

DARK FOREST

Written by

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EXT. OPEN PASTURE - DAY

It's late afternoon. A COUNTRY FATHER, 40s and grizzled, and his COUNTRY SON, late teens, weave together strands of barbed wire, repairing part of a long farm fence. The Father glances toward the horizon.

COUNTRY FATHER  
Sun going down. Time to head in.

COUNTRY SON  
Almost done.

COUNTRY FATHER  
Finish in the morning.

COUNTRY SON  
Thought we didn't have to worry.

COUNTRY FATHER  
We don't try a friend's patience.  
After sunset, his watch begins.  
Let's go.

COUNTRY SON  
Yes, sir.

The Country Father and Country Son toss their tools into a canvas bag, and start walking across the open field toward a small house in the distance.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

In a dense forest, in the waning daylight, a YOUNG MAN, late teens, leans against the trunk of a tall tree, peering down the open sights of a small-caliber rifle.

Between the seemingly endless tall trees, a large wild HARE nibbles at grass growing through the dense twigs and leaves of the forest floor.

YOUNG MAN  
Sorry, friend.

The Young Man squeezes the trigger. CRACK! The rifle jumps in his hands and a bullet hits the ground SMACK! in front of the Hare, which bolts upright and flees deep into the forest.

The Young Man shakes his head and sets out after it.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

The Young Man trudges through the forest, looking up occasionally at the dim light filtered through the trees. He sees the Hare, which has stopped and is standing on its hind legs, listening.

A twig breaks under the Young Man's foot with a SNAP, and the Hare bolts again, running deeper into the forest.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

A massive CREATURE, 10 feet tall and covered with solid black hair, almost completely hidden among the dense trees, looks down and through the forest, following the Young Man with its eyes as the Young Man moves among the trees, every footfall a loud CRUNCH to the Creature's ears.

Mingled with the footfalls is the roar of the forest: CHIRRUP, a chorus of crickets; the WHOOSH of the wind in trees; the occasional FLAP FLAP of bird wings.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

The Hare pauses, and the Young Man is there. He leans against a tree and slowly raises his rifle to shoot, then stops.

The hairs rise on his neck and goosebumps ripple across his cheeks. His eyes widen, and he turns slowly, looking up to see the Creature towering over him, a dark shape mostly hidden in shadow.

Deathly afraid and quivering, the Young Man lowers his rifle.

YOUNG MAN

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have. I was just following...I'm so sorry.

The Creature makes a deep, rumbling GROWL.

The Young Man sets the rifle down on the ground and steps away from it, holding up his hands.

YOUNG MAN

Please. Please let me go.

The Creature GROWLS again, and the Young Man turns and runs, sprinting thorough the forest, then out into the open field.

The Young Man hears the sound of THRASHING BRANCHES and turns to look back to see his rifle sail through the air, then land at his feet with a THUD, its barrel twisted and bent.

A resounding HOWL from the Creature echoes from the forest and into the open air. The Young Man ducks his head and sprints across the field toward home.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

WILL, mid-40s, doughy and kind-eyed, stands in a bathrobe in the foyer of an expansive apartment, looking down at MIMI, a small dog, clearly very old, who stands next to a puddle of pee on the floor.

WILL  
Mimi, where's your momma?

Mimi wags her tail and looks around.

WILL  
Come on, old girl.

Will picks her up and carries her to the front door.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Outside a large inner-city apartment building, Will puts Mimi down on a patch of grass to pee.

ERIN, early-40s and sharp-eyed, double parks on the street, hops out, and begins unloading bags of groceries. She grins when she sees Will in his bathrobe.

ERIN  
You gonna put some clothes on?

WILL  
Eventually.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

ERIN  
(putting bags of groceries  
on the kitchen counter)  
I thought she'd be fine. I just  
went to the store.

WILL  
It's okay.

ERIN  
I was gone twenty minutes.

Erin bites her lip, her eyes sad. Will hugs her.

WILL  
I know. It's okay.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

On hands and knees, Will wipes up the pee while Mimi watches him. He balls up the used paper towels and scruffs her head.

WILL  
You still with me?

Mimi wags her tail.

WILL  
When it's time, I need you to let me know. Can you do that?

Mimi looks into his eyes.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Will, looking sharp in a dark suit, sits at the breakfast table with Erin, drinking coffee. JASON, a brainy 12-year-old, walks in.

JASON  
What's with the suit?

ERIN  
Today's the day.

Jason raises an eyebrow.

JASON  
You're really gonna do it?

WILL  
Yep.

Jason and Will exchange a high-five.

ERIN  
How do you feel?

WILL  
It's the right thing to do, market-wise. Client base is solid. We're exiting at the right time.

ERIN  
But how do you feel about it?

Will looks at her and shrugs.

ERIN  
How's Ken?

WILL  
Seems fine.

ERIN  
You always had to take the lead in that deal.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

The modern lobby of a mid-sized company. A backlit logo for "Evergreen Software" shines behind a reception desk. A HIPSTER, 20s, moves through the hallways, passing empty office after empty office and open plan workstations with empty chairs, before entering a large conference room.

In the conference room, Will stands addressing ASSEMBLED EMPLOYEES seated at a large conference table and standing around the room. Next to him is KEN, 40s and scruffy.

WILL  
The past three years have been amazing, and we couldn't have gotten here without you. The sale of the company will be final next Tuesday, and after that some of us have to find something else to do.

Around the room, the Employees look nervously at one another.

WILL  
I don't like uncertainty, and I doubt you do, either. Everyone here - everyone - gets a one-year severance package.

Collective OOHS and AHHS from the Employees, followed by spontaneous APPLAUSE. Will and Ken smile and nod. Will pushes his hands down, motioning for the Employees to stop applauding.

WILL  
It's the least we can do. Next week, the transition team from L.R.X. will be here. Many of you will be asked to stay. From what I know, they're great people. I'll miss working with you.  
(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

Anyone who wants to stay in touch,  
give Ellen your contact info, and  
she'll make sure Ken and I get it.  
Now get out there, finish up the  
day, and have a good weekend.

More APPLAUSE, then everyone but Ken files out, all smiling.

KEN

That went well.

WILL

Only way for it to go.

KEN

I've been with you on this, but...I  
keep thinking we could have gone  
another three or four years...

WILL

It was time.

KEN

(shrugs)

What are you gonna do with your ten  
mil? I'm gonna get drunk for a very  
long time.

Will smiles and shakes his head.

WILL

I've got a family who's tired of me  
being on the road, and with my mom  
gone I've got a house in the  
country I haven't seen in years.  
I'm going home.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Moving day. Will and Erin stand by the curb. Jason sits in  
the back of the car, reading a book. Boxes and furniture are  
piled high in the back of a MOVING TRUCK.

MOVER ONE and MOVER TWO, 20s, heft a couch and maneuver it up  
a ramp and into the truck, then close the truck's back doors.  
They turn to Will, who waves.

WILL

We'll see you there.

Will turns to Erin.

WILL  
How are you doing?

ERIN  
You think I'm gonna miss a city  
that smells like pee when it's not  
buried in snow?

Erin scans the street and shakes her head.

ERIN  
Let's get outta here.

INT. CAR - DAY - DRIVING

Will, Erin, and Jason turn off the farm road and creep up the long drive to the front of a two-story, 1800s-era country house. It needs paint, and a few of the shutters hang a bit crooked. They stop the car and get out.

EXT. HOME - DAY

The family stands in front of the home.

WILL  
This is it. Six bedrooms, three  
bathrooms, two living areas...

ERIN  
Bad paint and an old roof. We'll  
find out how old when we get our  
first rain. Wow.

JASON  
Is that a good wow or a bad wow?

ERIN  
Guess.

JASON  
Well, it's big.

WILL  
And it's ours.

JASON  
How could your mom afford it?

WILL  
They didn't buy it. My great  
grandfather built it.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Mover One and Mover Two move boxes and furniture into the house.

Erin walks over to the fireplace and runs her finger across the mantle, then holds up a black fingertip.

ERIN

Gonna need a lot of paper towels.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

The family is in the living room. Will opens a box and pulls out blankets and a pillow from a box and tosses them onto the couch, then grabs a pile of bedding and two pillows and drops them onto a mattress on the floor.

WILL

It's late. I don't feel like setting up the beds, so tonight we'll sleep together down here. Jason, you're on the couch. Your mom and I will use your mattress.

JASON

That's dumb.

ERIN

A double bed. Just like the old days.

WILL

Don't remind me.

ERIN

It wasn't so bad, was it?

Will looks into her eyes. Erin grins.

WILL

No, it wasn't.

JASON

Gross.

WILL

I'm gonna take Mimi out one last time. And don't leave her alone outside. There's snakes, and bigger stuff at night.

JASON  
Like what?

WILL  
Wolves. Maybe a cougar.

JASON  
You're hilarious.

ERIN  
He's not kidding.

Will scoops up Mimi and carries her out the front door. Jason lies down on the couch and squirms.

JASON  
This is lame.

ERIN  
Come on. It'll be like camping.

JASON  
When have we ever gone camping?

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

Outside, the wind ROARS.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Inside, the sound of the wind is muted, but still audible. Will lies on his side on the small mattress, his eyes open.

With a CLICK, the front door slowly swings open. Mimi gets up and goes to investigate, and Will gets up and closes the door.

WILL  
No you don't, missy.

Will moves a box in front of the door. As Will lies back down and closes his eyes, Erin sits up.

WILL  
Door blew open. I'll look at it in the morning.

Erin lies back down and puts her arm around Will, spoons him, and closes her eyes.

INT. WORKSHOP - DAY

A padlock CLICKS, a chain CLANKS, and Will swings open the doors to an old shed, flooding a small free-standing workshop with sunlight.

Will pulls a box from under the workbench and takes out a bottle of whisky, its label long since rotted away. He opens the bottle and smells it, breathing it in.

WILL  
I remember you.

He pours a bit into the cap and takes a sip, closing his eyes and savoring it.

WILL  
Here's to you, dad.

EXT. WORKSHOP - DAY

Will pours the whisky out onto the ground, then walks back into the workshop with the bottle and tosses it into an old trash can.

WILL  
Already regretting that.

EXT. RING ROAD - NIGHT

Will jogs at a steady pace up the road. To one side is an open field. A small herd of sheep regards him as he runs by.

WILL  
Hey guys.

On the other side of the road, the forest seems endless. As Will runs, his feet SLAP the pavement.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

As Will jogs past, hidden among the shadows of the trees, the Creature watches.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Will is on top of Erin in bed. He drops his chin to his chest, shakes his head, and rolls off of her, looking up at the ceiling.

WILL

Dammit.

ERIN

Don't worry about it. Plenty of  
time to break this place in.

WILL

How am I not supposed to worry  
about it?

Erin rolls over to face Will.

ERIN

Think it's gonna keep happening?

WILL

Don't know. Felt funny lately.  
Selling the agency. Brain won't  
stop. If it happens again, I'll go  
to a doctor. I'm not that old.

ERIN

Come here and snuggle me.

INT. HOME - DAY

In a cluttered attic, Will and Erin open dusty boxes.

WILL

Hard to know where to start.

Erin opens a box and pulls out a framed photo.

INSERT - FRAMED PHOTO

of WILL'S FATHER, 40s and smiling.

BACK TO SCENE

WILL

That's how he looked the last time  
I saw him.

Will takes the picture from her and wipes the dust off the  
glass with his sleeve.

ERIN

I never understood why he left.

WILL

Mom never said. Toward the end, I'd hear him go out at night, come back hours later, or not at all. One night he walked out in the middle of the night and never came back.

Will studies the photo of his dad.

WILL

He'd been acting strange. Sometimes I think, maybe...

ERIN

You were five years old. There's nothing you could have...

WILL

After that, we didn't have much, but there was always enough.

Will hands the picture back to Erin.

WILL

A year later my mom sent me to live with my aunt. Didn't see her much after that.

INT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Will and Jason go into a small grocery and general store. Behind the counter is FLETCHER, 60s and gruff. Standing perfectly still behind him is EFRAM, 40s, a giant of a man. Fletcher and Efram eye Will as he grabs a small basket and heads for the grocery shelves.

LATER

Will puts his filled basket on the counter. Fletcher and Efram quickly sort the items into paper sacks. Fletcher extends his hand.

FLETCHER

Ivan Fletcher. Most folks call me Fletcher.

WILL

Will Clayton.

They shake hands.

FLETCHER

I knew your mother. Pretty much everyone in town comes through here. She was a nice woman. Have you seen her yet?

WILL

I don't understand.

FLETCHER

Cemetery's a quarter mile up. Never closes.

WILL

Haven't been there in...a long time.

Fletcher nods. A FEMALE CUSTOMER, 30s, lines up behind Will.

FLETCHER

And this is Efram.

WILL

Hello.

Efram regards him. Jason waves and grins, and Efram responds with a blank stare.

FLETCHER

Doesn't say much.

Fletcher pushes Will's sacks toward him.

WILL

You didn't ring anything up. What do I owe you?

FLETCHER

First time's on the house. Welcome back.

WILL

I don't feel right about that.

Fletcher shoos him off.

FLETCHER

Should have grabbed some steaks. Too late now. I'll make a fair profit next time. Next in line!

