

RAUM'S PURGING GROUNDS

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. RICHARD'S HOME/YOUNG CANDICE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (DREAM)

YOUNG CANDICE ROBIN (7) lies in bed with a blanket pulled over her face. She peeks out, frightened.

The tree limbs outside her window cast a man-shaped shadow on the ceiling with outstretched hands.

She reaches for her toy flashlight and turns it on.

The closet door is closed. The sound of squeaking wheels comes from within.

She shines her flashlight at the closet door. The squeaky wheels draw closer, louder...

Then downstairs -- the front door slams.

Candice trembles, clutches her toy keyboard. She plays her comfort song with shaking fingers...

YOUNG CANDICE

(sings)

*Don't be afraid, my little one. All
bad things go away in the end.
Don't shed a tear, my little one.
'Cause momma's got your hand.*

Heavy boots climb the stairs. Each step closer, heavier.

The doorknob turns. The door creaks open.

RICHARD ROBIN (30s) staggers inside her bedroom with a whiskey bottle. He leans against the threshold.

Candice shines her flashlight on him like a spotlight.

RICHARD

Just two beers, Officer. I swear.

He staggers to her bed, attempts to walk a straight line to prove his sobriety -- he fails miserably.

RICHARD

Could've been more. Maybe.

He laughs. The bed post prevents him from falling over -- it cracks under his weight.

RICHARD
 Hey there, little fly. I visited
 your mother today. She whispered
 something in my ear.

YOUNG CANDICE
 But -- but mommy's dead.

RICHARD
 Stop saying that!

He finishes off his whiskey. Chucks the bottle across the
 room. It shatters against a wall.

RICHARD
 You're making me out to be a liar!
 I bet, you think I'm crazy!

YOUNG CANDICE
 No, Daddy.

RICHARD
 Sure, you do! You want me locked
 away! They put me away, nobody's
 gonna care for you! No one! 'Cause
 nobody cares! Nobody!

Candice cowers against the headboard, tears soak her cheeks.

RICHARD
 Don't be afraid of me, little fly.
 I don't wanna hurt ya. It's just
 sometimes, I get a little upset.
 (beat)
 'Cause I just want things to be
 perfect again. And I know, I can't
 have that. I can't. You can't. And
 Kevin can't...

He rips the flashlight away from her. Shines it in her face.

RICHARD
 Stop cryin'! You're bein' a little
 baby!

YOUNG CANDICE
 I'm sorry.

RICHARD
 Sorry ain't gonna dig up your
 mamma! Sorry ain't gonna breath air
 back into her lungs!
 (beat)
 You shoulda listened!

RICHARD (CONT'D)
She told you not to go near the
water! But you went anyway! And now
she's gone!

Richard lunges for her, gripping her throat. Candice
struggles for air, flailing her arms and legs...

END DREAM

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - DAY

CANDICE (20s) shoots out of bed in a panic, gasping for air.

She reaches for the baseball bat propped against the bed,
then realizes she's alone...

She presses her palm to her chest, tries to steady her
breathing.

A beat.

She sets the bat aside. Grabs a pill bottle from her
nightstand. Her fingers fumble with the cap. Finally, she
gets it open. Shakes a pill into her hand. Pops it into her
mouth.

She walks to her bedroom door and unlocks it.

IN THE HALLWAY

She shuffles toward the bathroom. Nightlights are plugged
into each hallway outlet.

IN THE BATHROOM

Candice locks the door behind her.

Throughout the duration of her shower, she wipes the steam
from the transparent curtain, peering out as if expecting to
see an unwanted visitor...

INT. THERAPY OFFICE - DAY

Candice sits across from her THERAPIST (female, 40s).

CANDICE
The new medication seems to be
working.

She holds out her hands -- they're steady.

THERAPIST

Good.

CANDICE

I'll take it.

THERAPIST

Any side effects?

CANDICE

Nothing unbearable.

THERAPIST

Tell me what you're experiencing.

CANDICE

Dry mouth. Fatigue. Insomnia.
Sometimes my skin gets itchy.

THERAPIST

That seems like a lot to bear.

CANDICE

It beats the alternative.

Candice smiles, strained.

THERAPIST

The last time we spoke, you had
mentioned a garden that you were
working on.

CANDICE

I gave up. Too many spiders.

THERAPIST

Spiders are more afraid of us.

CANDICE

Someone should tell them that.

They share a chuckle.

The therapist glances at her notes.

THERAPIST

I would like to go back to this
dream that you keep experiencing.

CANDICE

Yeah. I know it's just a dream, but
it's so vivid, you know? Sometimes,
I feel like it's not a dream.

CANDICE (CONT'D)
Like, I'm there, reliving it.
Watching it unfold and...

Candice's face drains of color. She stares off in deep thought.

The therapist leans forward, showing genuine concern.

THERAPIST
And?

CANDICE
And then *he* comes home...

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - LATER

Candice gazes at a dark red wall. She stands alone in the middle of the room, surrounded by paint cans and supplies.

A faint shift of movement crosses the window of the front door. A shadow sliding past, enough to catch her eye.

Candice stops mid-sentence. Her shoulders tense. She listens.
Silence.

The doorbell rings. A melodic tune, instead of a basic chime.

Candice heads to a side window. Peers out. Relief floods her face, glee even.

She unlocks a series of deadbolts...

Click.

Click.

Click.

...and opens the door...

KEVIN ROBIN (20s) stands outside with a ladder.

KEVIN
Hey, Sis.

Candice glances at the ladder with disapproval.

CANDICE
I'm not some damsel in distress,
Kevin. I can do things on my own.

KEVIN

Yeah, like the time it took you two weeks to change the light bulb in your garage.

CANDICE

I don't even use the garage.

KEVIN

That's not the point, Candice. Putting things off comes way too easy for you. You're a typical *Gemini*.

Kevin barges inside, maneuvering around her. He props the ladder against the nearest wall.

Candice lifts a paint roller extender in retaliation to his ladder.

KEVIN

That's cheating.

CANDICE

My feet never come off the ground, you know that.

KEVIN

There's exceptions to every rule.

CANDICE

Not in my rulebook.

LATER

All four walls are wet with a fresh coat of paint in a neutral color.

Kevin intentionally leaves a spot untouched near the ceiling, then climbs down the ladder.

Candice enters the living room from the kitchen with two glasses of lemonade. She notices the small area Kevin left unfinished.

CANDICE

Umm... You missed a spot.

Kevin confiscates her paint roller extender.

KEVIN

I'm sure it's nothin' you can't handle. You're not some... *damsel in distress*.

Candice sets both glasses of lemonade down, and motions for the extender.

KEVIN

Nah. I don't think so.

Candice's every attempt to retrieve the extender is unsuccessful.

CANDICE

Hand it over!

KEVIN

It's a teeny weeny spot. Swipe, swipe. Done.

CANDICE

Not gonna happen.

KEVIN

I'll steady the ladder. Nothing'll happen to you, cross my heart.

Candice fights back what she really wants to say. She regains some composure, takes a deep calming breath...

CANDICE

Listen, Kev. I appreciate what you're trying to do. But this isn't helping. I'm working on getting better. I am. I'm making huge strides with my counseling.

(beat)

I wish I could be strong like you. Someday, I'll get there. But now is not that time.

A look of remorse washes over Kevin.

KEVIN

I'm sorry.

Kevin hands the roller extender back to her.

Candice smiles appreciatively.

EXT. HOTEL/PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Heavy rain.

A lightning flash shows a parked car.

INT. CAR - SAME

WILLY (20s) sits in the passenger seat, face lit by the glow of his laptop. He adjusts his headset, eyes locked on the live feed.

The laptop screen shows a close up of an elevator button panel.

KEVIN (O.S.)
(filter: headset)
We good at the front desk?

WILLY
She's out of our hair for the next hour. I talked her down to eighty bucks.

KEVIN (O.S.)
I said nothing over fifty.

WILLY
She wanted a hundred. I pushed it as far as I could.

Kevin exhales, frustrated.

KEVIN (O.S.)
We can't keep bleeding our budget like this.

WILLY
I know. But once we hit a million subscribers, we won't have to.

INT. HOTEL/ELEVATOR - SAME

Kevin wears a headset and camera eyeglasses. His eyes are focused on the elevator floor buttons.

The elevator doors close.

The elevator begins to ascend.

Kevin consults his wristwatch -- it's almost midnight.

KEVIN

All right, Willy. Start recording.

WILLY (O.S.)

And... we're rollin'.

KEVIN

(to channel subscribers)

Hello, you freak maniacs! Welcome back to another episode of The Kevin and Willy Show! Tonight, we're delving deep into another hellish nightmare!

(mimics a drum roll)

The Elevator Game! That's right! It's believed that this game will transport its player into another world. What will we find in this whole new world? We're about to find out.

The elevator reaches the top floor. The doors open.

Kevin glances at the time again -- it's midnight.

KEVIN

All right, maniacs. It's exactly twelve midnight. Here we go.

He dabs a sequence of floor numbers, commencing the ritual
ELEVATOR GAME.

The doors close.

The elevator descends and stops.

The doors open.

What appears to be a female HOUSEKEEPER pushes a cleaning cart in the distance. Her face is hidden behind broom bristles.

WILLY (O.S.)

(to self)

Housekeeping? At this hour?

The elevator doors close.

INT. CAR - SAME

Willy's gaze is fixed on his laptop screen. The elevator doors slide open. He sees what appears to be the same housekeeper, only she's much closer.

The doors close.

The elevator descends to the next floor.

It reopens, revealing the housekeeper again. Willy's suspicion deepens, his curiosity turns to unease.

WILLY

Tell me you're seeing that.

KEVIN (O.S.)

(static)

Be a little more specific --

WILLY

The cleaning lady.

The elevator doors close.

KEVIN (O.S.)

(static)

What about her -- ?

WILLY

She's on every floor.

KEVIN (O.S.)

We did it, Willy! We've made contact with the spirit world!

WILLY

I'm being serious.

The doors open. The housekeeper is gone.

WILLY

She was right there...

KEVIN (O.S.)

We're just here for subscribers, Willy. I don't need you to go off the deep end.

INT. HOTEL/ELEVATOR - SAME

The elevator doors begin to close. A gnarled hand reaches in. The doors retract.

A thin, frail man in dark robes enters. This is the SICKLY MAN.

WILLY (O.S.)

Whoa! He just came outta nowhere!

The Sickly Man turns toward the doors as they close.

KEVIN
Uhh, what floor, sir?

No reply.

WILLY (O.S.)
He's creeping me out. I wouldn't
get too close.

Kevin attempts to get the man's attention.

KEVIN
Sir?

Again, nothing from the Sickly Man. The elevator shuts and advances to the next floor.

The Sickly Man begins to sing a traditional nursery rhyme --
"WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?"

SICKLY MAN
(under his breath)
...Who dug his grave? I, said the
Owl, with my little trowel, I dug
his grave...

The elevator doors open. The Sickly Man exits, continuing to sing.

The lights flicker. The doors close.

The elevator descends to level "B" -- the basement.

INT. CAR - SAME

Willy continues to watch Kevin, the laptop screen goes black.

WILLY
Kevin? You there?

Lightning flashes, illuminating the contorted ghastly face of the Sickly Man just outside his window. Willy doesn't notice.

WILLY
Can you hear me?!

After another lightning flash, the Sickly Man is gone.

INT. HOTEL/ELEVATOR - SAME

The doors open to the darkness of the basement.

KEVIN
(mutters)
Hello, darkness.

The elevator doors stay ajar. He pushes the "close doors" button. They won't budge.

He jabs it several more times...

Still nothing.

WILLY (O.S.)
Kevin!

KEVIN
You disappeared on me, bruh.

WILLY (O.S.)
I lost visual.

KEVIN
I'm stuck in the basement.

Kevin pokes his head out of the elevator.

Water pipes hiss with pressure.

A dark FIGURE moves about.

KEVIN
Someone's down here with me.

WILLY (O.S.)
Someone?

