

SHUT IN

by
Christina Hodson

christina.hodson@gmail.com

EXT. THE HOUSE, FRONT YARD - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun is shining on a balmy late summer's day. MARY (35) is tending to the front yard of her large family home in coastal New England. She is a natural beauty and, with her hands in the soil, she looks relaxed and happy.

The property is isolated, set back from the road by a long drive surrounded by fir trees. Mary is at least 100 yards away from the house and only just catches the sound of the phone ringing inside. Unhurried she stands up and strolls toward the house.

INT. THE HOUSE, DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Mary enters, leaving the front door open behind her. As she heads for the phone in the kitchen, we continue to move freely through the house, hearing snatches of her conversation.

MARY (O.C.)
...It looks like you weren't the
only one trying to get hold of me.
It's so beautiful out... They left
a few hours ago...

The house is bright, and warm, full of light thanks to the skylights in the kitchen and the open design. The upstairs is linked to the downstairs by a balcony and the rooms downstairs are mostly open plan, surrounding the staircase in the middle.

MARY (O.C.) (CONT'D)
No, Richard took him on his own.
Stephen wouldn't even speak to me
this morning. I think it just would
have made it harder on everyone...

The walls are covered with photos of Mary and her husband, RICHARD, going back to when they were just teenagers. A college graduation photo shows them both in mortar boards, Mary with a prominent baby bump, Richard kissing her cheek.

Other photos show the arrival of baby STEPHEN. They are a beautiful family. More recent photos show Stephen growing up, a serious boy with his mother's eyes. In the most recent photos he is 15 years old.

MARY (O.C.) (CONT'D)
No, I know. I know... That's what
Richard keeps telling me... No,
you're right. It's the right thing
to do.

(MORE)

MARY (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Who are we kidding, it's not like
we had much choice after he got
expelled from St Paul's... Besides,
it's a great school and he'll be
home at Christmas.

Eventually we find our way to the kitchen where Mary is on
the phone, now with a glass of wine in hand. The voicemail
light is flashing.

MARY (O.C.) (CONT'D)
I'm okay. I'll be okay... To tell
you the truth I'm kind of excited
to have some time off. Does that
make me a terrible mother?...
(laughing)
We absolutely should!... I'd love
that... Thanks for checking in on
me... Let's get lunch this week...
Okay, great. Bye.

Mary hangs up the phone and absent mindedly clicks PLAY on
the answering machine before moving over to open the fridge.

ANSWERING MACHINE
First new message.
(a man's voice)
My name is Andrew Wiseman. I'm
calling from Mercy Hospital for a
Mary Portman? Please call us
immediately on 207-662-0111. I'm
afraid there's been an accident.
(automated voice)
Next new message.

Mary staggers away from the fridge and lunges for the phone,
stumbling with the handset. The machine keeps rolling.

ANSWERING MACHINE (CONT'D)
(same man's voice)
Mrs Portman, this is Andrew Wiseman
calling again from Mercy
Hospital...

As Mary's world begins to fall apart we move out through the
big kitchen window. Outside the sun has just dipped below the
tree line and it is starting to get cool.

ANSWERING MACHINE (O.C.) (CONT'D)
...please call us urgently. Again,
our number is 207-662-0111. Your
son is in critical condition...

The sound of the answering machine fades out.

Lifting up above the trees, we see the faint glimmer of red and blue lights approaching the house.

TITLE: FOUR YEARS LATER

INT. THE HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

It is winter outside as we move once again through the house. The warmth has left the building and the place is starting to look a little outdated, rundown.

We move through the downstairs, exploring the kitchen, the family room, the never-used dining room. A room off to one side remains closed, as does the door to the basement at the bottom of a flight of stairs.

Small ramps have been installed wherever there is a step between rooms and there are scuff marks from a wheelchair on the wallpaper that could do with being replaced anyway.

Through the window, the dawn air is cold and clean and the snow on the drive is unploughed.

Moving up the stairs and along the balcony, we enter Mary's room and see her lying in bed awake.

Now in her late thirties, Mary is still beautiful but, much like the house, she looks tired and a little worn around the edges.

She moves to get up out of bed just as the ALARM goes off. She silences it immediately.

Throughout the ensuing routine her movements suggest total familiarity. She could do this blindfolded. She doesn't have time to feel weary or hard done by, this is just how it is.

She walks from the bedroom, down the hallway to the shabby little upstairs bathroom.

Barely taking a moment to look at herself in the mirror she begins brushing her teeth.

INT. KITCHEN, THE HOUSE - MORNING

Now dressed in jeans and a thick knit jumper, Mary enters the kitchen. Again, her movements are mechanical and efficient, the result of repetition and routine.

She flips a switch on the coffee machine and raises the enameled lids on a big old-fashioned wood-burning stove.

The cooking plates remain hot and she puts a pot of oatmeal on to cook before throwing in a few extra logs for good measure.

INT. STEPHEN'S BEDROOM, THE HOUSE - A MOMENT LATER

Mary opens the door into total darkness and finds her way easily to the window. She draws open the heavy curtains to let in cold white morning light.

Turning, we see a figure lying stretched out neatly in the bed. This is STEPHEN, now 19 years old. He still has his mother's lovely blue eyes but now they are cold and empty.

His skin is very pale and his limbs are thin. Despite this he is strangely beautiful. Like a doll or a cadaver.

MARY
Wakey wakey rise and shine.

Mary's voice is flat, as though she talks more out of habit than anything else.

She pulls the sheets back and opens Stephen's nightshirt. From beside the bed she takes a clunky electronic muscle stimulator (EMS) unit, similar to the ones that TV shopping networks promise will give you perfect abs with no effort. She begins attaching it to Stephen's arms and chest.

MARY (CONT'D)
Time for your work out.

She flips a switch and the machine clicks into action, pulsing current through Stephen's inert muscles.

INT. STEPHEN'S BEDROOM, THE HOUSE - LATER THAT MORNING

Mary's morning routine continues but now the EMS is attached to Stephen's legs and he is propped up in bed.

Mary plucks two prescription pill bottles from a neat array on Stephen's bedside table. She opens Stephen's mouth and places the pills at the back of his throat, lubricating his mouth with water and then gently rubbing his throat until there is a swallow reflex.

Then she takes a bowl of oatmeal and painstakingly spoon feeds her grown son.

Stephen's eyes remain vacant, staring ahead of him, but he is able to eat, albeit messily.

INT. STEPHEN'S BEDROOM, THE HOUSE - MORNING

Stephen is now dressed neatly lying on the bed. Using all her strength, Mary maneuvers Stephen into a wheelchair: shifting his legs into position, then hoisting him under the armpits.

The exertion takes its toll: Mary is strong and lean but Stephen is not a boy any more and the daily ritual is exhausting.

Finally ready, Mary pushes Stephen's wheelchair out of the bedroom and into the living area.

INT. LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Mary wheels Stephen over to a worn patch of carpet in front of the big windows overlooking the drive.

She clicks on a TV but leaves the volume low, as if only to break the silence.

With Stephen all set up, Mary walks towards the door and takes a few seconds to look at her own face in the mirror.

She pulls back her long dark hair and applies a quick dab of blusher on each cheek. The touch of color is enough to remind us that she is still beautiful.

Her coat and boots are ready for her by the door. She slips them on without doing either up and opens the front door.

EXT. THE HOUSE, FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

The air is cold and bright from the snow as Mary steps out. With a final look at the back of Stephen's head, she closes the door behind her.

She breathes in deep lungfuls of fresh air before taking a few steps to her left and opening the door to an extension of her own house.

This is Mary's commute. The two room extension serves as Mary's clinic and a discreet sign on the door displays: "Mary Portman, Clinical Psychologist".

INT. MARY'S OFFICE - DAY

Mary is mid-way through a session with a patient. MRS HARTFORD is a plump middle aged woman with a bad haircut and ill-fitting jeans.

MRS HARTFORD

And now she's pregnant again and what? I'm supposed to take care of another grandchild? She's making all the same mistakes I made when I was her age and it feels like there's nothing I can do to stop her.

MARY

Has she asked you to take care of the child?

MRS HARTFORD

She doesn't have to. Who else is going to do it? She barely even sees Jack. I do everything. Sometimes I wonder what is going to become of these children.

Mary nods sadly.

MRS HARTFORD (CONT'D)

Did you hear about this runaway kid in the paper today?

Mary cocks her head inquisitively. In response Mrs Hartford pulls out a folded local newspaper from her handbag.

It is a paltry looking publication filled with small town news. On the cover is photo of a young BOY.

MRS HARTFORD (CONT'D)

Seven years old. Been in and out of foster care his whole life. And now he's run away, missing. Seven years old. Out in the snow. It's a tragedy.

(she shakes her head)

In this weather. Can you imagine?

Mary looks out the window at the snow-covered trees. She sees a car pulling into the drive.

Looking quickly down at her watch she is grateful to find that the hour is almost over.

INT. WAITING ROOM OUTSIDE MARY'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Mary re-enters the extension, stepping into the warmth of the waiting area from the cold outside.

A slim woman with a mass of curly hair, LUCY (30s) is standing behind a small desk, filing papers. She has a kind face and her affection for Mary is obvious.

MARY

You're a life saver. That was delicious. I had no idea what I was going to make him for lunch.

Lucy waves it off.

MARY (CONT'D)

Seriously, Lucy, I don't know what I would do without you. Thank you.

LUCY

Before I forget, I filed Mrs Hartford's papers and faxed that information over to her doctor.

Mary rolls her eyes as if to say, "How did I forget that?"

She sits down in an armchair and opens up the local paper left behind by Mrs Hartford.

She looks once again at the picture of the missing boy on the front page. His face is solemn, his eyes old beyond their years.

She is moved by the image, her finger tracing the soft line of his cheek.

MARY

This poor kid. No family and now no roof over his head.

LUCY

I know. I dread to think what's happened to him. It's so cold out I'd be amazed if he isn't dead already.

MARY

Oh Lucy, don't say that.

LUCY

I'm serious. It's below zero out there and there's a storm coming in at the end of the week. Speaking of which, do you need me to get you extra supplies? We're stocking up now before people start panicking and raiding the stores.

Mary is distracted, still looking at the face of the young boy in the paper.

MARY
Sure. That'd be great.

Lucy is clearing papers from the desk. She finds a brochure for WILLOWBROOK ADULT CARE HOME along with a letter addressed to Mary in regards to Stephen.

LUCY
Mar, is this..? Are you finally moving Stephen to Willowbrook?

Mary snaps out of her daze and looks at her friend. She gives a sort of defeated shrug.

MARY
I was going to tell you last week.
I just can't do it anymore, Luce.

Lucy moves around the desk and takes Mary in her arms.

LUCY
I think it's wonderful. I know I've been on your case about this for a long time but I really do think it's for the best.

Mary gives a half shrug, half smile. It's hard for her to talk about this.

LUCY (CONT'D)
You have been taking care of Stephen on your own since Richard died. It's too much for you. You'll both be better off if he's in a care home. You can't go on like this forever Mary. I know how hard this decision's been but you know better than anyone that Stephen's not getting better. Your life's disappearing before your eyes. When was the last time you left this place for more than an hour?

MARY
I can't just leave him.

LUCY
That's what I'm talking about.
You've given up your whole life for him and I just...

Mary is getting emotional. Lucy doesn't want to push it.

LUCY (CONT'D)
I just want you to be happy Mar.
You deserve that. You have been
such a wonderful mother but it's
time for you to be free.

Lucy pulls Mary into another embrace. Mary lets a tear escape
but laughs it off.

LUCY (CONT'D)
It's not like you're pulling the
plug on him! He'll be in great
hands and you can go see him
whenever you want to. But at least
you can live again. While you're
still young. And hot!

Mary pushes her off playfully and they laugh as Mary wipes
her eyes.

EXT. BETWEEN THE HOUSE AND THE EXTENSION - EVENING

Evening has fallen and it is bitterly cold as Mary and Lucy
say goodbye outside the house. Lucy has the garage door open
and is backing out of the drive. She shouts out the window to
Mary.

LUCY
I'll see you Tuesday and I'll pick
up Stephen's pills from the
pharmacy.

MARY
Thanks Luce. Appreciate it. Drive
safe.

Lucy drives off and Mary enters the house.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS, THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The lights are low in the house but it is warm and welcoming.
Stephen remains seated in his wheelchair just as Mary left
him.

Mary begins her evening routine with the same mechanical
familiarity as her morning routine.

She removes her coat and boots and hangs them by the door.
She pulls open the fridge and takes out a casserole, placing
it on the range before throwing in another couple of logs.

She lifts the lid of the casserole.

MARY

Thank god for Lucy.

INT. LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS - LATER

Mary spoon feeds Stephen a bowl of soup, blowing on each mouthful. He wears a bib around his neck and he dribbles like a baby.

Under the blanket laid in his lap, Stephen's legs are hooked up to the EMS machine again. The indicator light flashes like a pulse.

INT. BATHROOM, UPSTAIRS - LATER

Mary is sitting on a stool, bathing Stephen in the tub.

The bath is only half full and she uses a jug to pour water over his head like a child. Stephen sits inert as Mary washes him with a soapy washcloth.

Suddenly his leg spasms, splashing water out of the tub. Ever patient, Mary rubs the leg gently, massaging the muscles as she lowers it back into the water.

She leans over him to clean the far side of his body. They are physically very close.

When she is done rinsing under his arm she looks down and notices that Stephen is aroused. If anything the sight of her grown son's erection seems to make her sad.

She pulls the plug on the bath and lets the water get lower before hoisting Stephen out of the tub. She helps him into his waiting towel-lined wheelchair and starts drying him down.

INT. STEPHEN'S BEDROOM, DOWNSTAIRS - LATER

Clean and dry, Stephen is propped up in bed. Mary picks up another selection of prescription bottles, including benzodiazepine sleeping pills.

She helps Stephen to swallow the medication just as she did in the morning.

Carefully she moves the pillows and lies Stephen down, closing his eyes gently with her hand.

She pulls up an extra blanket from the end of the bed and tucks him in tightly, making sure he's warm and safe.

Picking up a mug of hot tea from the bedside table she moves to leave. She pauses as she gets to the door, looking back before turning off the light.