WILL

Thank you.

Will and Jason pick up the groceries and head for the door.

EXT. STORE - DAY

Will and Jason go to the car, where SEVERAL BLACKBIRDS are perched. As they approach the car, the Blackbirds fly off.

INT. HOME - DAY

Erin is in the attic, looking through boxes. She opens a large box to see a small box sitting on top of a pile of papers. Erin opens the box and pulls out a small folded note, revealing an antique silver locket underneath.

Erin unfolds the note and reads.

INSERT - NOTE

Written in cursive: "For Erin. Forgive me."

BACK TO SCENE

Erin folds the note and sets it down, then picks up the locket. Erin opens the locket.

INSERT - PHOTO

An old photo of a forest clearing.

INT. HOME - DAY

Will walks into the house. He's dirty, and heads straight for the sink, where he washes his hands and arms.

WILL

Got most of the brush cleared from around the house. That'll help with mice and bugs.

ERIN

Found something.

Will towels off. Erin opens her hand to show him the locket.

WILL

That was my mom's. It was always around her neck. Where'd you find it?

ERIN

In a box, with a note. To Erin.  
Forgive me. There's a picture in  
it.

She opens the locket and shows him the picture.

INSERT - PHOTO

An old photo of a forest clearing.

BACK TO SCENE

WILL

It's just trees.

ERIN

What does it mean?

WILL

No idea.

INT. HOME - DAY

Erin carefully winds the silver chain around the locket, puts  
it back in the box, and puts it in a dresser drawer.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

In the upstairs bathroom, Will is brushing his teeth. He  
looks in the mirror and notices a few curly hairs on his  
shoulders.

WILL

I've got a couple of curly hairs.

ERIN

Where?

WILL

Shoulders. What would cause that?

ERIN

Dunno. Talk to a doctor if you're  
that concerned. Are you gonna talk  
to him about that other thing?

WILL

Got an appointment tomorrow at  
three.

INT. STORE - DAY

Will walks into the store to see Fletcher and Efram behind the counter.

WILL  
Morning. Anywhere to get coffee around here?

FLETCHER  
Most folks make their coffee at home.

WILL  
Course they do.

FLETCHER  
You go out for coffee every morning?

WILL  
Pretty much.

FLETCHER  
Got what you need over here.

Fletcher comes out from behind the counter and takes a small box and bag off the shelf, handing both to Will.

FLETCHER  
Twenty years ago I lived in Boston for a spell. Went out for coffee every day. Had my own cups I took with me for me and my wife.

WILL  
Didn't know you were married.

FLETCHER  
My wife's gone on ahead, but she's always close. Sometimes I see her in the corner of my eye.

EXT. STORE - DAY

Will goes to the car to find SEVERAL BLACKBIRDS sitting on it. As he approaches the car, the Blackbirds fly off.

INT. HOME - DAY

Will comes through the door with the small box and bag.

JASON  
What's that?

Will sets the items on the counter, opens the box, and pulls out a tiny coffeemaker.

INT. HOME - DAY

Will, Erin, and Jason sit at the kitchen table, looking down at the coffee cups in front of them. Jason picks up his cup and takes a sip, then grimaces.

JASON  
This tastes terrible.

WILL  
The twelve-year-old coffee connoisseur. You'll get used to it without the chocolate syrup and the whipped cream.

ERIN  
And the caramel.

JASON  
And the cinnamon.

ERIN  
It's actually good. I don't think I've tasted the coffee in...

WILL  
It's been a long time.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Jason stands in a busy school hallway, looking around. A sea of STUDENTS, 7 to 16 years old, file past him in both directions. EARL, a surly 12-year-old, approaches from behind and shoulders Jason as he passes.

EARL  
Watch where you're going.

Jason looks after him, and Earl turns and flips him off with both hands.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

In a small exam room, Will is perched on the exam table. A DOCTOR, 70s and cantankerous, leans forward with his stethoscope, listening to Will's chest.

DOCTOR

Heart and lungs sound fine.  
Reflexes are good. The short answer  
is there's nothing wrong with you.

WILL

Is there a longer answer that gives  
me a better idea of what the hell's  
going on?

DOCTOR

Cut down on the salt, keep up the  
exercise, and try to relax. No use  
struggling against the passage of  
time. Nothing any of us can do to  
prevent what's coming.

EXT. RING ROAD - DAY

Jason rides his bike home from school. On the side of the road, a KID, early teens, leads a SHEEP by a rope tether. Jason stops next to him.

JASON

Hey.

The Kid ignores him and keeps walking. Jason circles around and catches up.

JASON

What are you doing?

KID

Paying my debt. Run along now.

JASON

What?

The Kid just shakes his head, then veers toward the forest.

KID

Be seeing you.

Jason watches the Kid and the Sheep enter the trees, then rides down the road.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Will and Erin are looking around an unused bedroom.

ERIN  
Was this her room?

WILL  
(nods)  
She liked the morning light in the windows.

ERIN  
There's a sadness here. Do you feel it?

WILL  
I feel like someone needs to get in here and clean up a bit.

ERIN  
Got anyone in mind?

WILL  
Let's open up that bottle of wine from Ken and think about cleaning up tomorrow.

Erin purses her lips, thinking.

WILL  
What are you thinking about?

ERIN  
I'm wondering if anybody delivers pizza out here.

INT. SMALL PIZZA SHOP

Will and Jason walk into a small pizza shop, with one wall covered with a mishmash of black and white and color photos. CALEB, mid-30s and rock-solid, leans on the front counter. NOEL, early-30s and steely eyed, works in the kitchen.

WILL  
Hi there. I'm Will Clayton.

CALEB  
I know who you are.

WILL  
Is that good?

CALEB  
Your mother didn't eat a lot of  
pizza, but she was friendly enough.  
I'm Caleb.

Will and Caleb shake hands.

WILL  
This is my son, Jason.

CALEB  
Hello, Jason.

JASON  
Hi.

Jason turns toward the wall of photos.

CALEB  
This is my place. I'm also the  
volunteer fireman.

WILL  
Fireman singular?

CALEB  
For now. Lots of history over  
there, young man.

Jason focuses on a yellowed image of an old man in worn  
overalls over a dirt-stained work shirt.

JASON  
Who's this?

CALEB  
That would be Spencer Clayton. One  
of the founding fathers of this  
town.

WILL  
Really?

Will moves to look at the photo, placing a hand on Jason's  
shoulder.

WILL  
That would be your great-great-  
grandfather.

JASON  
He doesn't look happy.

CALEB

I don't suppose he was, at least not then. All lives endure their hardships, some more than others.

WILL

What happened to him? I never knew him. He died long before I was born.

Caleb squares his jaw and looks down.

CALEB

That story isn't mine to tell.

Will studies Caleb.

WILL

So maybe I'll sign up for the fire brigade.

CALEB

Talk to me any evening after we close. Everybody helps out around here in their own way. And Noel here's got your pizza ready.

Noel sets a box and a paper bag on the counter, then returns to the kitchen.

WILL

How do you know what we want?

CALEB

Large meat lover's. And a salad for your wife. Unless you two want a salad, too.

WILL

Nope.

Will turns to Jason, who shakes his head.

WILL

Just one salad. Whatta I owe you?

Caleb shakes his head.

CALEB

Next time. Welcome to Foster.

Will smiles.

WILL  
You're serious?

Caleb nods.

WILL  
We appreciate it. We'll catch you  
next time.

Will and Jason leave. Noel joins Caleb at the counter.

NOEL  
That's him?

CALEB  
Yeah.

NOEL  
What do you think drew him back?

CALEB  
Not for us to know.

EXT. FARM FIELD - NIGHT

Lit by the moonlight, WOLF ONE, WOLF TWO, and WOLF THREE tear into the body of a SHEEP while the rest of the FLOCK OF SHEEP looks on, BLEATING and afraid.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

At the end of the long driveway to home, Will peeks in his mailbox at the Ring Road. ABRAM, 30's and fit, jogs up the road holding the extended leash of MARCUS, an oversized dog. They stop.

WILL  
Morning.

ABRAM  
Morning. Finding your way around?

WILL  
(extends his hand)  
One road makes it easy. Will  
Clayton.

ABRAM  
(shakes his hand)  
Abram Lantz. Next farm over, you  
need anything. This is Marcus.

WILL  
Hey boy. He friendly?

ABRAM  
Depends. Go easy.

Will slowly reaches forward to pet Marcus, who smells his hand, then licks it.

ABRAM  
Good sign. Gotta be going. Take care.

WILL  
You, too.

Abram trots off, Marcus next to him, and Will turns back toward his house.

INT. HOME - DAY

Will and Erin. Sweaty and smiling, are in bed after morning sex.

ERIN  
We haven't had sex like that since our wedding night.

WILL  
Maybe since our freshman year in college.

ERIN  
I'm not complaining. Glad Jason's at school. And oatmeal's not gonna cut it this morning.

WILL  
Let's go into town.

INT. DINER - DAY

In a diner half-filled with VARIOUS CUSTOMERS, all adults, Will and Erin sit at a table, eating breakfast. As Will looks around, he notices Various Customers eyeing them. A jaded SERVER, 50s, approaches and refills their tea.

WILL  
(quietly)  
We really look that different?

SERVER  
(scans other tables)  
You're new. People move out of town  
once in a while. Not too many move  
in. Give it time.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Jason is sitting at a table in the cafeteria, reading a book,  
when Earl approaches.

EARL  
You reading?

JASON  
Yep.

EARL  
Why?

JASON  
Because I can.

EARL  
You making fun of me?

JASON  
Something tells me it wouldn't be  
hard, but no. I'm not.

EARL  
I think you are.

JASON  
Then we have a difference of  
opinion.

EARL  
You talk like a lawyer.

JASON  
Thanks.

Earl moves in and leans down so he's nose to nose with Jason.  
BRRRING! The school bell rings, and Jason jumps up.

JASON  
That's my cue.

Jason walks off.

EARL  
See you later.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Outside the school, Jason is at a bike rack unlocking his bike when Earl appears.

EARL  
Nice bike.

Earl kicks Jason's bike to the ground.

JASON  
What if I just ask you nicely not  
to hit me?

EARL  
Are you chickenshit?

JASON  
I try to avoid pain.

Earl shoves Jason. Jason falls hard, but immediately starts to get back up.

As Earl clenches his fist to hit Jason, a huge hand encloses Earl's fist. HARLAN, early teens and massive at over six feet tall, squeezes Earl's fist tight. Earl SHRIEKS.

HARLAN  
Violation. Fight's over.

Earl, pale with pain, looks at Harlan, then at Jason.

EARL  
I didn't know. I'm sorry.

Harlan nods, releases Earl's fist, and Earl turns and stumbles off. Flanking Harlan are JEFFRIES and BARTON, both early teens and almost Harlan's size. Harlan turns to Jason.

HARLAN  
Get up.

Jason gets up.

JASON  
That wasn't gonna end well.

HARLAN  
He won't bother you anymore.

JASON  
I'm Jason.

HARLAN

Harlan. This here's Jeffries and Barton.

JASON

Good to meet you guys. Been kind of weird here without any friends.

HARLAN

You have more friends than you know.

Harlan turns and leaves, with Jeffries and Barton close behind. Jason shakes his head and watches them go.

JASON

What just happened?

EXT. DINER - DAY - TRACKING

Outside a small diner, Erin checks her watch, gets up, and goes inside and flags down the Server.

ERIN

Can I sit out there?

SERVER

Suit yourself.  
(points to the register area)  
Menus are over there.

Erin grabs a menu, goes back outside and sits down. The Server approaches.

ERIN

How's the tuna salad?

SERVER

It's fresh and it's not watery, if that's what you're asking.

ERIN

Not sure that's a recommendation, but I'll take it on rye.

SERVER

We have wheat.

ERIN

Wheat it is.

MOMENTS LATER

Erin is eating her sandwich when VERITY, 70s, with eyes that see everything, walks up the sidewalk.

VERITY

What are you doing sitting out here?

ERIN

Kinda in the mood to eat on a patio.

VERITY

Not much of a patio. Mind if I join you?

ERIN

Suit yourself.

Verity gives her a look.

ERIN

Got that one from the woman inside.

VERITY

Local color. Back in a minute.

MOMENTS LATER

Erin and Verity talk between bites.

VERITY

So where do you come from?

ERIN

Big city.

VERITY

Any one in particular?

ERIN

Does it matter?

VERITY

I guess not. What do you do?

ERIN

Raise a twelve-year-old and try to cook, now that my husband's not gone all the time.

VERITY  
You have a son?

ERIN  
Yep. He's definitely all boy.

VERITY  
Of course you do.

ERIN  
Will wanted a son. I didn't care either way. That's about all I can handle at the moment. What about you?

VERITY  
I'm the librarian.

ERIN  
Really?

VERITY  
Really as in I don't look like a librarian, or you didn't figure this town had a library?

ERIN  
Little of both.

Verity smiles and shakes her head.

VERITY  
I think we're gonna get along just fine.

LATER

The dishes are gone, and the two women are drinking wine from cans.

VERITY  
You don't hold much back, do you?

ERIN  
Nope. Especially not after three cans of wine. Didn't know cans and wine could be in the same sentence.