Kevin steps out of the elevator.

The figure approaches.

Kevin whips out his cell phone. Actuates the flashlight app. The figure closes the distance, materializing in the dim lighting...

It's a MAINTENANCE MAN (40s) carrying a tool box.

MAINTENANCE MAN
No one's allowed down here.

KEVIN
Uhh, sorry. I hit the wrong button.

The maintenance man studies him for a minute, then stares down at Kevin's feet.

MAINTENANCE MAN

I think you dropped something.

Kevin looks down. Sees an old gaming rulebook. He picks it up. Inspects it. The lettering resembles dried blood: "*RAUM'S PURGING GROUNDS.*"

INT. WILLY'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kevin sits on a couch and flips through the rulebook.

Willy enters from the kitchen, two beers in hand. Plants one in front of Kevin.

Kevin turns the rulebook over. The back cover depicts incantation symbols.

WILLY

There's something off about the video we shot at the hotel.

Kevin opens his beer. Takes a swig.

WILLY

That cleaning lady, she didn't show up on video. It's like she wasn't even there --

KEVIN

Don't say it. Don't you...

WILLY

She was a ghost.

KEVIN

Easy there, *John Edward*.

WILLY

Well, there's no other way to explain it. We both saw her.

KEVIN

I've seen a lot of things.

WILLY

And a lot of those *things* probably had a good explanation.

Willy swipes through his cell phone photos. Finds one in particular.

WILLY

And that creepy old guy in the elevator, there's something really off 'bout him. Check this out.

He shows Kevin a close-up of the Sickly Man's feet. Zooms in...

closer...

closer...

Until they're not feet at all, but...

split hooves similar to a goat.

KEVIN

Nice special effects. Viewers are gonna eat that up.

Kevin pats Willy on the back, then chugs the rest of his beer. Belches.

WILLY

It wasn't me.

KEVIN

Sure.

WILLY

I swear!

Kevin flips to the first page of the gaming rulebook. It reads "DEAD END" followed by role-play gaming instructions.

KEVIN

I'm curious about your plans tonight.

WILLY

You're outta your mind if you think I'm playing that thing.

KEVIN

Oh, come on. Don't be such a wuss.

WILLY

Sorry. You're on your own.

KEVIN

I've never seen you so freaked out. You're supposed to be the science guy, not the spiritualist.

WILLY

Something just seems way off. I'm tellin' ya, Kevin. Don't do it.

KEVIN

Come on, *shutterbug*.

WILLY

No way in Hell, man. Sorry.

KEVIN

Hell is right. That's what I tell my viewers. It's perfect. It sells itself. We're almost at one million subscribers. I think this'll launch us over.

WILLY

Before you do anything, you should talk to Dylan about this.

Kevin shakes his head, chortles mirthlessly.

WILLY

This is his sorta thing.

KEVIN

We kicked him off the show. We're the last people he'd wanna help.

WILLY

That was moons ago --

KEVIN

How many moons does it take?

A contemplative beat.

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

An oil painting of a farmhouse and cornfield hangs on the wall, the bottom corner displays a signature: "*Josephine Robin.*"

LUCY (13) plays piano with sheet music in front of her -- it's a grueling composition.

Candice stands behind her student, nods with approval.

Lucy flubs on a piano key. She winces at her mistake, but recovers.

Candice smiles, impressed.

CANDICE
Very good, Lucy.

Lucy brings the song to a close. Looks up at Candice, guilt-faced.

LUCY
I screwed up --

CANDICE
I didn't point it out, and you shouldn't either.

LUCY
Yes, ma'am.

Candice places a comforting hand on Lucy's shoulder.

CANDICE
You didn't quit. And that's what matters.

Candice glances at a wall clock. Notes the time.

CANDICE
Your mother will be here soon.
Let's start at the beginning.

LUCY
Okay.

Lucy begins to play...

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Candice sits at her piano. No music. Her hands hover over the keys -- trembling. The harder she tries to steady them, the worse they shake.

Her cell phone rings.

Candice startles, a sharp inhale. She laughs at herself, then taps speaker.

PATTY (O.S.)
(filter: cell phone)
Can-dice.

CANDICE
Pat-ty.

PATTY (O.S.)

I have a very big favor to ask. And it's gonna be really hard for me to take no for an answer...

CANDICE

Lay it on me.

PATTY (O.S.)

I was wondering if you would give me the honor of playing at my wedding. Now, I know how you feel about public settings, but... Luke's family is willing to fly in Maestro Neil Shine, and I told 'em I know someone who blows him out of the water.

CANDICE

How long did your nose grow?

PATTY (O.S.)

They're onboard. That's what matters. And they are freakin' loaded. So, trust me, when I say: they'll make it worth your while.

CANDICE

Money isn't an issue, I just --

Candice's cell phone vibrates. A second incoming call flashes across the screen: KEVIN.

PATTY (O.S.)

Please, please, please... You can't see me right now, but I am literally on my knees begging. Please, Candice, do this for me.

Candice's hand begin to tremble, just enough to notice.

CANDICE

Just give me some time to think about it. And I'll get back with you. Sorry, Patty, but I gotta let you go. My brother's calling me.

PATTY (O.S.)

Okay. No rush. Well, not a huge rush. But kind of still a rush.

CANDICE

Later, goof.

PATTY (O.S.)

Later.

The line clicks off.

Candice answers Kevin's call.

CANDICE

Hey, Kev.

KEVIN (O.S.)

(filter: cell phone)

Hiya, Sis. Just checking in. How's your night?

Candice glances at her hands, curls them into fists.

CANDICE

Oh, you know. Same old.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Taking your meds?

CANDICE

Kevin, don't.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Not nagging. I'm just asking.

Candice continues to steady her hands.

KEVIN (O.S.)

I'm about to film something big tonight. My subscribers are gonna lose their minds.

CANDICE

It already sounds dangerous.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Dangerous is subjective.

CANDICE

Just be careful.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Sorry to cut this short. I'll give you a buzz in the morning. Hey, ya wanna do breakfast?

CANDICE

Sure.

KEVIN (O.S.)
Cool. Gotta go. Love ya, Sis.

CANDICE
Love ya, too.

The call ends. The room seems quieter than before.

EXT. FOREST/DEAD END ROAD - NIGHT

Kevin parks his car. He detaches his video camera from the dashboard. Faces it toward himself. Gestures devil horns toward the lens.

KEVIN
Hello, you freak maniacs! Welcome back to another episode of The Kevin and Willy Show! Tonight, we're delving deep into a hellish nightmare! It's so scary, even Willy chickened out! That's right! I'm on my own for this one!
(beat)
You've watched us demonstrate *light as a feather, stiff as a board -- Bloody Mary -- Sandman -- Tsuji-ura -- The Picture Game*. We even tackled *The Elevator Game*, and now we bring you...

He makes a drum roll sound, then holds the gaming rulebook in front of the camera.

KEVIN
Raum's Purging Grounds! To tell you the truth, I don't even know if I should be doin' this alone! And that's what makes it so freakin' fun! Let's get started!

He opens the rulebook to the first page...

FADE OUT.

EXT. FOREST/DEAD END ROAD - DAY

Willy drives up. Parks next to Kevin's vacant car and steps out. He cautiously approaches the driver's side, notices the shattered window. He peeks inside. Spots a video camera and the gaming rulebook. His attention shifts to the dense woods.

WILLY

Kevin!

He ventures

INTO THE WOODS

and searches for any sign of Kevin. Nothing turns up.

WILLY

Kevin!

He returns to Kevin's car. Opens the door. Inspects the video camera. Removes the flash drive.

Takes the rulebook.

INT. WILLY'S APARTMENT/BEDROOM - LATER

In place of a bed and dresser, there's tech gadgets and bundles of wires branching out in every direction.

Willy sits at his computer. Inserts Kevin's flash drive. A video uploads and plays...

ON THE MONITOR: Kevin reads the rulebook instructions aloud...

KEVIN

*Unlock the doors. Wait for the
knock. Do not look out your
windows.*

Kevin unlocks the car doors as instructed. Waits for the knock...

KEVIN

All right. How long do we have to
wait --

Before he finishes his question, there's a loud knock on the driver side window.

Willy jerks back in his seat, startled.

ON THE MONITOR: The Sickly Man stands outside the driver side door.

A gnarled hand continues to knock on the window.

Kevin stares into the camera with fearful eyes.

KEVIN
It's real! It's real!

His hands tremble as he attempts to read the next set of instructions, fumbling over his words...

The driver side window shatters.

A long tentacle slithers into the car.

KEVIN
Aaaaaah! Help me!

SUDDENLY --

The flash drive in Willy's laptop sparks and pops like a firecracker.

Willy leaps out of his seat.

WILLY
Aaah!

Smoke plumes from the laptop input and wafts toward the ceiling, sets off the smoke alarm...

INT. MENTAL HEALTH CENTER/REC ROOM - DAY

A young man with long hair and ripped jeans DYLAN (20s) carries a bag of fast food.

ANGELO (40s) sits at a small table, stares blankly out the window.

DYLAN
Dad, I got your favorite. Double
cheeseburger. No pickles.

Angelo continues to gaze out the window, seemingly unaware of someone speaking.

Dylan pulls out the food, lays it out on the table.

DYLAN
Your team won today. Thought you'd
wanna know that. They're pretty
good this year. Good enough to make
the playoffs, I think. We'll see...

His words hang in the air.

DYLAN

I told you about Roger Helm, the
rookie from Philadelphia. He blew
out his knee on his second game.

(beat)

When that happened to me in the
ninth grade, you ran out there and
carried me off the field like I
weighed nothing.

Dylan sits beside his father. Angelo's eyes remain fixed on a
world that only he can see.

DYLAN

And that night, you sat on the edge
of my bed, and you played your
guitar. You said if music can heal
King Saul over night, maybe it'll
do the same for me.

Dylan places a gentle hand on Angelo's arm. He takes a deep
breath, keeps his emotions in check.

DYLAN

Love you, dad.

INT. DYLAN'S HOUSE/GARAGE - LATER

Dylan strums an electric guitar.

Willy enters through a side door. Dylan spots him and ceases.

WILLY

Hey.

Dylan's death glare says it all.

WILLY

I know, I know. I shouldn't be
here. But look, Dylan. I'm --

Dylan turns up the amp volume and strums over Willy's voice.

WILLY

I'm sorry for how things went down
between us. I apologize for letting
you go.

DYLAN

There had to be a good reason why
you did it! And I wanna hear it!

Dylan thrashes his guitar.

DYLAN
Say it, Willy!

WILLY
What's it matter now?! I just want
it to be over! Forgive and forget!

DYLAN
You weren't betrayed by the ones
closest to you! It's really hard to
forget something like that! Now say
why you did it!

WILLY
All right! All right!

Willy drops his head, debates what he should say...

WILLY
I was -- I was jealous.

DYLAN
I can't hear you!

WILLY
I said I was jealous!

DYLAN
It kinda sounded like you said you
were *jealous*!

WILLY
Yes! I am pathetically envious!

DYLAN
I'm not sure why!

WILLY
You know why!

DYLAN
Maybe I do! Maybe I don't!

WILLY
Because Candice was head over heels
for you, and it tore me up! And I
knew Kevin wouldn't stand for it,
so I told him! The next thing I
know, you were out!

Dylan stops playing.

WILLY

I can't say it enough. I'm really sorry. It was all me. I take all the blame. All of it. I really, really suck.

DYLAN

Yes, you do.

WILLY

I apologize.

DYLAN

Eh.

Dylan sets his guitar aside.

DYLAN

So, what do you want?

WILLY

Kevin's missing. And you're the only one who can help.

Willy pulls out the gaming rulebook. Dylan's eyes widen with shock.

WILLY

He played this game last night. Raum's Purging Grounds.

DYLAN

How'd you get that?

WILLY

Kevin found it.

Willy hands the rulebook to Dylan.

DYLAN

You don't find something like this.

WILLY

We were recording a segment for our show. The elevator game. And then this shows up.

