

VERVE

NO GOOD DEED

By

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Management:

Good Fear

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EXT. WOODS - DAY - 1917

Wild game birds fly overhead, skimming the treetops of a quiet forest.

A hunting rifle silently tracks the birds. The rifle belongs to a YOUNG MAN, 18, crouching in a cluster of shrubs. He's dressed in clean but well-worn early 20th century style clothing -- the year is 1917.

As the birds fly past, the Young Man shoots. But his aim is shaky, and he misses. He seems distracted, on edge. He checks the time on his watch.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY - 1917

The sun starts to set as the Young Man returns home. He emerges from the woods and walks toward a large FARMHOUSE.

A TOWERING TREE marks the property line of the farm.

The tree is huge, but brittle-looking, dry, and sparsely covered in withered leaves. It bears some kind of dark prunish-looking fruit -- deep red flecked with black.

The Young Man avoids looking at the tree as he passes.

When he reaches the Farmhouse porch, he realizes the front door is ajar.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - DAY - 1917

The Young Man takes a hesitant step inside. His foot slides a little, because the floor is slick with blood. The Young Man stops. He's trembling now. He doesn't want to go any further.

From the doorway, the Young Man peers past the staircase, down the front hall. At the end of the hall, he can see into the entrance to the kitchen, at the back end of the house.

There's more blood there. Much more.

And partially visible, sprawled all over the kitchen floor, he sees glimpses of bodies, here and there. A stocking-clad leg, a crooked elbow. All blood-streaked.

A small HAND, child-sized, grips the kitchen door frame. The hand has been ripped away from the owner's body, not cleanly. The wrist ends in a ragged stump.

EXT. TREE - NIGHT - 1917

Later, the Young Man sits at the base of the tree, staring at the blood on his shoes. His eyes are glazed; he's in shock.

A fresh drop of blood dots his forehead. Then another. The Young Man flinches and looks up. The blood seems to be raining down from the tree itself. It runs down the tree trunk like sap.

CUT TO BLACK

EXT. SUTTON HOUSE - NIGHT

Present day.

A hot, airless, summer night in the suburbs.

A shirtless NEIGHBOR wearing baggy athletic shorts walks his dog along the curb. The neighbor mumbles to the dog, urging it to hurry up and squat so they can go home. But the dog is distracted by--

a drawn out SCREAM

--coming from the SUTTON HOUSE in the middle of the street. The scream turns into hysterical wailing.

The neighbor looks uncomfortable, but pretends he doesn't hear the cries. He pulls the dog along.

INT. SUTTON HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A hospital bed has been set up in the living room.

A NURSE stands by, tending to the patient in the bed: AMY SUTTON.

Amy is about 40, but her age would be impossible to guess. Her hair is gone, her features sunken, and her skin waxy. Despite her frailty, she has a determined expression that suggests she's still fighting.

Amy's husband JASON slumps in a chair across the room. He stares wearily at the source of the screaming, his daughter --

ZOEY SUTTON, 11.

Zoey radiates the usual pre-adolescent awkwardness and angst. But her typical self-consciousness is masked now, by fury.

Zoey paces the room. Tears stream down her face and inarticulate howls escape her throat.

Zoey pauses to pound her fists against the cushion of a reclining chair. Then she wheels around to face her father.

ZOEY

I'm not going *anywhere*! I live here. You don't get to just send me away! And I don't even know *her*!

Zoey gestures to a woman in the doorway. This is JULIA MITCHELL, 40.

Julia looks meek, beaten-down, ill-equipped to deal with a raging pre-teen. She tries her best to blend into the background.

JASON

She's your family. She's your Aunt Julia.

ZOEY

I don't know her!

Jason seems to sink further into his chair.

JASON

Zoey. It's just for the summer...

He trails off, apparently too tired to argue.

ZOEY

You can't make me go. You can't! I'm not leaving--

From the hospital bed, Amy reaches her arms out.

AMY

Zoey. Baby, come here.

Zoey suddenly loses her fire.

The impassive Nurse moves aside and disappears into another room.

Zoey runs into Amy's arms.

Amy holds Zoey tight and whispers something to her -- we can't hear what it is. Whatever Amy's words are, they have an immediate affect. Tears still stream down Zoey's face, but the anger is gone.

From the doorway, Julia watches the agonizing scene of a dying mother comforting her distraught daughter. She feels like an intruder, clumsily encroaching on something sacred. She backs out of the living room.

INT. SUTTON HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Julia takes a seat at the bare kitchen table and lays her head down on her folded arms.

The Sutton's dog, CHITO, follows Julia into the kitchen and lies down at Julia's feet.

INT. SUTTON HOUSE, STAIRCASE - DAY

Early morning.

Zoey glumly drags her suitcase down the stairs.

INT. SUTTON HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Julia stands by Amy's bed. She scans the row of framed family photographs adorning a nearby bookshelf: Jason, Zoey, and a healthy-looking Amy on various adventures. They look happy.

Julia looks down at the hospital bed. Amy looks deathly still. But then she lets out a shallow breath.

Just outside the living room, Zoey's suitcase THUMPS as it reaches the bottom of the stairs.

The girl stops in the doorway of the living room for a moment, just long enough to glare at Julia. Then she moves on, pulling her suitcase towards the front door.

Julia watches Zoey leave. When she looks back down at Amy, she sees that Amy is awake and staring back at her.

AMY

Thank you for doing this. She needs this. She needs to be away. From all this.

Julia nods and leans down to give Amy a hug. She tries to hold it together, but soon breaks down.

JULIA

Amy, I'm so sorry. This sucks. You beat this already.

AMY

There's always a risk. I went through so much radiation as a kid. There was always a chance it was going to come back to bite me in the ass.

JULIA

They should have figured out a less risky way to treat you back then. They should have warned you, like "oh by the way, this cancer treatment might eventually give you even more cancer."

AMY

It's not like I would have done anything different.

(then)

Maybe I would've picked up smoking. I could have been smoking six packs a day all this time.

JULIA

Yeah. You could have been just like Uncle Gus.

AMY

(rasping)

"Girl! Grab me a Schlitz!"

Julia cracks up but the laughter quickly fades. She embraces Amy again. Then steps away from the bed. But Amy reaches out and latches onto Julia's arm.

AMY (CONT'D)

Take care of my girl.

JULIA

Bye, Amy.

Julia steps out.

Amy stares at the empty doorway. Her smile disappears. She looks eerily vacant.

EXT. SUTTON HOUSE - DAY

Julia slides into the driver's seat of her car, parked in the driveway.

Zoey leads her dog Chito to the car, and they climb into the back seat.

Jason places Zoey's suitcase in the trunk. Zoey stares at her father through the back seat window. He waves to her. She doesn't wave back.

INT. JULIA'S CAR - DAY

Julia backs the car out of the driveway and hits the road. She sneaks a look at Zoey through the rear view mirror and finds Zoey staring back at her.

ZOEY
My mom only has brothers.

JULIA
Yeah.

ZOEY
So you're not my real aunt?

JULIA
Your mom and I are cousins. But we were practically like sisters growing up.

ZOEY
If you were like sisters, how come I've never met you?

A look passes over Julia's face -- she looks slightly hurt, confused.

JULIA
Your mom's always been so busy. At least we're finally getting to know each other. That'll make her happy.

Zoey scoffs.

ZOEY
She doesn't care if we're friends. She just can't handle me being around. And now, I might never see her again.

JULIA
We don't know that. Nobody knows what's going to happen. And she's doing this because she loves you. She knows that this isn't easy for you. It's not easy to watch someone you love--

ZOEY

Die?

Julia can't bring herself to confirm that. Not out loud.

JULIA

She's just trying to help.

Zoey bitterly turns her attention back to the window.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The sun starts to set after a long day of driving. The car passes through some deep rural county, where miles stretch between neighboring houses.

Julia turns her car into a long dirt drive leading toward the farmhouse.

This is the same farmhouse to which the Young Man came home more than a century ago, only to find bodies and blood.

INT. JULIA'S CAR - DAY

Zoey gawks at the size of the house as they approach.

ZOEY

You live here all by yourself??

JULIA

Too big for one person, right?
Yeah. I'm still getting used to it.

ZOEY

I thought you grew up here.

JULIA

I did. My Grandma and Grandpa-- your great-grandparents-- raised me in this house. But I never lived here alone before, until now. It's a little weird.

ZOEY

Then why'd you move back?

JULIA

Grandpa left me this house when he died. It wasn't helping anybody, sitting here empty and boarded up.

(MORE)

JULIA (CONT'D)
I figured I'd either better sell it
or move in. So last month, I
finally moved in.

Julia stops the car in front of the house. She stares up at
the place with a mix of fondness and apprehension.

JULIA (CONT'D)
It was never empty when I as a kid,
there were always people in and
out. Your mom and her family spent
every summer here, and she loved
it. We all loved this house.

ZOEY
She never told me that. She never
even mentioned this house. Or you.

Julia reacts -- that stings.

Zoey exits the car, and Julia follows.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Zoey surveys the property.

JULIA
The nearest neighbor is about two
miles that way. There's a cool
hiking path that starts right at
the edge of the woods east of the
house. And-

ZOEY
What's that?

Zoey points down a gravel road leading to a little cemetery
on the edge of the property.

JULIA
Family cemetery. Lucky us, we get
all this history and six
generations of dead relatives
conveniently located just a few
steps away.

ZOEY
Creepy. So, are we going inside?

Julia fumbles to find her keys.

JULIA
Of course.

ZOEY

Chito. Come.

The dog sniffs around the yard, but he bounds over when Zoey calls. He stops though, when he reaches the porch. He cocks his head and stares uncertainly at the front door.

Julia unlocks the door and pulls it open.

JULIA

Give him time. It might take a minute for him to--

As the front door swings open, Chito charges toward the house and races inside.

JULIA (CONT'D)

--get comfortable.

Julia and Zoey step into the doorway to watch as Chito streaks around the entryway, sniffing EVERYTHING.

INT. FARMHOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

The daylight is starting to fade, although nobody has bothered to turn on any lights inside.

Upstairs, Zoey drifts down the dim hallway. Somewhere downstairs, Chito barks ceaselessly.

Zoey reaches a bedroom at the end of the hall. The door stands half ajar. Zoey pushes it all the way open.

INT. FARMHOUSE, SMALL BEDROOM - DAY

Zoey steps into the room. The first thing she notices is a giant window centered in the wall opposite the door. It has a view for miles.

Zoey moves to the window and takes in lush surroundings. Everything outside is so green, the landscape seems to pulsate with life--

--except for the immense tree that still stands on the property line.

The tree appears unchanged since it last rained blood down on a Young Man. It still looks almost dead, on the verge of drying up and turning to dust.

One change has occurred in the last century: a decrepit TREEHOUSE now sits nestled in the tree's branches.

Zoey's gaze zeroes in on the treehouse -- it's clearly vacant, abandoned. But Zoey stares intently at it, as if expecting to see something.

JULIA (O.S.)
You found my old room.

Zoey spins around to find Julia behind her.

ZOEY
When my mom was visiting, she
stayed in this room too. Right?

JULIA
Yeah. We shared a bed every summer
for about ten years in a row.

Zoey turns to look at the musty looking twin bed in the corner.

ZOEY
So you really were close.

JULIA
Yeah, we even had these...

Julia crosses to the bedside table and opens the drawer. She pulls out a cheap gold plated chain necklace with a half heart "best friends" pendant.

JULIA (CONT'D)
This one was mine. I bet your mom
still has the other. You want it?

Zoey accepts the necklace and turns back to the window.

Julia starts to close the drawer but spots an old notebook shoved in the back. She pulls it out.

ZOEY
What's that?

JULIA
It's your mom's old journal.