VERITY  
Whole lotta stuff to get used to out here. But you will.

A sad look crosses Verity's face.

VERITY

Just thought of some things I have  
to take care of at home.

ERIN

No worries. Don't let me keep you.

As Verity gets up, Erin puts her hand on top of Verity's and  
squeezes her hand.

ERIN

I'm glad you stopped and said  
hello. It's been nice talking with  
you. I'll see you at the library.

VERITY

See you then.

Verity walks up the sidewalk and opens the door to her car.  
When she opens the door, she looks over the top of her car at  
Erin. She takes a long look, then gets in and drives away.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

Will walks through the forest, kicking over logs and looking  
around. He walks up to a tall tree and sees four deep grooves  
clawed through the bark. The marks are old and overgrown.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY - FLASHBACK

YOUNG WILL, 5-years-old, stands in front of the same tree.  
The four deep grooves are fresh. Young Will dips his  
forefinger into one of the grooves, then rubs the sticky sap  
between his forefinger and thumb.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY - PRESENT

Will rubs his forefinger and thumb together, then walks on.

EXT. FARM FIELD - NIGHT

WOLF ONE, WOLF TWO, and WOLF THREE trot across the open field  
toward a FLOCK OF SHEEP. The Flock of Sheep sees the wolves  
and flees over a small hill, and the Three Wolves follow.

The Three Wolves crest the hill to find the Creature -  
massive, with gleaming, jet-black fur - waiting for them on  
the other side.

With the Flock of Sheep behind it, the Creature springs forward and dispatches Wolf One with a swipe of its claw. Wolf Two and Wolf Three attack, but the Creature easily kills them with two more sweeps of its claws.

With the dead wolves at its feet, the Creature turns to the Flock of Sheep, which bleat quietly.

EXT. RING ROAD - DAY

Will is driving down the road when he sees Fletcher and SHERIFF FREEMAN, 60s and rugged, standing by the roadside. He stops his car and gets out.

Laid out side by side near the fence line are the carcasses of Wolf One, Wolf Two, and Wolf Three. Sheriff Freeman, wearing latex gloves, pokes at the dead wolves with a long stick as Will approaches.

WILL

What happened here?

FLETCHER

Looks like three dead wolves. You met Sheriff Freeman?

WILL

Not so far. Hello.

Will extends his hand, and Sheriff Freeman holds up his gloved hands.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

Afternoon.

WILL

What happened? Was it a bear?

Sheriff Freeman and Fletcher exchange a look.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

No bears in these woods. Excuse me.

Sheriff Freeman turns on his heels and goes back to inspecting the wolf carcasses. Fletcher joins him.

Ignored, Will shifts from foot to foot for a moment, then goes back to his car and drives away. As he drives off, Sheriff Freeman and Fletcher turn to look after him.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

It's a dark business.

FLETCHER

It is.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

When do you think we'll need to...

FLETCHER

Soon. That's what it feels like.  
Change in the wind. I hear it's  
always like this.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

Never liked it. It's too much for  
one family to bear.

FLETCHER

It keeps things working, but if it  
doesn't make you pause, you're  
already gone.

EXT. PLOWED FIELD - DAY

FARM HUSBAND, 60s, stands next to an old tractor, shaking his head, looking down at a very flat tire. He checks the gear shift to make sure the tractor is in gear, then starts popping the lug nuts loose with a tire iron.

Farm Husband positions a small scissor jack on top of a cinder block under the rear axle and jacks up the tractor. When it's high enough, he loosens and removes the lug nuts, then tugs on the wheel. The wheel is stuck fast.

Farm Husband sits down, positions his legs under either side of the wheel, and pulls furiously, over and over, struggling to pull the wheel free.

The gear shift pops backward and the tractor rolls a foot or so backward, the axle falling off the jack, dropping the heavy wheel onto Farm Husband's right leg. His tibia breaks with a SNAP and the man SCREAMS.

Grimacing in pain, Farm Husband cranes his head in all directions. There is no one in sight. He tilts back his head to yell.

FARM HUSBAND

HELP! HELP MEEEEEEEE!

INT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

FARM WIFE, 60s and worried, sits at the kitchen table. Steam rises from a pot simmering on the stove.

Farm Wife gets up and looks out a window and across the fields, craning her eyes. She goes back and sits down at the table, tapping a finger nervously on the tabletop.

EXT. PLOWED FIELD - NIGHT

Trapped under the wheel, Farm Husband's face is covered with sweat as he strains to free himself. He stops struggling and lies back, his chest heaving from the exertion.

At the THUD THUD sound of heavy footfalls in the dirt, he looks behind him as the shadow of the Creature falls over him.

FARM HUSBAND

I can't walk. I have to get home.  
Can you help me?

The Creature GROWLS a low growl, then leans forward and grips the tractor frame. With a single shove of its hand, it pushes the tractor onto its side and off of Farm Husband.

FARM HUSBAND

Can't walk. Have to get home.

Lightning fast, the Creature grabs Farm Husband's arm and sets off across the field, dragging Farm Husband behind it.

EXT. PLOWED FIELD - NIGHT

THUD, THUD, THUD, the Creature plods across the field, dragging Farm Husband along. The man winces in pain at each bump, but holds on.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

The Creature drags Farm Husband up onto the front porch and lays him down.

INT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

Farm Wife hears a loud SCRATCH at the front door. She jumps up from the table, rushes to the door and flings it open to see Farm Husband lying on the porch, bleeding and dirty, but alive. She drops to his side, clutching at his shirt, tending to him. He raises a hand, pleading, as the front door slowly swings closed.

FARM HUSBAND

Call the doctor.

She gets up, turns back toward the house, and sees four long claw marks etched across the door.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Jason is eating lunch in the cafeteria. Harlan is sitting with Barton and Jeffries. Harlan locks eyes with Jason and nods, then looks away. Jason gets up from his seat, slings his backpack over his shoulder, and approaches the three.

JASON

How are you guys doing?

HARLAN

We're fine, Jason. Something on your mind?

JASON

When you said I have more friends than I know, what did you mean?

Harlan, Barton and Jeffries all exchange a quick glance. When Jeffries opens his mouth to say something, Harlan shakes his head. Harlan stands, towering over Jason. He carefully chooses his words.

HARLAN

You're from the Clayton line. Your father's Will Clayton. Carson Clayton was his father before him, and his father was Harold Clayton.

JASON

My great grandfather?

HARLAN

All the way back to eighteen twenty and Spencer Clayton, who was tilling the field one evening when one of the old ones came out of the forest to meet him.

The bell rings, and Barton and Jeffries stand.

HARLAN

That's enough history for one day. Be seeing you.

Harlan, Barton, and Jeffries all pick up their trays and walk away, leaving Jason to stand there as the other students walk past him on all sides on their way to class.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Will and Erin are in the kitchen by the sink, washing the dishes and utensils and stacking them in a dish rack. Jason sits at the table, finishing his food.

ERIN

I'm still trying to figure out what's going on. Everyone's nice, but I don't trust them.

WILL

I think they're just used to who they're used to. And you're probably used to having to watch yourself everywhere you go. Out here there's not a junkie around every corner waiting to rip us off. I breathe a lot easier.

ERIN

Maybe. Part of me's still wondering if someone's gonna bring us a pie.

Will puts down a dish and dries his hands on a towel.

WILL

Jason, help your mom with the dishes. I'm going out for a run.

JASON

Yep.

EXT. RING ROAD - NIGHT

Will jogs at a steady pace up the road. To one side is an open field, and on the other side is the forest, dark and impenetrable. As he runs, his feet SLAP the pavement.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

The Creature eyes Will as he runs, keeping pace with him, moving fluidly and almost noiselessly among the trees.

EXT. RING ROAD - NIGHT

Will winces and stops abruptly, bending down to massage his calf. An audible SNAP comes from the forest. Will looks up, peering into the trees. He clenches his fists, and the tendons in his arms stand out, his muscles twitching.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

The Creature stands motionless, eying Will as he scans the trees.

EXT. RING ROAD - NIGHT

A PICKUP TRUCK SCREECHES to a stop next to Will, who jumps. Fletcher is behind the wheel. He rolls down his window.

FLETCHER

Didn't mean to scare you. Need a ride? Lots of animals out here. Some come out at night. Best to do your running before the sun goes down. Hop in.

Will scans the trees, then gets in. They drive off.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

From within the trees, the Creature watches them drive away.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

Will stands on the front porch looking up at the moon. The moon fills his vision, blotting out everything else.

Will is startled by Erin's hand on his shoulder.

ERIN

What are you doing?

WILL

Just looking at the moon.

ERIN

You've been standing there for an hour.

EXT. HOME - DAY

Will stands on his front porch in a bathrobe, looking down at a cloth bag on the porch.

INT. HOME - DAY

Will, Erin, and Jason gather at the kitchen table. Will opens the bag and pulls out a pie wrapped in aluminum foil.

ERIN  
You're kidding.

WILL  
Nope. And there's a note.

Will opens a folded piece of paper.

INSERT - HANDWRITTEN NOTE

"Welcome!"

BACK TO SCENE

WILL  
It says welcome.

ERIN  
Do we eat it?

JASON  
Looks like breakfast to me.

INT. HOME - DAY

Will and Jason sit at the table, devouring big pieces of pie.

JASON  
Mom, this is really good.

WILL  
You don't know what you're missing.

ERIN  
I'm gonna hold off. Someone's gotta be able to drive to the hospital when you two fall over and start foaming at the mouth.

WILL  
Seriously, I don't know what kind of berries these are, but they're...

JASON  
Awesome!

LATER

Will, Erin, and Jason are in the kitchen.

ERIN  
Don't miss your bus.

JASON  
I'm leaving, I'm leaving.

ERIN  
(to Will)  
Think I'm going to the library this morning.

WILL  
The library.

ERIN  
You wanna find out anything about a town, you go to the library. And don't make fun of me. Thank your lucky stars you didn't marry a shopper.

WILL  
While you're at the library, I'll be mending the fence.

JASON  
What's the rush? We don't have any animals.

Jason leaves.

ERIN  
(to Will)  
It's your fault he's this smart.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Erin walks into a small library. She walks over to a scale model of the town, which shows dozens of small farms and homes, the drive through the town, and a large forest at the center. Verity walks up behind her.

VERITY  
It doesn't have all the farms and houses on there, but you get the idea.

ERIN  
Everyone built around the forest.

VERITY

The first farms were to the south,  
and they just started building  
around it. There's plenty of  
available lumber, and a small lake  
in there, so it made sense at the  
time. The Ring Road goes all the  
way around.

ERIN

They all started out with a farm?

VERITY

For the most part.

ERIN

And they just stayed farmers over  
the generations? World's changed.

VERITY

When you have land, you have a  
responsibility to the land.

Verity looks deep into Erin's eyes.

VERITY

Some have more responsibility than  
others.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Erin and Verity walk among the stacks.

VERITY

This is the history section. State  
and national history the next row  
over. Local history or related is  
here.

ERIN

This is what I need. Thanks.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Erin sits at a table with a tall stack of books in front of  
her. She opens one and starts to read.

EXT. RING ROAD - DAY (DRIVING)

Will, Erin, and Jason drive along the Ring Road. From the back seat, Jason points out the window at the homesteads they pass.

JASON

That's where Ezekiel lives. He's my age. His sister's Esther. She's a year older.

As they pass a rusted metal gate, Jason points.

JASON

That's where Ivan lives. He has two brothers and two sisters. Elijah, Micah, Honor, and Abigail. I think they're kinda poor.

ERIN

Don't any of your friends have normal names?

WILL

I'm waiting to hear a Mike or a Jeff.

JASON

What about Harlan?

WILL

Close enough. It's the country.

They pass an OLD MAN, 70s and scarecrow thin. Will waves, and the Old Man simply eyes them as they pass.

JASON

Dad, what do you know about your great, great grandpa?

WILL

Spencer Clayton? Not much. He was gone before I was born. Why?

JASON

Kid at school mentioned him. It was kind of weird.

ERIN

Which kid?

JASON

Harlan.

WILL  
How'd it come up?

JASON  
It's...a long story.

Jason is clearly thinking.

JASON  
Hey, have you noticed what's  
different about this town?

WILL  
Lots of things are different about  
this town.

Jason eyes Erin.

ERIN  
Okay, what?

JASON  
There aren't any churches.

Will and Erin consider it, then exchange a look.

ERIN  
(chuckles)  
He's right. So maybe this is the  
best place we've ever lived.

Jason stares out the window and frowns.

JASON  
Or maybe it's not.

INT. FIELD - NIGHT

Flames leap from a car burning in an empty parking lot. The fire CRACKLES. With Caleb directing him, Will holds a firehose and sweeps the stream of water from side to side.

CALEB  
That's it. Concentrate on the base.  
Sweep side to side.

LATER

The fire is out, water is everywhere, and steam rises from the burned-out car. Will shuts off the nozzle and hands it to Caleb.

CALEB

I think you got it.

Caleb walks over to the fire truck, a BIG PICKUP TRUCK with a large water tank in the back. Will joins him while Caleb rolls up the hose.