DYLAN

This rulebook is an invitation...

INT. DYLAN'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - LATER

Dylan walks to his closet. Rummages through a crate of old record albums. Pulls one out. Hands it to Willy. Séance.

The album cover bares the band name: "BONEYARD SÉANCE."

DYLAN

My dad and his brother, Greg,
started this band.

Willy opens the album cover. The inside shows the same incantations as the gaming rulebook.

DYLAN

My uncle Greg got mixed up with
things this world was never meant
to see.

Dylan points to the title: "RAUM'S GAME."

Willy glances over the display of lyrics and reads aloud.

WILLY

*Stay awhile, my friends, yeah,
climb on in/ Come play, retrieve
your kin/ Without redemption,
prepare to stay/Kin redeems kin/
Come play, come play, come play...*

Willy looks up, puzzled by its meaning.

Dylan reads his face and gestures the gaming rulebook.

DYLAN

This game has two roles. Redeemers
and captives. Raum left this
behind, knowing Kevin would play.

WILLY

How do we get him back?

DYLAN

You have to be blood-related to
pull someone out.

WILLY

How do you know all this?

Dylan gestures to the album.

Willy's confusion gives way to concern.

DYLAN
 One day, my dad went missing.
 (beat)
 Like Kevin...

EXT. RAUM'S PURGING GROUNDS/GROVE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

GREG, PETER, and DIANE (30s) dart through the trees.

Something large and inhuman chases them.

Up ahead, a lone tree emerges. Its trunk pale, bark peeling.
 A rotted sign hangs crooked from a rusted nail. It reads:

"ALMOST THERE."

Greg and Peter race forward. Diane trails behind.

DIANE
 Wait up!

Diane stumbles over a mummified corpse. She scrambles to her feet.

DIANE
 Greg! Peter! Don't leave me!
 Please! Come back!

Greg barrels ahead, vanishing between the trees. Peter stops dead, sprints back toward Diane.

Peter gestures a small gaming rulebook in his hand.

PETER
 You know the rule, Diane! We stop,
 we die! Let's go!

The thundering footfalls cease. An eerie silence hangs in the air.

Peter and Diane exchange bewildered glances.

DIANE
 I don't hear it anymore.

PETER
 'Cause it's too late.

WHOOSH!

A scythe blade glints in the pale light.

Peter's head lands next to Diane's feet, mouth agape in a silent scream. His lifeless eyes gaze up at her.

Diane screams. She snatches the gaming rulebook from Peter's hand and runs off.

The blade whistles passed her head.

The SCYTHE WIELDER closes in...

Diane sees a break in the woods ahead of her. She flits through the trees and finds herself in a clearing.

EXT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/FRONT GATE - CONTINUOUS

Diane collapses, exhausted and drained.

The scythe wielder stands at the edge of the grove as if barred from pursuing. It unleashes a guttural snarl.

Diane struggles to her feet. She turns her back on the dark figure. She spots Greg. He has collapsed, curled in on himself. His knees are pulled tight to his chest, elbows locked around his head as if trying to hold his skull together.

DIANE

Greg! You left us! You left us,
damn you!

WHOOSH!

The scythe splits her in two.

The gaming rulebook flings from her hand mid-flight.

Diane's legs hit the ground, twitching and contorting.

The rulebook drops right beside Greg's feet.

END FLASHBACK

INT. DYLAN'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - DAY

Dylan takes the album from Willy. Stares at it like it's something he wishes he could forget.

DYLAN

My uncle managed to bring my dad
back.

Dylan's thumb traces the edges of the worn album sleeve.

DYLAN

I've thought about burning this more times than I can count, but... it's all I got left of my dad's voice. The real him. When he was the happiest.

Dylan finally slides the album back in the crate. Slams his closet door.

DYLAN

Candice is exactly what Raum wants. He feeds on despair. She's the perfect entrée.

WILLY

We gotta find some way to get her to play.

DYLAN

Listen. That place didn't just scare my dad, it hollowed him out. He's still breathing, but he's gone.

(beat)

And my uncle... he couldn't carry it any longer.

(beat)

Leave it alone, Willy. Candice is better off.

WILLY

Kevin is all she's got left. If he's gone, too, I don't know what that does to her, Dylan.

A contemplative beat.

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - LATER

Candice sits on the couch, phone in hand, thumb hovering over Kevin's name. She hits call. It rings. Goes straight to voicemail.

CANDICE

Hey, Kev. Me again. Hope you didn't do anything stupid last night.

(frustrated sigh)

Give me a call when you get this, okay?

She ends the call. Sets the phone on the coffee table. Her hands tremble, barely noticeable. She presses them between her knees.

The house creaks. A normal sound, but it makes her flinch.

She stares at her phone, waiting for it to light up.

It does. An incoming call.

For a split second, hope flickers across her face until she sees the caller ID: "Potential Spam."

The hope drains. Her jaw tightens.

Then, the doorbell...

...the melodic tune fills the house.

Candice springs from the couch. Peeks out the window. Unlocks her door and opens it.

It's Willy.

WILLY

Hi, Candice.

CANDICE

Hey, Willy. Is Kevin with you?

WILLY

Uhh...

Candice reads his troubled look.

WILLY

Well, that's what I came to see you about. I, uhh, need to tell you something.

CANDICE

What's wrong? Is he okay?

WILLY

It's probably best if I show you.

Willy pulls out the gaming rulebook. Hands it to Candice.

WILLY

Kevin played this game last night. I told him not to, but you know how your brother is, he doesn't listen to anybody. This book has instructions, like a RPG game.

WILLY (CONT'D)

It has scenarios with rules. You follow the rules, you're safe. You break 'em, and, I dunno, there's consequences...

Willy grows hesitant in continuing, but then --

WILLY

Well, I think... he might be trapped. Inside the game.

CANDICE

Is this some sick joke? I've been waiting on his call all morning.

WILLY

I know this sounds crazy, but it's true. It's all on video. I found his camera in his car this morning. And I pulled the flash drive. But then it went up in smoke right after something grabbed him, whatever this thing was, it broke through his window and took him and then --

CANDICE

Willy, just stop. Please.

WILLY

I'm not lying. I wouldn't do that to you. I know how ridiculous this may seem. You gotta believe me.

Candice takes a moment to gather her thoughts.

CANDICE

You said you saw his car.

WILLY

Yeah. At Auglaize Forest.

CANDICE

Why didn't you call the police if you knew something was wrong?

WILLY

What would I tell them? Kevin is locked away inside Jumanji? They'd stick me in a padded room.

Willy reaches for her wrist.

WILLY

If you wanna see him alive, you're gonna have to come with me.

Candice pulls away. Slams the door. Deadbolts all the locks.

WILLY (O.S.)

Candice?! What're you doing?!

Willy pounds on the door.

Candice flinches.

WILLY (O.S.)

Candice!

CANDICE

Stop, Willy! You're scaring me!

WILLY (O.S.)

I need you to believe me!

CANDICE

I want you to leave!

WILLY (O.S.)

Candice!

Candice snatches her phone from the couch. She approaches the window, already dialing. She presses the phone to her ear.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)

911, what's your emergency?

CANDICE

I need you to send someone to 732 Main St., hurry please!

WILLY (O.S.)

Candice! I didn't hurt him! I'm leaving now! I'm going! Please, don't --

Candice peeks through the curtains.

Outside, Willy is in her yard, hands raised, desperate. His voice is muffled but urgent.

WILLY

I need you to believe me!

Willy rushes off to his car. The engine roars to life. He speeds away, taillights disappearing.

Candice stands frozen at the window.

INT. POLICE STATION/INTEROGATION ROOM - LATER

A one-way mirror window reflects Willy's tense posture. He sits across from a DETECTIVE (50s).

DETECTIVE

How do you know Candice Robin?

WILLY

I'm best friends with her brother. We've known each other since grade school.

DETECTIVE

She has reason to believe that something tragic might've happened to him, and suspects that you were involved.

WILLY

I believe something horrible happened to him, yes. But I had nothing to do with it.

DETECTIVE

She told us where we'd find his vehicle. She got that information from you.

(glances at file)

Auglaize Forest. His car was pretty banged up. Want to fill me in?

A contemplative beat.

WILLY

I, uhh, want my lawyer.

BEHIND THE ONE-WAY WINDOW

Candice watches, her face etched with concern. She chews on a fingernail. The CHIEF OF POLICE (60s) stands beside her.

CHIEF OF POLICE

He's absolutely convinced that your brother is trapped inside some game. I must admit, it's quite an unusual story, unlike anything I've ever heard.

(beat)

CHIEF OF POLICE (CONT'D)

We dispatched an officer to investigate his apartment and the report confirmed that the flash drive mentioned was destroyed. Unfortunately, any potential evidence it may have contained is now irretrievable. I have a strong feeling he attempted to dispose of incriminating evidence.

Candice's breathing grows uneven as she leans closer to the one-way window. She tries to steady her trembling hands.

CHIEF OF POLICE

I understand this is rough for you, Candice. We're going to do our best to find your brother.

CANDICE

Thank you.

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Candice sits at the kitchen table, cradles a cup of tea. Her laptop is open. It displays multiple images of Kevin.

She takes a shaky sip of her tea, the steam momentarily shrouds her face. The worry lines deepen on her forehead.

The photos capture Kevin's infectious smile, his vibrant personality shines through each snapshot.

She pauses at a childhood photo of her and Kevin standing in front of their mother. Their arms draped over shoulders -- siblings but best buddies.

CANDICE

(under breath)

Oh, Kevin, I need to know you're safe.

The gaming rulebook lies on the kitchen counter. It slides off, lands next to her feet. She picks it up. Gives it a glance. Ponders its existence, then flings it into the wastebasket.

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/HALLWAY - LATER

Candice turns off the hallway light. Her nightlights turn on. She heads to her bedroom with her tea...

As she passes the nightlights, they pulsate.

A faint WHISPER calls to her: "*Candice.*"

She spins around.

A nightlight bursts, startling her.

She drops her tea cup. It shatters on the floor.

LATER

The hallway light is on. Candice sweeps up the shards.

There's a faint knock on her front door.

She sets the broom and dust pan aside.

The knocks become urgent.

CANDICE
I'm coming!

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Candice glances out a window. Her vision is skewed from her standpoint. She sees the sideview of SOMEONE in black robes.

The outside light shuts off. Then flickers back on.

Off again, on again...

off.

On.

Off.

Candice turns from the window just as the light turns on.

The ghastly face of

THE SICKLY MAN

stares inside, his wicked eyes gaze at her.

The light flickers back off.

Candice faces the window just as it flickers back on, but the Sickly Man is nowhere to be seen.

SUDDENLY --

Someone tries to kick the door in.

Candice retreats from the door. Retrieves her cell phone.
Dials 911.

A guttural VOICE answers on the other end.

SICKLY MAN (O.S.)
Candice! Candice! Shall I come in
and count your bones?!

The voice ends with malevolent laughter intermingled with a
goat's bleating.

The door continues to shake as the kicks persist.

Candice hurls the phone. The laughter grows with intensity.

CANDICE
Go away! Stop it! Stop it! Stop!

She covers her ears and screams...

SUDDENLY --

Complete silence. Not a single sound.

The door bell rings, releasing soothing music into the
atmosphere...

Candice hears a familiar voice at the front door.

DYLAN (O.S.)
Hello? Candice? Are you okay?

Candice peeks out a window. Sees Dylan.

CANDICE
Why the hell are you pounding on my
door like that?!

DYLAN (O.S.)
I wasn't.

CANDICE
What do you want?!

DYLAN (O.S.)
I heard about your brother. And I
just came by to check on you, to
see if you were okay. Figured you
might need someone to talk to, I
don't know. I would've called, but
I don't have your number.

Candice glances at her cell phone. The screen is shattered.

CANDICE

Well, I'm not okay! I'm far from being okay!

DYLAN (O.S.)

Hey, listen. I can tell this isn't a good time. I'm gonna head out.

(beat)

I didn't mean to bother you. Guess, I'll see ya 'round.