ZOEY
My mom kept a journal?

JULIA
It was our grandmother's idea.
She'd give us a notebook at the
beginning of the summer and tell us
to write something every day, even
if it was just a sentence.
(MORE)

JULIA (CONT'D)

She said we'd want the memories. I
could never get into the habit.
Your mother was better at it.

Julia opens the book to a random page. She smiles, seeing
little doodles and notes.

She flips the page and her smile fades. She looks down at the
words:

"today I met a demon."

Zoey sees Julia's expression change.

ZOEY

What's wrong?

Julia closes the book.

JULIA

Nothing. I shouldn't read this.
Your mom would be pissed.

Julia shoves the diary back into the drawer.

Downstairs, Chito's barking seems to intensify. Julia is
suddenly hit with the need to get out of this room.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Hungry? I'll start dinner.

Julia doesn't wait for Zoey to respond. She quickly hurries
downstairs to the kitchen.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Julia scours her near empty fridge, looking for something
that might seem appetizing. She finds a can of chili in the
pantry. Good enough.

She grabs the can and lights a burner on the stove.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Julia tries to make conversation as Zoey eats in silence.

JULIA

There's plenty to do around here.
When it's hot like this, the pond
is good for swimming. Do you like
to swim?

ZOEY

Not in bodies of water that fish
crap in.

JULIA

If you don't like swimming, there's
a lot of work to be done around the
house. Little repairs, gardening,
repainting. You could help me.

ZOEY

Am I being punished?

JULIA

No. Work isn't punishment.
(then)
I'm becoming my grandfather.

ZOEY

What happened to your parents?

JULIA

(stalling)
What?

ZOEY

How come you lived with your
grandparents instead of your
parents when you were growing up?

JULIA

I didn't know my father. And my mom
was going through a rough time and
couldn't take care of me. So I
know a little bit about what you're
going through.

ZOEY

What kind of "rough time"?

JULIA

She just... She was young. And
scared all the time. I don't know
what she was scared of, I don't
think she even knew. But she
wasn't ready, and she didn't trust
herself to take care of a kid.

ZOEY

So it wasn't that your mom was too
sick to take care of you. She just
didn't want to.

Julia, taken aback, doesn't respond.

ZOEY (CONT'D)
So it's not really like my
situation.

Julia, stung by Zoey's childish cruelty, lets her own
petulance creep in.

JULIA
You must be really angry. I get
that. I mean, my grandparents
offered to take care of me right
away. They welcomed me in as soon
as I needed them. I wonder how
many relatives your parents went
through before they finally got me
to take you in.

Julia seems to regret her words as soon as they're out. But
Zoey seems unfazed.

ZOEY
It sounds like you're angry, too.

Zoey sets her bowl of chili on the floor to let Chito finish
it.

INT. FARMHOUSE, JULIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Julia sits on her bed, reading. She looks up to see Chito
restlessly pacing the hall outside her bedroom.

JULIA
Go to sleep.

Chito agreeably moves further down the hall, out of Julia's
sight.

Julia turns off the light.

INT. FARMHOUSE, SMALL BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the little bedroom, Zoey sleeps. Her suitcase rests by
the bed -- she hasn't unpacked yet.

For no obvious reason, Zoey suddenly wakes up with a gasp.
She's sweating, looks wild-eyed, blinking away a nightmare.

ZOEY
Mama!

Zoey bursts into tears, muffling her sobs by claspings her
hands over her mouth.

Her sobs are interrupted, though, by a small sound, just outside her door.

Zoey eyes the slightly open door, wide eyed, searching in the dark.

ZOEY (CONT'D)
Who's there?

She sees nothing, but hears of a strange muffled sound downstairs.

INT. FARMHOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Zoey creeps down the hall. She reaches the stairway's landing and peers down.

The sounds come from Chito, who appears to be intently investigating something around the front door.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

Zoey joins Chito downstairs. He sniffs urgently around crack under the front door.

Zoey fumbles in the dark for the handle, then pulls the door open. Chito flies outside like a bullet. Zoey follows him.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Chito heads for the brittle tree on the edge of the property.

Zoey follows him, blank faced, almost zombie-like.

The closer Zoey gets to the treehouse, the more precarious the construction appears. The tree looks so dry, frail and sickly. The treehouse seems like an impossible burden for it to hold. But somehow, everything stands.

Chito starts to growl, low, serious.

Zoey's toe touches the roots of the dead tree, and suddenly all the night sounds of leaves rustling and crickets chirping fall silent.

Zoey places a hand on the treehouse ladder. Then starts to climb.

INT. FARMHOUSE, JULIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

At this moment, Julia sleeps soundly in her bed. Then--

BANG

Julia jolts awake to the earsplitting sound. She races out of bed.

INT. FARMHOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Julia tears down the hall and peeks into the small bedroom.

JULIA

Zoey?

Of course, the room is empty.

Julia looks down the stairs and realizes what the slam must have been -- the front door is open and banging with every sudden gust of wind.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Julia hurries outside and scans the property.

JULIA

Zoey?

Julia starts to move around the perimeter of the house.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Zoey??

Julia breaks a sweat in the night's heat, and she stops to fan herself with the neckline of her shirt.

After a brief pause, Julia hears a faint noise.

A GNAWING sound, rodent-like. It seems to come from under the house, in the crawl space.

Julia steps closer, head cocked, listening, when--

A SNARL startles her. Julia yelps involuntarily as Chito appears out of nowhere, streaking past her. He sniffs frantically around the base of the house.

Julia stares at Chito. Her back is to the distant dead tree. If she turned around, she would see Zoey up in the tree, standing in the treehouse. But Julia is focused on Chito.

In the distance, Zoey descends the treehouse ladder. When she reaches the ground, she moves, ghostlike, towards Julia and the farmhouse. When she's a few feet away, Julia finally senses Zoey's presence, and she wheels around to face the girl.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Jesus!

ZOEY

I was sleepwalking, I think.

JULIA

Back to bed.

Julia leads Zoey back to the house.

INT. FARMHOUSE, SMALL BEDROOM - NIGHT

Julia settles Zoey back into the little bed.

JULIA

You can't do that. You scared me to death.

ZOEY

I told you. I was sleepwalking. I think. It felt like I was dreaming.

JULIA

We'll talk about it in the morning.

Julia closes Zoey's door as she leaves the room.

INT. FARMHOUSE, JULIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Julia climbs into bed. But as soon as she's pulled up the covers, she hears something. She sits up to listen.

The GNAWING sound again.

But it's not outside anymore. It sounds like it's coming from the attic, right above Julia's head.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Early morning.

Julia strides into the kitchen to find Zoey already awake, eating toast.

JULIA
(lightly, peacemaking)
Good morning. You're an early
riser, huh? I'm jealous. I always
have to drag myself out of bed.

ZOEY
You can go back to sleep. We don't
have to make conversation.

JULIA
(forced, pointed
cheerfulness)
Nope, I'm up now.

Julia looks in the pantry.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Sorry about the limited breakfast
options. We can head to the market
later.

ZOEY
Whatever.

Zoey stares out the window.

JULIA
Until then, you can go out and
explore if you want. Weather's
nice. Hell, when I was a kid, I
don't think I spent more than ten
waking minutes indoors if I could
help it.

ZOEY
Okay, Tom Sawyer.

Julia sags. Feels like possibly the squarest, most unhip 40-
year-old woman on earth.

Zoey has nothing better to do, however, so she follows
Julia's advice and heads outside.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Zoey wanders across the property.

Some of the weeds, prickly with barbs, grow waist high --
they whip and drag across her legs. Zoey winces and rubs her
shins where the weeds have left scratches. She finds herself
drawn to the tree once more.

EXT. TREE - DAY

The tree looks no less imposing during the day time. Zoey stares up at it, but makes no move to ascend the ladder this time.

A piece of fruit falls from the tree and hits the ground nearby. A curious squirrel crawls over to investigate. It takes a bite from the fruit. The fruit's juices stain the squirrel's mouth blood red.

Zoey kneels down. Gives the squirrel her best Disney-princess-who-talks-to-animals smile.

ZOEY

Hello, there. Can I help you?

But the squirrel just runs off.

Zoey turns and spots the cemetery over a small hill. She heads there.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Zoey looks over the graves. Her face softens. The quiet solemnity of the place affects her. There's no sign of snarkiness or attitude in her expression.

Zoey moves to the back of the cemetery. She reads the names on this last row of headstones--

ZOEY

Jonathan Mitchell... Cassandra
Mitchell... Gregory Mitchell...
Alice Mitchell...

There are seven headstones in this row. And on each headstone--

--the same date of death.

JULIA (O.S.)

I thought you said the cemetery was
creepy.

Zoey turns to see Julia coming to join her.

ZOEY

I didn't say creepy was bad.

Zoey points to the row of headstones in the back of the cemetery.

ZOEY (CONT'D)

Look at this row. These people
here all died on the same day.

Julia joins Zoey in the back of the cemetery. She points
down the row of headstones.

JULIA

That's your great-great-great
grandfather... there's his wife,
your great-great-great
grandmother... and their kids. Has
anybody ever told you about them?
This is like... the big mystery of
the Mitchell family. They were all
found dead one night.

Zoey grabs a stick and starts tracing lines in the dirt.

ZOEY

What happened?

JULIA

I don't know. Maybe the dad went
crazy and did a murder-suicide?
That's my guess. Although people
around town say it must have been
an animal attack because of the way
the bodies-

Julia shakes her head, not wanting to go into the gory
details.

Zoey points to the last headstone. The date of death is
different on this one -- the occupant of the grave did not
have his life cut short like the others. He lived another
seventy years past the deaths of the rest.

ZOEY

This one didn't die that day.

JULIA

Oh yeah. That's your great-great-
grandfather. He was the oldest kid
in the family. The only survivor.

ZOEY

Why didn't he die with the rest of
them?

JULIA

I think he was out hunting when it
happened. He was the one who came
home and found them all dead.

Zoey's eyes return to the graves, but Julia's expression goes vacant as she thinks.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I knew him. He was old when I met him. Really old. But still alive when I was little. He slept in the room across from mine. Across from the room you're staying in now.

Zoey absentmindedly breaks a twig in half and uses the twig to poke at the Old Man's grave.

ZOEY

So what was he like?

JULIA

When I knew him?

QUICK FLASH

5-YEAR-OLD JULIA stands in a dark room, next to a bed. An OLD MAN lies in the bed. His face is twisted in an expression of horror.

END QUICK FLASH

Julia looks disturbed by the memory.

ZOEY

What?

JULIA

Nothing. He was a vegetable.

She shudders.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Want to head back to the house?

Julia hops over the cemetery fence, taking the quickest route out instead of traveling down the short winding path toward the gate. Zoey takes the normal route, closing the gate firmly behind her.

On the way to the farmhouse, they pass--

THE TREE

-- and then a little further away, Zoey notices the squirrel lying dead on the ground, its mouth still stained red. A crow is already pecking at the corpse. The half eaten fruit lies abandoned a few paces away.

Zoey stops and stares at the grisly scene until Julia turns back.

JULIA (CONT'D)

You okay?

Before Zoey can answer, Chito erupts in frantic barking from behind the farmhouse.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Julia and Zoey move towards the house, following the sound of Chito's barking.

JULIA

Christ. Does he ever stop?

ZOEY

He's overstimulated. There's too many smells. He's not used to the country.

Zoey peeks around the corner of the house, looking for Chito in the backyard. She sees something that alarms her, and she gasps.

JULIA

What? What happened?

Zoey doesn't answer. She races around the house toward Chito.

EXT. BACK YARD - DAY

Hurrying after Zoey, Julia finds the girl crouched on the ground. Chito dances around her, growling.