MARY
(quietly, and without
conviction)
Good night.

Mary closes the door behind her and moves back through the family area and the kitchen, turning off lights as she goes.

The house is big and old. The snow outside creaks and the wind whistles in the chimney but Mary pays no notice as she ascends the staircase in the dark.

INT. BATHROOM, UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

Mary is soaking in the tub, trying to absorb a moment of peace and quiet with her cup of tea beside her.

She looks down at her wet limbs, admiring, critical, curious. Her arms are long and muscular from all the lifting.

She leans back and closes her eyes. The tap drips quietly and the wind blows outside the bathroom window.

There is a faint scratching noise somewhere within the house.

Mary opens her eyes, unafraid but listening.

She hears it again.

It could be a mouse in the walls. Or a branch blowing against the side of the house.

She closes her eyes.

Then she hears a different sound that makes her eyes flick open.

A low drone that sounds like it could be a person moaning.

Mary gets out of the bath and pulls on a bathrobe.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS, THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mary opens the bathroom door onto the balcony upstairs, letting light spill into the darkened house.

The moaning noise has stopped and in its place is the usual concert of nocturnal sounds in a big house.

She pads down the stairs softly in her robe and slippers. Without turning on any lights, finds her way towards Stephen's room.

The big glass windows are uncovered as Mary passes by. Her movements are reflected against the darkness outside.

INT. STEPHEN'S BEDROOM, THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She opens the door to Stephen's room quietly and peers into the darkness. Even in the dim light she can see Stephen lying in bed.

She waits a moment until, reassured that he is alright, she closes the door again.

INT. BATHROOM, UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

Mary is giving Stephen a bath but everything seems slightly different.

The decor looks a little less shabby, the light a little warmer, and now the tub is full of steaming hot water.

Mary washes Stephen tenderly, singing to him under her breath. It is a scene of maternal love and Mary almost glows as she smiles down at her son.

Cradling the back of his head in her hand, Mary lowers Stephen back into the water. She takes him lower, and lower, until the water comes over his face and he is fully submerged.

She continues to hum and look down at him lovingly.

Stephen's beautiful blue eyes remain open, staring vacantly through the water at the ceiling.

For a moment, all is still.

Suddenly, Stephen's eyes dart over to make eye contact with his mother.

She continues to sing and smile down at him. She holds him down firmly as his look turns to fear and he struggles to sit up.

His thrashing becomes wild as he starts to drown.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM, UPSTAIRS - DAWN

Mary's eyes flick wide open.

The nightmare has shaken her but she is not panicked or confused.

Something in the weariness of her face tells us that this is not the first time she's had dreams like this.

She rubs her brow as if to rid her mind of such thoughts before getting out of bed to begin her morning routine.

The alarm RINGS as she stands but her hand is there to silence it before it has a chance.

INT. WAITING ROOM OUTSIDE MARY'S OFFICE - DAY

Mary is alone in the office, sitting behind the desk in the waiting room.

She looks tired and holds her brow between her fingers, propping herself up. Her head throbs.

MARY
(into the phone)
I'd love to speak with him today if he has time... I understand. If you could just tell him that it's Mary Portman... Yes. I'm a patient of his... No, I need a video appointment...

Mary sits back, frustrated, as she is put on hold.

Out of the corner of her eye she sees a station wagon pulling up in the drive.

A teenaged boy, AARON (16) gets out of the passenger side and slams the door closed with unnecessary force.

MARY (CONT'D)
...Yes, that works. That's perfect... Thank you so much... Yes, I'm on the same skype address... I'll be waiting for his call... Thank you.

Relieved, Mary hangs up the phone and stands to look out the window.

She seems disappointed to see the station wagon drive off, but she straightens herself out as she sees Aaron approaching her office door.

INT. MARY'S OFFICE - DAY

Mary is coming to the end of a session with Aaron.

At sixteen, Aaron is a fairly typical messed-up teenager. His hair is long, his clothes deliberately oversized and grungy.

He sits indian-style in the armchair, mid-rant.

AARON

Don't you see how fucked up that is? The kid's been bouncing around foster homes for half a decade but no one gave a fuck then. Now suddenly the whole fucking town's decided it's time to give a fuck? They're all a bunch of fucking hypocrites. Do you know how many children run away and go missing every year in the United States alone?

MARY

Aaron, I'm afraid that's the end of our time for today.

AARON

Whatever. Sure. Thanks a lot.

Aaron stands sulkily and moves toward the door. Mary is unmoved by his behavior.

MARY

Is your dad coming to pick you up?

Aaron has already opened the door and passed through into the waiting room. He makes an affirmative grunt.

Mary quickly reaches into a purse beside her chair and applies lipstick in a small mirror.

Suddenly self-conscious she tries to blot it off on her hand.

She pulls out her hair clip and shakes down her hair before muttering to herself nervously and immediately clipping it back up.

EXT. BETWEEN THE HOUSE AND THE EXTENSION - LATE AFTERNOON

Mary says goodbye to Aaron just outside the office door. She stands in the snow, arms crossed to keep warm.

Aaron barely acknowledges her before skulking over to the station wagon.

The driver, Aaron's father DOUG (42) is already out the car and heading towards Mary.

When Aaron breezes past him, Doug makes a face at him as if to say, "Really?" but Aaron ignores him and climbs into the car.

Doug watches him go but then turns and walks over to Mary.

He is ruggedly handsome and has a winning smile that he flashes at Mary now.

He clearly has a soft spot for Mary, and as awkward and new to this as she may be, the feeling is mutual.

DOUG
(jokingly)
Teenagers, huh?

Mary chuckles.

DOUG (CONT'D)
How's he doing? Does he hate me
more or less than the rest of the
world today?

MARY
Aaron's a good kid. He's just going
through a rough time with the move
and the divorce. He'll get through
it.

DOUG
Sometimes it's hard to remember
that he was just a cute little kid
who liked throwing a ball around
with his dad a few years ago. He's
so angry all the time.

MARY
He's at a difficult age. He'll get
through it.

DOUG
Let's just hope I do! I'm public
enemy number one these days.

Doug glances back at his son waiting for him in the car. He doesn't want the conversation to be over yet.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Did you hear about the storm coming in? They think it's going to be a big one.

MARY

I heard.

DOUG

You know you really shouldn't be up here all alone if it turns into an ice storm. We could be without power for at least a couple of days. Aaron and I were thinking of moving into one of the hotels in town to ride it out if you want company. Maybe I could take you to dinn-

MARY

(before he can finish)
I'll be fine. We'll be fine. I've got my...

Mary gestures towards the front door behind her.

MARY (CONT'D)

My son's sick. I can't really move him.

Doug is thrown for a loop.

DOUG

Oh. I'm sorry to hear that. Wow. I didn't know you had kids. How old is he?

Mary is getting increasingly uncomfortable.

MARY

He's nineteen. Stephen's nineteen.
(off Doug's reaction)
We had him when we were right out of college.

DOUG

But you're not...?

Doug awkwardly raises his left hand to ask if she is married.

MARY

Married? No. I was. My husband actually passed away a few years ago. So it's just me and Stephen now.

There is a moment of uncomfortable silence as Doug wonders how to recover from this.

DOUG

Well maybe one night we could all get dinner. The four of us. You, me, and our angry teenagers.

Doug laughs at his joke. He's not very good at flirting.

Mary is upset, confused, embarrassed. She doesn't quite know what to say. She puts her hand on the door to the house behind her and starts to open it, wanting to get out of this conversation.

MARY

That wouldn't really be appropriate. Aaron's my patient. And he's waiting for you so you should probably go.

DOUG

Sure. Of course. Sorry, I was just. Okay, well, thank you. And goodbye. I hope your son feels better.

Mary doesn't say anything in response. She opens the door and steps inside the house.

Over her shoulder Doug glances into house and sees Stephen from behind, sitting in his wheelchair, just before Mary closes the door.

DOUG (CONT'D)

(under his breath to
himself)

Shit.

He walks back towards the car, embarrassed and annoyed.

INT. FRONT HALL, DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Mary has just closed the front door behind her. She too is feeling embarrassed and annoyed. She kicks the door with the back of her foot.

MARY
Shit.

She shakes her head, wishing that she'd handled that differently. She is frustrated.

Then she looks up and sees her son waiting for her in his wheelchair. Her face is suddenly awash with guilt, exhaustion and frustration. This is her life.

INT. DEN, DOWNSTAIRS - EVENING

Mary is sitting in the den, a small boxy room just off the main living space and adjacent to Stephen's bedroom. She has put the door to, without closing it, and is sitting at a cluttered desk in front of an old desktop computer, waiting.

She checks the clock on the wall. It is six o'clock. Mary seems anxious.

Suddenly the computer comes to life as a Skype call comes through from a DR WILSON, ringing loudly. Mary clicks ACCEPT immediately.

INT. DR WILSON'S OFFICE - EVENING

Dr Wilson (50s), a kindly but serious academic with a beard, is sitting before his (much newer) computer screen. His office is impressive: full of dark wood, books, expensive rugs and leather chairs.

He adjusts his collar as the call with Mary connects and her face appears on screen before him.

MARY DR WILSON
Dr. Wilson. Hi! Hello Mary.

INTERCUT WITH MARY IN HER OFFICE.

Mary adjusts the webcam on her outdated computer and pushes her hair behind her ears when she sees herself in the little window on screen.

MARY
Thank you so much for squeezing me
in today Dr Wilson. I really
appreciate it. I know it's been a
while.

DR WILSON
It has. I was surprised to hear
from you. How are you doing?

MARY
I'm good. I'm fine. I'm okay.

DR WILSON
And Stephen?

Mary glances towards the door. She looks through the crack where she can see a sliver of Stephen's wheelchair.

Without looking back up at Dr Wilson, she shakes her head.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)
(nodding in understanding)
Still no change.

Mary is too ashamed to lift her head and make eye contact.

MARY
I'm moving Stephen into a home next month.

Mary waits for some reaction from Dr Wilson. He in turn waits for her to look up. When she does, she has tears running down her cheeks. She gives him a nervous, questioning smile through the tears.

MARY (CONT'D)
I think it's time.

She wipes her cheek with the palm of her hand and stands for a moment to push the door fully closed.

INT. THE DEN, DOWNSTAIRS - LATER

Mary and Dr Wilson are still chatting over Skype. She is more composed now, talking fluidly.

MARY
It's not even that I can't manage the work. I mean, I could do it in my sleep. It's that I don't know why anymore. I don't know why I'm doing it. Who am I doing it for? He's gone. He's not coming back. I kept waiting and waiting for him to wake up. To talk to me again. But I don't even know what he would say if he could speak. I'm the one who sent him away. I'm the reason he was in the car in the first place. I've spent four years trying to atone for this guilt that I feel as a mother. Making myself a martyr.
(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

Locking myself off from the rest of the world. But I'm not doing it for him. I'm doing it for myself. And I need to stop it.

DR WILSON

You know Mary, self-awareness can be a blessing an a curse. You're a wonderful psychologist but you cannot be your own patient. I think you're right to question your actions, your seclusion, your self-sacrifice. But you also need to see the good in what you've done. You can't write off these years as pure selfishness. You're a good mother, Mary. You have to remember that too.

MARY

Then why are the dreams back?

DR WILSON

Now Mary. We talked about this before. Your dreams of hurting Stephen, no matter how vivid or cruel, cannot undo any of the good you are doing. It's understandable that the dreams are back. You're about to go through a big change. The depression may have lifted but this time of transition is not going to be easy and you may need help getting through it.

MARY

I don't want to be on those pills again.

DR WILSON

And you may not need to be. Let's just run your blood work and we can talk later about whether or not you need something to help you through this period.

MARY

Okay.

DR WILSON

I'm pleased you called me Mary. You shouldn't go through this alone. You're doing the right thing. For both of you.

Mary nods, quietly, steeling herself for what is to come.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS, THE HOUSE - DAY

The sun is shining outside and through the skylights in the main living area of the house the sky is blue and clear.

Someone is knocking at the front door. Stephen sits alone in his wheelchair, in the main living area.

EXT. THE HOUSE, FRONT DOOR - SAME

A young West Indian nurse, GRACE (20s), is waiting on the doorstep. Her car, parked in the drive, bears the logo: MCA LabTech.

Not getting any response at the door, she peers through the small glass window beside it and catches sight of Stephen in his wheelchair.

GRACE
(calling through the
glass)
Hallo?

No response.

Suddenly the door is thrown open by Mary, somewhat dishevelled like she has just woken up.

MARY
Hi. Sorry. I was upstairs. Come in.
Come in.

Mary shakes her head as if to get rid of the cobwebs. She feels unusually tired.

Grace shows herself in, looking around the big house as she takes off her coat. She makes a bee-line for Stephen.

GRACE
(with her hand on his
shoulder)
So what we doing for this young man
today then?

MARY
Actually, it's me. I just need to
get some blood work done.

Grace, unimpressed, looks from wheelchair-bound Stephen to Mary.

GRACE
And what's wrong with you?

MARY
(confused, defensive)
Nothing. I'm fine.

GRACE
Then why you not take yourself to
the doctors.

MARY
I don't like to leave him. Alone. I
try not to leave the house.

Grace has pulled up a chair next to the sofa and pushes Mary into sitting as she sits down herself and starts pulling out syringes, vials, gloves.

GRACE
(gesturing back at
Stephen)
He born like that?

MARY
(not wanting to talk)
Car accident.

GRACE
Shame. Handsome boy. Got your eyes.
He don't talk none?

MARY
No.

GRACE
Don't understand nothing?

Mary shakes her head.

GRACE (CONT'D)
You take care of him on your own?

MARY
For now.

Grace has wrapped a blood pressure strap around Mary's arm and is pumping it up. She reads the results.

GRACE
(raising her eyebrows)
Blood pressure too high for a woman
your age.

She looks at Grace, sympathetic for a moment. She takes in the dark circles under her eyes.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Looks like you need to take a break.

MARY
I'm fine. Could we just..?

Grace pulls off the blood pressure monitor and pulls out a tourniquet, preparing to take the blood sample.

GRACE
None of my bees wax. I get it. You just wait. Your doctor tell you the same thing when he get the results.