CALEB

Nine-hundred-gallon tank. Hundred-gallon-per-minute pump. Gives us enough water for about nine minutes, and we used half of it on that car. Whatever we do, we do it fast. Got me?

WILL

Got it. Now what?

CALEB

Spend the rest of your life hoping the phone never rings.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Jason is sitting on the couch in front of the TV when Will comes through the front door.

WILL

Hi there. What are you watching?

JASON

It's just on. I'm thinking.

WILL

What about?

JASON

There's something in the forest.

WILL

An animal?

JASON

Dunno. It's there just about every night.

WILL

Have you seen it?

JASON

No. But I know it's there.

WILL  
How do you know?

JASON  
You feel stuff sometimes. You know  
what I mean.

Will looks out the kitchen window.

WILL  
I do.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Will and Erin sit on the front porch in lawn chairs, looking  
up at the stars.

ERIN  
I haven't seen so many stars  
since...ever.

WILL  
So many constellations you never  
see in the city. There's  
Sagittarius, struck by Hercules'  
poisoned arrow, doomed to live a  
life of pain until Zeus lets him  
die. Over there's Lyra, the harp  
played by Orpheus when he lost  
Eurydice forever. And up there's  
Cygnus, who gave his life so his  
friend's spirit could go on to the  
afterlife.

ERIN  
Any stars with happy stories?

WILL  
Capricorn's a goat that suckled a  
god. That count?

ERIN  
Best you can do.

There is the sound of BARELY AUDIBLE WHISPERING, dozens of  
voices mixed together. Will makes a face and cranes his head.

WILL  
You hear that?

ERIN  
What?

WILL  
You seriously don't hear that?

ERIN  
I hear the wind in the trees. Every  
now and then a night bird.

WILL  
Under that. Sounds like whispering.  
Think I'm just tired.

INT. HOME - DAY

Will, Erin and Jason are in the kitchen eating breakfast.  
There's a CREAK sound from the front porch.

ERIN  
What was that?

WILL  
I'll check it out.

EXT. HOME - DAY

Will opens the front door and looks around, seeing nothing,  
then looks down. On the edge of the porch is a small figurine  
of the Creature pieced together with wood. It has big ears,  
spines on its back, big teeth, and long arms with hands that  
end in claws.

INT. HOME - DAY

Will walks back inside and holds up the wooden figurine.

WILL  
Someone left us this.

ERIN  
What is it?

JASON  
The worst housewarming gift ever?

Will puts it on a shelf with the figurine facing the room.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

Lightning flashes and thunder BOOMS as rain falls in sheets.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Lightning flashes illuminate the windows. Will, Erin, and Jason look up at the ceiling, where water pools before dripping down into several pans.

WILL

Guess I need to go into town and see about fixing that when the rain lets up.

ERIN

Do you even know how to fix a roof?

WILL

Can't be that hard.

ERIN

Like the faucet?

WILL

It was old. Everything was old in that apartment.

ERIN

You broke it in half.

WILL

You saw how rusty it was inside.

Erin shakes her head.

ERIN

When you're in town, buy a few more pans. We might need 'em.

INT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Will and Jason set an assortment of pans on the counter in front of Fletcher and Efram.

FLETCHER

Morning.

WILL

Hi there. What do you have in the way of roofing supplies?

FLETCHER

Now I don't need to ask about the pans. I don't carry anything in stock, but I can order it in bundles or squares.

Jason drums his fingers on the counter, then looks up at Efram, who turns to him and looks into his eyes.

WILL

Probably need a few bundles, and roofing nails.

FLETCHER

Sure you want to tackle that yourself? It's thirty miles to the nearest hospital.

WILL

Gonna give it a try.

Jason waves at Efram, who frowns, then looks away.

FLETCHER

I'll get you a price by tomorrow. Might as well put the pans on the same ticket.

WILL

You sure?

Fletcher nods. Will and Jason scoop up the pans and walk out.

EXT. STORE - DAY

Will and Jason go to the car and see Several Blackbirds sitting on it. Several other Blackbirds sit on nearby buildings and in the branches of trees, crying out CAW CAW CAW.

JASON

What. The. Hell.

WILL

You got me.

When Will and Jason reach the car, the Blackbirds fly away in a rush.

JASON

Wow.

Will slowly shakes his head and watches the Blackbirds fly away.

EXT. HOME - DAY

TWO PICKUP TRUCKS pull up out front, and THREE WORKERS, 20s and scruffy, get out and start unloading bundles of shingles from a truck. MAXWELL, late 30s and hard-bitten, gets out of a truck and eyes the house.

INT. HOME - DAY

Erin comes down the stairs.

ERIN

What's going on out there?

WILL

No idea. I'll take a look.

EXT. HOME - DAY

Will goes outside as Maxwell leans an extension ladder against the side of the house.

WILL

Morning.

MAXWELL

Morning. My name's Maxwell. I heard you need your roof fixed.

WILL

I was going to do it myself.

MAXWELL

That roof there's a twelve-twelve, and it's not something you want to be doing your first roof on, and you should really take my word on that. I got some boys here who definitely know what they're doing on top of a roof. Maybe you and me can just go inside and get a cuppa coffee.

WILL

Don't I need to get an estimate first?

MAXWELL

I wouldn't worry about that right now. We're real reasonable, and it won't take 'em more than a short stretch to get you fixed up.

WILL

I'd feel a lot better if I had an estimate.

MAXWELL

Nearest roofing company's over in Grayston. Might get 'em here late next week. They're nice boys, real friendly, and it's a family shop, but I wouldn't let 'em do my roof, if you get my meaning. How 'bout that coffee?

INT. HOME - DAY

With the TAP TAP TAP of hammers in the background, Will and his family sip coffee with Maxwell at the kitchen table.

MAXWELL

Don't hear so much hammering now. Sounds like they're winding down. Just as well. Fourth cup probably woulda done me in.

There's a KNOCK KNOCK at the door. Will opens the door to see a Worker standing there.

WORKER

Morning, Mr. Clayton. Maxwell in here?

WILL

Sure. Come on in.

The Worker looks uncertain.

WORKER

Boots are dirty. Prefer to stay out here. Thanks.

Maxwell walks over to the door.

WORKER

Boys are done.

MAXWELL

Be right out.

The Worker leaves. Maxwell closes the door, sets his coffee cup by the sink and turns to the family.

MAXWELL

That's it, then. You folks have a good day. Gonna be a nice one.

WILL

Wait a second. What do I owe you? And I hope you'll take a check.

MAXWELL

No charge. Least we could do, you being a new neighbor and all.

WILL

I appreciate that, but we can pay our own way.

MAXWELL

I'm sure you can, but I won't take your money.

WILL

You do this for everyone?

Maxwell regards him and shakes his head.

MAXWELL

No, we don't.

Maxwell turns and leaves, closing the door behind him.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Erin sits across from Verity, who is sorting books at her desk.

ERIN

Everyone keeps doing things for us.

VERITY

What's wrong with that?

ERIN

Nothing, I guess.

VERITY

Not something you're used to.

ERIN

No.

VERITY

Maybe you can get used to it.  
People help each other here, and  
they know when they need help  
you'll be there for them, too. Not  
everything has to have a dark  
motive, does it?

INT. HOME - NIGHT

In their bedroom, Erin lies in bed, reading a book. Will pulls off his shirt, and Erin turns her eyes from the book, playing her eyes across his form. Will has lost some weight and is a little more muscular.

ERIN

Outside work looks good on you.

WILL

I look the same.

Erin shakes her head and grins.

ERIN

Why don't you lock the door and  
come over here?

Will locks the bedroom door and turns out the light. Erin grins.

ERIN

Leave it on.

Will flips on the light, grins, and walks toward the bed.

EXT. PASTURE - NIGHT

Will walks naked across a pasture, his skin shining in the moonlight. He comes upon a FLOCK OF SHEEP. A bit skittish, they quietly BLEAT and move out of his way as he walks among them.

The sheep behind him, he comes upon THREE WOLVES who SNARL at him, then turn and run away across the field. He watches them go, then turns around to see the FLOCK OF SHEEP gathered behind him, staring silently at him.

INT. HOME - DAY

Will wakes up nude on the couch. He looks down at the floor and sees a trail of muddy footprints leading from the front door to the couch. He looks down at his feet, and sees they're muddy, too.

As Jason comes down the stairs, Will quickly covers himself up with a blanket. Jason eyes him and goes into the kitchen.

Erin comes down the stairs.

ERIN

Morning.

WILL

Morning.

Erin walks into the kitchen, and Will gathers the blanket around him and slinks upstairs.

INT. HOME - DAY

JASON

See you later.

ERIN

Love you.

Jason leaves. Will, now dressed, enters the kitchen. Erin looks out the window, watching Jason walk across the yard and up the road.

ERIN

Anything I need to know about?

WILL

No.

ERIN

Get it together. I'm not going through that shit again.

WILL

I promise. Sleepwalking. I think I was outside.

ERIN

Something on your mind?

WILL

Not that I know of.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Will walks up the drive toward the main road. As he reaches his mailbox, Abram jogs up the road with Marcus on his leash. They stop.

WILL  
It's a nice one.

ABRAM  
You run?

WILL  
Used to at night.

Abram eyes Will.

ABRAM  
Not a good idea.

WILL  
So I hear.

Abram nods, and Will leans down to pet Marcus, but Marcus shies back, pulling at his leash.

ABRAM  
Easy there.

Marcus whines, smells Will's hand, and bolts, jerking the leash out of Abram's hand and running up the road, his leash bouncing behind him.

Abram shoots Will the briefest look, then sprints after Marcus. Will looks down at his hand, then brings it to his nose to smell it.

EXT. RING ROAD - DAY

Will jogs at a steady pace up the road. As he runs, his eyes are always on the forest.

EXT. COUNTRY STORE - NIGHT

Fletcher and Caleb sit on a bench in front of the store.

FLETCHER  
How many winters has it been?

CALEB  
Why can't you just say years like everyone else?

Fletcher gives him a look.

CALEB  
Forty years.

FLETCHER  
Once in a generation.

CALEB  
Yep.

Efram comes out of the store and stands in front of the two men. Caleb turns to Efram.

CALEB  
Efram.

Efram looks at Caleb and frowns, then turns to Fletcher.

FLETCHER  
Say it.

CALEB  
Once in a generation.

FLETCHER  
A sacrifice.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Young Will watches from the dense trees as the Naked Man stands facing away from him in the center of a large forest clearing. Young Will walks closer, creeping as quietly as he can toward the Naked Man.

Young Will steps on a twig, the SNAP as loud as a gunshot. The Naked Man, having heard the sound, cocks his head, and slowly turns toward Will, his face almost visible.

INT. HOME - NIGHT - PRESENT

Will wakes up in bed, eyes wide. He sits up, scans the room. The house is quiet, and Erin is sleeping soundly next to him. He rubs his eyes and gets up.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Will stands in front of the open refrigerator, drinking milk out of the carton. He puts the carton back and closes the refrigerator. On the shelf, the figurine catches his eye.

WILL

What are you supposed to be?

Will looks down to see Mimi standing by the front door.

WILL

Hey there.

Mimi looks up at him.

WILL

Come on. Let's go outside.

Will scoops up Mimi and carries her outside. He watches her pee and looks up at the clouds crossing in front of the moon.

There is the sound of BARELY AUDIBLE WHISPERING, dozens of voices mixed together. Will scans the forest treeline, then picks up Mimi and goes inside.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Erin is talking to Verity.

ERIN

He likes to read. Or he used to, when he had time. Guess he has plenty of time now. Was he in here a lot as a kid?

VERITY

He didn't grow up here. He was about five when his mother sent him off to live with her sister. Hadn't seen him for twenty years when he came back for her funeral.

ERIN

What was she like?

VERITY

Catherine. Never Cathy. She had a sadness about her. She worked here.

ERIN

Here? In the library.

VERITY

Part time, for almost thirty years.

ERIN

Did it...

Verity shakes her head.

VERITY  
It didn't...doesn't pay much.

ERIN  
How'd she make ends meet?

VERITY  
She did what she had to do, like  
any of us.

ERIN  
Is that why she abandoned her  
child?

VERITY  
No.

ERIN  
Then why?

VERITY  
Maybe she did what she thought  
needed to be done. I don't expect  
you to understand our ways. You  
will someday. Excuse me.

Verity walks away. Erin watches her go.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

The Creature moves outside the house, its shadow falling  
across the exterior walls.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Will, Erin, and Jason are on the couch, watching a noisy  
action movie on TV. Mimi, lying on the floor, perks up her  
ears and stands up, alert. Looking around, Mimi BARKS. Will  
turns to Mimi.

WILL  
What is it? You hear something?

Will gets up from the couch and opens the front door.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

Will stands in the open doorway, light spilling out into the  
night. Seeing nothing, he closes the door.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Will sits back down by the TV. Erin looks at Will, who shakes his head.

WILL  
Nothing.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

The Creature watches the home from the treeline.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Will's cellphone rings on the coffee table, and he picks it up and answers.

WILL  
Hello.

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Caleb stands next to his fire truck, phone in hand. Behind him, a barn is on fire, flames leaping into the sky.

CALEB  
Barn's on fire at the Pinter place.  
Maxwell's on the way. You're the  
closest. Get here as fast as you  
can.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

WILL  
How bad?

