D)

So what about the house?

Pause.

NICOLE

My friends... I know them, and then it's like they're not them. That can't be... The faces are different... If it happened once, but it keeps repeating constantly.

(pause)

They think I've gone crazy, but I'm sure of what I see. Anna, she--

Her hands begin to shake. She sets the cup down. Takes out the pills. Swallows two. Washes them down with tea.

Fred watches calmly.

FRED

What about Anna?

NICOLE

She was pregnant yesterday, and today she brought a child out of the house.

(MORE)

NICOLE (CONT'D)

(pause)

I saw everything with my own eyes... You probably think I'm crazy too?

FRED

No. I don't think that.

NICOLE

If you don't think that, then there must be a logical explanation.

Fred listens attentively, not taking his eyes off Nicole.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

Tell me about that house. I want to know more about it.

FRED

I already told you. It's an ordinary house.

NICOLE

Please. You know what's wrong with it. You must know.

(beat)

Who lived there before?

A long pause. Fred looks at her as if thinking about the consequences of his next words.

FRED

Why "lived"? Someone lives there even now.

NICOLE

I don't mean us.

FRED

What do you have to do with it?

Nicole's expression changes.

FRED (CONT'D)

A lonely, elderly WOMAN lives there.

Nicole suddenly jumps up.

NICOLE

That can't be. There's no one there except us.

FRED

She's been there for many years.

NICOLE

I don't believe you... We've been there for two days. And we didn't see anyone.

FRED

You should look more carefully.

Fred looks at her with cold certainty.

Nicole freezes, feeling that gaze. Walks past him. Almost reaches the door.

FRED

Find her, Nicole!

Nicole exits.

33. EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

Nicole walks quickly, decisively. Goes up the stairs and, without stopping, enters the house.

34. INT. HOUSE HALL -- DAY

Inside, tense silence. Chris and Jess sit at the table. Anna and Mark on the couch. Daniel in the armchair, leaning back, watching.

Nicole walks straight toward Jess.

Mark gets up and tries to stop her, holding out his hand.

MARK

Don't you want to explain anything?

Nicole abruptly pushes his hand away.

NICOLE

Not now, Mark.

Mark holds himself back. Steps a couple of steps back, watches from the side.

Nicole stops in front of Jess.

NICOLE

Who lived here before we arrived?

Jess involuntarily straightens under her gaze.

JESS

You know who. I already told you.

NICOLE

After them.

Jess spreads her hands in confusion.

JESS

What are you talking about?

Nicole walks up to Anna.

NICOLE

Anna, remember when we first entered here, you said: "It's too clean for a house where no one has lived for so many years."

Anna tenses, shifts her gaze to Mark.

MARK

Nicole, stop talking nonsense.

NICOLE

You yourself said that it felt like someone cleaned before our arrival.

ANNA

But we didn't enter here with you. You arrived after us... Don't you remember that anymore?

Nicole's gaze loses focus for a moment. She lowers her eyes, trying to gather her thoughts.

NICOLE

I remember everything... I just don't understand why you pretend like it didn't happen.

(pause)

Jess, do you have anything to say?

Nicole looks at Jess.

Jess spreads her hands -- she has nothing to answer.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

You don't want to or you can't answer my question?

JESS

Nicole, I really don't understand you.

CHRIS

What makes you think there's anyone else here at all?

Nicole raises her hands, emphasizing her certainty with the gesture.

NICOLE

Because I know! A lonely elderly woman lives in this house... For many years... After Jess's relatives died.

ANNA

Nicole, there's no one here. Who could have told you that?

NICOLE

Fred... He has known this place his whole life.

JESS

Who is this Fred?

NICOLE

Oh right... of course. You don't remember him either. Or how he helped us with the vehicle the day before yesterday.

Daniel lazily stretches in the armchair, watching her with tired condescension.

DANIEL

Nicole, we're not obligated to accept everything that happens in your head as reality.