Mary, who has been looking away, turns to see the blood pumping out of her veins into three neat little vials.

INT. STEPHEN'S BEDROOM, THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Mary is tucking Stephen into bed after a bath. Her usual cup of tea sits on the bedside table and she sits on the edge of his bed.

She looks at his pale vacant face and gets ready to leave when she hears an indistinct noise from outside the bedroom.

She turns to look at the doorway. The rest of the house is dark and through the cracked door she can see nothing but blackness.

The noise comes again. A dull THUD from somewhere within the house.

It could maybe be the water pipes but it doesn't sound like it and Mary, for the first time, is frightened.

She keeps her gaze fixed on the slice of darkness in the door frame.

She holds her breath.

A second passes. Two. Three.

Silence.

There it is again. Closer this time. Barefeet running on hardwood. A flicker of shadow in the darkness outside the doorway.

Suddenly Stephen's hand reaches out and grips her wrist.

Mary jumps.

She looks down and sees Stephen still staring vacantly up.

MARY
(gently)
Shhhhhh...shhhhhh...

She reaches down to prize his fingers from her arm. His fingers are stiff but she carefully lifts each one and then lays his arm back down by his side.

Her fear abated, Mary picks up her tea and leaves Stephen's bedside.

She opens the door and peers into the darkness.

Nothing.

She switches out the light and closes the door.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM, UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

Mary is lying in bed in the near darkness. The bedside clock tells us that it is past 2am but Mary is still wide awake, eyes open, staring up at the ceiling.

The old house is making its usual array of winter noises: the hum of the fridge downstairs, the heating pipes, the creak of snow outside and the sound of branches in the wind. Mary hears them all, but she does not hear the thudding again.

The rhythms seem to lull her finally into sleep as her eyes drift closed.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM, UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

Mary's eyes suddenly open wide.

It is not clear how much time has passed. She remains motionless, eyes wide, staring up at the ceiling.

She has heard something.

At first there is silence. Then the distinct sound of FOOTSTEPS downstairs.

The whites show around Mary's pupils. Fear.

She tries to move, to sit up, but she doesn't seem to be able to move anything but her eyes.

MARY'S POV.

Lying on her back, Mary can see the ceiling, the closed bedroom door and the window, through which some moonlight enters.

She hears the sound again.

It is the sound of bare feet on the hardwood floor downstairs. A child's footsteps. Running.

Her breathing speeds up and we feel her panic as she tries to make a sound but finds herself paralysed.

The footsteps seem to circle the downstairs area before finding the stairs.

The soft footfall begins to ascend. It's getting closer, slowing down.

The old floorboards outside the bedroom creak gently under the weight of the approaching footsteps.

Mary's eyes flick desperately towards the door.

For a moment there is silence.

Then she sees the door handle turn. Slowly. Creaking.

She shuts her eyes, trying to wake herself from this nightmare.

BLACKNESS.

When she opens them the room is still dark.

But now the door is open.

The hallway outside is dark but she can make out a figure in the doorway.

It's the silhouette of a child. Entering her room. Moving towards her.

Mary starts to hyperventilate.

She screws her eyes shut plunging us into BLACKNESS once again.

Only the sound of her terrified BREATHING. Otherwise silence.

She deliberately tries to calm herself down. Taking control of her breath. Forcing it to slow.

The BLACKNESS remains as she keeps her eyes shut.

Silence.

She opens her eyes.

Above her. Hovering over her bed. The grotesque face of a small BOY.

His face is pale and gaunt. His eyes sunken and red-rimmed, burn into her, painfully close.

But it's his mouth that fills her with dread and horror.

Crude black stitches hold together his bleeding lips. The wounds are crusted and swollen where the thick twine penetrates the flesh.

It is a horrifying sight that lasts but a moment.

Mary's panic overwhelms her. As she tries desperately to scream we BLACK OUT in the climax of her panic.

INT. DEN, DOWNSTAIRS - AFTERNOON

Mary is in the middle of a Skype consultation with Dr Wilson. She is shaken, disturbed and exhausted. Her tired eyes are puffy with crying.

MARY

(getting worked up)

You don't understand. It wasn't like any of the others. It was so real. It was awful. I couldn't move. My whole body was frozen and I couldn't do anything. I was in my room. And then I saw it. It was real. I swear, I saw it.

INT. DR WILSON'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Dr Wilson is sitting at his desk, looking calm and collected as usual.

DR WILSON

Mary... Mary, calm down. Listen to what you're saying. You're a rational adult.

(MORE)

DR WILSON (CONT'D)

You're a psychologist. There's no such thing as ghosts. You know what.

INTERCUT BETWEEN DR WILSON AND MARY

MARY

Maybe I'm not.

DR WILSON

Not what?

MARY

Rational. I know what I saw Dr Wilson. So either I'm losing my mind or there's...

DR WILSON

Or perhaps you experienced sleep paralysis.

MARY

What?

DR WILSON

It sounds very much to me like a case of sleep paralysis. It's not uncommon. It occurs when the body is stuck between REM sleep and waking. The mind is awake and alert, the eyes open, but the body is still asleep. Paralysed. Just like you experienced.

MARY

But I saw something. The boy. It was horrible. His face was... I heard him.

DR WILSON

Most cases of sleep paralysis involve some degree of auditory and visual hallucination. Often these are terrifying, precisely because of how real they seem and how physically disabled you feel. You are quite literally trapped between the dream world and the waking world.

Dr Wilson's words ring true and Mary begins to calm down.

MARY

I've never experienced anything like this.

DR WILSON

With the amount of stress you're under and the existing pattern of disturbed sleep it doesn't surprise me at all.

MARY

But the boy...? It was the boy from the paper. I recognized his face.

DR WILSON

The runaway you told me about?

MARY

Yes! I saw him. He was dead. I thought he was trying to tell me something.

DR WILSON

(calm, academic)

It's not surprising. You said yourself that the case has been all over the local news. You might be interested to know that sleep paralysis is thought to be the explanation behind most experiences of ghostly apparitions, even alien abduction.

Dr Wilson looks away from the camera as he searches for something on his computer. He types something on the keyboard. Clicks on a few links.

A window pops up on Mary's screen with a link.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)

It's in the folklore of many cultures. In Anglo tradition it's known as "Old Hag" syndrome because victims share a vision of an old woman sitting on their chests.

Mary clicks on the link and a new window opens up.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)

Take a look for yourself. Sleep paralysis can be utterly terrifying in the moment but it is not something to be worried about medically unless it becomes a recurring problem.

On Mary's screen is a smattering of terrifying images: John Henry Fuseli's famous painting THE NIGHTMARE showing a demon sitting on a woman's supine figure; etchings of the "Old Hag" from Anglo tradition; modern cartoons of victims trapped in bed while alien strangers lurk in the corners.

The frightening nature of these images seems to soothe Mary, reassuring her that Dr Wilson is right.

He waits til he can see that she is calmer.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)

We can still look to analyze the dream though, Mary. Tell me, what do you think the runaway boy represents for you?

MARY

(still distracted)

I don't know. My patients keep talking about him. In this town, so little happens that when something does, it takes over. You remember what it was like for me after the accident? I think that was probably half to blame for my depression.

At the memory Mary sits back in her chair, rubbing her eyes. She's back in control now. The psychologist once again.

MARY (CONT'D)

I guess he's been on my mind too. I can't stop thinking how badly we must have failed him. The system, I mean. All of us. For him to think running away was his best option. It's like the world just turned its back on him and left him out in the cold.

DR WILSON

Do you think it has anything to do with Stephen?

(off her quizzical expression)

(MORE)

DR WILSON (CONT'D)

Do you think that the sound of the child's footsteps in your house was a reminder of the child that you've lost? The son who used to come into your room at night when he was scared?

MARY

Stephen never used to do that.

DR WILSON

(pushing forward)

Your son whose own mouth has been sealed into silence by the accident.

Mary doesn't respond to this.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)

You often used to say that you felt that you lost Stephen long before the accident. That as he grew into a teenager with all his behavioral problems at school, you felt like you had lost your little boy. Do you think that is who your dream is really about? The Stephen of your memory?

Mary remains silent. She looks at a framed photo on the desk beside the computer. It shows her and Richard and a smiling young Stephen, aged 7, on holiday. She touches his cheek.

MARY

I wonder if things had been different... He was such a sweet little boy...

She trails off, lost in thought.

DR WILSON

Mary, I'm afraid our time is up. No more talk of ghosts. Okay?

Mary shakes herself alert and looks at her watch.

MARY

(to herself, remembering)

I have to give Stephen his bath.

DR WILSON

Might I suggest that you try and take some time in the next couple of days to yourself? Maybe get out of the house. See a friend.

Mary laughs ironically as if to say, "What friends?"

DR WILSON (CONT'D)

Soon you're going to have a lot more time and space to live your own life, Mary. Start easing yourself into it. You deserve it.

Mary nods, acquiescing.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)

We'll speak next week about prescribing something to help you regulate your sleep cycle. The lab still hasn't sent me your blood work. In the meantime, take care of yourself and stay warm.

Mary smiles goodbye as Dr Wilson ends the call on his end.

She minimizes the disconnected Skype window and remains seated at the desk, absorbing Dr Wilson's words.

EXT. THE GROUNDS SURROUNDING THE HOUSE - DAY

It is another stunningly clear day. The sun shines off the snow, that by now has become hard and frozen over.

Mary and Lucy, bundled up in coats and scarves, are walking through the fir woods.

They are only a few hundred yards away from the house and they appear to be circling it, slowly.

LUCY

You want to know something ridiculous? I think this is the furthest away from the house I've seen you since you brought Stephen home from the hospital.

MARY

(laughing it off)

Don't be crazy... I get out.

(off Willow's raised eyebrows)

Sometimes.

They keep walking. This is a rare treat for Mary.

MARY (CONT'D)
Is it just me or does that feel
like a lifetime ago? I really
thought he was going to just wake
up one day and be normal again.
Even if he was still angry. At
least he'd be able to tell me
himself.

LUCY
It wasn't your fault.

MARY
(lost in recollection)
He looked at me. About a month
after the accident. Just for a
moment. The doctors kept telling me
how well he was doing. That it was
just a matter of time before he
came back to us. But now, looking
back, I think I lost him the day I
lost Richard. Stephen never came
home with me.

LUCY
I'm proud of you, Mar.

Mary smiles, she looks down at the snow crunching beneath her feet.

LUCY (CONT'D)
So when are you taking him in?

MARY
End of the month. My analyst says I
need to start practicing leaving
the nest.

LUCY
He's right! You need to get a life!

Mary elbows her playfully.

MARY
I've been a wife and a mother since
I left school. Now I'm what? A
widow and an ex-nurse?

LUCY
You're a sexy widow.

MARY

Right.

LUCY

I know someone who certainly thinks so.

(off Mary's look)

Doug Hart. I saw him in town yesterday. He was asking after you.

MARY

Oh god. I was so rude to him.

LUCY

Funny. He was worried he'd offended you.

MARY

He said that? What else did he say?

LUCY

I knew it! You like him. You should. He's cute. Why don't you ask him out?

MARY

Out? I think we just established that I don't do out.

LUCY

Soon you will. And in the meantime you could always call him.

MARY

I don't know, Luce. What would I even say?

LUCY

It's a brave new world, my love.
It's a brave new world.

Lucy takes Mary's arm in hers as they continue to walk through the snow.

INT. LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS - EVENING

Mary is sitting curled up on the couch in the living area. Stephen is in his wheelchair nearby. She has an address book open in her lap and is nervously looking at the phone.

Eventually she takes a deep breath in and exhales, readying herself before picking up the phone and dialling.

As she waits for someone to pick up she stands and starts pacing nervously.

MARY
Hello, Doug? ... Hi. It's Mary.
Portman...
(finally, smiling)
Hi.

INT. DINING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS - EVENING

The dining area, which until now has looked unused and dusty, has been cleaned and decorated. The table is laid with fresh linens, candles and silverware. Mary has gone to some effort.

She and Doug are sitting at the table, the remnants of a homemade dinner surrounding them.

At last they seem relaxed, comfortable. They are both laughing at something that Doug has said.

DOUG
I'm not going to lie. I was pretty surprised to hear your voice. In a good way. It was a good surprise.

Mary smiles, enjoying this.

DOUG (CONT'D)
I felt like such an ass the other day. I've been wanting to ask you out for weeks and then... I had no idea.
(gently)
About your husband, or Stephen. I'm so sorry. Lucy told me about what happened.

MARY
Course she did.

DOUG
She didn't say much. Just that there was a car accident and you lost your husband and your son's been in a coma ever since.

MARY
It's not that simple. But. I guess that's the gist of it.

DOUG
Not that simple?

MARY

Richard was killed immediately. He wasn't wearing his seatbelt. Didn't stand a chance. Thankfully Stephen was. He had some intracranial bleeding but when...

She catches herself and stops.

MARY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, you don't want to hear all this.

Doug reaches across the table and touches her hand. It's gentle, sympathetic.

MARY (CONT'D)

His brain started to heal and the scans showed him recovering. For a while it looked like he was regaining consciousness. His reflexes were normal, he would seem to sleep and wake, but he never came back. They called it a waking coma.

DOUG

And you've been taking care of him ever since?

MARY

Eventually there weren't any more tests they could run. The doctors didn't know what to do with us. After 6 months he was still vegetative, so they let me take him home.

DOUG

I can't even imagine how hard that must have been. Losing your husband as well.

MARY

I miss him. I miss him so much. I miss them both... I struggled - for a long time - with depression. For a while I thought I was never going to come out of it. I felt like I was losing my mind...

Mary snaps out of her daze. She realizes that she's said more than she wanted to. She pulls her hand out from under Doug's.

MARY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. Sorry. I haven't done...
(gesturing at the "date"
they've just enjoyed)
this... in a while. Well, ever. I'm
sorry.

DOUG
Mary, it's okay. I understand. I've
had a wonderful time.

MARY
Really?

DOUG
Yes! We all have our baggage. Lord
knows I do. You've met my son. You
know better than anyone.

Doug laughs, forcing Mary to relax and smile at least.

MARY
Divorce is tough but being a
teenager is even tougher.

Doug laughs. Mary looks over to the living area where Stephen
is sitting in his wheelchair facing away from them out of the
window.