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Behind Caleb, the fire ROARS through the barn.

CALEB  
It's wood, hay, and horses. GET  
HERE NOW!

WILL  
I'm on the way!

Erin and Jason, alarmed, look up at him.

WILL

Barn on fire. Back as soon as I  
can.

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Will skids to a stop and jumps out of his car. Caleb is sweeping a fire hose back and forth, spraying water on the flames. Inside the barn, a horse SQUEALS, its cry heard over the ROAR of the fire. Will runs up behind Caleb and slaps him on the shoulder.

CALEB

They're out of town. Came to feed  
the horses.

WILL

What do I do?

CALEB

Two horses in there. Open the  
stalls and get out of the way.  
They'll run out. Hurry. Only got  
enough water for a couple more  
minutes.

A pickup truck roars up the drive.

CALEB

That's Maxwell. Don't wait. GET IN  
THERE!

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Flames are everywhere as Will enters the barn. He rushes to a stall, unlocks the latch, and flings open the stall door. The HORSE crashes out of the stall and races out of the barn.

The stall wall for the SECOND HORSE is on fire, and the panicked horse bucks and stomps in the stall. Will unlocks the latch to open the door, and the SECOND HORSE crashes into it, flinging it open and knocking over Will before racing out of the barn.

Will jumps to his feet as the burning barn falls apart, flaming pieces of wood crashing all around him. As Will sprints for the door, a section of the roof collapses. Expecting to die, Will drops to his knees and closes his eyes.

Maxwell sprints into the barn, raising his hands to take the brunt of the weight of the burning wood.

Will opens his eyes to see Maxwell, eyes wild as he bursts into flame, holding up the section of roof with blackened hands and arms.

MAXWELL

GOOOOOOOOOO!

Will rushes out of the barn and turns to see Maxwell, charred completely black, still staring at him, finally collapsing under the weight of the burning roof.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Will and Erin join TOWNSPEOPLE at a graveside service. Fletcher leads a simple service.

FLETCHER

Maxwell Gentry was as good as any of us, and better than some. He gave his life to save a life, and he will be remembered.

Will looks over at MAXWELL'S WIFE, 30s and oddly composed, who stands with her arms around CHILD ONE and CHILD TWO, both no more than 5 years old. Maxwell's Wife turns and meets Will's eyes and smiles a sad smile. Will quickly looks away.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

As Will and Erin are getting into their car, Maxwell's Wife approaches.

ERIN

We're so sorry.

Maxwell's Wife ignores her and approaches Will. Putting her hands on his shoulders, she leans forward and whispers in his ear, then turns and walks away. Erin watches her go, then turns to Will, who is visibly shaken.

ERIN

What did she say?

WILL

She said thank you.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Verity sits at her desk in her office, surrounded by stacks of books. She looks tired. She cups her face in her hands and quietly sobs.

Fletcher appears in the doorway. He watches Verity for a moment, then clears his throat. Startled, Verity pulls her hands away and looks up, wiping the back of a hand across the underside of her nose.

VERITY

What is it?

FLETCHER

I just came to check on you, see how you're doing.

VERITY

How am I supposed to be doing?

FLETCHER

As best you can, like any of us.

VERITY

I'm the worst person in the world. I'm supposed to be her friend, but they have no friends here.

FLETCHER

We're all doing what we have to do. I feel the same way about him.

VERITY

They have names.

FLETCHER

(nods)

And those names will be remembered by this town long after the likes of us are dead and gone.

VERITY

How much...

FLETCHER

Not much longer. The blackbirds have returned, and there's a chill in the air. For now, do what you can.

VERITY

What if I can't?

FLETCHER

You have to. She'll need you when the time comes.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Sheriff Freeman stands in the small dirt parking lot of a bar, running his hand over the fender of an OLDER SEDAN. He takes his flashlight from his belt, switches it on, and plays the light over the car's interior. The car is empty, except for a blanket in the back seat. Sheriff Freeman switches off his flashlight, puts it back in his belt, purses his lips, and heads toward the front door of the bar.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Sheriff Freeman walks into the bar, sweeping his eyes across the dark room, where a handful of BAR PATRONS sit at small tables. His eyes stop at the bar, where a BARTENDER, 30s, subtly nods toward a MALE BARFLY, 30s and scruffy, who is seated at the bar, nursing a beer. Sheriff Freeman approaches and leans up against the bar, turning toward the Male Barfly.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

Evening.

The Male Barfly sets down his beer and turns to Sheriff Freeman.

MALE BARFLY

Evening, deputy.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

Sheriff.

MALE BARFLY

My mistake. No offense meant.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

Haven't seen you in town before.

MALE BARFLY

Just passing through. Figured I'd stop in for a few beers.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

A few? We take a dim view of driving under the influence.

MALE BARFLY

Figure of speech. One beer.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

And then you'll be moving on.

The Male Barfly slowly shakes his head.

MALE BARFLY  
Yessir. And then I'll be moving on.

SHERIFF FREEMAN  
So we understand each other.

MALE BARFLY  
We do, sheriff.

Sheriff Freeman raps his knuckles on the bar, turns on his heels, takes a few steps toward the door, then turns.

SHERIFF FREEMAN  
One last thing.

The Male Barfly looks over his shoulder.

MALE BARFLY  
What's that?

SHERIFF FREEMAN  
Once in a while, trouble finds its way into Foster. It doesn't always find its way out.

MALE BARFLY  
I think I get your meaning.

Sheriff Freeman frowns and shakes his head.

SHERIFF FREEMAN  
No, I don't think you do.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The Male Barfly and a TOWN GIRL, 20s and plain, are parked in his OLDER SEDAN just inside the forest. The Town Girl looks around at the surrounding trees, clearly concerned.

TOWN GIRL  
Maybe we can go somewhere else.

MALE BARFLY  
What are you afraid of? C'mere.

He roughly kisses her.

TOWN GIRL  
We shouldn't be here.

MALE BARFLY  
We're right where we need to be.

He roughly kisses her and paws at her breasts. She squirms and breaks the embrace.

TOWN GIRL

Stop it! I don't want to.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

The Creature watches the car from the trees.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The Male Barfly sits back and glares at her.

MALE BARFLY

What'd you think was going to happen? Bought you drinks all night.

TOWN GIRL

Take me back. My friends'll take me home.

MALE BARFLY

You said you wanted to have a good time. Not taking you just yet. She turns and pulls on the door handle to get out of the car. His hand moves like lightning. Grabbing her hair, he smashes her face against the dash.

MALE BARFLY

You Foster girls are all the same. Just need to be told what to do. Woozy, she holds her hands up to protest. Blood trickles from her nose and a smashed lip.

TOWN GIRL

Please.

MALE BARFLY

Shoulda done like you were told.

He grins, pulls a large lock-blade knife from his pocket, and flicks it open.

The Town Girl SCREAMS and turns and kicks the Male Barfly in the face, knocking him backward. She yanks the door handle, flings open the door, and bolts from the car. Sprinting up the dirt road, she runs headlong into the Creature.

He looms over her. Horrified, she backs up slowly, holding up her arms in surrender.

TOWN GIRL

Please. He's gonna kill me.

The Creature GROWLS and looks past the Town Girl, who flees up the road and disappears into the darkness. As the Creature approaches the car, the Male Barfly flings open the door and stumbles out. He looks up, incredulous but angry.

MALE BARFLY

What the hell are you?

The Male Barfly lunges forward with the blade, and the Creature grabs him by the wrist, breaking it with a terrible SNAP. The man SCREAMS.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

Running up the road, the Town Girl stops at the sound, looks back, then runs.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

The Creature looks down at the cowering man, flexes his claws, then plunges them into the Male Barfly's stomach.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

As the Town Girl continues running, she hears one long, terrible SHRIEK that echoes through the trees.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

The wind WHOOSHES through the trees on the edge of the forest, the branches swaying back and forth.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

The wind WHISTLES around the front door, which shudders. The door lock CLICKS, then the door slowly swings open.

Mimi, sleeping in her dog bed, open her eyes and struggles to her feet. She wobbles to the door and goes outside.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

Mimi stands on the porch, sniffing the air, her coat ruffled by the wind. She snorts and steps off the porch, slowly making her way across the field toward the forest.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

Mimi pauses at the edge of the forest, looking up at the tall trees swaying in the wind. Then she sets off again, slowly working her way over the thick forest floor.

Mimi lies down on a carpet of leaves, closes her eyes, and exhales one last, long breath.

Mimi lies dead, a calm breeze ruffling her fur. The Creature stands over her, then turns and walks away.

EXT. HOME - DAY

Will stands in the open front doorway. He closes the door behind him and walks toward the forest, scanning the ground as he walks.

WILL

Mimi! Mimi! Where are you? MIMI!

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

As Will enters the forest, he sees the claw marks on the tree are fresh. He runs his fingers over the exposed wood.

WILL

Mimi! MIMI!

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

Deeper in the forest, on a carpet of leaves, Will finds Mimi. He nods his head, bends down, and picks her up. Holding her close, he buries his nose in her fur, closes his eyes, and sobs.

EXT. HOME - DAY

Will, Erin, and Jason stand a short distance from the house. In front of them is a small, deep grave holding a Mimi-sized lump wrapped in a blanket. Erin has her arm around Jason.

WILL  
She was one of the best people I  
knew.

ERIN  
(to Jason)  
Is there anything you want to say?

JASON  
I don't know what to say.

ERIN  
Tell her you love her.

JASON  
She already knows that.

Will picks up the shovel and looks into the grave.

WILL  
Wait for us, sweet girl. We'll see  
you again.

As Erin and Jason look on, Will gently shovels dirt into the  
grave.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

The Creature looks down at Mimi's grave, where a small cross  
has "MIMI" painted on the crossbar.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

In the darkness, light pours from the windows of the Clayton  
home. Through one window, Will and Erin can be seen talking  
in the kitchen, while Jason sits at the table doing homework.  
The shadow of the Creature moves across the outside wall,  
stopping outside the kitchen window, then moves away.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

In their bedroom, Will and Erin are asleep.

There is the sound of WHISPERING, dozens of voices mixed  
together, louder than ever before. Will opens his eyes and  
gets out of bed, wearing only his underwear. He stands next  
to the bed, his eyes vacant. Erin opens her eyes.

ERIN  
What are you doing?

Will walks out of the bedroom, up the hall, and down the stairs. Erin hears the CLICK CREAK CLICK of the front door opening and closing.

ERIN

Shit.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

Under the bright moonlight, Will walks across the field toward the forest.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Erin hops out of bed and pulls on a pair of pants and a sweater, tugs on her sneakers, and then trots down the stairs. Jason comes out of his room in his pajamas.

JASON

What's going on?

ERIN

Your dad's sleepwalking. Stay here.

In the kitchen, Erin rummages around under the sink. She pulls out a big flashlight and switches it on, playing the blindingly bright beam across the living room wall.

ERIN

Don't come outside. I mean it.

Jason nods in agreement, and Erin turns and dashes out the front door.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

Erin scans the ground between the house and the forest, playing the bright flashlight beam over the field. Seeing nothing, she trots toward the forest.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

A blindingly bright flashlight beam cuts a swath of light through the dark forest. Erin sweeps the beam from side to side, peering between the trees.

SWISH SWISH SWISH. Something small rushes through the leaves away from Erin. She swings the flashlight beam toward the sound, and sees a raccoon dash behind a tree and disappear.

Erin heaves a sigh of relief, then stops, frozen in place. At the edge of the beam of light, from behind a tremendous tree, the shadow of a long clawed arm is cast on the trees behind.

Erin leans very slightly to the side to peer around the tree, and hears a long, low GROWL. She opens her mouth to scream, but no sound comes out.

Her breaths fast and ragged, Erin spins around and runs back toward the house with everything she has, the flashlight beam swinging wildly in every direction as she runs for her life.

Erin bursts from the trees and SCREAMS, flailing her arms, and crashes into Will, who is now wide awake.

ERIN  
Where were you?

WILL  
(shaking his head)  
I don't know.

INT. HOME - DAY

Jason is heading for the door to go to school, his backpack over his shoulder. Will and Erin sit at the table, drinking coffee.

JASON  
See you later.

ERIN  
Have a good day at school!

WILL  
Take care, son.

Jason goes out the front door, closing it behind him.

WILL  
How's he doing?

ERIN  
Seems fine.

WILL  
Does he have any friends?

ERIN  
I've heard a couple names. I'm not sure if they're friends, but I think he's getting along. He's gotten a few texts here and there.

Jason opens the door and leans inside.

JASON

Dad, can you come outside for a minute?

Will and Erin exchange a look.

WILL

Sure.

Will gets up and heads for the door.

EXT. HOME - DAY

Will and Jason look down at a set of large clawed footprints in the dirt next to the front porch.

JASON

Never seen these before this morning.

WILL

No, they're definitely fresh. Whatever it is, it's pretty good-sized.

JASON

What would make a footprint like that? A bear?

WILL

No.

JASON

Then what?

WILL

I have no idea. But whatever you do, don't tell your mom. Got it?