Julia realizes that Zoey is kneeling in front of an injured OPOSSUM. Its leg is mangled. It has stained the grass with its blood.

JULIA

Ugh. It doesn't look so good.

ZOEY

Get me a towel.

JULIA

What??

ZOEY

Can you hold Chito back?

Julia takes hold of the dog.

Zoey bounces to her feet and starts running toward the house. She disappears through the back door and comes back a moment later carrying a kitchen towel and some rubber dish gloves.

JULIA
What are you doing?

ZOEY
(pulling on the gloves)
I can help it.

JULIA
Don't. It might have rabies or something.

Zoey wraps the towel around the injured animal.

ZOEY
Opossums hardly ever get rabies.
And I can help it. I helped my dad
fix up a cat once, after Chito
almost ripped her to shreds. I can
at least clean it up.

Zoey wraps the opossum in the towel and lifts it up. She starts for the house.

JULIA
You're not bringing it in the house!

ZOEY
Just to the back porch then. I'll
try to stop the bleeding. If you
leave it here it's gonna attract a
coyote or something way worse.

Julia doesn't look happy but she gives in.

JULIA
Be careful. Don't touch it with
your bare hands. Don't touch
anywhere near its mouth.

Zoey carries the opossum to the screened in back porch.

Julia remains in the yard, looking around, as if noticing for the first time how shabby and overgrown it's become.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ATTIC - DAY

Julia searches through a box of stuff in the corner of the attic.

She quickly finds what she's looking for -- her grandmother's old address book. She grabs it, but before turning away she notices something behind the box.

The edges of the hardwood floorboards look ragged, nibbled on. More than that, they look blackened, as if scorched by a fire.

Julia stares at the scorch marks for a moment, puzzled, before shrugging it off and turning to the address book. She flips through it, searching for a name.

INT. FARMHOUSE, BACK PORCH - DAY

Zoey has pressed a few bandages to the opossum's bloody haunch.

Outside, we hear the sound of a TRUCK, pattering toward the house.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Julia stands in front of the house and waves to HENRY DANJOU, late 40s, as he hops out of his truck.

HENRY

Hey there, shorty! It's been a minute, hasn't it!

Julia crosses the driveway to pull Henry into a hug. They're old friends, comfortable with each other.

JULIA

I should have called you sooner.

HENRY

I'm just relieved you don't hold a grudge. Your grandparents never forgave me for leaving them high and dry.

JULIA

That's not how it went down. Was it?

Henry shrugs looking guilty.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Well, I sure could use your help
now.

Julia leads him inside.

INT. FARMHOUSE, BACK PORCH - DAY

Julia and Henry step onto the back porch, where Zoey is still tending to the opossum.

JULIA
Hey, Zoey. This is my friend
Henry. He used to work for our
family. Helping around the farm.

ZOEY
(uninterested)
Oh.

Julia gives Henry an apologetic look -- 'kids.' They walk through the porch to the backyard.

EXT. BACK YARD - DAY

Julia and Henry stride to the edge of the yard.

HENRY
What's with the opossum?

JULIA
She thinks she can nurse it.
(beat)
Amy was like that. I remember once
a sparrow flew into the house. Amy
tried to help it. She was always
looking out for lost causes. She
was so upset when it died.

HENRY
There's not much you can do when
that happens. It's either okay,
ready to fly off in a minute or
two, or...

He shrugs. They scan the overgrown yard.

JULIA
I figured I'd start here. Clear
out the weeds. At least give the
kid a nice yard to play in.

HENRY

At her age? She's probably more concerned about getting good cell service so her texts go through.

Julia looks embarrassed. He's right, of course.

JULIA

I guess I don't know much about kids.

Henry sees she feels bad, tries to remedy it.

HENRY

It's good of you. To want to make things nice for her.

Henry wipes the sweat off his brow with a handkerchief.

JULIA

(noticing how hot it is)
Sorry! Let me get you a cold drink.

HENRY

Yeah, and while you're doing that, I'll see what I got in the back of my truck. I could take care of this pretty quick, I think.

Henry bounds off around the house.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Julia stirs sugar into some cold tea. She searches the freezer for a half filled ice cube tray.

After retrieving the tray, she glances outside to see Henry in the backyard. He's wielding some kind of FLAMETHROWER hooked up to a small propane tank. He's passing the flame over the weedy parts of the yard.

EXT. BACK YARD - DAY

Julia exits the house.

JULIA

Well shit, Henry. This seems a little extreme.

Henry grins and points at the flame thrower.

HENRY

Eco-conscious. Best chemical-free way to get your weed problem under control. Zap 'em with heat, and they wither away. Shouldn't take more than an hour to do the whole yard.

JULIA

Great! So we can finish up here today, and then maybe tomorrow do a few repairs inside. I can't afford you for more than a week, but-

Henry turns off the propane and shuffles a bit, awkwardly.

HENRY

Julia- The thing is, I'm happy to help for today. No charge. But you know, my wife really doesn't want me coming out here.

JULIA

What? Why?

(teasing)

She jealous? She can't blame fifteen year old me for crushing on you, Henry. I was young and you spent most of your time shirtless back then.

HENRY

(embarrassed)

No! It's not that.

(beat)

She just doesn't want me *here*.

This place. You know.

Julia doesn't know. Henry searches for words to explain, but they're interrupted by a--

PIERCING SCREAM.

Zoey, on the porch, is screaming.

Henry DROPS the flamethrower on the ground, and he and Julia race to the porch.

INT. FARMHOUSE, BACK PORCH - DAY

Julia jerks open the porch door. As she does, the opossum waddles out the door and disappears into a bush outside.

Zoey sits rigid on the porch floor. She grips her left hand with her right one. She's still wearing the rubber dish gloves. She squeezes her index finger, and blood starts to drip through a small tear in the glove.

ZOEY

It *bit* me!!

Julia swallows an 'I told you so' response.

JULIA

To the car. Now. Come on.

Julia hurries Zoey through the house.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Julia and Zoey sit in the office of a country DOCTOR, 50s, friendly but with an irksomely patronizing smile.

He applies disinfectant to Zoey's finger.

DOCTOR

Opossum bite? They're not pets.
You do know that right? Wild
animals tend to act like wild
animals.

ZOEY

It needed help.

DOCTOR

Maybe from now on, leave the animal
tending to the veterinarian, and
save your good deeds for the church
youth group. You might even get a
thank you for your trouble instead
of a bloody stump.

The Doctor bends his knuckle in a way that makes it look like his index finger has been bitten off, and he waves his hand in Zoey's face.

ZOEY

It didn't bite my finger *off*.

DOCTOR

Maybe not this time. The next one
might not be so gentle.

JULIA

She doesn't need stitches?

DOCTOR

No, I'd say you just need to watch for signs of infection. And keep her away from the critters, Julia, I'm surprised you didn't know better.

This mild reproach seems to hit Julia hard, despite the Doctor's light tone.

JULIA

Besides infection what else should I be worried about? Rabies? Lyme disease?

ZOEY

That's from ticks.

DOCTOR

Probably nothing. If you see the opossum again, call animal control. They'll catch it, kill it, and test it for anything nasty. But chances are, you have nothing to worry about.

The Doctor pats Julia on the back and leaves.

INT. JULIA'S CAR - DAY

Both Julia and Zoey seem tense and Julia pulls into the long drive of the farmhouse.

JULIA

If this is going to work, you've got to respect me. I know I'm not your mom or dad. But I'm the adult here. And you have to trust that I'm making decisions to keep you safe. Okay?

ZOEY

Fine.

JULIA

So next time I tell you that something's a bad idea, you'll listen?

ZOEY

I can do that.

Julia looks relieved.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - DAY

The pair return home, and Zoey starts up the stairs.

JULIA
I noticed you hadn't unpacked.

Zoey pauses.

ZOEY
Not yet.

JULIA
Maybe you should.

Zoey nods and continues up the stairs.

Julia starts to follow Zoey upstairs when--

CRASH

Julia and Zoey freeze, hearing a crash from the kitchen. They exchange a look, then hurry down the steps to see what's going on.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Julia and Zoey race into the kitchen.

They find the kitchen floor littered with broken dishes from breakfast. The dishes appear to have slid right off the table because--

The table now stands at a slant.

Julia peers under the table and sees that the floor beneath is warped. Several of the floorboards push up in a strange bulge. The boards also look eaten away at the edges. Some of the boards are blackened as if they've been scorched.

JULIA
What the hell?

Julia pushes the table off of the warped part of the floor.

She circles the bulging floor boards, trying to figure out what would cause this damage. As she paces, her foot comes down on something sharp.

JULIA (CONT'D)
OW!!

Julia leaps back and grabs her foot. She inspects the bottom of her shoe and finds a puncture mark through the sole.

She quickly drops onto one of the kitchen chairs and removes her socks and shoes.

The puncture mark has pierced through her shoe, all the way to the bottom of her foot. A dot of blood beads at the puncture mark.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Fuck!!

Julia stares at the floor, searching for the loose nail or screw that must have pierced her foot.

She finds the sharp object, but it's not an old nail.

Julia kneels on the floor, inspecting the thing.

It looks like a tiny plant growing up through the crack between two floorboards. Not like a green shoot or blade of grass, but something tougher, like a root from some tuberous plant, about the size of Julia's pinkie finger.

Julia pokes at the root and finds it stiff, inflexible. She pulls at it, but can't grasp it well enough to loosen it.

Julia, upset, stalks out of the room.

ZOEY

Where are you going?

Zoey stares uncertainly after Julia, who returns moments later carrying a crowbar. She starts pulling up floorboards one by one, casting them aside.

Soon, a gap in the floor reveals what is causing the bulging underneath.

A system of tentacle like tree roots, pale, ash-colored, rise out of the dirt in the crawl space below. They've grown tall enough to push at the kitchen floorboards from underneath, causing the bulge.

JULIA

What the hell is going on here?

ZOEY

Are they... part of a tree?

Julia grabs hold of a root, then recoils, grimacing.

ZOEY (CONT'D)

What?

JULIA

It feels *warm*.

Julia looks incredibly unsettled as she stares down into the crawl space.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Julia watches as a foundation inspector, MIKE backs out from under the crawl space.

MIKE

You're right that it's a problem. With tree roots under the house you get cracks in the foundation, they draw water, you get mold, decay... We gotta figure this out.

JULIA

But how did this happen? Everything was fine a week ago, today there's suddenly roots in my kitchen.

MIKE

Could be a sudden shift in soil upended everything. Maybe the rains last week. Maybe even a little earthquake, we get them from time to time. Look, I'll give you a quote, but it's not going to be cheap.

Julia looks grim.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - DAY

Julia sits on the bottom of the stairs, phone pressed to her ear. Her credit card dangles from her fingers. She listens to the hold music until--

CUSTOMER SERVICE REP (V.O.)

Hi, how can I help you?

JULIA

Hi. I wanted to talk to someone about increasing my line of credit.

She listens for a moment, doesn't seem particularly hopeful.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Julia kneels over the hole she made in her kitchen floor. She uses a thick roll of masking tape to tape a piece of tarp over the hole.

She stands back to admire the job.

Zoey appears in the doorway to watch her.

JULIA

I think we're just going to have to live with this. For a little while. At least until my credit score goes up.

Julia slides the kitchen table over so that it covers the hole.

INT. FARMHOUSE, SMALL BEDROOM - NIGHT

Julia and Zoey unpack Zoey's things.

Julia hangs the last of Zoey's shirts in the closet. Zoey arranges a few personal items on her nightstand to make the room feel more like hers -- a family photograph, a few collectible figurines, a jewelry box, etc.

Among these items, Zoey spots the "best friends" locket Julia gave her. She pauses over it, then takes it and fastens it around her neck.

JULIA

Ready for bed?

ZOEY

I'm going to read for a bit first.