MARY (CONT'D)
No psychology degree prepares you
for being the parent of a teenage
boy. When Stephen hit puberty it
was like he became an entirely
different person.

DOUG
(light hearted)
Aaron too. I swear it's the
hormones.

MARY
(remembering)
He was so cold. It was like having
a stranger in the house all of a
sudden. Now I'd give anything just
to hear him tell me to fuck off.

Doug shifts in his chair. Not sure how to respond.

MARY (CONT'D)
You're lucky. Aaron's a good kid.

She shakes off the memories and smiles at Doug. He takes her hand again and this time she doesn't move it.

MARY (CONT'D)

I think I just need to take this
really slow.

DOUG

Of course. I should get back to
Aaron anyway. It's late.

(standing)

Are you sure I can't help you with
the dishes.

MARY

No, it's fine. I need to give
Stephen a bath and get him to bed.
Dishes can wait.

Doug raises Mary's hand to his lips and kisses it.

DOUG

Then I shall bid you goodnight.

Mary smiles, blushing.

INT. LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS - LATER

Mary, tea in hand, is leaving Stephen's bedroom after putting him to bed. She switches the light out and shuts the door behind her.

She turns to see the dirty plates and glasses all over the dining table.

She sighs, too exhausted to face the clean up.

Her eyes start to droop and she rubs them, trying to wake up.

She takes a gulp of her tea but it doesn't help. She is overcome with exhaustion and sits down for a moment on the sofa to rest.

Her eyelids feel impossibly heavy.

EXT. THE GROUNDS SURROUNDING THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Mary is outside.

It is dark and the moonlight reflects off the snow covered ground.

It all appears more pristine, more sparkling and fresh. Snow flakes fall from the sky with picturesque grace all around her.

Mary stands beneath the fir trees, on the path that surrounds the house.

It is silent.

She turns to see her house, not a hundred yards away. The lights are on low inside and the place looks warm and cosy, almost like a Christmas card picture.

Confused, Mary looks all around. Behind her, the woods are impenetrably black. Before her the house looks inviting.

She takes a step towards it.

The sound of her footsteps crunching through the thick fresh snow breaks the silence. Everything seems heightened.

Then, softly at first, but becoming clearer, another sound.

Between Mary's own footsteps she hears another set of steps. Further away.

Running.

A child's FOOTSTEPS.

Mary whips her head around, peering into the black space between the trees. She sees nothing, but the sound of running gets closer.

She turns back to the house and starts to speed up.

Walking turns to running until she is going as fast as she can towards the warmth and safety of the house.

The snow is now coming down inexplicably FAST and THICK. It blurs her vision and makes running even harder.

The footsteps are closing in.

She turns back once again and still sees nothing.

The sound of the child running is almost upon her.

She pushes full tilt towards the house, her feet struggling to grip the thick snow underfoot.

The breath catches in her throat.

Panic overtakes her. The primal fear of being chased.

The sound of the footsteps is getting louder and LOUDER.

Just as she is sure that she is about to be caught, she makes it to the porch of the house.

She rips open the front door and hurls herself inside.

She turns to slam the door behind her. A hand shoots inside, trying to grab her.

She SLAMS the door onto the hand. SMASHING it between the door and the frame.

Without thinking, she pulls the door open a fraction and SLAMS it again and AGAIN onto the hand of the intruder.

Looking down, she sees that it is the hand of a child.

Tiny, pale and bloodied now.

Horrified by the brutality of her own actions she STOPS abruptly.

Mary throws open the door, expecting to find the boy with the stitched lips.

Instead she sees her son Stephen, sitting in his wheelchair on the porch.

He looks paler and weaker than usual, shivering in the cold, half frozen and covered in snow. He clutches his hand to his chest.

It is a bloody mess of broken bone and cartilage.

Appalled at what she has done, Mary rushes out to her son and throws her arms around him, SOBBING uncontrollably.

She cradles him in her arms like a baby, weeping hot tears onto his face and rocking him back and forth.

Stephen looks up into her eyes, making real conscious eye contact.

He opens his mouth to speak and his voice is soft and quiet like a child's.

STEPHEN
Don't leave me mother.

INT. LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS - NIGHT

Mary wakes up from her nightmare with a jolt. She is still on the sofa in the living area and the clock on the mantelpiece says that it is 3am.

The dream has shaken her badly.

She tries to stand and finds that her legs are weak. She is still groggy with sleep and she struggles to focus her eyes properly.

Pulling herself upright she makes her way to Stephen's bedroom door.

She pauses for a second, resting her head against the door frame. She doesn't want to wake him but she desperately needs the reassurance and comfort of seeing him.

Ever so gently she turns the handle and pushes the door open noiselessly.

The warm light from the living area floods into Stephen's room, making a path to the bed.

She moves into the room, tiptoeing groggily, almost drunk with exhaustion.

Finding the bed, she sits down beside her son's sleeping figure. The light crosses over his body, leaving the head of the bed still shrouded in darkness.

She reaches out and pats the form beneath the covers.

Even in her exhausted state she notices something is different.

The lump in the bed is curled into a ball: small, entirely covered by the blanket.

She leans over and reaches for the edge of the covers.

Tentatively she pulls back the blanket.

Looking up at her with his awful red eyes and gruesome mouth full of stitches and scabs is the little boy.

Gripped with terror, Mary opens her mouth to SCREAM.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM, UPSTAIRS - MORNING

Mary wakes up with a cry. The sun is up and her alarm is RINGING loudly, like a mechanical scream.

Mary is badly shaken. She seems confused to find herself in bed and her head aches terribly.

She sits on the edge of her bed for a moment trying to regulate her breath which is still coming fast and hard from the shock of the nightmare.

Finally she takes a deep breath and stands, only now turning off the shrieking alarm clock.

INT. LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS - LATER THAT MORNING

Mary looks shattered as she goes about her morning routine.

She pours oatmeal into a bowl and heads for Stephen's bedroom.

INT. STEPHEN'S BEDROOM, THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Stephen is in bed with his arms and chest connected to the EMS machine.

Mary enters with his oatmeal and sits down on the side of his bed as usual to give him his pills.

She selects his medication but her hands are shaking and she knocks over the sleeping pills before carefully selecting a different bottle.

Taking his face in her hands, she turns him towards her and catches sight of something on his cheek.

Faint but undeniably there: four neat red scratches, like nail marks.

Trembling, she holds her hand over his face, positioning her fingers over the marks.

The scratch marks are too small, too close together to fit her own hand.

They are a child's claw marks.

INT. MARY'S OFFICE - DAY

Mary is alone in the office. Outside the sky is grey and heavy.

Mary is on the phone with Dr Wilson, she is very worked up and emotional.

MARY

I told you. It's real. Something is happening to us.

INT. DR WILSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr Wilson is standing in a corner of his office. His secretary is standing in the open doorway, anxious about the time.

Through the door to his office a patient is waiting for him outside. He ushers his secretary out, gesturing that it won't be long.

DR WILSON

(firmly)

Mary. You need to breathe. Take a deep breath and think about what you're saying.

INTERCUT BETWEEN MARY AND DR WILSON.

MARY

(irrational)

I don't care. I don't care how crazy it sounds. It was real. I saw him. I was dreaming but then I woke up. I woke up and he was still there. I'm not crazy. It's not fucking sleep paralysis. It's real. You have to help us. I don't know what he wants. What does he want with my son?

DR WILSON

Mary, listen to yourself. This isn't you. You're talking about the ghost of a little boy you never met. Your stress levels are through the roof and your sleeping problems are making it hard for you to distinguish your nightmares from reality.

MARY

For god's sake, don't you think I know how this sounds? You have to believe me. Stephen has scratches on his face. I can prove it.

DR WILSON

Now no one is saying you're crazy. You're sleep deprived. You're confused. You're struggling to make sense of everything and you're latching onto irrational explanations. You said yourself that the scratches are barely noticeable. You could have done it yourself and not even noticed.

Mary, exhausted, is quiet now. She's tired of fighting.

MARY

You have to help me. I can't do this. I don't know what is real anymore. If it's not real then what's happening to me?

DR WILSON

I'm here to help you, Mary. Everything's going to be okay. The results of your blood work are due today and I'm almost certainly going to recommend that we get you straight onto a strong anti-depressant.

MARY

I don't want to do that again.

DR WILSON

We'll talk it through later but it may be what you need to get you through this transition. Let's speak again tonight for our video session. Okay?

Mary is resigned, wiped out.

MARY

The storm's coming tonight.

DR WILSON

Well hopefully you won't lose power and we'll still be able to speak.

Mary does not respond.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)
Alright then, Mary. Until later.

Dr Wilson hangs up the phone feeling dissatisfied.

The intercom buzzes, reminding him to move on. He shakes off the feeling.

INT. MARY'S OFFICE - DAY

Mary is still sitting at her desk, staring into nothingness. It isn't clear how long she has been like this but the sound of the door opening causes her to look up.

Lucy enters carrying a box of supplies. In contrast to Mary she is bustling with energy and her face is flushed from the cold outside.

LUCY
What are you doing in here? All your appointments are cleared for today and tomorrow.

MARY
(dazed)
What?

LUCY
Hon, what is going on with you? Didn't you get my message? Haven't you turned on the TV? The storm is due to hit us tonight and it looks like rain. You know what that means.

MARY
I know. I know. I'm sorry. I just. I'm so tired Luce.

LUCY
(bustling about, not noticing how bad Mary looks)
I've brought you some extra food and water just in case and Mike packed you a few emergency things.

Lucy places the box down and shows Mary the contents.

There is a flashlight, a packet of batteries, a few disposable lighters, candles, a small hand axe.

Mary picks up the axe absent-mindedly.

LUCY (CONT'D)
(by way of explanation)
It's gonna be an ice storm. Last
year our front door froze shut.

Lucy takes the axe from Mary and puts it back in the box.
Mary is still dazed.

MARY
Did they find the little boy?

LUCY
Oh god. Didn't you hear? The
picture went national and of course
now the police are dealing with
"sightings" everywhere from Florida
to Washington.

MARY
(staring into the
distance)
He's dead.

LUCY
I'm sure he's fine. Probably hopped
a bus south. Now what about you?

Lucy finally stops moving and takes both of Mary's hands in
hers.

LUCY (CONT'D)
Are you SURE you don't want to
hunker down with us tonight?

MARY
He's got his machines and his
drugs. We're all set up here. I
can't move him. But I appreciate
the offer Luce. We'll be okay.
We've weathered worse storms.

Lucy kisses her hand warmly and stands.

MARY (CONT'D)
Luce? Do you believe in ghosts?

LUCY
What?

MARY
I don't know. Do you believe that
our souls can stay on after we die?

LUCY

I believe in souls. And I believe that Richard's always going to be looking out for you if that's what you mean.

Mary looks away, out of the window, her eyes are glassy again.

LUCY (CONT'D)

What's going on with you? You okay?

She reaches out and touches Mary's face. Mary flinches slightly and her eyes refocus on Lucy. Her friend's eyes are full of love and concern.

MARY

I'm okay. I think I'm just tired.

LUCY

I hate leaving you like this but I have to get back and help Mike or he's going to kill me.

She stands and takes a last look over the provisions she's left.

LUCY (CONT'D)

You sure you have everything?
Blankets? Lanterns? These candles won't do you much good.

MARY

We have everything Lucy. Thank you.
Really.

Lucy's already heading out the door.

LUCY

Make sure you have enough wood.
There's extra batteries in the box too.

And she's gone. Mary is left alone again.

INT. LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS - AFTERNOON

Mary is prepping the house for the storm. The dining table is covered in provisions. Big bottles of water, food, batteries, flashlights, blankets etc.

Stephen is sitting in his wheelchair in the middle of the living area as Mary moves around him.

She unloads an extra bushel of firewood beside the stove and throws in a couple of logs. Lifting one heavy enamel cover she holds her hand over the cooking plate, checking that it's still hot.

She turns to look over what is on the table, making a mental checklist.

MARY
(to herself)
Laterns. Laterns... Basement.

She turns on her heel and heads toward the basement stairs.

Her brisk pace slows as she descends each stair, and when she finally reaches the door to the basement she opens it with some hesitation.

INT. BASEMENT, THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mary pushes open the door to the basement and stands on the threshold for a moment as though afraid.

The basement, however, it is not the dark, dingy cellar that her face might suggest. On the contrary, the room is fully furnished like the rest of the house: a little outdated but warm none the less.

Mary takes a deep breath, steeling herself, then steps into the basement.

She moves slowly, as though taking in the room for the first time in a long time.

The walls and surfaces are covered in framed photos, many of which we might recognise from upstairs before the accident. Young Mary and Richard, happy and laughing.

Now they are propped up hurriedly, hidden from view in an unused room.

Mary's hand lingers over these photos, the ones that were too painful to keep upstairs.

She lovingly touches a dusty photo of Richard's face before looking around the room.

This was clearly Richard's domain. There is fishing tackle on the walls, hunting gear, an old shotgun, a work table still covered in tools.

Mary's gaze moves slowly over all of this, drinking in the memories of her husband.

Upstairs and outside, the wind has picked up and it whistles now in the chimney, snapping Mary out of her daze.

Remembering what she is down here for she goes towards a small door in the far wall.

The ceiling here is pitched and the door is only 3 or 4 feet high and appears to lead to a small extra storage space.

Mary tugs at the handle. It jams.

Looking down she sees that the door has been locked with a padlock. She looks at it quizzically, turning it over in her hand as though she isn't sure she remembers it.

Frustrated, she gives the door one more jiggle before turning to head back upstairs.

As she ascends the stairs she suddenly hears a sound.

It's not the wind this time. It's that same low thudding noise that appears to be coming from the walls of the house itself.

Mary stops moving and holds her breath, listening.

She cocks her head to one side, not sure whether the sound came from back in the basement or upstairs.

She waits for another beat but hears nothing.

Turning to go back up, Mary screams as she walks straight into someone standing at the top of the stairs.

The figure takes her by the shoulders. She looks up and sees that it is Doug.

DOUG

Hey, hey. It's me.

MARY

(scared, angry)

Jesus Christ. What the hell are you doing?

She breaks free from his grip. Adrenaline rushing through her, making her angry.