MARK

Actually, he lives in that crooked house down the road... But he's just a senile, lonely old man.

NICOLE

Thank you, darling. I'm glad that at least here you don't consider me crazy... But don't talk about him like that. You don't know him. He's the only one who listens to me and understands me.

MARK

So, you know him well then? One time was enough to give him a ride home, and now you're inseparable.

NICOLE

I believe him.

The room grows quieter.

MARK

So you believe him, but you don't want to listen to me... Just wonderful.

(beat)

And what your friends say means nothing to you?

NICOLE

I didn't say that. But you deny everything. As if it never happened.

DANIEL

Does Fred take the same pills as you?

NICOLE

Fuck off, Daniel.

(to everyone)

If Jess doesn't want to admit it herself, then--

Nicole walks up to the bookcase. Looking at Jess, she opens the GLASS DOORS. Takes a book. Flips through it, throws it. The second one -- the same.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

--then we'll help her with it.

MARK

Nicole, enough. Your behavior is going beyond normal.

NICOLE

No.

Anna holds her head with her hands.

ANNA

Nicole, please stop... You're scaring me.

Mark walks up, grabs her hand with the book.

MARK

Enough!

Nicole abruptly pulls her hand away.

NICOLE

Don't touch me.

With one sharp motion, she knocks the books off the top shelf.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

You promised to be on my side.

Nicole abruptly empties the second shelf.

DANIEL

This is too much even for me.

Daniel gets up. Walks to the window, looks outside.

CHRIS

Can you at least say what you're looking for?

NICOLE

The truth.

Pause.

JESS

You've really lost your mind.

NICOLE

I know you all think I've gone crazy. I'll prove that it's not true.

CHRIS

If you look at it from the outside, that's exactly how it looks.

Mark walks closer.

MARK

Show me the pills.

NICOLE

What?

MARK

Give me the pills you took this morning.

Nicole stops, only looks at him with indignation. She takes out the pills and forcefully presses the package into Mark's chest.

Mark steps back, takes out the leaflet with the description.

Nicole walks to the kitchen.

Jess follows her. Stops behind the kitchen table, in the same place where she cut her finger.

Nicole pulls open the cabinets, one after another, rudely throwing everything onto the floor.

JESS

Oh my God... what could you possibly find in the kitchen?!

NICOLE

Any proof that there's someone else here besides us.

JESS

Nicole, stop wrecking everything! This is my house!

ANNA

I can't watch this.

Mark walks up.

MARK

Who gave you these pills?

NICOLE

I told you, I bought them at the pharmacy.

MARK

This is not a sedative! These are stabilizers, serious drugs, you can't take them just like that.

Nicole doesn't listen.

Nicole reaches the cabinet with the first aid kit. Takes it in her hands.

MEMORY FRAGMENT

The light becomes brighter. Hands hold the first aid kit.

Nicole turns around. In Jess's place stands A STRANGE GIRL. Different clothes. Behind her is a bright, blurred light. She presses her finger with her other hand, blood flows from the finger. On the table are chopped vegetables and salads.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE HALL

Nicole freezes for a moment, simply looking at Jess. The first aid kit falls from her hands. She closes her eyes for a moment.

DANIEL

Did you come back to your senses?

Nicole turns around and walks to the stairs. Goes upstairs.

CHRIS

No. She won't stop until she
destroys the whole house.

Mark follows her.

INT. CORRIDOR

Nicole enters the first room. Mark stays in the doorway, watching what is happening. She methodically searches the room. Nothing. She exits, roughly bumping Mark with her shoulder, without looking at him, walks further.

Enters the second one.

Mark doesn't follow her. He remains in the corridor, leaning against the wall, not interfering.

OFF SCREEN: the sound of Nicole checking the cabinets one after another is heard.

Nicole quickly leaves the second room, enters the next one.

OFF SCREEN: the sound of drawers being pulled out. The creak of a cabinet door.