Jason nods, and Will sweeps his foot back and forth in the dirt, obliterating the footprints.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Jason is digging through his open backpack as he shuffles up a school hallway. As he pulls out his laptop, a couple of books, and a stack of papers he bumps into a trash can, spilling everything into a pile on the hallway floor.

Jason drops to his knees and begins picking up his belongings. Earl appears, standing over him. Jason's eyes widen.

EARL  
Need some help?

JASON  
(surprised)  
Uh, sure.

As Jason picks up his laptop and a book, Earl scoops up the stray papers, straightens them, and shoves them into Jason's backpack. Earl appears, standing over him. Jason's eyes widen.

EARL  
There you go.

Then Harlan is towering over them, flanked by Barton and Jeffries. Harlan puts his hand on Earl's shoulder. He looks at Jason.

HARLAN  
Everything okay here?

Jason looks up at Harlan and nods, smiling.

JASON  
Everything's fine. Earl's just giving me a hand.

Harlan eyes the two boys for a moment, then turns and walks away, Barton and Jeffries behind him. Jason looks at Earl and grins.

JASON  
Everything's fine.

Earl looks into Jason's eyes, and an unbearable sadness washes across his face. Earl shakes his head and looks down.

EARL  
No, it's not.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Erin is reading in bed when Will comes into the bedroom. He flings the door shut with a wave of his hand and moves toward Erin with a wild, blank look in his eyes.

ERIN  
What are you doing?

Will doesn't respond, but pulls the covers off of her.

ERIN

I guess someone wants to play. Is that it?

Will is silent. He climbs on the bed, rolls Erin over and roughly tugs at her underwear. Erin flips herself back over.

ERIN

Hey! What are you doing?

Will's eyes are blank.

ERIN

Will!

Will stares straight ahead, unseeing. Erin raises her upper body and SMACK! Slaps Will.

ERIN

STOP IT!

Will is back. He looks at Erin, surprised, then looks around the room, getting his bearings.

WILL

What happened?

ERIN

You tried to pull off my underwear. You...Your eyes weren't right.

Will is confused. He climbs off the bed.

WILL

I...I don't know what happened.

Erin eyes him, wary, measuring him.

ERIN

You've always been gentle. Our sex life's better than it's been in a while, so I'm not complaining about the frequency, but...if you're rough with me like that again, I'm not gonna stay around. You understand me?

WILL

I don't remember anything after, after I went outside. I know that sounds crazy. I promise I haven't been drinking again. I'm so sorry.

Will reaches down to touch Erin, but she dodges his touch, gets out of bed, and walks out of the room.

INT. HOME - DAY

Will walks down the stairs just as Jason is heading out the door. Jason stops in the doorway and turns to look at Will, then at Erin, who is staring out the window, trying to figure out what isn't right. Will smiles a tight smile, and Jason shakes his head, leaving and closing the door behind him.

Will slowly approached Erin from behind, and she raises a hand.

ERIN

Not yet.

Will stops and nods his head. He stands there for a moment, not knowing what to do, then pulls his jacket from the hook by the door, shaking it to hear the car keys jingle in the pocket.

WILL

Think I'm going to go into town.

ERIN

See you later.

Will slips on his jacket and leaves. He opens the car door and stops, turning to look back at the house and at Erin, who is still staring out the window, a blank expression on her face. Their eyes meet.

WILL

(mouths)

I'm sorry.

Erin eyes Will, and her expression softens, the barest hint of a smile crossing her face, and then it is gone. She waves a slow wave, and then turns from the window to disappear into the house.

INT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Will walks into the store to see Sheriff Freeman talking with Fletcher and Efram.

WILL

Morning.

Will grabs a basket, but Fletcher waves him over.

FLETCHER

Will, you need to hear this.

Will walks over.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

Three prisoners escaped during a transfer from Harrison county prison to the state prison.

WILL

Really bad guys?

SHERIFF FREEMAN

(nods)

Overpowered their guards, killed 'em both, then took off in a prison van. Took the guards' handguns. They'll probably lay low during the day and move at night; and they'll probably be looking for another car. State police are on the way with dogs and a helicopter. If you see anybody near your house or on your land, call it in. For now, you and your family need to stay indoors until we round 'em up. Do you have a gun?

WILL

I do.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

Then get it ready.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Will stands in the living room holding a shotgun. Erin is next to him, and Jason stands on the stairs.

JASON

Where did you get that?

WILL

It was my dad's. It's old, but it'll get the job done. I'm hoping we won't need it. We're by ourselves out here. No one goes outside. You hear anything, you let me handle it.

JASON

I want to stay up, too.

ERIN

Go to bed.

Jason looks at Will.

WILL

You heard your mom.

Jason turns and shuffles up the stairs.

ERIN

Be careful.

WILL

We'll be fine.

Erin and Will hug, then Erin heads up the stairs. Will sits down in a chair facing the front door, the shotgun across his lap.

EXT. RUN-DOWN FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

CRIMINAL ONE, CRIMINAL TWO and CRIMINAL THREE, all 30s and mean, dressed in light blue prison jumpsuits, stand in a driveway as Criminal Two picks the door lock on a PICKUP TRUCK.

The front door of the house opens, light spilling out into the yard. An OLD MAN, 70s and rail thin, shuffles toward the thieves, leveling a shotgun at the men.

OLD MAN

What are you boys doing?

CRIMINAL ONE

Taking your truck. Better put down that peashooter before you hurt yourself.

OLD MAN

Only gonna ask you once. Step away from the truck and get off my land.

Criminal One quickly draws a pistol from his waistband and PAK! fires one shot, hitting the Old Man in the shoulder. The Old Man drops his shotgun and crumples to the ground.

Criminal One approaches the Old Man and kicks away the shotgun. The Old Man lies on the ground, wheezing and groaning, clearly in pain.

CRIMINAL ONE

Better to talk less and shoot more in situations like these. You could probably get that patched up, but I can't have you phoning this in, so I'm gonna shoot you some more.

OLD MAN

I'm sorry.

CRIMINAL ONE

Hear that, boys? Man says he's sorry.

Criminal Two and Criminal Three laugh.

CRIMINAL ONE

Now what are you so sorry about?

The Old Man raises his arm and points a shaky finger toward Criminal Two and Criminal Three. Criminal One turns to see the Creature looming behind Criminal Two and Criminal Three.

The Creature moves in a blur. With one swipe of a clawed hand, the Creature rips open Criminal Three, then swats him aside.

CRIMINAL TWO

What the hell...

As Criminal Two struggles to pull a pistol from his waistband, the Creature thrusts three claws through the man's face. Criminal Two twitches in death, and the Creature pulls its hand from the man's face and lets the man's body crumple to the ground.

The Creature dashes toward Criminal One, who quickly empties his pistol PAK! PAK! PAK! PAK! PAK! PAK! PAK! PAK! into the Creature's chest. Stunned, the Creature hesitates. His gun empty, Criminal One throws it aside and scoops up the shotgun, pivoting to face the Creature. BOOM! He fires a round into the Creature's chest, leaving a gaping wound. Criminal One racks the slide and fires again BOOM! Another terrible shot to the chest. The Creature shakes its head, bellows a hideous SHRIEK!, then lunges forward and decapitates Criminal One with a swipe of its claw. Headless, Criminal One's body stands for a moment, then topples over.

The Creature steps forward to look down at the Old Man. As blood freely oozes from the shotgun wounds, the Creature lets out a long GROAN.

OLD MAN

You're hurt. What can I do to help?

The Creature tosses back its head and ROARS, turns, and marches back toward the forest.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Young Will watches from the dense trees as the Naked Man stands facing away from him in the center of a large forest clearing. Young Will walks closer, creeping as quietly as he can toward the Naked Man.

Young Will steps on a twig, the SNAP as loud as a gunshot. The Naked Man, having heard the sound, cocks his head.

NAKED MAN

I know you're there.

The Naked Man turns to face Young Will, who recognizes his Father, whose face and hands are caked with blood.

NAKED MAN

I'm sorry. I'm so very, very sorry.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT - PRESENT

Will stands naked in the clearing, staring at the place where he saw his dad. The wind streams through the trees, the RUSTLE of the leaves almost rising to a roar.

Will looks up at the moon, high in the night sky, and shivers, then turns and walks into the trees and disappears.

EXT. RING ROAD - DAY

Will is driving when he sees a BLACK SUV with a "County Coroner" decal on the side heading up a drive toward a small house. He follows the SUV, and it passes Sheriff Freeman's truck, which is partially blocking the road.

Sheriff Freeman gets out of his truck and waves for Will to stop. Will stops and lowers his window, and Sheriff Freeman leans down to talk.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

Morning, Mr. Clayton. Can I help you?

WILL

Came to see what's going on.

SHERIFF FREEMAN

You don't want to go up there. It's an ugly scene.

WILL

Was it those escapees?

Sheriff Freeman nods.

WILL

Anybody hurt?

SHERIFF FREEMAN

Prison escapees shot Mr. Holliston. Shoulder wound. A bad one.

WILL

He gonna be okay?

SHERIFF FREEMAN

Yep, but he'll know when the weather's turnin' from now on. Prisoners are all dead.

WILL

Did he kill them?

SHERIFF FREEMAN

(shakes his head)  
Looks like wolves.

WILL

Wolves again. What are the chances?

SHERIFF FREEMAN

Have a good day, Mr. Clayton.

Sheriff Freeman taps the edge of the window, turns away, and walks up the drive where a CORONER, 50s, opens the back of the SUV. The Coroner and Sheriff Freeman have a brief exchange, and the Coroner turns toward Will, eying him.

Will puts his car in gear and backs down the drive, as the eyes of Sheriff Freeman and the Coroner follow him.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

As Will opens his mailbox at the main road, Abram runs by on the other side of the road with Marcus. Abram nods at Will, but eyes him warily, picks up his pace and runs on by.

INT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Sheriff Freeman stands at the counter talking softly with Fletcher.

SHERIFF FREEMAN  
There was a lot of blood.

FLETCHER  
Those boys were torn apart.

SHERIFF FREEMAN  
Wasn't all those boys' blood. You get my meaning?

FLETCHER  
How much?

Sheriff Freeman shakes his head.

SHERIFF FREEMAN  
A concerning amount.

FLETCHER  
I'll start putting things together. No sleep the next few nights. For any of us.

EXT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Will gets out of his car and stops to look at a large hand-painted banner across the top front of the store that reads, in tall, bright letters, "FESTIVAL."

WILL  
Should open a sign business.

INT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Fletcher and Efram staff the counter when Will and Jason walk in.

WILL  
Fletcher, Efram.

FLETCHER  
Will. Looking for anything in particular?

WILL  
Nuts and bolts. I have a couple. Trying to find some to match.

FLETCHER

What we've got's in the back. If it's standard, I just might have it. No guarantees if it's metric.

WILL

Thanks. I'll look around.

Will and Jason head for the back of the store.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Erin and Verity are in the library. A GRANDMOTHER, 80s and frail, puts her hand on Verity's shoulder.

GRANDMOTHER

Will you be coming to the festival?

Verity nods, then brushes her off with a turn of her head. Erin watches the Grandmother totter off, then turns to Verity.

ERIN

What's that about?

VERITY

What?

ERIN

Festival. Is that something you do every year?

VERITY

No. Haven't done one for...for a long time.

ERIN

Is it like a carnival? Games, cotton candy?

VERITY

It's a little more sedate than that.

ERIN

But fun though. Right?

Verity shakes her head and frowns.

VERITY

No. Not really.

INT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Will and Jason stand at the counter with Fletcher. Efram stands sentinel behind Fletcher. Will drops a handful of nuts and bolts on the counter.

FLETCHER  
Find what you needed?

WILL  
I think so. How much?

FLETCHER  
A handful of nuts and bolts? Hardly worth the time to look it up.

Will shakes his head and pulls a small wad of cash from his pocket, peeling off a bill.

WILL  
I'm getting better at adding.  
Here's a five. Mind if I ask you something?

FLETCHER  
I've got a feeling you're going to ask me anyway. But go ahead.

WILL  
What keeps you in this place?

FLETCHER  
You think I could give up all this?  
(looks out the window)  
I have responsibilities.

WILL  
That I know something about.

FLETCHER  
Some of us have more responsibilities than we know.

WILL  
Seriously, though. You ever get lonely here?

FLETCHER  
Is this your way of telling me Erin has a sister?

WILL

Nothing like that. It's just...I like you, Fletcher. I want you to be happy.

Fletcher's smile disappears.

FLETCHER

I appreciate that. I really do. The truth is that I made my peace with loneliness a long time ago. Is there anything you need to make peace with?

Will regards Fletcher, who looks deep into him.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Don't wait much longer.

Fletcher sweeps the nuts and bolts into a small bag, handing it to Will.

WILL

Thanks. So, about the signs everywhere.

FLETCHER

The festival.

WILL

Is it some kind of harvest festival?

FLETCHER

It is.

Fletcher smiles a thin smile and crosses his arms. Efram moves out from behind the counter, walks to the front door, and holds it open, eyeing Will. Jason takes the hint and walks out, then leans back in.

JASON

Dad.

Perplexed, Will shakes his head and leaves.

EXT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Will walks out of the store to see Jason standing by the car, staring wide-eyed at the sky. On both sides of the street, TOWNSPEOPLE stand still and look up.