Zoey climbs in bed with a book but doesn't open it. Instead, she stares at the ceiling.

JULIA

Good night.

Zoey's face crumples, on the verge of tears. There's a flash of something else, too: panic. Julia hesitates at the door.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Zoey?

Zoey quickly wipes the tears from her face and sits up with a sudden urgency.

ZOEY

What was my mom like when she was my age?

Julia sits on the edge of the bed.

JULIA

Um. Pretty much the opposite of me. But that was a good thing. She was willing to try anything. She was always convincing me to do stuff I never would have done otherwise.

Zoey raises an eyebrow.

ZOEY

School says peer pressure leads to things like smoking and risky sex.

JULIA

Ha ha. I'm talking about fun, kid stuff. Like we'd sneak out in the middle of the night, ride our bikes twenty miles, and hop the fence at the county fairgrounds after hours. Or ride out to the bluffs over the lake.

ZOEY

That sounds more creepy than fun.

JULIA

It would have been, if I were alone. But your mom always had this attitude like she knew everything would be okay, so I believed her.

ZOEY

I wish I could have seen her like that.

JULIA

She grew up to become such a strong person. You should be proud of who she is.

ZOEY

I know. But I was so little when she got sick. I don't remember her being anything but sick.

(MORE)

ZOEY (CONT'D)

Maybe that's why she picked you for
me to stay with. You knew her the
best, when she was healthy and...
(alive)

JULIA

Yeah.

ZOEY

You loved her right?

JULIA

Of course! I still love her.

Zoey looks relieved.

ZOEY

Okay.

Julia looks overwhelmed. She seems like she wants to hug
Zoey, but stops herself; they're not quite there yet.

JULIA

Good night.

Julia pats Zoey's leg and slips off the bed.

INT. FARMHOUSE, UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - NIGHT

Julia looks like she's fighting back tears as she brushes her
teeth. She tosses her toothbrush on the counter and stares
at herself in the mirror.

When she turns off the faucet, she becomes aware of
something. A sound--

tap tap tap

Julia glances over to the window. Outside there is only
black. Again, Julia hears--

tap tap tap

--and realizes it's not coming from the window, but the
mirror.

Something is tapping from *behind* the mirror -- from the other
side.

Julia drifts toward the sound, moves her ear close.

The tapping sound slows down.

tap

tap

Julia stares at the mirror, perplexed when,

THUMP

Julia jerks back at the sound of something slamming full force into the wall behind the mirror.

The rattling wall causes the medicine cabinet to swing open.

Julia races out of the bathroom and into--

INT. FARMHOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

--the hall, where Julia turns directly into her bedroom.

INT. FARMHOUSE, JULIA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Julia stares at the shared wall between the bathroom and her bedroom. She sees nothing out of the ordinary on this side. But before long she hears something--

GNAWING

--Over her head.

Julia looks distressed, but it's late, and she's tired. This is going to have to be a problem for another day. She crawls into bed.

INT. FARMHOUSE, SMALL BEDROOM - NIGHT - [DREAM]

5-year-old JULIA is fast asleep, in the small bedroom. Until--

A low MOAN

--wakes 5-year-old Julia up.

5-year-old Julia looks at the bedroom door. The door is open, just a crack. The moaning sound continues. It's coming from across the hall.

She gets out of bed, creeps to the door, crosses the hall, and walks into--

INT. FARMHOUSE, SICK ROOM - NIGHT - [DREAM]

5-year-old Julia stares wide eyed at the Old Man lying in the sick room bed.

The Old Man is moaning.

5-year-old Julia is more concerned than scared. Maybe the Old Man needs help.

5-YEAR-OLD JULIA
What is it?

The Old Man keens. Julia creeps forward, toward the bed.

Between the moans, the Old Man's breath comes out in rattling gasps. Tears leak from his eyes. They soak the Old Man's pillow and wet the tufts of hair around the base of his skull.

Julia is beginning to feel scared now.

5-YEAR-OLD JULIA (CONT'D)
I'll get help.

But the Old Man's arm shoots out and grips 5-Year-Old Julia's wrist. She freezes, paralyzed in terror.

OLD MAN
How?

Guttural noises escape the Old Man's throat as he tries to articulate some urgent message.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
How will it eat me?

5-year-old Julia can't scream, but she whimpers, quietly.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
How much of me will it feast on?
How much of me will become its
shit?

The Old Man's face moves very close to 5-year-old Julia's, and now, she can finally let out a scream. She screams as loud as she can, but the Old Man doesn't let go.

5-year old Julia keeps screaming. She wrenches her arm away.

And then--

INT. FARMHOUSE, JULIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Julia wakes up with a gasp. She bolts out of bed and runs out of the room.

INT. FARMHOUSE, SICK ROOM - DAY

Julia peers into the sick room, where the Old Man once slept, long ago. It is empty. Julia catches her breath, trying to shake her dream/memory free. Then she backs out of the room.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Julia enters the kitchen to find Zoey. The girl sits on the kitchen counter, messing with an old radio somebody installed in the kitchen wall decades ago.

ZOEY

Why does anyone still listen to the
radio when you can just stream
music?

Julia listens to an annoying RADIO ANNOUNCER rambling a stream of catchphrases and sound effects.

JULIA

But then you don't get the
commentary.

A song plays -- some hit pop song from some late 80s/early 90s band, like NKOB.

Julia gasps in delight.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Oh my God. Your mom and I called
the local radio station 47 times
one summer trying to get them to
play this song. The stupid DJ was
on some kind of power trip. He
always said no.

Julia grins at the memory.

JULIA (CONT'D)

That's one thing radio has. You
don't get to call in song requests
to an app.

ZOEY

Yeah, you get to listen to the
songs you pick yourself whenever
you want.

JULIA

But then it doesn't feel like you
earned it.

Julia starts dancing around the kitchen, singing along.

ZOEY

Oh. No.

JULIA

Come on. I'm rusty, but I-

Julia stops mid twirl and shrieks as a rat pokes its head out
from behind a cannister of flour on the counter.

Julia jumps back and runs into Zoey, who yelps.

They watch as the rat scurries across the counter and
disappears behind the refrigerator.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Jesus. I knew I heard those
fuckers in the walls.

ZOEY

(piously)
Language.

Julia looks at her -- is she for real? But then Zoey breaks
and starts giggling.

INT. COUNTRY STORE AND SERVICE STATION - DAY

Julia and Zoey enter the country store.

JULIA

Just pick out whatever you like.
Do you know how to cook?

ZOEY

No.

JULIA

Pick stuff you can microwave.

Zoey wanders off.

Julia moves a few aisles over and finds rat traps. She starts grabbing an armload.

Julia and Zoey meet at the checkout counter. The CLERK eyes the rat traps.

CLERK

What you need is a cat.

ZOEY

I can't have a cat. My dog annihilates cats.

CLERK

Then maybe he could take care of your rat problem, too.

JULIA

I'm thinking the rats might be operating with a bit more brain power than this particular dog.

Zoey looks thoughtful.

ZOEY

Nah, he's not dumb. I think he'd just rather be an agent of chaos than a problem solver.

Julia grins at Zoey, thinking that maybe they're starting get along.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Julia and Zoey unload the bags from the car.

As Julia carries them to the porch, she pauses for a moment to stare up at the house.

She notices clumps of an ugly clinging plant, something like a grayish Spanish moss, climbing the exterior walls. Some of it even worms up through the porch floorboards and encircles the frame of the front door.

Julia shifts the bag to one arm and reaches out to scrape the moss away before entering the house.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - DAY

As Julia and Zoey bring their bags inside, they hear a RING from Julia's phone.

Julia checks the screen.

JULIA
It's your dad.

Zoey drops the bags and tenses up. Zoey and Julia stare at each other for a moment, wondering: bad news?

Julia answers the phone, apprehensive.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Hello? Yes?
(relieved)
Yes. We're adjusting.

The change in Julia's voice signals that everything is okay. Zoey relaxes.

JULIA (CONT'D)
She's right here.

Julia hands the phone to Zoey.

ZOEY
Hi, dad. Yeah. Okay, I guess.
How's mom?

Julia grabs the bags and leaves to give them privacy.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ATTIC - DAY

Julia starts laying rat traps down everywhere, all around the attic.

As she kneels, she hears again --

tap tap tap

--but when she whips around she sees that this time it's just the scratch of a tree branch against the attic window.

She turns back to the rat traps and sets the last one down.

She places it next to a dusty box in the corner. The box is filled with old papers and photographs. One of the photographs on top of the pile catches Julia's eye.

It's a pale snapshot of Julia's grandparents standing with Julia at age 5 in front of the farmhouse.

Julia lifts the box flaps to see what else is inside.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Julia carries the box into the kitchen, where Zoey waits for her.

Zoey hands back Julia's phone.

JULIA
How's your dad? Did you guys have
a good talk?

ZOEY
It was short. He was preoccupied.
He usually is.

JULIA
Did you talk to your mom?

ZOEY
She was kind of out of it.

Zoey stares at the box.

ZOEY (CONT'D)
What's that?

JULIA
Just old family stuff. I thought it
might be cool to look through. Less
creepy than the cemetery. Want to
check it out?

ZOEY
Maybe later.

Zoey shuffles out.

INT. FARMHOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Zoey makes her way to her room, but as she passes the bathroom she stops.

A MIDDLE AGED MAN stands in the bathroom flanked by two PRE-TEEN BOYS. All three are dressed in black suits; but the style dates back at least a hundred and fifty years.

They face the door, staring straight ahead. They look right through Zoey without seeming to see her.

Zoey gasps, reaches out to grab the bathroom door knob and pulls the door closed.

She blinks in disbelief, then opens the door again.

The bathroom is empty.

Zoey slowly backs away from the bathroom. She steps into her room and firmly shuts the door.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Julia sits at the kitchen table, spreading the contents of the box in front of her.

She smiles at a picture of herself and Amy as teenagers, arms wrapped around each other, mugging for the camera.

Other pictures show Amy as a child. In some of these pictures, Amy looks frail and thin.

In one picture, Amy lies in a hospital bed, celebrating her birthday, surrounded by family -- but also tubes and I.V. bags.

Julia stares at the photo. She looks heartbroken.

JULIA

Oh, Amy.

She glances up at the ceiling, thinking of Zoey. Then she tucks the photo of sick Amy at the bottom of the box.

As she does so, her hand grazes a stack of photographs bound together with an elastic band.

The top photo is a blurry snapshot of the Old Man from Julia's dream. He sits in a rocker on the front porch of the farmhouse, staring vacantly forward.

Underneath that is another photo of him, younger. And then several more photographs of the man, progressively younger. He looks tense and haunted in each of these photos.

At the bottom of the pile Julia finds a black and white photo of him: the Young Man from the woods. This is the only photo in which he looks completely at ease. He leans back in his chair, his lip curled in a confident smile.

Julia compares this carefree photo with the anguished looking man in others.

After the last photograph, Julia spots several folded pieces of paper. The first are a pair of newspaper clippings. Julia unwraps them and holds one up.

The headline reads: **"Hero Rescues Fawn"**

JULIA (CONT'D)
"A young local staged a daring
rescue yesterday, pulling a
drowning fawn from Brinkman Creek."

Julia grins. She looks at the picture under the headline, the same Young Man, smiling next to a baby deer.

Julia looks at the next newspaper clipping and her grin fades away.

The picture accompanying the article shows the Young Man sitting on the ground next to the tree. He looks shell-shocked.

The headline reads: **"Son Survives Brutal Family Slaying"**

Julia puts the news clippings down. She looks pityingly back at the photograph of the Old Man.

After the news clippings, Julia finds a small packet of official-looking documents.

At the top of the pile, she sees a notice from the draft board dated November 10th, 1918.