She comes out into the corridor, irritation on her face. She throws a quick, empty glance at Mark and immediately enters the fourth room.

INT. FOURTH ROOM

Nicole walks up to the wardrobe, abruptly opens the door. A faint smile appears on her face.

NICOLE

There it is.

Inside hang WOMEN'S CLOTHES of an outdated style. She goes through them, moves the hangers one after another. Checks the space between them. Nothing.

She walks to the dresser. Opens the top drawer. Inside are many packages of pills. ONE PACKAGE catches her attention, the same as the one the Pharmacist gave her. She quickly opens it: the pills are in place, not a single one used. Throws it back, closes the drawer. Opens the next one -- empty. Another one -- empty.

Inside the last one lies only one PHOTO. Nicole takes it. In the picture -- A GIRL, no older than twenty-five. She looks at it longer than at everything else. She takes the photo, gathers the clothes from the wardrobe into her arms. Leaves.

INT. CORRIDOR

Nicole walks right up to Mark. Holds out the photo.

NICOLE

Here. Look.

Mark takes the photo. Throws a brief glance.

MARK

So what? These are just old things.
Possibly Jess's aunt's.

NICOLE

Why is she the only one in the
photo? And where are the uncle's
things then?.. Or did he prefer to
walk naked?

Nicole abruptly pulls the photo from his hand. Walks toward
the stairs.

MARK

(calling after her)

What are you trying to prove with
this?

NICOLE

(not turning around)

That I'm not crazy.

(quietly, to herself)

Like you all think I am.

INT. STAIR

Nicole goes downstairs. The Blonde Girl blocks her way.

BLONDE GIRL

Nicole, what do you have there?

NICOLE

Move.

BLONDE GIRL

Honey, what's happening to you? I
don't recognize you.

NICOLE

Really?.. I don't recognize you
too, Jess.

Nicole roughly pushes her aside and walks past.

BLONDE GIRL

(turning after her)

Actually, I'm Anna.

Nicole doesn't turn around.

NICOLE

I don't care.

INT. HOUSE HALL

Nicole freezes for a moment by the staircase. In the room are the Guy, the Strange Girl, and a DARK-HAIRED GUY whose face she sees for the first time.

GUY

Looks like our Sherlock Holmes finally dug up a couple of old things in the closet. We can consider the case of the woman supposedly living in this house solved.

Nicole lowers her head and walks to the exit.

STRANGE GIRL

And where are you going?

Nicole doesn't answer and exits.

35. EXT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

Dusk deepens. Nicole exits the house and walks away from the porch.

Mark comes out after her.

MARK

Nicole, wait. I want to talk to you.

Nicole abruptly turns to him. They stand facing each other. Their voices rise.

NICOLE

About what? About something being wrong with me?

MARK

No. I want to tell you--

NICOLE

Why don't you believe me? Even after I found all this!

MARK

Because these things prove nothing!

NICOLE

Then what will prove it?.. What will prove that I'm not crazy? All this time here, neither you nor they have tried even once to understand what I'm talking about!

(MORE)

NICOLE (CONT'D)

All you do is try to convince me
that everything I saw is nonsense!

MARK

Because that's exactly what it is!

NICOLE

If that's so, what's the point of
this conversation?!

MARK

So much time has passed. I tried to
be everything for you all these
years. It's just as hard for me as
it is for you. But why can't you
come to terms with what happened?!

NICOLE

Come to terms with what?!

MEMORY FRAGMENT

The light becomes brighter. Not as dark as before. The
Stranger stands before her. Different clothes.

STRANGER

With the death of our child! No one
is to blame for this! No one!

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE

Mark stands in front of her. Nicole's breathing falters.

NICOLE

What?

MARK

If you leave now, everything
between us is over... I have
nothing more to say.

Nicole shakes her head no. Looks him straight in the eyes.
Takes a couple of steps forward. Stands right in front of
him.

NICOLE

You're not with me anyway.

She turns around and walks away.