INT. LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Mary pushes past Doug and walks round to the living area. He follows, apologetic.

DOUG

I'm sorry Mary. I knocked but no one answered. I just wanted to make sure that you were okay.

MARY

You can't just let yourself in to other people's houses. You scared the shit out of me.

DOUG

I'm sorry. I was worried about you.

Mary turns her back on him and opens a drawer in the bureau in the dining room.

There is a box of assorted keys that she begins to rummage through.

Doug is taken aback by her change of behavior.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Are you really going to stay here tonight? It's already picking up out there. You're almost certainly going to lose power out here.

MARY

(not looking up from her task)

This isn't my first storm.

DOUG

Aaron and I have a suite down at the Holiday Inn. There's plenty of room. Why don't you come with us?

MARY

I can't just check him into a hotel, okay. Look at him.

She points to Stephen, in his wheelchair, legs wired up to his clunky EMS unit.

Mary goes back to looking for the key.

DOUG

I'm sorry. I was just trying to help.

Mary starts opening other drawers, rummaging around looking for a key that might fit that padlock.

DOUG (CONT'D)
(trying a different tack)
Hey did you hear? That runaway
kid's alive.

This gets Mary's attention.

MARY
What?

DOUG
I don't know the whole story but I
heard something on the radio on my
way over about New Orleans.

MARY
New Orleans?

DOUG
Great news right?

MARY
He's definitely alive?

DOUG
So I guess we don't have to worry
about him getting caught in the
storm now.

Mary lets this sink in. She starts to half laugh for a second, relieved.

But if the boy is still alive then maybe she's just crazy. She's not sure which is worse.

Her face clouds over.

Unaware, Doug moves over to the arm chair next to Stephen's wheelchair as he continues talking to Mary. He reaches out and touches Stephen's face, turning his cheek.

DOUG (CONT'D)
(joking)
Did you two get into a fight or
something?

Mary stands up, immediately defensive.

MARY
Leave him alone.

DOUG
Sorry. Wow. I am doing everything
wrong right now.

MARY

Doug, I think it would be best if
you just left now.

DOUG

I'm sorry. I was kidding. I didn't
mean anything by it.

MARY

We'll be fine. You should go before
it gets dark.

Doug takes the hint and starts moving toward the front door.

Mary picks up the axe from Willow's emergency supply box and
starts heading back towards the basement.

MARY (CONT'D)

(without looking back)

You can let yourself out.

INT. BASEMENT, THE HOUSE - DUSK

Mary re-enters the basement, this time with a more purposeful
look. She heads straight for the locked door and kneels down
beside it.

She gets a good grip on the little axe and lines it up
against the metal arch of the padlock.

She pulls back the axe and brings it down hard on the lock.

INT. LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS - DUSK

In the main living area the sound of Mary's axe working on
the padlock is muffled and intermittent. The space is
otherwise quiet. Empty.

The sky outside is turning dark. Cold wet raindrops are just
starting to fall on the big glass skylights in the kitchen.
As the water hits the glass it freezes instantly.

A phone starts ringing.

INT. BASEMENT, THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mary stops swinging at the metal padlock which shows no sign
of breaking open.

In her frustration she swings wide and the axe sinks into the
wood just above the lock.

Realizing that this is a better idea, she starts working to free the lock from the door altogether.

The satisfying thud of the axe sinking into the wood helps Mary to vent her frustration.

The sound of the phone ringing upstairs goes unnoticed.

INT. THE DEN, DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Mary's computer monitor shows DR WILSON trying to connect. The little green phone rings loudly.

From deep within the belly of the house comes the steady thudding of Mary's axe.

INT. DR WILSON'S OFFICE - EVENING

Dr Wilson is sitting in front of his computer looking agitated.

He has a pile of papers in front of him, one of which has MCA LabTech and the name PORTMAN, MARY printed neatly above a set of results.

He looks at his screen, waiting for the call to connect then looks at his watch impatiently.

Just as he's about to give up, we see the window on his computer pop open as Mary arrives, a little out of breath.

INT. THE DEN, DOWNSTAIRS - SAME

The door to the den is wide open and Stephen can be seen sitting in his wheelchair outside.

Mary, who has just run upstairs, is a little out of breath. She speaks quickly, blurting her words out and not letting him get a word in.

MARY

Dr Wilson. I'm sorry I didn't hear you. The storm's just starting up and I have to get the lanterns so I can't talk but it's okay. I'm sorry about this morning. I was really shaken up. But you're right. It's all in my head. Turns out that runaway kid isn't even dead.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

I don't know what's gotten into me
but if you think an anti-depressant
would help then we should
definitely talk about that tomo-

DR WILSON

(interrupting her)

Benzodiazepine.

MARY

What?

DR WILSON

That's what got into you.

He holds up the lab test results in front of the camera.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)

Mary, I got the results of your
blood work today. I have to say I'm
extremely disappointed. If you'd
told me that you were self-
medicating I could have helped you
much more quickly. It's no surprise
you're having so much sleep
disturbance. With the amount of
pills you've been taking it's
little wonder.

MARY

What are you talking about?

DR WILSON

Mary, I understand that you're
under a lot of pressure right now.
I want to be able to help you but I
can't do that if you're not being
honest with me. Do you know how
dangerous this could have been?

MARY

I'm not taking anything.

DR WILSON

Aside from the fact that mixing
prescription drugs can be lethal, I
can only assume you've been taking
medication from Stephen which puts
not only your health at risk but
also his.

MARY

I don't know what you're talking
about. I haven't taken anything.

DR WILSON

Mary, I can't help you unless you're honest with me. And with yourself. Now if you need something to help you sleep, I can prescribe you something much lighter.

Outside the rain is getting heavier and heavier. There is a clap of thunder.

MARY

You've made a mistake. Those aren't my results.

Mary stands up from the desk.

DR WILSON

Mary.

MARY

I have to go. I don't have time for this.

She clicks her mouse and the Skype window is minimized.

The glowing green light on the webcam remains lit as Mary walks out the door.

INT. DR WILSON'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Dr Wilson is irritated, frustrated that Mary has walked out. He can still see the empty den in Mary's house.

He shakes his head as he puts Mary's lab results into a manila folder sitting on his desk.

He looks back up at the Skype window and moves to disconnect the call.

As he does, something on screen catches his eye.

INT. BASEMENT, THE HOUSE - EVENING

Mary is back in the basement, axe in hand, working on removing the lock from the little wooden door.

The sound of the storm upstairs is getting louder. The freezing rain makes a strange creaking, cracking sound that can be heard throughout the house.

With a final swing, Mary manages to loosen the lock enough that she is able to pull it right off.

INT. DR WILSON'S OFFICE - SAME

Dr Wilson is leaning in close to the computer screen. He is looking at something through the open den door in Mary's house.

Something is not right.

The Skype window on Dr Wilson's computer shows an image of the den. Through his computer speakers he can hear the faint sounds of the storm and the occasional thud from downstairs.

It is not at first clear what it is that Dr Wilson is looking at.

Then we see what caught his eye.

Stephen's wheelchair is sitting in the middle of the living area, just as it was before, visible through the open door of the den.

What has unsettled Dr Wilson is that now, suddenly, the chair is empty.

Dr Wilson leans close to the screen. What can this mean?

Suddenly a dark figure moves past the doorway.

The shock throws Dr Wilson back in his chair.

INT. BASEMENT, THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mary, careful to avoid splinters, pulls the lock free of the door.

She opens the door slowly.

Inside it is dark. It seems to be a tiny, sloped crawl space that can be used as extra storage.

The door is only a few inches open when Mary notices a strange smell emanating from inside.

She pulls the door wider.

BLACKNESS.

The power cuts out with a soft whirr and Mary is plunged into total darkness.

INT. DR WILSON'S OFFICE - SAME

Dr Wilson is absorbing what he has just seen, his mind is racing.

DR WILSON
(calling out)
Mary? MARY?

He starts to realize what a mistake he has made.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)
(louder now)
STEPHEN?

The Skype window on his screen freezes. An on screen message shows CONNECTION ENDED.

He tries frantically to re-dial her but the call cannot be connected. USER UNAVAILABLE.

Whipping open the manila folder labelled PORTMAN, MARY he quickly finds her home address and phone number. He picks up his landline and tries dialling her.

Another fail.

He sits for a moment, trying to calculate the severity of the situation.

With only the briefest moment of hesitation he stands up, folder in hand, throws on his coat and grabs his car keys.

INT. BASEMENT, THE HOUSE - SAME

Down in the basement, Mary is stuck in virtual blackness.

MARY
(under her breath)
Shit.

In the dark she fumbles for something in her pockets.

The sounds of the rain freezing on the roof and sides of the house is even more pronounced in the inky stillness.

Mary flicks on a small disposable lighter from Willow's emergency box.

It creates a warm pool of light. The small success elicits a brief smile from Mary.

Moving back to the door, Mary pulls it open.

She smells it again. That strange odor.

On the floor, close to the door is what she came here for. A pair of sturdy old hurricane lanterns.

She leans into the crawl space itself to reach them, bringing with her the small pool of light.

She reaches down to grab the lanterns when she hears a noise behind her, approaching from further down in the claustrophobic crawl space.

She turns, holding her lighter out before her.

From the darkness emerges a horrible visage she knows all too well.

The pale face, red-rimmed eyes and bloody stitched lips of the boy from her nightmares.

All of a sudden he is right in front of her, almost on top of her, his eyes wide.

Mary opens her mouth to scream as she stumbles back, trying to get away and out of the small space.

Before she can get very far she is knocked unconscious by some unseen force.

DARKNESS engulfs us once again.

INT. BATHROOM, UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

MARY'S POV:

Mary's eyes slowly start to flutter open. Her vision is hazy at first.

She finds herself in the upstairs bathroom.

Like in her dream, the bathroom seems warmer, almost glowing. The room is steamy. She can hear water trickling into the already full tub.

But now Mary is in the water.

She tries to sit up but finds that she can't.

Her head her throbs and she feels woozy. Her eyes drift shut for a moment.

She opens them again.

Stephen is leaning over her, looking down into her eyes.

END POV.

Mary is naked in the bath which is full of hot soapy water.

Her hands are bound and strapped to the faucet. Her ankles too are bound together and there is duct tape covering her mouth.

Stephen is sitting on Mary's usual stool next to the tub, leaning over her in the same way that she did.

There are candles everywhere.

The steamy room has a soft dreamlike feel.

Mary's clothes have been removed and neatly folded in a pile on the counter.

Mary moves to sit up again but Stephen gently pushes her back.

Her eyes are wide with panic and confusion as she looks up at her son. Straining against the tape on her mouth.

Stephen smiles and sings a lullaby ever so softly under his breath.

When he speaks, his voice is calm and soft. He takes the tone of a mother talking to a young child: reassuring, gentle.

STEPHEN
Hello mother.

Mary is even more thrown to hear him speak. She struggles beneath his hand, trying to sit up but he holds her more firmly down.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Shhh... shhh... it's okay. There
there. Shhhhh now. You're awake.

He picks up the jug that Mary used to wash him and begins pouring hot water over her hair, careful not to splash her eyes.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
You've been sleeping for a long
time. But now we're both awake and
it's my turn to look after you.

He picks up a bottle of shampoo and squeezes some into his palm. Cradling her neck, he begins lathering the shampoo into her hair.

He touches a certain point on the back of her head that makes Mary cringe in pain.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Oh, I'm sorry about that. I think I left a nasty bump. But you were ruining the surprise.

He continues rubbing the shampoo into her head. His movements are sensual, slow.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

You always had such beautiful hair. And it always smells delicious. Like honeysuckle.

He pours the jug of water slowly over her hair, rinsing it.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Doesn't it feel wonderful to be washed. I love it when you bathe me. Your hands are always so soft.

He runs his hand lower over her body.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Doesn't that feel good?

Mary squirms underneath his touch. She thrashes in the tub and strains to scream through her taped up mouth.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Now now mother. Be a good girl. There there now. Shhhhh.

At Stephen's calming touch, Mary starts to whimper.

She is afraid and confused and entirely at Stephen's mercy tied in the bathtub.

She makes a quieter noise, trying to speak.

Stephen reaches out and starts to lift a corner of the tape over her mouth.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Will you be a good girl? If I take this off will you be good? I'd like to talk to you.

(MORE)

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
And you know better than anyone
that there's no point in screaming
in this house.

Mary nods her compliance and Stephen slowly peels off the
duct tape.

Mary takes deep lungfuls of air. She looks up at Stephen, not
sure what to say.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Hello mother.

MARY
(barely more than a
whimper)
Stephen, what are you doing? What's
happening?

STEPHEN
I'm taking care of you silly. Just
like you take care of me.

MARY
Am I dreaming?

STEPHEN
(stroking her cheek with a
wet hand)
No my love. Not any more.

MARY
How are you doing this?

STEPHEN
Moving? Talking? Being "awake"?

Mary nods.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
(like a naughty child
telling a secret)
I was never really asleep.

MARY
What?

STEPHEN
Well, I was. For a while. After the
accident I woke up in the hospital
and you were by my side.

FLASHBACK TO:

MONTAGE {ALL FROM STEPHEN'S POV - FOUR YEARS AGO}

--Stephen's eyes flutter open. There is a mirror above his head. We see a 15 year old Stephen lying in a hospital bed. He has small cuts on his face that have been neatly stitched. He is hooked up to monitors and there is a tube going into his mouth to help him breathe.

He turns his gaze and sees Mary sitting by his bedside. She is younger and more beautiful though her eyes are red and puffy.

Her face fills with hope and expectancy as she sees Stephen's eyes opening.

STEPHEN (V.O.)

You were waiting on my every move.
So worried. So full of love. In the beginning I didn't say anything to you because I was still angry. I wanted to punish you for sending me away.

--Some time later Stephen still in hospital, sits in a similar room with a wall mirror. We see his cuts and bruises have healed. The tubes have gone and he is lying propped up in bed. Staring vacantly ahead. Mary is in the room, she is standing talking to two doctors, looking agitated. A nurse wipes Stephen's mouth.

STEPHEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But then it became a game. The longer I didn't speak the more worried everyone seemed to be and the more attention you gave me. Just because I didn't, everyone assumed that I couldn't.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Mary is listening to Stephen's story in horror and disbelief.