Candice watches as Dylan turns to leave. She gains her composure and decides to unlock the door. She cracks it open just enough to see him.

CANDICE

Wait.

Dylan stops, turns back.

CANDICE

You don't have to go.

DYLAN

I know about your house rules, and I totally respect that. If you're more comfortable, we can just talk out here.

CANDICE

It's chilly.

DYLAN

Yeah. It is.

Candice's grip on the door loosens. She opens it a little wider, still cautious, but no longer hiding behind it.

CANDICE

Would you --

(gathers herself)

Would you like to come inside?

Dylan is caught off guard by the offer. Candice reads his hesitation.

CANDICE

Kevin says I should make exceptions to my rulebook.

Candice steps aside, giving him space.

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - SAME

Dylan enters. Regards the decor.

DYLAN
Nice place.

CANDICE
Still needs a lot of work. But it's
getting there.

Dylan glances at the painting of the farmhouse and cornfield.

When he looks away, we see a DARK FIGURE lurking in the
cornfield. It moves.

CANDICE
I have tea. Want some?

DYLAN
Sure. Thanks.

Candice heads to the kitchen. Dylan follows.

IN THE KITCHEN

Candice spots the gaming rulebook on the table. She picks it
up, inspects it. Glances at the wastebasket, confused.

Dylan reads her puzzled demeanor.

CANDICE
I could've sworn I threw this in
the -- Eh, nevermind.

Dylan watches her toss the rulebook back into the
wastebasket.

CANDICE
Sorry about earlier. I didn't mean
to snap like that.

DYLAN
Forget it.

CANDICE
I'm not sure what's happening, but
I think this new medication I'm
taking has me hearing things.
Seeing things that aren't there.

She sets the pot for tea.

SUDDENLY --

Dylan covers her mouth with a cloth.

DYLAN

I'm sorry about this, Candice.

Candice tries to break free, but he holds his grip until her eyes close. Her body goes limp.

Dylan lies her gently on the floor, then retrieves the rulebook from the trash.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Dylan drives his car. The headlights barely illuminate the road. He pulls up to a dead end and parks. Turns off the engine.

INSIDE DYLAN'S CAR

Candice blinks opens her eyes. She looks around, trying to make sense of what just happened.

Dylan glances at the time on his cell phone -- a few minutes until midnight. The gaming rulebook lies on the dashboard.

Candice half-focuses her eyes. She's drowsy, still under the spell of an inhaled chemical. Her hands and feet are bound with duct tape.

CANDICE

Dylan? W-w-what are you doing?

DYLAN

It's not your medication. The things you're seeing are real. Willy tried to tell you.

CANDICE

Please, don't hurt --

DYLAN

I promise, I'm not going to hurt you.

Dylan consults the time again -- it's midnight. He grabs the rulebook. Skims the instructions. Unlocks his doors.

DYLAN

It'll all make sense in a minute.
This is what your brother was doing
when he went missing.

Candice tries to shift her body, attempting to free herself from the restraints. Her struggle only intensifies her fear.

CANDICE

Please, Dylan. Just let me go. I
won't tell anyone.

DYLAN

We're going to hear a knock.
Whatever you do, don't look out the
window. It's part of the rules.
Okay? There's consequences to every
rule we break. Some are more severe
than others.

CANDICE

Let me go. Please.

As she speaks, her voice grows stronger...

CANDICE

Dylan, please!

DYLAN

I know you're scared. I didn't want
to do this, but I really didn't
have another choice.

Candice gathers strength, squirms in her restraints.

DYLAN

I'll let you go, I promise. But I
need you to see something first.

CANDICE

I don't want to see anything!

Dylan glances at his cell phone -- it's midnight.

A single knock hits the driver-side window.

Then another.

Then a third.

The knocks layer and overlap until they sound like hail
hammering the car. Too fast and too many to be hands.

The game has begun...

INT. DYLAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS (RAUM'S PURGING GROUNDS)

Candice, unable to resist, looks out her window and sees something so hideous, she lets out a gut-wrenching scream.

DYLAN

Don't look! Don't look!

The passenger-side window shatters. Tentacles slither in and attempt to yank Candice out.

Dylan starts the engine. Throws it in reverse. Steps on the gas.

The tentacles release their grip on Candice.

DYLAN

I told you not to look!

CANDICE

What's going on?!

DYLAN

Kevin is trapped inside this place!
This is Raum's Purging Grounds!

CANDICE

Stop the car! Let me out!

DYLAN

I can't! We're part of the game
now!

CANDICE

You and Willy are in on this! What
did you do to Kevin?!

DYLAN

Listen to me! If you wanna see him
again, you need to trust me! I'm
gonna help you find him!

Dylan backs out onto the highway.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Dylan throws his car into drive and speeds away.

DYLAN

Those things broke through the
windows, because you looked.

Dylan holds up the gaming rulebook.

DYLAN
Our lives depend on following these
rules!

Dylan reaches a crossroads and slams on the breaks. The roads seem identical, each leading to depthless dark.

CANDICE
Untie me! Now! I want out!

Dylan removes the duct tape from around her wrists. She tears off the tape from around her ankles...

EXT. CROSSROADS - SAME

Once her restraints come off, Candice dashes out of the car.

DYLAN
Candice, wait!

Candice regards the four crossroad signs: North, South, East, and West. She aimlessly wanders East.

Dylan gets out of the car and chases after her.

DYLAN
It's not safe out there!

CANDICE
Leave me alone!

DYLAN
Candice! Come back! I'm trying to
help you!

CANDICE
Kidnapping me and bringing me to
the middle of nowhere?! That's your
idea of help?!

DYLAN
It was the only thing I could think
of to get you here! I'm trying to
save your brother!

CANDICE
You're a deranged lunatic! Just
keep the hell away from me!

Dylan refrains from his pursuit. He calls out...

DYLAN
Candice! There's more of those
things out there! Worst things!

She continues on...

DYLAN
Candice!

Dylan watches as the darkness envelops her.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATER

Candice glances over her shoulder. Sees nothing but darkness.
Something approaches...

She hears a squeaky bicycle wheel.

It's followed by a faint bell jingle.

From the darkness, a hallow VOICE speaks...

THE VENDOR (O.S.)
I just love the smell of warm
candy.

The voice is followed by a series of bell jingles.

THE VENDOR, a human-shaped ghoul, enters the dim light on an
old-style ice cream vending bicycle.

The ghoul pedals toward Candice.

THE VENDOR (O.S.)
A new limited edition flavor.

Candice backs away.

The ghoul stops pedaling. Senses something. Or someone? It
slowly turns and faces us.

THE VENDOR
How interesting. It seems, you've
brought along some extra eyes.

The ghoul returns its attention to Candice.

THE VENDOR
(recites a poem)
They call me the vendor, he-he/
I give and I take away, he-he/
I keep things on ice/

THE VENDOR (CONT'D)
 Deliver for the right price/
 And that's all there is to know
 about me.

CANDICE
 What do you want?

THE VENDOR
 Your first inquiry was a freebee.
 But the second one...

The ghoul climbs off the bicycle. Approaches the rear of the ice box. Opens a hatch. Pulls out a severed arm and leg.

THE VENDOR (CONT'D)
 ...will cost you an arm and leg.

Candice screams. Falls backward into a ditch. Lands in murky water. She springs up.

The ghoul turns and gazes directly at us. Chucks the bloodied limbs in our direction. After malevolent laughter, it turns its attention to Candice.

CANDICE
 Get away from me, you freak!

THE VENDOR
 Oh, you have it all wrong, *candy girl*. You came here on your own accord. I never went looking for you.
 (beat)
 And the same goes for your guests.

The ghoul motions in our direction, then returns its attention to the ice box.

THE VENDOR
 You look like you could use some cheering up. I know an upside down smile when I see one.

CANDICE
 Leave me alone!

The ghoul opens a second hatch.

THE VENDOR
 Ice cream works wonders.

CANDICE
 I don't want anything from you!

The ghoull pulls out a hand saw with dried blood. Turns to Candice with a grim smile.

THE VENDOR

I was talking to myself.

Candice notices movement in the water. Tentacles emerge and slither around her legs. She screams, unable to move.

The ghoull positions itself leisurely on the bicycle. Takes up the hand saw.

The tentacles tighten their grip, Candice attempts to pull away, but it's futile.

THE VENDOR

Consider yourself fortunate. Your game begins on the South road. Had it been the East road, I'd mince you into itty-bitty pieces.

(beat)

But rules are rules. I'm obligated to send you off. Tah-tah.

The tentacles release their grip on Candice and retreat below the water's surface, leaving only ripples behind.

Candice crawls out of the ditch and dashes toward the crossroads without looking back.

EXT. CROSSROADS - MINUTES LATER

Dylan sits on the hood of his car, in deep thought.

A strange sound interrupts the silence, followed by a faint bicycle bell.

Dylan looks around. Sees nothing...

DYLAN

Candice?

The squeak of a bicycle tire.

The bell sounds a little louder this time.

Footfalls race toward him.

DYLAN

Candice?

Candice enters the light.

DYLAN

Candice!

Dylan opens his arms, assuming she'd fall into them. She bypasses him. Leaps into the car. Slams the door shut.

INT. DYLAN'S CAR - LATER

Dylan and Candice eye the contents of the gaming rulebook.

CANDICE

...And so now, Willy's in jail, because of me. There was a part of me that wanted to believe him, but...

DYLAN

You couldn't have known.

CANDICE

It's all my fault.

DYLAN

Hey, don't beat yourself up. I would've done the same thing. This whole thing is bizarre.

CANDICE

There has to be another way to find Kevin. There just has to be.

DYLAN

If I could take your place, I would. In a heartbeat. But only you can bring him back. That's the main rule.

Dylan studies the rulebook, skims a few instructions.

DYLAN

We shouldn't waste any more time. Are you ready to play?

CANDICE

No.

DYLAN

Same here.

Dylan turns the ignition. The engine fires up.

CANDICE

Just so you know, before we go forward. The meds I'm on is the reason I'm not balling up right now. I don't know how soon, but it's gonna wear off.

Dylan reaches over and grabs her hand. He gives her a reassuring nod.

DYLAN

I'll be with you every step of the way.

(beat)

Now let's go get your brother and get the hell outta here.

Dylan skims through a rulebook page, then looks at the directional signs. His focus: The South.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATER

Dylan speeds down the highway.

DYLAN

There's something in there about picking up a hitchhiker.

He hands over the rulebook.

Candice reads the instructions to the first scenario...

CANDICE

Pick up the hitchhiker. Do not look at his face. Drop him off.

(beat)

There's nothing else.

DYLAN

The main thing is, we don't look at whoever or whatever climbs inside. Just keep your head down.

CANDICE

Okay.

In the distance, they see a HITCHHIKER waving their thumb. A fedora shrouds the hitchhiker's face. Dylan pulls up and comes to a stop. The hitchhiker climbs inside, carrying a guitar case.

THE HITCHHIKER

Thanks for stoppin'. Didn't think
anyone'd bother this time of night.
Never can be too careful, I get it.
I've been out here for a season and
a half, it seems.

(beat)

Lovely night. Wouldn't you say?

Dylan nods.

THE HITCHHIKER

Headin' South. Me, too.

The hitchhiker laughs.

THE HITCHHIKER

Just like birds flockin' together.
Searching for comfort. Others
searching for love.

Dylan pulls onto the highway.

THE HITCHHIKER

What are y'all searching for?

DYLAN

Nothing. Just out for a drive.

THE HITCHHIKER

Out for a drive. Hmmm.

DYLAN

Yes, sir.

THE HITCHHIKER

I went out for a drive late one
night, and never made it back
home...

Through the rearview mirror, we see a mangled body with
twisted limbs and torn clothes; thus, the garbling voice.

THE HITCHHIKER

I was fixin' to see someone about
showing me a thing or two about
guitars. They weren't there, so I
turned and came back. Y'all know
how to play guitar?

Candice shakes her head.