JULIA (CONT'D)
(reading)
"Notice to appear for physical
examination."

Julia lifts the next paper it reads: "Notice of Classification"

JULIA (CONT'D)
(reading)
"...has been classified 1A,
eligible for military service..."

Julia picks up the final piece of paper. It reads "Certificate of Exemption."

JULIA (CONT'D)
(reading)
"...is exempted from the provisions
of the Military Service Act..."

Julia sets down the papers. She gazes out the window as she ruminates on the past. While staring, she spots movement in the corner of the yard.

It's the opossum.

Julia jumps from her chair.

She grabs a broom and a large canvas grocery bag and rushes out the back door.

EXT. BACK YARD - DAY

Julia hurdles across the yard. She's almost there.

JULIA
I got you, you little rat.

But the opossum scampers away, towards the woods.

Julia follows it.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Julia jogs through the brush, following the animal. Branches scrape against her, but she ignores them.

The opossum isn't very fast, and she's gaining on it.

Finally, she corners it against a cluster of rocks and fallen trees.

The opossum freezes, then rolls over -- playing dead.

Julia raises the handle of the broom, as if to jab it, when--

A NAKED MAN

--steps out from behind a tree.

He stands at least ten feet tall. His skin, white as a sheet, is dry, ashy, mottled and rough, like an unpeeled turnip.

Julia breaks out into a sweat, immediately. She stares at the naked man with dread.

The naked man bends over, his spine cracking as it curves into a bow. At first it seems almost like he's paying them a polite curtesy. And then something happens with his throat. Horrible churning sounds escape his gaping mouth. His jaw seems to stretch, his lips bulge out.

Moments later, something comes up, out of his mouth. He regurgitates a set of bones, clean, white, and stripped of all flesh.

The bones come from a human arm, hand, and fingers. But with skin and cartilage gone, nothing holds the bones together anymore. As they're vomited from the man's mouth, they clatter to the ground in an untidy pile.

A piece of jewelry -- a gold WEDDING RING -- comes loose from one of the smallest bones and rolls across the dirt, stopping at Julia's feet.

The Boneeater straightens and grins at Julia.

This seems to break Julia's paralysis.

She screams, wordlessly, turns, and runs.

She flees through the woods.

As the trees thin and the farmhouse comes into view, Julia steals a look backwards, to see if the Boneeater is following her. Her foot snags on a root and she pitches forward, landing on the ground, hard.

Julia is stunned by the fall. She rolls onto her back, dizzy.

QUICK FLASHES

-- The brittle treehouse creaking as a sudden gust of wind blows through the rotting old boards.

-- A convulsing bird lying on the front porch

-- A hissing opossum

Then BLACK.

ZOEY (V.O.)

Julia??

Julia's eyes flutter open. She's still lying on the ground.

ZOEY (V.O.)

Are you okay??

Julia seems disoriented. She looks past Zoey to stare into the woods, expecting to see the Boneeater closing in.

But there's nothing there.

JULIA

Where did he go?

Zoey looks worried. She helps Julia to her feet, and they walk back to the Farmhouse.

EXT. BACK YARD - DAY

When they reach the back porch, Julia stops. Takes another worried look at the woods.

ZOEY

What are you looking for??

JULIA

I don't know. I'm seeing things.

Julia looks up at the porch. She notes more of that clinging grayish moss edging up the walls. She shudders.

They step onto the porch.

INT. FARMHOUSE, JULIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Julia tries to sleep, but she's restless. She tosses and turns.

She tries to take deep, relaxing breaths. It seems to work, but then she hears--

--an explosion of BARKING downstairs.

Julia jumps, then grimaces.

JULIA

That Goddamned dog.

Julia hops off the bed.

INT. FARMHOUSE, SMALL BEDROOM - NIGHT

ZoeY is also awake. But she ignores Chito's barking. She sits on her bed reading a book.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

Julia jumps down the last step to the entryway.

Chito's barking stops, but he's still growling, low and menacing.

Underneath the growling, Julia hears a second noise from the kitchen.

It's low, but there--

tap

tap

tap

-- against plastic tarp.

Julia slows her pace, suddenly afraid.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Julia stands in the kitchen doorway, head cocked. Chito whines.

The slight tapping against plastic continues.

Julia slowly grabs the edge of the kitchen table and pushes it aside.

She stares down at the tarp taped over the large hole in the floor.

For a second, there's nothing. Then--

tap

tap

PUNCH

With a loud smack, the tarp is lifted up, as if a fist is punching it from the other side.

Julia screams and clutches the door frame.

She grabs a knife from a block on the counter, then strides over to the tarp. She rips the tape away and pulls the tarp aside.

Chito, suddenly, uncharacteristically, timid, shrinks back.

Julia, brandishing the knife in front of her, peers into the darkness of the whole.

She sneaks a glance at Chito.

JULIA

(angry)

If it's that God damned opossum
again, you better rip its throat
out.

But there is no sign of what could have made the noise. Down in the hole, she sees nothing but the tangle of pale tree roots.

Finally, she stands, ready to forget the tapping noise. She turns away, then--

PLINK

The sound of something small and metal, coin-sized, hitting the kitchen floor -- something has been tossed from the hole and is now rolling across the floorboards.

Julia looks down to see the shiny object rolling towards her. It comes to a stop at her feet -- A gold wedding ring.

Julia staggers backwards, turns, and flees--

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

-across the entryway. She flies up the stairs as if the devil is chasing her.

INT. FARMHOUSE, JULIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Julia runs sobbing into her room and slams the door behind her.

INT. FARMHOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Zoey comes out of her room and stands in the doorway. She peers down the hall. She looks worried as she hears Julia's sobs. She steps out of the room onto the stair's landing and glances down the stairs.

It's dark. There's nothing to see.

Just the THWAP sound of the tarp, being lifted by an invisible draft, then settling back down to the floor.

Zoey looks across the hall, into the darkness of 'the sick room.' And from the darkness, she hears:

OLD MAN (O.S.)
What have you done, little girl?

Zoey gasps and runs back to her room, slamming the door shut.

INT. FARMHOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

The next day.

Julia stares straight ahead, focused on a photograph hanging on the wall in front of her.

INSERT - PHOTO

Of Julia's grandparents, GEORGE and HELEN. The photo was taken when they were in their sixties. George holds Helen close. He looks like he's about to kiss her, and has his hand on her cheek. His wedding ring, catching the sunlight, reflects a sparkling glare.

Julia backs away from the photograph.

Behind her, in the kitchen, we hear the sound of a pounding hammer.

Julia looks down the hall and sees Henry at work, replacing the boards on the kitchen floor.

EXT. FARMHOUSE, FRONT PORCH - DAY

Later, the floor repaired, Julia and Henry sit side by side on the porch.

JULIA

Thank you for fixing the floor.

HENRY

Don't worry about it.

Henry sighs and glances back at the kitchen.

HENRY (CONT'D)

But you're kind of paving over the problem there, Julia. You want to do something about those roots under the house eventually.

Julia waves the issue away -- roots under the house seems the least of her worries.

JULIA

But I appreciate you coming.

HENRY

No problem.

JULIA

(abruptly)

Why did you quit? You worked for my grandparents for years. They were old. You left when they needed you the most.

HENRY

I'm sorry. I worked here as long as I could stand it. But my wife didn't want me to keep coming here.

JULIA

Why?

HENRY

Come on, Julia. You get that there's something wrong, right? Like I'm not the kind of guy who... I mean ghosts and spirits aren't my thing, but you feel something off, right??

JULIA

My whole life has been off. I had nothing. No dad. Crazy mom. Nothing felt normal until I got here! The only moments I ever felt safe were when I was living in this house. And then, finally, everything was perfect.

Henry shakes his head.

HENRY

Well maybe that's why you don't feel it then. You don't want to see it.

He stands to leave, but Julia presses him.

JULIA

Have you seen things? Heard things? That you can't explain?

HENRY

No. I just feel it. There's something here. Your grandparents were like you. They were happy here. And maybe that kept them safe. Because I think that acknowledging it makes you vulnerable.

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

When it knows you've seen it, and when it has its sights on you, it's dangerous. And that's why I'd like to get the hell out of here, if you don't mind.

Henry strides down the porch, down the drive to his truck.

Julia watches him go, frustrated.

She hears music coming from inside the house; Zoey in there, playing some teen pop song.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Julia enters the kitchen, where Zoey stands by the counter, fiddling with the radio again.

Julia scans the room. With the floor repaired, the kitchen table has been pushed back into its normal spot.

Julia takes a seat at the table.

JULIA

I'm not crazy.

Zoey moves away from the radio and sits across from Julia. She keeps an even expression as if there's nothing unusual about Julia's pronouncement.

ZOEY

That's good to know.

JULIA

Something is happening here. It's crazy. But I'm not.

ZOEY

Okay?

JULIA

Have you seen anything? Anything weird?

ZOEY

No.

But Zoey looks scared. And almost guilty.

JULIA

You can tell me.

Zoey considers this. Then she turns to the box on the kitchen table. She pulls out an old album.

ZOEY

I was looking through this before.
While you were in the woods.

She opens to the first page.

She points to a sepia toned photograph and shows Julia a family portrait.

ZOEY (CONT'D)

I saw them.

Julia moves close to take a look.

The portrait shows the Middle-Aged-Man and two Pre-teen Boys that Zoey saw in the bathroom. Next to them sits a MIDDLE-AGED-WOMAN holding a TODDLER.

JULIA

This picture is from at least a
hundred and fifty years ago.

Julia spots a date written in the corner.

JULIA (CONT'D)

1867. I think those are my great-
great-great-grandparents. You saw
them?

ZOEY

I didn't see all of them. Just
these three.

Zoey points to the man and boys.

ZOEY (CONT'D)

And they look different here. They
look... starving here.

Julia studies the picture of the family. Zoey is right. In this picture, the whole family looks gaunt, even the children. Their cheeks are hollow. Their clothes hang off of them.

Julia flips forward in the album.

JULIA

I guess they had a few rough years.
The boys look better in this one.

She stares down at a photograph of the two pre-teen boys, a little older and now more full faced, playing with a rabbit.

There is a scrawl of writing beneath the picture:

**"The boys, playing with a jackrabbit they rescued from a
snare"**

Julia turns the page again and finds a news clipping.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Oh my God. Look.

Zoey scans the article, reading it out loud.

ZOEY

"We are sad to learn of the tragedy that has befallen Andrew Mitchell. Mr. Mitchell and his two sons left the county last Thursday, to purchase an assortment of fruit trees from a seller in Rochester. The three took lodgings there that evening. When they returned to the house yesterday afternoon, Mr. Mitchell discovered that his wife and youngest child, a girl aged 2, were the victims of an inhuman act of cruelty. We do not know the identity of the cold-blooded murderer who has struck down our dear ones, but we pray that his savage barbarity will soon be met with justice."

Julia turns the page back to the family portrait.

JULIA

So a man goes on a trip with his sons, and when they come home, his wife and daughter have been killed.

Julia reaches into the box and pulls out the news clipping with the headline: **"Son Survives Barbaric Family Slaying."**

JULIA (CONT'D)

Fifty years later, his grand-son, goes hunting in the woods, and when he comes home his whole family is slaughtered. So much death, all in this house. What does that mean? Is our family cursed?

ZOEY

Everyone dies. That doesn't make us
cursed.

They stare down at the family pictures.

JULIA

Maybe we should leave.

ZOEY

You love this house.

JULIA

I do. I did. But something is
really wrong here. Don't you feel
it?

ZOEY

I don't think we should leave.

JULIA

But I'm supposed to keep you safe.

ZOEY

Nothing really bad has happened
yet. And if the house is
possessed, there has to be
something we can do about it. Like
the people on that show, Ghost
Hunters.