Will looks up to see HUNDREDS OF BIRDS flying silently in a circle overhead. One by one, the Townspeople turn to look at him. Jason jerks open the car door and jumps inside.

Will slowly shakes his head, opens his mouth to say something, then stops, gets in the car, and drives away.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

A half dozen pickup trucks are parked in a circle in a parking lot. Harlan, Jeffries, and Barton, along with other TEENAGE BOYS, sit on the tailgates, silently filling tiki torches with fuel.

INT. COUNTRY HOME - NIGHT

In the bedroom of a simple country home, an OLD HUSBAND and OLD WIFE, both 70s and trying to keep it together, put on their Sunday clothes. The Old Wife picks up a bottle of perfume, and starts to spray, but the Old Husband gently touches her arm and shakes his head. The Old Woman's eyes are wide.

OLD WOMAN

I don't know what I was thinking.

EXT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

In the school parking lot, a line of cars drops off CHILDREN, 3 to early teens. A PAIR OF TEACHERS, mid-20s, direct the Children into the school.

INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

In an old school classroom lit by candlelight, an OLD CRONE, 90s and clearly blind, sits in a chair in front of DOZENS OF CHILDREN, 3 to early teens, all sitting on the floor.

OLD CRONE

You older children know this tale.  
Stories have power, and this is a  
story that must be told.

The Children gather close around the Old Crone to listen.

OLD WOMAN

In times of old, a bargain made,  
an innocent drawn to peaceful  
glade. And underneath a starry sky,  
beside the fire, a man must die.

EXT. RING ROAD - NIGHT

A stream of cars and pickup trucks heads toward the edge of town where it borders the forest.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

Harlan trudges up a narrow trail deep into the woods, following a long line of lit tiki torches. A crowd of TOWNSPEOPLE, all older adults, walk silently behind him.

Harlan enters a large circular clearing, the same clearing pictured in Erin's locket, and walks straight toward a huge pile of branches, logs, and dry leaves at the center.

Several dozen TORCHBEARERS, all older adults, carrying unlit torches, stand as still as statues in a large circle at the edges of the clearing.

With his torch, Harlan lights the bonfire, which ROARS to life, flames leaping up into the sky. Harlan strides to the edge of the circle to an open spot, where he lights the torch of the Torchbearers on either side of him. The Torchbearers do this in turn. Moments later, the entire circle is lit.

Half-hidden among the trees, Townspeople stand silently, watching.

Fletcher, in a long robe, walks out of the forest to stand near the bonfire at the center of the circle. He speaks to the sky.

FLETCHER

Watcher among the trees, we thank  
you for watching over us and  
keeping us safe. We are grateful  
for your protection.

EXT. TOWN STREET - NIGHT - DRIVING

As Will and Jason drive down the street, all the stores are closed. They see strands of red holiday lights hanging from storefronts and strung in windows, blanketing the town in a reddish glow.

WILL

Wow. They sure have everything lit  
up, don't they?

JASON

All the lights are red. Weird  
festival.

WILL  
Maybe it's a thing.

JASON  
A weird thing.

They drive up to the front of the Pizza Shop, but it's closed.

WILL  
Guess I'm cooking. Unless you want  
mom to cook.

JASON  
Two words. Turkey tetrazzini.

WILL  
Why do you think they didn't invite  
us?

JASON  
Because they're weirdos.

WILL  
I'll ask Fletcher about it  
tomorrow.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

In the forest clearing, Fletcher continues to speak.

FLETCHER  
As the stars wheel in the sky, you  
watch. As the moon shines on our  
crops, you watch. As the seasons  
pass, and the years go slowly by,  
you watch.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

After dinner, Erin and Jason wash dishes while Will sits at the table. Erin turns to Jason.

ERIN  
Any homework?

JASON  
Did it at school.

Will checks his watch.

WILL  
Better get ready for bed then.  
Later than I thought.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

The family walks up the hall toward their bedrooms. Jason closes his door, turns on the small light by his bed, picks up a book, plops down on the bed, and reads.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Erin lies in bed under the covers. Will sits on the edge of the bed, pulling off his socks.

ERIN  
The whole town?

WILL  
Red everywhere. Made the hair stand  
up on the back of my neck.

ERIN  
And no one told you what's going  
on.

Will shakes his head.

WILL  
Fletcher wouldn't talk about it,  
probably because we're new.

ERIN  
New? We've been here for six  
months.

WILL  
(climbs into bed)  
Around here that's new. These  
people have been here all their  
lives. Parents, too. And their  
parents.

ERIN  
I don't like it. It doesn't feel  
right.

WILL  
I'll ask around tomorrow.

Will reaches over and turns out the light by the bed.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Jason looks down the hallway at the closed door of his parents' bedroom. He peers at the light spilling out from the bottom of the door. As soon as the light goes out, Jason creeps down the hallway and then down the stairs.

Jason grabs his coat from the coat rack and slips it on, then quietly unlocks the door and slinks outside, closing the door silently behind him.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

In the forest clearing, Fletcher continues to speak.

FLETCHER

New blood has come, just in time.  
We keep our promise to you, just as  
you have kept your promise to us.

EXT. RING ROAD - NIGHT

Jason rides his bike up the Ring Road. As he rides, he scans the forest to his right.

EXT. TOWN - NIGHT

Jason rides his bike through the quiet town streets. There is no one in sight. He sees himself reflected in a red-tinged store window as he rides by.

EXT. RING ROAD - NIGHT

Jason stops his bike by a long line of cars parked on the side of the road. Up ahead, he sees Townspeople following the trail of tiki torches into the forest.

Jason hides his bike and creeps into the forest, vanishing among the trees.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

Jason crouches among the trees, his eyes wide as he watches the spectacle taking place in the clearing. Fletcher raises his hands to the sky.

FLETCHER

Once in a generation.

TOWNSPEOPLE  
 (in unison)  
 Once in a generation.

FLETCHER  
 Once in a lifetime.

TOWNSPEOPLE  
 (in unison)  
 Once in a lifetime.

FLETCHER  
 A promise made.

TOWNSPEOPLE  
 (in unison)  
 A promise made.

FLETCHER  
 A promise kept.

TOWNSPEOPLE  
 (in unison)  
 A promise kept.

FLETCHER  
 A sacrifice.

TOWNSPEOPLE  
 (in unison)  
 A sacrifice.

FLETCHER  
 For the good of all.

TOWNSPEOPLE  
 (in unison)  
 For the good of all.

A rough hand grabs Jason by the back of his shirt and hoists him into the air. Efram easily tucks Jason under one arm. He binds his arms to his sides and holds him tight as he strides through the brush and into the open, marching straight to Fletcher.

JASON  
 Let me go! LET ME GO!

Efram places a terrified Jason on his feet in front of Fletcher. Jason cries in fear.

FLETCHER  
 Why are you crying?

JASON  
Because you're going to kill me.

FLETCHER  
Child, we would never hurt you.  
You're more important than you  
know.

JASON  
I don't...

FLETCHER  
You'll understand. In time. Efram  
will take you home.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT - DRIVING

Efram drives down the road toward Jason's home.

JASON  
I figure something happened to you.  
I bet you could talk if you wanted  
to.

EFRAM  
Most days, I just don't have  
anything to contribute.

JASON  
I KNEW it!

Efram looks over at Jason and flashes a thin smile, then  
turns back to the road, frowning.

EFRAM  
Now isn't the time for laughter.  
Dark days ahead. Steel yourself.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Jason walks through the front door. Erin leaps up from the  
couch to confront him.

ERIN  
Where the hell have you been!

JASON  
Riding my bike.  
(looks around the room and  
up the stairs)  
Where's dad?

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

As Fletcher stands with his hands raised to the sky, he turns toward the trees at the sound of a low, rumbling GROWL. The Other Torchbearers also turn toward the sound. One by one, they cap their tiki torches, extinguishing them.

At the sound of CRUNCHING branches and leaves, the circle of Other Torchbearers parts. The Creature emerges from the trees, scans Fletcher and the Other Torchbearers, and walks to the center of the circle.

In the bonfire's light, a large patch of dried blood mats the hair on the Creature's chest, and its hair is now a faded, weathered gray. The Creature raises up to its full height, raises its arms to the sky, claws extended, and HOWLS a mighty howl.

Half-hidden among the trees, Townspeople stand silently, watching.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

Will follows the trail of waning tiki torches to the clearing. He is alone. The bonfire, no longer roaring, burns quietly.

As Will looks into the flames, the Creature silently emerges from the trees, gray and haggard, the matted fur on its chest slick with wet blood. It's bleeding again.

The Creature advances slowly toward Will, who turns to face it, his feet freezing in place at the sight. Now only a few yards away, the Creature towers over a terrified Will.

WILL

Please. Don't hurt me.

The Creature makes a KEENING sound.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

In the clearing, Young Will stares at his Father, whose face and hands are streaked with blood.

NAKED MAN

I'm so sorry.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT - PRESENT

In Will's face, all becomes clear.

WILL  
My god. Dad. It's me. Will. Your  
son.

The Creature's eyes widen, and it drops its shoulders. It takes a step forward, lets out a WHINE, then leans down and vomits on the ground, a sickening SPLAT. It's blood.

WILL  
You're hurt.

The Creature looks down and studies Will, then GROWLS, turns and walks away, vanishing among the trees. Will stares into the trees, but the Creature is gone.

WILL  
Please.

INT. HOME - DAY - FLASHBACK

In the kitchen, Young Will pleads with WILL'S MOM, 40s and bone tired.

WILL  
Will he ever come back?

MOM  
He's not coming back. Sooner you get used to that, the better off you'll be.

WILL  
How are we gonna live?

MOM  
We'll get by.

There's a KNOCK at the door. Will's Mom opens the door, and a DELIVERY BOY, late teens, enters and sets two bags of groceries on the kitchen table.

The Delivery Boy smiles a grim smile at Will's Mom, then catches Young Will's eye. He tips his hat, turns away, and leaves, and Will's Mom shuts the door behind him.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT - PRESENT

Will stands on the porch, peering into the forest. He looks closer and closer into the trees. The rain falls in sheets, with occasional flashes of lightning.

One particularly bright flash illuminates the Creature amidst the trees, a dark frightening shape. When the lightning flashes again, the Creature is gone.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Erin walks through the stacks at the library, idly letting her fingers drift across the spines of the books as she walks. At a slight gap between two books, she stops. She pushed the two books apart to reveal a thin, hand-bound leather book. She looks at the title.

INSERT - WEATHERED BOOK COVER

In hand-drawn letters: "The Spirit of the Forest"

BACK TO SCENE

Erin takes the book to a table and sits. Seemingly in a trance, she slowly turns the pages.

INSERT - YELLOWED PAGE

A woodcut print shows a Farmer standing next to an Ox and plow. In front of him is a tall Creature. Underneath it, in hand-drawn letters: "An Auspicious Meeting."

BACK TO SCENE

Erin turns the page.

INSERT - YELLOWED PAGE

A woodcut print shows a spiny eight-pointed star. Underneath it, in hand-drawn letters: "The Eight-Pointed Star."

BACK TO SCENE

Erin turns the page.

INSERT - YELLOWED PAGE

A woodcut print shows a Farmer in the forest clearing. Two Creatures stand within a shining portal that fills the clearing with light. A third Creature grasps the hand of the Farmer. Underneath it, in hand-drawn letters: "A Parting."

BACK TO SCENE

Erin turns the page, and the color drains from her face. Her eyes widen, and she clasps her hand over her mouth, shaking her head.

INSERT - YELLOWED PAGE

A woodcut print shows a full-page drawing of the Creature. Underneath it, in hand-drawn letters: "The Clayton."

BACK TO SCENE

ERIN  
 (losing it, her voice  
 rising)  
 No, no, noo, noooo, NOOOOO!

Verity lays her hand on Erin's shoulder and Erin jumps.

VERITY  
 You found something.

ERIN  
 It's terrible. Can't...be true. It  
 can't.

VERITY  
 If you have time, just a little  
 time, I'd like to tell you a story.

Erin looks around the library. The LIBRARY READERS are all looking at her. In their eyes she sees fear and sympathy.

ERIN  
 Do they know?

VERITY  
 (smiles a sad smile)  
 Everyone knows.

In her other hand, Verity holds a small packet of tissues. She pulls one out and hands it to Erin, who wipes her eyes.

ERIN  
 I have time.

VERITY  
 Then come to my office, because  
 this is a private story.

Looking down at the book, Erin sits transfixed. Verity takes her arms and helps her to her feet.

EXT. FARM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A dark, violent 1800s night. MEN ON HORSEBACK, carrying torches and pistols, flash past a GANG OF KILLERS, roughly a dozen men with pistols and rifles. Behind them, a farmhouse burns.

KILLER ONE, 40s and wild-eyed, tosses a rope over a large tree limb and then affixes a noose around the neck of a barely conscious BLOODIED FARMER, 30s, who lies hogtied on the ground.

A COUNTRY GIRL, 20s and terrified, gathers her bloody, torn dress about her and darts past the Gang of Killers into the forest.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

The Country Girl dashes among the trees, emerging in the clearing. She SCREAMS.