THE HITCHHIKER

How 'bout you, young man?

DYLAN

A little.

THE HITCHHIKER

Oh, I'd say you know more than you're lettin' on.

DYLAN

You wouldn't be wrong.

THE HITCHHIKER

Humility has no place in a world like this. Learn to puff out your chest a little. Same goes for you, missy. Take my word for it.

The hitchhiker leans forward, taps Candice on the shoulder.

THE HITCHHIKER

I'm willin' to bet you got music in your bones.

CANDICE

(stammers)

I, uhh, play -- play piano.

THE HITCHHIKER

I'm sorry, sweetness. Didn't catch that. Gotta speak up.

CANDICE

I play piano.

THE HITCHHIKER

Ahh, the piano. My grandmother tickled the ivories for many years. And what a sweet soul she was. I never saw her without a smile. Good woman. Good. Very good. Boy, I miss 'er.

(beat)

Now, my grandfather, not so much. Don't miss 'im one bit. He loved the bottle. That was his heart. His joy. His forte... And he passed it onto my father, and I watched my ol' man become a monster. And that monster passed it onto me. Then my poor boy was raised by one. A monster.

(beat)

You know a thing or two about the bottle, don't ya, Candice? A thing or two about... *monsters*.

Dylan glances at Candice. Tears roll down her cheeks. She wipes them away. More tears flow.

DYLAN

Where do you -- Where do you want
dropped off?

The hitchhiker leans forward.

A twisted arm reaches over the driver's seat. The hitchhiker grabs Dylan's hair and yanks his head back. The car swerves momentarily.

THE HITCHHIKER

(guttural)

She sheds a few tears and that
gives you the guts to play hero!

The hitchhiker releases him.

Candice fights the urge to look at the hitchhiker. Dylan glances at Candice, wags his head, dissuading her. He lips the words: "No. Don't."

The hitchhiker's voice is suddenly garbled as if they're choking on their own blood.

THE HITCHHIKER

Yeah! Look at me, Candice! Look and
see how the bottle returns its
love. Look! A peek won't hurt ya!
Look at me, Candice! Look at me!

The hitchhiker's voice is muffled with gurgles.

THE HITCHHIKER

*Can-dissssssss. Can-dissssssss. Can-
dissssssss.*

The hitchhiker points at a car wrapped around a utility pole. Smoke ascends from a busted radiator.

THE HITCHHIKER

Right there. That's my stop.

Dylan pulls over at the site. The hitchhiker climbs out. Shuts the door. Enters the wreckage and repositions as if they never left the scene of the accident. A horrendous mess.

Candice dabs at her eyes.

DYLAN

You okay?

CANDICE
Can we go, please.

Dylan pulls onto the highway.

LATER

Candice opens the rulebook, skims the next set of instructions...

CANDICE
All it says is drive.

DYLAN
We're already driving.

CANDICE
That's all it says.

Candice turns the page.

CANDICE
Wait. Here's something...
(reads)
Fast is not fast enough --

She is cut off by the car stereo. Static at first, then a brief message: *"Let's see what you got, highway star."*

The radio turns off.

After a few miles...

The radio turns back on, begins to surf channels on its own. Each channel repeats the same word: *"FASTER!"*

Then it transitions in reverse: *"RETSAF!"*

Then forward: *"FASTER!"*

Reverse: *"RETSAF!"*

The volume rises. Candice attempts to turn it down -- the more she tries, the louder it becomes...

A CHORAL SYMPHONY accompanies: *"FASTER! RETSAF! FASTER! RETSAF!"*

Dylan steps on it. Candice buckles her safety belt.

FASTER! RETSAF! FASTER! RETSAF!

DYLAN
Candice! Read the page!

FASTER! RETSAF! FASTER! RETSAF!

Candice brings herself to open the rulebook. Reads the next instructions aloud...

CANDICE
Fast is not fast enough! Do not stop! She will stop you!

DYLAN
That's it?!

CANDICE
Yes!

The speedometer begins to climb.

The choral chant continues...

FASTER! RETSAF! FASTER! RETSAF!

They approach trees on both sides. Their eyes are peeled, anticipating anything.

The radio flips off.

After a long while, they grow weary. Nothing out of the ordinary takes place.

DYLAN
There's gotta be something we're missing.

The radio flips on with another message: "*Fly, birdie, fly!*"

DYLAN
(reiterating to self)
Fast is not fast enough.

He contemplates the words on the page.

DYLAN
We gotta go faster.

He fastens his safety belt and floors it.

In a matter of moments, they're at top speed. Candice closes her eyes, grips the support handles.

The radio: "*Open your eyes, Candice!*"

She squints one eye open.

DYLAN
Follow the rules! Open 'em!

Candice opens her eyes.

SUDDENLY --

A young GIRL (10) bolts out of the woods, scurries across the highway...

Candice SHRIEKS.

Dylan hits the brakes, veers the car to avoid the girl. The tires SCREECH.

The car spins violently out of control, careens through the trees before vanishing

INSIDE A FOREST

where the car comes to a halt. The engine continues to run.

Candice is disoriented. Blood streaks down the side of her face. She faces Dylan. He's motionless, eyes closed.

CANDICE
Dylan?

She shakes him.

Nothing.

She unbuckles her seatbelt. Shakes him again. He groans in pain. His eyes blink open.

CANDICE
You're alive.

DYLAN
I'm not so sure if that's a good thing.

CANDICE
It is for me.

Dylan throws the car in reverse. Presses the gas. The wheels spin, kicking up dirt and sinking deeper into the soil.

DYLAN
Come on, come on!

He shifts it into drive, but the result is the same -- the tires sink.

DYLAN

It's not going anywhere.

They exit. The trees begin to rustle, a sense of unease washes over them.

From the shadows, the young girl emerges. Something unsettling lingers about her demeanor.

She giggles.

DYLAN

Who -- who're you?

The young girl refrains from answering.

In the distance, a deafening ROAR echoes in the night sky. Followed by FOOTFALLS, charging in their direction.

The girl grins malevolently.

DYLAN

Let's go, Candice. We gotta get back to the road.

Dylan winces in pain, struggles to walk. Candice notices his discomfort.

CANDICE

You okay?

DYLAN

I'll manage.

Candice aids him back to the highway.

The young girl follows...

EXT. HIGHWAY/EDGE OF FOREST - MINUTES LATER

Candice and Dylan emerge from the woods. They spot a dark house on a hill. A small dirt path leads up to it.

The trees begin to sway, growing louder... A whooshing sound cuts through the air.

YOUNG GIRL

It's coming for you.

DYLAN
Come on, Candice. We have to go.

Dylan limps up the dirt path.

CANDICE
Wait! The instructions! I left them
in the car!

She rushes back to the car in search of the rulebook.

Meanwhile, the young girl approaches Dylan.

YOUNG GIRL
Look at you, pretending to be
brave. We're going to get you. Just
like we'll get her. Just like we
got your cousins... *Doug, Gale,*
Peter, and Diane. We get everyone.

DYLAN
Shut up! Get away from me!

The heavy footfalls gain momentum...

DYLAN
Candice! Let's go!

The whooshing sound grows louder and louder...

DYLAN
Come on! Forget the rulebook! Just
leave it! We have to go!

Candice bursts out the woods, the rulebook in hand.

CANDICE
I got it!

She drapes Dylan's arm over her shoulder and aids him up the path.

The swaying of the trees tapers to dead silence.

YOUNG GIRL
Oh, darn. No bones.

The young girl returns to the forest, disappearing in the thickness of the trees.

EXT. THE MARWOOD HOME/DIRT PATH - CONTINUOUS

Candice and Dylan head up the trail.

The house is dark. A candle illuminates the front porch.

EXT. THE MARWOOD HOME/FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Candice assists Dylan up the stairs.

They attempt to gaze through the front door window -- it's pitch black inside.

At the far end of the porch, Dylan peeks through a small window. Sees the soft glow of an old television set. Across from the TV sits an elderly COUPLE on a dingy couch, their silhouettes emanating.

DYLAN

There's people inside there.

Candice glances in the rulebook.

CANDICE

This is the home of Mr. and Mrs.
Marwood.

She reads the current set of rules...

CANDICE

*When they leave, redeemer takes the
key. Don't let the candle burn out.*

Candice knocks on the front door.

A light comes on inside.

MRS. MARWOOD (80s) approaches the front door. Opens it. Peers out. Appears to see nothing.

CANDICE

Uhh, hello.

Mrs. Marwood's **POV**: no one stands outside her door.

MRS. MARWOOD

Is someone there?

CANDICE

Hi. I'm Candice. This is Dylan.

Mrs. Marwood shuts the door in their face.

The inside lights go out.

CANDICE

I don't think she saw us. Maybe,
she's blind.

DYLAN

Deaf, too.

CANDICE

Let's try this again.

Candice knocks. The lights come on.

Mrs. Marwood opens the door, peers out.

MRS. MARWOOD

Who's out there?

DYLAN

Hello, Mrs. Marwood --

Mrs. Marwood turns and calls to her husband.

MRS. MARWOOD

It's happening again!

MR. MARWOOD (80s) steps out onto the porch, bypassing Dylan
and Candice.

DYLAN

All right. Something is definitely
wrong here.

Mr. Marwood looks around, appears to see no one.

MR. MARWOOD

Come on out! Show yourself!

Mr. Marwood reenters the home and reaches for the doorknob to
shut the door, but Dylan holds it open.

MR. MARWOOD

This blasted thing!

Mr. Marwood struggles to shut the door.

MR. MARWOOD

It's always getting stuck!

Dylan releases the door. It slams shut.

DYLAN

They can't see us.

CANDICE

Or hear us.

DYLAN

(reiterates the rules)

When they leave, redeemer takes the key.

CANDICE

What do you think it means?

DYLAN

Maybe, we gotta draw them out.

Dylan opens the door and barges in. Candice follows.

INT. THE MARWOOD HOME/DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The house lights flick on.

Candice and Dylan see a dinner table.

Cardboard boxes tower to the ceiling. Piles of miscellaneous items. Stacks of newspapers, magazines, and used PAINT CANS.

In one of the corners, stands an eerie sculptured CLOWN BUST on a plinth. It's EYES continually glare at us.

CANDICE

I hate clowns.

Dylan gives it a quick glance, then moves on...

Candice stumbles over a pile of items, bumps into a column of boxes -- they tumble over.

Mr. and Mrs. Marwood embrace each other, petrified. A look of empathy spreads on Candice's face.

CANDICE

Look how scared they are.

Dylan considers her assumption, then...

DYLAN

That shouldn't matter. They're just characters, playing their part.

CANDICE

You could be wrong.

DYLAN

I'm just trying to stick to the
game rules.

He overturns the dinner table. Dishes and utensils crash on the floor. Tears stream down Mrs. Marwood's cheeks -- she clutches a rosary, holding it close to her heart.

A look of guilt washes over Candice.

Dylan pushes over another column of boxes. They tumble onto the floor, contents spill out.

Mr. Marwood comforts Mrs. Marwood with a tight embrace. Their lips quiver in silent prayer.

Their fright triggers something within Candice. She can no longer bare to look at them and exits the house.

EXT. THE MARWOOD HOME/FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Candice wipes her teary eyes.

Dylan steps out.

DYLAN

(soft)
Candice.

She looks at him, choked with emotion.

CANDICE

I can't get over the feeling that
they're trapped here. Like, what if
this is their personal Hell?

(beat)

The hitchhiker talked about having
a grandfather, a father, even a
son. What if they died drinking and
driving? And now they have to live
with that regret over and over.

DYLAN

That hitchhiker was waiting to kill
us. These people could be just as
dangerous.

CANDICE

Maybe. I dunno.

DYLAN

I'm here for you and Kevin, so whatever you want me to do, I'm willing to do. But we gotta figure something out soon, 'cause that candle's about to burn out.

Candice glances at the candle, the flame gradually diminishes...

INT. THE MARWOOD HOME/LIVING ROOM - LATER

An old, large television set occupies a spot on a dusty entertainment center. The screen flickers with static, casting an eerie glow.