Julia looks thoughtful.

INT. FARMHOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Julia sits on the couch tying a bunch of sage leaves into a
bundle.

JULIA

Burning sage is supposed to help
with bad energy.

Zoey looks skeptical.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Can't hurt, right?

Julia places the sage bundle into a bowl. She grabs a book
of matches from an end table. She hands the matches to Zoey.

ZOEY

(lighting the sage)
Are we supposed to say something?

JULIA

I don't know. Something like "hey
ghosts, stay the fuck out of here?"

Zoey looks amused.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Cleanse this space. Negativity
begone forever.

Zoey stares into the bowl of smoking sage.

ZOEY

What else?

JULIA

We could sprinkle some holy water.
I think my grandmother kept some
around.

Zoey shrugs. Repeats Julia's words:

ZOEY

Can't hurt, right?

Julia hurries upstairs to find the holy water.

INT. FARMHOUSE UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Julia heads for the bathroom, but stops. The Middle-Aged-Man stands at the end of the hall. He's cradling a small TODDLER to his chest. His suit is covered in blood. Two Pre-Teen boys stand by his side, their heads bowed in grief.

Julia looks eyes with the Middle-Aged-Man.

JULIA

We live here now. You don't. You
can leave, now.

Julia blinks and the hall is empty. The figures are gone.

She lets out a breath. Could it be that simple? Maybe it worked? She quickly turns into the bathroom.

INT. FARMHOUSE, UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

Julia searches a cabinet in the upstairs bathroom. She reaches for a drawer in the vanity. As she does, she suddenly hears--

tap

tap

tap

Julia pauses. Listens.

tap

tap

CRASH

With a shower of glass, the mirror explodes, revealing a gaping hole in the bathroom wall behind the glass.

Julia screams and shields her face.

From the hole in the wall, a network of rootlike branches unfold. But the branches don't resemble wood; they seem to have a spongy texture, almost like the tentacles of a squid.

The roots reach for Julia. Some of them are fringed with tiny teeth-like ridges that cut at walls around them, making a grinding sound, like the GNAWING that Julia has been hearing.

Julia screams again, and scrambles backwards into the bathtub.

The branches claw outwards and wrap themselves around Julia's forearms. Julia tries to rip herself away, and manages to break one of the smaller branches off the root. A spray of viscous red liquid gushes from the stump. The branches' grip on Julia's arms loosen.

Julia wrenches herself free and pulls herself out of the tub. She starts for the bathroom door, but the door--

SWINGS OPEN

--right before Julia can reach it.

Zoey stands in the doorway.

The girl gapes at the scene for a moment, then she flees down the hall without a word.

Julia tries to follow Zoey, but the roots grab hold of her and pull her back. They wrap around her neck.

Julia struggles but can't disengage them. She starts to sputter and choke. Her eyes flutter. Her breathing slows down. Her face starts to turn purple. She's about to pass out.

But then, Zoey returns.

The girl holds a cleaver in her hand. She wields it maniacally; starts hacking at the roots.

More red liquid spills from the roots' wounds as the branches withdraw and wither.

A branch tangles itself into Zoey's hair.

ZOEY

No!

Zoey drives the cleaver into the center of the thickest trunk of the root system. A final spurt of the dark liquid floods out of the roots, which begin to retreat, back into the walls.

Zoey and Julia stumble out of the bathroom, covered in slick red goo.

INT. FARMHOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS - NOW

Julia slams the bathroom door behind her before collapsing on the floor.

ZOEY

I don't think the sage worked.

Julia lets out a raspy, almost hysterical laugh. She gets up and stumbles toward the stairs.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Julia and Zoey race into the kitchen.

Julia pulls her purse from a hook on the wall. She spots her phone on the table and snatches it. She grabs a dish towel from the kitchen counter and tosses it at Zoey.

JULIA

Get cleaned up. Then I'm calling your parents. I have to tell them you can't stay.

ZOEY

You can't. They have enough to worry about.

JULIA

They'll be more than worried if I get you killed.

With a sudden flash of anger, Zoey moves away from Julia.

ZOEY

I'm fine. It wasn't coming after
me. It-

Zoey suddenly gasps and clutches her hand. The hand is still bandaged, from the opossum bite.

JULIA

What is it?

Zoey shakes her head, but she looks unwell. She rapidly turns a grayish, sallow color. Her eyes look feverish.

She clutches her hand tighter, draws it in to her chest.

ZOEY

Ow!

JULIA

Let me see!

Julia pries Zoey's hand out of her own tight grip. She pulls at the bandages, ripping them away.

Beneath the bandages, the bite mark on Zoey's finger has reopened. It oozes fresh blood. The rest of Zoey's finger is rapidly darkening, turning purple. Blue and red veiny lines emanate from the bite mark. They travel up Zoey's arm -- Julia can actually see them creeping, further and further up.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Oh my God. Jesus. Come...

Julia grabs Zoey by the shoulders and pushes her out of the kitchen.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Zoey stumbles to her knees as they head for the front door, but Julia helps her up and practically drags her out the front door.

INT. JULIA'S CAR - DAY

Julia drives like a bat out of hell. She glances at the rearview mirror to check on Zoey, sitting in the back seat.

Zoey groans of pain grow louder. Soon they become screams of agony.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The Doctor, less congenial now, examines Zoey's hand. A NURSE hovers over the bed, taking vitals.

DOCTOR
(angry, sarcastic)
Typically we'd want you to bring her in before she reaches the point of sepsis.

JULIA
I didn't know. I had no idea it had gotten this bad.

ZOEY
(through the pain)
It wasn't like this before.

JULIA
It's true. She seemed fine until twenty minutes ago.

DOCTOR
(to the Nurse)
Tell the lab to hurry on those blood cultures. I want to start her on 50 mgs of Flucloxacillin right away.

The Nurse nods. Julia watches them work, her face frozen in fear and guilt.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

Julia sits in a small hospital waiting room.

She takes out her phone with a grim expression, then dials.

JULIA
Hey, Jason. Something happened. You need to come get Zoey. She can't stay with me anymore. I'm sorry.

She looks defeated as she listens to Jason's response.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Julia watches Zoey sleep in the hospital bed from the doorway. In a--

BRIEF FLASH

--Julia sees a vision of Zoey's mother Amy, dying in a hospital bed in a living room miles away.

She puts the vision out of her head and returns her thoughts to--

THE HOSPITAL ROOM

--where Zoey wakes up.

JULIA

I called your dad. Your parents
are coming to take you home.
They'll be here tomorrow.

ZOEY

My mom can't travel.

JULIA

She wanted to come see you. Your
dad said she was pretty insistent.
There was no point in arguing with
her. Cheer up. This is what you
wanted. To be with her.

ZOEY

I didn't want it to be like this.
I can't leave yet!

JULIA

Come on. I know you don't like me
that much.

ZOEY

But what are you going to do? Are
you going back home?

JULIA

No. I'll find a hotel somewhere.

Zoey starts trembling, shaking her head.

ZOEY

She'll die. She'll die and I'll
die.

JULIA

What?

Zoey becomes hysterical.

ZOEY
She'll die! And I'll die!

JULIA
Slow down. Talk to me.

ZOEY
I agreed!

JULIA
Agreed to what?

ZOEY
I'm sorry. I did it. I didn't believe it was true, until I saw him in the tree house. And even then, I thought it was a dream. Until the opossum-

JULIA
Zoey, what did you agree to??

ZOEY
I didn't want her to die! He said she would live, if I agreed--

The Doctor strides in.

DOCTOR
Whoa, settle down. This isn't what we want. What did you say to her, Julia?

JULIA
Nothing, I just told her that her parents were coming!

DOCTOR
Nurse-

The nurse strides in with a sedative. She administers it to Zoey, who sobs uncontrollably.

JULIA
Zoey!

DOCTOR
Why don't we let her calm down.

JULIA
Zoey! Agreed to what??

DOCTOR
Julia!

Julia stops. Steadies herself.

The sedative starts to take affect, and Zoey's sobs quiet down. She goes limp in the hospital bed.

JULIA
I'll let you rest. I'll be back
later.

Julia backs out of the room.

INT. JULIA'S CAR - NIGHT

Julia pulls up to the farmhouse.

She pauses before exiting the car, staring at the house, taking everything in.

The clinging moss has spread. It grows in thick clusters around the first floor doors and windows, wraps around the posts of the porch, and creeps its way up to the second floor.

It's not just the moss enveloping the house that unnerves Julia. Everything around the house -- the grass, the trees, the shrubs -- seems to lean toward it. It's as if nature is closing in.

Julia gets out of the car.

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Julia searches the kitchen. The old box of family photos and documents remains on the kitchen table.

Julia paws at the pictures. Her eyes fall on a trio of unfolded documents: notices from the War Department. Her great-grandfather's certificate of exemption.

Julia thinks aloud to herself.

JULIA
Agreed to what?

Julia trods across the freshly repaired floorboards, leaving the kitchen.

INT. FARMHOUSE, STAIRWAY - CONTINUOUS

Julia heads up the stairs.

She sees streaks of congealed red gunk on the steps. She ignores this and ascends to the second floor.

She pushes into her old bedroom, where Zoey is staying.

INT. FARMHOUSE, SMALL BEDROOM - NIGHT

Julia searches the room, frantically, muttering to herself. She looks for clues, desperate to learn what Zoey has done.

Julia looks through the closet. She opens Zoey's empty suitcase. There's nothing here.

Then, she remembers something.

Julia opens the drawers of the nightstand and pulls out a notebook: Amy's journal.

Behind Julia, the wall suddenly ripples and dimples, like the house itself is warping. Splinters of wood and plaster rain down from the ceiling.

Julia shrieks, clutches the journal to her chest, and runs from the room.

INT. FARMHOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Julia hurries down the hall, through the gunk seeping out from under the bathroom door, and to the stairs.

When Julia is halfway down the steps, there's a--

KNOCK

--at the front door.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Julia makes her way down the stairs and crosses the entryway. She opens the front door. She finds an empty porch -- a breezy summer night. Nothing more.

Julia closes the door and slowly backs away from it.

The front door's latch clicks. The door slowly reopens with a creak. Julia backs away further. She is so fucking terrified.

A dark FIGURE stands in the door. It steps forward.

As the Figure steps into the light, Julia sees it clearly.

It's the Old Man, her great-grandfather, from the sick room.

The Old Man is crying. Wailing. A horrible sound. He shuffles into the house, walking toward Julia. Julia freezes, pressing her back against the wall. But the Old Man just shuffles past her, like he doesn't even see her.

He makes his way down the hall until he reaches the kitchen.

Julia listens to the Old Man in there, his cries getting louder, more anguished. She follows him into--

INT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

--the kitchen. Here, she finds the Old Man standing in the middle of the room.

All around the Old Man are bodies. Six bodies in all. Two adults, a MAN and a WOMAN. And four CHILDREN. They're covered in blood, and worse, they've been mauled. Eaten at.

The Old Man tears out his hair as he stands over the grisly scene. He screams louder and louder.

OLD MAN

I'm sorry I did it. I'm sorry I
did it! I'm sorry! I'm sorry.

Julia makes a croaking sound. She can't make a scream come out. She stumbles backwards, slips on the blood, and falls to her knees. The Old Man turns to her.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

It hasn't finished eating.

Julia crawls away, out of the kitchen, back to--

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

--the front hall. The front door is still open. She crawls to it. Before she gets there, she hears a scratching sound behind her, nails sliding on hardwood floor. She casts a fearful look back and sees--

Chito, moving toward her. And behind him--

The Old Man and the bodies are gone. There's no trace of the bloody scene anywhere.

Julia releases a sob and hugs the dog to her.