MARY
(in denial)
No, no, no...

STEPHEN
(chosing not to hear her)
You all made it so easy.

FLASHBACK TO:

--More time has elapsed in the hospital. Stephen is sitting upright in a wheelchair and we can see his reflection in a window. Mary looks frustrated and exhausted, sitting behind him talking to another doctor who shakes his head, looking baffled.

STEPHEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The doctors stood around scratching their heads and all I had to do was nothing. The more they told you how complex the brain is and how little we understand about brain damage, the easier I knew it would be.

--Now Stephen is at home, in his bedroom. Mary attends to his every need and we see her through his eyes. The tireless nurse, beautiful, close; leaning over him, touching him, feeding him.

STEPHEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

You were taking such good care of me. I finally had you all to myself.

BACK TO PRESENT:

MARY

No. It can't be true. You couldn't.

He pauses and looks at his mother. Mary is shaking her head, unable to process what he's telling her.

STEPHEN

It was worth it.

Mary does not understand his meaning.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

The accident. I took a risk but it was worth it.

FLASHBACK TO:

--It is the late summer's day of the opening. Younger Stephen looks at himself in the side mirror of the car as his father, RICHARD (35) drives. Richard is talking. We see his mouth moving but hear nothing. Neither father nor son look happy.

STEPHEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He was taking me away. Away from this house. Away from you. I hated him.

The car is travelling fast down a near empty highway. Young Stephen takes his eyes off the road and down to the seatbelt buckle at his father's side.

STEPHEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I didn't care if I died. As long as
he did.

Young Stephen reaches out and releases Richard's buckle.

As Richard looks down in confusion, Stephen grabs hold of the wheel and pulls it sharply, sending the car into a wild spin that sends them crashing into the barrier.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Mary opens her mouth in a paroxysm of grief. She struggles to breathe. Her body tries to curl up into a foetal position but the restraints make it difficult.

Stephen tenderly strokes her back, trying to soothe her.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
There, there. Shhhhh. It's okay.
It's over now. I'm here.

MARY
How could you? How could you? Oh
god. Stephen, you're sick. You're
not well.

STEPHEN
(still calm)
You're overreacting. I did it for
us. So we could be together. I know
it wasn't you that wanted to send
me to boarding school. It was him.
I had to do it.

Mary is crying more quietly now. Her head is bent forward over her knees.

Stephen puts his hand on her head, stroking her wet hair softly.

He twists his fingers in her hair and jerks her head back sharply so that she is forced to look up at him.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
(a flash of anger)
But now it looks like you're trying
to send me away again.

Mary gasps in pain. He holds her head far back exposing her throat and making it hard to breathe.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Willowbrook Adult Care Home? Really
mother? Are you just going to
dispose of your only child?

Just as quickly as it erupted, his anger subsides.

His fingers release their grip on Mary's hair and he starts stroking again.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
(softly again)
It's okay. I understand. I'm not
your little boy any more. It's time
for me to be a man. That's why I
got you a new little boy.

MARY
What are you talking about?

STEPHEN
(teasingly)
Come on, now. I know you've met him
already. I wanted it to be a
surprise but he's just been so
excited to see you.

MARY
The boy.

STEPHEN
Yes! Now we can be a real family
again. You and me and our son.

MARY
He's alive?

STEPHEN
Of course, silly! He's downstairs
right now. He can't wait to meet
his new mother.

MARY
What did you do to him?

STEPHEN
I gave him a home. I'm giving him
my mother.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. LOCAL BUS STOP - NIGHT

STILL STEPHEN'S POV:

It is a pitch black night and the air is freezing. The snow on the ground is hard and frozen.

We are approaching a solitary street lamp on a lonely stretch of road surrounded by fir trees that illuminates a small bench with a little BUS STOP sign beside it.

On the bench sits a seven year old BOY. He is skinny and shaking with cold, under-dressed in a cheap winter coat and a woolly hat. He has a backpack with him and has been waiting at the bus stop for some time.

STEPHEN (V.O.)

It was pure luck that I found him.
In all the years I've been sneaking
out no one ever saw me before.

We are getting closer. The boy looks up as he hears footsteps in the snow. He struggles to see anything outside of the street lamp's pool of light.

STEPHEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It was meant to be. There he was.
No mother, no father. Waiting for a
bus that wasn't going to come. I
told him that I had the greatest
mother in the world and I asked him
if he wanted to meet you.

MARY (O.S.)

What did you do to him?

The boy sees the figure approaching him. He looks confused, a little scared. He manages a small smile as we sit down beside him on the bench.

STEPHEN (V.O.)

I told him that there was a price
if he wanted to meet you.

INT. BASEMENT, THE HOUSE - NIGHT

STEPHEN'S POV:

The boy is inside now, but it is dark and it is hard to tell where we are. His hat and coat have been removed. He looks nervous.

His eyes grow wide with fear as a hand reaches out and grabs him by the face. The fingers pressing into his cheeks, pushing his lips closed.

Another hand approaches, holding a big shiny needle threaded with thick black twine.

STEPHEN (V.O.)
I'm going to make him just like I
was.

The boy squirms in panic, desperately trying to get away as the needle pierces his flesh and begins stitching his mouth closed.

BACK TO PRESENT:

INT. BATHROOM, UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Mary screws her eyes closed at the horror and reality of what she is hearing.

Stephen stands up and moves over to the bathroom counter where he picks up a bottle of his own prescription medication: benzodiazepine.

MARY
I saw him. He came into my room. I
thought I was...

STEPHEN
Aren't you relieved you're not mad, mother? He's quite real and quite alive. You'll meet him soon enough. He's not ready yet. I haven't finished making him.

MARY
What are you doing to him?

STEPHEN
We can't have him running around anymore.

MARY
No, Stephen, no. Please, no. You need help. I can help you.

STEPHEN
Oh dear. You're becoming hysterical again. Why don't you sleep it off? You've been doing that so well these days.

Stephen takes hold of Mary's face with one hand, his fingers pressing into her cheeks, forcing her mouth open.

In the other hand he holds three sleeping pills.

She tries to close her mouth and turn her head away but he holds her face tight.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
(maternal, coaxing)
Come on now. There's nothing to be scared of. I normally put one in your tea before bed but lately you've needed two to go down. Just be a good girl and swallow.

He pushes the pills into her mouth and holds her nose closed. Then he rubs her gullet just as we saw her do to him.

As much as she tries to resist, she eventually swallows.

Stephen releases her nose and forces her mouth open again, checking that all three pills are gone.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Just making sure.
(checking under her tongue with his finger, playful)
That's where I like to hide them from you.
(finding nothing)
There's a good girl. Now you just go to sleep and when you wake up he'll be ready and we can be a happy family again.

He pulls the plug from the tub and the water level rapidly drops.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Don't want you drowning, do we?

He pats her on the head and moves to the door, leaving Mary alone and naked in the tub.

I/E. DR WILSON'S CAR - NIGHT

The conditions on the road are terrible as Dr Wilson drives on the freeway.

The rain is coming down and the roads are covered in ice. Dr Wilson is forced to drive slowly to avoid skidding.

His windscreen wipers move at full tilt trying to stop the rain from freezing on the screen.

Beside him on the passenger seat is Mary's case file. Her address is at the top of a sheet of paper jutting out of the file: 28 Delphi Lane.

Dr Wilson is holding the steering wheel with one hand and holding a cell phone to his ear with the other. He is waiting on hold.

DR WILSON

Hello? No, please. I've been on hold already... Yes, I need you to send someone round to see Mary Portman at 28 Delphi Lane... She's a patient of mine... No she hasn't been in an accident. It's more complicated than that... I think she's being drugged.

His car begins to skid on the ice and he puts both hands on the wheel to right it.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)

(back into the phone,
frustrated)

Well when will they be able to get a car out to her?

INT. BATHROOM, UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

Mary, alone in the bathroom, listens to the sound of Stephen's footsteps receding down the stairs.

She knows that she doesn't have long before the pills knock her out.

She tries to free her hands but the ties are too tight. She looks around the bathroom for any means of escape.

There is a nail file sitting on the counter near her clothes. It's sharp but there's no way she'll be able to reach it.

Then her eyes light on the bottle of shampoo Stephen used to wash her.

She leans forward and picks it up in her mouth.

Flipping her head back she sucks some of the shampoo into her mouth.

Dropping the bottle, she spits the viscose liquid onto the ties around her wrists and uses it as a lubricant.

With some difficulty she manages to slide first one hand then another out of the restraints.

She quickly undoes her feet and in one movement pulls herself out of the tub and over to the toilet.

Kneeling on the floor, naked, she bends her head over the bowl and sticks her fingers down her throat.

Her whole body heaves but nothing comes up.

She reaches back into the tub and takes the bottle of shampoo, knocking it back and swallowing a mouthful.

She tries again with her fingers and this time it works.

She vomits into the toilet and is gratified to see the three sleeping pills, still relatively in tact.

No time to rest.

Drawing on every last ounce of will in her body, she pulls herself up and hurriedly pulls on her jeans and sweater.

She moves towards the small bathroom window above the toilet and forces it open, cracking the thin layer of ice that had formed around it.

Immediately, freezing air rushes into the bathroom, extinguishing several of the candles.

Standing on top of the toilet, Mary puts her hands onto the sill and sticks her head outside trying to see whether her shoulders will fit.

Mary's wet fingers freeze instantly to the ice surrounding the window. Her hair forms ice crystals.

Looking down at frozen ground two storeys below, Mary realizes that this is not a viable option.

Pulling herself back inside she peels her fingers from the ice, ripping the skin painfully.

She looks towards the closed bathroom door.

I/E. DR WILSON'S CAR - NIGHT

Visibility is dangerously low as Dr Wilson follows an exit off the freeway. He is hunched over the wheel, squinting to see through his iced-up windscreen.

INT. UPSTAIRS, THE HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is quiet. Candles have been lit downstairs, casting a low, flickering light.

Mary stands frozen outside the bathroom, listening for sounds of Stephen's whereabouts. There is only silence and the sound of her own heart pounding.

Light on her feet, she tiptoes down the stairs and around to the front door as fast as she can.

Her coat and boots are waiting for her by the door as always. She silently throws on the coat and slips one barefoot into a boot.

As she does so she hears the low MOAN that she heard before. Only this time she knows it is not the wind. It's a little boy, crying out in pain.

Torn, Mary remains frozen. Then she hears it again, low and plaintive, and she knows that she has no choice. A little boy is lost in a storm and she is the only one who can save him.

She takes her foot back out of the boot and pads noiselessly over to the top of the basement stairs.

INT. BASEMENT, THE HOUSE - NIGHT

The basement is lit by two large hurricane lanterns placed on the worktable.

Stephen is sitting at the table hunched over a book. On the table is a home made surgical tray. Neatly composed of bits and pieces from Richard's fishing gear and tool kit: buck knife, scissors, fishing twine, needle, rags. Beside the tray is a hammer and a bag of shiny 4-inch nails.

In one hand Stephen holds a sharp-edged chisel. He toys with it, enjoying the weight of it in his hand.

The fingers of the other hand flit over a diagram of the human body.

The book on the table is an outdated medical encyclopedia, a household family-health book. It is opened to a page entitled: THE CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM.

There is a simple diagram of the human nervous system, intended for lay reference. Stephen runs his finger up and down the red and blue lines of the SPINAL COLUMN.

STEPHEN
Just a little incision. You won't
feel a thing.

In front of him we now see the body of THE BOY stretched out and tied to a work bench. Face down and turned away from us.

The boy's body is skinny and dirty, naked but for his underpants. It's hard to tell if he is still alive until he MOANS again.

Behind Stephen, moving in the shadows, Mary silently slips into the basement.

Unaware of Mary's arrival, Stephen moves round to the work bench and kneels down beside the boy.

His delicate fingers reach out and begin fingering the vertebrae of the boy's lower back. He then takes the chisel and positions it carefully at the base of the spine, nestled between two bones.

Over by the door, Mary spots an old hunting rifle belonging to Richard. It is mounted on the wall like a trophy, gathering dust.

She lifts it gingerly from its mount and points it at Stephen's back. She edges cautiously closer, summoning the courage to speak.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
(without turning around)
Hello mother. You're a slippery one
aren't you?

MARY
Stephen, you need help. I'm trying
to help you. You need to put down
the chisel.

STEPHEN
Maybe you're the one that needs
help mother. After all, you're the
one holding an unloaded gun.

Stephen turns back to the boy and his chisel, eyeing it up like a carpenter.

Mary keeps edging ever so slowly closer.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Perhaps it's better that you're here. We can finish making him together. I can't decide how deep to go to sever the cord. Do you know?

Mary is almost upon him.

MARY

(firmer now)

Stephen, move away from the boy.

STEPHEN

(without looking up)

I've told you. It's not loaded.

The boy moans and Stephen turns to look up just as Mary brings the butt of the shotgun down hard on his temple.

Stephen slumps sideways onto the floor and Mary puts down the gun, rushing to the boy's side. She still has not seen his face.

Her fingers shaking, she unties first his ankles and then his hands. Then, as gently as she can, she rolls him over onto his back.

His face is as gruesome as she remembered it. But now she can see that the wide red-rimmed eyes are filled with pain and fear.

The boy looks up at her, terrified. He moans again, straining against the crusted stitches at his lips.

His suffering is palpable, almost unbearable for Mary. She reaches back to the worktable and picks up a pair of sewing scissors.

Stephen remains motionless on the floor, his body only partly illuminated by the hurricane lantern.

Fighting the tremors in her hands, Mary gingerly uses the small scissors to snip the half dozen black threads crossing the boy's lips.

Then helps him to sit up, cradling the boy in her arms protectively like a mother.

He looks into her eyes. His lips part, cracking the scabs a little.

MARY
Shhhh. It's okay. Don't try and speak.

The boy is weak, floppy in her arms, exhausted.

She prepares herself to lift him but again, his lips move and his hand reaches out to Mary's face.

Mary leans down towards him, bringing her ear closer to his mouth.

His lips start to move he struggles to get a sound out. Mary leans even closer.

THE BOY
(barely a whisper)
Behind. You.