The Marwood couple sit on the couch, their eyes fixed on the television. On the far wall, hangs a family photo -- a time when they were young and vibrant. The young girl between them is familiar -- she's the same pestering young girl from outside, only she hasn't aged like her parents.

The faint sounds of an old talk show and audience emanates from the television.

Mr. Marwood leans forward, squinting at the screen.

Candice and Dylan stand at the threshold, observing the elderly couple.

DYLAN

(whispers to self)
This is so bizarre.

MRS. MARWOOD

I heard them say something.

The television static worsens.

MR. MARWOOD

I swear! Nothing works around here!

SUDDENLY --

Mr. Marwood's frustration peaks. He lunges at the television set and pounds it with his fist, causing the static to disappear. The screen flickers before displaying an unsettling image: Candice and Dylan are broadcasted on the television.

DYLAN

It's us! Look! We're on the screen!

MR. MARWOOD

Ah, that's better!

MRS. MARWOOD

Oh, how nice. She's a pretty little thing. Not much meat on them bones.

MR. MARWOOD

Oh, but she'll do. Yup. She'll do nicely. Mmm-hmmm...

Mr. Marwood licks his lips.

As the elderly couple watches Candice and Dylan on the screen, the channel abruptly changes...

ON THE T.V., we see the sculptured CLOWN BUST. It's EYES seem to pierce through the screen, locked with Candice and Dylan's terrified expressions.

Candice turns and scans the dining room. Her eyes fixate on the sculptured clown in the corner.

CANDICE

The clown's eyes, they're moving.

The clown turns at its base. It raises an arm. Points directly at us. Its eyes follow us as WE PAN across the room, TRACKING Candice. What we see is also displayed on the television set, viewed by Mr. and Mrs. Marwood.

Something dawns on Candice...

CANDICE

When I was on the East road, there was this thing, I'm not sure what it was. He called himself a vendor. He spoke to me. And said something about extra eyes following me here. Like, I somehow brought others with me. He called them: *Onlookers*.

DYLAN

Onlookers?

CANDICE

Yeah. Like, we're being watched. I mean, look at the television. How do you explain that? Look around. I don't see any cameras. Yet, there we are.

A contemplative beat.

DYLAN

When they leave, redeemer takes the key. Maybe "they" is not this couple.

(beat)

What if "they"... are the ones that are watching us.

Candice nods, affirming the theory.

Dylan gazes at the clown sculpture. It's eyes continue to glare at us.

DYLAN

Let's test it out.

Dylan glances at Mr. and Mrs. Marwood as they continue to watch the television.

DYLAN

Go outside. Shut the door behind you.

Candice walks toward the front door.

The clown's eyes stay focused on us as we TRACK Candice.

EXT. THE MARWOOD HOME/FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Candice steps out, closes the door behind her.

SUDDENLY --

Dylan hollers in pain from inside.

Candice attempts to re-enter. The door is now locked. She glances through the door window to see what is transpiring inside...

Dylan tussles with Mr. and Mrs. Marwood.

CANDICE

Dylan!

MR. MARWOOD/MRS. MARWOOD

BONES!!!

They bite and claw at Dylan, tearing flesh off his body.

CANDICE

Dylan! Nooooooooo!

Candice rams her shoulder into the door, attempts to break it down. It won't budge. She injures herself.

Dylan manages to break free from their grip. He darts for the front door. Holds up something -- a large SKELETON KEY.

DYLAN

I got it, Candice! I got the key!

The doorknob won't turn. Dylan attempts to smash through the door window. It's solid.

Mr. and Mrs. Marwood topple him, continuing their actions of rage. Blood splatters on the door window.

CANDICE

Dylan!

Mr. and Mrs. Marwood yank him away from the door. The lights turn off.

CANDICE

Dylan!

She violently pounds on the door window until her own blood streaks down her arm. She's left in tears, hopeless.

CANDICE

(low to self)

We followed the rules, we followed
the rules...

She looks toward the night sky.

CANDICE

We followed the rules!

She crumbles where she stands and buries her face.

The Sickly Man trails up the dirt path, singing a nursery rhyme -- "WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?"

SICKLY MAN

*...All the birds of the air fell a-
sighing and a-sobbing when they
heard the bell toll...*

Candice looks up and recoils against the front door.

The Sickly Man approaches the front porch. Plants a split-hooved foot on the first step. His features have noticeably changed -- his skin is fuller.

SICKLY MAN

(ghastly voice)

On the contrary, Candice. He touched the key. He's not the redeemer. You are.

CANDICE

Is he dead?

SICKLY MAN

The dead are no good to me. He's with your brother, but trust me when I say: they wish for death.

His long tongue flicks the air like a snake.

CANDICE

Let them go. Please.

SICKLY MAN

That's not how this game works.

Candice hyperventilates, her entire body trembles. The Sickly Man caresses the air between them with his tongue.

SICKLY MAN

Your pills are giving way. I know you can feel it. Your lovely aroma grows stronger by the minute.

(beat)

I knew you were the one, Candice. You don't disappoint.

He grins ear-to-ear.

SICKLY MAN

The Marwoods have been with me for a while. They came here looking for their tempest who you've met. She's a wild one, but serves her purpose. Believe it or not, her parents managed to make it past the grove. That is great love. But it wasn't strong enough to carry them through the monastery.

(gestures the home)

I'm not too fond of the Marwoods these days. They reek, if I may be so bold. They've gotten shopworn. Stale. I think this home is long overdue for a new tenant. Someone like you. A new parasite.

Candice remains quiet.

SICKLY MAN

It's settled then. When you fail, I
will call this place... *The Robin*
Home.

He turns to leave. The darkness engulfs him.

Candice is left alone, her body shaking with fear.

A gust of wind tangles her hair. She drops her head in
defeat.

The candle's flame teeters on the edge, growing dimmer...

EXT. RICHARD'S HOME/BACKYARD - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Young Candice sits with an intricate wooden puzzle in front
of her, focused on solving it.

YOUNG KEVIN (10) approaches, leans over her shoulder.

YOUNG KEVIN

Is that the puzzle mom made?

YOUNG CANDICE

Yeah.

YOUNG KEVIN

You're never gonna solve that
thing. There's a trick to it.

Candice looks up at him, annoyed. She returns to the puzzle,
determined to prove him wrong.

YOUNG CANDICE

Don't stare. You're distracting me.

YOUNG KEVIN

Dad's gonna be home soon.

YOUNG CANDICE

Hush!

Kevin retreats to the house.

YOUNG KEVIN

You'll be sorry.

Candice doesn't seem to notice the passage of time, her
entire focus consumed by the task at hand.

The puzzle approaches completion...

SUDDENLY --

Richard snatches it away from Candice, startling her. He gives the puzzle a glance.

RICHARD
Oh, I see what's going on here!
You're wasting your damned time
with this stupid thing!

Candice is afraid to look up.

RICHARD
You better have them dishes done,
missy!

YOUNG CANDICE
I -- I forgot.

Richard raises an open hand. Candice flinches, braces herself. Kevin throws himself between his sister and father, fists poised like a boxer.

YOUNG KEVIN
You're not gonna touch her!

RICHARD
Ahh, so you think you're a man now?
Hmm? All right, you wanna be a man.
Well then, I'm gonna treat ya like
a man.

Richard backhands him. Kevin falls back on his butt.

RICHARD
Come on, boy! Get up! You're a man
now! Get up! Let's see what you can
do! Stand up!

Kevin stands to his feet. Richard delivers a harder blow, sending his son to the ground. This time, the boy lies motionless.

Richard stands over him, nudges him with his boot.

YOUNG CANDICE
Stop it! Leave him alone!

RICHARD
The bull gave him the horns.

Kevin stirs, groans in agony.

RICHARD

Well, Kev, you're not quite a man.

Richard turns his attention to the puzzle. Walks over to a bullet-riddled mannequin standing erect at the end of his property. He steadies the puzzle on top of the mannequin's head.

YOUNG CANDICE

Daddy, no!

Richard enters a shed, exits with a shotgun. Loads it.

YOUNG CANDICE

Daddy! Don't! Please! Mommy made that for me!

Richard takes aim. Squeezes the trigger.

The mannequin's head explodes. The gunshot echoes across the sky. The puzzle descends to the ground, still intact -- untouched.

Richard towers over Candice, ruffles her hair.

RICHARD

What have ya learned today, little fly?

His question lingers.

Candice glances at her brother still lying on the ground...

EXT. THE MARWOOD HOME/FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Candice attempts to steady her nerves. She pulls herself to her feet. Takes a calming breath.

CANDICE

I learned... that my brother has my back. And I got his.

She pounds on the door. The lights come on.

Mrs. Marwood opens the door. Peers out. She turns around and calls out to her husband...

MRS. MARWOOD

It's happening again!

Candice storms inside the house, determined.

INT. THE MARWOOD HOME/DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Candice rushes toward the sculptured clown. It's eyes remain fixated on us. Candice notes it. Contemplates a plan...

She scans the room. Spots the PAINT CANS. Pops off the lids.

We see Candice from a different camera angle -- the angle is duplicated on the television set in the living room.

Candice tracks the clown's eyes. Waits until the gaze locks on us. It lifts its arm, points. She splashes paint in our direction... blotches out our view.

BLACK SCREEN.

INT. THE MARWOOD HOME/DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Candice snatches up another can of paint, poised to blacken our view. The clown's eyes track us. It raises its hand, targeting us once again.

She heaves the paint, blotches out our view...

BLACK SCREEN.

INT. THE MARWOOD HOME/DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A different angle on Candice.

The sculptured clown lifts its arm. Points in our direction. Candice grabs another can of paint, blackens our view...

BLACK SCREEN.

EXT. THE MARWOOD HOME/FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Our perspective is from outside the home, with only a view of the front porch. We're not permitted to see what transpires inside.

The candle's flame dances, on the verge of extinction.

We hear the sound of Candice shuffling across the room, followed by the distinct winding and clicking of gears.

Then another sound: a KEY clicks on the floor.

More shuffling...

Candice steps outside. She opens her hand, revealing a skeleton key with an HOURGLASS symbol.

The candle's flame flickers one last time, then goes out.

She opens the rulebook. Reads the instructions: *"Run to the monastery. Do not stop."*

She turns the page to gain additional information -- finds none. She pockets the skeleton key and the rulebook.

She steps off the porch. When she reaches the edge of

THE GROVE

her hands begin to tremble uncontrollably.

CANDICE

No. Not now. No, no, no...

Winds rustles the trees.

Loud footfalls pound the ground, approaches in strides.

Candice sees a large dark figure in the distance. It begins to take shape as it draws near.

A scythe cuts the air.

Candice backs away from the grove, takes cover

BEHIND A LARGE TREE

with spiny limbs.

The scythe wielder takes shape as it approaches the Marwood property. It narrows its gaze, surveys the yard.

Candice peeks out from her hiding spot, meets eyes with the scythe-wielding ghoul.

The towering entity unleashes a thundering growl, proclaiming its domain, then retreats back into the shadows.

Candice clings to the tree for support. She's unable to catch her breath. Begins to hyperventilate. Sits on the ground, her back against the tree. Hugs her legs, buries her head...

BEGIN DAYDREAM

KEVIN (O.S.)

Hi, Sis.

Candice snaps her head up. Sees Kevin leaning against the tree. He waves and plants himself next to her. Places a comforting hand on her shoulder.

KEVIN

I'm proud of you. For coming this far. It took a lot of guts.

CANDICE

It was the medication. And Dylan.
(beat)
Now, it's just me. I'm not a hero.

KEVIN

I know you're afraid. But if there's one thing I know. You're fast on your feet. I've seen you run. And that's all you need to do right now. Is run. And don't stop.

CANDICE

I don't even know which way to run.

Kevin's eyes trail up the tree, gestures toward the top.

KEVIN

You'll find your answer up there.

CANDICE

You know I can't --

KEVIN

Make an exception to your rulebook.