EXT. FARMHOUSE, FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Julia sits on the wooden boards of the porch, next to Chito. She holds Amy's journal to her chest.

Then, she opens the journal and stares down at a sentence:

"today I met a demon."

Julia looks down at the dog. Chito wags his tail -- a high jumpy sort of wag. He's tense.

Julia turns the page and sees that Amy has drawn a sketch of a tall, lithe, grinning figure: the Boneeater from the woods.

Julia turns to the next page and sees that Amy filled the entire page with writing.

Julia begins to read:

JULIA

"Today I met a demon."

INT. TREE - DAY - 25 YEARS AGO

TEENAGED AMY, about 14, sits at the base of the tree, reading a book.

TEENAGED JULIA, 14 stands a few paces away, tossing a softball into the air.

TEENAGE JULIA

You're so moody.

TEENAGE AMY

I'm just not ready for summer to be over.

TEENAGE JULIA

Why? You actually *like* school.

TEENAGE AMY

It's not just school. I have to go to the doctor's. As soon as I get home.

Teenage Julia pauses throwing the ball.

TEENAGE AMY (CONT'D)

I have to go in every four months. To see if the cancer came back.

TEENAGE JULIA
It won't. You beat it.

TEENAGE AMY
It might.

Teenage Julia hurls the softball upwards. It lands with a thud inside the treehouse.

TEENAGE JULIA
(determined)
Stop. It won't. Want a soda?

TEENAGE AMY
No thanks.

Teenage Julia saunters back to the house.

But Teenage Amy stays. She turns back to her book. But a moment later something from the tree falls and hits her face - a half decayed piece of fruit. It leaves a red streak on her cheek.

Teenage Amy wipes off the streak, disgusted.

She looks up. Another piece of fruit falls and lands with a splat on her open book.

Teenage Amy hears a whisper of a groan above her, coming from the tree house.

TEENAGE AMY (CONT'D)
Hello??

No response.

Teenage Amy looks annoyed. She decides to investigate. She begins to climb the tree.

INT. TREEHOUSE - DAY - 25 YEARS AGO

Teenage Amy reaches the treehouse, looking ready to confront someone. But nobody is there.

Teenage Amy runs her hand along the old wooden boards. She examines the dust she's collected on her fingers.

She leans down, and grabs the softball, which had rolled into the corner.

Then, she makes a lap around the treehouse, exploring, until--
--she run into--

--the Boneeater. The pale man from the roadside is climbing out of the gash in the tree trunk, emerging from the heartwood.

The Boneeater grins at her, revealing rows of gleaming white shark-like teeth.

Teenage Amy scream and backs away. The Boneeater stands between her and the door, the only escape route.

The Boneeater inches towards her: pallid, grotesque, and twice the size of a normal man. He blinks his alien black eyes at them, and inhales her scent.

Teenage Amy hears its voice speaking to her, apparently telepathically.

BONEEATER

*Do you treasure your flesh,
daughter? Shall I gorge now?*

TEENAGE AMY

Leave me alone!

BONEEATER

*There is more flesh in the house.
I smell it. I would like to gorge
there. Would you prefer that?*

The Boneeater brings his face an inch from Teenage Amy's. She's reached an almost catatonic level of terrified.

TEENAGE AMY

Please... Don't hurt me.

The Boneeater flicks a skinny finger to Teenage Amy's forehead.

BONEEATER

*There is so much pain ahead of you
daughter.*

Teenage Amy sees--

QUICK FLASHES

--of herself, as an adult, sitting in a doctor's office. Breaking down into tears.

--Pricked with needles. Facing Concerned-looking DOCTORS.

--Dying in a hospital bed, set up in her living room.

--and then she's back in--

THE TREEHOUSE

Teenage Amy backs away from the Boneeater, even more petrified now, by what she has seen.

BONEEATER (CONT'D)

*I could eat you now, that would
spare you all that pain ahead.
Or... I could take that pain away.
It could be gone. Instead, you
could have--*

Teenage Amy sees a BRIEF FLASH--

--of Adult Amy, with Zoey and Jason. Laughing at the dinner table. Healthy. Happy.

Amy older, watching Zoey get married.

Amy older, holding her first grandchild.

And then she's back in the--

TREEHOUSE

She's started to cry.

BONEEATER (CONT'D)

*If you let me into the house, I'll
spare you. I'll **save** you. I'll
grant you better things-- I'll gift
you a better life, if you let me in
to feed on them inside the house.*

Teenage Amy, looks down at the softball she's clutching in her hands, suddenly launches it, full force, at the Boneeater. It misses him and strikes the heartwood in the trunk behind him, chipping the bark. The Boneeater flinches.

While he's distracted, Teenage Amy rips away from him. She races toward the treehouse ladder. But the Boneeater grabs her shoulder before she can make it down.

Teenage Amy shudders as the Boneeater inches its face to her ear.

BONEEATER (CONT'D)

*Let me into the home. I'll come to
you in some other form. Something
harmless--*

Teenage Amy sees--

QUICK FLASHES

--of

--a nibbling field mice

--a chattering squirrel

--a hopping sparrow

Teenage Amy blinks these visions of animals away.

BONEEATER (CONT'D)

*--When I come to you, you will
grant me a favor. A good deed.
You will forge our covenant and
concede entry to me. You will
welcome me in. Then they will be
eaten. You will be **safe**.*

This last word reverberates in Teenage Amy's head.

She claps her hands to her ears, uselessly, and falls backwards--

EXT. TREE - DAY - 25 YEARS AGO

--to the ground.

Teenage Amy gets up and starts to race toward the farmhouse.

EXT. FARMHOUSE, FRONT PORCH - DAY - 25 YEARS AGO

Teenage Amy hurries onto the porch. She passes a CAT, grooming itself on the porch steps. She reaches the front door.

Just as she clasps the doorknob, a SPARROW flies past her and hits the wall next to her with a thunk.

Teenage Amy's hand freezes.

The bird falls to the porch floor, fluttering.

Teenage Amy reflexively moves away from it.

But the cat stops grooming and shimmies over to the sparrow.

Teenage Amy intervenes, picking up the sparrow before the Cat grabs it.

She holds it in her hands. It turns one black shining eye to stare at her, when--

TEENAGE JULIA (O.S.)
Hey! Either come in or don't!

Teenage Julia swings the front door open, startling Teenage Amy.

Teenage Amy drops the bird. It hits the floorboards with a soft plop. A tiny spray of its blood spatters the floor. The cat sees its opportunity, pounces, and carries the bird away.

Teenage Amy looks devastated. She wheels around to face Teenage Julia, then--

EXT. FARMHOUSE, FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Julia slams the notebook closed.

She looks horrified. She throws the diary across the porch and launches herself off the steps.

She runs across the yard, and heads for the tree.

EXT. TREE - NIGHT - NOW

Julia starts to climb the tree.

About a third of the way up towards the treehouse, Julia finds a hollow in the trunk; a nesting place for small animals.

There are indeed many little creatures packed inside this hole, apparently not bothered by the tight accommodations: squirrels and other rodents curled in a pile, silent sparrows perched along the inner crags of the hole, a raccoon nestled in the dry leaves, etc.

The animals stare at Julia, their glowing eyes piercing the darkness.

Julia glances at the hollow then keeps climbing.

INT. TREEHOUSE - NIGHT

Julia has entered the treehouse, where it's dry and stifling.

The floor of the treehouse is built around the thick trunk. The bark of the tree trunk appears slashed open, and the wide gash reveals the pale heartwood underneath.

Thick branches crisscross through the structure, entering and exiting in the gaps between the wooden boards that make up the treehouse walls. These branches are covered in scars and grooves.

Julia touches the exposed heartwood in the tree trunk.

JULIA

Are you here?

She looks frightened, expecting something to answer. But nothing does.

She turns around.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Where are you? Where-

But then, through the treehouse doorway, she catches a glimpse of the farmhouse.

The door is wide open, waiting for her.

Julia takes a step forward. Suddenly, the floorboards beneath her can't take her weight. They crack, splinter, and give way. Julia falls through the shattered wood, down-

EXT. TREE - NIGHT - NIGHT

--to the ground. She hits the grass and lies there with the wind knocked out of her. She weeps.

She hears footsteps in the grass. She looks up and sees the Old Man standing over her. He's not looking at her; he's staring up at the tree house.

Julia scrambles to her feet. When she stands up, the Old Man isn't old anymore. He's young -- the Young Man from the woods, wearing early 20th century clothes. He's still staring at the tree house.

YOUNG MAN

He showed me something horrible. A vision. I saw myself dying in the mud, far away from home. My body was rotted from the inside. There were bullet holes in me.

JULIA

You didn't die that way, though.
You changed it.

YOUNG MAN

When I saw him again, he wasn't a monster anymore. He was just a scared fawn, drowning in the creek. I dragged him out of there. It seemed right to help him. How could that be wrong, to help a frightened, helpless thing?

JULIA

But it wasn't just a good deed. You knew what it meant, didn't you? You knew what you agreed to. You did it to save yourself.

The Young Man looks guilty.

YOUNG MAN

I didn't want to die that way.

JULIA

Why do you keep coming back here?
Why do they?

Julia turns to the porch, where the Middle-Aged-Man stands silently with his two Pre-teen Boys.

YOUNG MAN

Because we let him in. And he won't ever let us forget it.

The Young Man stares past Julia, into the cemetery, at all the family graves.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

Neither will they.

The Young Man turns and walks away. He disappears into the woods behind the house.

Julia forces herself to move. She stumbles across the yard, towards the cemetery.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

In the dark hospital room, Zoey wakes up. She touches the necklace around her neck, the 'best friends' half heart pendant Julia gave her.

Zoey hears some commotion outside in the hall, some unseen patient in another room is coding. NURSES run down the hall to attend to him

Zoey slides out of bed.

INT. HOSPITAL, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Zoey slips down the hall. Nurses are busy with the other patient. They don't notice Zoey. She exits into a stairwell.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Zoey runs out into the night.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT - NOW

Julia sits on a flat grave marker in the cemetery. She scrubs the tears away and tries to calm herself.

The headlights of a truck shine through the trees surrounding the nearby road, and soon, the truck has parked in front of the house.

Julia can't see him, but she hears Henry emerge from the truck.

HENRY (O.S.)

Julia?

JULIA

I'm here.

Henry makes his way down the cemetery path.

HENRY

I heard Zoey got hurt. She's in the hospital?

JULIA

Infection. From the opossum bite.

HENRY

Is she okay?

JULIA

Zoey's in a little trouble, I think.

HENRY

What's going on, Julia?

JULIA

You were right. There's something
horribly wrong here. I've met it.
Me and Amy did.

Henry sits by Julia's side. He doesn't look like he wants to
hear more, but--

HENRY

Tell me.

Julia stares bleakly at Henry.

JULIA

It's evil. You felt it. It's
everywhere outside, in the dirt.
In the animals. The house is safe,
until you let it in. It tempts
you. A long time ago, this farm was
failing. The family was starving.
My great-great-great-grandfather
made a bargain with it. He made a
sacrifice. And the farm recovered.

Julia stares at the grave of her great-grandfather.

JULIA (CONT'D)

After that, there was my great-
grandfather. He would have died in
World War I. But he bargained with
it. He made a sacrifice, and got a
draft exemption. And then there was
my cousin Amy. She knew the cancer
would come back, eventually. She
tried to save herself. She tried to
bargain with it. I stopped it. I
didn't even know what I was doing,
but I stopped it.

Julia crumples. Ready to break down.

HENRY

Don't. This doesn't have to be your
burden. Just go. Forget the
house. Your grandparents didn't
want this for you.

JULIA

It's too late to forget it. Zoey
made a deal with it.

HENRY

Jesus.

JULIA

She must have offered me. Maybe she regrets it. When it attacked me, she tried to help. She fought it off. Which is why she's being punished now, I think.