From behind, Stephen grabs Mary's hair and yanks her back, sending her sprawling onto the floor.

Mary looks at the boy. Stephen is between them.

MARY
(calmly)
Run.

The boy, alone on the bench, doesn't move. Stephen is clutching the glinting chisel in his right hand. He turns to the boy and smiles.

Mary pulls herself up and throws herself at Stephen's legs before he can get to the bench.

MARY (CONT'D)
(screaming now)
RUN!

She slams into Stephen, tackling him to the floor. The boy is spurned into action and leaps up, running for the door.

Mary and Stephen tussle on the floor. Stephen loses hold of the chisel.

Mary is strong from lifting Stephen in and out of the bath and now the adrenaline is pumping through her veins. Stephen is slight for a man his age and the pair are evenly matched.

Managing to get the upper hand, Stephen rolls Mary onto her back, pinning her down with his body and gripping both wrists tightly.

Mary struggles but is unable to get Stephen off of her.

He smiles, enjoying his dominance. He sits up a little, keeping her pinned.

Slowly, he lifts her left hand up to his face, his own fingers vice-like around her wrist.

MARY (CONT'D)
Get. Off. Me.

Stephen smiles and then opens his mouth, inserting her ring finger into his mouth.

Mary tries to pull away but he holds her hand firmly as he starts sucking her finger.

Mary writhes beneath him, sickened and desperate to get out.

Stephen is enjoying watching her distress, getting off on it.

MARY (CONT'D)
(desperate)
Please.

Stephen slowly, sensuously, pulls her finger out of his mouth.

Just before the tip is free he sucks an inch of it back in and without warning bites down hard.

Mary SCREAMS in agony, pulling her hand free and finding her finger severed at the first knuckle.

Blood drips from Stephen's lips as he spits the piece of finger out.

STEPHEN
I didn't want it to be like this.
But you're being a very bad girl,
mother.

Mary clutches her bleeding hand to her chest, desperately trying to stifle her cries, not wanting to give Stephen the satisfaction of her suffering.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Maybe you're the one I should be
operating on. Would you like that?
(MORE)

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Would you like me to take care of
you from now on?

Stephen sees the chisel on the floor only a couple of feet away. He leans forward to reach for it.

As he does, Mary takes her chance.

She knees him as hard as she can in the groin and when he collapses she darts up and out of the room.

INT. STAIRS TO THE BASEMENT, THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mary comes bursting out of the basement and immediately slams the door closed behind her.

Without skipping a beat she grabs a collapsible ironing board propped up nearby and wedges it under the door handle.

I/E. DR WILSON'S CAR - NIGHT

Dr Wilson is still driving but now he is on smaller local roads. There are ice-covered fir trees on either side of the road.

His GPS system beeps, indicating that he has reached his destination. Dr Wilson can't see any houses, just dense trees caked in ice.

Suddenly he spots the small wooden sign at the end of Mary's drive: 28 Delphi Lane. He's going too fast to turn on this ice.

Pulling the steering wheel down hard, Dr Wilson sends his car into a dangerous skid.

Out of control on the slick road, Dr Wilson crashes the front of his car into a large tree at the top of the drive.

The house is only 100 yards away.

INT. LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS - NIGHT

Mary, clutching her bleeding hand to her chest, moves silently and quickly between the rooms downstairs, looking everywhere for the boy.

MARY
(calling out in a hushed
voice)
Where are you?

She spots a dirty scuff mark on the wall: a small smudged hand print. She follows it.

MARY (CONT'D)
We have to get out of here.

Downstairs, the basement door rattles as Stephen tries to open it from the inside.

MARY (CONT'D)
We have to go now. Where are you?

She spots another scuff mark just outside of a linen closet.

She opens the door and sees the usual array of little-worn coats hanging on the rail. Folded towels on a shelf above.

Then she hears a small WHIMPER and looking up she sees the boy curled up into a ball, hiding on the shelf just above head height.

He is partly obscured by towels and Mary cannot reach him securely enough to be able to pull him down.

The sound of Stephen SLAMMING against the door downstairs has not subsided. It is only a matter of time before he breaks through.

MARY (CONT'D)
We have to leave the house NOW.
Come on, it's okay, I've got you.

The boy considers climbing down to her but downstairs the sound of the BANGING changes his mind.

Their window to escape is getting smaller.

MARY (CONT'D)
Shit.

Leaving the boy, Mary rushes round to the front door, and throws it open. The freezing air rushes in immediately.

She steps into her boots which sit waiting as always by the door. She leaves a bloody hand print where she leans against the wall for support.

For a moment we think she is going to leave without the boy.

She steps out into the snow and ice making deep visible footprints on the porch.

She lets go of her left hand and holds the bleeding stump out, allowing blood to drip onto the pristine white ground.

Then, Mary steps backwards into the same three footprints she just made until she is back inside. She whips off her boots and puts them in the sideboard, careful not to bleed on anything else.

Standing inside it looks very much as though someone has run out into the darkness.

Satisfied with her work she rushes back inside leaving the front door wide. The last remnants of warm air have left and the house becomes dangerously cold.

Grabbing two dish towels from the kitchen Mary wraps her bloody hand in one and then uses the other to clean off the boy's dirty hand marks leading to the linen closet.

BAM!

Wood splinters. The door downstairs begins to give way.

Mary reaches the closet.

She wipes her blood from the door handle and with no other choice, she steps inside the closet, underneath the boy who remains huddled on the top shelf.

She pulls the slatted door closed and shuts her eyes, praying for the best as she hears the door downstairs finally burst open.

I/E. DR WILSON'S CAR - NIGHT

Dr Wilson comes to in his car and finds himself propped up on an airbag. He is not sure how long he has been unconscious but he quickly regathers his senses and opens the door.

The air outside is bitterly cold and as he steps out of the car he finds his legs are shaky. He staggers slowly toward the house, trying not to slip on the ice.

Looking up he sees that the front door appears to be wide open.

DR WILSON
(calling out)
Mary? Mary are you there?

Although the rain is slowing, the wind manages to drown out the sound of his voice.

Dr Wilson continues to make his way towards the house.

INT. CLOSET, THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Mary stands inside the closet, pressed against the hanging coats in the confined space. She tries to still her shaking limbs, listening.

Stephen's footsteps can be heard ascending the stairs from the basement.

STEPHEN (O.C.)
(calling out, playful)
Mother. Mother.

She hears his footsteps move towards the front door.

INT. FRONT HALL, DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Stephen stands at the front door looking out at the blood and the footprints. His eyes scan the darkness.

He is about to follow the tracks outside when he notices water on the floor. Melted ice.

He follows the drips to the sideboard and slides the door open with his foot.

Mary's boots sit inside, covered in snow and ice.

He smiles and turns back inside.

Over his shoulder, through the open doorway, Dr Wilson suddenly comes into view, approaching slowly at a distance.

INT. CLOSET, THE HOUSE - SAME

Mary tries to be as silent as possible as Stephen's footsteps can be heard moving away from the front door, through the downstairs living area.

STEPHEN (O.C.)
I know you're still here mother. I
can smell you.

Tears come to her eyes as she realizes that he is making his way towards the closet.

STEPHEN (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Does naughty mother want to play
hide and seek?

She hears the sound of something dull and heavy being dragged along the wall. It's a hammer.

STEPHEN (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Ready or not.

Mary looks up to check on the boy. His eyes are fixed on the slatted door in front of them.

The air throughout the house is freezing now. The boy's warm breath forms little clouds inside the closet.

Mary quickly realizes her own breath is doing the same.

INT. LIVING AREA, DOWNSTAIRS - SAME

Stephen trails his hammer along the central wall like a child along a fence.

His eyes dart around the darkness, searching.

He squats to look under the dining table. Nothing.

Behind him, we can see the linen closet only a few yards away. A small cloud of warm breath escapes through the slats.

INT. CLOSET, THE HOUSE - SAME

Realizing that her breathing is giving away their hiding place, Mary covers her mouth with her hand.

She hears Stephen push the door to the den open with his hammer. He is only a few feet from the closet now.

STEPHEN (O.C.)
I only want us to be together.

Mary can hear Stephen right outside the closet. She screws her eyes tight, praying for a miracle.

Suddenly her prayers are answered.

DR WILSON (O.C.)
(faintly, from the
direction of the front
door)

Mary? Mary are you here?

Mary watches through the slats as the dark figure of Stephen suddenly vanishes.

She exhales, her breath trembling.

DR WILSON (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Mary? Is anyone here? It's Dr
Wilson.

Mary is desperate to call out to him.
She can hear his voice at the front door.
But she doesn't know where Stephen is.

I/E. FRONT DOOR, THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Dr Wilson is standing in the open doorway. Slightly out of breath, he holds onto the door frame for support. He peers into the house.

Just out of sight, in the main living area, the flickering candle light is extinguished.

Perhaps it was just the wind.

DR WILSON
Mary? Is that you? Stephen?

Dr Wilson steps cautiously into the house. He is surprised by how cold it is and instinctively closes the door behind him.

Without the moonlight it is even darker inside and as he steps quietly into the house and round into the kitchen area he struggles to see.

Fumbling, he pulls out a cell phone and presses a button to illuminate the screen.

It throws a sickly weak light. Extending his arm he uses it to illuminate a yard or so ahead of him.

He sweeps his arm 180 degrees, shedding a small arc of light that reveals nothing. Emptiness.

He sweeps his arm back through 180 degrees.

Suddenly the light reveals Stephen, in his wheelchair, now only a few feet away from him. Dr Wilson jumps in surprise.

Stephen's face is vacant, his beautiful eyes have an empty stare.

Dr Wilson recovers from his shock and tries to regain control of the situation.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)
Stephen. Where is your mother?

There is no reaction from Stephen who remains static in his wheelchair.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)
Stephen I know what you've been
doing. There's no need to pretend.
I saw you out of the chair. Where
is your mother?

Stephen's eyes remain glassy, not reacting to Dr Wilson's accusation.

Almost invisible at first, his lips begin to move. A strange murmur or whisper escapes them.

DR WILSON (CONT'D)
What did you say?

Stephen makes the same quiet mumble, it's not quite audible but it sounds like he's saying something.

Dr Wilson leans in closer.

His body hangs over Stephen's wheelchair as he cranes his ear to Stephen's lips.

From behind we see Dr Wilson's eyes suddenly go wide.

There is a soft sickening THUD.

The sound of a kitchen knife being plunged into Dr Wilson's lower abdomen.

For a moment Dr Wilson is frozen, bent over Stephen's chair.

Stephen tilts his head back so that he is face to face with Dr Wilson.

He makes eye contact and smiles.

Then, slowly and precisely, Stephen drags the knife through the muscle and flesh of Dr Wilson's belly.

He is alive for every agonizing second of it.

INT. CLOSET, THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Mary stands in the closet listening for any sound of Dr Wilson or Stephen.

There is only silence.

BANG! She suddenly hears the sound of a hammer smashing a nail into the wall only feet away from the closet.

Mary jumps, biting her lip to keep quiet.

Another BANG. This time from slightly further away.

Then another, further still.

And another.

As terrified as she is, the banging gives away Stephen's location and Mary knows that this may be their only chance to escape.

She silently motions to the boy to come down and this time he does, allowing her to take him in her arms and gently lower him to the floor.

Mary grabs a bathrobe from the pile of clean towels on the shelf and wraps the boy in it, the sleeves hanging loosely at his side. She finds a pair of old house slippers on the floor of the closet and puts those on her feet.

The intermittent banging continues, on the far side of the house now, by the front door.

Through the slatted closet door she can see the path to the back door.

It's only a few yards away and the way is clear.

Mary takes her chance.

She slides open the closet door and puts a finger to her lips, motioning to the boy to be quiet as she scoops him up in her arms like a baby.

She takes two silent steps over to the back door.

As silently as she can she turns the locks and pushes the door open.

It opens an inch. She can smell freedom.

Then the door jams.

Mary pushes harder but it won't budge.

She uses her shoulder to silently ram the door while clutching the boy to her chest.

She looks out through the tiny open crack and sees snow piled up high around the door.

EXT. BACK DOOR OF THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Outside in the bitter cold we see the back door from the outside.

It has been pushed open an inch and the door shudders as Mary pushes against it from the inside.

What we see from this perspective, however, is that it is not just snow drifts blocking the door.

Slumped against the back door, with his neck wrapped in snow chains, is the frozen body of Doug. His face and body encased in clear hard ice.

The way his body is propped up against the door, he has become a human door stop.

There is no way Mary will be able to get through.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS, THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mary realizes that her efforts are futile. She also fears that the noise she's making will alert Stephen to their whereabouts.

She stops and pauses, listening for the sound of Stephen's hammering.

BANG!

The sound has come from further around the house.

Mary takes her chance and, boy in her arms, she tip toes back to the central wall, keeping close to it as she eyes the dimly lit pathway to the front door.

She takes a step forward.

Nailed to the wall, below head height, is a long dark rope.

The 4-inch nails glint, reflecting the moonlight, but Mary does not stop to look.

She moves further along the wall. So too does the rope, draped almost like tinsel against the wall with nails holding it up every few feet.

Silence.

Mary realizes she hasn't heard Stephen's hammer in a while. She pauses, not moving, just listening.

Then, finally, she hears his FOOTSTEPS on the stairs.

He moves without haste, ascending the stairs until he is directly above her on the balcony.

Mary hears him above her and hugs herself to the wall.

Stephen starts HUMMING, softly, the same tune that he was singing when she was in the bath.

Then he moves along the balcony into one of the bedrooms.

Mary exhales and quickly resumes her journey to the front door.

Rounding the corner Mary and the boy are within sight of the front door.

The nailed rope disappears around the next corner and something there catches Mary's eye.

The wheels of Stephen's wheelchair, jutting out almost imperceptibly, and in the footrest, a pair of black leather shoes.

Mary pauses.

Upstairs, she can clearly hear the sound of Stephen humming and the HAMMERING has resumed.

She gently lowers the little boy to the floor by the front door.

MARY
(barely more than a
whisper)
Dr Wilson?

She takes a step forward.

Still all she can see is the front of the wheels. The rest of the chair and its occupant are still obscured.

MARY (CONT'D)
Dr Wilson is that you?