36. EXT. FRED'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nicole walks up to the house from the side of the trail. A pickup is parked by the house. As she passes, she looks at it in surprise.

37. INT. FRED'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nicole stops at the doorstep. Looks around. The house is quiet and empty. She walks to the table, places the things she brought. Stands there for some time, not daring to sit.

Then lowers herself into the armchair.

A moment later, the front door opens. Fred enters. He doesn't notice Nicole. Closes the door. Calmly walks to the kitchen.

Nicole suddenly gets up and walks to him.

NICOLE
Was it Mark who came?

FRED
No.

Fred lays out the herbs on the table.

NICOLE
Then who was it?

FRED
No one.

Nicole is confused.

NICOLE
Then how did the vehicle end up by your house?

FRED
It was always here.

NICOLE
I don't understand you.

FRED
It's my vehicle.

NICOLE
(surprised)
Yours?

Fred finishes laying out the herbs. He walks to the table where the brought things lie. Takes one of them. Looks at it. Puts it back. Sits in the armchair.

FRED
What is this?

Nicole steps closer. Remains standing.

NICOLE
These are things from the house.
They prove you were right. There is
someone else in the house besides
us.

Fred looks at her.

FRED
This proves nothing.

Nicole sits in the armchair opposite him.

FRED (CONT'D)
These are just old things.

NICOLE
But you said--

FRED
I said to find the woman who lives
there.
(beat)
Did you find her?

NICOLE
No... But there is a photo.

She picks up the photo from the table and hands it to Fred.

He takes it. Looks at it for a long time. Then turns the
photo back toward Nicole.

FRED
Do you know who this girl is?

NICOLE
No.

FRED
Nicole, answer me. Who is in this
photo?

NICOLE
(irritated)
I don't know who it is.

Pause. Nicole stares at him intently.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
You know who it is, don't you?

Fred doesn't answer. His stone-calm gaze remains fixed on her.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

Tell me.

FRED

For many years, I didn't ask you what happened--

NICOLE

Who is the girl in the photo?

FRED

Perhaps I don't need to know--

NICOLE

Enough!.. Just tell me who she is, damn it!

Silence.

FRED

Her name is Nicole.

MEMORY FRAGMENT

Bright light. The girl from the photo is sitting in the armchair. Her eyes slowly open. In front of her -- A STRANGE MAN and A STRANGE WOMAN. Their faces are filled with concern.

STRANGE WOMAN

What happened? Who is she?

STRANGE MAN

I don't know. I found her in the forest.

STRANGE WOMAN

She's freezing. Fred, wrap her in a blanket.

The girl from the photo watches as the Strange Man covers her with a blanket.

STRANGE WOMAN (CONT'D)

I'll make her some tea.

CUT TO:

INT. FRED'S HOUSE

Fred is still holding the photo.

FRED

I found you in the forest. In the exact same place where we met... You were unconscious.

Fred puts the photo on the table.

NICOLE

That can't be true.

FRED

The taste of the tea... you recognized it because you drank it many times. Francine used to make it for you all the time.

MEMORY FRAGMENT

Bright daylight. The girl from the photo and the Strange Woman sit outside the Fred's house.

STRANGE WOMAN

Sweetheart. I added a little juniper to the tea. How does it taste now?

THE GIRL FROM THE PHOTO

I think, Francine, the taste hasn't changed at all.

They smile at each other.

CUT TO:

INT. FRED'S HOUSE

NICOLE

I knew her.

FRED

Yes.

NICOLE

That's impossible... She died many years ago.

FRED

Nicole--

Nicole takes the photo from the table. Puts it in her pocket. Gets up from the armchair.

NICOLE

I want to talk to my husband.

Nicole quickly walks toward the door.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
I need to talk to him!

38. EXT. FRED'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nicole grabs her head. She paces back and forth, trying to comprehend what she's just heard. Tears stream down her face.

Behind her, the door opens. Fred steps outside. He stops on the porch, watching her.