COUNTRY GIRL

HELP!

A CREATURE, 10 feet tall and covered with jet black hair, emerges from the trees and regards her, seemingly curious.

COUNTRY GIRL

Please help us! They're gonna kill us all!

EXT. FARM - NIGHT

Killer One hoists the Bloodied Farmer upward. The man jerks helplessly at the end of the rope. As Killer One grins an evil grin, he is startled by the sound of MEN SCREAMING AND DYING.

Killer One turns and releases the rope and sees THREE CREATURES, all 10 feet tall and covered with solid black hair, standing among the dead, horribly dismembered bodies of the entire Gang of Killers.

With one giant stride, one Creature approaches to stand looking down at Killer One, who looks up in awe.

KILLER ONE

What...what in god's name are you?

With a flick of a single long claw, the Creature neatly decapitates Killer One, then thrusts its hand into Killer One's body. The Creature watches idly as blood pumps from Killer One's neck, then tosses the body aside.

INT. SALOON - NIGHT

A couple dozen MEN TOWNFOLK, 40s and 50s, sit at tables, each with a tankard in front of him. At the front of the room, addressing the group, are MORTIMER and SPENCER CLAYTON, both 50s and grizzled.

MORTIMER

They have offered to help us.

SPENCER

And for that help they ask precious little.

SAMUEL, 40s and red-faced, stands.

SAMUEL

This is an abomination! It is against God! I will not stand for it!

He sits, and IVAN, 30s and rail thin, stands.

IVAN

Samuel, where was your god when my sons were burned and hung as a warning? And my Sarah. After all those men were with her, she cries in her sleep and will never bear a child.

(to Mortimer)

What do they want?

MORTIMER

An occasional tribute. Nothing more.

SAMUEL

False idols!

SPENCER

(to Samuel)

Don't be a fool. An old cow or horse, a sack of grain when we have more than we need. They do not ask to be worshipped like the god you say you know so well.

MORTIMER

They have been here for a long time, and just want to live peaceably. I say we put it to a vote and accept what comes of it. Samuel, what do you say?

SAMUEL

Very well.

SPENCER

A show of hands, then. All in favor of this bargain, raise a hand high.

One by one, the Men Townfolk raise their hands. Samuel does not. He looks around the room into the hardened faces, then at Spencer and Mortimer, and nods his head.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Spencer throws open the door to the Clayton home and stumbles inside, falling into a chair by the fire. TESSA, 50s and weathered, hair pulled into a tight bun, rushes to his side.

SPENCER

Our protectors have called to me. They offered something, something terrible, but necessary.

TESSA

What need do they have of you?

SPENCER

Our worlds have grown too far apart. They cannot keep their feet in this world. There was no time.

TESSA

Husband, what have you done?

SPENCER

What needs must do. For all of us.

There is a loud knock at the door.

SPENCER

Come in!

Mortimer comes in. His face is white.

MORTIMER

Have you seen the light in the forest?

SPENCER

(nodding)

They are leaving through the door  
that brought them here.

MORTIMER

Is it true?

Spencer holds up his hand to display an eight-pointed star  
burned precisely into his palm.

SPENCER

They have marked me, and by marking  
me, they have marked the Clayton  
name.

MORTIMER

Will you be changed?

Spencer nods.

SPENCER

Their burden is now my burden, and  
their home will become my home, for  
the rest of my days.

MORTIMER

When do you go?

SPENCER

This very night, when the moon is  
highest in the sky. I hear voices  
in my ears, but there is no one  
there. Already something pulls at  
me.

TESSA

Say it isn't true!

SPENCER

Dearest, I cannot say any such  
thing.

MORTIMER

Then I'll leave you to talk about  
the things only wives and husbands  
talk about.

Mortimer stands and goes to the door, then turns.

MORTIMER

Tessa, the town is here for you,  
and all who come after you. Now and  
forever.

Mortimer leaves. Spencer looks deeply into Tessa's eyes.

TESSA

Your eyes have changed. They're the eyes of an animal. I'm so afraid.

SPENCER

And for that I am sorry. I wish we had more time.

Tessa kisses Spencer hard. There is a terrible hunger in it, and when they break the kiss their eyes are filled with tears.

SPENCER

Please don't think too unkindly of me.

TESSA

Never. I can only wish you godspeed, husband.

SPENCER

(looking away)

Where I go, I imagine God seems very far away.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY - PRESENT

Erin sits in Verity's office. Her eyes are red from crying, and she gulps occasionally to hold back sobs.

VERITY

There's no more I can tell you. The next days - it'll be hard for a long time - but whenever you want to talk, I'm here to listen.

ERIN

Thank you.

VERITY

Are you okay to drive?

Erin nods and moves to stand. Verity comes around her desk and helps her up.

VERITY

Come on, then. You'll want to be home before nightfall.

INT. HOME - DAY

In the bedroom, Erin opens a dresser drawer and pulls out the small box with the locket and necklace. She opens the box, takes out the locket, and puts the necklace around her neck.

INT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Will gets out of his car and sees Fletcher sitting on a bench in front of the store. He walks up and sits down.

WILL

I can't do this.

FLETCHER

I don't think you have a choice. Your dad tried to leave. He came to my house. He'd been drinking, but that night, no matter how much he drank, it wasn't enough. He left just after midnight. I never saw him again.

WILL

What if I don't? What if I...

FLETCHER

Then it falls to him who is next in line.

WILL

Jason.

FLETCHER

And he's not ready.

WILL

How long do I have?

FLETCHER

Until the moon is highest in the sky, and no longer. Make your peace. And say your goodbyes.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Will walks in the door to find Erin sitting on the couch with a half empty bottle of whiskey on the coffee table in front of her, a glass in her hand.

ERIN  
Verity's a tricky one. They all  
are.

She turns to look at him, and Will sees her eyes are red and puffy from crying.

WILL  
Why are you crying?

ERIN  
Don't you know? How could you not  
know?

Will steps back. He looks up the stairs, then back at Erin. He grits his teeth and nods his head.

WILL  
I know. Where's Jason?

ERIN  
I sent him to bed.

Erin stands up, her eyes wild, on the border of hysteria.

ERIN  
It's too much.

Will grabs her and holds her tight.

WILL  
Shhhhh.

ERIN  
It's not fair. They can't expect  
this of us. What are we going to  
do?

WILL  
What has to be done. Let's go  
upstairs.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

In the bedroom, Will climbs on top of Erin, cradling her in his arms. He opens his mouth to speak, but Erin places her finger on his lips.

ERIN  
Be as gentle as you can. I'll try  
not to cry too much.

Will and Erin move together. Covered with sweat, the muscles and tendons ripple under his skin, busily rewriting themselves.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

In the bedroom, Will stands naked next to the bed. Erin lies in bed, clutching the bedcovers. Her eyes are filled with tears.

ERIN

Will you remember me?

WILL

I could never forget you.

Will, still naked, walks out of the room. He pauses at Jason's door.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

In his bedroom, Jason opens his eyes and sits up in bed. He turns toward the door, and sees two shadows where Will's feet are blocking the light coming under the door. Jason stands and tiptoes to the door, leaning toward it, listening.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

In the hallway, with his heightened senses, Will can hear Jason's breathing. With a pained expression, he raises his hand and lightly places it against the door.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

In his room, Jason raises his hand and touches just the tips of his fingers to the door opposite Will's hand. He purses his lips, then grimaces, not knowing what to do. Jason lowers his hand and takes a few steps back.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

In the hallway outside Jason's door, Will lowers his head, drops his hand to his side, and steps back from the door.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

In his room, Jason sees the shadows from Will's feet disappear.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

In the hallway, Will walks down the stairs.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Erin lies in bed, her hand over her mouth, tears streaming from her eyes as Will's footfalls sound on the stairs. She winces at the sound of the front door shutting with a quiet CLICK.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

Will walks toward the forest, his skin shining in the moonlight, his breath white in the cold night air.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Erin stands in the bedroom window, her hands against the cold pane, her face streaked with tears, watching over Will as he crosses the field.

ERIN

There is a place, where winter  
never comes, and the days do not  
pass. Someday, I will meet you  
there.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

Will pauses at the edge of the forest and looks up at the moon. Moonlight gleams in his eyes. He steps forward into the trees and disappears.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

Will enters the large clearing, where the bonfire is now only ashes, some of which are lifted by the night breeze and borne on the wind.

Will strides across the open land and sees the body of the Creature lying dead next to the spent coals. Will leans down to touch the Creature. It is dead, its fur lightly rustled by the breeze, its sightless eyes gazing up at the moon. Will brushes his hands across the Creature's eyes, closing the lids.

As soon as Will touches the Creature, the bonfire comes to life with a WHOOSH! The firelight illuminates the clearing and the trees beyond.

Will changes. Wiry, jet-black hair sprouts in thick stripes up and down his back. He shivers as his back and chest expand, new muscles bubbling up from under his skin. Will GROANS and sways, unsteady on his feet.

Will's feet and hands grow and lengthen, and sharp claws extrude from his fingers and toes. He stops and shudders, and his spine elongates, propelling him upward to seven feet, then eight feet, and finally to a towering 10-foot height.

The hair fills in until nothing of Will's old skin remains. His ears protrude outward and rise to points, growing along with his jaw, which morphs forward. When Will opens his mouth to stretch his jaws, a mouthful of sharpened canines gleam in the moonlight.

Will is gone, replaced by the Creature, which looks to the sky and ROARS, a long and terrible cry that echoes through the forest.

EXT. OPEN PASTURE - NIGHT

The Creature's ROAR echoes across the open prairie.

EXT. FLETCHER'S HOME - NIGHT

Fletcher, standing on his front porch, hears the distant ROAR and takes a sip of whisky from a flask.

FLETCHER  
Thank you, my friend.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

The Creature approaches an old, giant tree, raises its hand, and claws long, ragged scars across the bark to mark it.

INT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Erin wheels her cart to the counter, where Efram quickly bags her groceries and places the bags on the counter.

Erin pulls out her wallet to pay, and Fletcher lightly places his hand on hers. Erin looks up at him, and Fletcher shakes his head and smiles a sad smile.

FLETCHER

No charge. Not today. Not ever.

Efram picks up the bags and waits by the door. There is the DING of the door chime as Erin opens the door and leaves, Efram behind her. There is the CLICK of the door as it shuts, and then the store is silent.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Erin walks into the library and sees Verity. Verity gives her a long look, then gets up, walks over to her and wraps her arms around her.

ERIN

Do you think...

VERITY

Three days a week. Come in at ten tomorrow.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

Snow is falling on the land, on the house where soft light streams from the windows.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Erin and Jason are in the kitchen, finishing dinner. The room is lit by candlelight.

Jason pushes his plate away and walks over to the fire. He throws another log on the fire and stokes it with a fireplace poker. A cloud of sparks flies up from the logs and up the flue.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

The sparks pour out from the chimney and swirl up into the night sky, mingling with the falling snow.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Erin and Jason sit at the kitchen table. Erin nurses a glass of wine. A fire CRACKLES in the fireplace.

JASON

I used to think I knew everything.

ERIN

I think that's pretty common for a twelve-year-old.

JASON

But not any more.

ERIN

Then you're growing up. And with your dad gone, you've had to grow up fast. The older I get, the less I know. Is that what you mean?

JASON

Maybe. During the day, I'm usually busy, but at night...I have questions.

ERIN

What questions are those?

JASON

Is dad ever coming back?

ERIN

Not the dad you knew.

JASON

The night he left, he was outside my door. I got out of bed and went to the door, but I just stood there. I was afraid. Why would I be afraid?

Erin eyes Jason and considers her words.

ERIN

I don't have all the answers for you. At least not now.

Jason's struggle for understanding is clear in his face.

JASON

Will I see him again? I...

ERIN

I miss him, too. For now, he lives in your heart. And you'll see him again.

JASON

When?

Erin gets up, goes to the window, and looks out on the snow-covered field and the forest beyond.

ERIN

It may be a long time. You have your whole life still ahead of you. You'll go off to school, and there you'll meet a girl. You'll find work, get married, and raise a family.

JASON

So that's how it is?

Erin nods. She furrows her brow as she scans the treeline.

ERIN

And you'll have a child, a son. And some evening, when autumn is on the wane and the last leaves have fallen from the trees, when winter's in the air and the full moon is high in the night sky, you'll see him again.

JASON

How do you know?

Staring out the window, Erin's face looks terribly sad. She steels herself and turns to face her son, looking deeply into his eyes.

ERIN

Some things a mother knows.

EXT. THE FOREST - NIGHT

In the forest, the Creature is watching the house. A sheep cries, far off, and the Creature turns toward the sound. It races through the forest, moving impossibly fast, dashing between the trees, crashing through the leaves and crunching twigs underfoot.

EXT. FARM FIELD - NIGHT

The Creature emerges from the forest to see THREE WOLVES tearing apart a SHEEP while the rest of the FLOCK OF SHEEP looks on, afraid. The Wolves turn toward the Creature, lowering their heads and baring their teeth, ready to fight.

The Creature clears the ranch fence with a single leap and faces the Wolves, who snarl, their teeth gleaming in the moonlight. With a ROAR, the Creature charges forward at the Wolves.