She rounds the corner and drops to her knees as the wind is knocked out of her.

Sitting in the wheelchair is Dr Wilson: his face pale and cold with sweat. His jaw is slack and his eyes are open and glassy.

He is only just alive.

His abdomen lies gaping, his clothes soaked with blood.

The dark rope that Mary saw nailed to the wall, wrapping half way around the house, now hangs limply from the last nail in the wall and down into his stomach, along with the rest of his intestines.

Mary, sitting on the floor with a look of abject horror on her face, looks into Dr Wilson's eyes.

With what tiny reserve of energy he has left, Dr Wilson lifts his arm and reaches out his hand to Mary. Pleading.

MARY (CONT'D)
(mouthing)
I'm sorry.

Backing up, Mary stands and moves back over to the front door.

She moves with determination now.

She puts her hand on the front door and pulls. The door does not move.

Immediately she sees three of Stephen's large heavy duty nails smashed into the wooden door, keeping it firmly in place.

She pulls at one but she can't get a purchase on it. It's useless.

Upstairs, Stephen is in another bedroom, HAMMERING.

He is sealing them in.

Mary looks around for another way out.

The ground floor windows are all nailed shut like the door and their square French panes are too small to be worth smashing.

Her eye lights on the large kitchen skylight, directly over the wood-burning stove.

Mary kneels down in front of the boy. She lifts the hood of the robe over his head.

MARY (CONT'D)
Stay here, okay? Do not move. I'm going to get us out of here.

The boy nods.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM, UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Stephen is in Mary's bedroom, nailing down the last of the windows.

He continues to hum, happy in his work.

THUD.

He hears a loud noise from downstairs.

THUD.

And another. He smiles.

INT. KITCHEN, THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mary has climbed onto the kitchen counter-top beside the stove. Wielding a heavy skillet she is swinging at the glass skylight sloping above her.

It is heavy with ice and snow and as she swings again the impact makes a loud THUD accompanied by the sound of cracking ice.

STEPHEN (O.C.)
(calling from upstairs)
Mother? Mother?

Mary looks at the little boy, cowering by the front door.

She grits her teeth and puts everything she has into the last swing.

CRASH!

In a hail of glass, ice and snow, the skylight shatters, falling to the floor and barely missing Mary who covers her head with her arms and leans back out of the way.

STEPHEN (O.C.) (CONT'D)
(from the stairs)
What are you doing to our house
mother?

Mary reaches her arms out to the boy.

MARY
Come on. Come here. Let's go.

The boy, cautious, steps slowly over the broken glass and ice in his bare feet.

As soon as he is in reach, Mary bends down from the counter top and scoops him up. One hand under each armpit.

Stephen reaches the bottom of the stairs.

Mary and Stephen make eye contact for a moment.

Mary doesn't waste a second.

She hoists the boy over her head, lifting him towards the open skylight.

The boy is light and Mary pushes him up and out onto the roof almost instantly.

Stephen approaches. Slowly. Hammer in hand.

Mary reaches up and, using her sleeves to protect her hands, tries to lift herself up through the skylight.

This proves much harder.

EXT. THE ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Mary's head emerges into the cold night air. She manages to lift herself a little higher, so that her elbows are resting on the outside of the roof, her legs dangling beneath her.

INT. KITCHEN, THE HOUSE - SAME

Stephen is below, inside the house, watching her struggle.

Cool and calm, he puts down the hammer and bends to pick up a shard of glass.

EXT. THE ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Mary is desperately trying to summon the strength to pull her body clear.

The boy reaches out to her, trying to help, unable to do anything.

She looks into his face and wills herself to do this.

She pushes down with her arms and lifts up another six inches, her waist almost clearing the window frame.

INT. KITCHEN, THE HOUSE - SAME

Stephen, with a quizzical look on his face, finds the sharpest edge of his glass fragment, testing it with his finger.

Mary's legs are dangling from the skylight, the back of her knees at Stephen's eye level.

Pushing up the bottom of one leg of her jeans, Stephen exposes the soft white skin of Mary's calf.

EXT. THE ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Feeling his hand on her leg, Mary's expression changes to fear.

Then pain.

Her eyes screw shut and she lets out a scream in the freezing air.

INT. KITCHEN, THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Stephen has pressed the point of the glass shard into the back of Mary's calf muscle.

The cut is not deep but he keeps the fragment pressed into her flesh as he slides the tip down her calf, slicing her open all the way down her ankle.

He lets the slipper fall from her foot as the glass shard continues to make its way down over her heel and down into the soft underside of her foot.

Above him, Mary screams in pain, making Stephen smile.

When the glass has sliced through Mary's foot all the way to the tip of her big toe, Stephen lets it drop.

Blood drips profusely down Mary's hanging leg.

Curious, almost childlike, Stephen leans forward and sniffs the wound.

Then, tentatively, his tongue flicks out of his mouth and he touches it to the wound.

He runs his tongue up the seam he has created in the back of his mother's leg.

Slowly he reaches up and puts his hands on her hips.

EXT. THE ROOF - SAME

Mary, in agony, is barely able to keep hold of the ledge with her upper body. She can feel Stephen taking hold of her.

She looks at the little boy, wrapped in his robe on the ice covered roof. He looks so small and alone.

MARY

Just hold on. I promise I'm going to come get you.

And then she's gone. Pulled from beneath. Leaving the boy alone and shivering.

INT. KITCHEN, THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephen is holding Mary from behind, pressing her up against the counter beneath the open skylight from which she dropped.

Her hair is flecked with ice crystals and her hands are blue with cold. The bloody stump of her ring finger has frozen over.

If it weren't for Stephen pressing his whole body up against her, leaning her against the counter, she would collapse.

STEPHEN

Why do you keep trying to leave me mother?

He talks close into her ear and though his tone is calm, it feels threatening, sexual.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Don't you want us to be a family again? I thought he would bring us closer together but I can see that he's just a distraction.

His hands are on her body, clutching her like a needy child.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

I'm the one you should be protecting. I'm the one. I'm your flesh and blood.

His right hand moves down and grabs her violently by the crotch.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

I came out of you. I'm part of you.

Mary winces.

A fleck of ice drops from her hair and lands on the stove-top. The heavy enamel lids that cover the cooking plates are down but when the ice lands on them, the heat from the stove is still enough to cause it to melt and evaporate.

Stephen nestles his face in Mary's neck, his hand still clutching her groin.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

We can be together now. There's no one to stop us.

Mary closes her eyes.

Slowly, calmly, she slides her right hand down to rest on top of his right hand.

MARY

(soft and soothing)

Shhhh. Shhhh. It's okay.

She doesn't try to move his hand.

MARY (CONT'D)

We're together now. Everything's going to be okay.

Tears are rolling down Mary's cheeks. She tries to regulate her breathing.

Slowly slowly she starts to shift his right hand up, over her belly and toward her breast.

Stephen's eyes are closed, breathing her in, as if seeking comfort in her smell.

MARY (CONT'D)

This is where you belong.

As gently as she can, Mary reaches her left hand out and silently raises the heavy enamel cover of the stove-top cooking plate.

Another tiny piece of ice drops from her hair and onto the now exposed cooking plate. Instantly it SIZZLES and SPITS, evaporating into steam.

Stephen is too absorbed to hear it.

With a swift decisive move Mary rips his hand from her body and SLAMS it palm down onto the cooking plate.

With her left hand, Mary pulls down the heavy lid as hard as she can, SMASHING his wrist and trapping his hand on the burning plate.

His flesh immediately SEARS and Stephen screams out like a wounded beast.

Mary grabs for a skillet on the kitchen counter. Before Stephen can react she SWINGS it at him, catching him square on the temple and knocking him to the floor.

He lies there inert.

Mary is still holding the skillet. She kneels over Stephen's body and raises it over her head, ready to smash his skull in.

But she does nothing.

Unconscious, Stephen looks so peaceful. So innocent. She cannot bring herself to kill him.

Instead she stands and moves over to the sideboard by the front door. She pulls out the boots that she stashed there.

Gingerly she steps her bleeding foot into them, grabs Stephen's hammer from the kitchen counter and moves straight for the front door.

She uses the tail of the hammer to quickly and efficiently rip out the nails that were holding the door closed.

She lets the hammer drop as she swings the front door wide open.

The icy rain has stopped and the world outside is very still.

She breathes in the fresh air of freedom.

EXT. SIDE OF THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Mary is standing round the side of the house, helping the little boy down from the sloped roof above the kitchen.

MARY
Come on. I've got you.

Carefully he clammers down into her arms and wraps his arms around her neck, allowing her to carry him like a koala.

She moves carefully, wary of slipping as she limps across the ice and to the garage.

The garage door is iced closed, there is no way she can get it open.

MARY (CONT'D)
Fuck.

The boy, looking over her shoulder, is facing the opposite direction.

He spots Dr Wilson's car at the end of the drive. The door is still open and the lights are on inside.

He taps her shoulder and points.

Mary is relieved to see the car but with the thick coating of ice on the sloped drive it is a treacherous walk.

They set out slowly.

Mary watches carefully where she places each painful step.

The boy, head resting on her shoulder, looks back as the house slowly gets further and further away.

They are less than half way when Mary stops.

She uses her arms to pull the boy away from her chest a little.

Her clothes are wet and steaming. The boy has pissed himself.

Confused she leans him away from her so that she can see his face.

He is frozen in fear. His eyes wide, his mouth gaping, opening and closing but not making any sound.

He is staring back at the house.

Mary turns and sees what the boy sees: Stephen standing in the open door way, hammer in hand.

He is angry.

STEPHEN
(guttural, loud)
MOTHER.

He steps off the porch towards them.

Mary turns and tries to run.

She is only 60 yards from the car. She clutches the boy to her chest and moves as fast as she can.

She turns her head back towards the house.

Stephen is gaining on her. He spits up blood as he strides after them. He has a wild look in his eyes.

Turning back to run, Mary slips, losing her footing on the ice.

She manages to regain her balance just before hitting the floor. She keeps running on the ice.

Too scared to look back again, she hears Stephen gaining on them. His BREATH coming fast and hard.

Suddenly Mary goes sprawling, landing hard on the ice.

In a split second, Stephen is on top of them.

The boy is thrown out from under her.

Her lip SMASHES and SPLITS on the frozen ground.

Stephen kneels over her, pinning her to the floor.

She is dazed from the fall.

MARY'S POV.

The sky above is jet black and perfectly clear now.

Stephen's bleeding face hovers over her, lit by the moonlight. His eyes are manic.

Mary struggles to focus.

Tilting her head back she sees (upside down) the boy, sprawled on the ground a few feet away, his robe flapping open.

END POV.

Stephen clutches his burned right hand to his chest and the hammer in his left.

Letting the hammer rest momentarily on Mary's chest, he fumbles for something in his shirt pocket with his left hand.

He pulls out a 4-inch nail and places it gingerly between his blistered fingers.

His charred hand hovers over Mary's face, the point of the nail positioned right between her eyes.

He picks up the hammer again.

When he speaks his voice is different, full of anger, malice and pain.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
I did this for you, you fucking bitch.

Mary cranes her neck back again to see the little boy stirring on the ice.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Don't look at him. Look at me! I'm your son. I'm your fucking son.

Mary turns her eyes back to look at him.

The fight seems to have left her now.

Stephen is weeping, angrily, spit falling from his mouth.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
I'm your little boy. I'm the one.
Don't send me away. Don't send me away.

Mary tries to speak but the weight of Stephen sitting on her chest and the blood pumping from her lip and into her mouth chokes her and makes her cough.

She tries again to speak.

MARY
(barely audible)
Kill me.

Stephen lifts the hammer.

STEPHEN
(sobbing like a child)
You made me do this, mother. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

MARY
Kill me. Just don't hurt him. Don't hurt him Stephen.

Stephen stops crying instantly. He moves the nail from her forehead.

STEPHEN
What did you say?

MARY

Just let him go. He's just a boy.
Please.

STEPHEN

You're still thinking about him.
What about me? I'm just a boy too.

With that, Stephen grabs for Mary's hand, opening it palm up against the ground.

He places the nail in the centre of the fleshy part of her hand and raises the hammer high.

In one swift blow he brings it SLAMMING down hard and true, pushing the nail deep into the frozen earth.

Mary nearly vomits as the pain sears up her arm.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Since you're so worried, mother,
I'm going to let you see what
happens to your precious boy before
I kill you.

MARY

No. Stephen. No. Please.

STEPHEN

None of us are getting out of her mother. None of us are leaving. But it's good to know that he's the only one you care about.

Stephen stands up, leaving her pinned to the ground by her hand.

She rolls over, towards the pinned hand, and sees Stephen move closer to the boy.

She looks at the head of the nail, glinting in the moonlight.

She looks back at the half naked child lying helpless on the ground.

Gritting her teeth, spitting out blood, she grabs hold of her wrist with her free hand and pulls her palm up the shaft of the nail.

The pain is excruciating.

The hand stops when the flesh meets the wide nail head.

Mary looks up once again.

She sees Stephen lower himself to kneel beside the boy, the hammer hanging in his left hand.

She steels herself and in one awful, ripping motion, she tears her hand up and over the nail head, destroying ligament and bone as she does.

Without stopping to think of the pain she comes to stand and throws herself at Stephen, tackling him from behind and knocking him back to the ground.

She is like a wild animal, savage, bloodied, unstoppable.

She takes Stephen's head between her hands, gripping his ears, and before he knows what has hit him, she smashes his head into the iron-like earth beneath.

Again, she raises his skull between her hands and smashes it down as hard as she can.

Again.

And again.

Until dark blood seeps out from behind Stephen's shattered skull and the body beneath her is limp.

Her arms stop moving as she slumps over his body, her body wracked with silent sobs.

After a moment, her crying stops.

She lifts her head and looks at her son.

He is still now. Peaceful. His beautiful blue eyes are once again empty.

Tenderly she places her arms beneath his body and easily lifts him into her lap.

She is numb to the cold, the pain, the anguish.

She turns to see the little boy standing, moving towards her.

She looks into his eyes and smiles.

We begin to lift, higher and higher, above the three figures in the driveway.

The moon shines brightly upon this frozen world.

FADE TO BLACK.