NICOLE
Take me to Mark.

FRED
He's not there.
(pause)
There's no one in that house.

Nicole keeps pacing, refusing to accept his words.

NICOLE
I'm sure they're there... They have to be there.

She shakes her head, as if trying to push the thought away.

FRED
I drove them to the ferry forty years ago... I assure you -- that house is empty.

Nicole suddenly turns toward him.

NICOLE
Forty years ago?.. What are you talking about?!

Nicole steps closer and grips his shoulder for support.

NICOLE
I'm asking you.

Fred wraps one arm around her.

FRED
Alright.

They get into the pickup.

39. INT. PICKUP -- NIGHT

Fred starts the engine. The headlights cut through the darkness. The pickup moves along the dark road.

Nicole sits turned toward the window. Tears continue to run down her face.

FRED

You know, we always treated you like family. We never understood why you shut yourself off so much. You hardly ever came down to town or talked to anyone... except us.

Nicole doesn't react. She just keeps staring into the darkness beyond the glass.

FRED (CONT'D)

I don't know what has to happen to a person for them to choose to live in complete isolation.

A long pause. Only the sound of the engine is heard.

NICOLE

(quietly)

What's wrong with me, Fred?

FRED

Nothing... You're still the same young girl who came here many years ago.

The house appears ahead. All the windows are lit. The pickup stops. The engine dies. They sit in silence for another second. Then they get out of the truck.

40. EXT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

Fred remains by the open pickup door.

Nicole steps away from the truck. Stops a few steps ahead.

NICOLE

Thank you.

FRED

I have always been by your side. And I will continue to help you.

Nicole calmly walks toward the porch.

MEMORY FRAGMENT

Bright daylight. Near the house -- the Guy, the Stranger, the Blonde Girl, the Strange Girl, and the Dark-Haired Guy. They laugh. Drink wine. Grill barbecue. A joyful atmosphere.

STRANGER

Nicole, sweetheart, bring more wine
on your way back.

THE GIRL FROM THE PHOTO

Okay.

The Guy wraps his arms around the Blonde Girl.

GUY

And tell your aunt -- if she ever
wants to have fun with an awesome
guy, I'm busy. I've got a beautiful
wife.

THE GIRL FROM THE PHOTO

Yeah... Just make sure that if her
uncle shows up, you don't crap your
pants tonight.

Laughter erupts.

TRANSITION TO NEXT MEMORY FRAGMENT

INT. HOUSE -- STAIR

The girl from the photo and the Blonde Girl meet on the
stairs.

BLONDE GIRL

Nicole, you're scaring me. What's
happening?

The girl from the photo looks at her with a strange, distant
expression.

THE GIRL FROM THE PHOTO

Move.

The girl from the photo abruptly shoves her aside and walks
past.

TRANSITION TO NEXT MEMORY FRAGMENT

EXT. HOUSE

Evening. Bright light. The Stranger stands in front of the
girl from the photo.

STRANGER

Our child died! We can't do
anything about it!.. We can't!

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

Nicole stands in front of the door. She turns to Fred.

NICOLE
I KNOW THIS PLACE...
(beat)
This is my home.

Nicole looks around.

NICOLE
You wanted to know what happened?

Pause.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
My child died, Fred.

Nicole turns and enters the house.

41. INT. HOUSE HALL -- NIGHT

The house is quiet. In the kitchen -- a mess. Open cabinets. Dishes and things scattered across the floor. She walks further. The bookcase is open. Books lie at its base. Nicole stops. Looks around.

Then she walks to the armchair and sits down. She takes the photo from her pocket. Looks at it. Her fingers tremble slightly. A tear breaks free and falls onto the surface of the photo.

Nicole slowly raises her eyes toward the bookcase. In the reflection of the open glass door of the bookcase -- AN OLD WOMAN. She sits motionless in the armchair. It is OLD NICOLE.

CUT TO BLACK.