CANDICE

My hands won't stop shaking. Look!

She holds out her trembling hands.

KEVIN

Hey, remember that time when dad chased us through the woods?

CANDICE

Yeah. We found that tree.

KEVIN

That's right. And I couldn't believe how fast you climbed it.

CANDICE

I didn't fear anything more than
him.

KEVIN

Fear can be a great motivator. But
so can love.

(beat)

Love you, Sis.

END DAYDREAM

Candice glances at the grove, then back at Kevin. He's not
there. Never was.

CANDICE

(whispers)

Love you, too.

She musters enough strength to rise to her feet. Regards the
size of the tree. Her face reveals a hint of determination.
Her hands tremble, refusing to cooperate, but she pushes
through, one limb at a time.

When she reaches the top, she spots the MONASTERY beyond the
vastness of the grove --

YOUNG GIRL (O.S.)

I'm surprised to see you up here.

The young girl is behind her, creepily perched on a limb.

Startled, Candice loses her footing and tumbles toward the
ground. A branch breaks her fall with a hard snap.

She lands hard on the ground. Winces in pain.

The young girl laughs and jeers.

As Candice struggles to get up, the young girl descends head
first from the tree, crawling like a SPIDER and singing to
the tune of a nursery rhyme -- "Little Miss Muffet."

YOUNG GIRL

Little Miss Clum-sy fell on her bum-
sy, eating some dirt and clay...

(voice deepening)

When from above, to her dismay,
crawled down an attercop that
wanted to play...

The young girl plants her hands and feet on the ground,
crawls toward Candice.

YOUNG GIRL (CONT'D)
...With legs like needles, and a
voice like a hiss, a web of malice
spun for the little miss...

Candice hobbles to the edge of the grove.

The young girl holds out her arms -- they appear to stretch.

YOUNG GIRL (CONT'D)
...Little Miss Clumsy was trapped
and scared, inside a realm of
darkness, completely ensnared.
(voice deepens, reaches an
inhuman pitch)
Take heed, little children, look
and listen, for something watches
in the dark with eyes that glisten.

The trees begin to rustle...

EXT. GROVE - CONTINUOUS

Candice sprints through the trees.

Heavy footfalls strike the ground, drawing closer...

The scythe slices the air.

Candice trips and stumbles over a headless corpse. She bites her fist, stifling her scream to avoid giving away her position.

The ground quakes. The scythe wielder is several yards away, garbling and grumbling.

Candice pulls herself up and continues...

The scythe wielder **POV:** Candice is a mere few feet away. The creature draws back the scythe and swings. It slices through nearby tree branches, barely missing its target.

Candice gains momentum.

As does the creature in pursuit.

Candice sees dim lights through the thickness of the trees -- burning torches.

The scythe wielder takes another swing.

Candice glances over her shoulder and parries in the nick of time. It cuts off a lock of her hair.

She sees a clearing several yards away...

With everything she can muster, she breaks through the gap, exiting the grove...

The scythe wielder reaches out, clutches her hair. It yanks her back into the grove.

Candice tugs with all her might, tries to break free from the creature's grip. Her scalp begins to tear away. Blood spews...

She hollers in pain as a chunk of her hair rips off with skin still attached. She falls backward. Blood streaks down her face. She turns and crawls out on her stomach.

We see the silhouette of the creature standing in the darkness, the scythe poised to strike.

Candice manages to distance herself, continuing on her belly...

The scythe-wielding ghoul grumbles in defeat, then returns to the shadows.

Candice rises from the ground. Wipes blood from her brow.

EXT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/FRONT GATE - NIGHT

Candice approaches the monastery. Torches illuminate intricate carvings on stone walls, each depicting scenarios from Raum's Purging Grounds -- modernized throughout the centuries.

An iron gate guards the entrance to the monastery's courtyard.

Candice pulls out the rulebook. Reads the instructions to the next scenario: "Who goes there?"

There's a cryptic inscription engraved on the front gate.

CANDICE

(reads the inscription)

*I am the path to redemption's
embrace, to pull them from
darkness, to shine upon their face.*

She contemplates the riddle for several minutes, then the answer dawns on her...

CANDICE
 (whispers to self)
 The redeemer. It's me. I am... the
 redeemer. I'm the redeemer.

She glances at the gate, expecting it to open. To her dismay,
 nothing occurs.

...And in the dead silence... a loud booming BARK.

Candice flinches. She whirls around and spots the young girl.
 A dog is nowhere to be seen. Yet, the bark was clearly
 animalistic.

YOUNG GIRL
 Bark louder. It works for me.

The young girl chortles.

Candice turns toward the gate.

CANDICE
 I am the redeemer!

YOUNG GIRL
Ugh! Pathetic!

Candice knows what she must do. She draws in a deep breath
 and then:

CANDICE
I AM THE REDEEMER!!!

Her voice carries into the courtyard.

The gate creaks and swings open.

Candice turns to the young girl. Nods appreciatively.

YOUNG GIRL
 Don't think I'm helping you.
 Whenever I enjoy something tasty, I
 dread the last bite. I'd do
 anything to savor it longer.

Candice ponders the young girl's statement. She steps away
 from the young girl and walks through the open gate.

EXT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

An elderly enigmatic figure JANUS stands in the center. Clad
 in tattered robes. He carries a lantern, its soft glow
 casting an ethereal light around him.

JANUS
Redeemer. Welcome to Raum's
Monastery. I am Janus.

Janus points at the monastery's front entrance.

JANUS
You must run a gauntlet of
chambers. Each one will test your
will. If you face them all with
success, you shall find your
brother.

CANDICE
And Dylan?

JANUS
You're not his redeemer.

Janus steps aside.

JANUS
If you fail, you will join your
brother, and you shall remain here
in this world forever. For you are
the last of your kin.

Candice makes her way to the entrance.

INT. RAUM'S MONASTERY - CONTINUOUS

Candice steps into a corridor lined with burning candles.

At the far end of the corridor, stands a red door with no doorknob. Its surface bares incantations resembling the ones found on the back cover of the rulebook.

She inches closer to the door. Pulls out the rulebook. Searches through the pages. Finds one that reveals: a dark red handprint centered on a red door.

Blood streaks down her face from her wound. A single droplet splatters onto the page. It dawns on Candice that blood could be the key.

She swipes her hand across her face, smearing blood on her palm. Her hand, now covered in blood, trembles as she presses it firmly against the center of the door. It unlocks.

The door swings open, leading into darkness.

INT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/THE WHITE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Candice enters.

The red door shuts behind her and locks.

Lights turn on.

On the opposite side of the room, stands an orange door with no doorknob.

Black curtains are draped around a window frame. There is no window, just the frame.

A ladder is propped against one of the walls.

In a corner, a statue of a CROW stands erect with its beak spread open. Its throat is a black abyss, large enough for someone's arm to fit.

In another corner, lies a large cardboard BOX.

Candice references the rulebook. It states the rules of the white room: "*Feed the crow.*" She pockets the rulebook.

She looks over at the box.

It jerks...

Then begins to shake violently...

Something appears to be trapped inside, attempting to escape.

Candice recoils, retreating to the far end of the room.

Malevolent laughter echoes off the walls.

Candice scans the room. There's no sign of the Sickly Man.

The box sits motionless.

SICKLY MAN (O.S.)
It won't hurt to take a peek.

Candice proceeds with caution, inching toward the box. She lifts one flap at a time and peers inside...

Her eyes widen in shock.

A colossal SPIDER lunges passed her head. She screams.

The spider scurries up the nearest wall.

Candice grabs the box and trusts it toward the spider, in an attempt to crush it. The spider dodges the attack and scuttles toward an upper corner, where it cowers...

CANDICE

(low to self)

It's more afraid of me than I am of it. It's more afraid of me than I am of it...

She studies the spider for a minute.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

...It's more afraid of me than I am of it. It's more afraid of me than I am of it.

She approaches the upper corner. The spider is too high for her to reach. She scans the room. Notices the ladder. Retrieves it.

Her hands continue to tremble, she fights against it.

She stands at the base of the ladder.

CANDICE

You climbed a tree. You can do this.

She steadily scales the ladder, each rung creaks underneath her weight. As she approaches the top, the ladder begins to sway. She loses her footing, catches herself. Freezes.

Then continues...

She reaches the top rung. The spider is at arms length. It's poised to lunge at her. A faint hiss.

CANDICE

We're on the same team, you and me.

The tips of her fingers make contact. She winces in disgust. Grips the spider's abdomen. Pulls it away from the corner.

The spider squirms and flails in her hand.

Candice groans with detest. Descends the ladder. Walks the spider over to the crow. Stuffs it down its throat.

The orange door unlocks. It swings open.

Candice heads toward the door, panting.

The Sickly Man stands behind Candice. She's unaware of his presence.

She exits.

INT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/THE MANNEQUIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Candice enters. The orange door slams behind her.

Bullet-riddled MANNEQUINS line the walls.

A single beam of light cuts through the darkness, illuminating a pedestal at the center of the room.

Candice approaches the pedestal.

A mannequin swivels on its base, tracking her.

As she gets closer to the pedestal, she finds a wooden puzzle resting on top -- it's an exact replica of the one crafted by her mother.

Candice glances at the rulebook. The rules state one word: "Complete."

In the background, we see the silhouette of a mannequin step off its base. It inches forward, undetected.

Faint FOOTSTEPS clack behind her.

Candice spins around.

The mannequin is motionless, but undeniably closer.

She returns her attention to the puzzle. Removes it from the pedestal. As she studies the pieces, deciphering the correct arrangement, the mannequin continues its advance, creeping closer to her.

Clack. Clack. Clack.

Feeling a growing sense of unease, Candice darts her eyes at the mannequins. Their stillness is unsettling.

Candice's hands tremble as she fumbles with the puzzle. It slips through her fingers. Falls to the floor.

The mannequins begin to chortle at her clumsiness.

She snatches the puzzle off the floor, continues to solve it.

In the background, we see each mannequin step off its base. They begin to close in on her as she approaches the puzzle's completion.

CLACK! CLACK! CLACK!

They swarm her, mere inches from enacting fatal violence.

She twists the last arrangement of the puzzle, completing it. Holds it out as proof. The beam of light illuminates her hand.

The ceiling lights turn on. The mannequins hold their position.

Silence...

A yellow door is now visible. It unlocks and swings open, inviting Candice into darkness.

She slips between the maze of mannequins -- they give off the sense that they could attack her at any moment.

She reaches the yellow door.

Exits.

INT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/AUDITORIUM STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Candice enters. The yellow door shuts behind her. Locks.

An old upright piano with cracked paint is illuminated in the center of the stage.

A green door stands on the opposite end.

Heavy curtains begin to draw back, revealing an AUDIENCE, concealed in shadows.

The spotlight shifts to Candice. She's blinded by the light.

A good-looking young MAN (30s) in a suit holds a microphone to his mouth. His unmistakable voice echoes through the auditorium:

SICKLY MAN

And now what you've all been
waiting for. Put your hands
together and give a warm welcome to
our weary little owl, Candice
Robin!

The audience applauds.

The Sickly Man beckons Candice over, his smile appearing genuine and welcoming -- an odd and rare moment.

Candice is unable to move a muscle, stage fright sets in.

Murmurs and complaints stir from the audience.

SICKLY MAN
Come on, Candice. Everyone is
patiently waiting...
(long beat)
...even Kevin.

The mention of her brother pulls her back. She plants one shaky foot in front of the other. Makes her way to the piano.

SICKLY MAN
That's a girl. Come. Play.

The Sickly Man turns to the audience.

SICKLY MAN
Another round of applause, if you
please.

The audience obliges.

Candice hesitantly takes her seat at the piano. She notices a name carved into the cabinet's front panel: "Josephine Robin."

CANDICE
Mom.

The lights dim. The spotlight brightens.

Candice pulls out the rulebook. Flips through the pages. Comes across the current scenario. She reads the rules: "*Feed them.*"

The Sickly Man reads her confusion.