Julia clutches her own finger, gripping the same place that Zoey was bitten.

JULIA (CONT'D)

She made a promise, and it made sure to get collateral.

Julia looks tired. Comes to a decision.

JULIA (CONT'D)

It wants me, and she let it inside so it could have me. If she reneges, I think she dies.

HENRY

Julia--

Henry looks horrified at himself, but he continues.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You can still leave.

JULIA

I think you should go home, Henry.

Julia leaves the cemetery. Henry looks torn, unsure. Finally, he exits the cemetery and makes his way back to his truck.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Julia stands in the front yard and listens to Henry's truck drive away. She stares at the front porch. She forces herself to walk up to the farmhouse. The front door swings opens by itself.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

As Henry drives off, another car slows in front of the Farmhouse drive.

Zoey gets out of the car -- a STRANGER has given her a ride. She runs towards the farmhouse.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Zoey spots Julia about to enter the house.

ZOEY

Wait!!

Julia stops.

ZOEY (CONT'D)

Don't! It's in there. It'll be waiting. I'm sorry. It'll kill you. I let it--

JULIA

I know.

ZOEY

It told me I could have a different future. It said--

JULIA

I know.

ZOEY

--it said my mom could live.

JULIA

Zoey. I know.

Zoey bursts into tears. Sobs.

Julia wraps her arms around Zoey. She squeezes tight.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Run. To the neighbor's house. Cut through the woods. Your parents are on their way to come get you. You can wait for them there.

Julia releases Zoey and strides into the farmhouse. Zoey reaches out, but the door slams shut behind Julia.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

Julia takes a seat at the foot of the stairs and waits. From upstairs, far overhead, she hears the faint sound of gnawing.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Outside, Zoey stands frozen in front of the house. Then, she starts to run.

But she doesn't cut through the woods. She races around the farmhouse.

Toward the dead tree.

INT. FARMHOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Julia sits on the steps and tries to keep her terror under control as tapping and knocking sounds intensify around her, above her, and under her. Then--

CRACK

The stair below Julia explodes. Wood flies everywhere. Tentacle like roots push out of the floor and wrap around Julia's ankles.

CRASH

The stair above Julia bursts open moments later. More roots appear. They wrap around Julia's arms.

Julia's trapped. She hears footsteps from the hallway above her.

She begins to scream.

EXT. TREE - NIGHT

Zoey begins to climb slowly, breathing through the pain in her throbbing hand--

--up

--up

--up

Until she reaches the hollow Julia discovered earlier. A hole filled with creatures and vermin.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

Julia remains pinned to the stairs by a system of roots. She tries to crane her neck, to look above her.

The Boneeater appears at the top of the stairs and slowly descends closer. He leaves blackened singed footprints in the floorboards as he walks.

BONEEATER

Don't be afraid. This is how it goes. This was always your fate. I eat all of them in the end. If I can't eat them alive, I wait until they're buried. Your grandfather; your grandmother. They were in the ground when I took them, less fresh, drained of blood, full of poison. But I gorged. But I would have liked to eat them alive.

As the Boneeater gets closer, Julia writhes and tries to pull away. Its mouth begins to yawn open.

Julia falls limp and begins to cry.

EXT. TREE - NIGHT

Zoey peers inside the hollow. The animals become active, sensing a danger. A rat bares its sharp teeth at her.

In the back of the hollow, Zoey spots an opossum. It has scars on its haunch -- it's the same one she saved.

Zoey reaches with trembling hands and grabs the opossum. She yanks it by the tail out of the hollow.

This awakens the animals from their daze, and they launch themselves at her, attacking.

Before she's swarmed by rats and pecking birds, Zoey leaps off the ladder, dragging the opossum with her.

She lands in a crouch by the base of the tree. The opossum wheels around. It tries to escape, tries to bite and scratch. Zoey dodges the teeth and claws, and grabs the thing by the neck.

ZOEY

I take it back.

Zoey hears Julia's screams from inside the farmhouse, and acts quickly. She fumbles to grab a rock as the opossum flails around.

ZOEY (CONT'D)

I take it back! There's no favor!
No good deed! You're not allowed
to have her!

Zoey smashes the opossum's skull with the rock, killing it.

INT. FARMHOUSE, ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

The Boneeater pauses and cocks its head, looking perplexed. Then it seems almost to MELT--

Into the tree roots exposed by the holes in the floor.

The boneeater's shape changes as it fuses with the roots. It's body and head elongate and harden. It slips down into the floor, under the floorboards, into the dirt. And then it disappears.

We hear the roots moving under the floorboards, traveling through the dirt back to their source -- the tree at the edge of the property.

Julia, frozen on the stairs, comes back to her senses. She leaps up, loses her footing, and tumbles down the steps. She lands hard on the floor below.

She rises again and starts running.

EXT. TREE - NIGHT

Zoey throws the bloody rock away. The opossum twitches as it dies, and then goes still.

Zoey leans against the tree to catch her breath. Her hand suddenly explodes in pain, and she winces and grabs it.

Before she has time to even think about this new pain, the Boneeater emerges from the treehouse overhead.

Zoey screams. The Boneeater's arm stretches out, down the entire length of the tree trunk. The Boneeater grab Zoey and lifts her up to meet its eye.

EXT. BACK YARD - NIGHT

Julia staggers to the back porch of the farmhouse. She hears Zoey screaming from across the grounds. She starts running towards the tree, but only makes it a quarter of the way before she--

TRIPS

--over Henry's flamethrower, which he dropped and left forgotten in their yard the day Zoey was bitten by the opossum.

Julia grabs it. Gets up. Starts running.

EXT. TREE - NIGHT

Zoey grips a tree limb with both hands. The Boneeater has an arm wrapped around her waist and tries to pull her inside the treehouse. Zoey screams and kicks at the Boneeater.

Julia runs toward the tree.

JULIA
Let go of her!!

The Boneeater eyes her approach.

Tree roots rise out of the ground underneath Julia's feet. She loses her balance and falls backwards, hard.

While Julia is lying on her back, a branch from above comes hurtling down. It stabs Julia, impales her through the meat of her shoulder, piercing her through like a stake. Julia's trapped.

ABOVE

--Zoey watches Julia's struggle in horror from the tree. While she's distracted, the Boneeater pries her grip loose from the limb. He pulls back into the treehouse. His jaws widen.

BELOW

--Julia cries out in pain, but manages to keep hold of the flamethrower. She lights it and shoots a flame over the branch impaling her.

The fire ignites the branch that pins her to the ground. The branch recoils away from Julia. Julia groans in pain as the branch dislodges from her body.

But she's free.

The fire spreads quickly into the tree. Julia helps the fire grow by shooting more flames at the tree's trunk.

The tree is such a dry husk, it burns like kindling.

ABOVE

--The Boneeater lets out a hoarse scream. It loses its grip on Zoey.

Zoey scurries away from the Boneeater, trying to climb further up in the tree, anything she can do to get away from it. She grabs hold of a branch, but when she puts her weight on it, it bends, and then--

CRACK

The limb starts to break.

Zoey loses her balance and slips, but manages to hang on to the branch with one hand.

She dangles helplessly from the broken branch.

BELOW

--Standing on the grass, Julia is calm. She peers up at Zoey, and they lock eyes.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Just let go, baby.

Zoey lets go, and Julia is there to break her fall. They both fall to the ground.

Above them, the whole tree is alight. Julia can't see the Boneeater through the flames -- it appears to be gone.

Julia helps Zoey to her feet and they move away. They hurry to Julia's car. Chito gallops towards them. The three of them pile into the car.

They don't look back.

INT. JULIA'S CAR - NIGHT

Julia drives away from the farm.

She glances in the rearview mirror at Zoey, who sleeps in the back seat. Julia returns her eyes to the road. She sees the sun starting to rise over the treeline.

INT. MOTEL - DAY

A shabby room with two queen sized beds.

Julia sleeps soundly in one of the beds. Chito sleeps at her feet.

Zoey sits awake on the other bed. She seems agitated. She stares at Julia's cell phone charging on the nightstand. She grabs it.

EXT. MOTEL - DAY

Zoey exits the motel. She dials a number on Julia's cell phone and presses it to her ear.

INT. SUTTON FAMILY CAR - DAY

Julia's parents, Amy and Jason, drive in silence.

Amy looks even weaker and more drawn in then the last time we saw her, but somehow she's making this journey.

Amy's phone rings. She answers--

AMY

Hello?

ZOEY (V.O.)

Mom?

Amy turns her face away from her husband.

EXT. MOTEL - DAY

Zoey's face crumples. She starts to cry.

ZOEY

I couldn't do it. I tried. I found it, where you said it would be. In the treehouse. I talked to it. It said it would help. But then-- I couldn't. I'm sorry.

AMY (V.O.)

It's okay. I understand. Don't think about it anymore. It's nothing you have to worry about.

ZOEY

But what are you going to do?

Zoey looks more scared now than we've ever seen her. Scared for her mother's life.

INT. SUTTON FAMILY CAR - DAY

Jason looks over at Amy. She smiles at him reassuringly.

AMY

We're fine. We're on our way.
We'll be there soon. I love you.

Amy hangs up and puts her phone away.

JASON
Everything okay?

AMY
Everything will be fine.

Jason reaches out to clasp Amy's hand. Amy stares straight ahead, no expression at all.

EXT. MOTEL - DAY - NOW

Zoey finally hangs up the phone.

The door to the motel room behind her opens. Julia pokes her head out.

JULIA
What are you doing out here?

ZOEY
Nothing.

JULIA
You're exhausted. You should get
some more sleep.

Julia guides Zoey back into the motel room.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Jason stands on the front porch, knocking on the front door. Amy sits in a wheelchair on the path in front of the house.

JASON
Where the hell are they?

AMY
I'm sure they'll be back soon. We
can wait.

Jason's phone rings. He grabs it from his pocket.

AMY (CONT'D)
Is that Zoey?

JASON
No. My mom. Uh... hold on.

Jason moves to the other side of the porch. Amy wheels her chair further away, giving him privacy.

JASON (INTO THE PHONE) (CONT'D)
 Hello? Yeah. We're here.
 (lower)
 I told her that. Well... She
 wanted to come.

Jason has his back to Amy, so he doesn't see when she struggles to stand and walk, leaving the wheelchair behind.

She starts to move across the yard.

JASON (CONT'D)
 I know, but she needed to see her
 daughter. And... I think it's not
 just about Zoey.

Jason looks up at the farmhouse.

JASON (CONT'D)
 This house means a lot to her. She
 spent a lot of time here growing
 up. And I think... she wanted to
 see it one last time.
 (anguished)
 Because we're out of options, mom.

Jason turns around and realizes he can't see Amy anymore.

The empty wheelchair sits alone in the grass.

EXT. TREE - DAY - NOW

The tree is a burnt out husk. Amy stares at it. She can peer down into the trunk through a charred hole.

Inside this hole, the Boneeater's pale face, almost totally submerged in the dirt, looks back at her.

Pain and fear cause Amy to sink to her knees. The Boneeater's hand rises out of the ground and touches her face, gently. Almost sympathetically.

BONEEATER
*The pain I showed you. It has
 come?*

AMY
 Yes.

BONEEATER
*I could swallow you whole. The
 pain would end.*
 (MORE)

BONEEATER (CONT'D)
*Or I could save you. Your future
can still be undone. You know how.*

Amy nods.

BONEEATER (CONT'D)
What do you want?

AMY
(in a whisper)
I want to live.

BONEEATER
*Who do you have to offer me,
daughter?*

Amy turns her head to look.

In the distance, by the farmhouse, Jason is searching for her. He doesn't see her yet.

Amy turns back to the Boneeater.

THE END