SICKLY MAN
Your heart and soul. That is what
they require. So, feed them.

The Sickly Man approaches Candice, his smile now gone. He removes a music sheet from his inner coat. Sets it on the piano.

The title of the song: "The Crimson Waltz."

Candice shakes her head incredulously.

CANDICE

You know it can't be done.

SICKLY MAN

What a shame.

CANDICE

This is unfair.

SICKLY MAN

Perhaps --

CANDICE

It's unfair!

In a fit of rage, Candice's fists crash down on the piano keys, releasing an unholy discordant of notes -- a symphony of anguish.

SICKLY MAN

Perhaps, I may lend a hand, my precious little owl.

The Sickly Man places his gnarled hands over the keys. His fingernails are black and elongated.

SICKLY MAN

Let us begin.

Candice eyes the sheet music. Her trembling hands hover over the piano keys. She grunts with agitation.

SICKLY MAN

One, and two, and three, and four...

A sinister alliance forms, a blurred line between salvation and damnation. As the Sickly Man's influence intertwines with Candice's own talent, the notes gradually transform into a haunting melody.

The audience is captivated.

SICKLY MAN

They're hungry for more, Candice.

CANDICE

I want this to end! I want my brother!

SICKLY MAN

Do you wish to save him?! Or join him?!

Candice refrains from answering...

SICKLY MAN
Save him?! Or join him?!

The answer is obvious, Candice hollers out of frustration.

CANDICE
SAVE HIM!

SICKLY MAN
Then you must satisfy their hunger!

The progression of notes build to a climax.

SICKLY MAN
It ends when they're on their feet!

Candice hammers the keys. The melody intensifies.

As the music swells, her fingers begin to bleed, staining the ivory keys with drops of blood...

The Sickly Man observes with wicked delight.

SICKLY MAN
Show us the depths of your love!

Candice's playing reaches a crescendo, her fingers dancing across the keys with raw, almost reckless, energy. Each note she plays carries the weight of her love for her brother, pushing her beyond her limitations...

The Sickly Man struggles to keep up with her sharp and precise pace. He has no choice but to leave the performance. He's taken aback by Candice's defiance, recovers with a chilling smile.

Candice's fingers, now red with her own blood, continue to dance upon the keys. And then, in a climatic moment, she strikes the final chord. The haunting melody comes to an abrupt halt, leaving a lingering silence to hang heavy in the air.

The audience grants her a standing ovation.

After the last clap...

Silence...

Several minutes pass and then:

SICKLY MAN
(whispers)
Bravo, Candice. Bravo. You have fed
us well.

The green door unlocks. Swings open.

Candice is lethargic, spent. She steps away from the piano,
leaving a trail of blood.

CANDICE
Is this over?

SICKLY MAN
Your brother is near.

The Sickly Man holds out his hand.

SICKLY MAN
The book, if you will.

Candice pulls out the rulebook. Places it in his hand.

CANDICE
Who are you?

SICKLY MAN
I am... the author.

CANDICE
You're Raum.

The Sickly Man disregards her assumption. He merely walks
toward the green door. Candice follows.

SICKLY MAN
No one has ever come this far.

He pushes the green door open and motions her to enter.

INT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/HOTEL CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Candice steps into a hotel corridor -- it resembles the same
hotel where Kevin and Willy played the elevator game.

The green door slams shut.

A housekeeping CLEANING CART stands abandoned.

Candice approaches the cart and spots an envelope with her
name on it. She opens it. A note reads: *"Anyone who seeks
will find."*

You'll find your little sparrow just beyond the blue door. It would be wise to bring the cart. Sparrows are messy creatures."

At the end of the corridor, there's an elevator.

Candice leans into the cleaning cart, pushes it forward. The wheels squeak.

As she advances, the elevator doors begin to open and close in intervals...

Open.

Close.

Open.

Close...

Candice approaches an intersecting corridor near the elevator.

At the end of the intersecting corridor, she spots the blue door.

She pushes the cleaning cart down the corridor. A young girl's voice, accompanied with toy keyboard music notes reverberates from the walls. It's a familiar voice:

YOUNG CANDICE (V.O.)

(sings softly)

*Don't be afraid, my little one. All
bad things go away in the end.*

Don't shed a tear, my little one.

'Cause momma's got your hand.

Candice reaches the blue door. This one has a doorknob with an hourglass emblem and a keyhole.

A young girl can be heard WEEPING on the other side of the door.

Candice stoops down and peeks through the keyhole... and sees... her childhood bedroom. Her father comes into view, towering over her younger self.

RICHARD

Stop cryin'! You're bein' a little baby!

YOUNG CANDICE

I'm sorry.

RICHARD

*Sorry ain't gonna dig up your
momma! Sorry ain't gonna breath air
into her lungs!*

(beat)

*You shoulda listened! She told you
not to go near the water! But you
went anyway! And now she's gone!*

As Candice continues to peer through the keyhole, tears stream down her face. Her lips quiver. Her hands shake violently.

Candice watches as her father begins to strangle her younger self. She quickly stuffs her hand into her pocket, yanks out the skeleton key, inserts it into the keyhole. Turns it.

The blue door flies open...

INT. RICHARD'S HOME/YOUNG CANDICE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Candice bursts out of the closet and leaps onto Richard's back, claws at his eyes.

Young Candice climbs off the bed and hides underneath.

RICHARD

Get off me!

Richard breaks free from Candice's grip. He delivers a haymaker sending Candice to the floor. She lands hard.

RICHARD

Who the hell are you?! What're you
doin' here?!

He straddles Candice, wraps his hands around her neck. Young Candice slides out from under the bed and jumps on his back.

Richard shoves her off. Continues to strangle Candice. Her eyes strain and bulge. Veins protrude from her forehead as her eyes begin to glaze.

Young Candice pulls his hair. His grip on Candice loosens.

Candice comes to, then pulls herself away. Seizes an opportunity to kick Richard. Her heel connects with his nose, breaking it. Blood pours down his mouth.

Richard stands to his feet with young Candice still holding tight. He throws her off. She hits the floor hard. She lies motionless.

Candice struggles to her feet. With Richard's back turned, she jars a bedpost loose.

Richard turns around. Candice strikes his face. He crumbles to the floor.

Young Candice opens her eyes.

Candice stands over Richard, the bedpost poised high above her head, ready to bash his skull.

Richard spits out a mouth full of blood.

RICHARD

Do it if you got the guts.

Candice turns to her younger self.

CANDICE

Close your eyes, baby.

Richard laughs, strained.

RICHARD

Come on! Do it!

Candice hollers, frustrated with herself. He's right. She doesn't have the guts. She brings the bedpost to her side.

Richard spots a large shard from his broken whiskey bottle. He grips it like a weapon. Rises to his feet. Lunges at Candice.

BOOOOM!

A shotgun blast sends Richard hurling through the air. He slams against the far wall. Collapses on the floor in a pool of blood.

Candice turns to find her younger brother Kevin standing at the threshold, poised with his father's shotgun. Smoke wafts from the barrel.

CANDICE

Kevin.

YOUNG KEVIN

How'd you know my name?

YOUNG CANDICE

She looks like mom. I think it's her ghost.

CANDICE

I'm not a ghost. And I'm not your mother. I know, I must look like a monster right now. But I'm a friend.

YOUNG KEVIN

I can tell.

CANDICE

You don't need to be scared.

YOUNG KEVIN

I'm not.

YOUNG CANDICE

Me neither.

Young Candice glances at Richard's lifeless body.

YOUNG CANDICE

Not anymore.

CANDICE

Everything's gonna be all right. I promise.

YOUNG CANDICE

Are you a guardian angel? My mommy told me that guardian angels watch over us.

CANDICE

She's right. They do.

YOUNG CANDICE

Is my brother going to jail?

Candice peers through the closet. Sees the cleaning cart.

CANDICE

I'm not gonna let that happen.

Candice struggles to drag Richard's body through the closet, leaving behind a gruesome trail of blood. The streak leads into the corridor where she leaves his body.

She returns to the bedroom with the cleaning cart...

LATER

Candice wrings out the last remnants of blood from a mop into a bucket, the red liquid swirls and mixes with the soapy water.

Young Kevin and young Candice can't take their eyes off the bloodied stranger.

CANDICE

Kevin?

YOUNG KEVIN

Yeah?

CANDICE

I need you to look after your sister. Always remember that you're her rock. She's gonna need you more than you know. And no matter what life throws at you, you'll both have each other.

YOUNG KEVIN

What's going to happen to us?

CANDICE

You're gonna be sent to live with your great aunt. She's a nice lady, lives on a farm. Plays piano.

YOUNG KEVIN

How do you know so much?

YOUNG CANDICE

Mommy told me that guardian angels know everything.

CANDICE

Well, almost.

Candice approaches the cleaning cart.

CANDICE

I have to go now.

Young Candice wraps her arms around her adult self.

YOUNG CANDICE

Thank you, guardian angel.

CANDICE

You're welcome.

Candice pushes the cleaning cart

INTO THE CORRIDOR

and closes the blue door behind her.

YOUNG GIRL (O.S.)

BONES!!!

The young girl scurries around the corner and pounces on Richard like a writhing demon, devouring his flesh.

SERIES OF SHOTS - KEVIN'S RETURN

-- A dimly lit street.

-- Kevin stumbles on the steps of the police station. His clothes are torn. His exposed skin bears marks of torture.

-- POLICE OFFICERS exit the police station, their expressions shift from surprise to concern. They rush to Kevin's aid.

BACK TO SCENE

Candice runs down the corridor. The elevator doors open. The Sickly Man steps out.

SICKLY MAN

Congratulations, Candice. You did it. Your brother is safe now. They'll release Willy soon.

CANDICE

I want to see Kevin!

SICKLY MAN

You will, but first --

CANDICE

No! I don't want to hear anything you have to say! I want to see my brother!

SICKLY MAN

Do you hear that? It's *them*.

CANDICE

I'm done with your game! Where is he?! I want to see him!

SICKLY MAN

This was never about you, Candice.
Or Kevin. Dylan. None of you. It
was always about *them*. The
onlookers.

(beat)

The same ones that were entertained
by your suffering, the same ones
that want some sort of resolve. You
fed them well, Candice. So much so
that they failed to realize that
they are a part of this game. And I
don't want to let them go just yet.

Candice remains silent, bewildered.

The Sickly Man holds out his hands. In each hand, he holds a
skeleton key.

SICKLY MAN

You have two choices.

The Sickly Man gestures his right hand.

SICKLY MAN

I'll let you take Dylan back with
you. His father Angelo is no good
to me.

CANDICE

That's the one I want. I don't
wanna hear the other choice.

SICKLY MAN

Trust me, Candice. You want to hear
what I have to say.

Candice remains silent.

SICKLY MAN

Your mother drowned, trying to save
you.

The Sickly Man gestures his left hand.

SICKLY MAN

This key will give you the chance
to go back and rescue her.

(beat)

What'll it be?

Candice is paralyzed with her choices. Her eyes dart back and
forth between both keys.

Then she makes her choice and reaches out...

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

A warm melody fills the chapel, echoing softly against the stained glass windows and the wooden pews filled with GUESTS.

Candice's fingers dance over ivory keys.

She sits at a grand piano. No trembling. No hesitation. Just music. Hers. Unbroken. Flawless.

The bride PATTY (20s) and the groom LUKE (20s) watch from the front row, deeply moved.

Candice finishes the final chord. It rings out, bright and clean.

Applause rises.

Candice rises from the bench. Walks down the aisle toward her seat.

She sits.

Dylan is beside her.

He gives her a small, knowing smile -- the kind that says *we made it out*.

Candice returns it.

Behind her sits Kevin, looking a little worn. He reaches forward and rests a gentle, reassuring hand on her shoulder -- a quiet reminder that he's here, healing, and holding up.

FADE TO BLACK.

SICKLY MAN (V.O.)

(sings)

*...Who'll be the parson? I, said
the Rook, with my little book, I'll
be the parson...*

THE END